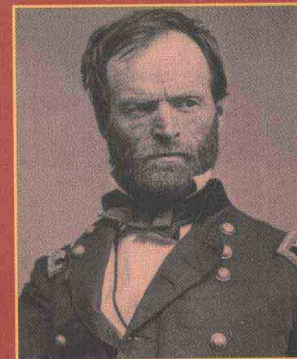
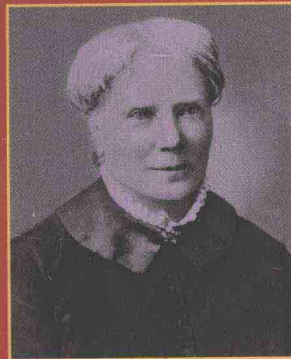
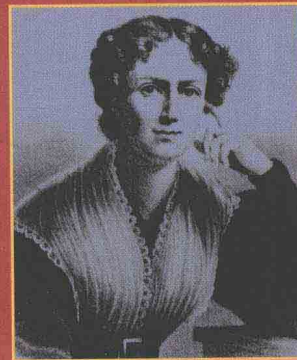


Second Edition

Volume I



Stephen G. Weisner

William F. Hartford

# AMERICAN PORTRAITS

Biographies in United States History

# *American Portraits:*

## *Biographies in United States History*

VOLUME I  
*Second Edition*

*Stephen G. Weisner*  
*Springfield Technical Community College*

*William F. Hartford*  
*Independent Scholar*



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## AMERICAN PORTRAITS, VOLUME I: BIOGRAPHIES IN UNITED STATES HISTORY

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*For my mother, Anne Weisner, 1921–1993*

# Preface

*American Portraits* is a two-volume collection of biographical profiles designed to supplement the textbooks used in college-level survey courses. We adopted this format for several reasons. One is a belief that biography provides a particularly valuable tool for introducing students to the excitement and wonder of history. Life-writing forcefully reminds us that, beneath the abstractions, history is about the aspirations and struggles of flesh-and-blood human beings; it further enables us to identify with these individuals as they seek to give meaning to their lives. In so doing, biography restores a sense of immediacy to the study of the past that is often lost in textbook generalizations. Accordingly, the articles in this anthology have been selected not only for their readability—though that was certainly a consideration—but also for the interest they are likely to generate. It is our hope that, in reading these essays, students will learn more about themselves as well as the people whose lives are profiled.

We also believe that biography provides an especially effective means of exploring the social and cultural diversity that has figured so prominently in the American experience. In the not-too-distant past, U.S. history was largely the study of middle-aged white males who had attained positions of political, military, or social distinction and whose forebears hailed from the British Isles. This is no longer the case, and textbooks today devote increasing attention to both women and men from a variety of cultural groups and social classes.

Biography cannot expand the breadth of this coverage. It can, however, deepen our understanding of these people. To cite but two examples from this anthology, Alvin M. Josephy's examination of the obstacles Tecumseh encountered in his efforts to achieve Indian unity sheds light on the diversity of Native American life; and Cletus Daniel's portrait of Cesar Chavez shows how factors such as religion and ethnicity shaped the development of this leader's unique brand of trade unionism.

On a related matter, biography adds depth to our understanding of major historical themes. Most of the essays selected for this anthology thus have a dual purpose: to profile the life of a given individual and to explore how that person influenced and was influenced by broader historical forces. For example, Patricia Horner's article on Mary Richardson Walker describes the trials and tribulations of a female pioneer in the Oregon Country; however, it also raises

important questions about the ways in which environment and culture limited women's self-activity in frontier areas.

## New to this Edition

In this revised second edition we have made changes—in large measure based upon suggestions from our reviewers—that strengthen the reader.



John Smith and Mary Rowlandson add new perspective on Indian-White relations in early seventeenth century Virginia and decades later in Western New England, respectively. Benjamin Franklin's long life bridges the gap between the colonial period and Revolutionary era. The article on Andrew Jackson, by master stylist Albert Castel, is a fine character study of antebellum America's leading political figure.

In Volume II we have included a more accessible article on John D. Rockefeller by noted author Robert Heilbroner. Mary Lease who urged farmers in late nineteenth century Kansas to "... raise less corn and more hell ..." sheds light on the Populist movement. Ray Kroc, the man who made the "golden arches" of McDonald's a world-wide symbol of American culture, is our final new selection.

We have also clarified some questions in retained articles. Updated bibliographies include works through the year 2000, as well as relevant Websites and video recommendations.

