

# *Taxation and Representation: Pennsylvania Bachelors and the American Revolution*

IN 1771 RICHARD NEWLIN FACED THE TAXMAN. While the rest of Pennsylvania breathed a little easier that year thanks to the removal of the Townshend duties and the hope that a violent conflict with Great Britain had been avoided, Newlin's mind focused not on the taxes imposed by a far off government but on a levy demanded by his own county. Newlin was twenty-three in the summer of 1771 and resided in Chester County's Concord Township. Like most young men in colonial Pennsylvania, Newlin spent his days in agricultural toil, working in the fields of either his father or another landowner. He owned no property and it is probable that he was working and saving for the day when he could acquire an estate of his own. And Richard Newlin was single. A man dependent on another man, he could not expect to support a wife and family in his current state. As long as Newlin remained without property of his own, he would remain a bachelor.

Richard Newlin's life was not remarkably unlike that of most young men in colonial America, with one exception: as a single man who owned no property, he owed a special tax. Specifically, Newlin owed Chester County a poll tax of six shillings. Although six shillings was not an onerous amount, it was higher than the property tax collected on three-quarters of the estates in Concord Township that same year.<sup>1</sup> Nor was it a one-time occurrence. Every year after his twenty-first birthday, Newlin owed Chester County six shillings. He also was rated annually for fifteen

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<sup>1</sup> In the county rates of 1771 for Concord Township, the fifteen propertyless single freemen were each rated six shillings, an amount less than the property taxes on eleven of the sixty estates and equal to four. Chester County, PA: Board of County Commissioners, *County Taxes, 1718-1800*, Historical Society of Pennsylvania (hereafter *Chester County, County Taxes, 1718-1800*).

shillings by the province, which again was an amount that was higher than the taxes placed on many of his propertied neighbors.<sup>2</sup> For a bachelor like Richard Newlin, however, there was a larger issue than high taxes. Because Newlin did not own fifty acres of land or fifty pounds worth of moveable property, he did not meet the threshold requirement to qualify for suffrage. Although young bachelors paid some of the highest taxes in the colony, they received no commensurate right to vote. At a time when complaints about the unfairness of "taxation without representation" resounded throughout the colonies, it was propertyless single men in Pennsylvania for whom the slogan was most clearly a reality.

We know from the records of the Concord Monthly Meeting that Richard Newlin, raised as a Quaker, took a wife soon after the signing of the Declaration of Independence and that, in March 1777, he was disowned for being married "by priest to one not a member."<sup>3</sup> He thereafter ceased to pay a poll tax because he ceased to be a bachelor. Coincidentally, had Newlin not married in 1776, he would have discovered some of the inequities of his status as a taxed bachelor rectified. The Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776, the state's first postcolonial frame of government, granted all men over twenty-one the right to vote regardless of whether or not they owned property, so long as they had been rated for taxes and lived in the state for at least a year. Although Pennsylvania continued to lean on single men for revenue throughout the Revolution and for decades more, never again was a white man asked to contribute taxes without the recompense of a vote.

The story of Richard Newlin is instructive for the new perspective it provides on the American Revolution in Pennsylvania, especially the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776. As Richard Beeman has written recently, "the document . . . was the most radically democratic frame of government that the world had ever seen."<sup>4</sup> Among other things, it placed unchecked power in the hands of the assembly, reduced the executive

<sup>2</sup> James T. Mitchell and Henry Flanders, eds., *The Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania from 1682 to 1801*, 16 vols. (Harrisburg, PA, 1896–1915), 6:8, 345, 8:379. In the 1770 provincial tax list, forty of sixty-one estates owed taxes of more than fifteen shillings. Chester County, PA: Board of County Commissioners, Provincial Taxes, 1715, 1756–1776, Historical Society of Pennsylvania (hereafter Chester County, Provincial Taxes).

<sup>3</sup> Concord Monthly Meeting Records, 1684–1872, Delaware County, PA, 273, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. See also Robert P. Case, *Prosperity and Progress: Concord Township, Pennsylvania, 1683–1983* (Chester, PA, 1983), 103–8.

<sup>4</sup> Richard R. Beeman, *The Varieties of Political Experience in Eighteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia, 2004), 273.

branch to an advisory council, and required annual elections. Although these innovations later would be dismissed as a mistake of the heady days of independence and left out of the Constitution of 1790, the principle of equal representation pioneered in 1776 remained primary to Pennsylvania's electoral laws. The first state to extend the suffrage beyond property owners, Pennsylvania became a model for American democracy; where Pennsylvania led, others followed. By 1821, only five of the twenty-four states still restricted the franchise to property owners, while eleven allowed propertyless male taxpayers to vote in at least some statewide elections.<sup>5</sup> The idea of connecting suffrage to taxation remained the law in Pennsylvania until the 1930s, only to be replaced by the even more radical idea that everyone should be allowed to vote whether they paid taxes or not, and by then whether they were black or white, male or female.<sup>6</sup> In this, taxpayer suffrage in the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776 was the first step in a two-century-long process that expanded the electorate from white male property owners to all adult citizens.

The Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776 has received considerable attention from historians over the last hundred years, with much focus specifically on the franchise provisions.<sup>7</sup> Only within the last thirty years, however, have historians such as Richard Ryerson and Steven Rosswurm begun to connect the constitution to events on the ground.<sup>8</sup> Such innovative works have mainly stressed the extension of the vote to those groups of men that were the most vocal during the creation of the new government: unnaturalized German immigrants and Philadelphia resi-

<sup>5</sup> The other eight states ended both property and taxpaying requirements. Alexander Keyssar, *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States* (New York, 2000), 328–36, 356–58.

<sup>6</sup> Keyssar, *Right to Vote*, 131–32.

<sup>7</sup> The classic works on the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776 are Charles H. Lincoln, *The Revolutionary Movement in Pennsylvania, 1760–1776* (Philadelphia, 1901); J. Paul Selsam, *The Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776: A Study in Revolutionary Democracy* (Philadelphia, 1936); Robert L. Brunhouse, *The Counter-Revolution in Pennsylvania, 1776–1790* (Harrisburg, PA, 1942); Theodore Thayer, *Pennsylvania Politics and the Growth of Democracy, 1740–1776* (Harrisburg, PA, 1953); David Hawke, *In the Midst of a Revolution* (Philadelphia, 1961). On the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776 in the national context, see Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1969), 83–90, 226–37; Marc W. Kruman, *Between Authority and Liberty: State Constitution Making in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1997), 24–28, 37, 39, 92–93, 99, 101.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Alan Ryerson, *The Revolution Is Now Begun: The Radical Committees of Philadelphia, 1765–1776* (Philadelphia, 1978); Steven Rosswurm, *Arms, Country, and Class: The Philadelphia Militia and "Lower Sort" during the American Revolution, 1775–1783* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1987).

dents who lacked sufficient wealth to claim the ballot. But these groups were less numerous than the single men who faced the taxman regularly for eighty years. At the same time, social historians like James Lemon, Lucy Simler, and Billy G. Smith have examined the long lists of taxed single men in their efforts to explore wealth, labor, and the life cycle in eighteenth-century Pennsylvania.<sup>9</sup> These historians, however, have tended to pass over the meaning of the tax, its origins, and its implications for the American Revolution. It is the purpose of this essay to bridge these two bodies of literature in order to explore how single men played a central role in the creation of American citizenship.

This essay also aims to recover the story of men like Richard Newlin and to examine what it meant to be an unmarried man in colonial Pennsylvania. Bachelors are a difficult group to write a history of, largely because their identity was so amorphous. As the case of Newlin illustrates, a single man could alter his legal identity at any moment by getting married. The politics of bachelorhood were equally amorphous. It is quite likely that historians have not connected the expanded suffrage of the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776 and the taxation of single men because few Americans during the Revolution did so. Although propertyless bachelors were key beneficiaries of an expanded electorate, their enfranchisement was not greeted with the fanfare that accompanied the nineteenth amendment when women nationwide won the vote. Instead, revolutionary-era Pennsylvanians harbored deep suspicions about the role of single men in their society even as they accepted them as equal citizens.

<sup>9</sup> James T. Lemon and Gary B. Nash, "The Distribution of Wealth in Eighteenth-Century America: A Century of Change in Chester County, Pennsylvania, 1693–1802," *Journal of Social History* 2 (1968): 1–24; Billy G. Smith, "Inequality in Late Colonial Philadelphia: A Note on Its Nature and Growth," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 41 (1984): 629–45; Lucy Simler, "Tenancy in Colonial Pennsylvania: The Case of Chester County," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 43 (1986): 542–69; Paul G. E. Clemens and Lucy Simler, "Rural Labor and the Farm Household in Chester County, Pennsylvania, 1750–1820," in *Work and Labor in Early America*, ed. Stephen Innes (Chapel Hill, NC, 1988), 106–43; Lucy Simler and Paul G. E. Clemens, "The 'Best Poor Man's Country' in 1783: The Population Structure of Rural Society in Late-Eighteenth-Century Southeastern Pennsylvania," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 133 (1989): 234–61; Lucy Simler, "The Landless Worker: An Index of Economic and Social Change in Chester County, Pennsylvania, 1750–1820," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 114 (1990): 163–99; Jack D. Marietta, "The Distribution of Wealth in Eighteenth-Century America: Nine Chester County Tax Lists, 1693–1799," *Pennsylvania History* 62 (1995): 532–45; Karin Wulf, "Assessing Gender: Taxation and the Evaluation of Economic Viability in Late Colonial Philadelphia," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 121 (1997): 201–35; Jack D. Marietta and G. S. Rowe, "Violent Crime, Victims, and Society in Pennsylvania, 1682–1800," *Pennsylvania History* 66 Suppl. (1999): 24–54.

However, as political participation was gendered at the creation of the United States and equal citizenship became the purview of men alone, the fact that bachelors were male drowned out concerns about them being single.

