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# Review of *Sarah Osborn's World: The Rise of Evangelical Christianity in Early America* by Catherine A. Brekus

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fellowship. Letters also document how Massachusetts Masons saved and returned paraphernalia recovered from several pillaged Southern lodges. Numerous examples of early nineteenth-century pitchers decorated with Masonic symbols and presented to lodges as gifts appear under the heading “Gifts and Charity.” Charity, being an important Masonic principle, is demonstrated in an 1823 letter from the widow Hannah Dean thanking King David’s Lodge for its financial assistance, and in the monetary donations sent from Massachusetts lodges for relief efforts after the 1906 San Francisco earthquake. The final chapter, “Memory and Commemoration,” presents artifacts that were collected because of their associations with famous persons or events—for example, a vial of tea from the Boston Tea Party, a pistol belonging to John Paul Jones, and a bit of stuffing from a chair in which George Washington once sat.

The reader expecting a strictly linear account of Freemasonry in Massachusetts as told through its artifacts will not find it here. The thematic arrangement tends to disrupt chronologies, and in some instances information is repeated or a topic’s fundamental elements are scattered across various chapters. A list of objects, arranged by chapter, would have been a useful reference tool. That being said, *Curiosities of the Craft* offers the attentive reader many insights into the principles of the fraternity and its significance. Anyone interested in Freemasonry, fraternalism, material culture, American social history, and the history of Massachusetts will benefit from this delightful addition to the literature.

Edith J. Steblecki is Curator/Assistant Director for the Paul Revere Memorial Association, which owns and operates the Paul Revere House (ca. 1680), a historic house museum on Boston’s Freedom Trail. She is the author of PAUL REVERE AND FREEMASONRY.

*Sarah Osborn’s World: The Rise of Evangelical Christianity in Early America.* By Catherine A. Brekus. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2013. Pp. 448. \$35.00.)

*Sarah Osborn’s World* is a magnificent book. Catherine Brekus’s new study of Sarah Osborn, an eighteenth-century Rhode Island evangelical, is beautifully written, deeply researched, and effectively argued. Published as part of Yale University Press’s New Directions in Narrative History series, *Sarah Osborn’s World* is a must-read for

all scholars of early American and religious history as well as anyone interested in evangelicalism or the Enlightenment more broadly.

Osborn is not unknown to early Americanists. Many are aware of her diaries and later spiritual memoir, published by Samuel Hopkins in 1799. Through much of her life, Osborn faced persistent poverty and struggled to make ends meet. However, her religious and cultural significance far outweighed her socioeconomic status. Osborn attained a degree of fame in her own time because, in the 1760s, she led a powerful revival in Newport, Rhode Island, where hundreds of listeners—black and white, male and female—showed up to hear her preach. Brekus discusses this pivotal moment in Osborn's life and spiritual development, but she also goes beyond—indeed, *well* beyond—a standard biographical account to craft a work that situates Osborn within her context while simultaneously explaining how she shaped it.

Building on her previous studies of female preachers, Brekus painstakingly sifts through Osborn's writings, including her spiritual journals and personal letters, collected from multiple archives. As the book's title suggests, however, Brekus also paints a much larger picture of the world in which Osborn lived, thus illuminating the vital role that Enlightenment thinking played in the development of American evangelicalism. Even as evangelicals like Osborn derided and resented the secularist implications of Enlightenment philosophy, they absorbed and incorporated Enlightenment thinking into their own religious frameworks. Brekus emphasizes that Osborn and her contemporaries believed in a benevolent maker who was kind and just but, most important, knowable. Osborn frequently asked for signs of grace, or empirical evidence, that her sins could be forgiven and that she could be saved. Brekus concludes that Osborn's writings fused "the Christian language of human sinfulness and divine glory with a new Enlightenment vocabulary of benevolence, happiness, rationality, and empiricism" (p. 133). In recovering this world, Brekus bears witness to the birth of an intellectual milieu that was simultaneously highly evangelical and self-consciously empirical. Indeed, Brekus is doing nothing less than using Osborn to explain the birth of modern thinking itself.

