

New Jersey, Impressment, and *Chesapeake* Affair of 1807

By Harvey Strum

DOI: [10.14713/njs.v11i2.348](https://doi.org/10.14713/njs.v11i2.348)

Abstract: During the first decade of the nineteenth century, British warships cruised off New York Harbor, Sandy Hook, and Monmouth County seizing cargoes, ships, and impressing seamen. British naval officers did not discriminate between a seaman born in Ireland or an American born in Newark. Impressment angered Americans, including the people of New Jersey, as a violation of American sovereignty and national honor. In June 1807, the British attacked the American warship Chesapeake. Briefly, the British united Federalists and Republicans in a show of national unity and condemnation of the British. Residents met in unity meetings in places such as Orange, Trenton, Newark, Morristown, and Elizabeth. Fourth of July celebrations allowed citizens to express their anger at the British. Militia companies came forward, passed anti-British resolutions, and offered to serve if war declared.

“**BRITISH INSOLENCEN, OUTRAGE, AND MURDER,**” read the headline in the major Republican Party newspaper in New Jersey—Trenton’s *True American*—on 6 July 1807. Reminding its readers of the nefarious conduct of the British, the paper asserted, “In the annals of a nation notorious for its acts of **Piracy, Robbery, and Murder,** a more atrocious, dastardly, and cowardly outrage is not to be found.” Future Governor and U.S. Senator Samuel Southard summed up the public mood in New Jersey and the nation: “The news about the Chesapeake had raised my feelings to a pitch of keenest sensibility...I hate the English nation—it is a mass of corruption.” The attack by the British warship *Leopard* on the American warship *Chesapeake* off the Virginia

Capes in June 1807 angered Americans from Maine to Georgia. Citizens of New Jersey joined their fellow Americans in expressing their outrage and anger at British attacks on American ships in violation of American neutrality in the wars in Europe.

From 1793 to 1815, France and Great Britain fought for supremacy in Europe. Both nations seized American ships laden with goods en route to the other's ports. British authorities claimed the right to seize contraband goods destined for French controlled territory and to impress British-born subjects serving in neutral American merchant ships. The British also took naturalized Americans and American-born seamen off American vessels and forced them to serve in British naval forces. Americans perceived the British violations of American neutral rights as an assault on American sovereignty, a violation of American national honor, and evidence of the British reluctance to accept American independence.

Federalists recognized British violations of American neutral rights but blamed President Thomas Jefferson for encouraging the attacks by not providing sufficient funds for naval forces. While critical of British violations of American territorial waters, Federalists concentrated their attacks on French violations of American neutral rights. Federalist and Republican reactions to impressment, ship seizures, and British off and on temporary but de facto blockades of New York harbor and the Jersey shore of Monmouth County in 1804 and 1806 often reflected the basic attitudes the two parties held toward foreign affairs from 1793-1815. Republicans assailed the British, and Federalists attacked the French and called for a peaceful accommodation of Anglo-American problems. However, the blatant seizure of American ships and seamen by the British, frequently within American territorial waters, created a quandary for Federalists as they tried to balance their own objections to impressment with their equal distaste for President Jefferson's policies, especially since they realized British actions outraged Americans.

Throughout the first decade of the nineteenth century, British warships cruised off New York harbor, Sandy Hook, and Monmouth County seizing cargoes, ships, and seamen, leading to repeated diplomatic confrontations between the British government and President Thomas Jefferson. While the British government did not claim the right to seize native-born Americans, British naval officers did not discriminate between a naturalized American from Ireland and an American born in Newark. When the British attacked and boarded the *Chesapeake* in 1807, two of the four men impressed were African Americans. Officers of the British Navy impressed between 8,000 and 10,000 Americans into British service from 1793-1815. Historian James Zimmerman estimated that half of the impressments took place between 1803-07. British naval officers routinely stopped American vessels to seize seamen.

These actions by British naval officers led to tragic mistakes and exacerbated Anglo-American relations. Repeated seizures of ships and seamen off Sandy Hook in 1804, violating American territorial waters, created a diplomatic confrontation between Great Britain and the United States. Protests did not change British policy as warships hovered off New York and Monmouth County. In an effort to stop a coasting vessel, the trading sloop *Richard*, the British warship *Leander* fired on the American sloop decapitating John Pierce on 25 April 1806, near Sandy Hook. This attempt to stop and search an American ship looking for alleged contraband French goods backfired, harming Anglo-American relations. Members of *Richard's* crew brought the body of Pierce ashore in New York City and the sight infuriated New Yorkers. Future president John Quincy Adams wrote to his wife about the indignation of New Yorkers to the murder of Pierce. Both Federalists and Republicans wanted to claim his body and the right to bury Pierce. He became a national symbol leading to a major diplomatic confrontation between Great Britain and President Jefferson.

Pierce's death became a local, national, and international problem. Accounts appeared in newspapers across the country such as Charleston, South Carolina; Richmond, Virginia; and Brattleboro, Vermont. In Northampton, Massachusetts, the *Hampshire Gazette* voiced the anger of the American people at Pierce's murder "by a foreign force." Some newspapers, like the Philadelphia *Aurora* and the Richmond *Enquirer*, recommended declaring war. A killing of an American seaman by British cannon in American territorial waters aroused American nationalism and Anglophobia, forcing Federalists to join with Republicans in denouncing the murder. According to historian Bradford Perkins, "all parties agreed that Pierce must be avenged." However, Federalists also criticized Jefferson for failing to provide sufficient naval protection. While the murder of Pierce produced unity against the British actions, it did not end partisanship.

Upon learning of the murder of Pierce, President Jefferson instructed two American commissioners in Great Britain, James Monroe and William Pinckney, to negotiate on impressment and other Anglo-American issues to impress on the British the seriousness of the crisis produced by the killing of Pierce. President Jefferson demanded the British court-martial Captain Henry Whitby of *Leander* or turn him over to the United States for punishment. In April 1807, a court-martial acquitted Whitby, much to the annoyance of Jefferson and the American public. Also, the negotiations led to the Monroe-Pinckney Treaty, which failed to resolve impressment. President Jefferson rejected the treaty, leaving the problems of Anglo-American relations unresolved.

In June 1807, the British *Leopard* fired on the American warship *Chesapeake* off the Virginia Capes, killing three, wounding eighteen, and impressing four seamen. *Chesapeake's* commanding officer, James Barron, refused to allow the British to infringe on American national sovereignty by accepting a boarding crew to search his vessel for alleged deserters. The British

preferred to open fire on an American warship in time of peace. This unprovoked attack outraged Americans who viewed the attack as a national insult. Several meetings of protest against the British were held in places such as Norfolk, Williamsburg, Alexandria, Washington, Philadelphia, New York, Boston, Savannah, and Albany. Historian Edward Gaines noted that in Virginia a grassroots movement developed to express citizen anger at the British, leading to meetings in town halls and county courthouses. In New York, citizens held meetings from the Niagara Frontier to New York City. For residents of New York City, the attack on the *Chesapeake* had special significance due to the murder of Pierce a year earlier and British occupation of the city from 1776-1783. Residents of New York still celebrated Evacuation Day in 1807, a holiday to commemorate the British leaving the city in November 1783.

