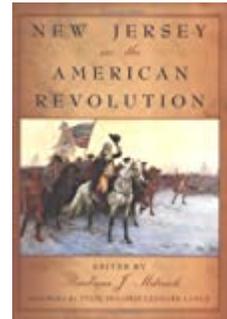




Barbara Mitnick, ed. *New Jersey in the American Revolution*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005. xviii + 268 pp. \$29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8135-3602-6.



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The Cockpit and Beyond

Growing up in Morris County, New Jersey, I could not avoid at least one school field trip to Morristown National Historical Park. I have memories of riding a yellow school bus down route 287 to Morristown and spending the day touring George Washington's headquarters at Ford Mansion before being let loose to explore the "log city" that the Continental Army built in the winter of 1779-80 at Jockey Hollow. (At the time, I had no idea that the log huts we ducked in and out of were replicas that had just been constructed by the National Park Service.) I am sure sometime throughout the day we were reminded about just how exciting it was to be living so close to such an important historical site and, though my memory has faded, I have no doubt that there were probably some remarks made about how New Jersey played an overlooked and underappreciated role in the American War for Independence.

Today, as we near the end of the 225th anniversary of the War for Independence, it appears that more and more people are becoming aware of what my childhood tour guides knew all along: one cannot understand the American Revolution without understanding the people

and landscape of the Garden State. For example, David Hackett Fischer devoted hundreds of pages to New Jersey in *Washington's Crossing* (2004), his massive Pulitzer Prize-winning study of the early years of the War. Moreover, in the summer of 2006 the United States House of Representatives joined the Senate in declaring fourteen New Jersey counties (including all of Union, Middlesex, Somerset, and Mercer counties), the "Crossroads of the American Revolution." Needless to say, it is a good time to be a student of New Jersey history.

And now, in *New Jersey in the American Revolution*, Barbara Mitnick has gathered twelve historians who have placed my elementary school excursions to Morristown (and the excursions of thousands of other kids at dozens of other historical sites across the state) at the very center of the stories Americans tell about our revolutionary past. Mitnick, Rutgers University Press, and the Washington Association of New Jersey have put together a handsome volume (including 13 glossy plates of eighteenth-century paintings and artifacts) that anyone with an interest in New Jersey history should add to their reading list. State senator Leonard Lance wrote the fore-

word and there is a blurb on the back cover by former governor Thomas H. Kean.

Some of the authors in this volume have resurrected the work of Leonard Lundin, the historian whose *Cockpit of the Revolution: The War for Independence in New Jersey* (1940) first detailed the important place of the state in the American Revolutionary War. Lundin is to the New Jersey revolutionary experience what Perry Miller was to the Puritans or Richard Hofstadter was to the American political tradition or C. Vann Woodward was to Southern history. His sixty-six-year-old interpretation of the war in New Jersey has shaped the field and serves as a necessary starting point for any re-evaluation of the topic. Half of the essays in *New Jersey in the American Revolution* cite him. Several make reference to his “cockpit” metaphor. And Mark Lender’s essay, “The ‘Cockpit’ Reconsidered,” engages Lundin directly.

Mitnick’s collection seeks to confirm Lundin’s thesis about New Jersey’s central role in the War. Military history buffs will find much to like about this volume, such as Thomas Fleming’s introductory essay, “Crossroads of the American Revolution,” Lender’s fine article on the British failure to counter American troops in the forgotten battles of the New Jersey interior, and Richard W. Hunter and Ian C.G. Burrow’s study of the geography and archaeology of the War. Hunter and Burrow’s essay, the longest in the book, is filled with helpful maps and provides a fascinating account of how archaeology can help historians develop a fuller picture of the War’s battles. They should be commended for their successful attempt at synthesizing technical archaeological research reports into an essay that is accessible to non-specialists.

But even as Lundin’s ghost looms large over New Jersey in the American Revolution, Mitnick has selected essays that take us well beyond the military dimensions of the Revolution. Maxine Lurie, the foremost authority on New Jersey’s 1776 state constitution, makes a strong case for the “radical” nature of the American Revolution in the Garden State, reminding us that the state’s government invested political authority in the people, provided for annual elections and jury trials, and maintained its commitment to religious freedom. David F. Fowler provides a thorough overview of the social and economic history of New Jersey at the time of the Revolution that is rooted in some of the best early American scholarship on these themes. Mitnick and Harriett C. Hawkins expand the scope of the volume even further by providing two informative essays on the arts (Mitnick) and architecture (Hawkins) in revolutionary New Jersey.

This volume does not neglect the impact of the Revolution on New Jersey’s slaves, free blacks, Indians, and women. Giles R. Wright, drawing on his previous work on African Americans in New Jersey and some of the most recent literature on American slavery, offers an outstanding essay that should be the starting point for all future students of the early New Jersey black experience. Lorraine E. Williams tells the story of the New Jersey Delaware’s eighteenth-century migration to the Ohio country and the attempts of missionaries such as John and David Brainerd to Christianize those Indians who stayed behind. Delight Dodyk introduces readers to women, such as Margaret Morris, Elizabeth Franklin, Susannah Livingston, Molly Pitcher, Ann Whithall, and Theodosia Prevost, who either participated in the American Revolution or had their lives permanently changed by it.

Such a volume should serve as a springboard to even further study in New Jersey’s revolutionary past. Some readers may want to know more. We are left, for example, with very little information about the loophole in the 1776 constitution that allowed some New Jersey women to vote and why this privilege was rescinded in 1807. This development in New Jersey political history often finds its way into United States history survey courses and textbooks, but unfortunately Dodyk devotes only a paragraph to it at the end of her article on New Jersey women.

Merrill Maguire Skaggs’s essay on New Jersey literature offers some helpful orientation to the works of women authors such as Esther Edwards Burr, Annis Boudinot, and Elizabeth Ashbridge, but we need to know more about early New Jersey literature (both print and scribal) beyond her references to the Benjamin and William Franklin correspondence; the writings of John Woolman; the fact that the authors of the Federalist papers had New Jersey connections; and that Thomas Paine spent time in Bordentown. New Jersey is rich in private diaries and letters relating to the Revolution. Several newspapers were founded during the period. Clergymen of all stripes published sermons expressing their views on the political conflict. The literature of the Garden State during the era of the Revolution is much more diverse than Skaggs’s essay suggests.

We also have not fully explored the role that religion played in New Jersey’s Revolution. Presbyterians, for example, the state’s largest denomination, became some of the most radical proponents of liberty in the New Jersey. John Witherspoon, the president of the College of New

Jersey, was the only clergyman to sign the Declaration of Independence. Anglicans, Swedish Lutherans, and the Dutch Reformed were often divided over how to respond to Revolutionary activity in their midst. Patriotic clergymen were forced to flee their pulpits when the British army arrived in their towns and some were even killed. As Harriett Hawkins reminds us, churches were used for hospitals and barracks. The trials of local churches make for some of the most interesting and compelling stories

of the Revolution in the Garden State.

In the end, *New Jersey in the American Revolution* is another important step toward placing New Jersey where it belongs in the historical narrative of the American Revolution. Barbara Mitnick has edited a work that will be of great worth to scholars, general readers, and, of course, to those faithful public historians who still introduce scores of children each year to the wonders of New Jersey's past.

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