

V FROM RESISTANCE TO REBELLION

the New England Restraining Act of March 30, 1775, forbade the New England colonies to trade outside the empire. On April 13 Parliament extended the provisions of the act to New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and South Carolina when it was learned that they had entered into the Association.

3 Minutes of the Shrewsbury Township Committee

[The Minutes for the period June 19—September 2, 1775 are located in the American Revolution Manuscripts of the Monmouth County Historical Association; those for October 6, 1775 to May 6, 1776 are to be found in the East Jersey Manuscripts, 26, New Jersey Historical Society.]

The success or failure of the resistance movement ultimately depended upon the effectiveness of the local committees of inspection. The minutes of the Shrewsbury, Monmouth County, committee are the most comprehensive record available of the activities of a local revolutionary organization in New Jersey. Although the committeemen faced special problems because of the sizable Quaker population in the community, their duties were typical of those performed by committees throughout the province. Of special significance is the wide range of tasks which fell to the committee; with the power of legislation, adjudication, investigation, and enforcement, the vigilante organization truly exercised the essential functions of government.

[19 June 1775—29 February 1776]

[June 19, 1775] In Consequence of an Advertisement signed by Josiah Holmes Chairman, the following Committee Men for the Township of Shrewsbury mett at the House of Mr. Shaw to put into execution the resolutions of the Province Congress of New Jersey as far as relates to themselves.

Josiah Holmes	Daniel Hendrickson
John Little	Nicholas Vanbrunt
Corn[elius] Lane	Samuel Breese
Corn[elius] Vanderveer	Garrat Longstreet
David Knott	Samuel Longstreet
Benja[min] Dennis	Thomas Morford

They unanimously upon motion placed Josiah Holmes in the Chair & Voted Samuel Breese Clerk.¹

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It appears to this Committee that in this township we have 755 male inhabitation which divided by 75 makes 9 companies Qualified by Province Congress as to age & That these Nine companies make a Regiment. . . .

[October 6] Ordered that publick advertisements² be put up for the Officers of the Several districts in this Township to render in the names of all that still retain the province arms contrary to the sense of the advertisement published by the late committee dated 16th September 1775 for them to be proceeded against & also a full account must be taken of all the province arms in this township into whose hands they are by the Captains or their order of each district & that he take receipts from all holding them that do train³ & that a Copy of this order be served upon the Colonel.

Ordered that Col[one]l Samuel Breese ask the assessor about his assessment and acquaint the Chairman of the sum of his information.

Whereas the riotous & numerous meetings of negroes at unlicensed houses is pernicious in its self & may be of pernicious consequences, if the Col[one]l is informed of any such meetings he is desired to use his militia as many as he finds necessary to secure the Negroes & give the names of the delinquents to be proceeded against agreeable to Law.⁴

Ordered that all these proceedings be publickly advertised in two of the most publick places in this township. . . .

[October 16] Whereas the Meeting together of Servants Negroes and other Disorderly Persons at Unli[c]enced Taverns and other Bad Houses is attended with Great Mischiefs and Dammage not only to the Masters But to all the Neighbourhood and may Be of more fatal and pernicious Consequence to the Community in General —Therefore in Order that the penaltys of the Law may Be More Duly Inflicted on all Such Offenders, Resolved that the Collonell Shall order a party or parties of the Militia to Attend at Such Suspected places at proper times to Search for and to Apprehend all Such transgressors of the Law.

Ordered that the Above Resolve Be Made publick By Advertisement. . . .

[November 13] Captain James Mount Being about to Sail in Ballast to the West Indies Requested the Committee to Appoint proper persons to Search his Vessel the Day of her Sailing to See that the Rules of the General Congress were Duly Observed.

Resolved that John Hartshorne, Henry Marsh, and Josiah Holmes or any two of them Attend the said Service.

Whereas Divers Complaints are Made against the Shop keepers and Retailers of Goods and Merchandise that they take an Exorbitant Advance on Sundrey Articles⁵ therefore

Resolved that if any Person or Persons Can Well Support Such Charge, that they attend the Committee on the 11th of December next at the House of Jeremiah Bonham Where Due attention Will Be Given to their Complaints and Such Redress as the Rules of the General Congress hath provided Shall be had. The accused must have proper notice Before a final Conclusion.

