Connecticut's First Family: William Pitkin and His Connections

by Bruce Colin Daniels
As one phase of the Bicentennial observation, The American Revolution Bicentennial Commission of Connecticut has authorized scholars in a wide range of study to write a series of monographs on the broadly defined Revolutionary Era of 1763 to 1787. These monographs will appear yearly beginning in 1973 through 1980. Emphasis is placed upon the birth of the nation, rather than on the winning of independence on the field of battle.

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Connecticut's First Family:
William Pitkin and His Connections
For

My Mother & Father,

Willa & Howard Daniels
Connecticut's First Family: William Pitkin and His Connections

By BRUCE COLIN DANIELS

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HARTFORD, May 12.

Last Thursday being the Anniversary
Feast (agreeable to the Royal Char-
ner granted to this Colony) the follow-
ing Gentlemen were elected, viz.

Hon. WILLIAM PITKIN, Esq.

Government.

Hon. JONATHAN TRUMBLE, Esq.

Deputy-Governor.

Assistants.

HUSBAND HUNTINGTON, Esq;

MATTHEW GREEWOLD, Esq;

SHERMAN CONANT, Esq;

ELISHA SHELTON, Esq;

ELIPHALET DYAR, Esq;

JAMES HUNTINGTON, Esq;

WILLIAM PITKIN, Jun., Esq;

ROGER SHERMAN, Esq;

ROBERT WALKER, Esq;

ABRAM DAVENPORT, Esq;

WILLIAM-SAMUEL JOHNSON, Esq;

JOSEPH SPENCER, Esq;

In Gentlemen, with an "prefix'd to their
Name, are new Members.

JOSEPH TALOOTT, Esq; Treasurer.

GEORGE WYLLYS, Esq; Secretary.
The Pitkin Family in
Eighteenth-Century Connecticut:
The Colony's Most Powerful Family

The family that spawned William Pitkin III, governor of Connecticut from 1766 until his death in 1769, was eighteenth-century Connecticut's most politically powerful family. Governor Pitkin, who achieved fame among historians by his turbulent election in 1766, was but one of two dozen politically-prominent Pitkins in the years between 1700 and 1783. The home base for the family was the Third Society (parish) of Hartford or the East Society as it was sometimes called because it was on the eastern side of the Connecticut River and was separated from the rest of Hartford by the river. The East Society was an integral part of colonial Hartford and was not incorporated as a separate town until 1783 at the end of the Revolution when it became the town of East Hartford. From this secure base of Hartford's East Society, the Pitkin family supplied political leadership to the Third Parish, the town of Hartford, the county of Hartford, and the colony of Connecticut.

The Pitkin family could quite easily be misjudged because of events in Connecticut's eighteenth-century colonial history and the interpretations historians have placed on these events. Richard Bushman, in From Puritan to Yankee: Character and the Social Order in Connecticut, 1690-1765, has shown convincingly that in the first sixty-five years of the eighteenth century, under the economic stimuli of land hunger and land speculation and under the religious stimulus of the Great Awakening, an old era of calm, deference, and respect for authority, was replaced by a new era of frenetic activity, impassioned politics, and relatively more democratic social attitudes.1 Oscar Zeichner, in his study of the pre-Revolutionary years in Connecticut, saw much the same change.2 Both men showed that the new era was led during the Great Awakening by New Lights who were in favor of the religious revival and were opposed to the Standing Order of the Connecticut churches. These New Light leaders of new "yankee" social forces triumphed, both historians write, with the election of the New Light politician, William Pitkin, to the governor's chair, and the ouster from that chair of the Old Light incumbent, Thomas Fitch.3 One might infer from this, though neither Bushman nor Zeichner does explicitly, that the Pitkin leaders of the Revolutionary years were upstarts who pumped new political blood into Connecticut's political system. Nothing could be further from
the truth. William Pitkin III, the governor, was a New Light and later an active pre-Revolutionary leader, and he may have represented ideological forces that were new. But his own social and political ancestry was rooted firmly in an impeccable past of family leadership, responsibility, and respectability.

The Pitkin family first achieved its dominant position in Hartford and in the colony in the first twenty years of the eighteenth-century. The first Pitkin in Connecticut, William Pitkin I, or "William the immigrant," as he was sometimes called by the family, was one of a dozen of the most important leaders in Connecticut in the second half of the seventeenth century, and he was undoubtedly Hartford's most active and influential politician at the time of his death in 1694. He started a dynasty of Pitkins that would see Hartford's leadership pass from himself to William Pitkin II, to William Pitkin III, and to William Pitkin IV between the end of the seventeenth century and the Revolution. All four William Pitkins were not only Hartford's leading officeholders, but they were also dominant leaders on the colony level as well. Only one leader in Hartford, Joseph Talcott, governor of Connecticut from 1725 to 1742, could exceed any of the William Pitkins in officeholding and power. Each generation of William Pitkins, after the first one, was accompanied by a host of brothers and cousins bearing the Pitkin name who were also extremely influential in local and colony-level decision-making and officeholding. A quantitative measure of officeholding that counted the number of terms elected to the major town and colony offices of assistants to the governor (the most prestigious offices in the colony after the governor and deputy governor), deputy to the General Assembly, town selectmen, town meeting moderator, town clerk, and town treasurer, revealed that men bearing the name Pitkin filled about 35% of these terms among Hartford men during the period 1701-1783. Measuring the top ten leaders in Hartford in terms of these offices for the three twenty-year periods between 1701 and 1760 and the two ten-year periods immediately before and after independence, also reveals the growing strength of the Pitkins. In the first period, 1701 to 1720, only one Pitkin, William II, was among the ten top officeholders. Between 1721 and 1740, three Pitkins were among Hartford's leading ten officeholders. Between 1741 and 1760, four Pitkins were among the ten top officeholders, and in the ten years immediately before the Revolution, 1766 to 1775, four Pitkins were still among the top officeholders. In the ten years after independence was declared, three Pitkins were among Hartford's ten top officeholders.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Officeholder</th>
<th>Terms Elected</th>
<th>Officeholder</th>
<th>Terms Elected</th>
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</table>
2. Aaron Cooke 21
3. Joseph Talcott 17
4. Hezekiah Wyllys 17
5. Nathaniel Stanley 16
6. Cyprian Nichols 14
7. William Whiting 9
8. John Haynes 8
9. Joseph Wadsworth 7
10. Nathaniel Hooker 7

1741-1760

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Joseph Pitkin</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1. John Pitkin</td>
<td>40</td>
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<td>2. William Pitkin III</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2. William Pitkin IV</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>5. Nathaniel Stanley II</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5. George Wyllys</td>
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<td>7. Thomas Seymour</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7. William Pitkin III</td>
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<td>10. Ozias Pitkin</td>
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<td>10. Elisha Pitkin</td>
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1766-1775

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<tr>
<td>2. Benjamin Payne</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2. William Pitkin IV</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Thomas Seymour</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3. James Church</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. George Wyllys</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4. Oliver Ellsworth</td>
<td>7</td>
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1776-1785

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<td>2. Benjamin Payne</td>
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<td>2. James Church</td>
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<td>3. Thomas Seymour</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3. Oliver Ellsworth</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. William Pitkin IV</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5. Ashbel Pitkin</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

These lists measure only elected town and colony offices. But the Pitkin family was equally dominant in the offices elected by the Third Society, in the offices appointed at the county level by the General Assembly, and in the quasi-elected offices of the militia. Their power in terms of officeholding can be found in every level of Connecticut government.

Of course it is not surprising to historians of seventeenth-century Puritanism to learn that a family like the Pitkins existed in Connecticut. Edmund S. Morgan, in the definitive qualitative analysis of Puritan family life, has stressed that Puritans intended the family to be, in Cotton Mather's words, "the very first society that by the direction and providence of God, is produced among the children of men." God chose to lay the foundation of society in the family, "making that
the mother hive, out of which both those swarms of state and church issued forth.”7 Despite the tendency towards nuclear families caused by the exigencies of immigration to the new world, there is every evidence that seventeenth-century Puritans consciously sought to recreate extensive kinship networks as they had known them in England. The Pitkin family in Connecticut shows that with some groups that attempt was eminently successful. Samuel Sewell’s inclusive definition of his family, when he refers to distant relations by marriage as “brother,” reveals how much larger than the nuclear unit the family network could be.8 Morgan, however, only mentioned the political role of the family network and emphasized instead the ecclesiastical and economic roles. Perhaps families like the Pitkins show that the political role should also be emphasized.

Other historians of the family in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries distinguish between the “household,” which was nuclear, and the family, which was not. John Demos shows beyond a doubt that in Plymouth Colony units usually existed which were composed of only father, mother, and children (and servants), and which were similar to our modern nuclear families.9 These units, however, were “households” as distinct from families. A family in Plymouth Colony was the wider kinship unit which Demos believes to be much stronger and more meaningful than today’s kinship units. The usefulness and interdependence of the wider family can be seen in the way children in households related to this wider family. The “putting out” of children as servants or as apprentices often ran along family lines.10 Sons and daughters frequently learned their trades or social responsibilities from uncles, aunts, cousins, and grandparents. Custody over orphaned children almost always followed blood lines rather than marriage lines. For instance, a grandfather or an uncle by blood lines would normally get control of a child rather than a stepfather who was married to the child’s deceased mother but had no blood connection.

Philip Greven, in his study of four generations of family life in colonial Andover, Massachusetts, also emphasizes the concept of the wider kinship unit.11 He feels that the traditional tri-generational family, composed of grandparents, parents, and children, is far too narrow a definition of the word family to be useful for colonial America. Also too narrow is the concept of household. Greven shows that in a community where most children lived out their entire lives and did not leave, the only concept of family that had a valid meaning was the extended family which was a network of households.12

Demos and Greven emphasize, as does Morgan, the social and economic ramifications of this wider concept of family. Each raises and partially answers questions concerning the social and economic roles of the family. Did strong partriarchalism exist? That is, did a father try to exercise strong control over his sons after they had
reached adulthood? How were patterns of inheritance and landhold-
ing affected by the concept of family? What was the average number
of children in a household? What were the ages at which people mar-
rried? What were the relationships between economic conditions and
family structure? Do the answers to all of the above differ from gen-
eration to generation?

An analysis of the Pitkin family in terms of some of these questions
can add a new dimension to our knowledge of both colonial politics
and the colonial family. No family in eighteenth-century Connecticut
was more powerful politically. What were the statistical social, eco-
nomic, and political dimensions of an unusually prominent family?
What were the family members' patterns of officeholding? . . . of
inheritance? . . . of land transfer? How did they rise to such promi-

tence? Did prominence, colonial events, or generational differences
cause changes in their family patterns? What did their extended fam-
ily, and extended families in general, mean for the government of col-
onial and Revolutionary Connecticut and the counties, towns, and
parishes within Connecticut? These are some of the questions that
a study of the Pitkin family of Hartford can help answer.

II

William Pitkin, I, the progenitor of the family, was not among the
original settlers of Hartford in the 1630s. This, of itself, makes him
something of an exceptional case, since almost invariably the seven-
teenth-century leaders of Connecticut towns were men who had been
among each town's original proprietors. 13 Little is known of William I's
English background, but he arrived in Hartford in 1659 directly
from England with four valuable assets: an excellent legal education,
education as a minister, a reputation for Godliness, and "a consider-
able amount of money."14 He probably did not intend to stay in Hart-
ford or even in the colonies permanently. Martha, his sister, joined
him in Hartford in 1661 for a short visit, after which the two planned
to return to England. 15 Neither ever did return to England, and the
short visit to Connecticut lasted a lifetime.

William's early political, social, and economic successes and Mar-
tha's social triumphs reveal that Hartford was hungry for people of
social distinction and higher education. William was admitted to pro-
prietorship in Hartford almost immediately and was admitted to col-
ony freemanship in 1662, merely three years after entering the col-
ony.16 He married Hannah Goodwin, the eldest daughter of an origi-
nal settler, in 1661. Martha, who was obviously gentle, and who had
a reputation for great beauty, was the most sought-after young girl
in the river valley towns. The Reverend Thomas Rollins, her pastor,
said that "it became a matter of general consultation what young man
was good enough for Miss Pitkin.” Martha finally selected Simon Wolcott, the son of one of Windsor’s first settlers, as the fortunate man.

Because Hartford needed neither a lawyer nor a new minister when he arrived, William turned his education to other tasks. The town meeting voted in 1659 that he should “have free liberty to teach school in Hartford.” For support of his school, which was to operate for seven months a year, the town voted him a salary of £8 per year and a “load” of wood from each scholar by way of tuition. Teaching school, however, was not a weighty enough permanent occupation for a man with what the colony must have considered excellent talent. In 1662, school teaching was put behind him, and William became the first attorney appointed by the colony to assist the General Assembly (the colony-level government). He served in that capacity for fourteen years, during which his main duties were as a prosecutor against miscreants. In the same year (1662) that he made his entry into colony-level leadership, William was also elected to his first town office, lister and ratemaker. A lister and ratemaker was a middle-level officer who was not as powerful or prestigious as a selectman, but was not as low an elected officer as a fenceviewer or a surveyor of highways, who were usually young and untested. Apparently, William satisfied the town thoroughly in his listing and rating duties, as he was elected one of the town’s four selectmen, its highest elected officials, in 1666.

Hence, by 1666, only seven years after entering the colony, William’s education, money, and talent had carried him to a secure, respected, and powerful place in Hartford and in the colony. His quick rise reveals how fluid the lines of power and authority could be in Puritan Connecticut if one were fortunate enough to have assets like his. The next twenty-eight years of William’s life, until his death in 1694, witnessed success after success in terms of officeholding and power. He was a frequent deputy to the General Assembly from Hartford between 1675 and 1690. He was appointed colony treasurer in 1676, when the incumbent, John Talcott, resigned. In the two most severe external crises the colony faced, a war with the Narragansett Indians and the loss of Connecticut’s charter during the Dominion of New England, William was appointed to the three-man committees that negotiated settlements. He was the sole negotiator for the town of Hartford in its most severe external crisis, political warfare with Windsor over the two towns’ boundaries. In 1690, he was one of twenty men to be nominated in the colony-wide election for assistants to the governor, and he was one of the twelve assistants elected that year out of the twenty nominees. The only high position to which he was not elected was the governorship, and that was probably precluded only by his premature death in 1694 at the age of fifty-nine.
In a society known to revere age and experience, William’s rapid rise to positions of high leadership came at an extremely early age. He was twenty-seven when appointed the attorney for the General Assembly and thirty-one when elected a town selectman. In Plymouth Colony, the average age for new selectmen was 43.9, and even in frontier communities, a man was seldom elected or appointed to a major office until he was past forty.26 The average age of selectmen in Plymouth was fifty-three.27 By the time he reached fifty-three, William was well beyond the selectman stage of leadership. Seventeenth-century New England was not a place where positions of power or positions of dignity were likely to be conferred on one as youthful as William was in his first major offices. The normal long apprenticeship in minor offices was skipped by him.