How did the press, politicians, and people of New Jersey react to the war scare of July 1807? What did the state militia companies do? Did the residents of New Jersey unite behind a common perceived enemy, or did they remain divided by partisan political loyalties, Federalist or Republican? Historians of New Jersey military history either avoided the *Chesapeake* affair or mentioned it in passing. This includes Mark Lender, *One State in Arms*, David Petriello, *Military History of New Jersey*, and Joseph Bilby, *New Jersey: A Military History*. Similarly, Joseph Bilby, James Madden, and Harry Ziegler in *The Hidden History of New Jersey at War* covered the War of 1812 but omitted the events of 1807. Historians of the first party system in New Jersey mentioned it in passing, like Carl Prince in *New Jersey's Jeffersonian Republicans*. Prince pointed out that the attack on the *Chesapeake* was “an inflammatory incident brought on by the impressment of American seamen.”¹ While they covered the War of 1812, Rudolph and Margaret

¹ Carl Prince, *New Jersey's Jeffersonian Republicans* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina, 1967), 159; Also, see David Petriello, *Military History of New Jersey* (Charleston, S.C.: History Press, 2014); Joseph Bilby, *New Jersey: A Military History* (Yardley, P.A.: Westholme Publishing, 2017); Joseph Bilby, James Madden, and Harry Ziegler, *Hidden History of New Jersey at War* (Charleston, S.C.: History Press, 2011). James Zimmerman,

Pasler in their study of New Jersey's Federalists skipped over the *Chesapeake* and 1807 war scare. In an older study of the Republican Party in the Garden State, *The Transition from Aristocracy to Democracy in New Jersey, 1789-1829*, Walter Fee devoted several pages to the *Chesapeake*. Fee accurately noted that "for a time it looked as if the *Chesapeake* affair might lead to war." Fee's concern about events in the summer of 1807 suggest the need for a further look at what happened in New Jersey. Military historian David Petriello did stress, "Impressment one of the larger issues, personally impacted the sailing state of New Jersey," because many men from the state sailed on vessels "stopped, searched, and even seized by the English." Many historians, like Robert Cray Jr., agreed with Fee, treating the "*Chesapeake-Leopard* affair as a precursor to the War of 1812." As another example, Richard Barbuto noted "Americans of all political bents were incensed. The threat of imminent war was palpable."²

Even before 1807 the press condemned impressment as an attack on American honor and independence. The Trenton *Federalist* believed the "evil has become so enormous and seemed to call for the most energetic measures." The *Federalist* added, "It is about eighteen months the British have impressed a greater number of American seamen than we recollect to have heard of during the whole of the late war." President Jefferson's inability to stop impressment led the *Federalist* to lash out, "What has been done by government to redress these wrongs—to vindicate

Impressment of American Seamen (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1925); Mark Lender, *One State in Arms: A Short Military History of New Jersey* (Trenton: New Jersey Historical Commission, 1991); Quotes in first paragraph, Trenton *True American*, 6 July 1807; Samuel Southard Journal, 4 July 1807, Box 115, Samuel Southard Papers, Special Collections and Rare Books, Firestone Library, Princeton University (PU), Princeton, New Jersey. As an example of the outrage over Pierce's death, Northampton *Hampshire Gazette*, 7 May 1806; Bradford Perkins, *Prologue to War: England and the United States, 1805-1812* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963), 107.

² Walter Fee, *The Transition from Aristocracy to Democracy in New Jersey, 1789 to 1829* (Somerville, N.J.: Somerset Press, 1933), 149; Also, see Rudolph and Margaret Pasler, *The New Jersey Federalists* (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1975); Robert Cray, Jr., "Remembering the USS Chesapeake: The Politics of Maritime Death and Impressment," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 25 (Fall 2005), 447, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3004338>; Richard Barbuto, *New York's War of 1812* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 2021), 12; Petriello, *Military History*, 101.

our national honor—and to protect our citizens in their lawful, commercial pursuits?”³ Similarly, the Republican *Centinel of Freedom* from Newark raised the issue with its readers: “What have we done that merits this treatment? Have we impressed British subjects? Do we take their seamen? No we respect their rights, and they are bound to respect ours.”⁴ According to the Republican *True American* from Trenton, American efforts to ameliorate the situation by offering certificates of citizenship were rejected as spurious and false by the British, “and what greater insult can be offered the independence and integrity of our constitutional authorities than this usage.”⁵

Republican Congressman James Sloan, one of the most ardent Republican partisans from South New Jersey, “appealed to the spirit of ’76 saying [in an 1806 debate in Congress] ‘May the remaining sparks be rekindled and burn up the residue of British tyranny.’” Sloan emphasized the pain impressment caused on Americans “singling out parents bereft of their only son, and the widows and orphans left destitute after husbands and fathers died in the forced service of the Royal Navy.” Sloan felt under pressure from constituents back home in New Jersey to act against the “unjust aggressions of Great Britain.” For this reason, Sloan strongly supported economic pressure on the British government via a proposed Non-Importation Act in January 1806.⁶

American lawmakers in Congress believed the British dependence on the American market would force them to make concessions on impressment. While Federalists and Republicans debated the best approach to deal with impressment, they agreed “that the operations of the press-gangs was an insult, ruinous to the United States’ national honor, and the injuries had to be

³ Trenton *Federalist*, 12 August 1805, “Impressment of American Seamen.”; Also, Trenton *Federalist*, 5 May 1806, “The very important intelligence.”

⁴ Newark *Centinel of Freedom*, 6 August 1805, “Fishermen Impressed.”

⁵ Trenton *True American*, 7 November 1805, see “On the Impressment of Seamen.”

⁶ Zimmerman, *Impressment*, 113, citing *Annals of Congress, Ninth Congress, First Session*, 734; Joshua Wolf, “To be Enslaved or Thus Deprived’: British Impressment, American Discontent, and the Making of the *Chesapeake-Leopard* Affair, 1803-1807,” *War and Society*, Vol 29:1 (May 2010), 14, based on *Annals of Congress, Ninth Congress, First Session*, 458-59, 608, <https://doi.org/10.1179/204243410X12674422128795>.

redressed.” Americans believed in free trade and sailors’ rights—meaning ending impressment because “Impressment into the British navy threatened the rights of American citizens at sea and therefore threatened the American national identity.”⁷

British ships stationed themselves off Sandy Hook or in the Narrows to stop every vessel they could catch. As an example, Captain William Bradley of the warship *Cambrian* boarded *American Packet* on 1 October 1803, taking off two seamen, including Thomas Cook of Shrewsbury, New Jersey. Even the British consul in New York City, Thomas Barclay, pleaded with the British officers to release Cook: “he is well known as a real American citizen.”⁸ Apparently, British naval officers did not rush to release the falsely impressed Thomas Cook.

