

JOIN OR DIE.

NUMBER

COURANT



The Constitutional

SATURDAY, September 21, 1765.

Containing Matters interesting to LIBERTY,

and no wife repugnant to LOYALTY.

TO THE PUBLIC.

The Constitutional Courant

Was New

Jersey's First

Printer

Responsible

for New

York's Most

Virulent

Anti-Stamp Act

Broadside?

“Since the last which I had the honour to write to you of the 23d of September this town has remained quiet,” New York’s Lieutenant Governor, Cadwallader Colden, wrote to the British Secretary of State, Henry Seymour Conway, on November 12, 1765.

For Colden, it was a welcomed respite from what had been a personally harrowing and politically embarrassingly time. It began with England’s passage of The Stamp Act of 1765—and act that has gone down as among the seminal policies to come out of Parliament responsible for driving the wedge between Great Britain and her North American Colonies. The Act called for a direct tax on paper, requiring all printed matter produced in the Colonies to be on “stamped” paper to show that the tax had indeed been paid. And that covered a lengthy list of things, indeed—everything from newspapers to playing cards.

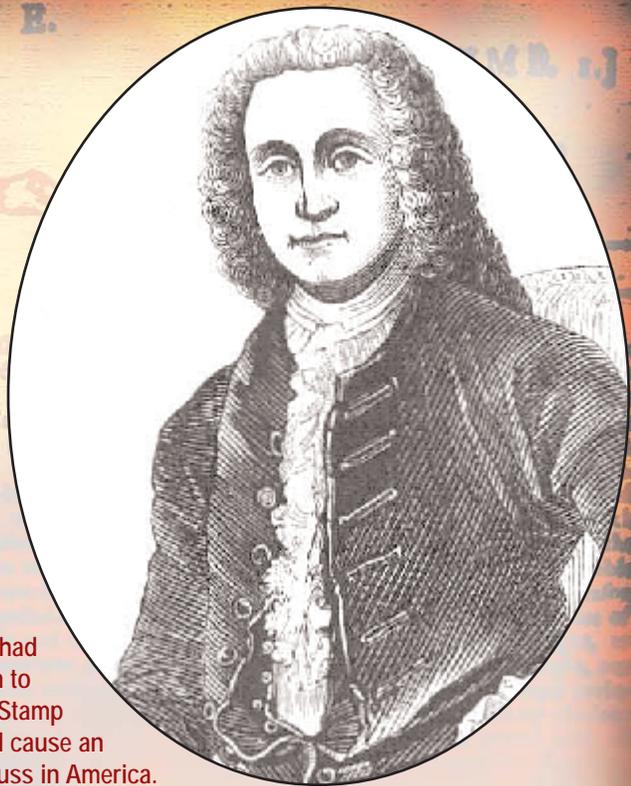
Such taxes were nothing new. Indeed, New York and Massachusetts had both imposed stamp taxes the previous decade, though they were repealed after failing to raise enough revenue. People back in England were used to such measures. Since pretty much everyone used some form of product involving paper, there was a presumed equity in such a tax. Certainly some business required more paper than others, but it didn’t single out any specific group of users.

So there was no reason for Parliament to think it would be such a big deal in 1765. Besides, the Crown had just assumed a big debt to pay for all those troops that had recently won the Seven Year's War against France—effectively securing North America for British interests. Since the French had been threatening the colonists' collective backyard for years, London reasoned, they too benefited from this military action and, therefore, ought to help with the tab.

But the issue here wouldn't be *what* but *how*.

The Parliament in London—a government some three-thousand miles across an ocean in which the colonists had no representation—had basically just told the Americans that, like it or not, you *are* going to pay us this tax. The colonies all had their own provincial assemblies and expected that they would at least have been consulted in the matter. Instead, Parliament bypassed them all, and simply made it the new law of the land. But it wasn't entirely capricious. The home-rule assemblies had always been making excuses why they couldn't afford the various military expeditions against the French. Royal Governors—the official representative of His Majesty in the colonies—pushed their imperial agendas against an unending tide of resistance from the local interests represented by the respective Assemblies. There was little history to prove that wading through fights with each of the 13 assemblies individually was going to be particularly successful in increasing revenues.

