

The Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776. By J. PAUL SELSAM. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1971. Pp. 280. Bibliography, index. \$12.50.)

As we approach the two hundredth anniversary of the birth of our nation, we may anticipate a spate of new books narrating the stirring events leading to independence; probing with new methodologies into processes of political change; and examining anew the degree to which the thrust for separation from England was paralleled by political and social change within the individual states as they emerged from colonialism. While it is wise to seek new insights, we will do well to reacquaint ourselves with the scholarly works of the pre-behavioral era. It is altogether timely that Da Capo Press has decided to make Dr. Selsam's volume, *The Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776*, available.

This book has a broader appeal than the title suggests, for it is largely the story of the revolutionary movement in Pennsylvania, spearheaded not by the Quaker-Philadelphia merchant oligarchy which had long controlled the destinies of Penn's colonial experiment but by new participants in Pennsylvania's political system. Its dynamics rested rather on the discontents of the disfranchised artisans and mechanics of Philadelphia and of the western farmers seething under the insensitivity of the East to their needs. Impatient with the slow pace of the colonial assembly in embracing the movement for separation, the leadership of the disaffected elements organized such extralegal agencies as committees of correspondence and committees of safety.

Gradually these extralegal agencies grasped more and more of the functions of leadership and decision-making that were slipping from the assembly and local agencies of government. Thus, it was the conference of committees of correspondence rather than the assembly that called the Pennsylvania constitutional convention of 1776. It was the conference composed largely of persons disfranchised under the existing laws who determined the qualifications for voting for delegates. It was the conference with fair representation for the western counties that prescribed equality of representation in the convention for Philadelphia and each county. This was crucial in the determination of the character of the convention. Although the convention roster contained a few distinguished names, most of the delegates were politically inexperienced. The document they produced reflected largely the liberal concepts of the political activists in Philadelphia and the aspirations of the West for full participation.

Dr. Selsam gives a descriptive analysis of the major features of the

constitution — the long, very liberal Declaration of Rights, the dominant position of the unicameral legislature with powers limited only by the Declaration of Rights, the weak plural executive, the curious and unique Council of Censors, and the generous suffrage qualifications.

The author portrays the bitter political division in Pennsylvania from the conflict over the Constitution of 1776 after it was proclaimed by the convention as the fundamental law of the state. He perceives the struggle over the new constitution to have been based largely on economic interests. "It was a conflict between the merchants, bankers, and commercial groups of the East and the debtor agrarian population of the West; between the property holders and employers and the propertyless mechanics and artisans of Philadelphia." This struggle he suggests foreshadowed the struggle which would produce the new national constitution reflecting a conservative reaction to revolutionary liberalism.

The book is well documented throughout with primary sources. For those who wish to inquire more deeply into any aspect of the study, Dr. Selsam has provided an excellent bibliography.

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Two Centuries of Costume in America, 1620-1820. By ALICE MORSE EARLE. (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., Unabridged Reprint, 1970, from work originally published by the Macmillan Company, New York, 1903. Two Vols. Pp. 807. Illustrations with author's comments listed, index. \$7.50 set, \$3.75 each.)

Since the story of costume is really a part of the history of a people, the two-volume softback reprint of Alice Morse Earle's *Two Centuries of Costume in America, 1620-1820* fills a definite need for handy reference on the subject. In the present durable edition, the two volumes are unabridged, "with minor corrections." The author has written with love and humor, and there is much for both amateur and specialist.

Her work reflects knowledge of New England sumptuary laws; of old wills in which clothing was often an important item, entered with detailed descriptions of color, line, material, and trimmings; of Southern parish records and visits to old homes; and of scanning colonial newspaper advertisements. But by far the most important preparation