### *Bachelors and Politics in Early America*

The topic of bachelors<sup>10</sup> in American history is a relatively recent subject of historical inquiry. Only within the last decade have Howard Chudacoff and David Courtwright provided sustained analyses of single men in American history, largely focusing on social and cultural issues in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>11</sup> Within the field of early American history, much of what we know about single men comes from the histories of the New England family by Edmund Morgan and John Demos. In both instances, the unmarried consume no more than a few pages and are largely dismissed as ostracized exceptions.<sup>12</sup> More recently, Mark Kann has extended the view of bachelors as pariahs to the revolutionary era, arguing that their exclusion from the body politic was critical to the formation of the republic and the language of American manhood.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, our knowledge of single men remains underdeveloped and far less sophisticated than our understanding of single women in the colonial and revolutionary eras.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> On usage of the terms "unmarried," "single," and "bachelor," Howard Chudacoff has observed that the terms we have for unmarried people are incomplete, anachronistic, and often pejorative. Within the body of colonial American law, the terms unmarried, single, and bachelor were used often without distinction of age, status, and wealth. Because Pennsylvania's laws used the terms single and unmarried but not bachelor, it is appropriate to refer to the levy as a "singles tax." However, there is less need to quibble over terminology when referring to the men themselves. See Howard P. Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor: Creating an American Subculture* (Princeton, NJ, 1999), 9.

<sup>11</sup> Chudacoff, *Age of the Bachelor*; David T. Courtwright, *Violent Land: Single Men and Social Disorder from the Frontier to the Inner City* (Cambridge, MA, 1996).

<sup>12</sup> Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England*, rev. ed. (New York, 1966); John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (New York, 1970).

<sup>13</sup> Mark E. Kann, *A Republic of Men: The American Founders, Gendered Language, and Patriarchal Politics* (New York, 1998). For an intelligent critique of Kann's argument, see Scott Slawinski, *Validating Bachelorhood: Audience, Patriarchy, and Charles Brockden Brown's Editorship of the Monthly Magazine and American Review* (New York, 2005). See also Lisa Wilson, *Ye Heart of a Man: The Domestic Life of Men in Colonial New England* (New Haven, CT, 1999); Anne S. Lombard, *Making Manhood: Growing Up Male in Colonial New England* (Cambridge, MA, 2003).

<sup>14</sup> Lee Virginia Chambers-Schiller, *Liberty, A Better Husband: Single Women in America: The*

To be sure, the story of being single and male in early America is loaded with complexities. Chief among these are the political dimensions of bachelorhood. As Morgan and Demos have noted, the New England colonies maintained laws that barred single people from living alone, a phenomenon they connect with the influence of the Puritan religion on the family.<sup>15</sup> Yet laws that referred explicitly to single people were not limited to either the seventeenth century or New England: they existed throughout the colonies from settlement to the Revolution. The meanings of these laws varied according to the specific context of each colony and the time when they were adopted. From our perspective in the twenty-first century, these laws provide a window through which to glimpse what life was like for a bachelor in early America. Of the various statutes, perhaps the most revealing is Pennsylvania's poll tax on single men. Not only was it one of the most enduring of the singles laws, it was also one of the few that existed both before and after independence. The Pennsylvania singles tax thus provides an excellent opportunity to demonstrate the unique political identity that bachelors had in early America and how this identity changed with the Revolution.

### *Origins and Meanings*

The idea of a special tax on bachelors was not unique to colonial Pennsylvania. Plato proposed a levy on single men in ancient Athens, while the Romans, during the early days of the empire, instituted financial penalties on men who never married.<sup>16</sup> The first instance of a tax correlated to marital status in early modern England was in 1660 with the Restoration of King Charles II. To replenish the empty royal treasury, Parliament approved a head tax on every person in the kingdom except the very poor. In this tax scheme, people ages sixteen and older with no property were rated six shillings per head, unless they were unmarried, in

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*Generations of 1780-1840* (New Haven, CT, 1984); Karin Wulf, *Not All Wives: Women of Colonial Philadelphia* (Ithaca, NY, 2000).

<sup>15</sup> Morgan, *Puritan Family*, 27, 144-46; Demos, *Little Commonwealth*, 77-79.

<sup>16</sup> *The Laws of Plato*, trans. Thomas L. Pangle (New York, 1980), 108-9; Pál Csillag, *The Augustan Laws on Family Relations* trans. József Decsényi (Budapest, 1976), 77-79; Richard I. Frank, "Augustus' Legislation on Marriage and Children," *California Studies in Classical Antiquity* 8 (1975): 41-52; Karl Galinsky, "Augustus' Legislation on Morals and Marriage," *Philologus* 125 (1981): 126-44.

which case they were assessed twelve shillings.<sup>17</sup> Although this double tax on propertyless singles was not reauthorized in subsequent legislation, the idea did spread to the America colonies, where it enjoyed a short and varied life in several New England towns. In 1670, for example, the town of Plymouth voted a poll tax on single men who did not possess enough land to qualify for the property tax.<sup>18</sup>

The logic behind the singles tax was manifold. At least rhetorically, it involved a notion of social engineering; through punitive taxation, single men would be encouraged to marry and increase the legitimate population of the country. In *Oceana*, his 1656 utopian vision for England, James Harrington suggested that legal restrictions be placed on bachelors because "the commonwealth demandeth as well the fruits of a man's body as of his mind." In a section on taxation, Harrington rewarded men who married and fathered a large number of offspring, writing: "If a man have ten children living, he shall pay no taxes; if he have five living, he shall pay but half taxes," however, "if he have been married three years, or be above twenty-five years of age, and have no child or children lawfully begotten, he shall pay double taxes."<sup>19</sup>

There was also a sense that a man who did not marry should be punished for living a life that disposed him to immorality. In 1677, English writer Thomas Sheridan proposed a "Tax upon Caelibat, or upon unmarried People" in order to "provide against those Evils, and to obviate in some measure the Looseness and Debauchery of the present Age."<sup>20</sup> Eight years later, Sir William Temple worried about "the late humour (introduced by licentiousness) of so many mens marrying late or never." Like Sheridan, Temple advocated a tax on bachelors to bring about a moral

<sup>17</sup> 12 Car. II c. 9, *Statutes of the Realm, Printed by Command of His Majesty King George the Third, in Pursuance of an Address of the House of Commons of Great Britain*, 9 vols. (London, 1810–1822), 5:209. See also Ronald Hutton, *The Restoration: A Political History of England and Wales, 1658–1667* (Oxford, 1985), 138–39; Roy Douglas, *Taxation in Britain since 1660* (New York, 1999), 7.

<sup>18</sup> William T. Davis, ed., *Records of the Town of Plymouth, Published by Order of the Town*, 3 vols. (Plymouth, MA, 1889–1903), 1:117. See also Demos, *Little Commonwealth*, 77–79.

<sup>19</sup> James Harrington, *Oceana*, in *The Political Works of James Harrington*, ed. J. G. A. Pocock, (Cambridge, 1977), 226–27. As Pocock notes about this passage, Harrington himself "was a bachelor at the time of writing." See J. G. A. Pocock, "Machiavelli, Harrington, and English Political Ideologies in the Eighteenth Century," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 22 (1965): 549–83.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Sheridan, *A Discourse of the Rise and Power of Parliaments, of Laws, of Courts of Judicature, of Liberty, Property, and Religion, of the Interest of England in Reference to the Desires of France, of Taxes and of Trade* ([London], 1677), 179–80. See also Joyce Oldham Appleby, *Economic Thought and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century England* (Princeton, NJ, 1978), 133–37.

reformation of the kingdom.<sup>21</sup> It is difficult to determine exactly what Temple meant by "licentiousness," that is, whether this was a coded indictment of homosexuality or all nonmarital sex. Certainly tales of "mollies" had begun to animate English writing in the second half of the seventeenth century, although the immediate concerns of Sheridan and Temple were those unmarried heterosexual men who were increasing the burden on taxpayers by producing illegitimate children for whom they refused to provide.<sup>22</sup>

Such moral issues were a great concern among lawmakers in early Pennsylvania. The province's Quaker founders placed a great deal of importance on the family as both a political and spiritual good, and they were highly skeptical that an unmarried person could resist the sins of the flesh.<sup>23</sup> The best defense against sin was marriage.<sup>24</sup> Accordingly, early marriage laws of Pennsylvania demanded that "all marriages not forbidden by the law of God, shall be encouraged."<sup>25</sup> Some early lawmakers even

<sup>21</sup> William Temple, "Of Popular Discontents," in *The Works of Sir William Temple, Bart*, 4 vols. (London, 1814), 3:58. On the fears inspired by unmarried men in sixteenth-century England, see A. L. Beier, *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England, 1560-1640* (London, 1985).

<sup>22</sup> Richard Godbeer, "'The Cry of Sodom': Discourse, Intercourse, and Desire in Colonial New England," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 52 (1995): 281-83; George E. Haggerty, *Men in Love: Masculinity and Sexuality in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1999); Kate Chedgzoy, Emma Francis, and Murry Pratt, eds., *In a Queer Place: Sexuality and Belonging in British and European Contexts* (Aldershot, Hampshire, UK, 2002).

<sup>23</sup> While we know a great deal about the Quaker family, we have very little information on those who stood outside it. When historians pay attention to single people at all, it is typically as an afterthought or intended to explain a statistical curiosity. See Robert V. Wells, "Quaker Marriage Patterns in a Colonial Perspective," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 39 (1972): 423-28, 432-33; J. William Frost, *The Quaker Family in Colonial America: A Portrait of the Society of Friends* (New York, 1973), 150; Susan E. Klepp, "Fragmented Knowledge: Questions in Regional Demographic History," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 133 (1989): 223-33. Barry Levy, *Quakers and the American Family: British Settlement in the Delaware Valley* (New York, 1988), 248, 273-76.

