

Dictionary of Literary Biography

Volume 24:

American
Colonial Writers,
1606-1734

Dictionary of Literary Biography • Volume Twenty-four

American Colonial Writers, 1606-1734

Edited by
Emory Elliott
Princeton University

A BRUCCOLI CLARK BOOK
Gale Research Company • Book Tower • Detroit, Michigan 48226
1984

Advisory Board for
DICTIONARY OF LITERARY BIOGRAPHY

Louis S. Auchincloss
John Baker
D. Philip Baker
A. Walton Litz, Jr.
Peter S. Prescott
Lola L. Szladits
William Targ

Matthew J. Bruccoli and Richard Layman, *Editorial Directors*
C. E. Frazer Clark, Jr., *Managing Editor*

Manufactured by Edwards Brothers, Inc.
Ann Arbor, Michigan
Printed in the United States of America

Copyright © 1984
GALE RESEARCH COMPANY

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Main entry under title:

American colonial writers, 1606-1734.

(Dictionary of literary biography; v. 24)

"A Bruccoli Clark book."

Includes index.

1. American literature—Colonial period, ca. 1600-1775—History and criticism. 2. American literature—Colonial period, ca. 1600-1775—Bio-bibliography. 3. Authors, American—Colonial period, ca. 1600-1775—Biography—Dictionaries. I. Elliott, Emory, 1942- II. Series. PS185.A39 1983 810'.9'001 83-20577
ISBN 0-8103-1703-6

Plan of the Series

... Almost the most prodigious asset of a country, and perhaps its most precious possession, is its native literary product—when that product is fine and noble and enduring.

Mark Twain*

The advisory board, the editors, and the publisher of the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* are joined in endorsing Mark Twain's declaration. The literature of a nation provides an inexhaustible resource of permanent worth. It is our expectation that this endeavor will make literature and its creators better understood and more accessible to students and the literate public, while satisfying the standards of teachers and scholars.

To meet these requirements, *literary biography* has been construed in terms of the author's achievement. The most important thing about a writer is his writing. Accordingly, the entries in *DLB* are career biographies, tracing the development of the author's canon and the evolution of his reputation.

The publication plan for *DLB* resulted from two years of preparation. The project was proposed to Brucoli Clark by Frederick G. Ruffner, president of the Gale Research Company, in November 1975. After specimen entries were prepared and typeset, an advisory board was formed to refine the entry format and develop the series rationale. In meetings held during 1976, the publisher, series editors, and advisory board approved the scheme for a comprehensive biographical dictionary of persons who contributed to North American literature. Editorial work on the first volume began in January 1977, and it was published in 1978.

In order to make *DLB* more than a reference tool and to compile volumes that individually have claim to status as literary history, it was decided to organize volumes by topic or period or genre. Each of these freestanding volumes provides a biographical-bibliographical guide and overview for a particular area of literature. We are convinced that this organization—as opposed to a single alphabet method—constitutes a valuable innovation in the presentation of reference material. The volume

plan necessarily requires many decisions for the placement and treatment of authors who might properly be included in two or three volumes. In some instances a major figure will be included in separate volumes, but with different entries emphasizing the aspect of his career appropriate to each volume. Ernest Hemingway, for example, is represented in *American Writers in Paris, 1920-1939* by an entry focusing on his expatriate apprenticeship; he is also in *American Novelists, 1910-1945* with an entry surveying his entire career. Each volume includes a cumulative index of subject authors. The final *DLB* volume will be a comprehensive index to the entire series.

With volume ten in 1982 it was decided to enlarge the scope of *DLB* beyond the literature of the United States. By the end of 1983 twelve volumes treating British literature had been published, and volumes for Commonwealth and Modern European literature were in progress. The series has been further augmented by the *DLB Yearbooks* (since 1981) which update published entries and add new entries to keep the *DLB* current with contemporary activity. There have also been occasional *DLB Documentary Series* volumes which provide biographical and critical background source materials for figures whose work is judged to have particular interest for students. One of these companion volumes is entirely devoted to Tennessee Williams.

The purpose of *DLB* is not only to provide reliable information in a convenient format but also to place the figures in the larger perspective of literary history and to offer appraisals of their accomplishments by qualified scholars.

We define literature as the *intellectual commerce of a nation*: not merely as belles lettres, but as that ample and complex process by which ideas are generated, shaped, and transmitted. *DLB* entries are not limited to "creative writers" but extend to other figures who in this time and in this way influenced the mind of a people. Thus there will be volumes for historians, journalists, publishers, and screenwriters. By this means readers of *DLB* may be aided to perceive literature not as cult scripture in the keeping of cultural high priests, but as at the center of a nation's life.

