

*New Jersey's  
Revolutionary Experience*

**10**

*The Religious Issue  
in Revolutionary  
New Jersey*

EDWARD J. CODY

*New Jersey Historical Commission*

## NEW JERSEY'S REVOLUTIONARY EXPERIENCE

Larry R. Gerlach, *Editor*

*This series of publications is dedicated to the memory of Alfred E. Driscoll, governor of New Jersey from 1947 to 1954, in grateful tribute to his lifelong support of the study and teaching of the history of New Jersey and the United States. He was a member of the New Jersey Historical Commission from 1970 until his death on March 9, 1975.*

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## Foreword

*New Jersey's Revolutionary Experience* is a Bicentennial pamphlet series published by the New Jersey Historical Commission with a grant from the New Jersey Bicentennial Commission. The twenty-six numbers and two teachers' guides are intended to acquaint secondary school students and the general public with the state's history during the era of the American Revolution. Some titles treat aspects of the Revolution in New Jersey, while others show how important themes of the colonial period developed during the revolutionary years; some bring together the results of existing scholarship, while others present the findings of original research; some are written by professional historians, and others by laymen whose investigations of Jersey history exceed avocation. Because the series is directed to a general audience, the pamphlets have no footnotes but contain bibliographical essays which offer suggestions for further reading.

*New Jersey's Revolutionary Experience* is the product of a cooperative venture by numerous individuals and agencies. On my behalf and that of the pamphlets' readers, I accord recognition and appreciation to the individual authors for their contributions to New Jersey history, to the New Jersey American Revolution Bicentennial Celebration Commission and the New Jersey Historical Commission for their support of the project, to Hank Simon, president, Trentypo, Inc., for his invaluable suggestions and cooperation in producing the series, and to the staff of the Historical Commission: Richard Waldron, Public Programs Coordinator, who as project director supervised the series from commencement to completion; Peggy Lewis, Chief of Publications and Information, and Lee R. Parks, Assistant Editor, who edited and designed each number; and William C. Wright, Associate Director, who contributed valuable suggestions at every stage of production.

Larry R. Gerlach  
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*Thomas Bradbury Chandler (1726-1790). Courtesy Library of Congress.*

A few months after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, a British visitor who had been observing the fighting in New York and New Jersey, wrote to his superiors in London that the Revolution was "at the bottom very much a religious war." There was certainly a religious dimension to the break with Great Britain. Indeed, religion was one of the factors that influenced Jerseyites in choosing between the patriot and Tory sides and inspired the ardor with which they fought. In New Jersey, many soldiers marched in the battalions of the Lord.

Religion and revolution intertwined so inextricably because most eighteenth century Jerseyites belonged to a church and, more important, they believed in its teachings. Whether one supported or abhorred the War for Independence might often depend on whether one was Presbyterian, Dutch Reformed, Baptist, Anglican, Methodist, or Quaker. But whatever a Jerseyite's religious persuasion, a belief that he was doing God's will helped buoy, sustain, and drive him. It was not just political principle, economic necessity, or a desire for social change that motivated Jerseyites to fight; religion too carried the ranks of the patriot militia, the Loyalist volunteers, and the pacifists as well.

Religion influenced such diverse groups because, despite their sectarian differences, most Jerseyites shared a fundamental set of beliefs about God and His relationship to secular events. As Protestants, generally of the Reformed-Calvinist stripe, they believed in the degenerate nature of man due to original sin. They knew that salvation could be achieved only through God's grace, and they were convinced that God gave His grace only to those who followed His will. Furthermore, they believed that God actively

involved Himself in the material as well as the spiritual world, and that He held people responsible for their actions, both individually and collectively, in this life and in the next. Consequently, it behooved Jerseyites to follow God's will and see to it that their neighbors did the same.

Indeed, the religious state of one's neighbors was a legitimate and important concern for any Jerseyite. As believers in original sin, they knew that humanity had fallen into a degenerate and unruly state. Without the aid of God, therefore, no one could be trusted to participate in political society. It was through religion, they believed, that citizens learned the values and behavior conducive to a workable social order. Unbelievers could not be counted upon to know what constituted right behavior, and hence, were not permitted to vote. Believers, on the other hand, having been rescued from irrationality and sinfulness, could be trusted. They need only follow God's will to insure the proper functioning of society.

But what was God's will? Should Jerseyites take aim at red-coats, fire their muskets on the side of the crown, or refuse to pick up a weapon at all? As Jerseyites read their Bibles, listened to sermons, attended church services, and prayed, they came to differing conclusions. Their particular religious perspectives influenced their interpretations of God's will, which, in turn, helped make them patriots, Loyalists, or pacifists. Why and how?

To answer these two questions necessitates an examination of the religious diversity and factionalism which characterized eighteenth century New Jersey. Let us begin with the patriots. The largest percentage could be found among three religious groups: Presbyterian, Dutch Reformed and Baptist. These denominations shared a common antipathy to the Anglican Church (Church of England), which helps explain their ardor for the revolutionary cause.

Their dislike of Anglicans stemmed from a fear that the Anglican Church wanted to become established (exist as a state church) in New Jersey as it was in England and in some of the southern colonies. Since this would have necessitated that all dissenters, or non-Anglican Protestants, pay taxes for the support of Anglican clergy, and since it would also have subjected dissenters to religious tests for office-holding and the possibility of



persecution, the dissenters dreaded any move in that direction. By 1776, the Presbyterians, Dutch Reformed, and Baptists were convinced that the British government supported this Anglican desire for an establishment.

Their fears along these lines had been growing for quite some time due, in some degree, to the outspoken warnings of William Livingston, who was to serve as governor of New Jersey from 1776 until 1790. In the 1750s Livingston, who had been raised in the Dutch Reformed Church and later converted to Presbyterianism, lived in New York, where he engaged in a heated controversy with Anglican leaders concerning King's College (now Columbia University). Livingston wanted this new institution of higher learning to be nonsectarian. The Anglicans, however, insisted that they should control the college, which should serve as a training institution for Anglican prelates. This disagreement led Livingston to assume that Anglican intentions went beyond the control of King's College. He became convinced that the Anglicans wanted an establishment.

Livingston wrote voluminously on the subject, asserting that the Anglicans were engaged in a "perilous and detestable" plot to secure religious supremacy. He outlined the dire consequences of such an event—taxes, tests, and persecution—and he called upon all dissenters to fight Anglican pretensions. Jerseyites certainly heard these warnings, not only because Livingston had close family and business ties in New Jersey, but also because the New York and Philadelphia presses served as the chief sources of reading matter for Jerseyites.

