

*New Jersey's  
Revolutionary Experience*

**13**

*William Franklin:  
New Jersey's Last  
Royal Governor*

LARRY R. GERLACH

*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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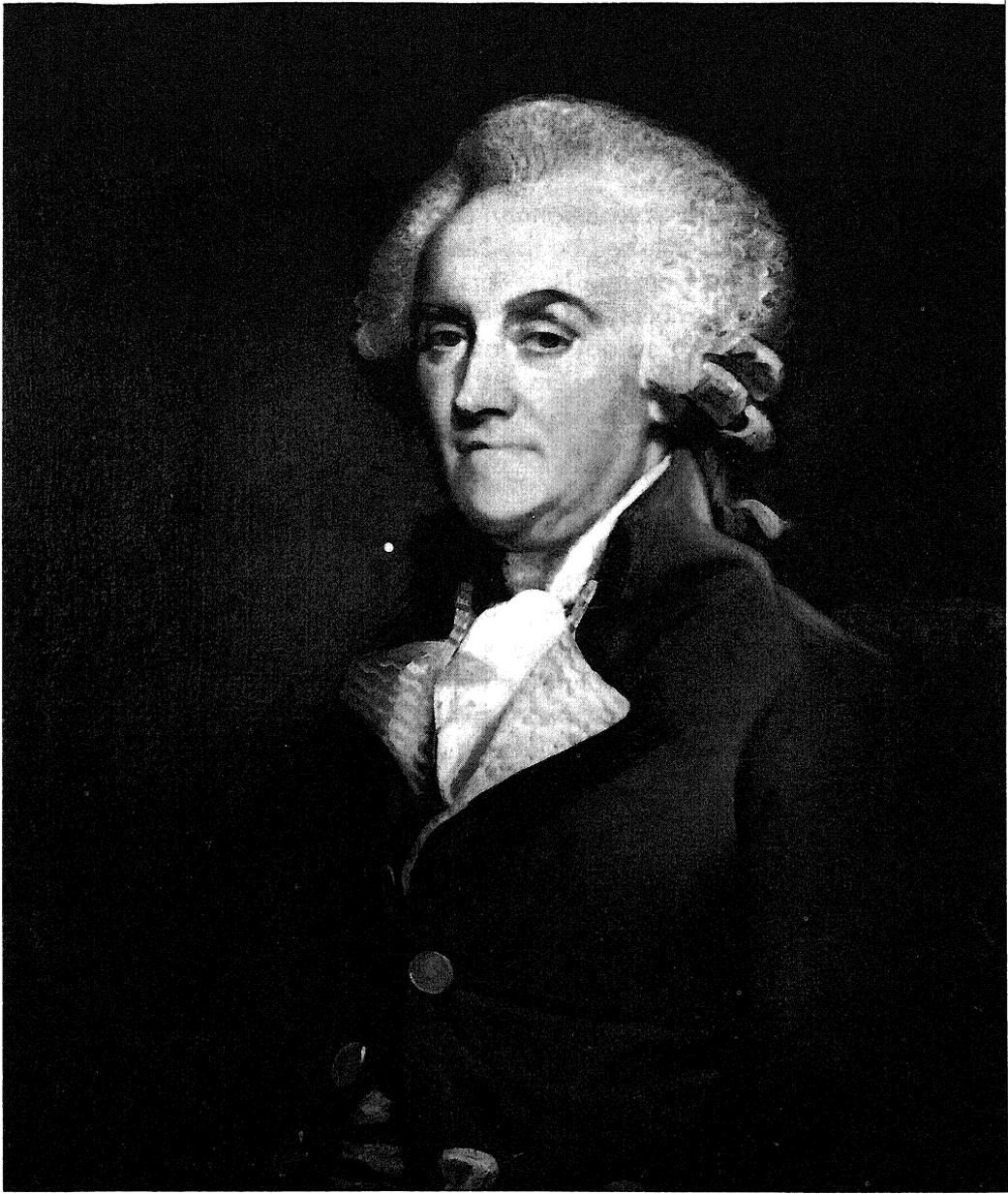
**THE NEW JERSEY AMERICAN  
REVOLUTION BICENTENNIAL  
CELEBRATION COMMISSION**

## 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.

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*William Franklin (1730[31]-1813), oil on canvas, 30 x 25, after 1780, by Mather Brown. From the New Jersey State Museum exhibition, "A Royal Province, New Jersey 1783-1776." (June 9-September 9, 1973). Collection of Mrs. J. Manderson Castle, Jr.*

The American Revolution was much more than a war for political independence from Great Britain. It was also a civil war fought by Americans of divergent political persuasions. The division between rebel and Royalist cut across ethnic, religious, economic, social and even blood lines. To illustrate the personal tragedy of families rent by the Revolution, Carl Becker, in his famous 1926 essay "The Spirit of '76," invented the fictional New Yorkers, Whig Jeremiah Wynkoop and his Tory father-in-law, Nicholas Van Shoickendinck. He might with better effect have chosen a factual portrayal of the Franklins of Philadelphia. Squarely behind the attempt to establish an independent republic was the father, Benjamin, perhaps the most illustrious American of his day; equally determined to defend the authority of the king and Parliament was the son, William, royal governor of New Jersey. The eventual success of the rebellion earned the former a prominent position in the section of the American pantheon of heroes set aside for the Founding Fathers, and ensured the latter a place in the national rogues' gallery of villains who opposed the creation of the new nation.

William Franklin deserves a better fate. Apart from an intimate involvement in the career of his illustrious father, William is a significant historical figure in his own right. He was one of the most popular and successful of all royal governors, effectively representing both the crown and the people of New Jersey from 1763 to 1776. He was also one of the most important American Loyalists, serving from 1780 to 1782 as president of the Board of Associated Loyalists headquartered in New York and from 1782 to 1790 as a chief spokesman for Royalist refugees in hearings before

the British Claims Commission. Moreover, his is the poignant story of a sensitive, dedicated, courageous man who strove to find himself amid the confusions of the world in which he lived.

Little is known of William Franklin's childhood, those formative years psychologists consider primary in shaping personality. Not even the date of his birth or the identity of his mother is known. He was probably born shortly after his father took Deborah Read Rogers as a common-law wife on September 1, 1730. Deborah may have been his mother, but he was probably born to a maid named "Barbara" or to one of the "low women" with whom his father had admittedly been "frequently" led into "intrigues" by the "hard-to-be-governed passion of youth." Perhaps it is enough to know that his father was Benjamin Franklin, for that single factor proved to be the dominant element in William's life.

By any standard of measurement, Benjamin Franklin was an extraordinary man. His personal odyssey through life, which began in 1706 as the son of a nondescript Boston tallow maker, ended in 1790 as the venerable First Citizen of the Western World. Every schoolchild knows the rags-to-riches tale of how he arrived nearly penniless in Philadelphia in 1723 to seek his fortune and how in succeeding years he achieved recognition and success as a statesman, scientist, inventor, philosopher, diplomat, publisher, educator and politician. He became a legend in his own time, the symbol of an age and model of an American. Ambitious, optimistic, brash, pragmatic, inquisitive, acquisitive, self-righteous, enlightened—any of the terms frequently used to describe the America of the eighteenth century also describe Benjamin Franklin. But there is another side to the multifaceted Mr. Franklin. A basically insecure person whose life evolved according to a series of identity crises and rebellions against authority, he was a mass of psychological contradictions. He consciously sought to cast himself in the commonplace image of the age, but longed to set himself apart from his fellow citizens; he was one of the wealthiest men of his day, but deliberately affected to be just plain Ben; he painstakingly fashioned elaborate codes of personal and ethical conduct, but violated them without hesitation; he cultivated the image of the creative intellect, but systematically adopted the ideas of others as his own; he yearned to be a Renaissance man, but at heart knew he was a gadfly.

Benjamin Franklin was at the threshold of his career at the age of twenty-four when in the span of a few months in 1730 he acquired in rapid succession his own newspaper, a wife, and a son. Billy, as William was called by the family, must have had an exciting childhood. It was never dull around the Franklin home on lower Market Street. There was constant activity in the print shop and retail store that shared the main floor. Customers were constantly coming and going as the Franklins did a thriving business, selling products ranging from medicine and stationery to food items and manufactured goods. The presses, it seemed, were perpetually in motion, turning out the *Pennsylvania Gazette* (1730-1748) and *Poor Richard's Almanack* (1732-1757) as well as an assortment of pamphlets and handbills. Things were no less hectic in the crowded second floor living quarters where Billy, his brother, sister, and parents shared bed and board with an assortment of friends, relatives, and apprentices. Outside, the hustle and bustle of Philadelphia, capital of Pennsylvania and the largest and most cosmopolitan city in North America, would entice any boy to seek adventure. Who knew what fun and fascination waited uptown near the government buildings or along the nearby Delaware River docks that drew ships and sailors from all parts of the world?

Of course Benjamin himself was the dynamic force of the household and the central character in "Will's" life. The boy was four years old when Benjamin advertised for a tutor who could "teach children Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic." No doubt the elder Franklin made sure that his son paid attention to "Poor Richard's" endless aphorisms on conduct and character. And if William probably spent wearisome hours helping mind the store or assisting in printing operations, he also undoubtedly whiled away numerous fascinating hours listening to conversations between his father and the procession of visitors, famous and obscure, who called at the house. From every indication, father and son were close companions, sharing each other's passion for books and scientific experiments.

