



# When Princeton was in Newark

**Aaron Burr, Sr. and Newark in the 1750s**

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*At two o'clock on Wednesday afternoon, November 9, 1748, six students emerged from Aaron Burr's house on the west side of Broad Street in Newark, near the corner of William Street.*

*They walked side-by-side in three pairs, followed first by the sixteen newly installed trustees of The College of New Jersey and then by Governor Jonathan Belcher and the Rev. Aaron Burr, who had been installed that morning as President of the college. Burr walked to the left of the Governor.<sup>1</sup>*

The twenty-four men proceeded two short blocks down Broad toward Market Street. They headed for the Presbyterian church, a stone building which stood on the opposite side of the street from where Old First Presbyterian, the replacement structure built in 1791, still stands today.<sup>2</sup> At the church door, with the bell peeling in the steeple overhead, the students parted to the left and right hand, as did the trustees after them, so that Governor Belcher and President Burr could enter the building for the very first commencement ceremony held by what is now Princeton University.

Once inside, President Burr delivered a forty-five minute oration in Latin, without notes, about the advantages of an education in the liberal arts and sciences, and the importance of the new college to both church and colony. Following the example of Harvard and Yale and indeed of Oxford and Cambridge, the young scholars then debated various philosophical and theological propositions in Latin. One of the questions was whether government should

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1. William Smith's account, *Parker's Gazette and Post Boy*, November 21, 1748, printed in John Maclean's *History of the College of New Jersey*, 1877, Volume I (129-132). See also the report in *The Boston Weekly News-Letter*, December 1, 1748, printed in William Whitehead, editor, *Documents Relating to...New Jersey* (1882), Volume VI, p. 503.

2. Jonathan F. Stearns, *Historical Discourses, Relating to the First Presbyterian Church in Newark*, 1853, pp. 118-120.

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have the power to restrain liberty of conscience in matters of religion. The students concluded no government should have that power.<sup>3</sup>

After the disputations, President Burr granted the six students their B.A. degrees. Five of them went on to become Presbyterian ministers, while the remaining one, Richard Stockton, became a lawyer and later signed the Declaration of Independence. Burr also awarded the College's first honorary degree, a Master of Arts, to Governor Belcher. That was followed by a thirty-minute oration, again in Latin and again from memory, by Daniel Thane, one of the new graduates. President Burr finally closed the proceedings with a heartfelt prayer of thanksgiving for the new college.

By comparison with the elaborate 264<sup>th</sup> Commencement exercises that Princeton University held last May, this first commencement in Newark was no doubt a small and modest affair. But in its way, it probably received even more national attention. News of the event traveled quickly throughout the colonies. A full report appeared in *The New York Gazette and Post Boy* newspaper on November 21, and *The Boston Weekly News-Letter* took note on December 1. The College of New Jersey was just the fourth college founded in the colonies, following Harvard in 1636, William & Mary in 1693, and Yale in 1701, and it was the first in the Middle Colonies.<sup>4</sup> So, the six students who got their degrees in Newark in November 1748 were among a very select group in the American colonies: Harvard's Class of 1748 had only 24 members, while Yale's had 36.<sup>5</sup> During the nine commencements that Aaron Burr presided over while Princeton was in Newark, 92 students received their bachelor's degrees – almost half of what Yale awarded and about a third of what Harvard awarded during the same period. No other American college awarded a degree during these years.<sup>6</sup>

In 1756, eight years after that first commencement, The College of New Jersey moved to the small village of Princeton, into the magnificent Nassau Hall that still holds pride of place in the center of the Princeton campus. After nine formative years in Newark under Aaron Burr's tireless leadership, The College of New Jersey was on its way.

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3. William Smith, one of the trustees, reported that Burr spoke about the importance and advantages "of the liberal Arts and Sciences, in exalting and dignifying the humane Nature, enlarging the soul, improving its faculties, civilizing Mankind, qualifying them for the important offices of Life, and rendering them useful Members of Church and State." Maclean, *op.cit.*, pp. 131-2.

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4. It was the third to award the bachelor's degree, because William & Mary apparently did not award any degrees until 1776. James McLachlan, *Princetonians, 1748-1768, A Biographical Dictionary*, Princeton, 1976, p. xix, note 2.

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5. *Quinquennial Catalogue of the Officers and Graduates of Harvard University* (1890), p. 78. Franklin Bowditch Dexter, *Biographical Sketches of the Graduates of Yale College* (1896), Volume II, pp. 143-4.

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6. McLachlan, *op.cit.*, p. xix.

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My purpose tonight is not to trace how The College of New Jersey grew into the great university that Princeton is today. The historians of Princeton are happy to do that for us. Instead, I want to use the period when Princeton was in Newark as a window into Newark's own history—into what Newark was like in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It's been said that a land without memories is a land without history. My impression is that while most of us have some vague notion that Newark had early ties to Princeton, we don't know the details. Perhaps this talk will help to refresh our collective memory.

For Newark, the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century was a time of intense religious revivals, when New England and the middle colonies divided into New Light and Old Light during the Great Awakening. It was a time of riots and violent controversy over land titles, when some Newarkers challenged the colony's judicial system. It was a time of urgent concern about war—the war that we call the French and Indian War and that some historians have called the first world war because England and France fought each other from North America to Africa.

It was time when literally and figuratively Newark was on the map, when leading people like Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, and Ezra Stiles went out of their way to visit.<sup>7</sup> It was a time when the Presbyterian Synod of New York frequently chose instead to meet in Newark. And, it was a time when Newark's ties to New England, still close and personal for the most part, began to ebb.

It was also a time, of course, when people lived their daily lives and built their futures, a time of children being born and people dying, of attending church and taking part in militia training, of calling on friends and dealing with the ravages of disease and the seeming tenuousness of life. And it was a time to launch a new college with the charge of “instructing...youth in the learned languages, and in the liberal arts and sciences”.<sup>8</sup>

So, Newark in the 1750s is a large and sprawling topic, but I hope to give it some shape by focusing on Aaron Burr, Sr. and his wife Esther Edwards Burr, and discussing how the Great Awakening, land disputes, and the new college affected Newark. I will also touch very briefly on the French and Indian War and some aspects of daily life in Newark.

Aaron Burr spent 19 years in Newark, as the seventh minister of Old First Presbyterian Church and as second president of The College of New Jersey. He is surely one of the most important and influential persons who ever lived in Newark. Esther Burr spent a bit more than four years in Newark after marrying Aaron and before moving to Princeton. The

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7. Ezra Stiles was later President of Yale University; he visited Newark in 1754 during the commencement when George Whitefield was awarded an honorary degree. His travel diary, with brief notes about his visit to Newark, was printed in *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, Second Series (1892), Volume VII, pp. 338-344.

8. *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, August 13, 1747, printed in *Documents Relating to...New Jersey* (Volume VI), p. 386.

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daughter of Jonathan Edwards, the great Calvinist theologian and philosopher, she was a bright and spirited young woman, only in her early 20s when she lived here. She found time to write almost daily journal notes and letters to her close friend Sarah Prince in Boston. Every few months, she would gather these letters into a packet and send them off to Boston, hoping very much for a similar packet in return. Her journal entries covering her first couple years in Newark have not survived, but the ones for 1754 to 1757 have. They form the earliest surviving account by a woman in the American colonies about her daily life and thoughts. And, to our good fortune, they are about life in Newark.<sup>9</sup>

Aaron Burr, Senior was the prototypical overachiever. Graced with a brilliant mind and first-rate administrative talent, Burr had remarkable leadership skills that he employed to great benefit both at Old First and at the College of New Jersey. He was persuasive in the pulpit and inspirational in the classroom. He was never reluctant to be a strong advocate on the important issues of his day, but his instincts went toward compromise rather than strident partisanship. He had a firm command of classical languages and the broad sweep of history and theology, which he could recall and employ with ease.<sup>10</sup> Burr seems to have gotten along with almost everybody – or perhaps it would be more accurate to say he swept almost everyone along in the slipstream of his energy and personality.

Aaron Burr was a young man in a hurry, even for a period when young men with talent and education got the chance to prove themselves very quickly. Burr was 19 when he graduated from Yale in 1735, and only 20 when the Newark town meeting voted unanimously in December 1736 to call him to preach for a trial year.<sup>11</sup> He was barely 22 when he was ordained and installed as the minister of Old First by the Presbytery of East Jersey on January 25, 1738.<sup>12</sup> He was 30 years old when he was included as one of the original seven

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9. Carol F. Karlsen and Laurie Crumpacker, editors, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757* (1984).

