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Isaac Norris II's Attack on Andrew Hamilton

ANDREW Hamilton (?1676–1741) is best remembered today for his brilliant defense of newspaper printer John Peter Zenger against charges of libel, a defense that earned Hamilton a reputation as the pioneer exponent of liberty of the press in the colonies and the epithet "Day-Star of the American Revolution." Hamilton's achievement in the Zenger trial (1735), along with his many important political offices (Attorney General, Speaker of the Pennsylvania Assembly, Prothonotary of the Supreme Court, among many others), combined to make him one of the most influential and honored Pennsylvania politicians of the first half of the eighteenth century.[1] But Hamilton, a man of a vigorous, even imposing personality, was not universally loved during his years of prominence in Pennsylvania politics. Although at his death James Logan eulo-

[1] The only book-length biography of Hamilton is Burton Alva Konkle's *The Life of Andrew Hamilton 1676–1741, "The Day-Star of the American Revolution"* (Philadelphia, 1941). Other shorter and perhaps more reliable accounts include Foster C. Nix, "Andrew Hamilton's Early Years in the American Colonies," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd. Ser., XXI (1964), 390–407; Joshua Francis Fisher, "Andrew Hamilton, Esq. of Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* (*PMHB*), XVI (1892), 1–27; J. H. Powell, "Philadelphia Lawyer," *General Washington and the Jackass and other American Characters in Portrait* (New York, 1969), 13–70. Alan Tully gives a brief biographical sketch and summary of the character of Hamilton's politics in *William Penn's Legacy: Politics and Social Structure in Provincial Pennsylvania, 1726–1755* (Baltimore, 1977), 17–19. Various accounts of the Zenger trial also often include biographical information.

gized him, saying that "Philadelphia shows us so many sorrowful pictures That it may rival in tears ancient Nineveh town," another of Hamilton's life-long friends, Benjamin Franklin, acknowledged in his obituary that Hamilton had "lived not without Enemies."[2] Indeed, throughout his long and distinguished career in Pennsylvania, Hamilton was the subject of attacks and denunciations in books, pamphlets, and newspaper commentaries. These attacks spanned the period from approximately 1726 until the eve of Hamilton's death in 1741, a period usually viewed as one of the most tranquil in Pennsylvania politics.

Among the attacks is a previously undiscovered satire written by Isaac Norris II (1701–1766).[3] Preserved in a unique manuscript version, this satiric poem—"Attend one Moment, Hear my Artless Tale"—is doubly significant. First it brings to light entirely new evidence of the enmity toward Hamilton of a man who himself played an important role in the political and social life of eighteenth-century Pennsylvania.[4] Like Hamilton, Isaac Norris II, heir to the status and fortune of one of Philadelphia's most prominent Quaker families, enjoyed a distinguished political career.[5] Elected to the Assembly in 1735, he became during the following sixteen years an

[2] This translation of the line "exhibet usque adeo tristes Philadelphia scenas, / Ut Niniven lachrymis aequiparare queat" is by Konkle who quotes the entire elegy along with a translation in *Andrew Hamilton*, 143–149. Franklin's remark appeared in the moving elegy of Hamilton in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* of Aug. 6, 1741.

[3] The manuscript poem appears in the Norris Commonplace Book, H. M. 164, Henry E. Huntington Library. The Huntington has graciously extended me permission to publish this work. This volume preserves other poems in Isaac Norris II's handwriting as well as poems and letters by his brother Joseph and their niece Hannah Griffiths. Hamilton is the subject of brief disparaging remarks in others of the poems. The entire Commonplace Book will be the subject of a monograph. I am indebted to Professor Paul M. Zall who first brought it to my attention and wish to thank him for his many valuable criticisms and suggestions.

[4] Although a book-length biography of Norris has not yet been published, useful information about his life may be found in Charles P. Keith, "Isaac Norris," *The Provincial Councillors of Pennsylvania . . . 1733–1776* (Philadelphia, 1883), 41–72; Marie Elena Korey, *The Books of Isaac Norris (1701–1766) at Dickinson College* (Carlisle, Pa., 1976); George Washington Norris, "Isaac Norris," *PMHB*, I (1877), 449–454; William T. Parsons, "The Lives and Interests of Isaac Norris—I and II," *The Bulletin of the Historical Society of Montgomery County*, XIII (1961), 5–24; Parsons, "Isaac Norris II, The Speaker" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1955).

[5] For comments on the social and economic prominence of the Norris family see Frederick B. Tolles, "Quaker Grandees," *Meeting House and Counting House: The Quaker Merchants of Colonial Philadelphia 1682–1763* (Chapel Hill, 1948), 109–143.

increasingly influential and vocal member of that body. As Speaker from 1751 until his retirement (1764) Norris was not only the leader of the Assembly, he was also the head of the Quaker or "Norris" party in that body.

Ironically, Norris and Hamilton have usually been assumed complementary stars in the skies of eighteenth-century politics.[6] The assumption, though unexamined, has been reasonable. Both men, after all, are best remembered for roles that would appear to make them compatible—Hamilton, of course, as defender of the liberty of the press, and Norris as the man who chose the motto that encircles the Liberty Bell: "Proclaim Liberty throughout All the Land, Unto All the inhabitants thereof." But the men were bitter enemies.

In addition to revealing for the first time the enmity of these two distinguished politicians, the satire "Attend one Moment, Hear my Artless Tale" also leads us to explore a significant dimension of Andrew Hamilton's biography. Organized as a catalogue of Hamilton's supposed "sins" or "crimes," the satire summarizes the many charges that Hamilton's opponents most commonly leveled against him. Thus, whatever the final accuracy of the individual charges, this satire is itself an accurate mirror of the topics and expression of anti-Hamilton sentiment as it was customarily articulated. Exploration of anti-Hamilton sentiment as reflected in this document, however, need not diminish the stature or accomplishments of Andrew Hamilton. Rather, this exploration can help us add some lively and culturally significant details to the biography of a man who despite his prominence has remained somewhat mysterious.