DLB includes the major writers appropriate to each volume and those standing in the ranks immediately behind them. Scholarly and critical coun-

*From an unpublished section of Mark Twain's autobiography, copyright © by the Mark Twain Company.

sel has been sought in deciding which minor figures to include and how full their entries should be. Wherever possible, useful references will be made to figures who do not warrant separate entries.

Each *DLB* volume has a volume editor responsible for planning the volume, selecting the figures for inclusion, and assigning the entries. Volume editors are also responsible for preparing, where appropriate, appendices surveying the major periodicals and literary and intellectual movements for their volumes, as well as lists of further readings. Work on the series as a whole is coordinated at the Brucoli Clark editorial center in Columbia, South Carolina, where the editorial staff is responsible for the accuracy of the published volumes.

One feature that distinguishes *DLB* is the illustration policy—its concern with the iconography of literature. Just as an author is influenced by his surroundings, so is the reader's understanding of the author enhanced by a knowledge of his environment. Therefore *DLB* volumes include not only drawings, paintings, and photographs of authors, often depicting them at various stages in their careers, but also illustrations of their families and places where they lived. Title pages are regularly reproduced in facsimile along with dust jackets for modern authors. The dust jackets are a special fea-

ture of *DLB* because they often document better than anything else the way in which an author's work was launched in its own time. Specimens of the writers' manuscripts are included when feasible.

A supplement to *DLB*—tentatively titled *A Guide, Chronology, and Glossary for American Literature*—will outline the history of literature in North America and trace the influences that shaped it. This volume will provide a framework for the study of American literature by means of chronological tables, literary affiliation charts, glossarial entries, and concise surveys of the major movements. It has been planned to stand on its own as a vade mecum, providing a ready-reference guide to the study of American literature as well as a companion to the *DLB* volumes for American literature.

Samuel Johnson rightly decreed that "The chief glory of every people arises from its authors." The purpose of the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* is to compile literary history in the surest way available to us—by accurate and comprehensive treatment of the lives and work of those who contributed to it.

The *DLB* Advisory Board

Foreword

Since the early nineteenth century, when the first literary histories of the American colonies and the early United States began to be produced, critics and historians have bemoaned the thinness of the early American literary heritage. With some embarrassment over the crudeness of American writings compared to the grace of the contemporary works of the English and Scottish poets, commentators provided a set of excuses to explain why Americans had failed as literary artists. One argument was that the colonists had been too busy clearing a wilderness and establishing laws, governments, schools, and commerce to devote time and energies to belles lettres. Another was that Puritanism was such a powerful force in the culture that its dictates against the indulgence of the imagination and toward utilitarianism suppressed aesthetic achievement and encouraged only literature of the most pedestrian and didactic form. The reasoning followed that since the clergy often controlled the presses in New England and were the masters of the written word, the sermon was the only literary form to reach the public in the Northern colonies. To account for the paucity of literary production in the middle colonies and the South, there was the ready explanation that the climate and geography did not favor the creation of cultural centers or energetic literary output. And when these excuses were not enough, there was always the plea that the vast majority of the colonists were illiterate, poor people who were outcasts of Europe. So convincing was this set of descriptions that many generations of Americans were taught that American literature really began with the essays of Ralph Waldo Emerson and the tales of Hawthorne and Melville.

Not until the second and third decades of this century was this interpretation of the American literary past seriously called into question. In the 1930s four great teacher-scholars—Thomas Johnson, Perry Miller, Samuel Eliot Morison, and Kenneth Murdock—began to reassess the writings of seventeenth-century New England by examining them in their aesthetic and religious contexts. The literary merits of both the early sermons and other forms of writing, such as autobiographies, histories, diaries, and elegies, became more apparent in light of this more sophisticated historical understanding. At the same time the discovery of the poetry of Edward Taylor led to a revision of the image of the Puritan minister and a greater appreciation of the

imaginative range of the Puritan mind. Under the direction of these and a growing number of scholars of colonial American literature, there began a reassessment of the literature of colonial New England that continues today. Almost concurrent with these discoveries has been a significant effort to unearth, catalogue, and evaluate the literary production of the Southern and middle colonies. Through the painstaking and persistent work of such prominent scholars as Richard Beale Davis, Lewis Leary, J. A. Leo Lemay, and Harrison Messerole, a host of early American poets and men of letters have been recovered from historical obscurity. Even after completing his monumental three-volume history of Southern literature, Davis was still at work in the last weeks of his life in the archives of small local libraries in the Carolinas discovering early Southern poetry and published sermons. The result of all this remarkable scholarly achievement is that we now have a wealth of materials and a much more complete understanding of the complex nature of the literary achievement of the colonial writers.

