

*New Jersey's  
Revolutionary Experience*

**24**

*Education in  
New Jersey in the  
Revolutionary Era*

DOUGLAS SLOAN

*New Jersey Historical Commission*

## NEW JERSEY'S REVOLUTIONARY EXPERIENCE

Larry R. Gerlach, *Editor*

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

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## Foreword

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

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

Larry R. Gerlach  
University of Utah

1760-61

BY HIS EXCELLENCY  
THOMAS BOONE, Esq;

Captain General and Governor in Chief, in and over his Majesty's Province of  
New-Jersey, and Territories thereon depending in America, Chancellor and  
Vice-Admiral in the same, &c.

*Y. Ho: - J. M. L.*

IN Consequence of the favourable Representation of  
Character produced to me, under the Hands of  
Justices, and a Certificate of his having Qua-  
lified according to my Proclamation. I do hereby Permit, and Authorize  
the said to exercise the Calling of School-Master,  
within the Province of *New-Jersey*, and strictly forbid all Persons to disturb  
or give him the least Molestation whatsoever.

GIVEN under my Hand and Seal, at Arms at  
in the Year of his Majesty's Reign

this Day of

By His Excellency's Command

A certificate from 1760-1761 authorizing the recipient "to exercise the  
Calling of School-Master, within the Province of New-Jersey . . ." Courtesy  
Rutgers University Library.

Education helped to shape the new society that was beginning to emerge during and after the period of the American Revolution. It was a source of many of the new political and social ideals that inspired the colonists' revolutionary aims and actions, and many of the outstanding revolutionary leaders were educators themselves, or deeply involved in educational enterprises. In the years following the war, education assumed a special prominence in the thinking of many leaders concerned with the problems and tasks facing the new nation. In many ways education greatly influenced the people of New Jersey during the revolutionary period.

Perhaps one of the most striking characteristics of colonial New Jersey on the eve of the Revolution was the ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity of her inhabitants. This diversity deeply influenced the development of education in New Jersey. In a population that had grown rapidly from approximately 15,000 early in the eighteenth century to about 120,000 by 1775, there were settlers from many different European countries and other American colonies. About half of these were English in background, some from the mother country, but many from New England. The other main groups — Dutch, Scotsmen, and so-called Scotch-Irish from northern Ireland — made up about one-third of the population. In addition, German settlers and smaller groups of Swedes, French and Irish further heightened the diversity of the colony. There were also some ten thousand Africans, most of them slaves, and a few remaining Indians.

Cultural differences in the colony were heightened by each group's tendency to settle in separate geographical regions and to bring with them their religious and cultural traditions. Thus five

main church groups were represented in the colony — Presbyterian, Quaker, Dutch Reformed, Baptist, and Anglican (Church of England) — as well as smaller numbers of German Lutherans and Moravians, Swedish Lutherans, and Methodists. A variety of educational agencies reflected the diverse society and helped to shape the lives of the individuals and groups within it.

Schools represented only one of the many different — and not always the most influential — agencies and institutions that educated. The family probably functioned as the one most important educational institution. Informal education was, of course, centered in the family. It was in the household, through the daily activities of family life, worship, and work, that children received basic instruction in religious ideas, moral values, and occupational skills. For many children the family was also the center of much formal education and the place where many children learned to read and write.

In areas where schools were unavailable or difficult to reach, the family often became the only source of formal education. Or if the mother and father themselves were unable to provide such instruction, children might be sent to a neighboring family to be taught. Sometimes for a small fee, a local housewife would teach her own and neighboring children in her kitchen as she went about her household tasks, maintaining what was called a “dame school” — a kind of school in the home.

In the family children were also taught the social and occupational skills they would need to earn a living. A boy would receive a vocational education in the everyday tasks of helping his father in the shop or in the field, just as his sister would be instructed by her mother in the skills of running a household. If a youngster desired to learn a special trade or vocational skill, which his parents were unequipped to teach, he could be apprenticed to a master. There, within the family of the master, the youngster would live, work and learn a trade. Apprenticeships might last anywhere from two to seven years. Even in the seventeenth century some of the American colonies, such as Massachusetts, required masters by law to teach their apprentices reading and writing as well as a trade, but New Jersey did not pass such legislation until 1774. Nevertheless, many masters agreed individually with parents to provide reading and writing instruction with vocational training.



Apart from the family, few institutions were as educationally important as the church. Sermons, devotions, and catechism classes not only introduced members to the written word but also imparted the community's values, customs, and ways of thinking. The minister, usually the most highly educated individual in the community, performed many tasks that were directly educational or had educational implications: preaching, lecturing, counseling, teaching school, and organizing various community services. Furthermore, most of the New Jersey denominations were rooted in European Protestant traditions that stressed the church's responsibility to provide schools for the community. Thus the different churches and their communities conducted much of the formal schooling in New Jersey, from elementary to higher education.

Although different church groups maintained most elementary schools, some schools received other kinds of support. In a few East Jersey communities, settled originally by families from New England, town taxes and town grants supported town schools, as in many New England towns. Another form of school support came from the gifts of individuals concerned with education. In several New Jersey communities private donors made provisions in their wills for schools that would be free to children of the poor. Private schoolmasters at times also set up schools as business ventures to be supported directly by student tuition.

In elementary schools, students were taught reading, writing, some arithmetic, and, usually, religion. The textbooks for beginning students included the Bible, psalters (books containing some or all of the Psalms), and simple primers containing the alphabet, lists of syllables, rhymes, and selections from the scriptures. More advanced students frequently used a speller, which included special exercises for punctuation and grammar, with regular sections on letters, spelling, and reading. Arithmetic and writing were often taught together, reflecting, perhaps, the conviction that good bookkeeping necessitated good penmanship.