10. I think it is also fair to say he was not a scholar: he didn't write scholarly works, and his personal library catalogued at his death was certainly smaller than the 400 volumes Abraham Pierson, the founding minister of Newark, left at his death eighty years earlier. "A Catalogue of Books left by the Revd Aron Bur reviewed by Jonathan Bauldwin & Timothy Edwards," Aaron Burr (1716-1757) Collection, Box 1, Folder 1, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

11. Burr was born in Fairfield, Connecticut on January 4, 1716, the sixth and youngest son of Daniel and Elizabeth Burr. His father died while he was young, and Burr's portion of his father's estate left him well situated for the rest of his life. He graduated from Yale in 1735, and as one of the top three students in his class he earned a scholarship established a few years before by Bishop George Berkeley, so he stayed on in New Haven for another year. After completing that extra year of study and experiencing a religious conversion, Burr traveled to New Jersey where he came to the attention of the citizens of Newark.

12. *Records of the Town of Newark*, entries for December 21 and 30, 1736; Stearns, *Historical Discourses*, pp. 154-155. John Pierson, the minister of the Woodbridge church, preached the ordination sermon. He was the grandson of Abraham Pierson (the founding minister of Newark) and youngest son of Abraham Pierson, Jr.

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trustees of The College of New Jersey in October 1746, and only 32 when he was chosen as President of the college in 1748 and presided at the first commencement in Newark. He burned his candle at both ends throughout his life, and he was 41 years old when he died in 1757.

Residents of New Haven Colony settled Newark in 1666—70 years before Burr moved to Newark — as the last Puritan experiment in godly government, and it remained essentially a New England town through much of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The church was central to Newarkers’ sense of themselves, and the minister was central to the smooth functioning of the church and indeed the town. When Newark needed a new minister, town leaders were quick to turn to Yale and Connecticut. (Newark’s pipeline to Yale was established when Abraham Pierson, Jr., the second minister of Newark’s church, became the first president of Yale in 1701.) It was the town meeting, working in cooperation with church leaders, that organized a search committee and voted whether to hire a minister and how much to pay him.<sup>13</sup>

When Aaron Burr was ordained and installed as the seventh minister of Newark’s church in 1738, Newark had gone decades without strong and persuasive leadership from their minister and had become a bit of a backwater—in stark contrast to nearby Elizabethtown,

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13. Burr was not the first young man called by Newark to be minister of Old First, nor was he even the first from Fairfield. For twenty-six years, from the founding of Newark until 1692, the Newark church was well served first by Abraham Pierson and then by his son Abraham Pierson, Jr. John Prudden then stepped in for seven years. Prudden was a Harvard classmate of the younger Pierson and son of the minister of the church in Milford, CT where Robert Treat and other founders of Newark had worshipped, so he was well known to Newarkers. When Prudden resigned in 1700, Newarkers reached back into Connecticut and called Jabez Wakeman, a very promising recent Harvard graduate from Fairfield who was then about 21 years old, to serve as their fourth minister. Wakeman was well received in Newark, but he contracted dysentery in October 1704 and died at the age of 26 just a few days after his young son. Stearns, *Historical Discourses*, pp. 106-109.

After Wakeman’s death, Newark struggled to find a suitable minister. The town meeting charged Theophilus Pierson with traveling to Connecticut “to endeavor to get a man upon trial in the work of the ministry among us.” Stearns, *Historical Discourses*, p. 111; *Records of the Town of Newark*, entry for February 19, 1706. Pierson met with his older brother Abraham, then serving as the first president of Yale, who recommended his student Samuel Whittlesey, a nineteen-year old graduate in the class of 1705. Whittlesey served a trial year in Newark, but things didn’t click and he declined a somewhat lukewarm call a year later. Dexter, *Biographical Sketches*, pp. 40-44.

After the Whittlesey experiment, it took Newark a few years to find and install Nathaniel Bowers as their fifth minister. He lasted six years and work started on the new stone church during his tenure. Stearns, pp. 116-118. After Bowers’ death in 1716, Newark sought advice from the Rev. Samuel Andrews of Milford, Connecticut who was then serving as the interim president of Yale.

It appears that Jedidiah Buckingham, a graduate of Yale in the Class of 1714, spent a trial year in Newark around 1717. When that trial ended, Newark called Joseph Webb of Fairfield, Connecticut and a graduate of Yale in the class of 1715, as its sixth minister.

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which benefited from its early days as East Jersey's capital, its easier access to New York City, and the powerful leadership of its minister, Jonathan Dickinson.<sup>14</sup>

Newark still had a small and fairly static population in 1738, perhaps some 2,000 people, counting the children and grandchildren of Newark's founders who had settled on farms in what is now the rest of Essex County. Most Newarkers traced their roots back to New Haven, Milford, Guilford, and Branford, and from there to England, but there had also been a modest but noticeable influx of Scots, along with a fair number of Dutch and a few French. In addition, there were probably about 65-75 slaves plus their children, comprising some 6 to 7% of Newark's population.<sup>15</sup> Almost certainly, there were no Catholics or Jews in Newark during this period.

Most Newarkers were farmers, with a smattering of tradesmen and merchants.<sup>16</sup> They were accustomed to participating in town government, serving on juries, training with the local militia, and going to church.<sup>17</sup>

Early on in Burr's tenure, the religious revival that became known as the Great Awakening shook Newark and indeed much of the American colonies. It's hard now for us to conjure just how profound the impact of the Great Awakening was on civil and church life in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. It was the first widespread American movement experienced at basically the same time throughout all the colonies. It agitated thousands of people into an intense conversion experience, split churches, and challenged the established order. Its impact was greatest where worship had become dry and formal, and where the established elite resisted

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14. While Joseph Webb was minister, Newark experienced its first substantial and highly divisive controversy when Colonel Josiah Ogden harvested his wheat on the Sabbath and was disciplined by the Newark church. The controversy led eventually to the formation of Trinity Church. Webb was incapable of providing leadership during that controversy, and it fell to Jonathan Dickinson, the long-time minister in Elizabethtown, to make the traditional Congregational-Presbyterian case against the new Anglican church. Stearns, *Historical Discourses*, pp. 121-145. Dexter, *Biographical Sketches*, pp. 145-6.

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15. *Documents Relating to...New Jersey* (Volume VI), pp. 242-244. Essex County included both Elizabethtown and Newark settlements during this period; I have assumed that Newark represented about a third of the population recorded in the 1737 and 1745 surveys.

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16. A tax-ratable list from 1751 notes only 30 dwelling houses (presumably houses occupied by families not involved in agriculture) in Essex County, which included both Elizabethtown and Newark. Peter O. Wacker, "The New Jersey Tax-Ratable List of 1751," *New Jersey History*, Volume 107 (Spring/Summer 1989), pp. 23-47.

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17. In 1786, one observer noted that even after 120 years, New Jersey residents living in New England settlements like Newark, retained "the manners, Language and worship of their predecessors." He commented that they affected "more gentility" and were "more apt to run in Debt, [and] to scheme and speculate." He added that they were "more litigious...[had] more Genius and Learning, [and were] fond of Arms, Liberty, and Democracy." He contrasted them with the Dutch, whom he considered "a quiet, frugal People, [who] possess[ed] considerable Property, [were] afraid to run in Debt, [and were not] fond of Law, or Offices of Government." Statement by John Rutherford, cited by Peter O. Wacker, *Land & People: A Cultural Geography of Preindustrial New Jersey Origins and Settlement Patterns* (1975), p. 159.

