



John Gilbert McCurdy. *Quarters: The Accommodation of the British Army and the Coming of the American Revolution.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019. 328 pp. \$45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-5017-3660-5.

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The Quartering Act of 1765 (and its subsequent iterations of the 1770s) maintains a prominent position in histories of the American Revolution. Yet for all of the act's associations with the outbreak of warfare, minute analyses of quartering legislation and enactments are noticeably sparse among Revolutionary scholarship. John Gilbert McCurdy's new social history *Quarters: The Accommodation of the British Army and the Coming of the American Revolution* addresses this gap, offering a detailed account of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English quartering—or billeting—practices. Looking closely at the period between the 1660s and 1770s, McCurdy follows evolving civilian attitudes toward military and domestic spaces and highlights the link between changing military geography and shifting imperial relations between Great Britain and the British North American colonies. The process of establishing a new nation, McCurdy argues, was as much about negotiating space as it was an intellectual and martial pursuit.

From the introduction, McCurdy clearly establishes that the phenomenon of quartering encompasses a variety of legislative, military, and political histories. At the heart of this engaging monograph, however, is a developing narrative of place and place making; anti-quartering sentiment was certainly not an inevitable precursor to a protracted movement for independence. Rather, the au-

thor argues that the disinclination to accommodate British soldiers was the result of a gradual turn toward viewing soldiers as “a violent presence unwelcome in a [domestic] place where women and dependents were to be protected” (p. 16). The more that colonists claimed privacy as an essential right owed to all stalwart, liberty-loving Englishmen, the more the British army was viewed as a threat to domestic tranquility and local political control.

McCurdy organizes his book both chronologically and spatially, moving seamlessly between domestic, military, and bureaucratic settings, each chapter focusing on one space. Chapter 1 begins inside the British North American house, a space understood in the seventeenth century to be noisy, crowded, and remarkably lacking in privacy from cohabitants and outsiders alike. Yet, in a shared space that continually fluctuated with the addition of enslaved men and women and indentured laborers, it was the continuous arrival of British soldiers from 1664 to 1765 that introduced a new language of domesticity and privacy. The idealized home came to be seen as a site of retreat and remove, a cultural change later reflected in the language of the Quartering Act forbidding soldiers from billeting in occupied private households without the homeowners' express permission. Drawing especially on New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania as case studies in growing colonial

resistance to an expanding military presence, McCurdy reveals a burgeoning hesitancy to engage with soldiers outside of public houses or explicitly martial environments.

Building on this newfound antagonism toward soldiers presented in chapter 1, McCurdy easily transitions to analysis of Parliament's attempts to find a solution to the issue of billeting in chapter 2: "Barracks." Permanent spaces devoted to military discipline and significantly removed from civilian populations, barracks appeared as the ideal alternate housing to colonial governors, imperial bureaucrats, and military officials alike. Seemingly, barracks fit perfectly within billeting legislation that explicitly prohibited housing soldiers in private houses outside of extenuating circumstances. Barracks could even function as a "public good," operating as charitable spaces, melding together civilian and military geography (p. 81). Yet colonial opinion could turn on a dime. Though colonists in one city may have welcomed barracks as emblematic of their constitutional right to domestic privacy, others chafed at the thought of provisioning barracks with necessary resources. McCurdy additionally reminds readers of the power of the physical and symbolic place barracks held over the landscape as he tracks the gradual emptying of these structures in 1763. Once the need for immediate military intervention vanished, McCurdy avers, colonists were confronted with towering reminders of the British Empire's ultimate military power over its North American colonies.