But the Franklins' was not the best of all possible households. Although William referred to Deborah as "mother," the circumstances of his birth, always a topic of town gossip, must have weighed heavily on the young boy. The problem was compounded by the conduct of Deborah who, whether from resentment or an

acerbic personality, usually treated William with ill-disguised contempt, if not outright hostility. He may have missed the significance of his parents' great sorrow at the death of his four-year-old brother Francis Folger during a smallpox epidemic in 1736, but the sensitive twelve-year-old was surely struck by the unbridled joy and subsequent adulation that followed the birth of sister Sarah, or "Sally," in 1742. While it may be true, as Benjamin declared, that William suffered no "hard usage at home," what about the emotional implications of living with a legend, observing first-hand the eccentricities and obsessions of a man determined to leave his mark on America and even the world, and growing up under the supervision of a father who was admittedly "too indulgent a parent?" William's behavior as an adult provides insight into his childhood. For example, he evidently became sick and tired of "Poor Richard's" homilies, for there is no mention of them in his writings. And as he grew older, he increasingly rejected the codes of conduct that his father constantly preached but rarely practiced and adopted a life-style contrary to Benjamin's. Whatever their origin, anxiety, insecurity, and frustration tormented William Franklin from cradle to grave.

Whether because of domestic discord, youthful restlessness, or the martial spirit that accompanied the outbreak of war with France in 1744, William, shortly after his fifteenth birthday, decided to explore the real world for himself. In early 1746 he tried to run away from home and join the crew of a privateer. But Benjamin, who himself had run away to sea at seventeen, "fetched" an embarrassed Billy from the boat. However, in June 1746 William got permission to go off to war as an ensign in one of four Pennsylvania companies attached to an intercolonial expedition against the French. He spent the winter of 1746-1747 around Albany, New York, where he saw no military action but plenty of the inefficiency and corruption that characterized colonial military operations. Yet instead of joining the disenchanting who deserted in droves, he returned home in the spring of 1747 with the rank of captain and, according to Benjamin, "so fond of a military life, that he will by no means hear of leaving the Army." Shortly after his "military Inclinations" ended with cessation of hostilities in the spring of 1748, William joined Conrad Weiser's entourage. He was with the famous Indian trader and frontier diplomat at formal negotiations

with the trans-Appalachian tribes in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and then he joined the subsequent trading expedition into the Ohio country. The exciting experiences of the summer and fall of 1748, which had taken the sophisticated city boy into a strange new world of Indian villages and wilderness forests, made a lasting impression on young William, who never lost interest in western land speculation. He and Benjamin were long-time members of several companies engaged in land speculation ventures in New York, "Ohio" and "Indiana"; the British government never recognized their claim to the lands in question.

William was at loose ends when he returned to Philadelphia in October 1748. At this point he probably took up residence in an apartment in the print shop, now run by David Hall (a partner in the firm since January), instead of following the family to its new home in "a more quiet part of town" at the corner of Race and Second Streets. Finally away from Deborah's sharp tongue and more removed from Benjamin's pervasive influences, he at last had a taste of independence. But what about the future? He had no desire to follow in his father's footsteps and learn the printing trade; nor was he drawn to the world of business. Actually, the interests of the tall, handsome, eighteen-year-old who could spin fascinating stories about military life and the wild frontier were limited largely to women and parties. Taking advantage of Benjamin's connections and prestige, William became a familiar figure on the Philadelphia social scene.

While the son frolicked, the father frowned. In April 1750 Benjamin reported to his mother that her grandson was

now nineteen years of Age . . . and much of a beau. He acquired a Habit of idleness on the Expedition, but begins of late to apply himself to Business, and I hope will become an industrious Man. He imagined his Father had got enough for him, but I have assured him that I intend to spend what little I have myself, if it please God that I live long enough; and, as he by no means wants Sense, he can see by my going on that I am like to be as good as my Word.

But William showed no signs of accepting responsibility for his own life, and Benjamin decided to take his firstborn in tow. William's immaturity and willingness to revert to a parent-child relationship with his father would later haunt them both.

For the next twelve years Benjamin controlled the direction of

William's life. The two were virtually inseparable, and the son's career mirrored the father's. It was decided that William should be a lawyer, and Benjamin arranged for him to study with the prominent Philadelphia attorney Joseph Galloway, ordered law books from England, and negotiated William's admission to one of the Inns of Court in London where Americans of means went for legal training. When Benjamin was elected to the Pennsylvania legislature in 1751, he named William to succeed him as clerk of the assembly. When Benjamin became deputy postmaster general of North America in 1753, he appointed William to his old office of postmaster of Philadelphia and the next year promoted him to comptroller of the postal system in the northern colonies. When Benjamin took charge of the campaign to round up horses, wagons, and supplies for General Edward Braddock's ill-fated campaign against the French in the spring of 1755, William was his chief agent. When Benjamin was named that December to lead an inspection tour of Pennsylvania military posts and devise a system of defense against the French and Indians, William served as his aide-de-camp.

More than simply promoting his son's career, Benjamin was attempting to mold William in his own preferred image – for the son to be what the father could not. In 1751 he sent William to Boston to meet relatives and wrote letters introducing him to important personages en route. Like the father, the son became a Mason; both Franklins held office in the Philadelphia lodge, the elder as deputy grand master, the younger as secretary. Naturally Benjamin was pleased when William expanded his interest and involvement in scientific matters: it was apparently William who flew the kite during a driving rainstorm in June 1752 as part of the famous experiment with electricity. No doubt Benjamin was relieved when William, driven by the “passion of youth” as he had been, was apparently able to rise above “intrigues” with “low women.” William, who was described by Londoner William Strahan in 1757 as “one of the prettiest young gentlemen I ever knew from America,” cut quite a figure in Philadelphia social circles despite his low status as a bastard and the son of a nouveau riche shopkeeper-printer. He even succeeded in winning the heart of one of the most sought-after debutantes in the colony, Elizabeth Graeme, daughter of the socially prominent Anglican physician Dr. Thomas Graeme, owner

of the lavish country estate “Graeme Park” in Bucks County. As fate would have it, no sooner had William fallen in love than he left for what was to be a six-year sojourn in England.

When Benjamin Franklin sailed for London in June 1757, William went along. He would not only be of assistance to his father in lobbying with the British government on behalf of the Pennsylvania assembly in the current dispute with the Penn family over the taxation of their proprietary lands in the colony, but also would be able to complete his legal studies. Besides, Benjamin could personally supervise William’s grand tour – the leisurely travel abroad required as part of the education and refinement of a young gentleman. Benjamin’s friend, London publisher William Strahan, noted the close relationship between father and son shortly after their arrival when he wrote to Deborah that William

seems to me to have a solidity of judgment, not very often to be met with in one of his years. This, with the daily opportunity he has of improving himself in the company of his father, who is at the same time his friend, his brother, his intimate and easy companion, affords an agreeable prospect, that your husband’s virtues and usefulness to his country may be prolonged beyond the date of his own life.

William was enchanted with England. After completing his legal studies with dispatch (entering the Middle Temple in November 1757 and being called to the bar a year later), he devoted his energies to his favorite pastimes: politicking, traveling, and socializing. William served well as Benjamin’s secretary and, during his father’s periodic illnesses, as representative of the assembly in discussions with agents of the Penns and officials of the British government. The Franklins made lengthy excursions throughout England (including visits to ancestral haunts), Scotland, Flanders, and Holland, and William became part of his father’s circle of famous friends and associates, including Dr. John Fothergill, Peter Collinson, Sir John Pringle, Richard Jackson, David Hume, Lord Kames, and Adam Smith. When Oxford University conferred an honorary Doctor of Civil Law degree upon Benjamin in 1762, William was awarded a master of arts degree. Distracted by the “Pleasures of London,” William soon forgot his American friends, including Elizabeth Graeme. He became something of a dandy, spending huge sums on fine clothes, frequenting the coffeehouses, and appearing at countless parties.

Father and son must have traded knowing glances when an unknown woman in 1760 presented William with a child, William Temple. Ironically, the two most important events of the entire stay in England occurred just after Benjamin had left for America in late August 1762: William took the hand of socialite Elizabeth Downes in marriage on September 4 and, five days later, the oath of office as governor of New Jersey.

News of William Franklin's selection to succeed Josiah Hardy as governor of New Jersey created a stir in both England and America. Family friends were delighted, political foes outraged, and the public at large apprehensive because of William's reputation for ribaldry, his bastard status, and his lack of executive experience. It was true, as many charged, that William owed his new post to his father's influence in the British government and that the ministry of Charles Stuart, the Earl of Bute, made the nomination primarily to gain favor with the elder Franklin. But the controversial appointment, if unexpected, was not unreasonable. The younger Franklin was eminently more qualified for the governorship than his predecessor. His experience in Pennsylvania in the 1750s made William wise in the ways of partisan politics and provincial government, knowledgeable about military affairs and Indian diplomacy, and familiar with routine administrative duties. While in England he had learned much about the relationship between British and American politics as well as the realities of imperial administration. He had also acquired numerous friends with influence in ministerial circles. Besides, his father was the illustrious Benjamin Franklin. When William arrived in New Jersey to assume office in February 1763, Benjamin was at his side; all expected that the good doctor would be the power behind the Jersey governorship. They were mistaken.

The governorship marked the beginning of the maturation of thirty-two-year-old William Franklin. He consulted frequently with his father during the early days of his administration, but was literally and figuratively on his own when Benjamin sailed for England in 1764, not to return for eleven years. For the first time William was not a subordinate, but a decision maker whose future depended on personal merit rather than parental prestige. He began to acquire the self-confidence and establish the independence previously lacking in his life. Of course Benjamin had passed on to his son more than the genes that produced a striking physical resemblance

between the two men; William's acquisition of a large library, his pursuit of scientific investigations, and his involvement in numerous real estate schemes reflect Benjamin's influence. But William also cultivated his own life-style. The playboy went domestic, pampering his wife, cultivating the image of a devoted husband, and even fretting about a steadily expanding waistline. (Because of political and social considerations, he left his illegitimate son in England until 1775.) His penchant for the good life found expression in elegant household furnishings and a fine wardrobe, a country estate of almost six hundred acres near Burlington, lavish dinner parties and dances, and an aristocratic demeanor and elitist brand of politics. Still, William was not entirely his own man. The dark cloud of his birth and the shadow cast by his father threatened to eclipse him throughout his gubernatorial career: as chief magistrate William Franklin was driven by a near obsession to prove himself and receive independent recognition for his accomplishments.

