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## From Commerce to Controversy: The Career of William Lee, 1769-1778

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FROM COMMERCE TO CONTROVERSY  
THE CAREER OF WILLIAM LEE, 1769-1778

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of History  
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

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by

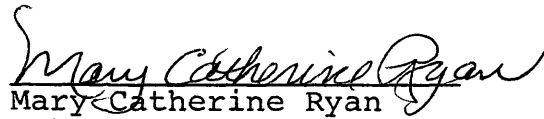
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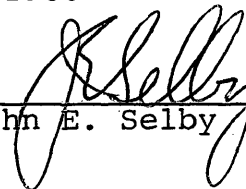
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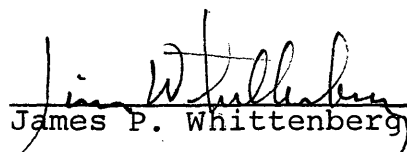
Master of Arts

  
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## ABSTRACT

This study of William Lee focuses on Lee's career between 1769 and 1778. The major sources for research were Lee's own letters and those of his brothers.

William Lee, the brother of Richard Henry and Arthur Lee, left Virginia for London in 1768. The next year he entered the tobacco trade and prospered. He and Arthur Lee associated with the radicals in government, those who opposed the British ministry and sympathized with the American colonies. Lee's political activities culminated in his election as sheriff, then alderman, of London, a unique accomplishment for an American.

In 1777 Lee accepted an appointment to become Congress's commercial agent in France. The next year he was sent to be Congress's representative to the courts at Vienna and Berlin. On the Continent he became embroiled in the feud between his brother Arthur and Silas Deane. The ensuing controversy led to Lee's discharge from office in 1778. Though brief, William Lee's public career highlights important aspects of America's initial steps onto the international stage and directs attention to this critical period in American history.

FROM COMMERCE TO CONTROVERSY  
THE CAREER OF WILLIAM LEE, 1769-1778

The Lees of Virginia--the name alone calls up an image of the gentleman-statesman of the Old Dominion, quick to rise in defense of his country. For the period of the American Revolution, Richard; Henry and Arthur Lee most readily spring to mind as representatives of the family who, working energetically on both sides of the Atlantic, best fit this tradition. Between them, Richard Henry, a leader in the Virginia; House of Burgesses and a prominent delegate to the Continental Congress, Arthur, the prolific letter- and pamphlet-writer and Revolutionary diplomat, more than fulfilled the service expected of any family.

Yet the prominence of these two Lees often leads us to forget that they had other brothers. The eldest, Philip Ludwell, sat on the Virginia Council; Thomas Ludwell and Francis Lightfoot, like Richard; Henry, served in the; House of Burgesses; and William Lee, though less well-known, achieved a status as remarkable as any of his brothers. Although William's career spanned the period leading up to and including the American Revolution, his service was in England and on the Continent, where he combined mercantile and political interests. Between 1768 and 1777, when the differences between the American colonies and Great Britain escalated into warfare, William Lee

not only became a successful tobacco merchant in London but was elected the city's sheriff and alderman. Holding both of these prestigious positions would have been an exceptional accomplishment at any time (Lee is the only American to have that distinction), but more impressive is that the citizens of London elected him on the eve of the Revolution.

London in the late 1760s and early 1770s was the center of support for anti-ministerial and pro-American factions. Both William and Arthur Lee attached themselves to this camp and urged greater support for America's cause. In his capacity as a public official in London, William Lee continued to call for recognition of and sympathy for America's grievances.

In 1777, however, the Continental Congress called him away from his prosperous business in England to take up duties as its commercial agent in Nantes, France. Though he set out with optimism and eagerness to serve his country as one of its official representatives, he soon became embroiled in a web of suspicion and ill-feeling between his brother Arthur and Silas Deane, both American commissioners to the French court. Though inclined toward his brother's side from the outset, William Lee's own mistrust of Deane grew steadily as he sensed that Deane was interfering with and impeding the execution of his office.

Lee's animosity toward Deane continued even after Lee was appointed Congress's commissioner to the courts at Berlin and Vienna. A successful merchant and public official in

London, William Lee had enjoyed steady advancement until he left England in 1777. His fortune changed in France, when the friction between the Lees and Deane overshadowed William Lee's performance. The change in appointments from commercial to political agent did not relieve his frustration. Neither the court at Berlin nor Vienna would receive him as an official representative of the United States, leaving him to spend a year in Frankfurt awaiting change. Congress revoked his commission in 1778, although Lee did not receive word of this until 1779. He stayed a few years longer in Europe but eventually returned to Virginia, where his story had begun.



On August 31, 1739, Hannah Ludwell Lee bore her tenth child, a son whom she and her husband named William. Stratford Hall resounded with lively young voices as strong family bonds that would persist through adulthood formed between the brothers and sisters. At age ten, William experienced the death of his mother, followed closely by his father's the next year--tragedies that many children in colonial Virginia endured. The oldest brother, Philip Ludwell Lee, became master of Stratford Hall, and his frequent absences left William, while in his teens, in charge of the family estates. During this period William learned managerial skills and became familiar with the country, attributes that proved valuable in his business career.

William Lee made his first public political appearance in 1766 as a signer of the Westmoreland Resolutions. These resolves, formulated by Richard Henry Lee, bound its subscribers to oppose enforcement of the Stamp Act and promised dire consequences to anyone who complied with the act in Virginia. Among the 115 signers were the names of all the Lee brothers except Philip Ludwell. This intense family loyalty surfaced on many occasions throughout the brothers' diverse careers. In his correspondence, William reveals how much he valued close family ties. He thought very highly of family duty and sharply admonished Richard Henry and Thomas Ludwell when they rented out part of

their estates. Because they had children to think of, William called their actions "totally unwarrantable" and proclaimed "I will endeavor, with less urgent motives than they have, to do my duty to my Family, as well as every other part of the Society." <sup>1</sup>

The greatest number of Lee's extant letters are to Francis Lightfoot Lee concerning business transactions. But beyond the detailed instructions and advice concerning tobacco and debts lie glimpses of a man with a sense of humor. Although William performed all his mercantile transactions with exact, businesslike expertise, this facet of his life did not overwhelm him. Occasionally he prefaced a letter to Francis Lightfoot with a teasing reprimand for not writing or some other lighthearted note. Upon his election as sheriff of London, William mentioned to Francis Lightfoot that he had heard that some of his friends doubted the compatibility of public office and merchandizing. Feigning wounded pride, he instructed his brother to "Tell these Cavillers they do not know me, and that the greater difficulties I have to encounter, the Greater I am--I have before me the glorious example of my namesake the Immortal William the third." <sup>2</sup>

Arthur and William Lee's voyage to London was not their first. Arthur had attended Eton and studied medicine at Edinburgh, and was now returning to study law. Although neither William nor his older brother Francis Lightfoot had been sent abroad to finish his education, William had made

a brief trip to England in 1761. Late in 1763 he acted as secretary for the Mississippi Company, a venture entered into by several Virginia and Maryland gentlemen to obtain land grants from the crown near the junction of the Mississippi and Ohio rivers. His involvement with this company could have been a factor in his decision to sail for England in 1768, for Arthur wrote to Richard Henry about that time complaining of the British ministry's "antiamerican" stand in opposing land grants such as the company sought.<sup>3</sup>

Shortly after he arrived, William Lee entered into two partnerships that shaped the course of his life. The first was his marriage in London on March 7, 1769, to his first cousin, Hannah Philippa Ludwell. The newly-married couple initially set up housekeeping in Ipswich, then on Tower Hill, the first of what was to be a series of overseas homes. Two of their four children, William Ludwell and Portia, were born in London. Brutus lived his short life (1778-1779) in France, and the fourth, Cornelia, was born in Brussels. It was not until 1784 that William Lee settled at Greenspring plantation, the Virginia estate his wife had inherited.

The second important alliance was Lee's business partnership with Dennys DeBerdt, tobacco merchant and colonial agent for Massachusetts, in December 1769. The DeBerdt firm had two other American partners, Dennis DeBerdt, Jr., and Stephen Sayre. Fearing that Virginia held few opportunities for him, Lee felt that this move definitely advanced

his career. By continuing in the tobacco trade in England, he believed he could reach a greater station in life. Informing Richard Henry of his decision, William pointed out the benefits of the partnership to his connections in Virginia as well as to himself. He asked his brother "to consider, how much more it will be in my power, to serve my Country and friends by being in such a respectable way here."<sup>4</sup> Since the Lee family had to deal with a London merchant in any case, why should they not prefer a near relation to a stranger? Certainly the tobacco trade was attractive. William asserted that he could clear more in one year in trade than in seven on a Virginia estate.

In January 1770 the four partners of the DeBerdt firm sent a circular letter to Virginia advertising their recent purchase of the ship Liberty. Lee, the newest member of the firm, promptly set to work writing to family and friends in Virginia, soliciting business and frequently drawing attention to the DeBerdt's and Sayre's friendship to America.

The elder DeBerdt died in April 1770, ending the partnership, but Lee's Virginia connections continued to serve him as he succeeded in the tobacco trade on his own. Lee was quite satisfied to continue alone, for the partnership had not left fond memories. A comment written soon after the dissolution reflects his strong sentiments: "Being now disengaged f[ro]m any connection I am determind to keep it so, for partnership I do not like."<sup>5</sup> However, in late 1774 he took Edward Browne as a partner, but he did not make the fact public, continuing to operate under his own name until his departure from England in 1777.

Lee's first concern was always for the smooth management of his family's business affairs. As their representative on London's Virginia Exchange, he advised his brothers on the commercial climate, conscientiously filled their orders, and kept them informed of the sailing schedules of the ships he chartered every spring. Usually he picked up consignments on the Potomac and Rappahannock, but he also sent his ships down to the James and York rivers. On these occasions he particularly relied on Francis Lightfoot Lee to advertise the arrival of the ship and gather enough tobacco to fill the hold.

Outside of his family, William Lee catered to a considerable number of clients, including members of some of the major families in Virginia such as Robert Carter Nicholas and Landon Carter. In carrying out his duties he shopped for a variety of goods to meet his clients' needs and desires. Paper, iron and nails, sugar, and vinegar, as well as candlesticks, books, and silver spoons made up only a fraction of the wide assortment of goods that Lee gathered and shipped to Virginia. When a planter's wife had a specific request, William's wife, Hannah Philippa, would step in to choose the best quality and price for a bonnet or length of lace.

