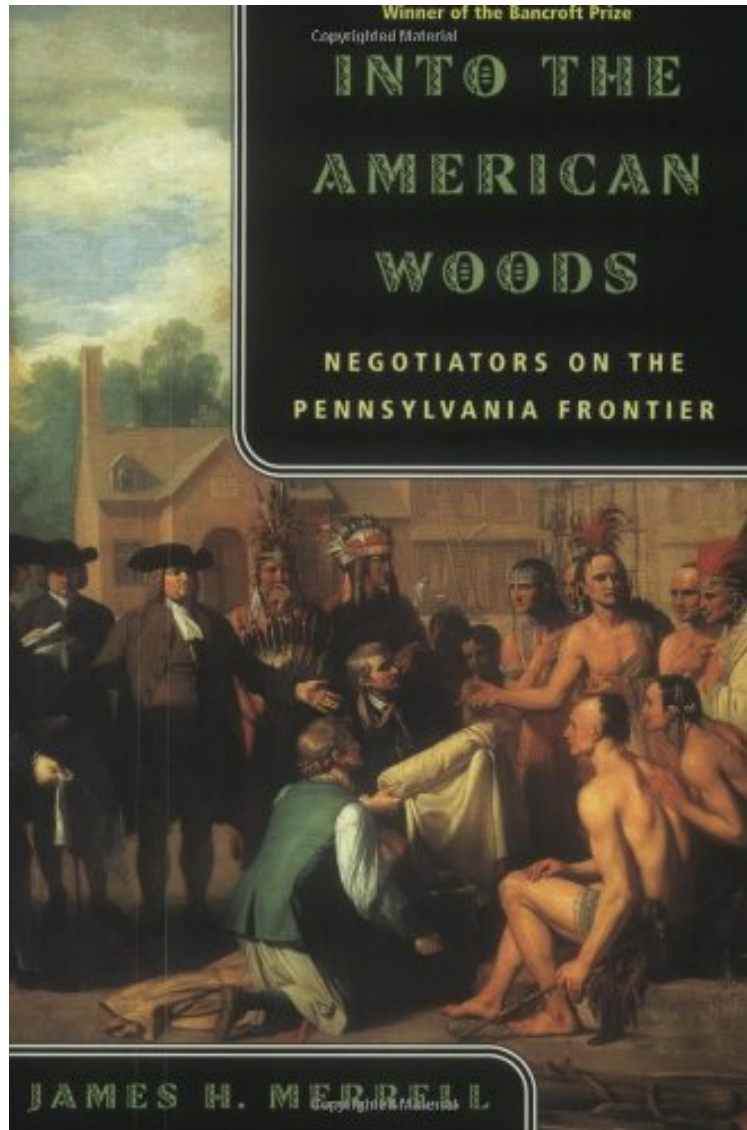


Into the American Woods: Negotiations on the Pennsylvania Frontier

James H. Merrell

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James H. Merrell : Into the American Woods: Negotiations on the Pennsylvania Frontier before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Into the American Woods: Negotiations on the Pennsylvania Frontier:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A very good book. Anyone familiar with the period (contact to ...By Ted EllisA very good book. Anyone familiar with the period (contact to 1800ish middle colonies) will be at home with