When two French vessels *Cybele* and *Didon* arrived in New York City in June 1804 to take home Jerome Bonaparte and his American bride Elizabeth Paterson, British warships appeared off Sandy Hook and the Narrows. The British “frigate *Cambrian* and sloop *Driver*” arrived on the 16th of June followed by the frigate *Boston*.⁹ They anchored within Sandy Hook, and as one British seaman, Basil Hall, a midshipman serving on another warship, *Leander*, remembered, “every morning at daybreak, we set about arresting the progress of all vessels we saw, firing off guns to the right and left to make every ship...heave to.” In their haste, the British warships fired on American vessels within American territorial waters off Monmouth County. Ships had to line up

⁷ Joshua Wolf, ““To be Enslaved or Thus Deprived” British Impressment, American Discontent, and the Making of the *Chesapeake-Leopard* Affair, 1803-1807,” *War and Society*, Vol. 29:1 (May 2010), 9; Paul Gilje, “Free Trade and Sailors’ Rights’: The Rhetoric of the War of 1812,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, 30:1 (Spring 2010), 9, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jer.0.0130>; For general background, Burton Spivak, *Jefferson’s English Crisis: Commerce, Embargo, and the Republican Revolution* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia, 1979), see the first two chapters of Spivak’s study.

⁸ Thomas Barclay to Vice Admiral Sir Thomas Mitchell, 22 November 1803, in George Rives, ed., *Selections from the Correspondence of Thomas Barclay* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1894), 154.

⁹ Malcolm Lester, *Anthony Merry Redivivus: A Reappraisal of the British Minister to the United States, 1803-6* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia, 1978), 52. Some of the men impressed from New Jersey, see Miscellaneous Lists and Papers Regarding Impressed Seamen, 1796-1814, M1839, RG 59, Department of State, National Archives.

for hours waiting for the British to board them, “losing their fair wind, their tide...and their market.” Observations by Basil Hall confirm that British warships sporadically appeared off the Jersey shore and New York Harbor seeking to stop and board every vessel entering or leaving in search of seamen to impress and cargoes and ships to seize. The Newark *Centinel* agreed with Hall’s observations and reported, “every vessel, inward or outward bound, is stopped, plundered, and sent to Halifax, or permitted to depart after losing her men by impressment.” Even Thomas Barclay, the British consul, complained to the captains of British ships off New York and Monmouth County that they acted too aggressively in impressing Americans and seizing ships, risking a confrontation with the Jefferson administration. According to historian Reginald Horsman, these actions damaged American commerce “and caused sharp resentment within the United States.” British warships carried out similar attacks off other American ports. Actions by British warships off New York and Jersey shore were repeated again and again until the War of 1812. They “were a constant source of bitterness to the United States.”¹⁰

Throughout the summer of 1804, the British warships stopped American and foreign vessels off Sandy Hook and the Monmouth coast to impress men into the British Navy. During June, Newark *Centinel* railed against “British Insolence” when the *Cambrian* boarded and impressed seamen aboard the *Pitt*. A month later, the *Cambrian* sent a boarding party to the *Diana* off Sandy Hook and impressed six British passengers. In August 1804, the *Leander* fired on the *Live Oak* near Sandy Hook and upon the *Almira* within a mile of the Jersey shore. Passengers aboard the *Live Oak* reported the British impressed seventeen men and boys, “torn from their

¹⁰ R. Sutcliff, *Travels in Some parts of North America in the Years in 1804, 1805, and 1806* (Philadelphia: B&T Kite, 1812), 20-24; Rives, *Barclay*, 203; Basil Hall, *Fragments of Voyages and Travels* (London, 1840). In chapter 5 he recounts his experiences as a midshipman on the *Leander* in the summer of 1804. Also, Basil Hall, *Midshipman* (London: Bell & Daldy, 1862), 136; Newark *Centinel*, 18 September 1804; Reginald Horsman, *Causes of the War of 1812* (New York: A. Barnes and Co.: 1962), 29-30. Also, see Bradford Perkins, *Prologue to War: England and the United States, 1805-1812* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963), 107.

mothers, wives, and sisters, who were left in distress that cannot be described.”¹¹ Consul Merry advised Captain William Bradley of the *Cambrian* to release a group of impressed American seamen to avoid an escalation of Anglo-American conflict over neutral rights. Captain Bradley ignored the request. Thomas Barclay appealed to Anthony Merry, the British Minister in Washington, for support to rein in Captain Bradley. Secretary of State James Madison complained to Anthony Merry about the *Diana* incidents, as did President Jefferson about the violation of American sovereignty. Merry met with Madison, who dodged the issue of impressment, and denied he had any authority over British naval officers. Barclay was disappointed at the lack of support from Merry, although Merry did caution British naval officers to try to observe American sovereignty more carefully. Although British authorities apologized and removed Bradley from command of the *Cambrian*, American protests did not prevent further violations of American neutral rights or American territorial waters.

As reported from Sandy Hook on 29 July 1804, “since you left me, I have witnessed the greatest insult that could be offered to a nation”: the British frigate *Cambrian* detaining American vessels within two miles of the shore. British insolence in the summer of 1804 reminded Republicans of the depraved behavior of Algerian pirates. This insolence of impressing men within American territorial waters “calls for the strongest remonstrances from the proper authority.” Continued actions by British warships to violate American neutral rights and territorial waters off New York and New Jersey led to another blistering editorial in the Newark *Centinel*, hoping “some

¹¹ Newark *Centinel of Freedom*, 26 June, 21 August 1804; Thomas Barclay to Anthony Merry, 23 June, 18 July, 1 August, 14, 24 August 1804, in Rives, *Thomas Barclay*, 166-68 and 178-90; *The National Intelligencer and Washington Advertiser*; 6 August 1804; Trenton *Federalist*, 25 June, 9 July 1804; Harrowby #3 to Merry, 7 November 1804, in B. Mayo, *Instructions to the British Ministers to the United States, 1791-1812*. American Historical Association, *Annual Report, 1936* (Washington, 1941) III, 208-09.

energetic measures will ere long be adopted by our government to obtain redress.”¹² Protests by President Jefferson and Secretary of State James Madison had no impact.

In the spring of 1806, three warships, the *Leander*, *Driver*, and *Cambrian*, appeared near Sandy Hook stopping every vessel, ordering seized ships to Halifax, and impressing seamen. At times, the British warships were within a mile and half of the Jersey shore. British warships routinely fired at American ships to make them heave to for boarding. Both the *Driver* and *Cambrian* fired on the American brig *Sally*. According to Consul Barclay in a letter to British Minister Anthony Merry “that the *Leander* in firing on an American Coaster coming into the Hook, killed the man at the Helm...will occasion much ill will on the part of the Americans.” Consul Barclay cautioned after the murder of John Pierce off Sandy Hook: “I shall take occasion to recommend more caution to Captain Whitby, the Commander of the *Leander*, and entrust that he and other two ships of war, will not approach so near the American coasts’ [and] “abstain from all acts that may give offense.” His comments had no impact on the actions of British commanders cruising near the Jersey shore stopping ships, impressing Americans, seizing cargoes, taking control of some American vessels, and sending them to Halifax. While British Minister Anthony Merry expressed his regrets over the death of an American and promised an investigation, he assured the Jefferson administration that British warships were not blockading New York-New Jersey harbor. President Jefferson issued a proclamation barring the *Leander*, *Cambrian*, and *Driver* from American ports and threatening the arrest of the officers of the three British warships if they came within American jurisdiction. Madison lashed out at Merry for the murder of the American seaman and reaffirmed the American position that British warships continued to violate American territorial waters, seize cargoes, and impress seamen off Monmouth County and Sandy

¹² Newark *Centinel of Freedom*, 26 June 1804, 18 September 1804. Also, Lester, *Anthony Merry*, 52-54.

