

BOOK REVIEWS

The Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776, a Study in Revolutionary Democracy. By J. PAUL SELSAM, Ph.D., The Pennsylvania State College. (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1936. x, 280 p.)

THIS monograph is patterned after the typical doctoral dissertation in American history and has practically all the merits and comparatively few of the defects germane to such a work. It is based upon an exhaustive study of the pertinent sources; it portrays the political, religious, ethnic, and economic phases of the colonial background of the revolutionary movement in Pennsylvania; it contains a straightforward, factual account of the incidents leading to and included in the revolution and the formation of the Pennsylvania constitution of 1776; it dissects and examines the provisions of that constitution; it discloses the difficulties encountered in effecting the acceptance of that constitution and the formation of a new state government under it; and it presents a general conclusion. The work is scholarly, logical, clear, concise, and meticulous in workmanship. But, as is apparently customary in such works, almost exactly one-half of the book is devoted to the background and steps preliminary to the constitutional convention and to the formation of the constitution. Undoubtedly this lengthy introduction aids in promoting an understanding of the new plan of government, but one wonders whether the general tendency to use long introductory chapters in historical monographs may not detract from the vitality of the exposition.

The author reveals that the revolutionary movement in Pennsylvania was relatively complex; in fact, that it was a revolution within a revolution; for the revolt against the leaders and the government within the colony was responsible for Pennsylvania's participation in the American Revolution. The development of the colony was such that the Quakers, with the aid of the quiet, peaceful Germans, dominated the General Assembly and refused to grant commensurate representation to newly formed western counties or to unfranchised urban groups in Philadelphia. The Penn family, owners of vast estates, were a part of the dominant Quaker element and did not like the idea of paying taxes upon proprietary estates. In addition, the eastern merchants became a part of this aristocracy and further promoted a division within the colony. The sectionalism produced by political, racial, economic, and environmental factors

made itself felt in 1774 and 1775, when eastern and western leaders formed a coalition to oppose the Tory government in Philadelphia, which meant opposing the British government as well. The conservative Assembly and Governor Penn, an Englishman, refused to accede to the demands of the democratic leaders. Extra-legal "associations" were formed in the different counties in 1775. The Whigs, or patriots, encouraged by the Continental Congress in 1776, established a Provincial Conference, which met at Philadelphia on June 18, 1776. This body was composed of an equal number of delegates from each county, a fact that appealed to the westerners. The Provincial Conference provided for a constitutional convention, the members of which were to be elected on July 8. The convention, also based upon equal representation, met on July 15, and practically constituted the state government at the same time that it produced the constitution.

The leaders of the convention were, for the most part, extremely democratic, explains the author, because the more conservative and perhaps more prominent men were then busy in the Continental Congress. Consequently, between July 15 and September 28 an ultra-democratic constitution was produced. It contained two parts, a bill of rights and a frame of government. The bill of rights embodied the "inalienable" rights-of-man theories, freedom of speech and of assembly, religious freedom, and trial by jury. The frame of government provided for a unicameral legislature elected yearly; a plural executive, designated as the Supreme Executive Council, containing one member, elected yearly from each county; and a judiciary with a court in each county and one in the city of Philadelphia. Provision was also made for a unique body, a Council of Censors, to be elected every seventh year and to be composed of two delegates from each county and two from the city of Philadelphia "to enquire whether the constitution has been preserved inviolate in every part; and whether the legislative and executive branches of government have performed their duty" (p. 199).

This government, the author states, was organized in the face of opposition on the part of the conservative aristocracy of the seaboard; but its democratic tenor met with favor in the western counties and with the democratic element in Philadelphia. In his conclusion the author emphasizes the influence of immigration and the frontier in the production of this ultra-democratic Pennsylvania constitution.

To students of Pennsylvania history the work is valuable. To students specializing in western Pennsylvania history it is of less value, because Westmore-

land County was the sole county formed in 1776. Westmoreland's delegates were heartily in accord with the new constitution, however, and added their weight to the democratic tide. Any student of early constitutional development in the United States will find this scholarly treatise well worth a careful examination.

Western Pennsylvania Historical Survey

RUSSELL J. FERGUSON

Life and Work of Rev. John McMillan, D.D., Pioneer—Preacher—Educator—Patriot of Western Pennsylvania. Collected, compiled, and published by DANIEL M. BENNETT. (Bridgeville, Pa., privately printed, 1935. xvi, 525 p. Illustrations.)

THE compiler of this work, a druggist long resident in Bridgeville, is a charter member of the Chartiers Historical Society, whose secretary he has been from its organization, and a connection of the McMillan family through his marriage to the late Rebecca Caldwell Bennett, a great-great-granddaughter of the famous western Pennsylvania pioneer preacher and educator. The book is dedicated to the memory of Mrs. Bennett, who, until shortly before her death in 1935, shared the labors and satisfactions of its preparation. Special acknowledgment is also made of help and inspiration received from Joseph Ferree, another resident of Bridgeville and a teacher in the high school there.

"The idea of compiling this record," explains Mr. Bennett in his preface, "first occurred to the writer as he attended the reunions of the McMillan Family. As he listened to verbal reports he noticed that there was nothing of a permanent nature and felt that what there was of McMillan Family history was likely to perish with the persons making the verbal reports." Moreover it had long been recognized that nowhere was there to be found in any one work an adequate account of the life of the distinguished founder of the family. Accordingly Mr. Bennett, equipped with a quiet enthusiasm born of strong family feeling and great admiration for the minister, undertook to supply both lacks. For a number of years he and his wife spent much of their spare time collecting materials—devotedly searching through published histories, delving into county archives, locating personal papers of Dr. McMillan, interviewing and corresponding with his descendants, visiting the scenes of his labors, and following the course of his travels.

The result is a compilation of wide scope and variety of form. Narratives, contributed articles, biographical sketches, documents, commemorative speeches