

Review in *RI History* (volume 40,#3, Aug 1981, pp 102-103) by William G McLoughlin

Peleg Burrough s's Journal, 1778-1798: The Tiverton , R.I. Years of the Humbly Bold Baptist Minister. Edited by RUTH WILDER SHERMAN. (Warwick. R.I.: Rhode Island Genealogical Society, 1981. 404 pp. Illustrations and index. \$19.00.)

To those who complain that history books too often leave out the life of the common man, this volume will be most welcome. Peleg Burroughs (1748-1800) was one of the common people of Rhode Island, and this edition of his journal provides us with a full and colorful account of his life as a farmer, shopkeeper, and Baptist preacher in Tiverton for the last twenty years of the eighteenth century.

The editor has given us a readable, accurate rendering of the surviving manuscripts and includes two maps to give us the geographical bearing for Burroughs's travels as well as two genealogical charts of his ancestry. **Robert Anderson** offers a short introduction pointing out the historical usefulness of the journal; **Jane Fiske** provides a short sketch of Burroughs's life; **Alden Saunders** describes the formation and growth of the genealogical society which supported the publication, and **Ruth Sherman** explains the editing process.

The book has many charms. Burroughs is a fascinating figure. He provides endless details of his private and public life but with odd omissions. For example, there is very little about the momentous events taking place in the new nation as it fights a revolution, goes through a critical period, adopts a constitution, and starts a new government. Burroughs was a pacifist [unusual among Baptists of the day) and during the Revolution told his church members "that God's people now have no warrant or authority from him, on any pretence whatsoever, to meddle with such war but encouraged them to fight the good fight of faith " (p. 25). His primary interest lay in saving souls, building up his church, keeping the members united, excommunicating sinners, and providing spiritual comfort to the bereaved and afflicted.

He was a Six Principle Baptist (common in Rhode Island then). His church believed in the laying on of hands, footwashing, anointing with oil, baptism by immersion, and the effort to attain "perfect holiness." Married to a Seventh Day Baptist from Hopkinton who bore him ten children, Burroughs honored her faith by refusing to work on Saturdays, although he and his church worshipped on the Lord's Day. Among his racially mixed congregation were a number of Warmpanoag Indians, black slaves, and freedmen . When Aaron Lopez, a leader of the Jewish community In Newport, died in 1784, Burroughs wrote a touching eulogy of him. He preached against "the great sin of slavekeeping or claiming property in the persons of our fellow creatures " (p. 68) in the days when Rhode Island was a slaveholding state, and he deplored the sins of dancing, intemperance, and dueling, Social historians will be interested in Burroughs's description of his efforts to make a living (for his church provided him only with occasional freewill offerings). On page after page we find him planting corn, beans, peas and barley, digging potatoes, raking hay, butchering pigs, gathering herbs, cutting wood, making soap, salting beef, rolling licorice balls and "digging stones." We also learn of the labors of his long-suffering wife and the "grannys" or midwives who attend during her "travels." We hear much about his and he r ailments from "sick head-eke " to "rheumatism" and "bilious cholick." When his children had "hooping cough" he doctored them with "an equal weight of oil of sweet almonds, loaf sugar and spermaceti, with an eighth part of spirits of lavender or turpentine " (p. 281).

Burroughs kept a "forenoon school" for several years, but he tells us little of its curriculum or discipline. There is somewhat more about his efforts to switch from farming to "keeping store." He had

little time for reading and preached ex tempore. The journal records murders, drownings, suicides, and the problems with "deluded Shakers" and "paper money"- "O, how great are the abominations now done in Providence," he wrote in 1788 (p. 229). For pastimes he wrote hymns and made acrosticks. Through it all, Burroughs emerges as a selfless, tenderhearted, hard-working, pious man, dedicated to God and his church. As a Baptist he insisted on the separation of church and state ; as a pietist he felt in the 1790S that "the latter days " were fast approaching.

This is an auspicious first volume for the Rhode Island Genealogical Society. It would benefit from a broader index including place names, subject headings, and significant topics. Also, some annotation would help identify people, places, and events mentioned fleetingly or ambiguously by the author (such as the Battle of Rhode Island). But this is an excellent beginning. It will delight and reward the local historian.

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