
This is a very difficult book to review. It is the first volume in what Dr. Arndt intends to be a documentary history of the Harmony Society (ca. 1785-1905). Already published is Dr. Arndt's outstanding A Documentary History of the Harmony Society . . . 1814-1824, 2 volumes (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1975-1978).

The Indiana Decade has a careful selection of documents, an exemplary job of editing and citation, and translations of the German documents, all of the things in which this book is deficient. This does not mean that this book is not valuable. In fact it is one of the great monuments in the scholarly life work of Karl Arndt.

The book discusses the founding of the Harmony Society in Württemberg by George Rapp (1757-1847) and its migration to the United States. The Harmony Society was one of the many separatist congregations in Germany in this period. They were more successful than most and are one of the more important footnotes in American history. They lived in Harmony, Pennsylvania (1804-1814), New Harmony, Indiana (1814-1824), and Economy (now Ambridge), Pennsylvania (1824-1905). The society grew wealthy in the textile manufacturing business and its later entrepreneurial activities contributed to developing Western Pennsylvania. The book covers the beginning of the society's history to the migration from Württemberg in 1804-1805.

The book contains a number of documents arranged in "Prolegomena" 1700-1782, the evolution of Rapp's ideas 1785-1792, the separate church 1793-1803, and the flight to America 1803-1805. There is introductory material before each section. Most of the documents come from the Landeskirchlichen Archiv and the Württembergischen Hauptstaatsarchiv or from Dr. Arndt's own collection. The documents are printed in German as found by Dr. Arndt, with misspellings, grammatical mistakes, and all. Except for a brief statement (in English) before each document, for all practical purposes there is no scholarly apparatus of any kind, footnotes, citations, comparisons, alternate readings, or the like.

The least useful part of the book is the "Prolegomena." It cites a number of documents concerning the pietists in Württemberg and
other parts of Germany. It has such things as the title page from the German edition of John Law’s account of Louisiana which might better have been placed in a footnote. These documents show that George Rapp was not alone in his beliefs and what the governmental attitude was toward pietists before Rapp developed his mission. On the other hand, probably the only place these documents are available in the United States is in this book. This matter might better have been discussed in the introduction except for material which applied particularly to the subject of the book.

The rest of the book will prove very useful to those people who are interested in the development of the Harmony Society. What is fascinating about this is how patient the Württemberg government was (for the time) with Rapp and his followers. Considering that the political theory at the time thought of one church and one state, this appears as an enlightened attitude. Rapp and his followers did suffer some persecution, but except for an occasional imprisonment and fine this was more of an annoyance than persecution. The state church was very tolerant for the age. The minister of Iptingen, Rapp’s home, was often cautioned not to exacerbate the situation and to win the separatists back by reason rather than persecution, something he was singularly unable to do.

The other factor that comes out is the dedication and perseverance of Rapp and his followers. It took a deep commitment and a strong will to oppose the government and the church and to migrate to America. One of the things brought out in the documents is the strong leadership ability of George Rapp and how many able secondary leaders he was able to attract.

The introduction is in four parts, three in English and one (sort of a reprise of the others) in German. It is a useful history of the beginning of the Harmony Society and George Rapp’s leadership. It is also an insight into much of Karl Arndt’s thinking and method of research. One of the difficulties with this book is that a few of the key documents mentioned in the introduction (without citations) are not printed in the text of this book.

The documents were assembled by Dr. Arndt over a lifetime and represent a monument to his perseverance and research. I bet that you cannot go to any place in Germany or the United States where a Harmonist was that is so obscure that Dr. Arndt has not been there and dug out documents. Not only that, but Dr. Arndt edited these documents. He is the printer. He typed some of the text himself with the aid of typists. He pasted up the book, saw to its printing, and is
now marketing it. So the book is also a monument as a publishing venture.

But what happened when there was a publisher’s meeting and Dr. Karl Arndt, compiler, and Karl Arndt, editor, and Karl Arndt, stylist, and Karl Arndt, printer, and Karl Arndt, publisher, assembled to decide the scope of the book? The meeting most certainly was a harmonious one, but unfortunately, I do not think such a committee could do justice to such a book and it shows. There are documents with citations from unknown sources, misspelled words, strikeovers, documents referred to and left out, documents that would have better been left out, a limited index, and no scholarly apparatus. For a book aimed at an American market, having all the pertinent text in German is not going to prove too useful to most researchers. The book is rather overpriced as well.

Should you buy this book? If you have a research library on Western Pennsylvania, the Harmony Society, or the communitarian movement in the United States and an easy reading knowledge of German (Swabian), the book will prove invaluable. It is not quite the thing one sits down at night and reads by the fire, but it is a useful reference work. The book is dedicated to Gayle Thornbrough, the editor of the Indiana Historical Society, and it would have been better if she had had a chance to edit this work, but this does not detract from a great piece of scholarship.

Washington Crossing Historic Park  
Washington Crossing, Pennsylvania  

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The American West has always had a fascination for Americans and peoples all over the world. Whether it has been the frontier of Virginia, Pennsylvania, Kentucky, and Tennessee or that of Texas, Wyoming, and Oklahoma, the West has been a mystical and a mythical place. The struggle against the wilderness and against the allegedly barbaric Indians has created tales of supermen with the strength of ten and the courage of many more. Folklore has often created what never was, but humankind apparently needs to believe it once existed.

William Darby was a man of the early nineteenth-century West.