William Lee, like most others in the tobacco trade at the time, repeatedly complained of the low price of the product and the consequent problems of both collecting and avoiding debts. The tobacco trade in the most stable times was a risky business; the troubles in the decade of the 1770s compounded

the risk. As of March 2, 1772, the year of a major banking crisis, William had only discouraging news for Francis Lightfoot Lee. He had not sold one hogshead of tobacco since Christmas, he wrote, "not for want of inclination or attention, but because I can't get a reasonable price."<sup>6</sup> June and July brought greater financial distress as a number of Scottish banking houses failed, throwing the entire business community into a panic. Though all about him trading houses tottered on the edge of disaster, William noted with pride that "all this immense storm did not in the least touch my little Cottage and so far from being affected with the epidemical madness, I carryed money to, instead of taking it from my bankers."<sup>7</sup> By July the situation had worsened. He asked Francis to do as much as he could to prevent bills from being drawn on him. The failures of several tobacco houses in London and Glasgow prompted him to request his brother to collect every possible debt owed to his business, "for the storm here is almost as black as wet, and no man can see where it will end or when it will stop."<sup>8</sup>

Through the beginning of the next year troubles continued to plague the London business community. In November 1772 William warned Francis Lightfoot Lee that he was hard pressed for money. The following February Lee was still complaining of tight money. Tobacco merchants were still distressed, and William had to inform his correspondents in Virginia that it was impossible for him to advance any money. Unfortunately, he did not meet with complete success, for he soon complained to Francis that these men drew upon him more liberally than usual, showing

themselves not to be real friends in pushing him so hard at such a critical time.<sup>9</sup>

These economic hard times brought out William's anti-Scottish feelings. After the collapse of Scottish banking houses he wrote, "times are so hard that the Scotchmen are all run to their own Country . . . God speed their Journey."<sup>10</sup> Two years later this hostility had not abated. He warned Francis Lightfoot and Richard Henry that they had better not "adopt the fashionable mode at St. James's, of introducing Scotticisms in their writing . . . What chance can England or America have for a continuance of their Liberty and independence when not only the principles, but the phraseology of that accursed Country is prevalent everywhere."<sup>11</sup>

William Lee's major concern, however, was not with the Scots but with the strength of the opposition against the government. At the time of the Lees' arrival, London was swept up in political controversy. His Majesty's government was faced with considerable opposition in the city. The Rockingham Whigs, remnants of the "Old Corps," had held power until the accession of George III. While they would not tolerate any diminution of British sovereignty, they were sympathetic to American suffering and looked longingly to the days when the Whig oligarchy ruled England and the colonists ran their own affairs.<sup>12</sup>

Another group critical of the present administration formed around William Pitt, the earl of Chatham. Along with

William Fitzmaurice Petty, the earl of Shelburne, and Charles Pratt, Lord Camden, Chatham supported the American colonies in their complaints but did not form an organized party. Chatham already enjoyed personal popularity in America because of his leadership in the Seven Years' War, and his denunciation of the Stamp Act increased his standing. Letters between Arthur and Richard Henry Lee in late 1769 and early 1770 express this sentiment. Richard Henry noted his pleasure in learning from Arthur that the lords Chatham, Shelburne, and Camden would "unite in supporting once more the cause of America, against the present weak and wicked Administration."<sup>13</sup> Chatham further increased his popularity among Americans in 1775 when he spoke in the House of Lords on their behalf. Moving to petition the king to remove troops from Boston and to "disavow the right of taxation explicitly on the part of G.B.," Chatham also "declared that America ought not to submit to the iniquitous and tyrannic laws for its government."<sup>14</sup>

In London opposition sentiment provided a vehicle for the English radicals. Despite their name, the radicals could more properly be called conservatives, for they aimed to reform British political practices by returning to traditional principles. Their goals can be seen as a quest to recover the pure ideals of the constitution, which they believed had been corrupted to the extent that the government was falling under tyranny.<sup>15</sup> They sought three changes: to establish a more equitable system of representation for the House of Commons, to limit the number of crown dependents in that house,



and to relieve religious dissenters from discriminatory legislation.<sup>16</sup>

In 1768, the year the Lees arrived in London, the figure at the center of the current controversy was John Wilkes, who had captured the imagination of many of those dissatisfied with governmental policies. Although a number of his contemporaries discounted him as a demagogue, to his followers he was the champion of liberty. Charged with libel in 1763, when a member of Parliament, he had fled to France and had been declared an outlaw. In 1768 he had returned to England to be elected to Commons and twice more in by-elections in 1769, only to be refused his seat each time at the instigation of the crown. Other members of the opposition severely criticized this disregard for the electoral process. To the Americans the Wilkes case supported the belief that their misfortunes were not simply the result of administration mistakes but the product of a deliberate government plan to curtail liberty.<sup>17</sup> The result was to cast America's discontent as concern for violation of the British constitution, the same as the English radicals'.

Not all members of the opposition were as supportive of America as Chatham and the Wilkesites. Many in the parliamentary opposition considered the pro-Americans a hindrance to their efforts to reform colonial policy.<sup>18</sup> However, the radicals, Chathamites, and Rockinghamites were joined by another group that supported America's protests, particularly against the

Stamp Act--the merchants of London. During the Stamp Act controversy in 1766, the merchant community effectively assisted in the act's repeal, though later William would chastise the merchants for dwindling enthusiasm during the debate over nonimportation and nonexportation in 1774 and 1775.

Yet the London-centered opposition was far from representative of the whole nation. The London government was a stronghold of the radicals, and since the capital was where most Americans circulated, their impression of the extent of British support for the colonies was distorted. The City of London continued to sympathize with the colonies even after violence broke out in America.<sup>19</sup> The Continental Congress sent a letter of thanks to the Lord Mayor in July 1775 for his support, noting especially the city's long-time stand as a "patron of liberty . . . against lawless tyranny & usurpation."<sup>20</sup>

Almost immediately upon his arrival in England, Arthur Lee was swept into the radical circles of London politics and soon carried William with him. Arthur often referred to his association with Lord Shelburne, a former secretary of state for the Southern Department, a post that controlled the administration of the American colonies. Proud of his connection with such a prominent figure, he did not hesitate to drop names. Shelburne supported Chatham's motion to withdraw troops from Boston in 1775 and spoke in favor of proposals for reconciliation between Great Britain and America.

Arthur might boast of his association with Lord Shelburne, but he was much closer to John Wilkes. After Wilkes's release from prison in April 1770, Arthur and William Lee took over a

large part of Wilkes's American correspondence.<sup>21</sup> William had contacts within the radical element, but Arthur was more deeply involved. He joined the Society of Supporters of the Bill of Rights when it was organized in February 1769. Although its immediate purpose was to pay off Wilkes's debts, it soon became a vehicle for radical opposition to the crown.<sup>22</sup> Arthur drafted many of the society's letters and manifestos, and when it was reorganized in 1771 as the Society of the Bill of Rights, Arthur served as its secretary.<sup>23</sup>

English and American radicals agreed that the empire's greatest enemy was the ministry itself. The two groups espoused a conspiracy theory that held <sup>that</sup> the ministry was pursuing a carefully orchestrated plan to curtail liberty first in America, then in England. Both issued warnings against what they perceived as the infectious spread of corruption. They believed they were witnessing the emergence of a grasping, power-hungry ministry that would endanger the constitutional balance through its disregard of the prerogatives of king and Commons. The radicals saw their mission as one to prevent authoritarianism from establishing itself in Britain and to ensure the survival of traditional British rights and liberties.<sup>24</sup>

William and Arthur Lee wholeheartedly accepted the conspiracy theory. Writing home to Richard Henry and Francis Lightfoot, they frequently referred to the government's conduct as wicked and unscrupulous. William even insisted that the crackdown on the colonies was meant as an example to keep

the people of England in their place and diffuse any unrest there. After stating that a settled plan against the liberties and constitution of Great Britain as well as America was in the works, he asserted that American patriots were "personally obnoxious to the King and his Junto, as having shown more spirit in support of yr. Rights than the people of this Country who are immersed in Rich's, Luxury and dissipation."<sup>25</sup>

William declared that Americans not only had justice on their side but virtue as well. However, he did see hope for a people immersed in luxury; even they, he felt, could not tolerate injustice much longer. When Parliament no longer responded to their complaints, they would rise up as they had under the Stuarts. <sup>26</sup>

When William Lee entered London politics he was stepping into a structure governed by time and tradition. By ancient charter, city officials were chosen by the freemen, that is, members of the city's sixty-nine liveried companies representing the craft guilds. Technically, a man became a member of a livery through apprenticeship, but more likely he simply purchased his freedom, or eligibility to vote, for a fee ranging from five to fifty pounds. William and Arthur Lee followed this route, with William joining the haberdashers because there was no tobacco guild. All of the liveries together formed the Court of Common Hall, which chose the Lord Mayor, the sheriffs of London and Middlesex (the county that encompassed London), and the city's four members of Parliament. Freemen ratepayers of each of London's wards

elected representatives to the Court of Common Council. This Court comprised 210 councilmen, 25 aldermen, and the Mayor, and acted as the main legislative body for the city in addition to performing certain administrative duties. Becoming a councilman was an important step for an aspiring politician since it was only from among this group that individuals could be elected to the life-time office of alderman. Besides presiding over the assemblies in their own wards and acting as magistrates for the City of London, the aldermen elected the Lord Mayor from their own ranks. Candidates for Lord Mayor, however, had first to serve a one-year term as sheriff.<sup>27</sup>

On July 31, 1773, William Lee informed his family in Virginia of his election as sheriff of London. Though a little concerned about the expenses of public office, William wrote that he was deeply honored by both the election and its somewhat unexpected nature.<sup>28</sup> At Guildhall the Court of Common Hall had met on July 3, 1773, to choose a sheriff for the year. Stephen Sayre, William's former business partner, and alderman Plomer had been elected earlier, but Plomer had to withdraw. As the London Chronicle reported, all the candidates were nominated, but "hardly any hands were held up. . . . After which, William Lee, Esq; Citizen and Haberdasher, a known and approved friend of liberty, was nominated; when almost every hand in the Hall was lifted up in his favour, and he was declared duly elected almost unanimously."<sup>29</sup> Though William Lee had rarely appeared in public records before this,

his near-unanimous election to the shrievalty shows that he was not an obscure merchant but "a known and approved friend of liberty."

The City of London now possessed two American sheriffs. Though the sense of nationality was growing in America, the idea of a transatlantic, Anglo-American community was also strong, especially among the radicals. Since they controlled the London government, the election of two Americans to city offices is not entirely surprising.

Lee showed his adherence to the radical platform in his acceptance speech when he vowed that "neither the terrors of a tyrannical Court, nor its allurements, will ever have any influence over My conduct." The radicals' primary contest was against the encroachment of the crown and its ministers on traditional rights and freedoms. Here William Lee pledged to continue the fight in his capacity as a public official. As proof of his determination, he let all in Guildhall know that it would not be his fault "if we do not transmit to our posterity undiminished, and even untainted, those glorious privileges and immunities which our ancestors have so nobly handed down to us."<sup>30</sup>

Though elected in July, the new sheriffs did not officially take office until September 29. On that day, William Lee and Stephen Sayre issued a set of instructions to all keepers of public jails and other sheriff's officers within the counties of London and Middlesex, urging them to execute the law with firmness and diligence but to avoid aggravating the misfortunes

of their charges. In addition to this general reminder, the sheriffs directed their officers to endeavor to keep order at public executions to avoid in future the need to call in the military. Finally, to strengthen the impact of their admonitions, Lee and Sayre announced that two of their officers had already been punished for bribery and blackmail. With these strong words the two new sheriffs made plain the tone they intended to set during their terms of office.