No one better understood the changeability of colonial opinion and the need for equitable quartering than General Thomas Gage, the central figure in chapter 3, "Empire." In 1763, Gage urged Parliament to pass the Quartering Act to ensure proper provisioning for North American barracks while protecting the privacy of individual households. According to McCurdy, the statute was intended to signify "imperial unity" and "equity" (p. 91). Indeed, eminent American lobbyist Benjamin Frank-

lin, in London to ensure that American interests were represented in Parliament, welcomed the measure and assumed such approbation would be mutual among his fellow colonists. McCurdy cleverly contrasts this initial optimism with the resulting fallout among Americans. First, McCurdy argues, Americans blanched at the statute's language; the Quartering Act merely implicitly prohibited billeting in private houses, allowed for the seizure of uninhabited private houses (as well as moveable property), and granted British soldiers broad access to public housing and spaces (p. 100). Second, the Quartering Act suffered from bad timing, following close on the heels of the widely unpopular 1765 Stamp Act. By the end of the chapter, McCurdy makes clear that cracks in imperial unity first manifested in colonial fears of an expanding military geography.

McCurdy expands on the changing colonial ideals of protected space in chapters 4 and 5, "Borderlands" and "Cities and Towns," respectively. The author defines "borderland" here as "a region around colonial settlements: a place at the periphery of European colonies where indigenous peoples also hold considerable power" (p. 130). The British imperial borderlands were also sites of rapidly expanding military infrastructure and escalating violence, particularly following the borderland's expansion after the Seven Years' War and the subsequent outbreak of Pontiac's Rebellion in 1763. Most relevant for McCurdy, the borderland forged an immediate association between the backcountry and military presence for many urban colonists. Cities and towns, by contrast, were gradually purged of a military presence from 1766 to 1770, as McCurdy explores in his penultimate chapter. The author does an excellent job especially of highlighting growing clashes between soldiers and civilians in Boston (particularly as there were rising reports of soldiers assaulting women), culminating in the explosive events of the 1770 Boston Massacre. While McCurdy cautions that the events in Boston did not chart a clear line to revolution, in the author's estimation, Boston was

important in setting a precedent for “evicting” British soldiers and modeling city life without a highly visible military infrastructure (p. 200).

This dual importance of place as both physical and symbolic pervades McCurdy’s final chapter, “Nation.” As the book winds to a close, the author raises an intriguing proposition about the relationship between place and identity. McCurdy concedes that a coherent American selfhood was certainly not present in 1775. However, a “proto-nationalism” had long been brewing in the thirteen colonies, burnished by the shared experience of war and a concretized antagonism toward a permanent British military presence (p. 203). By the time that the final Quartering Act of 1774 sought to improve the housing conditions for soldiers while respecting inhabited dwellings, the construction and maintenance of barracks (particularly in Patriot strongholds such as Boston) was enough to cause consternation among colonial inhabitants. No longer was the British army a partner in colonial interests, but rather an unwelcome, intrusive presence flexing its imperial might over its colonial residents.

McCurdy uses the epilogue as a meditation upon the legacy of the Quartering Act for United States legislation and American identity. To the former, McCurdy is clear: the Quartering Act ultimately had little immediate relevance for the Third Amendment, and billeting generally did not rate high on the list of congressional concerns. As to the latter, McCurdy views a far more capacious influence. Pre-Revolutionary and Revolutionary antagonisms toward expansive military infrastructure fundamentally reshaped Americans’ understanding of the appropriate parameters of civilian spaces. The era helped to enshrine the private household as a haven of domesticity, and forged powerful psychological links between barracks and imperial regimes. Though contemporary Americans may think of themselves as far removed from the specter of housing soldiers, the impacts of quartering pervade national memories of

the road to independence, as McCurdy ably demonstrates.

All in all, McCurdy offers an exceptionally readable and informative account of quartering and the American Revolution. Scholars of military geography will be gratified with the author’s minute attention to geographic vastness while political historians will appreciate McCurdy’s clear translation of military legislation into lived experience. Readers interested in histories of the American Revolution writ large should find an excellent response to the historiographical gaps in accounts of billeting and civilian-soldier relationships. The particulars of American national identity may have remained unclear at the conclusion of the Revolution—as they remain today—but McCurdy persuasively argues that place must be understood as an essential historic component.

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