In 100 lines of forceful, angry couplets, Isaac Norris sought to expose to censure a person he viewed as a powerful tyrant. In the opening of the poem he implored his audience to hear what he had to say:

> Attend one Moment Hear my Artless Tale
> Let neither heats, nor prejudice prevail
> But Judge impartial as the Crimes appear
> And Act unbiased by your hope or fear

[6] Parsons, for example, observes that Norris heard Hamilton's farewell speech to the Assembly and that he had gained some of his views on the Assembly's importance from Hamilton. "Isaac Norris II, The Speaker," 139.

He then vigorously launched into his indictment:

> Before our makers Image is defac'd
> Ere by long Tyranny the Soul's debas'd
> While yet one spark of Liberty remains
> And Brittish blood runs vigrous thrô our veins
> Let not an idle Vagrant scarcely known
> Untaught in language in Adress a Clown
> Whom yet no Country ever could endure
> false as his name and as his birth, Obscure
> The Widows deep distress, the Orphans foe
> Our Scourge our pestilence, unpunished go.
>
> But rould at length behold the man youd read
> Shake of his power, suppose him hangd or dead
> Suppose him banishd to his native Shore
> A Tyrant now, Who was a Slave before
> Then say what Just rewards his merits claim
> Learn whence he Sprung, and ask him what's his name
> Search the recesses of his Soul & See
> His Law, his morals, his Divinity.
> But if the maizes are too dark to Scan
> Observe his Actions well & Judge the man.

Although Norris did not actually name Hamilton, these first twenty-four lines are strategically important because in them he focused on three basic charges that make identification of Hamilton certain: irreligion, obscure birth, and the abuse of widows and orphans. These are the very charges that many of Hamilton's opponents voiced against him, and Norris could depend on them as identifying strokes in his portrait of Hamilton. At the same time that these charges bring before us some of the common subjects of anti-Hamilton tracts, exploration of them takes us deep into the origins, course, and conduct of this conflict between Andrew Hamilton and Isaac Norris II.

The poet charged Hamilton with irreligion when he called for action "Before our makers Image is defac'd." Later in the poem he reinforced this charge by having "Hamilton" defiantly ask, "Has Religion filld my soul with fears?" Although Hamilton did have religious principles, he was that most puzzling of religious types in Quaker Pennsylvania, a Deist. He did not belong to any church and he was known to discuss Newtonian science as a means of under-

standing the Deity.[7] To men like Isaac Norris I, prominent in the Philadelphia Monthly and Yearly meetings of the Society of Friends, and Isaac Norris II later, Hamilton's cool speculations about religious questions had probably appeared at best worldly, and at worst, deeply sinful. Many other opponents had also seized on Hamilton's supposed "irreligion" in their denunciations of him. One writer to the *American Weekly Mercury*, for example, had angrily accused Hamilton of being a self-styled Spinoso.[8] Declaring that neither Hamilton nor Spinoso could understand the Deity by "Reason's glimmering Light," this writer had gone so far as to call Hamilton a "vain-glorious Wretch" and a blasphemer against Heaven itself.

Yet despite the vehement outcrys which Hamilton's supposed "irreligion" could elicit from his enemies, Philadelphia's political and social ranks were being swelled by men who were not part of Penn's "Holy Experiment." Norris did not, therefore, rely on the charge of "irreligion" alone to identify Hamilton. He sounded a more telling charge when he accused the subject of having no name or country in the phrases "scarcely known," "false as his name and as his birth, Obscure," "Learn whence he Sprung, and ask him what's his name." The issue of his obscure birth had plagued Hamilton from the time he first came to Philadelphia, a man nearly forty years old. His opponents delighted in pointing out that he had adopted the name "Andrew Hamilton" and that his original name was something else.[9] They generally held that he was of obscure, even base Scottish parentage. One of the most violent invectives against him, *The Life and Character of a Strange He-Monster* (1726), described his mother as a beggar and his father as a peddler who conceived him "upon St. Andrew's Day."[10] Apparently Hamilton did not publicly defend himself by explaining his origins or claiming kinship with Lieutenant-Governor Andrew Hamilton (d. 1703).[11]

7 Powell briefly discusses the social significance of Hamilton's religion in Quaker Philadelphia, 22, 312.

8 *American Weekly Mercury*, Jan. 22–29, 1733/34. For other comments on Hamilton's religion see also *ibid.*, Nov. 1–8, 1733, Dec. 14–21, 1733, and Dec. 22–27, 1733.

9 Fisher cites the name "Trent," 2.

10 *The Life and Character of a Strange He-Monster, Lately arrived in London from an English Colony in America and is often to be seen upon the Royal Exchange, Gratis* (Philadelphia, 1726?), 3.

11 Although Hamilton probably knew the Lieutenant-Governor, the two men were not related. Nix, 391–392.

He let the charge that he had adopted the name Andrew Hamilton stand.

Why he did not publicly defend himself concerning his birth is not known, but his enemies supplied what was to them a logical explanation. As the poet suggested in "Whom yet no Country ever could endure," Hamilton, they said, fled his native country after committing an awful crime. In consequence, he could never again claim a name or a country.[12] This charge was repeated fulsomely, if not specifically, by a writer to the *American Weekly Mercury* who said, "He is foully belied, if he did not desert one Country, not for good Services done it, or in it, but to avoid the ignominious Punishment justly due to his Crimes, and other Countries not too remote, forced him to desert them."[13] Although in the poem Norris did not specify the "dark" crime Hamilton had committed, other opponents did so. In one story Hamilton was accused of killing a Scottish nobleman and in another of killing a near relation in a "barbarous Manner."[14] Thrown thus upon the world by his crimes, this "idle Vagrant" first found the most menial kind of work. A characteristic story held that he was an indentured servant and actually worked alongside field slaves in Virginia, a charge which Norris voiced in "A Tyrant now, Who was a Slave before."