Certainly, it was not because he eschewed controversial problems that William achieved his success. He was involved in at least three hornet’s-nest controversies, and he challenged the existing church and political structures in two of them. The Half-way Covenant, which was drawn up by a consociation of ministers and which changed the requirements for church membership, engendered conflicts in most of the parishes in New England, and Hartford was no exception. In 1664, when the minister in Hartford’s First Society, of which William was then a member, refused to accept the Half-way Covenant, William drew up a petition on behalf of himself and some dissidents that endorsed the Half-way Covenant and went even beyond it in advocating a liberalization in church-admission procedures.28 In its final form as it was presented to the General Assembly, the petition called for the church to admit immediately any people as members who had been full communicants with an orthodox church elsewhere and were still in good standing.29 Anyone who had ever owned the covenant should be allowed to own it again without further proof of Godliness. Interestingly enough, this procedure had already been followed for William himself, and he was already an admitted member of the church, but there were many others who were not members and who he thought should be. The General Assembly, of course, had no power over local churches, as William unquestionably knew, and it could only “commend the minister to entertain all such persons who are of an honest and Godly conversation.”30 The “commending,” however, was a moral victory for William and the dissidents he led.

The young man William was not afraid of controversy, and neither was the senior statesman. In 1693 and 1694, shortly before his death, he led the settlers on the east side of the Connecticut River in trying to secede from the first parish of Hartford and create a new third parish exclusively on the east side of the river.31 A second parish had already been carved out of the first one. These sorts of intra-town struggles over the creation of new parishes or societies, as the parishes
were called, were common in New England's largest towns and were almost always bitterly fought out.\textsuperscript{32} The battle raged in Hartford in 1693, and the people of the proposed new society, led by William Pitkin, presented a petition to the General Assembly that went over the head of the Hartford Town Meeting and called for the creation of a new society. Undoubtedly, William was chosen to draft and present the petition because he was the most influential man the proposed new society had in colony affairs. The General Assembly worked out a compromise that gave the essence of victory to the separating parishioners by granting their petition and thus creating the new Third Society. However, it gave the two older societies compensation by ruling that people who lived in the two older societies, but who owned land east of the river in the new society, would not have their land taxed by the new Third Society.\textsuperscript{33} Once again, in an important moment of Hartford's history, William was able to persuade the General Assembly to his viewpoint.

The third controversy in which William was involved was a dispute between Hartford and Windsor over the northern boundary of Hartford. In this dispute, unlike the other two, William had the undivided support of all of Hartford. This dispute was the only one of the three that was not resolved successfully during his lifetime. Probably it was not resolved because the Windsor proprietors were as intractable and united as those in Hartford. Three times between 1673 and 1684, William was empowered by the Hartford Town Meeting to negotiate with Windsor.\textsuperscript{34} In 1684, a temporary settlement was reached which caused five Hartford men to lose a considerable amount of their land.\textsuperscript{35} That the settlement was unsatisfactory to Hartford is revealed by its reopening of the case fifteen years later, in 1699, five years after William's death. This was no slight on the skill of William's diplomacy, however, since William Pitkin II, his son, took over the negotiations.\textsuperscript{36}

William I had eight children, of whom six were sons.\textsuperscript{37} The eldest son, surprisingly, was named Roger and not William II. Roger was named after William, Senior's, one elder brother who remained in England. Roger II was born in 1662, and William II was born in 1664. The last child born was Ozias in 1679. Except for one five-year hiatus between the fifth and sixth child, William and his wife, Hannah, had a child every other year for eighteen years. It appears from all of the economic evidence available that William I did not try to exercise strong patriarchal control over his sons once they had reached adulthood. Roger, his eldest son, who reached the majority age of 21 and was married in the same year of 1683, received three tracts of land containing over 250 acres from his father in that year as "part of his marriage portion."\textsuperscript{38} This assured Roger a means of support for himself and his wife, and it also assured him a degree of economic inde-
pendence from his father. In 1687, presumably as his financial obligations were growing, Roger received two more tracts of land from his father. William II, in 1686, at the age of 22, was also given lands and investments by his father, who said in the deed transfer that this was "in confidence of his [William II's] marriage to Elizabeth Stanley." William II was given less land than his brother, Roger, but William II was given one-third interest in a saw mill and one-third interest in a corn mill to compensate for the smaller quantity of land. In 1688, 1690, and 1692, William, Senior, bought tracts of land totalling over 300 acres from Caleb Stanley, Sarah Harris, and Richard Hyde. One might speculate that this was in anticipation of four more sons reaching maturity and needing land for support. Neither John Pitkin nor Nathaniel Pitkin, both of whom reached the age of 21 before William, Senior's, death, was given land before the father's death. Neither was married, however, and in view of the way Roger's and William II's early gifts from their father were worded, it seems likely that any son that married would have received the means to independence at the time of his marriage.

William, Senior's, will probated in 1695, equitably took care of his children and widow in a manner that was to become a characteristic pattern in the Pitkin family and was also a general pattern in society at large. The two eldest sons, Roger and William II, were given less land because they had received a portion of their inheritance at the time of their marriage. William, Senior, "confirmed to Roger and William all the land I have formerly given them and which they have in possession." The other four sons each received between 300 and 400 acres, much of which was arable, improved land. The two youngest sons, George and Ozias, had their lands held in trust for them until they were twenty-one. Roger and William, the two eldest brothers, were the trustees. William II, the second son, and not Roger, the first son, received the home lot and house. William and Roger were required to support their mother for the rest of her natural life, and the widow was to retain a third of the home-lot house for her use. William, Senior's, two daughters, Hannah and Elizabeth, were each given cash settlements out of the estate. The cash settlements were considerably less than the value of each brother's share (approximately 25% of them). The equal division of all assets and lands among all sons, the recognition of previous grants of land to sons in determining this equal distribution, the home lot and dwelling house passing to the eldest or second eldest son, the provision made for the widow of one third of the living space in the home-lot dwelling house, and the substantial cash bequest to each daughter, all became patterns that subsequent Pitkins would follow. The division between the two oldest sons, Roger and William II, that gave Roger more land and William the manufacturing assets and home lot, must reflect the fact that Roger was
more inclined to be a gentleman farmer, while William II was more inclined to follow his father's career in law, business, and politics. Certainly, that is how their subsequent careers unfolded.

III

The six second-generation Pitkin men were all legally-mature adults by the start of the eighteenth century. Of the four of them who married, Roger married at age 21, William II married at 22, Oziah married at 23, and Nathaniel married at 28, for an average marriage age of 23.5. John, who did not marry, was always in poor health in his adult life and died unmarried at age 38, and George, about whom little is known, also died unmarried at age 27.44 The early ages at which three of the Pitkins married undoubtedly reflects the fact that William I was willing to and had enough assets to settle on his sons when they were young and render them able to support a family. William I had enough land and other economic interests to divide to make all his sons prosperous. Of the four sons who married, the three eldest married girls from Hartford, while only the youngest, Ozias, married an outside girl. The four sons all had large immediate families and averaged ten children each, which also probably reflects their economic comfort. All six men of the second generation lived and died in the East Society of Hartford. Male members of the second generation lived until Ozias and Roger died in 1747 and 1748, respectively.

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>1. Roger, 1662</td>
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<td>2. William II, 1664</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. John, 1668</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Nathaniel, 1670</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. George, 1675</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Ozias, 1679</td>
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In terms of officeholding, two of the four second-generation men who survived into middle age, William II and Ozias, became extremely prominent in both local and colony politics. The other two sons, Roger and Nathaniel, were prominent in local affairs but never held an office outside of Hartford. The first office to which Roger was elected was that of selectman in 1697 when he was 35 years old. Unlike almost every other selectman of the time, and unlike his father, he had not served in a minor town office previously. He was elected a selectman twice again, in 1704 and 1713. It is not exceptional that he served no consecutive terms, nor does it indicate that he proved lack-
ing while in office. Many Connecticut towns rotated their selectmen and were unwilling to allow them to serve consecutive terms. In 1698, at the age of 36, Roger was elected captain of one of the third society's militia trainbands. In society affairs, Roger was elected one of the three church committee men, for the first time in 1700 at the age of 38, and served almost continuously until 1722. Church committee men comprised the chief executive board of society government and were elected annually. Roger's career, by itself, was distinguished and prominent, but not of an exceptional nature. Any one of ten men in Hartford in his lifetime had similar careers, with the only difference being that the other men would all have served political apprenticeships in lesser offices. Nathaniel Pitkin, Roger's younger brother, had a similar career—distinguished but not exceptional. At the age of 31, in 1701, after serving a year as a fenceviewer in 1699, Nathaniel was made a selectman. He was next elected an ensign in the militia in 1716 at the age of 46 and elected a church committee man in 1721 and often afterwards until his death in 1733.

William II and Ozias both became exceptionally distinguished men in Hartford and the colony. William II was elected a deputy to the General Assembly from Hartford in 1696 in the second election held after his father's death. William, Senior, had apparently picked William II to be his successor as a statesman, and as soon as the senior Pitkin died, the colony looked to his son for leadership. In 1697, William II was nominated and elected as an assistant to the General Assembly. He was now, at the age of 33, in a position of the highest authority, influence, and power in the colony, excluding only the governor and deputy governor. In 1702, he was appointed to the highest county office in Hartford County, the Judge of the County Court and Court of Probate. In every important committee the town named or in every petition Hartford sent to the General Assembly, William II was involved. At one time he was negotiating with both Windsor and Glastonbury in separate boundary disputes. Any committee of the General Assembly that required legal training or legal work also had William II on it. In 1712, he was named one of the five judges of the Superior Court. The five judges were almost always the most senior five assistants, and the chief judge was always the deputy governor. In case the chief judge was absent, William II became acting judge, which placed him in the number-three position in the Connecticut "pecking order." For fourteen of the years that he was so extremely active in town, county, and colony affairs, William II was also one of the three church committee men for his home society and was also moderator of several town meetings. It would be nearly impossible to be more enmeshed in all levels of government than he was.

Ozias, the youngest son of William, Senior, was elected to his first office, selectman, in 1709 at the age of 30. He served in no minor
offices previously. In 1714, at the age of 35, he was appointed a captain in one of the militia trainbands in the East Society and was also elected as one of the three church committee men where he joined his brothers, Roger and William. Ozias was continuously reelected to the church committee between 1714 and 1733 and was elected frequently thereafter until his death. In 1723, prior to ever holding a colony-level office, he was named one of the justices of the peace for Hartford County. This was the highest office in the county except for the Judge of County Court and Probate, and it entitled him to membership in the county court. In 1725, at the age of 46, Ozias moved into colony politics when he was elected a deputy to the General Assembly. He was reelected to consecutive terms as a deputy until he was elected as an assistant to the governor in 1727. He served in this capacity until his death in 1747. While serving as one of the colony’s senior statesman between 1727 and 1747, Ozias also served several times as moderator of the Hartford Town Meeting. Like his older brother, William II, Ozias played important roles in all levels of Connecticut’s government. The one difference between Ozias’ career and that of William II was that high offices generally came to the younger brother, Ozias, at older ages than they came to the older brother, William.

The practice started by William, Senior, of transferring land to sons during their young adulthood was partially followed by the second generation. But the land was not always transferred to sons at either the majority age of 21 or at the time of marriage. Roger deeded to his son, Caleb, five tracts of land totalling over 250 acres, in 1713, when Caleb was 26. 49 William III, however, eldest son of William II, received three tracts of land from his father precisely the year he became 21. 50 When Caleb married in 1716, his father transferred three more tracts of land to him “in consideration of my son marrying to my good satisfaction.” Caleb was also assigned land by his father from Caleb’s sister Rachel’s inheritance for which she was paid £12. 51 It was understood, however, that Caleb was not buying the land from his father, but was, instead, compensating his sister for the partial loss of her inheritance. No member of the third generation ever bought land from his father. All four second-generation Pitkins began buying several tracts of land, each when his own eldest son was reaching adulthood. There seemed to be a conscious effort on the part of the second generation to buy enough land to be able to pass on to their sons a sufficient amount of land to render them prosperous. 52 William II transferred to his second son, Joseph, the younger brother of William III, 40 acres of upland and a dwelling house when Joseph was 26. 53 Joseph was given the land and dwelling house “out of the natural love and affection” his father felt for him. 54 However, probably because they were hard pressed to have enough assets to render all their children prosperous, Roger and William II of the second generation trans-
ferred land to their younger sons when the younger sons were relatively much older. Roger, Junior, of the third generation, did not receive any land from his father until he received three tracts of meadowland at the age of 32. Thomas, the third son of William II, was 24 years old when his father died, and he had received no land previous to his father’s death. Ozias did not give his eldest son, Samuel, any land until 1735, when Samuel was 30 years old. Ozias’ second son, Ozias II, was also at least 30 before he was given any land. In the transfer of land between the second and third generation, the third-generation males were all much older when they received land than their fathers had been when they received land. Only William III, of the third generation, received land at an age similar to the second generation. One possible explanation for this is that the second generation was not eager to render its sons independent and wished, instead, to keep some control over them. Certainly, William III, who did receive land as a young man, received only a small portion of his father’s estate. He had to wait until his father’s death to receive the bulk of his portion. The second possible explanation is that the second-generation males did not have as much relative wealth as William I and hence were not as easily able to parcel it out. William I had only six sons upon whom to settle his fortune, while they, the second generation, had twelve sons who had to be fixed in prosperous stations.

