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"POOR SLAVISH DEPENDENTS"

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IT IS exciting to be able to report that the Rutgers University Library has recently acquired a pamphlet that is distinguished not only for its rarity but also for its significance in illustrating a major theme in the history of New Jersey.

The pamphlet, published under the pseudonym "Amicus Patriae," is titled *Proposals for Traffick and Commerce, or Foreign Trade in New-Jersey . . .* and was printed in 1718, probably by Andrew Bradford. In addition to the Rutgers copy, the only other complete copy that is known to exist is in The New-York Historical Society; a defective version is owned by the Library Company of Philadelphia.

The central concern of the pamphlet is one that has long plagued Jerseymen—how to achieve freedom from a "slavish dependence" on New York. The answer, devised in the best mercantilist tradition, was to develop an independent foreign trade by a judicious use of export and import duties and by the creation of a local supply of money.

From the earliest days of its career as a colony, New Jersey was acutely aware of its role as an economic appendage of its neighboring colonies. After the founding of Perth Amboy in 1683, high hopes were entertained that this port would come to rival New York City and serve East Jersey as the center of a flourishing foreign trade. For reasons that need not be detailed, these aspirations were not realized. East Jersey farmers and storekeepers continued to trade with New York, and Perth Amboy languished.

Proposals for Traffick and Commerce,
O R
Foreign Trade in
New-Jersey,

In Answer to that upbrading Question,
Why should not We have Trade, as all other

T H E
PLANTATIONS:

Collected
From the Papers of A. and B. D. N. A. P. F.
and G. H. W. and others.

And Humbly Presented to the
General Assembly

By *AMICUS PATRIÆ.*

Where Trade Flourisheth, Wealth and Learning increaseth.

Printed in the Year 1718.

The title page of *Proposals for Traffick and Commerce*

Throughout the eighteenth century, however, there were sporadic efforts to utilize the regulatory and taxing powers of the colonial government to discourage trade with the adjacent colonies and foster a direct trade with foreign nations. Typical of these efforts were two laws enacted in 1714 that placed duties on hogshead staves, pipe staves, and wheat exported to other colonies. The intention was to preserve the staves for the use of New Jersey exporters and to encourage the local milling and bolting of wheat.¹ In 1717, as the result of opposition from the "countrymen," who resented these restrictions, the export duties on hogshead staves and wheat were repealed.²

This setback did not discourage the proponents of legislation to stimulate foreign trade. Instead, it caused them to launch an intensive campaign aimed at persuading the legislature that was scheduled to meet in April, 1718, to adopt their proposals. Various "papers" arguing the merits of the proposals were circulated, and a petition was presented to Governor Robert Hunter calling for measures "to Create a Forreign Trade."³ The governor, in his customary address to the legislators, cautioned them pointedly against "imaginary or ruinous" schemes to promote trade, and the session quickly adjourned without considering the subject.⁴

It is against this background that *Proposals for Traffick and Commerce* must be studied. The twenty-four page pamphlet contains a collection of several of the "papers" that were circulated in connection with the legislative session of April, 1718, together with some that were prepared after that session had adjourned. Specifically, there are two "discourses" between two freeholders of East Jersey, dated January 20 and February 14, 1718, in which the major out-

¹ *Acts of the General Assembly of the Province of New Jersey . . .* compiled by Samuel Allinson [Allinson's Laws] (Burlington, N. J., 1776), 17-18; *Archives of the State of New Jersey*, First Series, IV (Newark, N. J., 1882), 196. Virtually all of the colonies experimented extensively with the use of export and import duties as a means of promoting foreign trade or general economic development. Although this interesting subject has not been sufficiently investigated, there is useful material in Albert A. Giesecke, *American Commercial Legislation before 1789* (New York, 1910), and Willard C. Fisher, "American Trade Regulations before 1789," *Papers of the American Historical Association*, III (New York, 1889).

² Allinson's *Laws*, 17-18; *New Jersey Archives*, 1st Ser., IV, 291.

³ *New Jersey Assembly Minutes*, April 11, 1718.

⁴ *New Jersey Archives*, 1st Ser., IV, 364-5.

lines of the trade proposals are set forth and defended and a "proposal" by "A. P." for the issuance of paper money, dated January 27, 1718. Two other essays, one "A Letter to a Friend in the Eastern Division of New-Jersey from a Member of the same," March 10, 1718, and the other "A few Observations, by A. P. on a paper dropt in Amboy three days since, not knowing by whom, but directed to the Speaker of the House of Representatives," April 14, 1718, continued the discussion. The final paper in the series was "A Conference between F. and G. relating to Trade in the Eastern Division of New-Jersey," May 7, 1718. Filling out the pamphlet are two items of marginal relevance, one dealing with the inoculation of fruit trees and the preparation of cider and another reciting the chain of title to East Jersey.