On at least one occasion, though, Lee allowed partisanship to influence his official actions. During the election of the Lord Mayor in November 1773, Frederick Bull, a Wilkesite, stood against the ministerial candidate, John Roberts. When someone questioned the credentials of a supporter of Bull, Sheriff Lee not only failed to investigate the charge, which was well-founded, but detained the challenger. In this action, however, Lee was certainly no worse than anyone else; in any election both sides expected public officials to play a partisan role.<sup>31</sup> On the whole, Lee seems to have discharged his duties competently, without incurring dishonor. When William heard of some doubt as to the compatibility of the shrievalty and his business activities among his friends, he took his critics to task, reminding them that great difficulties only stirred him to greater achievements. After all, he had before him the inspiring example of his namesake, William III.<sup>32</sup>

Despite his friends' warnings, William Lee attempted to plunge again into politics before his term as sheriff was over.

On September 21, 1774, he ran for alderman against Nathaniel Newnham but lost the race. He soon had another opportunity. One practice of the Livery was to draw up instructions for all candidates for London's parliamentary seats. On October 4, 1774, the Livery met at Guildhall to choose a new M.P. In his welcoming speech, Mr. Stavely urged them to choose known "Friends to Liberty, not only by Professions, but Experience." The candidates' instructions for this election emphasized the travails of America, calling for the repeal of repugnant legislation and restoration of "the essential Rights of Taxation by Representatives of their own Election." When Mr. W. Baker objected to some of the provisions in the instructions, William Lee immediately rose to challenge and accused Baker of seeking office without being willing to shoulder responsibilities to his prospective constituents. For his trouble in making this gallant defense, the Livery added the sheriff to their list of nominees, though once again he did not win the election.<sup>33</sup>

Lee waited only a short time before he met with success. In May 1775 the death of John Shakespeare opened the aldermanship of Aldgate. Members of the ward gathered at Ironmongers Hall to nominate four candidates. After a show of hands, Lee won seventy-five votes against his nearest competitor's thirty. In a run-off Lee held on to his substantial lead and became the first and only American ever to hold the office of alderman of London. The Lord Mayor, John Wilkes, must



have been pleased with the result. After a long wait, Wilkes had just won the mayoral seat himself and now the brother of one of his proteges had advanced high into city government. Eligible to sit on the Court of Common Council, Lee conceivably had a chance at the mayoralty himself.

Lee expressed his appreciation to the ward in his acceptance speech. As in his speech upon election as sheriff, he reiterated his respect for the liberties bestowed by the constitution and his determination to "resist the arbitrary encroachments of the Crown and its Ministers, upon the liberties of the people." He also expressed his wish that the American colonies and Great Britain would soon be reconciled on the basis of constitutional liberty. He warned that freedom was under attack from the administration. Reflecting the widespread fear of conspiracy, he predicted that the assault on freedom in America was only a prelude to what was in store for Britain. He declared his faith in the good sense of the people to resist these infringements, however, and to "teach the Tories of this day, as their ancestors had been happily taught, how vain a thing it is to attempt wresting their liberties from a people determined to defend them."<sup>34</sup>

Though Lee had won the support of Aldgate ward, not everyone in London shared that company's enthusiasm. Two days after the London Chronicle printed Lee's acceptance speech, it bemoaned the election result. In the eyes of the Chronicle's editor, the Livery of London was "unceasing in

their endeavours to destroy the importance of the metropolis, by their choice of aliens and improper people to offices, that were filled once with Gentlemen only of acknowledged worth and fortune."<sup>35</sup>

Despite the newspaper's disdain, Lee assumed his duties. The prestige of the office gave him a firmer base from which to work on behalf of Wilkes and his camp. In 1776 Lee aided Wilkes in person when the "champion of liberty" sought the position of Chamberlain for London. Though Wilkes ultimately lost, it was not for want of trying. Alderman Lee, with about twenty other liverymen, lodged a protest against the victor, Benjamin Hopkins, basing their argument upon a 1572 bylaw of the Court of Common Council.<sup>36</sup>

Amid this jostling for political power, the London government found time to debate some of the important contemporary issues, primarily the contest between the American colonies and the mother country. The ruling body of London had many times expressed its sympathy for the colonies through petitions and the election of an American to two major posts. On April 5, 1775, the Livery of London adopted a petition to the king, a copy of which William Lee forwarded to Richard Henry. In July, during William's term, the Lord Mayor and aldermen, first with the livery on July 5, then with the Court of Common Council on July 14, addressed two other petitions to the sovereign. Both urged the king to abandon the use of force in America. The first declared that "the power contended for over the colonies . . . is, to all intents and purposes, despotism, and that the

exercise of despotic power, in any part of the empire, is inconsistent with the character and safety of this country." The second opened with a gentler address, "humbly imploring" the king to turn his attention "towards the grievous distraction of their fellow subjects in America." Further on the petitioners called for action. They beseeched the king "to dismiss your present ministers and advisors from your person and council forever, to dissolve a parliament, who, by various acts of cruelty and injustice, have maintained a spirit of persecution against our brethren in America."<sup>37</sup> Appropriately, William Lee, who was most closely related to their "brethren in America," went as a member of the committee from the Commons to present the July 14 appeal to the king.<sup>38</sup>

William Lee did not spend all of his time on city business. He managed to continue in the tobacco trade and to keep abreast of his Virginia property. Carrying on business as usual at such a unsettled time was not easy. William aired his apprehensions to Francis Lightfoot Lee: "the times are so ticklish and the Political state of this Country and America so very alarming, that it will be impossible for the best intention'd person to stir one inch, without the apprehension of blame. I am sure I do not know how to act in some instances."<sup>39</sup>

The political state may have been ticklish but no more so than the economic. In October 1774 the Continental Congress decided upon a policy of nonimportation and nonconsumption of British goods to go into effect on December 1 and nonexportation

of goods to Britain to begin September 1775. William Lee had advocated this course of action earlier in the year. Just three months before Congress decided on economic coercion, he asked Francis Lightfoot to load a ship for him before exportation came to a halt. In his opinion, nonexportation would not last more than a year, but he trusted to Francis Lightfoot's judgment to gather a shipload to save him from possible disaster.<sup>40</sup>

When nonimportation did go into effect, William regularly offered his encouragement. Only one year, he assured, would bring the British merchants to their knees. Once they felt the economic pinch they would adopt the American cause as their own and fight the colonists' battles for them. Lee felt certain that Congress had found where to hit the oppressor. He firmly believed that a country so "overwhelmed with debt, profligacy, debauchery and luxury, which nothing can support but the most extensive flourishing commerce . . . must yield to the most humiliating terms" the American could ask.<sup>41</sup> William was proved wrong.

As early as January 1775 he had expressed his first doubts. The merchants of London had drawn up a petition to Parliament "for redress of American Commerce," but William, who had served on the drafting committee, knew that it was not a serious protest. Instead he assured Richard Henry, it was "only a blind to recover their lost reputation in America."<sup>42</sup> During the Stamp Act crisis, nonimportation

had been effective, but in 1774 the American trade was not as significant for English mercantile interests, which did not feel compelled to take up the Americans' banner.<sup>43</sup>

Yet William continued to encourage his brothers. The opinion of someone as closely involved in English politics as he carried great weight back home. When he testified that England was rotten, his readers believed him. Lee continued to reassure American colonists of their eventual success, and that friends in Britain would rally to their defense. Standing firm and united, the colonies were safe from the interference of any nation.<sup>44</sup> William Lee's messages to his brothers addressed a larger audience. Richard Henry and Francis Lightfoot were both burgesses and delegates to the Continental Congress, and William knew that his information would have a greater impact than if his family were only private citizens. In addition to relying upon informal dissemination of news from London, William sent such items as pamphlets and drafts of petitions for publication in America. He also informed his brothers of plans to send troops to the colonies and warned them against spies planted in Congress.<sup>45</sup> Not all of his dispatches reached America. Though Arthur and William attempted to forward information to the Secret Committee in Philadelphia by way of Paris, the British government intercepted some of these letters.<sup>46</sup>

William Lee soon conducted his correspondence with Congress on a more official level. Two years after Lee's

election as an alderman of London, he accepted Congress's appointment to be one of its commercial agents in France.

After nine years of residing comfortably in London, the young alderman engaged in a flurry of activity to close out his business affairs, preparing to uproot himself and his family. William Lee received word on April 21, 1777 of his appointment as Congress's commercial agent in France, a position he would share with the current agent, Thomas Morris. Together they would be responsible for purchasing goods for Congress, and receiving and selling all consignments from America on public account. Both men had highly placed family connections in America. Richard Henry Lee, William Lee's brother, and Robert Morris, Thomas Morris's half-brother, were members of Congress. Both served on the Secret Committee of Commerce, whose purpose was to procure, pay for, and distribute supplies for the army, and where they could influence appointments to the commercial posts.

William Lee was startled when he received notification of his appointment, not by the news itself, but by the careless manner in which Silas Deane, one of the three American commissioners in Paris, sent it. As Lee later discovered, Deane had known about the appointment in February but had not written him until March 30. Compounding this slight in Lee's eyes, Silas Deane sent the letter by penny post, addressing it in his own handwriting (which was known in London), and sealing it with his initials, laying it open to inter-

ception. Deane's carelessness appalled Lee: "I thought at the first moment, that the letter was a snare laid for me by the ministry; not then conceiving that it was possible for Mr. Deane . . . to be capable of such indiscretion." <sup>47</sup>

Taking greater care than Deane had, Lee replied on April 30. He sent notice of his acceptance by way of an American gentleman en route to Paris because interception meant almost certain imprisonment. Lee was convinced that spies watched his every move because of rumors that he "was concernd in a Conspiracy, with some of the most respectable persons in England, to take away the King's Life." <sup>48</sup>

If Lee's concern seems farfetched, the British government had other, more substantial reasons to keep an eye on him. Here was a man who was not only in close contact with two brothers active in Congress, and another who acted on behalf of that body in France, but who was also a high officeholder in the largest city in Great Britain. Lee's political allegiance in London was to the small, but vocal opposition to the government headed by John Wilkes, the infamous and self-appointed champion of liberty. By 1777 the colonies had publicly declared their independence from England following a resolution introduced by none other than Alderman Lee's older brother. The ministry therefore had reason to keep abreast of William's activities, and Lee had reason to be careful in his actions and correspondence. The British did intercept some of his letters, but by April 1777 one can

detect a hint of the overcautiousness that would develop further during his stay in France. At this point William was nearing the fine division between prudence and paranoia that Arthur crossed frequently. The evidence for William's obsession with secrecy at the time of his appointment may be overstated because he did not write about his amazement at Deane's carelessness until two years afterwards, in reply to Deane's charges against him. Yet his letters during 1777 and 1778 show increasing concern for conspiracies and plots, not entirely the result of, but doubtless influenced by, Arthur's own suspicions.