While the relatively small size of the Anglican population in New Jersey probably kept dissenters from becoming greatly concerned by the King's College dispute, the episcopate controversy surely made them more wary of Anglican intentions. This dispute centered around the Anglican desire to have an American bishop. Since the first decade of the eighteenth century, Anglican ministers in New Jersey, representing the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, the missionary arm of the Anglican Church, had called for the seating of an Anglican bishop at Burlington. To these Anglican clerics, the proposal was nothing more than an attempt to facilitate church governance. It was, after all, a decided inconvenience to send prospective ministers all the way to England for ordination and to have to communicate with a bishop

thousands of miles and a few months traveling time away. To the dissenters, however, nothing so innocent was afoot. They viewed bishops as a vestige of Roman Catholicism, and their anti-Catholic bigotry made them more suspicious of Anglican intentions. They became convinced that the Anglicans were plotting an establishment and that the call for a bishop was the first step in that direction.

This call became more insistent in the 1760s. Anglican clergy throughout the colonies met at Perth Amboy in 1764 and at Shrewsbury in 1766, focusing public attention on the question. Then in 1767 Thomas Bradbury Chandler, a leading Anglican missionary and a minister in Elizabethtown (modern Elizabeth), published *An Appeal to the Public in Behalf of the Church of England in America*, which argued for an American bishop. Chandler was answered by William Livingston, who had been engaging in the episcopate controversy with other Anglicans and who by this point was one of the leading spokesmen for those who feared the establishment of the Church of England in America. Indeed, an intercolonial controversy already raged and continued to rage on the subject, with Livingston and Chandler as two of the chief antagonists in the Middle Colonies. Consequently, when Livingston moved to New Jersey in 1772, his large mansion called "Liberty Hall" stood as a symbol of religious liberty to New Jersey dissenters.

While the episcopate controversy aroused apprehension among Jerseyites opposed to an Anglican establishment, there were other incidents which added fuel to the fire. In 1760, for example, the Anglican clergy petitioned the governor to deprive the justices of the peace of the right to perform marriages. Dissenters decried the move as part of an Anglican plot to monopolize the marriage ceremony and, thereby, force unwilling Jerseyites into conformity with Anglican religious practices. The governor refused the Anglican demand, but the Anglican clergy carried its appeal to the Lords of Trade in 1765, using the Bishop of London as spokesman. While nothing came of this request, it further heightened the anxiety of many dissenting Jerseyites.

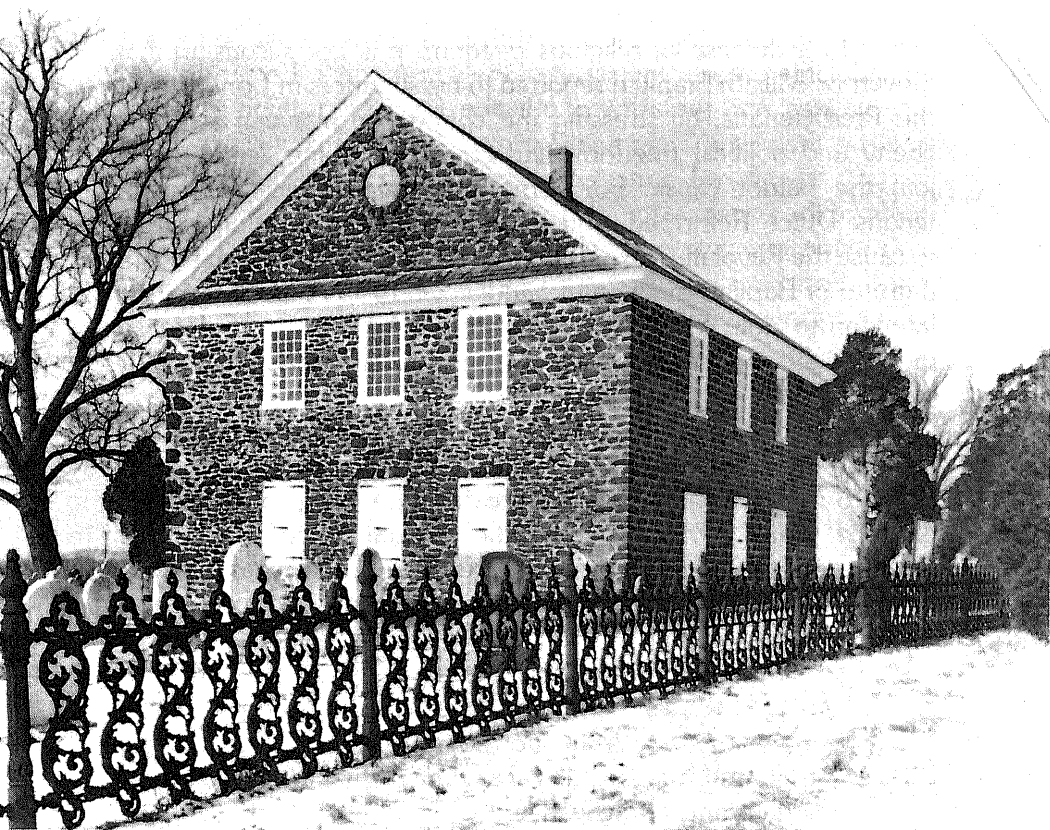
In fact, these dissenters became convinced that Anglican clerics in America were plotting with the British ministry in London to overthrow both religious and civil liberties. Thus, the

opposition to British political and economic measures became linked to a defense of religious freedom. It is not surprising that Governor William Franklin reported to his superiors in London that the Presbyterians, by stressing the connection between religious liberty and political freedom, had convinced many Jerseyites to join the patriot cause. For some Jerseyites, especially Presbyterians, Dutch Reformed, and Baptists, therefore, religion helped to cause the Revolution. Nor is it surprising that, after the war began, a group of Baptists meeting in Middletown in 1777 declared their intention to "join with these free states of America . . . in defense of our rights and privileges both civil and religious against our cruel enemies."

