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AMBITION, INTEREST AND FACTION:
POLITICS IN NEW JERSEY, 1702-1738

by
John R. McCreary

A THESIS

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TITLE

AMBITION, INTEREST AND FACTION: POLITICS

IN NEW JERSEY, 1702-1738

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COLONIAL NEW JERSEY

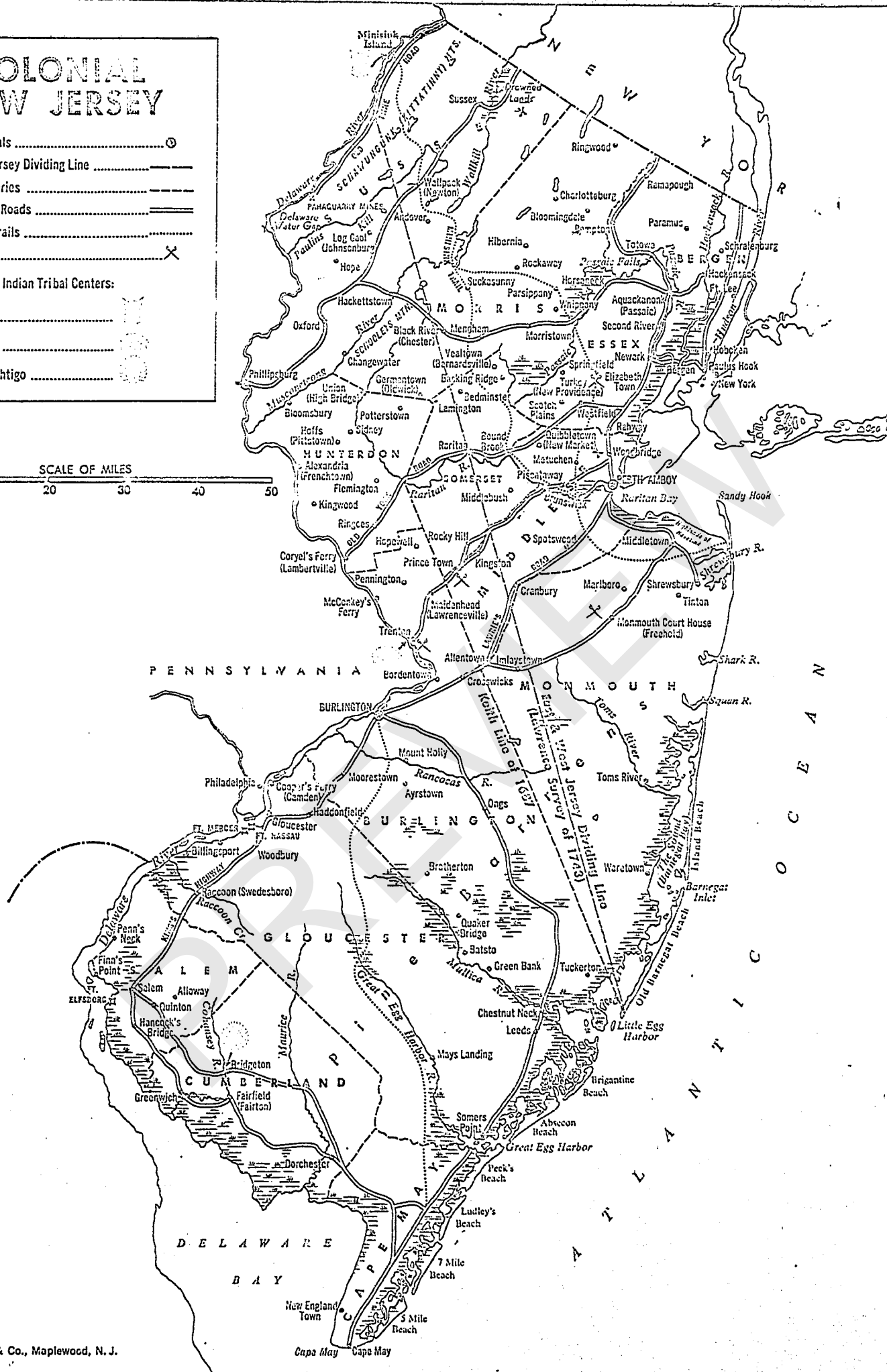
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INTRODUCTION

In writing of the past, the historian must analyze the evidence at his disposal, and attempt to retain a measure of objectivity while drawing certain conclusions about the individuals with whom he deals. This can be particularly hazardous when studying colonial politics, for invective was stifling and the paucity of evidence frequently renders definitive analysis impossible. Moreover, the study of political development has become somewhat passe, and the rewards might appear minimal. Nonetheless, such history is valuable, for it provides the only available framework for the seemingly more popular, albeit more nebulous ideological approach and indeed, the only counterbalance to it.

