

Reviews

***Many Identities, One Nation: The Revolution and its Legacy in the Mid-Atlantic.* By Liam Riordan. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007. xiv, 353 pp. \$49.95, ISBN 978-0-812-24001-6).**

By 1830, a national culture had emerged in the United States that was democratic, Protestant, white, and largely middle class. Most history textbooks explain this burgeoning culture by describing the presidency of Andrew Jackson, the evangelical reforms stemming from the Second Great Awakening, the rise of respectability and refinement among the middle class, and the prevalence of slavery in the South and the disenfranchisement of blacks in the North. As a result, students of early American history are given the impression that the development of American nationalism was inevitable or at least emerged with little local resistance. Liam Riordan challenges this idea in *Many Identities, One Nation*. Early national identity in America, he argues, was very much contested, and in some cases forged, at the community and town level.

Riordan shows that between 1770 and 1830, America was a very “multicultural” place. Modern tensions between advocates of a national culture and the defenders of more particular ethnic, religious, and political interests originated in the earliest years of the republic. To prove this thesis, Riordan turns to one of early America’s most multicultural regions—the Delaware Valley. Only through a close analysis of everyday life in this region, he argues, can we understand how the preferences of local communities converged, or in some cases did not converge, with an emerging national order. Rather than focusing his attention on Philadelphia, as most historians of the early Delaware Valley do, Riordan centers his narrative on local life in New Castle, Delaware; Burlington, New Jersey; and Easton, Pennsylvania. Readers of *New Jersey History* will be treated to what is, without peer, the best account we have of political, religious, and ethnic life in the early Delaware Valley. Riordan’s research in tax, census, military, and church records for New Castle, Burlington, and Easton is quite impressive. He has gathered data on 4000 individuals in the region and has used it to help him interpret an array of newspaper articles, personal diaries, works of art, and pieces of material culture.

After introducing us to the cultural diversity of the Delaware Valley during the British colonial era, Riordan examines how each town experienced the American Revolution. Scots-Irish Presbyterians turned New Castle into a center of patriotic resistance, but failed to apply their understanding of liberty to a growing population of slaves. Lutheran and Reformed German patriots in Easton used the Revolution to gain political and cultural supremacy in the town and define themselves against a substantial Indian population in Northampton County, Pennsylvania. Due to their loyalist leanings, Anglicans and Quakers in Burlington suffered at the hands of revolutionaries and lost much of their colonial influence there.

As the United States sought a national identity in the wake of the Revolution, so did these river towns. Burlington Quakers emphasized moral and religious order amid post-

revolutionary chaos, leading them to support New Jersey Federalists. Germans in Easton and the surrounding area resisted Federalist tax policy through what became known as “Fries Rebellion.” All three towns, but especially New Castle, were forced to deal with the implications of the gradual emancipation of slaves.

Chapters Four and Five, Riordan’s best, deal with the religious tensions in the early national Delaware Valley. This region had always been a very diverse religious place, but such diversity was enhanced by the Revolution. African-American denominations and congregations, such as the Union Church of Africans and the African Methodist Episcopal Church, were formed throughout the Delaware Valley. Methodist evangelicals challenged the longstanding religious authority of Anglicans, Quakers, and Presbyterians. Lutheranism and Calvinism continued to shape the identity of Pennsylvania Germans, which led to a general rejection of the evangelical movement then sweeping the country. Yet amid all of this diversity, the Delaware Valley was not immune to the campaigns of evangelical reformers (Riordan calls them “cosmopolitan evangelicals”) who sought to build a unified nation based upon Christian ideals. Riordan illustrates these attempts at creating a “Christian nation” through a careful study of the many Bible societies that sprang up during this period. While participation in these voluntary societies provided many middle-class Delaware Valley women with an opportunity to contribute to the moral improvement of their towns, states, and nation, the societies were only partially successful in creating a unified Christian culture. Delaware Valley Protestants, especially the German churches in Easton, often resisted these attempts at forging a national identity based upon an Anglo reading of the Bible.