One textbook known to have been used in New Jersey was entitled *The Instructor or Young Man's Best Companion*. About half of this book was devoted to arithmetic, while the remaining sections included exercises for teaching penmanship and instructions for making ink and goose quill pens. The book also

contained a collection of such general information as instructions on gardening, pickling and preserving, family medicine, and geography. During the late eighteenth century, one of the most popular books in New Jersey as well as in other American colonies and Great Britain was *The Schoolmaster's Assistant* by Thomas Dilworth. Dilworth's book, devoted almost entirely to arithmetic, is said to have been used in New Jersey as late as 1830.

The qualifications for elementary school teachers varied greatly from place to place. Each community and church group set up its own standards for teachers. Most teachers were men, except, of course, in dame schools, although Quakers tended to employ women as teachers more than other religious groups. In almost every other respect — background, training, and experience — uniform standards were lacking. Teachers' ages ranged from seventeen to seventy. Single men were often favored as teachers because they required lower salaries. Occasionally, however, a community preferred its teacher to be married because a family man was assumed to be more serious about his work and less liable to change jobs frequently.

Often communities seemed to be more concerned about saving money than finding a good teacher for their children. And its low status and poor salaries prevented teaching from attracting the most outstanding individuals. Consequently, communities often — willingly or from necessity — accepted as schoolmaster almost anyone who could read and write legibly, and who was willing to “keep school.”

No wonder many teachers were poorly prepared for their jobs, or worse, occasionally turned out to be simply scoundrels. A community was doubly fortunate if it found a man who was both a good teacher and willing to settle in the community for a long period of time. Many communities probably had the constant problem of finding a new teacher every year or so.

Yet usually, colonial teachers were probably capable and trustworthy individuals. Some church groups attempted to set high educational and moral standards for teachers in their schools. In such cases the minister — when he did not do the teaching — decided on the fitness of the schoolmaster. The quality of teaching in New Jersey continued to improve after the 1750s as new academies and colleges (which will be described in more detail later)

demanded better prepared students. At the same time the academies and colleges became a source of better qualified teachers, for it was not uncommon for a young academy or college graduate to teach school for a time before entering the ministry or one of the other professions.

One goal of the church-sponsored schools was to preserve or guard the distinct national, religious, and social traditions of the community. Dutch, Swedish, and German settlers also looked to their church schools to teach the younger generation the native language of their parents. Living as they did in a predominantly English-speaking colony made this increasingly difficult. By 1776 most of the younger members of these communities spoke only English, and only a few schools continued the older language instruction.

The Quakers, a group strong in West Jersey, were especially concerned with elementary education. Quakers were suspicious of higher education. They thought that excessive learning tempted men to place more faith and pride in themselves than in God. Like most other groups they hoped that proper elementary education would instill in children the religious principles that would guard them as “a peculiar people” from the corruptions of the world. As persons who strongly felt that a truly religious person should be able to conduct his daily business carefully and well, they also valued the practical skills that an elementary education provided.

The Quakers perhaps more than any other religious group, also valued elementary education as a prime way of promoting humanitarian social values. From their beginnings Quakers showed a special concern for the education of poor children, orphans, apprentices, and social outcasts. In colonial America local authorities commonly bound orphans and abandoned children to masters who neglected their education and treated them more as servants to be worked than as apprentices to be trained. In efforts to protect such children in New Jersey, Quakers took the lead in founding orphans courts, in placing children in families and with masters who would educate them, and in establishing free schools. Quakers also led in efforts to provide educational opportunities for Indians and black people.

Probably no one did more to further the humanitarian aims of Quaker education than John Woolman. The most outstanding

American Quaker leader of the eighteenth century, Woolman, a schoolteacher for a number of years in a Quaker school in Mount Holly, was born in Rancocas, New Jersey in 1720. With his friend Anthony Benezet, a Philadelphia educator, Woolman early and vigorously opposed the slave trade, pioneered in promoting education for Indians, slaves and free blacks, and stressed the importance of humane schools and teaching methods. Quakers were more consistent than any other religious group in insisting that for black people baptism into the Christian faith, educational opportunity, and complete manumission (freedom) went hand in hand. During the revolutionary years and after, the views of Woolman and Benezet helped to inspire the Quakers in Pennsylvania and New Jersey to carry on programs stressing educational and humanitarian reform.

The missionary arm of the Anglican Church, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (S.P.G.) also actively encouraged religious and basic elementary instruction for apprentices, poor children, and slaves. Prior to the outbreak of the Revolution, the S.P.G. established a number of free schools in New Jersey for poor white and black children. Once hostilities began the close identification of the S.P.G. with the Anglican Church and the British government forced an end to its effective educational endeavors.

Elementary education in New Jersey thus served diverse groups and purposes. It was not organized on a colonywide basis. The quality of teaching probably varied greatly from community to community, and from school to school. Family, church, and school were closely intertwined. And, yet, despite the unorganized pattern of formal elementary schooling, ample opportunities for learning the fundamental skills of reading and writing appear to have been available.

Higher education — that provided by colleges — presented a more impressive picture. New Jersey, in fact, was unique in being the only American colony by the time of the Revolution to have two officially chartered colleges. These colleges — their students and the educational leaders associated with them — were to exert a profound influence on New Jersey's role in the Revolution.

Important developments in higher education in New Jersey began during the massive religious revival known as the Great

Awakening that swept all of the American colonies in the 1740s. During the Great Awakening Presbyterian revivalist ministers became especially interested in higher education as a way of promoting and safeguarding their own religious points of view. Many of these ministers founded institutions of higher education known as academies. In the years before the Revolution Presbyterian ministers in the central and southern colonies, established more than fifty academies, including at least seven in New Jersey. A few anti-revivalist ministers also established academies, but the revivalists, perhaps because of their missionary zeal, were much more active. Most of the New Jersey Presbyterian academies – in Elizabethtown (modern Elizabeth), Mendham, Newark, Lower Freehold, and Basking Ridge – were founded by ministers sympathetic to the revivalist outlook.

Because the academies included several levels of instruction they are difficult to define precisely. They were under the direction of a single minister, who served as teacher, pastor, and often, father to his students, who were usually male. Prior to the Revolution most of the academy classes were held in the home of the minister-teacher. The students usually lived with the minister and his wife, or boarded out in a nearby home. Students probably ranged from ten to fifteen years of age, though not infrequently some younger and, occasionally, older boys were among them.

