

Joseph M. Paxton

BIOGRAPHIA AMERICANA;

OR,

A HISTORICAL AND CRITICAL ACCOUNT

OF THE

LIVES, ACTIONS, AND WRITINGS,

OF THE

MOST DISTINGUISHED PERSONS

IN

NORTH AMERICA;

FROM THE FIRST SETTLEMENT TO THE PRESENT TIME.

"If within the memory of man, or the compass of history, any class of individuals have merited, beyond others, the honours and rewards of their cotemporaries, the gratitude of posterity, and the admiration of the world, it is those who, unmoved by difficulty, danger, and misfortune, directed the councils, and led to victory the arms of their country, in the long and sanguinary contest, which resulted in the **INDEPENDENCE OF THE UNITED STATES.**"

"No study can be more useful to the ingenious youth of the United States, than that of their own history, nor any examples more interesting, or more safe for their contemplation, than those of the great founders of the republic."—*Tudor's Life of Otis.*

BY A GENTLEMAN OF PHILADELPHIA.

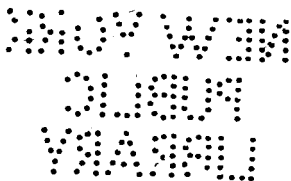
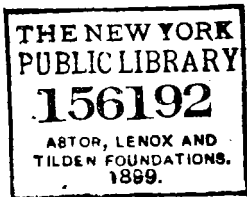
Benjamin Franklin French

NEW-YORK:

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1825.

Hopkins & Morris, Printers.



Southern District of New-York, ss :

BE IT REMEMBERED, that on the second day of July, in the forty-ninth year of the Independence of the United States of America, B. F. French, of the said district, hath deposited in this office the title of a book, the right whereof he claims as author and proprietor, in the words following, to wit:

“Biographia Americana; or, a historical and critical account of the lives, actions, and writings, of the most distinguished persons in North America; from the first settlement to the present time.

“If within the memory of man, or the compass of history, any class of individuals have merited, beyond others, the honours and rewards of their cotemporaries, the gratitude of posterity, and the admiration of the world, it is those who, unmoved by difficulty, danger, and misfortune, directed the councils, and led to victory the arms of their country, in the long and sanguinary contest, which resulted in the **INDEPENDENCE OF THE UNITED STATES.**”

“No study can be more useful to the ingenuous youth of the United States, than that of their own history, nor any examples more interesting, or more safe for their contemplation, than those of the great founders of the republic.—*Tudor's Life of Otis.* By a gentleman of Philadelphia.”

In conformity to the Act of Congress of the United States, entitled “An Act for the encouragement of Learning, by securing the copies of Maps, Charts, and Books to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the time therein mentioned;” and also to an Act, entitled “An Act supplementary to an Act, entitled an Act for the encouragement of Learning, by securing the copies of Maps, Charts, and Books to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned, and extending the benefits thereof to the arts of designing, engraving, and etching historical and other prints.

JAMES DILL,

Clerk of the Southern District of New-York.

of Burgoyne and his army. In the battles of Trenton, Princeton, and Brandywine, for his gallantry and good conduct he was promoted by congress to the rank of brigadier-general.

President Washington afterwards appointed him to the command of the posts on the Mississippi.

During the late war with Great Britain, after taking possession of the country west of the Perdido, and capturing the post at Mobile, he was transferred to the command of the northern army, with the rank of major-general. After several unsuccessful attempts to take possession of Canada, he was obliged to retire from actual service on account of the pressing infirmities of age.

He has published, "Memoirs of his own times," in three volumes 8vo.