For whatever reason, the delayed entry to economic independence seems to have affected the marrying age of the third-generation males and also the size of their immediate families. The average age at marriage for the third-generation males was 28.5, an increase of five years from the previous generation. The average size of their immediate families also correspondingly dropped to 4.4, a decline of over 50%. Of the third-generation men who married, six of them married girls from Hartford, and four of them married girls from outside their home town. Eleven out of twelve of the third-generation men lived out their lives in and died in Hartford. Thomas, the third son of William II, moved to Bolton and was the only one to live outside of the Third Society in Hartford. The first Pitkin of the third generation males to die was Samuel, who died prematurely in 1747. The last surviving one was Daniel, who died in 1815. Generally, the generation came into young adulthood in the second, third, and fourth decades of the eighteenth century. Six of the twelve members survived past 1763 into the time of the pre-Revolutionary struggles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name and Birthdate</th>
<th>Age at Marriage</th>
<th>Married From</th>
<th>Age, Date, Place of Death</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Caleb, 1697</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Hartford</td>
<td>76 in 1773, H</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. William, 1694</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Hartford</td>
<td>75 in 1769, H</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Jonathan, 1697</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Outside</td>
<td>70 in 1767, H</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Thomas, 1700 Unknown Outside 66 in 1766, Out 1
6. Roger, 1703 Unknown Unknown 59 in 1762, H Unkn‘wn
7. Samuel 1705 Unknown Outside 42 in 1747, H 3
8. John, 1707 26 Hartford 83 in 1790, H 2
9. Ozias, 1710 27 Hartford 51 in 1761, H 5
10. Isaac, 1730 Unknown Outside Unknown, H 1
11. Daniel, 1735 29 Hartford 80 in 1815, H 4
12. James, 1736 unmarried — 24 in 1760, H —

The third-generation Pitkin males can be separated into three different groups in terms of officeholding. The first and largest group comprised Jonathan, Isaac, James, Roger, Ozias, Samuel, and Caleb. Each of these men held some major office in his lifetime, and each must have been reasonably prominent to attain that honor. None, however, was a major leader either in Hartford or in the colony. Most of them were either selectmen for one or two terms, militia officers, or members of the church committee for a few years. Some of these men also served in lesser offices, usually in the home society. Roger, at the age of 33, was a rate collector for the society, and Samuel served in the same capacity at the age of 36. Isaac was a ratemaker in the society at the age of 29. The average age of the three men who were selectmen for their first term in office was 45, which was about the norm for all first-term selectmen.

The second group of third-generation officeholders comprised Daniel, the longest-lived of the third generation, and Thomas, the one man to move away from Hartford. Both Daniel and Thomas held several major offices, but neither would be considered political giants in either his home town or in the colony. Daniel was elected a selectman twice, served as a church committeeman for twenty years, and was often the moderator of the society meeting. Thomas was a selectman several times, a militia lieutenant and captain, and a justice of the peace in Hartford County for over twenty years. Each man was in his forties when he first held a major office, but neither man served an apprenticeship as a minor officeholder. Thomas and Daniel were prominent men who each held one major office over a long period of time, but neither shaped the history of his town or of the colony.

William III, Joseph, and John, the three eldest sons of William II, were the kind of men who were shaping Hartford’s and Connecticut’s history. William III, the future governor, seemed destined to a career as a statesman and politician early in his life, when, at the age of 25, he was elected to his first major office, society clerk, in 1718. From that date, and for the rest of his life, no matter where else he was serving, William III was either a church committeeman or clerk of the Third Society. He was also a moderator of 36 society meetings. In
1728, before ever serving in any town office, Hartford elected him to be one of its two deputies to the General Assembly, where he served continuously until elected an assistant to the governor. Much of the time he served as Hartford's deputy, he was also the speaker of the General Assembly. When he was elected an assistant in 1734, he was 40 years old. In 1735, he was appointed to be Judge of the County Court, and in 1741 he was appointed a Judge of the Superior Court. Along the way, he was appointed a captain in the militia in 1730 and a major in 1739. Throughout his career, after being elected a deputy, he was a frequent moderator at Hartford Town Meetings. In 1754, William was elected deputy governor and appointed Chief Justice of the Superior Court, and he was, of course, elected governor in the famous election of 1766. He even rose to a top position of colonel in the militia.

Joseph, William II's second son, had a career similar to his older brother's. He was elected a church committeeman of the Third Society the same year he reached the age of 21. Like William III, no matter what other office Joseph might hold, he was a church committeeman for the next 45 years until a year before his death in 1761. He was elected a moderator of over 40 society meetings. Joseph was appointed Sheriff of Hartford County in 1724, when he was 28 years old, but he resigned two years later because of "disadvantages that attended him in sustaining the office." He probably was referring to the constant travel around the county required of the sheriff. In 1727, at the age of 31, Joseph was elected a town selectman without ever having served in a lesser office. He was elected to that office five more times in his lifetime—an unusually large number of terms, given Hartford's propensity to rotate its selectmen. Joseph moved into colony-level politics in 1734 when he was elected a deputy from Hartford to the General Assembly, and he was almost continuously re-elected until his death in 1762. He rose rapidly in the militia and was appointed an ensign in 1730, a lieutenant in 1733, a captain in 1738, and a lieutenant-colonel in 1741. He was also appointed a justice of the peace for Hartford County in 1747 and continued to be a justice until his death. Between 1738, when he was first chosen to preside at a town meeting, and his death in 1762, he was a moderator at 13 of Hartford's Town Meetings. The only honor that escaped him was joining his brother, William III, and his uncle, Ozias, in the assistant's council. In the first election after Ozias died in 1748, Joseph was one of the 20 men nominated for assistant, but he failed to be one of the twelve men elected. He was nominated every year after 1748 until his death.

John, the third of the prominent brothers, was first elected to a major office in 1739 when he was elected a selectman at the age of 32. Like his brothers before him, John served no apprenticeship in
minor town offices. He did serve in lesser offices in the Third Society, as both a rate collector and a ratemaker and then as a member of the church committee between 1742 and 1754. In that 12-year period, the church committee of the Third Society comprised the three Pitkin brothers, William III, Joseph, and John. John moved even more rapidly than Joseph through the chain of command in the militia and was a captain in 1746, a lieutenant colonel in 1755, and a full colonel in 1756. He first moved into colony-level politics in 1754 when he joined Joseph as one of Hartford’s two deputies to the General Assembly. He was elected a deputy 21 times in his lifetime and was the moderator of 63 Hartford Town Meetings. He was also a justice of the peace for Hartford County after 1763. Like William III and Joseph, he was a leading officeholder in all five levels of Connecticut government: society, militia, town, county, and colony.

The three brothers, William III, Joseph, and John, were all wealthy, or at least appeared wealthy to the society around them. Their father, William II, had inherited the business and manufacturing interests from his father, while Roger, William II’s brother, had inherited William, Senior’s, land. William II built these manufacturing and business interests into a massive fortune and acquired huge amounts of land, at least huge by Connecticut standards. While William II did not pass the bulk of his fortune on to his three sons until he died, his bequests did make the three Pitkin brothers substantially wealthier than their cousins. William III and Joseph received, besides improved lands amounting to over 300 acres each, a corn mill, a slitting mill, and a saw mill, all to be owned jointly, and fulling mills (at least two) which were the source of an extremely profitable clothier business, also to be owned jointly. John received as much land as William and Joseph, and he also received his father’s one-third interest in two other mills which he owned jointly with two other Hartford men. The three Pitkin brothers, besides being among the town’s largest landowners, were Hartford’s leading mill owners and manufacturers. Thomas, the younger brother who had moved to Bolton, inherited land from his father in the four contiguous towns of Bolton, Lebanon, Stafford, and Coventry, Connecticut. William II had enough wealth that he could give £170 in cash to each of his four daughters, a sum large enough in 1724, when the bequest was realized, to buy a dwelling house and farm of average size.

Almost all of the second and third-generation Pitkin men were prosperous or moderately wealthy. Most of them would be in the top 10th percentile of Hartford’s economic classes. None of the other second-generation men, however, had the wealth of William II, and none of the other third-generation men had the wealth of William III, Joseph, and John. William II and his sons probably appeared to be the wealthiest men in Hartford during their lifetimes. The word “appeared” is
used because after a lifetime of heavy involvement in business and constant land speculation, Joseph died bankrupt in 1762. He appeared in the Hartford land records more than any other man in the eighteenth century and was involved in more than 125 separate land transactions in Hartford in his lifetime. Though he died bankrupt, the magnitude of Joseph’s sometimes real and sometimes illusory wealth can be seen by the fact that in 1748 he transferred lands and buildings to his son, Joseph, Junior, that were worth £5,500 Old Tenor. Old Tenor pounds were highly inflated in 1748, but notwithstanding, a gift of assets worth over £5,000 put Joseph, Junior, in the first or second percentile in Hartford wealth rating. When Joseph’s estate was probated, and he was found to be insolvent, it was undoubtedly no surprise to his two brothers, William and John, because they were among Joseph’s largest creditors. It cannot be known if other Hartford residents suspected that Joseph’s wealth was only apparent and that he was in financial trouble, but it must have been clear to everyone in town that Joseph was massively involved in land speculations. This did not seem to affect his political career adversely, and indeed, in the area where morality would be most sought after, church government, he was overwhelmingly successful.

Prior to the fourth generation, the Pitkin family males did not attend college. In the fourth generation, however, six members were graduated from Yale before the end of the Revolution in 1783. William I, as was previously mentioned, brought to Hartford an excellent legal education. His three namesake descendants, William II, William III, and William IV, all studied law with their fathers and were called lawyers by their contemporaries. Some historians have felt that Puritan New Englanders in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries nurtured a deep suspicion of lawyers. If this is true, the Pitkins certainly were exceptions. It was William I’s legal abilities that won for him his first appointment in colony-level government. The legal training of William II and William III certainly was a political asset for them. Most of their early committee assignments by the colony were in areas where a legal education was helpful. Other politically-powerful Pitkins, such as the second-generation Ozias and the third-generation Joseph and John, were neither college-educated nor lawyers. They were simply gentlemen farmers and merchants. It is interesting that a family as powerful and as politically-inclined as the Pitkins would not send their future leaders to college, prior to the fourth generation, but preferred, rather, either to educate them in law, such as the dynasty of Williams, or had them complete their education informally in the form of farming and business experience. Of the six fourth-generation Pitkins who did attend Yale, none was as prominent as the lawyer, William IV, who did not. A college education at Harvard and Yale for New Englanders was helpful, but its
absence did not prove to be a severe handicap for the Pitkins. Undoubtedly, had college educations been essential for eighteenth-century Connecticut leaders, the Pitkins would have been given them.

IV

Two quotations that are worn to the point of being cliches are often applied to colonial and Revolutionary Connecticut. The first is the anonymous statement that Connecticut was a "Land of Steady Habits," and the second is John Adams's contention that it was well known that a circle of half a dozen elite families ruled the entire colony. The Pitkin family experience sheds light on both of these cliches. It can easily be seen why Connecticut may have been a colony of steady habits. Family interrelationships provided a cement that bound all levels of government into an organic whole. The four-level system of government, society, town, county, and colony, meshed neatly, because in most instances it was the same people or members of the same family who were exercising the power at all the different levels. The Pitkin family bound firmly the East Society of Hartford, the Town of Hartford, Hartford County, and the Colony of Connecticut into a tight, adhesive unit. There was a minimum of conflict in the organizational structure because of this family cement. The Pitkin family experience in Connecticut was probably exceptional only in the sense that they were more spectacularly successful than other similar families. The examples of the Hamlins of Middletown, the Huntingtons of Norwich, the Burrs of Fairfield, and other families in the colony show that John Adams was essentially correct. Because the extended family was such an important factor socially and economically, it was also so politically. Many of the societies and towns of Connecticut undoubtedly had the same experience on a lesser scale as the East Society and Town of Hartford. If, on the local level, families were dominant political factors, it was logical that these factors should be extended to the colony and that the most prominent local families from the most prominent towns in the colony should be the half a dozen families that ruled the colony. This does not mean, in the rigid, Marxist sense, that talent, ability, and knowledge were meaningless ciphers that counted for nothing in the question of who should rule and exercise leadership. It does mean that talent and ability were easier to bring to bear and were more easily recognized if their holder were a Pitkin from Hartford than if he were a Smith from Windham. Undoubtedly, the four-generation dynasty of William Pitkins from Hartford was composed of men with exceptional ability, but this was accentuated and strengthened by the family name and position. Access to high offices came easily to Pitkins. This is shown by the fact that few of the major politicians among the Pitkins served in minor offices.
William Pitkin II's eldest three sons were likely candidates for major positions of leadership as soon as they became adults. The family name and position, and not a long period of political apprenticeship, were their credentials. Usually, upon legal maturity, some Pitkins were elected to major society and town positions, and, upon the death of a Pitkin prominent in colony affairs, one was promoted from town politics to replace the deceased Pitkin in colony politics. Often, it was the eldest son or one of the elder sons who replaced the father. In the entire period of the eighteenth century prior to the end of the Revolution, at least one Pitkin was elected each year to be one of the governor's twelve assistants. The continuity in office that was gained by the constant reelection of the same Pitkins, often until their death, to the positions of town meeting moderator, deputy, and assistant, also played a key role in the "steady habits" of the colony. Not all Pitkins were major political leaders, but even younger sons and sons of younger sons usually served in some major offices.

Bernard Bailyn has written, in describing the educational functions of an Elizabethan family, that it was difficult for children to distinguish where the family stopped and where society began. In Elizabethan villages, family and society were blurred together in a kinship-network of cousins, uncles, aunts, and so on. The Pitkin family experience shows that this pattern was recreated in Connecticut after the initial dislocation caused by immigration. William Pitkin I, the spirit of the Puritan community notwithstanding, was an island unto himself in the Hartford of 1660. By 1776, however, a young Pitkin growing up in the East Society of Hartford probably would have had a difficult time distinguishing between what he perceived to be his family and what he perceived to be society in general. There was no clear boundary between the two. Over fifty households contained members who were Pitkins or had a Pitkin grandparent. The pattern of the Elizabethan village was recreated. There was not even a clear separation between the generations. The third and fourth generations both covered such a long time period that they blended together. Uncles and nephews worked together as equals on the governor's council.