American colonial history has undergone a variety of interpretations. But for the most part, until comparatively recent times, historians concentrated on one theme--the ongoing struggle between the governors and the elected lower houses of assembly. Indeed, Charles M. Andrews, dean of American colonial historians, whose monumental work ¹ contributed so greatly toward

¹Charles M. Andrews, The Colonial Period of American History (4 vols., New Haven, 1934-38). Beginning his writing in 1899, Andrews completed this, his magnum opus, in his retirement.

popularizing the so-called "imperial school" of American colonial historiography, wrote in 1943 that "the most conspicuous feature of the political and institutional aspects of development in the eighteenth century..." was the rise of the colonial assembly with its growth to self-conscious activity and de facto independence of royal control."² This view was a natural extension of the assumptions made by late nineteenth century American patriotic historians, who saw the assemblies as the protectors of American liberties, locked in a struggle with the Crown agents. Yet this thesis, propounded by Andrews and by Herbert L. Osgood a decade before,³ contributed little toward a more realistic appraisal of eighteenth century politics than that of the patriots. This "imperial" approach laid emphasis on the whole rather than the component parts, and mistakenly distorted reality in search of a workable generalization. It ignored social, economic and political phenomena, which were the materials of

²Taken from Andrews, The Colonial Background of the American Revolution: Four Essays in American Colonial History (New Haven, 1924), 30, and "On the Writing of Colonial History," The William and Mary Quarterly, third ser., I (Jan., 1944), 39. (Hereafter cited as W&MQ).

³Herbert L. Osgood, The American Colonies in the Eighteenth Century (4 vols., New York, 1924). Osgood, whose outlook differed little from that of Andrews', set a bevy of Columbia University graduate students to work on colony-by-colony studies testing this hypothesis, and quite naturally, all arrived at comparable conclusions.

which the American political framework was cast, as competing interests and factions were lost to the overriding concern for developing an all-encompassing interpretation for colonial history, and particularly for the administration of the American colonies.

Early in the twentieth century, a small number of historians began the search for more satisfactory answers in attempting to explain the course of American colonial history. Although many of their efforts were marked by crude analysis involving class conflict and social discord, they did focus on the colonies' internal political divisions, caused by the clash of class and economic interests.⁴ Their writings prompted Professor Andrews, in the twilight of his career, to admit that an understanding of colonial politics was impossible without an "understanding of the social and propertied interests involved, class distinctions and personal rivalries, the motives of majorities, and the ambitions of political leaders."⁵

With this admonition in mind, historians since World War II have made some detailed explorations into

⁴The prototype of these works was that of Carl Lotus Becker, The History of Political Parties in the Province of New York, 1760-1776 (Madison, Wis., 1909).

⁵Andrews, "On the Writing of Colonial History," 40.

the world of colonial politics and government.⁶ Their efforts have elucidated, for some of the colonies, the domestic entanglements, rivalries and grievances which divided men and determined the course of colonial politics in the eighteenth century. They demonstrate the danger of generalization about the North American colonies as a monolithic entity, for local and state studies focus, of necessity, on the substantive rather than the ephemeral; on the concrete as opposed to the hypothetical; on action instead of ideology.

But just as the post-war era witnessed an intensive study of political history, so too did it produce a reaction against that type of scholarship. The sort

⁶Some of the most notable of these include: Oscar Zeichner, Connecticut's Years of Controversy, 1750-1775 (Chapel Hill, 1949); William W. Abbott, The Royal Governors of Georgia, 1754-1775 (Chapel Hill, 1959); Kenneth Coleman, The American Revolution in Georgia, 1763-1789 (Athens, 1958); M. Eugene Sirmans, Colonial South Carolina, A Political History 1663-1763 (Chapel Hill, 1966); Jerome R. Reich, Leisler's Rebellion: A Study of Democracy in New York, 1667-1720 (Chicago, 1953); and the more thorough and astute Lawrence H. Leder, Robert Livingston and the Politics of Colonial New York (Chapel Hill, 1961); William Hanna, Ben Franklin and Pennsylvania Politics (Philadelphia, 1964); Aubrey C. Land, The Dulany's of Maryland (Baltimore, 1956); and John A. Schutz, William Shirley: King's Governor of Massachusetts (Chapel Hill, 1961). Some other notable works which deal with the machinations of colonial politics, but which have never been published include: Beverly McAnear, "Politics in Provincial New York, 1689-1761" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1935); Leslie J. Thomas, "Partisan Politics in Massachusetts during Governor Bernard's Administration, 1760-1770" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1960); Jere R.