But more than that, there was a distinct fear among many of the powers in London that Americans—those provincial, backwater bumpkins—would soon outnumber the population back home. And it wasn't an entirely unreasonable fear. England was, after all, an island with only so many square miles and so many resources. By comparison, North America was vast, with plenty of room for the colonists to grow into and abundant natural resources to fuel that growth. And, in 1765, with the French removed as a barrier against



British Prime Minister George Grenville had no reason to think the Stamp Act would cause an unusual fuss in America.

them moving into the interior of the continent, there was little to stop it. If the center of gravity shifted across the ocean, what would that mean for the traditional British power culture?

The analogy has often be made characterizing the relationship between England and America as like between parent and child. A more accurate analogy, however, might be the dynamic between master and servant. England created the colonies in North America, as elsewhere, for one purpose only—the enrichment of England. Colonies were always to be subservient to the interests of the Mother Country. England was the master and America her servant, whose station in life was to make the world more comfortable and profitable for the master. A master could never suffer to permit a servant to think themselves equal. Such folly would just upset the natural, God-given order of things!

By this point, the Colonists had been in America for several generations and had managed to carve from the wilderness considerable swaths of European-style civilization. These had become more than hand-to-mouth existences clutching to the peripheries of empire. A distinct “American” culture was evolving. Yes, they were still subjects of the

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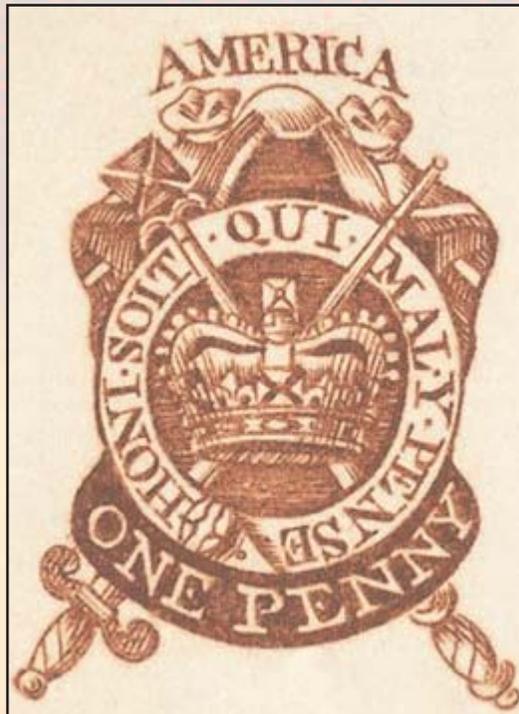
America

king—and proud of it, thank you very much—but they had a somewhat elevated self-image. They saw themselves as an integral part of the Empire but also as an equal partner in the enterprise—as equal possessors of the same rights and deserving of the same respect as anyone born on the Island Nation proper. As a matter of economics, politics and cultural preservation, many of the folks back in London had other ideas as to just where these Americans fit into the imperial scheme of things—and it certainly wasn't right alongside themselves. For them, to back down on the Stamp Act would be as good as an admission that the Americans were their equals and that a provincial Assembly should enjoy the same respect as an equal of Parliament—that the servant was the equal of the master. Both sides would dig in their heels over this one.

In broad terms, this was a case of that well-worn phrase, “no taxation without representation.” In political and legal terms, however, it was a little more complex than a slogan. In reality, by virtue of their Assemblies, Americans enjoyed a greater degree of representation and voting rights than their English counterparts. Thanks to the Mother Country's more strident prerequisites of property-ownership, it was estimated at the time that a full 75% of England's adult males did not have *any* real representation in any forum of governance. Nevertheless, so those in power argued, Parliament was bound to represent the interests of *everyone* in the Empire, regardless of it they were technically represented or not. The Americans—like others even at home—were represented “virtually.”

