



FRIENDS' MEETING-HOUSE AND ACADEMY, SOUTH FOURTH STREET.

Quaint Corners in Philadelphia (Philadelphia, 1883), 287.

THE PENNSYLVANIA SUNDAY BLUE LAWS OF 1779: A VIEW OF PENNSYLVANIA SOCIETY AND POLITICS DURING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

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THE LAWS of a society often reflect the manners and morals of its citizens. The Pennsylvania blue laws of 1779 provide a look at the heart of American society during the young Republic's struggle for independence. They reveal the social pressures, political tendencies, religious attitudes, and economic conditions of revolutionary Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania's blue laws¹ were instituted to give people time to honor the Lord on the Sabbath. Individuals were expected to worship the Creator by attending church meetings and reading the Scriptures. Both work and play were unacceptable forms of behavior on the Lord's Day.

Sabbath legislation in Pennsylvania dates back to 1676 when the territory was first governed by the *Duke of York's Laws*. The Sabbath was not to be profaned by "travellers, labourers or vicious persons."² These laws remained in force until William Penn,

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¹The term "blue laws" probably originated in New England when the General Court of Connecticut ordered Robert Ludlow to codify all the laws of the colony which differed from the laws of England. Ludlow completed this task in 1650, and the code was known as the "blue laws." This term may have been taken from the Old English phrases, "the blues," "blue-devils," or "to look blue," implying sadness or disappointment. The chief provisions of the laws dealt with respect for the Sabbath and the elimination of idleness. "Blue Laws," *Blackwood's Magazine*, CVII (April, 1870), 477-488. Another interpretation of the origin of "blue laws" was presented by Ralph Royal Hinman, *The Blue Laws of New Haven Colony* (Hartford, 1838), iv. Hinman stated that Governor Eaton of New Haven had the laws of that colony printed on blue paper in 1656.

²George Staughton, Benjamin A. Nead, and Thomas McCamant, comps. and eds., *Charter to William Penn and Laws of the Province of Pennsyl-*

upon receiving the territory as a grant from King Charles II, founded his Quaker colony and established his own code of laws. Penn enacted *The Great Law or Body of Laws* in 1682.³ Sabbath observance was clearly outlined; daily work was prohibited on the Lord's Day. This document also contained a section that prohibited "Cards, Dice, Lotteries, or such like enticing vain and evil Sports and Games." A *Petition of Right*, enacted in 1693, more fully identified the vain and evil sports by adding stage plays, masques, revels, bull baits, and cockfights to the list of objectionable diversions.⁴

These early laws were a reflection of Quaker philosophy. The Society of Friends believed that man could best prepare for the hereafter through self-denial, hard work, and prudent living. Friends frowned upon games, revelries, and other diversions because they tended to encourage idleness. In addition to being financially extravagant, stage plays were immoral in the eyes of the Quakers; they believed plays were the work of the devil because "the minds of people [were] alienated from heavenly things and exercised about [in] mere folly."⁵

Originally, Sunday observance laws only prohibited common labor on the Lord's Day. Such legislation noted the objectionable nature of sports, games, and stage plays but did not specifically bar these activities in Pennsylvania.⁶ These laws were sufficient for Quakers but were not followed by other members of the colony, particularly Anglicans, who held a more liberal view of the Sabbath and saw no reason to abstain from recreation on the first day of the week. As Pennsylvania's liberal citizens continued to engage in games and pastimes on Sunday, the Quakers and other strict Sabbatarians deemed it necessary to incorporate statutes prohibiting games, sports, and diversions into the Sunday observance laws.

vania, Passed Between the Years 1682 and 1700, Preceded by the Duke of York's Laws in Force from the Year 1676 to 1682 (Harrisburg, 1897), 19.

³ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 108, 114, 197.

⁵ William Penn, *No Cross, No Crown* (New York, 1845), 39, 161, 164.