of history raised in opposition might best be titled the Neo-Imperialist school, for its emphasis has been directed toward a revitalization of the old "imperial" conclusions regarding the lessons of the Anglo-American empire.⁷ Political studies which ignore the role of the assemblies, according to today's leading proponent of this thesis, make it "extremely difficult to construct an alternative general framework of interpretation that has so comprehensive an applicability."⁸ For this group, historical interpretation has come full cycle, returning to the "imperial" framework because of the intellectual need to construct a grand hypothesis.

Most recently scholars have turned to ideology as the unifying element in colonial politics. The first

Daniell, "New Hampshire Politics and the American Revolution, 1741-1790" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1964); and Larry R. Gerlach, "Revolution or Independence? New Jersey, 1760-1776" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Rutgers University, 1968).

⁷Under this general heading I would include studies by Lawrence H. Gipson, The British Empire Before the American Revolution (14 vols., to date, Caldwell, Idaho and New York, 1936-); and Jack P. Greene, The Quest for Power: The Lower Houses of Assembly in the Southern Royal Colonies, 1689-1776 (Chapel Hill, 1963).

⁸Greene, "Political Mimesis: A Consideration of the Historical and Cultural Roots of Legislative Behavior in the British Colonies in the Eighteenth Century," American Historical Review, LXXV, no. 2 (December, 1969), 338. See also, Bernard Bailyn's comment on the article, pages 361-63, and Greene's rebuttal, 364-67.

modern American historian to attempt this approach was Bernard Bailyn, although he was anticipated in some of his work on colonial political thought by Clinton Rossiter.⁹ Bailyn concentrated on the relationship between political thought and political behavior in Anglo-American development. After examining pamphlets and broadsides, he decided that the work of a number of early eighteenth century pamphleteers influenced succeeding generations of colonists in developing an anti-authoritarian philosophy which manifested itself first in colonial politics, and which eventually carried over into the Revolutionary era.¹⁰ Bailyn argued that this phenomenon of inherited English opposition thought was even more potent in America than in the mother country as a result of the political situation in the colonies.¹¹ While appearing to possess powers even greater than the English monarch, the royal governor was in reality far more

⁹Clinton Rossiter, Seedtime of the Republic: The Origin of the American Tradition of Political Liberty (New York, 1953).

¹⁰Bernard Bailyn, Pamphlets of the American Revolution, 1750-1776 (1 vol. to date, Cambridge, 1965-), I, 20-89. Moving to an expanded effort along these same lines, Bailyn examined earlier writings, and concluded that the same phenomenon could be found operative, at least in limited ways, even at the beginning of the eighteenth century, and certainly by 1730. See: The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution (Cambridge, 1967), 40-55.

¹¹Idem, The Origins of American Politics (New York, 1968); particularly the introduction and the first two chapters.

handicapped by the lack of means to control colonial politicians. Secondly, social fluidity heightened competition for power and place, and made any permanent settlement impossible. This most recent of Bailyn's contributions reflects, in some measure, the thrust of his earlier work, although it emphasizes ideology at the expense of social and economic analysis. In a perceptive and ground-breaking essay over a decade ago, Bailyn outlined an innovative approach to American colonial politics.¹² A permanent conflict existed among the uppermost level of American society because of a division of political authority. In the traditional, deferential society the social and economic elite exercised political authority, while providing a coterie of local leadership. While this elite felt itself bound to lead and govern, it was at the same time engrossed in the competition for place in a fluid New World environment which allowed men to gain wealth and status but limited the number of desirable positions. This approach seems promising, but little work has been done along these lines since 1957, when Bailyn proposed it. He has since shown more interest in the force of ideology in compelling men to act.

¹²Idem, "Political and Social Structure in Colonial Virginia," in James M. Smith, ed., Seventeenth Century America (Chapel Hill, 1959), 90-115.