As the nineteenth-century unfolded, these river towns often found themselves at odds with the dominant political culture of their states. Burlington, for example, was a Federalist stronghold in a largely Jeffersonian state. New Castle was a bastion of Republicanism in Federalist Delaware. Delaware River communities occasionally rejected the racial politics of the Jacksonian Era, but in the end they all elected officials who opposed African-American rights. By the 1830s, the national culture described above had permeated American society, but local diversity still persisted in the Delaware Valley. The Lutherans and Reformed Christians of Easton split over how much they were willing to accommodate the Anglo-Christian culture propagated by cosmopolitan evangelicals. A similar division occurred among Quakers, resulting in the Hicksite Schism of 1827. Small groups of blacks in New Castle and elsewhere stood against the racist dimensions of American society.

Riordan has produced a marvelous piece of scholarship. It is hard to argue with his interpretation, although the book is much stronger as an exploration of the Delaware Valley’s “many identities” than it is as a book about the emergence of “one nation.” It could also be read as a religious history of New Castle, Burlington, and Easton. *Many Identities, One Nation* will serve as the definitive work on the legacy of the American Revolution in the Delaware Valley. Readers of this journal will be introduced to many personalities and stories from the region that have long been overlooked or perhaps never fully examined.

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***The Irish in New Jersey: Four Centuries of American Life.* By Dermot Quinn. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004. 240 pp. \$26.95, ISBN 081-3-534-216).**

Nearly 16 percent of New Jersey's 8.4 million people are Irish-American, according to sample data from the U.S. Census Bureau. Most of the New Jersey Irish, no doubt, trace their immigrant roots to the great surge of immigration during and after the catastrophic 1845–1851 Irish famine. Dermot Quinn's mission in this narrative history is to remind us that the Irish made their presence known and felt in New Jersey long before the potato crop failed so disastrously in the nineteenth century. In doing so, he grapples with identity and its multiple meanings – what did it mean to be Irish, to be an Irish-American, and to be an Irish-American from New Jersey?

The answer to these questions is, of course, simple: it depends. Quinn, a history professor at Seton Hall University and an Irish immigrant himself, takes readers back through the, yes, mists of Irish history to show us that the very idea of Irishness changed over time. Indeed, he notes that nowadays, some scholars call attention to themselves by simply denying the very notion of a national or ethnic identity. They would be uninterested in Quinn's topic since, as he notes, they would argue that "Irishness" is "like an item of social clothing that may be discarded when something fancier comes along" (p. 8). Try telling that to the stalwarts of the Ancient Order of Hibernians.

Quinn clearly embraces the idea of Irishness, and in the course of slightly more than 200 pages of text, narrates the ways in which Irish immigrants and their children carved out a life for themselves in New Jersey. Subtly, the narrative moves from a religiously inclusive chronicle, one that takes note of the Protestant Irish presence in the eighteenth century, to a more parochial account of the Catholic Irish. Their numbers overwhelmed the Protestant Irish, in New Jersey and elsewhere, in the mid nineteenth century. The stories and even pictures reflect this change: there are a lot of priests in this book. As well there ought to be, although at times Quinn's book reads like an ecclesiastical history rather than a cultural study. Of course, some might argue that in the case of Irish America, it is hard to write one without the other. The Irish dominated the Catholic clergy in New Jersey as they did elsewhere.

Clearly, the Irish also enjoyed considerable success in local politics. Quinn recaptures the golden age of Irish-American politics in the state, with a special appearance from the inevitable Frank Hague. But before readers nod their heads knowingly and conclude that Hague somehow symbolized the complex story of Irish-American politics, Quinn also explores the careers of Richard Hughes, grandson of illiterate Irish immigrants; Brendan Byrne, the governor who couldn't be bought by Hague epigones; and William Brennan, the Supreme Court justice who emerged as a liberal hero in the 1970s and '80s. Quinn complicates the picture of the Irish in politics in language so clear and even charming that one begins to wonder about his academic affiliation. Perhaps he misplaced his thesaurus

during his research. “‘Bossism’ has had a bad press,” he writes. “The squeamishness of a later age finds its coercive methods hard to stomach.” But, he notes, “machines should be understood for what they were: channels of welfare and group protection, even (when occasion demanded) progressive instruments of urban reform” (p. 151).

