

# Breaking the Bonds: Marital Discord in Pennsylvania, 1730-1830 (The American Social Experience)

MERRIL D. SMITH



## BREAKING THE BONDS

*Marital Discord in Pennsylvania,  
1730-1830*

In *Breaking The Bonds*, Merrill Smith establishes the ambitious goal of determining what kind of problems arose in troubled marriages and of analyzing how men and women coped with marital discord. . . . To accomplish this, Smith studied hundreds of divorce petitions, other legal documents, newspapers, almshouse dockets, and prescriptive literature. She concludes that, as in the present day, married couples fought and parted over sex, money, and abuse. *Pennsylvania History* A richly textured study. . . With an eye to cross-class and cross-race representation, Smith utilizes diverse sources, including memoirs and diaries, correspondence, probate records, newspaper advertisements, depositions and petitions for divorce, and various moral reform and social regulatory organization records. . . . A brave attempt to write a description of the development of the Puritan concept of spiritual growth. . . . Gracefully written. . . provides specific new insights into a too-neglected area of early republican domestic politics. *William and Mary Quarterly* The late eighteenth century marked a period of changing expectations about marriage: companionship came to coexist as a norm alongside older patriarchal standards, men and women began to see their roles in more disparate ways, expectations about the satisfaction of marriage grew, and gender distinctions between husbands and wives became more complicated. Marital strife was an inevitable outcome of these changing expectations. The difficulties that rose, including abuse, a lack of sexual communication, and domestic violence (frequently brought on by alcoholism) differ little from those with which couples struggle today. *Breaking The Bonds* is an imaginative and original account that brings to light a strongly communicative world in which neighbors knew of, discussed, and even came to the aid of

those locked in unhappy marriages.

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