<sup>24</sup> On Quaker views of marriage and the single life, see George Fox, *A Collection of Many Select and Christian Epistles, Letters and Testimonies*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1831), 1:79-80; Mary Maples Dunn and Richard S. Dunn, eds., *The Papers of William Penn*, 5 vols. (Philadelphia, 1981-1987), 1:231-37, 328-33, 434; William Smith, "Universal Love," in *Balm from Gilead: A Collection of the Living Divine Testimonies* (London, 1675); Moses West, *A Treatise Concerning Marriage* (Leeds, UK, 1736). See also Arnold Lloyd, *Quaker Social History, 1669-1738* (London, 1950), 48-65; Richard T. Vann, *The Social Development of English Quakerism, 1655-1755* (Cambridge, MA, 1969), 181-88; Rebecca Larson, *Daughters of Light: Quaker Women Preaching and Prophesying in the Colonies and Abroad, 1700-1775* (New York, 1999).

<sup>25</sup> Staughton George, Benjamin M. Nead, and Thomas McCamant, eds., *Charter to William Penn, and Laws of the Province of Pennsylvania, Passed between the Years 1682 and 1700* (Harrisburg, PA, 1879), 151. See also *Charter to William Penn*, 101, 171, 229; Mitchell and



went so far as to seek legal means to minimize the number of single men in their midst. One draft of the province's first frame of government demanded that all men who voted or sought office be "[professed] christians and married." In January 1684, the provincial council considered a law that required men to marry when they reached the age of majority.<sup>26</sup> Although neither proposal was adopted, each suggests an impulse on the part of early Pennsylvanians to exclude single men from the political process.

There were also practical considerations. While it may have seemed just to tax a single man because he was exposing himself to licentiousness and not producing legitimate offspring, it was politically expedient to tax a single man because he had no dependents to support. Richard and Mary Dunn have observed that William Penn used James Harrington's *Oceana* as a model for his "Fundamentall Constitutions" of Pennsylvania and this may have informed his views on single men and the law.<sup>27</sup> In an early draft of the provincial laws, Penn sketched out disparate penalties for thievery based on the convict's marital status and familial responsibilities. "If a single man," Penn wrote, "he shall make Satisfaction." However, if the culprit be "married and has Children," then "he shall not be putt to make Satisfaction to the Prejudice of his Children that were Innocent to the fact, and which would only serve to encrease the Poor and so the Publique Charge."<sup>28</sup> Although Penn's proposal never became law, the principle that a bachelor should face stiffer penalties than a married man for the same crime eventually entered Pennsylvania's law code. A 1706 statute regulating the sentences of debtors ordered that a convict could be incarcerated "not exceeding seven years, if a single person and under the age of fifty-and-three years; or five years, if a married man and under the age of forty-and-six years."<sup>29</sup>

Early Pennsylvania lawmakers often considered *both* morality and political expediency to be equally valid reasons for the disparate legal

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Flanders, eds., *Statutes at Large*, 2:21, 161; Harry Emerson Wildes, *William Penn* (New York, 1974), 201, 234, 329–30.

<sup>26</sup> Dunn and Dunn, eds., *Papers of William Penn*, 2:168; *Minutes of the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania, From the Organization to the Termination of the Proprietary Government*, 10 vols. (Philadelphia, 1838–1852), 1:38.

<sup>27</sup> Dunn and Dunn, eds., *Papers of William Penn*, 2:140–41.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:149. See also Gary B. Nash, *Quakers and Politics: Pennsylvania, 1681–1726* (Princeton, NJ, 1968), 28–47.

<sup>29</sup> Mitchell and Flanders, eds., *Statutes at Large*, 2:250.

treatment of men based on marital status. This belief is particularly evident in the area of sexual offenses. In early laws against adultery, bigamy, fornication, rape, sodomy, and bestiality, Pennsylvania legislators mandated different punishments for bachelors than for husbands. Both social engineering and a desire to spare the wives and children of convicts informed a law that penalized rapists by ordering "if he be an unmarried person he shall forfeit all his estate; and if married, one-third part thereof."<sup>30</sup> All of the sex-crime laws demanded harsher punishments for single men than married men except for the statute punishing sodomy and bestiality. Although all men convicted of such crimes faced lifelong imprisonment and regular flagellation, the perpetrator, "if he be a married man, . . . shall also suffer castration, and the injured wife shall have a divorce if required."<sup>31</sup> In the case of sex with other men and animals, it was the presence of a family that subjected a man to severer penalties because such a man violated not only the natural order but his marriage covenant as well. Bachelor sodomites were not more acceptable than married ones, but at least their crimes did not destroy established families. While this particular law was abrogated by the Crown only six years after its passage for being "unreasonable, especially in case of a married man," its existence should restrain any assumptions that Pennsylvania lawmakers passed harsh laws against bachelors as a means of penalizing suspected homosexuals.<sup>32</sup>

### *The Pennsylvania Singles Tax*

Although marital status was recognized by the Pennsylvania law codes from the creation of the colony, lawmakers initially made no distinction between single and married taxpayers. Between 1682 and 1693, the province derived half of its taxes from property taxes and half from poll taxes on men "from Sixteen, to Sixty years of age."<sup>33</sup> In this initial formu-

<sup>30</sup> George, Nead, and McCamant, eds., *Charter to William Penn*, 109–11, 145, 194, 210; Mitchell and Flanders, eds., *Statutes at Large*, 2:6–9, 178, 183. Of all laws on sexual offenses, the fornication statutes were the most frequently enforced. See *Records of the Courts of Quarter Sessions and Common Pleas of Bucks County, Pennsylvania, 1684–1700* (Meadville, PA, 1943), 21, 178–79, 180, 183, 275, 277, 285, 289–90, 292; William M. Offutt Jr., *Of "Good Laws" and "Good Men": Law and Society in the Delaware Valley, 1680–1710* (Urbana, IL, 1995).

<sup>31</sup> Mitchell and Flanders, eds., *Statutes at Large*, 2:8.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:490.

<sup>33</sup> George, Nead, and McCamant, eds., *Charter to William Penn*, 147. See also Lemuel Molovinsky, "Continuity of the English Tax Experience in Early Pennsylvania History," *Pennsylvania*

lation of the tax code, the poll tax fell equally on all men regardless of wealth, property, or marital status. In 1693, however, Pennsylvania's tax code was abrogated by the Crown and the provincial assembly took the opportunity to revisit the issue of revenues. The assembly reaffirmed the spirit of the earlier law, directing that provincial revenue come from two sources: a one-penny-per-pound levy on all "reall, capital of and personal estates" and a six-shilling poll tax on men "as are not otherwise Rated by this act." In other words, property owners were to pay according to the value of their estates, and those without property were charged a flat fee in lieu of a property tax.<sup>34</sup> There were two other changes in the tax laws of 1693. First, the counties were granted the right to collect the same type of taxes for their own use.<sup>35</sup> Second, the tax scheme was tilted in favor of men with families. In the provincial tax of 1693, the assembly granted an exemption to those men "who have a great charge of children & [have] become indigent," indigence being defined as having less than thirty pounds worth of property.<sup>36</sup>

Three years later, the assembly again revised the tax laws. This time, the provincial taxes remained essentially the same, while the county rates were revised to help families. Specifically, the county rate act of 1696 included an exemption for poor men with "a great charge of children," while also narrowing the application of the poll tax from all men to only those

freemen who have been out of their servitude for the space of six months, and all such who Come free into this government & have been therein resident for the space of fourty days, and are above the age of sixteen years, and have not families or charge to maintain, and are not under their parents tuition, and assisting to them on their plantations or trades, or are not otherwise Rated by this act.<sup>37</sup>

With this revision in the law, those with real and moveable estates paid the property tax, but only single men who owned no property whatsoever paid the poll tax.

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*History* 46 (1979): 233–44; Lemuel Molovinsky, "Taxation and Continuity in Pennsylvania during the American Revolution," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 104 (1980): 365–78.

<sup>34</sup> George, Nead, and McCamant, eds., *Charter to William Penn*, 221.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 233–34.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.

For the next two centuries, Pennsylvania continued to collect poll taxes on single men. Although the language and reach of the tax changed over the years, the spirit remained consistent. In 1700 the assembly added the singles tax to the provincial rates, and in 1711 it began to demand the tax from all propertyless single men whether they lived with their parents or not. The age at which single men could first be taxed was raised from sixteen to twenty-one in 1700 in the provincial rates and in 1718 in the county levies. The language of the laws also changed over time, from those "not having families" to "single person or freeman" to just "single freeman." Although the laws did not specify whether the tax applied only to the never married or to widowers as well, it appears that colonists generally understood the tax to concern only young bachelors. In numerous tax lists, local assessors used the terms "Single Men" and "Young Men" interchangeably, while in at least one instance an "old Man unmarried" who was living with his adult son was not rated for the singles tax.<sup>38</sup> Despite these adjustments, the singles tax remained part of the provincial rates until the 1780s and part of the county levies until 1919.<sup>39</sup>

In terms of collection, there was considerable variation among the different polities from year to year. At the county level, where the taxes were used to help fund the poor, the courts, and the local infrastructure, the county commissioners decided when to collect taxes and how much to charge.<sup>40</sup> Thus the regularity of the county rates varied depending on the needs of the local government, although it appears that counties collected taxes more years than not. For example, from 1718 to 1775 Chester County ordered the tax collected about four out of every five years.<sup>41</sup> At the provincial level, the collection of the tax was far more irregular as the

<sup>38</sup> See Chester County, Provincial Taxes, West Whiteland Township, 1770.