Through the three volumes of *DLB* devoted to early American writing, of which this is the first, we hope to accomplish at least two important goals. First, to provide treatments of the lives and works of the major figures of the period, such as the Mathers, Bradstreet, Taylor, and Edwards, which are informed by the most recent critical interpretations of the works. Second, we wish to preserve in these volumes the sometimes fragmentary knowledge we currently have of some of the more elusive figures of our literary past. This volume necessarily contains a number of quite brief entries because, at present, we may know only that a certain writer produced one fine poem or a handful of sermons. More information about these writers and evidence of other works may emerge in the years to come, particularly if this reference work stimulates others to follow up the available evidence recorded here. With the exception of the bibliographies for Increase and Cotton Mather, whose published works number in the hundreds, the lists of books at the beginnings of entries include all the authors' separate publications, excluding broadsides, the most ephemeral pamphlets, and works of doubtful attribution. While original spellings have been preserved, idiosyncrasies of colonial typography, such as the swash *s*, have not.

The enthusiasm with which the contributors

to this volume welcomed the opportunity to investigate and present the lives and writings of the authors who appear in these pages has been typical of the liveliness, even zeal, that has characterized the work in the field of early American literature in the last three or four decades. After the groundbreaking work of the scholars of the 1930s and 1940s, there followed two generations of scholars who have taken up the challenge of rewriting the literary history of early America and putting to rest the myths and rationalizations that served for over a

century to explain the alleged lack of a heritage where, in fact, a rich and complex imaginative life remained to be discovered and explored. Though the list of those who have labored in this effort is a long and distinguished one, I have chosen to dedicate this volume to a few of the leading scholars who seem to me to have played, in the last twenty years, most significant roles in stimulating and furthering our study and appreciation of seventeenth-century American literature.

—Emory Elliott

Acknowledgments

This book was produced by BC Research. Karen L. Rood, senior editor for the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* series, was the in-house editor.

The production manager is Lynne C. Zeigler. Art supervisor is Alice A. Parsons. The production staff included Angela D. Bardin, Mary Betts, Josie A. Bruccoli, Patricia Coate, Claudia Ericson, Lynn Felder, Joyce Fowler, Laura Ingram, Sharon K. Kirkland, Nancy H. Lindsay, Cynthia D. Lybrand, Walter W. Ross, Patricia C. Sharpe, and Joycelyn R. Smith. Joseph Caldwell is photography editor. Jean W. Ross is permissions editor. Joseph Caldwell, Claudia Ericson, and Charles L. Wentworth did the photographic copy work.

A project of this magnitude is necessarily the work of many hands, and for such a book to be also of consistent high quality requires the commitment of hearts and minds as well. Credit should go to the contributors who patiently and cheerfully endured too many impersonal form letters from me during our two years of work together. To each of you, a hearty thanks for your goodwill and fine work.

While we would not have this volume without the collective commitment of the contributors, the book certainly would never have seen print without the splendid individual performance of our editor at BC Research, Ms. Karen Rood. Ms. Rood's superb editing skills, her unwavering professionalism, and her genuine scholarly interest in the material were exemplary throughout; she is indeed a person of exceptional talents, and I have been most fortunate to be able to work with her.

Closer to home, I have been able again to

count upon the assistance of the mainstay of the Princeton American Studies Program, Mrs. Helen Wright. Aiding me as she has American studies faculty since 1946, Helen helped to organize the complicated assignments for this and two forthcoming volumes of the *DLB*, and she typed and helped to mail those form letters. During the copyediting stage I received considerable assistance from my research assistant, Ms. Susan Mizruchi, who proved to be a remarkably capable editor as well as the most promising scholar I already knew her to be. Also assisting with final details and in searching for materials for reproduction in the volume has been another graduate student in the Princeton English department, Ms. Elizabeth Dant.

The skillful aid of the reference staff at the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University was essential in providing illustrations for this book. Norman Fiering, director, and Everett Wilkie, reference librarian, have earned my gratitude.

Valuable assistance was also given by the staff at the Thomas Cooper Library of the University of South Carolina: Lynn Barron, Sue Collins, Michael Freeman, Gary Geer, Alexander M. Gilchrist, Jens Holley, David Lincove, Marcia Martin, Roger Mortimer, Harriet B. Oglesbee, Jean Rhyne, Karen Rissling, Paula Swope, and Ellen Tillett.

Finally, I acknowledge the contribution of those closest to me whose understanding and support are essential to the completion of any project I assume: my children Scott, Mark, Matthew, Constance, and Laura, and as ever, my wife, Georgia.