At first, because there were no colleges nearby, the academies attempted to provide instruction in preparation for college and at a college level. In this sense they were a mixture of secondary and higher education. When colleges were chartered in New Jersey most academies served primarily as college preparatory schools.

The academies emphasized the study of the Greek and Latin languages and literature. Other courses, such as arithmetic, geometry, penmanship, public speaking and, of course, religion, were taught as well. Although never the sole purpose of the academies, the training of ministers was central. The students' subjects were those thought necessary for any well educated man and considered essential preparation for all the learned professions – medicine, the law, and politics, as well as the ministry. Frequently, as many as half the student body consisted of young men preparing for professions other than the ministry. Even though a single minister-teacher carried the entire teaching load, the quality

and variety of instruction at those academies on record appears to have been surprisingly good.

Even as academies proliferated leading revivalists became convinced of the need to concentrate their energies and resources in the creation of a single, full-fledged college. In 1746 a group of Presbyterian ministers and laymen obtained a charter for a new institution to be called the College of New Jersey, which opened in 1748.

At first the college operated very much as any other Presbyterian academy under the direction of a single minister-teacher. The first class of ten students met in Elizabethtown at the home of the Reverend Jonathan Dickinson, who had been chosen the first president. He died soon after taking office and was succeeded by the Reverend Aaron Burr, Sr., who moved the college to his parsonage in Newark where he conducted classes for the next eight years. Finally, desiring a permanent, more central location, the trustees moved the college to Princeton and erected a new building which they called Nassau Hall in honor of King William III of England (1689-1702), originally a Dutch prince of the house of Orange-Nassau. For years, the college was often simply called "Nassau Hall," after the name of the main building. With the completion of Nassau Hall, Aaron Burr moved his class — by that time some seventy students — to Princeton in 1756. The college eventually became Princeton University.

A similar movement among revivalists in the Dutch Reformed Church contributed to the founding of a second college in New Jersey. The revivalist wing of the Dutch Reformed Church developed an increasingly "American" orientation, favoring independence from church authorities in Holland and the creation of an American college. In spite of resistance from the "Dutch" party in the church, a charter for a new institution to be known as Queen's College was secured in 1766 through the royal governor of New Jersey, William Franklin. The college, which eventually became Rutgers University, finally opened in 1771.

The college got off to a shaky start. For several years it had a single tutor, Frederick Frelinghuysen, a young graduate of the College of New Jersey. The first class in 1774 had only one student, but the second graduating class had five members, and the college was underway. New Jersey now had two chartered colleges, one

well established and in full operation, the other new and fragile, but growing.

It was relatively easy to enlist widespread community support for the new academies and colleges. Both the churches and local communities welcomed institutions of higher education to serve their needs — institutions closer to home than Yale and Harvard. Moreover besides providing educational opportunities that would otherwise be unavailable to local youth, becoming the seat of a college enhanced a town's prestige.

It is not surprising, therefore, that towns in New Jersey competed with one another to become the site of a college. When the trustees of the College of New Jersey decided to move the college from Newark to a point more convenient to eastern Pennsylvania and New York, two towns, New Brunswick and Princeton, were proposed as locations. The trustees stipulated, however, that the town chosen would have to donate £1,000 in cash, 10 acres for a college campus, and 200 acres of woodland for fuel. New Brunswick was first selected under the condition that the town would meet the trustees' demands. Meanwhile, the citizens of Princeton were hard at work to provide the necessary land and money. Princeton eventually won the contest by making the gifts of land and money and by successfully convincing the trustees of their town's superior advantages as a college location. In 1752, the trustees voted to locate the College of New Jersey permanently at Princeton. In 1770, New Brunswick, trying once again for a college, was selected over its chief rival, Hackensack, as the seat of Queen's College.

Nor is it surprising, in light of the broad purposes of the new institutions, that a coalition of groups, including revivalist ministers, influential local leaders, and New Jersey government officials cooperated in securing the charters for both colleges. The charter of the College of New Jersey gave direct expression to the community and professional purposes envisaged for the colleges. The charter set forth the prime goal of that college as one of "encouraging and promoting a learned Education of Our Youth in New Jersey . . . for the Benefit of the inhabitants of the Saïd Province and others. . . ."

The Great Awakening also stimulated the educational activity of Baptists in New Jersey. The Baptist minister Isaac Eaton founded Hopewell Academy in 1756. Although the academy continued only

about eleven years, it was well known for the quality of its graduates. New Jersey Baptists joined the Philadelphia Baptist Association in 1762 in calling for a college of their own. Their efforts resulted in the founding of the College of Rhode Island, later Brown University, in Providence. Since the Baptists at the time could not support both institutions, Hopewell Academy closed with the opening of the new college in Rhode Island. The New Jersey academy, however, had helped pave the way for the new Baptist college, not only by encouraging a general interest in higher education among Baptists but also by seeing one of its alumni, James Manning, become the first president of Rhode Island College. During the war, in 1778, Burgis Allison, an alumnus of Hopewell, founded a new Baptist academy at Bordentown. Allison was noted for his progressive teaching methods and the distinguished achievements of many of his students.

The charters of the two colleges also took a new step toward greater religious cooperation and toleration. Each charter made it clear that the colleges were to serve Protestants of all denominations. Both limited the number of clergymen who could be members of the boards of trustees and forbade religious tests as bases for student admission.

The reasons for this new spirit of religious toleration were complex. Expediency no doubt played its part. The colleges knew they needed students to survive. Forbidding religious tests for admission would enable them to attract students from many different denominations. In addition, the original Presbyterian and Dutch Reformed sponsors of the colleges were aware of the need not to antagonize other groups, especially the large numbers of influential Anglicans and Quakers in New Jersey. Beyond being merely expedient, however, the charters expressed a real sense of the need for greater religious freedom and cooperation.

