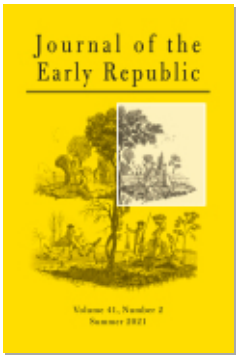
World of Trouble: A Philadelphia Quaker Family's Journey through the American Revolution by Richard Godbeer (review)



Charlene Boyer Lewis

Journal of the Early Republic, Volume 41, Number 2, Summer 2021, pp. 305-308 (Review)

Published by The University of North Carolina Press
DOI: *https://doi.org/10.1353/jer.2021.0037*

ecuted if captured, offer fascinating insights into how racial dynamics structured imprisonment. The occasional references to women illuminate the diverse familial communities entangled in the quagmire of prisoner exchange. Jones notes, for example, that German troops at Saratoga "saved their colors by sewing them into Baroness von Riedesel's mattress" (155–56) and that almost five hundred women and children accompanied the Convention Army to Lancaster in June 1781. Many of these women were Americans who had married enemy captives lodged in their towns. I found myself wanting to know more about the social communities, both military and civilian, that resided alongside enemy captives and shared in their suffering. In highlighting these complex social ties, Jones has raised compelling possibilities for future scholarship on civilian–military relations during the conflict. An ambitious and impressive book, *Captives of Liberty* offers a fresh interpretation of the American Revolution that will be required reading for scholars of the era.

Lauren Duval is an assistant professor of history at the University of Oklahoma. She is currently working on a book manuscript about revolutionary households, gender, and military occupation during the American Revolution.

World of Trouble: A Philadelphia Quaker Family's Journey through the American Revolution. By Richard Godbeer. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019. Pp. 460. Cloth, $38.00.)

Reviewed by Charlene Boyer Lewis

Richard Godbeer has written a stunning biography of a marriage. This book is more than a mere recounting of a wife, Elizabeth Sandwith Drinker, and her husband, Henry Drinker, and the years they spent together. Instead, Godbeer analyzes this decades-long, loving relationship in all of its complexity and uses it to examine the larger social and spiritual worlds of Quaker Philadelphia in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. We get the inner workings not only of a marriage and a family but also of a larger community—and all of it beautifully rendered. This was a tumultuous era of revolution and nation-building, and the principled, pacifist stance of the Quakers made life especially taxing—and dangerous—for the Drinkers and their fellow Friends. The Drinkers may be the era's best-known Philadelphia couple, and, as Godbeer nicely

states, they are "poignant characters with whom to travel through those turbulent revolutionary decades" (5) who also offer a distinctive and illuminating perspective of the period. There is plenty of public drama to draw on, but Godbeer also details the couple's more intimate, private struggles as they sought, usually as a united team, to decide what was best for their family and appropriate within their religious beliefs in such a challenging time. Sometimes events overwhelmed their well-laid plans, but the two also constantly chose, for better or worse, to live according to their beliefs and retain as much control over their own lives and the lives of their children as possible.

Godbeer uses the word "journey" often to describe this examination of the couple, and the way he has structured the book—organizing by prevailing themes instead of simple chronology—does feel as if we are travelling with the Drinkers through their trials and tribulations. We range through the years of their marriage in each chapter, which gives greater import to their actions and decisions, and their consequences, instead of just the details of each year. Both of the Drinkers were ambitious; both wanted status and the finer things in life, even if their Quaker principles regularly kept their desires in check. While examining Henry's "stunningly inept decisions" and his "woefully deficient" political instincts (88), Godbeer connects us to a larger discussion of changing Quaker principles in this era and how they created tensions in Pennsylvania and for Quakers themselves, especially as these stances caused them to suffer persecution once the Revolution began.

