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Published on H-Early-America (November, 2023)

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Reminiscent of William Ruston Pagan's micro-history *Anne Orthowood's Bastard: Sex and Law in Early Virginia* (2002), which uses scant legal records and local history sources to trace the family life and legal troubles of two intertwined families in seventeenth-century Virginia, Cynthia Kierner's *The Tory's Wife: A Woman and Her Family in Revolutionary America* highlights how microhistory can illuminate the significant social implications of important legal conflicts. Utilizing various court and legislative records, Kierner reconstructs the wartime struggles of the Spurgin family of North Carolina. Using methodologies developed by historians Michel Trouillot and Marisa Fuentes that focus on uncovering "silences in the archives," Kierner analyzes various documents that trace the lives of William and Jane Spurgin to uncover the story of a Revolutionary family divided by their ideological beliefs. Notably, Kierner focuses on three petitions submitted by Jane Spurgin to the North Carolina state assembly in the post-Revolutionary period, arguing that the documents represent "a remarkably rare instance in which a woman publicly asserted both a claim to citizenship and a political identity distinct from that of her husband" (p. 3).

Like many other women of her time, Jane Spurgin left behind no written records; instead, Kierner traces the Spurgin family's story through a trail of assorted Spurgin family legal records and local documents, including tax records, wills, property deeds, and probate records. To further compensate for the scarcity of documents, Kierner often uses educated speculation based on other contemporaneous sources to fill the silences and to create an engaging narrative. One set of primary sources that adds considerably to the Spurgins' story comes from neighboring Moravian settlement members, including the diary of its founder, Gottlieb Augustus Spangenberg. Employing such sources allows Kierner to trace the close family and community connections of the Abbotts...
Creek settlement, which further illuminates the lives of the Spurgin family and how they interacted with those in the surrounding community. Kierner’s chapters, arranged chronologically, re-create the lives of William and Jane Spurgin in surprising detail, especially given the lack of original sources from the family itself.

The first four chapters of the narrative establish the background for the family’s later legal battles and set the stage for Kierner’s analysis and arguments. The chapters situate the Spurgin family in the North Carolina backcountry during the pre-Revolutionary period and highlight their participation in the American Revolution. In the first chapter, Kierner establishes the settlement patterns of the Spurgins and their extended family. She then traces the change in the family’s social status when William Spurgin was appointed magistrate immediately preceding the Regulator movement. In chapter 2, Kierner contemplates how this new position of authority influenced William, and Jane’s, political beliefs. The middle chapters trace the movements of both Spurgins during the war. Kierner asserts that when the state prosecuted William for his tory beliefs with its new confiscation laws and targeted the family’s property, Jane began to form her own unique political beliefs. As evidence of this, Kierner points to Jane’s hosting of Continental Army general Nathanael Greene at the family home at the same moment her husband was actively fighting against Greene’s Continental Army as a loyalist soldier in the British Army. At the end of the American Revolution, Jane and William Spurgin informally ended their marriage and the loyalist William completely abandoned his family and set out for Canada, leaving his patriot wife to petition North Carolina’s legislature for the right to control her absent husband’s property.

In the final two chapters, Kierner closely analyzes the various legal petitions of Jane Spurgin, as well as the petitions of other women who applied for separate property rights in various southern colonies. Using Jane Spurgin’s legal petitions, Kierner draws connections between the legal status provided to abandoned wives of tory husbands and the unavailability of divorce as a remedy for these women (North Carolina did not allow divorce for either men or women at the time). Still legally married, North Carolina’s Treason Laws protected Jane’s right to a widow’s dower (a one-third share) of her husband’s confiscated property; however, her legal efforts ultimately guaranteed that her family received the entire portion of her husband’s estate. For Jane Spurgin, her status as the abandoned wife of a tory granted her political widowhood, based on the technicality that her husband was now a noncitizen. In chapter 6, Kierner concludes that changing legislative statutes in the immediate postwar era, including the newfound availability of divorce in states such as Pennsylvania, played a prominent role in women’s changing legal and political rights, while still maintaining a rigid, patriarchal system of authority.

Kierner demonstrates that, for at least one woman of the era, the Revolution allowed a wife to separate herself from her husband as a legal widow and assert an independent political identity and a limited claim to citizenship, even if only to protect her own family’s property. Unfortunately, Kierner never fully clarifies what rights citizenship entailed in this context. Historiographically, The Tory’s Wife obviously builds on the legacies of Linda Kerber, Marylynn Salmon, and Rosemarie Zagarri’s works on women’s legal, divorce, and property rights during the American Revolution, and it is an excellent illustration of many of those prominent historiographical arguments about revolutionary changes in early America. While Kierner’s microhistory explores the legal rights of married women during this era, it does not explicitly engage with this extensive historiography of women’s legal rights in the Revolutionary period. Although this maintains the captivating narrative, it does limit the book’s histori-
Kierner's analysis of family ideological conflict on North Carolina's Revolutionary frontier shows how differing political views split families and how gender complicated those disputes. Kierner highlights how Jane Spurgin was an anomaly in the post-Revolutionary legal landscape; Jane challenged a well-established, patriarchal system and claimed citizenship rights from a government that viewed her solely as a legal dependent. And she won. While her legacy was forgotten even by her own children, Jane Spurgin's story focuses on the uncertainty many women faced following the American Revolution, when their legal rights and identities were still in extreme flux. Kierner's engaging microhistorical narrative and easy-to-comprehend descriptions of complex legal concepts make this work a welcome case study for undergraduate classes on the American Revolution or more specialized classes on American legal history or the history of early American women.

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