## Structure and Pedagogy

We have divided the essays in each volume into three or four units. Each unit begins with an introductory essay that is designed to help put the portraits into topical and chronological perspective. To provide additional context for the lives profiled in the anthology, we have prepared headnotes for every article. Within each article, definitions are provided for any obscure terms and phrases and high-level vocabulary with which students might not be familiar. We also have selected a document to accompany each chapter and thus broaden the scope of coverage. For the second edition, this feature is newly titled "A Primary Perspective." Discussion questions follow, to help focus attention on the main issues raised in each chapter's portrait. Finally, each chapter concludes

with a list of additional resources that includes book,  Website, 

film, and video  recommendations.

## Online Instructor's Manual

An Instructor's Manual available on the book's Website ([www.mhhe.com/weisner](http://www.mhhe.com/weisner)) is also new to this edition. For every chapter, it will offer a variety of resources including quiz questions, questions for discussion, and extended lists of related Websites, films, and videos.

## Acknowledgments

We are grateful to reviewers for the second edition, who offered many helpful suggestions for revision:

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# Introduction

The fifteenth century was a time of intellectual, economic, and political renewal throughout much of Europe. After centuries of stagnation and decline, Europeans were once again behaving as masters of their own destiny. As technological innovation flourished and economic activity quickened, powerful postfeudal monarchs began looking outside the continent for new sources of wealth and power. The resulting voyages of exploration soon brought Europeans to hitherto unknown regions of the globe. As they did, colonization gradually displaced commerce as the main objective of European expansion.

Although Columbus reached the New World in 1492, it would be more than a century before the English established permanent colonies in the Americas. And the first of them, Jamestown, very nearly ended in disaster. After a long voyage, most of the initial settlers arrived in weakened condition. Poor housing and inadequate food did little to restore their health. Worse, the first settlement was located in a stagnant, marshy area where salt water mixed with the colonists' drinking water—water that contained the organisms that cause dysentery and typhoid. The result was all too predictable: "Swellings, Fluxes, Burning Fevers"—and death. By the time the first supply ship arrived the following year, only 38 of the original 104 colonists were still alive. It was at this point that Captain John Smith happened upon the scene. His efforts to save the fledgling settlement are examined in the unit's opening essay.

Far to the north of Jamestown, a much different sort of colony began to take shape several decades later. Where the Virginia Company's merchant directors made the acquisition of wealth their first priority, the Puritan migrants who founded Massachusetts Bay Colony hoped to create a "Bible Commonwealth" that would inspire the rest of humankind to better itself. As John Winthrop put it, "We shall be as a City upon a Hill, the eyes of all people are upon us." Given the nature of their mission, Puritan leaders stressed the need for discipline and unity. But they soon found that, as Elizabeth Anticaglia shows in her essay on Anne Hutchinson, such singleness of purpose was more easily asserted than achieved. When Hutchinson questioned the doctrinal emphases of leading ministers, she both challenged established religious beliefs and threatened the patriarchal foundations of political authority in the Bay Colony. Hutchinson's convictions would later find recognition in the First Amendment to the U.S.

Constitution. But that time was still far off. In Massachusetts during the 1630s, her alleged heresy provoked harsh retribution from the colony's male elite.

Where the actions of internal dissenters such as Anne Hutchinson periodically disrupted the social calm of Puritan New England, relations with Native Americans of the region at times threatened to end the Puritan experiment altogether. This was especially so during the mid-1670s when Native Americans under the leadership of King Philip laid waste to Deerfield and a host of other outposts. By the spring of 1676, the situation looked grim indeed for colonists. Despite some victories, early enthusiasm had collapsed. Because they had been trained to fight conventional wars, colonial forces had a difficult time adjusting to the hit-and-run guerrilla tactics employed by the Indians. As morale plummeted and more towns were put to the torch, ministers called for days of fasting and humiliation. God's anger, they claimed, had been aroused by drinking, gaming, and a lack of respect for parents and clergy. To turn the tide of battle, colonists needed to behave as Christians and reclaim God's grace. One person who found this interpretation of events particularly compelling was Mary Rowlandson, a minister's wife who was taken prisoner by Native Americans following the Indian attack on Lancaster. In her essay on Rowlandson, Nancy Woloach recounts the story of her captivity.

A third region of English settlement was the Delaware Valley. There, too, religion strongly influenced the decision to migrate, as English Quakers sought refuge from the savage persecution they faced at home. And what John Winthrop was to Massachusetts Bay, William Penn was to the colony that bore his name. But as Norman K. Risjord relates in his essay on Penn, the Quaker leader's views on colonization differed considerably from those of his Puritan counterpart. Where Winthrop dealt harshly with internal dissenters, Penn sought to conduct a "Holy Experiment" based on religious tolerance. In addition to describing how Penn set that experiment in motion, Risjord provides an analysis of transatlantic political developments that adds considerably to our knowledge of this complex man and the colony he founded.