Yet Hamilton had clearly not remained a "slave." Indeed, this was the vexing problem to those who found this "new man's" power in Philadelphia irksome or intolerable. The means of his rise to power and position brings us to the third charge the poet established early in the poem: Hamilton's abuse of widows and orphans. Not only is Hamilton "The Widows deep distress, the Orphans foe," but a few lines later we are told that his "Sins" are "unpunishd—in the Widow's cause." Still later in the poem Norris had Hamilton cry out "Has my heart melted at the Orphans Tears?" In these lines Norris raised one of the most common accusations, for in the stories that circulated around Philadelphia Hamilton was often depicted as rising to wealth and power by taking the property of helpless widows and orphans. One graphic writer, for example, accused him of amassing a fortune by "Piercing the Vitals, and drinking the Blood

12 Fisher, 2; *The Life and Character*, 3–4.

13 *American Weekly Mercury*, Jan. 29–Feb. 5, 1733/34.

14 *The Life and Character*, 13.

of Widows & Orphans" while another said he deprived "the Widow and Fatherless of their just Rights and Inheritance."[15] Opponents even questioned whether he had got title to his first estate in Virginia by legal means. William Byrd of Westover said that he was "a man of a bad character, and he got the estate nobody knows how."[16]

The most sustained account of his alleged abuses of the helpless was given in the prose satire, *The Life and Character*. . . . Its author narrated no fewer than five instances in which Hamilton was supposed to have defrauded helpless widows and orphans. In the first of these stories, possibly alluding to Hamilton's Virginia property, the satirist accused Hamilton of seducing the widow of his former Virginia master. Having won "her plate, money, costly rings, and other things of value," he eloped "without the formal ceremony of a parting kiss."[17] With this fortune he set up as a gentleman and was thus able to betray another widow. This one had in her care the large estates of several orphans. Soon Hamilton got those estates into his own hands leaving them all "so many weeping sacrifices to his treacherous Villany."[18] His third widow perhaps fared better than the others; although he got her money, he also married her.[19] In the fourth story the writer accused Hamilton of tricking a youthful American orphan into selling his valuable property at a low price, and concluded that Hamilton has "ever since, in contempt of all opposition, continued in Possession of the Infant's Inheritance."[20] In the fifth and most important of these tales he accused Hamilton of defrauding a family of their fine house and lot in Philadelphia. Hamilton, the author charged, persuaded the family to leave him in possession of the property while they journeyed to a distant island. When the father of the family died, Hamilton produced a fraudulent

15 *American Weekly Mercury*, Sept. 11–18, 1733, and Jan. 29–Feb. 5, 1733/34.

16 Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of Wm. Byrd of Westover 1709–1712* (Richmond, Va., 1941), 106, entry for Nov. 14, 1709. According to Nix, Hamilton had been counselor for Frances Makemie when William Byrd sued him over a bill of exchange. Nix, 396, 400–401.

17 *The Life and Character*, 7.

18 *Ibid.*, 9.

19 *Ibid.*, 11. In 1706 Hamilton married Ann Presson, a widow who had inherited some fortune from her husband, Joseph Presson. See Nix, 398–399, for an account of Hamilton's relationship with the family.

20 *The Life and Character*, 12–13.

"bond" and persuaded the Pennsylvania Assembly to pass an act for the sale of the estate in satisfaction of the "bond." He thus obtained a valuable house and city lot without paying a penny for them and remained in the house "in defiance of all Law and Equity, notwithstanding measures have been taken in order to make him disgorge the bait he has so unjustly swallowed."[21]

Of all these stories of Hamilton's alleged abuses of widows and orphans, Isaac Norris definitely knew a version of this last episode through the first-hand experiences of his father. And it was knowledge of this version that caused Norris II to write of Hamilton's abuses of property rights with such anger and conviction. During the 1717–1719 legislative years, the elder Norris, a member of the Governor's Council and later a member of the Assembly, witnessed the events that *The Life and Character* . . . described in the episode of the Philadelphia house and lot. This was the rather complex case of the widow Rebecca Clark.[22] By deed of her father-in-law, Rebecca and her husband, William Clark, Jr., had been left the property in question and had made it their home for some ten years. In 1714, however, they removed to Barbados in order to secure a legacy from Rebecca's mother, leaving their estate in the care of Clement Plumsted, a relative of Rebecca's. Plumsted rented the house to Andrew Hamilton who made it his first Philadelphia residence and who later claimed to have paid for extensive repairs on the house. After Clark's death in Barbados, several of his creditors as well as those of his father brought bills before the Assembly for the sale of the property in satisfaction of debts the Clarks owed them.[23] Hamilton was later accused of instigating these creditors, one of whom eventually sold the property to him.[24] After considerable debate in the Assembly, a bill "for Vesting the House and Lot of Ground

21 *Ibid.*, 13–16. Nix gives a more favorable account of Hamilton's early involvement with the estates of widows and orphans, 395–398.

22 The case dragged on for many years. The most complete documentation of the positions of the principals is in "Writ of Execution of a Decree—Richardson against Hamilton," *Pa. Archives*, 3rd Ser., VIII (Harrisburg, 1896), 69–80. After the death of William Clark, Jr., Rebecca married Zachariah Richardson.

23 The record of the Assembly minutes is found in "Votes and Proceedings of the House of Representatives of the Province of Pennsylvania," *Pa. Archives*, 8th Ser., II, 1237–1238, 1246, 1249, hereinafter cited as *Votes*.

24 "Writ of Execution of a Decree," 71–72.