<sup>39</sup> Provincial rates with poll taxes on single freemen, 1700–1781 found in Mitchell and Flanders, eds., *Statutes at Large*, 2:115, 374, 389; 3:84, 128–29; 5:202, 294–96, 380; 6:8, 345; 8:379; 9:102, 152, 363–64; 10:330–31. County levies with poll taxes on single freemen, 1700–1799 found in *Statutes at Large*, 2:35; 3:180–81, 296; 4:14; 9:403; 16:379–80. A scaled-back version of the poll tax was continued in the county rate in 1834, which was not replaced until 1919. See *Laws of the General Assembly of the State of Pennsylvania, Session 1833–34, in the Fifty-Eighth Year of Independence* (Harrisburg, PA, 1834), 512; *Supplement to Purdon's Digest: A Digest of the Statute Law of the State of Pennsylvania for the Years 1917–1921*, 13th ed. (Philadelphia, 1923), 9176–77. The singles tax was incorporated into other tax schemes in the middle of the eighteenth century. See *Statutes at Large*, 5:34, 6:205, 7:284–85, 8:105–6.

<sup>40</sup> The justices of the peace set the county rates until 1718, when the county commissioners assumed the task. Alan Tully, *Forming American Politics: Ideals, Interests, and Institutions in Colonial New York and Pennsylvania* (Baltimore, 1994), 337.

<sup>41</sup> Chester County, County Taxes, 1718–1800.

assembly only authorized it when war threatened and the existing taxes proved insufficient to fund the colony's defense. Following the end of Queen Anne's War in 1713, the legislature allowed the provincial singles tax to lapse and did not resume collection again until the Seven Years' War threatened.<sup>42</sup> Then, beginning in 1755, the province annually laid a tax on single men, which became increasingly burdensome as wartime expenditures spiraled out of control. In fact, for a brief period beginning in 1764, the province collected a poll tax of fifteen shillings on all single men in Pennsylvania regardless of whether they owned property or not.<sup>43</sup> In contrast, it appears that the counties limited the tax to those single men who owned neither real nor moveable property. As a result, whether or not a bachelor was taxed and how much he owed varied greatly depending on when and where he lived.

Despite these fluctuations, the poll taxes on single men were consistently quite high. The county rates law of 1696 set the poll tax on single men at six shillings and the property tax at one penny per pound of an estate's value. According to this formula, a propertyless single man paid as much for his county poll tax as a landowner paid for an estate worth seventy-two pounds. Similarly, the provincial rate of fifteen shillings on single men in the 1760s was roughly equivalent to the taxes placed on a hundred acres of farmland with a single dwelling in rural Chester County.<sup>44</sup> We also can measure the correlation of property taxes on estates and poll taxes on single men by examining the tax lists of Chester County. Between 1715 and 1775, the tax on propertyless single men fluctuated between four and nine shillings during the years the county rates were collected. Yet as Table 1 illustrates, before the Revolution propertyless single men consistently paid poll taxes that were higher than the property taxes on 80 to 90 percent of Chester County estates. Nor were such figures limited to Chester County. The provincial singles tax of fifteen shillings was higher than the property taxes on three-quarters of estates in Lancaster County in 1773 and Bedford County in 1775.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Tully, *Forging American Politics*, 83–84, 295.

<sup>43</sup> Mitchell and Flanders, eds., *Statutes at Large*, 6:345.

<sup>44</sup> There is considerable variation in value of estates. This estimate is derived from the provincial tax records for Chester County. See Chester County, Provincial Taxes, 1765, 1768, and 1770.

<sup>45</sup> "Transcript of Taxables in the County of Bedford for the Year 1775," *Pennsylvania Archives*, 3rd ser., 22 (1897): 85–116; "Returns for the Sixteenth Eighteen-Penny Tax for the County of Lancaster, 1773," *Pennsylvania Archives*, 3rd ser., 17 (1897): 323–487. The Bedford County figure excludes uncultivated lands in the county that were taxed.

Table 1: County Rate Returns, Chester County, Pennsylvania, 1715–1788

Year	Estates	Single Men	Inmates	Non-Residents	Total Taxables	Single Men as Percentage of Total Taxables	Percent of Estates Taxed Less than Single Men
1715	708	90	0	39	837	10.8	n/a
1721	1147	120	5	98	1370	8.8	79.9
1730	1688	163	0	0	1851	8.8	83.8
1740	2607	384	6	0	2997	12.8	94.0
1750	2920	582	138	0	3640	16.0	79.8
1760	3351	640	748	0	4739	13.5	86.1
1771	3554	888	746	0	5188	17.1	85.5
1781	3853	913	1070	53	5889	15.5	46.6
1788	4125	1344	1210	0	6679	20.1	30.1

Source: Chester County, County Taxes, 1718–1800, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Table 1 also provides some insight into the number of single men who faced the taxman over the course of the eighteenth century. In Chester County, propertyless single men accounted for 10 percent of the total number of taxables in the first half of the century, but soon grew to account for more than 15 percent by mid-century and 20 percent following the Revolution.<sup>46</sup> Assuming that freeholders and married wage laborers represent families of five to seven people each, single taxpayers constituted between 2 and 5 percent of the population.<sup>47</sup>

In its 1696 formulation, Pennsylvania's system of property taxes and poll taxes reflected the expected life course of a male colonist. When he was young and single, a man paid a poll tax while he was working another man's land; but when he matured, that same man married, bought land, and began paying property taxes. While thousands of Pennsylvanians followed this pattern, there were also exceptions. Perhaps the most significant exceptions were those men who married but who were unable to acquire their own estates. By the 1740s, a scarcity of land in older settlements drove up the price of land and forced many married men to work for wages. Termed "inmates" or "cottagers," such married laborers contracted employment with landowners and lived in small cottages on their employers' land.<sup>48</sup> As Table 1 indicates, inmates made up a significant

<sup>46</sup> These percentages confirm Lemon's findings. See Lemon, *Best Poor Man's Country*, 93–94.

<sup>47</sup> On estimating the size of households from tax records, see Rodger C. Henderson, *Community Development and the Revolutionary Transition in Eighteenth-Century Lancaster County, Pennsylvania* (New York, 1989), 224; Evarts B. Greene and Virginia D. Harrington, *American Population before the Federal Census of 1790* (New York, 1932).

<sup>48</sup> Simler, "Landless Worker," 175–77; Lemon, *Best Poor Man's Country*, 93–96.

portion of the taxable population in Chester County by 1750 and rivaled the number of single men within a decade. As the number of inmates increased, some counties chose to assess them a poll tax. Yet the tax burden remained consistently lighter on inmates than on single men. In the third quarter of the eighteenth century, Chester County rated propertyless married men between nine pence and one shilling three pence at the same time it charged single men eight to twelve times as much. In sum, whether or not a married man owned property, he could generally expect to pay lower taxes than a propertyless bachelor.

The tax rates for Chester County, however, tell only part of the story of taxed bachelors in colonial Pennsylvania. First, the definition of "propertyless" changed over time. Before the Revolution, Chester County rated all single men without real estate for a flat poll tax even though they may have possessed a small amount of moveable property such as a horse. After 1775, however, the assessors began to rate landless single men for the poll tax *and* any taxable items they possessed. Other counties appear to have also followed this practice, although local variations persisted. As a result, tax lists somewhat obscure the relative wealth of propertyless single colonists. Second, the figures in Table 1 exclude those bachelors who were significant real estate owners. Such men paid property taxes to the county and the province; thus they were exempt from paying poll taxes to the county and, before 1764, to the province. After 1764, bachelors with estates paid a poll tax to the province on top of their property tax. However, the number of landed single men was never very great. The 1770 provincial tax for Chester County rated 1,139 propertyless single men compared to 176 propertied ones, a ratio of more than six to one.<sup>49</sup> More importantly, the vast majority of propertied bachelors had estates of fifty acres or larger, meaning they had the right to vote. Such a privilege was not accorded to their propertyless single brethren.

### *Pennsylvania Bachelors: Contradictions in Life and Politics*

The singles tax was emblematic of the various contradictions young bachelors faced in colonial Pennsylvania, both in life and politics. The single men who paid the tax led liminal lives, trapped somewhere between childhood and adulthood. They enjoyed some of the privileges and responsibilities of mature men while being denied others. In part, the

<sup>49</sup> Chester County, Provincial Taxes, 1770.

contradictory status of single men was grounded in the realities of Pennsylvania's labor system. The economy of Pennsylvania was based largely on subsistence agriculture and the cultivation of cereal grains grown on small and moderate-sized family farms.<sup>50</sup> Thus little demand existed for large numbers of permanent laborers, such as indentured servants, convicts, or African slaves. Instead, as Mary Schweitzer has written, "the labor market in Pennsylvania relied in the main on teenagers and young single adults."<sup>51</sup> Some young people worked on their fathers' farms while others contracted out their labor to families in need of a field hand. This system provided a flexible labor supply for Pennsylvania farmers and allowed young people the chance to learn skills, earn wages, and, if they went to work for another family, leave home.

Pennsylvania's farmers were not unique in their reliance on young adults to provide the bulk of their labor. Instead, this practice was part of a centuries-old tradition then in existence in England and America. As part of this tradition, a young laborer lived with his employer and came under the rule of the householder, who was responsible for providing the youth with adequate food and shelter as well as discipline and moral instruction. A farmer who took a young man into his home or who utilized the labor of his adult sons was expected to ensure that his workers attended religious meetings and kept out of trouble. If they did not, he had a duty to correct them. While a laborer was expected to do a man's work, his status in the household was that of a dependent, not unlike a wife, child, or servant.<sup>52</sup> As the average age at first marriage for men in colonial Pennsylvania was about twenty-six, a young bachelor's liminal status often extended for a decade or longer.<sup>53</sup>

The ambiguous status of young bachelors was further complicated by contradictions in their political standing. Colonial Pennsylvanians rarely

<sup>50</sup> Lemon, *Best Poor Man's Country*, 150–83. See also Simler, "Landless Worker," 166–67.