The book is divided into two parts, based on Osborn's personal writings. The first offers several chapters oriented around Osborn's 1743 spiritual memoir, which reveals her developing religiosity as well as her innermost personal struggles: the death of her husband, her suicidal thoughts, stealing from her mother, and her torturous

efforts to receive divine grace. Examination of Osborn's diaries and other letters from 1743 until her death in 1796 comprise the second part. Here Brekus offers wonderfully informative chapters that explore how Osborn tried to understand the spiritual significance of losing her only son; how she wrestled with poverty in a world that seemed increasingly consumer driven; what she thought about race and slavery; and the controversial role she played as an outspoken religious leader in her community, among many other topics. One of the book's great strengths is its ability to look beyond Osborn's private struggles to survey the social, cultural, and economic phenomena that informed her world—including everything from apprenticeship and the printing trade to evolving ideas about infant mortality, sin, heaven, and the millennium.

It is difficult to find fault with this book, as it exemplifies the best kind of historical writing. Brekus offers a compassionate and sensitive understanding of Sarah Osborn and her world as well as a remarkable facility with the scriptures Osborn so often invoked. My only reservation is that the index might have included more conceptual terms, or even specific entries for scriptures. For example, Brekus discusses Isaac Watts, the Psalms, or Osborn's singing on several occasions, but the book lacks index entries for terms like "singing," "songs," "hymns," or "Psalms." This may have represented an editorial decision by the press, and it may be remedied fairly easily when the work is published in paperback. The index is solid, but a more comprehensive one would be useful to future scholars, especially since this is such a rich, superbly researched, and detailed text.

In spite of this minor complaint, *Sarah Osborn's World* is an excellent book, reminiscent of Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's work on Martha Ballard and Al Young's study of George Hewes. Like Ulrich's book, the chapters in *Sarah Osborn's World* begin with short excerpts from Osborn's writings, which offer a fascinating window into the soul of a woman who was, perhaps above all, a writer. Indeed, in producing an eminently readable book that still tackles big historiographical questions, Brekus is staking a claim, and a legitimate one, that *Sarah Osborn's World* be placed alongside those canonical studies.

Edward E. Andrews is Assistant Professor of History at Providence College. He is a historian of race and religion in early America and the British Atlantic. The author of *NATIVE APOSTLES: BLACK AND INDIAN MISSIONARIES IN THE BRITISH ATLANTIC WORLD* (Harvard, 2013), Andrews is currently working on a book that explores

*race, slavery, and religion in colonial Newport, Rhode Island, Sarah Osborn's hometown.*

*The Correspondence of Henry D. Thoreau, Volume 1: 1834-1848.*

Edited by Robert N. Hudspeth. (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2013. Pp. x, 520. \$99.50.)

When, as an undergraduate at the University of Toledo, I took David Hoch's Thoreau seminar many years ago, I economized by borrowing some textbooks from Carlson Library. When we reached *The Maine Woods*, Professor Hoch noticed that I was reading from the Princeton edition instead of the paperback version he had assigned. He commended me for being so conscientious about textual accuracy. I took the compliment, but I had no idea what he meant: I knew nothing about textual punctiliousness. I chose the Princeton edition because it was the best-looking edition of *The Maine Woods* on the library shelf. But my professor's remark got me thinking about editing for the first time and made me consider the thought and care that go into the preparation of scholarly editions.

The Princeton edition of *The Maine Woods* originally appeared in 1972, the second volume of *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau*. Additional titles have been published since at the leisurely rate of one volume every two and a half years. The most recent is the first volume of Thoreau's correspondence. Edited by Robert N. Hudspeth, *The Correspondence of Henry D. Thoreau* lives up to the same high standard set by *The Maine Woods* and other earlier volumes. The page design is easy on the eyes, and the small hardback fits well in the hands—just the right size for reading in bed on a cold winter night or beneath a tree on a lazy summer day. Despite the compact format, the pages have wide, creamy margins, ideal for taking notes or recording personal impressions while reading. On page 60 of my review copy, for example, I put both an asterisk and an exclamation point next to a sentence from a letter Thoreau wrote to his sisters explaining why they should write as well as read: "A good book is the noblest work of man."

Happily, the Princeton edition includes letters both to and from Thoreau. Most of Thoreau's letters have been published before, but it is preferable to have them collected together and interspersed with letters he received. Each letter is set up similarly: a heading lists the name of the correspondent and the date of the letter; notes follow each letter's text identifying the correspondent and glossing personal,