

AN EARLY BURLINGTON POSTMARKED COVER**By Ed & Jean Siskin**

Burlington, New Jersey was founded by two Quaker groups in 1677, five years earlier than Philadelphia. It was a planned community and the original draft map of the town prepared in 1678, contains many of the same street names that exist today. In 1681, when New Jersey was divided into two providences, East Jersey and West Jersey, Burlington was named the Capital of West Jersey. As Capital, it became a significant port city. Sometime shortly thereafter, a post office must have been established to receive and distribute incoming mail. The exact date is uncertain. In 1693, Andrew Hamilton functioning as Postmaster General under the Neale patent, identified two post offices in New Jersey, Burlington and Amboy. This identification in 1693, is often considered the establishment date of these two post offices, although almost certainly they had existed earlier.

From 1693 until 1776, there are only a few instances of official recognition of a post office in Burlington. The only recognitions we have been able to find are mentions in the Queen Anne Act of 1710, which established British responsibility for a postal system in the American colonies, and in the rate charts of 1764, 1766, and 1775. There are also newspaper references to a Burlington post office in 1743 and 1754, but no other official recognition of this post office's existence has been found.

Until 1754, the Burlington post office apparently was fairly active since it was directly part of the path for letters traveling between Philadelphia and New York. In 1754, Benjamin Franklin, who had become co-Deputy Postmaster General in October 1753, rerouted the Philadelphia-New York mail to travel via Trenton rather than Burlington, which substantially reduced Burlington's postal importance. The reason for this change was that the Burlington route required five ferry crossings, while the Trenton route could make do with two. Reducing the number of ferry crossings was crucial since each ferry crossing represented a potential for a significant delay to the mail. Ferries were required by law to carry mail for free, therefore they tended to wait until a crossing was to be made for a paying customer before taking the mail across.

Burlington's post office continued to function until about November 1776. At that time, the depredations of the British army chasing General Washington's rebels across New Jersey resulted in the collapse of the postal system in New Jersey. Apparently, the Burlington post office was not reopened until October 18, 1797 with the appointment of Thomas Douglass as its first postmaster under the new United States Post Office.

There are few covers recorded which traveled through the Burlington post office during the Colonial period. The earliest dated September 25, 1699, traveled from Burlington to The Falls (Trenton). This cover, shown in *Figure 1*, was sold in our collection in 2006. That cover and other early covers have no town post mark. Our records had indicated that the earliest Burlington postmark was dated August 1774. That cover was sold in Richard Frajola's Auction Number 26.

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Fig. 1: Cover sent from Burlington to The Falls (Trenton) datelined September 25, 1699. It has no town marking.

Ex Siskin Collection

Chris Records has brought to the Society's attention a new find. This cover is shown in Figure 2. The cover has a "Burl^{ton}" townmark, a 2 pennyweight rate (the correct rate from Burlington to New York) and a July 15 Franklin Mark. The cover is endorsed by Lawrence Sweeny, a New York attorney to whom the letter had been shown. The cover contains a dateline of July 7, 1767, shown in Figure 3.



Courtesy Chris Records

Fig. 2: Newly discovered cover datelined July 7, 1767, showing a town marking of Burl^{ton} and rate of 2 pennyweight (see overlaid enlargement of townmark).



Courtesy Chris Records

Fig. 3: Showing dateline of July 7, 1767.

This cover is now established as the earliest documented Burlington postmark.

The content is a letter from James Kinsey (1731-1803) to a client in New York. At this time Kinsey was a prominent attorney in Burlington who had succeeded his father John Kinsey Jr. and a brother John Kinsey III as chief counsel to the West Jersey Proprietors. Later, James Kinsey would be a delegate to the Continental Congress (1774-1775) and would become Chief Justice of the New Jersey Supreme Court (1789-1803). The addressee, William Bayard (1727-1804), was a New York City merchant. He was a member of the Stamp Act Congress in 1765. During the Revolutionary War, he sided with the Loyalists and raised a provincial regiment for the British Army. His lands were confiscated and he died in England in 1804.

The contents, provided below, concern the efforts to discourage people from stealing timber from lands possibly owned by the West and East Jersey Proprietors.

Note: Transcribing this letter proved to be a real challenge, but hopefully the authors with significant help of Jean and Bill Walton rose to the occasion.