Contents

Plan of the Series.....	xi	Benjamin Colman (1673-1747)	66
Foreword.....	xiii	<i>Wyn Kelley</i>	
Acknowledgments.....	xv	Ebenezer Cook (circa 1667-circa 1732)	72
James Alexander (1691-1756).....	3	<i>Robert D. Arner</i>	
<i>John R. Holmes</i>		John Cotton (1584-1652).....	76
George Alsop (1636-post 1673)	7	<i>Everett Emerson</i>	
<i>Robert D. Arner</i>		John Danforth (1660-1730).....	81
John Barnard (1681-1770).....	10	<i>Robert Daly</i>	
<i>Susan Mizruchi</i>		Samuel Danforth I (1626-1674).....	83
Robert Beverley (circa 1673-1722).....	13	<i>Robert Daly</i>	
<i>Robert D. Arner</i>		Samuel Danforth II (1666-1727)	85
Arthur Blackamore (1679-death date		<i>Robert Daly</i>	
unknown)	14	Daniel Denton (circa 1626-1703)	87
<i>Carl Bredahl</i>		<i>Paul Royster</i>	
James Blair (circa 1655-1743)	16	Jonathan Dickinson (1688-1747).....	89
<i>Homer D. Kemp</i>		<i>Paul W. Harris</i>	
William Bradford (1590-1657).....	19	William Douglass (circa 1691-1752).....	92
<i>Frank Shuffelton</i>		<i>Davis D. Joyce</i>	
Anne Bradstreet (1612 or 1613-1672).....	29	Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758).....	95
<i>Wendy Martin</i>		<i>Mason I. Lowance, Jr.</i>	
Thomas Bray (1656-1730).....	36	John Eliot (1604-1690)	109
<i>Michael A. Lofaro</i>		<i>Jane Donahue Eberwein</i>	
Thomas Budd (birth date unknown-1698)	39	Giles Firmin (1615-1697).....	116
<i>Jeffrey M. Jeske</i>		<i>Max Rudin</i>	
Mather Byles (1707-1788)	40	John Fiske (1608-1677)	119
<i>Kenneth A. Requa</i>		<i>Wesley T. Mott</i>	
William Byrd II (1674-1744).....	44	William Fitzhugh (circa 1651-1701).....	121
<i>Richard M. Preston</i>		<i>Michael A. Lofaro</i>	
Joseph Capen (1658-1725).....	51	John Foster (1648-1681).....	123
<i>Georgia Elliott</i>		<i>James Lawton</i>	
Charles Chauncy (1705-1787)	52	Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790).....	125
<i>Peter White</i>		<i>Richard E. Amacher</i>	
Ezekiel Cheever (1615-1708).....	62	Ebenezer Gay (1696-1787)	148
<i>Wesley T. Mott</i>		<i>Jeffrey M. Jeske</i>	
Cadwallader Colden (1688-1776).....	63	Daniel Gookin (1612-1687)	150
<i>Frank Shuffelton</i>		<i>Richard Cogley</i>	

John Hammond (birth date unknown-1663) ...151 <i>Daniel E. Williams</i>	John Norton (1606-1663).....233 <i>Michael P. Kramer</i>
Daniel Henchman (1689-1761)155 <i>James Lawton</i>	Nicholas Noyes (1647-1717).....238 <i>Peter L. Rumsey</i>
Thomas Hooker (1586-1647)156 <i>Sargent Bush, Jr.</i>	Urian Oakes (circa 1631-1681)239 <i>Catherine Rainwater</i>
William Hubbard (circa 1621-1704)164 <i>Alasdair Macphail</i>	Philip Pain (birth date unknown-circa 1666) ...243 <i>Frank Shuffelton</i>
John James (circa 1633-1729)172 <i>Robert W. Hill</i>	Francis Daniel Pastorius (1651-circa 1720).....245 <i>Rosamond Rosenmeier</i>
Edward Johnson (1598-1672)174 <i>Ursula Brumm</i>	Deuel Pead (birth date unknown-1727)248 <i>Michael A. Lofaro</i>
Samuel Johnson (1696-1772)180 <i>R. C. Gordon-McCutchan</i>	William Penn (1644-1718).....250 <i>Harald Alfred Kittel</i>
Hugh Jones (circa 1692-1760)183 <i>Randall M. Miller</i>	Thomas Prince (1687-1758)260 <i>Ronald A. Bosco</i>
John Josselyn (birth date unknown-1675).....185 <i>Robert D. Arner</i>	Mary Rowlandson (circa 1635-circa 1678).....266 <i>Richard VanDerBeets</i>
Sarah Kemble Knight (1666-1727)187 <i>Ann Stanford</i>	John Saffin (circa 1626-1710)267 <i>O. Glade Hunsaker</i>
John Lawson (birth date unknown-1711).....189 <i>Homer D. Kemp</i>	George Sandys (1578-1644)268 <i>Homer D. Kemp</i>
Richard Lewis (circa 1700-1734).....193 <i>Robert Micklus</i>	Joseph Sewall (1688-1769)273 <i>Ronald A. Bosco</i>
James Logan (1674-1751).....196 <i>Robert P. Winston</i>	Samuel Sewall (1652-1730).....278 <i>Richard E. Amacher</i>
Francis Makemie (circa 1658-1708)199 <i>Jeffrey M. Jeske</i>	Thomas Shepard I (1604 or 1605-1649).....284 <i>Thomas P. Slaughter</i>
Cotton Mather (1663-1728).....200 <i>Mason I. Lowance, Jr.</i>	Thomas Shepard II (1635-1677)286 <i>Nancy Craig Simmons</i>
Increase Mather (1639-1723)212 <i>Mason I. Lowance, Jr.</i>	John Smith (1580-1631)289 <i>Lewis Leary</i>
Richard Mather (1596-1669).....221 <i>Nancy Craig Simmons</i>	Josiah Smith (1704-1781)293 <i>M. Jimmie Killingsworth</i>
Jonathan Mitchel (1624-1668).....226 <i>Jane Gold</i>	Richard Steere (circa 1643-1721).....295 <i>Peter L. Rumsey</i>
Joshua Moody (circa 1633-1697)228 <i>Peter L. Rumsey</i>	James Sterling (1701-1763)297 <i>O. Glade Hunsaker</i>
Nathaniel Morton (1613-1685)230 <i>Thomas P. Slaughter</i>	Solomon Stoddard (1643-1729)300 <i>Karl Keller</i>
Thomas Morton (circa 1579-circa 1647)231 <i>Alan Axelrod</i>	Samuel Stone (1602-1663).....306 <i>Georgia Elliott</i>