Religion helped bring about war not only because dissenters came to fear Anglican pretensions, but also because Jerseyites came to perceive the British as threatening a group of religiously oriented values generally called the "puritan ethic." Like their neighbors to the north in puritan New England, Jerseyites believed that God called each individual to work in some productive and socially useful occupation. They believed that prosperity resulted from hard work and virtue, and like all things in this world, it came from God. Prosperity, however, was to be accepted warily lest it lead a man away from the moral, political and economic virtues of thrift and frugality, and into the spiritual and social vices of sloth, idleness, and extravagance.

If Jerseyites should fall into such a sinful state, God might punish them with adversity. When the British government passed the Proclamation of 1763 (limiting settlement beyond the Allegheny Mountains), the Sugar Act of 1764, the Stamp Act in 1765, the Townshend duties of 1767, the Tea Act of 1773, and the so-called Intolerable Acts of 1774, all of which infringed colonial rights of trade and/or directly taxed the colonies to help pay for services of the British government, some interpreted the acts as divine punishments, signals from God that He demanded repentance. Repentance, of course, meant a return to the virtues of thrift and frugality. Consequently, these Jerseyites could serve God as well as political and economic principle by joining the opposition through a refusal to buy, import, or consume British goods.

Furthermore, as the conflict between colonies and England intensified, many Jerseyites joined their neighbors in other



*Old Stone Church, Fairton Township, Cumberland County. Construction of this Presbyterian church was begun in 1780 after a long delay caused by British seizure of some of the original building materials. Courtesy New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection. Photograph by Jack E. Boucher.*

colonies in equating England with vice. In the New York and Philadelphia presses, they read of the corruption in England, of the heavy taxes, and the army of officeholders with nothing to do but pick up their pay. They heard of corrupt customs commissioners coming to colonial ports, and the dissenting ministers reminded them of the necessity to oppose vice. So dismal a picture of British corruption was painted in the colonial mind that many Jerseyites concluded that the only way to preserve virtue was to break all ties with England. Only then, they reasoned, could the moral, political and economic virtues of thrift and frugality be practiced, and only then would God grant prosperity.

Furthermore, once the war was under way, religion served to excite and stiffen the resolve of some patriot soldiers during the bitter fighting that took place in New Jersey. Presbyterian, Dutch Reformed and Baptist ministers exhorted their congregations to fight. They did so in a way that not only equated the patriot cause with the will of God, but also indicated that a soldier could seek personal salvation with the religious and political salvation of his country in the war. In short, they made the Revolution a holy war, adding a religious zeal to the fighting spirit of the Jersey troops.

These dissenting ministers told their congregations that the British attack on colonial liberties and the war itself resulted from the sinfulness and lack of religious ardor which pervaded New Jersey. To them, the state was a quagmire of lust, blasphemy, greed and irreligion. God, of course, punished such sins, and in this case He allowed Jerseyites to feel His wrath at the hands of the British army. For God to stay this punishment, dissenting ministers told their congregations that they must repent. If they did so, the ministers assured their parishioners, God would preserve and restore their religious and political freedom. Repentance, however, came to mean fighting the British. For some religious Jerseyites, therefore, the war became a spiritual as well as a military exercise.

In the forefront of the patriotic Jerseyites stood the Presbyterians, the largest religious group in New Jersey. Possessing substantial congregations in the main towns from Newark to Trenton and in the smaller hamlets throughout the new state as well, they were so staunch in their support of the Revolution that an English

observer declared, "Presbyterianism is really at the bottom of this whole conspiracy, has supplied it with vigor, and will never rest..." While this assessment clearly exaggerated the Presbyterian impact on the revolutionary movement in New Jersey, it was not so out of touch with reality as to be ludicrous.

To begin with, the Presbyterians were a closely united group. Like most of the denominations in New Jersey, they had been split during the Great Awakening of the 1740s. At that time, those supporting revivalism, the so-called "New Light" group, and those opposed to revivalism, the so-called "Old Light" party, had separated. In 1758, these differing Presbyterian factions had effected a reunion, but tensions remained. However, in 1768, the Reverend John Witherspoon became president of the College of New Jersey in Princeton (later Princeton University). The college had been organized by the "New Light" faction as a training institution for ministers. The "Old Light" Presbyterian clergy, continued to remain cool to and unsupportive of the institution. Witherspoon, however, overcame these differences. He won the support, both theological and monetary, of the "Old Light" clergy and turned the college into a truly denominational rather than a factional school. Furthermore, he worked hard through the Synod of New York and Philadelphia, the governing body of the Presbyterian Church for the Middle Colonies, to solidify the reunion. His efforts proved successful and the old differences substantially disappeared. Hence, Presbyterians could provide a united stand concerning the Revolution.

The action of the Princeton students signaled the patriotic nature of that stand. They protested the Stamp Act and the Townshend duties with patriotic graduation orations, and they cheered the conferring of honorary degrees on such American protest leaders as John Hancock and John Dickinson.

In response to the Tea Act, they vented their anti-British sentiments in what became a familiar fashion. They raided the college storehouse, seized twelve pounds of tea and burned it with an effigy of Thomas Hutchinson, the royal governor of Massachusetts. All the while they shouted "spirited resolves." While this incident reveals the feeling of independence pervading Presbyterian Princeton, the true depth of that spirit is better measured in the fact that more Princeton graduates signed the Declaration of

Independence than Harvard and Yale graduates combined.

One of the signers from New Jersey was the president of the college, John Witherspoon. Just as he had taken a central role in bringing about Presbyterian unity, he also assumed a leadership position in the movement for independence. In 1774, he published a pamphlet, *Thoughts on American Liberty*, which supported the idea of holding an intercolonial congress. Furthermore, Witherspoon proposed resistance to British tyranny with whatever means necessary. While declaring a dislike of revolution, he nevertheless urged the organization of colonial militia, the strengthening of intercolonial ties, the development of domestic manufacture, and the boycotting of English goods.

Moreover, Witherspoon sought to achieve these ends through both political and religious channels. He put himself forward and was elected to represent New Jersey at the second meeting of the Continental Congress. At the same time, he served as chairman of a committee which drew up a pastoral letter addressed to all Presbyterians in the Middle Colonies. The letter urged support of the Continental Congress and advised Presbyterians to unite with members of other religious denominations in this effort. Witherspoon supported the move for independence in the Continental Congress, and the vast majority of Presbyterians followed this lead and joined the patriot cause.