<sup>51</sup> Mary M. Schweitzer, *Custom and Contract: Household, Government, and the Economy in Colonial Pennsylvania* (New York, 1987), 34.

<sup>52</sup> On the household and work in England and America, see Ann Kussmaul, *Servants in Husbandry in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1981); Robert J. Steinfield, *The Invention of Free Labor: The Employment Relation in English and American Law and Culture, 1350–1870* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1991); Norton, *Founding Mothers and Fathers*, 97–101; Carole Shammas, *A History of Household Government in America* (Charlottesville, VA, 2002).

<sup>53</sup> Robert V. Wells, "The Population of England's Colonies in America: Old English or New Americans?" *Population Studies* 46 (1992): 88–89; Wells, "Quaker Marriage Patterns," 429; Henderson, *Community Development*, 51, 59–60, 105–8, 190–91, 287–89; Henry A. Gemery, "The White Population of the Colonial United States, 1607–1790," in *A Population History of North America*, ed. Michael R. Haines and Richard H. Steckel (Cambridge, 2000), 143–90.



wrote extended treatises on the young workers in their midst but one rare exception allows us to see how at least some Pennsylvanians characterized taxed bachelors. In a broadside titled *To the Commissioners and Assessors of Chester County, for the Year 1764*, a householder from Newtown Township bemoaned the high taxes in Pennsylvania. The anonymous author offered a pithy critique of each item rated for taxes including a variety of workers. On the subject of single men, he wrote:

No single Men have I at all,  
About my House living this Fall;  
If of them I'd an half a Thrave,  
There's not a Head of them I'd save  
'Cause their Wages so high doth run,  
Few of them cares how little's done,  
At Noon or setting of the Sun.<sup>54</sup>

The author's accusation that "their Wages so high doth run" suggests the great expense of hiring bachelors, a charge missing from a subsequent section titled "Inmates." The claim of excessive cost is especially revealing in light of the author's claim, "Few of them cares how little's done." Not only were single men expensive, they were not worth their wages.

Such allegations had some basis in fact. Whereas New England and the southern colonies followed English precedent and used the law to control the wages of workers, Pennsylvania left the matter to the vicissitudes of the market. The assembly did pass a law in 1684 empowering local justices to set wages, but there is little evidence that the measure was ever enforced.<sup>55</sup> At the same time, the demand for workers in Pennsylvania was desperate, so much so that by the 1760s landowners advertised for workers in the local newspaper. "Wanted, Two single Men, that understand the Farming and Gardening Business well," read one such notice in a January 1766 issue of the *Pennsylvania Gazette*.<sup>56</sup> When combined, no wage controls and a high demand for labor resulted in exceptionally lucrative wages for farm hands. Indeed, James Lemon has estimated that wages for agricultural laborers in Pennsylvania were 30 to

<sup>54</sup> *To the Commissioners and Assessors of Chester County, for the Year 1764*, American Broadside, Library Company of Philadelphia. A "thrave" was an early modern expression for a measurement of straw or fodder.

<sup>55</sup> Richard Brandon Morris, *Government and Labor in Early America* (New York, 1946), 86.

<sup>56</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Jan. 23, 1766. See also *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Jan. 3, 1771, Apr. 18, 1778.

100 percent higher than wages for similar workers in England.<sup>57</sup> It is also apparent that single men did not save all their wages for setting up a household. As Lucy Simler has observed, single men were distinguishable from inmates by their spending habits, often choosing to squander a portion of their wages on extravagant clothes and luxurious personal effects.<sup>58</sup> All of these factors may have confirmed the equity of the Pennsylvania tax system in the minds of legislators and tax assessors. Although bachelors were called upon to pay higher taxes than married men, a single man had his room and board provided by his employer, had liquid assets, and had no dependents to support. Fairness dictated that such a man should pay more in taxes than a father whose wealth was invested in his land.

Yet it was here that the status of a propertyless bachelor in colonial Pennsylvania was at its most contradictory. Although single men paid some of the highest taxes in Pennsylvania, very few could vote or hold elective office because they were not property owners. Oddly, this had not always been the case. According to the 1682 "Laws Agreed Upon in England," the right to elect representatives was granted to every freeman in the colony who paid "scot and lot," that is, taxes.<sup>59</sup> However, as the Pennsylvania Assembly attempted to wrest control of the colony from the proprietor at the turn of the eighteenth century, it seized control over both the franchise and election procedures.<sup>60</sup> As part of this struggle, the legislature approved a new suffrage law in 1700 that severely restricted political participation. Although enacted "with the advice and consent of the freemen of this Province," the law insisted that only *freeholders* had the right to vote. Specifically, a man had to be native born or naturalized, twenty-one years of age, a resident for two years, and hold either fifty acres of land or be worth fifty pounds of moveable property.<sup>61</sup> Four years earlier, the legislature approved the poll tax on single men. Pennsylvania lawmakers thus deemed propertyless bachelors capable of the responsibilities of tax payment while simultaneously denying them the commensurate

<sup>57</sup> Lemon, *Best Poor Man's Country*, 179.

<sup>58</sup> Simler, "Landless Worker," 182–84. See also Schweitzer, *Custom and Contract*, 25.

<sup>59</sup> George, Nead, and McCamant, eds., *Charter to William Penn*, 99. The law was issued again in late 1682. See *Charter to William Penn*, 122–23. See also Tully, *Forming American Politics*, 29–32.

<sup>60</sup> Tully, *Forming American Politics*, 71–73, 79–80.

<sup>61</sup> Mitchell and Flanders, eds., *Statutes at Large*, 2:24–25. The requirements did not change much until 1776. See *Statutes at Large*, 7:35, 8:334. See also Albert Edward McKinley, *The Suffrage Franchise in the Thirteen English Colonies in America* (Philadelphia, 1905); Cortlandt F. Bishop, *History of Elections in the American Colonies* (New York, 1893).

privilege of deciding how their tax dollars should be spent.

There was one more contradiction in the lives of Pennsylvania's propertyless single men. It was common for the American colonies to collect taxes on laborers, but Pennsylvania was one of the few places where these workers were responsible for their own taxes. When Virginia first defined the parameters of its poll tax in 1662, it placed a head tax on free white men, white and Indian indentured servants, and "all negroes male and female being imported."<sup>62</sup> But only free white men were expected to pay their own taxes; all others had their taxes paid by their masters. In this, a bound laborer in Virginia had his political identity wholly subsumed in that of his master: not only was he deemed dependent when it came time to elect burgesses, he was a dependent when the sheriff came to collect taxes. In Pennsylvania, the status of single freemen was more ambiguous. Although they were treated no differently than women, children, and indentured servants in voting, they were considered independent men for tax purposes. The tax lists recorded the names of the propertyless bachelors, not just how many workers lived at each estate, and they listed these men separately from their masters and fathers. To be sure, a master or father may have helped a bachelor worker with his taxes, but the onus of the poll tax fell clearly on the single man himself. As the provincial tax law of 1711 stated, the singles tax could be paid "by himself or his friend" or by his "householder, master or employer." But if no one paid the tax, then the constable was ordered "to take such freeman . . . and bring him before any one of the said commissioners," where he was to pay his assessment or else the sheriff would be directed to "commit such a person to prison till he do pay the same."<sup>63</sup>

Although it is difficult to determine how single men felt about their taxation, we might speculate that the underlying contradictions of their ambiguous cultural and political identities helped to cultivate a political awareness. Linda Kerber has argued that female landowners in the nineteenth century were "politicized" before they won the franchise; that is, the process of paying taxes heightened their political awareness and led

<sup>62</sup> William Waller Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature in the Year 1619*, 13 vols. (New York, 1819–1823), 2:84. See also Percy Scott Flippin, *The Financial Administration of the Colony of Virginia* (Baltimore, 1915); William Zebina Ripley, *The Financial History of Virginia, 1609–1776* (New York, 1893); Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1996), 116–28.

<sup>63</sup> Mitchell and Flanders, eds., *Statutes at Large*, 2:395–96.

them to demand a voice.<sup>64</sup> Perhaps a similar process was at work among propertyless single men in Pennsylvania. After all, young men were among the first to demand suffrage when the Revolution came to Pennsylvania.

### *Independence and Enfranchisement*

On April 25, 1775, less than a week after the Battle of Lexington and Concord, nearly eight thousand Pennsylvanians met in Philadelphia and agreed to associate for the defense of the colony. What began as a muster of volunteer soldiers, however, soon became a full-scale political movement. Within a week of forming military companies, the "associators" elected officers. By this act of political participation, men denied the ballot in provincial elections due to immigrant status or lack of property had their first opportunity to choose leaders, and soon they saw no need to stop at officers. By the autumn of 1775, the associators had organized the Committee of Privates to advocate their interests before the Pennsylvania Assembly and the Committee of Safety. The following March, the dying remnants of the provincial legislature considered a petition from the volunteer soldiers demanding that "all Persons, (not being Mercenaries) who expose their Lives in Defence of a Country, should be admitted to the Enjoyment of all the Rights and Privileges of a Citizen of that Country which they have defended and protected."<sup>65</sup>

When the Continental Congress advised the states to draw up their own constitutions in May 1776, voting rights came to the forefront of Pennsylvania politics. In a conference convened to decide how delegates to the constitutional convention were to be chosen, German volunteers from Philadelphia presented a petition "praying that all associators who are taxables may be entitled to vote." The conference agreed and admitted every volunteer soldier to vote for representatives to the constitutional convention with three caveats: a voting associator had to be twenty-one years of age, have lived in the province for one year, and have "contributed at any time before the passing of this resolve to the payment of either provincial or county taxes, or shall have been rated or assessed towards the

<sup>64</sup> Linda Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to Be Ladies: Women and the Obligations of Citizenship* (New York, 1998), 86–92.

