BOOK REVIEWS

Christopher Gist: Colonial Frontiersman, Explorer, and Indian Agent.

For years one of the crying needs of Western Pennsylvania history has been a good biography of Christopher Gist, one of the most important men involved in the early settlement of this area.

This is not it. We will have to keep waiting until some capable scholar takes up the task of writing a Gist biography, for which plentiful materials are now available.

Dr. Bailey's credentials for the work appear at first glance to be impressive: Director of the Office of Teacher Education and Senior Lecturer in History at the University of California at Irvine; author of a book on the Ohio Company of Virginia and a biography of Thomas Cresap; substantial research grants for the work. But the mountain has brought forth a mouse.

The book is astoundingly inaccurate and full of errors. There are wrong names, improbable dates, geographical and historical inaccuracies, inconsistent statements, and confusion. Although the 132 pages of text are supplied with 42 pages of notes, his most questionable statements (and they are myriad) are seldom annotated, and many notes cite no authority.

The reader will be astonished to learn that Venango was a French fort; that it was French penetration of the upper Ohio Valley which led to the organization of the Ohio Company; that Gist was "the central figure in that [the Ohio] company's history"; that Gist and Daniel Boone "had [prior to 1750] been good neighbors on the Yadkin River in North Carolina"; that Old Town, Maryland, was fifteen miles up the Potomac from Wills Creek; and that Gist "showed surprising unfamiliarity with the region when he observed that he believed the Juniata . . . emptied into the Susquehannah [sic]." And these are only a few of many such examples.

But if such inaccuracies as these were the worst fault, the book would not warrant this bitter criticism. Bailey has without question (to judge by his notes and bibliography) done a great deal of research for the work. But he seems to have no conception as to differences in material. His bibliography lists this in two categories: "Source Material" and "Secondary Material," each containing at least one work of
fiction. Primary and secondary materials are lumped together in his first category, which includes everything from records in the British Museum to magazine articles.

Worst of all, while the so-called Horn Papers are not listed among the sources, nor cited as proof in many notes, their foul and forged presence permeates the entire book. Material from them is constantly used, without any citation of source. In several places in the work Bailey refers with great affection to these forgeries, and although citing the principal proofs of spuriousness, adds such approving comments as: "Yet they are interesting documents, and whoever compiled the diaries knew more about eastern [sic] Pennsylvania history than anyone we know . . . . These papers have to be dealt with when studying the life of Christopher Gist." This and similar assertions that proved forgeries should be given credence are enough to boggle the mind of an afreet!

"Many years have been involved in putting together this biography," begins the author. Perhaps the time has been so long that it has outworn his capability as a historian. The book is worse than worthless. 

*Pittsburgh*  
George Swetnam


This biography examines the public and, to a lesser extent, the private life of Thomas McKean, the son of a tavern keeper who became a signatory to the Declaration of Independence. Although a victim of scholarly neglect, McKean, a plural office holder in both Delaware and Pennsylvania, held a multitude of important positions between 1762 and 1814. His government service included tenure as Speaker of the Delaware assembly, delegate at the Stamp Act Congress, member of the First and Second Continental congresses, and Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania. While McKean's career continued into the Jeffersonian era and included ten years as governor of Pennsylvania, Coleman's account ends in 1780.

McKean won prominence throughout the colonies for his criticism of British policies during the Stamp Act Congress. Although ideologically committed to the radical faction by the autumn of 1775, Mc-