Comparing the Pitkin family's generational statistics to the findings of Philip Greven on average families in Andover, Massachusetts, reveals that while the Pitkins followed the same trends as average Andover families, they tended to maximize these trends. For example, in Andover, each succeeding generation tended to be more geographically mobile than the previous one. Thus, 78.3% of the second-generation men died in Andover, as did 61.0% of the third-generation men, and 43.7% of the fourth generation men. Pressures of decreasing land availability forced more men from each succeeding generation to seek their fortunes elsewhere. The Pitkins followed the same trend,
The Third Society of Hartford in the early nineteenth century, after it became East Hartford.
but they were maximally rooted to Hartford because, of course, the economic pressures were not as severe on wealthy young Pitkins as they were on others. In the second generation, 100% of the Pitkin males remained in Hartford, in the third generation 91% of them did, and in the fourth generation 75% of them did. Pitkin marriage trends also follow those of Andover, as does the trend of size of immediate family. In Andover, the second-generation men married at an average age of 26.7, and this rose to 27.1 in the third generation. The average age of Pitkin males' marriages increased from 23.5 to 28.5. Also, second-generation immediate families in Andover averaged 6.6 children who reached the age of 21, while this figure declined to 5.1 in the

Oldest extant portrait of a Pitkin. The Reverend Timothy Pitkin, son of William III, the governor. Minister at Farmington 1752-1776; a fellow at Yale 1777-1804.
third generation. The Pitkins, similarly but more dramatically, dropped in immediate family size from an average of 10.0 children of second-generation parents to an average of 4.4 children of third-generation parents. These figures for the Pitkins are not statistically significant, but they do show that prominent families faced the same pressures as average families. It was clearly the pressures of declining land availability and relatively smaller inheritances that caused the third-generation Andover men to marry later, have fewer children, and have more of a propensity to leave the home town. The Pitkin third-generation, even though much wealthier than average men, shared the same problems and also gave the same response to these problems: they married later, had fewer children, and were more likely to leave Hartford.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Marriage Age</th>
<th>Children living until 21</th>
<th>Lived in home town</th>
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<tr>
<td>2nd generation Pitkins</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andover average</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>78.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd generation Pitkins</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>91.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andover average</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>61.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Perhaps the greatest difference between the Pitkins and the average Andover family was in patterns of land transmission from generation to generation. In Andover, most of the second-generation men did not receive land from their fathers until they were in their late twenties or early thirties or until their father's death. Greven believes that this shows that strong patriarchalism existed, based upon the possession and control of the land by the older generation. Pitkin second-generation men received large amounts of land upon marrying and did not have to wait until William I's death to become financially independent. This probably reflects a deliberate attempt on the part of William I to render his sons independent of him. Also, William I had enough wealth to make his sons independent and still be highly secure himself in his old age. This earlier transmission of wealth probably accounts for the earlier age of marriage for the second-generation Pitkins compared to the second-generation Andover men. Third-generation Andover men, like the second generation, also had usually to wait until their father's death to secure their inheritance. Many of them remedied this by buying tracts of land from their father. There is no evidence in the land records of Hartford to indicate that any third-generation Pitkin ever bought land from his father. However, third-generation Pitkins were not as likely to receive land in their early twenties as the second-generation men were. Those that did receive land at a young age received far less than the second generation had at the same age, and this partially accounts for the much older marriage age.
Aside from the sons of William II, most third-generation Pitkin males received relatively much less wealth than their second-generation fathers had and received it later in life. The economic squeeze that other families felt as increases in population put strains upon land resources was also felt by many of the Pitkin family and had similar effects on the Pitkins. In this sense, the extraordinary Pitkin family was very normal, and, like any entity, great or insignificant, large or small, reflected its times.

The Conciliatory and Reassuring Radical: William Pitkin III and The Stamp Act Election of 1766

WILLIAM PITKIN, III, the fifteenth governor of colonial Connecticut, is, from today's perspective, a seemingly enigmatic man, whose career abounded in paradoxes. He was the victor in the Connecticut Revolution of 1766, and yet he seemed to have had a very un-revolutionary character. Amidst all the political acrimonies, diatribes, and recriminations that surrounded the Stamp Act events of 1765-66, he, alone of major figures, seems to have escaped all attack. While other Connecticut politicians were scheming for their futures, justifying their pasts, and trying furiously to gain or hold some position of moral superiority, Pitkin was publicly and privately quiet. Pitkin's election in 1766 has always been seen as a victory for "radical" forces against an entrenched oligarchy, and yet no oligarchic politician could lay a greater claim to an "aristocratic" Connecticut past than he. Prior to his actual tenure as governor, Pitkin seemed immune to attack, and he was ignored by the polemicists and propagandists of his day. Not surprisingly, he has also been ignored by historians. While all the lesser figures in the early 1760s, Thomas Fitch, Benjamin Gale, Eliphalet Dyer, William Samuel Johnson, Jared Ingersoll, Jonathan Trumbull, and Ezra Stiles, have been fully, or near fully, treated by historians, the man in whose name the drama of 1766 was carried out has had little printers ink expended on him. Historians of Connecticut politics in the 1760s usually mention Pitkin's name once or twice, often as an afterthought. Undoubtedly, Pitkin has escaped the judgment of history in his role in 1766 because, except for his official correspondence as governor, he has left only about a dozen personal letters. He is the only major Connecticut politician who was not engaged in ex-
tensive correspondence with other men of affairs or who never issued a pamphlet or broadside during the Stamp Act controversy. Most of what we can know about Governor Pitkin, his actions, and his character prior to his election must be inferred from official records and the meager collection of letters he left. With the exception of Jonathan Trumbull, Pitkin is undoubtedly eighteenth-century Connecticut’s most famous governor, but, paradoxically, its least known.

William Pitkin III had a long distinguished career in government, replete with positions of power and honor, prior to the 1760s, and yet he seems to have remained unobtrusive. This quiescence is all the more enigmatic when contrasted with the written effervescence of his younger brother, Joseph, who occupied lesser offices but who was always much more visible to contemporaries and historians than William. William first appeared in the Hartford town records when his legal training enabled him to be of service to the Hartford Town Meeting. In 1725, he was appointed to a committee with two other men to take care of the common land and to collect the lease money for it. William was instructed to sue the debtors if necessary to obtain the money. Most of his subsequent service to the town of Hartford, besides serving as an officeholder in every major position, was in ways that utilized his legal training. His legal work, however, was always of a civil nature, and it usually involved a controversy in which a judicious appraisal was required. Thus, for example, the town asked him to examine Daniel Bigelow’s complaint that he (Bigelow) was not paid sufficiently for his lands which the town expropriated for a highway. William was to recommend a fair settlement. The recommended settlement was acceptable to both Bigelow and the town.

The Hartford Town Meeting records reveal that there was a half-century long irritant in the relations between the East Society and the rest of the town on the west side of the river. The East Society complained officially several times, beginning in 1727, that it was too difficult for them to cross the river to take part in all of the town’s affairs. Three times they petitioned the west side of Hartford to join them in asking the General Assembly to make the East Society a legally-separate town. William led the drawing up of these petitions, and he also prepared other petitions claiming that the highways in the East Society were less well cared for than those in the west. The town meeting always responded to East Society grievances by naming a committee, usually with William on it, to recommend a course of action. At all times the course of action was along the cautious route of compromise. A ferry was instituted to bring East Society residents back and forth across the river. When the East Society residents complained of the cost, the ferry was made free to men travelling on town business or going to a town meeting. When delays in getting the ferryman were complained of, the town ordered that there be two
keepers of the ferry and that one live on each side of the river. William Pitkin seemed to play both the role of spokesman for the East Society and the role of mediator between the East Society and the rest of Hartford. Unlike the similar secession move of the east side from the First Parish in Hartford in 1694, which was led by “William the immigrant,” and, contrary to normal practice in Connecticut, the East Society never went over the heads of the Hartford Town Meeting and never appealed to the General Assembly. Discontented societies frequently ignored the wishes of the town meeting and petitioned the General Assembly for separate status as a town, but the East Society did not do so until 1769, the year of William III’s death. For forty-one years after the first expression of the East Society’s dissatisfaction, the Hartford Town Meeting, with William as its central figure, was able to compromise the problem internally.

William became prominent in colony level politics with his election to the Governor’s Council in 1734, and he was never to be off the council for the remaining thirty-four years of his life. His experience on the council, prior to his election as deputy governor, generally falls into two distinct periods and categories. Initially, like most new assistants, William was given a number of committee assignments generally dealing with internal Connecticut problems. He was named to a three-man committee, along with John Marsh and Ebenezer West, to investigate and resolve a dispute in the town of Mansfield. The members of the northwesterly part of the town were petitioning the General Assembly for separate society status, and Pitkin and his committee were asked to resolve the problem and draw a dividing line between the two areas if need be. Similarly, a year later, Pitkin and two others were appointed to a committee to divide Hebron into two separate societies.

Success at conciliating the opposing parties in these struggles resulted in William’s being appointed virtual dictator over the town of Stafford which was embroiled in a heated controversy. He was given powers in Stafford similar to an ombudsman which included the sole right to call a town meeting and the sole right to dispense town funds.

After serving a period of time in these internal Connecticut functions, William moved on to committees dealing with more important problems in the 1740s and 1750s. He was appointed to the Council of War in 1740, along with Roger Wolcott, Nathaniel Stanley, Ozias Pitkin, and John Marsh. Only Marsh was not a member of the Governor’s Council, and Wolcott, Stanley, and Ozias Pitkin were all senior assistants. The council was to assist the governor in wartime emergencies and act with the power of the General Assembly when time dictated that the Assembly could not be called.

In 1751, William and John Chester were named commissioners to
represent Connecticut at a conference of northern colonies called by Governor Clinton of New York. Clinton was meeting with representatives of the Six Nations Indians and wished to have help in persuading the Indians to adhere to the British interest in the ongoing wars with France. Pitkin and Chester were given vague general negotiating powers towards the goal of "defeating the endeavors of the French to render the fidelity of the Indians precarious." 12

During the next three years, William was named to three more committees dealing with Connecticut’s external affairs. In October of 1752, he and his future rival, Thomas Fitch, were named a committee to assist the governor in drafting instructions to Connecticut’s agent in England regarding a dispute the colony was involved in with Massachusetts and the Mohegan Indians. 13 In 1753, at the request of Governor Shirley of Massachusetts, the Connecticut General Assembly named three men, William, Jabez Hamlin, and John Ledyard, to a committee that would confer with a corresponding Massachusetts body on the problem of “facilitating trade and commerce” between the two colonies for their mutual benefit. 14 Finally in 1754, in his last assignment before becoming deputy governor, William was appointed one of the three Connecticut delegates to the Albany Conference of 1754 to formulate plans for the defense of the colonies in the obviously-impending war with France. 15

Pitkin’s conduct in the Albany Conference, and afterwards in the Connecticut deliberations over the results of the conference, is revealing of the basic pattern of his political behavior. The Albany Conference recommended a loose confederation of the northern colonies for the purposes of defense, called by historians the Albany Plan of Union. The plan was drafted by Benjamin Franklin of Pennsylvania, even though Pennsylvania was not to be a part of the confederation, and it was signed by 22 of the 23 delegates. All three Connecticut delegates signed the plan, though Governor Fitch later said they had reservations about it, and, led by William Pitkin, they recommended that Connecticut adhere to it. The plan called for a union of Massachusetts Bay, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, and New Jersey for “their mutual defense and security and for extending the British settlements northward and westward of said colonies.” 16 As the second part of the preamble indicates, the plan was for offensive as well as defensive action. All the colonies were to maintain their present constitutions and individual identities, except for a few particulars concerning their militias. The union was to have a president-general who, for the time being, would be the governor of Massachusetts, and a grand council with representatives from each of the member colonies. The president-general, in consultation with the grand council, could coordinate defense and finances, negotiate with the Indians on behalf of all, declare war, and make new settlements.
He and the council could recommend to each colony what men and materials it should contribute to the common effort.

The Connecticut General Assembly appointed a six-man committee including William Pitkin to act on the recommendations of the three delegates to the Albany Conference. Neither of the other two delegates, Roger Wolcott, Jr., and Elisha Williams, was appointed to the new committee which countermanded the delegates' recommendation and advised the assembly against joining the plan of union. It rejected the plan, and the list of reasons it gave for doing so was really a thinly-disguised refusal to surrender any of Connecticut's self-governing powers. Interestingly, William Pitkin, the chairman of the three-man delegation which supported the plan, was the first signer of the committee report rejecting it. Public opinion, and the opinions and logic of his fellow legislators, both friend and foe, such as Jonathan Trumbull and Governor Fitch who were solidly against the plan, convinced him to change his mind.17

Pitkin's conduct over the Albany Plan of Union, his success in internal and external Connecticut problems, and his adroit handling of the internal Hartford problem, all would suggest that he was a cautious, judicious, and conciliatory politician who was given more to careful compromise than he was to head-on confrontation. In every difficult problem he faced, prior to becoming deputy governor and subsequently governor, he seemed to have been able to solve the problem and emerge well-liked by both sides. He had led a quiet and orderly, but nevertheless real, secession of the East Society from the town of Hartford, and yet Hartford frequently elected him as their town meeting moderator. He successfully cooled off the Mansfield, Hebron, and Stafford disputes without creating any new animosities, and he changed positions over the Albany Plan gracefully when it was obvious that, in the excitement of the conference, he had misjudged the temper of his colony.

Prior to his governorship, only one instance of an attack on his character occurred, or has been preserved, and that resulted in a £100 fine to the man who spoke against him. Roger Bidwell, a member of William's home church, called William Pitkin, Ozias Pitkin, and their minister, Samuel Woodbridge, “Beelezelbub, Lucifer, and——?” for asking in a guest preacher whose preaching disturbed Bidwell. For his intemperate outburst against two leading magistrates and a minister, Bidwell was heavily fined and had his voting rights and privilege of bearing witness suspended. The offender pleaded guilty to “dishonoring my superiors,” was contrite, and pleaded for mercy.18

The tone of William's character and his conciliatory bearing can be seen in a petition he presented to the General Court when he was Chief Judge of the Superior Court. In the petition, he was asking for a raise for himself and his fellow judges. When he drafted the petition,
he was also deputy governor of the colony. His language, however, was low key and humble, and he might have been a small farmer asking for some minor consideration. He noted that he and his fellow judges "accepted with cheerfulness" the difficult duties which required them to be on circuit and away from home "a great part of ye year" but did wish that their salaries at least matched the expenses they incurred in their travels. As in most instances, William's conciliatory manner paid off. The judges got their raises.

All the evidence, and in some cases the lack of evidence, would suggest that William, prior to his election as governor, was an extremely respected and non-controversial figure. A letter written by a William Williams (not the future signer of the Declaration of Independence), from a town in the Deerfield Valley of Massachusetts, to William Pitkin when he was deputy governor, asked Pitkin not to dissuade his son, Timothy, from accepting the minister's position in the new town. Williams wrote that he realized he was presumptuous in writing such a man as Pitkin, but he begged him not "to look upon it as arrogance in so small a people as we to aim so high." Later Williams asked Pitkin to "pardon me the freedom," explaining that he was writing to save "the life of my soul, my family's and my neighbors." The letter shows well the deferential nature of Connecticut society and also the respect both a high office and Pitkin, himself, commanded. William realized the massive respect that the Pitkin family name elicited. In correspondence with men of Stockbridge, Massachusetts, when he was pressed to assure them of his and Connecticut's good intentions towards aiding their town's defense, Pitkin in effect said, "you can trust my word and my assurances because you know me and my family's reputation for honesty and integrity."