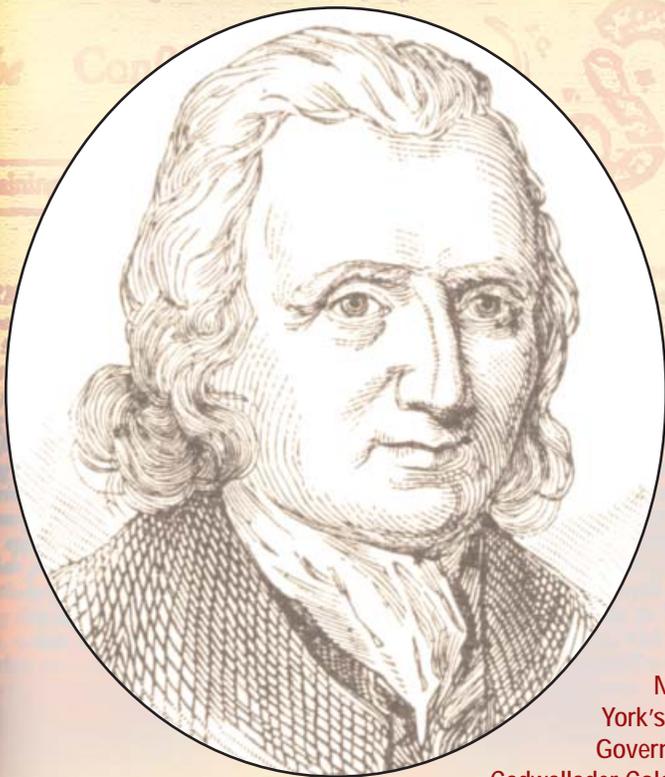
Riots

As such details were being argued in the halls of power on both sides of the Atlantic, they did little to assuage the folks out of whose pockets this new tax was to come. Colonial Assemblies created committees to address the problem and file the proper protests. Others, however, egged on by the Sons of Liberty and like groups, saw a more effective tool in mob action and took to the streets. It seems no one really appreciated just how worked up people were about to become. Much of their aggression would find focus on those who volunteered to act as “Stamp Agents”—those who collected the tax and distributed the stamped paper. That even the more politically and socially astute misread how bad things were about to get is demonstrated by none other than Benjamin Franklin, who recommended his friend, John Hughes, for such a post. Colonists who accepted the post in anticipation of the Act's start that November 1st—including Hughes—found themselves the target of angry mobs.



An example of a “stamp” that would prove the required tax had been paid.

Boston was the first to see outright rioting, on August 14, 1765. Would-be Stamp Agent, Andrew Oliver, was forced to resign the post in public. Once word spread that the tactic of threatened violence had worked, mobs became emboldened and sought to settle long-simmering scores against unpopular political and civic leaders—often for reasons that had nothing to do with the Stamp Act. Massachusetts' Lt. Governor, Thomas Hutchinson—never a very popular man though in power for near two decades—found his family turned out of their home and their possessions looted or destroyed. When the



New
York's Lt.
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Cadwallader Colden
bore the brunt of his colony's
displeasure over the Stamp Act.

ringleaders were arrested, local merchants sympathetic to their cause threatened even more riots and destruction, forcing their release.

With Boston's example, sometimes the mere hint of violence was enough to send Stamp Agents running. The Sons of Liberty had developed an efficient network of communication and word spread quickly. They were soon putting pressure on local merchants and even judges to make use of non-stamped paper as an outright defiance of the law. Portsmouth, New Hampshire; Annapolis, Maryland; Wilmington and New Bern, North Carolina; Charleston, South Carolina; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, all saw virulent demonstrations.

In New York City, however, it was particularly bad. As the chief port for the Northern Colonies, it was here that the stamped paper was to be landed and sent on to the agents—assuming any were left. When the ships arrived on October 14th, signs were found throughout the city, anonymously warning “the first man that either distributes or makes

use of stamped paper let him take care of his house, person, and effects.” New York's agent, James McEvers, had resigned back in August, after the example of what took place in Boston. By the end of October, merchants had banded together to enact what would be their strongest weapon—non-importation. They would refuse to deal in merchandise imported from England until the Act was repealed—and woe be to the merchant who dared violate the boycott. Lists of those merchants who had signed the pledge were printed in newspapers and hailed as patriots.

The politicians who were plying the normal channels would prove ineffective. Violent protests would soon burn themselves out and only inspired further entrenchment in London. By hurting English merchants through non-importation, however, those same merchants would be forced to petition their representatives in Parliament—they had representation—to consider repeal.

Nevertheless, for the moment in that winter of 1765, violence would seize New York for four fraught days as mobs roamed the streets that even the Sons of Liberty had a hard time controlling. “But on the evening of the first day of this Month,” Colden lamented to Conway on November 5, 1765, “the Mob began to collect together, and after it became dark they came up to the Fort Gate with a great number of Torches, and a Scaffold on which two Images [effigies] were placed, one to represent the Governor in his grey hairs, & the other the Devil by his side.”