Hook. In effect, the British warships continued to blockade New York harbor and the Jersey coast despite Merry's protestations to the contrary. As the Richmond *Enquirer* reported, "**NEW YORK BLOCKADED.**" Occasionally, an American escaped, like John Willis of Paterson impressed in June 1807 from the *Sally* off New York. He managed to desert the British brig *Express* in September 1807 but noted that eighteen other Americans remained impressed, showing the bankruptcy of Merry's assurances or Jefferson's diplomatic protests.¹³

"More British Friendship" announced the *Centinel* as it denounced the British warships "capturing our vessels and committing other outrageous acts." Also, in Newark, the Republican Fusiliers toasted to "The British navy, murderers of our fellow citizens and plunderers of our commerce—May these aggressions be duly remembered until full satisfaction is obtained—3 groans." In Morristown, *The Genius of Liberty* condemned "the recent outrages committed by the British off Sandy Hook." For example, the British seized the *Aurora* off Sandy Hook in April, even after the killing of Pierce, and sent the ship to Halifax. Similarly, the *Leander* captured the *Nimrod* off Sandy Hook and ordered for Halifax. Citizens, especially Republicans, remembered the murder of Pierce and British violations of American rights at Fourth of July celebrations in towns such as Trenton, Flemington, and Middletown Point. British actions in 1806 also angered New Jersey's Federalists, but they blamed "democratic management" for allowing the British to effectively blockade the port of New York and Jersey shore for the past three years. According to the Trenton *Federalist*, "our own vessels subjected to insult, detention, and seizure, within our own peculiar jurisdiction," and the Jefferson administration failed to do anything to stop it. British warships "are not to be frightened by paper bullets." During Fourth of July celebrations, Federalists in

¹³ Thomas Barclay to Mr. Merry, 26 April 1806, Rives, *Thomas Barclay*, 230; Also see Lester, *Anthony Merry*, 62-65; For Willis, Newark *Centinel of Freedom*, 24 November 1807; Richmond *Enquirer*, 6 May 1806, cited in Heather Walser, "Mourning Murder," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 43 (Spring 2023), 41, DOI:10.1353/jer.2023.0001.

Bridgetown, Cumberland County, toasted to “the rights and liberties of Americans—**right** to be plundered, insulted, and murdered by the subjects of foreign governments, and the **liberty** of complaining without redress.” Even before the *Leander* affair, Federalists, like William Paterson, expressed concern that the majority in Congress “cannot be obtained for any great measure of a defensive, much less, an offensive nature.” Like other Federalists, Paterson argued “you should add to the navy, fortify your seaports,” but he feared “nothing will be done.”¹⁴

Meanwhile, on 19 April 1806, President Jefferson signed the Non-Importation Act which would block the importation of specific British manufactures. Solidly Republican, New Jersey’s members of Congress supported the legislation to use commercial restrictions to pressure the British to respect American rights. Congressman Ebenezer Elmer, a local party leader from Cumberland County, spoke in favor of the proposed law as means of bringing justice to the United States without resorting to war. He admitted it might cause some negative economic consequences at home, but that Americans would support it in American national interest. James Sloan, from Gloucester County, supported the law although it did not mention “the principal cause of our complaint against Great Britain—I mean the impressment of our seamen.” Five of the six representatives from New Jersey voted for non-importation and one did not vote. The House voted 93-32 for the Non-Importation Act.¹⁵

Senator John Condit, from an old New Jersey family and a Republican who would serve in Congress from 1799 to 1820, voted for the law. Senator Aaron Kitchell of Morris County, another long-term party activist, supported Non-Importation, making it unanimous. All of New

¹⁴ Newark *Centinel*, 29 April 1806, 8 July 1806; Trenton, *Federalist*, 5 May, 14 July 1806. Morristown *The Genius of Liberty*, 8 May 1806; Trenton *True American*, 7, 14 July 1806. Also, see Robert Rodgers, “Some Phases of New Jersey History In The Jeffersonian Period,” (M.A. thesis, University of Chicago, 1931), 45; William Paterson to his wife, 8 February 1806, Box 2, William Paterson Papers, Alexander Library, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, N.J.

¹⁵ *Annals of Congress*, 9th Cong. 1st Sess., 630-34, 800-814; Rodgers, “Jeffersonian Period,” 47-48.

Jersey's delegation in Washington backed Jefferson's actions to use commercial restrictions to pressure Great Britain as the Senate voted 19 to 9 for the law. Reflecting the mixed feelings of New Jersey's Federalists about economic coercion, the Trenton *Federalist* informed its readers that "among the mighty acts of our National Legislature at this interesting crisis" [is passage] of non-importation. This reflected the mixed feelings and partisanship of New Jersey's Federalists who attacked Jefferson for not protecting American rights but voiced skepticism about commercial retaliation like the Non-Importation Act and the later Embargo Act.¹⁶

The British attack on the *Chesapeake* outraged the people of New Jersey. What happened in New Jersey was a microcosm of what happened throughout the United States in July 1807. Americans mixed outrage and partisanship in their reactions to the latest foreign policy crisis. Across New Jersey and the United States, Americans held meetings and drafted resolutions denouncing the British attack on an American national vessel and the seizure of seamen. For a brief period, some Federalists and Republicans buried their mutual hostility in the common bond of patriotism. William Coleman, the Federalist editor of the New York *Evening Post*, wrote a pleas for nonpartisanship. He hoped "all little party distinctions" would disappear into a "single individual sentiment of love of our common country." Federalists temporarily jettisoned their pro-British sympathies when the British blatantly attacked American neutral rights and willingly joined with Republicans to express their anger over the attack on the *Chesapeake*. As historian Robert Rodgers noted: "To the protest which reverberated through the states, New Jersey contributed noisily." Another historian of New Jersey's politics, Walter Fee, reached the same conclusion: "This event produced an indignant public reaction. Protest meetings became the fashion." The

¹⁶ *Annals*, 9th Cong., 1st Sess., 232, 877; Rodgers, "Jeffersonian Period," 46, 48-49; Trenton *Federalist*, 28 April 1806.

impact of impressment, *Chesapeake* attack, and the embargo assured that foreign policy issues “taken as a whole, remain an obsessively recurrent theme in New Jersey politics, as elsewhere in the nation.”¹⁷

“**BRITISH INSOLENT, OUTRAGE, AND MURDER,**” read the headline of the major Republican newspaper in New Jersey, the Trenton *True American*. Reminding its readers of the nefarious conduct of the British, the paper added, “in the annals of a nation notorious for its acts of Piracy, Robbery, and Murder, a more atrocious, dastardly, and cowardly outrage is not to be found.”¹⁸ Later, when the British executed one of the four impressed men, Newark’s *Centinel of Freedom* headlined “**Murder!**” The chief voice of the state’s Federalists, George Sherman, editor of the Trenton *Federalist*, agreed that the people of New Jersey should consider this “**Unparalleled outrage on their National Rights and Honor!**” Actions of the British in the attack on the *Chesapeake* pushed Sherman to warn that while the people of New Jersey preferred peace, upholding American national honor might require war. Future Governor and U.S. Senator Samuel Southard (1832-33 and 1833-42, respectively) summed up the public mood in New Jersey and the country: “The news about the *Chesapeake* had raised my feelings to a pitch of the keenest sensibility. I hate the English nation—it is a mass of corruption. It’s government...nourished more political evils than any other which history records.”¹⁹

Spontaneous protests erupted across the country. Public meetings appeared throughout the Garden State to express “their indignation at the outrages of the British in the *Chesapeake*” [and

¹⁷ Rodgers, “Jeffersonian Period,” 50; Fee, *Transition*, 148; Prince, *Jeffersonian Republicans*, 159; New York *Evening Post*, 1 July 1807.