## John Smith

*According to a once popular saying, the sun never set on the British empire. However true this may have been of a later era when England had become the world's leading imperial power, it did not describe its geopolitical status in the early seventeenth century. The small island nation was a late entry in the contest for colonies that made Europe's Age of Exploration a struggle for empire. Nearly a century after Spain and Portugal had established a solid foothold in the Americas, England had yet to make its mark in the New World. To be sure, John and Sebastian Cabot had reached the North American mainland as early as the 1490s; and in the 1580s, several expeditions had attempted to form a colony at Roanoke, an island off the coast of North Carolina. But no permanent settlement resulted.*

*All this changed during the early 1600s when King James I gave two corporations exclusive rights to northern and southern areas of the North American coast. The effort to create a colony in the Chesapeake Bay region began under the aegis of the London Company, whose merchant directors viewed the venture as a financial enterprise, and who expected settlers to provide a suitable return on their investment by mining gold, forging commercial ties with Native Americans, and discovering a northwest passage to the markets of Asia. Being patriotic Englishmen as well as aggressive entrepreneurs, they further believed that establishing a New World colony would add to the nation's glory and well-being. In addition to providing a foundation for imperial expansion, they maintained, their undertaking would bring civilization and Christianity to North American "savages" and give England's unemployed masses a way to escape lives of idleness and crime.*

*That the success of their venture rested upon the industry of this latter group should have prompted second*



thoughts on the part of company directors. Largely unskilled laborers who had been exploited all their lives, these men tended to view work as a curse that one endured as best one could, which in practice meant doing as little of it as need be. Once in Virginia, they had no reason to change these attitudes, as their treatment there differed little from what it had been in England. Their leaders certainly provided no inspiration. For the most part younger sons of the gentry, they were ambitious, self-confident men on the make who hoped that a stint in the colonies would put them on the royal road to fame and fortune; and they expected to get there without working very hard at it. As one historian has aptly observed, the London Company “had sent the idle to teach the idle.”

It was a situation that cried out for strong, responsible leadership. As the death toll mounted, the man who stepped forward to provide it was the globe-trotting son of a yeoman farmer from Lincolnshire named John Smith. In the essay that follows, Norman Risjord provides a colorful portrait of this brash, boastful, larger-than-life figure, who more than anyone else helped bring Jamestown through its perilous early years. In relating Smith’s story, the author never forgets that the first Americans did not hail from the British Isles. His treatment of Powhatan, Pohatan’s daughter Pocahontas, and settler–Native American relations makes Risjord’s account particularly worthwhile.

## John Smith

Norman Risjord

To his Indian captors he cut a strange figure. Smaller than they by several inches and heavily bearded, he wore a strange costume with metallic plates that seemed both too heavy for the trail and too hot for the season. Strangest of all, he seemed to accept his plight without sign of fear. Warriors were expected to suffer danger with impassive courage, but this shipborne invader was too much at ease for one who faced a likely death. Did he have some powerful and unseen medicine that protected him?

Indian medicine or modern charm, Captain John Smith certainly had it. Quick wits. Physical prowess. Commanding presence. Luck. He had them all. Only a few months before his current misadventure began—that is to say some time in the summer of 1607—Smith had been taken by another tribe of Virginia Indians, and he had charmed his way to freedom by impressing the chief with the magical powers of his compass. In one way or another his medicine in years past had enabled him to survive warfare in eastern Europe, piracy in the Atlantic, and slavery at the hands of the Turks. In all his adventures, fortune

accompanied him in the way that the goddess **Athena** watched over the roving **Ulysses**. His current status was a case in point. His Indian captors, having seized him while he was exploring the falls of the James River (killing his companions in the process), marched him overland some eighty miles to the Rappahannock, where Smith was to be interviewed by a tribe wronged some years earlier by an unnamed white explorer. Since all white men looked essentially alike to Indians, Smith stood little chance in his wilderness docket. Yet he escaped death again, *this time because of his diminutive size*. The earlier wrongdoer was remembered, despite the passage of some years, as a man of uncommon height. And fortunately for Smith, the Indian's sense of justice superseded their desire for revenge.

With that formality attended to, Smith's captors had taken him to their own capital, the village of Werowocomoco, to present him to their chief, Powhatan. That august being had governed the Powhatan tribe (and had even taken for his own the name of the tribe) for more than a quarter of a century. In that time he had extended his dominion over the neighboring tribes of eastern Virginia. His woodland empire extended from the Potomac River to the **Great Dismal Swamp**. The English, in their naive assumption that America was built in the image of Europe, commonly addressed Indian leaders as king or emperor. In the case of Powhatan they were not far off the mark.

