

III THE COMMON CAUSE

1. On May 21 a group of Philadelphia merchants known as the Committee of Nineteen declined to participate in an economic boycott prior to the holding of a general congress; two days later its New York City counterpart, the Committee of Fifty-one, came to the same decision.

2. German-born Hendrick Fisher (1697-1779) of Bound Brook was the dean of Jersey legislators, representing Somerset County continuously from 1745 to 1776. A farmer and mechanic by occupation, he also served as judge of the county court of common pleas. Active in the affairs of the Dutch Reformed Church, he was a trustee of Queen's College (now Rutgers University). Fisher was an ardent Whig, representing New Jersey at the Stamp Act Congress in 1765, serving on the county committee of correspondence in 1774, and exercising leadership in the Provincial Congress as both president (1775) and vice-president (1775-1776).

3. Samuel Tucker (1721-1789), a merchant and large landowner from Trenton, served as assemblyman from Hunterdon County from 1769 to 1776. A justice of the peace as well as sheriff of the county, the Presbyterian Tucker was nonetheless active in protest politics as member of the county committee of correspondence (1774), standing committee of correspondence for New Jersey (1774), vice-president (1775) and president (1775-1776) of the Provincial Congress, and signer of the state constitution of 1776. Still, he was a suspected inactive Loyalist (probably a neutral) during the War for Independence.

4. Presbyterian John Wetherill (?-1784), a South Brunswick farmer, represented Middlesex County in the legislature from 1749 to 1776. He served on the county committee of correspondence in 1774 and in the Provincial Congress from 1775 to 1776.

5. Quaker Robert Friend Price was an assemblyman from Gloucester County from 1769 to the outbreak of the Revolution.

6. John Hinchman, like Price a member of the Society of Friends, represented Gloucester in the lower house from 1769 to 1776.

7. Upon immigrating from Ireland to America, John Mehelm taught school in Berks County, Pennsylvania, before taking up farming near Tewksbury, New Jersey. He served as assemblyman from Hunterdon County from 1772 to 1776, service that did not prevent him from sitting in the Provincial Congress from 1775 to 1776.

2 The Essex County Resolves on the Boston Port Act

[New Jersey Manuscripts, AM 13951, Firestone Library, Princeton University. The rough draft of the resolves printed here differs substantially from the abbreviated account published in the *Pennsylvania Journal*; and the *Weekly Advertiser* on June 29, 1774 and reprinted *NJA*, 29:406-8.]

NEW JERSEY IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

The Essex meeting demonstrates the degree to which participatory democracy had become part of the process of protest politics in New Jersey. On June 7 a public advertisement was issued inviting all county residents, even those excluded by law from involvement in normal political activities, to gather in Newark to discuss the state of affairs. Throughout the meeting pains were taken to ensure that all views were presented and that the ultimate action of the gathering represented as nearly as possible the sentiments of the population as a whole. Such action did much to convert citizens to the cause, cloak the extralegal activities with an aura of legitimacy, and maximize popular support for the resistance movement.

At a meeting of the freeholders & Inhabitants of the County of Essex in the Province of New Jersey at New Ark in said County on Saturday the 11th June 1774.

The Meeting was opened by unanimously choosing Stephen Crane¹ Esq. Moderator & Elisha Boudinot² Esq. Clerk of the present Meeting.

The design of assembling together at this time, being opened & the Boston Port Bill read with some Letters & Resolves of the neighbouring Colonies, in order that the members of this assembly might be fully possessed of every Argument on both sides [of] the Question, It was then unanimously voted: That every Gentleman present be desired freely to express his Sentiments on the present Occasion, and that while so doing with Candor & decency, he shall receive the full protection of the Assembly.

After which some time being spent in explaining & inculcating the necessity of assisting our Sister Colonies on this alarming occasion & in hearing the subject fully debated, the following were unanimously resolved as the opinion & resolutions of this County; each Resolution being twice read & explained, and as often voted by different Modes of taking the Votes.³

The Providence of God having Cast our Lot in a Land of Light & Liberty, when, late within a few Years past, we enjoyed perfect tranquility under a most wise & gentle Government, Brittain considering the happiness of America as inseperably connected with her own; and America looking up to Brittain as a dutiful Child to an affectionate Parent for defence & protection. Thus Circumstanced, under the best Constitution, the unalienable priviledges of Englishmen have not only been handed down to us, but committed to our Care & improvement, as well for our own, as the felicity of our remotest posterity. We would therefore be unworthy the descendents from those glorious Characters, which dignified the British Name, by the noblest opposition against the Efforts of Tyranny & oppression—Unworthy of Ancestors who thro' fields of Blood acquired, established & confirmed the rational plan of British Government, should we at any time, continue silent & unmoved at the approach of Oppressive & despotic Power, altho' for the present, we may be at some remove from its immediate operation. After so many Years experience of the happiness we have enjoyed in the rational & filial dependance on the Crown of Great Britain whose Constitution, we must ever revere with an ardor & affection too great for utterance, we behold with the most sensible Regret & mortification, the success of our inveterate Enemy, in sapping that solid basis of our political Freedom—a basis which we fondly hoped would have been Coexistent with humanity. With horror & astonishm[en]t we have lately beheld America (not withstanding all the

