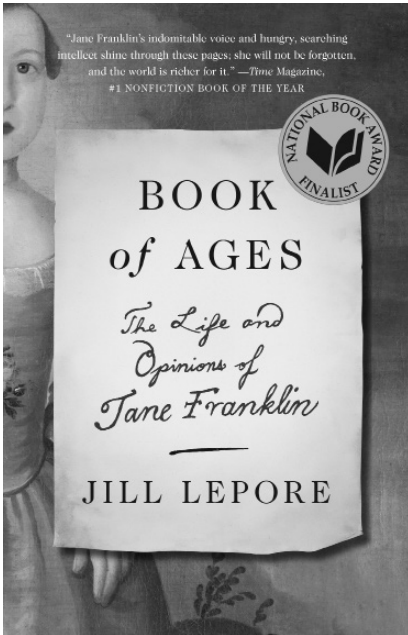


BOOK REVIEWS

***Book of Ages: The Life and Opinions of Jane Franklin.* By Jill Lepore. New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2013. 442 pages. \$16.95 (paperback).**



Only a generation ago, the study of history was almost entirely confined to the study of “great white men.” Often left out of the picture, or included peripherally, were the stories of women, children, and minorities.

The maturing disciplines of women’s history and black history have started to remedy this historical imbalance. We are now learning much more about how the other half lived and, one hopes, gaining wisdom from these revelations.

Jill Lepore’s biography of Jane Franklin, Benjamin’s youngest and favorite sister, adds immeasurable insight into this growing trend. It gives us valuable perspective into what it was like to be brilliant, capable,

female, and uneducated in a man’s world; and it sheds new light on the life of Benjamin Franklin as well.

Jane was Benjamin’s favorite sibling, and she thought of her brother as her Second Self. The contrasts between their life stories are often diametrically opposed. He traveled the world, meeting leaders and luminaries. She stayed home, caring for a seemingly endless stream of sick, destitute, and dying family members. He became a world-renowned author. Due to a lack of schooling, she could barely spell, although she was a voracious reader. They loved each other, corresponded frequently (he wrote more letters to her than to anyone), and yet he left her entirely out of his life story. You cannot help wondering if he was ashamed of his uneducated, unworldly, and poor relatives. Benjamin Franklin had moved on from his lowly beginnings, and perhaps did not want to be reminded of them, or to have anyone else be reminded.

This biography is drawn almost entirely from the correspondence between these two relations, as well as from Jane's "Book of Ages", which lends its title to this book. This was essentially a family diary of important events: births, illnesses, weddings, and deaths. Most of Benjamin's letters have been saved for posterity. Most but not all of Jane's letters have never been found, leading one to believe that Benjamin did not save them. Some of what she has to say is, therefore, inferred from his replies to her letters.

Famous men are often better at their vocations than they are in their family relations, and Benjamin Franklin was no exception. He escaped his own family as a boy, disinherited his illegitimate loyalist son, practically abandoned his wife while he globetrotted the world, and let his youngest sister Jane assume most of the family burdens. He didn't abandon Jane entirely, setting her up with a modest annuity and also letting her live in the family house that he owned. He also provided occasional small amounts of money to family members in need of assistance. But that was the extent of the support he lent, other than advice, while she took care of adults, grandchildren, and even great grandchildren through indebtedness, illness, and death.

This book lends some insight into what it must be like to be brilliant, but to have no intellectual outlet to use your intelligence for a useful purpose. Jane didn't ask her famous brother for money or fame, all she ever asked of him was contact when possible, letters when not (it usually wasn't possible, as they rarely saw each other), and most important of all, books. Books and the letters from her brother were her entre into the outside world. She may not have been able to travel the earth like her brother, or participate in important world events, but she could read about them, and read she did. Of course she tried to read everything authored by her sibling, but her reading tastes encompassed a wide range of topics of the day, including government and religion.

This book provides an insightful view into the life of an "average" eighteenth-century woman. Despite her link to fame, Jane Franklin led a life of self-abnegation and drudgery, often sacrificing her health and well-being to care for extended family members who had no one else. While Benjamin traveled the world and rubbed elbows with the famous, his sister devoted her life to keeping the family afloat. This is an old and recurring story that is only now being nudged into the direction of equality, if ever so slowly.

Stephen Donnelly is a consultant for the life insurance industry and a Westfield State College alumnus.