Ordered that this Resolve Be published by Advertisement in this town.

Resolved that Mr. Little Wait on Mr. John Wardel & Mr. Richard Pole and Let them know that the Committee Request a Sight of the Letters they Lately Rec[eiv]e[d] from England. . . .

[December 11] Whereas this Committee is Informed that Suspected Persons are Buying up Wheat In order for transportation and Actualy Have Sent off a Vessel

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Loaded with it to What place and for What purpose to this Committee Unknown and are Also Informed the Same Vessel or Some Other is Expected to Be in Shrewsbury River in order to Load With Wheat: Therefore Resolved that the Collonel Order a partie of the Malitia to Be Ready to Secure Such Vessel or Vessels Untill Such time the Committee are Well Assured and Satisfied that the Rules of the General Congress are not transgressed and that Such Exportations are not for the Use of our Enemies. And also that the Chairman Wait on Colonel Breese with a Copy of this Resolve. . . .

[December 26] Whereas Information to this Committee is Made that a Sloop is Come on Shore at Manasquon Loaded with fresh provisions Intirely; Such as Beef in Quarters hogs and fowls &c. and that there is Great Reason to Suspect that the Cargo was Intended for the Use of the Enemy at Boston as the persons on Bord of Said Vessel Refuse to give any Account of themselves or of their Intention Therefore

Resolved That David Knott and James Davis Be a Sub-Committee to Repair to the Spot and Make Enquirie Concerning the above Affair and if they find Sufficient Reason therefore to Secure the Cargo at Least and if Necessary Some or all of the Persons untill a heareing Be had Before this or the County Committee and if Assistance Be Wanting that they Call upon Capt. Longstreet and Capt. Shepherd to Attend With a Sufficient party of the Malitia. . . .

[January 15, 1776] As at this time of Difficulties when publick Musters are Necessary and Many other kinds [of] publick Meetings [illegible] that the Method of Enoculateing for the Small pocks will Be pernicious Therefore the Committee Strongly Recomend to the Inhabitants of this town and to all Docters to Refrain from Enoculation Dureing these times of troubles⁶. . . .

[February 12] Resolved that Capt. Vanbrunt have permission to purchase gun powder and Led &c. for the Use of the Malitia of this town.

Resolved that Orders Be Sent to Garret Longstreet the Assessor to proceed Imediately in Assessing the Quota of this town of the ten Thousand pounds formerly ordered by Congress and that if the proper Account of Estates and Rateables Cannot Be Had ni[e]ther from the town Assessor or Collector nor County Collector then to take account thereof from the Inhabitance.

Resolved that All Arms in the Hands or at the Command or Disposal of Negros Either free or Slaves Shall Be taken and Secured By the Malitia Officers of the Several Districts Untill the present troubles are Setled and that Such arms Shall Be Lodged in the Hands of the Colonel who Shall give Reciepts to the owners.

Resolved that it is the Opinion of this Committee that the Arms in the Hands of all Such as Refuse to Subscribe [to] the Association Should Be properly Secured So that they may not fall into the hands of our Enemies.

Resolved Unanimously that it Be Recomend to the Members of the Monthly Meeting of friends Called Quakers that for the future They forbear to pass Censure (By Reading off in their Me[eting]) on any person or Persons officers or Others for Acting in Conformity to their Milatary Stations and that the Chairman Serve the Meeting with a Copy of this Resolve.

Resolved that the former Resolve of the 13th of Novr. Last Concerning Shop Keepers &c. Be Re-advertised and that the Complaints Be handed to any future Committee.

Resolved that it Be Recomend to all Society of Christians that they Discourage as Much as possible at this Melancholy time all publick Entertainments,

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Assembly, Dancings, and Such Like proceedings and also to Every Inhabitant and all Majestrates to Endeavour to their Utmost to have the Laws against Gaming house Raceing &c. put in Execution.

Resolved that publick advertisement Be Set up in this town Informing the Inhabitant that a Committee of Observation is to Be Chosen at the next town Meeting on the Second tewsday in March.

Resolved that the Chairman, John Little and Jeremiah Bonham Be a Sub Committee or any two of them to act Untill the Last Day of this Month to Which Day this Committee is adjourned. . . .