In the opening discourse, the two freeholders deplored the action of the legislature in repealing the export duties on wheat and on hogshead staves. "I hear," said B., "that many of them cannot see and some of them will not see into that . . . great work of settling our Trade, and then what will they do but bring a charge on the Country." The proper course of action was clear. "Let the Assembly lay a large Duty upon every the Produce of the Country that shall be carried to any the Neighbouring Colonies, and we shall soon have Ships and Merchants come among us. . . ." This plan was hailed by "A.," who observed that although it might occasion some temporary inconvenience, "yet we had better bear that than remain forever Poor Slavish Dependents on *New York* and *Philadelphia*."

The program contained another important feature. "Let the Assembly lay a custom of four Shillings per Gallon on all Rum and Wine Imported from any the Neighbouring Colonies, and one Shilling from the Places of their growth: For the less Rum and Wine Imported, so much shall we be Enriched; and the more Goods will come in from *England*, besides Gold and Silver from the *West Indies*." The assembly was urged to enact these two proposals "and free this Poor Enslaved Colony, that all Posterity may Acknowledge 'em the worthy Patriots of their Country."

The third element in this comprehensive scheme was a plan to supply the colony with an adequate local currency. As set forth by "A. P.," this proposal involved the issuance of £10,000 in paper

money, which was to be lent to borrowers in amounts not exceeding £100. The loans were to be secured by mortgages on land and were to be amortized over a period of ten years. Interest, paid at the rate of $3\frac{3}{4}\%$, was to be devoted to the support of the government.⁵ The money could be used to pay debts and taxes and would free New Jersey from its dependence on New York currency.

Subsequent "papers" answered various objections to the trade measures. To the charge that the plan would restrict the liberty of farmers and local merchants, it was explained that such fancied liberty in reality meant enslavement by New York, that true freedom could be secured only through an independent foreign trade. When it was urged that perhaps the best solution for the colony's problem would be to annex East Jersey to New York and West Jersey to Philadelphia, the rejoinder was explosive: "What! *Betray our Country! Part with the Government!* . . . We cannot foresee the *Mischievous Consequences* of such a Change; and therefore they should be lookt upon as *Enemys* to their Country that dare but mention it."

The effect of the pamphlet on the legislature was hardly what its authors had anticipated. When the lawmakers convened in January, 1719, Jeremiah Basse moved that *Proposals for Traffick and Commerce*, together with other "libels" that had been circulated, should be taken into consideration by the House.⁶ A committee was appointed, headed by Basse, which in due course reported that it had found certain of the papers "False, Scandalous and Malicious," but that nothing in *Proposals for Traffick and Commerce* was deemed worthy of censure. The House declined to accept the second conclusion and appointed another committee to study the offensive pamphlet.⁷

It was the finding of this committee that the work in question "is a false and scandalous Libil, and contains gross Reflections upon the

⁵ Prior to 1718 several colonies had experimented with loan-office paper money, notably South Carolina, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and New Hampshire. New Jersey, which had issued unsecured bills of credit as early as 1709 created its first loan office, roughly on the principles outlined by "A. P.," in 1723. Donald L. Kemmerer, "The Colonial Loan-Office System in New Jersey," *Journal of Political Economy*, XLVII (Dec., 1939), 867-74.

⁶ *New Jersey Assembly Minutes*, Jan. 23, 1719.

⁷ *Ibid.*, Jan. 26, 1719.

Representative Body of this Province, and tends to the stirring up of Strife and Sedition amongst the Inhabitants thereof." Accepting this verdict, the House decreed that the pamphlet should be "burnt by the hands of the Common Hang-man, and that his Excellency be address to issue forth his Proclamation and promise a reward to the person that shall discover the author of the said paper."⁸ Thus ignominiously the elaborate proposals for liberating New Jersey from its enslavement met their doom.

By way of postscript, it might be added that the doom was not eternal. In 1723 a paper-money law, embodying the principles laid down by "A. P." was enacted, and it proved to be highly successful. In 1725 export duties were imposed for a term of ten years on wheat, wheat meal, and staves exported from East Jersey to other colonies. And in 1743 duties were levied on rum and wines not imported directly from abroad.⁹ These were by no means the final efforts of New Jersey to reduce its economic independence on New York, but the full story would be a very long one that has not yet reached its end in 1964.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Jan. 27, 1719. Later on the same day word was received by the House that the Governor "was pleased to say he would publish a Proclamation pursuant to the Desire of the House." Unfortunately for our purposes, this action did not lead to the discovery of the author—or authors—of the censured pamphlet.

⁹ Edwin P. Tanner, *The Province of New Jersey, 1664-1738* (New York, 1908), pp. 532-3.