<sup>65</sup> "The Petition of the Privates of the Military Association of the City and Liberties of Philadelphia," *Pennsylvania Archives*, 8th ser., 8 (1935): 7406; Rosswurm, *Arms, Country, and Class*, 49–75; Ryerson, *Revolution Is Now Begun*, 117–47.

same.”<sup>66</sup> When the constitutional convention met in Philadelphia a month later, tax payment became the threshold for all free men to vote. In the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776, property requirements for suffrage were removed altogether and replaced with a provision whereby “Every freeman of the full age of twenty-one years, having resided in this State for the space of one whole year next before the day of election for representatives, and paid public taxes during that time, shall enjoy the right of an elector.”<sup>67</sup> By this act, Pennsylvania became the first state to abandon property requirements for suffrage as it returned to its seventeenth-century tradition of granting the vote to all taxpaying freemen.

Steven Rosswurm and Richard Ryerson have argued that revising the suffrage requirements in Pennsylvania resulted in a dramatic widening of the electorate. Rosswurm has observed that most of Philadelphia’s male workers over twenty-one had paid or at least been assessed for taxes, while Ryerson has estimated that the electorate was 50 percent of the adult white male population in the colonial period but jumped to 75 percent in rural areas and 90 percent in Philadelphia with the new constitution.<sup>68</sup> Yet both historians neglect to note that it was propertyless bachelors who were leading beneficiaries of the new voting requirements.

As Table 2 indicates, there were thousands of propertyless single men in Pennsylvania during the Revolution, all of whom received the vote for the first time with the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776. Although these figures are incomplete, they do suggest that single men made up a sizeable portion of the taxable population throughout the state. Unfortunately, these figures do not allow us to compare the number of single men with the number of inmates who also received the vote for the first time with the new constitution. Due to either incomplete tax lists or because no poll tax was collected on inmates during these years, exact fig-

<sup>66</sup> “Proceedings of the Conference of Committees of the Province of Pennsylvania, Held at Carpenter’s Hall, Philadelphia, from June 18 to June 25, 1776,” *Pennsylvania Archives*, 2nd ser., 3 (1896): 560–61; Ryerson, *Revolution Is Now Begun*, 232–34; Glenn W. Jacobsen, “Politics, Parties, and Propaganda in Pennsylvania, 1776–1788” (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1976), 33.

<sup>67</sup> Mitchell and Flanders, eds., *Statutes at Large*, 9:590. On the convention, see Rosswurm, *Arms, Country, and Class*, 100–8; Ryerson, *Revolution Is Now Begun*, 207–46; Hawke, *Midst of the Revolution*. See also Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*, 83–90, 226–37; Kruman, *Between Authority and Liberty*, 24–28, 37, 39, 92–93, 99, 101.

<sup>68</sup> Rosswurm, *Arms, Country, and Class*, 100; Ryerson, *Revolution Is Now Begun*, 234. See also *Revolution Is Now Begun*, 9. These figures reflect the electorate for delegates to the constitutional convention. The percentages for elections after 1776 were probably slightly smaller as the constitution demanded voters to have paid taxes rather than merely be assessed them.

Table 2: Number of Estates and Propertyless Single Men in State Taxes, 1779–1785

County	Year	Estates	Propertyless Single Men
Bedford	1779	1555	102
Berks	1779	4415	661
Bucks	1779	3460	684
Chester	1780	3699	1102
Cumberland	1779	4539	935
Lancaster	1779	6710	1117
Northampton	1785	3473	287
Philadelphia City	1779	3499	315
Washington	1781	2722	328
York	1779	5946	570

Sources: Stella H. Sutherland, *Population Distribution in Colonial America* (New York, 1936), 124–34; Chester County, PA: Board of County Commissioners, *State Taxes, 1777–1791*, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; *Effective Supply Tax of the City of Philadelphia, 1779*, *Pennsylvania Archives*, 3rd ser., 14 (1897): 469–561.

ures on inmates for each county are unavailable.<sup>69</sup> However, tax lists for Bedford, Chester, and Lancaster counties from just before the Revolution suggest that the number of inmates was roughly equal to the number of single freemen.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, in these assessments, taxes on inmates varied from one shilling to four shillings six pence, while single men paid fifteen shillings, or three to fifteen times as much.

Single and married men without estates were not the only ones to receive the vote for the first time in 1776. The new suffrage requirements also enfranchised men who owned estates of less than fifty acres or worth less than fifty pounds. Yet even when considering the total number of newly enfranchised men, propertyless single men still comprised a significant percentage of the new voters. As Table 3 illustrates, bachelors without estates constituted almost 19 percent of taxables in Chester County in 1774 and 41 percent of new voters in the county, far outnumbering the number of newly enfranchised inmates or small property owners. The Lancaster County returns for 1773 (Table 4) record a smaller percentage

<sup>69</sup> Inmates are not listed in the published tax lists for Allegheny, Berks, Bucks, Cumberland, Fayette, Huntingdon, Northampton, Northumberland, Washington, Westmoreland, and York counties. See *Pennsylvania Archives*, 3rd ser., vols. 13, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22.

<sup>70</sup> "Transcript of Taxables in the County of Bedford, 1775"; "Transcript of the Seventeenth Eighteenth Pence Rate for the County of Chester, 1774," *Pennsylvania Archives*, 3rd ser., 12 (1897): 1–124; "Returns for the Sixteenth–Eighteen Penny Tax for the County of Lancaster, 1773."

Table 3: Taxables by Sex, Property, and Marital Status, Chester County, Provincial Tax, 1774

	Men with Estates of 50 Acres or More	Men with Estates Less than 50 Acres	Men with Moveable Property, No Land	Men with No Property, No Land	Inmates	Single Men with No Property	Women with Estates
Taxables	2790	461	107	73	804	1006	139
Percent of Taxables (N=5380)	51.9	8.6	2.0	1.4	14.9	18.7	2.6
Percent of New Voters (N=2451)	n/a	18.8	4.4	3.0	32.8	41.0	n/a

Source: "Transcript of the Seventeenth Eighteenth Pence Rate for the County of Chester, 1774." These figures exclude three rated estates which had no owners living in Chester County.

Table 4: Taxables by Sex, Property, and Marital Status, Lancaster County, Provincial Tax, 1773

	Men with Estates of 50 Acres or More	Men with Estates Less than 50 Acres	Men with Moveable Property, No Land	Men with No Property, No Land	Inmates	Single Men with No Property	Women with Estates
Taxables	3435	407	832	555	482	694	125
Percent of Taxables (N=6530)	52.6	6.2	12.7	8.5	7.4	10.6	1.9
Percent of New Voters (N=2970)	n/a	13.7	28.0	18.7	16.2	23.4	n/a

Source: "Returns for the Sixteenth-Eighteen Penny Tax for the County of Lancaster, 1773." These figures exclude eight rated estates that had no owners living in Lancaster County.

of single men, but only men rated for moveable property but no land outnumbered them.<sup>71</sup> It is also important to observe that, while the ranks of the enfranchised now included nearly all adult men, Pennsylvania continued to exclude the hundreds of women who owned estates and paid taxes on them.

While the statistics for Chester and Lancaster counties are largely representative of Pennsylvania as a whole, regional variations did exist. For one, there was a smaller concentration of propertyless single men on the frontier than in the older settlements. Table 2 indicates that the ratio

<sup>71</sup> This refutes the arguments of Wood and Williamson that the expansion of the electorate at the Revolution was not remarkable. See Chilton Williamson, *American Suffrage: From Property to Democracy, 1760-1860* (Princeton, NJ, 1960), 96; Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*, 167.

of estates to single men in Bedford, Northampton, and York counties was greater than ten to one. By contrast, Chester, Bucks, and Lancaster counties featured ratios of three, five, and six to one, respectively. Accordingly, we would expect to find fewer propertyless single men enfranchised in the newer settlements. Likewise, the city of Philadelphia is somewhat of an exception to the rest of the state. Although most propertyless bachelors lived and worked on rural estates, a considerable number resided within the city limits and worked for wages in shops and trades. The 1779 state tax records reveal that about 8 percent of taxables were men who owned no property but were rated "per head." This percentage climbs to almost 10 percent if the number of estates abandoned or controlled by another person is excluded and as high as 14 percent if bachelors with small estates are included. Such figures confirm Billy G. Smith's findings that "between 12 and 20 percent of the city's males were unmarried at any one time, many of whom boarded with families."<sup>72</sup> Yet the numbers of unmarried men in Philadelphia do not indicate their true importance, as it was among these bachelors that we would expect to find the first associators and consequently the most vocal advocates for expanded suffrage.

### *A Bachelors' Revolution?*

In the weeks leading up to the constitutional convention of 1776, various Pennsylvanians joined in the discussion of how far the electorate should be extended. In an oft-quoted letter that first appeared in the *Pennsylvania Packet* on April 29, 1776, the pseudonymous "Elector" offered the most coherent argument for taxpayer and associator suffrage. "Every man who pays his shot and bears his lot [that is, pays taxes] is naturally and constitutionally an *Elector* in a city," he opined, adding: "more especially I will affirm, that every citizen who has armed and associated to defend the Commonwealth is, and should be an *Elector*."<sup>73</sup> It is telling to note that Elector argued against denying the suffrage to "all persons who have come from Germany" who were not naturalized and "all men below the estate of fifty pounds" who lived in Philadelphia, as was currently done. Nowhere did he mention propertyless single men by

<sup>72</sup> Billy G. Smith, *The "Lower Sort": Philadelphia's Laboring People, 1750-1800* (Ithaca, NY, 1990), 177. See also Wulf, "Assessing Gender," 220.