The New Jersey Irish in Quinn’s chronicle embrace their identity, even (or perhaps especially) when the combination of their ethnicity and their Catholic religion inspire the disdain of their progressive social superiors. Quinn’s evidence and argument are an affirmation of novelist Peter Quinn’s observation that what is noteworthy about the Irish is not that they became white, as scholars of “whiteness” insist, but that they remained Irish in spite of Anglo-Protestant disdain and discrimination. Actually, there is something very Irish about that.

As he brings his story to more recent times, Quinn focuses too much on Irish-American attitudes towards the long conflict in Northern Ireland and not enough on the mass migration of the New Jersey Irish from Newark, Jersey City and other urban areas to the suburbs. The media, U.S. politicians, and the British exaggerated Irish-American interest in Northern Ireland – indeed, IRA sympathizers in the United States often bemoaned Irish-America’s failure to respond to anti-Catholic discrimination in the British-ruled province. The postwar movement from city to suburb, on the other hand, clearly was an important moment in the Irish-American narrative in New Jersey. This book would have benefited from less information about Northern Ireland’s six counties and more about the new Irish-American strongholds of Monmouth and Ocean counties.

Overall, however, Quinn’s book is thoughtful and well-written. Any historian of ethnicity in New Jersey ought to study it, and any academic who wishes to reach a popular audience ought to emulate, if possible, Professor Quinn’s stylish, jargon-free prose.

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***Fort Lee: The Film Town.* By Richard Koszarski. (Rome: John Libbey, 2004. 362 pp. \$65.00 (cloth), ISBN 0-86196-653-8; \$27.95 (paper) ISBN 0-86196-652-X.)**

Richard Koszarski, a member of the Fort Lee Film Commission and an associate professor of English and Cinema Studies at Rutgers University, has produced in *Fort Lee: The Film Town* an interesting but odd contribution to film history. Rather than write a history of the early film industry in Fort Lee, New Jersey, Koszarski has instead created a primary source reader about filmmaking in one of the important early centers of the American industry. Readers will find in this book a fascinating collage of original articles and reminiscences about the Fort Lee film industry accompanied by photographs of film studios, portraits of studio personnel and actors, film stills, and occasional manuscript documents. While these make enjoyable and interesting reading, they produce a very impressionistic history of the film industry in Fort Lee. As a consequence the reader is likely to be frustrated by Koszarski's failure to provide an overview of that history.

Oddly, rather than write any kind of introduction to this collection of primary sources, Koszarski leaves the introduction of the volume to film historian Paul Spehr. Spehr's account of the effort to recover Fort Lee's film history serves more as a preface than as the kind of introduction this book needs.

Koszarski does provide the reader with a kind of substitute for this missing overview in the first chapter where he reproduces in slightly edited form a series of historical articles written by staff writer Edmund J. McCormick of the *Bergen Evening Record* in 1935. McCormick's was the first historical account of Ft. Lee's film industry, which had largely disappeared by the early 1920s. It is an interesting account that provides necessary information to the reader. This is followed in the second chapter by a series of sources that explore the reasons that Fort Lee blossomed as a site of movie making. Nonetheless, Koszarski does his readers a disservice by not giving them the advantage of his in-depth research into the documentary record. Instead his voice appears only episodically in the form of headnotes to documents. The only exception is the odd penultimate chapter where he narrates the story of talking films in Fort Lee rather than presenting primary sources.