An occurrence that seems to be unequaled in Connecticut's colonial history also illustrates the esteem which William's career and family name had earned him. The small town of Durham was involved in a bitter dispute among its members, and the controversy threatened to disunite the town. Both sides in the dispute finally agreed that, rather than submit their relative positions to the General Assembly and have the Assembly decide the question, they would submit their differences to private arbitration. The rival sides agreed upon William Pitkin as the man they would trust to decide the question fairly. Thus, the town preferred his judgement to a hearing by the colony government. Pitkin, in response, "perceived [that] the matter is attended with some difficulty," but he accepted this rare request, and the town of Durham's future course of action depended on his decision.

On the eve of the imperial crisis of the 1760s, Connecticut was not without internal dissension and controversial leaders. The fundamental agreement of Connecticut society on most matters of importance that characterized the seventeenth century and had resulted in great
respect for law, authority, and institutions, suddenly was disrupted in the eighteenth century. First came the arousal of economic ambitions, and then came the impact of that massive religious revival, the Great Awakening. The simple agrarian economy of the seventeenth century gave way to a hustling-bustling economy in the eighteenth century. Farmers got involved in trade, artisans were in demand and constituted a new economic class, large-scale merchants appeared who tried to free themselves of Boston or New York control, embryonic manufacturing commenced, and almost everyone speculated in land. This economic pluralism which shattered the previous homogeneity also created a society given to factionalism and controversy, at least by Connecticut standards. It may, indeed, not have been a factious society compared to other colonies, but it looked that way to anyone comparing Connecticut's eighteenth-century experience with its earlier period.

Probably the greatest single divisive economic issue in the colony after 1709 was the problem of paper money. Connecticut first issued paper money in that year in response to a wartime emergency, and from then until the Revolution, the question of Connecticut currency sharply divided the colony into paper money advocates and pound sterling advocates. Lines were never clearly drawn, because the basic problem was that the currency always became badly inflated and different groups were frequently changing their positions as inflation might be beneficial at one moment and not at the next. The amount of dissension engendered by the economic pluralism is reflected by the statistics that in the first three decades of the eighteenth century, Connecticut's population increased three and one-half fold, while its debt suits in court increased nineteen fold.

Coupled with economic turmoil were the religious disputes in Connecticut after 1690. The Congregational Churches of Connecticut were on the defensive in the eighteenth century, as dissenters like the Anglicans and Baptists made inroads in the colony. Even within the Congregational Establishment there was no unanimity. The Saybrook Platform, which created associations of ministers and consociations of congregations, was as controversial within the church in the eighteenth century as the Half-way Covenant had been in the seventeenth. The church roughly divided over the Platform between purists, who claimed that the Platform led to Presbyterianism and undermined the true nature of Congregationalism, and realists, who insisted that the consociations were needed to maintain law, order, and discipline. The Great Awakening served to crystalize and harden the religious differences between the purists and the realists. The Great Awakening, in its Connecticut phase, tried to return Congregationalism to its original Calvinist roots and restore purity to the churches. The proponents of the Great Awakening, the purists, became known as New Lights and
were fought bitterly by the Great Awakening’s opponents, the Old Lights. The Old Lights saw a threat to law and order and a threat to what was left of Connecticut’s tradition of “steady habits” in revivalistic preaching of New Light ministers.

The New Light-Old Light religious division, as might be expected, spilled over into the colony’s political world. Political leaders and magistrates usually were typed as being of one of the two persuasions. The Old Lights were politically stronger on the west side of the Connecticut River, and the New Lights dominated the politics of the east side, though by no means was either side of the river totally united. Parishes and towns were often badly divided in attitudes towards the Awakening and its political aftermath. New Haven, the largest town in the colony, was caught geographically between the East and the West and was badly racked by dissension. Both New Lights and Old Lights referred to themselves as “the orthodoxy” and the other party as “the heretics.” The Old Lights claimed to be upholding the orthodoxy as it existed prior to 1740, and the New Lights claimed to be returning the colony to its original orthodoxy. The Connecticut General Assembly, in the aftermath of the Awakening, became polarized between the two factions. After 1748, in most elections, the New Lights controlled the lower house, the Assembly, while the Old Lights controlled the upper house, the Council.

Governor Roger Wolcott in 1754 became the first Connecticut governor to ever fail of reelection. Wolcott’s loss was not due to the political split in the colony but, rather, to the general disgust of Connecticut voters with the way he had conducted himself in the Spanish Ship controversy, which voters thought had exposed the colony to a possible law suit of a million pounds. However, Wolcott’s defeat cleared the way for Thomas Fitch and William Pitkin, the great antagonists of the 1760s, to become respectively the governor and deputy governor of the colony.

Fitch was a strident Old Light, and Pitkin was a moderate New Light. Fitch wrote one of the most influential religious tracts of the period which explained and defended the Saybrook Platform. Pitkin’s church, the Third Church of Hartford, had a New Light minister, Samuel Woodbridge, but Pitkin was not overly vocal in his religious persuasions. The Third Church adopted the New Light ideology with no more controversy than the incident where Bidwell defamed the Pitkins and Woodbridge for asking a New Light itinerant to preach a guest sermon.

Fitch and Pitkin, the two symbolic leaders of the Old Lights and New Lights, had careers that were strikingly parallel. Both men came from old and revered Connecticut families with long political traditions. Both men were trained professionally as lawyers in a colony where legal training was not as common as in the middle or
southern colonies or the metropolitan centers like Boston and New York. Coincidentally, both men were elected as new assistants to the governor in the same year, 1734. Fitch was defeated for assistant three times during the late 1730s, so technically Pitkin was his senior in terms served as an assistant. Both men frequently served on the same committees because both had similar legal skills to bring to committee work. Both had sat on the council of war during King George’s War and had helped administer the colony’s war efforts. Neither Fitch nor Pitkin pursued active merchant careers, but both had interests in the business activities of the large-scale merchants in their families. In terms of personality, Fitch seemed to be more vocal, and he made more personal enemies. This may have been partially a consequence of the fact that Fitch was governor before Pitkin and, hence, he was more fully exposed to the pitfalls of politics. Fitch was religiously intense, and he frequently gave sermons in his home church in Norwalk. His doctrine was always soundly Congregational, but of the Old Light persuasion. Pitkin never similarly preached in Hartford.

Fitch’s rapid rise to the governorship was almost without parallel by Connecticut standards. In the normal progression of Connecticut elective politics, the deputy governor was habitually elected governor if an incumbent governor died, and the ranking assistant in terms of seniority was elected deputy governor. In 1752, however, when Governor Jonathan Law died and Deputy Governor Roger Wolcott succeeded him, Fitch was elected deputy governor, and thus skipped over his three seniors, James Wadsworth, Samuel Lynde, and William Pitkin. When Wolcott was defeated over the Spanish Ship controversy and Fitch was elected governor in his stead, Pitkin similarly was raised to the deputy governor’s office over Samuel Lynde who was also his senior. This may sound trivial, but, in eighteenth-century Connecticut, it was a rare case of exceptional mobility. The two, Fitch and Pitkin, worked in harmony during the French and Indian War, even though each represented different political factions. Their limited correspondence was courteous and harmonious, and Fitch even spent at least one evening as Pitkin’s house guest in Hartford. On the one occasion that Pitkin discussed Fitch in an extant letter prior to the 1760s, he vigorously defended a course of action that Fitch, as governor, had taken and remonstrated with his correspondent for questioning the honor of a man like Fitch. All this would suggest that their opposition to one another, while very real, did not cause deeply bitter or vituperative personal antagonisms.

The types of leadership the two opposing politicians supplied furnish an interesting contrast. Fitch was the highly-visible, active leader of the Old Light faction. Pitkin, as the political leader of the New Lights, was not nearly as visible either to his contemporaries or to historians. Other New Lights, such as Eliphalet Dyer, Jonathan Trum-
bull, or even William Pitkin, Junior, supplied the active visible leadership in William, Senior's, stead. William seemed always to be hovering on the sidelines of political maneuverings, while others, often his son William, Junior, carried out the actual political work.

For example, in the Susquehannah affair, William, Senior's, position was well known, as he was connected to it by at least three links, and yet, he somehow was never involved directly. The Susquehannah Company was a group of land speculators, based mainly in eastern Connecticut and particularly in Windham County, who sought to place settlers in the Wyoming Valley of Pennsylvania, which they claimed by virtue of Connecticut’s sea-to-sea clause in the Charter of 1662. The Susquehannah Company wanted to get the land deeded to itself, and it needed the approval of the General Assembly. The company rapidly became a political cause, with the Old Lights firmly against it because they feared it would poison relations with other colonies, siphon off Connecticut’s population, make the colony more difficult to govern, and, above all, endanger the Connecticut Charter by incurring the wrath of English officialdom. The Susquehannah Company was run primarily by New Lights and was strongly cemented to the New Light cause.

Fitch, though rumored to have been an early stockholder, was an unequivocal and outspoken foe of the company by the late 1750s. Pitkin's role is less clear, but three curious pieces of evidence point to the conclusion that he was staunchly pro-Susquehannah but less obtrusive than Fitch. The company bought its land rights to the valley from the Indians at the Albany Conference of 1754 at which Pitkin was Connecticut's senior delegate. No direct connection between Pitkin and the buying agent, John Lydius, can be established, but, at such a small and intimate conference, Pitkin must surely have been aware of the transaction and would probably have indicated if he disapproved of it. William, Senior, was never a stockholder of the company, and he probably never attended any of its meetings, but his son, William, Junior, was the seventh-ranked stockholder, and he was prominent at many of its meetings. Thomas Pownall, the English colonial official, when writing to Robert Hunter Morris, the Governor of Pennsylvania who was deeply concerned over what he considered the invasion of his territory, told Morris that Fitch and the present government of Connecticut were implacably against the company, but that he (Pownall) suspected that Deputy Governor Pitkin was concerned in it and a backer of it, and that he knew that Hezekiah Huntington, Daniel Edwards, Eliphalet Dyer, Roger Wolcott, Junior, and Thomas Wells, all assistants, were stockholders. Pitkin seemed involved in the Susquehannah Company every way one turns, and undoubtedly his votes in the council reflected it, although he either preferred to have others act for him or to act behind the scenes. After
1766, when Pitkin replaced Fitch and the New Lights came to dominate the upper house, the Susquehannah Company always carried the Council but could not carry the lower house until 1774. The pro-Susquehannah men in the 1750s dominated the lower house but not the upper, and in the 1760s they dominated the upper house but not the lower.37

The political tensions of the 1750s caused attempts at a political revolution to remove Fitch from the governor’s office soon after he entered it. A score of respectable leaders like William Williams, Trumbull, Dyer, various Huntingtons, Hugh Ledlie, Israel Putnam, and John Durkee are mentioned by one historian as acting like rabblerousers and trying to oust the Old Lights from the Council.38 Though he was the New Lights’ candidate for governor, Pitkin was never implicated directly in the attempt.

In the 1750s, a controversy over Yale College was injected into the political mainstream, and Fitch and the Old Lights were almost turned out of office over it.39 According to a correspondent of Ezra Stiles, an Old Light and future president of Yale, the New Lights hatched a scheme in 1759 to throw Fitch out of office at the next election, but they differed among themselves, at first, whether to vote for Pitkin or Jonathan Trumbull. When they finally reached unanimity on Pitkin and tried to influence the freeman, they were “rather despised than approved of by the body and better part of the people.”40

The ongoing struggle between the two factions was given new virulence by the economic woes experienced by Connecticut after the close of the French and Indian War, and by the political reorganization of the British Empire which followed the end of the war. The colony was plunged into an economic recession in the 1760s by the lack of specie and the difficulty in paying the debts that burdened all classes of Connecticut men.41

Prior to 1763, the entire Connecticut economy had always been highly dependent on credit. English merchants extended credit to American importers who, in turn, extended credit to inland merchants and shopkeepers, who, in their turn, sold the goods to the smaller shopkeeper, farmer, or artisan, for credit. The system had worked reasonably well, with only occasional hardships, but it had resulted in all of Connecticut being badly laden with debts. At the close of the war, many English merchants felt that enough credit had been extended and that now was the time to contract and collect some of the debts. A vicious cycle began whereby each link in the economic chain was pressed for its debts by its creditors above it and, each, in turn, pressed the link below it for payment. Credit was no longer being extended, and the economic system threatened to break down. People who had freely given bonds for others were being pressed for them by sheriffs. Sheriff sales were common, as land, the great col-
lateral used by all, was seized by creditors. Major merchants like Joseph Pitkin were bankrupted, and even Jonathan Trumbull, the future governor and already one of the largest merchants in the colony, failed in his scramble to keep his head above water and eventually sank into insolvency. It was on this chaotic economic scene, added to the already-unstable political picture (unstable by Connecticut’s past standards), that the British colonial officials’ plans for reorganizing the empire burst.

The main thrust behind the New Imperial Policy which resulted in the Sugar Act and the Stamp Act is well known to all students of American History. At the close of the French and Indian War, Britain was faced with four major problems: a vastly enlarged empire, colonies that the home officials thought had been less than zealous in their supplies of money and men during the recent war, a huge war debt of nearly £140,000,000, and highly-taxed and disgruntled home-island taxpayers. Accordingly, the New Imperial Policy was designed to provide new administrative channels, cement the colonies more firmly in the imperial network, raise money to pay for the colonies’ defences, and provide some psychological and economic relief to the English taxpayers.

The act labelled by colonists as the Sugar Act provided for substantial duties upon many normally-consumed articles, while actually lowering a pre-existing duty on foreign molasses. However, the newly lowered duty on molasses, unlike its predecessor which was normally evaded, was to be strictly enforced and collected. Acts regulating the trade of the colonies and charging external duties on imported items had a long-accepted history in the empire, and no one in Connecticut questioned the constitutional soundness of the Sugar Act. But it is doubtful if the home officials realized the severity of the recession in the colonies and the economic hardships that the new act would work. The only aspect of Connecticut’s import-export trade that was healthy was the West Indian trade, one which the Sugar Act now made unprofitable.42 In Connecticut, both the recession and the hardships were acute, and the colony complained bitterly over the act which seriously exacerbated an already severe problem. The newly-founded Connecticut Courant harped on the “universal distress” caused by the act and made constant reference to the disruption of the vitally-needed trade with the French and Spanish Caribbean Isles.43 There was no division among Connecticut politicians over the Sugar Act. They all agreed that it was disastrous for the colony.

On the heels of the Sugar Act came the news to Connecticut that stamp duties for the American colonies were being considered by the Grenville ministry. Stamp duties for the colonies had often been talked about in the past. In 1722, Archibald Cummins of the Colonial Office had suggested them, and in 1743, the suggestion was reiterated by Sir
William Keith. In 1754 and 1757, the Treasury Board had proposed them to help financially administer the colonies and had even progressed to the point of drawing up acts which were never introduced in Parliament. After the Grenville administration succeeded the Bute ministry in April, 1763, it was suggested to Secretary of the Treasury Jenkinson that a stamp duty in the American colonies could conservatively amount to £60,000 per annum.

