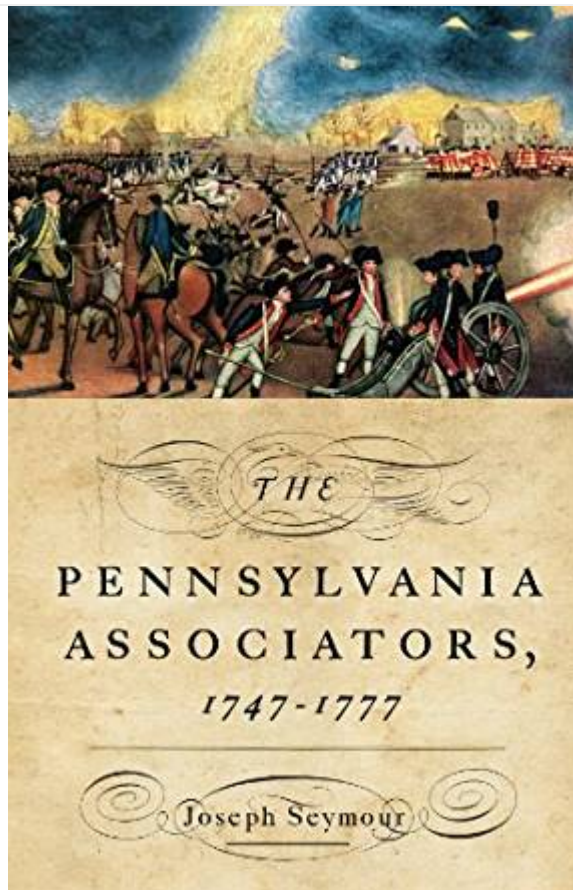


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The Pennsylvania Associators, 1747-1777



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Reviewed Work(s)

The Pennsylvania Associators, 1747-1777. By Joseph Seymour (Yardley: Westholme, 2012). Pp. xxiv, 280. Hardcover, \$29.95.

Joseph Seymour's *The Pennsylvania Associators, 1747-1777* examines the relationship between the Military Association of Pennsylvania and the colony's transformation from Quaker paradise to a seat for war and revolution. Seymour argues that the voluntary militia organization held a dual political vision of defending Pennsylvania while it also exerted pressure on the pacifist elements within it (xxiv).

As a historian at the U.S. Army Center of Military History and as a veteran of the Pennsylvania Army National Guard, Seymour pays tribute to the often neglected members of Pennsylvania's earliest militia tradition by tracing the Philadelphia Artillery and other Association elements from their formal organizational beginnings on December 7, 1747 through the first years of the War for American Independence. From the War of Austrian Succession, through the Seven Years' War, and finally to the revolutionary victories at Trenton and Princeton, the Association acted as Pennsylvania's "de facto defense force" and "served as a political vehicle for both defense-minded Philadelphians and for those with an imperial, rather than Quaker, vision" (xii, xxiii). Seymour utilizes an array of sources, including Associator papers (Benjamin Franklin's correspondence among them), the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, and colonial Pennsylvania records, to demonstrate how the Association acted as a vehicle for citizens to gain political influence and to rid themselves of arbitrary power.

By demonstrating how the Association came to act as a voice for those who advocated a military presence in Pennsylvania, Seymour provides a unique interpretation of how the Association came into being and its role in advocating colonial military preparedness. The disastrous expedition against Cartagena from 1740-1742 and the projected invasion of Canada via New York in 1746 during the War of Jenkins' Ear (later subsumed by the War of Austrian Succession) highlighted the need for military training in Pennsylvania. Seymour argues that as veterans returned home, their experiences allowed the general population to become familiar with the needs and expectations regarding warfare. While veterans spoke of their adventures and hardships, Benjamin

Franklin's *Plain Truth* spurred people to create a volunteer force by appealing to the safety of the colony and by playing upon their fears and superstitions. Amidst the frenzy of signatures and the formation of Association companies, people "demonstrated their opposition to Pennsylvania's policy of nonviolent defense in a tangible way" (48).

Nearly three decades later, as colonial resistance intensified against British policy, participation in the Association became a form of protest, as "members of the [Philadelphia Artillery] had long used the organization as a means of obtaining a political voice" (122). Marching and firing guns became expressions of anti-British sentiment, and following the meeting of the First Continental Congress, more Association companies formed and training increased. Service in the Association prepared leaders for the Revolution, as Associators served on Committees of Safety tasked with setting military standards and prepared Pennsylvania's militia to field units in only a few months' time. For Seymour, the legacy of the earliest Associators and their vision in the 1740s came to fruition in the American Revolution, as "the enthusiastic support for the Revolution shown by so many Associator officers demonstrated that the organization continued to be what it had been for decades: a politically motivated military organization serving the needs of its members and their community" (144).

While Seymour's discussion and analysis of the Association as a political mechanism offers new interpretation of Pennsylvania's militia, at times the work reverts into a unit history. For example, the author provides such a plethora of detailed information concerning company formation that the reader can get overwhelmed with linking companies and their commanders to their respective counties. Furthermore, a more thorough consideration of the European presence in the Delaware River Valley fifty years prior to William Penn's and the Quakers' arrival would offer further commentary on Pennsylvania's security tradition prior to the Association's formation. Nevertheless, Joseph Seymour's work provides an account grounded in the voices of the Associators and in official government records. *The Pennsylvania Associators* has filled-in a historiographical void by providing the first comprehensive account of the Military Association, and has opened the door to further research and interpretation of the force that answered Pennsylvania's call to arms in times of crisis.

Patrick W. Cecil

University of Alabama



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