Most of the book is given over to chapters devoted to the individual film companies that operated in Fort Lee, except for one chapter about the companies that operated in nearby communities where filming also took place. What each of these chapters on the studios lacks is a short summary of the kind provided by Spehr in his book *The Movies Begin: Making Movies in New Jersey, 2887-1920* (Newark: Newark Museum, 1977). Indeed, to make better sense of Koszarski's documents about these studios the reader would be well advised to first read Spehr's clear summaries of their histories, which also include lists of the locations they favored, company officers, technicians, writers, cameramen, laboratory personnel, directors, actors and representative films. Unfortunately, there are no references to either Spehr's book or to another necessary reference for Fort Lee film history, Rita Ecke Altomara's *Hollywood on the Palisades: A Filmography of Silent Features Made in Fort Lee, New Jersey, 1903-1927* (New York: Garland Pub., 1983).

In the midst of these chapters on the film studios there appear two other chapters that visually document Fort Lee film making. The first, following the chapter on the American Mutoscope and Biograph Company, uses stills from D. W. Griffith's film *The Curtain Pole*, to provide a Fort Lee travelogue as the camera follows a scene chase through the streets of the town. The other chapter presents a series of cartoons about Fort Lee filmmaking that appeared in the fan magazine *Picture Play*. The final chapter focuses on the reasons why the studios left Fort Lee. The original sources provided by Koszarski are primarily articles from contemporary magazines that reported on the movie business, especially *Moving Picture World*. Among the others are *Picture Play*, *Photoplay*, *Motion Picture News*, and *Exhibitors Herald*. These are supplemented with articles from local and New York newspapers and with reminiscences from the published and unpublished autobiographies of some of the directors, producers, film stars, and production people involved in film making in Fort Lee. On occasion, original manuscript documents appear, usually in the form of illustrations.

Unfortunately, it is not entirely clear who the readers of this book are intended to be. Film and other historians will appreciate the material that Koszarski has brought together, but will be frustrated by what is not here, especially unpublished sources. The general reader will not find the kind of overview of filmmaking in Fort Lee that most will expect. One suspects that this is ultimately a book that will appeal mainly to film buffs looking for interesting tidbits about early film history.

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***Early Architecture of Cape May County, New Jersey: The Heavy Timber Frame Legacy.* By Joan Berkey. (Cape May Court House, NJ: Cape May County Historical and Genealogical Society, 2008. 310pp. ISBN 978-0-615-19096-9).**

As the catchy tune goes, “On the Way to Cape May, I fell in love with you.” In this case, the “you” is a rather extraordinary book, Joan Berkey’s *Early Architecture of Cape May County New Jersey*. The book begins with an eye-catching cover, a historic photograph of the Jonathan and Sarah Hoffman House complete with osprey nest on the chimney. This evocative image sets the stage for a thorough examination of Cape May County’s early domestic architecture. The focus is not on the colorfully painted Victorian homes and hotels we have come to associate with Cape May; rather it is on the much-less-well-known houses of the Cape’s early colonial settlers. They are treasures in their own right.

The book follows a logical organization. It begins with a settlement history of Cape May County (Chapter 1), then introduces timber framing (Chapter 2), the home builders and first person accounts of early homes (Chapters 3 and 4), and house plans and components (Chapters 5 -11). The volume then provides a comprehensive survey of first, second, and third period buildings in Cape May and wraps up with a brief discussion of moved buildings, lost buildings, and some general conclusions.

Berkey’s interest in heavy timber buildings began with her first preservation project in Cape May County. Over the ensuing years, she has managed to ferret out dozens of examples of this previously little recognized house form. Her work is a significant contribution to the literature on early New Jersey architecture, and is reminiscent of Abbott Lowell Cummings pioneering work, *The Framed Houses of Massachusetts Bay, 1625-1715*.¹

Despite earlier attempts, serious settlement of Cape May County began in the 1680s as immigrants from the English-settled areas of Long Island and New England moved south to Cape May. There they engaged in farming, whaling, and other maritime pursuits. Although isolated from larger centers of population, population began to grow, especially in Lower Township. By 1680 a village named New England Town had been laid out in

¹ Abbott Lowell Cummings, *The Framed Houses of Massachusetts Bay, 1625-1715*. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1979).