<sup>73</sup> *Pennsylvania Packet, or the General Advertiser*, Apr. 29, 1776. See also *Pennsylvania Gazette*, May 1, 1776; Rosswurm, *Arms, Country, and Class*, 89-90; Kruman, *Between Authority and Liberty*, 98-99; Williamson, *American Suffrage*, 79-82; Keyssar, *Right to Vote*, 14.



name. Even more telling is that when "Civis" later disparaged such a broad suffrage threshold because "a great number of the associators in this city are minors and apprentices," Elector shot back with another letter in which he dismissed any suggestion that he advocated the enfranchisement of "stragglers and apprentices."<sup>74</sup> Using the model of the English borough franchise, he clarified his point, writing, "Every man, who has served his apprenticeship to a freeman of the cities either of London or Westminster, and has set up to be a housekeeper for himself, is an elector there." Elector then proceeded to draw a distinction between the suffrage requirements for rural residents and urban ones, noting, "He could not believe I meant that citizens and farmers were expected to have the same kind of qualifications." Instead, his intent was that taxes should serve only to bring Philadelphia's landless merchants and "mechanics" into the electorate.<sup>75</sup>

The opinions of Elector are critical to understanding the intent of the framers of the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776, especially if Steven Rosswurm is correct in his assertion that the man behind the pseudonym was Dr. Thomas Young, one of the four principle authors of the document.<sup>76</sup> Did Young and his compatriots intend to bring thousands of propertyless bachelors into the electorate or was it an unforeseen by-product? On the one hand, Elector appears to be an advocate for the suffrage of all men, so long as they provided some service to the commonwealth, either through paying taxes or bearing arms. By this logic, the single man taxed at rates higher than the majority of property owners certainly had proven himself. On the other hand, the vast majority of single taxpayers were not urban mechanics, but rural laborers, and thus it appears that Elector believed they should be excluded. Equally confusing is the distinction between apprentices and housekeepers. Where did propertyless single men fit into this dichotomy? They were neither bound servants nor household heads, but something in between. In sum, did Young or any of the other framers foresee that their actions would lead to a bachelors' revolution?

Unfortunately, we have no record of the framers' opinions on the enfranchisement of single men. In addition to Young, Timothy Matlack and David Rittenhouse aided in writing the constitution, although the

<sup>74</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette*, May 1, 1776.

<sup>75</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette*, May 15, 1776.

<sup>76</sup> Rosswurm, *Arms, Country, and Class*, 89–90.

primary architect was James Cannon, and it is for Cannon that sources are most scarce.<sup>77</sup> Certainly none of these authors were paying the singles tax when they sat down to reorganize the government. Three of the four were in their mid-forties—Cannon being the exception at thirty-six—and as was typical of men of this age group, apparently all four owned property and were married. Perhaps James Cannon's position as a tutor at the College of Philadelphia made him especially sensitive to the plight of young men, but on this we can do no more than speculate.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, it appears that even if the four authors had left better records we would be no closer to understanding their views on bachelors and the vote. Among leading Pennsylvanians who left more detailed opinions of the Constitution of 1776, a pattern emerges. There was a dissonance between opinions of expanded suffrage, which was universally accepted, and single men, who were universally disparaged.

As soon as the constitution was made public in the summer of 1776, it invited controversy. Supporters celebrated the democratic features of the document, while opponents attacked its lack of checks and balances. Although he was too sick to attend many of the meetings, Benjamin Franklin was officially the president of the constitutional convention and, he endorsed the unicameral legislature and weakened executive.<sup>79</sup> George Bryan also approved of the new frame of government, especially the equality afforded through broad suffrage. "Pray, who have we in Pennsylvania besides the people? and if they are not to be trusted with the care of their own interests who can?"<sup>80</sup> On the other side of the argument stood Benjamin Rush who belittled the constitution as "mob government." The formidable doctor claimed that a "single legislature is big with

<sup>77</sup> Beeman, *Varieties of Political Experience*, 272–74; Hawke, *In the Midst of Revolution*, 176–77; Rosswurm, *Arms, Country, and Class*, 107.

<sup>78</sup> William H. Egle, "The Constitutional Convention of 1776: Biographical Sketches of Its Members," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 3 (1879): 96–101, 194–201, 319–30, 438–46; 4 (1880): 89–98, 225–33, 361–72; L. H. Butterfield, ed., *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ, 1951), 1:107nn10–11, 148n2; William Barton, *Memoirs of the Life of David Rittenhouse* (Philadelphia, 1813), 262–63, 335–39; Rosswurm, *Arms, Country, and Class*, 260–61; Robert Gough, "Notes on the Pennsylvania Revolutionaries of 1776," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 96 (1972): 89–103.

<sup>79</sup> Leonard W. Labaree et al., eds., *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, 36 vols. to date (New Haven, CT, 1959–), 10:57–58; Carl Van Doren, *Benjamin Franklin* (New York, 1938), 554.

<sup>80</sup> Quoted in Joseph S. Foster, *In Pursuit of Equal Liberty: George Bryan and the Revolution in Pennsylvania* (University Park, PA, 1994), 82. See also Burton Alva Konkle, *George Bryan and the Constitution of Pennsylvania, 1731–1791* (Philadelphia, 1922), 111–29.

tyranny,"<sup>81</sup> an observation with which James Wilson agreed,<sup>82</sup> and soon the two began to campaign for a new constitution. Joseph Reed criticized the lack of a mechanism for the timely amendment of the frame of government, and because of this defect he refused the office of chief justice of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court.<sup>83</sup> In terms of suffrage, however, the constitution's opponents made no arguments for limiting the franchise. James Wilson was perhaps the most vocal proponent of "one man, one vote" anywhere in America. "In order to impart to them the true republican luster, I know of no means more effectual, than to invite and admit the freemen to the right of suffrage," he noted. "Its value cannot, in truth, be enhanced too highly."<sup>84</sup> Likewise, Rush and Reed attacked the constitution not because too many men were admitted to vote, but because too many were excluded. In an effort to keep Tories and political opponents disfranchised, the assembly elected under the new frame of government demanded that all electors swear allegiance to the constitution, an act which, according to Rush, resulted in "precluding 2/3 of the state from voting."<sup>85</sup>

While advocates and adversaries of the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776 uniformly supported an expanded franchise, they also were agreed in their low opinion of single men. Benjamin Franklin lampooned bachelors in the pages of *Poor Richard's Almanac* ("A Man with out a Wife, is but half a Man"<sup>86</sup>) and, on the eve of the Revolution, advised a young man that "becoming a useful Citizen" required escaping "the unnatural State of Celibacy."<sup>87</sup> Benjamin Rush agreed. "Matrimony in all ranks of people lessens the temptation to vice and furnishes fresh motives to just

<sup>81</sup> Butterfield, ed., *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, 1:148. See also *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, 1:114–15, 137, 150, 240, 244, 333, 498–99, 532–33; George W. Corner, ed., *The Autobiography of Benjamin Rush, His "Travels Through Life" Together with his Commonplace Book for 1789–1813* (Princeton, NJ, 1948), 141–42, 158, 161.

<sup>82</sup> Geoffrey Seed, *James Wilson* (Millwood, NY, 1978), 123–29; Butterfield, ed., *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, 1:530–36; Brunhouse, *Counter-Revolution in Pennsylvania*, 221–27.

<sup>83</sup> William B. Reed, *Life and Correspondence of Joseph Reed*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1847), 1:300–303. See also 2:19–23, 46–47.

<sup>84</sup> Robert Green McCloskey, ed., *The Works of James Wilson*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA, 1967), 1:403. See also Seed, *James Wilson*, 16–24.

<sup>85</sup> Butterfield, ed., *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, 1:336. See also Reed, *Life and Correspondence of Joseph Reed*, 1:302n2.

<sup>86</sup> Benjamin Franklin [Richard Saunders, pseud.], *Poor Richard: The Almanacks for the Years 1733–1758* (New York, 1964), 240; Van Doren, *Benjamin Franklin*, 107–15.

<sup>87</sup> Labaree et al., eds., *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, 15:184.

conduct," he wrote in 1788.<sup>88</sup> Three years later, the good doctor advised a sickly bachelor to wed in order to improve his health, "for your disorder is seldom met with in married life."<sup>89</sup> Accordingly, while the Constitution of 1776 brought thousands of single men into the electorate for the first time, we should not confuse this action with an endorsement of bachelorhood. Franklin and Rush echoed the sentiments of Penn; the moral qualms about single men present at the creation of the colony withstood the Revolution intact.<sup>90</sup>

In order to reconcile the actions and ideals of the founders with respect to enfranchising propertyless single men, it is useful to observe the writings of suffrage proponent James Wilson:

A momentous question now occurs—who shall be entitled to suffrage? This darling privilege of freemen should certainly be extended as far as considerations of safety and order will possibly admit. The correct theory and the true principles of liberty require, that every citizen, whose circumstances do not render him necessarily dependent on the will of another, should possess a vote in electing those, by whose conduct his property, his reputation, his liberty, and his life, may be all most materially affected.<sup>91</sup>

According to Wilson, independence determined ability to vote. The man capable of forming his own opinion was capable of choosing his governors, while he who was controlled by another man was only a pawn of another's will and thus incapable of independent thought. Such ideas were not new to Pennsylvania but were a typical formulation of Whig ideology.<sup>92</sup> Yet where Pennsylvania deviated from other states, which allowed it to enfranchise propertyless bachelors, was the way that its founders envisioned independence. To outside observers, the franchise portions of the 1776 constitution were a cause for alarm because a single man who lived under another man's roof could never be independent. The French Abbé de Mably warned that the "inevitable result" of the state's

<sup>88</sup> Butterfield ed., *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, 1:465–66.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:576.

<sup>90</sup> In this, the writings of the Pennsylvania framers confirm Kann's arguments that the language of manhood in early America disparaged bachelors as "disorderly men." However, Kann, like Morgan and Demos before him, omits the changing meaning of the singles laws, in particular the Pennsylvania singles tax. Kann, *Republic of Men*, 52–62.

<sup>91</sup> McCloskey, ed., *Works of James Wilson*, 1:406–7.