Throughout the revolutionary period the College of New Jersey was under the direction of the Reverend John Witherspoon. When the college president Samuel Finley died in 1766 Witherspoon's reputation as a graduate of the University of Edinburgh and as a leader in the Presbyterian Church of Scotland inspired the New Jersey trustees to offer him the presidency of the college. Witherspoon did not let them down. As president from 1768 until his death in 1794, John Witherspoon provided



indispensable leadership to the college — as educator, as minister, and as a man of public affairs — during one of the most crucial periods in its history.

Witherspoon worked energetically to expand and strengthen the college curriculum. The earlier presidents of the college had vigorously attempted to keep the curriculum as up-to-date as possible. Witherspoon continued their efforts, drawing on his own experience in the intellectual and educational life of the Scottish universities.

Originally the course of study at the college was based on the Greek and Latin classics, some Hebrew, and rhetoric, logic, geography and astronomy. Soon, even before Witherspoon, new courses were being added in philosophy, science, mathematics, history, French and modern English literature and composition. To these subjects Witherspoon added lecture courses — which he gave to juniors and seniors — in history, theology, oratory, literary criticism, and moral philosophy. And he increased the college library with hundreds of books he had purchased in London and Holland before sailing for America. The new additions to the library enabled his students to become acquainted with the most important contemporary European thought.

Although it may surprise the modern reader, from its beginning the college attempted to provide full instruction in mathematics and science. During the early years of the college, the lack of properly trained teachers and adequate scientific equipment often made this difficult. Witherspoon succeeded in putting science on a solid footing in the college curriculum. He purchased new scientific equipment, including maps, a globe, and an orrery, an intricate apparatus for astronomical instruction. In 1771, Witherspoon helped establish the college's professorship of mathematics and natural science. To fill the new post, he secured one of the college's outstanding graduates, William Churchill Houston.

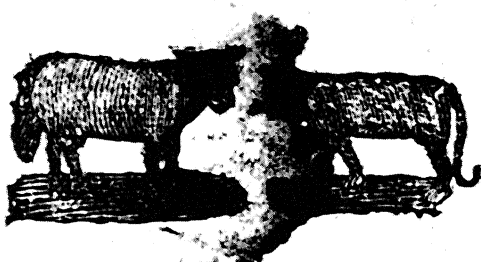
Witherspoon envisioned the college as playing a central role in shaping the future American society. In a newspaper advertisement for the college Witherspoon wrote that there could be no national progress without well educated leaders. He planned that the College of New Jersey would help fill that need. As the reputation of the college grew under Witherspoon's direction, increasing

*The English Alphabet.*

S s

T t

U u



Sheep

Tyger

Unicorn

V v

W w

X x



Vulture

Wolf

Xerxes

Y y

Z z



Yellowhammer

Zebra

A  
NEW GUIDE  
TO THE  
English Tongue:

In Five PARTS.

CONTAINING,

- I. Words, both common and proper, from one to six Syllables: The several sorts of Monosyllables in the common Words being distinguished by Tables, into Words of one, three, and four Letters, &c. with six short Lessons at the End of each Table, not exceeding the order of Syllables in the foregoing Tables. The several sorts of Polysyllables also, being ranged in proper Tables, have their Syllables divided, and Dispositions plac'd at the Head of each Table for the Accents, to prevent false Pronunciation; together with the like Number of Lessons on the foregoing Tables, plac'd at the End of each Table, as far as to Words of four Syllables, for the sake and more speedy Way of teaching Children to Read.
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By **THOMAS DILWORTH,**

AUTHOR of the **SCHOOLMASTER'S ASSISTANT; YOUNG BOOK-KEEPER'S ASSISTANT, &c. &c.**

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Title page and frontispiece from Thomas Dilworth's A New Guide to the English Tongue. Dilworth also authored a popular arithmetic text, The Schoolmaster's Assistant. Courtesy Rutgers University Library.

numbers of students came to the college not only from New Jersey, but also from the Middle Colonies, New England, the South and even from the West Indies.

Student life at the college was not always easy. All students took mid-term tests. At the end of each year public oral examinations were also held to determine which students should be promoted to the next class. Finally, to receive the bachelor's degree graduating seniors had to face a public, comprehensive examination on all the work covered in college. The president, the tutors, the trustees, and other learned men who happened to attend were eligible to examine the candidate.

After the ordeal of the examination, the commencement service itself was a gala occasion attended by friends, relatives, and community dignitaries. Graduating seniors delivered orations in Latin and English on topics of current interest and publicly debated questions that would enable them to display their newly acquired learning.

Most students enrolled in the college at about sixteen years of age although some entered as young as thirteen, and a few did not begin until their mid-twenties. The college day was closely supervised for these young students from beginning to end. It began regularly at five in the morning with a bell to awaken them for morning prayer and an hour of chapel before breakfast at eight. Until evening prayers and permission to go to bed at nine every night, every activity of the day — free time, meals, chapel, and eight or nine hours for study — had its appointed hour.

Discipline was strict. Boisterous and frivolous activity was prohibited. Student rooms were open to faculty inspection at all times. Without special permission students could leave their room only at stated hours. And when outside their rooms students were required to be properly dressed. College authorities tried to strike a balance between too much control over students' lives and too little. Witherspoon's own motto, for example, was "take care to govern always, but not to govern too much." There seems, however, to have been little left ungoverned.

Yet student life had its pleasures and mischiefs. Many graduates fondly recalled their time as students at the college. In 1774, for example, Philip Vickers Fithian, a former student of Witherspoon and a recent graduate of the college, recounted the

many diversions of student life as he had enjoyed them. "Everytime I reflect," Fithian wrote,

on that Place of retirement & Study, where I spent two years which I call the most pleasant as well as the most important Period in my past life—Always when I think upon the *Studies*, the *Discipline*, the *Companions*, the *Neighbourhood*, the *exercises*, & *Diversions*, it gives me a secret and real Pleasure, even the Foibles which often prevail there are pleasant on recollection: such as giving each other *names & characters*: Meeting & Shoving in the dark entries; knocking at Doors & going off without entering; Strewing the entries in the night with greasy Feathers; freezing the Bell; Ringing it at late Hours of the night . . . .

