



*In the late eighteenth century, deep divisions about the best kind of government and who would lead it separated settlers in otherwise serene southwestern Pennsylvania.*

## *'Let Us Be Independent':*

*David Bradford and the Whiskey Insurrection*

by James P. McClure

**D**AVID Bradford's legacy is not well known today, but during the Whiskey Insurrection in 1794, President George Washington wanted Bradford arrested "by Hook, or by Crook."<sup>1</sup> Pittsburgh author and attorney Hugh Henry Brackenridge, describing one event of the "rebellion," called Bradford "the Robe-

spierre of the occasion." The *Pittsburgh Gazette* later claimed that a "nod" from Bradford could have meant the destruction of one's property. And when he finally fled down the Ohio River, militia officers mistakenly thought that they were expected to kill him rather than allow him to escape.<sup>2</sup> Bradford's part in

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the Whiskey Insurrection was so notorious, according to Brackenridge, that he became identified with a Philistine deity of the Old Testament: when the people of Washington County learned that Bradford had finally advised submission to the government's terms, "The popular language, with respect to him, was, that 'DAGON was fallen.'"<sup>3</sup>

The Whiskey Insurrection was a series of incidents that originated in opposition to a federal excise tax on distilled spirits. It lost its momentum even before thousands of militiamen marched into Western Pennsylvania in the fall of 1794 to ensure compliance with the law.<sup>4</sup> David Bradford did not instigate the excise crisis, but he did much to give it the appearance of an insurrection. It is unlikely that there would have been a militia muster at Braddock's Field — the largest gathering of the Whiskey Insurrection — without him. He came the closest of any public figure to advocating a course of revolutionary action. He was the only leader to resist openly the government's original plan for the region's submission to law.

Many residents of Washington County and the neighboring region in the years before 1794 were discontented, frustrated, and uncertain. Those tensions fed the resistance to the tax on the product of the region's many stills. Bradford, for his part, was one of a number of would-be chieftans in a competitive political environment. There is limited information about him, so we cannot know for certain if he acted solely from personal ambition, or because he meant to represent others frustrated by the political situation. For whichever reason, the Whiskey Insurrection presented him with an opportunity to gain ground politically and he took advantage of it. His actions relate more to local power, ambition, and the society and politics of Western Pennsylvania in the 1790s than to the excise tax. He did not create the Whiskey Insurrection, but it is important to account for his role in it. And while much has been written about the insurrection, no historical study has

had Bradford as its primary focus. As a result, what his case tells us about the region in 1794 has been neglected.

David Bradford was born in Maryland about 1760 and probably moved to Washington County, Pennsylvania, about 1781, the year it was created from part of Westmoreland County. The following year he became deputy attorney general — the state's district attorney — for Washington County, a position which he still held in 1794.<sup>5</sup> He built an imposing stone house in the town of Washington and owned a gristmill and sawmill. In 1792 he was elected to the Pennsylvania House of Representatives, where he served a single term without seeking re-election.<sup>6</sup> One of his contemporaries stated that Bradford favored efforts to create a new state in the region in the 1780s but was a "zealous" supporter of the federal constitution at the time of its ratification.<sup>7</sup>

In attempting to explain the Whiskey Insurrection, Judge Alexander Addison stated that the "natural untamedness of temper" of frontier settlements "was increased by the peculiar circumstances of this country."<sup>8</sup> By "this country," Addison meant Western Pennsylvania, and the "peculiar circumstances" included a boundary controversy and conflicting claims that began in 1774 between Pennsylvania and Virginia. The two states reached agreement on the issue in 1780, but it was the middle of the decade before the boundaries were formally marked. Washington County's early years were marked by tension over land titles, disputes over the allocation of county offices, and resistance to tax collection and militia enrollments. There was agitation for the creation of a new state in the region.<sup>9</sup> The effects of these conflicts were felt for years.<sup>10</sup> Warfare with Native Americans continued in the 1780s and early 1790s. The region's white population swelled after the Revolution, and opportunities for land ownership declined. Cash was scarce and commercial prospects uncertain. Troubled by all these issues, Western Pennsylvanians displayed a

range of strongly held opinions about them.<sup>11</sup>

The population increase in the years preceding the Whiskey Insurrection brought tensions over the breaking off of new counties, including part of Allegheny, from Washington County.<sup>12</sup> Another attempt to reduce the county's size, instigated by residents of the southern portion of the county, began by 1792. One of the discontented southerners decried "the Aristocratical nest of Washington" with its "juridical & legal grandees."<sup>13</sup> In February 1794, a satirical piece in the *Pittsburgh Gazette* mocked the town of Washington as a self-styled "Athens of the western world," whose residents looked down on the ignorant "boobies" of the county's southern reaches.<sup>14</sup> Washington town's "grandees" also felt pressures from John Canon's town of Canonsburg to the north. In the early 1790s, Canonsburg competed with Washington as the county's center of activity.<sup>15</sup>

In the 1780s a group of Washington County residents, including David Bradford, attempted to create a structure to contend with some of their frustration. At the January 1787 term of the county's courts, "the magistrates, sheriff, prothonotary, attornies, and a number of reputable inhabitants" agreed to form an association against the purchase or use of any liquors imported into the region from east of the Allegheny Mountains.<sup>16</sup> Bradford represented the town of Washington when a county committee, calling itself "a general Patriotic Convention," met to promote this object. The "convention" expanded the list of concerns. Its delegates complained about several issues, including an "exceeding burdensome" tax collection system, the allocation of the county's election districts, and a potential "abridgement of our common rights" through restrictions on navigation of the Mississippi River. Although only 11 official delegates attended the meeting, representing fewer than half of the county's townships, they claimed the power to review bills



*The flag of those opposing the federal government's whiskey tax is now on display in the Century Inn in Scenery Hill, Pa. The original is deep blue behind the stars.*

under consideration by the state legislature, and "in future our decision thereon shall be considered as instructions to our representatives."<sup>17</sup>

Bradford was one of two delegates appointed "to prepare an instrument of association," but the group did not sustain itself.<sup>18</sup> The convention illustrates the issues that concerned the inhabitants of the western counties. It was perhaps the first attempt to create a standing association in the region based on township representation. In 1793 and early 1794 there were roughly similar meetings in Washington, Fayette, and Westmoreland counties. Delegates at those gatherings complained of an increase in state legislators' pay, and of a new system requiring county judges to be trained lawyers.<sup>19</sup>

Although government officials focused on the resistance to the excise law, during the Whiskey Insurrection people in the region expressed their concern about land speculation, incomplete land titles, federal policies toward the west, navigation of the Mississippi, delays in opening the northwestern corner

of Pennsylvania to settlement, continuing conflicts with Indians, official salaries, and the new requirements for county judges.<sup>20</sup> Westmoreland County politician William Findley observed that in some quarters "every discription of oppression that they have heard named is brought into the account."<sup>21</sup>

Six years before the Whiskey Insurrection, "A Washington County Farmer," writing in a Pittsburgh newspaper, predicted the approach of a political crisis: "The period will shortly arrive, when on our prudent exertions will depend the well being of these fractured counties; a time which must give birth to petty oppressions, or rise in a growth of happiness under an envied democracy."<sup>22</sup> In 1793 William Littell of Fayette County worried that the people, "finding themselves continually duped and disappointed by those in whom they placed the utmost confidence, may be induced to despise all authority and condemn every law; then follows despotic power among the people, which is the most dreadful of all." His advice: "Let the people therefore think for themselves, and place no implic-

it confidence in the integrity and wisdom of any set of men living."<sup>23</sup>

Within this setting David Bradford was a striver working to make a place for himself. Early in his career in Washington County, he was clerk for a special commission investigating a dispute involving James Marshel, John Canon, and Dorsey Pentecost, prominent contenders for county leadership in the 1780s.<sup>24</sup> He played an active role in the Washington County "convention" of 1787. He sat for a term in the assembly. In February 1789 he was one of the founding members, and also one of two "Counsellors," of the "Washington Society for the Relief of Free Negroes and others, unlawfully held in Bondage."<sup>25</sup> He was secretary to the trustees of the Washington Academy. In 1793 the governor appointed him a commissioner to oversee the sale in Washington of lots in the town of Beaver, recently laid out on the Ohio River.<sup>26</sup> And in March of 1794, at the first meeting of "the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, in Washington County," he was elected the group's vice president. This group was the county's version of the Democratic-Republican societies which had begun to form in opposition to the policies of the Washington Administration.<sup>27</sup>

Yet despite his energy, Bradford was frustrated in his attempts to distinguish himself in Washington County. His position as deputy attorney general carried far less political weight than judgeships or the offices of prothonotary, clerk of courts, sheriff, or recorder of deeds and register of wills. He did not parlay any of his offices into a sustained climb to a position of significant power. At a time when other politicians in the region were building the alliances that were the beginning coalescence of a party system, he was not part of an effective political network. He had significant family connections but without visible effect on his political career. Before the Revolution, his brothers-in-law, James Allison and John McDowell, had settled in what became the northern part of Wash-

ington County. Between them, the two held numerous offices from the 1770s into the nineteenth century. They were also trustees of Washington Academy and then Canonsburg Academy, and elders of the Chartiers Presbyterian Church.<sup>28</sup> One historian has noted the potential for a "family machine" in an alliance of Bradford, Allison, and McDowell. Yet although his sisters' husbands had influence, Bradford was junior to them in age and a more recent immigrant to the area. Apparently he was not their political crony.<sup>29</sup>