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the most. It imprinted America with an evangelical form of Protestantism that remained influential for nearly two centuries and still has strong echoes today.<sup>18</sup>

The most intense period for the Great Awakening was from 1739 to 1745, and Newark was at the leading edge. Burr was 23 years old and just a couple years into his ministry when the first signs of revival stirred Newark in August 1739 among young people. By the following March, most of the congregation were caught up in the experience. As one New Yorker wrote to a friend in Boston in July 1740, “I have good News to tell you of a wonderful Progress of converting Grace in these parts...[E]specially at Newark, there is a great Shaking among the dry bones.” The revival abated and flared up again a couple more times in Newark over the next few years.<sup>19</sup> The intensity of the experience for Newarkers can perhaps be best captured in the tombstone inscription for Thomas Ball, who experienced a conversion or new birth in 1740 and then died in 1744 at the age of 57, “an Aged man of 4 years old.”<sup>20</sup>

As an evangelical Calvinist, Aaron Burr was one of the so-called “New Light” ministers who embraced the Great Awakening.<sup>21</sup> Burr developed a warm friendship with the great English evangelist George Whitefield, his near contemporary, and welcomed him to Newark on a couple occasions. Whitefield was “the heart and soul of the American Awakening,” as the historian Richard Hofstadter put it. In a memorable passage, Hofstadter added, “Whitefield shook the religious sensibility of the seaboard as a dog shakes a rag, and when he was finished the religious life of America was permanently changed. Mid-eighteenth-century Americans were to think of two fellow Englishmen as being truly great: [William] Pitt, whose task was to beat France, and Whitefield, whose task was to beat the devil.”<sup>22</sup>

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18. See Richard Hofstadter, *America at 1750: A Social Portrait* (1972) and Patricia U. Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society, and Politics in Colonial America* (1986) for helpful discussions that place the Great Awakening in context. There were early signs of a revival in central New Jersey in the 1720s and 1730s, sparked by the fiery preaching of Theodore Frelinghuysen among the Dutch Reformed and of William Tennant and his sons among Presbyterians. Jonathan Edwards also reported a revival in Massachusetts along the upper Connecticut River.

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19. Jonathan Dickinson charted the spread of the revival in Newark in a letter to Mr. Foxcroft in Boston, dated August 23, 1743, printed in *Historical Collections Relating to Remarkable Periods of the Success of the Gospel* (1845), pp. 339-341. *Documents relating to the Colonial History of the State of New Jersey*, Volume XII (1895), p. 46.

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20. The tombstone is reproduced in John Cunningham, *Newark* (1988), p. 58.

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21. Burr was a small man – one friend called him “slender and delicate” – but he had a powerful presence in the pulpit and, as his friend put it, “he scorned to proclaim the peace of God, ‘till the rebel laid down his arms, and returned to his allegiance.” William Livingston, *A Funeral Eulogium on The Reverend Mr. Aaron Burr* (1758), pp. 8, 10-11. He usually wrote out his sermons in advance, but he was equally adept at preaching extemporaneously, without notes. Caleb Smith, *Diligence in the Work of God, and, Activity During Life. A Sermon Occasioned by the... Death of the Reverend Mr. Aaron Burr* (1758), pp. 24-26.

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22. Hofstadter, *America at 1750*, pp. 244-45.



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Burr apparently first met Whitefield in Boston in September 1740 and heard him preach there several times to large crowds. Whitefield made his first visit to Newark a month later. He recorded in his Journal that he “preached to a considerable congregation, but with little influence.” However, later that evening some young men came to his lodging place, and he spoke to them with great effect, noting in his Journal: “...how did the Word fall like a hammer and like fire! What a weeping was there!” Whitefield later became a strong supporter of the College of New Jersey, and returned to Newark in 1754 to receive an honorary degree.<sup>23</sup>

One lightning rod for the divisions caused by the Great Awakening was David Brainerd, who was expelled from Yale for famously declaring that one of his tutors had no more grace in him than a chair. Jonathan Edwards, Jonathan Dickinson, and Aaron Burr were among those who took up his cause, and Burr traveled to New Haven to appeal to the Yale trustees in person. Burr and the others didn’t succeed in getting Brainerd readmitted to Yale, but they did secure funds to support his missionary work among the Indians. Brainerd kept a journal of his work that Jonathan Edwards later published following his early death. It quickly became a classic in Protestant circles, and there are still websites today that keep Brainerd’s memory fresh 270 years later. Three things are worth noting for our purposes: the first is that in supporting Brainerd against the president and trustees of Yale, Dickinson and Burr found further reason to work toward the formation of a new college; the second is that, in a poke in the eye to Yale and the Old Light ministers in Connecticut, Brainerd was ordained in Newark in 1744; and the third is that Brainerd’s missionary work among the Indians near Cranbury, New Jersey aroused suspicion among the East Jersey Proprietors, who feared he was recruiting Indians to support Newarkers in their violent battle over land titles in Essex County.<sup>24</sup>

As the Great Awakening was coming to an end, the controversy over land ownership in the western reaches of Essex County started to take hold. Newarkers were again at the leading edge of this controversy, which eventually spread through much of New Jersey, involving some 600,000 acres of lands with disputed title. It’s important to sketch in the broad outlines of this controversy, which riveted all of New Jersey for years, because it greatly complicated

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23. Stearns, *Historical Discourses*, pp. 159-160; Whitefield provided fundraising introductions for the College of New Jersey to key people in Britain. He also joined in Governor Belcher’s campaign in the 1750s to persuade a Scottish University to award an honorary doctorate to Burr – a campaign that didn’t succeed before Burr’s early death. V. Lansing Collins, “George Whitefield and the College of New Jersey,” *Princeton University Bulletin*, June 1897, pp. 23-33; Joseph Tracy, *The Great Awakening* (1842), p. 108.

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24. The funds for Brainerd’s missionary work came from the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge. Stearns, pp.164-165. Frederick V. Mills, Sr., “The Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge in British North America, 1730-1775,” *Church History* (Volume 63, March 1994), pp. 15-30. Norman Petit, “Prelude to Mission: Brainerd’s Expulsion from Yale,” *New England Quarterly* 59 (March 1986), pp. 28-50. *Documents Relating to...New Jersey* (Volume VI), pp. 406-407.

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the formation of the College of New Jersey. It also helps to explain why the original seven trustees of the college included three laymen from New York but none from New Jersey, and why New Jersey never provided public support to the College of New Jersey, unlike Connecticut with Yale and Massachusetts with Harvard.

The land dispute was a contest between top-down and bottom-up views of the basis of civil authority, between the law and popular will, between gentry and small farmer, and even between Anglicans and New England Calvinists. In the end, the controversy exposed just how weak New Jersey's royal government was. The issue was who had title to the land, or as one contemporary put it, "whether the Property in the Soil of this Colony is vested in the Crown of England, or in the Indian Natives?"<sup>25</sup>

To make sense of what New Jersey authorities of the time considered riots, rebellion, and even high treason by Newarkers, it's helpful to view 17<sup>th</sup> century East Jersey as essentially a "land company" chartered by royal authority and owned by a small group of shareowners, or proprietors. This land company was vested with the right to lease, collect rents, or sell all property within the colony. It was also assigned the right to govern and collect taxes to support that government. Although the right to govern was removed in 1702 when New Jersey became a royal colony, the proprietors' influence over the Governor, Council and courts of the colony continued even as they retained control of all unsold property. Not surprisingly, the proprietors made sure to pass a series of laws that protected their property rights, including laws that nullified Indian titles.<sup>26</sup>

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25. Samuel Nevill's speech in the Assembly of New Jersey, May 1746, *Documents Relating to...New Jersey* (Volume VI), p. 331.

26. In all the great European countries and in most American colonies, the basic premise of government was that state and church should be joined in a unified system of power. Worship rituals and church schools helped to reinforce conformity with government and authority. In England and in Virginia, the Carolinas, Maryland, Georgia, and parts of New York, the Anglican Church was the established church. In Scotland, it was the Presbyterian Church. In Massachusetts and Connecticut, it was the puritan Congregational establishment, a strict version of which the founders of Newark had hoped to install. But four American colonies never had state churches: Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and New Jersey.

When he was Governor of New Jersey in the early 1700s, Lord Cornbury tried to create an Anglican establishment, but it was never made official. In the early 1740s, when Burr was beginning his ministry and the Great Awakening was sweeping New Jersey, the Anglican Lewis Morris was governor, his son was the Chief Justice, and most members of the Council and Proprietors were Anglicans. However, Anglicans were vastly outnumbered in New Jersey, and indeed it was considered a missionary field for the English Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. The weak condition of the Anglican church in New Jersey is one of clear indicators that the English political system did not reproduce itself effectively in the colony. While the Governor and his Council could pass laws, they had little power to enforce them if the public opposed them. They could gain influence by doling out patronage, but this was limited by the perpetual disagreements with the New Jersey Assembly over raising taxes for funding the colonial government. On occasion, they could even be outmaneuvered and outlobbied by their opponents when communicating with the Privy Council and Board of Trade in London.