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advantages of Friendness, so often eventually experienced between her & Her Parent State) most unreasonably & injuriously deprived of her original Priviledges & Immunities; her powers of distinct Legislation & taxation under the immediate Controul of the Crown & its Governors, invaded & destroyed; her Trade & Navigation not only limited, so as to be virtually useless, but a power claimed & actually exerted of totally preventing & abolishing the same. And finally, we are Apprehensive of the long dreaded Era, too fast advancing, which has so often been foretold by the ablest political Writers, as the only possible source of destruction to the British Spirit & Constitution—"an Era when the Legislative power shall become more Corrupt than the Executive." Under these trying Circumstances, the late extraordinary & unprecedented acts of Parliament for blocking up the port of Boston & regulating the government of the Massachusetts Bay, not only engage our most affectionate sympathy for the cruel treatment of our Brethren in that Town & Province but must alarm every thinking Englishman with the horrid destruction to himself & posterity, that seems advancing with such monstrous strides in so dangerous a Precedent. Therefore we the Freeholders & Inhabitants of the County of Essex do take this Opportunity to bear our Testimony ag[ain]st every attempt for establishing a mode of internal Taxation contrary to the established & constitutional Usage of being taxed by our own provincial Assemblies; as well as to convince our Brethren of the Town of Boston, that we consider their Cause as a Common Cause, and are ready to Join them in every lawful & constitutional measure for Redress & Relief. Wherefore we do unanimously & cheerfully Resolve and Agree

1st. That, under the enjoyment of our original priviledges & Immunities, we heretofore have, now do and ever hereafter most heartily rejoyce in rendering all the obedience to the Crown of Great Britain, as well as full faith & Allegiance to his most gracious Majesty King George the third, and do esteem such firm dependence on the Mother Country, the essential means of political security and happiness.

2nd. That the late act[s] of Parliament relative to Boston, which so absolutely destroy every Idea of Confidence & Safety appear to this assembly big with the most dangerous & alarming Consequences, especially as subverting that dependence, which we would earnestly wish to continue as our Guard & Protection. And we conceive that every well wisher to Great Britain & her Colonies, is now loudly called upon to exert his utmost abilities for promoting every legal & prudential measure towards obtaining a repeal of the said Acts of Parliament, as well as those which have been passed for the express purpose of raising a Revenue in America.

3d. That it is our opinion, that it would conduce to the restoration of the liberties of America & prevent any future unconstitutional attempts against them, for the Colonies to enter into a joint agreement not to purchase or use any British Manufactures, and particularly any Commodities imported from the East Indies, under such Restrictions as may be agreed upon by a general Congress of the Colonies hereafter to be appointed.

4th. That this Body will readily & cheerfully join their Brethren of the other Counties in this Province in promoting an immediate general Congress of Deputies to be sent from each of the Colonies, in order to form a general plan of union, so that the measures pursued for the important End in View, may be constitutional, uniform & firm. Which when concluded upon, we do pledge our faith & Veracity to adhere to & promote with all our powers—and for this purpose are ready to send a Committee (to meet those from the other Counties) at such time & place as may be agreed upon,

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in order to choose proper persons to represent this Province at the said general Congress.

5th. That we do hereby request the other Counties in the Province speedily to meet together & consider the present distressing State of our public affairs, & communicate their Sentiments on the occasion, to our Committee now to be appointed for that purpose, who are hereby authorized & impowered to meet & transact business with the several Committees of the other Counties, which may be appointed & with the Committees of any other Province. The said Committee is also impowered to meet with the said County Committees and to nominate & appoint Delegates to represent this Province in general Congress.

6th. We do hereby unanimously request the following Gentlemen to accept the said Trust, and accordingly do appoint them or any five of them our Committee for the purposes aforesaid, viz. Stephen Crane, Henry Garritse,⁴ Joseph Riggs,⁵ William Livingston,⁶ William Peartree Smith,⁷ John De Hart,⁸ John Chetwood,⁹ Isaac Ogden¹⁰ & Elias Boudinot¹¹ Esquires.

7th. That the Minutes of this Meeting be given to the Chairman and that these Resolves be printed in the public Newspapers.

1. Stephen Crane (1709-1780) of Elizabethtown was one of the foremost political figures in Essex County, holding the positions of high sheriff, judge of the court of common pleas, mayor of Elizabethtown, and assemblyman from 1766 to 1776 (he was Speaker from 1770 to 1772). The Presbyterian lawyer was a staunch Whig from the outbreak of the Stamp Act troubles through the Revolution.

2. Elisha Boudinot (1749-1819), a Newark lawyer, was the younger brother and close confidant of Elias Boudinot.

3. The customary methods of voting in New Jersey were voice vote and show of hands. However, the ballot came into use at about this time; the first recorded instance of balloting in the province occurred in a Somerset County mass meeting in December 1774.

4. Garritse, an Acquackanonk (now Passaic) farmer, represented Essex County in the assembly from 1772 to 1776.

5. Nothing is known about Riggs.

6. See Doc. 3, note 7.

7. William Peartree Smith was an independently wealthy landowner and merchant from Elizabethtown and a close personal friend of William Livingston. An ardent Presbyterian, he was a principal patron of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University). He served in the Provincial Congress in 1775.

8. See Doc. 4, note 8.

9. Anglican John Chetwood was an Elizabethtown lawyer; he served in the Provincial Congress in 1775.

10. Isaac Ogden, son of Judge David Ogden of Newark, was a lawyer and sergeant of the New Jersey Supreme Court. Although he was a member of the Provincial Congress in 1774, he became a Loyalist at the outbreak of the Revolution.

11. Boudinot, from Elizabethtown, was one of the leading lawyers in New Jersey and an intimate associate of Stephen Crane and William Peartree Smith.