Albert Gallatin, an important member of the Republican element allied with Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and others, sat in the state assembly with Bradford and made an acrid assessment of him. "Poor Bradford makes but a poor figure in our Legislature," Gallatin declared. "Tenth rate lawyers are the most unfit people to send there." Gallatin dubbed Bradford "an empty drum, as ignorant, [indolent] & insignificant as he is haughty & pompous."<sup>30</sup>

The Whiskey Insurrection threw the region's political system into flux and presented an opportunity to seek changes. Bradford played important roles at three meetings opposed to the federal liquor excise in 1791 and 1792.<sup>31</sup> Outright opposition to the federal excise before July 1794 took the form of threats against — or assaults upon — officers responsible for the tax's collection.<sup>32</sup> There is no evidence that Bradford was involved in any of those incidents. Nevertheless, Alexander Addison, the presiding state judge in the region and a staunch defender of order in the excise crisis, later claimed that Bradford's "disposition inclined him to omit all prosecution of such offences" as prosecuting attorney.<sup>33</sup>

In mid-July 1794, the serving of writs to distillers incited two armed confrontations at Bower Hill, the home of John Neville, federal excise inspector for Western Pennsylvania.<sup>34</sup> Bradford had no part in those events, and according to John Canon, who consulted him after the first incident at Bower Hill, "Bradford said he would not be concerned; let

the people go their own way."<sup>35</sup> Bradford later stated that he "dissuaded from all Violence, refused to give any Countenance, or enter into any deliberation." When Canon informed him of the incident at Neville's, he "disapproved in the Strongest Terms."<sup>36</sup>

Within a week, however, Bradford dropped this aloof policy. He delivered a long address in support of the excise resisters — "a most violent and inflammatory oration," one observer called it — at a July 23 gathering at the Mingo Creek meeting house in the Monongahela Valley settlements.<sup>37</sup> Soon thereafter two men stopped a postal rider carrying letters from Washington and Pittsburgh. When Judge Addison later made inquiries about the plan to intercept the rider, he could "trace it no higher than Bradford."<sup>38</sup> Bradford's actions had begun to shape the character of the developing situation.

At Canonsburg, Bradford, James Marshel, Canon, and four others examined the stolen mail. They also, without citing any authority to do so, drew up a circular calling a general muster of the region's militia battalions at Braddock's Field.<sup>39</sup> Evidently the original reason for the muster was to take arms or ammunition from Fort Fayette, the federal garrison in Pittsburgh, but after discussing the matter with militia officers, Bradford consented to issue another order countermanding the muster call.<sup>40</sup> A meeting on the countermand order was held in the town of Washington, where Marshel joined U.S. Senator James Ross of Washington County and others to support a retraction of the muster order. Bradford then reversed himself, denounced the countermand, and encouraged the militia to proceed to Braddock's Field as originally planned.<sup>41</sup>

Despite confusion over exactly what the orders were, the voluntary nature of each militia unit's response to the call, and the short interval between the call and the muster, there may have been as many as 7,000 people present at the muster at Braddock's Field on August 1-2.

On the second day, in a committee of representatives from the militia battalions, Bradford suggested that the assembled militia march into Pittsburgh as a demonstration of unity and strength. He was made one of the "generals" for the march.<sup>42</sup>

The Mingo Creek gathering had issued a call for a regional meeting, with delegates from every township, to convene on August 14 at Parkinson's Ferry on the Monongahela River.<sup>43</sup> On August 6, Bradford wrote letters to residents of Virginia's western counties, inviting them to send representatives. In one letter, he indicated that the central issue was whether to support those involved in the incidents at Neville's house, or instead "suffer them to fall a sacrifice to a federal prosecution." He continued:

On the result of this business we have fully deliberated, and have determined, with head, heart, hand, and voice, that we will support the opposition to the excise law. The crisis is now come: Submission or opposition — We are determined in the opposition — We are determined in future to act agreeably to system; to form arrangements, guided by reason, prudence, fortitude, and spirited conduct. . . . The cause is common to us all.<sup>44</sup>

Bradford brought a set of proposals for action to the Parkinson's Ferry meeting. They were unarguably bellicose. Brackenridge, who saw Bradford's "schedule," reported that it proposed "A committee of safety, magazines, arms, ammunition, clothing, provisions, &c." Albert Gallatin later testified that Bradford's proposals asked the meeting to "purchase or procure arms, and ammunition; subscribe money; raise volunteers, or draught militia; appoint committees to have the superintendence of those departments."<sup>45</sup> Marshel presented resolutions calling for a committee of safety "whose duty it shall be to call forth the resources of the Western Country, to repel any hostile attempts that may be made against the rights of the Citizen or of the body of the people."<sup>46</sup> Bradford insisted that the



standing committee be empowered "in case of any sudden emergency, to take such temporary measures as they may think necessary."<sup>47</sup>

Bradford was on a committee appointed to confer with commissioners from the federal and state governments. When they first met with the commissioners on August 21, he was apparently the only member of the committee resistant to the notion of submission to the government's terms. Brackenridge and Senator Ross, now one of the federal commissioners, endeavored "to take him in tow" and enlisted the aid of Pennsylvania's commissioners. According to Gallatin, the next day Bradford "said he saw the necessity of inducing the people to submit." On the 23rd the committee of conference acceded formally to the commissioners' terms, which required evidence that the region's citizens would submit to the government's authority.<sup>48</sup>

At a meeting of the standing committee at Brownsville on August 28-29, the conferees presented their report advising submission to the commissioners' terms. At the apogee of his career as a rebel, Bradford now, despite his earlier acquiescence, spoke vehemently against accepting the government's terms. "[H]e opposed the acceptance of the propositions, in direct and violent terms," Brackenridge recalled. "Speaking of the resources of war, arms, ammunition, &c. said he, 'We will defeat the first army that comes over the mountains, and take their arms and baggage.'"<sup>49</sup> William Findley described Bradford's speech as "a most extravagant harangue, in the course of which he urged the propriety of erecting an independent government" and criticized the federal government for its handling of such touchy issues as policy toward Native Americans, Spanish threats to Mississippi River commerce, and the continued British occupation of posts in the Northwest. "Let us be independent," said he, "and we will accomplish these objects in a few months."<sup>50</sup> Addison recalled that Bradford advocated independence for Western Pennsylvania and argued

that the region's geography, shielding it behind mountains, favored separation.<sup>51</sup>

After Bradford's speech a secret ballot revealed 17 members against acceptance of the commissioners' terms, while 40 favored submission to the government's terms.<sup>52</sup> A sizeable portion of the standing committee had voted against submission. Moderates such as Gallatin, striving to demonstrate that the region's political leadership could maintain order, believed that Bradford, without carrying the day, had done a great deal of damage.<sup>53</sup> The government's commissioners, disturbed by the lack of consensus, now imposed a new, stiffer requirement: each adult male must subscribe his name to a submission form in order to be included under the amnesty terms, then each county must certify whether excise offices could be reopened.<sup>54</sup>

On September 11, Bradford signed the submission statement. He also made a two-hour speech recommending submission, justifying this reversal, according to what Brackenridge learned of the speech from others, "on the principle of being deserted, and left to himself." Two days later he was one of those who met at the county courthouse to attest to Washington County's submission.<sup>55</sup> Although the signing of the submissions did not go as smoothly as the commissioners might have hoped, there was no longer any coherent body of resistance.

On October 2, another meeting convened at Parkinson's Ferry to seek a means of assuring the government of the region's submissiveness. Bradford was present, but delivered no inflammatory speeches. To Brackenridge he "appeared thoughtful," although he played an important role in the selection of David Redick of Washington County and William Findley as emissaries to George Washington at Carlisle.<sup>56</sup>

According to Washington's account of his meeting with Redick and Findley, they named Bradford as the only one of the "principal characters" involved in the excise

troubles who had resisted the government's terms of submission.<sup>57</sup> Bradford had now been identified to the administration as a lone recalcitrant among the prominent citizens involved with the "insurrection." Redick's and Findley's visit also made it evident that the administration was resolved to carry through whatever measures it thought appropriate to restore federal authority and punish the guilty. There was some doubt, too, whether Bradford's signing of the submission papers would count for much, since the amnesty excluded anyone who obstructed the law after the commissioners' formal offer of terms on August 22. Bradford's speech at Brownsville on August 29 seemed to put him outside the bounds of any amnesty, despite the fact that he later counseled for submission and signed the papers himself.<sup>58</sup>

Bradford left the region in October, before the government's forces arrived in the western country. The exact date of his departure and the details of his leave-taking are unknown.<sup>59</sup> He left his wife and several children behind in Washington County. On October 20, John Neville's son-in-law in Pittsburgh reported the rumor of his disappearance.<sup>60</sup> On the 30th, a militia captain at Gallipolis on the Ohio River learned that Bradford had passed downriver alone in a canoe. Four militiamen overtook him the next day, by which time Bradford had gone aboard a military contractors' boat operated by 13 men. Those men, several of whom were from Washington County, resisted the militiamen's attempts to arrest Bradford. The militiamen resorted to following the boat some distance downstream, offering \$50 to anyone who would assist in capturing Bradford. The government's troops discovered that Bradford had the sympathy of many people along the river, and he eluded capture.<sup>61</sup>

