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Review of *The Revolution Remembered: Eyewitness  
Accounts of the War for Independence* John C. Dann,  
ed.

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*Wife* (Boston, 1841). The popularity of Saul Padover's editorial selections of the letters and papers of various founding fathers illustrates the continued public interest, perhaps even an almost voyeuristic pleasure, in reading the private correspondence of public figures.

Some modern editors have recognized this audience as one having distinctive needs, and have designed collections of letters and papers edited specifically for a general readership. To continue to use the Adamses as an example, after completing the first two carefully annotated scholarly volumes in Series II of *The Adams Papers*, *The Adams Family Correspondence*, Lyman Butterfield prepared a separate volume, *The Book of Abigail and John: Selected Letters of the Adams Family, 1761-1784* (Boston, 1975) to coincide with the bicentennial. He eliminated footnotes, kept editorial apparatus to an absolute minimum, and gave the text "literally, with minimal regularization for readability."

The cost of producing books, however, has made it necessary for those modern editors whose documents have a popular as well as scholarly interest to attempt to serve the needs of both audiences simultaneously, by producing scholarly works that will appeal to the general reader. *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, edited by C. Vann Woodward (New Haven, 1981) is one such volume. Not only is its subject one that has enjoyed considerable popular interest, but the design of the book jacket, the advertising it has received, and the reviews in the popular as well as scholarly press indicate the hopes of its publisher and editor that it will have an appeal far beyond the scholars and students of academia. The book under review here falls into the same category. As such, it has strengths and weaknesses derived from its dual nature.

*The Revolution Remembered* makes a major contribution to scholarship of the Revolutionary War by bringing together in one volume a sampling of the rich resources of the common soldier's memory of that war as found in the Revolutionary War Pension and Land Warrant Records in Record Group 15 of the National Archives. Any student of the revolution who has used these records is aware of their virtually untapped potential for interpreting the way in which the war affected the common soldier both during the military campaigns themselves and in the decades after the men returned to their communities and families. The pension legislation of 1818, 1820, 1828, 1832, and afterward, spelled out which veterans and family members were eligible for aid, and required each of the 80,000 eventual applicants to submit certain types of documentation: discharge papers; commissions (in the case of officers); deposi-

## Review

John C. Dann, ed., *The Revolution Remembered: Eyewitness Accounts of the War for Independence* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), \$20.

The audience for the art of what is now called documentary historical editing has long been composed of two quite separate groups of people. Professional historians have depended upon editors for reliable reproductions of documents otherwise either inaccessible or costly (both in time and money) to study in their archival repositories. At the same time, a historically curious and literate general public has read the printed records of the past for insight into the lives of past heroes, for understanding of their own times, or simply for pleasure. The commercial market for our public and private documentary heritage has been steady, even lucrative; when Charles Francis Adams first published his grandmother's correspondence in *Letters of Mrs. Adams, the Wife of John Adams* (Boston, 1840) with an apology for attempting anything so "novel", the public contradicted his pessimism by buying up three editions of the work within a year and demanding a companion edition, *Letters of John Adams Addressed to His*

tions describing the veteran's service, including specific details about the officers under which he served and the battles in which he fought; schedules of property (to prove that the veteran was indigent and "in need of his country's assistance"); certificates of marriage; depositions testifying to the veteran's good character, veracity, or comradeship in a revolutionary military unit. These records have been reproduced on microfilm by the National Archives in two versions: M804, containing on 2,670 reels the entire file, and M805, a selection of the most relevant records for each veteran in a more manageable 898-reel series.

John C. Dann has read through the selected series and chosen from it the retrospective narratives of battle experience of seventy-nine men and women. He introduces each narrative with a brief summary of the veteran's life, and sets the narrative within the larger context of the particular battle or campaign it recalls. Narratives are grouped to form a coherent pattern according to the major events and campaigns of the war.