Lee's appointment to Nantes had not come as a surprise. In October 1776 he had written to Richard Henry, dropping hints that he would be available for any suitable position the Congress would care to fill. "I see clearly," he wrote, "that you must have mercantile, as well as other agents, in various places, and as the prospect of starving is by no means agreeable, can't you fix upon some employment for a certain of yours, that is equal to his station in Life, and his capacity, such as it is."<sup>49</sup> Before knowledge of the appointment reached Europe, Arthur joined in, urging Richard Henry to recall "the diligence, the ability, and the attachment of the Alderman in London." Though a switch in careers would entail great sacrifice, Arthur said, he was sure that William's zeal and patriotism would carry him through. If Congress desired, William "woud quit his high station and



prospects there, to serve them, as the Comptroler general of their commerce."<sup>50</sup> Shortly after that testimonial, Arthur wrote Richard Henry from Spain, stressing the need for care in the selection of commercial agents. Those controlling Congress's affairs were not worthy representatives and did more harm than good to American credit. Again he suggested the alderman was a suitable candidate, but by this time Congress's business was in such a miserable state, in Arthur's opinion, that he "coud not advise him to accept it were you to appoint him." One hope remained, however, for Arthur was confident that, if anyone could redeem this sad state of affairs, "it woud be the Alderman, who I know woud hazard a great deal to be of service."<sup>51</sup>

In leaving London in June 1777 William Lee did make sacrifices. Two years later, after Deane had been recalled to America and accusations flew publically and venomously between the Lee and Deane factions, Deane intimated that William Lee purposely delayed his departure from London after Congress appointed him commercial agent. In his defense William replied that he had responded as quickly as possible, considering his business ties in England. If Deane had forgotten, Lee reminded him that "every one in the least conversant in Trade will know, that it must require a considerable time for any London Merchant, who has been in a pretty extensive Commerce for upwards of Seven years, to settle finally and close all his business." <sup>52</sup> At the time of the move to France, he wrote his

brother Francis Lightfoot, mentioning how hurriedly he had left London. Considering that seven weeks elapsed between receiving notification of his appointment and arriving in Paris, Lee managed to settle his affairs in respectable time, particularly for a man with an established commercial enterprise and a family. The first months in France must have been especially tense since his wife and two children did not leave England until October. The sense of sacrifice was very real to him, and he did not hesitate to mention it when he felt he was being hampered in carrying out his duties.

When William Lee finally arrived in France in 1777 he knew that relations between Silas Deane and his brother Arthur had not always been congenial. Though they, with Benjamin Franklin, were commissioners representing the United States in Paris, Deane and Arthur Lee had rarely agreed since they first worked together. William Lee stepped into this already tense atmosphere, unaware that the circumstances of his appointment would intensify the friction.

The Lee-Deane antagonism originated in a meeting between Arthur Lee and Pierre Caron de Beaumarchais, a secret agent of the French court, in London in the spring of 1776. The two were guests of the Lord Mayor, John Wilkes, at the Mansion House. Beaumarchais's enthusiasm for the American rebellion convinced Arthur to write to the Secret Committee of Congress that, though France could not declare war on Britain at that time, she would send "five million worth of arms

and ammunition to Cap Francais to be thence sent to the colonies." <sup>53</sup> The plan, according to Lee, was to disguise these gifts and other supplies as simple commercial transactions by having Congress send tobacco in token payment. In addition, the French government would secretly give America two hundred thousand louis d'ors. <sup>54</sup>

About the time Lee met with Beaumarchais, Congress appointed Silas Deane a commercial and political agent of the United States in Paris, instructing him particularly to sound out Vergennes on the subject of French aid. Since Vergennes could not deal directly with Deane for fear of compromising France's official neutrality, Deane was directed to Beaumarchais who could act privately and informally to assist the American in securing French aid. <sup>55</sup>

The principal difference between the agreement Deane and Beaumarchais reached and the one Beaumarchais and Lee had concluded was whether the supplies and money were a loan that America had to repay or a gift from the king. Deane, and later Beaumarchais, insisted upon the former while Arthur Lee upheld the latter. A bogus company, Roderigue Hortalez et Cie, was to act as intermediary between France and the United States, disguising French assistance as private commercial transactions. Lee understood Hortalez et Cie to be a front only, but in the deal Deane made in July 1776, Congress was to ship eight cargoes of tobacco to the company as payment for supplies. <sup>56</sup>

Thus from the start, before Deane and Arthur Lee officially

took up their duties as commissioners of Congress in Paris, they were in direct competition with one another.

By the time William Lee reached Paris, Arthur had left for a mission in Berlin. Arthur not only resented Deane's negotiations with Beaumarchais but felt slighted when Deane moved into a house at Passy, where Franklin resided, that Lee had expected to occupy. In light of this "usurpation," Arthur took his assignment to Berlin as an attempt to alienate him from the other two commissioners. His correspondence from Germany reflects this fear as he complained of not hearing from them and remarked that it was "not easy to divine the reason of so long a silence."<sup>57</sup> Shortly after his return to Paris in July 1777, he further complained to Richard Henry that "During my absence in Germany the ill will, which Mr Deane always showed me, has formed a Cabal, consisting of Messrs Bancroft, Carmichael and himself. They have done everything in their power to traduce me here, and possibly may attempt the same on your side of the water."<sup>58</sup> The two other supposed members were Dr. Edward Bancroft, a former pupil of Deane and also his secretary, and William Carmichael, an unpaid aide to Deane who acted as his troubleshooter and chief inspector of goods and ships. Eventually Arthur Lee's suspicion of Bancroft proved correct when the doctor was revealed as a British spy.<sup>59</sup>

Arthur also vehemently disagreed with Deane over the appointment of Jonathan Williams to assist Thomas Morris in conducting the commercial agency at Nantes. This was the issue that involved William Lee in the quarrel. Silas Deane

and Benjamin Franklin had entrusted Jonathan Williams, Franklin's nephew, with the responsibilities of the agency though he had no official authority from Congress. Already a principal agent of Deane's own trading company, Williams was now to oversee the commercial affairs of the United States as well. Deane and Franklin thought this step necessary since the authorized agent, Thomas Morris, only muddled business while increasing his reputation for drunkenness and negligence.

Arthur Lee did not deny the need for change. In January his name appeared with Franklin's and Deane's on a letter asking Morris for funds. The commissioners reminded Morris that "the Congress directed you to pay Mr. Deane for the purposes of our Embassy, the sum of ten thousand pounds. This must consider as the first and most important obligation of that kind on you." In reply Morris indignantly cut them off, stating that they did not fully understand the various demands of a commercial enterprise. Since Congress had not specified in what order he was to make payments, the commissioners would have to wait their turn with his other clients.<sup>60</sup> In February Arthur warned his brother Richard Henry that America's cause was "suffering here extremely in its commercial branch by having a Sot at the head of it. Mr. Thomas Morris . . . is a man who would not get a month's employment in any counting House in Europe. Devoted to the most beastly drunkenness and debauchery, he is a reproach to this Country.

. . . if Morris continues any longer in any trust from the Congress, we shall not have credit here shortly for one Shilling."

Morris also allowed many of the responsibilities of the agency to come under the control of a French firm of questionable repute, De Pliarne, Penet, and Gruel, "who find it much their Interest," said Arthur Lee, "to keep him in a constant state of intoxication and debauchery, that they may manage the business for him, and plunder the public at pleasure." Because his brother Robert wielded great influence in Congress, Morris felt confident of retaining his comfortable post with a minimum of outside interference. The commissioners tried to persuade Robert Morris to act regarding his profligate brother, but Morris only became defensive. By December 1777, however, even Robert Morris had to concede the truth and apologized to the commissioners for his earlier curtness.<sup>63</sup>

Although Arthur Lee agreed that Thomas Morris had disgraced the American mission, he took Jonathan Williams's appointment as evidence of a widening conspiracy against him. It was especially galling after the appointment of his brother William to his post. William Lee met with Deane and Franklin shortly after his arrival in Paris, expecting to receive his commission as co-agent of commercial affairs at Nantes. Instead, they asked him remain in Paris until John Ross, a private agent of Robert Morris, had put the agency's affairs in order. According to the two commissioners, even if Thomas Morris had not made such a shambles of

the agency's transactions, they could not empower Lee to take up his duties since they had not yet received a copy of Lee's commission from Congress.

Lee was not entirely unprepared for the casual reception he received in Paris. Deane's letter acknowledging Lee's acceptance of the post had not expressed any sense of urgency. Deane had said nothing about the troubled state of the Nantes agency "or in the most distant manner hinting, that my presence was necessary or wished for: On the contrary, the whole spirit of the letter seemd to say--'you need not come.'"<sup>64</sup> But William Lee did come, only to sit idly in Paris for almost two months. This idleness was not self-imposed, as Deane later charged, but followed from Lee's deference to what he thought was the better judgment of commissioners more familiar with the Secret Committee's business and French politics. He frequently called on Deane and Franklin, expressing his willingness to "enter on the public business." Deane paid little attention to these offers, putting Lee off with the excuse that Ross had not yet finished his assignment.<sup>65</sup> Lee asked Deane and Franklin if they could officially invest him with enough power to act as agent; they said they had no such authority and that he would have to wait until circumstances cleared up on their own.

These delays and excuses might not have added fuel to the ill-feeling between Arthur (and William) Lee and Silas Deane if Franklin and Deane had been completely straightforward. Although William Lee was told that his commission had not yet

arrived when he reached Paris on June 11, Deane and Franklin had received a copy in February.<sup>66</sup> Thomas Morris also had a copy but told no one until John Ross discovered it on his own.

Faced with a chaotic state of affairs and a distrustful and uncooperative Thomas Morris, Ross had written to the commissioners on July 19 to enlist some assistance. While unaware that Morris held a copy of Lee's commission, Ross had suggested that the commissioners might supply sufficient authorization to send Lee to Nantes, pending official notification. Three days after that letter, Ross wrote to Deane requesting Lee to come immediately since he had just learned, by accident, that Morris possessed instructions from Congress to William Lee regarding his appointment.<sup>67</sup> Franklin and Deane informed Lee of John Ross's last letter of July 22, and on August 2 Lee left for Nantes.<sup>68</sup>

While settling in at Nantes, William wrote to Richard Henry on August 12 expressing dismay at the character of his new partner: "I forbear to say anything about the Coadjutor you have appointed with me, you will probably hear enough about his strange and unhappy conduct from others." Yet he hoped to improve the state of Congress's commercial affairs, for he felt his position was reinforced by a letter lately received from Robert Morris addressed to Lee and Thomas Morris jointly that mentioned their appointments. With this recognition he could assure Richard Henry, "I shall now proceed with confidence."



