

true accomplishment is revealing for us what it meant to be a Shippen in colonial America.

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*1777: The Year of the Hangman.* By JOHN S. PANCAKE. (University: The University of Alabama Press, 1977. Pp. viii, 268. Preface, prologue, epilogue, maps, notes, bibliographical essay, index. \$11.95.)

How strange is the public belief that December 31, 1976, marked a finish to the celebration of the bicentennial of the United States. Actually, most of the traumas and tribulations affecting the infant nation occurred after July 4, 1776, for on that date British troops occupied only Staten Island. Moreover, the mother country's effort to subdue the rebellion was confused by the Howe brothers' dual mission of reconciliation and suppression. A successful political separation remained tenuous. As one Philadelphian noted, "It is One Thing for the Colonies to declare themselves independent, and another to establish themselves in Independency."

The events of 1777, "the year of the hangman," so called because the sevens resembled gallows, contributed enormously to the performance of the "Independency," climaxing in the establishment of the French alliance. John S. Pancake traces these episodes through 1778, roughly the period of Sir William Howe's tenure as commander in chief in America. He concentrates on the twin British campaigns which were to split the states by capturing the Hudson valley and to seize the American political capital, Philadelphia. The author has aimed to demonstrate the interconnection between the two movements and the leadership weaknesses which permitted a limited success in Pennsylvania and a total disaster in New York. He weaves his theme by contrasting the actions, thoughts, and ambitions of the Howes and Sir John Burgoyne in America and Lord George Germain in London. And never would the trio agree among themselves in word or deed. This is military history, but Pancake includes sufficient explanations of the political and social climates to provide the necessary foundation.

A modern synthesis of the crucial campaigns of 1777 has long been needed. Based mainly on monographs and printed sources, *1777:*

*The Year of the Hangman* fills the void. Pancake is at his best when discussing the commanders and the battles they fought. He examines the actions of both opposing armies, but, appropriately, he emphasizes the British activities.

The campaign which ended with Burgoyne's defeat at Saratoga and that which concluded with Howe's capture of Philadelphia are too well known to rehearse here. Pancake's decision to discuss them chronologically, however, creates some problems. For example, he switches from the Battle of Freeman's Farm to Howe's action on Brandywine Creek and the occupation of Philadelphia before returning to Bemis Heights and Burgoyne's surrender. Although he furnishes an excellent summation of the organization and doctrines of the opposing forces, his arrangement at times interrupts the narrative flow. By inserting a chapter on the loyalists — essential as that is to comprehending the British objectives — between that on the formulation of the enemy "plan" and the one discussing the initial steps of the northern invasion, he unnecessarily breaks the reader's train of thought. These organizational difficulties, however, are more irritating than distractive.

The study is commendably illustrated with photographs and sufficient maps to follow the battle maneuvers. In my copy, though, the map of the Lake Champlain invasion route is barely legible. Small errors mar the text: the wrong date for the Boston Tea Party (p. 4); misinformation on the Quaker exiles (p. 111); Sir Guy Johnson's residence at Johnstown instead of Johnson Hall (p. 117). Additionally, a reader searching for sources would be misdirected in Chapter 7: Two references are numbered 14 in the text (p. 109) and, even so, one chapter note has been omitted in the back.

Pancake's discussion of the personalities is the key to this study. He effectively brings to life all the leaders, even though the characters and intentions of the Howes mystify him as they will continue to do so for future scholars of the period. He correctly classifies all the British commanders as mediocrities in America though more successful at other times and places. On the American side, he speculates that Horatio Gates failed to gain fame because of his physical appearance (p. 146), but he later analyzes the character deficiencies (without even mentioning the disaster at Camden) which frustrated Gates's ill-famed attempt to supersede Washington.

All these caveats do not alter the overall value of Pancake's contribution to the nation's bicentennial. Both general readers who seek an exciting story and scholars of the era will enjoy reading this book

and will profit from the experience. It is a welcome addition to the literature on the American War for Independence.

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*Success at Oil Creek, August 27, 1859.* (Washington, D. C.: Department of the Interior, 1976. Pp. 16. Photographs, map. \$0.65.)

On August 27, 1976, the Department of the Interior brought forth this pamphlet telling about the world's first successful oil well, drilled by Edwin L. Drake near Titusville, Pennsylvania, and which started to produce on August 27, 1859.

It is indeed unfortunate that the department has stated that it had an excellent general response to this pamphlet, because it includes a considerable number of historical inaccuracies, and therefore it must be used with considerable care by students, researchers, and the general interested public. How such a booklet on such a well-known and well-documented event ever got past the writer, the proofreader, and others, is a mystery indeed.

Some of the more glaring errors are worthy of note. For example (p. 2), the picture caption, "Drake Well in 1859," is really the Drake Well in 1875, decrepit and in very poor condition. It was subsequently taken down and shipped to the Philadelphia Exposition and never did come back to Titusville. On page six is a photograph showing "Titusville's Danforth House," which is strange inasmuch as the Danforth House was located at famous Pithole City, Pennsylvania, another oil boom town. Another photograph (p. 11) is captioned "First U. S. oil field developed at Titusville in 1860." This actually shows a group of very shallow wells just east of the Titusville town line which were drilled in the spring and summer of 1877 and lasted only a few months. Then on page five a map of the oil regions has misspelled both Tidioute and Siverlyville.

All the errors are not confined to the photographs either. The text (p. 2) mentions Dr. Paul H. Giddens's book, *The Early Petroleum Industry*. Actually there is no such volume. A concern called Porcupine Press, in Philadelphia, borrowed and reprinted without permission Giddens's *The Birth of the Oil Industry* (Macmillan, 1938) and his *The Beginnings of the Petroleum Industry: Sources and Bibliography* (1941) and titled the combination *The Early Petroleum Industry*. At this writing, Giddens is considering legal action.