Actually, the biggest surprise in connection with the stamp duties was that they had not been introduced in the colonies earlier. Stamp duties had been a large and not unpopular source of income in England since 1694, when the first Stamp Act was passed under William and Mary. When the Connecticut General Assembly met in May of 1764, Governor Fitch submitted to it a letter he had received from colony agent Richard Jackson which told of a Parliamentary resolution in favor of a stamp tax. A committee, with Governor Fitch as head, was appointed to write a remonstrance to the Bute Government against the proposed Stamp Act. With Fitch as the prime author and mover, the Connecticut General Assembly transmitted to agent Jackson, to be submitted to Parliament, a petition entitled, *Reasons why the British Colonies in America, should not be charged with internal taxes, by authority of Parliament, Humbly offered, for consideration in behalf of the colony of Connecticut.* The petition was reprinted for publication to the colony at large by Green printers of New Haven.

Most of Fitch's defense was based on the Charter of 1662. He contended that the Charter created the General Assembly and gave it legislative powers which included the sole power of taxation. Every Englishman was entitled to be taxed only by his consent in a legislature, and the legislature for Englishman in Connecticut was the Connecticut General Assembly. The Assembly had been created by the charter and was sanctified by over 100 years of existence. Fitch raised possible arguments in favor of the Stamp Act, and then he proceeded to demolish them.

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<th>Argument</th>
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<td>There was not much money per inhabitant involved.</td>
<td>It did not matter that the tax may be slight. &quot;The same principles which will justify such a tax of a penny, will warrant a tax of a pound, a hundred, or a thousand pounds and so on.&quot;</td>
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<td>Parliament has the good of the entire empire at heart. Dozens of acts of trade and navigation have already been passed and accepted.</td>
<td>Fitch strongly distinguished between taxes outside the boundaries of the colony, such as ocean taxes and trade taxes, and taxes raised inside the colony. He raised the external vs internal taxes issue which was to become familiar over the course of the next five years. Parliament already</td>
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41
had the right to levy external taxes for trade regulation purposes, and it was these that Connecticut had accepted in the past, not internal taxes.

**Argument:** The seaboard colonies should help pay for the westward defense and expansion on the North American continent.

**Answer:** New England was settled privately, financed privately, and defended privately. "Why should it now pay for western colonies and western defense?" Also, Fitch continued, "expediency did not justify a violation of principles." The fact that money was needed was no reason to destroy the rights of Englishman.

Fitch finished his *tour de force* against the Stamp Act with a short paragraph admonishing Britain that the tax was not only unconstitutional but also foolish. He reminded Britain that the colonies were a source of great strength to her, and that if the colonies were to lose their economic vigor, Great Britain would lose much of her strength.

Deputy-Governor Pitkin, the governor's council, and the entire General Assembly were behind Fitch in support of the petition to Parliament. At this initial juncture in the Stamp Act crisis, Connecticut was united. Jared Ingersoll, a prominent New Haven Old Light and frequent member of the General Assembly, was leaving for Britain on other business, and he was asked by a resolution of the Assembly to assist Richard Jackson, the Connecticut agent, in arguing against the impending act. Ingersoll and Jackson presented Grenville with Fitch's reasons, but Grenville thought that while they were exceptionally well written, they did not carry their point. He was, of course, receiving similar arguments from most of the other colonies, though Connecticut's arguments were somewhat unique in that they were based so heavily on its charter—a document that not all colonies possessed. Neither Fitch's nor any other protest was effective, and the Stamp Act was passed by Parliament in March of 1765 and was scheduled to go into effect on November 1, 1765. Ingersoll, the man Connecticut had dispatched to argue against the act, accepted the commission of Stamp Act Distributor for Connecticut. In a later attempt to justify his acceptance of the post, Ingersoll wrote that he did everything possible to stop the Stamp Act, but now that it was passed and an accomplished fact, he felt that he and the colony should make the best of it. He thought that Connecticut would rather have him administer the sale of the stamps than have it done by some stranger. He assumed he would be blamed if he did not accept the position, and he took pride in the fact that "I have been able to alleviate the act a little."

The Connecticut public followed the Stamp Act debates in Parliament with avid interest. On May 6, 1765, news was received from New York that the speeches in Parliament against the Stamp Act and for
the colonies were more numerous than had been anticipated, and that they were "infinitely superior in point of argument tho' outnumbered by the ministerial party." Grenville's speech introducing the act was "more specious than valid," and Connecticut was convinced that everyone in England with a knowledge of either the constitution or the colonies "seem'd unanimous in favor of the colonies."

When Hartford received notice on May 6 that the Stamp Act had been passed, the Courant noted that it was passed by a majority of only 42 votes out of a full house of 400. Connecticut people were particularly outraged by Charles Townshend's speech which said that the colonies were "children of our planting, nourished by our indulgence, and protected by our arms." Townshend was quoted as saying that the colonies should repay all this munificence by contributing to the empire's expenses. Isaac Barre, writing a public reply to Townshend, had a different version of Connecticut's early history—Connecticut was "planted by England's oppression, grew by England's neglect, and took up arms in defense of England's interests." Barre warned Townshend that the colonists were "jealous of their liberties" and "will vindicate them."

The protest in Connecticut after the passage of the Stamp Act went far beyond the niceties of gentlemanly language and reproof, and it was carried on in other tones and methods. A week after Hartford received news that Ingersoll had accepted the position of Stamp Master for Connecticut, the Courant reprinted a New Jersey letter stating that all good men will "detest, abhor, and hold in the utmost contempt," all those people who accept employment under the Stamp Act, and that such people were nothing but "stamp pimps." After May, in Hartford nothing else but the stamp duties was talked about in the letters to the papers, in July, the colonists were likened to the Israelites who were persecuted by the Egyptians now turned Englishmen, and the normal propriety of Connecticut newspapers was breached by comments which referred to the home officials as "those dirty sycophants," and "ministerial hacks."

It was when confronted with the actual passage of the Stamp Act, and the passionate attacks on it, that the unanimity of Connecticut's population and leaders broke down. Many people agreed with Ingersoll that though the Stamp Act was unfortunate, it was now law and Connecticut should work for its repeal, but in the meantime, all subjects of the crown would have to obey it and make the best of it. Others, however, swore never to obey the Stamp Act and advised breaking it and carrying on all transactions without it. Historians have usually applied the terminology of "conservative" and "radical" to denote these two positions and have seen a connection between western-Connecticut, Old Lights, conservatives, and Tories, and a similar connection between eastern-Connecticut, New Lights, radicals, and
Whigs. While some recent historians have pointed out problems with this terminology, and men and areas that it does not fit, the terminology is useful, and the connections somewhat accurate, if they are taken as general rules and not hardened into definitive categories.\textsuperscript{56} The progression is perhaps more accurate on the connections between the West, Old Lights, and conservatives, and the connections between the East, New Lights, and radicals. It is erroneous when it attempts to link these two groups to Tories and Whigs. While the Old Light conservatives usually polled 35\% of the colony’s votes in the 1760s, far fewer than that, probably 5\% to 10\%, were Tories. Many staunch Old Lights and conservatives such as Ebenezer Silliman, who was Speaker of the Whig General Assembly in 1776, and whose son, Gold Selleck Silliman, was a Revolutionary general, were active leaders during the Revolution.\textsuperscript{57} Nevertheless, if the Tory-Whig part of the connection is left aside, the connection is reasonably accurate, and the terms conservative and radical are as accurate as anything else proposed. Contemporaries of the 1760s often used the terms “western man” and “eastern man” to denote the political differences, though this was probably not as accurate as “conservative” and “radical.” Nevertheless, the two groups had basically differing attitudes towards authority. The conservatives felt that authority must be acceded to, and the radicals felt that their version of justice and liberty was more important than authority.

In the eastern part of the colony, the extra-legal organization known as the Sons of Liberty made its first appearance in the summer of 1765 and rapidly spread to most of the towns in the colony. Ingersoll, the Stamp Distributor, was hanged in effigy in Lebanon, Windham, Norwich, and New London. The papers reported with glee the festival-like atmosphere that accompanied these stamp master hangings.\textsuperscript{58} In that same summer, Benjamin Church published a broadside, entitled \textit{Liberty and Property Vindicated and the Stamp master Burnt}. It commented on the recent wave of effigy hangings and said that Ingersoll had been trusted and honored in the colony and now he had become a “traitor and a turncoat.” Church, taking a cue from Boston and New York, where the stampmasters had been forced to resign out of fear for their lives, called upon the freemen of Connecticut to visit the stampmaster and convince him of his error. Church suggested that Ingersoll should be asked peaceably to resign and if he refused “ask him in such a manner that he will be glad to do anything for a quiet life.”\textsuperscript{59} In September, the Sons of Liberty accepted this advice and intercepted Ingersoll on his way to attend a special session of the legislature called in Hartford by Fitch under pressure from both the conservative and radical elements.

Ingersoll tells the story well himself, about the “Wethersfield affair,” as he called it, in letters he later published in the \textit{Connecticut}
Gazette. He had heard in advance that a group of "eastern men" was going to try and "brain from me a resignation" on his way to Hartford from New Haven. Ingersoll, Governor Fitch, and some other gentlemen left New Haven for Hartford on September 18 and had ridden about 18 miles when they met two men who were advance riders of the mob. Ingersoll talked with the two men and agreed to go on with them and without the governor to meet the mob. He spent the night in a nearby tavern and journeyed on the next day in the company of a Major Hall and a Mr. Bishop, the tavern owner. Near Wethersfield, they met 500 men on horseback armed with white barrel staves. After a four-hour dialogue, both on the spot and in a nearby tavern, Ingersoll was told that if he did not resign it would mean "your fate." Ingersoll inquired what, precisely, "fate" meant, but he was given only muttered threats in reply. Nevertheless, he was sufficiently impressed with the mob's intentions that he complied and resigned. After his resignation in Wethersfield, he was escorted to Hartford by the mob and required to repeat publicly his resignation performance on the court house steps.69

Governor Fitch and the conservatives were shocked and appalled by the Sons of Liberty and the Wethersfield affair. William Pitkin, Senior, did not express himself on the affair in any records that have survived, and he was not an active Son of Liberty, although William Junior, was. Once again, the son seemed to have acted, while the father preferred to be known as sympathetic to the Sons of Liberty, while remaining above the level of actual participation. Governor Fitch issued a proclamation that condemned the riots and tumults in the colony and asked the people of Connecticut not to tolerate these disturbers of the peace.61

The General Assembly then voted to send three members to the Stamp Act Congress, meeting in New York that fall. The conservatives and radicals in the legislature compromised by sending Eliphalet Dyer, a radical from Windham in the East, William Samuel Johnson, an Anglican from Stratfield in the West but known to be temperamentally and politically moderate and between the two factions, and David Rowland, a conservative from Fairfield in the West.62 Connecticut still displayed the same care for its freedom of action that it had when it rejected the Albany Plan of Union. The Court instructed the three delegates to "take care that you form no such junction with the other Commissioners as will subject you to the major vote of the Commissioners present."63 The legislature next showed its temperate side and adopted unanimously a statement condemning the riots and tumults everywhere in the colonies, even though most assuredly some of the members of the Assembly had taken part in the Connecticut tumults.64 To show that this statement did not affect their attitudes towards the Stamp Act, however, the lower house passed a series of eleven resolu-
tions against it which were supported by all but five members. Symbolically, Thomas Fitch, Junior, a deputy from Norwalk, voted against the resolves, and William Pitkin, Junior, a deputy from Hartford, voted with the majority for them.

October must have been a difficult and trying month for Fitch, Senior. Under the terms of the Stamp Act, he was required as governor to take an oath prior to November 1 to support the act. Fitch, as the radicals realized and undoubtedly enjoyed thinking about, was in an untenable position. He was a man who believed in law and order and was apprehensive of the official repercussions if he defied the law, and yet he realized that a large percentage of Connecticut's population, probably a majority, wished him to refuse to take the oath. Finally, in late October, the governor asked the members of the Council to administer the oath to him. A long debate ensued, and the subsequent scene has become a familiar story to students of the Revolution in Connecticut. All of the assistants from the east side of the river refused to take part or even witness the oathgiving ceremony and withdrew from the chamber. One assistant from the West, Esquire Sheldon, "twisted and nestled about" in the council chamber and did stay but did not take part in the ceremony. The oath was administered by the remaining four assistants, Ebenezer Silliman, Jabez Hamlin, John Chester, and Benjamin Hall. The assistants who left are mentioned nowhere by name, but since it was unusual for an assistant to miss a council meeting of importance, it is safe to assume that six or seven assistants and Deputy Governor Pitkin walked out of the chamber in protest over the act.

Fitch, by taking the oath, signed his own political death warrant. On November 1, the day the act was to go into effect, a large crowd gathered at the Hartford court house and buried the Stamp Act and symbolically buried Governor Fitch with it. The "eastern men" had tried unsuccessfully to topple Fitch from office about as soon as he entered it, but now they had a winning issue to use against him. The governor and the four assistants who had cooperated with him were all marked for "political death in the highest manner."

Fitch realized this, and, in a desperate attempt to salvage his future and justify his actions, he published a broadside entitled, Some Reasons that Influenced the Governor to Take and The Council to Administer The Oath, Required By the Act of Parliament, Commonly Called the Stamp Act. Humbly Submitted to the Consideration of the Public. Much of his defense was based on the old argument the conservatives had used against the Susquehannah Company—defense of the charter. Fitch maintained that to not take the oath and to defy the Stamp Act would anger the home officials and possibly cause them to revoke the charter. If he had not taken the oath, it might have "been fatal to the charter privileges." Such a possibility was not
worth the risk. Fitch also laid bare his soul in the pamphlet, and he wrote that if he had not taken the oath he would have been tried and would have had to plead guilty. The conviction would have "deprived [Fitch] of any further usefulness in life" and "rendered [him] infamous." Further, the governor said that it was clear "to the whole council present" that the governor should take the oath and comply with the law. Fitch omitted saying that only five of his twelve assistants were present and that the majority had indicated their displeasure by walking out.