***Whips of Westfield: The Rise & Decline of an American Industry, Westfield, Massachusetts.* By Bruce W. Cortis. Amherst, MA: Off The Commons Books, 2018. 243 pages. \$21.50 (paperback).**

Rich in detail, Bruce W. Cortis's *Whips of Westfield* provides a comprehensive historical narrative and chronology of the early origins of the American whip industry. It was an industry that followed the familiar pattern of so many other industries in the Pioneer Valley—beginning with early handcrafted products created for local users and moving on to mass-produced product lines with national markets.

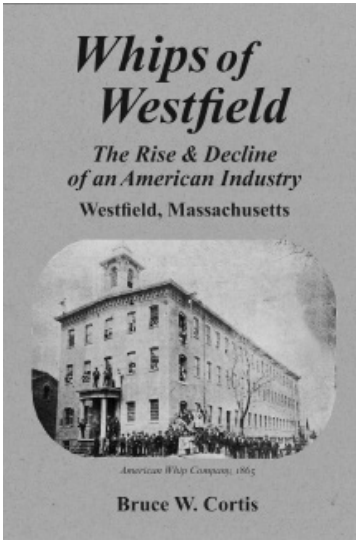
From the early 1800s to ca. 1820, local farmers made local whips by hand with no particular uniformity or durability. The whip-braiding machine changed all that. The following generation of Westfield whip manufacturers employed this basic device and constantly improved upon it.

Cortis also chronicles the Westfield inventors whose many patents and technological improvements constantly increased both quality and productivity in the whip industry. He provides a comprehensive list of those patents and their inventors in an appendix. Local inventors such as Henry J. Bush, Liverus and David C. Hull, James Noble Jr., Charles C. Pratt, and Henry M. Van Deusen appear time and again as important improvers of whip design and manufacture.

The amazing number of whip manufacturing companies in Westfield clearly explains the city's historical moniker as the "Whip City." The author has also compiled a list of over 270 whip manufacturers, both large companies and small single-owner shops from Hiram Hull's shop in 1822 to the Westfield Whip Manufacturing Co. in 2018. Cortis has provided an exhaustive list of each major Westfield whip manufacturing company with information about the founders and owners, the number of employees broken down by men and women and specialty operatives, special patents associated with that company, and the time span of its operations. Reading through these fascinating entries, the many interconnections between these companies can be ascertained.

Cortis effectively ties the history of the whip industry to the development of Westfield as one of the Pioneer Valley's important industrial centers. This study also adds to our understanding of the development of the Westfield community, its related businesses, and the people who provided the labor force to enable this unique industry to be so successful for so many years.

In 1885, Westfield labor was concentrated in four industries: whip manufacturing, 481 employees; cigar and tobacco, 386 employees; iron



goods manufacturing, 257 employees; and papermaking, 171 employees. Whip manufacturing employed 33% of Westfield's workforce. By 1890, serious efforts were being made to consolidate the many whip companies into a single entity.

On December 29, 1892, the United States Whip Corporation was formed. Between 1893 and 1894, U.S. Whip Corp. acquired sixteen Westfield whip manufacturing companies: American Whip, Sanford Whip, Lay Whip, Massasoit, Standard Whip, Baystate Whip, W. H. Owen, L. H. Beals, Peck & Whipple, J. C. Schmidt, Steimer & Moore, Geo E. Whipple, Westfield Whip, Searle Whip., Edmund Cooper, and A. Dibble.

Ironically, 1893 was also the year that the Duryea brothers developed America's first successful internal combustion automobile in neighboring Springfield. As Cortis states: "It would be many years before the automobile industry significantly cut into the whip industry but by the early 1900s its growing impact was unmistakable" (97).

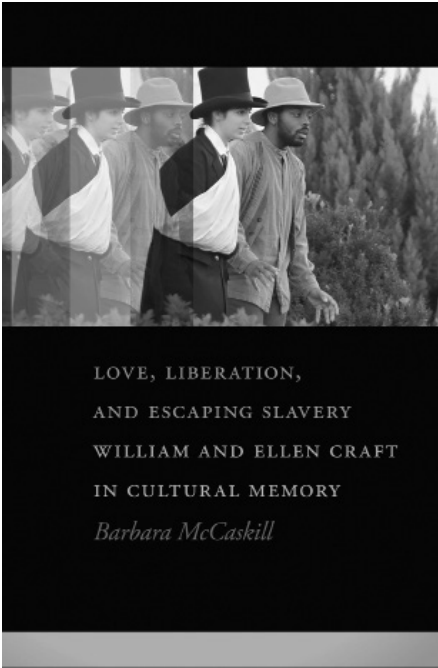
Well-illustrated throughout, the book also includes a chapter, "Westfield's Whip Industry in Pictures," which gives the reader a sense of the scale of these large manufacturing facilities. The interior photos provide a glimpse of the processes and working conditions within these whip factories.

