



The Richmond Theater Fire: Early America's First Great Disaster

by Meredith Henne Baker

Louisiana State University Press (March 2012) / 352 pages, 6 x 9, 31 halftones / ISBN 978-0-8071-4374-2

Cloth \$39.95, ebook available

www.theaterfirebook.com

The Book:

The day after Christmas in 1811, the state of Virginia lost its governor and almost one hundred citizens in a devastating nighttime fire that consumed a playhouse and transformed Richmond forever. The tragic Richmond Theater fire would become its generation's defining disaster. In *The Richmond Theater Fire*, the first book about the event and its aftermath, Meredith Henne Baker explores a forgotten catastrophe and its wide societal impact. The story comes alive through the accounts of actresses, ministers, slaves, and statesmen. Investigating private letters, diaries, and sermons, among other rare or unpublished documents, Baker reveals a rich and vital untold story from America's past.

Author Bio:

Meredith Henne Baker received her graduate degree in American History and a museum studies certificate from the College of William and Mary. An educator and writer, she currently lives near Richmond, VA with her husband and three children. She is a member of SCBWI and the James River Writers. *The Richmond Theater Fire: Early America's First Great Disaster* (LSU Press, Feb. 2012) was her first book.

Awards:

The Richmond Theater Fire was the winner of the 2012 Jules and Frances F. Landry Award for Most Outstanding LSU Press Publication on Southern Culture and the 2012 Phi Alpha Theta History Honorary Society's Best First Book Award. It was a Best of the Literary Hill 2012 book selection and was nominated for the Library of Virginia Literary Award. Meredith Henne Baker and the *Richmond Theater Fire* have been featured in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*,

Richmond Magazine.com, *Belle Magazine*, Richmond.com, WFLO radio, the Library of Virginia's *Broadside* magazine, the Junot Files webcast, WETA's *Inreads* blog, and the journal *Touchstone*. Cultural institutions that have invited Meredith to speak on the Richmond Theater fire include the Historic Richmond Foundation, the Library of Virginia, the American Association of University Women, the Literary Hill Bookfest, Quill Theatre, and the Regency Society of Virginia among others. She also had the honor of delivering a Banner Lecture at the Virginia Museum of History and Culture.

Reviews:

- ❖ "The Richmond Theater Fire is **totally engrossing, a real page turner**. Baker ably depicts the vibrancy of social and cultural life in early Richmond, and captures the horror, chaos, and shock of this terrible conflagration. She does a marvelous job of unearthing and marshaling primary sources to recreate for us **the most detailed and heartbreaking account of this disaster that I have ever read.**" Katherine Fuller-Seeley, author of "Celebrate Richmond Theater"
- ❖ "Gracefully written...A solid contribution to early American history." Nancy Isenberg, author of *Fallen Founder: The Life of Aaron Burr*
- ❖ "Best study yet of antebellum Richmond...highly recommended." *CHOICE: Current Reviews for Academic Libraries*, an American Library Association magazine.
- ❖ "The theater fire has never been the subject of a book-length study. **Baker's well-informed and impressively researched book** fills that gap, telling an engaging story in the process...Baker has written a **smart and responsible popular history**. Readers who want a good story and detailed descriptions will find both here...**Exhaustively researched and thoughtfully contextualized, this book is a welcome contribution.**" Review by Cynthia Kierner, *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, August 2012
- ❖ "First-rate storytelling...Baker brings to life an unfamiliar world...With *The Richmond Theater Fire*, readers can expect to gain certain insights into the early republic that are difficult to find in other, more traditional sources." Review by Karen Hagan in *The Historian*, December 2013
- ❖ "An important chronicle of a tragedy that marked – and changed – Richmond." Virginia Book Notes, *Richmond Times-Dispatch*

Learn more about the Richmond fire and the author at her website:

www.theaterfirebook.com