<sup>92</sup> Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*, 162–73; Kruman, *Between Authority and Liberty*, 89–91.

voting requirements "would be that a crowd of young men who did not enjoy the rights of citizenship in the other states would flock to Pennsylvania." Because such men did not "have the simple morals which democracy demands," they would soon sell their votes to the highest bidder.<sup>93</sup> Likewise, John Adams saw no difference between live-in single laborers and other household dependents, warning, "The same reasoning which will induce you to admit all men who have no property, to vote, with those who have, for those laws which affect the person, will prove that you ought to admit women and children."<sup>94</sup> Yet Pennsylvanians did not accept such assessments. They did not believe that living in another man's house necessarily made one a dependent. Rather, a man could demonstrate his independence by personally fulfilling obligations to the state. "No man, or body of men, in any nation, can have a just right to any privilege or franchise," observed Franklin, "without having done the nation some service equivalent, for which the franchise or privilege was the recompense or consideration."<sup>95</sup> By this logic, a propertyless single man was not necessarily a dependent. As long as he helped to support the government, he was an independent citizen and fully capable of electing leaders.

It is thus clearly possible that the framers understood that they were enfranchising a group of men whom most Pennsylvanians had long dismissed as dependents, men who still could fail to exert the proper political independence required of citizens. Accordingly, the constitution was replete with warnings aimed at keeping the newly enfranchised fully independent. The attached Declaration of Rights announced that "government is, or ought to be, instituted for the common benefit, protection and security of the people, nation or community," adding, lest anyone act purely out of self-interest, "and not for the particular emolument or advantage of any single man, family, or set of men who are a part only of that community."<sup>96</sup> Likewise, the framers prohibited the creation

<sup>93</sup> Quoted in J. Paul Selsam and Joseph G. Rayback, "French Comment on the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 76 (1952): 317.

<sup>94</sup> Charles Francis Adams, ed., *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States*, 10 vols. (Boston, 1850–1856), 9:376.

<sup>95</sup> Albert Henry Smyth, ed., *Writings of Benjamin Franklin*, 10 vols. (New York, 1905–1907), 9:340. Labaree et al., eds., *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, 22:512–15, 529–33; J. R. Pole, *Political Representation in England and the Origins of the American Republic* (London, 1966), 272.

<sup>96</sup> Mitchell and Flanders, eds., *Statutes at Large*, 9:587. This usage of "single" here probably does not mean simply "unmarried," but its juxtaposition against "family" makes it possible that the definition was not solely "individual" either.

of state offices for profit, claiming that such sinecures would make propertyless men into economic and political dependents. "As every freeman, to preserve his independence (if without a sufficient estate), ought to have some profession, calling, trade or farm, whereby he may honestly subsist," the constitution proclaimed "there can be no necessity for, nor use in establishing office of profit, the usual effect of which are dependence and servility, unbecoming freemen."<sup>97</sup>

Single men were not just kept independent by the moralizing tone of the constitution; rather, the Pennsylvania Assembly presented propertyless bachelors plenty of opportunities to prove their allegiance to the commonwealth. As the Revolutionary War dragged on, the state became increasingly dependent on its single men's service, loyalty, and taxes. A year into the fighting, as the initial enthusiasm of volunteers began to flag, Pennsylvania looked to young bachelors to come to its defense. In September 1776, the assembly issued fines to men who did not take up arms, but allowed exemptions to those who "shall have one or more sons who are associators, unmarried and residing with their father."<sup>98</sup> Moreover, the vote was clearly a way of ensuring the allegiance of young bachelors. Despite Benjamin Rush's criticism of the test acts, requiring a voter swear an oath to the commonwealth guaranteed that all electors were fully committed to independence and defense of the government.<sup>99</sup> Yet perhaps more than anything else, single men continued to demonstrate their devotion to an independent Pennsylvania by the politically independent act of paying taxes. In 1779, the assembly reaffirmed the county rates tax scheme with its poll tax on propertyless single men. It also approved four new singles taxes for the support of the commonwealth and four more to help fund the Continental army and the debts of the United States.<sup>100</sup> Had the assembly voted to end the singles tax, the legislature would have closed the primary method by which most propertyless single men proved their citizenship, and thus would have prevented the enfranchisement of thousands of new voters. That the body repeatedly renewed the levy suggests Pennsylvanians realized they were inviting

<sup>97</sup> Mitchell and Flanders, eds., *Statutes at Large*, 9:600. See also Konkle, *George Bryan*, 127–28.

<sup>98</sup> Mitchell and Flanders, eds., *Statutes at Large*, 9:27. See also 9:168.

<sup>99</sup> Beeman, *Varieties of Political Experience*, 272.

<sup>100</sup> Mitchell and Flanders, eds., *Statutes at Large*, 9:102, 153, 232–33, 363–64, 402–3, 447; 10:240, 330–31; 11:90. See also Brunhouse, *Counter-Revolution in Pennsylvania*, 84–89, 108–10, 121–22, 133–34, 157, 162.

thousands of propertyless single men to the polls and did so willingly.<sup>101</sup>

As a result, the enfranchisement of propertyless single men in the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776 was a remarkably complex and contradictory act. On the one hand, the state maintained its tradition of demarcating bachelors as politically distinct from married men. The opinions of the founders and laws of the revolutionary assembly indicate that Pennsylvania had no intention of becoming a bachelors' paradise. It was important for young men to marry and take up the responsibilities of fatherhood, especially now that a new nation was in the making. On the other hand, bachelors were not all that different from unnaturalized immigrants or propertyless husbands in that they were still men and could be of great service to the state. Through taxation, military service, and a pledge of loyalty they could demonstrate their independence and thus they deserved to be awarded the privileges of citizenship. In some sense, it was a compromise. Single men were not supposed to stay single any more than immigrants were to remain unnaturalized or married men propertyless. Thus Pennsylvania left in place the financial penalty for being single, while simultaneously acknowledging the contributions of its bachelors.

Ultimately, it is difficult to measure what effect changing the suffrage requirements had on the number of actual voters.<sup>102</sup> Nevertheless, propertyless single men had the right to vote because of the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776, and white bachelors never lost this right.<sup>103</sup> In stark contrast, female property owners did not gain suffrage in exchange for their taxes for another century. In this, the story of enfranchisement of Pennsylvania's bachelors confirms arguments about gender and citizenship in the revolutionary era offered by Linda Kerber and others. As the founders moved to downplay the differences of property and wealth among men when it came to voting, they consequently drew stark distinctions based on sex.<sup>104</sup> Single men benefited from this transition as

<sup>101</sup> Similarly, in 1786 Republicans charged that Constitutionalists kept mechanics disfranchised by keeping them off the tax rolls. See Brunhouse, *Counter-Revolution in Pennsylvania*, 192.

<sup>102</sup> Williamson, *American Suffrage*, 56–60, 83; James H. Kettner, *The Development of American Citizenship, 1608–1870* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1978), 122–24; Rosswurm, *Arms, Country, and Class*, 92–93; Keyssar, *Right to Vote*, 7.

<sup>103</sup> In 1838, Pennsylvania limited the electorate to white men. Race was not a factor in the 1776 or 1790 constitutions. Keyssar, *Right to Vote*, 339, 342.

<sup>104</sup> Kerber, *No Constitutional Right*. See also Ruth H. Bloch, *Gender and Morality in Anglo-American Culture, 1650–1800* (Berkeley, CA, 2003).

marital status, like property ownership and immigrant status, became less important than gender. Although propertyless bachelors had to prove their commitment to the state by paying special poll taxes, they were compensated for their financial obligations. In this, single men quietly joined the "universal manhood" that became the basis of the revolutionary innovation of universal manhood suffrage.

### *Conclusion*

At the end of the American Revolution, the status of young bachelors remained liminal. Despite receiving the vote for their taxes, unmarried men retained a unique political identity. As in the colonial period, Pennsylvanians assumed that single men had uncertain morals and the ability to contribute more to the state than married men because they lacked dependents. Although bachelorhood has changed dramatically over the past two hundred years, we still find traces of this logic in recent American politics, such as debates over the "marriage-penalty tax."<sup>105</sup> In this, the Revolution had a mixed legacy for propertyless single men. Although they entered the electorate, Pennsylvania's propertyless bachelors remained stigmatized. Such ambiguity is commonly associated with the experience of women and African Americans during the Revolution, but it is clear that in the shaping of American citizenship a sizable contingent of white men were also left with ambiguous identities.

Nevertheless, propertyless single men in Pennsylvania were invited to join an exclusive club of voters from which women and people of color were excluded for many years to come. To some extent, we can understand this change as being about gender. The founders valued personal independence when they laid out suffrage requirements and independence was a decidedly masculine concept. Propertyless men, whether they were single or not, were allowed to demonstrate their independence from their fathers and masters by paying taxes and serving in the military, while no comparable avenues were open to women. In an odd piece of legal fiction, a woman could not be independent, even if she was a landowner and a taxpayer. Although Lee Virginia Chambers-Schiller has touted the feeling of independence that single women experienced after the Revolution, such emotions had no legal basis, unlike the political independence of

<sup>105</sup> Nancy F. Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge, MA, 2000), 191–93, 223–24.



Pennsylvania's single men.<sup>106</sup>

However, women did not remain permanently disfranchised. In this, we might see the enfranchisement of propertyless single men as the first step toward the inclusion of other groups historically denied the vote. The principle that the vote should compensate taxpayers and veterans would resurface in the nineteenth century to justify granting suffrage to female property owners and black soldiers. In both instances, opponents of an expanded electorate countered that the excluded parties lacked the independence to make an informed decision. As with single men, these arguments were ultimately rejected as unfair and inaccurate.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Chambers-Schiller, *Liberty, A Better Husband*.

<sup>107</sup> Kerber, *No Constitutional Right*, 81–123; Eric Foner, *Reconstruction, 1863–1877: America's Unfinished Revolution* (New York, 1988), 115.