⁶ In 1700 William Penn established a new frame of government for his colony. The first act passed by the assembly under the new frame was "The Law Concerning Liberty of Conscience" which forbade work on the Sabbath. The second measure adopted, "An Act Against Riots, Rioters and Riotous Sports, Plays and Games," prohibited cockfighting, bull baits, state plays, and bonfires. Both laws were disallowed by the Privy Council. James T. Mitchell and Henry Flanders, comps., *The Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania from 1682 to 1801* (Harrisburg, 1903), II, 3-5.

Subsequent laws prohibiting sports, games, and other diversions were passed by the colonial government in 1705-06,⁷ 1710-11⁸, and 1759,⁹ but each was disallowed by the Privy Council. The proprietary charter gave the colonial legislators authority to make laws for the colony; however, such laws had to be in agreement with reason and could not be "repugnant or contrary" to the laws, statutes, and rights of England. To make sure these measures were carried out, the English government required the Provincial Assembly to submit all laws made in Pennsylvania to the Privy Council for approval or rejection.¹⁰ Council's veto of the 1710-11 act echoed the apparent differences between the Anglican and Quaker attitude toward sports and diversions. The Privy Council maintained that the act of 1710-11 "restrains persons from several innocent and healthy sports and diversions and the penalties in it are too great."¹¹ Sabbath observance laws and statutes regulating some sports were first combined in the 1749-50 "Act for Amending the Laws of this Province Against Killing Deer Out of Season." Deer hunting was prohibited on the Lord's Day, except out of necessity.¹²

By the end of the Great War for Empire in 1763,¹³ divisions

⁷ "Act Against Riotous Sports, Plays and Games" was passed by the Assembly on January 12, 1705-06, and became law on October 14, 1709, due to lapse of time as provided for in the proprietary charter. *Statutes at Large*, II, 186-187. If the Privy Council did not consider acts passed by the Pennsylvania Assembly within six months, such acts automatically became law. Carey and Bioren indicated that this law was disallowed by the Queen in Council on October 24, 1709. See M. Carey and J. Bioren, *Laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 1700-1800* (Philadelphia, 1803), I, 46. It seems that this law was vetoed by the Queen; otherwise there would have been no need for the subsequent acts of assembly regarding sports and other diversions.

⁸ "Act Against Riotous Sports, Plays and Games." Passed by Pennsylvania Assembly on February 28, 1710-11; vetoed by Queen in Council on February 20, 1713-14. *Statutes at Large*, II, 360-363.

⁹ "An Act for the More Effectual Suppressing and Preventing of Lotteries and Plays." Passed by Pennsylvania Assembly on June 20, 1759; vetoed by King in Council, September 2, 1760. *Statutes at Large*, V, 445-448.

¹⁰ *Charter and Laws of Pennsylvania*, 83-85.

¹¹ *Statutes at Large*, II, 550. For a more detailed explanation of the contrast between the Anglican and Sabbatarian outlook toward sports see Foster Rhea Dulles, *A History of Recreation, America Learns to Play* (2nd ed.; New York, 1965), 9-13.

¹² *Statutes at Large*, V, 98-99.

¹³ The armed conflict between England and France that lasted from 1754 to 1763 has been inaccurately called "The French and Indian War" or "The Seven Years' War." Neither of these titles is appropriate because each fails to place in historical perspective the magnitude of the war and England's role in it; that is, the defense of the British Empire. See Lawrence Henry Gipson, "The American Revolution as an Aftermath of the Great War for

