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Philadelphia Stories is a unique book in that the author died in 2015 and her friends worked to complete the unfinished manuscript for publication. C. Dallett Hemphill taught early American history at Ursinus College and was active at the McNeil Center for Early American Studies in Philadelphia. Her friends and colleagues at the McNeil Center completed individual chapters, and Hemphill, former student Rodney Hessinger, and Daniel K. Richter of the McNeil Center wrote the prologues that effectively introduce the themes for each section.


The authors who completed Hemphill’s essays all did a fine job maintaining the spirit of her work. Particularly useful are maps that help the reader better understand geographic relationships among these Philadelphians, whether they were natives or immigrants who chose to live there. The best section was the one on revolutionary wives, as Galloway, Livingston, and Logan all had to deal with absent husbands. Galloway stayed to fight for the property she inherited from her father, Joseph Growden, which was her daughter’s legacy. Livingston’s father picked her husband, but it was a loveless marriage that ended in divorce. Logan had a more pleasant marriage yet was still subordinate to her husband and outlived him. These three women’s lives were different, yet they all were upper-class women whose relatives had political influence.

One thing that is not clear—and, of course, the author cannot answer—is why Hemphill chose to write about these twelve people. Some, such as Be-nezet, Muhlenberg, White, Peale, and Girard, are
familiar names to most people who study Pennsylvania and US history, and the chapters devoted to them offer little new information (although it was interesting to find out that White and Muhlenberg's son Peter were ordained in England at the same time). Lesser-known figures are worthy of more attention, such as musician Johnson. Two were Hemphill's ancestors who had connections to the China business. For a book that purports to have “chosen [people] because each is the subject of good stories that illustrate important aspects of America's political, social, economic, religious, and cultural history between the Revolutionary and Civil War eras,” the fact that only one of the subjects is a person of color and only one-third are women leads the reader to question this assertion (p. 8).

The plus of this work is that it does not merely repeat what is commonly known about the famous people but instead places them in their neighborhoods, which is why the maps before each section are outstanding at showing geographical relationships. Overall, Philadelphia Stories introduces some intriguing perspectives on the subjects' lives, and I wish Hemphill had survived to write a companion volume that included more women and people of color, as the story of Philadelphia is more than the story of European Americans.

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