

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Friends and Enemies in Penn's Woods: Indians, Colonists, and the Racial Construction of Pennsylvania. Edited by William A. Pencak and Daniel K. Richter.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0375f982>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 29(2)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Shaw, John M.

Publication Date

2005-03-01

DOI

10.17953

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

to the diversity of women's lives and stories. Ultimately, regardless of any minor shortcomings, I agree with Gloria Steinem's and Vine Deloria's comments in the foreword and introduction that this book has great value. It is an invitation not only to learn *about* Native women's lives but to learn *from* Native women about life-sustaining principles and strategies important to us all.

Carol Ward

Brigham Young University

Friends and Enemies in Penn's Woods: Indians, Colonists, and the Racial Construction of Pennsylvania. Edited by William A. Pencak and Daniel K. Richter. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004. 336 pages. \$22.95 paper.

If history is the only human laboratory available to us, then colonial Pennsylvania has become the recent focus for many excellent studies on Euro-American and Native American relations. An outpouring of excellent new scholarship submitted to the journal *Pennsylvania History* provided the impetus for the publication of *Friends and Enemies in Penn's Woods: Indians, Colonists, and the Racial Construction of Pennsylvania*. The editors of this collection of essays, William A. Pencak and Daniel K. Richter, felt that American Indian and Euro-American relations in Pennsylvania from 1682 to 1768 had been overlooked in comparison to other regions in British North America.

It seems that Pennsylvania's nickname as the Keystone State provides an appropriate metaphor for helping to unlock some of the central issues of colonial era ethnohistory. Dedicated appropriately to historians Alden T. Vaughan and Francis Jennings, this book (which includes four helpful maps and a dozen relevant illustrations keyed appropriately to the adjacent text) makes a significant addition to other recent books focusing on colonial Pennsylvania. James H. Merrell's *Into the American Woods: Negotiators on the Pennsylvania Frontier* (1999) and Jane T. Merritt's *At the Crossroads: Indians and Empires on a Mid-Atlantic Frontier, 1700–1763* (2003) provide a dark yet compelling cross-cultural perspective on the history of Euro-American and American Indian interactions in Penn's Woods.

Taken together, these works represent an admirable effort to integrate the experiences of Native American peoples into the total fabric of British North American history. Every good collection of essays like *Friends and Enemies* needs a coherent focus. Discerning the increased use of racial terminology by non-Indians and Indians in early-eighteenth-century Pennsylvania provides a major contribution to the colonial history of Indian-white relations. The collective research in this volume pushes the advent of a serious racial divide between Natives and Europeans back in time to the 1740s, well before the Seven Years War (1754–61). The major scholarly question under investigation and contention throughout these essays is how and why a separatist racial discourse and transformation developed between Euro-Americans and Native Americans in colonial Pennsylvania.

Guided more by the Quaker principle of the “inner light” than the imperial implications of King Charles II’s charter, William Penn did more than any other British North American governor (with the sole exception of Roger Williams in Rhode Island) to establish peaceful relations with the Native peoples he encountered. That an English aristocrat did not regard Indians as equals should come as no surprise. Yet Penn did not treat them as mere subjects either. He acknowledged and respected their rights of possession by scrupulously purchasing land from them by consent. Penn’s courtesy, fairness, honorable dealings, and adherence to Native diplomatic protocols won the Indians’ respect and affection for generations after his passing. This era of good feelings became known as the “Long Peace” since it forestalled any serious Indian war in Pennsylvania for seventy years.

As James Spady’s essay “Colonialism and the Discursive Antecedents of Penn’s Treaty with the Indians” points out, this narrative of Pennsylvania’s founding “perpetuates a colonial understanding . . . rather than a Lenape point of view” (38). Where is the Native voice and perspective? Perhaps it can be found in the Great Treaty Wampum Belt given to Penn by the Delaware diplomats at Shackamaxon. It symbolized the Delaware’s vision of “linking arms together” to create amity in a multicultural borderland. Yet whether Penn’s first Indian council under the “treaty elm” near the center of present-day Philadelphia actually occurred, or was over-romanticized by painter Benjamin West a century later, does not diminish Penn’s legacy of dealing honorably with the Lenape and other Native inhabitants. To suggest otherwise seems anachronistic and beside the point. But Alison Hirsch’s essay “Indians, Métis, and Euro-American Women on Multiple Frontiers” does raise important concerns over West’s symbolic marginalization of women’s vital roles as economic providers, traders, healers, cultural brokers, and participants in military expeditions and at treaty conferences.