After this unpromising start, it is surprising that William Lee soon joined forces with Thomas Morris against Deane and Franklin. With time, Lee's suspicions grew. He became more and more protective of what he considered his rights and distrustful of anyone who seemed to encroach on them.

The break with Deane began soon after Lee's arrival in Nantes. While Lee had been delayed in Paris, American privateers had taken several prizes, which sparked a disagreement between Thomas Morris and Deane over who had authority to dispose of them. Morris's recalcitrance had led Franklin and Deane to send Jonathan Williams to Nantes in January 1777 with instructions to take charge of the sale of prizes and refitting the vessels for American use. Although the prizes were captured in late June 1777, William Lee, the incoming commercial agent, did not hear of the dispute until he reached Nantes in August when Morris informed him of it. Reflecting upon the events a couple of years later, it seemed to Lee that only Morris's obstinance regarding the privateers had forced Deane finally to send Lee to Nantes.<sup>70</sup> When Lee arrived in that city and learned of the uproar from Morris, he wondered at Deane's and Franklin's silence. As the co-agent he felt he should have been informed of such a major altercation. In August Lee and Morris wrote a joint letter to the commissioners requesting them to withdraw their orders to Jonathan Williams concerning the settlement of prizes, but they received no reply.<sup>71</sup>

However, in this instance, Deane does not bear the blame for the lack of a reply and the ensuing misunderstanding.

As in so many aspects of the Deane affair, personal involvement limited the ability of the chronicler to see the complete picture. Franklin did draw up a draft of a reply to Morris and Lee in mid-August authorizing Lee alone to take charge of disposing of a brigantine at Port L'Orient.<sup>72</sup> The roadblock was Arthur Lee, who objected to the wording of the letter because it would have vested the powers of disposal "in Mr. Lee alone, with very strong expressions against Mr. Morris. I objected what was obvious, that this would destroy the harmony recommended."<sup>73</sup>

The commissioners prepared a second draft (which has not survived), but when they were ready to send it, Arthur intervened once more. He held up the reply because by this time they had learned of Congress's July 1 appointment of William Lee as its agent to the courts of Berlin and Vienna, and Lee would soon arrive in Paris to receive his commission. What makes the scenario even more difficult to comprehend is that William Lee himself had urged his brother to have no part in any attempt to supersede Thomas Morris and place the bulk of the responsibilities in his hands.<sup>74</sup> Why William Lee would take up the cause of Morris, who had refused to see him until Lee forced himself into his room, is puzzling. Twists, missed cues, and misunderstandings based on obstinance enlarged the original Lee-Deane disagreement into a tangled web of suspicion, accusations, and counter-accusations that accomplished little but to discredit the participants. William Lee had good cause to be disgruntled at the delay in re-

ceiving his commission and at being kept in the dark about the dispute over the prizes, but he might have been more circumspect before siding with Thomas Morris. It was a situation in which anything that could have gone wrong, did, thus clouding the issues and preparing fertile ground for mistrust to grow. Arthur Lee by preventing the reply from being sent, helped to perpetuate an atmosphere in which future actions by either side would be viewed from a skewed perspective.

The debate over the prizes finally faded. William Lee disposed of one prize, from whose sale he received his only commission during his service as commercial agent.<sup>75</sup> But the episode was not completely forgotten. Eight months later, in a letter of complaint, Lee still demanded "good reason for throwing such a slur on my character, thereby in great measure incapacitating me to render that service to my country which I wished to do, when, on the appointment of the Secret Committee, I gave up a very respectable station which was for life the aldermanship, and sacrificed no inconsiderable part of my private fortune to enter upon their business."<sup>76</sup> William Lee, like Arthur, tended to interpret professional slights as personal affronts. This tendency among all the major characters in the Lee-Deane affair led to increasing vindictiveness on both sides as the disagreement grew from a misunderstanding over the form of French aid to America to a bitter feud that even infiltrated and divided Congress.

Yet there were other complaints about the general conduct of business at Nantes. On March 24, 1777, Deane and Franklin,

on their own, had entered into a contract on behalf of Congress with the Farmers General of France. The terms specified that the Farmers General would pay a fixed amount for five thousand hogsheads of James and York river tobacco, terms less desirable than those concluded by Thomas Morris in January for them, bound Congress to sell future shipments at the same price, regardless of market fluctuations. As a tobacco merchant, William Lee was dismayed by such a deal. According to the January contract, Morris had sold the tobacco far below the market price; yet Franklin and Deane agreed to a worse arrangement, squandering America's most valuable export.<sup>77</sup> In other cases the buyers for Congress needlessly spent more than they needed to. William Lee, noting that it would be possible to buy cheaper goods of better quality in Germany and Sweden, lamented to Richard Henry that "Your greatest enemies could not wish your affairs to be more deranged than they are on this side."<sup>78</sup>

In his deposition to the president of Congress in March 1779 Lee pointed out another example of the mishandling of public business. The commissioners could have bought a ship ready for action at a maximum of three thousand pounds. Instead, they bought one that was not yet completely built for fifteen thousand pounds and had another one built that cost three hundred thousand livres.\* Lee further asserted

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\*Approximately £12,790. John J. McCusker, Money and Exchange in Europe and America, 1600-1775: A Handbook (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1978), 97.

that between September/October 1776 and February/March 1778, no army supplies were dispatched though "several millions of public money passd thro' the commissioners' hands; or at least was disburs'd under their directions."<sup>79</sup>

On top of this general mismanagement there were also blatantly unethical practices. Often the trading companies authorized to sell prizes acted as purchasing agents for Congress as well. As a result, they could buy back the captured goods, sometimes making as much as an 8000 percent profit on the transaction.<sup>80</sup> Since the agents for Congress often were also agents for private commercial houses, the opportunity for personal gain was great. Although William Lee himself carried on his private business affairs while an official of Congress, the refrain he invoked most frequently in his correspondence was the sad fate that had befallen Congress in having selfish dealers in its service who used public positions for personal gain. Just five days after his arrival in Nantes he unburdened himself to Francis Lightfoot Lee: "You can't at this time be unacquainted with the faithless principles, the low dirty intrigue the selfish views, and the wicked arts of a certain race of Men and believe me a full crop of these qualities you sent in the first instance from P[hiladelphi]a to P[ari]s. Such qualifications in a debauched Country might have been exerted for Public benefit, but where the most insufferable vanity and invincible

regard for self interest are the prevailing passions, public Good is only used as a stalking horse to promote private emolument." 81

Business practices in the eighteenth century usually invited some abuse. Merchants who received public contracts treated the government as just another client. Both sides expected there to be some remuneration. Merchants and agents did not adhere to a rigorous system of bookkeeping, and very few large accounts were ever inspected, leaving greater opportunity for individual enrichment. William Lee, as a merchant, must have been scandalized only by the most flagrant abuses. Arthur, on the other hand, never having been involved in trade, continually expressed shock at the casual practices and the commercial and self-promotional atmosphere in the Continental service abroad.<sup>82</sup> With both men, however, personality rather than business integrity seems to have motivated their complaints. Who was involved was more important than what or how much.

Disgusted with the seemingly limitless opportunities for abuse, both William and Arthur Lee recommended that responsibility for commercial affairs be separated from diplomatic duties. "The Political and Mercantile character shou'd be eitirely distinct and separate, and both of them executed by Persons of your the Secret Committee's express appointment. If this regulation does not take place soon, an infinite deal of mischief will inevitably ensue."<sup>83</sup> Though William Lee sent this advice to Francis Lightfoot Lee at the beginning of 1778,

he had alluded to the benefits of a separation of powers just days after his arrival in Nantes. Then he had expressed irritation specifically with the interference of the commissioners at Paris in the commercial affairs at Nantes, reflecting, no doubt, antagonism toward Silas Deane for placing Jonathan Williams in <sup>(h)</sup> the agency. In November the matter was still very much on his mind, and he became more specific about the reason for the recommendation. "Until the Secret Committee confine all this mercantile business to their political duty," the latter "may be neglected from too much attention to private schemes of commerce on public funds and contemptible private jobs." <sup>84</sup>

Silas Deane, the old foe, once again came under the Lees' scrutiny. At first an agent for Robert Morris's mercantile establishment, then the agent of Congress who had negotiated with Beaumarchais, Deane aroused suspicion because he continued in commerce while a commissioner in France. This mingling of roles was not unusual since avoidance of conflict of interest generally did not rate very high among the concerns of businessmen and politicians of the eighteenth century. Deane began a business with the help of a prosperous French merchant, Donatien le Roy de Chaumont, to fit out privateers and sell prizes in French ports. He also organized a trading company with Chaumont, Robert Morris, and Thomas Walpole, a London banker. <sup>85</sup>

Deane's connection with the Beaumarchais negotiations back in 1776 most angered the Lees. Arthur, already irritated by what he perceived to be Deane's interference with his own nego-

tiations (questionable though those were), saw sinister implications in Deane's taking up Beaumarchais's claim for payment from Congress. Since he had talked to Beaumarchais first and understood that the French government was offering a gift, Arthur believed that Deane must surely have been involved in a conspiracy to defraud the United States.<sup>86</sup>

Arthur Lee complained that Silas Deane never showed him the commission's account books and issued orders in his own name on behalf of the entire group. To Richard Henry he lamented, "My situation is painful. I am oblig'd to sign the general Letters in wch. things not fact are inserted, or quarrel with them."<sup>87</sup> Yet when Deane replied to Lee's charges of financial misconduct, he asserted that Lee had had access to all the accounts "and I sent him in writing an explanation of every payment that had been made in his absence, or which had not been made by his written order." Furthermore, nothing could "be more groundless and unjust than for him to represent that millions had been profusely expended and as if he knew not in what manner or to what purpose."<sup>88</sup> This type of attack and counter-attack, one completely negating whatever the other said, was common. However, if Deane did show Arthur accounts of the transactions, it is not reflected in Arthur's correspondence, for his greatest complaint was that Franklin and Deane ignored him. In all, Arthur, with William's support, accused Silas Deane of failing to press the France for an alliance, endangering and violating French neutrality and hospitality, engaging in



indiscriminate privateering and openly illegal sales of prizes in French ports, and generally mishandling affairs.<sup>89</sup>

Perhaps the most damning accusation against Deane was the charge that he used privileged information for private speculation. As one of the three highest ranking American officials in France, he had access to all channels of secret information. He knew and took advantage of the sailing arrangements of many ships. Other agents had previously used inside information for personal gain, but Deane came dangerously close to the limits of acceptability.<sup>90</sup> Shipping was not the only area of his activity. He used his knowledge of the imminent Franco-American alliance to speculate in British stocks. Unfortunately for Deane, he ended up losing a great deal through these speculations.

