

Albrecht Koschnik. *"Let a Common Interest Bind Us Together": Associations, Partisanship, and Culture in Philadelphia, 1775-1840.* Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2007. xii + 351 pp. \$45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8139-2648-3.



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Albrecht Koschnik has made a valuable contribution to early national American history in this "prehistory" of both voluntary associations and political parties in the United States. For those wondering about the roots and antecedents of the associations that Alexis de Tocqueville found so ubiquitous by 1830, Koschnik supplies the missing link by showing how partisan groups first formed in Philadelphia in the aftermath of the American Revolution, and then how some of them evolved into extra-political culture-boosting societies in the 1820s. For those trying to understand the nature of what only some would call the "first party system," Koschnik supplies an up close look at the partisan activities in which Democratic Republicans and Federalists were in fact engaged, all while denying the legitimacy of the same in the opposition. Urban historians will appreciate Koschnik's description of how these developments unfolded in the homes, streets, and fledgling cultural institutions of the nation's capital city, and his concluding reflections on how Philadelphia's associational and political life compared with those of early national Boston and New York City.

The sum is more than these parts, moreover, as these stories are deftly woven together.

Koschnik's story begins with the political societies that developed during the Revolution in the contest over the shape and terms of the Pennsylvania Constitution. These groups were construed negatively as "factions," and this view persisted into the 1790s to color perceptions of the famous Democratic Republican societies that organized in opposition to Federalist rule. The Federalists, who were in power, saw no need for an organized political space to debate their policies, and did not accept the Democratic Republicans' claims to mediate between the government and the people. Rather, they tarred these societies as subversive of republican government. These societies did not survive long and the conflict they generated is well known. In his second and third chapters, Koschnik explains how both sides soon learned from past experiences how to organize to advance partisan goals more quietly and effectively. The challenge was to find means to be partisan without seeming a danger to the Republic. Both sides found ways to do this by forming political associa-

tions and voluntary militia companies that emphasized benevolence, fraternity, and defense of the Republic. That two sets—Republican and Federalist—of such institutions were formed reveals their nevertheless partisan character. Moreover, Koschnik shows how the meetings, musters, parades, and ward-level activities of these groups provided space for the participation of an expanding white male electorate. Thus, these associations eroded traditional elite control of politics while serving as essential incubators of political parties. Of course, presidential policies and foreign affairs of the period between 1790 and 1815 provided ample nourishment.

The consolidation of Republican power and the demise of the Federalists as a national political force after the War of 1812 brought an end to the particular set of conditions that had sustained these organizations, and they declined in consequence. While this is the end of the story of the Federalists for those only minding the national scene, it was not the end of Federalist power in Philadelphia, as Koschnik shows. In his final two chapters, he follows the activities of a younger generation of Federalists who learned to wield a different kind of power through the founding and maintenance of long-lived cultural associations. He does this by tracing the career trajectories of young men who were denied access to political positions in Republican-dominated Harrisburg and Washington. These men turned, instead, to training for professions all the while associating together in literary and debating societies, as well as new militia units. This apprenticeship fitted them to take on a new civic leadership role in the place of the explicitly political power of their fathers' Federalism. Most of their achievements live on today in such institutions as the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, the Athenaeum, and the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Indeed, Philadelphia Federalists came to dominate Philadelphia's associations while they lost out politically.

In telling this story, Koschnik justly claims to be adding to the history of Federalism. That is, the early members of Philadelphia associations support the view that Federalists continued to compete politically well after Thomas Jefferson's inaugural in 1800, but, then, he shows how a younger generation founded and supported cultural associations well after they abandoned explicitly political ambitions. He adds an introductory chapter to the history of voluntary associations by showing how some of the first examples in Philadelphia were formed to engage in partisan political activity. He adds a new dimension to the picture of the civic culture of early national Philadelphia painted by recent work on newspapers and public political celebrations by showing how partisan editors reported and supported (or criticized) the year-round activities of the societies that marched come parade-time. In describing the specific ward-level activities of partisan associations, Koschnik addresses and helps resolve the long-standing question as to whether the political "factions" of the first generation of Americans truly did constitute political parties. Koschnik is not doctrinaire, but he does clarify the issue by showing the multilevel workings of partisan groups with fairly consistent principles and personnel. In a sense, he shows how the voluntary associations of these partisan Philadelphians allowed them to have their party and deny it too. By describing the mutual finger-pointing and conflicts between these groups, he adds complexity to our picture of the evolving public sphere in postrevolutionary Philadelphia.

Koschnik might have enriched his interpretation further had he carried out more direct comparison of the Federalist and Republican associations of the 1790-1815 era. Did both sides use the same language of fraternalism that he notes in describing the Republican societies, for example, or did the views of the associations and militias reflect larger political and social divisions? He might also have compared the cultural institutions founded by Federalists with other Philadel-

phia institutions founded by voluntary groups at the same time. He briefly mentions, for example, but does not dwell on, the group that established the Philadelphia Waterworks. He does not mention the religious societies that proliferated in this period and provided an avenue for greater female participation in the public sphere. He acknowledges female support of Federalist activities, but only in passing. To be sure, Koschnik is simply trying to tell the story of the connection between parties and associations in Philadelphia, but that story might have been even more compelling were it set against a larger landscape that included gender and religion. More attention to class might have allowed Koschnik to connect his young Federalists with the would-be aristocrats that emerge in Daniel Kilbride's recent *An American Aristocracy: Southern Planters in Antebellum Philadelphia* (2006). Filling in this background might have forestalled nagging questions that occur when one reads his discussion of persisting Federalist power in founding exclusive cultural institutions. If they were so new and so exclusive, just how important were these institutions at the time? Might this form of association constitute withdrawal as much as assertion of civic leadership?

While some aspects of the social and political context remain out of focus, Koschnik's tale of partisan association is useful to urban historians. Koschnik's analysis begins at a time when Philadelphia was the nation's largest city as well as the capital and the center of publishing. He gives fascinating glimpses of partisan militias maneuvering on the streets. His detailed discussion of the various associations will be useful to those studying social and political networks in early national Philadelphia. His description of the cultural institution building of young Federalists helps explain the genesis of some of the city's most important and long-lived institutions. The book will also be useful to compare with the social and political evolution of other early American cities, especially Philadelphia's immediate rivals, Boston and

New York City. In his brief concluding discussion, Koschnik offers a starting point for this comparison as to how the various elements he examines played out differently in those places. He contrasts the disconnect that grew between political and cultural leadership in Philadelphia with the persistence of elite control of both spheres in Brahmin Boston. He demonstrates that New York leaders focused on the political sphere alone, leaving the founding of major cultural institutions to later periods. Urban historians might wish that he had pursued his comparison further, but his observations remain a useful place to start.

Koschnik is explicit about how his findings contribute to and modify existing scholarship. The book features clear jargon-free writing with lots of helpful argument signposting, including useful summaries at chapter heads. Koschnik's painstaking detail demands careful reading, but represents necessary tilling of new ground. The style is likely a shade too dense for average undergraduate tastes, but early national urban, political, and cultural historians will find this exhaustively researched book essential reading.

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