

3 “A Mechanic” to Bernardus La Grange

[Bernardus La Grange Papers, Alexander Library, Rutgers University.]

Bernardus La Grange (ca. 1721-1797) enjoyed the dubious distinction of being one of the most hated Loyalists in Middlesex County and probably in the entire state. A native New Yorker of French Huguenot descent, La Grange began his legal career in New Brunswick in 1745 and simultaneously commenced intimate involvement in the affairs of Christ Church (Anglican). He became one of the wealthiest members of the community; on the eve of the Revolution he had an extremely lucrative law practice (£400 annually) and over 350 acres of prime real estate in Middlesex County and neighboring Somerset County. One of the least popular men in the area, La Grange was roundly denounced by the citizenry for professional avarice in allegedly charging excessive fees; he was also condemned for opposing the protest-independence movement. To many, La Grange represented the man who was loyal to the crown because of base self-interest and thus was more despised than the philosophical Tory. The threats contained in the letter below — publicly posted in New Brunswick — plainly show the contempt with which the lower ranks held the affluent and affected La Grange. But such attempts at intimidation merely steeled his resolve to oppose the popular revolution. When the British army overran New Jersey in the winter of 1776, he actively administered oaths of allegiance to the crown. He subsequently fled to New York City before the advancing American army in 1777. His property was confiscated and sold in 1778, and he lived out his days in exile in London (see Doc. 17).

Present [June 1776]¹

To Mr. Ber[nar]d[u]s Legrange

Permit me your fellow Citizen to spend a few moments in Conversation with you, the reason of my chusing to discourse with you in black, and white is, because you are a person of so hasty, and violent a temper that it is impossible for any one coolly to reason with you, which I know by frequent experience. In the first place I shall relate a few certain facts. To begin. You are looked upon by all the Virtuuous inhabitants of this City to be a most inveterate enemy to your Country, as such you justly deserve to be despised by every good man; you are esteemed as a man but of very little Sense, and a disturber of the Community, as such you deserve punishment. Let us once take a view of your conduct from the beginning of our Struggles for Liberty. When a corrupted and venal ministry together with a deluded King made a number of Acts tending to enslave the inhabitants of North America, and the better to accomplish their wicked purposes, they established the popish Religion in the extensive Province of Canada² (a blot upon the Character of George the Third which the latest ages will never erase) add to that their robbing the treasury to hire the Canadians and savage Indians to lay waste [to] our Frontiers and barbarously murder our innocent women, and Children.³ They have also

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endeavoured to raise up our own domesticks to cut the throats of their Masters.⁴ But a kind Providence hath assisted us in discovering their horrid designs; nay further he has as yet baffled their vile attempts. They have stopped our harbours; marched an hostile force into our Country, destroyed a number of our most valuable towns, declared the whole Continent in a State of Rebellion: plundered our property, distressed our Seamen, Confined some of the Americans in dungeons, bound others in Chains and for what? Because they nobly stepped forth in defence of that Liberty which God himself granted them at their Creation, they have gone so far as to hire foreign Troops to destroy us.⁵ It is needless to mention any more of their impious practices, every American is acquainted with their black designs. And now I desire to know what we have done to merit such treatment? Have we not in the most humble manner time after time declared our loyalty to the King of England, earnestly requesting him to lay aside the weapons of destruction? And what has been the consequence? Our humble Petitions have been treated with Contempt, ourselves branded with the opprobrious name of cowardly Paltroons: What could we do which has not been done? We have as yet acted upon the defensive and the Lord of Hosts has prospered our glorious Struggles. Notwithstanding all the insults we have received, the cruelty and inhumanity with which we have been treated, the justice of the cause in which we are engaged, and at a time when every true friend to Liberty is roused with an honest indignation of avenging his Country's wrongs, you have, B. Legrange, from the beginning of the present Contest for Liberty, and do still by the whole of your conduct heartily agree with the distructive measures persued against us. Have we not then Sufficient reason to pronounce you an Enemy to your Country, nay to brand you with the odious name of Traitor?

When the Tea was destroyed in Boston, and that port was by an accursed Act of Parliament blocked up,⁶ you then blamed the inhabitants of that Colony, abusing those who had made a noble stand against Tyranny, calling them damn'd hot headed Presbyterians, who were aiming at independancy; and further you declared they were the sole cause of the dispute between *Britain* and the *Colonies* (an evidence of your political knowledge). Since the electing of a Congress you have broke all their Resolves, and have endeavoured to perswade others to do the same and alas! I am sorry to say it, you have had influence over some weak minds; you have proceeded so far in your impudence as to damn the whole Congress in whom centers the united wisdom of America. I dare say you will not deny this, *when you call to mind your effegy which was not long since carted thro' the streets of this City amidst the acclamations of your injured Countrymen,*⁷ ever since that unhappy day which stained your character with eternal infamy, you have been exercising all your talents (which are small indeed) in injuring the cause of American freedom by disobeying, and condemning the proceedings of the Congress by telling a number of lies which never had an existance but in your own vile imagination and that of your *virtuous* wife, tending to disunite the people, in short you are of late become an avowed enemy to Liberty, and true Virtue. Thus Sir I have given you a small sketch of the character you justly bear amongst your Countrymen, now let your own conscience speak (if it is not yet taught to be silent). Does not such a character appear most vile, and detestable? How is it possible that a man who was born an American, who has got his bread in this Country, and made that estate here, which he at present possesses; that such a one can become a most cruel enemy to that very people, who have favoured him with their assistance? Mr. Legrange we are all well acquainted with your birth, family, and Education. We are sensible they are not such as will