The result is a stunning "oral history" that recreates, as few other volumes have, a sense of what the war was like for the people who experienced it in the lines of battle. Anecdotes abound: Colonel Shepard, reports Private Wood, received a ball "through his double chin"; Josiah Sabin, on guard at Quebec, refused to let General Arnold "who had been out woman hunting beyond the line of sentinels" pass back into quarters because he did not know the countersign; John Cock, stationed in Cherokee country on the frontier, was scalped and left for dead, but lived to show the holes in his head, "one of them . . . perhaps two inches long and one wide and about one deep." The narratives of the slave Jehu Grant and of Anna Oosterhout Myers, who watched her husband and sons being dragged off by Indians and matter-of-factly returned to her burning home and put out the fire, are moving in their straightforwardness and eloquence. In short, *The Revolution Remembered* is a compelling, readable book which will entertain countless Revolutionary War "buffs" and become an integral part of professorial lectures wherever the war of independence is part of the curriculum.

In presenting these narratives, however, Dann has chosen an editorial method that makes it necessary for serious scholars to return to the microfilms of the originals. "Punctuation, capitalization, abbreviation, paragraphing and spelling have been regularized and corrected without comment," he explains. "Names of persons and places have been corrected when identity was certain"—this too without comment. This is, on the whole, a sound policy, parti-

cularly when designing edited materials for broad readership. Yet one does not have to be a complete "Tansellian" to wonder if so much regularization is really necessary. In the narrative of James Huston, for instance, a narrative of seven manuscript pages signed by the deponent with an "X" (thus indicating that the actual writing was done by a court clerk), Dann has transcribed each ampersand as "and," inserted a substantial number of commas, periods, semicolons, and apostrophes (several where even current rules of punctuation would not require them), changed "block house" to "blockhouse," respelled "Loughrey" as "Lochrey," and "Rannell" (a consistent spelling within the deposition) as "Randall," and removed random capitalizations. None of these changes represent a real alteration of the content of the text, but taken together they sanitize and subtly change its impact. Since this *is* oral testimony, it might be significant to a student of language, for instance, to know that the way Huston pronounced his words consistently led the clerk to write "Rannell." In the military records as a whole, spelling of names is often arbitrary: "Lochry" could appear as "Loughry," "Lochrey," "Lachrey" or another variation. Frequently a man's name will be spelled in as many different ways as there are people writing it down. In the case of a non-literate individual, we cannot even determine spelling by the way he himself chose to spell it. What then is the basis for deciding on one particular spelling over others? The general reader, even the professor preparing a lecture, does not need to know. But the researcher looking for other records of this man needs to search all the variant spellings, and needs to know why this particular one has been chosen as authoritative. Not only does Dann not tell us, he does not indicate where he has made changes in spelling.

The headnotes Dann provides for each entry are well-written, and for the general reader are less disruptive than explanatory footnotes might be. But there is no citation of the sources for the information. This reviewer suspects, from personal knowledge of the pension records, that much of it is from other papers in each pensioner's file. If Dann has gathered additional information from a search of census lists or other sources, he does not tell us. Finally, the volume is well-indexed, although in some cases the entries seem arbitrary, if not amusing. (Where is the reader who would search an index for accounts of "Indecent exposure of the hind parts?" The curious will be glad to know that information about this activity can be found on page 298.)

Documentary editors have recently engaged in some rather strenuous debates about their responsi-

bilities in transcribing, annotating, and indexing. It is perhaps unfair to criticize the editor of this volume for not recognizing some of the standards that have emerged from these debates, or to suggest that he falls short of a rigorous application of those standards with which even some of the members of this association themselves disagree. Most users of Dann's work will be impressed by it and grateful for the contributions it makes, which are substantial. Those who are engaged in the debate about editorial practices can recognize those contributions, but have a responsibility to look at the way in which the practice of documentary editing is being carried on, even by those who have little training in it, and suggest ways in which the needs of a broad variety of users of edited documents can be met.

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