James Logan Biography

James Logan

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Biography

James Logan (1674-1751), American colonial statesman and scholar, became noted as a jurist, political philosopher, and botanist.

James Logan was born on Oct. 20, 1674, in Lurgan, Ireland, of Scottish parents. His father, an Episcopalian clergyman turned Quaker, headed a Latin school in Lurgan. James was apprenticed to a linendraper but later succeeded his father as a schoolmaster at Bristol, England. After further study he entered the shipping trade, where he so impressed William Penn with his ability that the proprietor of Pennsylvania took him to America in 1699.

Penn made Logan secretary of Pennsylvania and clerk of the provincial council; when Penn returned to England in 1701, Logan became commissioner of property and receiver general as well. By 1704 he was a fully qualified council member and remained so for 43 years.

Logan dominated the aristocratic Proprietary party and greatly influenced provincial administration. He was opposed by the democratic faction, which wanted reduced proprietary authority. Charges that Logan had usurped power were quashed when he took his case to England and returned in 1712 completely vindicated. In 1714 he married Sarah Read; the couple had five children.

Logan broke with Pennsylvania's governor when the latter joined the party attempting to weaken proprietary control. A wordy pamphlet controversy ensued. The governor's replacement made Logan county justice, judge of common pleas, and provincial chief justice. In 1736 Logan delivered a "Charge ... to the Grand Inquest," outlining man's duties to society. Though he believed in self-defense, Logan urged fellow Quakers who could not approve frontier military appropriations to decline legislative office. Upon the governor's death, Logan became acting governor. His 2 years in office were marked by violence arising from a Maryland border dispute and a questionable purchase of land from the Delaware Indians.

Logan accumulated a fortune in trade and lands. In 1730 he completed a fine brick mansion near Germantown, where he lived luxuriously and studied literature and science, especially botany. He corresponded widely, made reports to the Royal Society, and published *Impregnation of the Seeds of Plants* (1739) and translations of Cato and Cicero (1735 and 1744). Logan retired from the council in 1747 and died on Oct. 31, 1751.