[February 29] Resolved that as Samuel Right of Squancum Appears to Be a person Unfriendly to the Libertys of these Colonys and in interest With Our Enemies: That he Be publickly Advertised as Such and Layed Under Common Restriction In Such Cases Made Use of. And that the Malitia Officers Make Strict Search & Enquiry for arms & Amunition in his Hand or Custody and Safely Secure them Untill farther Order.

Resolved that All Slaves Either Negros Molattos or Others that Shall Be found off their Master or Mistresses premises any time of the night after the Daylight is Gone May Be taken Up By any person Whatsoever and Secured Untill a fine of ten Shilling[s] Be paid By the Master or Mistress to the person takeing them up and in failure of payment of Such fine the Slave Shall Be Delivered to the Minute Men to Be kept Under Guard Untill he Shall Receive fifteen Lashes on the Bare Back for Which the Master Shall pay the Sum of four Shillings provided that Such Slaves as have Leave from their Masters in Writeing Shall not Be Liable to the above penalty.

Charles Brook Being Charged with Selling goods at Unreasonable prices and Appearing and the Evidence Being Examined But some Evidence not attending the Matter is Refered to the next Meeting of the Committee.

Resolved that the Chairman Informe the County Committee By Letter of Such proceedings of this Committee as M[ay] Be thought Necessary to Informe them of. . . .

1. Information concerning the place of the meetings and the members in attendance has been deleted from the remainder of the minutes. In addition to the men listed above, Jeremiah Bonham, James Davis, Gavine Drummond, Henry Green, Thomas Leonard, and John Polhemus served on the committee during the period covered by these records. It is significant, given the attention accorded to the prominent personages of the Revolution such as Jefferson and Franklin, that there is virtually no biographical information available about the grass-roots leaders of the Shrewsbury rebellion. In their anonymity, they are typical of the countless nameless and faceless men and women upon whose shoulders the success or failure of the Revolution rested.

2. The lack of mass communications media, especially acute in rural communities such as Shrewsbury, meant that committeemen had to rely upon public advertisements and the word-of-mouth process to transmit directives to the people.

3. That is, participate in militia drills.

4. As the imperial crisis reached the point of armed confrontation, rebel leaders were haunted by the spectre of uprisings of slaves and servants (the

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former were mostly black, the latter mostly white). Rumors of Negro plots and insurrections, more fanciful than substantive, circulated throughout New Jersey in 1775 and 1776. As a result, steps were taken to disarm servants and slaves, prevent them from gathering in large groups, and restrict their activities at night. Although the problem was not so serious in the middle colonies as in the South, the concentration of sizable numbers of blacks in Bergen, Monmouth, and Somerset Counties did prove worrisome to local Jersey Whigs.

5. Inflated prices charged by merchants to profit from the shortages caused by the boycott of British goods was a persistent problem for committee-men in all parts of the province.

6. There was widespread opposition to inoculation in colonial America, the more so during times of public crisis because of fears that exposure to disease might start an epidemic.

4 Daniel Coxe to Cortlandt Skinner

[*NJA*, 10:654-55. This is a copy of Coxe's letter enclosed by Governor William Franklin in his letter to Lord Dartmouth of August 2. See Doc. 7.]

The increased intensity of the protest-turned-rebellion and the outbreak of actual fighting between Britons and Americans struck fear in the hearts of many Jerseymen, especially those who held positions with the royal government or occupied the highest rungs of the socioeconomic ladder. To Daniel Coxe (see Sec. I, Doc. 1), who fit both descriptions, the growing rebellion was an intensely personal matter: he feared a social as well as a political revolution, an upheaval that could utterly destroy his privileged place in society. In other words, the activities of the rebels angered ideological conservatives like Thomas Bradbury Chandler (see Sec. VIII, Doc. 2) and Frederick Smyth (see Sec. IV, Doc. 10) but frightened men like Coxe and Cortlandt Skinner (see Doc. 14).

July 4th 1775

Dear Sir

Such is the present infatuated Temper of the Times, and the Minds of Men daily increasing in Madness and Phrensey, that they are ready to enter upon the most daring and desperate attempts. A prostration of Law and Government naturally opens the Door for the licentious and abandoned to exercise every malevolent Inclination. What then have men of Property not to fear and apprehend, and particularly those who happen and are known to differ in sentiment from the generality? They become a mark at once for popular Fury, and those who are