Sometime later — the date cannot be determined — Bradford alighted at Bayou Sara, above Baton Rouge in Spanish Louisiana. He continued to hold property in Pennsylvania and elsewhere in the Ohio

Valley.<sup>62</sup> His wife Elizabeth and their children eventually joined him at Bayou Sara, described years later as “a beautiful settlement” in “certainly one of the most favoured spots in Louisiana.” It was an excellent place to raise cotton, and Bradford became a planter.<sup>63</sup>

In May 1795 a federal grand jury in Philadelphia indicted him on a charge of high treason.<sup>64</sup> He was excluded from the general pardons issued by the government in the aftermath of the excise troubles.<sup>65</sup> Living in the Spanish colony, beyond the reach of U.S. judicial authorities, he evaded trial, but could not expect an individual pardon from Washington. Attorney General Charles Lee and District Attorney William Rawle advised the president that no one who stayed beyond the reach of the courts could be “a fit object of mercy.”<sup>66</sup>

In the fall of 1798, Bradford took advantage of the presence of Andrew Ellicott, who had surveyed boundaries in Western Pennsylvania in the 1780s and was now a commissioner marking the line between the United States and Spanish territory, to transmit a petition for pardon to John Adams, Washington’s successor as president. Bradford also enlisted James Ross to lobby the administration in his behalf. Passions had cooled, and Adams pardoned Bradford in March 1799.<sup>67</sup> He returned to Washington County at least once to settle business matters, and he made a tentative return to the practice of law in Louisiana.<sup>68</sup> The latter years of his life are especially hard to document.<sup>69</sup>

Even after the excitement and rancor aroused by the incidents of 1794 had settled, Bradford wrote little about his actions or motivations. As a result, he had almost no role in shaping later interpretations of his conduct. His reputation was formed by others’ published accounts, most notably Brackenridge’s *Incidents of the Insurrection* and William Findley’s *History of the Insurrection*. Both were quite willing for Bradford to assume as much of the opprobrium for the distasteful incidents of 1794 as could

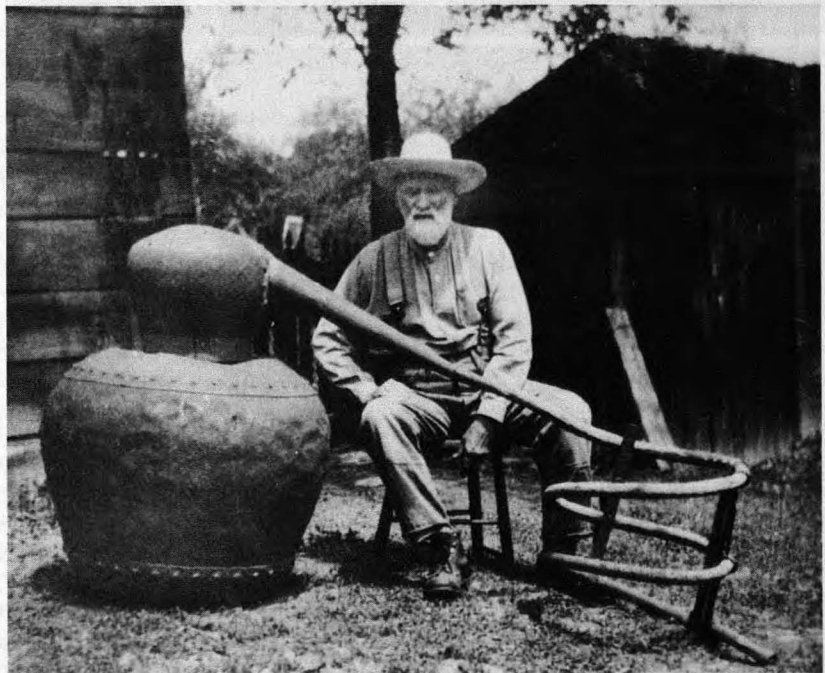
be laid upon him.

Brackenridge intended his narrative to justify the temporizing course which he and others had followed during the rebellion. The Bradford of his account was weak, cowardly, limited in vision and analytical abilities, dominated by a fear of the crowd but deluded by a notion that he had some control over the popular tide. One could mistake him for an oafish character from Brackenridge’s satirical novel, *Modern Chivalry*.<sup>70</sup> Brackenridge painted this picture to lend credence to the view that he was himself capable of “the management of Bradford.” But his own account shows that the scheme did not work. He could not manipulate Bradford at his pleasure.<sup>71</sup> Undaunted, he depicted Bradford as dim and weak, subject to forces he could neither comprehend nor control. Despite Brackenridge’s confident assertions, his interpretation of Bradford says at least as much about its author as it does about its subject. Nevertheless, it

has influenced succeeding generations’ views of Bradford.<sup>72</sup>

For his part, Findley meant to release the western country from a stigma. He needed to control the damage done by the excise resistance to the political opposition to the Federalist program. He aimed to show that the frontier counties were traditionally and inherently law abiding, and that the incidents of 1794 were not the result of a conspiratorial program or deep-seated western rebelliousness. To demonstrate that there was no chronic political disease in the region, he portrayed Bradford, like the Whiskey Insurrection itself, as an aberration — subject to a “frenzy.” Findley declared that one of Bradford’s speeches “did not contain sufficient good sense to be relished, even by many of his admirers.” It was an “absurd and inconsistent exertion.”<sup>73</sup> Findley made sure that the Bradford of his narrative would not be taken seriously as a political leader.

*While leaders such as Bradford, Gallatin and Brackenridge jockeyed for position among the settlers, the government’s whiskey tax galvanized these factions and sparked the insurrection. This copper still is similar to those used in the late eighteenth century, and came from the farm of Robert B. Bell (pictured, date unknown) of Lawrence, Pa.*





*'The Burning of Col. John Neville's House,' above, with the Whiskey 'boys' marching; 'The Mingo Meeting House, 1794,' top right, shows militia gathering before their march to burn down the house of tax collector Neville. These modern-day paintings of famous scenes in the insurrection — the original works are in acrylic — are by Washington, Pa., artist Ray Forquer. 'David Bradford and the Whiskey Boys,' suggests Forquer's ideas about Bradford: 'I think a lot of men thought of him like a willow tree — he blew with the wind.'*

Bradford was far from the scene when these accounts were published, and James Ross drew the obvious conclusion in his behalf: "Having fled, he sustained like a scapegoat, all the sins of the people. Every thing bad was ascribed to him because he was out of reach & out of danger."<sup>74</sup> Actually Bradford was much more like Brackenridge and Findley, and more a part of Western Pennsylvania's political culture than either author would have acknowledged. He was, as they were, attempting to find a place for himself in an uncongealed political situation.

While he never fully explained himself, Bradford did make some guarded statements about his conduct. On October 4, 1794, as Redick and Findley were about to make their appeal to George Washington, Bradford wrote to Ross and to Governor Thomas Mifflin. He believed that his behavior was "greatly misrepresented or entirely misunderstood," and asked that he not be condemned "till time & a future Explanation will throw more light & afford means of a more correct Judgment."<sup>75</sup> In both letters he referred specifically to only two aspects of his conduct, essentially the beginning and the end of his involvement in the insurrection.

In the letter to Ross, Bradford declared: "After the

Occurrences at Nevells House had taken place a new scene presented itself; a scene impressing on the minds of the Inhabitants of this Country, Ideas, that cannot easily be expressed." There was a "frenzy, that none can concieve of, but those who were amongst us."<sup>76</sup> In his petition for pardon in September 1798, his only other surviving comment on his actions, Bradford again used "frenzy" — Findley's word for the situation. Bradford's frenzy, however, was a broader, less superficial phenomenon than Findley's. Bradford declared that he "fell into the general errors which misguided the people of the western Counties of Pennsylvania." He characterized his own conduct as shaped by "the difficulty of the times."<sup>77</sup>

"The Object" of his entry into the excise resistance, he wrote to Ross, "was to cover the retreat of the real offenders, and to get Terms of accommodations."<sup>78</sup> He meant, apparently, that by widening the affair to involve more of the western counties' population, he might help obtain a general amnesty to protect the participants in the affairs at Neville's house from prosecution. Bradford later admitted that "his ultimate object" in the mail robbery and Braddock's Field muster had been "to cover what had been done, by making the opposition formidable to the government."<sup>79</sup>

With no mention of the intervening events, Bradford next, in his letters to Mifflin and to Ross, referred to his conduct late in the crisis, when at the Brownsville meeting on August 29 he opposed the commissioners' terms of submission. He claimed that he had favored submission and obedience to the law, but that many people mistrusted the commissioners and believed their real purpose was to identify offenders for punishment or to distribute bribes to popular leaders. In order to have any influence in favor of submission, Bradford claimed, it had been necessary for him to show that he had not sold out to the government. To shape public opinion in favor of submission "required great prudence and considerable Length of time. It required that the agents in effecting it should have, or at Least seem to have a Degree of the Spirit and firmness in opposition, that actuated the mass."<sup>80</sup> A week before he wrote Ross and Mifflin, Bradford made a similar explanation to Alexander Addison, arguing that he believed it necessary to make "some Shew of resistance" to the commissioners' terms or "the people would consider themselves betrayed and reject them."<sup>81</sup>

Ironically, Bradford may have borrowed this obfuscating line of argument from Brackenridge. In his account, Brackenridge argued that he had only appeared to be sympathetic to the excise resisters in order to buy time and gain their trust while he waited for passions to cool and worked to moderate the situation. He revealed himself to Bradford and Marshal sometime before August 21, informing them of his true sentiments.<sup>82</sup> Over a month before he employed it himself, then, Bradford was given the excuse that one might appear to sympathize with disorderly elements in order to maintain influence over them.