There are two dimensions to William Franklin's performance as governor. In provincial affairs he fashioned a record of popularity and achievement perhaps unmatched by any other North American governor. With skill and aplomb, he discharged the duties of chief executive, commander of the provincial militia, and officer of the courts of error and appeals, chancery, and prerogative. More than an able administrator, he was an astute politician who proved adept at dealing with the factionalism of Jersey politics. Although a transplanted Jerseyman, Franklin soon took the colony to heart. Whether by proposing beneficial legislation or providing effective executive leadership, he labored to make good his inaugural pledge "to promote the true Interests of the Province. . . and to increase by every Means in my Power, the general Welfare and Happiness of its People." Consequently, he enjoyed great popularity with the people at large and pervasive influence among ranking political figures. As he himself remarked in August 1765: "The utmost Harmony subsists between the several Branches of the Legislature. . . . All is Peace and Quietness, & likely to remain so."

Franklin was a good—but also fortunate—governor. Because government in New Jersey was a low-key affair, he escaped many problems his arrogance, impatience, stubbornness, and fiery temper might have provoked. Moreover, his political power was due largely to the unstructured, diffuse nature of politics in New Jersey: he

would have fared less well with the system of family alliances in Virginia, the rudimentary parties in Massachusetts, or the cohesive factions in New York and Pennsylvania. Then, too, the political stakes in the markedly rural province, which had neither frontier regions nor urban-commercial centers of note, were relatively small; except for the East Jersey land riots of the 1740s, the colony was spared the internal turmoil and bitter political infighting that frequently erupted elsewhere. The most serious provincial problems Franklin confronted during his administration were disputes over the location of county courthouses and the allegedly excessive fees charged by lawyers. Circumstance as well as ability combined to make William Franklin the most popular and successful chief magistrate in colonial New Jersey history.

But he was less successful in his role as the chief representative of British authority in the province. Like every royal governor, Franklin faced the impossible task of simultaneously serving two masters—the people of New Jersey and the British government. The interests and desires of the two constituencies were often incompatible, sometimes irreconcilable. He learned that truth as he struggled for more than a decade to implement controversial imperial programs in the province and prevent the destruction of the First British Empire.

The smooth sailing generally enjoyed by Franklin at the outset of his administration ended amid the storm of protest caused by the Stamp Act of 1765. For two years he had observed growing opposition to various aspects of the new British colonial program instituted after the end of the French and Indian War (1756-1763), including reform of the customs service, prohibition of colonial legal tender, imposition of duties on imported molasses, and establishment of garrisons manned by British soldiers in the western territories acquired from France. Smoldering resentment, compounded by postwar recession, came to a head when Parliament in March 1765 imposed a stamp tax on a wide variety of items ranging from legal documents and publications such as newspapers and almanacs to dice and playing cards. The Stamp Act crisis of 1765-1766 presented William Franklin with his first real test as governor.

During the summer of 1765 Jerseymen pondered the constitutional implications of taxation by a body in which they were

not actually represented and noted the increasingly militant and sometimes violent measures taken in other colonies to oppose the revenue measure. Finally, by early fall, covert, isolated opposition became overt and widespread. The provincial stamp distributor, William Coxe, a personal friend of the Franklins who had secured the post because of Benjamin's influence, resigned his commission on September 2 because of the hostile political climate. On the nineteenth lawyers from all parts of the province gathered in Perth Amboy and agreed to suspend all legal and judicial transactions requiring the use of stamps or stamped paper until the tax was repealed. On the twenty-first there appeared in Woodbridge the one and only issue of the *Constitutional Courant*, a pseudo-newspaper that contained inflammatory attacks on the Stamp Act and its supporters. A week later the students of the College of New Jersey (later Princeton University) used the annual commencement exercises as a forum for political protest. In early October about a dozen members of the New Jersey assembly met without Franklin's knowledge in a rump session at Robert Sproul's Perth Amboy tavern to reverse an earlier decision in June not to send representatives to the intercolonial conference scheduled for the seventh in New York City. The protest intensified after adjournment on October 24 of the Stamp Act Congress, which among other things had issued a forceful declaration of American rights and grievances. In mass meetings Jerseymen vowed to "discountenance and discourage by all lawful Measures, the Execution and Effect of the Stamp Act" and denounced "all and every Stamp Pimp, Informer, Favourer, and Encourager of the said Act." A boycott of British manufactured goods also went into effect. In early November, Robert Ogden, who had attended the New York meeting but had refused to sign its provocative proceedings, was hanged in effigy throughout East Jersey and forced to resign as Speaker of the House. On November 30 the assembly adopted a series of protest resolves that flatly condemned the Stamp Act as an unconstitutional abridgment of American liberties.

It was a thoroughly frustrated William Franklin who finally recognized that the Stamp Act, scheduled to become operative on November 1, was a dead letter in New Jersey. The governor was angry at what he considered to be a personal betrayal by Coxe and resentful of the failure of his superiors in England to provide any

instructions for dealing with the crisis in governance. He was annoyed by his failure to read the mood of the people accurately. Confident that the Stamp Act would be “quietly carried into Execution” in the colony, he had been “not a little Surpriz’d” by the intensity and magnitude of the protest against it. He was also disappointed by his inability to control the course of events in New Jersey. “The Infection has Spread,” he lamented, “and a great Part of the Inhabitants of this Colony are now become actuated with the same kind of spirit which before raged so furiously in the neighbouring Provinces.” Although Jerseymen had not “proceeded to the same Length in Acts of Riot & Violence” as elsewhere, the governor admitted that “the most prudent Management has been, & still is, necessary to prevent them.” And he was especially embarrassed by the repeated reversals of policy decisions. Franklin requested royal troops from General Thomas Gage to maintain order but then concurred with the Provincial Council (the upper house of the colonial legislature) that the presence of soldiers would only make matters worse. He was determined to secure the stamps and stamped paper in the province but ultimately had to arrange for their storage aboard a warship in Delaware Bay. He was opposed to calling the legislature in the wake of the Stamp Act Congress but upon reconsideration acknowledged that it would be “prudent” to issue the summons.

After criticizing the members of the assembly at the close of the four-day special session on November 30 “in pretty strong Terms” for showing “a greater Regard to Popularity than to their own Judgment” in attending and endorsing the extralegal gathering at Sproul’s Tavern, Franklin abandoned all efforts to implement the hated Stamp Act. Fearful at one point that he might be “burnt in Effigy. . . & . . my Effects destroyed,” he reasoned that “for any Man to set himself up as an Advocate for the S. Act in the Colonies is a meer Piece of Quixotism, & can answer no good Purpose whatever.” Since he personally disliked the statute, had received no directives from London, and saw no likelihood of the protest abating, he concluded that “we might legally go on with Business in the usual Way, as much as if the Stamps had never been sent, or had been lost at Sea.” His dual objective during the winter of 1765-1766 was “to steer clear of giving any Umbrage to the People here, & of embarrassing myself with the Ministry in England.” While the

suspension of legal and judicial activities continued, the boycott of British goods remained in force; the Sons of Liberty organized to direct the protest, and William Franklin sat back awaiting Britain's response. At long last, in May the welcome news that Parliament had repealed the Stamp Act on March 18 ended the turmoil that had racked New Jersey for almost a year.

William Franklin's performance during the Stamp Act controversy revealed his gubernatorial inexperience and ignorance of the nature of intercolonial politics and imperial administration. Unsure of himself, he corresponded frequently with his father and consulted often with his council; but neither Benjamin, who had opportunistically become an outspoken critic of the act, nor the councillors, who were sensitive to political realities, could offer much real assistance. Nor did the hoped-for instructions from London arrive until after the first of the year. Despite the inevitable disappointments and setbacks, the governor learned valuable lessons that would serve him well. Unable to rely on others for support or advice, he now appreciated the necessity of acting swiftly and decisively on his own. He understood how bureaucratic inefficiency and British party politics could color and complicate imperial administration. He recognized that events occurring elsewhere in America, especially in the neighboring provinces of New York and Pennsylvania, could have a profound impact on the thoughts and actions of Jerseymen. He realized that private persuasion was a technique more effective than open confrontation for a governor lacking sufficient power and authority to impose his own wishes or royal measures upon an unwilling public. Finally, notwithstanding the joyous celebrations that greeted repeal of the Stamp Act, he knew well that Americans would not soon forget the motives and methods of the recent protest movement; he also feared that the passage of the Declaratory Act of March 18, 1766, which asserted the authority of Parliament to legislate for America "in all cases whatsoever," would spark future Anglo-American controversies.

