Thus the political significance of this development was the promotion of Van Buren's prospects for presidential succession and the growth of anti-Calhoun sentiments. The author is on credible ground in this respect but perhaps underemphasizes issues of public policy, such as the tariff or national banking. He does show that Henry Clay did not attack Jackson personally, but he might have given more attention to the politics of economic policy, as well as to the personal impact of the Margaret O'Neale affair.

Overall, this is an excellent book, which brings in some interesting views of O'Neale's long life in Washington. Another valuable theme throughout is the analysis of women's "proper" roles as illustrated by the treatment Margaret O'Neale received.

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Few in the annals of American diplomacy have accomplished as much and received so little credit in their own lifetime as Nicholas Trist. A Democrat who married Thomas Jefferson's granddaughter, Trist became chief clerk of the state department in the Polk administration. During the Mexican War, Polk and Secretary of State James Buchanan sent him to join the American forces in Mexico with instructions to negotiate a peace treaty. Polk, of course, distrusted General Winfield Scott, a Whig, and expected the presence of the trustworthy Trist to diminish the ambitious general's presidential prospects.

Despite initial misunderstandings, Trist and Scott developed an effective working relationship. Polk grew as suspicious of Trist as he was of Scott and, leaning toward the All Mexico movement, recalled the diplomat just as he was on the verge of reaching an agreement with Mexican authorities. The "defiant peacemaker" ignored the recall notice and concluded the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Displeased, Polk sent the treaty to the Senate for ratification but extracted his revenge by refusing to pay Trist for the time he remained in Mexico after he received his recall.

Financial problems dogged Trist for years. Dismissed from government service, he eventually became paymaster for the Philadelphia, Wilmington, and Baltimore Railroad, a modest position that required constant travel over the often uncomfortable and frequently dangerous rail system. His life improved in 1870, when Massachusetts senator Charles Sumner took up his cause and won for Trist not only the back pay owed him, but interest as well. Soon after he was awarded a comfortable sinecure as postmaster of Alexandria, Virginia, where he lived comfortably until his death in 1873.
Wallace Ohrt relates Trist's story in a lively and engaging manner. The best and most original aspect of this book involves the details of Trist's close and loving relationship with his wife, Virginia, and their children, drawn from the Trist papers in the microfilm Southern Women and Their Families series in the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Unfortunately, the book has more defects than virtues. It lacks focus. The title indicates that the book is about Trist in the Mexican War, but more than half of the text is about Trist before his appointment as chief clerk. When the author does get to the war with Mexico, the research is thin. The book relies on previously published materials for evidence, and the author's treatment adds little to those earlier works. One significant newer effort the author does not consider is Drew McCoy's Last of the Fathers: James Madison and the Republican Legacy (1989), which includes valuable insights into Madison's influence on Trist's political views.

There are a number of slipshod errors. Ohrt wrongly places Jefferson and Madison together at the Constitutional Convention, while Jefferson was minister to France (p. 3). He incorrectly asserts that Scott "had taken part in negotiating the Treaty of Ghent" (p. 110). Ohrt writes that Virginia Trist's brother "disappeared into Tennessee Territory" where he became an aide to the "territorial governor" in the 1830s, when Tennessee became a state in 1796. Finally he declares that the state department employed "four or five hundred" clerks while the actual number for the diplomatic, consular, and home bureaus combined amounted to fourteen plus a handful of temporary clerks from time to time (pp. 60, 99).

These limitations seriously weaken the usefulness of this volume. Readers who wish to know more about Trist's role in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo would be better advised to read the already existing literature.

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