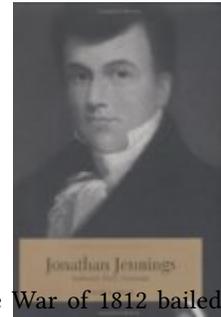


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Randy K. Mills. *Jonathan Jennings: Indiana's First Governor*. Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society Press, 2005. xxvii + 259 pp. \$19.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-87195-182-3.

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Randy K. Mills's *Jonathan Jennings: Indiana's First Governor* provides a much-needed treatment of one of early Indiana's most important figures. Jennings, originally from Pennsylvania, decided like so many young men of his generation to seek his fortune on the frontier, in this case the Indiana Territory. When Jennings arrived in 1806, he found a well-entrenched territorial governor, William Henry Harrison (himself a transplanted Virginian), and a rustic capital city in Vincennes. Like his soon-to-be political ally John Badollet (receiver at the Land Office in Vincennes), Jennings initially enjoyed cordial relations with the governor. That soon changed, largely over the issue of slavery.

Harrison and his supporters, later known as the "Virginia Aristocrats," made numerous attempts to have the antislavery provision of the Northwest Ordinance (Article VI) repealed, or at least suspended, to allow additional African-American slaves north of the Ohio. Failing to persuade Congress to do so, Harrison and his pliant legislature in 1805 passed legislation that allowed masters to bring their slaves into Indiana, then have them "indentured" as servants. As Mills correctly points out, it was merely a back-door slavery—such "servants" often had terms of dozens of years (up to ninety-nine years). The growing antislavery sentiment in Indiana, keyed by antislavery settlers in the eastern sections of the territory, provided Jennings his political *raison d'être*. For the remainder of Harrison's years in Indiana, Jennings, Badollet, and others keyed on the slogan "No Slavery in Indiana."

In 1809, Jennings beat Harrison's ally Thomas Randolph in a disputed election for the territory's delegate to Congress, the beginning of nearly two decades in politics. The antislavery faction won out, securing a re-

peal of the indenture law. But the War of 1812 bailed Harrison out politically, and after he left Indiana, Jennings capitalized on the power vacuum. He went on to become Indiana's first governor with statehood in 1816, and later served Indiana in the U.S. House of Representatives. But the post-Harrison years also brought turmoil for Jennings. By 1818, public attacks began to center on his drinking, which increased to frightful levels as he grew older. The death of his first wife, Ann, and repeated defeat in running for the U.S. Senate further dogged Jennings. When he died in 1834, at the age of fifty, no specific cause of death was given, but most conclude Jennings's alcoholism was the primary cause. In an era where alcoholism was not recognized as a disease, Jennings was easily stigmatized, and until an 1892 act of the state legislature, he lay in an unmarked grave.

We should be grateful to Mills for rescuing such an important figure as Jennings from obscurity, as his life and career have much to tell us about territorial politics and frontier society. Mills does a good job of incorporating social and cultural factors into Jennings's tale. This reviewer certainly found some useful information.

However, there are some problems: Mills frequently refers to William Henry Harrison as a Federalist, or having strong Federalist leanings. While Harrison was certainly aristocratic, his territorial days defy such easy political categorization. He had championed the Land Law of 1800 (the Harrison Land Law), which made it easier for settlers to purchase Ohio Valley lands. His support for Ohio statehood—in opposition to Arthur St. Clair—and Jefferson's land acquisition policy were hardly "Federalist" measures. Also, Mills repeatedly refers to Indiana's territorial settlers as "Hoosiers," despite the fact that the term is anachronistic for the time period.

The sources also give one pause. In going over Mills's endnotes, I found only three archival sources. Granted, in part this is because the Indiana Historical Society has published so many pertinent primary sources from early Indiana, but it still seems odd that more manuscripts were not consulted. In addition, when citing Harrison's correspondence, historians would do well to consult the Indiana Historical Society's own excellent microfilm edition of *The Papers of William Henry Harrison*

(1999). Thoroughly edited and footnoted, they are now indispensable to grasping territorial Indiana, and prevent one from credulously citing Harrison's letters to Ranger Captain William Hargrove provided (and perhaps forged) by William M. Cockrum in his *Pioneer History of Indiana* (1907).

Even with these reservations, *Jonathan Jennings* is an important contribution to early Indiana history, but one that could have been better.

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