

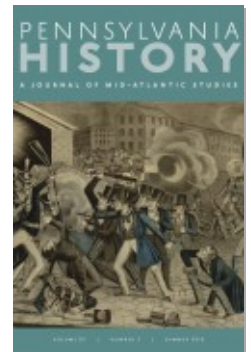


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*Dangerous Guests: Enemy Captives and Revolutionary
Communities during the War for Independence* by Ken Miller
(review)

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Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies, Volume 83,
Number 3, Summer 2016, pp. 432-434 (Review)



Published by Penn State University Press

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Back to Matt Groening: readers of *School Is Hell* might also recall the warning attached to Professor Single-Theory-to-Explain-Everything: “Theory may be correct.” Anglicization may not explain everything about early America, but after fifty years of currency, it has certainly proved its worth. That staying power is testimony to Murrin’s insight and his ability to make sense of the big picture. This volume serves as a fitting tribute to the originality of his work and as an excellent introduction to it for the next generation of historians.

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Ken Miller. *Dangerous Guests: Enemy Captives and Revolutionary Communities during the War for Independence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014). Pp. 260. Illustrations, notes, index. Cloth, \$35.00.

Ken Miller’s *Dangerous Guests: Enemy Captives and Revolutionary Communities during the War for Independence* provides a case study of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, during the American Revolution and investigates how an ethnically diverse town faced the wartime pressures of hosting British and German prisoners of war and in turn emerged with a united American identity. Utilizing local archives, military and political records, and engaging with a growing historiography in frontier Pennsylvania and prisoners of war during the War for American Independence, Miller contributes to our understanding of the conflict in the American interior and in the everyday lives of the revolutionaries. An associate professor of history at Washington College, Miller argues that while residents of Lancaster tended to local security and oversaw the detention of hundreds of prisoners, their position as a crossroads, both ethnically and spatially, resulted in a mixture and exchange of differing cultures, backgrounds, and perspectives that transcended their communal attachments. Lancaster’s German, Scots-Irish, and English populations became invested in a larger, communal struggle, and residents increasingly identified with distant friends and allies in a shared sense of patriotism and as Americans.

Presenting his argument in a topical approach, Miller does well in establishing the assorted peoples and cultures making up Lancaster in order to demonstrate their changing identities during the conflict.

Pennsylvania's rich soil and accommodation for different religious beliefs attracted a variety of peoples from Europe who moved to available lands in the interior. Lancaster as a result sprang up with different cultures, religious beliefs, languages, and trades. By the mid-eighteenth century German speakers made up 70 percent of the population, with Scots-Irish and English settlers rounding out nearly the rest. This pluralism did have its drawbacks. Miller shows that established Anglo officials, including Benjamin Franklin, feared a German takeover and that Pennsylvania's society remained divided along ethnocultural lines. In establishing the sense of exclusiveness among groups, and in particular the struggle faced by Germans to increase their political participation, Miller is able to jump into the meat of his research and to consider the multiple enemies of Lancaster's Whigs.

Differences among Lancaster's residents were mitigated by the need for unification against the threat of proximal hostilities or in seeing their enemies face to face. Violence from the French and Indian War had first bonded frontier settlers and communities as they relied upon each other for mutual support and survival. The same dynamic is seen with the American Revolution as the imperial crisis aroused Lancaster's inhabitants to new public roles and responsibilities, thus requiring interethnic cooperation. The legacy of ethnic antagonism remained as English and German associators mingled and worked uncomfortably with each other at the outset. German print media proved critical in informing the German population and in gathering support for defending their material gains. Loyalist neighbors assisted in furthering cooperation as Lancaster's revolutionaries marginalized their internal enemies and "enforced the boundaries of a properly patriotic community and refined their evolving American identity" (137).

Miller is at his best in his discussion of prisoners of war, their relationships with their captors, and how residents of Lancaster came to view and treat British and German captives in different ways. The arrival of nearly 400 British captives of the Seventh and Twenty-Sixth Regiments of Foot in early December 1775 put Lancaster's ethnic and cultural divisions to immediate test. Lacking instructions from the Continental Congress or their state government and with winter approaching, Lancaster's residents had no time to squabble with each other and worked to provide humane treatment for the prisoners. The deepening conflict entrenched the two camps of the British captives, particularly their vocal officers, and

Lancaster's Whigs. By the summer of 1776 militants collectively identified against their mutual enemies who endangered their community. Not only did the British redcoat become a daily reminder for the cause, but it also symbolized an imminent threat that could unravel all of the patriots' efforts. Miller's use of transitions between his topics is best illustrated with events in late 1776. Prisoner exchanges removed the quarrelsome British contingent, but before Lancaster could enjoy the war being removed from its doorstep, the success at Trenton on December 26 brought another dreaded responsibility.

His treatment of the arrival and reception of over 800 German Hessians in Lancaster is where Miller shines. After discussing the familiar American fears of the Hessians and clarifying the Germans' status as "auxiliaries" (instead of "mercenaries," as they are usually identified), Miller shows that the Hessians' longing to return home created a buffer of detachment between the Americans and themselves. This disconnect, combined with their work ethic, developed into docility among the Hessians. Americans eagerly sought to employ skilled German craftsmen, and one gains a sense of appreciation for the budding relationships between supposed enemies. With one-third of the German captives being skilled craftsmen in over thirty trades, and with American labor in short supply, it became commonplace to see German prisoners strolling through the town and countryside as "the Hessian laborers provided valuable service to the state's revolutionary community" (116). With such difficulty suppressing British soldiers' vocal dissent or escape attempts, the Germans' overall cooperativeness and industry "deepened the revolutionaries estrangement from the British while reinforcing their attachment to an emerging American identity" (98).

Dangerous Guests provides insight into the diverse communities in the interior of perhaps the most diverse state during the War for American Independence. It offers another lens through which to view the formation of an American identity, working through a topic that may appear more specialized but is garnering increased attention: prisoners of war. While at times the prose can short-circuit its own momentum with an overabundance of narrative threads, Miller provides a valuable contribution to the growing field of prisoner-of-war scholarship during the American Revolution.

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