BOOK REVIEWS


The second volume of The Papers of William Penn covers four years that were the formative period for Pennsylvania. It includes 202 complete documents pertaining to Penn and an appendix with two extracts and two tables clarifying the names of those who first purchased from Penn. In view of the sparsity of outgoing Penn correspondence that has been preserved, the editors have shown good judgment in choosing what to print, although the Charter of Charles II and the Second Frame of Government are conspicuously absent. Nineteen of the 202 pieces are not from those in the fourteen-reel microfilm of Penn Papers completed in February 1975 by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Researchers should note that although the editors of the Papers drew from the transcriptions done by or under the supervision of Hannah Benner Roach, which are on the microfilm, they have reviewed the original items and made slight changes. Thus, although in this volume ampersand appears as “and” and the thorn as “th,” its transcriptions are superior to those on microfilm. Identification of the names of people who wrote to Penn or wrote for him is often very difficult, and that is another high achievement of this edition. The book has ten chronological divisions, each of which also has a thematic title. Except for “Negotiating the Charter” and “The Frame of Government of Pennsylvania,” the contents of the sections stray from the theme, and conversely the editors often have to refer to other sections to pull together aspects of the themes. Certainly there are more than ten important themes in the collection.

The editors dismiss (p. 138) Gary B. Nash’s assertion that Penn, following the sixth draft of the First Frame of Government, moved to conservative principles because he needed wealthy support. Their argument maximizes the significance of overlapping writing by Penn and
Thomas Rudyard on some drafts of the charter, ignoring a range of possible relationships that might have existed between the two men. To comment on Nash's point and the politics of the period the editors should have provided background information drawn from British manuscript sources. That might show whether wealthy men could have pressured Penn. The notes identifying Rudyard, John Darnall, Robert Spencer, William Markham, and others are too superficial for a volume that will be considered authoritative for many decades.

Certain traits of the founder can be discerned from these documents. In his territorial dispute with Lord Baltimore he always remained officially polite — far more than his opponent — but as his position became precarious he moved frantically from one argument to another. The sincerity of his toleration for the non-Quaker element in his colony is attested to by a letter to a complaining Quaker, Jasper Batt (pp. 346-49). Penn feared the ocean passage more than anything else and seemed oblivious of natural dangers that might arise in Pennsylvania, including Indian belligerence.

Apparently in order to force a lesson into the story, the editors state (p. 510) that "once the Pennsylvanians knew of [Penn's] impending departure, they saw him as less of a patriarch and more of a landlord. For the first time he was openly criticized by his colonists." How so? The General Assembly at Chester had earlier voted against some constitutional arrangements intended to enlarge Penn's power. Also, it is not known when the populace learned that Penn would depart, and there is no evidence of such a sharp change in their attitude.

Richard S. Dunn, Mary Maples Dunn, and their associates are to be congratulated for their laborious efforts which have made these documents of Pennsylvania's founding period available in such a reliable form.

Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

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This latest volume in the Army Lineage Series is a worthy addition to the Center of Military History's two previous works (The