One further dimension must be assessed. Political factions operated within a colony and exploited the division of authority between local and imperial power. Most recently a few studies have sought to examine the impact of factional politics on the local scene and to demonstrate the imperial connection. The most successful of these works is by Stanley Katz.¹³ While he has perhaps not paid sufficient attention to the internal struggles in New York, Katz has certainly demonstrated the inadequacy of writing American colonial history as merely a struggle within the local arena and ignoring the external authority. Most politicians realized that ultimate power lay outside the province; indeed, outside North America itself. This necessitates, at various points, the analysis of English politics, and perhaps more importantly, the political connections of provincials in the administrative boards and offices which dealt with colonial affairs. For it was here, at the Plantation Office, particularly among its undersecretaries, secretaries, and commissioners that recommendations, if not actual decisions were made. And it must be recognized that these men possessed their own family and factional ties, as well

¹³ Stanley Nider Katz, Newcastle's New York, Anglo-American Politics, 1732-1753 (Cambridge, 1968). See also the prototype of this type of study, Shutz, William Shirley.

as their particular economic interests.

Between the Restoration of Stuart rule in 1660 and the abortive uprising of the Pretender James in Scotland in 1715, one can refer to the party labels of Whig and Tory in delineating political groups within England.¹⁴ For while personal, familial and regional interests certainly impinged on political alliances,¹⁵ two issues divided men into rival camps. Tories generally remained exponents of royal prerogative and the established church, while the Whigs, most broadly, stood for religious toleration and constitutional limitations on the monarchy. By 1714 the Whigs had embraced the Hanoverian Succession, and although the Tories under Oxford had enjoyed a period of resurgence during Anne's reign, they were too tainted with the aura of Jacobitism following James' unsuccessful coup in 1715 to be an effective force in English politics.¹⁶

¹⁴See: Ian F. Burton, P. W. J. Riley, and E. Rowlands, Political Parties in the Reigns of William III and Anne, The Evidence of Division Lists, Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research, no. 7 (November, 1968). A thorough analysis of division lists shows existence of political splits along these "party" lines.

¹⁵For a detailed analysis of factions at the accession of Anne, see Robert Walcott, English Politics in the Early Eighteenth Century (Cambridge, 1965).

¹⁶Sir Lewis B. Namier, England in the Age of the American Revolution (London, 1930), 230-31. See also, The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III (2d ed., London, 1957); and with John Brooke, The History

Political strife did not end with the decline of the Tories. After 1720 it continued within an amorphous collection of politicians, among various families and political interests, under the Whig label. Stability was achieved only by the shrewd parliamentary management of the type provided first by Sir Robert Walpole (1721-42) and later by the Pelhams.¹⁷ Politics became less oriented toward larger national causes, and in time became local, parochial and personal. As Lewis Namier put it, "In 1706 it was faithful service to your country," while by 1760 "service to one's friends,"¹⁸ had come to predominate in politics. The holding of office had become a passion, with its own raison d'être, and a politician's power was gauged by the amount of patronage at his disposal.

Such a political system, constructed on patronage and on individual and family alliances aimed at gaining and holding political power, with the sometimes subtle, sometimes rapid alterations of factions, affected the conduct of colonial affairs. Major responsibility for colonial administration fell to the Board of Trade, a

of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1754-1790 (London, 1964), particularly vol. I.

¹⁷On these respective parliamentary regimes, see: J. H. Plumb, Sir Robert Walpole (2 vols., London, 1956-1960); and John B. Owen, The Rise of the Pelhams (London, 1957).

¹⁸Namier, The Structure of Politics, 18.

body created in 1696. The Board played an important role, particularly through active members such as William Blathwayt, whose influence in colonial management and politics was probably second to none in England during his service on the Board.¹⁹ Quite naturally, positions on such administrative boards were political plums, as were appointments to offices in the colonies. The royal governor was ordinarily appointed because of his connections with a prevailing faction, and a change in the ministry might well bring disaster for his administration. For the governor was indeed in a uniquely difficult situation, forced to maintain a constant surveillance of political developments within his colony, and concurrently to keep abreast of the English political scene. For provincials also forged transatlantic political and family alliances. The dissident colonist, resentful of his treatment by a governor, had available two courses of action. He could launch an attack within the colony, normally conducted within the assembly and the press, and he could carry his fight to England, in the hope of utilizing his own political interest there to obtain the governor's

¹⁹For a discussion of Blathwayt's career, see Gertrude A. Jacobsen, William Blathwayt: A Late Seventeenth Century English Administrator (New Haven, 1932). More recent articles on Blathwayt, detailing his involvement in English politics are by Stephen Saunders Webb, "William Blathwayt, Imperial Fixer: From Popish Plot to Glorious Revolution," W&MQ, third series, XXV (January, 1968), 3-21, and "William Blathwayt, Imperial Fixer," W&MQ, third series, XXVI (July, 1969), 373-415.