In his pardon application, Bradford eschewed any detailed examination of his part in the events from July to October 1794 and concentrated on the late stages of the excise crisis, perhaps from a belief that his speech at the Brownsville meeting was the least forgivable of his actions. He declared that people misunderstood the intentions of the government's commissioners and a lack of calm reasoning made it "dangerous" to oppose public opinion. As the frenzy receded, Bradford said, he "became as active and as sincere on the part of government as any friend the gov<sup>t</sup>. had in that country." His appeal for pardon was humble, contrite, and repentant, but left the great bulk of his actions in 1794 unassayed.<sup>83</sup>

An element common to Bradford's letters to Mifflin and Ross, his statements to Addison, and his petition to John Adams was the notion that he had resisted submission to retain influence with the people. Whether or not he genuinely wished to use it to promote submission, as he later claimed, retaining influence with the people was more important to him than disengaging himself from what the state and national governments considered a form of revolt. The excise crisis presented him with a chance to increase his political capital in the region. If he was simply swept along by a popular tide or driven by fear for his own safety, then his conduct was too obstinate, his measures too extreme, and he adhered to a radical course much longer than expediency required. He took deliberate, purposeful action and gave no sign of resisting a prominent role after addressing the meeting at Mingo Creek. His youth had prevented him from taking advantage of the American Revolution to improve his lot, as had so many older men. The Whiskey Insurrection was the next best thing.<sup>84</sup>

In this sense, Bradford was much more similar to Brackenridge than the latter cared to admit. Brackenridge, too, was politically ambitious but frustrated in his search for a sustained career in elective office. Like Bradford, he had been a one-term assemblyman. Unlike Bradford, he had, by way of his policies, his abrasiveness, and a series of acrimonious exchanges with William Findley in the *Pittsburgh Gazette* in 1787, made himself unpopular with many of his constituents.<sup>85</sup> Brackenridge also labored to bolster his political fortunes in the fall of 1794, presenting himself as a candidate for Congress. In the process, he acknowledged that Bradford held, for a time, real power. In an effort to explain his own failure to separate himself from any appearance of support for the excise resistance, Brackenridge noted that "Bradford had influence," and that alienating him might have hurt Brackenridge's chances in the congressional race.<sup>86</sup> After the Mingo Creek meeting, wrote Brackenridge, "I was thought to be at best but a half-way whig, as the term was, and Bradford the real man to be depended on."<sup>87</sup> For a time, then, the two were rivals for popular attention, and Brackenridge was jealous of Bradford's popularity. Brackenridge's sensitive ego was particularly galled by what he saw as Bradford's "idea of superiority over me" during the Whiskey Insurrection. Referring to an earlier day, he confessed that "Bradford,

though not a great lawyer, was a popular one, and I had found it useful, at a time when I was struggling to restore my practice, to stand well with him."<sup>88</sup>

One can find ideological elements, or at least a consistent rhetoric, in Bradford's public statements during the Whiskey Insurrection. "We have discovered that there are traitors and aristocrats . . . who are forming schemes to trample upon the liberties of the people," he stated. In his Brownsville speech he declared it "Dastardly to talk of property, when liberty is in question."<sup>89</sup> The call to muster at Braddock's Field, issued by Bradford and the six others, announced that "it is therefore now come to that crisis, that every citizen must express his sentiments, not by his words but by his actions. You are then called upon, as a citizen of the western country, to render your personal service. . . ."<sup>90</sup>

There are indications that he pointed to the French Revolution as an example. Findley reported as "well known" Bradford's "holding up Robespierre's system of terror for imitation" in his speech at Mingo Creek, and he alluded to the French again at Brownsville.<sup>91</sup>





According to Addison, Bradford cited both the American and the French Revolutions. Brackenridge asserted more generally that “the example of the Terrorists, as they have been called, in France, was in the public mind, especially with Bradford.”<sup>92</sup>

Bradford had some talent for adapting language to meet circumstances, and it is possible that his public statements were rhetorical flourishes. For example, in his petition for pardon in 1798 he depicted the federal government’s measures during the Whiskey Insurrection as humane and reasonable, teaching “the lesson of obedience with the affection of a parent.” “The best of men may err,” he stated. “The best no doubt have erred as well in politics as in religion; but there may be a repentance as glorious as innocence itself which in some degree may make atonement & reparation for frailties incident to human nature.”<sup>93</sup>

While there is little evidence of his political sentiments in general, there are indications that Bradford’s

talk of liberty, traitors, and aristocrats in 1794 had a sincere foundation. Over a decade later, as a Louisiana planter, he followed Pennsylvania politics in the pages of the *Aurora* and made observations to David Redick, with whom he carried on a warm correspondence. “When a man begins to grow insolent in office,” Bradford wrote, “... the people, as they have a right, ought to dismiss him from their employ. This is the glorious privilege of a republican Government.” Noting that officeholders “soon become graceless towards the people,” he favored rotation in office. Referring to a possible revision of the state constitution, he advised Pennsylvanians to do “with it as you please — It is in your own hands at any and all times as pot in the hands of the potters.”<sup>94</sup>

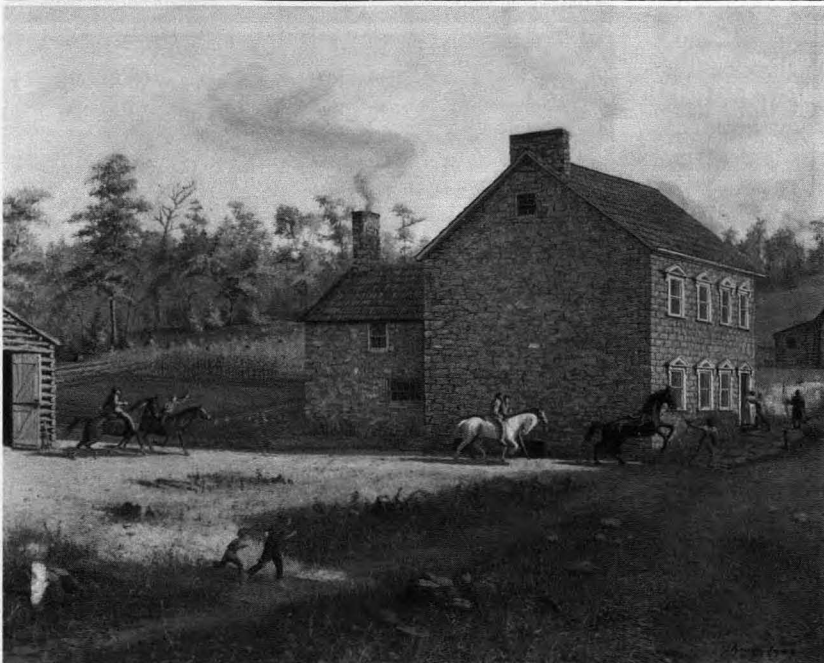
Certainly many of his contemporaries were loathe to accept him as any form of sincere, even if misguided, democrat with the interests of the people at heart. When Brackenridge heard that Bradford called

the Braddock’s Field muster and march through Pittsburgh a “glorious revolution accomplished without bloodshed,” he took it only as a sign that Bradford would continue “at all hazards” to support the excise resisters. At the muster, when Brackenridge tried to cajole Bradford into modifying a call for the expulsion of certain Pittsburgh residents, Bradford replied that he could not, for “the people came out to do something, and something they must do.” Brackenridge interpreted this statement to mean that Bradford was subject to the whims of the mob, that “he saw the necessity of giving a tub to the whale.” This cynical interpretation obscures Bradford’s report that “the people” had set out to “do something” — as well as the possibility that Bradford, far from intimidated, may have willingly taken on a active role in the process. “We ought to be firm,” he told Brackenridge, “. . . and unanimous.”<sup>95</sup> In Bradford’s eyes, Brackenridge may have been the waverer and the coward, the man of limited vision intent on his own self-interest.