within Pennsylvania society had begun to crystallize along religious, economic, and geographic lines. A generation before, Quaker domination in Philadelphia was supplanted by Anglican and Presbyterian influences, but the Friends retained their stronghold on the eastern rural districts throughout this period.¹⁴ Quaker merchants and Anglican gentry comprised the largest segment of the aristocracy. Industriousness and frugal business practices enabled the Quaker merchants and master craftsmen to join the ranks of the elite.¹⁵ Many Anglicans had come to Pennsylvania with family fortunes inherited in England. Others grew wealthy in the colony as sea captains, merchants, custom officers, or officials in the proprietary government. Because membership in the Anglican congregation often paved the way to social advancement, many newly arrived English gentry and wealthy Scotch Irish Protestants were quick to join.¹⁶ Some Friends, tired of simplicity and austerity, cast aside Quakerism for the more mundane Anglicanism.¹⁷ The Anglican philosophy gave the former Quakers the excuses they needed to utilize their wealth for worldly pleasures and enjoyment. Many wealthy Anglicans and orthodox Quakers built luxurious estates on land they purchased on the outskirts of Philadelphia. These gentlemen tried to imitate English country life. Hunting, fishing, riding, and other leisurely activities became prominent in the lives of these Philadelphia aristocrats.¹⁸

The middle class consisted chiefly of craftsmen, shopkeepers, and tradesmen. Many were Presbyterians, but a large number had no particular religious affiliation. Although most did not have the means to purchase franchise, many leaders and spokesmen, such as Benjamin Franklin, David Rittenhouse, and James Cannon, emerged from their ranks. The inarticulate, namely seamen, journeymen, day laborers, and servants, looked to the middle class for leadership. The majority of the lower classes

Empire, 1754-1763," *Political Science Quarterly*, LXV (March, 1950), 86-104.

¹⁴ Carl Bridenbaugh and Jessica Bridenbaugh, *Rebels and Gentlemen: Philadelphia in the Age of Franklin* (New York, 1965), 16-17.

¹⁵ Frederick B. Tolles, *Meeting House and Counting House: The Quaker Merchants of Colonial Philadelphia 1682-1763* (New York, 1963), 116-117.

¹⁶ Bridenbaugh, *Rebels and Gentlemen*, 12, 17; Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in Revolt: Urban Life in America, 1743-1776* (New York, 1955), 336.

¹⁷ Tolles, *Meeting House and Counting House*, 141.

¹⁸ Bridenbaugh, *Rebels and Gentlemen*, 179-224.

professed no religion, though some belonged to the Presbyterian, Lutheran, German Reformed, and other faiths.¹⁹

The post-Revolutionary War depression swept Pennsylvania into the throes of political and economic turmoil, and Philadelphia bore the brunt. Prices rose sharply as did taxes. The influx of immigrants after the war and the recently discharged soldiers and sailors intensified the already acute housing shortage and unemployment crisis. The British Navigation Acts magnified the economic plight. The aristocracy had ample resources to weather the storm, and the middle class attained some degree of satisfaction by expressing its feelings through trade organizations. The lower class, however, suffered most, for it had the highest unemployment rate and could not articulate its grievances.²⁰

Along with economic hardship, Pennsylvania experienced a period of social disorder. In the ten-year period preceding the Revolutionary War moral standards changed, particularly in the city. The Sabbath became more secular. Gambling, crime, prostitution, and mob violence increased many-fold. Philadelphia police were ill-equipped to handle such a rapid increase in crime, and the antiquated jails were not secure. Local citizens wondered if the "age of violence had arrived."²¹

In spite of difficult times, members from all segments of society took part in amusements and pastimes.²² Quaker austerity and Presbyterian sobriety could not dissuade Philadelphia society from enjoying recreation. "Philadelphia in this, as in so many other ways, called the tune, teaching the colony how to play."²³ The middle and lower classes, following the aristocracy's example, engaged in numerous pastimes. Even the stern Quakers allowed their members the "innocent diversions" of skating, sleighing, hunting, fishing, and swimming. Several of their sect, however, were known to enjoy the more scandalous pastimes of horse racing and cockfighting.²⁴

Horse racing, though most popular among aristocrats, was

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 10, 14-19.

²⁰ Bridenbaugh, *Cities in Revolt*, 250, 284, 306, 332.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 299-314.

²² *Ibid.*, 381.