Powhatan received his captive in a large ceremonial house. He lay on a small platform of mats, garbed in a robe of raccoon pelts. A young woman sat at his head, another at his feet. Squatting in rows on either side of him were the principals of the tribe, each with a woman behind him. All wore ceremonial beads; faces and bodies were decorated with bloodroot paint.

A great shout greeted Smith on his entrance. Then an Indian woman presented him with a bowl of water to wash his hands and a towel of turkey feathers. Trays of food were brought in, and then, at last, Powhatan greeted him. His tone was reassuring; he spoke of friendship and promised Smith his freedom within four days. Then they exchanged military intelligence. Smith described the power of the English, what their ships and cannons could do. Powhatan countered with a summary of his dominions and the allies he could command. The vocabulary was limited—Smith as yet had only a few words of Powhatanese—but the meaning was clear.

Then the mood in the council house changed. Priests entered and began a ritual chant. The fire blazed forth, and two large stones were placed before it. Smith was suddenly grabbed and his head placed on the improvised altar. The invocations of the priests grew louder, and two executioners stood forth with raised clubs. For the first time in his captivity, he knew fear.

At that critical moment Powhatan's favorite daughter, eleven-year-old Pocahontas, rushed forth with a cry and threw herself on Smith, daring the executioners to club her first. All eyes turned to Powhatan,

**Athena** Goddess of wisdom.

**Ulysses** Greek leader of the Trojan War.

**Great Dismal Swamp** A forested area between Virginia and North Carolina.

who, after a tense moment, nodded solemnly. It was a commutation of sentence, a redemption from death. The emperor then indicated that Smith thereafter was to belong to Pocahontas; he should serve her by fashioning bells, beads, and copper ornaments.

To the end of his life Smith believed that he had been saved by the Indian maiden. Instead, what he had undergone was in all likelihood a tribal initiation ceremony. Mock executions were part of the puberty rites of woodland Indians; Powhatan simply adapted the litany to meet the occasion. Newly absorbed captives were usually “given” to some member of the tribe, who put them to menial tasks, such as gathering firewood or tanning deerskins. It was natural that a captive of Smith’s importance (especially when he was to be set free before long) should be given to the emperor’s favorite daughter. The remark about making bells and beads was Powhatan’s heavy-handed humor, a reference to Pocahontas’s prepubescent youth. Four days later Smith was free and on his way back to Jamestown.

Death or initiation—we shall never know for sure, but the mystery itself symbolizes the clash of cultures, the mixture of love and hate, fear and misunderstanding that would scar Indian-white relations for the next three centuries. At the same time the tender friendship that developed between Pocahontas and John Smith symbolized the common interest that did exist, the need to coexist on the same continent.

## JOHN SMITH, WORLD SOLDIER

Historians were long inclined to disbelieve the Pocahontas rescue story, in part because everything Smith wrote about himself seemed so incredible. And few men have written as much about themselves. Smith’s adventures were certainly strange, but most of his autobiography can be tied to actual historical events. Smith was given to exaggeration and he no doubt enriched his own role in history, but recent scholars are inclined to credit his story, fantastic though it seems.

He was a self-made man in a society that frowned on such. Smith’s father was a yeoman farmer of Lincolnshire, a county that bordered on the North Sea. In the highly stratified society of Elizabethan England, Smith was expected to work contentedly his father’s modest plot of land. Excessive ambition, it was felt, was dangerous to the social order.

Of ambition he had plenty; it was his glory and his undoing. At village schools in Lincolnshire he learned some grammar and a little mathematics. At fifteen he was apprenticed to a merchant in the coastal town of King’s Lynn. But neither formal education nor vocational training satisfied his drive. In the year 1597—he was about eighteen then—he entered “that university of war,” as he called it, the Netherlands. For a quarter century the Dutch had been fighting to rid themselves of Spanish rule. The English had been slowly drawn into the conflict, and after the Armada of 1588 they became a formal ally of the Dutch.

More than a struggle for independence, it was a war of Protestants against Catholic Spain.

Whatever he learned of the art of war, Smith returned from that “university” convinced that he must become a gentleman. Since gentlemen were normally born to their station, this was no easy task, but Smith went about it with systematic devotion. He retired to his Lincolnshire fields with books on war and social behavior, built himself “a pavillion of **boughs**,” and concentrated on self-improvement. A mysterious Italian companion taught him fencing, horsemanship, and a little Italian. How Smith financed all this he does not say. His autobiography never dwells on such mundane details as monthly income.