In reporting that Bradford, in his Brownsville speech, opposed submission to the government’s terms “because he saw the fury of the people against the accepting, and was afraid to have it thought that he was for submitting,” Brackenridge presumed that Bradford was “afraid” for his person.<sup>96</sup> What Bradford actually may have feared was the loss of the popular attention and influence he had attained during the excise crisis. His actions, however motivated, had drawn the notice of thousands and given him power such as he had never possessed. His conduct identified him to George Washington and Alexander Hamilton as a dangerous rebel, and earned him comparisons with Robespierre. But it also made him popular to a degree he had never known before, as when a militiaman at Braddock’s Field waded into the Monongahela to dip a hatful of cool water for him to drink.<sup>97</sup>

The Whiskey Insurrection was as

*‘General David Bradford House (Front View),’ by J. Howard Iams, c. 1935. This oil painting by Iams, a descendant of Western Pennsylvania pioneers, shows Bradford at the front door of his home, about to leave for the gathering of local militia at Braddock’s Field. The buildings of ‘Little Washington’ now surround Bradford’s place — a house museum.*



much as anything else a crisis of local politics. A divided leadership group sent mixed signals to the region's inhabitants and to the state and national governments across the mountains. Local leaders with close ties to the federal executive and the enforcement of the excise, along with others who simply feared disruption, saw the excise troubles as a serious threat to political order. To them it was literally a "civil war."<sup>98</sup>

Other politicians, such as Findley and Gallatin, fell on the other side of the excise issue, but they, too, were deeply concerned for the region's political stability. They feared the broader constitutional consequences of armed resistance to law. As key figures in the growing Republican alliance, they were also realists who saw that the excise troubles gave their Federalist opponents a potent weapon against the partisan networks they were laboring to build in the western country. Bradford, on the other hand, took the disruption as a political opportunity. Marshel, Canon, even Brackenridge, did the same, although not to the same degree or in quite the same fashion.

These elements all moved in different directions in the summer and autumn of 1794. Equally significant were the region's many officeholders who made no prominent demonstration one way or the other during the Whiskey Insurrection. Their lack of outspoken involvement on the side of law and order helped bring on the hard response to the excise resistance, for in the Washington Administration's view, the local leadership's failure to control the situation was one of the factors requiring federal intervention.<sup>99</sup> The lack of involvement by so many of the region's political leaders also set the stage for Bradford — by Gallatin's lights a "tenth rate lawyer" and "empty drum" unfit for the state legislature — to assume a critical role during a political crisis.

If Bradford, the state's attorney for his county, really was motivated by fear for his own safety — or because he felt he must behave as a rebel to earn popularity — then

political authority in Western Pennsylvania was quite tenuous. If he was motivated by ambition or political frustration, then he shows the degree to which local political competition could be carried. His example implies not only a system in which popularity and influence could be thought attainable by "rebellious" deeds, but one in which the actual pursuit of such a course was, at least to some extent, possible. That he was even a temporary success indicates that many of those who distrusted officeholders, or were distressed by various problems relating to their situations within the new nation, were willing to entertain his methods — at least until it became clear that resisting the authority of government had no real chance at all. The federal commissioners believed that they saw in Western Pennsylvania a people who "have no compact among themselves that the will of the majority shall prevail."<sup>100</sup>

In the end Bradford failed. His goal, as Gallatin expressed it, had been to induce the region's population "to make a common cause with the rioters." Bradford himself used similar language: "The cause is common to us all."<sup>101</sup> He did not succeed in moving the region's people to a "common cause," either misreading the potential for such action or failing to communicate a message that could bring it about.

He faced a problem, however, which few politicians could have solved. Western Pennsylvania was a fragmented region. Powerful centrifugal forces worked against any efforts to unite and motivate its population. The very diversity of the residents' political complaints illustrates the problem. For some the difficulty was the excise; for others, it was the means of the law's enforcement; for others, it was officeholders' salaries, or the right to ship goods down the Mississippi, or protection against Native Americans, or the resolution of land titles, or conflicts over local political power. The excise crisis itself was a collection of localized incidents characterized by a milling confusion, difficult for anyone at the time to

comprehend as a whole.<sup>102</sup> It would be difficult even to communicate an effective political message in those circumstances, harder still to overcome inertia and bring about any real unity of action. Ironically the very localism that made Bradford's task so difficult helped make his partial success possible. As Judge Addison saw the situation, "every neighbourhood, considering itself [as the] people, thought it had a right to do as it pleased."<sup>103</sup>

A more astute politician might have seen the limitations on what was possible in the region and been more cautious. Perhaps he might also have anticipated the government's swift, strong response, although few westerners foresaw that George Washington's reaction would be so aggressive. Many believed that a punitive force could never be raised, or that it would never enter the western counties. Bradford might have seen himself benefitting from any of a variety of conclusions to the excise crisis. He demonstrated that a county politician of modest prior success could enhance his standing in the region by pursuing a bold course of action. Whether the westerners lost in their confrontation with government or forced concessions on the excise issue, any resolution of the crisis that had left him still on the scene might have allowed him to claim status as the champion of the region's rights. And he certainly could have anticipated a favorable position for himself if, in some way, the western country had indeed managed to separate itself from the rest of the nation.<sup>104</sup>

Unless new documents come to light, it will never be possible to know precisely what Bradford was up to in 1794. Regardless, his example demonstrates that the Whiskey Insurrection both was and was not about the federal tax on distilled spirits. The excise brought on the crisis and was the primary issue around which it revolved. But Bradford, who probably did more than any other individual to give the events of 1794 their face as an "insurrection," did not assume his lead-

ership role as an unhappy distiller. His message had to do with power.<sup>105</sup>

Bradford gambled his political future and lost. Yet in the short run he was a remarkable success. For a time, his assertive acts called the tune, and people who were brighter, abler, or more thoughtful reacted to his lead. His eventual lack of success illustrates the nature of the forces that made him so significant to George Washington and others for those weeks in 1794. The feelings of impotence, frustration, and restless discontent in Western Pennsylvania were so unfocused that he was unable to forge them into a movement of any real power. Nevertheless, his adventurism and the fleeting success it brought him demonstrate important features of the region's political fabric in the early years of the new republic. ■

<sup>1</sup>George Washington to Alexander Hamilton, Oct. 26, 1794, in Harold C. Syrett, et al., eds., *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton* (27 vols., New York, 1961-1987), 17:344, 345-footnote 11 (cited hereafter as *Hamilton Papers*). [Footnote references indicated by n hereafter.]

<sup>2</sup>Hugh Henry Brackenridge, *Incidents of the Insurrection in the Western Parts of Pennsylvania, In the Year 1794* (3 vols. bound as one, Philadelphia, 1795), 1:59; *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Nov. 8, 1794; Captain Francis D'Hebecourt to Henry Lee, Nov. 10, 1794, and Lee to D'Hebecourt, Nov. 22, 1794, in John B. Linn and William H. Egle, eds., *Pennsylvania Archives*, Second Series, vol. 4 (Harrisburg, 1876), 450-51, 470-71 (cited hereafter as *Pa. Arch.*). A reprint of this volume of the *Pennsylvania Archives*, differing from the original edition in pagination, was issued in 1896.

<sup>3</sup>Brackenridge, *Incidents of the Insurrection*, 2:29. The reference is to 1 Samuel 5:2-5, where the idol of Dagon falls onto its face after the Ark of the Covenant is brought into Dagon's temple at Ashdod.

<sup>4</sup>Two books have dealt with the Whiskey Insurrection in detail: Leland D. Baldwin, *Whiskey Rebels: The Story of a Frontier Uprising*, rev. ed. (Pittsburgh, 1968), originally published in 1939; and Thomas P. Slaughter, *The Whiskey Rebellion: Frontier Epilogue to the American Revolution* (New York, 1986).

<sup>5</sup>Boyd Crumrine, ed., *History of Washington County, Pennsylvania, with Biographical Sketches of Many of its Pioneers*

and *Prominent Men* (Philadelphia, 1882), 250, 483; Boyd Crumrine, *The Courts of Justice, Bench and Bar of Washington County, Pennsylvania* (Washington, Pa., 1902), 263, 263-64n, 304; *Pa. Arch.*, 111n; docket, Westmoreland County quarter sessions courts, Apr. 1773-Apr. 1783 (typescript), Clerk of Courts Office, Greensburg, Pa., 168. Crumrine provided the basic biographical outline upon which subsequent historians have directly or indirectly relied. An alternate version puts Bradford in the western country by 1773 or 1774: Donald Jackson and Dorothy Twohig, eds., *The Diaries of George Washington*, vol. 6: Jan. 1790-Dec. 1799 (Charlottesville, Va., 1979), 188-89n4.

<sup>6</sup>Crumrine, ed., *Washington County*, 471, 603; Earle R. Forrest, *History of Washington County, Pennsylvania* (Chicago, 1926), 1:834; Dorothy E. Fennell, "From Rebelliousness to Insurrection: A Social History of the Whiskey Rebellion, 1765-1802" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1981), 286.

<sup>7</sup>William Findley, *History of the Insurrection, in the Four Western Counties of Pennsylvania in the Year M.DCC.XCIV. With a Recital of the Circumstances Specially Connected Therewith: and an Historical Review of the Previous Situation of the County* (Philadelphia, 1796), 95-96. Findley was confused about some facts of Bradford's past. He reported, for instance, that Bradford became the deputy attorney general for Washington County at the time of the county's formation in 1781, and that he had represented the area in the Virginia assembly before resolution of the Virginia-Pennsylvania boundary conflict. Findley may have been wrong about Bradford's positions on the new-state and constitutional questions.