compliance or removal. By such tactics William Shirley brought about the removal of a governor and his own appointment as chief executive in Massachusetts.²⁰

A study of provincial New Jersey offers an opportunity to test the operations of a political system with divided authority. But New Jersey between the years 1702 and 1738 offers a unique opportunity for there were not two, but four divisions of power. Not only as between legislative power and the authority at Whitehall, but due to the peculiarities of New Jersey's history the colony was part of New York for administrative purposes and still bore some of the vestiges of the old proprietary regimes. Due to the heterogeneous population and to New Jersey's peculiar economic dependence on New York and Philadelphia, a study of the colony might also reveal the effects of trade and religion on the course of politics.

Perhaps the most unique aspect of New Jersey's colonial history was the colony's location, and the circumstances surrounding its origins. Situated between New York and Pennsylvania, Nova Caesaria appears in retrospect to have been a geographic hoax, perpetrated on her inhabitants by some mad mapmaker. With but few natural boundaries, the Jerseys came into existence as a separate entity only

²⁰See: Schutz, William Shirley.

at the whim of James, Duke of York, and from an economic point of view, nothing could have been less natural. Parochial Jerseyans preferred to compare their state to Issachar: "a strong ass crouching down between two great burdens," ²¹ but this sentiment hardly reflected the realities of eighteenth century trade. The western section leaned toward its natural financial and marketing center--Philadelphia, while East Jersey found that its natural orientation was toward New York. And in politics, as in finance, the Jerseys were in part dependent on these flanking metropolises. Indeed, this sectional division was to remain one of the central features of New Jersey's politics and society down to the Revolution. Strife between contending proprietary organizations for control of the richest of Jersey lands was the root cause of much of the period's political wrangling.

Certainly New Jersey was no microcosm of colonial society. The province was, if anything, atypical, both in the bi-polarity of its orientation and in the great ethnic and religious diversity of its population. The wonder is not that New Jersey did not develop greater internal unity, but rather that such an unnatural assemblage of disparate religious and ethnic groups as were brought together in 1702 under one government, could

²¹Gerlach, "Revolution or Independence?" xiv.

maintain any degree of internal harmony. The central fact of New Jersey's history throughout the period, however, was that political unification in 1702 did not break down the de facto divisions which continued to plague the colony long after the last vestiges of proprietary government itself had disappeared. In attempting to weld the colony into a working unit, the royal governors were harrassed by competing land speculators, by religious conflicts among Quakers, New England Puritans, Scottish Calvinists, and of course, the influential Anglicans. They were additionally beset by the piques of irritated, ambitious, but unsuccessful Jersey politicians, frequently representing these groups, whose inability to influence the executive and win admission to the provincial Council, or gubernatorial support for their cause, drove them into opposition. During the period under study, the royal governor was in even greater difficulty than otherwise might have been the case, since he was in danger not only from dissident Jersey groups, but as governor of New York faced the disaffected from that province as well. Here was a natural combination, and politicians from the two colonies frequently joined in applying inter-colonial as well as transatlantic pressures to an already beleaguered governor. Indeed, these were sometimes one and the same men, for Lewis Morris, James Alexander, Doctor John Johnston and others were prominent in both colonies.

Comparable, though less pervasive influence was exerted from Pennsylvania, where Quaker leaders such as John Kinsey and James Logan exercised considerable sway over the many Quakers in West Jersey through the Philadelphia and Burlington Friends Meetings. Politicians from any of the three colonies were capable of producing effective opposition in Whitehall to a governor. It was this multifaceted political structure, together with the sectional nature of the colonial society itself, which contributed to the uniqueness of New Jersey's politics.

While many historians have dealt with New Jersey's colonial politics, several important questions remain unanswered. For the years preceeding New Jersey's royalization, John E. Pomfret's two serviceable works remain the scholarly standard.²² Nothing comparable serves for the later period, although several monographs treat the subject of New Jersey between the years 1702 and 1776. The most recent of these is that of Donald L. Kemmerer, which gives a fairly standard "imperial" approach to the history of colonial New Jersey. Kemmerer's major difficulty is his failure to explain intra-colonial struggles

²²John E. Pomfret, The Province of West New Jersey, 1609-1702 (Princeton, 1956); and his companion work, The Province of East New Jersey, 1609-1702 (Princeton, 1962). A third work, The New Jersey Proprietors and Their Lands, 1664-1776 (Princeton, 1964), is a more general work, based in large part on the two earlier monographs.