They grey haired figure was meant to represent Colden, then seventy-seven years old, with Satan whispering in his ear. The crowds seemed content to curse and shoot at this effigy, but as they drew closer to Fort George's gates, the Lt. Governor must have wondered if their appetite might soon crave the real thing. “This scaffold with the images,” a besieged Colden told Conway, “was brought up within 8 or 10 feet of the Gate with the grossest ribaldry from the Mob. As they went from the gate they broke open my coach house, took

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my charriot [sic] out of it & carryed [sic] it round the town with the Immages [sic] & returned to the Fort Gate, from whence they carryed them to an open place, where they had erected [sic] a Jibbett [sic], within 100 yards of the Fort Gate & there hung up the Immages. After hanging some time they were burnt in a fire prepared for the purpose, together with my charriott, a single horse chair and two sledges, our usual carriages when

take away his life in the most shamefull [sic] manner."

By 9:30 p.m., the mob began to disperse on its own, leaving a city in shock and disarray.

Inflammatory Papers

When Colden wrote Conway that things had quieted down, he was likely hoping that the mob's energies had been spent and he

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To the PUBLIC.

WHEN a new public Paper makes its appearance, the reader will naturally be curious to know from whence it came, the publisher, and the design of it. To gratify that curiosity, know reader, that the publisher having formerly acquired a competent knowledge of the Printing-business, for his amusement furnished himself

especially when a method of answering the same ends, (as far as they ought to be answered) perfectly agreeable to the constitution, so readily offers itself. Let us then beseege the throne with petitions and humble remonstrances, and not doubt of a favorable issue in the result.

It must certainly give the most sensible pleasure to every American that loves this his native country

may be misled; some persons they must trust for the information they receive; those persons are generally such, whose interest it is to represent all things to them in false lights; so that it is rather to be admired that they are not oftner misled than they are. Parliaments also are liable to mistakes, yea, sometimes fall into capital errors, and frame laws the most oppressive on the subject.

snow is on the ground, which they took out of my Coach house."

Like a fancy car in modern times, a personal carriage—particularly ones as grand as Colden had—was a status symbol. Trashing them was as much about symbolic insult as wanton vandalism. "While this was doing," Colden reported, "a great number of gentlemen of the Town if they can be call'd so, stood around to observe the outrage on their King's Governor."

As the mob passed the fort, they taunted the soldiers with words, bricks and stones as they beat on the walls, daring them to open fire. They were outnumbered by several hundreds to around one-hundred-thirty. Major Thomas James maintained strict discipline. His restraint, however, was rewarded by the mob breaking into his house, destroying his belongings and burning it to the ground—as well as, according to Colden, "threatening to

could, quietly, at last get the stamped paper offloaded from the ship sitting in the port. But, he also added, "the inflammatory Papers continue to be published, exciting the People to oppose the execution of the Act of Parliament for laying a Stamp Duty in the Colonies. The most remarkable of these Papers is inclosed."

Newspapers, signs and broadsides had been distributed, urging the people to rise up against the Act. The newspaper he included with his dispatch to Conway bore the masthead of *The Constitutional Courant* and "remarkable" was putting it mildly. Its debut issue dated, September 21, 1765, featured the segmented snake cartoon, each piece representing a colony, with the caption above reading "JOIN or DIE." It was the revival of a graphic device Benjamin Franklin had used in his *Pennsylvania Gazette* for May 9, 1754 when he hoped to rally the Colonies to their common defense on the eve of the last French

and Indian War. The introduction topping the first column promised an incendiary read:

To the PUBLIC. When a new public Paper makes its appearance, the reader will naturally be curious to know from whence it came, the publisher, and the design of it. To gratify that curiosity, know reader, that the publisher having formerly acquired a competent knowledge of the Printing-business, for his amusement furnished himself with a set of proper materials;—and the authors of the following pieces having been acquainted him that they applied to the printers in York, who refused to publish them in their news-papers—not because they disapproved them, or were apprehensive of danger, but purely because several of their friends had been anxious on their account; and particularly desired them to be careful not to publish any thing that might give the enemies of liberty an advantage; which they would be glad to take, over them; and as these pieces are thought to be wrote with greater freedom than any thing that has yet appeared in the public prints, they thought proper to shew [*sic*] so much complaisance to the advice of their friends, as to desire to be excused, and to return the copies : But I, who are under no fear of disturbing either friends or enemies, was pleased with the opportunity of turning my private amusements to the public good; I not only undertook to publish them, but now inform my countrymen, that I shall occasionally publish any thing else that falls in my way, which appears to me to be calculated to promote the cause of Liberty, of virtue, of religion and my country, of love and reverence to its laws; and constitution, and unshaken loyalty to the King.— And so I bid you heartily farewell.

Andrew Marvel.

