

# James Bowdoin to James de Caledonia, Philadelphia Independent Gazetteer, 27 February

This satirical Antifederalist letter was addressed to James Wilson, a native of Scotland, who was sometimes called derisively James de Caledonia. Wilson's widely reprinted public speech of 6 October (CC:134) and his prominence in the Pennsylvania Convention made him one of the country's leading Federalist spokesmen.

James Bowdoin (1726–1790), a wealthy Boston merchant, had been governor of Massachusetts from 27 May 1785 to 1 June 1787. As governor, Bowdoin's main sources of strength were the state's powerful commercial interest, and as such, he was considered the leader of an aristocratic junto. He supported measures to strengthen the central government and to pay the federal debt; proposed heavy taxes to pay the state debt and congressional requisitions; and employed the state militia to crush Shays's Rebellion. In April 1787 Bowdoin was defeated in a bitterly contested gubernatorial election by John Hancock, whose adherents portrayed Bowdoin as a symbol of repressive and aristocratic government. Bowdoin represented Boston in the Massachusetts Convention, where he voted to ratify the Constitution on 6 February. Although he spoke infrequently, he was one of the principal Federalists in the Convention.

This fictitious letter and the statement by "QUID" were reprinted in the *New York Journal*, 6 March, and in the *Boston American Herald*

and Boston *Independent Chronicle*, 20 March. The *Herald* prefaced both items with a statement by “A Federal Customer”: “The following commendable production made its appearance in the ‘*New-York Weekly Register*,’ of March 6, 1788; and as it is a political Phœnomenon, you are requested to re-publish it in your boasted ‘*open, impartial, uninfluenced*’ Herald of Thursday next, in order that the fallacy of its reasoning, &c. may be detected and exposed.” The *Chronicle* prefaced the items with an editorial comment: “The following is inserted by desire.—The public must judge for themselves of the probability of its being *real* or *fictitious*.”

The author of this Antifederalist satire did not end with this letter. On 4 March the *Independent Gazetteer* published a reply from “James de Caledonia” that discussed a number of points made in the earlier letter and elaborated upon the state of politics in Pennsylvania, in particular, and in several other states, including Massachusetts (Mfm:Pa. 481). Two more “James de Caledonia” responses considered the prospects of ratification in the states that had not ratified the Constitution and the question of the alleged public defaulters, especially Robert Morris (Philadelphia *Freeman’s Journal*, 12 March; and *Independent Gazetteer*, 14 March, [238] Mfm:Pa. 512, 522. For a reply to the letter on the public defaulters, see the Philadelphia *Federal Gazette*, 15 March, Mfm:Pa. 527.).

Mr. Printer, I send you a copy of a real letter from one of the junto to the *Eastward*, to his friend in this city, that you may lay it before the public, who may from it, form some faint idea of the *juggling* carrying on by the *well born* few.

QUID.


February 23, 1788.

Boston, February 12, 1788.

To the Right Hon. James de Caledonia.

Dear Sir, I duly received yours of the 24th January, containing very disagreeable accounts of our scheme being so ably opened up, and of the people falling off from you, &c. it made us very unhappy here; however do not despond; I am glad to find you have got your "*writing committee*," **1** appointed, and employed: I confess what you say is just, and that there is somewhat disagreeable in writing, with the argument against you, and with able competitors. In your two first numbers of the *Freemen and Pennsylvanian*, **2** to be sure you exceed yourself: But I would not advise you to continue the publication of them in the city, they will suit better for the country; ha, ha, ha: You make bold assertions; you should take care not to let it be known who the author of them is, the very name of a *lawyer* would ruin a publication in our country.

Keep your committee hard at it; and fill *your weekly paper* **3** from top to bottom: Your notion of answering your own pieces may do, if not found out. Do try by all means to regain your lost ground, leave no stone unturned; much is gained by confusing the business, and you are really a compleat *sophist*: You know your reward should it succeed; we have all agreed you shall have £.8000 per annum, with the office of Attorney General (of the union.) As to the office of Chief Justice **4** which you wished for, it would have been yours, but, necessity obliged us to close with J—y—**5** it was his price.

I was glad to find you had stopped the publication of the debates of your convention;<sup>6</sup> and that you had suited *your own* so well *to the tune*; you was very right to hold back the second volume containing the speeches of the minority, as perhaps the *real* ones might come out. But I was sorry you could not *silence the press* entirely;<sup>7</sup> However as we have the P-t O—ce still at our service,<sup>8</sup> you must prevent any of the newspapers which contain publications against us, getting out of your state. We have been remarkably successful in this hitherto; every newspaper against us has been stopped, even the reasons of dissent of your minority, and the information of Mr. Martin, has been scarcely heard of here;<sup>9</sup> this was very fortunate, as it would certainly have ruined us in this quarter. So great was the want of information here, that we made the people believe all to the southward [239]  ]of us, indeed that every state but our own were almost unanimous in favor of our plan. You would have laughed to have seen our newspapers on the day the final question was taken in our convention; there we published an account of the almost unanimous adoption of the constitution by the convention of North-Carolina; that the state of New-York had called a convention at a very early day, without any opposition; and the *trifling* opposition in your state had ceased; that Randolph, Mason, Lee, &c. had joined our party;<sup>10</sup> and many other similar accounts.