It appears that there was never any doubt that William Pitkin would be the candidate for the radicals. Negotiations carried out to ensure voting against Fitch never mentioned Pitkin by name as the other candidate but used the terminology "our side" or "eastern side." Undoubtedly, even had no political machinations gone on and had no deals been made, public indignation would have voted Fitch out and Pitkin in. However, two clear cut deals were made that ensured Pitkin's election by such a large percentage that the votes "were too numerous to be counted."72

William Pitkin, Senior, played no overt part in either of these two operations, although William Pitkin, Junior, did in one of them and possibly may have in the other. The first cabal was worked out between William Samuel Johnson, a political leader of the Anglicans in the western part of the colony, and Eliphalet Dyer, the mercurial radical from Windham.73 Johnson, a close friend of Dyer's, was convinced that Fitch was a fading star and would certainly lose in the spring elections. Dyer suggested to Johnson that if Johnson would lead the Anglicans in supporting the eastern interest, he, Dyer, would influence the East to support Johnson for the council. Ezra Stiles felt that this strategem added 1,000 votes to Pitkin's total.74 Johnson's answer to the proposed deal is not recorded, but, shortly thereafter, he was denouncing Fitch and the leaders from the West as men with "little scoundrel turns of mind."75 The Stamp Act was making some strange bedfellows. Johnson and Dyer, by this deal, cemented the very conservative Anglicans to the eastern radicals in a coalition to defeat the western interests. Once again, while William Pitkin, Senior, seems to have taken no part in the negotiations, it is coincidental to the point of making one suspicious that William, Junior, and Johnson must have been in active correspondence at the time. Much of this correspondence has not been preserved, but the extant letters show that the two aided each other in legal work in their respective towns. When Johnson needed some debts collected in Hartford, he turned to William, Junior, for assistance.76 Certainly, if William, Junior, had not been involved actively in the electioneering deal, Johnson's knowledge of him could only have enhanced his willingness to negotiate with Dyer.
The other political deal might more aptly be termed Connecticut's first nominating convention. On March 15, a Sons of Liberty meeting was held in Hartford, with delegates attending from all the towns in the colony. William Pitkin, Junior, was elected clerk of the meeting and publicized the meeting in subsequent signed notices in the newspapers. People other than Sons of Liberty were allowed to attend the first part of the meeting which set up a committee of correspondence to write to other Sons of Liberty groups in other colonies, but after this business was concluded, spectators were asked to leave. When the meeting was reduced to just delegates, one of them inquired as to its purpose. He was answered “that as there was dissatisfaction in the colony, it was proposed whether a change in the ministry might not be necessary among us.” Some Sons proposed “to collect the minds of the people for unity,” and, by that means, give the freemen “a lead” in the upcoming election. Even some of the radical Sons were shocked by this open interference in the election proceedings and answered that the general warning of the election was lead enough, and that any other politicking would be “unconstitutional” and tend in an undue manner to influence the minds of the freemen and be fraught with the worst sorts of mischief. Electioneering would produce “infinite disquietudes among the people, and lay a foundation for perpetual feuds.” The argument continued that this sort of politics was “unknown and unpracticed by the virtuous founders of the colony.” The meeting adjourned with these protests, but the delegates met again the next day and caucussed into counties. Each county caucus decided “independently” to vote in the future for P——— and T——— for governor and deputy governor. The dissenters to this practice, which was tantamount to a nominating process, declared that they did not see how the gentlemen concerned in these extraordinary measures could reconcile their conduct “with the spirit of liberty, which is the object in view.” However, the die was cast, and the movement to unseat Fitch and the Old Lights moved from subtle innuendo to overt action.

On the eve of the May election, the last edition of the Courant before the voting day carried the news that the Stamp Act had been repealed by Parliament. Rumors that the Stamp Act was repealed had been flying around the newspapers for a month, but now concrete proof had arrived. In the same edition, the Courant published a poem by a young lady to her swain rejecting his suit because he had not opposed the Stamp Act with sufficient force.

Awhile Fond Damon, prithee tarry,
not me to thee eager arms,
thinkest thou, this is a time to marry,
when our dear country's in alarms.
In holy wedlock shall we join,  
our hearts when fierce oppression braves,  
or canst thou wish to have me thine,  
to propagate a race of slaves.

No! Furbish up thy armour bright,  
and let me first thy valour see,  
who for his freedom feers [sic] to fight,  
I fear will never stand by me.

Then buckle on thy trusty sword,  
I plight thee now my faithful word  
and when your freedom's foes are dead,  
to take thee to my virgin bed.

The message was undoubtedly not lost on the freemen of Connecticut. Governor Fitch had “feared to fight” and had not sufficiently “buckled on [his] trusty sword.” He could not now be trusted to stand by his colony and should not enjoy the rewards of valor and virtue.

The angry populace, the deal with Johnson and the Anglicans, the “lead” of the Sons of Liberty, and the anti-Fitch newspapers were enough to swing a landslide victory for Pitkin and displace Fitch and all four assistants who had administered the oath to him. Fitch, who had ridden a wave of anger with Governor Wolcott into office in 1754, was ridden out with a wave of anger and some electioneering tactics in 1766. His farewell speech to the General Assembly was surprisingly gracious and subdued and contained no traces of bitterness. Unlike all the conservatives around him who were denouncing the tactics used by the radicals, he mentioned no combinations against him, and he seemed to bear no grudges against his successor. He did quietly answer an election sermon preached by the Reverend Jonathan Lee which was critically aimed at him, by repeating simply his sentiments that he had acted the way he did in the Stamp Act crisis because he was concerned for the security of the charter.

William Pitkin’s conduct in the campaign was circumspect. Unlike Fitch, he had not indulged in polemics, and he was personally immune to the charges of electioneering, although his supporters certainly were not. It is revealing that the Sons of Liberty chose not to try to elect a hot head like Eliphalet Dyer, when it was suggested, but chose instead to back the quiet and respected deputy governor. This, in a sense, makes the Revolution of 1766 seem less revolutionary than it otherwise would have been. While rejecting the normal Connecticut system of reelecting a governor until his death, the radicals accepted the system to the point of electing in his stead the next most senior man in the colony. While his votes and sentiments made him totally acceptable to the radicals, his aloofness and stature made him
By the Arrival of several Vessels at Boston, in June ensuing from Europe, we have the important Account of the REPEAL of the American STAMP-ACT.

An Act for granting and applying certain Stamp duties, and other duties, in the British colonies and plantations in America, towards further defraying the expense of defending, protecting, and securing the same; and for amending such parts of the several acts of Parliament, relating to the trade and revenues of the said colonies and plantations, as direct the manner of determining and recovering the penalties and forfeitures therein mentioned.

Whereas an Act was passed in the last session of Parliament, entitled an Act for granting and applying certain Stamp duties, and other duties, in the British Colonies and plantations in America, towards further defraying the expenses of defending, protecting, and securing the same; and for amending such parts of the several acts of Parliament relating to the trade and revenues of the said colonies and plantations, as direct the manner of determining and recovering the penalties and forfeitures therein mentioned: And whereas the continuance of said Act would be attended with many inconveniences, and may be productive of Consequences greatly detrimental to the commercial interests of these Dominions: May it therefore please your most excellent Majesties, and the Commons assembled in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, that from and after the first day of May, 1766, the above-mentioned Act, and the several matters and things therein contained, shall be, and is, and are hereby repealed, and made void, to all intents and Purposes whatsoever.

The Connecticut Courant’s account of the repealing of The Stamp Act.

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seem not to be a repudiation of the colony's alleged virtue of "steady habits."

The election of 1766 was a political revolution, but it was also an election that might not have been as disquieting to the average moderate freeman as the election of a less temperate man would have been. Pitkin was a natural for the election. His present position of deputy governor, his lack of involvement in the upsetting electioneering tactics, his family tradition, and his past record of moderation and sober leadership, all combined to make him the man to whom the colony could turn for relief from both British oppression and local turmoil.

In an obituary for Pitkin's wife, Mary, in the spring of 1766, the piety, sobriety, and gentility of Mary and the entire Pitkin family was stressed. The more rash actions of William, Junior, did not seem to detract from that image prior to his father's actual tenure as governor. William, Senior, was one of the few public men never attacked by any letter in the Courant and probably seemed to be one of the few men left who still commanded the dignity required of the governor's office. William Pitkin moved into the governor's chair easily and was seemingly unscathed. He found, as Fitch had found, that in the governor's office he would suddenly become far more visible, but unlike Fitch, he would not personally draw hosts of political enemies, and would be able to remain somewhat aloof from political maelstroms.

The Governorship and The Family in Perspective

Governor Pitkin's three and a half years tenure were not peaceful years for the colony of Connecticut and probably were not happy years for the governor. Externally, the years saw a continuation of the struggles with Britain when the Townshend Acts were enacted by Parliament and Connecticut responded with a non-importation agreement among the merchants. Internally, the colony continued its factional politics when the conservatives responded to the radicals' electioneering of 1766 with subsequent politicking of their own in the hope of returning former Governor Fitch to the governorship. Connecticut's earlier economic woes were exacerbated by the tensions of the 1760s and men complained publicly that they could barely afford to feed their families. Governor Pitkin had to contend with all these problems and suffered, as well, the personal losses of his
wife, Mary, a month before his first election and his eldest grand­
daughter on the day of his second election.

Vituperation characterized Connecticut's internal politics between 1766 and 1769. Governor Pitkin, while not totally immune to attacks, still managed to escape the worst ire of his opponents. Indeed, most criticism of him came through attacks on William, Junior, who was villified in two series of public exchanges. William, Junior, and the radicals were denounced for being inordinately ambitious for nominating and electing the governor's son to the Governor's Council.³ The importance of family connections in politics notwithstanding, no father-son combination had previously sat in the council together, prior to William, Junior's, election in the same year as his father's election to the governorship. The opposition made the most of this and charged the radicals with nepotism. One conservative pointed out that though former Governor Wolcott's son had been one of the most respected men in the colony, the freemen had not elected him to the Council until the year after his father left office. In the eyes of another conservative, William, Junior, shared the blame with Eliphalet Dyer, whom everyone acknowledged to be the fieriest radical in the colony, for the recent Stamp Act tumults and dissension. In a cutting attack, William, Junior, and Dyer were blamed for stockpiling gun­powder, which was to be used in celebrating the repeal of the Stamp Act, in a local school. Overexcitement caused a match to be struck prematurely, which resulted in the blowing up of the school and a general conflagration. The attacking writer left no doubt that the school explosion symbolized the Colony of Connecticut being de­stroyed by the actions of the same culprits.⁴

Political criticism of William, Junior, and the radicals, however, should not be taken as an indication that William, Senior, had lost his stature as the colony's most respected man. By his election, he had foregone his low visibility, but criticism of him, personally, still re­mained minimal. For every line in the Courant that found fault with the governor, there were at least ten lines that found fault with Deputy Governor Jonathan Trumbull. Trumbull was a far more contro­versial figure, and some conservatives were concerned for the governor's health because they feared that his death would result in Trum­bull's elevation. Benjamin Gale, the most outspoken and caustic con­servative in the colony, who normally attacked anything that faintly resembled radicalism, publicly praised Pitkin as "an aged but very worthy governor" and strongly implied that his death would be a greater disaster for the conservatives than it would be for the radicals.⁵ An election sermon preached in Gale's home town, Killingworth, a conservative stronghold, and published at large in the colony, echoes this praise for Pitkin, even though the sermon was presumably de­livered to an audience hostile to the radicals.⁶
Despite the loud political wrangling of the late 1760s, there were discernible signs that Governor Pitkin was cooling the political fires, and he might have quenched them, had it not been for his death. As Gale’s praise shows, Pitkin had maintained the respect of the radicals’ most ardent opponents. This may have been helped by a slight restraining hand Pitkin placed on the Susquehannah Company’s plans and by his compromise in a highly-publicized fight between Norwalk and Fairfield over the location of the Fairfield County courthouse. The colony was also much more united in its opposition to the Townshend Acts than it had been in its opposition to the Stamp Act. John Dickinson’s Letters From A Pennsylvania Farmer, the most influential response of a colonist to the Townshend Acts, was reprinted in Connecticut amidst general acclaim. Pitkin’s firm but measured official response to the acts seemed to be approved of by most. While proclaiming the colony’s loyalty, he petitioned the King for relief from the taxes, charging, as Fitch had done previously in the Stamp Act controversy, that the taxes violated Connecticut’s charter. The election returns for the years 1767, 1768, and 1769 show that Connecticut politics were becoming less heated and that Pitkin reached a crest of popularity in 1768 and maintained it in 1769. In the years that the votes were recorded, fewer people voted in each succeeding election. Political scientists usually believe that the more heated an election is, the more people will vote.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pitkin</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
<th>Fitch</th>
<th>Total Votes</th>
<th>Margin of Victory</th>
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<tr>
<td>1767</td>
<td>4,777</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>3,484</td>
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<td>2,835</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1769</td>
<td>4,654</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>2,636</td>
<td>7,290</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The freemen and population of Connecticut were increasing in numbers, but the declining number of actual voters indicated a lowered controversy level. Similarly, while the total number of voters declined, Pitkin’s margins of victory in 1768 and 1769 were substantially higher than in 1767, and he nearly doubled Fitch’s total in his last two elections. If one doubts that this was a personal tribute to Pitkin, the election difficulties of Jonathan Trumbull ought to dispel the doubt. Trumbull could not muster enough votes to be reelected deputy governor by the freemen in 1769 or to be elected governor in 1770. In both cases, the election was cast into the General Assembly where Trumbull barely eked out victories.

Pitkin’s calming influence on Connecticut politics ended with his death in October, 1769. With this, the political struggle over the annual elections blazed again as the conservatives attempted and nearly succeeded in blocking Trumbull from the governorship. In the elec-
tion of 1770, the total number of votes increased to 9,771, as compared to 7,290 in 1769, indicating that with Pitkin's death the controversy level sharply increased. In the renewed battle, the popular anti-Trumbull ballad of 1770 that was sung by the conservatives criticized Pitkin, but it did so gently. The ballad was a long series of verses which chronicled the history of Connecticut's governors. After many stanzas, it came to the Fitch-Pitkin years.

Old Captain Pitch [Fitch] commanded next,
a skillful navigator,
and as good a seaman as ever turned
his hardy face to weather,
when a mutiny on board the ship
fomented by chaplain and gunner,
drove Captain Pitch from the quarterdeck
and the ship was most undone sir.

Now this is what I will maintain
Let who will it gainsay, sir,
whene'er the crew has mutinied
the chaplain has been in the fray, sir.

Our old friend Will [Pitkin] next took the helm
who cruised for many years, sir,
and steered as well when the weather was calm,
as any tar on board sir,
his friendly art succeeded now
to accomplish every measure
by a "how do you do," with a decent bow
and a shaking of hands forever.

Now this is what I will maintain
as the judgement of one freeman,
that his bowing his head and shaking of hands
was done to please the seamen.