For William Franklin, 1767 was a year of recurring problems. Rumors, apparently instigated by the Proprietary Party in Pennsylvania, circulated widely to the effect that he would soon be replaced as governor, probably by William Skinner, colonel in the Royal Army, son-in-law of Admiral Sir Peter Warren, and brother of

New Jersey Attorney General Cortlandt Skinner. Although Franklin dismissed such talk as improbable, he was concerned about his political future. He was also worried about his wife's frequent illnesses; three times in six months Elizabeth had been sick in bed. He was further troubled by the courtship of his sister, Sarah, and Richard Bache, a young English-born Philadelphia merchant who was known to be in considerable debt; apparently his disapproval of the match was so great that he declined to attend "Sally's" marriage in October. His public career was no less burdensome than his private life. In addition to the seemingly endless paperwork and perfunctory responsibilities that went with being a governor, Franklin labored over detailed special reports for the ministry on the income of government officials and the state of manufacturing in New Jersey. And he found himself embroiled in what was to become an annual dispute with the assembly over the appropriation of funds to quarter British troops stationed in Jersey en route to or from western posts. To top it off, Parliament, under the leadership of Chancellor of the Exchequer Charles Townshend, adopted a provocative legislative package for America. In June Parliament passed laws creating a Board of Customs Commissioners resident in Boston to crack down on violations of the imperial commercial codes and levying import duties on glass, paint, lead, paper, and tea to pay for the defense of North America and, where necessary, the salaries of colonial officials. To complete the Townshend program, three additional vice-admiralty courts, which operated without juries, were established in December to supplement the existing tribunal of Halifax, Nova Scotia.

With the enactment of the Townshend duties, William Franklin once again found himself caught between American resistance and royal authority. As he pointedly remarked to Lord Hillsborough, secretary of the American department, passage of the revenue act

immediately rekindled the Flame that had subsided from the Time of the Stamp Act, and has occasioned as general Dissatisfaction and Uneasiness as ever prevailed among any People. . . . Mens Minds are sour'd, a sullen Discontent prevails, and, in my Opinion, no Force on Earth is sufficient to make the Assemblies acknowledge. . . that the Parliament has a Right to impose Taxes on America.

Franklin spoke for all Jerseymen. For nearly three years they

joined fellow Americans in sending protest petitions to England, staging public demonstrations, and boycotting British products until finally gratified in April 1770 with removal of all of the duties except the tax on tea, which was retained as a symbol of Parliamentary authority. While the substance of the protest was essentially the same as during the Stamp Act crisis, Franklin's task of maintaining order was much easier than in 1765-1766. Instead of disobedience and defiance, Jerseymen complied with the provisions of the law but coupled constitutional protestation with economic sanctions in seeking its repeal. The few acts of violence and disorder which occurred in the colony were directed against individuals rather than the authority of the royal regime. Ironically, it was not American protesters but British officials who now caused Franklin fits.

From 1768 to 1771 William Franklin was engaged in a running battle with the American Board of Customs Commissioners in Boston and John Hatton, revenue officer of the port of Salem and Cohansey. Hatton repeatedly charged that local magistrates were interfering with his efforts to enforce imperial commercial codes, but hearings conducted by the governor and council invariably concluded that the allegations were false, that Hatton was both derelict in his duty and in collusion with Philadelphia smugglers, and that his peevish personality and private feuds lay behind his difficulties. But though the antics of the cantankerous collector irritated Franklin, the conduct of the commissioners outraged him. They regularly reminded him of his responsibility for ensuring compliance with the trade laws and requested additional information regarding Hatton's complaints; on one occasion they even conducted their own investigation of the collector's performance.

More serious was the run-in with Wills Hill, the Earl of Hillsborough, who had assumed in early 1768 the newly created post of secretary of state for the American department. He promptly censured Franklin in the summer of 1768 for "a very blameable Inattention to. . . Duty" in failing to prevent the New Jersey assembly from sending a petition to the king protesting the Townshend duties in May 1768. The governor exploded over the "unmerited" reprimand. In the course of a thirty-page rebuttal, Franklin pointed out that he had first learned of the assembly's action from the printed minutes of the lower house and that he had not received

Hillsborough's orders to prevent consideration of the proposal until after the close of the legislative session. He also stated that "however blameable" its conduct might have been the New Jersey assembly was not "singular" in challenging parliamentary taxation, and that Hillsborough was profoundly ignorant of the state of American affairs. Although neither correspondent mentioned the matter again, unmistakable tension marked future relations between the two officers of the crown.

An invitation from Indian Superintendent Sir William Johnson to participate in treaty negotiations with the Iroquois at Fort Stanwix, New York, in the fall of 1768 brought a three-month respite from the problems that swirled about him. Franklin probably appreciated in more ways than one the gesture of the Oneida chief who gave him the name "Sagorighweyoghsta" (Great Arbitrator of Justice). These were trying times for Franklin. As he approached forty, he must have wondered about his lot in life.

First, there were the ever-present personal problems. He worried about Elizabeth's frail health. He regularly sent food and money to his favorite aunt, Jane Mecom, in Boston, and came to the financial rescue of her ne'er-do-well and mentally unstable sons, John and Benjamin. He agonized over his own son, William Temple, who was growing up in England under Benjamin's supervision. Pathetically, he asked Benjamin's opinion about bringing Temple to New Jersey so that the youngster "might then take his proper Name, and be introduced as the Son of a poor Relation for whom I stood Godfather, and intended to bring up as my own." Elizabeth knew nothing of the child and William was psychologically unprepared to acknowledge him; Temple remained in England until 1775.

Moreover, Franklin's public career was becoming increasingly troublesome. Despite his justifiable pride in the record of his administration, he feared that the increasing intransigence of the assembly combined with Hillsborough's obvious enmity for himself and Benjamin would cost him the governorship. The Stamp Act crisis had destroyed the spirit of accord between governor and assembly. While the legislators continued to respect Franklin's political and administrative ability, the injection of imperial issues into provincial politics necessarily drove a wedge between the spokesmen of the people and the representative of the crown.



*Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790), oil on canvas, oval 28½ x 23, 1778, by Joseph Siffred Duplessis. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. The Michael Friedsam Collection, 1931.*

From 1766 to 1771 Franklin and the assemblymen battled annually over appropriations to quarter and supply royal troops temporarily stationed in the province: the governor tried to enforce the terms of the Mutiny Act of 1765, but the legislators, resentful of having to provide for more soldiers than any other colony and fearful of the potential problems posed by the presence of the military, refused to comply with the letter of the law. The issue of the colonial agent caused a similar polarization of positions: Franklin upheld the ministerial view that the unofficial lobbyist in London should be appointed by all branches of the legislature, but the lower house claimed sole authority over the agency. Disagreement over such basic issues as the salaries of public officials and the prerogatives of the lower house was to be expected, but when such a peripheral episode as the robbery of the East Jersey Treasury in 1768 turned into a six-year struggle between governor and assembly over the appointment of provincial treasurers, there was no doubt that the executive and legislative branches of the New Jersey government were at loggerheads. Franklin even lost when he sided with the assembly. When the British government persistently vetoed much-needed paper money bills passed by the legislature from 1768 to 1770 because of a narrow interpretation of the Currency Act of 1764 which prevented colonial assemblies from issuing legal tender, Franklin put his reputation on the line by supporting the legislation and striving to effect a deal that would trade the issue of new currency for military appropriations. He was unsuccessful and for his pains lost prestige and influence with both the colonial legislature and the imperial government. Franklin must have wondered more than once if his annual salary of £ 750 plus sundry fees (together about £ 1200, the lowest income of any North American governor) was worth the constant and often bitter confrontations with stubborn assemblymen and equally headstrong ministers.

Indeed, William Franklin was at the crossroads of his gubernatorial career in the early 1770s. More than the recurring clashes with the assembly, he was fed up with the British government. Although he had "on no occasion given up a single point of the Crown's Prerogative," he generally found himself in agreement with the American position. He had little confidence in the ability of British bureaucrats to devise meaningful programs for

America. The governor made it a point to register his opposition to parliamentary taxation and the decision to send troops to Boston in 1768 as a peacekeeping force, and he let it be known that he considered the ministry to have been unreasonable in dealing with the New Jersey legislature on money bills and quartering appropriations. He also resented what he felt was unwarranted interference in provincial affairs by imperial authorities and chaffed at an apparent lack of confidence in his executive ability and personal integrity by superiors. And he was tired of the constant snubs from Hillsborough. William again turned increasingly to his father for support, even to the point of sending official dispatches for his approval before presentation to the ministry. But after the New Jersey assembly appointed Benjamin to the post of colonial agent in 1769 William often found himself the victim of divided loyalties between father and king.

Consequently, when Benjamin Franklin was censured, stripped of his government posts, and nearly kicked out of England in early 1774 because of his involvement in sending stolen letters written by Massachusetts Governor Thomas Hutchinson to Boston for use by the radicals, William lost his most important connection in British governmental circles. Shortly after his public hearing and reprimand, Benjamin advised William to retire to his Burlington farm since "there is no Prospect of your being ever promoted to a better government." Besides, the life of a gentleman farmer was "an honest and more honourable . . . more independent Employment." William thought about it. The pastoral life was appealing. In recent years he had devoted increased attention to agricultural pursuits, to the activities of the Anglican Church, and, most of all, to the attempts of the land companies in which he and Benjamin were members to obtain real estate rights in western New York and the Ohio Valley. On the other hand, the governorship brought him prestige, and the irascible Hillsborough had been replaced as secretary of state for the American department by the conciliatory William Legge, Earl of Dartmouth. Furthermore, if William ever seriously considered resigning as governor, he abandoned those thoughts in the aftermath of the Boston Tea Party.

The destruction of three shiploads of tea belonging to the East India Company by a band of Boston radicals disguised as

“Mohawks” in December 1773 and the reaction of the British government the following spring renewed the Anglo-American troubles that had diminished after 1770. Jerseymen, like other Americans, generally disapproved of the violent tactics used to protest the Tea Act of 1773 and the Townshend tea tax of 1767. But they deplored Parliament’s retaliatory legislation, which closed the port of Boston pending restitution for the tea, revised certain governmental and judicial procedures in the Bay Colony, and facilitated the deployment of troops to maintain law and order. Throughout the spring and summer mass meetings were held in New Jersey to denounce the so-called “Coercive” or “Intolerable” acts, pledge support for the Massachusetts martyrs suffering in “the common cause,” collect foodstuffs and cash to assist the beleaguered Bostonians, and form committees to correspond with similar groups in other towns and counties. On July 21 representatives from the various county committees gathered in New Brunswick to select delegates to the general congress of the colonies scheduled for Philadelphia in September.