¹⁸ Trenton *True American*, 6 July 1807.

¹⁹ Newark *Centinel of Freedom*, 22 September 1807; Trenton *Federalist*, 29 June 1807; Samuel Southard Journal, 4 July 1807, Box 115, Samuel Southard Papers, Rare Books and Special Collections, Firestone Library, Princeton University (PU), Princeton, New Jersey. Also, for a brief account of the role of *True American*, see R.S. Pieringer, “Principles, Not Men” (Senior thesis, Princeton University, 1970), 39.

to support the government] “in their measures to vindicate the honor of our country,” according to accounts in the Trenton *Federalist*.²⁰ Both the *Federalist* and the Republican *True American* reported on some of these public meetings that reached a peak in July 1807. Meanwhile, a post rider brought news to Orange. The people “aroused to a fever heat in righteous indignation” [as the news quickly] “spread throughout the town and excited groups” met at taverns to discuss “the war-provoking act.” Feelings voiced in Orange suggested the anger felt by citizens and the widespread discussion of the *Chesapeake* attack by the people of New Jersey. As historian Walter Fee recorded: “Corresponding committees in township and county were revived or formed anew to discuss proper action at this critical time.” Historian Rudolph Pasler noted that the attack on the *Chesapeake* united both parties in anger at British conduct: “With the British attack on the *Chesapeake*, in June 1807, both parties were poised for war.”²¹

Outraged citizens, Federalists and Republicans, met in Trenton at the State House Yard on July 3 to condemn “the cruel and lawless murder of our fellow citizens on board the frigate *Chesapeake*.”²² Briefly, Federalists and Republicans united to condemn the British assault on American national honor. Another resolution supported “the constituted authorities in obtaining redress for that injury and in maintaining the honor of our flag.”²³ Federalist John Beatty, former speaker of the Assembly and congressman from 1795-1805, chaired the meeting, while prominent Republican party leader James J. Wilson played an instrumental role in the drafting of resolutions condemning the British. Wilson served as secretary of party nominating conventions in Hunterdon County, and he turned the Trenton *True American* into the leading voice of the state’s Republicans.

²⁰ Trenton *Federalist*, 13 July 1807.

²¹ David Pierson, *History of the Oranges* (New York: Lewis Publishing Company, 1922), II, 235; Walter Fee, *Transition*, 148; Rudolph Pasler II. “The Federalist Party in Burlington County, New Jersey.” (Master’s thesis, University of Delaware, 1964), 161.

²² Trenton *True American*, 6 July 1807

²³ Trenton *Federalist*, 6 July 1807.

Federalist Charles Ewing, a merchant and state legislator, served on the resolutions and correspondence committees. Lucius Stockton, a Federalist nominated by John Adams for Secretary of War and later organizer of the Washington Benevolent Society in Trenton, delivered a speech calling for unity in response to the “unprovoked, murderous and outrageous conduct” of the British and his speech “was received with undivided applause.”²⁴

Unity meetings took place in other towns to express the anger of the people of New Jersey at the actions of the British. Many of the people in Essex county met at the courthouse in Day’s Hill in July 1807 “to protest British outrages on the high seas,” condemn the attack on *Chesapeake*, and offer their services in case of war. Federalists and Republicans used Fourth of July celebrations to voice their patriotic support for the victims of the attack on the *Chesapeake*. Citizens of Newark gathered at the courthouse on July 9 and agreed to put aside their partisan differences because of the crisis facing the nation. A committee including Republican William Pennington (governor from 1813-1815) and Federalist Joseph Hornblower, a county leader, drafted resolutions attacking the violations of American neutral rights. While the citizens preferred peace, if war came, they would “engage in it with alacrity” [and pledged] “their lives and fortunes in defense of the rights of an independent nation.”²⁵ Two leading Republican rivals in Essex County, William Pennington and Shepard Kollock, agreed to work with Federalists in a show of nonpartisan unity and patriotism. Federalist John N. Cumming, a prominent figure in the party, served on the correspondence committee. This confirms a conclusion of Walter Fee that “Newark citizens, irrespective of party, condemned the British action and agreed to fight, if necessary, in defense of their liberties.”²⁶

²⁴ Trenton *True American*, 6 July 1807. For details on Wilson’s role as editor and his political influence, Jeffrey Pasley, *The Tyranny of Printers* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001), 320-29.

²⁵ Newark *Centinel of Freedom*, 14 July 1807; Frank Urquhart, *A History of the City of Newark* (New York City: Lewis Publishing Company, 1913), II, 597-98. For Day’s Hill, Alan Siegel, *Out of Our Past* (Irvington, N.J.: American Graphic, 1974), 74.

²⁶ Walter Fee, *Transition*, 148.

In a meeting in Elizabeth on July 16, Federalist Aaron Ogden (governor 1812-13) worked with Republican newspaper editor Shepard Kollock, who edited the *New Jersey Journal* for thirty-three years and “exerted a pronounced influence on the political opinions of his readers,” to express the community’s anger at the attack on the *Chesapeake*. The people of Elizabeth “forgetting all party differences” [agreed to] “unite with our lives and fortunes at the call of our government, to defend the blood brought freedom and independence of our country.” Resolutions emphasized “the blood of our fellow citizens has been wantonly and cruelly spilled.” Since Ogden and Kollock represented partisan political leaders, their cooperation suggested that temporarily patriotism proved more persuasive than partisanship. Historian Theodore Thayer agreed “all parties united” to protest the attack on the *Chesapeake*. Similarly, in Paterson, citizens had not originally planned a celebration of the Fourth of July, but “on hearing of the late dastardly yet daring outrage committed on our fellow citizens” [decided to meet and express] “our united sentiments” against the British.²⁷

Throughout the state meetings excoriated the British. Even the Trenton *Federalist* reported hearing of numerous meetings around the state in the wake of the attack on *Chesapeake*. Resolutions adopted in Mansfield Township, Sussex County, warned “sincerely as we desire as continuance of the blessings of peace...we cannot...place them in competition with the preservation of our national rights, honour, and independence.”²⁸ Fourth of July celebrations in Roxbury Township, Morris County, provided an opportunity for residents to shout three cheers to Colonel Jacob Drake’s toast: “Let Chester, Roxbury and Washington unite in cursing the conduct

²⁷ *New Jersey Journal* (Elizabethtown), 14, 21 July 1807; *Newark Centinel of Freedom*, 28 July 1807. Also, see Walter Fee, *Transition*, 148. For Kollock, 104. Also, Theodore Thayer, *As We Were: The Story of Old Elizabethtown* (Elizabeth: Grassman Publishing Company, 1964), 200.

