

end of slavery to the present day. *A Class of Their Own* is scholarly history at its very best: A richly textured and nuanced book, it tells an important American story that should not be forgotten.

—David J. Garrow

Vintage Founder

THOMAS JEFFERSON IS thought of as the father of American wine. He was also an advocate of rural yeomanry that would forever keep the country whole, decent, and egalitarian, and presumably vineyardists were part of this idealistic vision. Jefferson paid a lot of money to import the good stuff, and served it often to grease the skids of civil discourse. He also tried valiantly to grow grapes at Monticello that would make a palatable drink, despite Virginia's extremes of temperature and humidity. A Chateau Monticello wasn't in the cards at the time, but wine thoroughly informed Jefferson's life, in public and in private.

Until now, no one has attempted to view the author of the Declaration of Independence and his times solely through his stemmed glass, but John Hailman does just that. A former wine critic clearly enamored of his subject, he doesn't shy away from the most incidental mention of anything vinous in the letters and conversation not just of Jefferson but of anyone with whom he had the most minimal contact. The result is a compendium of occurrences and facts sometimes only tenuously related to wine that together offer a backstairs view of a great man. War, presidential elections, and other big events are mere backdrops to the really important business of choosing the right claret and getting it from Europe to Monticello without its being watered down or imbibed by what Jefferson called the rascally Tidewater bargemen.

In an attempt to make our third president more palatable to contemporary oenophiles, Hailman says that Jefferson's letters about wine

"read remarkably like a Robert Parker newsletter or *Wine Spectator* article," conjuring a Jefferson who talks about oodles of blackberry on the nose, cigar box overtones, and the relative toastiness of plush cabernets. Jefferson was not, in fact, rhapsodic about wine, but merely appreciative, and more concerned with procuring it than describing it. For instance, of Meursault, one of his favorite wines, he wrote simply that he "found it so good that I will take three feuilletes," which were casks of 114 American gallons.

Jefferson championed wine more by drinking it than by doing anything else, as an emissary sent to Paris in 1784 and later as secretary of state, president, and statesman emeritus. Because of the breadth of Jefferson's acquaintance-ship, we get the incidental views of other dignitaries and demi-mondains on a wide range of subjects, from Benjamin Franklin's cure for flatulence (dried rhubarb and attar of roses dissolved in—what else?—wine) to John Adams's opinion of Jefferson's entertaining (extravagant and tiring).

In addition to the important events in Jefferson's life, we witness others that are no less interesting: his wine tour of France in 1787, with visits to "Chateau de la Fite" and many other prime vineyards that still attract peripatetic elites; his early orders of wine (Jefferson was a Bordeaux man, and to a lesser extent a Burgundy one, but no snob, finding merit in everything from plonk to Pommery); his list of favorite Bordeaux wines, remarkably similar to the top tier of the official French classification established much later; and the Marquis de Lafayette's visit to Monticello in Jefferson's declining years, during which the Frenchman drank much of what remained in a cellar once stocked with the best of France as well as wines from Germany, Italy, Hungary, Spain, and Portugal.

Thomas Jefferson on Wine has a gently didactic flavor, with old-fashioned subchapter labels (e.g., "The Mysteries of Jefferson's Bordeaux") and a modulated enthusiasm that suits the sub-

THOMAS JEFFERSON ON WINE.

By John Hailman.
Univ. Press of
Mississippi.
457 pp. \$38

ject. The most interesting president the Republic has yet produced is revealed here as a man who knew both the subtleties and the seductions of an ancient drink, and was afraid of neither.

—James Conaway

Wading Into Trouble

AT PUBLIC SWIMMING pools, we're naked but for whatever patches of fabric we select to do the job of fig leaves. Stripped of the usual social cues—cars, McMansions, Manolo Blahniks or scuffed Nikes—we're less likely to make

the same nice distinctions about one another that we would at the pizza parlor or shopping mall. This potential for fluid intimacy is one attraction of public pools. And as University of Montana historian Jeff Wiltse shows in *Contested Waters*, it's also the reason they've been social battlegrounds in America for the past century and a half.

Initially, swimming pools were bathtubs for the great unwashed. In 1868, Boston opened the first municipal pool in the United States, an "austere wooden structure" in working-class Roxbury. Though Americans soon realized that disease-bearing germs were easily transmitted through shared waters, a national fitness craze kept cities building pools—with showers and explicit instructions about foot washing. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, disputes about admission fees and where to locate pools revealed class tensions, but throughout the northern United States—to which Wiltse largely confines his examination—classes and races mingled at municipal pools. But men and women, and, in far greater numbers, boys and girls, took to the water at different hours or at separate facilities altogether.

In 1913, St. Louis opened a large circular pool in Fairgrounds Park replete with a sandy beach, and promoted it as a resort destination. It was the first pool in the northern United States where men and women splashed together, ushering in an era of stares and leers. Aside from women's very presence,

CONTESTED WATERS:

A Social History of Swimming Pools in America.

By Jeff Wiltse. Univ. of North Carolina Press. 276 pp. \$29.95

their swimsuit styles helped redefine pools as eroticized zones. As late as the 1910s, women waded into the water in a puffy skirt, a high-neck blouse, and stockings, but suits shrank during the next couple of decades. (It was the one-piece that was scandalous then; the fashion police couldn't imagine the sartorially diminutive bikini to come.)

Though a pool that had opened earlier in St. Louis admitted blacks, they were not invited to the Fairgrounds Park facility. That policy of exclusion proliferated as the genders integrated at pools nationwide. During the 1920s and '30s, whole families swam together as Americans basked in leisure. But the widely held yet rarely articulated feeling among whites, Wiltse contends, was that they didn't want black men near white women in this intimate setting. Blacks who attempted to swim where segregation policies weren't stated outright often endured threats and physical violence. A 1949 effort to integrate St. Louis's pools caused a riot. In upholding the segregation of Baltimore's city pools a month after the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, a judge observed that swimming pools were "more sensitive than schools."

The tide turned soon after, and when it did, many middle-class whites stopped swimming altogether, or else retreated to private swim clubs or their own pools. At the same time, residential swimming pools became a new sign of suburban social arrival. George Vanderbilt commissioned what was perhaps the first residential pool in 1895, but as late as 1950 only 2,500 of America's richest families owned private in-ground pools. Fifty years later, four million homes had a blue patch in the backyard.

Despite his subject, Wiltse's dutiful history has some dry stretches. Nonetheless, the struggle to desegregate public pools, recounted in the latter half of the book, makes for compelling reading. The stakes in integrating America's classrooms may have been higher, but it is something to behold the moral contortions of city officials as they fought to keep black children from cannonballing into the water on a blistering summer day.

—Sarah L. Courteau