

Newport History

Volume 53 | Issue 178

Article 3

Spring 4-1-1980

Book Reviews

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Recommended Citation

Millar, John F. and Browne, Howard (1980) "Book Reviews," *Newport History*. Vol. 53 : Iss. 178 , Article 3.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.salve.edu/newporthistory/vol53/iss178/3>

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BOOK REVIEWS

Florence Parker Simister, *The Fire's Center / Rhode Island in the Revolutionary Era, 1763-1790*, 258 pages, illustrations; Providence: The Rhode Island Bicentennial Foundation, 1979, \$12.95 hardcover only.

As a longterm admirer of Mrs. Simister's production of popular histories, as a member of the Publications Committee that commissioned *The Fire's Center*, and as the author of a smaller book on a similar theme, I feel slightly uncomfortable reviewing her new book, because I feel it falls short of what it was designed to do.

The book can be divided into four parts: the first, about a third of the book, deals with the period in Rhode Island from 1763 to July 1776. The author is quite right in devoting so much space to this critical period in Rhode Island's history, but unfortunately many of the most important events and concepts have fallen through the cracks. The second part describes life in Rhode Island from July 1776 through Yorktown in 1781. The third part — arguably the best part — deals with the activities of Rhode Island troops outside Rhode Island, but the crucial campaigns of Nathanael Greene in the South are inexplicably not covered; similarly, the exploits of Rhode Island's seafarers are given short shrift. The final part of the book ties up the loose ends, such as Tories, taxes and Union, and includes an entertaining account of Metcalfe Bowler's clandestine activities on behalf of the British. There are unfortunately no cross-references between the four parts of the book, and thus the organization of the book is needlessly clouded.

Here are a few random faults I found with the book. In the first place, little attempt is made to show any threads connecting events (for example, if Rhode Islanders had attacked the *St. John*, the *Maidstone Tender* and the *Liberty*, then the attack on the *Gaspee* could not have been regarded as a bolt out of the blue). The book misses Stephen Hopkins' role in founding the Stamp Act Congress (and even attributes this action to Massachusetts!), and misses Ezra Stiles' connection with the leaders of the Stamp Act Riot. The book misses the rationale behind Captain Wallace and the *Rose* being in Rhode Island, and smudges the sequence and details of the establishment of the Continental Navy in 1775. The book gives no explanation for d'Estaing's hurried departure from Rhode Island in 1778 (it was because he knew that British

Admiral Byron was due to arrive at any moment with a more powerful force than his own).

The copious illustrations are, for the most part, useful, but a few are inadequate: although Stephen Hopkins appears correctly on p.105, he is also represented as the man with the hat on p.8 (long known to be John Dickinson). The various pictures of the burning of the *Gaspee* and the Boston Tea Party are Victorian views that are full of anachronisms, and there are better pictures available.

Mrs. Simister obviously did her research well in some areas. For example, I have not seen before Esek Hopkins' quote about his lack of job satisfaction (p.95) which puts him in a better light than many accounts of his career have done, and John Hancock's quote about the background of the struggle for independence (p.99) is most useful.

Mrs. Simister's easy style clashes with her poor organization, giving one the impression of a handsome picture-frame around a mediocre painting. It is worth having a copy of the book, but it should only be read in conjunction with several others.

— JOHN F. MILLAR

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Edwin S. Gaustad, *George Berkeley in America*. Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1979. 225 pages, map, index. Hard cover, \$15.00.

Dr. Edwin Gaustad, professor of history at the University of California, Riverside, is a former Whitehall scholar who lived in what must be at least for him the haunted precincts of Berkeley's Middletown home. This little book cements his place in the forefront of modern Berkeley scholars. He has apparently not suffered too much from the chaffing of the philosophers, who told him at every opportunity that mere historians were strange for being interested in Berkeley.

From the way the philosophers talked at the Berkeley Conference here in September I am glad that a mere historian wrote this biography; at least the actual events in the philosopher's life were not too immaterial to report well. Gaustad does write well. "Readable" describes the book, and accurately and completely readable as well. It is about Berkeley in America only, but the author gives a good short account of the Bermuda project, how it

was planned and enthusiastically adopted by Berkeley, and how it was attacked at home and slowly dematerialized.

A short account of Berkeley's life brings him to his landing in Newport in 1729. An unusually good account of the religious climate of the colony shows the parlous state of the Anglican church and makes Berkeley's visit significant in an ecclesiastical sense as well as a socio-educational one. His "Bermuda Group" associates and his indigenous friends such as Honeyman and McSparran weave in and out of the story. The book is tightly written without jargon and tells probably all there is to know about Berkeley's two years in America.

Unfortunately the book has flaws but they are not of the author's making. The book is signature bound, has a utilitarian cover, and seems a quality production. The designer has chosen to place footnotes at the bottom of the page as in a thesis destined for the archives, to be read only by other researchers. This book is good enough to appeal to the general reader, and I think the footnotes should be at the back of the book or at least at the end of a chapter. Another flaw that annoys the eye and detracts from the enjoyment of the book is that the designer has chosen to have a ragged right margin, like you get on your own typewriter. Since we learn to read type with a straight right hand border and become practiced in it, the functionalists who claim that ragged right is more natural have never thought of conditioning. I can only conclude that since it came from Yale it was done to be *a la mode*.

— H.B.

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Jeffrey R. Redmond, "*Viking*" *Hoaxes in North America*. Carlton Press, Inc., New York, 1977. 64 pages, index, hard cover, \$3.95.

This book grew out of the young author's interest in Viking studies, which he is now pursuing as a graduate student. He discusses the Minnesota Kensington rune stone, the "Vinland" map at Yale, stone inscriptions near the Poteau river in Oklahoma, the Spirit Pond, Maine stones, and several lesser-known claims to Viking origin, some in New England. He dismisses the marks on Dighton Rock as Indian carvings. Too bad the book's narrow mission didn't allow him to comment on the claims that the inscription is a message from the Cortereal brothers.

The book comes to our attention because it mentions the stone structure in Touro Park. Mr. Redmond's statements about the structure do not coincide with the facts as they stand today. He bases his statements on Godfrey's paper of 1951. Then he sent his manuscript to Professor Thomas Lee of Laval University, who has access to material that to my knowledge has never surfaced before. Lee says, "There is a document in England that shows that the tower was there before Arnold obtained the property. There is an aerial photo, which I have seen, that clearly indicates a rectangular sub-surface structure running out from the tower in the manner of a church, and this has not been examined."

I don't think that the book would be of interest to local readers unless they are interested in other viking fairy stories.

— H.B.