the people and places it covers. All are familiar to anyone who's studied the times and region. This is not another book on the things that happened, but rather a more in-depth look at the people who made them possible. Merrell has done an original job of explaining the men, who and what they were and as much as possible, how they came to be of note without the romanticism frequently finding its way into such descriptions. He makes comparisons to different generations (and so, events), that seems to have confused some, but it's the people not the events that are of interest here. To that end, I found his mixing of people and events decades apart, not only explainable, but insightful. An indispensable reference for anyone desiring to understand those who lived in the region, both native and European.² of 2 people found the following review helpful. Into the American Woods By Kim Burdick. "Like." By examining the work of cross-cultural negotiators such as Conrad Weiser, George Croghan, Madame and Andrew Montour, Scarouady and Shickellamy, James Merrell helps us understand the transformation of America that took place in the years surrounding the French and Indian Wars. The book offers intriguing insights into changing social and cultural norms, including the growing reliance by white men on the messages to be read in wampum belts and the growing dependence by the Indians on written deeds and the printed word. This makes a good pairing with Richard White's "Middle Ground," where we also see the Indians and the white men becoming more alike than different. Of particular interest here is Merrell's observation that Native American protocol, not European tradition, set the tone early on for official frontier foreign relations. There are some delightful descriptions taken from primary documents telling of friendships and formal meetings between delegations and there are also some head-shakingly horrifying tales. In reaction to spillover from Europe's Seven Years War and massive 18th century immigration, Natives and Colonists became newly suspicious and fearful of each other. As the first generation of negotiators grew old and began to die off, early hopes and dreams for peaceful relationships were destroyed by explosive vengeance and violence. "Into the American Woods" is a major contribution to the understanding of 18th century Mid-Atlantic American history. Sociology, anthropology and history students will all find this a useful study. Kim Burdick Stanton, Delaware 34 of 35 people found the following review helpful. On Both Sides of the Council Fire By DBL The boundary that separated the territory of Pennsylvania's Indians and colonists indicated more than just a physical change in the landscape. The vast stretches of forest and mountain that encompassed the Pennsylvania woods designated a spiritual transformation between the colonial frontier and what Europeans considered the "hideous and desolate lands." The woods' edge marked the difference between order and disorder, darkness and light, and for many colonists it was a forbidding domain where the peoples and creatures were shunned. Likewise, for Indians, the margin between the Pennsylvania woods and what colonists haughtily termed "the inhabited parts," marked the divide between their world and one of mistrust and apprehension. Although there were overlapping notions among Indians and colonists about where the woods began and ended, both groups thought the darkness of that territory to be strange and unpredictable. In his book, *Into the American Woods: Negotiators on the Pennsylvania Frontier*, James Merrell explains the role and purpose of the individuals who straddled the divide between woods and clearing. More than that, these go-betweens, asserts Merrell, stood straddling Indian and colonial cultures in order to mediate a number of negotiations, land disputes, trade issues, and the occasional murder. Merrell's comprehensive discussion of the role of the cultural broker in colonial Pennsylvania during the "Long Peace" from 1680 to 1750 unravels not only the mystery behind eighteenth century frontier diplomacy, but also the curious life of the go-between. He takes the reader across that threshold between Indian and white ground in order to enter in and examine the frontier. It is his attempt to discover what it was like for the go-between to be the link between Indian and colonist, and to obtain a richer, fuller, and more colorful picture of the early American scene. At the outset of his work, Merrell stresses the complexities involved with defining the go-between; picking them out of the crowd in America's border country can be difficult work for historians. Thus, the strength of this work lies in Merrell's ability to define nearly every aspect of the frontier experience, and pick the brain of Pennsylvania's go-betweens. He contends that not every trader, missionary, or convert was a go-between. Moreover, a role in state affairs did not necessarily give one the credentials that would distinguish him from the common man. Canasatego, an Onondaga, summed it up vividly, with a hint of sarcasm, when he explained to Pennsylvania officials in 1742 that negotiator Conrad Weiser "has wore out his shoes in our messages, and has dirty'd his clothes by being amongst us, so that he is as nasty as an Indian." Merrell expands on Canasatego's idea by explaining that the role of go-between entailed a certain amount of dirty work, both figuratively and literally; once the trip was made across unforgiving terrain to reach the far side of the frontier, the traveler still had the passage into another culture to look forward to. Merrell explains that the go-between was a shadowy figure that carried the letters but did not sign and seal them; who memorized the speeches inscribed on wampum belts, but did not draft them; who translated, but did not hold the floor at councils. Essentially, this complex and necessary figure stood between the tables crowded with colonial and Indian officials to make sure that the liquor and talk flowed freely, but did not join the feast. A behind-the-scenes character, the go-between is not a figure of the past whose position in colonial society is easy to uncover. In order to facilitate this laborious task of assessing the life and role of the cultural broker, Merrell chose to tap into a source that, he alleges, few scholars choose to probe. The numerous volumes of treaty minutes recorded for every official interaction between Indians and colonists reveal in great detail the demands placed upon the go-between. Every formal proceeding required an intermediary to perform a multitude of tasks, and in these documented accounts, Merrell has

managed to illustrate the role of the go-between after a careful inspection of these sources. Also, in chronicling the life of the Pennsylvania frontier, Merrell does not take the conventional approach to telling history; his book takes on an unconventional role because he is dealing with exceptional characters. He starts and ends the book with what he calls woodlore, to offer a fresh view of historical sites and instances that might otherwise be common knowledge to the reader. While telling the stories of Jack Armstrong's murder in 1744 and concluding with the killing of Young Seneca George in 1769, Merrell systematically interweaves discussions about the recruitment of negotiators, their travels, talks, and treaties. By recounting the rough texture and gritty feel of the colonial frontier, Merrell proves himself to be an authority on the topic. No detail is left out of this work, and no stone goes unturned throughout Merrell's journey into the minds and duties of the go-between. His argument is both convincing and original, his prose innovative and direct. More compelling is his approach to telling the history of Pennsylvania's frontier diplomats as pivotal players on the frontier who are often excluded from conventional historiography. Merrell tells the story from both sides of the council fire, on behalf of both Indians and colonists uniformly. *Into the American Woods* is not only a fascinating read, but also a fundamental and comprehensive resource for those investigating the role of the cultural broker.

"A stunning achievement. . . . A pathbreaking scholarly work by one of the nation's leading historians of the interaction between Native Americans and European newcomers in early America."--Kirkus Reviews (starred review)
James Merrell's brilliant book is an account of the "go-betweens," the Europeans and Indians who moved between cultures on the Pennsylvania frontier in efforts to maintain the peace. It is also a reflection on the meanings of wilderness to the colonists and natives of the New World. From the Quaker colony's founding in the 1680s into the 1750s, Merrell shows us how the go-betweens survived in the woods, dealing with problems of food, travel, lodging, and safety, and how they sought to bridge the vast cultural gaps between the Europeans and the Indians. The futility of these efforts became clear in the sickening plummet into war after 1750. "A stunningly original and exceedingly well-written account of diplomacy on the edge of the Pennsylvania wilderness."--Publishers Weekly
Illustrations and maps

A stunning achievement. . . . A pathbreaking scholarly work by one of the nation's leading historians of the interaction between Native Americans and European newcomers in early America. -- Kirkus s, starred review
About the Author
James H. Merrell is professor of history at Northwestern University and the author of (Norton), winner of the Bancroft Prize.