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New Englanders had a different concept of land title and land distribution: in their view, Indians owned the land until they agreed to sell it.<sup>27</sup> For example, the first settlers of Newark insisted on buying title from the Indians for the land between the Passaic River and the foot of First Mountain. In 1678, the town of Newark made a further purchase from the Indians for land to the top of First Mountain. Then in October 1699, the Newark town meeting voted to purchase the “Tract of Land lying Westward of our Bounds, to the South Branch of Passaic River; and such of the Town as do contribute to the purchasing of the s’d Land, shall have their Proportion according to their Contribution.”<sup>28</sup>

In September 1701, 101 Newarkers subscribed for 117 lots, and negotiations proceeded with the Indians for the purchase of what became known as the Horseneck tract in what is now Verona, Roseland, Livingston, and the Caldwelles.<sup>29</sup> The children and grandchildren of Newark’s founders settled the land, cut the timber, and harvested their crops. They helped to form the Newark Mountain Society church in 1719, and they continued relatively undisturbed on the land for four decades.<sup>30</sup>

All that changed in 1743 when James Alexander, Robert Hunter Morris, and David Ogden bought a 13,000-acre tract from the East Jersey Proprietors that covered much of Horseneck. They were as well connected and powerful as any three men in New Jersey at the time. James Alexander was a New York lawyer who served for a time as Attorney

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27. Unsettled land acquired from Indians was owned by the community or by those who joined together to buy it, and then gradually distributed by lot. In 1802, a town committee reported, “[T]he first Inhabitants of the Town purchased all the lands of the Indian Natives, and held and possessed the same for a considerable time without any other title. During this possession they divided off to each Individual Inhabitant such part as reasonably fell to his Lott according to agreements made with the whole, which divisions were usually confirmed by a Vote of the Town Meeting.... After this occupation and possession of the Lands for a considerable time by the Inhabitants of the Town, the Eastern Proprietors set up a right to the Lands and demanded of the Inhabitants a quit Rent for the same. This demand was however resisted with great Spirit by the Inhabitants....” *Records of the Town of Newark*, p. 185.

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28. *Records of the Town of Newark* (1864), p. 114 (entry for October 2, 1699). A committee was formed to “put forward the Design,” and two townspeople were selected to “treat with the Proprietors” about this purchase. While title was never obtained from the Proprietors, the purchase was widely supported in Newark.

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29. Deacon Azariah Crane subscribed for three lots; John Prudden, a former minister of Newark’s church, signed up for 2 lots; and Elizabeth Ogden, who in Newark folklore as Elizabeth Swaine was the first to step off the ship carrying the original settlers and was now a widow, subscribed for one lot. Newarkers later claimed to have paid L130 and received a deed of title from the Indians dated March 6, 1702. The list of subscribers is reproduced in “A History of the Horseneck Riots”, <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~genepool/njriots1.htm>, accessed August 19, 2011. The deed was purportedly lost in a fire before they could produce it during their dispute with the Proprietors.

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30. James Hoyt, “*The Mountain Society: A History of the First Presbyterian Church, Orange, N.J.*” (1860), pp. 47-48. The church remained Congregational until 1748, when Caleb Smith was installed as the minister.

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General in both New York and New Jersey; he was also the surveyor-general for the East Jersey Proprietors. Robert Hunter Morris was the son of Governor Lewis Morris and Chief Justice of New Jersey in his own right; he later served as Governor of Pennsylvania. And David Ogden was a native Newarker, a Yale graduate, and the most important attorney in New Jersey; Esther Burr always referred to him as “Lawyer Ogden.”<sup>31</sup>

As attorney to the East Jersey Proprietors, David Ogden took the lead in enforcing the ownership rights that he and his colleagues had purchased. He offered three options to the settlers who lacked proper title: they could take a lease for one year without any rent, and then deliver the land; or, they could enter into a three-year lease with a yearly rent; or, finally, they could purchase the farm for a price per acre set by Ogden. None of these options was acceptable to the farmers, who thought the land was already theirs.<sup>32</sup> Ogden then prepared the necessary legal documents to eject the families from their lands.

While this was happening, a committee drawn from the Newark Mountain Society church organized the local farmers. Six of the men involved in this effort to oppose the Proprietors later participated in the Newark land riots, while several others put their names to a key petition.<sup>33</sup>

In September 1745, the Essex County Sheriff brought the issue to a head by arresting Samuel Baldwin for trespass for cutting timber on land to which he did not have title. Baldwin was jailed in Newark and refused to give bail. His arrest triggered the violent phase of the land dispute. On September 19, more than 100 men came to the jail reportedly with clubs, axes, and crowbars, and released Baldwin. The under Sheriff and two Justices of the Peace filed a report naming 26 of the rioters and indicating that there were about 100 others

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31. Ogden’s father, Josiah, had established the family wealth after accepting a patronage position with the East Jersey Proprietors that opened up opportunities for exporting wheat. It was concern about harvesting his wheat for export that led Josiah in the fall of 1733 to bring in his wheat crop on a Sunday. The elders of the Newark church rebuked him for breaking the Sabbath, and even though the Presbyterian Synod of Philadelphia tried to smooth over the dispute, Josiah retaliated by helping to form Trinity Anglican Church. Newark was left deeply divided for the first time on personal, religious, and political levels. Brendan McConville, *These Daring Disturbers of the Public Peace: The Struggle for Property and Power in Early New Jersey* (1999), p. 71. John T. Cunningham, *The East of Jersey: A History of The General Board of Proprietors of the Eastern Division of New Jersey* (1992), pp. 94-95.

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32. *Documents Relating to...New Jersey* (Volume VI), pp. 314-315. Cunningham, *ibid.*, p. 95. Ogden said the survey found 35 families settled there, while the settlers later claimed there were 60-80 farms. *Documents Relating to...New Jersey* (Volume VI), p. 293. Ironically, Ogden’s grandmother, Elizabeth Ogden, had been one of the subscribers in 1701 for Newark’s Horseneck purchase, as had a David Ogden and a John Ogden.

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33. Samuel Harrison kept an account book noting contributions and disbursements to men involved in organizing opposition to the Proprietors. An excerpt is reproduced in David Pierson, *History of the Oranges* (1921), p. 50. See also Stephen Wickes, *History of the Oranges* (1892), pp. 95-96. Samuel Baldwin, Thomas Williams, John Tompkins, John Vincent, Stephen Young, and Robert Young participated in the riots. Nathaniel Camp, Stephen Morris, Samuel Harrison, John Cundict, and possibly Nathaniel Wheeler were among the seven men who signed “The State of the Possessors Case” in 1749/50; see Robert Hunter Morris Papers, New Jersey Historical Society, MG 17, Box 1, Volume II, item 40.

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involved whom they could not identify. Five days later, the Grand Jury presented a bill of indictment against five of the rioters. In late September, Governor Morris urged the Assembly to pass a Militia Act, claiming “if these Rioters cannot be brought to Justice, all Civil process must Soon Cease, and the Government be overturned; The Infection will soon Spread, from such a Notorious Riot, to a Rebellion.”<sup>34</sup>

Three months later, on January 15, 1746, Essex County Sheriff John Chetwood arrested three of the rioters—Robert Young, Thomas Sergeant, and Nehemiah Baldwin—and then offered to release them if they put up bail for their personal appearance at the next session of the Supreme Court. All three refused to provide bail; Young and Baldwin claimed they had no friends in Newark to do it, while Sergeant refused to let his brother, who lived in Newark, enter into the surety. Tensions quickly escalated. According to Chetwood, when he tried to take Baldwin before a Justice of the Supreme Court, he and the five or six guards were “assaulted by a great Number of persons, with Clubbs and other Weapons, who, in a most Violent manner, rescued, and Carried away” Baldwin.

Chetwood rushed back to the Newark jail to secure the remaining two prisoners. More than two dozen militia soldiers, along with five officers, five justices of the peace, and two constables joined him at the jail. They faced off against about two hundred men, each carrying a club, who were determined to release Young and Sergeant. The Justices of the Peace read the King’s Proclamation against riots to the crowd and urged them to disperse. Chetwood then sent two militia captains with their drums into the crowd, “requiring all persons there, belonging to their Companies, to follow the Drums, and to Deffend the Prison.” No one in the crowd obeyed the order. At that point, crowd leader Amos Robards of Newark mounted his horse and shouted, “Those who are upon my List, follow me.” Almost all in the crowd, which had reportedly grown to about 300 men, followed Robards.

