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BOOK REVIEW

Thomas L. McKenney, Architect of America's Early Indian Policy: 1816-1830, by Herman J. Viola. The Swallow Press, Inc., Chicago, 1974. Illustrations, maps, endnotes, bibliography, index. Pp. xii, 365. \$15.00.

Despite the fact that he administered and in large measure designed American Indian policy in the decade and a half following the War of 1812, Thomas Loraine McKenney has been mostly ignored by scholars of the period. Perhaps best remembered for the Indian art he collected, which in the years 1836-1844 was published in collaboration with James Hall, McKenney as the second Superintendent of the Indian Trade and first Superintendent of the Bureau of Indian Affairs deserves much more. Herman J. Viola, director of the National Anthropological Archives in the Museum of Natural History at the Smithsonian, has finally given McKenney his due in a superbly researched volume that no serious student of Indian policy and administration can afford to ignore.

The responsibilities confronting McKenney as a public official were truly herculean. He journeyed thousands of miles to negotiate Indian treaties that established the pattern of the future. With only the most modest clerical assistance he administered large annuity contracts and ordered literally tons of presents and trade goods for the various tribes. He organized the Indian Office in the War Department into a reasonably efficient bureaucracy, presided over the government's faltering Factory System at a time when political and economic pressure from the private sector demanded an end to that unpopular "monster," and kept in close touch with the various humanitarian leaders who almost routinely came forth with plans for saving the tribes from extinction. More important, he provided the leadership for passage of the Civilization Act of 1819 and the profoundly important Removal Act of 1830. It is no exaggeration to argue that his methodical labors constituted the very foundation for the Indian Trade and Intercourse Act of 1834 and the more formal organization of the Bureau of Indian Affairs that same year.

Viola is especially adroit in analyzing the interplay of partisan politics and Indian administration—the often exciting battles between the Houstons, the Jacksons, and the Bentons on the one hand, and the Calhouns, Clays, and Randolphs on the other. For the reader he has rekindled the fires of partisanship in the early national period that so many other writers on similar topics have ig-

nored. Chapter 5, "Political Interlude," is a telling appraisal of the modes of political pressure and investigative strategy McKenney was subjected to—and in historical retrospect, provide a perceptive model for the experiences of those public servants who would follow in McKenney's footsteps. That McKenney (like his predecessor John Mason) did not always balance his accounts to the satisfaction of his detractors must be seen, as Viola wisely insists, within the context of the business ethics of the time, and a much less demanding definition of what today is styled "conflict of interest."

Because the government's civilization-removal program of the 1830's and 1840's had such a profound effect on the future of the original Americans, and because McKenney played such an important role in the formative stages of this policy, it is worthy to comment on the author's judgments regarding this critical point.

Contrary to the conclusions of Bernard Sheehan, Wilbur Jacobs, Francis Jennings, and, in modified form, Wilcomb Washburn, Viola sides with Paul Prucha in concluding that there were no *inherent* contradictions in McKenney's solution to the Indian problem. The legal system of the United States at that time provided no ironclad assurances that the land base of the eastern Indians would be protected. Christian humanitarians gave every indication that they were men of good will, and in any case, the executive and legislative branches displayed no firm inclination to halt or even control the white assault in the Indian country.

Thus, to protect the Indians from premature extinction, it was essential to segregate them from the more aggressive members of the "superior culture," while at the same time providing the Indians with a final chance to regroup and prepare for the eventual destruction of their way of life at the hands of well-meaning philanthropists.

Not surprisingly, many contemporary Indians are absolutely outraged at this system as it developed historically, while scholars in the more detached settings of academia take refuge in paradox or irony. But with McKenney as the test case, author Viola carefully places McKenney in time and context, and, at least by implication, characterizes him as a well-meaning functionary with little perception of the consequences. No serious historian, certainly not one who has mined the available documents, can fault him for this. Indeed, he should be congratulated.

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