Cortis's *Whips of Westfield: The Rise & Decline of an American Industry, Westfield, Massachusetts* is the seminal work on Westfield's Whip industry, one of the city's economic engines for almost a century.

Joseph Carvalho III is Co-editor of The Heritage Book Series of The Republican newspaper in Springfield, MA as well as retired President and Executive Director of the Springfield Museums Association.

***Love, Liberation, and Escaping Slavery: William and Ellen Craft in Cultural Memory.* By Barbara McCaskill. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015. 132 pages. \$22.95 (paperback).**

In *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* (1860), William and Ellen Craft told the story of their escape from slavery. They had "jumped the broom"



(married) in Macon, Georgia, but they were hesitant to begin a family, knowing that their children could be taken from them. Hence they planned to escape to the freedom of the North. Ellen, the daughter of a white man and a half-white enslaved woman, was very light and could pass as white. She took on the role of a white man going to Philadelphia for medical treatment and taking “his” slave for assistance. (A white woman traveling with a male slave would attract too much attention.) Despite the inherent difficulty of such a plan and a few close calls, they made it to Boston, where they were initially happy in a community that included a number of supportive white and black abolitionists. But even

Boston was not safe after passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, and so the Crafts went to Canada and from there to England, where they wrote the story of their escape, published in 1860. In 1868, with the Civil War over and slavery ended, they returned to the United States where they set up a school for freed people.

In *Love, Liberation, and Escaping Slavery*, Barbara McCaskill (University of Georgia) brings a new perspective to the story. By examining four periods in the lives of William and Ellen Craft—their escape from Macon and enslavement, their time in Boston, their years in England, and their return to Georgia after the war and formal emancipation (a part of their story not covered in *Running*)—McCaskill explores “how the Crafts and their antislavery friends framed and remembered the fugitives’ story to both challenge and conform to cultural attitudes” (9). For example, while *Running* makes a big deal of Ellen’s mixed-race background, William’s biracial identity was never mentioned. “By tamping discussion of the brown-skinned William’s Caucasian heritage and foregrounding Ellen’s blended ancestry,” McCaskill wrote, “activists like the Crafts could highlight the sexual victimization of enslaved women. They could slant William as a nineteenth-century hero whose African blood challenged white male monopolies on such traits as

bravery, pride, and intellect” (19). Several sympathetic people reported that Ellen had given birth as a slave to a baby who did not survive; if the story is true (and there is no firm evidence either way), it might have been omitted in order to keep intact the image of purity and chastity expected “within nineteenth-century norms of motherhood” (30). Cultural memory is also at play in *Running* when William came up with the risky plan of escape and Ellen had to be persuaded (at first she “shrank from the idea”); McCaskill suggests that it was actually Ellen who came up with the plan. The revised story is “an example of how black abolitionists often wrote formerly enslaved Africans into conventional gender roles” (25).

The Boston chapter might be of special interest to readers of this journal. The Crafts arrived in Philadelphia on Christmas day, 1848, but within a few weeks they moved to Boston, “the center of the American antislavery movement” (35). There, sympathetic Bostonians, black and white, guided and protected the new arrivals, and for the rest of their lives, William and Ellen would have to “maneuver . . . between the good intentions of northern abolitionists . . . and their own willfulness and determination to chart their own direction in life” (42). They went to night school (it is sometimes hard to remember that they were illiterate when they left Georgia) and began lecturing across New England (with Ellen playing the more docile role, as dictated by Victorian gender expectations). It was here that they made the famous daguerreotype of Ellen as she was dressed for their escape. In one of the most fascinating sections of the book, McCaskill tells how “this widely circulating image of a cross-dressed Ellen Craft challenged assumptions about the fixity of gender, race, normalcy, and class that those viewing her picture may have uncritically accepted” (39).

Elsewhere in the book, McCaskill describes other early works about the Crafts, especially Lydia Maria Child’s popular play, *The Stars and Stripes. A Melo-Drama* (1855); their work in Georgia during Reconstruction; a libel case brought against William in the 1870s; and more. She packs a lot into this small volume, and she does it well. *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* is one of the most popular fugitive slave narratives in undergraduate classes; students like the book because it is both fascinating and easy to read, and professors like it because it touches on so many aspects of slave life and the social and cultural context in which slavery and abolition existed. Thanks to McCaskill, we now know that the book tells us even more than we imagined.

David B. Parker is a Professor of History at Kennesaw State University.