After giving the Sheriff a final ultimatum to release the prisoners, Robards and the crowd stormed the militia guard and broke through. Several were bloodied but no one was killed. The crowd then used axes to break into the jail and release the prisoners. Although the Sheriff and Justices of the Peace sent a list of rioters to the Supreme Court, it was now clear that the King’s Writ could not be served in Essex County, at least so far as property issues were concerned.<sup>35</sup>

Over the coming months and years, land disputes and jail breaks spread to other counties, much alarming the government, but the conflict in Newark remained pretty much at a wary stalemate for several years. The goal of the Newarkers was to stay on their land by avoiding

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34. *Documents Relating to...New Jersey* (Volume VI), pp. 245, 397-399.

35. *Documents Relating to...New Jersey* (Volume VI), pp. 351; 400-404. McConville, pp. 158-159.

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trial and deferring any resolution based on the Proprietors' interpretation of events. They positioned themselves as loyal subjects of the king even as they argued that possession combined with their years of work improving the land formed a stronger claim than the purchase of title. They also raised questions, perhaps rightly, about whether the legal system was stacked against them.<sup>36</sup>

The Proprietors responded in kind with their own legal arguments and case statements. They had an incentive to exaggerate the number of men storming the jail and to call it not just a riot, but an "open rebellion," because they wanted the New Jersey Assembly to approve an expansion of the militia. When that didn't succeed, they petitioned London to send an "arm'd force" from England to re-establish order. To strengthen their case for a military response, they drew parallels to Bacon's Rebellion in Virginia in 1676 and reported that the insurrection in Essex County was spreading across New Jersey and over the border into New York and Pennsylvania.<sup>37</sup>

At times, the Horseneck settlers veered dangerously close to questioning royal authority, but they retained wide popular support. Overall, it's likely that the overwhelming majority of Newarkers, perhaps as many as 80%, supported the Horseneck settlers in their efforts to stay on their land.<sup>38</sup> As late as 1750, 404 men signed a petition to King George II on behalf of the settlers and against the Proprietors.<sup>39</sup> In the end, London refused to send troops to

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36. "The Petition of the Subscribers, Inhabitants & Freeholders of Lands in the Township of Newark & Parts Adjacent," filed with the Privy Council on October 23, 1750, copy in the Ferdinand John Paris Papers, New Jersey Historical Society, MG 244, Box 4, Folder 5. It was "vain & unprofitable to make a legal Defence; inasmuch as the Chief Justice of the Province, who was Son to s[aid] Gov[ernor] Morris, & some of the Council, were Our immediate Opponents, & the Interest of all Officers in general, both judicial & Ministerial, lay on that side; all the able Attorneys, both in this & the neighboring Province of New York, having received detaining Fees from, or being, some way or other, by Interest, linckt in with, Our Opponents; so that we could not conceive Ourselves, in any measure, in circumstances to dispute with them under equal Advantages, in this Province by the ordinary Provision therein made..." (p. 9).

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37. Stevens Family Papers, New Jersey Historical Society, MG 409, Box 42, Folders 4 and 6. *New York Gazette*, February 26, 1749/50.

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38. McConville, pp. 147, 168-174.

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39. "The Petition of the Subscribers, Inhabitants & Freeholders of Lands in the Township of Newark & Parts Adjacent," filed with the Privy Council on October 23, 1750, copy in the Ferdinand John Paris Papers, New Jersey Historical Society, MG 244, Box 4, Folder 5. The petitioners and their ancestors "have planted, settled & improved, great part of the s[ai]d Lands, Some whereof they have Possessed Twenty, some Forty & some fourscore Years; & on which is settled the Town of Newark, a large & shire Town & sev[era]l small Villages, & out Settlements; containing in the whole, Ten or Twelve hundred Houses and Families, equal all, some few excepted, dependent, on Titles, derived in the manner sett forth [i.e. Indian titles]." (p. 4). "...those Lands which the Indians had the occupancy of, & by the Law of Nature & Nations, had a Right to, & could not, justly be deprived of, without a voluntary Agreement, to part with them." (p. 6). The petitioners acknowledged the "folly, Illegality & pernicious consequences of their former rash, violent Proceedings" even as they suggested they had been "unadvisedly led on to oppose Force to the injurious proceedings of Our Adversaries." (p. 18).

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New Jersey and instead established a commission to sort through the validity of the different land title claims. Since that was the result recommended by lawyers for the Horseneck settlers, it can be said that their stalling tactics won the day, at least for several more years.<sup>40</sup>

Many of the issues and rivalries generated by this land dispute would play out even more forcefully, but in different ways, during the American Revolution twenty-five years later.

The violent controversy over land titles created a major new obstacle for Jonathan Dickinson, Aaron Burr, and others as they developed plans for the College of New Jersey. Before Newarkers challenged the Proprietors, there had been signs of broad support for the new college. Dickinson and Burr were known as effective teachers through their academies in Elizabethtown and Newark. Three or four of their students from Newark had entered Yale in the class of 1743, but even more sought a college education but did not want to travel to Connecticut or Massachusetts. At the same time, William Tennent's earlier initiative to instruct young men for the ministry at the so-called "Log College," just across the border in Pennsylvania, had run its course, although the need for educated young men to enter the ministry was as great as ever. Even the Anglican elite in New Jersey saw the benefit of starting a college in the middle colonies, since they wanted more options for educating their sons.<sup>41</sup>

In May 1745, an early fundraising effort was launched: Out of the 185 pounds raised, James Alexander subscribed for 50 pounds, while Robert Hunter Morris promised 20 pounds. Other leading Anglicans added their names to the list. William Smith, a prominent New York lawyer and a Presbyterian, subscribed for 20 pounds as well. But Alexander and Morris withdrew their support after the first Newark land riot. New Jersey's Quakers also opposed the plan, because they were suspicious of the motives of the Presbyterians pushing

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40. Judge Samuel Nevill held court in Newark in 1755; sixty "rioters" came in and "confessed indictment, were fined small sums by the court, and were bound over to good behavior for three years, with costs." Cunningham, *The East of Jersey* (1992), p. 98. Esther Burr had feared a different result. On June 17, 1755, she noted, "Yesterday the gentlemen of the Court came into Town – to day the Court sets. There has not been a Supream Cout held in this County this seven years till now, and now they have business enough to hold 'em three weeks tis thought. The King has many cases some of High-Treason. I am afraid of Hanging work." Journal, p. 125. Hoyt lists the names of 36 of the men who appeared before the court, all associated with the Mountain Society church; *The Mountain Society*, pp. 92-93.

41. Only nine students from New Jersey entered Yale from 1701 to 1745. The likely students of Dickinson or Burr from Newark were Daniel Farrand, Aaron Richards, Stephen Johnson, and possibly Thomas Arthur, all of the Class of 1743. Dexter, *Biographical Sketches*, pp. 725-726; 734; 738-740; 743-744. Two of Governor Morris's grandsons also attended Yale.

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for it. So, it is no surprise that Governor Lewis Morris, a staunch Anglican, refused to grant a charter for a new college so closely associated with New Light Presbyterians.<sup>42</sup>

But Governor Morris's death in May 1746 opened up a new opportunity. John Hamilton, president of the Council, automatically succeeded Morris as Governor on an interim basis until officials in London could name a replacement. For reasons that still are not clear, Hamilton approved a charter for the new college in October 1746. This first charter gave wide powers to a group of seven trustees—four clergymen (including Aaron Burr) and three New York laymen. Six were graduates of Yale and one was a graduate of Harvard; all were New Light Presbyterians<sup>43</sup>

The first classes got under way in May 1747 at Jonathan Dickinson's house in Elizabethtown. In August, the trustees placed notices in both the Philadelphia newspapers, emphasizing that the college was open to "those of every religious Profession". The trustees explained, "that all who are qualified for it, may be immediately admitted to an *Accademick Education*, and to such Class and Station in the College, as they are found upon Examination to deserve." Tuition was "Four Pounds a Year New-Jersey Money."<sup>44</sup>

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42. Thomas Jefferson Wertebaker, *Princeton, 1746-1896* (1946), p. 21. David C. Humphrey, "The Struggle for Sectarian Control of Princeton, 1745-1760," *New Jersey History* 91 (Summer 1973): 77-90. William Smith, a New York lawyer and one of the original trustees of the College of New Jersey, had recommended Burr to Governor Morris in 1743 as a possible tutor for his grandson. Morris's distrust of New Englanders like Dickinson and Burr was evident in his letter to his son Lewis Morris, Jr., dated May 22, 1743: "I had some thoughts to send him [his grandson] to Dickinson; & Smith recommended one Burr I think they call him of Newark. The first I am told is bewildred wth. the new light & the Other if not an Enthusiast (wch. it is Very difficult for A new England man And a Priest to avoid being) must act a Very hypocriticall part to Seem So among those he is with. I know nothing of Burr nor how far he is qualified for Such a task, or his wife (if he has one) qualified to take care of A boarder. I own I have no great Opinion of the Learning of any mere New England man bred a priest in that country, that has not been abroad and in part filed of that pedantry, cant, & rusticity So closely generally Adherent to those of Such an Education...". Eugene R. Sheridan, ed., *The Papers of Lewis Morris* (Volume III), p. 230.