Once again William Franklin found himself in a difficult situation. As before, prudence governed his behavior. He considered the Massachusetts acts ill advised but thought either the Bay Colony or the town of Boston should make compensation for the destroyed tea as a way of doing “Justice before they ask it of others.” He refused to call the General Assembly (a joint session of both houses of the legislature) during the height of the controversy, but neither made any pronouncement on the latest imperial crisis nor took any steps to counter the activities of the county meetings or prevent the appointment of delegates to the Continental Congress. Indeed, as he remarked to Dartmouth in reporting the proliferation of protest demonstrations: “Meetings of this nature there are no Means of preventing where the chief Part of the Inhabitants incline to attend them.” As for the Congress, he thought considerable good might result from a general gathering held “to fall upon measures for accommodating the present differences between the two countries, and preventing the like in the future.” But even more than an ad hoc conclave chosen haphazardly by assemblies and extralegal committees, Franklin felt that an inter-colonial conference “properly organized by His Majesty, and consisting of the several Governors, & some Members of the

Council and Assembly in each Province, would be productive of the most beautiful Consequences to the British Empire in general” – particularly if attended by “some Gentlemen of Abilities, Moderation and Candour from Great Britain commissioned. . . for that Purpose.”

William Franklin’s hopes for a resolution of the conflict between Great Britain and America came to naught. The ministry failed to act on his imaginative proposal for an Anglo-American conference, and the First Continental Congress widened the breach between the mother country and the colonies. In addition to the anticipated action of issuing protest petitions, formulating declarations of rights and grievances, and instituting a boycott of British goods, the Congress presented Americans with a crisis of allegiance by recommending the creation of special committees at the town and county level to enforce its extralegal directives in opposition to those of the duly constituted government. The congressional program went into effect with remarkable ease in New Jersey mainly because it enjoyed the support of the majority of the people but also because, as Franklin admitted, those who opposed the Continental Association were afraid to speak out for fear of becoming “Objects of popular Resentment, from which it is not in the power of Government here to protect them.” For his part the governor, who again had received no specific instructions from the ministry or even an inkling of how Parliament might react to the challenge of the Congress, hoped to maintain a low profile and wait out the current storm. But that was impossible, since governmental affairs required a meeting of the legislature in January 1775.

Franklin’s performance during the legislative session illustrates how far he had progressed as governor since the troublesome days a decade ago. Aware that the assembly, which had not met since March 1774, would take a stand on the imperial conflict, he nonetheless hoped to influence its action. He hoped to prevent the lower house from endorsing the action of the Continental Congress, or at least to persuade the assembly to send its own petition to the king instead of acquiescing in the common resolves of the Congress. His masterful opening address revealed his strategy. Stressing that he did not presume “to decide on the particular Merits of the Dispute between Great Britain and her Colonies” or intend “to censure those who conceive themselves

aggrieved, for aiming at a Redress of their Grievances,” Franklin declared that “All that I would wish to guard you against is the giving any Countenance or Encouragement to that destructive mode of Proceeding which has been unhappily adopted in Part by some of the Inhabitants of this Colony, and has been carried so far in others as totally to subvert their former Constitution.” Should they approve extralegal protest activities, he warned, “you will do as much as lies in your Power to destroy that Form of Government of which you are an important Part, and which it is your Duty by all lawful Means to preserve.” He then adroitly put the assemblymen on the spot: they were at a crossroads, he declared, and must choose whether to take the fork “evidently leading to Peace, Happiness, and a Restoration of the Public Tranquility” or the one “inevitably conducting you to Anarchy, Misery, and all the Horrors of a Civil War.”

It appeared at first as if Franklin’s forceful remarks would have the desired effect on the representatives, for most Jerseymen preferred moderation and restraint to radicalism. But members of the New Jersey congressional delegation quickly repaired to Perth Amboy to convince the assemblymen that a united front was essential to obtain satisfaction from the crown, and on January 24 the assembly went on record in support of the proceedings of the Congress. On February 13, after heated debate, the lower house adopted a statement of rights and grievances to be sent to George III. Always a poor loser, the governor flatly refused his duty to forward the petition to the crown; ironically, it was then sent to the assembly’s London agent, Benjamin Franklin. The depths of William’s anger surfaced in a letter to Joseph Galloway in which he asserted that he was “fully convinced” he could account for the “very extraordinary Conduct” of the assembly in “no other Way” than that it was “the Determination of the principal Demagogues of Faction to oppose every Thing which may have even the remotest Tendency to conciliate Matters in an amicable Way, & to omit nothing which may have any Chance of widening the Breach.”

At first glance it appears that the tirade was unfair. After all, the action of the assemblymen was neither surprising nor different from that taken by legislators in every other colony, and the governor had defended them before in a similar situation. But closer inspection suggests that William’s outburst resulted from increasing pressures

from several sources. In September he became “very furious” over the public disclosure of the contents of a letter he had written to Strahan in May which professed support for the British government in its action against Massachusetts. Printed excerpts of the letter created a stir throughout America and even prompted a letter from Aunt Jane Mecom in Boston expressing hopes that the account was a “hored lie.” It was not, of course, and as Britain and America drew further apart so too did William and Benjamin Franklin. Correspondence between them was overly affectionate in discussing personal matters, perhaps to compensate for the growing tension in their political comments. At one point the elder Franklin chided his son for suggesting that the Bostonians pay for the tea and concluded: “But you who are a thorough Courtier, see everything with Government Eyes.” It must have hurt. The news that Deborah Franklin had died of a stroke on December 19 and the decision later the same month that Benjamin would finally bring Temple to America when he left England in the spring of 1775 also took an emotional toll. But mostly William was angry at the assembly because he recognized long before most people that the Americans were no longer engaged in protest or resistance but rebellion. Local committees were openly coercing citizens and taking the law into their own hands. To the conservative governor disrespect for government was bad enough, but disregard of the law was intolerable. As early as December 1774 he had concluded that Congress had left Britain no choice but “either to consent to what must appear humiliating in the Eyes of all Europe, or compel Obedience to her Laws by a Military Force.”

Whatever the circumstances, William’s analysis of the political situation was correct. During the early months of 1775 the British government dispatched military and naval reinforcements to North America to back up Prime Minister Frederick, Lord North’s offer to refrain from future American taxes if the colonials would raise their own revenue. Americans also began to prepare for any military contingency. When British regulars and Massachusetts militiamen exchanged shots across Lexington Green on April 19, the war that would have broken out sooner or later was on.

The tocsin of war that rang so loudly in New Jersey carried an ominous message for William Franklin. As the chief representative of the crown and the principal symbol of royal authority, his

situation was tenuous if not precarious. He probably viewed the band of Monmouth committeemen and militia “arm’d with Firelocks” that boldly paraded “with Colours Drum & Fife” past his mansion in Perth Amboy on May 4 as an omen of things to come. At least he made no effort in a report to Dartmouth two days later to conceal his outrage that in sending the army to Lexington and Concord Gage had taken such precipitous action as could only lessen the chances of a peaceful resolution of the imperial dispute; in fact, because of the bloodshed, Franklin felt “an amicable Accommodation will be with Difficulty, if at all, effected at this time.” Moreover, he reported that the outbreak of hostility had “occasioned such an Alarm and excited so much Uneasiness among the People. . . that there is Danger of their committing some outrageous Violences before the present Heats can subside.” The state of the province was critical. Jerseymen were “taking uncommon Pains to perfect themselves in Military Discipline,” and “Every Day new Alarms are spread, which have a Tendency to keep the Minds of the People in a continual Ferment, make them suspicious, and prevent their paying any Attention to the Dictates of sober Reason and common Sense.” “All legal Authority and Government seems to be drawing to an End here,” he lamented, “and that of Congresses, Conventions, and Committees establishing in their Place.”

The governor was no pessimistic prophet of doom and gloom. During the summer and fall of 1775 the Continental Congress moved to assume control of the armed rebellion. While colonial forces in the field took on the British at Fort Ticonderoga and Bunker Hill, the delegates in Philadelphia issued a declaration setting forth the reasons for taking up arms, formed a Continental army under George Washington, and issued currency to finance military operations. Its program was mirrored in New Jersey by the Provincial Congress, the capstone of the extralegal political hierarchy that now paralleled the structure of the royal regime. Meeting for the first time in Trenton on May 23, the Provincial Congress moved swiftly to usurp the royal government’s authority by circulating a loyalty oath known as the Provincial Association, organizing and equipping the militia, issuing currency, levying taxes, and establishing machinery for future elections. By late fall New Jersey had taken on the appearance of an armed camp and the Provincial Congress had replaced the assembly as the source of

effective government in the colony.

Perhaps even more than other defenders of the crown, Franklin was alarmed that the rebels showed no signs of “a Disposition to promote conciliatory Measures.” One of many haunted by the “Dread” fear that “some of the Leaders of the people are aiming to establish a Republic,” he felt that if the British decided to seek a military solution, the Continental Congress “will immediately, in open and formal Manner, assume the sole Government of these Colonies, and declare their present Constitutions dissolved.” Personal safety as well as politics was involved in his apprehensions. By autumn royal authority had diminished in the province to the point where “all Government is nearly laid prostrate, and the public Officers from the highest to the lowest are now only on Suffrance, as it were.” He was alarmed by persistent talk that royal officials were to be “seized and detained as Hostages,” and was disconcerted that Gage had not sent a warship to Raritan Bay to serve as a refuge “in Case of Necessity.” William Franklin clearly faced a dilemma: “I am loath to desert my Station,” he told Dartmouth,

as my Continuance in it is a Means of Keeping up some Appearance of Government, and Matters may possibly take such a Turn as to put it in my Power to do some service. On the other Hand it would mortify me extremely to be seized upon and led like a Bear through the Country to some Place of Confinement in New England.