William Penn’s experiences and Quaker worldview created the most open and liberal society in British North America. Pennsylvania had more ethnic, linguistic, racial, and religious diversity than any other colony. As noted by Colin Calloway in *New Worlds for All: Indians, Europeans and the Remaking of Early America* (1997), Penn categorized the immigrant population as “a Collection of divers Nations in Europe” (172). Pennsylvania experienced several waves of immigrants from Northern Ireland and the German-speaking states bordering on the Rhine. The colony remained the favored destination for thousands of immigrants from these areas because it offered economic opportunity (land), low taxes, freedom of conscience, and no military conscription.

Demographic changes from 1725 to 1755 increased the potential for disruption as Pennsylvania’s population grew from 40,000 to 150,000. Germans became the largest ethnic group. Along with the Scots-Irish, the arrival of immigrants exacerbated tensions over land policy and relationships with Indians (curiously, *Friends and Enemies in Penn’s Woods* has no index entries for Germans or Scots-Irish). As noted in David Preston’s essay “Squatters, Indians, Proprietary Government, and Land in the Susquehanna Valley,” the Delaware chief Teedyusung concluded that “the Land is the Cause of our Differences” (188). A unique set of problems accompanied this

extremely heterogeneous population, challenged the founding principles of the Quaker colony, and made the formation of a stable society problematic.

This situation created a very confused and dispersed pattern of settlement that stretched Pennsylvania's limited liberal government to its full extent. Scots-Irish Presbyterians and German pietist sects lived along the frontier while Quakers concentrated in the more secure eastern parts of the providence. Religious and ethnic factors increasingly mixed with sectional, imperial, and security problems. Most immigrants wanted land. Unfortunately, the legal alienation of land became more difficult in the era following William Penn's death in 1718. Disputes among his successors in the Penn family between 1718 and 1732 made it virtually impossible for land titles to be issued. The colony's land office closed for several years. The new proprietors denounced the immigrants for not delaying settlement until they could purchase land legally. So they squatted on land belonging to the proprietors, absentee landlords, speculators, and Indians alike.

This volume's focus on the racial construction of irremediable European and Native differences reinforces a familiar declension narrative. Yet the book's relatively narrow frame of reference constitutes its major weakness. None of the scholars in this collection delineated a coherent model for how the cultural construction of racism in colonial Pennsylvania evolved like Nancy Shoemaker did in *A Strange Likeness: Becoming Red and White in Eighteenth-Century North America* (2004). Perhaps someone could have incorporated American Indian legal scholar Robert A. Williams Jr.'s adaptation of Albert Memmi's four-step model of how racism is constructed and institutionalized: Racist attitudes toward divergent populations start with perceived differences about physiology or culture. Then negative values are assigned to those different physical characteristic or cultural traits and become generalized stereotypes. This rationalizes the power, privilege, and status of the dominant group in society, which institutionalizes racism into government policies.

Any substantive examination of the cultural construction of race requires a broad assessment of many countervailing economic, political, and social forces. Most of the essays attempt to demonstrate how early Native American and Euro-American accommodation in Penn's Woods devolved into racial divergence. But looking almost exclusively at Indian-white conflict begs the questions of compared to what? Readers may get the false impression that interracial clashes represented an anomaly in Penn's relatively "peaceable kingdom." Nothing could be further from the truth. Perhaps scholars should remain wary of this "demolition" theme of colonial Pennsylvania history (266). A different perspective can be derived by analyzing Penn's Woods in a broader social context.

Paul Moyer's essay "'Real' Indians, 'White' Indians, and the Contest for the Wyoming Valley" explains how "frontier contests over property and power contributed to a culture of violence" between Natives and newcomers (228). In 1768, the unprovoked murder of ten Indian men, women, and children by Frederick Stump and his servant John Ironcutter represented the worst case of individual homicide in the history of colonial Pennsylvania. It occurred within the context of increasingly tense relations between American Indians

and Euro-Americans. But within Anglo-American society, Stump had engaged in a dispute with John Penn over the availability of Indian lands for legal settlement. Many frontiersmen like Stump became increasingly convinced that the colony's proprietors and Quaker-dominated assembly cared more for the Native peoples than European settlers. David Preston characterized this "complex, ambivalent, and contingent" situation as a "triangular contest involving squatters, Indians, and proprietors" (200). Yet this gruesome incident illustrated more than "dissatisfaction with the colony's land policies" (229). Like the 1763 brutal murder of twenty Christian Conestoga Indians by the Paxton Boys, Stump and Ironcutter were never brought to justice.