Obviously, all was not work and study.

The students and faculty of the College of New Jersey were among the earliest and most outspoken champions of colonial independence. With the passage of the Stamp Act in 1765, the college students began to express hostility toward the British government. Graduating seniors appeared at the commencement service in September 1765, seven months after the enactment of the Stamp Act, boldly wearing cloth of American make in support of the general boycott on British goods. Student orators at the commencement exercises speaking on the themes of "Liberty" and "Patriotism" were enthusiastically applauded. In 1766 the college trustees themselves drew up an address to the king expressing their pleasure at his "gracious condescension in repealing the Stamp Act."

Reaction to the Stamp Act also helped give rise to the first student "literary societies," the Well-Meaning and Plain-Dealing clubs. These were the forerunners of two very active student associations at Princeton, the Clisophic and American Whig societies. These extra-curricular student organizations provided a forum for debate and public speech in which students frequently voiced their opposition to the British government and its policies.

The shift in attitude toward the British government that occurred during the late 1760s was reflected in the topics chosen for the college commencement addresses. In 1761, for example, one of the commencement pieces was entitled, "The Military Glory of Great Britain." In a dramatic turn-about in 1771, ten years later, a

similar address bore the title, "The Rising Glory of America."

When John Witherspoon arrived in his new land he found himself head of a college that was undergoing a political awakening. Witherspoon recognized what was happening and gave it his wholehearted approval and encouragement. He supported his students' political activism, and he probably even helped graduating seniors write commencement addresses praising the American cause. More important, in senior class lectures Witherspoon introduced his students to many of the political ideas that were to appear later in the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution. If the laws of society turn out to be unjust, Witherspoon told his students, the people have a right to break up the old order and begin anew. And, if the state becomes tyrannical, he said, "the subjects may certainly, if in their power, resist and overthrow it."

Under Witherspoon the college became, as one historian has commented, "a hotbed of radical sentiment." Anti-British statements became so flagrant in student commencement orations that Witherspoon was sometimes accused by those unwilling to break with the mother country of teaching disloyalty. In a public debate during the commencement following the Boston Massacre in 1770, the president's son, James Witherspoon, who was killed in the battle of Brandywine (1777) during the revolutionary war, argued for the right of the people to resist oppressive kings in order to defend their freedom. Other student orators in the 1770 commencement praised the agreement by American merchants not to import British goods as "a noble exertion of self-denial and public spirit."

That same year the student body conducted a ceremony of protest against merchants who threatened to break the nonimportation agreement, denouncing them as "betrayers of their country." In January 1774, students held their own "Princeton Tea Party," confiscating the college tea supplies and burning them with an effigy of Massachusetts Royal Governor Thomas Hutchinson in front of Nassau Hall — all to the accompaniment of enthusiastic speeches and the tolling of the college bell. When, finally, news of the Declaration of Independence reached Princeton on the evening of July 9, 1776 Nassau Hall was illuminated with candles, and the event fervently acclaimed.

Not content only to teach, by this time Witherspoon had begun to play an active political role himself. In 1774 he helped to organize the Somerset County Committee of Correspondence, and he is thought to have introduced the resolutions passed by the first convention of the New Jersey county committees of correspondence which met that year in New Brunswick. The next year Witherspoon led the move to arrest and oust the royal governor, William Franklin. Witherspoon was elected in 1776 to the Provincial Congress of New Jersey, and from there was sent as a delegate to the Continental Congress in Philadelphia where he became the only clergyman to sign the Declaration of Independence.

Witherspoon served in Congress with few breaks from 1776 through 1782. There he was appointed to more than one hundred committees, including the two vital standing committees on war and foreign affairs. During the entire time Witherspoon maintained his post as president of the college, delivering his lectures whenever time and circumstances permitted. Witherspoon's impact on the College of New Jersey was many-sided. He not only introduced his students to some of the crucial ideas of the day, he also demonstrated their political and social importance by dramatic, personal example.

Congressional duties took Dr. Witherspoon out of Princeton during much of the war. In his absence, Professor Houston took charge, although during the first year of the war he divided his time between professional duties and those as a captain in the local militia, a commission he resigned when it interfered with academic responsibilities. In 1779 Samuel Stanhope Smith, Witherspoon's son-in-law, joined the faculty. With his help, despite wartime difficulties, the fortunes of the college began to improve. More than forty students were enrolled by 1782, and the presence of General Washington and other national leaders honored the commencement the following year.

The next decade required a constant struggle to overcome the severe financial problems into which the war had plunged the college. Both American and British troops, who seemed to vie with each other over the amount of damage each could inflict on the college building, repeatedly occupied Nassau Hall. Almost all college monies had been exhausted, and a fund-raising trip to Great

Britain undertaken by Witherspoon in 1783 met a cool reception and produced little. Yet the student body continued to grow, and Witherspoon and Smith managed to enlarge the faculty and broaden the curriculum. When Witherspoon died in 1794, the college under the presidency of Samuel Stanhope Smith was once more a flourishing institution.

After the opening of classes at Queen's College in 1771 the faculty and administrators displayed the same spirit that had captured the College of New Jersey — where, incidentally most of the first Queen's College teachers were educated. By 1773 the tutor John Taylor helped the small group of Queen's College students form their own literary group, the Athenian Society, modeled after the Cliosophic Society in Princeton. Like their Princetonian fellows, the Athenians fervently championed the colonial cause. Jacob Hardenbergh, the leading trustee and first president of Queen's College, publicly declared himself for independence during the war, and became close friends with General Washington. The two — and only — faculty members, Frederick Frelinghuysen and John Taylor, immediately enlisted in the American army when the war broke out.