William Stoughton (1631-1701)308 <i>Wesley T. Mott</i>	John Wilson (1588-1667).....351 <i>John Harmon McElroy</i>
Edward Taylor (circa 1642-1729)310 <i>Donald E. Stanford</i>	John Winthrop (1588-1649).....353 <i>Everett Emerson</i>
Benjamin Tompson (1642-1714)322 <i>Peter White</i>	John Winthrop, Jr. (1606-1676)363 <i>Alasdair Macphail</i>
Nathaniel Ward (circa 1578-1652).....326 <i>Rosamond Rosenmeier</i>	John Wise (1652-1725)370 <i>Richard Silver</i>
John Wheelwright (circa 1592-1679)329 <i>Mark R. Patterson</i>	Roger Wolcott (1679-1767)372 <i>William J. Scheick</i>
Alexander Whitaker (1585-1617)331 <i>Michael A. Lofaro</i>	William Wood (birth date and death date unknown).....376 <i>Jane Gold</i>
Andrew White (1579-1656).....332 <i>Daniel E. Williams</i>	Benjamin Woodbridge (1622-1684).....378 <i>Rosamond Rosenmeier</i>
Samuel Whiting (1597-1679).....336 <i>Wesley T. Mott</i>	John Peter Zenger (1697-1746)380 <i>Thomas P. Slaughter</i>
Michael Wigglesworth (1631-1705).....337 <i>Ronald A. Bosco</i>	Supplementary Reading List.....383
Samuel Willard (1640-1707).....343 <i>Peter L. Rumsey</i>	Contributors.....389
Roger Williams (circa 1603-1683)346 <i>Richard VanDerBeets</i>	Cumulative Index393

Dictionary of Literary Biography • Volume Twenty-four

American Colonial Writers, 1606-1734

Dictionary of Literary Biography

James Alexander

(1691-2 April 1756)

John R. Holmes
Kent State University

BOOKS: *The Arguments of the Council for the Defendent, In Support of A Plea to the Jurisdiction, Pleaded to a Bill filed in a Course of equity, At the suit of The Attorney General, Complainant, Against Rip Van Dam, Defendant, In the Supream Court of New-York*, by Alexander and William Smith (New York: Printed by John Peter Zenger, 1733);

The Proceedings of Rip Van Dam, Esq; In order for obtaining Equal Justice of His Excellency William Cosby, Esq., by Alexander and Smith (New York: Printed by John Peter Zenger, 1733);