²⁸ Trenton *Federalist*, 24 August 1807.

of the warship *Leopard*.”²⁹ This expression of anger at the British in townships in northern New Jersey represented the widespread disgust at the British for violating American neutral rights and infringing on American national identity.

A couple of examples of public sentiment in the summer of 1807 from other New Jersey communities reinforced the mood of public outrage. At a meeting of residents in Freehold, Monmouth County, on 7 September, participants, members of both political parties, resolved that the attack on the *Chesapeake* was “an insult and outrage which every American must feel and should resent.” Furthermore, while residents considered war an evil, “we consider national insult and indignity greater” calamities.³⁰ In Bridgeton, Cumberland County, at celebrations for the Fourth of July, Federalists mixed outrage at the conduct of the British with a criticism aimed at Jefferson toasting to “simple satisfaction from insolent Britains for the late horrid outrage, notwithstanding the pusillanimity of the present administration.”³¹ At another Fourth of July celebration in Bridgeton, “effigies of British worthies, capt. Whitby, and capt. Humphreys were burned.” The British flag was torn down and destroyed “which the acclamations of the citizens were heard throughout the town.”³² At a nonpartisan meeting in Fairfield, Cumberland County to celebrate the Fourth of July residents denounced British insolence for the attack on the *Chesapeake*. Citizens of Flemington toasted to: “May the spirit of just indignation excited by the cowardly and deliberate murder of our fellow citizens on board the *Chesapeake*” be avenged. Residents of Bloomsbury toasted to “the *Chesapeake* frigate: May the insult offered our nation by the dastardly attack upon that vessel unite all Americans...and war rather than insult and degradation.” Inhabitants of Woodstown, Salem County, resolved that we “compel the aggressor

²⁹ Morristown *The Genius of Liberty*, 30 July 1807.

³⁰ Trenton *Federalist*, 14 September 1807.

³¹ Trenton *Federalist*, 14 July 1807; Fee, *Transition*, 149.

³² Trenton *True American*, 27 July 1807.

to...rigid retribution, and for this purpose we are willing to make any sacrifices, encounter any difficulties, and meet any hazards.” Finally, the people of Morris County organized a countywide meeting to pass a series of resolutions denouncing the attack on the *Chesapeake*, voicing their “indignation and alarm...at the unprovoked aggressions” of the British. They sent the resolutions to President Jefferson as representative of the feelings of the people of New Jersey.³³

“War I expect...war is my wish,” Samuel Southard wrote in his journal. “I should like to stand within the walls of Quebec.”³⁴ This became a common sentiment in the summer of 1807. For example, in New York City, Republican John Irving reported, “all the talk here is war! war!” In July 1807, war appeared likely and militia units prepared for a possible Anglo-American war. Responding to a request from President Jefferson, Republican Governor Joseph Bloomfield directed 5,212 militiamen to prepare for service. Governor Bloomfield sent out general orders to the militia “to volunteer their services to their country in this important crisis in national affairs.”³⁵ Militia units rushed to volunteer and voiced their enthusiasm to avenge the insult to American national honor. Companies met, drafted resolutions denouncing the British, prepared to serve, and came forward to enlist in this noble cause.

Almost every militia unit volunteered. Captain Charles Carmichael of the Morris Brigade indicated his unit would stand in readiness “to aid in repelling any aggression, or in avenging any insult which may be offered our country.”³⁶ In Sussex County, Captain Henry Bidleman’s Troop of Horse supported President Jefferson’s attempts to preserve peace and denounced “the late

³³ Trenton *True American*, 20 July 1807; Morristown, *The Genius of Liberty*, 13 August 1807.

³⁴ Samuel Southard Journal, 4 July 1807, Box 115, Samuel Southard Papers, PU.

³⁵ Brigade Orders, 11 July 1807, written on General Orders for the Militia of New Jersey, 9 July 1807, Book 56, Box 8, Military Records, Militia, Department of Defense, Division of Archives and Records Management, New Jersey Department of State, Trenton, New Jersey (DARM). For Irving, John Irving to Gabriel Furman, 6 July 1807, John Irving Papers, Columbia University.

³⁶ Captain Charles Carmichael to Governor Joseph Bloomfield, 22 July 1807, Offer of Service, 1807, Morris Brigade, Box 21, New Jersey Militia Records, 1793-1868, DARM.

unprincipled attack made by the British ship *Leopard* upon the United States frigate *Chesapeake*.” The attack on the *Chesapeake* demands “an expression of public resentment and indignation.”³⁷ Members of the Salem Troop of Cavalry willingly volunteered because of “feelings alive to the indignities and late murderous outrage of the British.” They expressed their desire to serve their country in “a manly resistance to the lawless and wanton attacks of the British nation.”³⁸

Other militia companies and brigades expressed similar sentiments. The Fourth Troop of the Cavalry of the Hunterdon Squadron came forward “to aid in support of the honour, safety, and independence of our country.”³⁹ Officers and men of the Light Infantry Company of the Hunterdon Brigade volunteered “feeling the utmost indignation at this unprovoked insult of the British Squadron.”⁴⁰ Members of the First Uniform Company of Trenton, commanded by Republican party leader James J. Wilson, supported war because we “prefer war to a tame and disgraceful submission to such aggravated insults, outrages, and massacres.”⁴¹ Each member of the New Brunswick Artillery Company of the Middlesex Brigade volunteered on the 20th of July “in defense of our country’s rights.”⁴² Similarly, the First Regiment of the Monmouth Brigade offered their services because of our “Resentment to the Vile and outrageous Conduct of the British murderers on our Countrymen.”⁴³ Federalists as well as Republicans volunteered. John Noble Cumming, a prominent Federalist in Newark and brigadier general, volunteered because of the

³⁷ Trenton *Federalist*, 24 August 1807. Also, Trenton *True American*, 24 August 1807.

³⁸ Captain John Tuft to Governor Joseph Bloomfield, 20 July 1807, Offer of Service, 1807, Box 24, Cavalry, Salem Brigade, Militia Records, DARM.

³⁹ Fourth Troop of Cavalry, Hunterdon Squadron, to Governor Joseph Bloomfield, 24 July 1807, Offer of Service, 1807, Hunterdon Cavalry, Box 15, Militia Records, DARM.

⁴⁰ Captain William Vorhis and James Park, Clerk, to Governor Joseph Bloomfield, 21 July 1807, Offer of Service, 1807, Hunterdon Brigade, Box 15, Militia Records, DARM.

⁴¹ First Uniform Company of Trenton to Governor Joseph Bloomfield, 11 July 1807, item 113, Petitions, folder 52, Box 7, Militia Records, DARM.

⁴² New Brunswick Artillery Company to Governor Joseph Bloomfield, 20 July 1807, Offer of Service, 1807, Middlesex Brigade, Box 17, Militia Records, DARM.

⁴³ First Regiment to Governor Joseph Bloomfield, 23 July 1807, Offer of Service, 1807, Monmouth Brigade, Box 18, Militia Records, DARM.

“violent and dangerous outrage committed on one of our armed vessels.” Noble added, “I stand prepared to sacrifice feelings, property, & life when called by my country to do so.”⁴⁴ Men in the militia companies reinforced the public statements made at local meetings around the state in response to the attack on the *Chesapeake*. Militia companies expressed their willingness to serve if President Jefferson asked Congress for a declaration of war.

