Book Reviews

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Diversity and Accommodation: Essays on the Cultural Composition of the Virginia Frontier. Edited by Michael J. Puglisi. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997. Pp. x, 310. $45.00, ISBN 0-87049-969-6)

The twelve essays in this collection, the product of a conference held at Emory and Henry College in 1992, attest to the maturity and vitality of recent scholarship on the backcountry. The articles focus on ethnic and cultural interaction on the Virginia frontier, broadly defined in both geographical and chronological terms. Michael Puglisi, who organized the conference and edited this volume, sets the tone in prefatory remarks and an introductory essay by emphasizing the interdisciplinary nature of most recent work in this field and by establishing the unifying themes of the collection: "pluralism, toleration, acculturation, and accommodation"(ix). Overturning persistent stereotypes of backcountry life as "quaint, heroic, and backward"(3) and integrating Native Americans and African Americans into the story of Virginia's frontier culture are also chief objectives of the volume. To reflect this diversity and interdisciplinary approach, Puglisi selected essays from nine historians, two geographers, two archaeologists, and a linguist. The result is a sophisticated and nuanced portrayal of life on the Virginia frontier in the eighteenth century.

Robert Mitchell, whose classic work, *Commercialism and Frontier: Perspectives on the Early Shenandoah Valley* (1977), is cited in virtually every essay in the collection, leads off with a survey of recent literature on the Virginia backcountry. He criticizes scholars for neglecting to stress sufficiently place and the attributes of place, which he considers key determinants in understanding the frontier experience. Environmental conditions, such as the number and types of trees in a locale, were also crucial in shaping human responses to their situation. Mitchell acknowledges the ethnic diversity of western Virginia, but maintains that the "most distinctive fact" about settlement patterns there was the "search for edge habitats to provide a broader range of resource possibilities."(36) German, Scots-Irish, and Anglo-American settlers vied for prime tracts of land, but this competi-

tion produced economic cooperation and interaction, not conflict. Further empirical studies of the region grounded in a geographical context, Mitchell concludes, are needed to understand more fully how Shenandoah Valley residents related to each other and to the natural world.

Continuing the theme of ethnic diversity, Warren Hofstra discusses the process of community formation in the eighteenth century Shenandoah Valley. He describes the central role of ethnicity in shaping the "cultural landscape"(60) of the region, which developed through four stages: the transformation of the wilderness into property; the emergence of towns; the rise of commercial markets to transport backcountry agricultural products throughout the Atlantic trading basin; and the evolution of towns such as Winchester and Staunton as regional market centers which tied the widely dispersed settlements of the Shenandoah Valley together, at least economically. After describing this process, Hofstra boldly asserts that western Virginia in 1800 more closely resembled "twentieth-century, rural-farm, small-town America"(62) than either the older society east of the Blue Ridge or the European communities that backcountry farmers formerly called home. Hofstra, like Mitchell, found abundant evidence that German, Scots-Irish, and English immigrants often forged strong and lasting bonds on the frontier. At the settlement of Opequon, for instance, "families of all ethnic groups settled near one another, traded with one another, and governed in common."(70). Interaction and accommodation did not extend to social relations, however. A strong desire to maintain the "separate spheres of family and kin"(71) coexisted, at times uneasily, with the common goal of European settlers to achieve economic independence.

Richard MacMaster and Kenneth Keller provide more detail about the ethnic composition of colonial Shenandoah Valley society. MacMaster argues persuasively against the traditional interpretation that religious life in the region was marked by rigid ethnic boundaries. His research on Smith's Creek reveals an astonishing amount of social and religious intermingling. This interaction persisted even after the initial settlement period, when churches had been built and ministers hired, and extended to such areas as church services, baptisms, and weddings. The various religious groups of the area, he concludes, "learned to accept one another and to recognize a commonality with other Christians that made it relatively easy to change church memberships at times of marriage or in seasons of revival."(94). Keller's essay on "The Outlook of Rhinelanders on the Virginia Frontier" offers a straight forward account of the values and practices of this important group of immigrants. As one might expect, he finds that Rhinelanders continued to follow old world economic, social, and cultural practices after moving to western Virginia. Keller suggests that Rhenish society was simi-

lar in certain key respects to frontier Virginia society, which made the transition from old world to new less dramatic and allowed immigrants from the Rhineland to assimilate into Anglo-American culture with relative ease.

