

Mary M. Schweitzer — *Custom and Contract: Household, Government, and the Economy in Colonial Pennsylvania*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987. Pp. xii, 271.

Of all the eighteenth-century British North American colonies, Pennsylvania had the best reputation for benevolent government and economic opportunity. Residents of other colonies often looked in envy at the Quaker province and thousands of British and European immigrants indicated their approval with their feet. While numerous historians have examined the peculiar attractiveness of Pennsylvania's government, relatively few have turned systematically to the economic conditions that made William Penn's province such a desirable place in which to live. In her *Custom and Contract*, Mary Schweitzer helps to balance the historiography by focusing directly on the economic circumstances of Chester county residents between 1700 and 1755, and on the economic policies that Pennsylvanians pushed on both provincial and community levels. Using sample probate documents, Professor Schweitzer estimates that among families with children, per capita income grew annually between 0.9 and 1.65 percent, rates not far removed from the 1.4 percent economic historians attribute to the nineteenth century. Apparently contemporary opinion was quite correct: Pennsylvania was a remarkably prosperous place.

How is this prosperity to be accounted for? Professor Schweitzer offers a number of reasons. First, Pennsylvania's relatively late settlement meant that merchants and farmers could easily link themselves to an expanding export market in the West Indies. Immediate demand for country produce meant immediate income, part of which could be employed to expand production. Second, Pennsylvanians established a series of property rights short of full registration of title that provided easy access to land and gave a market value to whatever agricultural improvements a settler might make. Third, rural residents tended to diversify their economic efforts both to minimize risk and to maximize their earning capacity. Fourth, the weight of government was minimal; taxes were low, and local government tended to be responsive to the concerted demands of residents only for roads, bridges and rudimentary poor relief. Fifth, the provincial government was responsible for two important legislative innovations that were major contributors to economic development. The Pennsylvania Loan Office, a land bank begun in 1723, provided a circulating medium, subsidized loans, and capital with which producers could expand production. Closely enough controlled to prevent inflation, Pennsylvania's currency greatly facilitated economic activities in the colony. In addition, the provincial government instituted a series of inspection laws, beginning with flour and biscuit, which kept Pennsylvania produce in high repute. The result was higher returns for the Pennsylvania producer and easier sales for the colony's merchants.

While Professor Schweitzer's entire analysis of Pennsylvania's prosperity is important, the most significant new ground she breaks is in her discussions of land titles and the loan office. In her careful description of the types of real property claims Pennsylvanians could defend, she makes clear just how low the threshold to some kind of realty related capital accumulation was. In the case of the loan office, Professor Schweitzer is the first to subject the records of that institution to rigorous examination. Her conclusion that the loans were used largely to expand the production of middling to upper class rural households and not to finance land purchases adds additional depth to our perceptions of how the Pennsylvania economy functioned.

Strong as the monograph is as an analysis of Pennsylvania's colonial economy, there are some important areas of omission. One of these is immigration. Although Chester county attracted few immigrants after 1725, immigration provided much of the labor and human capital necessary for a vital provincial economy from which Chester county residents benefited in a number of ways. To see Chester as a self-contained unit amid a vibrantly growing Delaware region is to distort reality for the sake of the model. The second omission includes both physical and cultural resources. Southeastern Pennsylvania was a particularly fertile and productive place, and Chester county Quakers shared important characteristics of social behavior which affected their economic activities. While it might be argued that these characteristics are too well-known and too well-studied to merit extensive treatment, they do have an important bearing on the structure of economic opportunity in Chester and, as such, deserve inclusion in any model of economic development predicated on the Pennsylvania experience.

On the whole, *Custom and Contract* is a useful contribution to our knowledge of the colonial economy. Despite being occasionally over-freighted with the language of economic analysis, this book is a clearly presented, well-organized discussion of the complex process of economic development. It is a strong statement that later American industrialization was rooted in the slow process of economic diversification and incremental maturation that occurred in the colonial years. As such, it should stimulate more inquiry into the processes of economic change that shaped the various societies of eighteenth-century America.

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Paul-André Turcotte — *L'enseignement secondaire public des frères éducateurs (1920-1970) : utopie et modernité*, Montréal, Bellarmin, 1988, 220 p.

L'histoire des frères enseignants au Québec est relativement peu connue, surtout si on veut dépasser le cas des communautés individuelles pour analyser les caractéristiques et les développements communs. C'est pourquoi le dernier ouvrage de P.-A. Turcotte est particulièrement bienvenu. Il efface un certain nombre de préjugés sur les frères d'entre 1920 et 1970, leur âge d'or, et renouvelle ainsi un pan important de l'histoire collective.

Le livre est découpé en trois chapitres, recoupant trois périodes : 1920-1940, 1940-1960 et 1960-1970. Il s'attache surtout au sort de l'école secondaire publique où, dès les lendemains de la Première Guerre mondiale, les frères éducateurs ont voulu instaurer un cours moderne, nord-américain, urbain, scientifique, ouvrant à l'université. Ce fut le cours primaire supérieur, créé en 1921 à l'École Saint-Louis du Mile-End (Montréal). Ce cours de quatre ans contenait des innovations : outre l'enseignement des sciences, il insistait sur l'apprentissage de l'anglais et introduisait l'enseignement du latin.

On devine la résistance qu'y opposa le monde clérical, Comité catholique (évêques) et collèges classiques en tête, pour maintenir son monopole sur le latin et sur l'accès à l'université. On la voit s'affirmer dès 1929, se renforcer même, et se