



A Country Storekeeper in Pennsylvania: Creating Economic Networks in Early America, 1790-1807

Diane E. Wenger

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In early America, traditional commercial interaction revolved around an entity known as the general store. Unfortunately, most of these elusive small-town shops disappeared from our society without leaving business-related documents behind for scholars to analyze. This gap in the historical knowledge of America has made it difficult to understand the nature of the networks and trade relationships that existed between cities and the surrounding countryside at the time.

Samuel Rex, however, left behind a vastly different legacy. A country storekeeper who operated out of Schaefferstown, Pennsylvania, during the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Rex left a surprising array of documents exposing just how he ran his business. In this book, Diane Wenger analyzes the part Rex and others like him played in the overall commercial structure of the Atlantic region.

While Wenger's book has a strong foundation as a work of local history, it draws conclusions with much broader historical implications. The rich set of documents that Samuel Rex left behind provides a means for contesting the established model of how early American commerce functioned, replacing it with a more fine-grained picture of a society in which market forces and community interests could peacefully coexist.

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