During the war years Queen's College was held together largely through the efforts of the two young tutors, John Taylor and John Bogart. Although Taylor was serving as colonel in the army he managed during lulls in the fighting to keep his students together and conduct classes. Because of the presence of British troops in New Brunswick in 1777 Taylor and his handful of students met for classes in the small town of North Branch on the Raritan River. In 1779 he moved his classes to Millstone, west of New Brunswick, where John Bogart also served as teacher of the grammar school and secretary of the college. Finally, in 1781, the college was able to return to New Brunswick. By then college funds were depleted, the college buildings were in shambles, students were dispersed, and support from within the church was flagging. Only with the greatest difficulty, including a suspension of operations, did the college manage to survive.

The Revolution also seriously disrupted primary and secondary schooling. During the first years of the war so many teachers were being drafted into the militia that it became difficult to maintain regular school sessions in many parts of the state. To help



solve the problem the New Jersey Assembly in 1778 passed “An Act for the Encouragement of Education,” setting forth conditions under which elementary and secondary teachers “in every village, town, or neighborhood in the state” might be exempted from military service.

In order to qualify for exemption from the military a teacher had to be currently employed with at least fifteen students under his care. He had to demonstrate his allegiance to the American cause by taking a loyalty oath. He had to be able to produce witnesses willing to testify to the soundness of his character and morals. And, if the authorities still had any doubts he had to be able to pass an examination of “his knowledge and his skill in teaching” before persons appointed by the county officials. The act also granted exemptions to all faculty and regularly enrolled students at the two colleges. The state leaders clearly thought education was important enough to deserve special consideration. They were obviously also determined to prevent anyone from pretending to be a teacher to avoid military service.

Many schools suffered physical damage and financial loss during the war. There is evidence, however, that some people concerned enough about education continued to make private gifts to teachers and schools even at the height of the Revolution. And as soon as the fighting ended, schools began to resume their previous activities.

Indeed, the numbers and kinds of schools continued to grow in the years following the war. Schools teaching elementary reading, writing, some arithmetic and a considerable amount of religion were to be found in most parts of the state. One observer, perhaps with some exaggeration, wrote in 1786 that there were “few instances of a farm house being more than two miles distant from a school.” Some schools were supported by towns, but most owed their existence to some form of private support: to churches, parent groups, philanthropists, or enterprising private schoolmasters.

Also on the increase, as evidenced by their newspaper advertisements at the time, were private schoolmasters who offered to teach more advanced subjects. Some private schoolmasters, responding perhaps to the practical needs of increasing numbers of middle class tradesmen, craftsmen, and shopkeepers, advertised new courses in advanced technical subjects, such as surveying,

navigation, higher mathematics, accounting, and draftsmanship. Other private schoolmasters catered to the polite tastes of the wealthy by offering to teach young ladies and gentlemen such subjects as dancing, fencing, instrumental music, French and Italian. Some offered “finishing courses” for young women — needlework, singing, and manners. Such private schoolmasters were never as numerous in New Jersey as in the larger urban centers of New York and Philadelphia. Nevertheless, their presence indicates the growing educational demands of New Jersey society during the last decades of the eighteenth century.

The founding of academies continued to flourish after the war. Recall that the academies were originally established earlier in the century to provide both college preparation and college-level instruction. After the colleges were chartered in Princeton and New Brunswick, local academies no longer had any reason to try to offer a college-level course of instruction. Consequently, academies began to respond to a wide variety of educational needs.

Some academies simply concentrated on being college preparatory schools. These were frequently referred to as Latin grammar schools because they emphasized the basic instruction in Latin and Greek grammar that students needed to gain admission to college. Many of the Latin grammar schools owed their origins to the Presbyterian tradition of academy-founding, and the teachers in them were frequently young graduates of the College of New Jersey. British troops burned academies headed by young Presbyterian ministers in Newark and Hackensack, but local citizens who valued the educational opportunities they afforded promptly helped to rebuild them.

Many academies, however, began to change into new kinds of educational institutions. Rather than becoming merely Latin grammar schools for the college-bound, they began to offer a wide variety of vocational courses for people who had little or no intention of attending college. Thus, after the war, the academies became what can perhaps best be defined as general purpose schools which provided a variety of courses, elementary and advanced, for many different kinds of students. In the 1780s for example, the Trenton Academy provided basic elementary classes in reading and writing, traditional college preparatory subjects, and a variety of new courses in public speaking, bookkeeping, surveying, and navigation.

These new, general purpose academies spread swiftly throughout the state during the 1780s and 1790s.

In the years just before and during the Revolution Quakers began to experience a deepening of their religious and ethical concerns. As the spirit of reform spread among the Quakers it imparted new energy and commitment to Quaker educational undertakings. By the time of the Revolution, the educational and humanitarian work of such Quaker leaders as John Woolman and Anthony Benezet was beginning to bear fruit.

The yearly Quaker meetings in London and Philadelphia in 1777 urged that Quakers everywhere devote full attention to the religious and secular education of children by establishing schools. Coming as they did in the middle of the revolutionary hostilities, these recommendations did not, of course, have immediate, widespread effect. However, they signaled the presence of a lively current of educational reform moving among Quakers everywhere.

In New Jersey Quakers formed committees to work for the establishment of schools, to report on school conditions, and to strive to secure and provide homes for well qualified teachers. They took steps to assist in the education of poor and black children. Difficulties of war, a chronic shortage of Quaker teachers, and lack of funds prevented immediate realization of the new educational plans. By 1787, however, there was impressive evidence of the revival of interest in education. Schools had been erected in several new locations, endowment funds had been raised by some of the Quaker groups to support the education of poor children, and many New Jersey Quakers had set up school committees and adopted school regulations to insure the upkeep of the schools and support of teachers and their families. These educational efforts in the revolutionary period laid the foundations for a renewal of the entire Quaker community in New Jersey that persisted well into the nineteenth century.

The education of Indians and black people in New Jersey suffered greatly after the war. Quakers had long been concerned with the humane treatment of the Indians, and a handful of Presbyterian missionaries, inspired by the Great Awakening, attempted for many years to maintain a school, a church, and an organized community among the remnants of the Delaware Indian nation in New Jersey. Widespread public apathy, the loss of Indian

lands, and the lack of missionary support combined to prevent any effective help in behalf of the Indians in New Jersey. With the death of the missionary John Brainerd in 1783, the Presbyterian mission and school work collapsed. Left on their own, their numbers decimated and their way of life in decline, the few Indian survivors finally left New Jersey entirely in the early nineteenth century. New Jersey Quakers continued in the postwar years to support missionary activity among the Indians in upper New York, but it was too late to provide help for those in their own state.