Indeed, while the fiery Witherspoon stood out among Presbyterian patriots he did not stand alone. Eight of the eleven New Jersey delegates to the Continental Congress in 1775-1776 were Presbyterians. Presbyterians also dominated extralegal organizations at every level of government in New Jersey, and Presbyterian clerics did more than just exhort their congregations to fight. The Reverend Jacob Green of Hanover, for example, penned an immensely popular pamphlet supporting the cause of independence and took a large part in drafting the New Jersey constitution of 1776. Many other Presbyterian ministers served as chaplains in the Continental army. One of them, the Reverend James Caldwell of Elizabethtown (who also served as quartermaster), was also involved in a famous incident. On one occasion when the American troops were running low on wadding for their muskets, Caldwell ran into a nearby Presbyterian church and emerged carrying a handful of Isaac Watts's psalm books. He

passed them out to the troops shouting. "Now boys, give them Watts." A half dozen other prominent revolutionary leaders came from Caldwell's Elizabethtown congregation alone: William Livingston, governor of the state; Abraham Clark, a signer of the Declaration of Independence; Elias Boudinot, president of the Continental Congress in 1782-1783; Matthias Ogden and Elias Dayton, generals in the Continental army; and Jonathon Dayton, an army captain.

The British recognized this Presbyterian contribution to the war effort and took their revenge whenever possible. As the British army crossed New Jersey, British soldiers burned some Presbyterian churches, ransacked others, and used still others as stables. At the College of New Jersey, the British destroyed furniture, carried off the library, and stabled their horses in Nassau Hall. Many Presbyterians, common soldiers, officers and ministers, paid with their lives for supporting independence. The cost was high, but Presbyterians did not complain.

Neither did many Dutch Reformed. This denomination contributed extensively, though with less unanimity than the Presbyterians, to the patriot cause. The Reverend Jacob R. Hardenburg, pastor at Raritan, and later president of Queen's College (now Rutgers University), tirelessly supported the Revolution with sermons and political activity. His preaching was so stridently anti-British and so effective in helping to motivate the men of his congregation to fight that the British offered a reward of £ 100 for his arrest and burned his church when they got the chance late in the war. One of Hardenburg's parishioners, Hendrick Fisher, had served as one of New Jersey's three delegates to the Stamp Act Congress of 1765, and he supported the revolutionary cause in the New Jersey legislature. The Reverend Dirck Romeyn of Hackensack and his parishioner, Robert Morris, a lawyer, were the leading patriots in that part of the state. British soldiers burned Romeyn's house in reprisal for his efforts. The Reverend William Jackson of Bergen (now Jersey City) ignored the British garrison in New York and preached revolution to his congregation. The pastor of the Reformed Church of Millstone did the same, only to have British troops burn his church and ransack his house. Other Dutch Reformed clerics served as ministers in the Continental army, and Dutch Reformed laymen were well represented in Washington's forces.

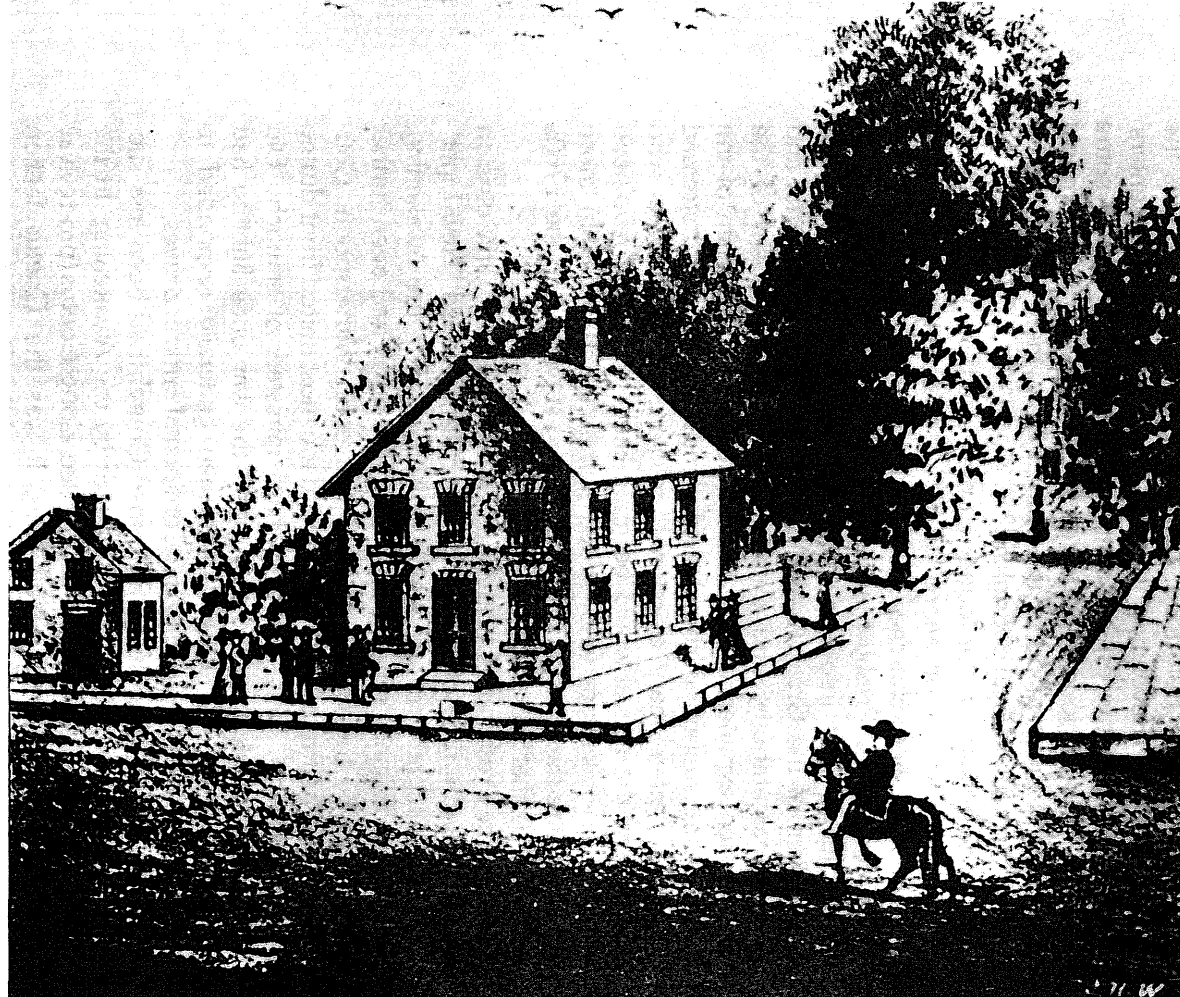


However, while support of the Revolution and piety went hand in hand for those Jerseyites, for others they did not. This was true even for a few Presbyterians and for a more significant minority within the Dutch Reformed Church. This, of course, raises the question: If the Revolution was caused in part by the dissenters' fear of an Anglican establishment, and if it was fought to some degree as a religious crusade for personal salvation, communal liberty, and preservation of the puritan ethic, then why did these dissenters remain loyal to England?