Yet his decision was never in doubt. Although the rebels were rifling the mails, he would continue to send intelligence to the American secretary and “let the Event be what it may, I shall not attempt to quit the Province as long as I have any Chance of continuing in it in Safety.”

In the waning months of 1775 William Franklin felt increasingly isolated and alone. The Provincial Council, the close-knit group of advisers upon whom he had relied so heavily for advice over the years, was disintegrating through resignations and defections, both overt, as with William Alexander, the self-styled Lord Stirling, who accepted a colonelcy in the Somerset County militia, and covert, as with John Stevens, Francis Hopkinson and Richard Stockton, whose attachment to the rebellion was obvious (the latter two signed the Declaration of Independence). Even his personal secretary, Charles Pettit, gave primary allegiance to the

rebels. Moreover, Benjamin's return to America in May with Temple served only to complete the alienation of father and son. During their first reunion, the elder Franklin, the "glass having gone about freely," openly declared himself for independence and tried to persuade William to join the American cause. William refused and resumed the role of royal governor, while Benjamin immersed himself in the politics of rebellion as a member of the Continental Congress and president of the Pennsylvania Council of Safety. Correspondence between the two men slackened and, after a heated argument in November, ceased. They would not meet again until after the revolutionary war. In the spring of 1774 William had written to Dartmouth that "His Majesty may be assured that I shall omit nothing in my Power to keep this Province quiet, and that, let the event be what it may, No Attachments or Connexions shall ever make me swerve from the Duty of my Station." He meant it, and in refusing to join his father in rebellion, William Franklin at last achieved his own independence.

Determined "to keep up some Appearance of Government" amid growing talk of independence, the governor met with the General Assembly on November 16. It was a most remarkable session, one that demonstrated both William's consummate political skill and the essential moderation of the Jersey rebellion. The members of the lower house made the usual appropriation of funds to operate the royal regime, appointed a new colonial agent in London, and declined to name replacements for the two Continental Congress delegates who had resigned. Even more remarkably, they went on record stating that royal officials were in "no Danger" (provided they conducted themselves "so prudently as not to invite ill-Usage"), dropped further consideration of the Franklin-Dartmouth letter that had appeared in the *Parliamentary Register* and had caused such a stir in the previous session, and adopted three resolutions disavowing independence. Had it not been for the appearance of a congressional delegation from Philadelphia who "harrangued the House for about an Hour," the assembly would probably have adopted a petition to the king "humbly beseeching him to use his Interposition to prevent the Effusion of Blood; and to express the great Desire this House hath to a Restoration of Peace and Harmony with the parent State on constitutional Principles."

At a time when the other royal governors had been driven from their provinces or rendered ineffective by the rebels, William Franklin had delivered a public address and extracted concessions from his rebel-dominated assembly that would have been impossible elsewhere. But he knew that the legislative “victory” was more apparent than real and that the Provincial Congress still exercised effective authority in New Jersey. He also knew that each passing day brought the colonies closer to a formal break with Britain. If the governor had any doubts that he was a marked man, they were shattered by the “violent Knocking” at his door about 2 a.m. on January 8 by a “large Party of Men armed with Guns & Bayonets” under the command of Lieutenant Colonel William Winds. The troops had been sent to Perth Amboy to arrest Franklin and Attorney General Cortlandt Skinner by Colonel Alexander after he had intercepted their mail and discovered correspondence inimical to the American cause. Skinner fled into exile, but Franklin, who boldly challenged the authority of the guard that surrounded his home, was taken into custody two days later. Only the intercession of Chief Justice Frederick Smyth and the lingering influence of his rebel father secured his release.

William Franklin exhibited remarkable fortitude during and after the ordeal. Aware of the consequences should he attempt to perform any official duties, he remained at home in voluntary seclusion, content to chronicle the events of the burgeoning revolution in his diary, send occasional reports to Lord George Germain, Dartmouth’s successor, keep up with personal correspondence, and watch helplessly as his world crumbled around him. The anxiety and frustration mounted. His anger increased as he read Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense* and the other writings that began to call for separation from Britain. He worried about Elizabeth, who had been so frightened by the events of January 8 that two weeks later her “Spirits continue so agitated, that the least sudden Noise almost throws her into Hysterics, and I am really apprehensive that another Alarm of the like Nature will put an End to her Life.” He was bitter that family and friends in Philadelphia did “not at present seem disposed to give themselves any Concern” about their plight. And he was disturbed that Temple, attending school in Philadelphia, had encountered considerable abuse because of his Tory father and had begun to

gravitate toward his rebel grandfather. The heated exchange between William and Temple during the spring of 1776, supposedly over the latter's inability to live within his budget, reflected the increasing tensions between a father and son who had never really gotten to know each other. In a letter to Sarah Bache on January 30 describing how she and William had been "scandalously treated," Elizabeth summed up their condition: "Amboy has been a very agreeable place till within these four weeks; but everything is now changed; and instead of those joyous, social evenings we used to pass with each other, we only meet now to condole together over our wretched situation." But Governor Franklin remained at the head of his phantom government. "My language," as he declared to Germain, "has constantly been — *You may force me, but you shall never frighten me out of the Province.*"

On May 30 Franklin broke his self-imposed silence and made a desperate, last-ditch attempt to thwart the rebellion. He knew his days as governor were numbered, for it was probable that the upcoming general election, in effect a referendum on independence, would produce a Provincial Congress willing to replace the royal government with a republican regime pursuant to the May 15 resolution of the Continental Congress. So, hoping to take advantage of the latent Loyalism in the province and the imminent arrival of a British peace commission, the governor summoned the General Assembly to meet in Perth Amboy on June 20 to discuss "Matters of great Importance." But the Provincial Congress, which convened in Burlington on June 10, countered his attempt to divide Jerseymen by voting on June 14 that the summons "ought not to be obeyed." That sealed the fate of William Franklin and royal government in New Jersey, for the congressmen the next day declared him "an enemy to the liberties of this country," terminated his salary, and ordered that he be taken into custody. When the resolute Royalist "absolutely refused" a parole which would have required him to remain within six miles of his home and not say or do anything detrimental to the rebel cause for the duration of the conflict "with that contempt such an insult deserved from one who has the honor to represent his Majesty," he was placed under arrest and escorted to Burlington.

William Franklin put his life, fortune, and sacred honor on the line when he appeared before the Provincial Congress on June 21

in the town where for a decade he had lived and served as royal governor. In some ways it was his finest hour. Unwilling to cooperate with those who had “presum’d to usurp the Government of the Province,” he refused to answer any charges or questions but instead challenged the authority of the Provincial Congress. As for his future: “do as you please, and make the best of it.” His haughty attitude and vigorous denunciation of the revolutionary organization removed any doubt about the outcome of the hearing. The congressmen unanimously condemned “Mr. Franklin” as “a virulent enemy to this country” who “may prove dangerous” and recommended to the Continental Congress that he be imprisoned as soon as possible. While awaiting word from Philadelphia, the ex-governor worked on the address to the General Assembly he had begun on June 17. Exhorting the legislators to “defend your constitution” and avoid “the traps of Independency and Republicanism” cleverly set by “pretended patriots,” he described in moving detail his arrest, journey to Burlington, and examination before the Provincial Congress. He finished his public farewell with a confession of political faith: “*Pro Rege et Patria* [for King and Country] was the Motto I assumed when I first commenced my Political Life, and I am resolved to retain it till Death shall put an end to my mortal Existence.” On June 25 an express rider thundered into Burlington; the next morning William Franklin, now in ill health from his ordeal, set out under guard for Connecticut. Such was the fate of the dedicated public servant who for the past thirteen years had served with honor and distinction as the governor of New Jersey.

Symbolically, the deposed royal governor reached Lebanon, Connecticut, on July 4, the very day the Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence. Later the same day, in the presence of the rebel Governor Jonathan Trumbull, William Franklin signed a parole as a prisoner of the now independent United States of America. Two days later he was sent to Wallingford, then to East Windsor, and, finally, in October to Middletown where he remained until the spring of 1777. Unlike prisoners of a lower station in life, he was not sent to languish in the infamous Simsbury Mines near Hartford, but was accorded all the perquisites of a gentleman. He took lodging in private homes and was allowed to retain his steward. He could come and go and correspond as he pleased, so long as he did not leave the town limits, contact the enemy, or in any way hinder the American cause.

However, he had to cover his own expenses.

Although Franklin had all the physical comforts a prisoner could reasonably expect, he paid the heavy psychological price of incarceration. The fact of confinement soon began to grate on his nerves, and he commenced worrying about problems real and imagined. He fretted about money, for he had not been able to make financial arrangements before his hasty departure from New Jersey. Recalling Elizabeth's uncontrolled grief when the militia took him from their home on June 19, he worried about her mental state and fragile condition and wondered how her finances were holding out; he was greatly relieved to hear that the family in Philadelphia was looking after "Betsey." Of course he stewed about Temple. One can imagine his elation when he learned in September that Temple was visiting Elizabeth in Perth Amboy and wanted to come to Connecticut before returning home for the fall term at the College of Philadelphia (now the University of Pennsylvania); one can also imagine his grief when he learned that Benjamin, already upset that his grandson had gone to the "Tory House," had not only denied the boy permission to visit his father but also had taken Temple with him when he sailed for France as the American ambassador at the end of October.