The printers in New York at the time would have been Hugh Gaine, William

Weyman and John Holt. Historian of the American press, Isaiah Thomas, wrote, “Gaine’s political creed, it seems, was to join the strongest party.” Indeed, his allegiance would shift in the coming decade. But in 1764 and 1765, he was doing printing for the Assembly and would likely have shunned anything so controversial as the pieces apparently being proffered. Weyman had suspended his *Gazette*, so he had no newspaper in which to print the pieces even if he wanted to. John Holt was another matter.

Rather than retreat from the Stamp Act, he would continue to issue his *Post-Boy* after November 1st—the date the Act took effect—with the declaration that it stood for “liberty and prosperity, and no stamps.” He no doubt had planned this open challenge to the authorities even as early as September as he had become the darling of the Sons of Liberty and enjoyed their protection. It is difficult to say if he would have turned down the job, no matter how virulent the polemics were. It is also possible that with only two active printers in New York, the identity of “Andrew Marvel” could hardly remain a secret for long. He had to print outside of the city.

Whatever the case, what followed the introduction did not disappoint. The more emotional grandstanding was taken up by an author under the name “*Philoleutherus*.”

At a time when our dearest privileges are torn from us, and the foundation of all our liberty subverted, every one who has the least spark of love to his country, must feel the deepest anxiety about our approaching fate. The hearts of all who have a just value for freedom, must burn within them; when they see the chains of abject slavery just ready to be riveted about their necks.

With the tone set, *Philoleutherus* asserted that, “It has been undeniably demonstrated . . . that no Englishman can be taxed, agreeable to known principles of our constitution, but by his own consent, given either by himself or his

representatives . . . these colonies are not in any sense at all represented in the British parliament."

The English colonies in North America were established under royal charters or concessions which guaranteed that the rights of the colonists as Englishmen would be preserved. *Philoleutherus* contended that "the tremendous conclusion, therefore, forces itself upon us, that the public faith of the nation . . . is violated, and we robbed of our dearest rights by the late law erecting a stamp-office among us."

Angered by London's obstinate refusal to even hear the colonists' grievances, *Philoleutherus* lamented, "Poor America, the bootless privilege of complaining, always allowed to the vilest criminals on the rack, is denied thee!"

But *Philoleutherus* saved his strongest invective for those who would support the Stamp Act. "Ye blots and stains of America! Ye vipers of human kind! Your names shall be blasted with infamy, the public execration shall pursue you while living, and your memories shall rot, when death has disabled you from propagating vassalage and misery further."

The second of the two essays, penned by "*Philopatriæ*" was perhaps more thoughtful, though no less stinging. He opened by countering the view that those who oppose the Stamp Act are all supporters of the violence seen in Boston. He asserted when news of the riots arrived in New York, "on the contrary, they hear of them with concern and sorrow."

The theme of potential slavery was repeated, "Let us not flatter ourselves, that we shall be happier, or treated with more lenity than our fellow slaves in Turkey; human nature is the

same every where, and unlimited power is as much to be dreaded among us, as it is in the most barbarous nations on earth : It is slavery that hath made them barbarous, and the same cause will have the same effect upon us."

Philopatriæ attacked the problem of the apparent social and ideological distance between the members of Parliament and the Colonies from an interesting angle.

Politicians in England who ran for office were required to have "considerable property in England." While restricting office to wealthy landowners might seem rather unfair to modern eyes, there was a logic to it. Such an arrangement meant that the politician's fortunes would be tied to those of the community who lived on his land. "But consider this rule with respect to America:"

Philopatriæ asked. "Have all the members of parliament property there? Will they each feel part of the burdens they lay upon us?—No. But their own burdens will be lightened by laying them upon our

shoulders, and all they take from us will be gains to themselves: Heaven defend us from such representatives!"

Both authors expressed their undying loyalty to the King, preferring to lay blame anywhere but on his head. To do otherwise would have been an outrage even *Philoleutherus* would not attempt. "We cherish the most unfeigned loyalty to our rightful sovereign;" he declared, "we have a high veneration for the British parliament; we consider them as the most august assembly on earth; but the wisest of kings may be misled . . . Be assured, my countrymen, whatever spirit we manifest on this juncture, it cannot be offensive to our sovereign: He glories in being King of freemen, and not of slaves."



King George III, from a 1762 mezzotint by William Pether, after a painting by Thomas Frye. As angry as the authors of *The Constitutional Courant's* authors were, they fell short of blaming the King directly—an act of treason.