The answer can be found not only in differing political, economic and social motivations but also in the internal factionalism produced in these churches by the Great Awakening of the 1740s. At that time the Presbyterian and Dutch Reformed Churches in New Jersey split into two parties. Those who supported the revivalism of the Great Awakening attacked denominational and ministerial authority and emphasized the emotionalism of the conversion experience. Those who rejected the revivalism of the Awakening supported church and clerical authority and stressed rational, rather than emotional, religion. Clearly, those who supported the revival would be more likely to support revolution than their colleagues who valued authority and order. In those cases where the schism of the Awakening survived into the 1760s and 1770s, that is exactly what happened.

In the Presbyterian Church, as we have seen, very little division existed by the time of the Revolution. The so-called "New Light" and "Old Light" factions, which had emerged in the Awakening, had been formally reunited in 1758. This bond had been further cemented by the tactful leadership of John Witherspoon. Consequently, the Presbyterians presented the most united front during the Revolution. Only a few die-hard ministers of staunch "Old Light" sympathies refused to support the war once fighting had broken out, and Presbyterian laymen generally responded to clerical leadership by joining the Continental army in droves.

In contrast the Dutch Reformed Church had been less successful in healing the wounds caused by the Awakening. In the 1760s and 1770s Jersey Dutch divided along *Coetus* (pro-revival) and *Conferentie* (anti-revival) lines. It was the *Coetus* faction which supplied the majority of patriots and the *Conferentie* groups who became for the most part Tory. For example, in Schraalenburg almost 100 percent of the *Conferentie* faction were Loyalists



*First Methodist Preaching House in New Jersey, built in Trenton, 1773. Courtesy Rutgers University Library.*

and over 90 percent of the *Coetus* faction were patriots. Similar divisions have been traced in Tappan and Hackensack.

Such a combination of statistical and theological precision is impossible to achieve in respect to the question of Jersey Baptist involvement in the Revolution. The New Jersey Baptists supported the Revolution in significant though by no means unanimous numbers. In Piscataway and Shrewsbury they took leading roles in the independence movement, and in Middletown more than half of the Baptists were active patriots. Upper Freehold Baptists were divided, but many were patriots. It is known that three New Jersey Baptist ministers served as chaplains in the Continental army. Baptist John Hart of Hopewell was a signer of the Declaration of Independence and also served as Speaker of the state legislature during the war. Furthermore, many Baptist ministers, notably the Reverend David Jones, preached revolution along with piety to their congregations. However, the New Jersey Baptists were mostly Regular Baptists (as opposed to Separatist Baptists) and as such did not experience the revivalism of the Great Awakening which swept Baptist congregations in other colonies. Except in matters of polity and the sacraments, New Jersey Baptists closely resembled the "Old Light" Prebyterians. It can be argued, therefore, that Baptist Tories took their stance in part because of the respect for authority and order inherent in an "Old Light" religious posture. Baptist patriots, on the other hand, probably feared Anglican and British encroachment on religious and civil liberties sufficiently to overcome their religion-based dislike of anti-authoritarian action. Some members of a group known as the Seventh Day Baptists (first established in New Jersey in 1705), like the Quakers, refused for religious reasons to take up arms; others fought on the patriot side. In any event, it is clear that the Revolution posed a problem for New Jersey Baptists.

In a somewhat different sense, the Methodists encountered difficulties because of the Revolution. Founded by John Wesley, Methodism was an offshoot of the Anglican Church. Methodist ministers emphasized evangelism and discounted episcopal organization and Anglican protocol. In a sense, Methodism became a revivalist or "New Light" version of Anglicanism, yet the Methodists maintained tenuous ties to the Anglican Church. Methodism did not arrive in New Jersey until the late 1760s.

Especially in the southern part of the state, however, thanks largely to the organizational and evangelical work of Francis Asbury, a growing number of members and circuits existed by the time of the Revolution. The question, of course, was whether "New Light" sympathies and dissenting status would incline Methodists to the patriot side or whether the tenuous ties to the Anglican church would lead Methodists to be Tories.

Had it not been for the position taken by John Wesley, the answer would have been overwhelmingly on the patriot side. Wesley, however, supported the mother country. Writing from England, he urged his American followers to remain loyal to the king and referred to the patriots as "poor deluded rebels." Once the fighting broke out, except for Asbury, all the English preachers whom Wesley had sent to America returned to England. The laymen, however, did not share this Toryism. In New Jersey, the Methodist Church lost most of its adherents. The membership diminished by half in the first year of the war alone, and, by 1779 only 140 Methodists remained in New Jersey. For the Methodists, doing God's will clearly meant one thing to the leadership and another to the laity.

The Anglicans, on the other hand, both priests and parishioners, saw the will of God in substantially the same terms. The Anglican clergy had long sought an establishment. As missionaries of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, they viewed New Jersey as heathen territory and strove to provide Jerseyites with the "true" church. This desire, of course, went hand in hand with support for the crown. As the revolutionary ferment increased, Anglican ministers preached sermons designed to "mitigate the general infatuation." They stressed order and authority and urged their congregations to remain loyal to England. Indeed, the Anglican liturgy included weekly prayers for the king, the royal family, and Parliament, and Anglican ministers acknowledged the supremacy of the king in their ordination oath.

When the Revolution began, most of the Anglican clergy fled to England or behind British lines. One such minister, the Reverend Jonathan Odell, rector of St. Mary's in Burlington, continued to try to influence events from his refuge in New York City, having fled there in 1776. Odell served as a propagandist for the British, employing his literary skills to satirize leading patriots. Among his

less elegant but more pointed lines was the statement, "I'd rather be a dog than Witherspoon." He described the Revolution as "a sort of insane frenzy produced by the wicked few . . . ." Moreover, he did not confine himself to heaping invective upon his political and religious opponents. Not only did he serve as a chaplain to the Pennsylvania Loyalists, but he also became involved in espionage and served as a go-between for Benedict Arnold and the British army when Arnold attempted to turn West Point over to the British in 1780. Other New Jersey Anglican ministers engaged in less flamboyant activity; they became chaplains for the British army or, like Thomas Bradbury Chandler, wrote Loyalist pamphlets and eventually fled to England for the duration of the war.