In this situation, when such a variety of circumstances


concluded in our favor; although we had *juggled in* above 50 members of the convention, by the assistance of country friends; and was so fortunate as to keep out any *Ciceros* from the opposition in the convention: Although we bought off the province of *Main* with the feather of a separate state;**11** although we had such a number of able hands, among which were many as complete sophists as yourself; although we gained the man of the people by holding out to him the office of Vice President;**12** although we had the influence of the town of Boston to assist us,**13** still we would have lost the question almost two to one if we had not agreed to the amendments, which you find included in the ratification; and these not to be made by the first Congress as you proposed, but according to the 5th article, that is, by another convention.**14** This was a fatal stroke, but we could not avoid it.

You have seen with much surprise, I dare say, the great parade we made at the ratification;**15** it cost us a considerable sum, but I am in hopes it will be of great service, these things have great effect on common minds.— You see we have the town of Boston under our discipline; I wish I could say so of the rest of the state, indeed it is far otherwise, four fifths of the people are against us: But as you say, what need we care for the sentiments of the people, if we can only get the army a-foot.

I was happy to hear you was disarming your militia both for your own safety,**16** and because you will want the arms

for the troops; but at the same time I thought it a bold push, and might cause alarm.

I have lately received a letter from Mr. J—A—, our A—d—r at London, he is pleased with my compliment on his volume, it was, I told him of much service to us.<sup>17</sup> He has endeavoured through *Bobby's*<sup>18</sup> credit, to contract for the *necessaries* we wrote for; but he found it would not do: He then pledged the faith of the United States to fulfil the contracts he has made. He has also entered into other treaties for the *other articles*, which I shall be more particular about, by a safer opportunity.<sup>19</sup>

When these things were told to our friends here, many of them began to stare; for they consider the matter as lost since this state, which, they say, is the most important in the union, has called for amendments; the people of your state, the states of Virginia, New-York, North-Carolina, and Maryland so generally against it: to be sure, matters look blue; but I am in hopes still that our exertions will be crowned with success. You know [240 ] that you or I have nothing to lose, and much to gain. Some of our milk and water friends here think we had better stop, and submit again to another convention; because, say they, we will be envolved in a civil war, if we persist; but I tell them we will not give it up while any hopes remain; as now, we are found out, we shall never be trusted in another convention; and so we shall lose every thing. But if we succeed in this plan, we

shall never again be troubled with the people, never dread the event of elections; we shall enjoy our places, honors, and preferments, and leave them to our children after us. We shall be able to keep the people at a proper distance, and establish our numerous friends and relations in lucrative and substantial offices.

Present my compliments to *Bobby*, and also to *Billy* in the new big house;<sup>20</sup> and tell them I congratulate them upon the prospect of all their old *continental balances* being done away;<sup>21</sup> as I don't find that part of the constitution is yet discovered.

You are an admirable man, the most useful in the convention; but you was rather for taking too much at one time; the *double powers* of our little sexentially elected senate; the controul over the press; the abolition of trial by jury in civil cases, and the common law proceedings; internal taxation; the pecuniary dependency of the judges, and their great powers; the standing army; the smallness of the lower house; the exclusion of rotation; and the "powers to make all laws which we may think *necessary* and *proper*." And that these *laws* and the *treaties* of the *little senate* should be the supreme law of the land, over the constitutions and laws of the several states. These would have been quite sufficient for us; with them alone we could chain down all America; we might have given up the rest to the winds: the controul over the elections; the command of the militia; the power of the senate to alter money bills; the powers of president to

pardon criminals, to command in person the armies, navies, and militia, &c. and his long appointment, his right of being re-elected; omission of declarations in favor of liberty of conscience, and twenty others, which have been of great hurt to us, might have been left out. But between you and me, they will never discover some of the most exceptionable parts.

I suppose you will soon hear of its adoption by *New-Hampshire*; but it will be many months before any other can come into it. Pray, inform me how Martin is going on; I hope he will be persuaded to discontinue his publications; we have sent him an offer of the office of chief justice of the federal court of his state, but I am afraid of him.**22**

We have gained much by deceiving one part of the continent, with plausible accounts from the other; pray, do not discontinue this; have you no more town or county meetings to publish? What M—**23** says is very true; almost all of our strength lies in the trading towns; and his remark is just that they would consent to go to the devil, if they thought they could again sell as many British goods, as they formerly did.

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Keep up the spirits of your boys, and exert you[r]selves; I shall write you again shortly.

I am, dear sir, Your most obedient, And very humble servant,

J. B-wd-n.



**1**For this alleged Federalist “*writing committee*” which was supposedly trying to inundate the state’s newspapers to counteract Antifederalist propaganda, see *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 12 March, note 6 (Appendix I).