<sup>8</sup>Richard H. Kohn, ed., "Judge Alexander Addison on the Origin and History of the Whiskey Rebellion," in Steven R. Boyd, ed., *The Whiskey Rebellion: Past and Present Perspectives* (Westport, Conn., 1985), 52.

<sup>9</sup>James P. McClure, "The Ends of the American Earth: Pittsburgh and the Upper Ohio Valley to 1795" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1983), 382-417. Slaughter, *Whiskey Rebellion*, gives almost no notice to the Virginia-Pennsylvania jurisdictional conflict and probably exaggerates the "Westsylvania" movement of the revolutionary period. Fennell, "From Rebelliousness to Insurrection," 7-8, 24-38, pays more heed to the boundary dispute and its political legacy.

<sup>10</sup>Kohn, ed., "Judge Alexander Addison," 52.

<sup>11</sup>McClure, "The Ends of the American Earth," 531-61. All studies incorporating the issue of landownership, including Fennell, "From Rebelliousness to Revolution," and Slaughter, *Whiskey Rebellion*, have used Robert Eugene

Harper, "The Class Structure of Western Pennsylvania in the Late Eighteenth Century" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1969) as their basis. See also Lee Soltow and Kenneth W. Keller, "Tenancy and Asset-Holding in Late Eighteenth-Century Washington County, Pennsylvania," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 65 (January 1982), 1-15.

<sup>12</sup>*Pittsburgh Gazette*, June 9, 1787; Solon J. Buck and Elizabeth Hawthorn Buck, *The Planting of Civilization in Western Pennsylvania* (Pittsburgh, 1939), 172; Crumrine, ed., *Washington County*, 241; McClure, "The Ends of the American Earth," 550-51.

<sup>13</sup>Jean Badollet to Albert Gallatin, Dec. 14, 1793, Jan. 30, 1793 (originals at New-York Historical Society, cited hereafter as NYHS), in Carl E. Prince and Helene H. Fineman, co-directors, *The Papers of Albert Gallatin*, microfilm edition (Philadelphia, 1969), reel 1 (cited hereafter as *Gallatin Papers*). Regarding the efforts for a new county, see Gallatin to Badollet, Feb. 22, 1792, Dec. 18, 1792, May 3, 1793, July 31, 1793, and Badollet to Gallatin, July 8, 1793, July 23, 1793, Aug. 2, 1793, *ibid.*; and *Pittsburgh Gazette*, May 25, 1793.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, Feb. 15, 1794. Another issue distressing the county's southern residents was levies for courthouse construction. Badollet to Gallatin, Jan. 30, 1792, *Gallatin Papers* (original at NYHS); *Pittsburgh Gazette*, May 25, 1793; Crumrine, ed., *Washington County*, 464-66; Alfred Creigh, *History of Washington County from its First Settlement to the Present Time* (Washington, Pa., 1870), 136-37.

<sup>15</sup>Crumrine, ed., *Washington County*, 464, 601-03, 606; Creigh, *History of Washington County*, 150-51, 220-22; Buck and Buck, *Planting of Civilization*, 393-94; *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Jan. 19, 1793; Alexander Addison to [John Hoge], Dec. 17, 1791, Historical Collection, Washington and Jefferson College, Washington, Pa.

<sup>16</sup>*Pittsburgh Gazette*, Jan. 27, 1787.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, Feb. 17, 1787.

<sup>18</sup>The "Patriotic Convention" drew attacks from critics who declared it the product of a small self-interested group. "Censor" and "Publicus" rose to the meeting's defense. *Ibid.*, Feb. 24, Mar. 3, Mar. 17, Mar. 24, 1787.

<sup>19</sup>McClure, "The Ends of the American Earth," 577-78. The Hamilton's District Society (better known as the Mingo Creek Society), which was the organizational force behind the opening incidents of the Whiskey Insurrection in July 1794, was related to these efforts at political organization within the region. *Ibid.*, 578-91. On the issue of official salaries, see Jean Badollet to Albert Gallatin, June 6, 1793, *Gallatin Papers* (original at NYHS) and the letter of "William



Tell" in the *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Aug. 17, 1793.

<sup>20</sup> *Report of the Commissioners, Appointed by the President of the United States of America, to Confer with the Insurgents in the Western Counties of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1794), 5-6; Brackenridge, *Incidents of the Insurrection*, 1:86-87, 99-100; *Hamilton Papers*, 17:30, 31. On the Presque Isle and Indian warfare issues, see William Irvine and Andrew Ellicott to Thomas Mifflin (draft), June 5, 1794, and Irvine to Mifflin (copy), June 23, 1794, Irvine Papers, 12:54, 61, Historical Society of Pennsylvania (hereafter HSP).

<sup>21</sup> Findley to William Bradford, Sept. 16, 1794, Wallace Papers, 3:38, HSP.

<sup>22</sup> *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Apr. 12, 1788.

<sup>23</sup> William Littell to —, July 15, 1793, *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Aug. 3 and 10, 1793.

<sup>24</sup> *Minutes of the First[-Third] Session[s] of the Seventh General*

*Assembly, of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1782-1783), 966; *Minutes of the First[-Second] Session[s] of the Ninth General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1784-1785), 301; McClure, "The Ends of the American Earth," 403-08. As noted in Crumrine, ed., *History of Washington County*, 224n, Marshal's name frequently appears as "Marshall," but he signed it "Marshel."

<sup>25</sup> *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Feb. 14, 1789. Bradford was a slaveholder. In 1788, in accordance with Pennsylvania's gradual abolition act, he registered two slave children from his household. He owned two slaves in 1790, and later had slaves in Louisiana. Typescript of Washington County's slave registration lists, at Western Pennsylvania Historical Society; Crumrine, ed., *Washington County*, 259; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Heads of Families at the First Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1790: Pennsylvania* (Washington, D.C., 1908), 246; Bradford to David Redick, Nov. 30, 1801, and Feb. 9, 1803

(typescripts), David Bradford Letters, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University (hereafter LSU). For Bradford's role in a case involving a runaway slave from Virginia, see William McMachan to Henry Lee, Sept. 25, 1792, with enclosures, in Letters Received by the Executive, Box 75, Virginia State Library (VSL hereafter).

<sup>26</sup> Eugene Perry Link, *Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800* (Morningside Heights, N.Y., 1942), 170; Albert Gallatin, et al. to governor (abstract), received Feb. 28, 1793, *Gallatin Papers* (original at Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission); *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Mar. 30, 1793.

<sup>27</sup> David Redick, et al. to John Breckinridge, Apr. 2, 1794, Harry Innes Papers, vol. 5, Library of Congress (LC hereafter); Philip S. Foner, ed., *The Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800: A Documentary Sourcebook of Constitutions, Declarations, Addresses, Resolutions, and Toasts* (Westport, Conn., 1976), 127-30, 133-35; William Mill-

er, "The Democratic Societies and the Whiskey Insurrection," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 62 (1938), 342-47; Link, *Democratic-Republican Societies*, 14, 145-46. The administration's bleak view of democratic societies, made explicit in the aftermath of the Whiskey Insurrection, was shaped in large part by remonstrances from the Washington County group. *Hamilton Papers*, 16:258-60.

<sup>28</sup> Crumrine, ed., *Washington County*, 529, 707-08, 869-70, 876.

<sup>29</sup> Russell J. Ferguson, *Early Western Pennsylvania Politics* (Pittsburgh, 1938), 47. In 1792, James Hutchinson named McDowell and Allison, but not Bradford, as political allies of William Findley, James Smiley, and Albert Gallatin. Neither Findley nor Gallatin was on particularly friendly terms with Bradford. Hutchinson to Gallatin, Sept. 25, 1792, *Gallatin Papers* (original at NYHS).

<sup>30</sup> Gallatin to Thomas Clare, 9 Mar. 1793, and to Jean Badollet, same date, *Gallatin Papers* (originals at NYHS). Gallatin's



'President Washington's Coach Fording the Susquehanna River at Harrisburg,' by J. Howard Iams, c. 1935. In early October 1794, the president traveled to Western Pennsylvania to inspect the troops sent to quell the frontier uprising. An old frontiersman himself, Washington later wrote that the Susquehanna, where he crossed, teemed with 'Rock fish.' Here, the curious president holds open the coach door, watching the fish.

opinion may have been shaped by Bradford's opposition to Gallatin's election to the Senate the previous month. Ferguson, *Early Western Pennsylvania Politics*, 120.

<sup>31</sup> Aug. 1791 Washington County meeting: *Hamilton Papers*, 17:28-29n6. Sept. 1791 Pittsburgh meeting: Brackenridge, *Incidents of the Insurrection*, 3:18; *Pa. Arch.*, 20:22. Aug. 1792 Pittsburgh meeting: *ibid.*, 29-31; answers given by Josiah Tannehill, [1792-1793], in vol. 2 of Pennsylvania Whiskey Rebellion Collection, 1792-1796, LC (cited hereafter as *Pa. Whisk. Reb. Coll.*, LC); this meeting's proceedings are also in *Hamilton Papers*, 12:308-09n, and *Gallatin Papers*, reel 1.

<sup>32</sup> Baldwin, *Whiskey Rebels*, chapters 3-4; Slaughter, *Whiskey Rebellion*, 11-12, 109, 113, 150-51, 158, 166. Fennell, "From Rebelliousness to Insurrection," 5-24, puts the assaults on excise officers within the context of ritualized violence on the Pennsylvania frontier.