After the Revolution Quakers were again in the forefront of attempts to provide education and other assistance to black people. In New Jersey as elsewhere, Quakers led the antislavery movement. They organized the first antislavery society in America in 1775, an outgrowth of the traditional Quaker conviction, voiced repeatedly by such leaders as Woolman and Benezet, that the practice of slavery was contrary to the Christian faith. In 1774 the Quaker yearly meeting condemned slaveholding, and Quakers in New Jersey set about to bring an end to the practice.

The task in New Jersey was particularly difficult. With nearly ten thousand slaves, New Jersey was second only to New York as the largest northern slaveholding state. Other Influential persons, including the governor and the printers of New Jersey's leading newspapers, joined the Quakers in their cause. With such combined forces it was possible for the movement to launch a campaign of political and moral education. Relying heavily on the educational power of the press, antislavery spokesmen frequently called attention to the glaring contrast between the widely proclaimed revolutionary ideals of liberty for all men and the ugly reality of persisting slavery.

Opposition to the antislavery movement, however, did not yield easily, nor did public apathy soon diminish. It was not until 1788 that the New Jersey legislature enacted a truly effective law against the slave trade. It also passed measures compelling masters, at their own expense, to teach their slaves how to read before they reached the age of twenty-one. This clearly indicates that education was viewed as a necessary preparation for emancipation. While the act requiring masters to educate their slaves was, in one sense, a victory for the antislavery forces, it may also have helped provide an excuse for delaying full emancipation.

Not content merely to agitate for change in the wider society, Quakers also sought to eliminate slavery within their own circles and to increase their aid to black people. By the end of the Revolution New Jersey Quakers had succeeded in almost eliminating the practice of slavery among their members. From 1776 on, New Jersey Quakers increasingly promoted schools for blacks, and local meetings collected funds and encouraged legacies for black education. Evidence also exists that Quakers in the northern part of the state actively secured the establishment of free schools for poor children, white and black. Such educational efforts may have helped pave the way for the final passage of a gradual abolition bill in New Jersey in 1804.

In throwing off English rule Americans were forced early in the Revolution to consider the kind of government they wanted. American leaders increasingly championed republicanism as the form of government that would best insure future cultural unity and national greatness. On specific details public leaders were often vague about what they meant by republican government, but they were generally in clear agreement concerning its essentials. A republic would be free of monarchical rule and aristocratic privilege. It would be representative government in which men of talent, virtue, and learning would be elected to positions of leadership. These leaders would respond to an educated citizenry capable of participating intelligently in the determination of important public issues. A republic, moreover, would foster national unity and progress because its citizens, despite religious and cultural differences, would be bound by a higher loyalty to patriotic and moral values.

In this vision, education of all kinds, formal and informal, was absolutely essential. Education would also promote needed social and moral values. A republic, it was thought, would itself be educational in that it would encourage the poets, orators, historians, men of science, and statesmen, on whom progress depended.

During the Revolution and with mounting enthusiasm in the 1780s and 1790s various leaders advanced plans and proposals for the kind of education they thought best suited a republic. Preeminent among the spokesmen for republican education was, of course, Thomas Jefferson, with his conviction that no people can be both ignorant and free. A free press, schools, institutions of higher

learning, and an intelligent and reading public, Jefferson insisted, were necessary safeguards of liberty and national unity.

Many others besides Jefferson, however, contributed to the discussion of republican education. Interestingly enough, three of the most important statements of republican education came from alumni of the College of New Jersey. In South Carolina in 1778, David Ramsey, a distinguished former student of John Witherspoon, published a widely circulated oration on the importance of the arts and sciences to national unity. Another alumnus of the college, Benjamin Rush, a physician, professor and social reformer in Philadelphia, produced many educational plans for the new nation. They included plans for public schools in Pennsylvania, for women's education, and for a national university. At the College of New Jersey itself, President Samuel Stanhope Smith addressed himself repeatedly to the political, cultural and moral importance of education to the new republic.

Special steps, Smith said, should be taken to instruct future leaders of society in the liberal arts and higher branches of science. Colleges and universities, he declared, "might be regarded as so many elementary schools for training a constant succession of wise and enlightened statesmen for the republic." Even if they never actually participated in the administration of government, Smith thought that the very presence of graduates of these higher institutions would help to raise the political and moral tone of the country.

Smith also insisted that education be made available to every citizen. "The poor," he wrote, "ought to have access to the fountains of knowledge as well as the wealthy; they have equal talents from nature, and are equally capable of becoming enlightened patriots, legislators, and instructors." Consequently, he argued, colleges and universities should be open to all who have the ability and inclination to pursue the higher branches of knowledge. Above all, he counseled, state legislatures should provide every citizen with moral and civic instruction as well as the basic skills needed to conduct their ordinary affairs responsibly and intelligently. As Smith viewed the nation he voiced the fear that not enough was being done. "We want a great reform," he wrote to his friend, Benjamin Rush, "in the elementary parts of education that may be extended over the whole country."

R U L E S

James AND Co's

# REGULATIONS

FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF

QUEEN'S COLLEGE,

IN NEW-JERSEY:

Enacted by a Board of the TRUSTEES of said  
COLLEGE, the 7th day of August, 1787.

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NEW-BRUNSWICK:  
Printed by SHELLY ARNETT, 1788.

## CHAP. II.

Of Deportment.

*Section 1.* EVERY student shall address the President, and Tutors with becoming respect, shall take off his hat when he meets them, and shall remain uncovered while in their presence within doors. An insult offered to the President, or either of the Tutors shall be deemed an high misdemeanor, and punished accordingly. The students shall also treat all men with decency and good manners.