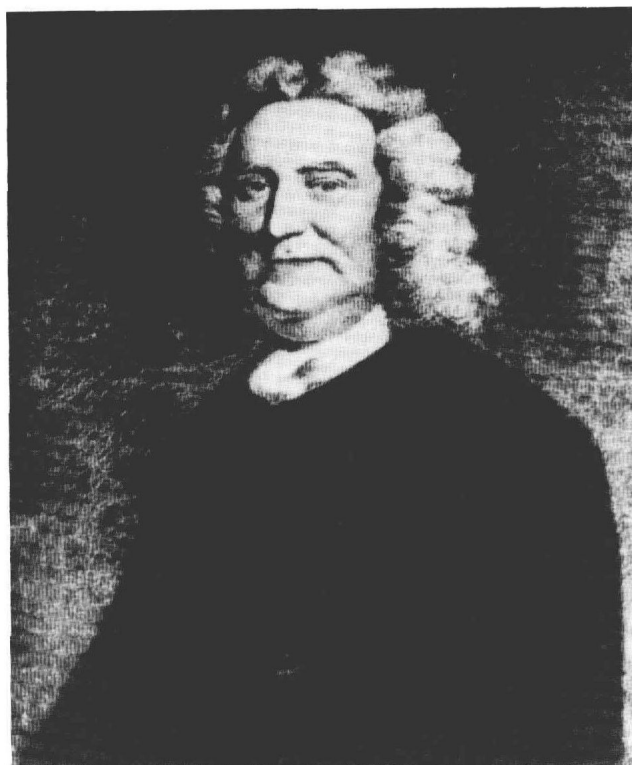
The Vindication of James Alexander, One of His Majesty's Council for the Province of New-York, and of William Smith, Attorney at Law, From the Matters charged and suggested against them in two Pamphlets lately published . . ., by Alexander and Smith (New York: Printed by John Peter Zenger, 1734);

The Complaint of James Alexander and William Smith to the Committee of the General Assembly of the Colony of New-York, &c., by Alexander and Smith (New York: Printed by John Peter Zenger, 1735);

A Brief Narrative of the Case and Tryal of John Peter Zenger, Printer of the New-York Weekly Journal . . . (New York: Printed by John Peter Zenger, 1736);

A bill in the Chancery of New-Jersey. At the suit of John, Earl of Stair, and others, Proprietors of the Eastern Division of New Jersey . . ., by Alexander and Joseph Murray (New York: Printed & sold by James Parker, 1747).

James Alexander, a colonial New York attorney



James Alexander

and statesman, was a contributor to and editor of the *New York Weekly Journal*. He is of literary interest primarily for his lifelong advocacy of freedom of the press, particularly in the celebrated libel trial of New York printer John Peter Zenger. His political prose anticipates that of Paine, Jefferson, and Hamilton, and his *A Brief Narrative of the Case and Tryal of John Peter Zenger . . .* (1736), which went through fifteen editions in both New York and London by

1800, has been called by Charles R. Hildeburn "the most famous publication in America before the *Farmer's Letters*."

Born in the village of Muthill in Perthshire, Scotland, son of David Alexander, James Alexander was to become the seventh Earl of Stirling, though he never claimed the title. Alexander studied science and mathematics at Edinburgh and joined the Scottish army as engineering officer in the unsuccessful Jacobite uprising of 1715. When the Scots forces were routed by the British, Alexander fled to Devon, where his cousin Henry, fifth Earl of Stirling, arranged his passage to America. He arrived at New York on 17 August 1715, and by November he had obtained a position as surveyor-general of New Jersey. He began studying law in 1718, serving as court recorder in Perth Amboy, New Jersey, as well as becoming deputy secretary of New York. Such double duty was fairly common: New York and New Jersey were not totally separate political entities at that time, sharing a governor and several administrative offices between them. In March of 1719 he moved to New York to oversee the surveying of its border with New Jersey; later that year he was admitted to the Council of New York as deputy clerk.

