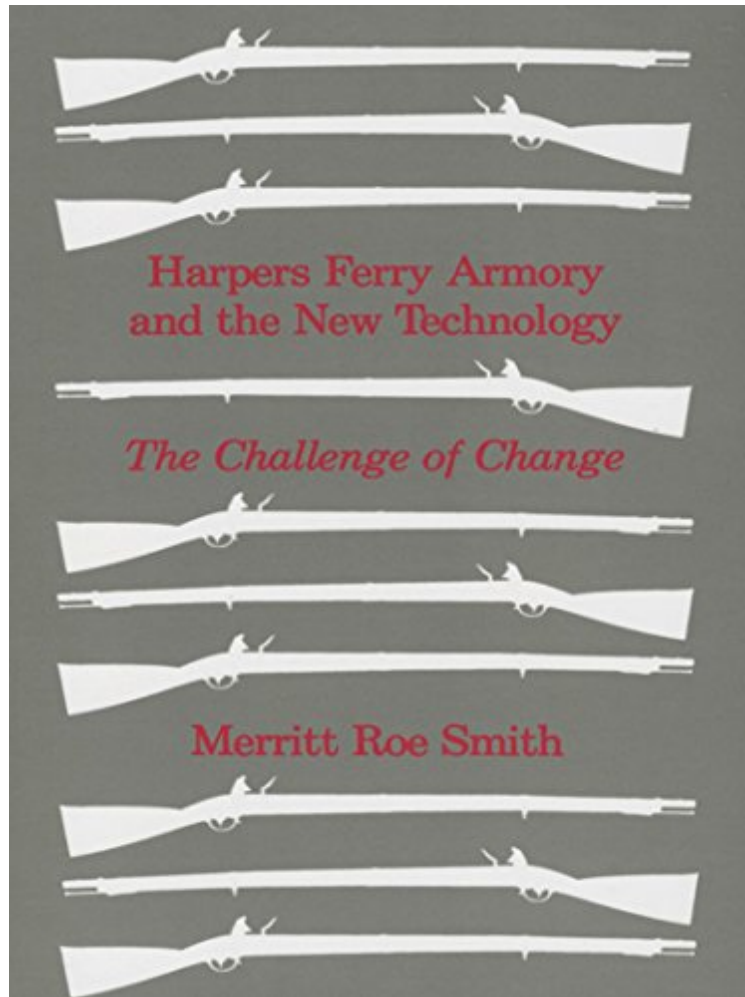


Harpers Ferry Armory and the New Technology: The Challenge of Change

Merritt Roe Smith

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Merritt Roe Smith : Harpers Ferry Armory and the New Technology: The Challenge of Change before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Harpers Ferry Armory and the New Technology: The Challenge of Change:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Really decent treatise By UrbanMonique Very readable analysis of the Harper's Ferry Armory, from the late 17th to the mid 18th centuries. Especially interesting in the contrast and comparison the author provides vis a vis the Springfield Armory at the time - The Harper's tendency to champion artistry over machination in that regard is fascinating stuff. 4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Superb history on a challenging subject By A. L. Jones Smith's research and analysis on a topic with few records and nearly 200 years in the past in a remote rural community is an extraordinary achievement for any historian. Smith takes a deep look at one of George Washington's poorer ideas, establishing the second national firearms manufacturing

operation in a remote small town in Virginia, next to a swamp so malaria is an ongoing major problem and workforce (and workforce housing) are always difficult to find and keep as well as Philadelphia being the closest relevant industry hub. It's a study of the fiesty craftsman approach (Harpers Ferry) vs solving challenges with new machine tools (Springfield Armory) common to all manufacturing then and now so the lessons are relevant to anyone in manufacturing today. The quest for quality, interchangeable parts, worker training, developing new models (Lewis Clark get their rifles here, the Hall Breechloader is developed mostly here and one of the team goes on to create the Sharps rifle), productivity (Springfield Armory outproduces them tremendously, inventing milling machines and multi-spindle lathes along the way.) It's a great book for anyone interested in 19th century gunmaking, manufacturing in general, rural economic development strategies, workforce training, implementing new technologies with existing workforces (always an adventure and often a failure), or even those who wondered why John Brown thought seizing it would immediately facilitate a widespread slave uprising.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.
Introduction to mass productionBy Hugh FikeExcellent reading for gun historians and any one interested in the beginning of mass production in America.

Focusing on the day-to-day operations of the U.S. armory at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, from 1798 to 1861, this book shows what the "new technology" of mechanized production meant in terms of organization, management, and worker morale. A local study of much more than local significance, it highlights the major problems of technical innovation and social adaptation in antebellum America. Merritt Roe Smith describes how positions of authority at the armory were tied to a larger network of political and economic influence in the community; how these relationships, in turn, affected managerial behavior; and how local social conditions reinforced the reactions of decision makers. He also demonstrates how craft traditions and variant attitudes toward work vis-a-vis New England created an atmosphere in which the machine was held suspect and inventive activity was hampered. Of central importance is the author's analysis of the drastic differences between Harpers Ferry and its counterpart, the national armory at Springfield, Massachusetts, which played a pivotal role in the emergence of the new technology. The flow of technical information between the two armories, he shows, moved in one direction only—north to south. "In the end," Smith concludes, "the stamina of local culture is paramount in explaining why the Harpers Ferry armory never really flourished as a center of technological innovation." Pointing up the complexities of industrial change, this account of the Harpers Ferry experience challenges the commonly held view that Americans have always been eagerly receptive to new technological advances.

"Smith's book confronts one of the central issues in the history of American technology: how, from about 1800 to 1860, did the United States change from being technologically dependent on Europe to a leader in many fields. In choosing a national armory and the machine tool industry as his examples, he tills well-cultivated but still fertile ground. In challenging the notion that American workers enthusiastically accepted the mechanization of the work processes, he breaks nearly virgin soil. The harvest is bountiful. . . . Smith has written a fine book, and few will read it without learning something interesting and important."Journal of American History "Among the pleasures of this extremely well-written book are the in-depth character studies that Smith provides. Important leaders like James Stubblefield, Colonel Roswell Lee, John H. Hall, and Edward Lucas Jr. are portrayed with critical finesse. . . . This study is an important contribution to both urban and technological history."American Historical "This is a superb book, based on exhaustive archival research, imaginatively structured, clearly and forcefully written. It is easy to understand why Smith's study should be so highly prized among historians."Journal of Economic History "An excellent book that will be required reading for students and scholars interested in the emergence of the 'American System' of interchangeable manufacture and the assimilation of that process at the national armory at Harpers Ferry. . . . If you are going to purchase one book this year, make it this one; you will not be disappointed in your investment."Technology and CultureAbout the Author Merritt Roe Smith is Leverett Howell and William King Cutten Professor of the History of Technology at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.