A few Anglican clergymen remained in New Jersey. The Reverend Abraham Beach of New Brunswick stayed on, but his church was closed because he refused to comply with the patriots' order to remove the prayers for the king and Parliament from the Anglican liturgy. Near the end of the war, however, he resumed worship services without those prayers. Another Anglican priest, Uzal Ogden, of Sussex County, after initially fleeing to New York, returned to his parish, where he confined himself to practical ministrations and made no attempt to use the *Book of Common Prayer*. Ogden, it seems, secretly held patriot sympathies, for in 1779 he wrote a letter to Washington wishing him well and expressing hope for a patriot victory. Only one Anglican minister from New Jersey outwardly supported the Revolution. The Reverend Robert Blackwell of Gloucester, Waterford and Greenwich, became a chaplain in the Continental army.

With only this one visible patriot among their clergy and with a tradition of conservatism behind them, the Anglican laity remained, for the most part, loyal to the crown. Certainly, there were some exceptions. In Middletown, for example, a majority of Anglicans became supporters of independence, but a more representative case was Newark, where less than 10 percent of the Anglicans were patriots. Overall, Anglicans tended more to join the Loyalist camp or brood in sullen neutrality than to support revolution. After all, they were convinced that theirs was the "true" church, and the British supported it. For any staunch Anglican, God's will was clear: be a Tory. Furthermore, their minority status made them fearful of the dissenters, and they sought safety in the British cause.

It is not surprising, therefore, that many leading New Jersey Loyalists were Anglicans: Cortlandt Skinner and his brother Stephen were officers in New Jersey Loyalist regiments; David Ogden, Frederick Smyth, Daniel Coxe and John Lawrence, all formerly high colonial officials, were among the principal Tory leaders. Together with these, many less well known Anglicans sacrificed their property, and their homeland, for the British cause. Others paid with their lives, and even the more fortunate among them suffered the recriminations and hostility of patriot neighbors. Doing the will of God was costly for Tory as well as patriot, but religious conviction helped spur both to sacrifice and endure.

Doing God's will also proved difficult for the Quakers. Unlike their neighbors, the Quakers did not find themselves called upon to fight on either side. From their perspective, God demanded pacific behavior. Quakers believed in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit—that is, the concept that God is found in every person. As their founder, George Fox, noted, this “takes away the occasions of wars and gathers our hearts together in God.” Furthermore Quakers believed that “the setting up and putting down Kings and governments is God's peculiar prerogative.” Hence the Revolution went against their religious principles.

This created a difficult situation for many Quakers, some of whom found their patriot political principles at odds with their religious scruples. One such Jerseyite was James Kinsey, Quaker lawyer from Burlington, who had been a consistent advocate of colonial rights. As head of New Jersey's committee of correspondence, which was created in 1774, he worked diligently to activate and unite the forces of resistance in the colony. When the war came, however, Kinsey remained neutral. Another Quaker who refused to fight was Isaac Collins, also of Burlington. But Collins contributed to the patriot cause by printing the *New-Jersey Gazette*, New Jersey's first newspaper, in which William Livingston, using the pen name “Hortentius,” frequently satirized the Tories. The *Gazette* served as an effective outlet for patriot ideas throughout the war. Other Quakers went further than Kinsey and Collins and followed the lead of James Logan, who argued that fighting a defensive war was allowable for Quakers. Some Quakers, especially younger ones, found this position authoritative and fought on the patriot side. Most, however, refused to fight or to pay taxes to support the

fighting or even to participate in the revolutionary government.

Naturally, this antagonized both the patriots and the Tories. In New Jersey, Quakers found themselves caught in a cross fire. To his credit, it must be noted that Governor William Livingston, in accordance with his often repeated espousal of religious liberty, tried to protect them. When General Israel Putnam ordered the arrest of Quakers who had not fulfilled their militia obligations, Livingston countermanded the order. Furthermore, Livingston supported measures to allow Quakers to travel freely, even across enemy lines, for the purpose of attending religious services, and he also tried to exempt Quakers from legal practices which violated their religious scruples.

Livingston's concern, however, proved insufficient to spare the Quakers from all suffering. As the conflicting armies fought their way across New Jersey, Quakers found their homes pillaged, their houses used to quarter soldiers, their property confiscated, their persons threatened, and themselves reviled as traitors by both sides. Many were imprisoned, and a few were even hanged, but through it all they stood fast in their adherence to pacific principles and awaited, as confidently as their patriot and Tory neighbors, the ultimate blessings they believed God bestows on those who do His will.

Doing God's will, after all, was a key to the connection between religion and Revolution in New Jersey. Patriots, especially Presbyterians, Dutch Reformed, and Baptists, sought to do God's will by preventing an Anglican establishment and by fighting the war as a religious crusade for personal regeneration, communal liberty, and preservation of the puritan ethic. Tories on the other hand were motivated, in part at least, by a religion-based concern for order and authority or, in the case of the Anglicans, by a desire to preserve the "true" church against the wishes of their erring neighbors. Finally, the Quakers believed that God demanded living together in peace. Whatever their decision, religious Jerseyites felt that there was more to the Revolution than political and economic questions. For them, their relationship to God was also involved.

That being the case, an inquiry into the Revolution's consequences for religion appears warranted. The most obvious consequence, and the most pervasive, was disruption. All sides saw

churches destroyed, ministers killed, congregations scattered and normal patterns of worship interrupted. It took many years for religious life to return to even a semblance of its prerevolutionary state. The changes wrought by the war were many and far-reaching for all concerned.

Those churches whose ministers had been predominantly Tory faced severe problems in postwar New Jersey. The Methodist Church, having lost most of its membership and all but one of its leaders and having been branded disloyal during the war, began a rebuilding process. Fortunately for Methodists in New Jersey, and throughout America for that matter, Francis Asbury had not returned to England. Now, joined by Dr. Thomas Coke, and honored by John Wesley with the title of superintendent of the Methodist Societies in America, Asbury initiated a drive for new members. He and Coke sent a letter to George Washington in 1789 congratulating him on his assumption of the presidency. When Washington sent a warm reply, Methodist ministers made sure that all who would listen were aware of the general's warm feeling toward their religious body. This did a good deal to dispel the Tory label, and the Methodists embarked on a period of gradual growth in New Jersey.

