
In many homes, a "sampler" is an heirloom hung in a place of honor. It is a cloth, usually natural linen, embroidered with designs, homilies from the Bible, family crests, symbols of morality and no nonsense, encircled by the alphabet. It was stitched in childhood by a feminine ancestor, and framed simply — a "sample" of stitching skill and, one suspects, of painful respectability and pride in doing.

And so, it is easy to see why Mr. Beers has named his collection of more than a score of word-pictures of Pennsylvania through two centuries The Pennsylvania Sampler. In its pages, men and women, visitors and natives, have described their favorite countryside or mountain view; have told dramatic stories of the river, a peaceful highway or a fearful flood; have praised artists, authors, musicians, politicians of state and nation, athletes, manufacturers, tycoons, millionaires, both conservationists and despoilers of land, stream, and air, religious leaders, heroes, folk of many creeds and races and nationalities, all who built the Commonwealth. Manifold facets of Pennsylvania life are here — its faults and failures and its great successes and noble accomplishments.

S. K. Stevens, historian, describes Pennsylvania as the "seat of the united colonial movement for independence . . . and a powerful force in winning that independence." Gifford Pinchot, politician and conservationist, defines Pennsylvania as a place where "nature paid the price of better living, faster thinking, and the more stable existence of the heirs of all the ages." Marcia Davenport, Pittsburgh author, finds a Pennsylvania symbol in the glorious singing voice of Marian Anderson, one of the world’s greatest singers, internationally triumphant in spite of the barriers of poverty and race.

Authors, known well to all of us, talk of the derivation of quaint place-names, of the individual customs of citizens from a variety of ethnic backgrounds; of wars and political campaigns and the legends of strange folk and their ways persisting throughout generations.

So much variety is in this "sampler," it is difficult to do all of it justice in a brief review.

The book is rewarding reading. The samples chosen are discriminating, sensitive, and representative of the strength and breadth of Pennsylvania life. There is the contrast of neat farmlands; crowded dirty manufacturing centers; polluted streams; forests, hills, and mountains, unrivaled anywhere in beauty — a land still capable of
being indeed a keystone of the greatness of our nation. American history is Pennsylvania. The strength of character and skill and courage to build is in Pennsylvania, still. The Pennsylvania Sampler is only a representative stitching of the design.

And, although in substance it is easy and pleasant reading, as a "sampler" for the Commonwealth which was the home of the master printer, Benjamin Franklin, the book deserves a more distinguished format.

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Professor Rice's account of the exploration and settlement of what was to become West Virginia is regional history at its best. His scholarship is obvious but not obtrusive. While Dr. Rice is clearly fond of "his" region and its people (at least most of them), he avoids both defensiveness and special pleading. He can also write.

There are two rather distinct parts to his book. The first six chapters are devoted largely to what might be called, for want of a better term, "straight history." They provide an essentially chronological account of exploration, Indian massacres, political intrigues, military campaigns and land speculations. While the specialist will find little new in these chapters, the general reader will be grateful for an interesting and well-organized treatment of a very complex period.

If the first six chapters are good, the last nine are more than good. Dr. Rice's ability as a social historian becomes obvious in his treatment of folkways, education, medical care and religious life on the Allegheny frontier. The author has done far more than compile a series of quaint anecdotes — a task so easy and entertaining that all too many regional historians stop there. Consider, for example, the first paragraph in his chapter on medical care:

> The common belief that the wilderness was conquered by men and women of unusual physical strength and robust health is without solid foundation. Instead, the difficulties which lay across the path of civilization were overcome by pioneers whose physical vigor was sapped by privation, disease, exposure, and debilitating seasonal ailments. Such an accomplishment by no means diminishes — rather it enhances — the heroism of the conquerors.