Lower Township. Unlike some of the contemporary communities of northern and central New Jersey (Middletown, Shrewsbury, and Woodbridge), New England Town failed to thrive. While this was undoubtedly a disappointment to its founders, the persistent rural character of Cape May County has allowed a large number of early houses to survive.

Berkey divides up the buildings into three construction periods. The first runs from 1690 until 1730, the second from the 1730s through the 1780s, and the third from the 1780s or 90s until about 1845. The author is able to link many of the buildings with particular families through the use of primary documents. However, it is often challenging to associate particular structures with particular builders. She also devotes some time to the building materials the house framers employed, especially timber and clay.

One of the strengths of the volume is Berkey's employment of first-person accounts that describe the construction of these buildings. She uses this information to provide a rich contextual understanding of Cape May's early architecture. There is also a useful discussion of house plans and their antecedents. Attention is also paid to patterns of massing and fenestration (placement of windows) in these structures. Although leaded glass windows in wood and iron frames appear in diaries and other early documents, only double hung wood sash windows survive in Cape May's early buildings. Berkey's thorough study also includes a discussion of chimneys, bake ovens, smoke chambers, and other building features.

The interior and exterior finishes employed on Cape May's early houses are also analyzed. In addition to the expected shingles and clapboards, plank walls are also found. Interior finishes on these early houses generally lack plastered walls; instead, board walls were employed. Berkey attributes the absence of plastered walls to the area's humid climate which caused plaster to fail. Detailed information is provided on many framing elements, especially gunstock posts and chamfered joists, traits that are present here but otherwise uncommon outside of New England.

In addition to the detailed architectural analysis, Berkey provides a house-by-house review of first, second and third period heavy timber buildings in Upper, Middle, and Lower Precincts. Although the houses show a gradual evolution in terms of construction technique they are most noteworthy for their conservatism. One of Berkey's finest case studies deals with the incredible Reeves-Izard-Godfrey House, moved during the construction of the Parkway.

The end of the book briefly examines moved buildings. Strong timber frame buildings were moved with some regularity which has allowed many to survive. Lost buildings are also examined including the noteworthy Jonathan and Sara Hoffman House, the Bachelor House, the two Goldin Houses at Beesley's Point, and others. The book's brief conclusions are followed by a master list of heavy timber frame buildings in Cape May County.

The volume has few weaknesses. A bit more information on how the dates of the houses were arrived at would be useful. Many were dated based on historic documents, but tree-

ring dates and archaeological evidence would help corroborate these dates, particularly as Cape May's builders appear to have had rather conservative taste. A bit more information on log houses would also be welcome. It would also be interesting to know if what Berkey found in Cape May is also present in nearby Cumberland and Atlantic Counties. However these are minor quibbles with an outstanding work.

Simply put, this book is a model for the kinds of studies we need on New Jersey's early vernacular architecture. Joan Berkey, the Cape May County Historical and Genealogical Society, and the New Jersey Historical Commission, which helped fund the research and publication, are to be complimented on a job well done. The color photographs in the center of the book are a real treat. I hope that her book inspires similar book-length studies of East Jersey cottages, Anglo-Dutch farmsteads, pattern-brick houses, and other architectural treasures of colonial New Jersey.

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***The Way of Improvement Leads Home: Philip Vickers Fithian and the Rural Enlightenment in Early America.* By John Fea. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008. 269 pp. \$24.95, ISBN 978-0-812-241-099.)**

I thought that Philip Vickers Fithian was an insufferable prig well before page 168, where John Fea informs us that Fithian's twentieth-century editors described him as such. Nevertheless, this erudite biography of such a judgmental epigone is an illuminating work of intellectual history that also has much to say about the Enlightenment, eighteenth-century education, rural life, Presbyterianism, and the American Revolution. Yet discussing Fea's considerable accomplishments exposes Fithian for the pompous ass he surely was.