Sometime during the winter of 1776-1777 William violated his parole. Whether because of personal frustration and bitterness over Temple's allegiance to Benjamin or resentment at the Continental Congress for refusing either to permit the transfer of his parole to New Jersey or his exchange with the British, he began to issue pardons in the name of the king to Loyalists in Connecticut and New Jersey. His duplicity was soon discovered, and in April 1777 William Franklin found himself imprisoned in the Litchfield town jail. He chafed at the close confinement. And back home, Elizabeth was distraught by the thought of her husband's being unable to receive visitors, write letters, or for any reason leave the small, one-windowed room above the taproom of a tavern. She moved to New York City near the end of June just prior to the British evacuation of Perth Amboy; her health grew worse, and on July 28 she died. Jane Mecom, who informed her nephew of his wife's death, noted cryptically that Elizabeth had "suffered much in her mind."

William Franklin, who had once seen unlimited opportunity before him, now sank to the very depths of despair. He had lost everything—his son, his father, his position, his possessions, and

now his wife. He lapsed into acute depression, sick in body and mind. In asking Governor Trumbull in mid-September for “some speedy Relaxation of the unparalleled Severity of my Confinement,” he graphically described his condition:

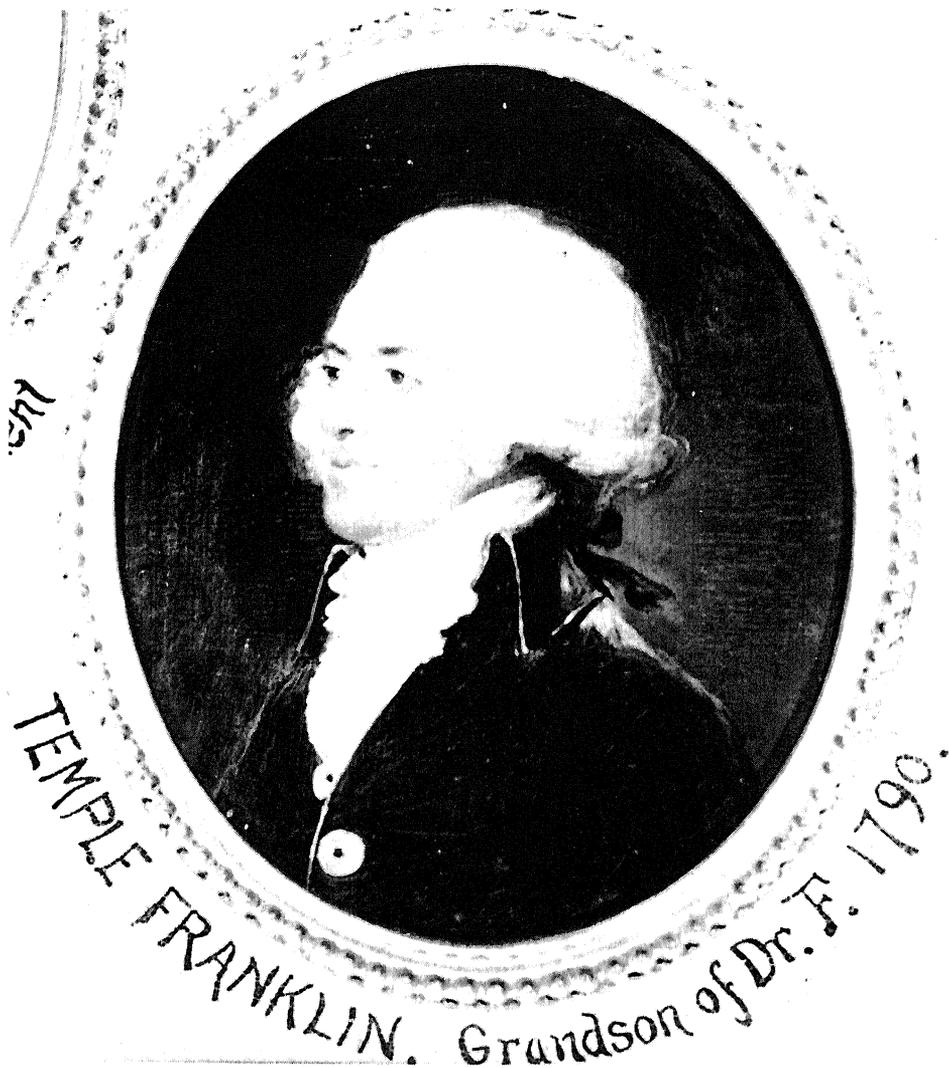
I feel myself in a sensible Decline and am already so much reduced in Size, and become so weak and relax'd, as to render it extremely improbable that I shall ever recover my health and Strength again. . . . the Affliction with which I was overwhelm'd on the News of the actual Death of one of the best of Women, has brought on such a Dejection of Spirits, attended with an almost constant Fever, besides other Complaints, that my Life has become quite a Burthen to me. In short, I suffer so much in being thus, as it were, buried alive, having no one to speak to Day or Night, and for the Want of Air and Exercise, that I should deem it a Favour to be immediately taken out and shot—a speedy or sudden Death being, in my opinion every Way more eligible than such a miserably lingering though equally sure one as I seem at present doom'd to.

He rested more comfortably after Trumbull permitted him to move to a private residence in East Windsor in December, but he continued despondent.

As fate would have it, William once again got a new lease on life because of his father. Word of his misfortune and suffering elicited sympathy from rebels and Royalists alike. While his old nemesis in the New Jersey assembly, James Kinsey (later chief justice of the state and a neutral during the war), could not “justify nor even palliate” William’s “imprudence” in breaking the parole, he felt that because “he is the only Son of a Man to whom America owes so much he seems to be almost entitled to some Indulgence.” British supporters, some of whom felt that William was being treated badly because he was the “son of the older sinner,” shared similar sentiments. “Whatever his Demerits may be in the Opinion of the reigning Power in America,” family friend William Strahan thought, “the son of Dr. Franklin ought not to receive such Usage from them.” From August to October of 1778 the details of a prisoner exchange involving Franklin and John McKinley, the former president of Delaware, were worked out. On October 24, as William prepared to leave East Windsor, he made the extraordinary gesture of pardoning his rebel landlords because of their hospitality. Seven days later he arrived in New York City a free man.

William Franklin entered a New York City very different from the one he had known as governor. The sights and sounds of war were all around—refugees and soldiers, gunfire and rubble. New York was the bastion of British authority in America from its occupation by General Sir William Howe in September 1776 to its evacuation by General Sir Guy Carleton in November 1783. It served both as headquarters for the Royal Army and as a haven for Loyalist exiles. Here William could read a newspaper that supported the crown, join a public conversation denouncing the rebellion, and be addressed by the title, “Governor.” Initially he thought of going to England, but, as he confessed to Joseph Galloway, “an unwillingness to quit the scene of action, where I think I might be of some service, if anything is intended to be done, has induced me to remain till I can discover what turn affairs are likely to take.”

Accustomed to being in the center of administrative activities, William set a frantic pace for himself over the next four years. He more than earned the £500 annual pension and £1200 grant he received from the crown for expenses incurred while a prisoner. He secured propagandists to “keep the papers full of decent well-meant essays” promoting the British cause, worked closely with Captain John Andre of the Secret Service, formulated a plan for defending the city that was instituted when the bulk of the Royal Army sailed for South Carolina in 1780. He urged the restitution of civilian government and sat on the advisory council to the military commanders created in 1779; he served on the Council to the Commissioners for Restoring Peace established in 1780. His principal objective, proposed as early as November 1778, was to create a united Loyalist organization which would have autonomous military and civilian authority. Toward this end, he organized in December 1778 the “Refugee Club” which conducted unofficial military raids and intelligence operations in Connecticut and New Jersey. The British government finally gave approval to the formation of a Loyalist association in May 1780, and in January 1781 the Board of Directors of the Associated Loyalists began operations with William Franklin as its president. The Association, which gave the Loyalists independent political status in dealing with the British and American governments, operated militarily under the jurisdiction of General Sir Henry Clinton, who replaced Howe as the British commander in chief in 1778. In a grim



William Temple Franklin (1760-1823), oil on wood, oval 3 $\frac{5}{8}$  x 3 $\frac{3}{8}$ , 1790, by John Trumbull. Yale University Art Gallery.

twist of irony, the man who had earlier pledged to do everything in his power to promote the peace and prosperity of New Jersey now encouraged and directed numerous plunderous and murderous raids in an attempt to reconquer the state, including the infamous attacks on Connecticut Farms and Springfield in June 1780. And he knew that once again he had risen to a position of prominence because of Benjamin. British officials agreed with former colonial governor of New York, William Tryon, that "it is the soundest Policy to place him in a respectable point of View in Contrast to his Father's Principles & Employ."

By the spring of 1782 William realized that his future in America was nearing an end. He had expected the worst from the mounting disillusionment in war-weary Britain after General Charles Cornwallis surrendered to George Washington at Yorktown in October 1781, forcing the ouster of Lord North. In March the conciliatory Charles Watson-Wentworth, the Earl of Rockingham, replaced the war-tested Lord North as chief minister. By May, preliminary peace negotiations between Britain's Richard Oswald and, fittingly, America's Benjamin Franklin ended hostilities and the operations of the Associated Loyalists. Moreover, the vengeance execution of Captain Joshua Huddy and the resultant court-martial of Associator Captain Richard Lippincott, in Monmouth County, New Jersey, cast the royalist refugees and their leaders into disrepute. A disconsolate William Franklin wrote Galloway on May 11 that the "late sudden Revolutions which have taken place in Men and Measures, and my Apprehensions of the Consequences, have made such a whirl in my poor Brains, that I can scarcely fix my attention to anything of Consequence." He was certain only that he would "soon become useless here." "My Patience is now nearly worn out," he sighed, "and I heartily wish myself out of the Country." And so, on September 18, twenty years to the month since he had been appointed governor of New Jersey, William Franklin, carrying an address from the American Loyalists to the king, sailed for England.