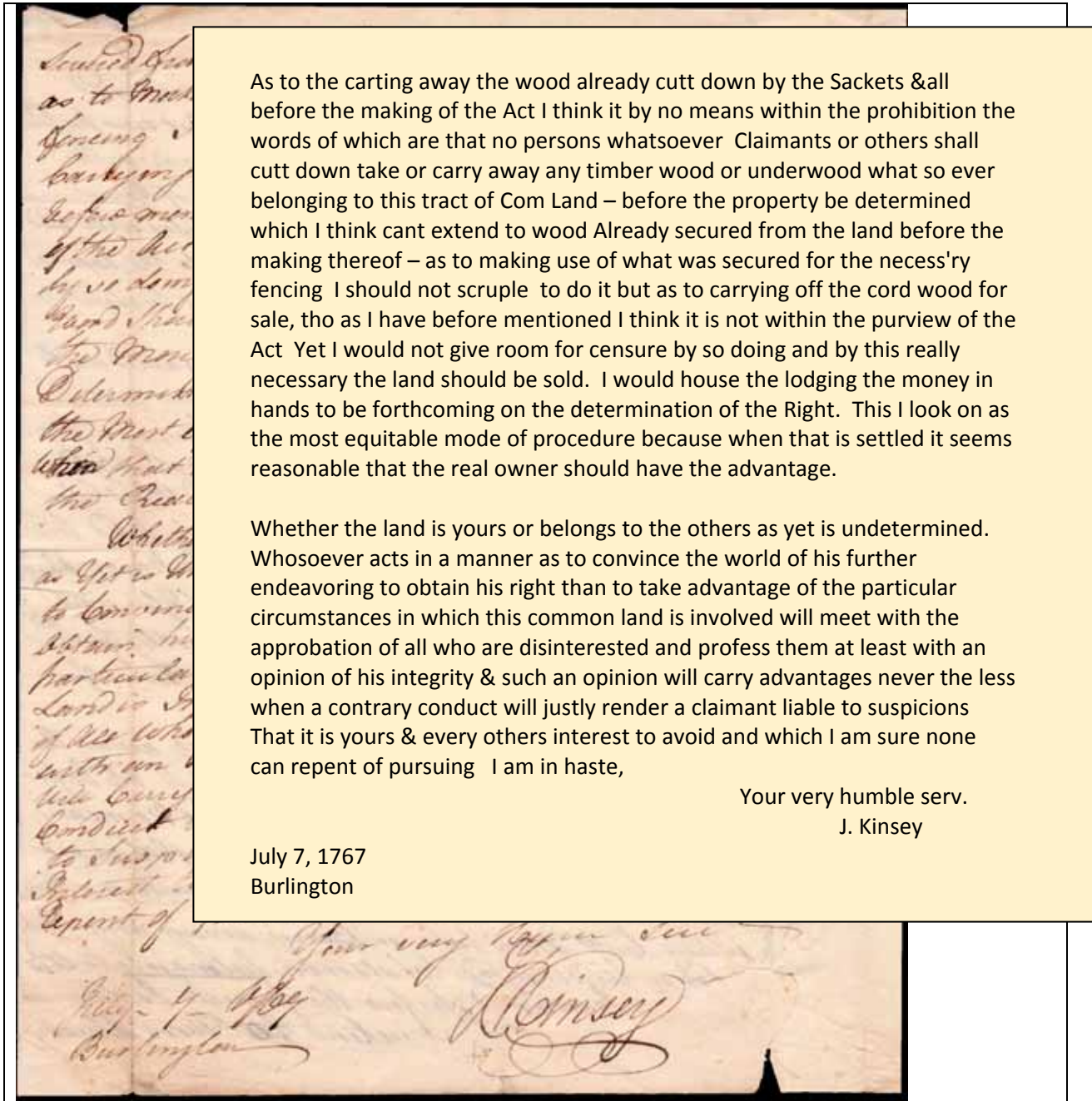
Dear Sir

I just recd yours of 29 instant and in answer thereto inform you that the act now passed is only a continuation of the former law made in the Yr 1765 – 5 GEO 3 with which Mr. Stevens or many of your acquaintance at New York can furnish you with and render it unnecessary for me to put you to the expense of a Copy from the Clerk of Assy of whom at present it is only to be had.

I am glad you have enabled me to contradict an assertion that was current with us at the time of the Bills passing the House of Assy that there was many thousands of cord destroyed since the expiration of the last Act and that you was amongst the number of those who had been allow continuing that practice and it was observed by some of the house that you acted as if you were conscious of your claim & being unjustly founded in so doing I think it best not to leave room for observations of this kind.

By the time you receive this Mr. Parker probably will have the copies of the Law to

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As to the carting away the wood already cutt down by the Sackets & all before the making of the Act I think it by no means within the prohibition the words of which are that no persons whatsoever Claimants or others shall cutt down take or carry away any timber wood or underwood what so ever belonging to this tract of Com Land – before the property be determined which I think cant extend to wood Already secured from the land before the making thereof – as to making use of what was secured for the necess'ry fencing I should not scruple to do it but as to carrying off the cord wood for sale, tho as I have before mentioned I think it is not within the purview of the Act Yet I would not give room for censure by so doing and by this really necessary the land should be sold. I would house the lodging the money in hands to be forthcoming on the determination of the Right. This I look on as the most equitable mode of procedure because when that is settled it seems reasonable that the real owner should have the advantage.

Whether the land is yours or belongs to the others as yet is undetermined. Whosoever acts in a manner as to convince the world of his further endeavoring to obtain his right than to take advantage of the particular circumstances in which this common land is involved will meet with the approbation of all who are disinterested and profess them at least with an opinion of his integrity & such an opinion will carry advantages never the less when a contrary conduct will justly render a claimant liable to suspicions That it is yours & every others interest to avoid and which I am sure none can repent of pursuing I am in haste,

Your very humble serv.
J. Kinsey

July 7, 1767
Burlington

This cover was found amongst a number of old papers and material contemporary to this period which is now in Chris's hands. Anyone wishing to contact him may do so at therecords5@gmail.com. A nice find!