Characterized as "Christian white savages" by Benjamin Franklin after their murderous spree, the Paxton Boys further alarmed the colony by marching on Philadelphia to petition the government (202). Krista Camenzind's essay "Violence, Race, and the Paxton Boys" denies that such democratic and racist impulses can coexist. Yet the right of citizens to petition for the redress of grievances has always been a fundamental tenet of democracy. In British North America violent democratic outbursts fueled in part by anti-Indian racism created organized extralegal actions ranging from Bacon's Rebellion in 1676 to the Paxton Boys in 1763.

These infamous homicides against innocent Natives raise serious questions about Indian-white relations. But the larger issues of endemic violent crime and ineffectual law enforcement in colonial Pennsylvania remain unaddressed in this volume. As noted by Jack Marietta's and Gail Rowe's extensive statistical analysis of crime in Pennsylvania from 1682 to 1800, "Many murders arose from the physical intimacy between Indians and whites after 1718. The place where the cultures met, which historian Richard White calls 'the middle ground,' was a violent and often deadly place" (in *Explorations in Early American Culture* 3 [1999]: 26).

While this collection of essays provides a more dubious view of Penn's benevolent paternalism toward the indigenous peoples of colonial Pennsylvania, James H. Merrell's afterword adds an appropriate cautionary note. Penn's ambitious colonization efforts may have focused largely on attracting European settlers and selling them land to make money, but characterizations of Penn as "duplicitous, conniving, or hypocritical," or grudging admission that he was only "comparatively flexible in his dealings with Natives" seem unwarranted (267). These negative inferences raise crucial questions about what standards are being applied to reach such conclusions. Revisionist reassessments cannot diminish Penn's legacy of championing and institutionalizing relative peace, religious pluralism, political freedom, legal due process, and interracial harmony.

William Penn has stood the tests of time and critical inquiry as an exemplar of peaceful and inclusive relations between European Americans and Native Americans. As Merrell points out, it pays to be skeptical but "not too cynical" about them (267). Although some Native diplomats may have embellished Penn's reputation for equity as a shrewd ploy to call subsequent high officials of Pennsylvania to task for less than honorable dealings, at least the savvy proprietor of Penn's Woods made many Indian friends and very few

enemies. This admirable volume realized its collective hope that “Pennsylvania’s Native friends and foes . . . will be forgotten folk no more” (268).

John M. Shaw

Minnesota State University Moorhead

The History of the American Indians. By James Adair. Edited and with an introduction and annotations by Kathryn E. Holland Braund. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005. 608 pages. \$65.00 cloth.

Those who study southeastern Native American history struggle with finding sources for the eighteenth century, which are rare and often problematic. Some scholars consider James Adair’s *History of the American Indians* a source too riddled with errors and exaggerations to be of use, even though he lived in intimate contact with southeastern Native people during the eighteenth century for more than forty years. The new volume reintroduces Adair as a viable source for understanding southeastern Natives. A handsome, accessible book, it is enhanced by Kathryn Braund’s lucid annotations in which she uses other primary and secondary sources to aid in understanding Adair’s work.

James Adair was a British trader who emigrated to the American southeast around 1735. Soon after his arrival he entered the lucrative though risky trade in deerskins. He made connections first with the Catawbas and Cherokees and by the mid-1740s developed a trading relationship with the Chickasaws farther to the west in what is today northern Mississippi. He married a Chickasaw woman and had several children with her. Like most other British traders of the time, his experiences gave him many insights into southeastern Native people’s rich culture. Unlike other traders however, Adair was literate and educated and had a good knowledge of classical texts and languages, all of which allowed him to publish his book in 1775. While the title suggests a more comprehensive geographic coverage, Adair dealt only with southeastern Native Americans, specifically five tribes: the Chickasaws, Choctaws, Creeks, Cherokees, and Catawbas.

Other similar works from the eighteenth century possess neither the scope nor the depth of observation and understanding available in Adair. Most people who were inclined to publish accounts of travels or even extended stays in the interior southeast were usually educated but seldom showed the same interest in Native people, and none spent as much time with any of the tribes as did Adair. For example, among accessible, published works, Bernard Romans’s interest was primarily environmental and he, in his relatively short visit and only in the Gulf region, never lived with Native Americans. John Lawson’s journal showed more concern with Natives, but in South Carolina only and again for a limited time compared to Adair. French and Spanish sources, primarily unpublished and in archival collections, give us a good deal of knowledge about tribes farther west, especially the Choctaws and to some degree the Creeks, but are mostly silent on the other three groups explored by Adair. Antoine Le Page Du Pratz is one of the more