He undoubtedly spent many hours aboard ship reviewing the events of the past fifty-two years. The restless youth, the Philadelphia playboy, the arrogant and ambitious governor, and the resolute Royalist blurred into the tragic figure of a dejected, disillusioned man grown old before his time. William Franklin had seemingly lost all. Like thousands of other Americans who had

supported the losing side in a long and bloody civil war, he had lost his home, property, and place in society. But he had also suffered the pain of the death of his beloved wife and the estrangement of his father and son. As the vessel sailed up the Thames, he must have wondered what the future held in store for an American in London. He could not have imagined that he was destined to spend the next thirty years in obscurity as a lonely exile in a foreign land.

Upon arrival in London, he immersed himself in Britain's new American problem—the exiled Loyalists. He worked feverishly to present the plight of the Loyalists to the British government and to secure compensation for his own services. In June 1783 Parliament authorized the creation of a commission to inquire into the losses and services of those who “Suffered in their Rights, Properties, and Professions” because of their loyalty to the king during “the late Unhappy Dissensions in America” and to provide indemnification if warranted. For the next seven years William Franklin testified on behalf of countless claimants. When his own case came up in March 1788, he learned to his astonishment that the commissioners had been told that he had been in collusion with his father during the war and that consequently he was obliged to produce witnesses and provide documentation of his activities on behalf of the king. His blood must have boiled as he recounted his service and suffering in a formal petition and prepared a detailed claim for over £48,000 in losses. While he was pleased that the commissioners voted to increase his annual lifetime pension to £ 800, he was angry that they disallowed all his claims except £ 1800 for personal property lost in a warehouse fire in New York. It was a paltry sum compared to that awarded others, and he probably wondered if Temple's well-intentioned efforts in 1782 to get him a government appointment had not raised the spectre of Benjamin again. At any rate, in the years ahead the former governor would receive no position in government, no place in society — only a comfortable pension and ample time to travel, chat with fellow exiles, and think of what might have been.

As always, William spent much time thinking about the family he had not seen since 1775. At the risk of jeopardizing his public reputation, he took up the pen in July 1784 and wrote to his “Dear and Honoured Father” in France. Sincerely wanting to “revive that affectionate Intercourse and Connexion which till the

Commencement of the late Troubles had been the Pride and Happiness of my Life," William felt obliged to make it clear that "were the same Circumstances to occur again Tomorrow, my Conduct would be exactly similar to what it was heretofore, notwithstanding the cruel Suffering, scandalous Neglect and Ill treatment." He closed with the hope that Benjamin would respond and arrange "a personal Interview" so that they could discuss "private Family affairs of a very important Nature." Benjamin's prompt response must have cut William to the quick. "Nothing has ever hurt me so much and affected me with such keen Sensation," he wrote from Passy, "as to find myself deserted in my old Age by my only Son; and not only deserted, but to find him taking up Arms against me, in a Cause, wherein my good Fame, Fortune and Life were all at Stake." Admitting that "I ought not to blame you for differing in Sentiment with me in Public Affairs," *Cher Papa*, as he was called by the French ladies, pointedly noted that "your Situation was such that few would have censured your remaining Neuter, tho' there are Natural Duties which precede political ones, and cannot be extinguish'd by them." Wishing William "Health, and more Happiness than it seems you have lately experienced," the aged diplomat agreed to allow Temple to visit his father for the first time in nearly ten years. Temple was in England from September to mid-December 1784; Benjamin, out of genuine love for the boy who had become more of a son than William, as well as fear that his grandson might become attached to his father, kept harping for his earlier return.

The two men finally met at Southampton in July 1785, but it was clear that the antagonism between father and son had not diminished. The four-day reunion was nothing more than a business meeting. There was nothing to be said about Temple. Like William in his youth, he was a lazy, emotionally insecure dandy; like his father and grandfather he had sired an illegitimate son, who died in 1785. Benjamin would take the twenty-five-year-old man-child to America and make something of him. William's land in America, which had not been confiscated (probably because of his paternity), would provide the perfect security for Temple. So Benjamin arranged to lend Temple £2000 to buy his father's real estate in New Jersey on condition that William turn over all his New York holdings to Temple in lieu of a £1500 debt owed Benjamin. It

was a hard, callous business deal. William was probably glad he never again wrote to, heard from, or saw his father. The feeling was mutual. In his will Benjamin gave William his claim (nonexistent) to lands in Nova Scotia, "all my Books and Papers which he has in his Possession" (few, if any), and "all Debts standing against him on my Account Books" (none). In essence, he disowned his only son: "The part he acted against me in the late War, which is of public Notoriety, will account for my leaving him no more of an Estate [than] he endeavoured to deprive me of." He carried his bitterness to the grave on April 17, 1790.

When William learned of Benjamin's death, he exclaimed that the "Revolution in America, and the shameful Injustice of my Father's Will, have in a manner dissolved all my Connexions in that Part of the World of a private as well as Publick Nature." But he was mistaken. Sally and her family spent the year 1792-1793 in England. Brother and sister, who had remained affectionate in spite of Benjamin, enjoyed the reunion immensely. William regretted only that his house was too small to accommodate the Baches: "Time was — but no more of that!" He maintained correspondence with Sarah and her sons (he still did not like Richard, her husband) until she died in 1808. Temple's arrival in 1792 was less pleasant. After thirty-two years William finally came to know his son. Unfortunately, their relationship was strained. Temple, a devotee of the good life, resented his father (who now found "Poor Richard" a valuable ally) constantly urging him to launch a career, get married, and raise a family. They often exchanged angry words, and in 1798 Temple left for Paris in a huff where, William later learned, he "lives genteelly, and keeps a Female Companion." The alienation caused William "more Trouble of Mind than I had ever before experienced," and he vindictively wrote Temple out of his will. In 1812, father and son began a periodic correspondence. William, who knew he was dying, yearned to see Temple again. He assured his son that he wanted "to bury in Oblivion all past Transactions," and confided to a friend that he had "forgiven Temple not being able to bear the thoughts of dying at enmity with one so nearly connected." No evidence shows that they ever met again or effected a true reconciliation.

There were two bright spots in the otherwise dreary chronicle of William Franklin's life in exile. One was his marriage in 1788 to

Mary D'Evelin. Little is known of his second wife other than that she was much younger than he and a member of a notable Irish family. Without ambition to drive him, William settled down to a contented if unexciting domestic existence. But this happy relationship also ended in tragedy. Illness afflicted Mary in 1808, and her health deteriorated until 1810, when she became bedridden. She soon became insane and had to be force-fed until her death in September 1811. The other light of his life was his "dear Ellen." In 1798 Ellen Franklin was born out of wedlock to Temple and Ellen Johnson D'Evelin, Mary's sister-in-law who lived in the Franklin house. William raised his granddaughter as if she were his own child; indeed, he was far closer to her than to his son. (In 1812 William admonished Temple not to be "unmindful of one who will succeed us, and who from Education and amiable Disposition is every way qualified to do credit to the Family.") For years Ellen shared his love, and by attending to his every need made his last days not only more comfortable but also, in some ways, the most satisfying of his eighty-three years.

During the winter of 1812-1813 William became sick. By May he was seriously ill, suffering from "Angina Pectoris," a condition diagnosed by his physicians as similar to "a flying gout or species of Rheumatism." Already "tormented by two perpetual Blisters" from the disease, his pain increased with the onset of influenza and the accompanying nagging cough. Weeks, then months went by. Finally, on November 13, shortly before or after his eighty-fourth birthday, his troubled life came to an end. William Franklin could at last rest in peace.

## **For Further Reading**

At present there is no satisfactory biography of William Franklin. William H. Mariboe's "The Life of William Franklin, 1730 (31)-1813: *Pro Rege et Patria*" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1962) is uneven in coverage, research, and analysis; the author's untimely death precluded completion of the study.

William A. Whitehead's "Biographical Sketch of William Franklin, Governor of New Jersey from 1763 to 1776," *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society*, 1st ser., vol. 3 (1848), pp. 137-159, is a dated but valuable concise portrait. Catherine Fennelly's "William Franklin of New Jersey," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., vol. 6 (1949), pp. 361-382, is a thoughtful appraisal of his governorship. Larry R. Gerlach's *Prologue to Independence: New Jersey in the Coming of the American Revolution* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1975) offers a detailed account of his gubernatorial career within the context of the independence movement. I am currently at work on a full-scale biography of Benjamin Franklin's neglected and misunderstood son.

William Franklin can be understood only in context with his famous father. One should begin with Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* (available in numerous editions), in which the good doctor reveals more about himself than he intended. *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* (18 vols. to date, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1959- ), edited by Leonard W. Labaree and William B. Willcox, is a treasure trove of information. Carl Van Doren's *Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Viking Press, 1938) remains the best biography of the man. Verner W. Crane's *Benjamin Franklin and a Rising People* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1954) and Ralph L. Ketcham's *Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1965) are the best brief biographies. Thomas Fleming, *The Man Who Dared the Lightning: A New Look at Benjamin Franklin* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1971) is a sprightly popular life that devotes more attention to William than previous studies. As correctives for the usual laudatory writings on Franklin, one should consult William S. Hanna's *Benjamin Franklin and Pennsylvania Politics* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University press, 1964) and Cecil B. Currey's *Road to Revolution: Benjamin Franklin in England, 1765-1775* (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1968) and *Code Number 72. Ben Franklin: Patriot or Spy?* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972).

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