*Section 2.* No student shall frequent taverns, or any houses of ill-repute, or be guilty of cursing, swearing, or any unbecoming language; or be found guilty of playing at cards, dice, or any unlawful games. No one of the students shall keep any cards, dice, or game-fowls at his own lodgings, or elsewhere.—No one shall be guilty of drunkenness, or fraud, or wilful falsehood. The students are expressly forbidden to keep spirituous liquors at their lodgings, to associate with persons of low and bad characters.—They shall devote no part of the Sabbath to recreation, pleasure, or secular business; but shall remain within their rooms; except whilst attending upon religious exercises, or works of necessity.—The students are strictly forbidden

to

Front cover and representative page of the Queen's College regulations governing student conduct. Courtesy Rutgers University Library.

Many persons in New Jersey shared the same commitment to republican education and formed associations to encourage education and to support the erection of schools. Such societies for the promotion of education which appeared in Trenton in 1781 and in Morris County in 1786, were incorporated by the state legislature. In 1794 the legislature added further encouragement by passing a general measure to incorporate societies devoted to the promotion of learning and, later, extended their aid to include library companies. Whether these associations actually accomplished very much, however, is difficult to determine.

Not everyone was uncritically enthusiastic about education. In 1786, John Rutherford, later United States senator from New Jersey, described the extent and quality of education in New Jersey. He found educational institutions of all kinds to be flourishing — churches, elementary schools, academies, Latin grammar schools, the two colleges — and, in general, he felt this to be a good thing. He, nevertheless, expressed mixed feelings about the widespread enthusiasm for higher education that he found among people everywhere. “It must be owned,” he said, “that the Farmers and middle Class of People run too much on sending their Sons to Colleges. . . .” This he felt made them unfit for their own jobs, overstocked the learned professions, and instilled ideas and raised expectations that for most people could never be fulfilled. He lamented that while there were many “Smatterers of Learning” among the people, there were few deep scholars. He was all in favor of establishing more private and public libraries as means of encouraging serious scholarship.

In a sense Rutherford can be seen as representing a conservative point of view in that he appears to have favored higher learning for a few — the leaders of society — and only elementary and vocational education for the many — the citizenry. At the same time, however, he was raising a warning voice, pointing out that education is not a panacea, that it can create as well as solve problems, that the ultimate results of education will depend largely on the values and goals people bring to it. Rutherford’s observations also illustrate and underscore that in spite of a growing enthusiasm for education in general, postrevolutionary New Jersey lacked any clear-cut public agreement on future educational policies.

This state of affairs prevailed in New Jersey for decades into



the nineteenth century. A variety of educational institutions would continue to flourish. Self-education would remain important. Informal and formal educative agencies would continue to work side by side. And education of all kinds would continue to serve many purposes. A statewide system of education would begin to emerge gradually, introducing new debates about educational purpose, new achievements, and new problems.

### **For Further Reading**

The reader who wishes to learn more about education in revolutionary New Jersey can turn to a variety of sources. Unfortunately, no single book is devoted solely to the history of education in New Jersey during the colonial and revolutionary periods. The most complete history of schooling in New Jersey is Nelson R. Burr's *Education in New Jersey, 1630-1871*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1942). Burr devotes special attention to the role of churches in sponsoring schools during the colonial period. His discussion of academies in New Jersey is especially good. An older work is David Murray's *History of Education in New Jersey* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1899), which contains many interesting quotations from records and reminiscences of the early period. Thomas Woody's *Quaker Education in New Jersey* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1923) is poorly organized, but it contains valuable information on the educational work of one of the most important religious groups in early New Jersey. Roscoe L. West's *Elementary Education in New Jersey: A History* (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Co., 1964) is a recent work with a brief chapter on New Jersey schools during the colonial and revolutionary periods.

The reader who is particularly interested in the two colleges of New Jersey during the Revolution will find a number of interesting and useful books. Thomas J. Wertenbaker's *Princeton, 1746-1896* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946) contains engaging discussions of the early college leaders, students, and curriculum. An older history of the university, useful for basic information and many interesting details and insights is Varnum Lansing Collins's *Princeton* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941). Richard P.

McCormick's *Rutgers: A Bicentennial History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1966) is the most recent history of that college. The first two chapters in McCormick's book tell the interesting story of the origin and life of the college during the Revolution. A brief history of the colleges from their founding to the end of the revolutionary war is contained in the first chapter of George P. Schmidt's *Princeton and Rutgers — The Two Colonial Colleges of New Jersey* (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Co., 1964).

Varnum Lansing Collins's *President Witherspoon*, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1925) is the most complete, full-length biography of John Witherspoon. William Thorp, ed., *The Lives of Eighteen from Princeton* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946) presents excellent, brief accounts of outstanding Princeton educators and alumni, including several associated with the college during the revolutionary years. An extremely interesting discussion of the revolutionary activity of Princeton students and faculty is Sheldon S. Cohen and Larry R. Gerlach, "Princeton in the Coming of the American Revolution," *New Jersey History*, vol. 92 (Summer 1974), pp. 69-92. Readers interested in comparing student unrest in the 1960s with the rebellious student mood of the 1760s and 1770s will find this article by Cohen and Gerlach especially interesting.

The reader may also find two recent, general histories of colonial education particularly useful. Lawrence A. Cremin's *American Education: The Colonial Experience, 1607-1783* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970) is the most outstanding general history of colonial education available. Sheldon S. Cohen's *A History of Colonial Education, 1607-1706* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1974) is succinct, very readable, and contains a brief, special section on education in colonial New Jersey.

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DOUGLAS SLOAN received his doctorate in history from Teachers College, Columbia University, in 1969, and now is associate professor of History and Education there. He is a Methodist minister. His writings include *The Scottish Enlightenment and the American College Ideal* (1971), *The Great Awakening and American Education: A Documentary History* (1973), "The Scottish Enlightenment, Princeton, and Republican Education," in William C. Wright, ed., *Economic and Social History of Colonial New Jersey* (1974) and numerous articles and reviews.