Lying in Philadelphia late the estate and inheritence of William Clark . . . deceased, to be sold for the payments of his debts" passed and was sent to Governor Keith who gave it his speedy approval.[25]

During the debates on this question the widow Clark had remained in Barbados and was unable to present her side. When she returned she brought before the new Assembly (1718–1719) a petition "setting forth her reasons and Allegations against a Certain Act passed by the last Assembly . . .," and another petition "complaining of undue methods taken in the sale of the said house."[26] After she was finally allowed to appear and present her case, the Assembly discussion on the matter lasted many months and included an appearance by Andrew Hamilton himself.[27] Although the Assembly as a whole finally decided that the widow did not have grounds for her complaints, some of its members felt that she had been handled unfairly and that unjust methods had been used in the sale of her property.[28]

Among those who became sympathetic to the plight of the widow was Isaac Norris I, who followed the case first as a member of the Governor's Council (by whom the bill was reviewed) and then as a member of the 1718–1719 Assembly. In 1719 he recorded his views in a letter to his friend Thomas Story. Although disturbed at the injustice done the woman, Norris had been cautious in saying anything:

One thing I had inclination to mention to thee, which I have never done to any yet on that Side being cautious, and not caring to involve myself unnecessarily, perceiving what a dust is raised, and how everybody is watched and ill used that does but declare their opinion, tho' as they apprehend on the side of Justice, and to prevent if possible such ways of alienating People's Estates, without due course of Law. . . . [I] presume by this time thou takes me to mean the business of Rebecca Clark . . . with Clement Plumstead and Andrew Hamilton. I understand her husband [Richardson] is at London, and some friends have taken notice of him and the case . . . indeed I think it is Justice, Generosity and Charity to do it.[29]

25 *Votes*, II, 1270–1272.

26 *Ibid.*, 1289, 1298.

27 *Ibid.*, 1301.

28 *Ibid.*, 1314–1315. In June 1733 the Lord High Chanchellor of Great Britain ruled that Hamilton deliver possession of the house over to the widow Clark. "Writ of Execution of a Decree," 78–80.

29 Norris Papers 1716–1735, Norris Family Note Books, II, 32–33, Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP).

Norris went on to complain to Story that concerning this bill "our Governor for reasons best known to himself, did not think fit to consult the Council, as had been always usual." Further, Governor Keith tried to keep the Council from even raising any objections to the bill:

> The Council (who in compliance were Gazers) perceiving what it was [*the bill*], ventured *two* or *three* of them, to mention their dislike of it to the Governor and desired his further consideration. He answered it was a Private Bill, and that he had the Attorney General's opinion on it, and so passed it. This Attorney General thou knows to be a Party chiefly concerned, and who now possesses the House.

At the bottom of the page this Attorney General is identified as Andrew Hamilton.

Norris was a member of the Assembly when the widow Clark brought her petitions before that body. In the same letter he described to Thomas Story a scene of confusion and base politicing when he and a few other Assembly members spoke on the widow's side: "Nothing could be done, a strong Party was made, and the calmest reasoning would not be hearkened to. Noise and clamour was indecently and artfull raised, the members formed (some of them) against one another and indeed the Assembly broke up in a kind of heat and without doing any business that or other." He ended his letter concerning the case on a note of caution: "Thou wilt use this, and my name discreetly.[30]

Isaac Norris II, who undoubtedly knew the story from his father, seems to have based specific accusations on it. For example, when he charged that Hamilton is "Obnoxious to his Country's Laws" because he "Sins unpunished, in the widow's cause," the word "unpunished" points directly back to the widow Clark story. In Norris' view because Hamilton did not have to make restitution to her he was "unpunished." Despite the Assembly's decision, both Norris I and Norris II continued to believe that restitution should

[30] Norris was to remember Hamilton's behavior with disapproval. A few years later, speaking of a piece of property that was rightfully his, he explained to a friend that "I should ere this so far [have] pursued my just right as to put the mortgage in A. H.'s hands & gain[ed] possession were it perfectly easy to suddenly turn out the widow." Norris to Benj. Thurman, Copy Book of Letters 1716–1730, 285, HSP.

have been made. In another probable allusion to the story the poet suggested that Hamilton was able to deflect or pervert the law itself if it suited his purposes. Here Norris depicted Hamilton and his assorted followers bending the laws in a most pernicious way:

> All but his Spies whom Strictest tyes unite
> dark Scenes and Leagues of amicable spite
> Fallning on discord these, like vermin prey
> And wallow in corruption All the day
> Lyons on Lyons beasts unknown before
> Prowl in our streets and thrô the Country roar
>
> And when Attackd they rake ye Common Sewers
> Doctors & Bullys aldermen & whores
> Eves Droppers Secretarys' pimps & Jades
> Too old and ugly to pursue their trades.
> All Join promiscuous in their Hero's cause
> And turn the usual current of the Laws
> Dreading the faithful record might reveal
> To after ages, what the present feel.
>
> But tho' no Record Should Remain to tell
> Such Crimes forever on the Mem'ry dwell
> Against th' offence Nature herself takes part
> And Libertines despise it from the Heart.

Here the phrase "turn the usual current of the Laws" may allude to Rebecca Clark's case. Hamilton's opponents including Norris I believed that the act passed against her was a perversion of the law and hence illegal. A writer to the *Mercury*, for example, summarized this view when he asked had Hamilton "utterly forgot who was the Cause of bringing that odious Reproach upon a Government (bearing a very different Character before his residing there) of passing an Act to deprive the Widow and Fatherless of their Just Rights and Inheritance."[31]

When the poet charged that Hamilton and his supporters were able to "turn the usual current of the Laws," he made a further

[31] *American Weekly Mercury*, Jan. 29–Feb. 5, 1733/34.

accusation that deserves attention. According to him, the worst of their irregularities was an attempt to hide any record of the action: "Dreading the faithfull record might reveal / To after ages, what the present feel." This intriguing allusion to an obscured or falsified record may also be buried in the widow Clark story. Although examination of the relevant minutes and other public documents reveals no attempt by Hamilton to obscure or falsify the record of this case, yet the poem raises questions about Hamilton's influence over an official record.

In addition to his father's views on this episode, Norris II may well have known some of the other stories concerning Hamilton's alleged abuses of widows and orphans that circulated around Philadelphia. Another accusation in the poem, for example, may be based on such stories. The poet described Hamilton's treatment of his benefactors in these angry lines:

> Or if Supported by their bounteous hand
> He wounds his Patrons while he beggs their Land
> Till grown too mighty he disdains their power
> And bullys Evry mortall, evry Hour.