in any terms other than the familiar contest of the assembly against the governor.²³ Not to be neglected is the venerable work of William A. Whitehead on the East Jersey proprietary governments.²⁴ Still useful, it provides a pot pourri of useful facts and anecdotes. Finally, Richard P. McCormick's brief survey of New Jersey in the colonial period merits mention.²⁵ A judicious account of the colonial period, based on the titles cited above, this little book devotes only a portion of one chapter to the period of royal government under the New York governors. Indeed, none of these works devote more than a few chapters to the period, yet it would seem to have been critical to the subsequent development of New Jersey.

The course of New Jersey's history would indicate that the "imperial" interpretation is simplistic.

²³Donald L. Kemmerer, Path to Freedom, The Struggle for Self-Government in Colonial New Jersey, 1702-1776 (Princeton, 1940; reprinted in 1968 by John E. Edwards). A much earlier, though in some respects more detailed work is that of Edwin P. Tanner, The Province of New Jersey, 1664-1738 (New York, 1908). Tanner, who studied under H. L. Osgood, gives greater detail in political and institutional development than Kemmerer, but his approach to the working of politics and politicians is quite similar.

²⁴William A. Whitehead, East Jersey under the Proprietary Governments (2d ed., Newark, 1875).

²⁵Richard P. McCormick, New Jersey from Colony to State, 1609-1789 (Princeton, 1964).

Legislative bodies, in and of themselves, have no life. When a colonial governor referred to "the assembly" he was in reality describing a group of factions, often a temporary majority of the assemblymen acting in unison on some particular and often transitory issue. Confusion has arisen as a result of the fact that governors, endeavoring to justify and preserve their own political position, occasionally charged recalcitrant assemblymen with attacks on the prerogative. There is no evidence that there was an irreconcilable struggle between these political figures in New Jersey. Much of the actual workings of colonial politics depended upon the ability and sagacity of the governor. Out of the chaos that was the political world, the New Jersey governor had to bring some kind of order. Able governors enjoyed successful, if hazardous tenures in office (barring English political complications) while the less able found the tumult of unrestrained factional politics more than they could abide (apart from the fact that some found their English ties so weak as to render them virtually helpless in the colony). In any case, however, it becomes obvious in this study that little of New Jersey's colonial politics is to be understood by clinging to concepts of "the rise of the representative assemblies," in which the lower houses are viewed as constantly engaged throughout the eighteenth

century "in a continuous movement to enlarge their sphere of influence."²⁶ For men, rather than institutions, are the moving forces of history. Where disputes arose between governor and "assembly," it is not sufficient merely to contend that the prerogative was being challenged by a monolithic body, which is accorded a quasi-organic nature. The historian must probe deeper into the nature of the conflict, to find that such disputes are traceable to conflicts of personalities and interests rather than to inherent and irreconcilable antagonisms between governing institutions. It is to these dimensions that this dissertation shall be addressed.

²⁶Jack P. Greene, "The Role of the Lower Houses of Assembly in Eighteenth-Century Politics," Journal of Southern History, XXVII (November, 1961), 456-57. For the same interpretation applied specifically to New Jersey, see: Gordon B. Turner, "Colonial New Jersey, 1703-63," Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society, LXX (July, 1952), 229-45. (Hereafter cited as PNJHS). For Turner, the conflict was quite simple--the assembly represented "the desire of the landless for land while the provincial council and governor represented the proprietary interests." p. 230-31.

CHAPTER I

PROPRIETARY BACKGROUND

The restoration of the Stuart Charles II in 1660 marked the intensification of anti-Dutch struggles in England, a rivalry which had originated under the Protector Cromwell. Within the anti-Dutch clique was the King's brother James, Duke of York, appointed lord high admiral in 1660 and his associates on the Navy Board, Lord John Berkeley and Sir George Carteret. Both would later have a prominent part in the establishment of the Jerseys. It was quite natural that the area between the Connecticut and the Delaware rivers should come under the notice of these men, for in spite of an English claim to the region dating to John Cabot's voyage in 1497, it had long been under Dutch occupation. Under repeated prodding from James and the commercial expansionists, a royal fleet was sent to eliminate the Dutch from the area. In 1664 the expedition under the command of Colonel Richard Nicolls seized New Amsterdam.

In March Charles II granted to his brother an enormous aggregate of lands lying between the St. Lawrence and the Delaware. Coming prior to the actual conquest,