²³ Whitfield J. Bell, Jr., "Some Aspects of the Social History of Pennsylvania, 1760-1790," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, LXVII (July, 1938), 295.

²⁴ *Tolles, Meeting House and Counting House*, 137.

enjoyed by all classes.²⁵ The Jockey Club was organized in 1766 by seventy-one gentlemen to promote horse racing for the avowed purpose of improving the breed of horses.²⁶ Another favorite diversion of the wealthy was the dancing assemblies. Philadelphia gentlemen held exclusive dances and balls once a week between January and May.²⁷

The tavern continued to be the social center for the masses after the Great War for Empire. It not only provided entertainment in the form of plays, dances, gambling, and sports, such as animal baiting and cockfighting but served also as a meeting place for political discussions and intellectual exchanges.²⁸ The seeds of numerous social clubs germinated in the taverns. Many clubs began as convivial organizations but later evolved into middle-class political cliques.²⁹ The most extravagant and exclusive clubs belonged to the elite. The first of these, the Colony in Schuylkill, a fishing club founded in 1732, was the precursor of the numerous clubs organized during the 1760s by the aristocracy for hunting, fishing, and dining pleasures.³⁰ The Gloucester Foxhunting Club, established in 1766, was patronized by no less than John Dickinson, Robert Morris, Thomas Mifflin, Thomas Willing, Benjamin Chew, and John Cadwallader.³¹

No institution epitomized Pennsylvania society during this period better than the theatre. Encouraged by the Anglican gentry, British players first came to Philadelphia in 1749. Quakers and Presbyterians, allied on one of the few issues common to both sects, forced the theatre out of Philadelphia in 1750. After a brief appearance in 1753, the theatre returned again in 1759. This time religious opposition mustered by the Friends, Presbyterians, Lutherans, and Baptists could not shut it down.³²

During the 1760s middle-class citizens became incensed at the theatre because it served as an expression of aristocratic vanity.

²⁵ Bell, "Social History of Pennsylvania," 297-298.

²⁶ Bridenbaugh, *Cities in Revolt*, 364-365.

²⁷ Joseph P. Sims, ed., *The Philadelphia Assemblies, 1748-1948* (Philadelphia, 1949), 11-16.

²⁸ Bridenbaugh, *Rebels and Gentlemen*, 21-28.

²⁹ Bridenbaugh, *Cities in Revolt*, 364.

³⁰ William A. Milnor, Jr., *A History of the Schuylkill Fishing Company of the State in Schuylkill, 1732-1888* (Philadelphia, 1889), 15; Bridenbaugh, *Cities in Revolt*, 363.

³¹ John F. Watson, *Annals of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania in the Olden Times*, rev. by Willis P. Hazard (Philadelphia, 1891), III, 157.

³² Bridenbaugh, *Rebels and Gentlemen*, 137-144.

The privileged used it to display their wealth. They arrived in elaborate carriages and wore luxurious garments. They sat in the most expensive seats. The separation of the boxes from the gallery was a great social divider which prompted the Sons of Liberty to democratize the theatre by ripping out the partitions. By 1776 opposition to the theatre had become almost entirely social and economic.³³

The Revolutionary War interrupted this atmosphere of recreation and amusement. As a contemporary of the Revolution observed, "the troublous times have come, . . . independence has become a fact. . . . In Philadelphia everything bears a warlike aspect. We hear no more of races, of cockfighting, . . . bull-baiting or bear-baiting; these men have something else to think of, they discuss the war views, they prepare for war."³⁴

Attention increasingly focused on political issues after 1774. Although its influence in the political arena declined steadily after 1750, the Quaker party, composed largely of English Quakers and Anglicans, still constituted the largest single group in the Pennsylvania Assembly in 1774.³⁵ The moderates, under John Dickinson, and the radicals, consisting chiefly of Scotch-Irish frontiersmen and Philadelphia mechanics, challenged the Quaker authority. Each faction vied to supplant the conservative Quaker party. The moderates, whose political philosophy differed from that of the radicals, supported the latter on issues that appeared advantageous to their own cause. An alliance of moderates and radicals usually garnered enough votes to pass measures over the Quaker opposition.³⁶