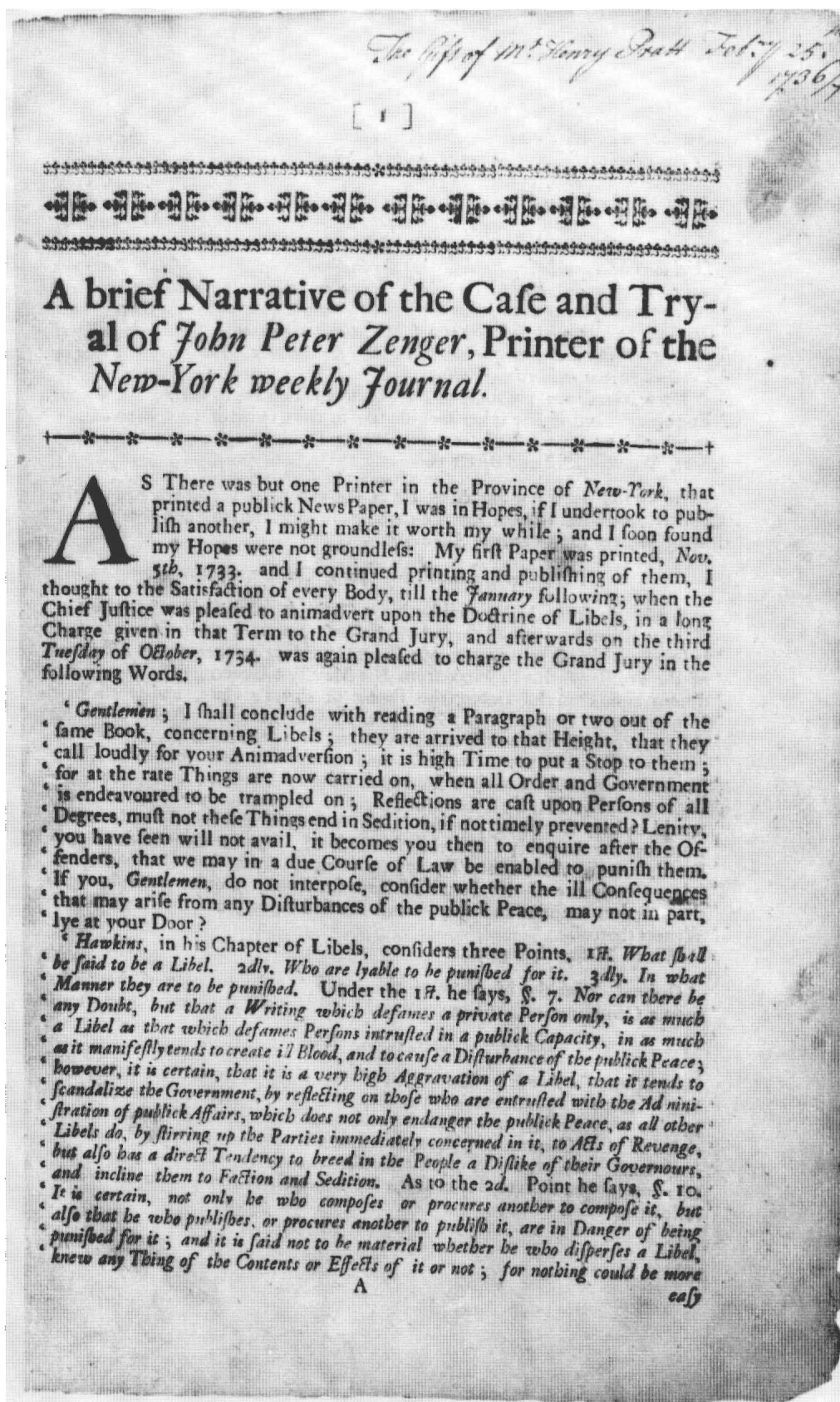
In 1721 he married Polly Spratt, widow of the Dutch merchant David Provoost, with whom she had two children. With Alexander she had five children in the next five years; the last, born in 1726, was their first and only son, William. Named after the first Earl of Stirling, court poet to James I and Charles I, William was to become the eighth Earl of Stirling and a general of the American Revolutionary Army.

James Alexander was admitted to the bar in 1723 and named attorney general for the province of New Jersey and member of the Council of New Jersey. In October he was named naval officer to the New York Council, where he defended the rights of colonists to trade with the Indians and the French, rights which had been suspended by Governor William Burnet (who served from 1720 to 1728) to protect the trade of London merchants. This defense was the first of Alexander's attempts to limit the powers of the colonial governor, and his first victory: the Privy Council in London accepted Alexander's recommendations and issued a Royal Instruction prohibiting governors from "assenting to *private* bills." In the ensuing years, however, Alexander came to realize that further victories could not be gained without comprehensive legal reform. In 1725 he made a formal motion in council for such a reform in order to place more control of the courts in the Provincial Assembly and less in the hands of the

governor. The motion made little progress in the council but was picked up by the assembly, which moved to abolish the Court of Chancery. On 25 November 1727, when the resolution was presented to Governor Burnet, he dissolved the assembly. Such a furor resulted that the colonial authorities were obliged to remove Burnet in March 1728. The new governor, John Montgomerie, avoided Burnet's excesses, but such discretion was the result of a change of administration, not of law: the potential for gubernatorial abuses of court remained, and in Governor William Cosby that potential was realized. It was during Cosby's administration (1732-1736) that Alexander's most heated opposition appeared—as well as his most powerful prose.