Deane's association with Dr. Edward Bancroft also invited suspicion. Though Deane himself was not a spy, Bancroft was a British agent and used Deane as his unwitting source for confidential information on the progress of the American commission with regard to the treaty of alliance, the capture of privateers, and shipments of supplies. Arthur Lee suspected Bancroft of treachery, but Bancroft stood up to him and accused Lee of disloyalty instead.<sup>91</sup> Although Arthur was correct in this case, his overall record for accuracy is not impressive. His generally suspicious nature often transformed caution into over-caution and encouraged him to envision plots at every corner.

Deane may have been guilty of indiscretions, but William Lee also ventured into areas of dubious business practices. Despite his own indignation when others did so, Lee shipped private goods on public conveyances. Like Deane, he also speculated on war stocks in Britain. On December 8, 1777, he wrote to his business contact in London, Thomas Rogers, that it was likely "a great stroke may be made and very considerable advantages gained by your stocks, and as it may fall my way to see how things will turn as soon as most people, with your aid in London, ye. business might be successfully accomplished."<sup>92</sup> The profits were to be divided one-third for Rogers and two-thirds for Lee. Lee asked Rogers to be sure to keep the scheme a secret, allowing Rogers's partner, Mr. Welch, to be the only other person to know. Lee even had secret method of correspondence worked out to ensure that no one would be able to intercept mail going directly to Rogers. The two corresponded through a third party, Edward Browne, Lee's former business partner. Lee also sent his orders in code. Instead of openly requesting the purchase of stocks, he would write, "'but so many pounds of hops for me.'" Even the go-between that Rogers was to send to Boulogne if the transaction went through was to know nothing of the real nature of his mission.<sup>93</sup>

In addition to this secretive, almost cloak-and-dagger, conduct, William Lee carried on a personal trade, continuing to supply his family in Virginia with manufactured goods and

selling tobacco in England. In a letter to T. Adams (the cover name for Edward Browne) dated December 18, 1777, Lee informed Adams/Browne that "Those who have tobacco lodged in Dunkirk have written over if 200 livres per 100 lbs. can't be got for it, to send it to England. That price will not be got there, consequently it will not be shipped. Judge then what effect that will have on ye. London market."<sup>94</sup> Although Lee had difficulty paying his creditors in August 1777, his financial situation must have improved considerably, since upon receiving his commission as agent to the courts of erlin and Vienna he declared that "most certainly the honor is increased but the profit is greatly lessened, with the difficulty, labor, and hazard greatly enlarged."<sup>95</sup>

While in France, William Lee continued to receive reports from Richard Henry and Francis Lightfoot Lee about the state of his business in Virginia. In these reports Richard Henry kept William informed of the local news, telling him how his new estate manager was coping with the disorder left by his predecessor. There were also requests for medicine for Greenspring. The elder brother also gave William advice on the sale of his property in Virginia. Richard Henry, who was in a position to know, was sure that the "Western people will soon force a removal of the Seat of government," in which case William's present land holdings in and around Williamsburg would greatly decrease in value. To prepare for his change and to escape rising taxes, William was advised

to sell all his land and invest the money in the Continental Loan Office at 6 percent. Richard Henry reassured William that he could always buy better land at a lower price, for land prices would fall as surely as money would rise.<sup>96</sup>

Another time Francis Lightfoot informed William that the army had made a barracks of his houses in Williamsburg, but the public would most likely compensate him for losses.<sup>97</sup>

While Richard Henry kept an eye on William's possessions in Virginia, William and Arthur looked after two of their brother's sons, Thomas and Ludwell, in France. Richard Henry had marked Ludwell for the law but directed his older son, Thomas, to go into commerce and take advantage of his uncle William's experience.<sup>98</sup>

In September 1777 William Lee learned through private correspondence that he was to be named the congressional commissioner to the courts of Berlin and Vienna. He was to formally announce the Declaration of Independence to the two courts and impress on them the importance of preventing Britain from enlisting German troops for service in North America. In addition, he was to propose treaties of friendship and commerce with Prussia and Austria-Hungary, though limiting commercial treaties to twelve months from their ratification by Congress.<sup>99</sup> In response Lee sought to enlarge the powers of the office by requesting Congress to authorize him to conclude as well as propose treaties.<sup>100</sup>

William Lee felt honored but expressed mixed feelings

about this appointment. As the commercial agent he believed he could have served the public better had he been free of interference from the commissioners in Paris. In his new capacity he doubted his abilities, for "it must require both much time and more capacity than is common for a man not versed in the crooked paths of courts to get into the mysteries of the most subtle cabinets of Europe."<sup>101</sup> He also expressed minor irritation at being "tossed about continually from one post to another, with a Family to carry along" and noted that since he was "above 40 years old it is somewhat awkward to go to school to learn languages."<sup>102</sup>

Once Lee got the appointment, however, he was not entirely sorry to leave Nantes. On October 13 he had met the commissioners in Paris to complain of "the several abuses, and mismanagement of the Commercial business of Congress" which stemmed, he claimed, not so much from the conduct of Thomas Morris, "as from Mr. Williams being appointed to interfere with us in our business."<sup>103</sup> Lee insisted on the immediate recall of Williams's orders, to which Franklin agreed. Lee let about two weeks pass, but when he received no word from Franklin he "gave over all thoughts of taking any further active part in the Commercial business" and applied his "attention to that of a Commissioner at the Courts of Vienna and Berlin."<sup>104</sup> In coming to this decision he reasoned that he "could not therefore continue to act for the public without coming to an open rupture with Mr. Deane, which at this critical moment

might be attended with bad consequences to our public."<sup>105</sup>

Lee received his new commission on October 7. He hoped to get under way as soon as possible but met with several delays. In November he requested from Franklin copies of the proposed treaties with France, as his instructions had directed, but he did not receive them until January 12, 1778. After having waited this long, he decided to remain in Paris for the official signing of the treaties.

Though William Lee was presented to the king and queen of France along with the three commissioners, he and Ralph Izard had hoped to have had a greater influence on the actual course of negotiations. Izard, in Paris waiting to take up his duties as Congress's representative to Tuscany, had learned of the progress of the Americans' talks with Conrad Alexandre Gerard through his close contact with Arthur Lee. Izard, supported by William Lee, encouraged Arthur to object to Articles XI and XII of the treaty of amity and commerce. These objectionable articles, proposed by Gerard, provided for the exemption of duties on all American goods shipped to the West Indies in return for the suspension of duties on molasses from the French West Indies to America. This arrangement, the Lees and Izard believed, would place the southern states in particular at a disadvantage. Deane's willingness to accept the articles seemed to them evidence of his preference of New England over the interests of southern agriculture. Arthur Lee eventually gave in when his colleagues and Gerard

agreed to allow Congress to strike the articles if it wished. Arthur also had wanted the commissioners to consult his brother and Ralph Izard before signing the treaties, but Deane and Franklin declined. The Lees' objections to Articles XI and XII were upheld by Congress in May 1778.<sup>106</sup>

Although Vergennes and the American commissioners signed the treaty of alliance and the treaty of amity and commerce on February 6, William Lee did not leave for Germany until March 24. The sudden death of Thomas Morris in January further complicated his plans. At Deane's urging, Lee postponed his departure for Germany and returned to Nantes to take possession of Morris's papers before the French government could seize them.<sup>107</sup> The commissioners confirmed this action in a report to Congress: "On our application to the ministry, an order was obtained to put Mr. Lee in possession of his Thomas Morris's papers."<sup>108</sup> Lee originally planned to separate the public papers from the private and turn the latter over to John Ross, the commercial representative for Robert Morris's firm.<sup>109</sup> Ross, however, disapproved of this design and reported to Deane that Lee had spent four days secretly going through all of Thomas Morris's papers. Lee tried to get three American merchants to certify that he had taken only the public papers, but they refused.<sup>110</sup> In the midst of this controversy, Lee finally re-sealed the trunk and delivered it to Franklin.

The Lee-Deane affair spread to Congress where the tempests it aroused, combined with a series of domestic scandals,

held up the regular course of business from late 1778 through 1779 and nearly demoralized the body.<sup>111</sup> The split among supporters of the Lees and of Deane aggravated existing factional divisions within Congress. Yet what prompted the first motions for Deane's recall was not the personal enmity between him and the Lees but irritation with the commissions that he issued to French officers and the demand for payment from Beaumarchais's agent. Congress had had enough of complaints from French officers impatient for the posts Deane had promised them and American officers who resented the intrusion of foreigners. On August 5, 1777, Congress tabled a motion to recall Deane, but the next month it unanimously voted to appoint John Adams in his place.<sup>112</sup>

The public rupture between the Lees and Deane, over which William Lee had earlier expressed concern, finally occurred in late 1778. Though less central to the dispute than Arthur, William Lee attracted Congress's attention because of a series of accusations Deane had made against him. In December an "Address of Silas Deane to the Free and Virtuous Citizens of America" appeared in the Pennsylvania Packet.<sup>113</sup> This touched off a newspaper feud between factions that lasted for months. In his "Address" and in a letter to Henry Laurens, president of Congress, Deane outlined a series of charges against Arthur and William Lee. William countered each charge that was directed at him in a lengthy letter to John Jay, the succeeding president of Congress.<sup>114</sup>



William began his defense by stating that he had long anticipated an inquiry because of the strange events that had occurred in France. He systematically refuted Deane's accusations, beginning with the supposed delay in taking up the duties of a commercial agent. Deane also claimed that Lee left for Germany only after he heard of General Burgoyne's defeat in America. In answer Lee reminded Deane of the October conference with the commissioners to prove that he had not been inactive and cited Thomas Morris's death as an obstacle to his departure. Lee indignantly claimed that "If there was any thing criminal in my staying in Paris for those two Months October and November, 'tis evident that the Commissioners are culpable, and not me." <sup>115</sup>

According to Deane, Lee appointed other agents, supplanting Jonathan Williams, and charged a 5 percent commission instead of 2, which he would split with his appointees. Lee did appoint agents to look after American commerce in various France ports before he left for Berlin but not consciously to supplant Jonathan Williams, whom he actually appointed co-agent with John Lloyd in charge of Nantes and other ports in Brittany. Deane approved all these appointments, but Franklin counseled his nephew against accepting the post. As to the question of higher commissions, Lee correctly replied that it was Thomas Morris and Jonathan Williams who had instituted the 5 percent commission. <sup>116</sup> Because the two had agreed to divide the 5 percent between them, their smaller individual shares made it

look as though Lee had doubled the percentage. In addition, Lee produced affidavits from his appointees declaring that he never demanded a share of their commissions.