The Anglicans faced even more formidable difficulties. Not only were they branded as Tories, but in the eyes of dissenters their demand for an establishment had helped precipitate the war. Anglicanism stood as a symbol of a hated and defeated enemy. With most of their priests gone, their congregations despondent, their finances devastated, and many of their parishes disbanded, the Anglicans expected a bleak future.

A New Jersey Anglican minister, Abraham Beach of New Brunswick, who had remained in the state throughout the war, began the difficult task of rebuilding. Beach was responsible for calling a meeting at New Brunswick of Anglican clergy from throughout America, and he was also largely responsible for ultimately settling the differences which emerged between the northern and southern factions of the national church.

Ironically, those differences revolved around the question of bringing an Anglican bishop to America, with the northern faction favoring such a move and the southern group standing against it. Even more ironic was the fact that when Samuel Seabury, the



northern candidate for episcopal ordination, arrived in England he encountered concerted resistance in the Anglican hierarchy and was forced to go to Scotland for ordination. After Seabury's return to America, Beach and his colleagues among the Anglican clergy in New Jersey mediated the dispute between the two factions of the church. Union was achieved in 1789 with the creation of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States. Since ties had been broken with England, the dissenters did not set up a hue and cry against a reunited Anglican Church with an American bishop. A slow rebuilding process followed, but it took many decades to heal the wounds of the Revolution.

For the Dutch Reformed Church, the wounds never really healed. The split between the *Coetus* and *Conferentie* factions of the church, which had helped to cause a patriot-Tory split during the Revolution continued in fact, if not in name. While the Dutch Reformed achieved ecclesiastical independence from the Netherlands and while they made Rutgers College a productive institution in which to train their ministers, they were beset with internal problems which continued to break out into open schisms in the decades following the Revolution. Furthermore, identification with the Dutch nationality also retarded growth in the increasingly nationalistic atmosphere of postrevolutionary New Jersey.

For the Baptists in New Jersey, the patriot-Tory split had been neither as deep-rooted nor as traumatic as it had been among the Dutch Reformed. Consequently, the postwar years saw a dissipation of internal hostilities and a period of slow growth, especially in frontier areas. For the most part, New Jersey Baptist congregations remained small and scattered, making no dramatic advances after the war.

Quakers welcomed the end of hostilities. With the fighting finished and the British gone, they were free to practice their religion without demands from both sides that they violate their principles by engaging in war. Quakers in New Jersey turned inward after the war. Quietly they emphasized the communal spirit of their religion and instructed their children in the faith. They made no attempts to convert others and, consequently, their membership failed to grow. Where the war had brought suffering to the Quakers, the postwar brought them tranquility.

For the Presbyterians, the end of the Revolution seemed to

presage a period of spectacular growth and prosperity. After all, they had supported the patriot cause, they possessed a number of vigorous leaders, their college at Princeton ranked as the leading institution of higher education in the state, and the war had not split their congregations. Yet, even though they instituted a scheme of national organization in 1781, Presbyterians could do little better than hold their own. The fact that the Presbyterians encountered difficulties, therefore, indicates the malaise which the disruption of the war created for all religious groups in New Jersey.

The general decline in religious sentiment among Jerseyites stemmed from a variety of causes. Perhaps the most important reason is that religion had been used to enhance fighting ardor during the war. Patriot ministers had exhorted their congregations to battle against the British as a sign of personal repentance and as a defense of religious and civil liberty. Now the war was won, the crusade was over. Whatever religious enthusiasm had been whipped up during the war was spent. This decline of ardor applied to Tories and pacifists as well, and in their case the emotional drain was undoubtedly compounded by some degree of cynicism and despair. Wars seldom result in moral uplift, and the Revolution, holy war though it was for some, proved no exception to that rule. Indeed, membership in organized churches in general entered a period of decline which did not reverse until the nineteenth century. Furthermore, the Revolution brought Enlightenment thought (the writings of a number of English and French authors calling upon people to question all inherited ideas) to the forefront. In terms of religion this led to the spread of deism, especially among the more educated groups in New Jersey. Deists acknowledge the existence of God, but assert that He has left the world to its own devices and never intervenes in human affairs. They also emphasize the primacy of reason as opposed to revelation for determining modes of moral behavior. Naturally, representatives of organized religion looked upon proponents of such beliefs, as well as the increasing number of agnostics (those who denied man's ability to comprehend the existence of God) with horror.

But as if moral lethargy and the rise of deism were not enough to trouble New Jersey ministers, they also faced financial woes. The Revolution left in its train statewide depression. This in turn

left many ministers with their salaries unpaid, many churches unreconstructed and many laymen uncontacted by representatives of organized churches. In short, while religion helped to make revolution in New Jersey, the Revolution failed to help make Jerseyites religious.

However, the Revolution had some positive effects on religion in New Jersey. It increased religious toleration. The constitution of 1776 provided everyone with "the inestimable privilege of worshipping God according to the dictates of his own conscience." But it imposed a religious test for office holding, which was confined to "persons professing a belief in the faith of any Protestant sect." Furthermore, the general decline of religious sentiment in New Jersey following the Revolution moved religious leaders increasingly to band together in the cooperative evangelization of society rather than to continue sectarian conflicts. Finally, the spirit of liberty inherent in the Revolution brought many Jerseyites to defend the concept of religious toleration. This laid the groundwork for the acceptance of even non-Protestants, and the first Roman Catholic church came to New Jersey in 1814 and the first Jewish synagogue in 1847.

Furthermore, the Revolution once and for all ended any attempt to organize a state church. While most Jerseyites had opposed any move in that direction prior to the Revolution, the idea now became totally unthinkable. The doctrine of separation of church and state became the law of the land, and any defense of religious orthodoxy as a test for political office disappeared.

Religion helped to cause the Revolution and motivate the troops who fought the war. The Revolution, in turn, disrupted religious life and temporarily reduced fervor, but while it may not have been "at the bottom a religious war," religion was inextricably intertwined in the cause, conduct and consequences of the Revolution in New Jersey.