While asserting similar allegiances *Philopatrice* nevertheless proved the more radical—and prophetic. “If she [England] would strip us of all the advantages derived to us from the English constitution, why should we desire to continue our connection?” he asked. “We might as well belong to France, or any other power; none could offer a greater injury to our rights and liberties than is offered by the Stamp Act.”

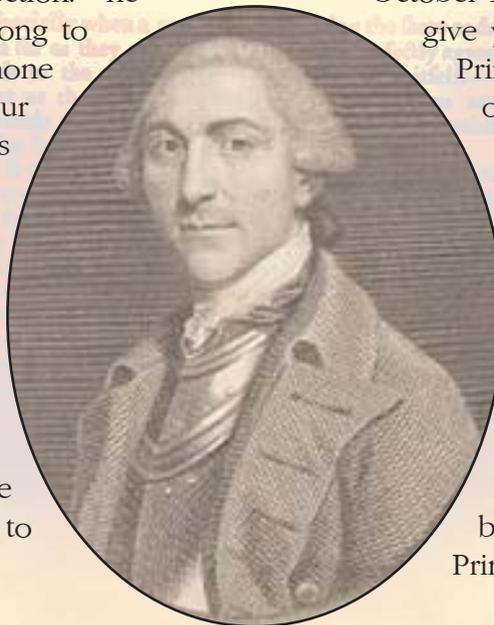
It is that sentiment which no doubt gave the likes of Colden reasons for anger and concern. These were strong words indeed. Nothing like them had been publicly printed before. Who would write such things? And, perhaps more to the point, who would dare to print them?

“This was distributed along the Post Roads by the Post Riders,” Cadwallader Colden explained to Conway. “I examined the Post Master [of New York, who happened to be Colden’s son, Alexander] in this place to know how this came to be done. He assured me that it was without his knowledge : That he had examined the Post Riders and found that one or more Bundles of them were delivered at Woodbridge, New Jersey, to the Post Rider, by James Parker Secretary [*sic*] to the General Post Office in N. America. Parker was formerly a printer in this place and has now a Printing Press and continues to print occasionally. It is believed that this Paper was printed by him.”

Such a revelation must have come as a surprise to Colden. He had known James Parker from his days as the King’s Printer New York and hired him to print his book on gravity—the first work of physics ever printed in America. There is evidence that the two families were at least somewhat friendly. Could it

be that Parker, an otherwise upright subject, had joined the ranks of the miscreants who threatened the peace of his province?

Before he made his report to Conway, Colden had written to Franklin first, on October 1st. “My regard to you makes me give you the trouble of the inclosed Printed Paper,” he told him, “one or more bundles of which, I am well informed were deliever’d to the Post Rider at Woodbridge by James Parker, were distributed by the Post Riders in several parts of this Colony, and I believe likewise in the Neighboring Colonies: the doing of which was kept Secret from the Post Master of this Place. It is believed that this Paper was Printed by Parker after the Printers in this Place had refused



Henry Seymour Conway, to whom Colden wrote on his troubles. Conway urged a moderate policy towards the American colonies, being the principal supporter of the repeal of the Stamp Act in 1766.

to do it, perhaps you may be able to judge from the Types. As he is Secretary [*sic*] to the General Post Office in

America, I am under a necessity of takeing [*sic*] notice of it to the Secretary of State [Conway] by the return of the Packet which is daily expected, and I am unwilling to do this without giving you previous notice by a Merchant Ship which Sails Tomorrow.”

James Parker

Born in Woodbridge, New Jersey in 1714, James Parker was apprenticed to the pioneering printer, William Bradford, in New York in 1725. Parker’s father, Samuel, had died and his mother, Jana, took care of the paperwork. Bradford was a good choice—he had been Philadelphia’s first printer and published New York’s first newspaper. When, in 1733, Bradford found he didn’t have enough work to keep Parker busy, however, he elected to offer the remaining eight months of the indenture for sale. Part of the agreement was

Bradford had to pay to feed and keep Parker—so when business was slow, he became a liability. By that point, Parker was nineteen years old and likely felt he was good enough to start making his own way in the world. Before Bradford could sell his services, James Parker ran away.

Apprentices ran away for any number of reasons, including abusive masters. There is no indication this was the case here. But so long as he was, in effect, a “wanted man,” Parker couldn’t remain in New York. Bradford offered a reward for the return of his wayward apprentice in his newspaper. The closes place a new printer could find work would have been Philadelphia—and it was there young Parker appears to have gone. He ended up working in the shop of Benjamin Franklin, the beginning of what was to become a lifelong friendship.

