



PROJECT MUSE®

---

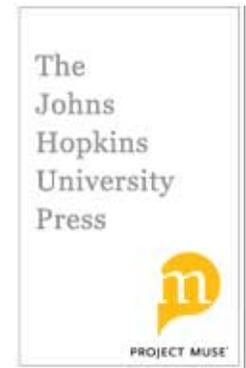
The Weaver's Craft: Cloth, Commerce, and Industry in Early  
Pennsylvania (review)

Gail Fowler Mohanty

Technology and Culture, Volume 45, Number 4, October 2004, pp. 836-837  
(Review)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/tech.2004.0189>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/175765>

**The Weaver's Craft: Cloth, Commerce, and Industry in Early Pennsylvania.**

By Adrienne D. Hood. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003.  
Pp. 230. \$35.

OCTOBER  
2004  
VOL. 45

This brief volume examines the various ways that people in southeastern Pennsylvania acquired cloth: by domestic production, craft manufacture, and importation. Adrienne Hood also shows how hand manufacture of fabric and textile technology were incorporated into a basically agricultural economy. Hood studied the colonial population of Chester County and linked it to its European roots to discover how cloth manufacturing traditions might be translated to different geographic and economic circumstances. Because her work examines both the status of and changes to the weaving craft within the environment of colonial Pennsylvania, Hood offers new interpretations of cloth production. Her Pennsylvania research is meticulous. She combines information from account books, civil records, and advertisements with material culture to determine how immigrants from textile-producing regions of Europe brought tools, production methods, and skills to the colonies and integrated them into a largely agricultural economy. Hood's ability to integrate interpretation based on material culture seamlessly with archival research connotes years of experience.

In her introduction, Hood reviews the literature on hand textile production prior to industrialization and during the period of early industrialization, demonstrating that her work augments but also lies within the context of previous historical understanding. The next seven chapters examine the European origins of the Chester County population, fiber production as a byproduct of agriculture, flax and wool, spinning, knitting, weaving, and finishing. Finally, she considers how the introduction of textile manufacture in water-powered mills gradually but inexorably eliminated the market for domestic hand production. Her narrative encompasses both the people performing tasks and the tools or technology used to make fabric. In sum, she presents a well-rounded evaluation of textile production in the regional economy and its ultimate demise.

Despite its many achievements, this work raises some concerns. When Hood centers her discussion on southeastern Pennsylvania, and Chester County in particular, the interpretation is excellent. Unfortunately, her treatment of a different region and a different population is not as successful, because they do not demonstrate the same level of understanding. Hood also studied the population in Essex County, Massachusetts, and seeks to generalize from that to New England in its entirety. A better tactic might have been to compare the two counties—one in Pennsylvania, one in Massachusetts—and their adaptations to preindustrial and early industrial environments, without attempting to extend the analysis to a much larger area.

In most cases, Hood makes evident the factual basis for her interpreta-

tions with absolute clarity and demonstrable accuracy. However, a few small points are not well documented. These include the reasons for women's exclusion from knitting on knitting frames, as distinct from women practicing the weaving craft (pp. 68, 79); the thought behind the location of weaving in outbuildings based on concern about noise, lint, and moisture (p. 104); and the suggestion at various points that hand weavers and spinners entered the industrial workforce (pp. 144, 154). Hood's failure to provide definitive answers here is puzzling, as is her failure to note how little evidence survives in the historical record.

These few issues aside, *The Weaver's Craft* is a well-written and welcome addition to the literature and provides historians with a much-needed and thoughtful examination of the organization and process of cloth production prior to industrialization in southeastern Pennsylvania.

GAIL FOWLER MOHANTY

Dr. Mohanty received her Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania under the guidance of Anthony F. C. Wallace. She is an adjunct faculty member at Bryant College and has published a number of articles on hand-loom weavers and weaving in New England.

---

### **The Roots of American Industrialization.**

By David R. Meyer. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.  
Pp. xi+333. \$45.

Historical geographer David R. Meyer challenges the traditional interpretations of early industrialization, insisting that beginning in the 1790s a prosperous agricultural sector in the northeast both created capital and provided markets for early industrial growth. Meyer addresses a "puzzle" about early economic development: If, as the conventional arguments go, farmers in the east were impoverished and the vast majority of the population lived in areas with primitive transportation, where did developing small industry find markets? Not in the midwest or south until the 1840s, or in export trade. And even in 1860 two-thirds of the population in the east remained rural.

According to Meyer, antebellum rural growth resulted from the increase in intensive specialized farming households near Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, which prospered from urban markets and purchased the products of light industry. Thus, in regional and subregional metropolises "agricultural and industrial transformations were integrated, mutually reinforcing processes" (p. 6). "As eastern agriculture was transformed, local farm communities increased their engagement with the market economy. Wholesalers and retailers . . . transmitted through price signals information about changing nonlocal demand for agricultural products. Farmers strategically determined supply responses. . . . As farm productivity rose, surplus rural labor entered eastern factories. . . . [G]rowing farm prosperity (slower during 1790–1820) supplied capital and provided lucrative markets for local, subregional, and interregional manufactures" (p. 8).