



# Male-Male Intimacy in Early America: Beyond Romantic Friendships

*By William E Benemann*

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**Male-Male Intimacy in Early America: Beyond Romantic Friendships** By William E Benemann

Previously hard-to-find information on homosexuality in early America—now in a convenient single volume!

Few of us are familiar with the gay men on General Washington's staff or among the leaders of the new republic. Now, in the same way that Alex Haley's *Roots* provided a generation of African Americans with an appreciation of their history, *Male-Male Intimacy in Early America: Beyond Romantic Friendships* will give many gay readers their first glimpse of homosexuality as a theme in early American history.

Honored as a 2007 Stonewall Book Award nonfiction selection, *Male-Male Intimacy in Early America* is the first book to provide a comprehensive overview of the role of homosexual activity among American men in the early years of American history. This single source brings together information that has until now been widely scattered in journals and distant archives. The book draws on personal letters, diaries, court records, and contemporary publications to examine the role of homosexual activity in the lives of American men in the Colonial period and in the early years of the new republic. The author scoured research that was published in contemporary journals and also conducted his own research in over a dozen US archives, ranging from the Library of Congress to the Huntington Library, from the United Military Academy Archives to the Missouri Historical Society.

*Male-Male Intimacy in Early America* explores:

- the role of the open frontier and the unregulated seas as places of refuge for men who would not enter into heterosexual relationships
- the sexual lives of American Indians—particularly the berdache tradition—and how the stereotypes associated with American Indian sexuality molded white America's attitudes toward homosexuality
- homosexuality in slave narratives—and the homosexual subtexts of racist minstrel show lyrics
- the formation of European gay communities during American colonial times,

with an emphasis on Berlin, Paris, and London—with English translations of material previously available only in German or French!

- homosexuality as presented in eighteenth-century novels popular with American readers, plus information on homosexuality that was published in medical treatises of the period
- United States Army and Navy courts-martial that focused on sodomy
- the sublimation of homosexuality by religious revival movements of the early nineteenth century, particularly among Quakers, Mormons, and Oneida Perfectionists
- social groups as a perceived cover for homosexual activity, with an emphasis on the Masonic Order
- non-procreative sexuality as a theme and as a threat during the American revolution
- the West in American literary tradition—and the role of popular writers such as James Fenimore Cooper and Davy Crockett in creating the myth of individual sexual freedom on the margins of American society

Author William Benemann rejects Foucault's contention that homosexuality is an artificial construct created by medico-legal authorities in the latter half of the nineteenth century. He recognizes that men have been sexually attracted to other men throughout American history, and in this book, examines their historical options for expressing that attraction. He also addresses related issues surrounding race and gender expectations, population and migration patterns, vocational choice, and information exchange. Written in a straightforward style that can easily be understood by lay readers, *Male-Male Intimacy in Early America* is an ideal choice for educators, students, and individuals interested in this unexplored area of American history and sexuality studies.

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**Bibliography**

- Sales Rank: #1732519 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Routledge
- Published on: 2006-03-12
- Released on: 2006-03-10
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.38" h x .78" w x 6.00" l, 1.15 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 344 pages



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### **Editorial Review**

#### **Review**

"QUITE REMARKABLE. . . A SWEEPING HISTORY of male homosexual relationships in early America." -- *Steve Estes, PhD, Assistant Professor, History Department, Sonoma State University*

"This METICULOUSLY RESEARCHED, ARDUOUSLY ARGUED, AND REMARKABLY DETAILED exploration is a welcome addition to the literature." -- *Jim Van Buskirk, MLIS, Program Manager, James C. Hormel Gay & Lesbian Center, San Francisco Public Library*

#### **About the Author**

William Benemann is the archivist for Boalt Hall Law School Library and a former librarian at the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley.

### **Users Review**

#### **From reader reviews:**

##### **Margaret Williams:**

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