By the 1740s, Franklin entertained ambitions to become a proper gentleman in the English style—this was before the coming Revolution would make an American out of him. And that meant he couldn’t continue to get his hands dirty as a printer. He began to form partnerships with up-and-coming printers, bankrolling their shops for a cut of the profits. He evidently saw talents worth backing in Parker because in 1742 he sent him back to New York with a silent partnership, financing Parker’s establishment of a printing shop of his own. He saw him as the heir apparent to the aging William Bradford’s dominance in the New York trade.

Parker would indeed become a major force in New York’s literary evolution. His newspaper, *The New-York Gazette and Weekly Post-Boy* would become the paper of record. He was named the official government printer for both the King and the local governments and his clients included the city’s elite.

The concept of the “freedom of the press”—or “liberty of the press” as it was then called—was still something of a new and malleable idea.

There is no evidence to suggest that

Franklin ever pursued the issue with Parker. He probably didn’t have the time to make a study of the print to determine if it had, indeed, come from Parker’s press.

William Goddard

In the end, however, most historians have concluded that it was not James Parker who printed *The Constitutional Courant*. In Isaac Thomas’ 1810 work, *The History of Printing in America*, he tells that the paper “was printed by William Goddard, at Parker’s printing house in Woodbridge, Goddard having previously obtained Parker’s permission occasionally to use his press.”

The significance of this statement was explained by historian Ralph Frasca—perhaps the only historian to make a detailed study of the question regarding who really printed the paper. Thomas and Goddard were close friends, he explained, and Goddard assisted him in preparing his second edition of his book (which would not be published until after Thomas’ death, in 1874). In his proof-reading, Goddard pointed out to Thomas that he had mistakenly called the paper the *Constitutional Gazette* and informed him it had indeed been printed in Woodbridge. He did not refute the statement that he had been its printer. Furthermore, in a private letter to Thomas, Goddard outright admitted responsibility. He told him that John Holt “showed me several elegantly written and highly spirited essays, against the unjust tax, which no printer in New-York dared publish. I volunteered my services, went to Woodbridge, and obtained leave to use the apparatus there at pleasure, where I planned a newspaper with this title.”

Born in New London in Connecticut—the son of Dr. Giles Goddard, who served as the town’s Post Master—he served an apprenticeship under James Parker in New York from 1755 to 1761. The next year brought a chance to go to Providence, Rhode Island, to start that colony’s first newspaper. The Governor, Stephen Hopkins (who would go on to sign

the Declaration of Independence), backed Goddard's *Providence Gazette and Country Journal* as a propaganda outlet for his political views. It was printed "at the Sign of Shakespeare's Head," referring to the sign under which he traded, which featured William Shakespeare's portrait. Ralph Frasca believed that this was significant, as *The Constitutional Courant* was published "at the Sign of the Bribe refused," reminiscent of Goddard's advertising device.

In spite this encouraging start, Goddard's fortunes in Rhode Island were not as promising as he had hoped. On May 11, 1765, he was forced to cease publication of his *Gazette* due to a lack of subscribers and advertisers. The impending Stamp Act likely hastened his decision. He had tried to gain the Province's government printing to no avail—that was all sewn up by Benjamin Franklin's sister-in-law, Ann Franklin. About this time, he decided to return to New York, leaving the print shop to his mother, Sarah (who, along with Ann Franklin, were among the several unsung women who operated print shops when the original male owners were absent for various reasons). There, he found employment with John Holt, whom he knew from when both worked for Parker. He would make several return trips to Providence, including one where he re-issued his *Gazette* for one *Providence Gazette Extraordinary* edition on August 24th to rail against the Stamp Act. Such strong anti-Act sentiments and his associations with Holt in New York—and by default Parker—are strong bits of further supporting evidence that he was indeed behind *The Constitutional Courant*.

Assuming it was indeed William Goddard behind the name "Andrew Marvel," it was an interesting choice of pseudonym. Andrew Marvell (1621-1678) was a real person and a member of Parliament during the reign of Charles II. Marvell opposed the King by supporting a republican government following the Restoration.

But what about Alexander Colden's claim

to his father that it was James Parker—Secretary and Comptroller of the Post Office—who turned the bundles over to the post-rider? The younger Colden learned this from the rider, so the question is if the rider knew Parker by sight? If he didn't know his face, either he merely assumed it was Parker, it was actually Parker's son, Samuel Franklin Parker or Goddard misled him into thinking he was Parker. But if the rider knew Parker and received the bundles from his hands, two possibilities emerge—either Parker didn't know what they contained or else he was secretly in on Goddard's plan to distribute the vitriolic publication on some level.