Scotch-Irish Presbyterians, who came to Penn's colony in large numbers during the second quarter of the eighteenth century and settled on the frontier, contested for political influence.³⁷ They continually sought frontier defenses and internal improvements from the Quaker-dominated legislature. The intransigent Quakers inflamed the frontiersmen's bitter feelings toward the eastern

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ J. Thomas Scharf and Thompson Westcott, *History of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1884), II, 892.

³⁵ Robert L. Brunhouse, *The Counter-Revolution in Pennsylvania, 1776-1790* (Harrisburg, 1942), 2; Charles Henry Lincoln, *The Revolutionary Movement in Pennsylvania, 1760-1776* (Philadelphia, 1901), 190.

³⁶ Lincoln, *Revolutionary Movement*, 190-199.

³⁷ Wayland F. Dunaway, *A History of Pennsylvania* (New York, 1948), 70-74.

oligarchy by repeatedly turning a deaf ear to the Westerners' pleas and refusing to grant the newcomers equitable representation in the Assembly.³⁸

In 1776 a coalition of Scotch-Irish radicals and a group of moderates and radicals from the East toppled the conservative Quaker regime.³⁹ Although this encounter was a struggle within itself, it was also related to the movement for independence from England and had the support of the Continental Congress. The moderates favored the redress of American grievances by the British government but opposed complete separation from the mother country. The radicals enthusiastically favored independence. When independence became a reality, the moderates withdrew from the movement, leaving the radicals in command of Pennsylvania politics.⁴⁰

The radicals quickly established their own government and selected all the delegates to a convention that framed a new constitution for Pennsylvania. The radicals' political position was tenuous as the moderates threatened to gain control of the Pennsylvania Assembly. Concerned about the threat of the moderates, the radicals hastily adopted a new constitution without a popular referendum. Although the Constitution of 1776 was the most democratic that revolutionary America had seen, it was highly unpopular in Pennsylvania. The result was a political feud between the radicals (constitutionalists) and the moderates (anti-constitutionalists) which plagued Pennsylvania politics throughout the revolutionary period.⁴¹

Despite factional political disputes, there was an increasingly general emphasis on virtuous living. Various factions in Pennsylvania's politics which "long associated liberty with property. . . now concluded that both rested on virtue." Property was the prerequisite of liberty, but "property itself could not exist without industry and frugality."⁴² Without factional controversy, the Assembly in September of 1774 passed a resolution which discouraged "every species of extravagance and dissipation, espe-

³⁸ Theodore Thayer, *Pennsylvania Politics and the Growth of Democracy, 1740-1776* (Harrisburg, 1953), 77-103.

³⁹ Brunhouse, *Counter-Revolution in Pennsylvania*, 10-14.

⁴⁰ Lincoln, *Revolutionary Movement*, 189-214, 242-276.

⁴¹ Brunhouse, *Counter-Revolution in Pennsylvania*, 14-17.

⁴² Edmund S. Morgan, "The Puritan Ethic and the American Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, XXIV (January, 1967), 10.

cially horse racing, and all other kinds of gaming, cockfighting, exhibition of plays and other expensive diversions."⁴³ The Pennsylvania Assembly's action reflected a widespread attitude. The First Continental Congress, meeting in Philadelphia from September 5 to October 27, 1774, adopted a Plan of Association on October 20. The plan included a provision that discouraged "every species of extravagance and dissipation. . . ."⁴⁴

The Scotch-Irish Presbyterians, led by George Bryan, were particularly influential in including their views in the 1776 constitutional convention.⁴⁵ They incorporated Presbyterian ideals of virtue and industry into the new constitution. Section 45 was devoted to "the encouragement of virtue and the prevention of vice and immorality."⁴⁶ Scotch-Irish Presbyterians, like the Quakers, opposed work and recreation on the Sabbath.⁴⁷ Their reverence for the Almighty, no doubt, influenced them to insert this provision in the new constitution.