In other sources including *The Life and Character* (especially in the accounts of the "American youth" and of the "City-Lot") Hamilton was said to have first posed as the trusted adviser of wealthy patrons.[32] After gaining their confidence, he began his carefully conceived campaign to defraud them. Once he had obtained their property, he callously disregarded his former friends.[33]

The episode of the widow Clark focuses our attention on the political scene in Philadelphia during the 1720s and 1730s. For, in the last analysis, it was not Hamilton's obscure origins or even his

[32] *The Life and Character*, 12–13. A writer to the *Mercury*, Jan. 1, 1733/34, also charges Hamilton with ingratitude to his patrons. *The Triumvirate of Pennsylvania* (1725?) a Keithite pamphlet that castigated Hamilton, James Logan, and Jeremiah Langhorne under the names *Conivatur Pedgo*, *Pedagogus Matematicus*, and *Negroso Bullico* respectively charges Hamilton and his friends with defrauding the Proprietor, 4.

[33] In the "Writ of Execution" Hamilton acknowledged advising William Clark, Jr. "how he should dispose of his said House & Lott for the payment of his own Debts and not be lyable to be sued for his Father's Debts. . .," 75. Nix argues that Hamilton came into the inheritances from his patrons rightfully. See, for example, Nix's description of the Foxcroft will in "Andrew Hamilton's Early Years," 392–397.

irreligion that kindled Norris' anger. Norris used these charges to give bite to his satire and to identify the target of it. It was, rather, Hamilton's more recent political activities that seemed to have occasioned Norris' satiric attack and formed the bases for the many other charges that he leveled against Hamilton.

The opening four lines of the poem provide a vital clue concerning its specific occasion. These lines called for attention and action—"And Act unbiased by your hope or fear." I believe the action for which the poet called was the defeat of Andrew Hamilton at the polls during the Assembly election held in October 1733. That election brought to the surface some explosive clashes between the political leaders. Hamilton, long a member of the Assembly from Bucks County and for many years its Speaker, had come into ever sharper conflict with Governor Patrick Gordon.[34] The exact causes, whether temperamental or political, are not precisely known. Some historians blame a quarrel between the children of Hamilton and Gordon. Others say that Gordon believed Hamilton responsible for an attempt to have him replaced.[35] Whatever the precise cause, their antagonism came to a head at the end of the 1732–1733 legislative year. When the Assembly decided to adjourn, Governor Gordon and Speaker Hamilton exchanged angry messages, Gordon accusing the Assembly of not discharging its responsibilities and the Assembly accusing the Governor of obstructing its work.[36] In spite of the Governor's wishes, the Assembly did adjourn and Gordon began campaigning personally and through allies against Hamilton's re-election. One of Gordon's chief political allies was Isaac Norris I whose conflicts with Hamilton also sharpened during the 1733 election.[37]

Much of the public part of this campaign was conducted on the

34 Patrick Gordon (d. 1736) had replaced the rebellious William Keith in 1726. Although his administration is often viewed as relatively peaceful, clashes such as this one between Gordon and Hamilton did occur. Hamilton had originally influenced the proprietary family to appoint Gordon.

35 Keith, *Provincial Councillors*, 124; Tully, 134; Anna Janney DeArmond, "Politics in Philadelphia: The Bradford-Hamilton Controversy," *Andrew Bradford: Colonial Journalist* (Newark, Del., 1949), 88–89.

36 *Votes*, III, 2186.

37 When Gov. Gordon died in 1736, a member of the Norris family, possibly Isaac II, wrote an elegy preserved in the Commonplace Book.

pages of Philadelphia's *American Weekly Mercury* whose editor, Andrew Bradford, was himself to become a bitter, long-standing enemy of Hamilton.[38] Indeed, on the pages of the *Mercury* we may find charges that closely parallel those that Norris leveled in "Attend one Moment." These parallels help us identify the occasion and date of the poem. Moreover, the *Mercury* letters, taken together with the poem, allow us to understand for the first time the role the Norris family played in the affair.

Of the many letters that appeared in the *Mercury* attacking Hamilton both during the election campaign and after it two are especially useful in portraying the anti-Hamilton movement and in understanding the Norrises' part in it. The first of these appeared just before the election and was signed by one "Cato Junior."[39] Cato first reminded his audience that they should elect men of absolute integrity to be the guardians of their liberties. He then described the kind of man who must be kept from office. Although his warning was couched in hypothetical terms, it was clear that he had a particular bad ruler in mind:

> As Arbitrary Governments, where the Will of one Man is made Law, there are no remedies against the Worst Disorders of human Nature; so even in free Governments, when [one] that is guided by the impetuosity of his Passions, has by Art and Management made a Monopoly of Power, so as to be able to influence the publick Administration; such a man will not fail to Prey on Mens Properties at his pleasure, and [carry] his private resentments, will sacrifice publick Justice, will dispense with the sacred Laws of God, and oppose the clearest Dictates of Nature. The freest and best States have had their Usurpers and Enslavers, who have by degrees raised themselves from enfranchised Villians to absolute and destructive Tyrants; the most solemn Laws, and Constitution of the freest State, and its most valuable Priviledges will never be regarded by such State Cormorants, and will fall a Sacrifice to their ambitious desire of Despotic Power AND unbounded AVARICE.

38 DeArmond traces the course of the conflict between Hamilton and Bradford. The defense of Hamilton was largely conducted in Franklin's *Pennsylvania Gazette*. Hamilton became one of Franklin's early patrons.

39 *American Weekly Mercury*, Sept. 20–27, 1733. The *Pennsylvania Gazette* printed a rebuttal to the letter of Cato in which the writer upbraided Cato for choosing an illustrious name to mask low opinions, *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Sept. 28–Oct. 11, 1733.

Several references here parallel and illuminate the views Norris expressed in the poem. Cato, like Norris, referred to a man who rose from poverty to position ("enfranchised Villians to absolute and destructive Tyrants") and a man who abused the property rights of others ("Prey on Mens Properties at his pleasure") in order to point the attack to Hamilton. Cato also accused Hamilton of irreligion, connecting it with immorality—"dispense with the sacred Laws of God, and oppose the clearest Dictates of Nature." Norris, too, had accused Hamilton of immoral acts of a sexual nature:

> Or what (O Shame to Tell) is harder Still
> Breaks natures Sacred Law, that Law designd
> To sweeten Life, And propogate mankind.