43. In addition to Burr, two other trustees were well known to Newarkers: Jonathan Dickinson, the long-time minister in Elizabethtown, was one of the most distinguished and widely published clergymen in the American colonies. He had been Abraham Pierson, Jr.'s student at Yale soon after that college was founded, and he had lived and studied in Pierson's home before graduating in 1706. Over the next three decades, he often preached in Newark. Another trustee was Dickinson's good friend John Pierson, the son of Abraham Pierson, Jr. and grandson of the senior Abraham Pierson who helped found Newark in 1666. He was born in Newark before moving at a very young age with his family to Connecticut. He was a teenager while his father was president of Yale, so Dickinson and he could draw from their experience of Yale's early development when planning for the College of New Jersey. Pierson graduated from Yale in 1711 and was called by the church in Woodbridge, New Jersey. He later preached Aaron Burr's ordination sermon in Newark in 1738. For Dickinson, Bryan F. LeBeau, *Jonathan Dickinson and the Formative Years of American Presbyterianism* (1997) and Dexter, *Biographical Sketches*, pp. 45-52. For Pierson, see Dexter, pp. 103-105. Richard Treat, who became a trustee when the board was soon expanded, was the great-grandson of Robert Treat, who founded Newark.

44. *The Pennsylvania Journal*, August 13, 1747; the same notice was printed in *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, August 13, 1747. Documents Relating to...New Jersey (Volume 12), pp. 384-388. Before classes got underway, the *New York Gazette and Weekly Post Boy* of February 2, 1746-47 printed a report about the new college that named the trustees; Maclean, *History of the College of New Jersey*, p. 70.



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But Dickinson's death two months later put the new college at sudden risk.<sup>45</sup> The remaining trustees acted quickly to shift classes to Aaron Burr's house in Newark. For the next ten years, nine of them in Newark, Aaron Burr was the driving force behind the College of New Jersey, even as he remained minister of Old First for the first eight years. Burr developed the curriculum, taught most of the classes, recruited students, kept the college accounts, and engaged in non-stop fundraising and promotion for the college. He spared no effort to build a solid foundation for the college, even though he took no salary for at least the first three years.<sup>46</sup>

Fortunately, he had the strong backing of Jonathan Belcher, the new Governor of New Jersey. Belcher's appointment delighted most Newarkers, because in many ways he was one of them. He was a former Governor of Massachusetts, a New England Congregationalist who supported the Great Awakening, and a former trustee of Harvard. Most of all, he was not Robert Hunter Morris, who had lobbied intensively for the position.<sup>47</sup> Early on, Belcher adopted the College of New Jersey as his key priority. In a letter to Jonathan Edwards in 1748, Belcher commented, "As to our embryo college, it is a noble design; and if God pleases, may prove an extensive blessing. I have adopted it for a daughter, and hope it may in time become an "Alma Mater," to this and the neighboring provinces." Belcher also engineered approval of a more secure charter than the one approved by Hamilton.<sup>48</sup> It was under this new charter that Aaron Burr was named president and presided over the first commencement in Newark in November 1748.

While the charter provided assurances that "those of every religious denomination may have free and equal liberty and advantages of education," it was widely recognized that the College of New Jersey was established and controlled by Presbyterians. Anglicans and Quakers strongly opposed supporting it with public funds. Even though Pennsylvania and

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45. Notice of his death appeared in the *Supplement to the New York Gazette Revived in the Weekly Post Boy*, October 12, 1747. "By his Death our infant College is deprived of the Benefit and Advantage of his superior Accomplishments, which afforded a favourable Prospect of its future Flourishing and Prosperity under his Inspection." John Pierson preached his funeral sermon. *Documents Relating to...New Jersey* (Volume 12), pp. 410-411.

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46. His salary was 230 pounds for the academic year that ran from September 1755 to September 1756, Aaron Burr's Account Book, folio 173, C0199 (no. 176), Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

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47. Alison B. Olson, "The Founding of Princeton University: Religion and Politics in Eighteenth-Century New Jersey," *New Jersey History* (Autumn 1969), 133-150.

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48. Jonathan Belcher's letter to Jonathan Edwards, dated May 31, 1748. Jonathan Edwards, *Letters and Personal Writings (WJE Online Vol. 16)*, Ed. George S. Claghorn, page 262. Belcher sought "the best advice and assistance" in drafting it and plotting how to get it approved by the Council—despite a boycott of the Council meetings by Robert Hunter Morris and other East Jersey proprietors on the Council. Olson, *op.cit.*, pp. 140-141. Michael C. Batinski, *Jonathan Belcher, Colonial Governor* (1996), pp. 158-159. Wertenbaker, *Princeton*, pp. 26-27. John Maclean, *History of the College of New Jersey* (1877), pp. 73-97.

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Connecticut both authorized lotteries to raise money for the college, New Jersey never did despite Governor Belcher's best efforts. Yet in the same period, New Jersey approved a lottery to raise money for building Trinity Church in Newark.<sup>49</sup>

So, Aaron Burr had his work cut out for him in building support for the college and attracting a wide range of students. Every strong leader has a quick story or "elevator speech" ready to convey how his organization is making essential progress toward achieving its basic mission. Burr's story revolved around "a small incident" at the College's second commencement, which (as he put it) "considerably increas'd the reputation of our College among its Enemies." In a letter to a supporter in England, Burr explained that "A Gentleman of Considerable Figure as to Station & Fortune, who had by some means or Other got Strangely prejudiced against our design, and ha[d] done all that laid in his power to bring Odium upon it" happened to observe the graduation ceremony. This gentleman was surprised to see how well the students did in their disputations, and he was particularly impressed by "An Oration in Latin" delivered by one of the students. Burr concluded, "He has since exprest himself very much pleas'd & turned his Reproaches into praises."<sup>50</sup>

We don't know who the gentleman was in Burr's story (although I wonder if it could have been the lawyer David Ogden), but we know the student was William Burnet, a Newarker born at Lyon's Farms who as the top student in the class of 1749 had the task of delivering the speech in Latin. Burnet went on to become a doctor with a very successful medical practice in Newark. He was a founder of the New Jersey Medical Society, an elder of First Church, and a pillar of the Newark community. During the American Revolution, Burnet chaired the Newark Committee of Safety, served in the Continental Congress, and for a while was the chief physician and surgeon of the military hospital at West Point.

By my count, Burnet was one of seven Newarkers who were students while Princeton was in Newark, out of a total student body of 92 during those years. The seven Newark students were a mix of Anglicans and Presbyterians. Daniel Browne, son of the rector of Trinity Church, and Lewis Ogden, son of Uzal Ogden, were both in the class of 1753 and both became attorneys. Jonathan Odell, class of 1754, became a schoolmaster, studied medicine, and was later ordained an Anglican clergyman. Jonathan Baldwin, class of 1755, became steward of the college and managed its move to Princeton in 1756. Stephen Camp,

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49. Maclean, pp. 90-97, provides the text of the second charter. *Documents Relating to...New Jersey* (Volume 12), pp. 505-507 (Trinity Church lottery) and 590-592 (Pennsylvania lottery); (Volume 19), *New York Gazette*, November 26, 1753 (Connecticut lottery).

50. Aaron Burr's letter to Philip Doddridge, May 31, 1750, Aaron Burr (1716-1757) Collection, Box 1, Folder 9, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. This commencement ceremony took place in New Brunswick.

