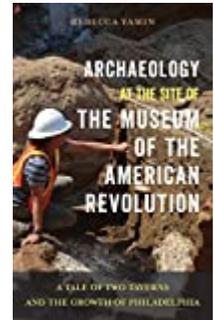


Rebecca Yamin. *Archaeology at the Site of the Museum of the American Revolution: A Tale of Two Taverns and the Growth of Philadelphia.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2018. Illustrations. 160 pp. \$19.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-4399-1642-1.



Reviewed by David Zonderman (North Carolina State University)

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

As the Museum of the American Revolution was being constructed, in the summer of 2014, an archaeological excavation of the site in downtown Philadelphia also took place. This work was mandated by federal law, and it would have been tragically ironic if an institution designed to present cutting-edge interpretations of America's War of Independence was built literally on a foundation that obliterated pieces of the city's history. Rebecca Yamin's account of this excavation and its material findings is an accessible and richly illustrated guide to what urban archaeology can tell readers about the history of one of America's great cities.

Yamin explores how this one project uncovers layers of Philadelphia history that extend from its colonial roots in the seventeenth century all the way to its redevelopment in the late twentieth century. There are shattered plates and mugs that indicate several taverns from the revolutionary period; and Yamin takes time to explain the crucial role that such places played in urban politics during the late eighteenth century. But the history on this site also expands far beyond what is now be-

ing told in the new museum that sits at the corner of Chestnut and Third Streets. Through a broad sampling of material remains, Yamin tells the story of a city block as it evolved from a collection of small houses into commercial and craft shops then on to manufacturing sites devoted to tanning, button making, printing, and eventually patent medicine in one of the city's first skyscrapers: the Jayne Building.

This concise book also gives readers a glimpse into the methods of urban archaeology—including a deep dive into privies and “night soil” that yields all kinds of insights into daily life and diet, and the particular importance of ceramics and industrial refuse at this site. Some of the artifacts unearthed can be dated to the revolutionary era, and they are now in the new museum's collections and exhibits. Many other objects come from before and after that time period and offer glimpses into the changing economy of Philadelphia across four centuries. Yamin blends discussions of artifacts uncovered in the dig—especially a multitude of ceramics, glass bottles, typeface, buttons, and pipe stems—with

documents available in Philadelphia's many archives to help reconstruct those patterns of urban change and the impact of such transformations on "common folk" even down to individual residents who populated long-forgotten alleyways on the block where the museum now stands. In fact, the documentary records even more than the archaeological material help to sketch out the presence of enslaved men and women blocks away from the "cradle of liberty."

The book contains a plethora of color photographs of many archaeological finds, as well as numerous historical and contemporary maps of the site and surrounding neighborhoods. There are also various color-coded pages where Yamin offers intriguing sidebars on material culture analysis and intimate portraits of various personalities who called this locale their home and/or place of business. All of this apparatus makes for a lively presentation, but any attempt at an overarching narrative or analytical arguments often gets broken up in all these digressions.

By blending meticulous archaeological analysis with dogged archival research, Yamin offers a micro-historical study of this one city block that adds to our understanding of Philadelphia's social and economic history at the time of the American Revolution. But this book also extends far beyond that one time period, even as it says little about the impact of the Revolution itself in any military manner. It will be up to the museum to help tell that story of the fight for independence, but the ground on which the museum stands has yielded many more historical accounts of an ever-changing American city.

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