<sup>33</sup> Kohn, ed., "Judge Alexander Addison," 53; see also deposition of William Goudy, Sept. 29, 1792, *Pa. Whisk. Reb. Coll.*, LC, vol. 1.

<sup>34</sup> Baldwin, *Whiskey Rebels*, 113-20; Slaughter, *Whiskey Rebellion*, 177-81.

<sup>35</sup> Brackenridge, *Incidents of the Insurrection*, 3:136, quoting William Rawle's notes of trial testimony.

<sup>36</sup> Bradford to James Ross, Oct. 4, 1794, Timothy Pickering Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society (MHS hereafter); Bradford to Governor Thomas Mifflin, Oct. 4, 1794, *Pa. Arch.*, 396-97. Slaughter, *Whiskey Rebellion*, 268n33 and 271n29, mistakenly identifies Timothy Pickering as the recipient of the letter to Ross.

<sup>37</sup> Brackenridge, *Incidents of the Insurrection*, 1:32, 3:86. In describing Bradford's conduct I have relied on statements by eyewitnesses as much as possible.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:38-39.

<sup>39</sup> Alexander Fulton, petition to George Washington, n.d., *Pa. Whisk. Reb. Coll.*, LC, vol. 1; Brackenridge, *Incidents of the Insurrection*, 3:82, 97-98, 121-22; also *ibid.*, 1:38-39, 45, and Findley, *History of the Insurrection*, 93-94. For the muster call see Brackenridge, *Incidents of the Insurrection*, 1:40-41n; Findley, *History of the Insurrection*, 94-95; *Pa. Arch.*, 78-79.

<sup>40</sup> Bradford to Col. David Williamson, in Brackenridge, *Incidents of the Insurrection*, 3:128. For the circumstances of the countermand order see *ibid.*, 1:42-43, and Findley, *History of the Insurrection*, 103-04.

<sup>41</sup> Brackenridge, *Incidents of the Insurrection*, 1:43; Findley, *History of the Insurrection*, 104. Thomas Stokely may have been Brackenridge's source of information about the meeting, which neither Brackenridge nor Findley at-

tended.

<sup>42</sup> Brackenridge, *Incidents of the Insurrection*, 1:66, 3:148. For first-hand accounts of the discussions in the committee that day see *ibid.*, 1:52-65; 3:83-85, 110-11, 119-20. James Carnahan's colorful description of Bradford "in full martial uniform," with plumed hat and drawn sword as he "harangued the multitude," finds no support in witnesses' accounts. Carnahan apparently was not present at Braddock's Field. He gave his account of the Whiskey Insurrection in 1852 and did not cite sources of information for most of what he described. James Carnahan, "The Pennsylvania Insurrection of 1794, Commonly Called the 'Whiskey Insurrection,'" *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society* 6 (1853), 127, 145. Regarding the numbers involved, see Baldwin, *Whiskey Rebels*, 146-47, who tried to distinguish between those present at the muster and those who marched to Pittsburgh. In addition to the sources he cited, see *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Aug. 9, 1794.

<sup>43</sup> *Pittsburgh Gazette*, July 26, 1794.

<sup>44</sup> To inhabitants of Monongalia County, Aug. 6, 1794, in Brackenridge, *Incidents of the Insurrection*, 1:38n; also printed in *Pa. Arch.*, 111-12. For a letter to Harrison County residents, see Bradford to J. McCally, K. Robinson, T. Cottrall, and J. Black, Aug. 6, 1794 (contemporary copy), Executive Papers of Henry Lee, box 86, VSL, printed in William P. Palmer, ed., *Calendar of Virginia State Papers and Other Manuscripts* (Richmond, 1875-1893), 7:249.

<sup>45</sup> Brackenridge, *Incidents of the Insurrection*, 1:87, 3:138, including Rawle's notes of Gallatin's testimony.

<sup>46</sup> Marshal's manuscript copy of his resolutions is in *Gallatin Papers*, reel 3, under the date Aug. 14, 1794 (original at NYHS).

<sup>47</sup> Brackenridge, *Incidents of the Insurrection*, 1:87-99, 3:137-39; *The Speech of Albert Gallatin . . . in the House of Representatives of the General Assembly of Pennsylvania, on the Important Question Touching the Validity of the Elections Held in the Four Western Counties of the State . . .* (Philadelphia, 1795), 14-17 (and 53-54 for Marshal's original resolutions alongside the resolutions as adopted).

<sup>48</sup> Brackenridge, *Incidents of the Insurrection*, 1:102-07 (quotation p. 104), 3:139 (Rawle's notes); *Speech of Albert Gallatin*, 17. For the exchanges between the commissioners and the committee, see *Report of the Commissioners*; papers in the *Pa. Whisk. Reb. Coll.*, LC, vol. 1; and printed versions in *Pa. Arch.*

<sup>49</sup> Brackenridge, *Incidents of the Insurrection*, 1:111-16 (quotation p. 116); *Speech of Albert Gallatin*, 18.

<sup>50</sup> Findley, *History of the Insurrection*, 124-25.

<sup>51</sup> Addison deposition, [1794], copy in

Neville Papers, Carnegie Library, Pittsburgh (CLP hereafter); printed in *Pa. Arch.*, 390-91. There were newspaper reports of papers, supposed to contain details of separatist activities over several years, found in Bradford's house after he fled the region. Baldwin, *Whiskey Rebels*, 299n4; Slaughter, *Whiskey Rebellion*, 267n18. As Baldwin noted, if such papers really existed they surely would have appeared as evidence in the prosecution of insurgents. It seems unlikely, too, that Bradford, if involved in clandestine activities over a long period, would be so careless as to leave behind damning evidence. Before the Parkinson's Ferry meeting of Aug. 14, Brackenridge heard vague talk of making himself or Bradford "governor, on this side of the mountains," but at the meeting he "heard not a whisper of the kind." Brackenridge, *Incidents of the Insurrection*, 1:99.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:116-18. These totals allow for six men who later said they voted nay through misunderstanding.

<sup>53</sup> *Speech of Albert Gallatin*, 18.

<sup>54</sup> *Pa. Arch.*, 212-15, 233-37, 348-59; William Bradford, James Ross, and Jasper Yeates to Edmund Randolph, Sept. 2, 1794, and W. Bradford and Yeates to Randolph, Sept. 5, 1794, *Pa. Whisk. Reb. Coll.*, LC, vol. 1.

<sup>55</sup> Brackenridge, *Incidents of the Insurrection*, 2:20, 28-29; submission for Washington Township, and statement by the county's justices and committeemen, *Pa. Whisk. Reb. Coll.*, LC, vol. 2.

<sup>56</sup> Brackenridge, *Incidents of the Insurrection*, 2:32-35 (quotation p. 33).

<sup>57</sup> Jackson and Twohig, eds., *Diaries of George Washington*, 6:183-86.

<sup>58</sup> Brackenridge declared that Bradford "was out of the amnesty, no doubt, by his speech at Brownsville," but acknowledged that the issue of who would fall within the terms of a general pardon was unclear. Brackenridge, *Incidents of the Insurrection*, 2:29, 33-34.

<sup>59</sup> Legend has it that he "jumped from a rear window" of his house to escape capture, but the dragoons never got that close to him. George Swetnam and Helene Smith, *A Guidebook to Historic Western Pennsylvania* (Pittsburgh, 1976), 214.

<sup>60</sup> Isaac Craig to John Neville, Oct. 20, 1794, in Kenneth A. White, ed., "Such Disorders Can Only Be Cured by Copious Bleedings": The Correspondence of Isaac Craig During the Whiskey Rebellion," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 67 (1984), 238 (from Craig Papers, CLP). Alexander Hamilton reported the same thing on Oct. 25, perhaps with Craig as his source, since both also referred to Alexander Fulton. *Hamilton Papers*, 17:342-43.

<sup>61</sup> Captain Francis D'Hebecourt to Henry Lee, Nov. 10, 1794, and Lee to

D'Hebecourt, Nov. 22, 1794, *Pa. Arch.*, 450-51, 470-71. For the efforts to arrest and punish those who protected Bradford on the contractors' boat, see: *Hamilton Papers*, 17: 418n2; Clarence E. Carter, ed., *The Territorial Papers of the United States*, vol. 3 (Washington, D.C., 1934), 427-29; William Henry Smith, ed., *The St. Clair Papers: The Life and Public Services of Arthur St. Clair* (Cincinnati, 1882), 2:336; Isaac Craig to Anthony Wayne, Dec. 3, 1794, in White, ed., "Such Disorders", 241-42; and Alexander Addison to William Bradford, June 24, 1795, Wallace Papers, 3:32, HSP.

<sup>62</sup> Patent for lot #110, Beaver, Pa., July 31, 1798, Vertical File, Maryland Historical Society; Bradford's letters to David Redick in Bradford Letters, and papers relating to land transactions in Bradford Family Papers, LSU.