Although "immorality" may appear quite an ordinary or general charge to launch against an opponent, both Cato and Norris were probably alluding to a specific episode. In the late 1720s one Robert Gregory had accused Hamilton of sexually abusing his wife, Mary Gregory. Vexed, Hamilton had brought charges of fraud and blackmail against the Gregorys. A special session of the Court of Common Pleas that heard the case ruled in his favor, finding the Gregorys guilty of fraud. Although the results of the trial were reported in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* (where the Gregorys' accusation was labeled a "villanous Forgery"), apparently neither Cato nor Norris was convinced of Hamilton's innocence.[40] As the poem and the letter revealed, they both continued to believe that the charge of immorality could be used to damn their enemy.

Yet the overriding issue for both Cato and the poet was Hamilton's immense political power. To Cato, Hamilton's power was so great that it threatened to make all of Government an instrument of his single will (e.g., "Where the Will of one Man is made Law"). Indeed, the writer probably chose the name "Cato" for its capacity to symbolize the noble individual opposing tyranny. And Norris, in his portrait of Hamilton painted a man with an enormous lust for power and wealth. In a central section of the poem, for example, Norris presented Hamilton as the "Chief" of all the dissolute Philadelphia politicians:

[40] *Ibid.*, Feb. 1–8, 1733.

These are your Rulers, all the Numerous train
Of Pimps and Spies I leave to your disdain
But sure their Chief, if such a Man can be
deserves your care, at least if this is he
As on vast piles of Wealth he rowld his Eyes
Are these in trust or are they mine he crys
In Ev'ry Contest have I won the day
And shall such Wretches take these heapes away
Have I not rid 'em ev'n to Death opprest 'em
And dard they breath it when I most distrest 'em
All Ranks, all Sizes my protection Own
Who dares deny a pasture or a Town
Lands for my Bullys and as I agree
All offices are given to mine or me
Of all this Heap, was ever One so bold
To doubt my ballance or to get it told

Here is the complete tyrant who could take all power and turn it against the very people most in need of protection. Here is the man with a gargantuan appetite for wealth. And here, one cannot help noticing, is a man so swelling and omnipotent that Isaac Norris I felt compelled to speak with caution even as he wrote his friend Thomas Story about the widow Clark.

Behind the dramatic interpretation of Hamilton's power, given by both Cato and Isaac Norris II, appeared to lie the facts of Hamilton's career. When Cato wrote that Hamilton had "by Art and Management made a Monopoly of Power," or when the poet had Hamilton say "All offices are given to mine or me," they had as evidence the many and important positions that Hamilton held. By 1733 he had been Attorney General of Pennsylvania, Recorder of the City, Prothonotary of the Supreme Court, Master of the Rolls, Member of the Pennsylvania Assembly and its Speaker, Master in Chancery Court, Member of the Governor's Council, Trustee of the Loan Office and a member of the many committees entailed by these offices.

Such prominence allowed Hamilton considerable control over land, money, and men, and brought on accusations of abuse of power. A writer to the *Mercury*, for example, accused him of passing an act to do away with trial by jury "purely to enhance the Fees of his Office, and in effect to subject all Judicial Controversies to the

decision of his arbitrary will."[41] This writer also accused him of manipulating the funds of the General Loan Office to the detriment of trade. Yet another writer questioned whether it was not a conflict of interest for a trustee of the General Loan Office to also be a member of the Assembly, the body charged with overseeing the Loan Office accounts.[42]

History reveals that on some occasions Hamilton did use his offices for personal profit. The poem's line "who dares deny a . . . Town" probably refers to such an episode. When the Assembly and the Governor agreed on the site for the town of Lancaster, they assumed that it was owned by the proprietary family. This assumption along with the central location of the site overrode disadvantages of the place. After the site was finally approved by both Governor and Council (1730), it was revealed that the land, in fact, belonged to Andrew Hamilton.[43] At the time Hamilton was Speaker of the Assembly, Prothonotary of the Supreme Court, and in a position to realize a profit from the transaction.

Just after Hamilton was defeated at the polls in October 1733, a letter appeared in the *Mercury* purporting to tell a "Friend in the Country" the reasons that the people had finally turned against a man whom they had kept in power for so long.[44] Among many other reasons offered, this writer said that the people had become angry with Hamilton's "Quarelling with, abusing and endeavouring to displace our Governor whom the People say they have General & good Reasons to like well."

This letter, moreover, described Hamilton's strategies for maintaining and increasing his power. According to the letter's author (I will call him the "City-Friend"), Hamilton, for example, threatened the property of all freeholders because as Recorder he could pry into the titles of everyone's land and force them to register their deeds with his office. Moreover, from his position in the General

41 *American Weekly Mercury*, Jan. 29–Feb. 5, 1733/34.

42 *Ibid.*, Dec. 14–21, 1733.

43 Joseph E. Illick, *Colonial Pennsylvania: A History* (New York, 1976), 173.

44 *American Weekly Mercury*, Oct. 11–18, 1733. Although Hamilton was defeated in this election he was returned in a special by-election held in December when the member from Bucks County died. The *Pennsylvania Gazette's* rebuttal to this letter, Nov. 8–16, 1733, entitled "Half-Hour's Conversation with a Friend," purported to be a conversation with Hamilton himself.

Loan Office, he could insure that loans were more freely given to those who supported him. As Speaker, he was able to control all the public money through his power to examine the legislative accounts. The writer gave as an example "one dark Article in lump" that was paid by order of the Assembly alone. Hamilton, the City-Friend charged, even managed to devise a new way of reporting the public accounts so that they showed exactly what he wanted them to.