Militia companies used the Fourth of July to parade and demonstrate their willingness to fight. Mary Hall attended a celebration in Flemington, and her local militia company marched, passed resolutions, and “went into the field and fought a sham battle” to show their readiness. For spectators, like Mary Hall, “drums rolled, and fifes put a sense of celebration in the air.”⁴⁵ An African American woman, Silvia Du Bois, ran her own “interracial tavern and liquor business during training days” and visited the 1805 training day in Flemington. She described it as “filled with dancing, laughter, music” and excessive consumption of rum. Men from the iron forge towns of the southern Pine Barrens turned training days into drunken brawls after consuming too much rum, mead, whiskey, gin, or beer. While men over eighteen were required to attend periodic training days, they often involved little training and too much imbibing of alcoholic refreshments. Officers in full dressed uniforms looked impressive, but when they shouted orders, “no one obeyed.” In Jersey City, training days gave the Bergen Company an opportunity to meet for the “supper they always had at the tavern on Bergen avenue.” Training days, whether in 1805, 1807, or during the War of 1812, provided an opportunity for excessive drinking and partying rather than

⁴⁴ John Noble Cumming to Major General Elias Dayton, 12 July 1807, Miscellaneous Papers, John Noble Cumming, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library, New York City.

⁴⁵ Mary Hall to John Hall, her father, 10 August 1807. Folder 1, Capner-Exton-Hill Papers, Special Collections, Alexander Library, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, N.J. For Silvia Du Bois, see James Gigantino II, *The Ragged Road to Abolition: Slavery and Freedom in New Jersey, 1775-1865* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 126-27; Also, Bilby, *New Jersey*, 93-4; Martha Furnace Day Book, 1808-15, Alexander Library, RU; John McPhee, *Pine Barrens* (New York: FSG, 1968), 33.

military preparation. Readiness was also a problem for some militia units. James Westcott noted that his company of militia in Bridgeton, Cumberland County, expected war. However, the company consisted of young men unable to afford to “uniform or equip themselves,” and the company lacked muskets and artillery. Colonel John Stevens of Hoboken feared that the dispute with Great Britain would “occur before means of defense were ready.” Some Federalists, like future governor Aaron Ogden, endorsed efforts to build fortifications. William Paterson wrote a year earlier “I have uniformly advised...prepare for war.” At the same time, another Federalist, James Wemyess of Boundbrook, agreed with Paterson: “circumstances may soon arise that will render some preparatory steps necessary.”⁴⁶ Preparing for war emerged as one of the problems for militia companies in 1807 and 1812. Men lacked the ability to provide their own uniforms, weapons, ammunition, and other military supplies required by the militia laws. In 1807, while eager to serve, militia units were not necessarily prepared or equipped to wage war. Neither New Jersey nor New York City were prepared for an Anglo-American War in 1807.

Unfortunately, the status of the militia’s preparedness did not change between the war scare of 1807 and the War of 1812. For example, Captain Murray of the Light Infantry Company of the Monmouth Brigade informed Governor Ogden that his men had “guns of different sizes and calibers, and most of them not fit for actual service.”⁴⁷ Captain Nathan Shaver of the Republican Greens in Sussex County reported that “one third of the men lack adequate arms” and because of

⁴⁶ Captain James Westcott to Governor Joseph Bloomfield, 14 August 1807, Offer of Service, 1807, Cumberland Brigade, Box 7. Militia Records, DARM. For Colonel Stevens proposed plans for the defense of New York City and New York Harbor, 27 August 1807, Harbor Defense-1807, Reel 14, 1804-08, Stevens Family Papers, New Jersey Historical Society, Newark, N.J. and items 266 and 267 in the Calendar of the Stevens Family Papers, Stevens Institute of Technology, Hoboken, N.J.; McPhee, *Pine Barrens*, 33-34; Aaron Ogden to Jonathan Williams, 20 October 1807, Vol. III, 1789-1813, American Military and Philosophical Society, New York Historical Society, New York City; William Paterson to his wife, 18 February 1806, Box 2 and James Wemyess to William Paterson, Box 1, William Paterson Papers, RU; Harriet Eaton, *Jersey City and its Historic Sites* (Jersey City: Women’s Club of Jersey City, 1899), 66.

⁴⁷ Captain William Murray to Governor Aaron Ogden, 1 December 1812. Folder 9, Box 16, Monmouth County, Vol. 51. Militia Records, DARM.

the lack of resources had great “difficulty of procuring arms.”⁴⁸ In addition, Captain John Lambert of the Anwell First Light Artillery Company of the Hunterdon Brigade wrote that his company has “know [sic] guns that is suitable for actual service.”⁴⁹ If the war scare of 1807 had turned into war, New Jersey’s militia was not prepared. Five years later the militia remained unprepared when the United States entered the War of 1812.

To add insult to injury British warships appeared off the Jersey coast and New York Harbor in the summer of 1807. The British warships *Columbine* and *Jason* cruised off Monmouth County and Sandy Hook impressing American seaman, including John Bateman of Newark who was taken off the *Ulysses* along with thirteen other Americans. Ironically, several seamen from the *Columbine* fled on a pilot boat to Sandy Hook “where they gave three cheers” after escaping from British naval service.⁵⁰ Other seamen deserted the *Jason* and made it to either the Jersey shore or to New York City. A sloop from Egg Harbor picked up a seaman from the *Jason* three miles off Sandy Hook “almost exhausted” because he swam six miles missing landing at Sandy Hook due to the strong currents. To further add insult and demonstrate British arrogance, when Sandy Hook pilots refused to guide one of the warships into New York, the warship “chased and fired at by the ship.”⁵¹ Fleeing service in the British Navy proved popular for seamen serving on the *Jason* and *Columbine* in September 1807.

By the middle of September, the unity created by the *Chesapeake* ended as Federalists and Republicans campaigned for the 1807 elections. In the wake of the *Chesapeake* attack, foreign

⁴⁸ Captain Nathan Shaver to Governor Aaron Ogden, 7 December 1812, Folder 2, Box 16, Sussex Company, Vol. 52, Militia Records, DARM.

⁴⁹ Captain John Lambert to Governor Aaron Ogden, 4 December 1812, Folder 7, Box 16, Hunterdon Brigade, Vol. 51, Militia Records, DARM.

⁵⁰ New York *Mercantile Advertiser*; 7 and 9 September 1807; Trenton *True American*, 14 September 1807.