Lee was confident that he had proved all of Deane's accusations false. Ironically, he noted, the only thing Deane considered doubtful "happens to be a truth, this is, that I might be an Alderman of London at the time he was writing his letter." Lee had remained in that office until January 1780.<sup>117</sup> Lee explained that he had tried to resign as soon as his family was safely out of England, but his constituents refused to allow him. Although he finally sent a formal resignation in December 1778, his constituents had not taken any action. In December 1779 Lee learned that his letter must not have reached the ward when he received a letter from them suggesting he resign. He sent another resignation immediately, upon the receipt of which the ward elected a successor with a vote of thanks to Alderman Lee.<sup>118</sup>

By August 1779 the fuss in Congress had died down, yet the effects of the Lee-Deane controversy lingered. None of the three major characters ever<sup>again</sup> played as prominent a role on the national or international scene as before. In March 1779 a congressional commission recommended the recall of all the commissioners in Europe to resolve the conflict. While in the end Franklin easily retained his office, Arthur Lee lost his post in France as well as in Spain when the latter came up for renewal in September 1779. In June both William

Lee and Ralph Izard lost their positions in Prussia and Tuscany respectively, and in August Deane was discharged from his duties.<sup>119</sup>

During his short tenure as commissioner to the courts of Vienna and Berlin, William Lee met with little success. Tensions had peaked between those two powers due to a dispute over the succession to the Bavarian electorate, and neither power wished to antagonize Great Britain by treating with her rebellious colonies. From Paris Lee had intended to travel to Berlin, stopping first in Frankfurt to await word from the Prussian court. Two weeks passed before word came that the king would not at present acknowledge American independence or enter into a commercial treaty with the United States.

Upon reaching Vienna at the end of May 1778, Lee was told that the court was not prepared to receive him as an official representative of the United States. He stayed in Vienna until July, when he returned to Frankfurt to await more favorable signals from the Prussian court. Unfortunately, these never came, leaving Lee with little else to do but keep Congress abreast of the developments of the war between Prussia and Austria-Hungary.

In August, however, Lee seized an opportunity to make a bolder diplomatic move and entered into negotiations with Jean de Neufville for a treaty of commerce with the Dutch Republic.

Yet Lee had no authority to take such responsibility, nor would his treaty, had Congress accepted it, have carried much weight with the Dutch. De Neufville had received his instructions from only the burgomasters of Amsterdam, not from the United Provinces as a whole. All Lee's efforts, therefore, went into a document unrecognized by the two governments it concerned. He admitted that he had no power to sign the treaty and considered this lack an embarrassing oversight in his commission. However, he hoped that presenting the treaty as a fait accompli would override any objections.<sup>120</sup> The document met a far stranger fate than William Lee could have imagined. As a treaty of commerce made by negotiators unrecognized by either the United States or the Netherlands, it might have dropped into obscurity had not its accidental discovery by the British in September 1780 led to Great Britain's declaration of war on the United Provinces that winter. Lee also tried his hand at negotiations with Denmark. Like his other efforts, nothing substantial resulted.

During the period of Lee's thwarted diplomatic efforts, he expressed dissatisfaction with his post. In addition to being rebuffed by Prussia, Austria-Hungary, and the committee on foreign affairs, he experienced strains in his family life, especially in June 1779, when his eight-month-old son, Brutus, died. The traveling and uncertainties entailed by his commission were taking their toll. As Lee wrote to his brothers, living conditions were quite expensive and the "wonted happiness

we enjoyed before has been a stranger in my family for two years ~~sat~~. We breathe, indeed, and that is all." <sup>121</sup>

He no longer considered his position much of an honor and wondered why it had been made. To Richard Henry he proposed that the shift to political duties had been to separate him from his former mercantile associate, Thomas Morris. <sup>122</sup> The months of inactivity and lack of success sat uneasily on him. Disillusionment overtook his initial optimism when he was anxious to escape the tangled controversies of the commercial agency.

There was also a comic element in Lee's sojourn in Germany. In 1778 an Englishman, Samuel Petrie, had spread rumors that Arthur Lee had leaked information concerning the Franco-American alliance to the British. When confronted by Arthur, Petrie excused himself by shifting the blame to William Lee. Upon receiving no reply to his demand for a retraction, William challenged Petrie to a duel, but on three successive appointments, one or the other was always prevented from appearing by some unforeseen obstacle.

After this somewhat undignified display, Lee faded from the scene. He received official word of his dismissal in October 1779, which left him deeply disappointed to see "that the representatives of a free people should permit themselves to be made the instruments of a little, contemptible commis." <sup>123</sup> No longer with any official obligations, he looked forward to

a retirement in which his family and his books would employ his time. But his wife, Hannah, who had stayed behind in Brussels, apparently because of ill health, died just over a year after William's departure for his Virginia estate, Greenspring, in 1783. Developing blindness also robbed him of even the pleasure of his books. By the time of his own death on July 27, 1795, just a month shy of his fifty-sixth birthday, he had completely lost his sight.

William Lee's career between 1769 and 1778 followed an intriguing path, one on which he experienced great swings of personal success and failure in the major European capitals. Through his own accounts of his rise to be alderman of London, through the dim days of the Deane affair, Lee is an entertaining, if sometimes acerbic, guide through the major developments of the American Revolution in Europe. His public career, though brief, highlights important aspects of America's initial steps onto the international stage.

The London years were his happiest and most prosperous. In examining his activities between 1769 and 1777, one is drawn into both the mercantile and the political realms. In the first instance, Lee's correspondence illustrates the common duties and concerns of a tobacco merchant. His own interests and his close association with his brother Arthur drew him in to the volatile world of London politics. From his vantage point in the midst of the political whirl, Lee reported to Virginia the

support and encouragement of the pro-American community, even though it did not represent the views of the entire British nation.

Lee's entry into congressional service draws attention to the conduct of the American Revolution in Europe. On the Continent, Lee did not fare as well as he had in England. Though always an ardent patriot, his well-intentioned actions brought more harm than good to America when he allowed his zeal to blur the distinction between personal dignity and public obligation. When Lee rebutted Silas Deane's charges against him point by point, Lee showed that he had reasonable explanations. Unfortunately, the enmity between the Lee and Deane factions had been allowed to grow beyond the reach of a reasonable settlement. The motives behind the escalation of the Lee-Deane affair were irrelevant by the time the feud came to the floor of the Congress in 1779. What mattered at that point was that it seriously delayed the flow of congressional business at a time when Congress needed to focus solely on the war.

William Lee's election as sheriff and alderman of London still stands as a unique accomplishment for an American. That his years in the service of the Continental Congress did not match his early success only leads one to further investigation of this critical period in American

history. Lee himself may have been disappointed that greatness had eluded him, but this lack of personal fulfillment should not obscure the remarkable course of his career.



## [Notes for pages 6-13]

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>William Lee to Francis Lightfoot Lee, March 4, 1773, Lee Family Papers microfilm, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Va., roll 2.

<sup>2</sup>W. Lee to F. L. Lee, Dec. 2, 1773, ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Arthur Lee to Richard Henry Lee, Dec. 23, 1768, ibid., roll 1.

<sup>4</sup>W. Lee to R. H. Lee, Dec. 9, 1769, William Lee Letter Book, Aug. 10, 1769-June 30, 1771; Jan. 24, 1770-Nov. 20, 1771; Aug. 31, 1775-Sept. 13, 1776, Robert E. Lee Memorial Foundation, Stratford Hall, Va., microfilm, Colonial Williamsburg Research Center.

<sup>5</sup>W. Lee to James Mils, July 9, 1770, ibid.

<sup>6</sup>W. Lee to F. L. Lee, March 3, 1772, Lee Family Papers microfilm, roll 2.

<sup>7</sup>W. Lee to F. L. Lee, June 23, 1772, ibid.

<sup>8</sup>W. Lee to F. L. Lee, July 20, 1772, ibid.

<sup>9</sup>W. Lee to F. L. Lee, Feb. 23, 1773, ibid.

<sup>10</sup>W. Lee to F. L. Lee, July 22, 1772, ibid.

<sup>11</sup>W. Lee to F. L. Lee, Sept. 5, 1774, ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Bernard Donoghue, British Politics and the American Revolution: The Path to War, 1773-1775 (London, 1964), 133.

<sup>13</sup>A. Lee to R. H. Lee, Dec. 3, 1769; R. H. Lee to A. Lee, April 5, 1770, Lee Family Papers microfilm, roll 2.

<sup>14</sup>W. Lee to R. H. Lee, Jan. 20, 1775, ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Colin Bonwick, English Radicals and the American Revolution (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1977), 4.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 23.

<sup>17</sup>Pauline Maier, "John Wilkes and American Disillusion-

## [Notes for pages 13-22]

ment with Britain," William and Mary Quarterly, 3d Ser., XX (1963), 379.

<sup>18</sup>John Sainsbury, "The Pro-Americans of London, 1769 to 1782," WMQ, 3d Ser., XXXV (1978), 425.

<sup>19</sup>Maier, From Resistance to Revolution (London, 1973), 256.

<sup>20</sup>Letter of Congress to the Lord Mayor of London, July 8, 1775, The Letters of Richard Henry Lee, I, 1762-1778, ed. James Curtis Ballagh (New York, 1911), 142.

<sup>21</sup>Maier, Resistance, 222.

<sup>22</sup>Sainsbury, "Pro-Americans," WMQ, 3d Ser., XXXV (1978), 427.

<sup>23</sup>Louis Potts, Arthur Lee: A Virtuous Revolutionary (Baton Rouge, La., 1981), 86.

<sup>24</sup>Bonwick, English Radicals, 251; Bernard Bailyn, The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), 130.

<sup>25</sup>W. Lee to R. H. Lee, Sept. 10, 1774, Lee Family Papers microfilm, roll 2.

<sup>26</sup>A. R. Riggs, "Arthur Lee, A Radical Virginian in London, 1768-1776," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, LXXVII (1970), 274.

<sup>27</sup>George Rudé, Hanoverian London (London, 1971), 120, 124-125; Worthington Chauncey Ford, ed., Letters of William Lee, I (Brooklyn, N.Y., 1891), 12.

<sup>28</sup>W. Lee to F. L. Lee, July 31, 1773, Lee Family Papers microfilm, roll 2.

<sup>29</sup>London Chronicle, July 1-3, 1773, 16.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., July 3-6, 1773, 18.

<sup>31</sup>Ford, Letters of William Lee, I, 17-18.

<sup>32</sup>W. Lee to F. L. Lee, Dec. 2, 1773, Lee Family Papers microfilm, roll 2.

<sup>33</sup>Purdie and Dixon's Virginia Gazette (Wmsbg.), Dec. 8, 1774.