His education completed, Smith set out again to find a war. War, after all, was one of the few avenues to success available to a low-born fortune seeker. This time he directed his steps toward eastern Europe. The never-ending struggle between Holy Roman Empire and Ottoman Turks offered infinite opportunities for glory and plunder, and the cause at issue—Christianity versus Islam—was stark enough for any professional crusader.

Confident that the war would always be there, Smith proceeded to the front at a leisurely pace. He rode across France to the Mediterranean and took ship for Rome. It turned out to be full of Catholic pilgrims, who, discovering that he was a Protestant, threw him overboard. That he was himself embarking on a crusade against Turkish infidels apparently made no difference. Smith swam to a nearby island where he was rescued by a French merchant vessel. Taking a liking to the captain, he signed on as a partner in the Mediterranean trade. The Frenchman proved to be a part-time pirate, and Smith cooperated in this side of the venture as well. He emerged with a modest fortune of 500 zecchini (a gold Venetian coin) in his purse “and a little box God sent him worth near as much more.”

This windfall enabled him to resume his education. He toured Italy in gentlemanly style, acquainting himself with the “rarities” of Italian culture. He also made some important political acquaintances, one of whom mapped a route for him through the Balkans to Vienna, seat of the Holy Roman Empire. There this “English gentleman,” as he now styled himself, became a captain in the imperial army.

Courage and ingenuity soon made Smith a hero of the Hungarian war theater. In his first operation he showed his commander how to coordinate an attack by the use of signal fires, a system apparently picked up from books read in his “pavillion of boughs.” Given command of a cavalry troop, he besieged a town on his own and captured it with some homemade bombs—clay pots filled with gunpowder, musket balls, and pitch, which he ignited and slung over the walls. In a later campaign he answered a challenge from a Turkish commander for one-on-one combat, slew him, and in successive days defeated two more challengers. After each victory he cut off the head of his opponent, presenting the trophies to his commander. The Prince of Transylvania

**boughs** large branches of a tree.



rewarded him for this exploit with an insignia bearing three Turk's heads and an annual pension of 200 ducats. With a coat of arms and a pension, Smith at last had the trappings of a gentleman.

Good fortune soon gave way to bad. The Transylvanians lost a battle, and Smith was taken prisoner. Chained to twenty other prisoners, he was marched 500 miles to Constantinople to be sold into slavery. From there he was shipped to Tartary on the north shore of the Black Sea. He escaped and walked back to Hungary across Russia and Poland. Many years later, when setting down his life story for posterity, he still had fond memories of the kindness with which Russian farmers had treated him.

In Leipzig, where he finally found his former commander, he obtained a formal discharge from the imperial army and 1500 gold ducats in lieu of an annual pension. He then toured Germany, France, Spain, and North Africa before returning to England.

Four years had passed since Smith began his search for gentility. The war with Spain had ended. Elizabeth had died, unwed and childless, leaving the crown to her distant cousin, James Stuart, king of the Scots. With peace, England's merchant-adventurers were ready to resume their quest for a foothold in the New World, a quest begun by Elizabeth's "sea dogs" before the Armada.

In April 1606, King James I issued charters to two companies and authorized them to build settlements in Virginia, the English name for North America. The Plymouth Company received a patent to the northern part of Virginia; the London Company got the southern part. Smith played no part in the proceedings, nor did his name appear in the king's grant. But when the London Company dispatched three shiploads of colonists the following December, Smith was on board, and he was prominent enough to be included in the list of councillors who were to govern Virginia on arrival. No doubt the story of his eastern adventures—which Smith was never shy about recounting—earned him a place. For Smith the choice was natural. He had seen virtually all of the civilized world. It was time to try "uncivilized America."

The voyage was uneventful nautically and tense politically. In the Canary Islands, where the fleet stopped for water, Smith was accused of plotting a takeover and arrested. That he actually planned to "murder the Council and make himself king" is unlikely to the point of being preposterous. What probably happened is that Smith the soldier forgot his common origins and offended with impertinent suggestions one or more of the aristocrats who commanded the company. Tempers flared again when the fleet touched land in the West Indies; only the intercession of the fleet commander, Admiral Christopher Newport, saved Smith from the gallows. It was probably Newport too who set him free when the three vessels arrived at last in Chesapeake Bay. The shower of arrows that greeted the first landing party doubtless convinced the bluebloods that a man with military experience, even a commoner, might be of value. The tension nonetheless portended ill for the colony and for Smith.

"sea dogs" Experienced sailors or pirates.