

Benjamin and William Franklin: Father and Son, Patriot and Loyalist. By Sheila L. Skemp. (Boston, Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1994. Pp. v + 205. Preface, acknowledgments, documents/speeches, bibliography, index. \$15.95)

Sheila L Skemp works as an associate professor of history at the University of Mississippi. She published Benjamin and William Franklin: Father and Son, Patriot and Loyalist four years after her larger volume William Franklin: Son of a Patriot, Servant of a King was released. Skemp mentioned in the acknowledgements that most of her interpretation for William and Benjamin Franklin's relationship comes from her first tome. The Bedford Series in History and Culture includes, in addition to the interpretive work, a collection of the sources that Skemp used to draw her conclusions.

Skemp begins the book with the birth and early life of Benjamin Franklin. She follows the elder Franklin from Boston to Philadelphia and to England and back again. She marks the hard starts and slight failures that Franklin went through before William was born in 1730. Once William is born Skemp works to point out how similar the Franklin men are, even though Benjamin tried to give William more opportunities than life had afforded him.

Skemp divides here book into long chapters. The first four describe how close the Franklin men became, not just in family practices but also as upstanding and proud Englishmen. The fifth chapter begins a new discussion, each chapter afterwards studying one Franklin man or the other.

Skemp points out that during the early years people would rarely see the two Franklins separately. William worked as Benjamin's personal secretary while on their sojourn to England after the French and Indian War. While in London William completes his law studies and passes the bar in 1758. Before returning to the colonies

with a commission as royal governor of New Jersey, young William married Elizabeth Downes and fathered an illegitimate son, William Temple Franklin. Temple would be the least of William's worries over the next decade.

Skemp believes that the Franklin men would never be as close as they were immediately following their trip to England. She recounts that the two men even went to the old Franklin estate in England and met Benjamin's elderly aunt. They then looked through church records to see Franklins going back "almost 200 years. This genealogical quest solidified the Franklin's claim on being men of English blood through and through. Those ties would be stronger for William than they would be for Benjamin in the coming years.

Back in the colonies, Skemp writes how both of the Franklin men were "Government men." William working as the royally appointed governor of New Jersey, and Benjamin as the Postmaster General. Skemp shows letters and evidence that the two men still shared common interest and common political views during this time, but that they were beginning to change.

During this time England began to make it increasingly difficult for someone in William's position to serve both "King and Colony." Parliament came through with many unpopular, and some, according to Skemp, believed unconstitutional, acts to tax the colonies. Skemp indicates that the battle between William Franklin and his New Jersey assembly over the Stamp Act would just be a preview of the trying times that would come.

This same time saw the beginning of a new Benjamin Franklin as well. According to Skemp, the elder Franklin was in the middle of his decade long ambassadorial post in

London. Franklin's work in London always began with trying to make Pennsylvania a royal colony and removing power from the Penns. Benjamin worked tirelessly to compromise everything that he possibly could to smooth relations between the colonies and parliament. Benjamin grew increasingly impatient with London politics as time wore on. In many instances, Skemp points out, Benjamin was so blinded by his Pennsylvania project that he could not focus on any other issues.

The largest battle for Franklin in London and the colonial policies in general was whether or not parliament had the right to tax the colonies. Many colonies were still very loyal to their king, but were feeling very put out by a parliament that was overstepping their perceived boundaries. Many colonist, says Skemp, were also unaware how powerful parliament had become in the mother country.

The entire London affair came to a head when Benjamin Franklin was called to a meeting in the cockpit. In 1774 Benjamin Franklin was accused of trying to "dupe the people of Massachusetts into a near treasonous activity." (85) Skemp marks this hearing as the final insult to Franklin. He became very disenchanted with politics in London and soon believed that American republican virtue was the only thing worth saving, and at any cost. The final blow came two days after the hearing when Franklin discovered that he had been removed from the Postmaster General position. For Benjamin Franklin the die of patriotism had been cast.

Meanwhile, Skemp studies the relationship between a royal governor and his assembly. She writes that during the same time that Benjamin Franklin was becoming disenchanted with London politics, his son was having issues of his own with the assemblies and legislators of the colonies. Skemp reiterates, repeatedly, how moderate a

colony that New Jersey was. Even though the colony was split in two, with two capitals that required alternate locations for assembly meetings. Perhaps this disunity in New Jersey led to its moderation. Skemp does not say.

William Franklin saw his colonial assembly grow more and more rigid. They began outright objecting to any parliamentary acts, as well as sending delegates to “extralegal” congresses summoned throughout the decade. Skemp uses this as an example of how precarious William’s, and other royal governor’s, position was. “On the one hand,” she writes, “they had to enforce policies that they had no hand in making...on the other hand, growing self-confidence of the colonial assemblies made it nearly impossible for the governors to secure compliance with unpopular directives.” (94)

If parliament had garnered more control for themselves in London, the colonial assemblies were doing the same on the American continent. Both sides believed that they had the authority to speak for, regulate laws and trade, and tax themselves. They were on a collision course. Benjamin saw the fault lying in the political corruption and rot in London’s parliament. William Franklin saw the fault lying in the growing self-confidence and “extralegal” activities within the colonies. Father and son were on the same collision course. Skemp says the colonies and the Franklins would never be the same.

Skemp argues that while American independence looks inevitable in retrospect it was not the general consensus of most colonists until right before the war. In fact, Franklin blamed people like his son, who wrote letters to parliament saying that most colonists were still loyal, and that only a few hotheads were rabble-rousing. William at the same time believed that the colonies would slip into anarchy without a “strong hand

at the helm.” Many more maintained, according to Skemp, that they had no problem with the King at all, that their problems stemmed within parliament and unfair taxation.

Before the war began, William Franklin believed his father saw the colonies through rose-colored glasses. If Benjamin would just return to the colonies he would see for himself how far they had all fallen from their ideal government. At the same time Skemp shows that Benjamin Franklin thought his son “a Courtier” and that he “saw everything through Government eyes.” (109) But perspective was only half the reason for the growing chasm between the Franklins.

Skemp writes that while Benjamin Franklin had many things he could do after independence, William decidedly did not. Benjamin Franklin held on to the postmaster post as long as he could, but he was a famed printer, representative, scientist and effective diplomat. William, on the other hand, had a law degree from England, and was a royal governor. If the colonies were to rule themselves, then William was effectively out of his life’s work, with no other options in the afterwards that would become the United States.

Skemp shows that far from being a hotheaded patriot from the first hints at revolution, Benjamin Franklin worked his best diplomacy to stave off any conflict between the mother country and the colonies. She also shows that views toward the English Crown were supportive until very close to the outbreak of war. She uses the Franklin men’s relationship as a broader perspective for what may have happened elsewhere. However, she does caution that the Franklin’s had things going for them that were not available to average colonist and that this scenario may not encompass most of the colonists feelings.

What Skemp does well is to show how perspective and alignment have a lot to do with political ideology. After reading Skemp's work, one can only wonder what would have happened if Benjamin had returned to America sooner, and avoided the hearing in the Cockpit. What if William had visited England with his father a second time, would he have seen the corruption and rot that his father spoke of? What of governmental appointments? What if William had never become the royal governor, or Benjamin never lost his postmaster general position? Would the family have been saved even though the colonies moved towards independence? Skemp does not attempt to answer these questions. She leaves the reader's with what they know of the American Revolution, but with some more intimate details about one of America's founding fathers, and how he helped father a nation by giving up a son.

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