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make you noted in the annals of posterity; we also in some measure know the wickedness of your heart, and it is from this Source we expect that your name will be handed down to the latest ages in blackest Colours. I suppose you expect to gain favour from the corrupted Court of G. Britain. But give me leave to tell you, that in all probability they will not be able to assist themselves, and then what will become of you? *Surely you will not have the impudence to ask a favour from those whom you have endeavoured to ruin.*^p Be advised for once, change your wicked heart, become a friend to your County; hearken not to the unwholesome advice of your wicked wife. I really pity you when I behold the storm that is gathering over your head, big with destruction, and threatening every moment to burst upon you; for when your enraged Citizens rise against you, the Consequences will be dreadful. Let me intreat you to imitate the man of true Virtue, and lover of his Country. Lay aside (for one minute) your Prejudices, and view the man who is a true friend to the rights of mankind, and I think your guilty Soul will be struck with Conviction, and you [will] be persuaded to follow his example. To behold the noblest disposition of the Christian, and Patriot united; an overflowing benevolence, generosity, and candour of heart, joined to an intimate persuasion than on it depends the happiness and glory both of King and People; to see these shining out in publick is a prospect that can not but inspire a general Sentiment of Satisfaction and gladness more easy to be felt than expressed. The Patriot stands undaunted when the Storms of mingling War rage around him; firm as himself, his bolder heart clad with awful justice Spurns every danger; all his united efforts seek the publick good. He is a friend to trampled worth, and Suffering right—corruption and bribery durst not attempt his virtue joined to publick zeal and honour of adamant proof; his heart is pure, and detached from Sordid pleasures; a Soul panting after perfection. Striving to imitate the goodness of Heaven and devoted to the Service of mankind, he is roused by the first pang of his Suffering Country, gives his whole illustrious Spirit to her relief, rises above all human allurements, never remits his zeal, fears nothing, regards nothing but the Sentiments which virtue and magnanimity inspire. The Sacred flame thus enkindled is not fed by the fuel of faction, or party Spirit, But by pure Benevolence and love of the Publick. And when he leaves this tabernacle of clay, Methinks I see his mounting Spirit freed from tangling earth, regain the realms of day, its native Country, Behold! *he* is approved by the tremendous judge of Heaven and Earth, and joined to the presence of the *Almighty Father* he takes his rank in glory and in bliss. But Stop! for the Sublimest flight of my imagination falls so far beneath the Patriot's glory, as the light of the moon and Stars is inferior to the Sun in his meridian Splendour. I am suspicious I have gone so far in describing a few of the properties of a true Patriot, that your patience is wearied in attending to sentiments so contrary to your own. But has not the character of a friend to mankind some weight with you? If you can not love it I am convinced you must revere it. Set down Mr. Legrance and Seriously reflect upon the character of a true friend to Liberty and then compare your own character to it, that is, the Character of an enemy to your Country, to benevolence and true Virtue, and consider in what an odious light you must appear to your Countrymen, to all mankind, nay to God himself. But to conclude[:] if neither reason, justice, or humanity are able to change your Sentiments, and daily practice, be assured there is a fatal day approaching which will bring *ruin* to your devoted head.

A MECHANIC^s
Monday morning 3 o'clock

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1. Since the author mentions events that occurred in the spring of 1776 and in a subsequent letter to Mrs. La Grange dated July 28 pointedly refers to American independence, it seems likely that this document was written sometime in June 1776.
2. The Quebec Act of May 1774 which permitted the French inhabitants of Quebec to practice their Catholic faith.
3. The reference is to the border warfare that accompanied the American assaults on Montreal and Quebec (September 1775-May 1776); the Canadians and the Iroquois Indians sided with the British.
4. The reference is to the proclamation issued by the governor of Virginia, John Murray, the Earl of Dunmore, in November 1775, declaring that "all indentured servants, Negroes, or others" who took up arms to suppress the rebellion would become free citizens. By December the British had some 300 slaves in uniform in a unit officially termed "Lord Dunmore's Ethiopian Regiment." The freeing of slaves and servants was not a policy of the British government. For fears of a black uprising in New Jersey, see Sec. V, Doc. 3, note 4.
5. The first treaties for obtaining soldiers were negotiated in January 1776 with the German states of Hesse-Cassel, Hesse-Hanau, Brunswick, and Waldeck.
6. The Boston Tea Party of December 1773 and the Boston Port Act of March 1774.
7. An effigy of La Grange was burned in New Brunswick in June 1775.
8. The unidentified author was apparently well-known to the La Grange family; in his July 28, 1776, letter to Mrs. La Grange he signed the initials "K. L." and remarked "you remember me of old by my name."

4 The Reverend Jonathan Odell to the Reverend Thomas Bradbury Chandler

[Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, Missionary Letters, Ser. B. 24:5, New Jersey. Photocopies in the Alexander Library, Rutgers University.]

Anglicans—virtually all of the clergy and a majority of the communicants—were conspicuous in the Loyalist ranks in New Jersey. There, as elsewhere, the Anglican church was a primary symbol of royal government. As adherents of the established (i.e., tax-supported) Church of England, priests and parishioners alike assumed an integral relationship between ecclesiastical and civil authority since the monarch was theoretically the head of both church and state. Whigs, with reason, were especially suspicious of Anglican ministers because of their persuasive influence in the community. Consequently, outspoken clerics such