BOOK REVIEWS


This scholarly and handsomely illustrated hardback book is published by the Henry duPont Winterthur Museum. According to the statement of editorial policy, the objective of the museum in publishing Winterthur Portfolio 8 is to make available to the serious student an authoritative reference for the investigation and documentation of early-American culture. Its object is to publish articles contributing to the knowledge of America's social, cultural, political, military, and religious heritage, as well as those offering new approaches or interpretations concerning research and conservation of art objects. Evidently the designation Portfolio 8 is a chronological one and not generic, as in Catch-22. Interestingly, this particular issue is devoted entirely to the theme of diversity in American religious life.

The articles range from a study of the self-image of the Protestant minister in the last half of the nineteenth century to a delightful compendium of birth and baptismal certificates used by many German sects which settled in Pennsylvania. There they continued to practice their peasant crafts, including the folk art of handwritten illuminations, many of which are illustrated. Then there is a piece on the religious architecture of French-colonial Louisiana, together with a comparison of the Truro Synagogue of Newport, Rhode Island, and the Wren city church. Among others there is an account of another communal religious group, the Shakers, and their vested interest in the welfare and teaching of children brought into the midst of this celibate society.

This work is bountifully illustrated with photographs, maps, line drawings, old prints, and plans, all conveniently placed adjacent to the pertinent text which itself is annotated by copious but, happily, short footnotes.

Our own vice-president, Charles M. Stotz, is the author of one of the chapters in this book. "Threshold of the Golden Kingdom: The Village of Economy and Its Restoration," besides being a scholarly work by itself, fits remarkably well into the chosen theme of Portfolio 8 as a story of the motivating force of one man, George Rapp (1757-1847), in establishing in the Harmony Society an experiment in communal living with unique religious and community rules and regulations. It also fits that dictum of the museum’s editorial policy related
to conservation of Americana. This is a story, by the architect himself, of a restoration which in many ways is as important an example of the restoring of a nineteenth-century village as is Williamsburg a model (admittedly a much more extensive one) of an eighteenth-century site.

But, as Stotz points out, though the conservation of our early building is a proper and worthwhile cause, no artifice of the curator to reanimate the buildings and gardens by guides in period costumes or elaborate displays of son et lumière can supplant the informed imagination of the observer. In this work we have an expert job by a unique amalgam of knowledgeable historian, conscientious researcher, superb craftsman, and delineator, combined with an innate ability to spin a tale and to illustrate a point. By the use of these talents and the generous use of his own drawings and photographs and those of others, Stotz succeeds admirably in the task of informing the observers. We are led first to the geography of the site, eighteen miles below Pittsburgh at the present town of Ambridge on the Ohio River. Here, after previous efforts in Butler County on the Connoquenessing and again in Indiana along the banks of the Wabash, "Father" Rapp settled his Harmonists in their final home at Economy. Here he built a complete self-contained community, supported as always by a firm belief that the second coming of the Lord was near. Though religion was the focal point of their existence, Stotz shows us how the Harmonists were not without many physical and cultural amenities. Our imagination is fired by a graphic scene of the daily existence and a step-by-step word picture of the erection of building after building and the fascinating display of the employment of the great diversity of skills within the membership.

We are shown the structure and architectural techniques and skills used in the straightforward, sturdy, practical brick structures dominating the area. We may enjoy the fragrance of the garden behind the Great House, with its Gazebo, Arbor, Grotto, and polychrome figure of Harmonie displayed in the classic Pavilion. The work lets us visualize the shady retreats and share the aroma of cherry, apple, pear, and peach trees scattered throughout the garden.

The Feast Hall, with its huge clear span and its fireplace flues following the roofline to the ridge chimney, is but one of the structures described and illustrated. There is the granary, the vaulted underground wine cellar, the tailor shop, the community kitchen with modern-looking hooded ranges and kettles, the utility shed with its
proudly displayed fire engine. All these, and many dwellings and outbuildings, are graphically illustrated and described in detail. The author's evident enthusiasm for his subject shines through to illuminate the imagination of the reader.

But this tract is not a history of Economy or of the Harmony Society. It is, after all, a story of restoration, a story told by an expert, by a dedicated enthusiast. We are led through the pitfalls, difficulties, and heartaches of government-financed restoration projects. We become aware of disheartening procrastination and share in the taste of the sweet fruits of persistent perseverance. It is the story of the Old Economy Memorial and its completion, almost brick by brick, grapevine by grapevine. This is a story of twenty-seven years of restoration work told by the architect, who, to say the least, gave it tender loving care, and whose perseverance and zeal now lets us all enjoy the only truly homogeneous early nineteenth-century community remaining in Western Pennsylvania, if not in the nation.

Pittsburgh

Alfred D. Reid, A.I.A.


This is a reprint of a series of anecdotes about famous Americans from the days of William Penn to those of President Grant. Unfortunately, Da Capo Press fails to provide the reader with an introduction which could serve to orient him to the book, why its republication is significant, and the background of the author. Anecdotes of Public Men is in no sense a scholarly work but rather a mixture of tales, told haphazardly, as the author found time and inclination to write down a particular recollection or story regarding a prominent figure in American history.

Most of the anecdotes relate to people who lived during the lifetime of Forney, who was a newspaperman, editor, and minor political figure between the 1840s and the 1870s. Some of these anecdotes are firsthand accounts, but most seem to be gossipy stories about people of the time. Some stories relate to people who lived long before Forney's time, such as George Washington or William Penn, and are of the patriotic hero-worshiping variety. In fact, Forney seems to write more to praise than to analyze the men of his time, the excep-