Now Will is dead and his purser [Trumbull] broke,
I know not who'll come next, sir,
The seamen call for old Pitch again,
affairs are sore perplexed, sir.12

Clearly, the ballad saw Pitkin as a steady man with a sure grasp of the situation in the 1760s who was managing by "his friendly art" to placate the differing factions in the colony. The most severe criticism this anti-radical ballad mounted was the gentle chiding it gave Pitkin for not remaining aloof and above the people, but instead allowing his policies to be influenced by them. The conservatives, while
Elisha Pitkin's house built in 1758-59 on land given to him by his father, Joseph. Known in the early nineteenth century as “Squire Pitkin's Home.”

First floor plan of Elisha Pitkin's house.
recognizing the quality of Pitkin's leadership, could not reconcile themselves to the new role in politics that public opinion played in his election and governorship. The conservatives, however, did realize that Pitkin's death removed from office the man who was conciliating the entire colony, and once again left "affairs . . . sore perplexed."

II

The Pitkin leaders of the Revolutionary years were the surviving members of the third generation and the oldest members of the fourth generation. The most prominent Pitkin of the early Revolutionary struggles in the 1760s, besides William the governor, was his brother John of the third generation. The Pitkin leaders in the new state of Connecticut at the end of the Revolutionary years were William IV, Ashbel, Elisha, and Richard, all of the fourth generation. The third-generation Pitkins were old men when the Revolution broke out, and most of them died during its course. The fourth-generation Pitkins were generally young men during the 1760s who took over the leadership of Connecticut from their fathers during the Revolution. Only John, of the third-generation men, survived the Revolutionary period in a position of power. The best symbol of the passing of the old third generation and the newly-emerging fourth generation was in the death of William III at the age of 75 in 1769, and the rise of William IV to his father's status as a leader. In 1770, William IV was the sixth-ranking assistant in the new governor's council.

Pitkins also played an active role in the military years of the Revolution. William IV was one of Connecticut's delegates to the Second Continental Congress. He and his brother George were both colonels in the militia during the war years, and their cousins, Elisha and Richard, were captains. Only one Pitkin, Samuel, was killed in military action during the war. Probably the greatest contribution the Pitkins made to the military effort came through their role as manufacturers. William IV and George started the first powder mill in Connecticut to supply the troops with gunpowder. They were undoubtedly asked to do so by the General Assembly, since the brothers expected to lose money on the venture, which, in fact, they did.13

At the end of the war, there were seventeen fourth-generation Pitkin men living in Connecticut. Four of them lived outside of the Third Society, and seven of them married wives from outside of Hartford, indicative of the start of a trend towards the dispersal of the family. In 1783, the Pitkins' long dominance in Hartford came to an end when they successfully led a movement that resulted in the creation of the town of East Hartford out of the Third Society. In East Hartford's first town meeting, it elected 41 town officers of whom thir-
teen bore the Pitkin name. Twelve of the thirteen were from the fourth generation.\(^\text{14}\)

III

From 1659, when “William the Immigrant” arrived in Hartford, until 1783, when the Third Society became East Hartford, Pitkins supplied Hartford with leadership. Amidst this striking continuity, some discontinuities can be seen. Different kinds of leadership were required by different times. William the Immigrant was controversial in a time when Connecticut was in its steadiest habits. At a time when Connecticut was its unsteadiest, William III provided calm and reassuring leadership. When Connecticut became engulfed in factious politics that required artful electioneering tactics, William IV supplied them. William the Immigrant was known for his piety, while each successive generation became more secularly-oriented. Ideological changes did not affect the Pitkins’ leadership position. Instead of being replaced with changes, they changed with the times. As Connecticut passed from Puritan to Yankee, to use Richard Bushman’s phrase, the Pitkin family underwent the same metamorphosis. William the Immigrant was a Puritan magistrate. William IV was a Yankee politician.

Notes

THE PITKIN FAMILY IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY CONNECTICUT

4. There were twelve assistants to the governor elected annually in a colony-wide election. These twelve men comprised the Governor’s Council, the upper house of the General Assembly. Each town could elect two deputies to the Assembly, the lower house of the General Assembly, though some of the smaller and more distant towns occasionally sent only one deputy in order to save money. Each town meeting elected a moderator to preside over it, and each town elected five, six, or seven selectmen annually, one town clerk, and one town treasurer. See Bruce C. Daniels, “Large Town Power Structures in Eighteenth Century Connecticut,” unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (University of Connecticut, 1970), 15-56.
5. These computations can be seen in expanded though slightly different form in Daniels, “Large Town Power Structures,” chap. II.
7. Thomas Cobbett, *A Fruitfull and Usefull Discourse Touching the Honor
Due From Children to Parents and The Duty of Parents Towards Their Children (London, 1656), quoted in Morgan, *Puritan Family*, 133, 134.


10. Ibid., 120, 121.


12. Ibid., 15, 16.


14. A. P. Pitkin, *Pitkin Family of America* (Hartford, 1887), xxvii. The Pitkin genealogy is an excellent one and was of major aid in preparing this study.

15. Ibid., xxviii.


19. Town Votes, I, 137.

20. Col. Recs., I, 461. All citations of militia officers, county officers, deputies to the General Assembly, assistants to the Governor’s Council, and other colony officers are taken from the Col. Recs.

21. All citations of town officers are taken from Town Votes, I, and Hartford Town Votes, 1716-1789, ms., Hartford City Hall. Hereafter cited as Town Votes, 1716-1789.

22. For a discussion of the relative importance of different town officers, see Daniels, “Large Town Power Structures,” chap. I.


25. Town Votes, I (1673), 168.


27. Ibid., 173.


29. Ibid., 196.

30. Ibid., 197.


34. *Town Votes*, I (1673), 168; (1678), 182; (1684), 212.
35. *Town Votes*, I (1684), 212.
37. All family relationships cited in this essay are from Pitkin, *Pitkin Family*.
38. Hartford Land Records, Hartford City Hall, I, 77. Hereafter cited as HLR.
39. HLR, I, 77.
40. HLR, I, 92, 93.
41. HLR, I, 92, 93.
42. HLR I, 135, 136.
43. All wills, estate papers, and probate inventories used in this essay can be found in the Connecticut State Library, where they are indexed both alphabetically and by probate district.
44. The state of John's health is indicated in his will.
46. All officers elected in the First Society of Hartford and cited in this booklet can be found in *Historical Catalogue of the First Church in Hartford, 1633-1685* (Hartford, 1885). All officers elected in the Third Society of Hartford and cited in this booklet can be found in Connecticut Church Records, *East Hartford's First Congregational Church, 1699-1912* (Hartford, 1932), part II.
47. *Town Votes*, I (1703), 267.
49. HLR, II, 220.
50. HLR, II, 346, 348.
51. HLR, III, 227.
52. HLR, II, 287; II, 288, 289, 290; II, 346, 348; III, 260, 261; III, 317; IV, 1, 18, 19.
53. HLR, IV, 42, 43.
54. Quoted in the deed in HLR, IV, 42, 43.
55. HLR, VI, 265.
57. His will revealed that he owned substantial amounts of land in Hartford (on both sides of the river), Bolton, Lebanon, Stafford, and Coventry.
58. See the will of William Pitkin II, 1724. Pitkin, *Pitkin Family*, also has a section on the manufacturing interests of the family, chap. XII.
61. See estate of Joseph Pitkin, 1762.
62. HLR, V-XIII, passim.
63. HLR, VIII, 81.
64. Daniels, "Probate Inventories," 4-7.
66. This can be seen in the colony records by their activities and committee assignments and is also confirmed by Pitkin, Pitkin Family.
67. Daniel Boorstin, The Americans: The Colonial Experience (New York, 1958), 197. Boorstin cites Puritan legislation that prohibited a man on trial or in a civil suit from having another man represent him. However, the prominence of the Pitkin lawyers in lawmaking, boundary disputes, and court cases, suggests that it was not legal knowledge and lawyers that were suspect, but, rather, criminal defense lawyers and people who assigned their defense to others than themselves.
68. The Land of Steady Habits cliche was the subject of an address by Professor Christopher Collier, of the University of Bridgeport, to The Association for the Study of Connecticut History, in Storrs, Connecticut, May, 1972. John Adams' famous quote can be found in most collections of John Adams' works. See Charles Francis Adams, The Works of John Adams (Boston, 1850-1856), VI, 530. It can also be found in most general histories of Connecticut that deal with the colonial period. See Albert E. Van Dusen, Connecticut (New York, 1961), 171.
71. Pitkin, Pitkin Family, liii.
72. Bailyn felt that the colonists tried to recreate the Elizabethan kinship groups, but "despite heroic efforts they failed." Bailyn, Education, 22. Philip Greven shows that they did not fail economically or socially, and the Pitkin experience shows they did not fail politically.
73. Greven, Four Generations, 212.
74. Ibid., 35, 117, 118.
75. Ibid., 201.
76. Ibid., 99.

THE CONCILIATORY AND REASSURING RADICAL
2. Hartford Town Votes, 1716-1789, 1732.
3. Hartford Town Votes, 1716-1789, 1727.
5. Hartford Town Votes, 1716-1789, 1735, 1744, 1745, 1746.
7. This petition is in the Connecticut Archives, first series, Towns and Deeds, IX (April, 1769), 278.
8. Col. Recs., VIII, 47.
19. Petition to General Assembly from the Chief Judge of Superior Court, Connecticut Archives, second series, Civil Officers, X, 227 A.
21. William Pitkin to Israel Williams, December 16, 1754, Massachusetts Historical Society.
23. The best account of this process and the account to which I am indebted for much of this discussion is Bushman, From Puritan to Yankee.
25. Ibid., 239-241.
26. The Spanish Ship Controversy involved a ship bound for Spain with gold and silver worth a fortune, that put into New London harbor when it sprung a bad leak. A massive controversy erupted and lasted over three years concerning how to guard the cargo, who was responsible for its protection, who got salvage rewards and how much these awards should be, and how was the cargo to be shipped to Spain. The best treatment of this is in Richard Hooker, The Spanish Ship Case: A Troublesome Episode for Connecticut, 1752-1758, [Tercentenary Commission of the State of Connecticut Pamphlet] (New Haven, 1934).
27. Thomas Fitch, An Explanation of Saybrook Platform by One That Heartily Desires the Order, Peace, and Purity of These Churches, (Hartford, 1765).
29. Ibid., xxviii.
32. William Pitkin to Israel Williams, December 16, 1754, Massachusetts Historical Society.
34. Susquehannah Papers, I, lxxvi-lxxxiii.
35. Ibid., I, 88, 103.
36. Thomas Pownall to Robert Hunter Morris, December, 1754, Susque-
39. Ibid., 56.
42. Collier, Roger Sherman, 30.
43. Connecticut Courant, 1764, 1765, passim.
45. Gipson, Ingersoll, 123.
47. Gipson, Ingersoll, 126.
48. Ibid., 130.
49. Jared Ingersoll, Mr. Ingersoll's Letters Relating to the Stamp Act (New Haven, 1766), 32, 33. Hereafter referred to as Ingersoll Letters.
50. Courant, May 6, 1765.
51. Courant, May 6, 1765.
52. Courant, May 6, 1765.
53. Courant, May 20, 1765.
54. Courant, June 24, 1765.
55. Courant, July 22, 1765; July 29, 1765.
56. For examples of where this terminology breaks down, see Daniels, "Large Town Power Structure," especially IV, and for a questioning discussion of the terminology, see Warle, "Connecticut's Critical Period," 25-30.
57. Daniels, "Large Town Power Structures," IV.
58. Courant, September 2, 1765; Gipson, Ingersoll, 168, 170.
59. Benjamin Church, Liberty and Property Vindicated and the Stamp master Burn't (Hartford, 1765).
60. Ingersoll Letters, 61-83.
61. Courant, September 23, 1765.
63. Col. Recs., XII, 410.
64. Col. Recs., XII, 411.
65. Col. Recs., XII, 421-425. For the votes, see John Hubbard to Ezra Stiles, New Haven, October, 1765, Dexter (ed.), Stiles.
66. This account of the oathtaking comes from Leverett Hubbard to Ezra Stiles, New Haven, November 6, 1765, Dexter (ed.), Stiles. Jared Ingersoll, Ingersoll Letters, gives a similar account. Almost every book on Connecticut which covers this period provides a description of this scene.
67. Hubbard to Stiles, November 6, 1765, Dexter (ed.), Stiles.
68. Ingersoll Letters, 41.
69. Thomas Fitch, Some reasons that influenced the governor to take and the council to administer the oath, required by the act of Parliament, commonly called the Stamp Act. Humbly submitted to the consideration of the public (Hartford, 1766).
70. Ibid., 9.
71. Ibid., 12.
72. The fact that the votes were too numerous to count is recorded by many contemporaries. It has always been a tradition in the Pitkin Family also. The Pitkin genealogy mentions it, as does a note from a Pitkin descendant in the 1820s that accompanies a letter written to William Pitkin, no date, Franklin Papers, Sterling Library, Yale University.
74. Dexter (ed.), Stiles, 63, 64.
77. This paragraph is based on the Courant, March 31, 1766. Zeichner describes the meeting on the basis of the same source, Zeichner, Connecticut's Years, 73, 74.
78. Courant, April 28, 1766.
79. Courant, April 28, 1766.
80. Courant, May 12, 1766.
81. The election sermon is Jonathan Lee, A Sermon Delivered Before the General Assembly of the Colony of Connecticut; at Hartford; on the Day of the Anniversary Election, May 8, 1766, (Hartford, 1766). Lee praised law and order, but said that the good ruler must obey "higher law" if it and man-made law conflict. The implication was, of course, that the two types of law had conflicted in the Stamp Act crisis and that Pitkin had obeyed "higher law," while Fitch had obeyed man-made law.
82. Courant, February 24, 1766.

THE GOVERNORSHIP AND THE FAMILY IN PERSPECTIVE
1. The best general account of these years is in Zeichner, Connecticut's Years, IV, V, VI.
2. Courant, December 29, 1766.
3. Courant, March 16, 1767; March 23, 1767; April 6, 1767; February 22, 1768.
4. Courant, March 2, 1767; March 30, 1767.
5. Benjamin Gale, Doct Gales letters to J. W. Esq., containing a narrative of the principle matters, of a public and interesting nature, which were subjects of the debates and resolves in the General Assembly of the colony of Connecticut, during their session in May, 1769 (Hartford, 1768), 11.
6. Eliphalet Huntington, The Freemen's Directory, or, well accomplished and faithful rulers described (Hartford, 1768), passim.
7. Governor Pitkin issued a proclamation forbidding the settlement of the Susquehannah Company settlers on their tract of land in Pennsylvania without the permission of the Pennsylvania Proprietors; Courant, June 12, 1769. For the
courthouse fight, *Courant*, September 12, 1768; September 19, 1768; January 2, 1769.


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