### **For Further Reading**

The best general history of religion in New Jersey is Wallace N. Jamison, *Religion in New Jersey: A Brief History* (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Co., 1964), which contains a chapter on religion and revolution. William T. Hanzche, "The History of the Churches

in New Jersey" in Vol. II, *The Story of New Jersey*, ed. William Starr Myers (5 vols., New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1945) gives a good overview. Francis Bazley Lee, *New Jersey As A Colony And As A State* (4 vols., New York: Publishing Society of New Jersey, 1902), contains both a general history of religious groups and some biographical sketches. Leonard Ludin, *Cockpit of the Revolution: The War For Independence in New Jersey* (Princeton University Press, 1940; reprinted 1972 by Octagon Books, New York), is the outstanding general study of the role of New Jersey in the Revolution and provides some information regarding religion. Richard P. McCormick, *New Jersey from Colony to State 1609-1789* (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Co., 1964), is also valuable in this regard. Edward Cody, "The Growth of Toleration and Church-State Relations in New Jersey 1689-1763: From Holy Men to Holy War," in William C. Wright, ed., *Economic and Social History of Colonial New Jersey* (Trenton: New Jersey Historical Commission, 1974), sets the stage for the role of religion in the Revolution in New Jersey.

Students of colonial religion should begin by examining W. W. Sweet, *Religion in Colonial America* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1949), which provides a good overview for all the colonies. The classic study of the Quakers is Rufus M. Jones, *The Quakers in the American Colonies* (New York: Russell & Russell Publishers, 1962), while the best study of Anglicanism in New Jersey is Nelson R. Burr, *The Anglican Church in New Jersey* (Philadelphia: Church Historical Society, 1954). Leonard J. Trinterud, *The Forming of an American Tradition: A Re-examination of Colonial Presbyterianism* (Philadelphia: Books for Libraries Press, 1949), deals with the history of Presbyterianism and is invaluable to the student of religion and revolution in New Jersey. William L. Duren, *Francis Asbury: Founder of American Methodism and Unofficial Minister of State* (New York: MacMillan, 1928), is an account of Asbury's life which has relevance to the role of that denomination in the Revolution in New Jersey, and John Atkinson, *Memorials of Methodism in New Jersey* (2nd ed., Philadelphia, 1860), gives a general history of that denomination in the state. Norman H. Maring has written *Baptists in New Jersey: A Study In Transition* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 1964), which contains a discussion of New Jersey Baptists during the colonial and revolutionary

periods. Frederick L. Weis in *Colonial Clergy of the Middle Colonies: New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania, 1628-1776* (Charlottesville, Va.: University Press of Virginia, 1975), provides a wealth of biographical and background information.

There are also a number of more specific studies relevant to the topic. The standard account of the Great Awakening has been Charles H. Maxon, *The Great Awakening in the Middle Colonies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1920), but students should also be sure to read Martin E. Lodge, "The Crisis of the Church in the Middle Colonies, 1720-1750" in the *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* (April, 1971), pp. 195-220. Furthermore, James R. Tanis, *Dutch Calvinistic Pietism in the Middle Colonies: A Study in the Life and Theology of Theodore Jacobus Frelinghuysen* (The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967), is also important for an understanding of the Great Awakening as well as for the history of the Dutch Reformed Church in New Jersey. Alan Heimert, in *Religion and the American Mind: From the Great Awakening to the Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966), traces the theological split caused by the Awakening and assesses the influence of religious thought on the Revolution. Edmund Morgan provides the most explicit development of the relationship of the Revolution to the puritan ethic in "The Puritan Ethic and the Coming of the American Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 24, no. 1 (January, 1967), pp. 3-18. Students interested in this topic should also read Perry Miller, "The Moral and Psychological Roots of American Resistance," in James Ward Smith and A. Leland Jamison, eds., *The Shaping of American Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 322-350 (vol. 1 of *Religion in American Life*, 4 vols.), and Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967.) Carl Bridenbaugh in *Mitre and Sceptre: Transatlantic Faiths, Ideas, Personalities, and Politics 1689-1775* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), details the conflict between Anglicans and dissenters which helped bring about the Revolution. Milton Klein, in his lengthy introduction to his edition of William Livingston's *The Independent Reflector* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963), provides the best discussion of the King's College controversy and also gives a good account of

Livingston's life before he came to New Jersey. Sheldon S. Cohen and Larry R. Gerlach in "Princeton in the Coming of the American Revolution," *New Jersey History* (Summer 1974), vol. 92, no. 2, pp. 69-92, offer a detailed discussion of the role of Princeton students and faculty in the origins of the Revolution. John A. Todd, *Reformed (Dutch) Church in America: the Posture of its Ministers and People During the Revolution* (New York, 1877), has useful information on the Jersey Dutch split in the Revolution as does Adrian C. Leiby, "Conflict among the Jersey Dutch in the Revolution," in William C. Wright, ed., *New Jersey in the American Revolution. Political and Social Conflict*, (rev. ed., Trenton: New Jersey Historical Commission, 1974). Dennis P. Ryan, "The Revolution in East Jersey: A Whig Profile" in William C. Wright, ed., *New Jersey in the American Revolution II* (Trenton: New Jersey Historical Commission, 1973), provides useful statistical information on the political positions of members of different denominations during the Revolution. Finally, Abraham Messler in *First Things in Old Somerset* (Somerville, 1899) and Andrew D. Melick, Jr., in *The Story of an Old Farm or Life in New Jersey in the Eighteenth Century* (Somerville, 1889; reprinted as a paperback by Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 1961) both give accounts and vignettes of life in the Raritan Valley during the Revolution which throw light on the role played by religion. Also useful is Adrian C. Leiby, *The Revolutionary War In The Hackensack Valley: The Jersey Dutch and the Neutral Ground, 1775-1783* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1962).

Aside from those already cited, biographies of some of the leading individuals include Theodore Sedgwick, *A Memoir of the Life of William Livingston* (New York, 1833), and David A. Bernstein, "William Livingston: The Role of the Executive in New Jersey's Revolutionary War," in William C. Wright, ed., *New Jersey in the American Revolution II* (Trenton: New Jersey Historical Commission, 1973). A Biography of John Witherspoon is Varnum L. Collins, *President Witherspoon: A Biography* (2 vols., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1925). Students will also be interested in Louis H. Patterson's "John Hart, the New Jersey Signer," *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society*, new ser., vol. 10, no. 4 (October, 1925), pp. 375-382.

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