⁵¹ *New Jersey Journal* (Elizabethtown), 8 September 1807; New York *Evening Post*, 2 September 1807; George H. Moss, Jr., *Navoo to the Hook* (Locust, New Jersey: Jervey Close Press, 1964). 38.

policy issues slipped into New Jersey politics and emerged as the dominant concerns in state politics until the end of the War of 1812. The Trenton *Federalist* appealed for peaceful accommodation of outstanding disputes with Great Britain, and Federalists campaigned as the peace party to win over Quakers. In a special appeal to Quakers, Federalists warned of the danger of war if Republicans won. Federalists feared Republicans “would make them march in the front ranks.” In Burlington County, for example, to counter the Federalist arguments, the Burlington Democratic Association, led by Stephen Ustick, told voters to put their faith in President Jefferson. Republicans endorsed whatever actions President Jefferson would take, suggesting “if our rights are denied us, and the principle must be settled by recurrence to arms, let the issue commence.” Some Republicans misjudged President Jefferson who preferred the economic coercion of the Embargo Act to war. Federalists in New Jersey and other states portrayed themselves as the party of peace; however, this was not successful in New Jersey or elsewhere. As historian Walter Fee accurately concluded: “These opportunistic election arguments gained the Federalists nothing. This episode in Anglo-American relations did not in itself offer an issues upon which to challenge Republican power.”⁵²

Impressment angered Americans including the people of New Jersey, but they could not agree on how to pressure the British into respecting American maritime rights. The British routinely seized ships and men within sight of the Jersey shore and within a couple of miles from Sandy Hook. Impressment continued until the end of the War of 1812. Some impressed men, like Lewis Fairchild and Henry Martin from New Jersey, became prisoners of war. By attacking the

⁵² Newark *Centinel of Freedom*, 29 September 1807. Also, see Trenton *True American* and Trenton *Federalist* for mid-September to mid-October 1807. Also, see Rudolph Pasler II, “The Federalist Party in Burlington County, New Jersey,” (Master’s thesis, University of Delaware, 1964), 161; Fee, *Transition*, 150-51. Trenton *Federalist*, 5 October 1807,

Chesapeake, the British briefly in July and August 1807 united the people of New Jersey and the United States. Federalists and Republicans united in meetings to condemn the British.

Public meetings, especially Fourth of July celebrations, provided an opportunity for citizens to express their outrage at British behavior. Militia units, whether prepared for war or not, readily came forward, passed anti-British resolutions, and offered to serve. The people of New Jersey united in a common cause to protect American national honor, preserve the revolutionary legacy, American independence, and sailors' rights. The *Leander* and *Chesapeake* incidents forced Federalists to temporarily abandon their Anglophile tendencies and use Jeffersonian means—Anglophobia for Hamiltonian ends. In an atmosphere of partisan distrust, unity lasted but a few weeks. Beneath a thin veneer of nonpartisanship, political conflict remained unsettled and soon burst into its pre-*Chesapeake* virulence. Imposition of an embargo instead of war by President Jefferson divided the nation. The sense of national purpose created by the *Chesapeake* affair dissolved in acrimony and partisanship. In New Jersey, it led to a resurgence of the Federalists as a viable political alternative. The embargo failed to protect free trade and sailors' rights “and it brought the *Chesapeake-Leopard* crisis no closer to resolution.”⁵³

During the first decade of the nineteenth century, the embargo of 1807-1809 emerged as the only issue capable of challenging Republican domination of New Jersey politics. Republicans only narrowly retained control of the Garden State and may have used a little fraud in Gloucester County to ensure their success in 1808. Because New Jersey was not as dependent on foreign trade as neighboring New York, and because most farmers sold their surplus produce in New York or Philadelphia, Federalists were unable to gain power in 1808. The Federalist resurgence in 1808 and 1809 was greater in New York, Rhode Island, and Maryland due to the embargo. However,

⁵³ Robert Cray, “*Chesapeake*,” 457; Also, *Impressed Seamen*, NA.

the embargo produced a temporary Federalist resurrection, seriously challenging the Republicans for the first time since 1800-1801.

The embargo demonstrated that foreign policy issues could dominate local and state politics. During the 1808 campaign, Federalists hammered away at Jefferson's imposition of the Embargo Act. Republicans were put on the defensive both on the embargo and the upsurge in Federalist organizational activity. The increased competition brought voters to the polls in the state and congressional elections. As one example, voter turnout in the 1806 congressional elections was thirty-five percent but jumped to seventy percent in 1808. Increased political competition brought voters to the polls in 1808 and in 1812. The campaign of 1808 paved the way for a more successful use of foreign policy issues by the Federalists in 1812 that would finally permit them to regain control of New Jersey despite a Republican landslide in 1811. The War of 1812 brought the Federalists the victory they narrowly failed to achieve in 1808. Party loyalty and the desire to protect American national honor and independence linked the Republican positions in 1808 and 1812. The War of 1812 had a greater impact on New Jersey politics and disrupted party allegiances to a greater extent than the embargo. Imposition of the embargo threatened Republican dominance of the Garden State, but it took the declaration of war to drive them from power temporarily in 1812.

In 1812, when President James Madison opted for war, he could not recreate the unity of July 1807. Historian Edward Gaines concluded: "the ironic aftermath of the *Chesapeake* affair was when war did come, Virginia and the nation, united and determined in 1807, had become a house divided."⁵⁴ New Jersey, like Virginia, united in July 1807 and went to war in 1812 bitterly divided.

⁵⁴ Edward Gaines, "The Chesapeake Affair: Virginians Mobilize to Defend National Honor," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 64 (April 1956), 142, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/4246209> For another state study, see Harvey Strum, "New York and the Chesapeake Affair, 1807," *The New England Journal of History*, 67:2 (Spring 2011): 34-

Also, as Carl Prince concluded, due to the *Chesapeake* affair and the subsequent embargo, “foreign issues would, taken as a whole, remain an obsessively recurrent theme in New Jersey politics, as elsewhere in the nation,” from 1807-1815.⁵⁵ The *Chesapeake* affair excited the passions of the people of New Jersey. Ending impressment emerged as a major concern from 1803-1815. For the people of New Jersey and the United States free trade and sailors’ rights remained the main issues. All Americans viewed impressment and the attack on the *Chesapeake* as crimes against the United States.⁵⁶

Harvey Strum is professor and program director for history and political science at Russell Sage College in Albany and Troy, New York. His publications and research interests are in the early national period politics and impact of foreign policy on New York, New Jersey, and Rhode Island; American Jewish history; anti-Irish nativism and anti-Catholicism in New Jersey, 1820-70; and American and Canadian aid to Ireland in 1846-47, 1862-63, and 1879-80.

53; Also see Spencer Tucker and Frank Reuter, *Injured Honor: The Chesapeake-Leopard Affair, June 22, 1807* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1966), 142.

⁵⁵ Prince, *Republicans*, 159.

⁵⁶ Wolf, “*Chesapeake*,” 18-19; There are only limited correspondence from 1806 and 1807 about the *Leander-Chesapeake* affairs or impressment. Collections at Rutgers, Princeton, New Jersey Historical Society, and New Jersey Archives do not appear to hold additional material. Recent emails from Rutgers and New Jersey Historical Society confirmed the absence of additional resources.

If the reader is interested in secondary works on the *Leander* affair, see Harvey Strum, “The *Leander* Affair,” *The American Neptune*, XLIII:1 (January 1983), 40-50; Leo Hershkowitz, “The Richard Affair: Rising Tensions between the United States and the United Kingdom, 1806,” *The Mariner’s Mirror*, 100:3 (2014), 307-321; DOI:10.00253359.2014.935143; Heather Walser, “Mourning Murder: The Death of John Pierce, Local Politics, and British-American Relations,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, 43:1 (Spring 2023), 27-57; Harvey Strum, “Unimpressed,” *New York Archives*, 24:3 (Winter 2025). 24-29.