**2**“A Freeman” I-III and “A Pennsylvanian” I-IV were written by Tench Coxe and printed in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* between 23 January and 27 February (CC:472, 488, 505; and Mfm:Pa. 408, 430, 439, 459).

**3**Probably the *Pennsylvania Gazette*. On 24 November “Plain Truth” had accused Wilson of writing “numerous paragraphs ... for a certain weekly paper-which contained the most glaring falsehoods, about Messrs. Mason, Gerry, Randolph, Clinton, Lee, &c, and all others who opposed the violent measures used by the advocates of this his favorite plan” (*Independent Gazetteer*, RCS:Pa., 292-93); while Federalist Benjamin Rush stated that the *Gazette* “is filled every week” with Federalist essays, anecdotes, and political intelligence (to Henry Muhlenberg, 15 February, Mfm:Pa. 432).

**4**“Cincinnatus” VI, *New York Journal*, 6 December (CC:324) had also linked these two offices with Wilson.

**5**Probably John Jay, who was appointed the first chief justice of the United States under the Constitution.

**6**For Thomas Lloyd’s publication on 7 February of the debates of the Pennsylvania Convention which consisted only of speeches by Federalists Wilson and Thomas McKean, see CC:511. Lloyd had promised to publish a second volume of Antifederalist speeches, which never appeared.

**7**Probably a reference to the publication of the debates of the Pennsylvania Convention in the *Pennsylvania Herald*. Federalists objected to some of the *Herald’s* reports and allegedly applied pressure on the publisher, who eventually fired the *Herald’s* editor in early January before all of the lengthy debates were published. (See CC:Vol. 1, xxxix; CC:357; CC:470, note 7; and RCS:Pa., 40.)

**8**For the alleged control of the post office by Federalists, see Appendix II.

**9**See CC:353 (page 11) for the publication of the “Dissent of the Minority of the Pennsylvania Convention” in Boston in either mid-January or early February and for more on the Antifederalists’ charge

that Federalists prevented the “Dissent” from circulating in Boston during the meeting of the Massachusetts Convention from 9 January to 7 February. Luther Martin’s *Genuine Information* I–II, V–X, and XII were reprinted in the Boston *American Herald* between 4 February and 8 May. For Martin’s *Genuine Information*, see **CC:389**.

**10**Massachusetts ratified the Constitution on 6 February. On **23** and **30** January and **6 February** the *Massachusetts Centinel* contained items on Randolph, Pennsylvania, New York, and North Carolina (Mfm:Pa. 392; CC:Vol. 3, Appendix I; and Appendix I). On **5 February** the *Massachusetts Gazette* contained an item on North Carolina (Appendix I); while on 31 January and 7 February the *Independent Chronicle* reprinted the items on New York and North Carolina that had appeared in the *Massachusetts Centinel*.

**11**Five statehood conventions were held in Maine from October 1785 to September 1787, but by early 1788 separationist feeling in Maine had declined significantly. In the Massachusetts Convention the Maine delegates voted 25 to 21 to ratify the Constitution.

**12**See “**John Hancock and the Constitution,**” **3 January–4 February**, CC:Vol. 3, Appendix I.

**13**For an example of Boston’s influence, see “Reports of the Boston Tradesmen Meeting,” 8–9 January (**CC:424**).

**14**See **CC:508**.

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**15**This parade took place on 8 February—the day after the state Convention adjourned. The “Grand Procession,” totaling some 4,500 persons, was composed of representatives of the trades and professions of Boston and the adjacent towns (*Massachusetts Centinel*, 9 February).

**16**On 4 December the Pennsylvania Supreme Executive Council ordered “That the Lieutenants of the city and several counties within the state, be directed to collect all the public arms within their respective counties, have them repaired” and report the expenses to the Council. For the newspaper debate over this order, see Mfm:Pa. 273.

**17**For John Adams’s *Defence of the Constitutions*, see **CC:16, 557**.

**18**Robert Morris.

**19**On 10 January Antifederalist “Philadelphiensis” VII had attacked John Adams for signing an agreement (1 June 1787) for a Dutch loan of one million florins (\$400,000). The loan, thought to be “necessary, to prevent the total ruin of our Public Credit ...,” was ratified by Congress on 11 October (**CC:438**, note 3). In the same month, the Confederation Board of Treasury examined and approved Adams’s accounts (JCC, XXXIII, 534, 609–10).

**20**William Bingham was a prominent Philadelphia merchant. His recently completed “Mansion House” was one of the most luxurious and richly furnished houses in America.

**21**See **CC:565**.

**22**The twelfth and last installment of Luther Martin’s *Genuine Information* was published on 8 February (**CC:516**). Martin was never a federal judge.

**23**Possibly George Mason who objected to the Constitution’s failure to provide for a two-thirds vote of each house of Congress on navigation acts.

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