Fea uses Fithian's life to explore significant issues of the American revolutionary era. He successfully challenges some central assumptions—the gulf between urban cosmopolitans and rural localists, and the irreconcilable tension between religiosity and the Enlightenment. Fithian, a striver and self-improver, was, first and foremost, of the rural world. Fea situates him in the Cohansey River region of southern New Jersey and lovingly demonstrates how at home he was there. Fithian was a yeoman's son. His formative years were organized around the rhythms of agriculture.

Fea shows how connected many rural localities were to a broader world. One link was Presbyterianism, which brought to regions like Cohansey educated ministers steeped in the latest learning. Presbyterians prized education and supported academies to prepare talented young men for higher education, especially at the Presbyterian College of New Jersey in Princeton. Presbyterians also embraced the French and especially the Scottish Enlightenment, brought to Princeton by its brilliant president, John Witherspoon. They

drew on Enlightenment ideals of rationality and responsible control of emotions to end the conflict produced by the Great Awakening.

This locally oriented, cosmopolitan world produced Philip Vickers Fithian and countless others on the eve of the American Revolution. As a Presbyterian minister at Princeton, Fithian struggled, through his reading and extensive diary keeping, to lead a life at once pious, enlightened, rational, engaged, zealous for God, and in service of Man. Along the way he fell in love, preached in the backcountry, lived for a year in Virginia, and died in October 1776 as an army chaplain in service to his country.

By the end of the book I couldn't stand him. Fithian reliably licked the boots of his betters, mouthed the platitudes of his superiors, used many long words where a few small ones would do, and condescended to the poor and uneducated. On the great questions of his age, Fithian bravely insisted on occupying ground least likely to question injustices or to improve much of anything. Fithian spent the year in Virginia for which his diary is famous in awe of his employer Robert Carter. Not once (as Carter himself impressively would do) did his Enlightenment learning cause him to question the source of Carter's wealth. Revolutionary tensions caused Fithian to write imitative Whig-inspired history, though his leading preoccupation was that inferiors were becoming unruly. His examples were servants stealing horses and slaves stealing, well, themselves. Many Enlightenment thinkers wrestled with the problem of slavery in an age of revolution – Fithian not so much.

Fithian had problems with those he thought inferior. His backcountry flock was “barbarous, clownish, and ungospelized [*sic*] as Indians...” (p. 158). He often had to disguise his clerical costume afraid he would be mocked and assaulted. I assume his was the concern of many itinerants, though I do hope it was a particular fear for Fithian. Men of the backcountry, Fithian opined, had no conversation. No opinions would be proffered unless by Fithian himself. Of course his opinions were really just warmed-over Witherspoon.

Fithian really shone in his treatment of the ladies. When his long-adored Elizabeth Beatty rejected him, he helpfully explained her behavior to her in a letter. Women were “fond of being admired and flattered,” wrote Fithian, which was why she had succumbed to another. Fithian succeeded in breaking Betsy's attachment and married her. His triumph led him immediately to wonder whether he would love her once her looks went. In an extensive passage, he described in pitiless detail what Betsy would look like at age 60: “poorly supporting a pipe in a toothless mouth...her flabby wrinkled Bosom...lips...sunk down, like a mouldered Grave, upon her wasted gums...” The passage is considerably longer and, Fea allows, “...overly graphic...” (p. 171). More accurately, it's cruel, fetishistic, and neurotic. But Fithian had a problem with the body. His chief criticism of the backcountry barbarians was the one-room cabins and all the immodesty. I only wish Betsy had possessed a bit more of the spirit of one backcountry Irish girl who, when Fithian rose “in the morning, in the Blaze of day,” gazed scornfully “searching our subjects for Remark” (p. 167).

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That Fithian was shallow, self-important, and obnoxious really only adds to Fea's achievement. All of us are far less than we should be, and some of us try to improve. To improve in Fithian's eighteenth century was to be a pious, educated, enlightened, revolutionary who tried to merge love of home with graceful devotion to the world and those who lived in it. When he died young, this schlemiel had a long way to go.

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