The City-Friend also had much to say about Hamilton's use of language. And here again, his comments parallel and illuminate what the poet and other opponents charged. At times, he alleged, Hamilton was blunt, abusive, and intemperate in his speech. In conducting the business of his offices, he uttered "hardly a Sentence without Dog, Rogue, be Damn'd and the like," all of which was "hard to be born by Honest or Innocent People." Others had certainly found Hamilton's language offensive. Another writer to the *Mercury* accused him of "blustring speeches" and still another spoke of his "headstrong Passions" and of "the swelling Declamations of a roaring Bully."[45] Whatever the personal experiences of these writers, they may well have recalled that in 1717 the Governor's Grand Jury had indicted Hamilton for cursing and uttering "Wicked, opprobrious and reproachful words" against then Lieutenant-Governor Gookin.[46] Although the charges had been dropped, apparently Hamilton's reputation for passionate harangues continued to be the material of his enemies.

In his presentation of Hamilton, Isaac Norris II joined these other critics in describing Hamilton as passionate and abusive in his speech. Toward the end of his poem he had a personified Virtue visit Hamilton with a view to somehow reforming him. But the wild, passionate Hamilton repulsed her advances with all the vigor of a true sinner:

> Virtue Just in this pause 'tis said designd
> A hospitable visit to his mind
> If calm rebuke might ore his doubts prevail
> And prudence Guard him if his heart should fail

45 *American Weekly Mercury*, Sept. 4–11, 1735, Sept. 11–18, 1735.
46 Konkle, 24.

But firmly fixd unalterably He
Slave to a Wild ungovernable Will
Soon as he found his ancient foe so near
To Guard each Avenue became his Care
A Double watch the least access denyd
And Rousd at Her approach enragd he cryd:
Have I not Shund you full when'ere you turnd
Redn'd with Vengeance or with Envy burnd
Has my heart melted at the Orphans Tears
Or has Religion filld my soul with fears
What Umbrage from my Conduct could you find
No Trace of Virtue lurks within my mind
Man Lord of Reason from Restraint is free
And knows No Rule No Law but Liberty
Then Hence begone, attempt my breast no more
I'll kiss you with my crimes, a secret Store.

According to the City-Friend, even more irritating than Hamilton's bluntness and intemperance was the extraordinary verbal facility and wit he could command when it suited him. The writer argued that Hamilton could easily impose his will on others by his damnably skillful use of words: "The ways he takes with the Assembly (considering he has got all the publick Money in his Hand) are very pernicious and dangerous, for 'tis said those whom he cannot Coakes and bring over to him, he falls upon with witty and abusive Rallery, and so manages the whole at Pleasure." The City-Friend also charged, "If One or two stands out he is always ridiculing or abusing them."

These comments on Hamilton's skillful and energetic use of language brings before us one of the key reasons his opponents considered him an extremely dangerous enemy. Because of his quick, cutting, or bludgeoning tongue, he could readily seize power from anyone, even those established, rightful leaders who deserved it more. To make graphic Hamilton's ability to use words to overpower all and to rise above his "station," another writer to the *Mercury* likened Hamilton to Vatinius, a buffoon in Nero's court who rose from poverty to power by his tongue: "Vatinius was a Buffoon of this pestilent Cast, and from working in a Stall taken into Court, at first for jest and diversion, but having a Malicious Spirit and a Sarcastical turn, soon became a Terror to every worthy and illus-

trious Man, insomuch that in Wealth, Favour and in Power to do Mischief, he grew to exceed all other Ministers of Iniquity."[47]

This writer established clear parallels between the careers of Vatinius and Hamilton. Significantly, Isaac Norris II also drew on these parallels in the conclusion to his poem. In the last lines he lamented, "Such as of old in Nerôs court refind / Exceeded all belief of Humankind."

Taken together, these two letters provide ballast for the charges in the poem. There are, moreover, closer connections which not only help us confirm the approximate date of the poem, but which take us deeper into the Norris family's role in the 1733 election controversy. Cato's letter bore several striking resemblances to the poem, not only in its depiction of Hamilton but in the cadence and style of its language. The opening of the poem, for example, echoed the closing appeal of the letter. Cato exhorted his audience to "Let not false promises or deceitful pretenses delude us, but let us judge what men will do by the principles they have always professed and put in practice." Although the poet's version is more condensed, he made the same point in nearly the same language: "Let neither heats, nor prejudice prevail / But Judge impartial as the Crimes appear." Cato asked, "Let us not be byas'd by private Considerations, or fearful of little Injuries." The poet implored the audience to "Act unbiased by your hope or fear." "Private considerations" was equivalent to "hope" and "fearful of little injuries" was reduced to "fear," and there are other similarities.

In their conclusions both writers also showed Hamilton repulsing "Virtue." Norris portrayed a Hamilton who guarded "each Avenue" when he found Virtue close by him. And Cato wanted to see "Virtue meet with due encouragements," asking his audience to "Pursue to Deserved Disgrace the Common Enemies of Virtue. . . ."

These similarities suggest a connection between the poem and Cato's letter. Presumably the poet read the letter and, fueled by it and the Norris family hostility to Hamilton, was inspired to write.[48]

47 *American Weekly Mercury*, Jan. 29–Feb. 5, 1733/34. The writer quoted Thomas Gordon's preface to *Tacitus*. See also DeArmond, 92n. *The Triumvirate of Pennsylvania* also depicted a witty and abusive Hamilton.

48 When the newspaper controversy began a writer to the *Mercury* (Sept. 13, 1733) spoke of a "malicious lampoon" that had been circulated against Hamilton. Since the poem was probably written during the height of the controversy, I have wondered whether this lampoon was the Norris poem.

Of course, Cato could have read the poem and then written the letter, but this compositional sequence is less likely.