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class of 1756, became a doctor. His classmate Josiah Ogden, son of David Ogden who was the attorney involved in the land disputes, died young. Burr also taught three other Newarkers in both Newark and Princeton. Moses Baldwin and Samuel Parkhurst, class of 1757, both became Presbyterian ministers, while Isaac Ogden, class of 1758, withdrew in reaction to a religious revival sweeping through the college and earned his degree instead at King's College (now Columbia University). Finally, two young Newarkers, Jabez Campfield and James Lyon, entered Burr's grammar school while it was still in Newark and became students at the college after Burr's death.<sup>51</sup>

Aaron Burr was the sort of man who combined keen intelligence with intense energy in order to get tasks done efficiently. But he could rarely have been as efficient in achieving his objectives as he was in his courtship of Esther Edwards. At the end of May 1752, Burr squeezed in a trip to Stockbridge, Massachusetts with the express purpose of proposing to Esther. While he had frequently corresponded with her father Jonathan Edwards, he hadn't seen Esther for six years. She was now 20 years old, but he was sixteen years older. Nonetheless, just five days after arriving in Stockbridge, he proposed and she accepted. They were married in Newark at the end of June.

Esther grew up in a household where matters of the mind and matters of the spirit were of equal importance, and she was probably as well educated as any young woman of the time. She understood and was committed to the evangelical Calvinist view of religion, although she struggled at times with the Puritan role for women. By observing her mother, she knew that if she married a leading clergyman and intellectual, she would have duties not only as a wife and mother but also as host to an endless stream of visitors and guardian of students boarding in her home.<sup>52</sup>

Her parents helped with the transition. Her mother Sarah traveled with her to Newark for the wedding and helped her settle into the parsonage. Jonathan Edwards no doubt stayed in the house a couple months later when he visited Esther and preached to the Presbytery of

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51. James McLachlan, *Princetonians: 1748-1768* (1976), pp. 17-18 (William Burnet); pp. 69-70 (Daniel Browne); pp. 79-80 (Lewis Ogden); pp. 109-112 (Jonathan Odell); pp. 131-133 (Jonathan Baldwin); p. 155 (Stephen Camp); p. 161 (Josiah Ogden); pp. 171-172 (Moses Baldwin); p. 199 (Samuel Parkhurst); pp. 238-240 (Isaac Ogden); pp. 262-264 (Jabez Campfield); pp. 279-282 (James Lyon).

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52. Carol F. Karlsen and Laurie Crumpacker, editors, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757* (1984), pp. 6-13 (hereafter cited as "*Journal*"). Stearns, *Historical Discourses*, pp. 191-192. Stearns reprints two letters of Burr's student Joseph Shippen, Jr. about their marriage; Shippen thought Esther Edwards was too young for Aaron Burr, but after meeting her he wrote to assure his mother, "From the little acquaintance I have with his lady, I think her a woman of very good sense, of a genteel and virtuous education, amiable in her person, of great affability and agreeableness in conversation, and a very excellent economist."

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New York during its meeting in Newark.<sup>53</sup> The parsonage was a two and a half story house set far back from Broad Street. Built in 1734, it had walls two feet thick and broad windowsills. “The entry was eight feet wide, and on each side was a room eighteen feet square. At the rear of one room, there was piazza opening upon the back yard, and in the rear of the other was a frame addition” with the dining room, pantry, and kitchen.<sup>54</sup>

There was a constant stream of visitors, especially around Commencements and when the Presbytery of New York met in Newark. It would have been almost overwhelming for anyone, let alone a young woman in her early 20s with no family nearby, and with children on the way. When Aaron Burr returned from a trip to Boston in October 1754, Esther noted in her journal: “Now is Mr. Burr come home *All the World and his Wife comes here.*”<sup>55</sup> Ten days later, she confided to her journal: “The Governor and Lady just went from here. They drank Tea with me....There is great confusion in the house...occasioned by a crowd of people here all day, such a day as I have hardly seen since I have been here.”<sup>56</sup> A couple weeks later, she writes “We are much in a clutters today cleaning the house fit for the Presbytery next week...I shall do the best I can, and wish all was better. And so they must accept the *will* for the *deed*, and I know some of ‘em will.”<sup>57</sup> The following Tuesday, she was frustrated when she prepared a mid-day meal but none of the ministers showed up till the afternoon. The next day eight ministers dined, and the following day the number increased to ten. The weather turned bad, so the ministers stayed over. Finally, on the following Monday, she could exclaim, “At last the house [is] cleared of company.”<sup>58</sup>

So it went around the calendar. She was able to hire occasional help from local women,<sup>59</sup> and the Burrs apparently owned a couple slaves, one of whom may have worked in the kitchen. Occasionally, her younger sisters would visit, and sometimes friends would “put out” their 12 or 13 year old daughters to learn household management skills from

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53. *Records of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (1841), p. 247. Edwards’ Newark sermon was published as “True Grace Distinguished From the Experience of Devils” (New York, 1753).

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54. Joseph Atkinson, *The History of Newark* (1878), p. 73. The house remained standing until 1835.

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55. *Journal*, p. 59 (October 30, 1754). I have modernized the spelling when quoting from the Journal.

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56. *Journal*, p. 61 (November 9, 1754).

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57. *Journal*, p. 68 (November 30, 1754).

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58. *Journal*, p. 70 (December 3-9, 1754).

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59. *Journal*, p. 95 (March 1, 1755): “A woman here Ironing for me, and I am very busy mending stockings and one thing and another.”

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her.<sup>60</sup> But it's clear that Esther Burr worked very hard. In June 1755, she noted in her Journal, "Wednesday and Thursday and Friday, all up in Arms a cleaning House, white-washing, rubbing Tables, cleaning silver, China and Glass, etc. And poor I am almost Tired out of my senses."<sup>61</sup> She found it difficult to carve out time to write in her letter journal, and it is no surprise that it took her a month to read Samuel Richardson's recent novel *Pamela*.<sup>62</sup> After her second child Aaron was born in 1756, she lamented, "When I had but one Child my hands were tied, but now I am tied hand and foot."<sup>63</sup>

Aaron Burr was "always on the go," as Esther put it in one of her journal entries. She nearly always referred to him as "Mr. Burr", but sometimes she refers to him as "my better self", and it is apparent they had a loving marriage despite the gap in their ages. In January 1755, she writes, "Our house is very gloomy, as tis *always* when Mr. Burr is gone. I am ready to imagine the *sun* does not give so much light as it did when my best self was at home."<sup>64</sup>

Aaron discussed all sorts of issues with Esther, so she was well informed about developments at both the college and the church. When the college acquired a couple of its very first scientific instruments—a new microscope and a 14-inch telescope—she joined in testing them out. They studied Jupiter's moons with the telescope, but they were also delighted to discover that when they looked through it at a Bible held on the other side of Broad Street from their house, they could read the small print.<sup>65</sup>

From 1754 on, both Aaron and Esther paid very close attention to developments in the French and Indian War, which went badly for the British and colonial forces in the early years. Aaron preached a strong sermon against the French and their designs on North America: "The Way to have Peace," Burr argued, "is to make a speedy and vigorous Preparation for War."<sup>66</sup> Esther, who was deeply concerned about how vulnerable her family was at the frontier settlement in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, agreed. Worry about the French brought

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60. *Journal*, pp. 27, 30.

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61. *Journal*, p. 127 (June 25-27, 1755).

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62. *Journal*, p. 98 (March 10, 1755). She finished *Pamela* on April 12, 1755.

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63. *Journal*, p. 192 (April 13, 1756).

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64. *Journal*, p. 81 (January 17, 1755).

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65. *Journal*, p. 123 (June 14, 1755)

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66. Aaron Burr, *A Discourse Delivered At New-Ark in New-Jersey. January 1, 1755. Being a Day set apart for solemn Fasting and Prayer, on Account of the late Encroachments of the French, and their Designs against the British Colonies in America* (New York, 1755), p. 39.