Parker had a plausible alibi, however. Correspondence around the time in question place him in Burlington, New Jersey. He had opened a new shop there and would have issued New Jersey's first newspaper had it not been for the Stamp Act. Another reason he abandoned the effort was a new law that required him, as Secretary and Comptroller for the Post Office, to live in New York—never mind that he could have easily done the job anywhere. So what about it? *Was* he in Burlington when he was alleged to have been handing off this papers to the post rider? The answer seems to lie in the interpretation of a single word.

On September 22, 1765, James Parker wrote a letter to Benjamin Franklin, dated from Burlington, with the added note that it was a Sunday night. In it, he discussed matters pertaining to the new rates tables he would have to print for the post office. Indeed, he would be departing for Woodbridge the next day to do so. In the next paragraph, however, Parker informed Franklin, "I wrote you about a Fortnight ago, via New-York; but whether it went by a Vessel bound to Liverpool, or whether Mr. Colden kept it till this Packet I know not." A fortnight equals two weeks, which would place the mailing of this other letter around September 8th. The question, however, rests on the phrase "via New-York" and, specifically, on the word "via."

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In the strictest definition of the word, “via” means “by way of.” Parker could have sent his letter from Burlington to New York to be forwarded to Franklin. Evidently it passed through Colden’s hands. However, the editors of *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, volume 12, published in 1968 seem to have taken a different meaning. They stated, “Parker wrote Franklin, September 22, that he had enclosed this new account [of Franklin’s accounting with David Hall] in a letter sent *from* [italics added] New York ‘about a Fortnight ago,’ that is, about September 8, but neither that letter nor any acknowledgment from Franklin has been found.”

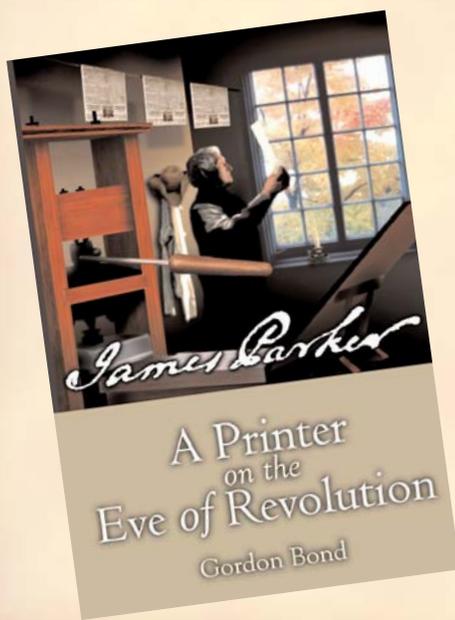
Why this is important is that, if the letter was written and mailed *from* New York, it would put Parker on the side of the New Jersey closer to Woodbridge at the critical time. If the September 8th letter were ever found, and if Parker continued his habit of including the location as well as the date, it would answer the question. But, alas, the letter seems to be lost.

Whether Parker played a role in *The Constitutional Courant* or not, he was in a difficult spot—*he* was the one getting in trouble with Cadwallader Colden, not Goddard or the essayists. Fortunately for him, Colden’s Council appears to have been too jittery to act.

“The Gentlemen of the Council think it prudent at this time to delay making more particular inquiry,” Colden told Conway in his October 12, 1765 report, “lest it should be the occasion of raising the Mob which it is thought proper by all means to avoid.”

James Parker was a “law and order” kind of man. Throughout his life, he was possessed of a strong and abiding sense of duty. On the surface, he was about as good a candidate for a Loyalist as one might find. And, yet, he also had friends amongst the Sons of Liberty and in the last year of his life would become embroiled in controversy for having printed a broadside for one of its leading lights, Alexander McDougall. When the petty bureaucracy of London resulted in complicated delays of his pay for various government positions, his expressions of tried patience made him sound as if he might be a breath away from joining the radicals. Did he feel some empathy—if not sympathy—for the frustrations his fellow-Americans were laboring under? Was this once proud subject of the King beginning to question his loyalty?

We will never know. On July 2, 1770, death spared him the agonizing choices circumstances would shortly force upon his neighbors.



This article includes portions from my book, “James Parker: A Printer on the Eve of Revolution.” For more information, please visit:

http://gardenstatelegacy.com/James_Parker.html

to read the introduction, find out about speaking engagements and order the book!