The first issue to reunite the opposition against Cosby was that of "Van Dam's salary." When Montgomerie died on 1 July 1731, Rip Van Dam, as senior councilman of New York, assumed the office until Cosby's arrival. When he reached New York in August 1732, Cosby demanded half of Van Dam's interim salary and used his own appointees in the New York Supreme Court to sue for it. Alexander, along with William Smith, took up Van Dam's legal defense, filing a 1 February 1733 rule declaring the supreme court invalid. When it came before the grand jury on 9 April, Chief Justice Lewis Morris agreed, affirming that the court had no jurisdiction in equity; Cosby had Morris removed from office. This action gave the opposition party their leader, Morris, and another complaint against Cosby. Alexander became the party spokesman in court and in the press. He had been having articles published in the *New York Gazette*, but he found its editor, Francis Harison, to be a de facto censor for Cosby. Finding printer John Peter Zenger sympathetic to the opposition, Alexander published the proceedings of Van Dam's trial at Zenger's press. On 5 November, following an overwhelming Morrisite victory in the assembly elections, Alexander launched the party's newspaper, the *New York Weekly Journal*, from Zenger's press. It was the first politically and editorially independent paper in America. The best pieces in it were Alexander's editorials on freedom of the press, offering the legal and philosophical basis for opposing the governor. Arguing that the paper defamed his administration and, therefore, threatened public order, Cosby tried on 15 January 1734 to gain indictments for seditious libel against the publishers through James De Lancey, who had replaced Morris as chief justice: the grand jury refused to grant them.

A threatening letter placed on Alexander's doorstep on Friday evening, 1 February, gave the journal editor a chance to respond more openly than



First page for Alexander's defense of John Peter Zenger

in his unsigned editorials. Identifying the handwriting as that of rival editor and Cosbyite Francis Harison, Alexander ordered a council investigation, and printed the proceedings and his own account as a pamphlet, *The Vindication of James Alexander* . . . (1734).

Failing in a second attempt to gain a grand jury indictment, De Lancey went to the council and succeeded in having Zenger arrested as the *Journal's* printer on 17 November 1734. Alexander continued to publish the paper while he and Smith defended Zenger in the celebrated case. As in the Van Dam case, Alexander's bold strategy was to challenge the legality of the court. When Smith and Alexander refused to retract the protest, De Lancey cited them for contempt and had them disbarred on 16 April 1735. *The Complaint of James Alexander and William Smith* . . . (1735) is a record of their final address to the court. Zenger was acquitted on 4 August 1735 through the efforts of Philadelphia lawyer Andrew Hamilton, though the defense had been prepared by Alexander, who recorded it in *A Brief Narrative of the Case and Tryal of John Peter Zenger, Printer of the New-York Weekly Journal* . . . (1736).

Cosby died the following March, and Alexander was returned to the bar, though he continued to meet opposition from subsequent governors for the rest of his career. Reelected to the council in 1737, he led an opposition party majority in the General Assembly. Attacks on *A Brief Narrative of the Case and Tryal of John Peter Zenger* . . . appearing in July of that year occasioned one of Alexander's finest defenses of a free press, which appeared in Benjamin Franklin's *Pennsylvania Gazette* (17 November-8 December 1737). This association with Franklin led to Alexander's charter membership in the American Philosophical Society when it was founded in 1744. Alexander was also instrumental in legal action that led to the rejection of New Jersey's territorial claims against New York (1748), in raising funds (1751) to establish King's College (now Columbia University), in preventing his old enemy (now governor) James De Lancey from dissolving the Council of New York (1753), and in several unsuccessful attempts to secure religious freedom for disenfranchised Quakers,

Jews, and Roman Catholics. He died in Albany while working on a tax bill to pay the colony's debts.

Recent historians have pointed out that the Zenger case set no legal precedent, and that virtually every practice that Alexander opposed continued after his death. No later political prose was demonstrably indebted to Alexander's, but he kept alive in print and in court the Lockean language of individual rights that was the foundation of the political writings of the American Revolution. James Alexander's contribution to American literature goes beyond his own writings, however: as editor of the *New York Weekly Journal* he offered a forum for local rhymesters and satirists. Much of the verse was doggerel-verse propaganda, but a few of the anonymous contributors were competent versifiers, and some mock advertisements, interviews, and letters to the editor were fine pieces of satire. Alexander also reprinted the best of the British periodical literature in the *Journal* when it supported his own views, particularly the *Spectator* essays of Addison and Steele and *Cato's Letters* of Gordon and Trenchard. Both of these were models for Alexander's own essays in the *Journal*. In these editorials, in his pamphlets, and in editing the works of other writers, James Alexander provided the first independent journalism in America.

References:

- Vincent Buranelli, *The Trial of Peter Zenger* (New York: New York University Press, 1957);
- Charles R. Hildeburn, *Sketches of Printers and Printing in Colonial New York* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1895);
- Stanley Nider Katz, Introduction to *A Brief Narrative of the Case and Trial of John Peter Zenger* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972);
- Livingston Rutherford, *John Peter Zenger, His Press, His Trial, and a Bibliography of Zenger Imprints* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1904);
- William Smith, *A History of the Province of New-York*, edited by Michael Kammen (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972).