

STORIES of New Jersey

At Freehold, just 11 miles away from the Mount Pleasant estate, lived Eleanor Forman, a beautiful, gentle lady whose attractions outweighed those of the sea for Philip. It is said that they corresponded in verse during their courtship, but unfortunately the letters were destroyed in the fire that later razed their home. Eleanor and Philip were married April 15, 1790.

The new country, operating under the constitution which incorporated the ideals Freneau and others had championed, was facing political problems that threatened the Union. From Boston to Charleston the battle between strong central government and state's rights was being fought with hot words and bitter animosity. In Philadelphia, the capital, the Federalist party of Hamilton, champions of a strong central government, had two papers, while Jefferson's anti-Federalist party had none. The accusations of "monarchy" and "tyranny" that the anti-Federalists leveled at their opponents, therefore, were but whispers against the roar of "radical" and "atheist" that the Federalist papers hurled at them.

Jefferson, anxious to have a paper in Philadelphia representing the views of his party, readily accepted James Madison's suggestion that Freneau be given a position in the Department of State. Jefferson offered the poet the job of translator at \$250 a year, and, it is very likely, suggested to him the establishment of a paper in Philadelphia. A letter from the Secretary of State to his son-in-law at the time said:

We have been trying to get another weekly or half weekly set up...We hoped at one time to have persuaded Freneau to set up here, but failed.

In August 1791 Freneau finally accepted the job as clerk for foreign languages in the State Department, after ascertaining that he could supplement the small salary by publishing the kind of paper Jefferson wanted.

On October 31, 1791, the first issue of the *National Gazette* was published, and Freneau's most important excursion into the political life of the country began. The Federalist paper explicitly charged that Freneau was the paid tool of Jefferson, and the *National Gazette* spared neither the policies nor the personalities of the Federalist party. Soon the most important people were drawn into the fight. Hamilton wrote a series of letters denouncing Freneau and Jefferson in John Fenno's *Gazette of the United States*. Even Washington was piqued by the poet's attacks on his policies, and at a cabinet meeting called him "that rascal, Freneau." Freneau had been sending the President three copies of each edition of his paper, which Washington considered a deliberate insult.

"That rascal, Freneau" was not intimidated by the powerful interests opposing him. He was caught up in the surge of democratic equality that was spreading throughout Europe and America from the deluge of the French Revolution. His attacks against the "monarchical" and "tyrannous" policies of the Federalist party reached a climax in the Citizen Genet Affair. Genet had been sent to America as the minister of the new French Republic to obtain this country's aid for France in her war against England. Freneau fiercely supported his claim, but Washington was opposed to involving the United States in war. When the Frenchman threatened to take the question to the American people, this indignity to the President turned the temper of the country, and not only Genet but also his supporters were discredited. Beaten down in the hail of opposition was the *National Gazette*, and with it, Philip Freneau.