Even though Norris' knowledge of Cato's letter may remain conjectural, there is definite proof that he had read the letter of the City-Friend. Indeed, he knew the author well enough to have read the letter even before it was published in the *Mercury*. Just after Isaac II left for London in October 1733, his father wrote him this revealing bit of news:

> The low stile paper thou saw part of was added to & Published in Mercury (720) ye 18th Instant. The Indisputable Truths there take universally on ye one hand & nettle on ye other beyond Expectation. Thos Peters told Samll ye matter was so much his thoughts that he coud hardly Persuade himself he was not ye author. Some call it thy legacy. A[ndrew]—(I'm told) says one of my negroes wrote it. He complain'd to ye proprietor of it Saying he could guess ye writer, however ye publisher was known & ought to be call'd to accot and reed [sic] a Discreet but Disapproving answer.[49]

A short time later, Deborah, Isaac's sister, wrote him: "In thy absence . . . variety of scenes has past. A-H was very handsomely told his [own] in the next paper after thee left us make some guess thee to be the author."[50] On this point of authorship a problem arises. When Isaac Norris I said that his son "saw" a letter that was later "added to," he implied that his son was not, in fact, the author. Even though the community suspected the son (probably on the basis of his known views about Hamilton), they were wrong in believing he had written the letter.

There is, however, a strong possibility that the father himself wrote it. The evidence suggesting this point brings us closer to understanding why Isaac II composed the poem "Attend one Moment." Early in January 1733/34, the elder Norris informed his son about the appointment of James Hamilton, Andrew's son, to the important post of Prothonotary of the Supreme Court.[51] Isaac I, believing that the Hamiltons had bullied Governor Gordon into granting the post "With secrecy and dispatch," described the episode:

49 Copy Book of Letters, 1730–1735, 52–55, HSP.

50 Deborah to Isaac Norris II, Nov. 3, 1733, Norris of Fairhill Manuscripts, Family Letters, I, 10.

51 James Hamilton (*ca.* 1710–1783) was to become Lieutenant-Governor of Pennsylvania and a leader of the proprietary group.

many Stood as in a maze at first on this piece of Policy and then talk'd freely. Jas by a Soothing & artfull contrivance as I Took it Endeavourd to Draw me into a Vindication of my Self from a Supposition Some of them had taken up of my being ye author of ye late papers published against Andrew. This I could have gone far in for I knew nothing of those since 8er. But disenting the Design wch I conceiv'd was to Tuck me under ye Girdle of that Imperious man, & make me appear his Tame frightened Tool, in ye Eyes of ye People, after his Insolent & unprovok'd abuse of me at ye Election & since.[52]

Although the question of authorship of that letter remains open, nevertheless, the comments of Isaac Norris I and Deborah Norris do show that the family's resentments toward Hamilton were exacerbated during the October 1733 election. The cause appears to be some mistreatment Norris I felt he had suffered at Hamilton's hands. Later comments by him and others suggested that Hamilton had kept Norris from a seat in the Assembly. A writer to the *Mercury* the next year referred to this conflict when he said that Hamilton had prevented "by wicked and sinistrous [*sic*] means a Gentleman of unquestionable Capacity from sitting in the Assembly and employing his known good, Talents in the Service of his Country."[53] When the elder Norris did win a seat the 1734 election, he spoke of the embarrassment this was bound to cause Hamilton's party because of the way they had treated him the year before. He noted that the opposing party had again tried to prevent his election by bringing in "crowds of journeymen & such like in Opposition. . . ."[54]

These views further strengthen the probability that the poem was written in the late summer or early fall of 1733 and was inspired by the election controversy. Although the family had disliked Hamilton's behavior as far back as 1719, its hostility came to a head during the election of 1733.

52 Isaac Norris I to Isaac Norris II, Jan. 25, 1733/34, Copy Book of Letters, 1730–1735, 57–58. The James mentioned here is probably James Logan, friend to the elder Norris and to Hamilton, and future father-in-law of Isaac II.

53 *American Mercury*, Jan. 29–Feb. 5, 1733/34. Tully describes other sources of the Norris-Hamilton conflict, 134.

54 Isaac Norris I to Isaac Norris II, Oct. 2, 1734, Copy Book of Letters, 1730–1735, 64–65.

Anti-Hamilton sentiment in general and the hostility of Isaac Norris II in particular did not cease in 1733 nor with Hamilton's celebrated defense of Zenger in 1735. Until nearly the end of the decade, the *Mercury* continued to print letters derogatory of Hamilton, many of which repeated the charges explored here. Interestingly, James Logan thought that one of the most virulent of these attacks was the work of Isaac Norris II.[55] Whether or not Norris joined in any of the published attacks on Hamilton, the family letter books reveal his continued animosity toward his old enemy. As late as 1740, for example, Norris wrote of his satisfaction at the defeat of Hamilton's party in the election of that year. And when Hamilton died in 1741, Norris noted the event in these curt words: "A. Hamilton dyed the 4th instant after about a weeks illness which will weaken and distract the opposing party which had he lived I think would have been too weak to have been dangerous and without him if I judge right will soon fall into confusion."[56]

The satire "Attend one Moment" then has brought into focus the long buried animosity of two powerful colonial politicians. The conflict between them was probably well known in the meeting houses, counting houses, and drawing rooms of Philadelphia. Yet although contemporaries may have witnessed other expressions of the younger Isaac Norris' anger, for us the poem is the clearest remaining evidence of the depth and earnestness of this enmity. This document, moreover, has given us a microcosmic or concentrated version of anti-Hamilton sentiment as it was expressed during his years in Pennsylvania.

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55 This satire, appearing in the *Mercury*, Feb. 17–24, 1735/36, and continued in its issue of June 3–10, 1736, purported to be an excerpt from La Vassor's *History of Louis XIII*. It was, in fact, a slightly veiled attack on Hamilton and Logan under the names of the Marquis D'Ancre (Hamilton) and Madam Leonora Galigai (Logan). In a letter to John Penn, Logan revealed that he thought Isaac Norris II was the author. Logan Papers, Letter Book, IV, 413–416, HSP.

56 Isaac Norris II to Charles [Norris?], Aug. 10, 1741, Norris Letter Book 1719–1756, IX, 9. Oddly, at Hamilton's death the *Mercury*, forum for so much anti-Hamilton sentiment printed verbatim the moving eulogy of Hamilton that appeared also in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*.