



TOMAHAWKS, TRADE AND TAXES

1666

Jersey Justice In Olden Days

1787

The first native son to greet the first Connecticut Yankee in the meadows bordering the Passaic River was an Indian Chief with a tomahawk and a tax bill. "Greetings, my fellow craftsman," saluted the Yankee guilefully. "Our little band of peace-loving patriots has traveled over land and sea to escape Death and Taxes, but I see you have them with you. It is our custom, when allowed a choice, to take Taxes. Patience, Brother! We are prepared to make a most generous offer. In exchange for twenty-two square miles of your virgin soil, your finest harbors and choicest timber land, we will give you, in perpetuity, or until we know each other better, a barrel of jewsharps, two dozen looking glasses, a quintal of sea shells, a basket of clay pipes, a bale of cut plug, a pot of fish hooks, a basket of nutmegs ("Old Hickory" brand), and a keg of Ancient Jamaica Rum—all bearing the royal seal."

"Nutmeg—ugh! ugh! Rum—yum! yum!" grunted the Indian Chief, dropping his tomahawk, and the deal was consummated as soon as the militia arrived and the Parson emerged from the tall grass to conduct the services.

Thus, was the settlement of New Work, in the County of Essex, established in the year 1666, and the tomahawk gave way to the flintlock and the tax collector went on his way.

There was little to tax in that day and scarcely any cash in the colonies. East Jersey was without for-

eign trade, and the farmers and immigrants kept their money in the Dutch oven where the Manhattan merchants couldn't find it. In West Jersey, the frugal Quakers, recently arrived from England, were in good financial standing, but they didn't choose to use their cash in trade—in most cases, goods were exchanged. As a result taxes in East Jersey at first were paid with the products of the farm; in West Jersey, in "coin or skins or money." An attempt to exact payment altogether in cash, failed to produce the desired revenue, in West Jersey, so a Salem County Grand Jury substituted "wheat, cheese and butter" in cases where cash was not available. Lord Cornbury was enjoined by the crown from giving "consent to any act or acts to lay any tax upon lands that lye unprofitable."

After the Union, in 1704, a revenue act was passed assessing innkeepers, merchants and traders, slave holders, etc. The minimum tax on all freemen was six shillings. Each county was a separate unit and required to pay its proportionate share of the total tax.

Then came that horrendous dog tax, made necessary because chasing and killing sheep was a favorite pastime of dogs. If you owned a single dog, or harbored a stray one, the tax was two shillings six pence, and, if you owned several, the tax was seven shillings six pence per year for every pug over six months of age.