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former adversaries together. David Ogden, the attorney involved in the Horseneck land dispute, sought Burr's support in November 1755 to persuade Governor Belcher to ask the Assembly to raise troops to fight the French. Joined in this new cause against a common enemy, some of the old animosity drained away.<sup>67</sup>

Esther accepted the patriarchal nature of Colonial society, but she occasionally chafed at it. When Aaron traveled to Boston in October 1754, she imagined what the gathering at Sarah Prince's house must be like: "I imagine now this Eve Mr. Burr is at your house. *Father* is there and some others. You all sit in the Middle room. *Father* has the talk, and Mr. Burr has the *Laugh*. Mr. Prince gets room to stick in a word once in awhile. The rest of you sit and see, and hear, and make observations to yourselves...and when you get upstairs you tell what you think...".<sup>68</sup> On one occasion after she moved to Princeton and when Aaron Burr was not present, she did not hold back. One of the college tutors said to her that women should only talk about fashions and dress – things that they understood. As she reported to Sarah Prince, "(My Tongue, you know, hangs pretty loose; thoughts crowded in – so I sputtered away for dear life.) You may Guess what a large field this speech opened for me – I retorted several severe things upon him before he had time to speak again. ...we carried on the dispute for an hour – I talked him quite silent."<sup>69</sup> On another occasion, Esther wrote somewhat bitterly, "...I am perplexed about our public affairs. The Men say (tho' not Mr Burr he is not one of that sort) that Women have no business to concern them selves about em but trust to those that know better and be content to be destroyed because they did all for the best."<sup>70</sup>

Esther also reported on events in Newark, including the training day in October 1754 when militias from all over the county gathered in Military Park. There were 18 companies of men, and more than 2,000 people gathered to watch. She had never seen so many people

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67. *Journal*, p. 172 (November 30, 1755) and p. 186 (January 26, 1756). When Ogden's child fell dangerously ill two months later, he asked Burr "to come and pray with it," which astonished Esther because (as she put it) Ogden was "a very great Bigot to the Mother Church." In November 1757, Newarkers greeted Colonel Peter Schulyer (who had raised and led a troop of New Jerseyans into battle with the French) with the discharge of 13 cannon and a large bonfire. *New York Mercury*, November 28, 1757.

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68. *Journal*, p. 54 (October 13, 1754).

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69. *Journal*, p. 257 (April 12, 1757). He added that women did not know "*what Friendship was. They were hardly capable of anything so cool and rational as friendship.*" Esther was outraged, since her friendships with other women were at the center of her life.

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70. *Journal*, p. 178 (December 20, 1755). As an aside, when reading Esther's journal I was reminded of the comment by Alan Bennet's character Dorothy Lintott in his play, "The History Boys," that "History is a commentary on the various and continuing incapacities of men. History is women following behind with the bucket."

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together before, and the noise of the drums, guns, and trumpets left her dazed. There was a similar training day six months later.<sup>71</sup>

As the college grew and its finances became more stable, Aaron Burr needed to focus full-time on the college. Although the Newark church resisted, Burr gained the approval of the Presbytery of New York to resign his pastorate in March 1755. Like any good leader, Burr had a successor in mind. He recommended the church hire John Brainerd, the brother of David Brainerd, as his replacement. Brainerd preached in Newark over the next year as the congregation sized him up. Esther was quite positive about his preaching, but the congregation never quite warmed to him. I suspect his main fault was that he was not Aaron Burr.<sup>72</sup>

When the College of New Jersey was founded, the intent was always to move it to some central location in the colony, partly to help unite East Jersey and West Jersey. Governor Belcher had his eye on Princeton from the very beginning. The trustees set up a competition to see which town would offer the best deal to the college, but Newark and Elizabeth were never really in the running because they were so closely associated with the New England faction. New Brunswick put up a brief fight, but Princeton won the competition in January 1753. With funds raised in Scotland and England, work on Nassau Hall and a new President's house started in 1755, and the college moved in the fall of 1756.<sup>73</sup> By December, the Burrs had moved into the President's house.<sup>74</sup>

Esther initially felt isolated in Princeton, cut off from friends and from news. As she wrote in her journal, "Since we moved to this new World, it seems as if we did not live in the same World that we did at Newark—there we used to hear from our friends, and hear public news—but here we know not what the World, Friends or Foes, are about—I believe if the French were to take Boston we should not hear of it so soon as they would in London."<sup>75</sup>

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71. *Journal*, p. 55 (October 14 and 15, 1754), p. 107 (April 7, 1755), p. 229 (October 11, 1756). On November 18, 1755, a strong earthquake woke them up between 4:00 and 5:00 in the morning. Aaron thought it lasted almost three minutes, while Esther thought it had to be at least four minutes: "nothing in Nature that ever I met with in my life seemed so awful and dreadful." *Journal*, p. 167 (November 18, 1755). Sidney Perley, *Historic Storms of New England* (1891; 2001 edition), discusses "The Great Earthquake of 1755", pp. 49-52. The epicenter was near Cape Ann, off the coast of Massachusetts. In June 1756, Esther reported on an apparent microburst storm at Newark Mountain that tore up whole orchards, twisted off thick trees, flattened fences, and destroyed a number of houses. *Journal*, pp. 210-211 (June 28, 1756).

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72. *Journal*, pp. 103-4 (March 27, 1755); p. 207 (June 3, 1756). Stearns, *Historical Discourses*, pp. 212-216.

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73. Wertenbaker, pp. 35-38

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74. The Newark church had still not accepted its fate, and Aaron Burr returned to Newark for the first Sabbath following the move to conduct Sunday services and assuage their loss. *Journal*, p. 235 (December 5, 1756).

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75. *Journal*, p. 238 (January 10, 1757).

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As much as anything else, what comes through in Esther's journal is the tenuousness of life in the 1750s. Diseases were not well understood, and people feared that illness could always take a turn for the worse. On August 31, 1757, when Esther received "a Letter with a Black Seal" that "contained Blacker news" about Governor Belcher's death, she had no way of knowing that it was the start of a series of desperate calamities. She told her husband the news the next day when he returned exhausted and ill from a trip. He rested overnight and then started work the following day on a funeral sermon for the governor. That same morning Esther wrote an unusually chatty and contented journal entry to her friend Sarah Prince. She sent news about how her three and a half year old daughter Sarah scorned to be told she was a baby and wanted to be thought a woman, and how they were beginning to think about her schooling. She also made affectionate comments about how 18 month-old Aaron—the future Vice President—was "a little dirty Noisy Boy." He was beginning to talk a little and was "very sly and mischievous." It was the last entry in her journal.<sup>76</sup>

Three weeks later Aaron Burr, Sr. was dead of a fever, just four days before he was scheduled to preside over the first commencement in Princeton. The college trustees moved quickly to name Esther's father Jonathan Edwards to replace him as President. Edwards set out from Stockbridge for Princeton in January 1758. The following month, he and Esther both agreed to be inoculated against small pox since they had never had the disease and it was prevalent in Princeton at the time. Edwards died from the inoculation four weeks later. And, just two weeks after that, Esther developed a fever, the cause of which is not known. She died on April 27, 1758, only 26 years old.<sup>77</sup>

With the move of the College of New Jersey, followed in quick succession by the deaths of both Aaron and Esther Burr, Newark's role in the story of Princeton University came to a sudden end. The legacy of the Burrs and the impact of the early years of the college on its later development are beyond the scope of this talk. So, I will conclude by just quickly noting that the lives of both Aaron and Esther continued to resonate among Americans for at least several decades. For example, Samuel Hopkins paid tribute to Esther in 1799 in an appendix to his biography of Jonathan Edwards.<sup>78</sup> In a similar way, Aaron Burr, Sr.'s reputation as

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76. *Journal*, pp. 273-275 (September 2, 1757).

77. *Journal*, p. 18 (introduction).

78. "Appendix. No. 1. Containing a brief Account of Mrs Esther Burr, and some Extracts of Letters Wrote by her." In Samuel Hopkins, *The Life and Character of.. Jonathan Edwards*, first published in 1765. "Mrs Burr exceeded most of her sex in the beauty of her person, and in a decent and easy gesture, behaviour and conversation; not stiff and starch on the one hand, nor mean and indecent on the other...She had a lively, sprightly imagination, a quick and penetrating thought, and a good judgment...she knew how to be pleasant and facetious without trespassing on the bounds of gravity, or strict and serious religion." The reprinted letters concern her conviction and comfort in her faith following Aaron's death.



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the President who established the College of New Jersey remained bright among Presbyterians and other evangelical Calvinists throughout the colonies. John Adams even claimed that voters' memory of Aaron Burr, Sr. and Jonathan Edwards tipped the election of 1800 for President of the United States. Adams lost that election to Thomas Jefferson, when Aaron Burr, Jr. was also a candidate. Writing to Jefferson years later about the election of 1800, Adams claimed: "Burr had 100,000 votes from the single circumstance of his descent from President Burr and President Edwards."<sup>79</sup> ■

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79. John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, November 15, 1813, cited in Suzanne Geissler, *Jonathan Edwards to Aaron Burr, Jr.: from the Great Awakening to Democratic Politics*, 1981, p. 1.