Although austerity and frugality were the order of the day, a few Philadelphians participated in jubilant celebrations, great festivals, and lavish entertainments during the early years of the Revolution.⁴⁸ Richard Henry Lee described Philadelphia as an "attractive scene of debauch and amusement,"⁴⁹ while James Lovell, in a letter to George Washington, explained that the French army engineers had not reached his position because they had "remained subject to the crucifying expenses of this city."⁵⁰

The British army under General William Howe spent the winter of 1777-78 in Philadelphia. The British enhanced the frivolity and gaiety of Philadelphia during their occupation. English army officers reopened the Philadelphia theatre and performed on the stage.⁵¹ Lavish parties and balls were prevalent,

⁴³ Scharf and Westcott, *History of Philadelphia*, II, 966.

⁴⁴ Worthington Chauncy Ford, ed., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789* (Washington, 1904), I, 78.

⁴⁵ J. Paul Selsam, *The Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776: A Study in Revolutionary Democracy* (Philadelphia, 1936), 150-151.

⁴⁶ Francis Newton Thorpe, ed., *Federal and State Constitutions, Colonial Charters, and Other Organic Laws, etc.* (Washington, 1909), V, 3091.

⁴⁷ Guy S. Klett, *The Presbyterians in Colonial Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1937), 177-178.

⁴⁸ Bell, "Social History of Pennsylvania," 287-295.

⁴⁹ Richard Henry Lee to George Washington, April 10, 1777, quoted in Jared Sparks, ed., *Correspondence of the American Revolution* (Boston, 1853), 366-367.

⁵⁰ James Lovell to George Washington, July 24, 1777, *ibid.*, 408-413.

⁵¹ Thomas Clark Pollock, *The Philadelphia Theatre in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1968), 34-36.

but the biggest extravaganza was the gala farewell given to General Howe by his officers on May 18, 1778. The festival was called the Meschianza.⁵² British soldiers, dressed in luxurious garments, participated in a jousting tournament according to the rules of ancient chivalry. The tournament was followed by a dinner party, fireworks display, a grandiose supper at midnight, and dancing until dawn. Many Loyalists participated in the celebration.⁵³ In June the British left Philadelphia.

American reoccupation did not drastically alter the tone of night life in some circles. Benedict Arnold, the commander of American forces, lived extravagantly and entertained lavishly. While most Americans were enduring economic hardships, Arnold and his companions indulged in merrymaking and revelry. Shortly after Congress returned to Philadelphia, Arnold was transferred to another position in the Continental army.⁵⁴ Congress reacted to the theatre and other frivolities which characterized certain segments of Philadelphia social life. It passed a resolution on October 12, 1778, which encouraged the states "to take the most effectual measures . . . for the suppressing of theatrical entertainments, horse racing, gaming and such other diversions as are productive of idleness and dissipation."⁵⁵

The Philadelphia theatre continued to operate despite the Congressional resolution. According to Sam Adams, Congress opposed the theatre because American army officers imitated their British counterparts by performing on the stage.⁵⁶ On October 16 Congress adopted a second resolution making it illegal for any officeholder in the United States government to promote, attend, or act in stage plays. Failure to comply was grounds for dismissal from office.⁵⁷

The Pennsylvania Assembly expressed its opposition to entertainment on March 30, 1779, when it passed "An Act for the Suppression of Vice and Immorality." This act forbade work or any

⁵² The term "meschianza" means mixture or medley. It was derived from one of two Italian words, "meschiare" to mingle, or "mescere" to mix. Watson, *Annals of Philadelphia*, III, 471.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, II, 240.

⁵⁴ Scharf and Westcott, *History of Philadelphia*, I, 387-388.