<sup>63</sup> Zadok Cramer, *The Navigator: Eighth Edition* (Pittsburgh, 1814; reprint, Ann Arbor, Mich., 1966), 221; William Darby, *A Geographical Description of the State of Louisiana, the Southern Part of the State of Mississippi, and Territory of Alabama*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1817), 94-95; Bradford to Redick, Nov. 30, 1801, Feb. 9, 1803, Aug. 20, 1805 (typescripts), Bradford Letters, LSU.

<sup>64</sup> Albert Gallatin to Hannah Gallatin, May 8, 1795, to Jean Badollet, May 20, 1795, and to Thomas Clare, May 30, 1795, *Gallatin Papers* (originals at NYHS); William Rawle to Alexander Addison, Aug. 15, 1795, *Pa. Arch.*, 535-36.

<sup>65</sup> Henry Lee's Nov. 1794 proclamation, *ibid.*, 479-80, and in *Hamilton Papers*, 17:380n14. See also Rawle to Addison, Dec. 24, 1794, *Pa. Arch.*, 2nd. Ser., 4:500-02. Alexander Hamilton's instructions regarding those excluded from the pardon are in the Rawle Papers, 1:111, HSP, and printed in *Hamilton Papers*, 17:378. The draft of Washington's 1795 proclamation, from which Bradford was exempted as an indicted fugitive, is in Petitions for Pardons, 1789-1860, Box 1, Misc. Files — Washington's Term, General Records of the Department of State (Record Group 59), National Archives (hereafter RG 59, NA).

<sup>66</sup> Lee to Washington, Apr. 18, 1796, and Apr. 25, 1796, *Pa. Whisk. Reb. Coll.*, LC, vol. 2. See also the petition of some Washington, Pa., residents (including James Allison, Bradford's brother-in-law), Dec. 3, 1795, asking that the president's pardon be extended to everyone without exception, and copy of reply, Apr. 24, 1796, *ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Bradford to Ellicott, Oct. 5, 1798, and Ellicott to Ross, Nov. 9, 1798 (draft), Ellicott Papers, LC; Ross to Winthrop Sargent, Apr. 11, 1799, Winthrop Sargent Papers, MHS; papers relating to Bradford's pardon, case #19, Adams Administration, Petitions for

Pardons, 1789-1860, RG 59, NA.

<sup>68</sup> Bradford to Redick, July 24, 1800, Nov. 30, 1801, May 30, 1805, July 1, 1805 (typescripts), Bradford Letters, LSU; Ross to Sargent, Oct. 4, 1800, Sargent Papers, MHS.

<sup>69</sup> At the Bradford House museum in Washington, Pa., his death is said to have occurred in 1810. Documents in the Bradford Family Papers, LSU, confirm only that he was no longer alive in December 1816.

<sup>70</sup> Brackenridge, *Incidents of the Insurrection*, 1:30-31, 32, 55, 105, 118-20; 3:10, 150. Claude Milton Newlin's edition of *Modern Chivalry* (New York, 1937) combines the various components of the novel originally published from 1792 to 1815.

<sup>71</sup> Brackenridge, *Incidents of the Insurrection*, 1:87-88, 92-93, 94-95, 104.

<sup>72</sup> Baldwin, *Whiskey Rebels*, 138, 196, 271, 291n8, 292n4; Thomas P. Slaughter, "The Friends of Liberty, the Friends of Order, and the Whiskey Rebellion: A Historiographical Essay," in Boyd, ed., *Whiskey Rebellion*, 11, 15; Slaughter, *Whiskey Rebellion*, 183-86, 201. Fennell, "From Rebelliousness to Insurrection," and Jacob E. Cooke, "The Whiskey Insurrection: A Re-evaluation," *Pennsylvania History* 30 (1963), were less distracted by Brackenridge's depiction of Bradford.

<sup>73</sup> Findley, *History of the Insurrection*, 124-25.

<sup>74</sup> Ross to Winthrop Sargent, Oct. 4,

1800, Sargent Papers, MHS.

<sup>75</sup> To Mifflin, Oct. 4, 1794, *Pa. Arch.*, 396-97.

<sup>76</sup> To Ross, Oct. 4, 1794, Pickering Papers, MHS.

<sup>77</sup> Petition to President John Adams, Sept. 20, 1798, RG 59, NA.

<sup>78</sup> Bradford to Ross, Oct. 4, 1794, Pickering Papers, MHS.

<sup>79</sup> Brackenridge, *Incidents of the Insurrection*, 3:150. Brackenridge's informant was John Hollingsworth, who had seen Bradford in New Orleans. *Ibid.*, 113. According to Ross, Bradford suggested, after proposing that the militia at Braddock's Field should march through Pittsburgh, "that the news of five thousand men having marched through that place, would strike terror into the minds of all below, who might dream of punishing any thing that had been done." *Ibid.*, 120. See also *Speech of Albert Gallatin*, 11; Findley, *History of the Insurrection*, 109.

<sup>80</sup> Bradford to Ross, Oct. 4, 1794, Pickering Papers, MHS.

<sup>81</sup> Addison deposition, Neville Papers, CLP; also in *Pa. Arch.*, 390-91.

<sup>82</sup> Brackenridge, *Incidents of the Insurrection*, 1:103-04.

<sup>83</sup> Bradford's petition to President John Adams, Sept. 20, 1798, RG 59, NA. Bradford's Oct. 5, 1794, letter to Isaac Craig, published in White, ed., "Such Disorders," 235-36, gives Bradford's version of conversations with Brackenridge, but provides no explanation of his own behavior. On the subject of this

"Tarring and Feathering," by J. Howard Iams, c. 1935. This linoleum block print depicts one response by local insurgents to the whiskey tax. The most famous victim of such acts was Robert Johnson, a federal tax collector for Allegheny and Washington counties.





letter see also Brackenridge, *Incidents of the Insurrection*, 2:37-43; 3:84, 110-11. The initial applications for Bradford's pardon came in the form of four appeals from his wife to George Washington: Elizabeth Bradford to Washington, Dec. 10, 1794, and Jan. 22, 1796, Pa. Whisk. Reb. Coll., LC, vol. 2; Sept. 10, 1795, Washington Papers, LC; and Dec. 10, 1795, Pickering Papers, MHS. Her letter of Sept. 10, 1795, may have been directed to Ross or another resident of Washington, Pa., then forwarded to the president. Her petition of Dec. 10, 1795, was sent to Ross with a cover letter asking him to give the petition to the president. The cover letter mentioned a letter from her husband providing more detail; this may refer to David Bradford's Oct. 4, 1794, letter to Ross.<sup>84</sup> Over 25 years ago, Jacob Cooke noted the importance of maneuvering by ambitious local politicians such as Bradford, as well as the role of personal popularity as a basis for influence. Cooke, "Whiskey Insurrection," 337-39.<sup>85</sup> See McClure, "The Ends of the American Earth," 532-36, and the issues of the *Gazette* cited there. Claude Milton Newlin, *The Life and Writings of Hugh*

*Henry Brackenridge* (Princeton, N.J., 1932), 95-98, 112-14, discusses Findley as the model for the biting portrayals of Traddle the weaver and Teague O'Regan, characters in Brackenridge's satirical poetry and fiction.

<sup>86</sup> Brackenridge, *Incidents of the Insurrection*, 2:34. Brackenridge later learned that both Bradford and Marshal had declared they would not support him for Congress because of his duplicity during the excise troubles. *Ibid.*, 3:112. Albert Gallatin won the election to Congress.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:49.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:34, 3:28. Baldwin, *Whiskey Rebels*, 41, noted that Bradford and Brackenridge were competitors for popular attention before the Whiskey Insurrection.

<sup>89</sup> Brackenridge, *Incidents of the Insurrection*, 1:116, 3:121.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:40n.

<sup>91</sup> Findley, *History of the Insurrection*, 100, 125.

<sup>92</sup> Addison deposition, Neville Papers, CLP, also in *Pa. Arch.*, 390-91. Brackenridge, *Incidents of the Insurrection*, 1:117; see also 54-55, 111.

<sup>93</sup> Bradford petition for pardon, RG 59,

NA.

<sup>94</sup> Bradford to Redick, Aug. 20, 1805 (typescript), Bradford Letters, LSU.

<sup>95</sup> Brackenridge, *Incidents of the Insurrection*, 1:63, 81.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:150.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:55.

<sup>98</sup> See John Gibson to Thomas Mifflin, July 18, 1794, *Pa. Arch.*, 69; Isaac Craig to Samuel Hodgdon, Aug. 22, 1794, Craig Papers, CLP.

<sup>99</sup> *Hamilton Papers*, 17:180-90.

<sup>100</sup> Wallace Papers, 3:42, HSP.

<sup>101</sup> *Speech of Albert Gallatin*, 11; Brackenridge, *Incidents of the Insurrection*, 1:38n (Bradford's letter to Monongalia County).

<sup>102</sup> McClure, "The Ends of the American Earth," 627-28.

<sup>103</sup> *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Dec. 27, 1794.

<sup>104</sup> Baldwin declared that "it is hard to escape the conclusion that he had visions of himself as the Washington of the West, laying the foundation of a new nation." Baldwin, *Whiskey Rebels*, 138.

<sup>105</sup> Bradford owned a still, according to Fennell, "From Rebelliousness to Insurrection," 286. But he seems never to have presented himself as a disgruntled victim of the excise tax.

# Sons and Daughters of Labor

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