Part III of the collection contains four essays on Native Americans and African Americans in western Virginia. These studies advance our understanding of the composition of frontier society and shed light on neglected aspects of that culture, most notably the nature of slavery. To accomplish this, however, requires extending discussions beyond the eighteenth century Shenandoah Valley. Michael Barber and Eugene Barfield, for instance, use archaeological evidence to explain the extensive but "indirect interaction"(150) between Indians and Europeans in the seventeenth century Roanoke Valley. For a variety of reasons, however, the region "was devoid of Native Americans early in the eighteenth century"(147). Likewise, Marilyn Davis-DeEulis's case study of slave literacy on Wilson Cary Nicholas's plantations in Kanawha and Cabell counties between 1795 and 1840 is intriguing and informative, but is a poor fit with the rest of the collection. Back in the eighteenth century, but now on Virginia's Kentucky frontier, Ellen Eslinger provides an overview of the development of slavery between 1775 and 1800. Noting that "frontier conditions were extremely conducive to unfree labor"(173), she explains the rapid growth of the institution (slaves accounted for 18% of Kentucky's population in 1800) and argues that "the two most important factors shaping western slavery were the selective migration process and the danger of Indian attack"(185).

The most compelling essay in this section, and the one that most closely fits the scope of the volume, is J. Susanne Schramm Simmons's examination of African Americans in Augusta County in the late colonial period. While fewer than one hundred blacks lived in Augusta in the 1750s, their number and importance rapidly increased as hemp production took off in the region the following decade. By the time of the first federal census in 1790, African Americans (all but 59 of whom were slaves) accounted for 15% of the county's population, contributed significantly to the "evolving commercialism of the frontier"(159), and established important precedents and contexts for slavery in the antebellum period.

Turk McCleskey examines another aspect of life in Augusta County in his essay, "The Price of Conformity: Class, Ethnicity, and Local Authority on the Colonial Virginia Frontier." His comparison of officeholding in two settlements, one Anglo-American and one German-American, produces three central conclusions. First, both towns followed similar patterns "in the establishment and succession of local officeholding"(219). Next, German immigrants regularly held political office, despite being legally excluded from these positions. This was allowed, McCleskey explains, because na-

tive Virginian elites desirous of recreating the hierarchical society of the Tidewater recognized that certain German settlers possessed the "potential to regulate and govern"(219). Thus, "class counted for more than ethnicity"(220) when it came to local officeholding in Augusta County. Finally, German officials accepted Virginia-style politics and "participated willingly in the fabrication of a deferential, hierarchical frontier society"(212).

Moving from local to national officeholding, Gail Terry explores congressional elections in far western Virginia in the 1790s. In a penetrating analysis of three elections between Francis Preston and Abram Trigg, Terry reveals that certain aspects of Virginia's colonial political culture, especially the vital role played by family and kinship, remained intact after the Revolution. But the creation of the two-party system in the 1790s opened the political process to savvy newcomers (in this case Alexander Smyth) who employed Democratic rhetoric to accuse "aristocrats" like Preston of lacking virtue and disinterestedness and therefore being unfit for office. Smyth's attacks on Preston helped Trigg oust the two-term congressman in 1797, despite the valuable and practical advice that Preston's sister, Eliza Preston Madison, gave him during the campaign. Madison's actions in both defending her family's honor and sharing with Preston her knowledge of local politics suggest the need to reformulate our understanding of women's political participation in the post-revolutionary period.

The volume closes with two essays on material culture. Ann McCleary provides an overview of the literature on vernacular architecture in the Shenandoah Valley, which emphasizes the tremendous diversity of the area, even among ethnic groups. She calls for more intensive study of this topic, conducted along interdisciplinary lines. John Morgan traces the history of the distinctive cantilever barn, noting its existence in southwest Virginia before it appeared in eastern Tennessee, where scholars have argued it originated. He suggests that the cantilever style evolved from structures in western Pennsylvania, but developed distinctive features on the Virginia frontier. Echoing McCleary, Morgan stresses the need for additional research on this topic.

Taken together, these studies provide compelling evidence that ethnic diversity, interaction, and accommodation were the hallmark of eighteenth century frontier Virginia society. They also establish the uniqueness of the region and reveal the inaccuracy of many previously held interpretations. Most important, the essays in *Diversity and Accommodation* contribute significantly to the creation of a much needed consensus on the culture of the colonial Virginia backcountry.

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