⁵⁵ Ford, *Journals of the Continental Congress*, XIII, 1001.

⁵⁶ Samuel Adams to Samuel Savage, October 17, 1778, quoted in Edmund C. Burnett, ed., *Letters of Members of the Continental Congress* (Washington, 1926), III, 451-452.

⁵⁷ Ford, *Journals of the Continental Congress*, XII, 1018.

kind of sport or diversion on Sunday. It also outlawed cock-fighting, horse racing, bullet playing, shooting matches, or any other "idle" games which involved gambling. In addition, it contained a section prohibiting stage plays.⁵⁸ Because the theatre in Philadelphia maintained a British flavor from its inception in 1749 and because English soldiers and Loyalists patronized it during the Revolution, many Americans regarded it as a pro-British organization. It is possible the Pennsylvania lawmakers held this same view and banned it for that reason.

Pennsylvania's traditionally narrow social ethic, the pressures of war, and intellectual influences led to the 1779 act. The radicals' concern for virtue, a reaction to the immorality displayed by segments of the aristocracy, widened the breach between the upper and lower social classes in Pennsylvania society. Because the majority of the radicals came from the middle and lower classes,⁵⁹ they detested the revelry of some Philadelphia aristocrats during the early years of the Revolution. The enactment of the blue laws may have been the radicals' manner of rebelling against the pleasures of the aristocracy. The year 1779 also saw America beset with a severe economic depression. Inflation ran rampant. Paper money depreciated as much as fifty percent a day.⁶⁰ Perhaps the reality of depression and hard times, coupled with the war, also caused many legislators to move toward frugality. To the radicals, sports, gambling, and other "idle" activities were the antithesis of industry and thrift which they considered virtuous.

The Revolution also helped popularize the humanitarian doctrines of the Enlightenment in America. Several aristocrats contributed generously to the cause of benevolence, but the chief exponents of the humanitarian crusade were members of the middle class.⁶¹ Though primarily concerned with slavery, indigence, and disease, humane principles extended also to animals which stimulated a wholesale condemnation of cockfighting.⁶²

The 1779 law was largely ineffective because the depreciation

⁵⁸ *Statutes at Large*, IX, 333-338.

⁵⁹ Lincoln, *Revolutionary Movement*, 77-96.

⁶⁰ Frederick D. Stone, "Philadelphia Society One Hundred Years Ago," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, III (1879), 361-394.

⁶¹ Merle Curti, *The Growth of American Thought* (3rd ed.; New York, 1964), 114-123.

⁶² Bridenbaugh, *Rebels and Gentlemen*, 261.

of currency made the fines tolerable to its violators.⁶³ The Supreme Executive Council urged the Assembly to take corrective action.⁶⁴ In 1786 the Assembly repealed the 1779 act and replaced it with "An Act for the Prevention of Vice and Immorality and Unlawful Gaming and to Restrain Disorderly Sports and Dissipation." Except for two minor stipulations, the 1786 act contained the same provisions as its 1779 predecessor. Fines for violations were substantially increased, and the new statute had a time limit of seven years.⁶⁵

Philadelphia theatre directors, Lewis Hallam and Thomas Wignell, defied the act of 1779 when they opened their theatre in 1782. Magistrates quickly suppressed the stage plays, but the ingenious directors continued the performances by disguising the titles of the plays as lectures, illuminations, or French dances.⁶⁶ This practice worked until 1788 when some Quakers and other theatre opponents petitioned the Assembly to halt the camouflaged performances. The theatre question was reopened, and newspapers published the debates between the supporters and opponents.⁶⁷ The final tabulation was 6,000 in favor of the theatre, while 4,000 opposed it.⁶⁸

The Assembly responded in 1789 by repealing section 10 of the 1786 law which prohibited theatres and stage plays. Theatres were legalized in Philadelphia and within a one-mile radius of the city.⁶⁹ The theatre movement was enhanced by the presence of the federal government in Philadelphia. George Washington and several other dignitaries were avid theatre goers.⁷⁰ Opposition to the theatre persisted, but it was to no avail. In 1794, after the expiration of the 1786 act, Pennsylvania lawmakers renewed it *in toto* with the exception of the provision that outlawed the theatre.⁷¹ Philadelphia experienced a severe yellow-fever epi-

⁶³ *Statutes at Large*, XII, 313.

