

NEW JERSEY IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

III. RESOLV'D, That as we are of the unanimous Opinion of our Countrymen, that the STAMP ACT is unconstitutional, we will pay no Sort of Regard to it; but are resolv'd to oppose it to the utmost, with our Lives and Fortunes, if the glorious Cause of Liberty requires it.

IV. RESOLV'D, That a Committee of five Persons be immediately chosen, to act in Conjunction with the several Committees of our neighbouring Townships in the County of Middlesex, in Order that the respective Committees of the several Townships may form a Committee out of their own Body, to act in Conjunction with the several Committees of the neighbouring Counties in the Province of New-Jersey, that we may be in actual Readiness on any Emergency.²

V. RESOLV'D, That our Committee are hereby authorized to transact all Affairs relating to the Stamp Act, any Three of which acting, shall be decisive.

VI. RESOLV'D, That we commit these Resolves to the Press, without any Design to Dictate to our neighbouring Towns or Counties, but only to communicate our Sentiments, for them to improve upon; and shall be ever ready to hear other Proposals that they shall think more conducive to the public End aim'd at, namely, the Union of the Provinces throughout the Continent.

P. S. We have taken the above Measures, in Consequence of a Letter from a Committee of the Sons of Liberty of the City of New-York, recommending such a Step as a necessary Precaution against the Stamp Act.

1. John Holt, publisher of the paper.
2. The identities of the committeemen are not known.

14 Richard Smith to the Committee of Correspondence of the New York City Sons of Liberty

[Miscellaneous Manuscripts, 502, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.]

Support for the Sons of Liberty was not nearly as widespread in the more rural areas of West Jersey as in the towns of the eastern division. The counties of south Jersey were especially cool toward the organization, owing mainly to the presence of a sizable Quaker population. Still, the resistance movement had firm supporters in the West, among them some members of the Society of Friends who, like Richard Smith, placed political above religious convictions. Richard Smith, Jr. (1735-1803), maintained an extensive law practice in Burlington and Philadelphia in addition to performing the duties of county clerk for Burlington. Despite his Quaker professions, Smith played an active role in the

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protest movement both at the local level and as a delegate to the Continental Congress from 1774 to 1776. He was a brother of Samuel Smith (see Doc. 2, note 5).

Burlington, Saturday, 15 March 1766

Gentlemen

Yours of the 14th February I Receiv'd last Wednesday Evening & Immediately Communicated [torn] Sentiments to such Gentlemen of this Town as have shown [torn] proper Contempt of the Stamp Act. Unfortunately for the Ass[istance you] desire, the Numbers of these are few, not owing to any Regard to [torn] for there is no Man now, I am well persuaded, whose Affections are not with the good Cause in which you are Engaged but to other Considerations particularly a large Number of the People called Quakers whose Religious Principles interfere with Vigorous Measures.

I Acquiesced in the Opinion of those I consulted, that We could not, at present, meet & enter into the necessary Resolves without feeling the Want of that Weight & Solidity which Numbers always add to a Cause, & which We could wish to Accompany Ours. Two of these Gent[leme]n Thomas Rodman & Robert Smith Esq[ui]re Judges of ye Common Pleas¹ Authorize me to Assure You That their Court has been always open & Nothing has hindered Business but the Late Resolutions of the Lawyers. The Justices of the Sessions² have not ceased to grant Tavern Licenses & transact their other Affairs.³

No Man can be a more hearty Enemy to the Stamp Act & to ye other Iniquitous Measures respecting America, adopted by George Grenville & his unfeeling Abettors, than myself. Long before the second of November⁴ took Place, I formed a deliberate Resolution both as a publick Officer & as a private Individual, of paying no Regard to that *faux Pas* of Parliament, & have Accordingly acted upon that Principle. I need no other Justification for this Conduct than the Want of proper Jurisdiction in ye Makers of the Act; a Matter Notorious to all America & I believe to all Considerate Impartial People in Britain & other parts of Europe. But if ye Parliament of ye Island of G. Britain had Enjoyed a legal Acknowledged Authority to lay Taxes upon America I was of Opinion That the Infernal Matter Contained in the Stamp Act was alone sufficient to render it void & not binding upon the Subjects, having always Understood it to be a Capital Maxim, That when An Act of Parliament or An Act of Assembly strikes directly at the Main Pillars of the Constitution & is besides Contrary to Natural Justice, such an Act must be a mere Nullity as ye Legislators have Exceeded their Trust which was Confined in ye Nature of it, to ye Benefit of their Constituents.

That a Minister should dare to lay such an Act as the Stamp Act before the King, the Lords & Commons for their Approbation & that such an Approbation should be Actually given, Naturally induces a Melancholy Reflexion of the Weakness of Human Nature & of the All prevailing Power of Corruption & when a wicked senseless Ministry, or any Ministry for the Time being, can do & Undo at their Pleasure We May Indulge a Hope from the Influence of the present Sett of Men who it seems, wish us well.⁵

Nonetheless I agree in Sentiment with You That our Existence as Freemen

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depends (under the Divine Favour) intirely upon our own Virtue, Union & Steadiness in ye defence of our Inestimable Rights & Priviledges, & I am also of Opinion That if We lose a Tittle of them without the utmost Force of Opposition We shall well deserve the Chains prepared for Us.

I am Gentlemen
Your most obt Servt
RICHARD SMITH⁶

1. Rodman and Smith were judges of the court of common pleas for Burlington County, a tribunal that had jurisdiction in civil suits. Rodman later served in the assembly from 1767 to 1768.

2. The court of quarter sessions consisted of a quarterly meeting of certain justices of the peace in each county to handle a variety of civil matters.

3. Despite the determination to suspend all legal and judicial activities in the civil sphere until the Stamp Act was repealed, business was transacted as usual in some parts of the province; lawyers and judges simply ignored the statute. This was increasingly the case by the spring of 1766 after news of the likelihood of repeal reached the colonies.

4. Smith is referring to the fact that the Stamp Act was to have become operative on November 1, 1765.

5. The references are to the Grenville ministry, responsible for passage of the Stamp Act, and the Rockingham ministry, pledged to its repeal.

6. Smith's signature is crossed out in the manuscript, and a postscript apparently from the Burlington Sons of Liberty committee of correspondence is appended. Unfortunately, the postscript is also lined through and is not legible; the complimentary close lacks signatures but is plural in form.

15 Woodbridge Celebrates the Repeal of the Stamp Act

[*Supplement to the New-York Gazette; or, the Weekly Post-Boy*,
June 19, 1766.]

When the long-awaited news that the Parliament had rescinded the Stamp Act finally reached Philadelphia on May 19, communities throughout the Mid-Atlantic colonies responded with a series of public celebrations. Giving vent to the pent-up frustrations and anxieties attendant to nearly a year of concerted protest, the celebrants also took advantage of the occasion to reiterate the reasons for their opposition to the Stamp Act and, as in Woodbridge, to praise those deemed responsible for securing repeal. Most Jersey Whigs sent news of their activities to John Holt, whose paper favored popular causes.