

NEW JERSEY IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

this Act, returned Us his Thanks for our Kindness & dismissed Us. The whole of the Chief Justice's Behaviour being evidently in Confidence, treating Us as his private friends, I was much surprised to find these Questions made publick, especially in the form they have appeared to the World, tending Obliquely to charge the Chief Justice with endeavouring to Solicit an Office so detestable to all the Colonies, I therefore could do no less, in Justice to every one concerned, than to give this plain State of the Matter, that every thing might have its due weight.

A. LAWYER

1. Frederick Smyth (see Sec. III, Doc. 9, headnote).
2. A distorted account of the meeting appeared in the *Pennsylvania Journal and Weekly Advertiser* on October 3.
3. Most likely Judge David Ogden of Newark and attorney Philip Kearny of Perth Amboy.

7 Cortlandt Skinner to Thomas Boone

[Printed in William A. Whitehead, *Contributions to the Early History of Perth Amboy and Adjoining Country . . .* (New York, 1856), 102-3. I have not been able to locate the manuscript of this letter or of other valuable items cited by Whitehead from his extensive personal collection, much of which was deposited in the New Jersey Historical Society.]

Cortlandt Skinner (1727-1799) was a man of great wealth and political influence. He was a member of the Board of Proprietors of East Jersey (vice-president), a prominent lawyer, provincial attorney general, assemblyman from Perth Amboy (1763-1776), and Speaker of the House (1765-1770, 1772-1776). A devout Anglican and political conservative, he was tied by blood and marriage to the close-knit group of East Jersey merchants, shippers, lawyers, and landowners known as the Perth Amboy Group—the single most influential interest group in the colony. His unswerving loyalism prompted his flight from the province in January 1776, his organization of the royalist New Jersey Volunteers during the War for Independence, and his exile in England. Thomas Boone served as governor of New Jersey from 1759 to 1761, whereupon he became the chief executive of South Carolina. He remained governor of South Carolina until 1776, but spent the last three years of his administration in England, defending his conduct in a protracted row with the Commons House of Assembly stemming from his dissolution of the legislature in 1762 to negate the election of Christopher Gadsden. In the following letter Skinner underscores the

I REFORM AND RESISTANCE

economic reasons for opposition to the Stamp Act as well as the general notion that imperial policies were contrary to American interests.

October 5th, 1765¹

Every thing here is in the greatest confusion, and the first of November dreaded. The laws of trade had ruined the merchants, and drained the colonies of their silver. Little was left after paying the duties, to pay their debts in England. Without money no clothing can be got, and woollens must be had in this climate; great attention was therefore given to manufactures on which considerable advances are made, but the want of wool and manufactures, are difficulties not easily removed. Discontent was painted in every man's face, and the distress of the people very great, from an amazing scarcity of money, occasioned by the sudden stagnation of trade. At this time (and a more unlucky one could not have been chosen) the Stamp Law and Mutiny Bill found their way through parliament.²

Upon these laws all restraints were broken through, and the papers will abundantly show you the violence and fury of the people. Great pains have been taken by some writers to expose the laws, and show the people that they are deprived of all liberty, and contributed not a little to the outrages that have been committed. The increased jurisdiction of the Courts of Admiralty, and the restraint on the press by the Stamp Law, have been the subjects and employment of their pens, which they have taken care to dip, if not in gall, yet abundantly in scurrility and abuse, if not in *treason*. With great difficulty the people have been restrained in this province, but how long it will be in the power of the magistrates to prevent disorder I know not. As the day approaches on which the Stamp Law is to take effect, fresh causes present themselves to fear great disturbance. . . .³

It is hoped that with the new ministers⁴ will follow a change of measures, and that the interest of Britain with respect to her colonies will be better understood, and the colonies relieved both from duties and stamps. I wish it may prove so; for if the interest of Britain is adhered to, it will be best advanced by encouraging the colonies in their trade to the West Indies. While that continues, agriculture will be their only employment, and they will not then (as it will not be in the interest) think of manufactures; but solely attend to the improvement and settlement of lands. Without trade they have no money, and every body knows that all the money they can get will not pay for the necessary clothing from Britain; consequently they cannot pay taxes. But the wealth flowing from trade will be more for the interest of Britain than all the taxes that can be imposed on the colonies. . . .⁵ The protection of the colonies is made the pretence for taxing them. This is assistance indeed. Garrisons may be necessary at Quebec and Montreal, but what occasion is there for garrisons and forts hundreds of miles in the Indian country? These are so far from protecting, that they are the very cause of our Indian wars, and the monstrous expenses attending them. Before we had these forts we had no wars with the natives, they were our friends, and will be so again when we withdraw the French settlers and our garrisons from their country.⁶ Their quarrel with us is, that we will take their lands, and treat them as a conquered people. All we want with them is their trade, which we can never enjoy with any advantage until we remove their jealousy. When this is done we shall live in all the security we have heretofore enjoyed, when a few

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independent companies were sufficient for the continent. And why cannot we do without so many regiments when every enemy is removed at least a thousand miles from our borders?

But independence is suggested and made the pretence, more than a fear of Indian inroads. Those who make these suggestions are enemies to their country, and are most likely to put the thought into the heads of the colonists by the very means they take to *prevent* dependence. Separate governments and an encouragement to agriculture and settlement, will effectually fix it. Taxes and a restraint on the West India trade are most likely to force the colonists into manufactures and put independence into their heads. *They are in the high road to it now, and though 'tis true that they have not strength to effect it, but must submit, yet 'tis laying the foundation for great trouble and expense to Britain, in keeping that by force which she might easily do without, and alienating a people which she might make her greatest prop and security.*⁷

1. The printed date in Whitehead, 1755, is a typographical error.
2. It should be noted that the Stamp Act would not have been a drain on American specie; all revenue raised by the act was to be spent in the colonies.
3. Whitehead's deletion.
4. The Rockingham ministry, established in July 1765.
5. Whitehead's deletion.
6. In point of fact, the English settlers had been at war with the western Indians (save for the Iroquois confederacy of the Six Nations, which sided with the British) for most of the past three-quarters of a century as allies of the French: King William's War (1689-1697), Queen Anne's War (1702-1713), King George's War (1740-1748), the French and Indian War (1754-1763), and Pontiac's Rebellion (1763-1764).
7. Whitehead's transcription ends here; these may be his italics.

8 The Essex County Stamp Act Resolves

[*Supplement to the New-York Gazette; or, the Weekly Post-Boy,*
October 31, 1765.]

The mass meetings held to protest the Stamp Act were vitally important for both the procedural and ideological development of the subsequent independence movement. These local, grass-roots gatherings were to provide the foundation of the extralegal political organization that first paralleled and then replaced the duly constituted royal government of New Jersey; because they were open to all, they increased the opportunity to participate in political