⁶⁴ Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania, Minutes of the Council Meeting, February 9, 1785, *Colonial Records* (Harrisburg, 1853), XIII, 352.

⁶⁵ *Statutes at Large*, XII, 313-322.

⁶⁶ For a more detailed account of the theatre controversy in Pennsylvania, see Pollock, *Philadelphia Theatre* and William S. Dye, "Pennsylvania versus the Theatre," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, LV (October, 1931), 333-371.

⁶⁷ *Pennsylvania Packet and Daily Advertiser*, February 16-18, 1789.

⁶⁸ Dye, "Pennsylvania versus the Theatre," 368.

⁶⁹ *Statutes at Large*, XIII, 184-186.

⁷⁰ Pollock, *Philadelphia Theatre*, 42.

⁷¹ *Statutes at Large*, XV, 110-118.

demic in 1793.⁷² Some attributed the disease to the passage of the 1794 law. Several religious factions viewed the epidemic as the Creator's vengeance for the increasing secularization of society.⁷³

The Pennsylvania blue laws enacted in 1779 and renewed in 1786 and in 1794 were a small facet of Pennsylvania politics obscured by a much larger political movement in Pennsylvania and in the United States. When the laws of 1779 were enacted, Pennsylvania and twelve other colonies were struggling to maintain independence from England. Pennsylvania was not only involved in a national movement for independence but was also beset with internal problems. The moderates were attempting to regain some of the power they relinquished to the radicals in 1776.

Just as the American Revolution was an extremely complex movement, the forces which led to the enactment of the Pennsylvania Sunday blue laws in 1779 were equally complex. Several factors, some of which were interrelated, led to their formation. The religious fervency of the Quakers and Presbyterians was a leading contributor to the enactment of these laws. Both groups revered the Sabbath, but the latter was the predominant factor during the revolutionary period. Although Quaker influence had greatly diminished by 1779, their high respect for the Sabbath exemplified by their religious practices cannot be disregarded.

After America declared independence, Pennsylvania legislators were no longer hampered by the threat of royal interference by the Privy Council. In the past Anglicanism, with its liberal attitude toward worldly pleasures and entertainment, prevented the legislative enactment of the austere, rigid philosophies of the Quakers and Presbyterians. This was no longer the case after 1776.

Resentment of the aristocracy by certain religious factions and by the lower classes may have been another cause for the adoption of the 1779 statutes. Religious zealots probably detested the aristocracy because the pleasures enjoyed by some of its members were counter to Presbyterian and Quaker ideals. Many members of the lower classes likewise despised the wealthy, but for different reasons. They resented the privileges that wealth

⁷² *Pennsylvania Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, August 28, 1793.

⁷³ Pollock, *Philadelphia Theatre*, 55.

afforded the elite class. A large contingent of radicals, the group that governed Pennsylvania at this time, was Presbyterian, representing the middle and lower classes of society.

The frivolity and conviviality displayed by many officers and soldiers of the British army led some Americans to associate pleasurable diversions with the British. To some Americans, it was unpatriotic to indulge in frivolous diversions. Those who dared to take part in such activities often risked being labelled Loyalists and left themselves open to harsh reprisals by the rebellious Americans.

The blue laws were formulated during a time of crisis. The austere conditions brought about by the Revolution and internal disorder within Pennsylvania made life extremely difficult for most local inhabitants. To survive such adversities, one had to be industrious and frugal, while sacrificing many of the pleasures of life. Few could afford to do anything else.