<sup>34</sup>London Chronicle, May 24, 1775, 490.

## [Notes for pages 22-31]

- <sup>35</sup>Ibid., May 26, 1775, 490.
- <sup>36</sup>Ford, Letters of William Lee, I, 41.
- <sup>37</sup>Pinckney's Va. Gaz. (Wmsbg.), Sept. 25, 1775; London Chronicle, July 13, 1775.
- <sup>38</sup>W. Lee to R. H. Lee, April 6, 1775; Petition address to the King by the Lord Mayor, Alderman and Commons of the City of London 1775, Lee Family Papers microfilm, roll 2.
- <sup>39</sup>W. Lee to F. L. Lee, Sept. 5, 1774, Lee Family Papers microfilm, roll 2.
- <sup>40</sup>W. Lee to F. L. Lee, April 2, 1774, ibid.; W. Lee to F. L. Lee, July 16, 1774, Letters of William Lee, I, 86.
- <sup>41</sup>W. Lee to Landon Carter, April 10, 1775, Letters of William Lee, I, 148-149.
- <sup>42</sup>W. Lee to R. H. Lee, Jan. 9, 1775, ibid., 111n; W. Lee to F. L. Lee, Jan. 13, 1775, Lee Family Papers microfilm, roll 2.
- <sup>43</sup>Donoghue, British Politics, 148
- <sup>44</sup>W. Lee to R. H. Lee, April 3, 1775, Jan. 1, 1774, Lee Family Papers microfilm, roll 2.
- <sup>45</sup>W. Lee to R. H. Lee, April 6, 1775, ibid.
- <sup>46</sup>Ford, ed., Letters of William Lee, I, 43.
- <sup>47</sup>W. Lee to the president of Congress [John Jay], March 8, 1779, Papers of the Continental Congress, National Archives microfilm, M247, roll 118.
- <sup>48</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>49</sup>W. Lee to R. H. Lee, Oct. 15, 1776, Letters of William Lee, I, 187.
- <sup>50</sup>A. Lee to his brother [R. H. Lee?], Feb. 20, 1777, Lee Family Papers microfilm, roll 3.
- <sup>51</sup>A. Lee to R. H. Lee, March 6, 1777, ibid.
- <sup>52</sup>W. Lee to pres. of Congress, March 8, 1779, Papers Cont. Cong., roll 118.
- <sup>53</sup>Elizabeth S. Kite, Beaumarchais and the War of American Independence, II (Boston, 1918), 68.

## [Notes for pages 31-36]

- <sup>54</sup>Charles J. Stillé, "Beaumarchais and 'The Lost Million,'" Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, XI, (1887), 19.
- <sup>55</sup>Ibid., 9-10.
- <sup>56</sup>Ibid., 20.
- <sup>57</sup>A. Lee to Silas Deane and Benjamin Franklin, June 28, 1777, Lee Family Papers microfilm, roll 3.
- <sup>58</sup>A. Lee to R. H. Lee, Sept. 5, 1777, ibid.
- <sup>59</sup>Julian Boyd, "Silas Deane: Death by a Kindly Teacher of Treason?" WMQ, 3d Ser., XVI (1959), 187; Coy Hilton James, Silas Deane--Patriot or Traitor? (East Lansing, Mich., 1975), 21.
- <sup>60</sup>The Commissioners at Paris to Thomas Morris, Jan. 30, 1777, T. Morris to the Commissioners, Feb. 1, 1777, Lee Family Papers microfilm, roll 3.
- <sup>61</sup>A. Lee to his brother [R. H. Lee?], Feb. 20, 1777, ibid.
- <sup>62</sup>A. Lee to R. H. Lee, Oct. 4, 1777, ibid.
- <sup>63</sup>Clarence L. Ver Steeg, Robert Morris: Revolutionary Financier (Philadelphia, 1954), 19.
- <sup>64</sup>W. Lee to pres. of Congress, March 8, 1779, Papers Cont. Cong., roll 118.
- <sup>65</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>66</sup>Thomas Perkins Abernethy, "The Origin of the Franklin-Lee Imbroglia," North Carolina Historical Review, XV (1938), 44.
- <sup>67</sup>John Ross to Deane, July 19, 22, 1777, Letters of William Lee, I, 200-203.
- <sup>68</sup>James, Silas Deane, 40; Abernethy, "Origin of the Franklin-Lee Imbroglia," NCHR, XV (1938), 46.
- <sup>69</sup>W. Lee to R. H. Lee, Aug. 12, 1777, Lee Family Papers microfilm, roll 3.

## [Notes for pages 37-44]

<sup>70</sup>W. Lee to pres. of Congress, March 8, 1779, Papers Cont. Cong., roll 118. Ford, ed., Letters of William Lee, I, 52.

<sup>71</sup>W. Lee to Deane, Dec. 17, 1777, Letters of William Lee, I, 296; W. Lee to pres. of Congress, Papers Cont. Cong., roll 118.

<sup>72</sup>Ford, ed., Letters of William Lee, I, 53.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 56.

<sup>74</sup>W. Lee to A. Lee, Aug. 12, 1777, ibid., 212-213.

<sup>75</sup>Ford, ed., ibid., 54-55.

<sup>76</sup>W. Lee to Deane, March 16, 1778, ibid., 400.

<sup>77</sup>Abernethy, "Origin of the Franklin-Lee Imbroglia," NCHR, XV (1938), 46.

<sup>78</sup>W. Lee to R. H. Lee, Nov. 24, 1777, Letters of William Lee, I, 276-277.

<sup>79</sup>W. Lee to pres. of Congress, March 8, 1779, Papers Cont. Cong., roll 118.

<sup>80</sup>Abernethy, Western Lands and the American Revolution (New York, 1937), 183.

<sup>81</sup>W. Lee to F. L. Lee, Aug. 9, 1777, Lee Family Papers microfilm, roll 3.

<sup>82</sup>E. James Ferguson, "Business, Government, and Congressional Investigation in the Revolution," WMQ, 3d Ser., XVI (1959), 297-298, 307.

<sup>83</sup>W. Lee to F. L. Lee, Feb. 28, 1778, Lee Family Papers microfilm, roll 4.

<sup>84</sup>W. Lee to R. H. Lee, Nov. 29, 1777, Letters of William Lee, I, 274; W. Lee to F. L. Lee, Aug. 9, 1777, Lee Family Papers microfilm, roll 3.

<sup>85</sup>Abernethy, Western Lands, 183.

<sup>86</sup>Ferguson, "Business, Govt., and Cong. Investigation," WMQ, 3d Ser., XVI (1959), 307.

<sup>87</sup>A. Lee to R. H. Lee, Dec. 22, 1777, Lee Family Papers microfilm, roll 3.

<sup>88</sup>Deane to pres. of Congress [Henry Laurens], Oct. 12, 1778, Papers Cont. Cong., roll 129.

## [Notes for pages 45-51]

- <sup>89</sup>James, Silas Deane, 45.
- <sup>90</sup>Ferguson, "Business, Govt., and Cong. Investigation," WMQ, 3d Ser., XVI (1959), 305.
- <sup>91</sup>Boyd, "Death by a Kindly Teacher," WMQ, 3d Ser., XVI (1959), 323, 337.
- <sup>92</sup>W. Lee to Thomas Rogers, Dec. 8, 1777, Letters of William Lee, I, 284.
- <sup>93</sup>Ibid., 286.
- <sup>94</sup>W. Lee to T. Adams [Edward Browne], Dec. 18, 1777, ibid., 297.
- <sup>95</sup>W. Lee to his brother, Nov. 10, 1777, Lee Family Papers microfilm, roll 3.
- <sup>96</sup>R. H. Lee to W. Lee, Jan. 25, 1778, Letters of Richard Henry Lee, I, 1762-1778, 383.
- <sup>97</sup>W. Lee to R. H. Lee, Jan. 2, 1778, Letters of William Lee, I, 318.
- <sup>98</sup>R. H. Lee to Thomas and Ludwell Lee, May 10, 1777, Lee Family Papers microfilm, roll 3.
- <sup>99</sup>Instructions from Congress to W. Lee, July 1, 1777, Letters of William Lee, I, 195-196.
- <sup>100</sup>W. Lee to C. Thompson [secretary of the Congress], Nov. 24, 1777, Papers Cont. Cong., roll 118.
- <sup>101</sup>W. Lee to his brother, Nov. 10, 1777, Lee Family Papers microfilm, roll 3.
- <sup>102</sup>W. Lee to R. H. Lee, Jan. 2, 1778, and to his brother, Nov. 10, 1777, Lee Family Papers microfilm, rolls 4 and 3.
- <sup>103</sup>W. Lee to pres. of Congress, March 8, 1779, Papers Cont. Cong., roll 118.
- <sup>104</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>105</sup>W. Lee to R. H. Lee, Nov. 24, 1777, Letters of William Lee, I, 273-274.

## [ Notes for pages 52-59 ]

- 106 James, Silas Deane, 55-56; Potts, Arthur Lee, 191; W. Lee to R. H. Lee, Feb. 2, 1778, Lee Family Papers microfilm, roll 4.
- 107 W. Lee to pres. of Congress, March 8, 1779, Papers Cont. Cong., roll 118.
- 108 Franklin, Deane, and A. Lee to the Committee of Foreign Affairs, Feb. 28, 1778, The Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States, II, ed., Francis Wharton (Washington, D.C., 1889), 509.
- 109 Abernethy, "Origins of the Franklin-Lee Imbroglia." NCHR, XV, (1938), 49.
- 110 James, Silas Deane, 41.
- 111 Ferguson, "Business, Govt., and Cong. Investigation," WMQ, 3d Ser., XVI (1959), 307, 312.
- 112 Potts, Arthur Lee, 194.
- 113 James, Silas Deane, 76.
- 114 W. Lee to pres. of Congress, March 8, 1779, Papers Cont. Cong., roll 118.
- 115 Ibid.
- 116 T. Morris to Jonathan Williams, Dec. 5, 1777, Lee Family Papers microfilm, roll 3.
- 117 W. Lee to pres. of Congress, March 8, 1779, Papers Cont. Cong., roll 118.
- 118 Ibid.; W. Lee to Mr. Deputy Partridge and the Rest of the Common Council of the Ward of Aldgate, London, Letters of William Lee, III, 771-774.
- 119 Potts, Arthur Lee, 231-234, 236.
- 120 Ford, Letters of William Lee, II, 472n; W. Lee to the Committee of Foreign Affairs, Sept. 12, 1778, ibid., 473-474.
- 121 W. Lee to F. L. Lee, May 20, 1779, ibid., 639.
- 122 W. Lee to R. H. Lee, Oct. 15, 1778, ibid., 495.
- 123 W. Lee to R. Lee, Oct. 14, 1779, ibid., III, 759.
- 124 W. Lee to A. Lee, Sept. 28, 1779, ibid., 752.

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