Though on an intimate scale, looking at the Revolution through the Drinkers' experiences allows us to see not only how complicated the upheaval was but also the irony of how intolerant those fighting for liberty were toward those who would not enthusiastically join them. Philadelphia quickly became a dangerous place for Quakers, who were harassed, fined, imprisoned, exiled, and even executed by patriot mobs and government officials. Henry Drinker was one of a large group of male Quakers who found themselves separated from their families and exiled to Virginia for refusing to take loyalty oaths. Their wives worried about their welfare for months before taking action. In one of the best stories in the book, Godbeer chronicles how Elizabeth and some other courageous Quaker wives stepped beyond the spiritual realm and became "actively involved in political controversy" (171) when they prepared a petition to the local, state, and even Continental governments demanding the release of their husbands. They then journeyed through war-torn Pennsylvania

to deliver it in person, even stopping to plead with General George Washington at Valley Forge. Godbeer also reveals how war invaded women's domestic spaces as soldiers from both sides repeatedly demanded and often confiscated food, supplies, or horses. This invasion could extend further when soldiers, usually officers, demanded board and moved into some of the best rooms in women's houses, as happened to Elizabeth. More troublingly, the women in the Drinker home repeatedly had to deal with unruly soldiers who sought to harm them physically. As Godbeer makes perfectly clear, there was no separation of war and homefront; women were never truly safe.

As the Drinkers dealt with patriot persecution, Henry's exile, and soldiers' incursions, they suffered inward, spiritual crises that were just as damaging. The Quaker admonition to embrace a "spirit of resignation" often divided Henry and Elizabeth (169). Henry relied on this precept far more to get through his ordeals than Elizabeth did; she regarded her sufferings as the practical and emotional struggles of a woman alone in occupied Philadelphia. No wonder Elizabeth "remained embittered decades after the Revolution" (208). Henry, on the other hand, was "determined not to forget the spiritual lessons of the war" and gave up his international business for economic pursuits more in keeping with Quaker principles in an effort to reinvent himself "as an ethically driven entrepreneur who would bring both wealth and enlightenment to the post-revolutionary world" (215). Yet, he would be disillusioned by the dishonesty and cupidity of his business partners. Elizabeth also faced new challenges in her domestic life as servants, both black and white, challenged her authority as they sought more freedom and equality in the new republic. Godbeer carefully unpacks the complex dynamics of domestic race relations inside the Drinker home, noting that "Elizabeth's attitude toward her domestic staff blended self-interest, condescension, and distrust with loyalty, compassion, and sometimes affection" (279), regardless of race, and allows his fascinating research to shine.

Godbeer successfully balances the biography between the two Drinkers, adroitly playing her world to his world and highlighting the spaces they shared, especially those concerning their children. The Drinkers' parenting receives the most attention once their children are adults, but I would have liked to have seen more discussion of this issue when the children were much younger since they had always been so central to the Drinkers' lives. Indeed, we learn very little about the children until they are grown and in their own households. Godbeer never romanticizes this

family or marriage. The Drinkers, like everyone else in their age, understood their marriage in hierarchical terms. Godbeer's talent for fine prose and expert storytelling is nicely displayed throughout the book, and he evokes sympathy and understanding for this couple who sought to love and cherish one another and their children through the storms and terrors of revolution and its aftermath. Expertly setting their lives into the larger context of the times, he repeatedly demonstrates that the Drinkers are significant not merely in their own right but also for "remind[ing] us that the fraught political issues of their era had personal, spiritual, and emotional ramifications that played out in private as well as public spaces" (371).

Charlene Boyer Lewis is a professor at Kalamazoo College. She is the author of *Elizabeth Patterson Bonaparte: An American Aristocrat in the Early Republic* (Philadelphia, 20212) and *Ladies and Gentlemen on Display: Planter Society at the Virginia Springs, 1790–1860* (Charlottesville, VA, 2001). She is currently writing a biography of Peggy Shippen Arnold.

Breakaway Americas: The Unmanifest Future of the Jacksonian United States. By Thomas Richards, Jr. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 2020. Pp. 332. Cloth, $49.95.)

Reviewed by Brandon Mills

While historians of the early United States have increasingly questioned received narratives about U.S. expansion in recent decades, they have often continued to overlook how uncertain the geopolitics of North America remained throughout the early nineteenth century. This is the central historiographic challenge that animates Thomas Richards's excellent *Breakaway Americas: The Unmanifest Future of the Jacksonian United States*, which grapples with "a dizzying number of political formations between the years 1838 and 1846" (6), including Americans supporting republican rebellion in Upper Canada, Cherokee nationalists on Indian Territory, exiled Mormon dissidents in Mexico, and white settlers in Texas and on the Pacific Coast. While these short-lived efforts at political autonomy tend to be dismissed or ignored, Richards strives to evaluate them on their own terms and, in doing so, succeeds in striking a blow to the persistence of Manifest Destiny, an ideology that has caused histori-