Kummer's brief biography of Wilson is an excellent example of what can and should be done with minor American writers. Biographical details are kept to a minimum, and are generally concerned with events which most influenced his writings. As it should be, the major portion of the book is devoted to an analysis of Wilson's novels, the main aspects of which are very well handled. Kummer has made extensive use of Wilson's personal papers and has included a bibliography of his books.

The book should have a particular appeal for readers interested in the social history of the United States for, although his ability to write was limited. Wilson's novels provide a commentary on life in the 1920's. These views, frequently differing from those presented by other writers of the period such as Sinclair Lewis or F. Scott Fitzgerald, have been more than adequately explored by the author. Wilson, the defender of the small town, was a product of provincial America who wrote for provincial America. For this reason alone, Kummer is more than justified in his attempt to preserve Wilson's name for posterity.

Indiana University 
Richard T. Farrell


In the annals of American historical scholarship no single group of institutions has loomed larger in importance than the major state and regional historical societies. Since 1791, when the Massachusetts Historical Society was founded, these organizations have done most of the work of gathering and preserving the historical source materials without which a great deal of American history could not have been written. They have made a major contribution to a better understanding of the American past. How these societies developed, what they have accomplished, and what the future may hold for them are questions to which Whitehill addresses himself in the book. Emphasis is on the independents, but considerable attention is given to the nonindependent societies and agencies whose support comes partly or wholly from public funds.

Mr. Whitehill begins his book with chapters on the major eastern independent societies, and follows this with discussions of geographical groupings of other societies around the country. He traces each society's history, evaluates its accomplishments, examines its present-day operations, and seeks to detect trends which may indicate its future course of development. He also discusses some of the vexing questions facing these societies today—whether to seek broad or limited membership, the relative advantages of trying to serve the more "popular" needs of the average citizen or the more limited needs of the historical scholar, and the role of the society in such fields as the collection of source materials, operation of historic sites and museums, and publications.
Book Reviews

The author's long years of experience with such outstanding "independents" as the Boston Athenaeum, of which he is the capable director, assure him a wide audience that probably will place great store in what he has to say. And this is unfortunate. Independent Historical Societies, despite a wealth of useful factual information, is a one-sided interpretation of the historical society movement. It is essentially a rejection of the view held by most nonindependent societies—that the society must not only serve the needs of the scholar but must also serve, in a variety of ways, the needs and interests of a great many nonscholars. Whitehill has a right to his views on the role of the historical society, but to this reviewer he seems downright uncharitable in his evaluation of societies which do not follow the pattern of the major independents.

The crux of the matter is that Whitehill—and many of the independent societies for which he speaks—believes that "it is only the serious workers that count, and their numbers will always be small" (p. 576). This may have been true a half century or full century ago, when a knowledge of history and of the nation's development was almost a birthright of every citizen—when the fourth of July was more a joyous public testimonial to patriotism than an excuse for a backyard barbecue. But times have changed, and a whole nation's sense of history has receded and diminished in the process. Whitehill's independent societies may, if they wish, feel the self-satisfaction of continuing to serve well the "few who really count," but in this reviewer's opinion the nation and the historical profession will in the long run owe their greatest debt to those historical societies that most feel Mr. Whitehill's sting—those that believe the number of people who "count" is very great indeed. It is to be hoped that their efforts and their philosophy will some day be expounded by so eloquent and gifted a writer as Mr. Whitehill.

American Association for State and Local History William T. Alderson


The third volume of The Papers of James Madison spans a year of near-despair and climactic military victory at Yorktown. As reflected in the private letters, reports, and memoranda of Madison and his correspondents, most of them Virginians, 1781 was a year of great weariness, of deep anxiety over British naval and military strength as Cornwallis and Arnold pressed their campaign into Virginia, and of growing concern lest the "perpetual union" shatter on the jagged edges of chaotic finance and state particularism. These 174 documents, 76 of them Madison's personal communications, convey a sense of just what confederation, rather than national solidarity, meant. They also reveal clearly why it was that Madison, proud Virginian though he was, had become a Nationalist by the time of Cornwallis' surrender.