WYTHE, GEORGE, chancellor of Virginia, and one of the signers of the declaration of independence, was born in the year 1726, in the county of Elizabeth City, Virginia. His mother, a woman of great acquirements, superintended his education, and taught him the Latin and Greek languages. To grammar, rhetoric, and logic, he added by his own exertions, at an early age, an extensive acquaintance with civil law; a profound knowledge of mathematics, as well of natural and moral philosophy. Of these various attainments, so honourable to his industry and genius, much of the merit, no doubt very justly, is ascribed to the affectionate and tender zeal of his mother. Of this excellent parent, he was bereaved during his minority. And in a short time after, he lost his amiable father. Being thus in the possession of money, like many unthinking youths, he commenced a career of dissipation and intemperance, and did not disengage himself from it before he had reached the age of thirty. He then bitterly lamented the loss of those

nine years of his life, and of the learning which, during that period, he might have acquired. But never did any man more effectually redeem his time. From the moment, when he resolved on reformation, he devoted himself most intensely to his studies.

He commenced the study of the law in the office of the late John Lewis, Esq. and at an early period was licensed to practise in the courts of Virginia. He took his station at the bar of the old general court, with many other great men whose merit has been the boast of Virginia. For a short time he continued their equal; but by reason of his extensive learning, correctness of elocution, and his logical style of argument, he quickly arrived at the head of the bar.

When the time arrived, which heaven had destined for the separation of the wide, confederated republic of America from the dominion of Great Britain, he was one of the instruments in the hand of Providence for accomplishing that great work. He took a decided part in the very first movements of opposition, and urged his fellow citizens to open resistance. With a prophetic mind he looked forward to the event of an approaching war, and resolutely prepared to encounter all its evils rather than to resign his attachment to liberty. As the controversy grew warm, his zeal became proportionally fervent. He joined a corps of volunteers, accustomed himself to military discipline, and was ready to march at the call of his country. But that country to whose interests he was so sincerely attached, had other duties of more importance for him to perform. It was his destiny to obtain distinction as a statesman, legislator, and judge, and not as a warrior. Before the war commenced, he was elected a member of the Virginia assembly. After having been for some time speaker of that enlightened and patriotic body, and rendering himself conspicuous as the vindicator of the

rights and privileges of his injured countrymen, he was sent by the members of that body, as one of their delegates to the congress which met at Philadelphia in May, 1775, and did not separate until it had declared the independence of America. In that august assembly, he possessed no small share of influence. He was one of those who signed the memorable declaration, by which the heroic legislators of this country pledged "their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honours," to maintain and defend its violated rights.

In November following, by a resolution of the general assembly of Virginia, he was appointed one of the committee to revise the laws of the commonwealth, and to prepare bills for re-enacting them, with such alterations as the change in the form and principles of the government, and other circumstances, required of this extensive work of legislation. Wythe executed the revision of those laws which had been enacted during the period commencing with the revolution in England, and ending with the establishment of the new government here, except the acts for regulating descents; for religious freedom; and for proportioning crimes and punishments; which were part of the labours of Mr. Jefferson.

After finishing the task of new modelling the laws, he was employed to carry them into effect according to their true intent and spirit, and was appointed one of the three judges of the high court of chancery of Virginia: but on a subsequent change in the organization of the court of equity, he was constituted sole chancellor: which high station he filled with the strictest integrity for more than twenty years. Whilst in this office, he published a collection of chancery reports, which by legal characters are held high in estimation.

In 1786, he was appointed a delegate to meet the grand convention at Philadelphia to revise the federal constitution. His country never losing

sight of his distinguished patriotism and abilities, when occasion required his services, we again find him a conspicuous member of the great public body which assembled at Richmond in 1788, to take into view the adoption or rejection of the lately framed constitution of the United States. During the debates on this occasion, he acted for the most part as chairman. Amidst all his public services, throughout all his private life, the devotion of Wythe to his country, his scrupulous discharge of the duties of his office, and his universal benevolence of disposition, were eminently apparent. Some of the greatest luminaries at the bar, and in the senate, that Virginia has produced, were instructed in science, and led up the steep of fame by George Wythe. In the list of his pupils we may enumerate two presidents of the United States, a chief justice, and others who by their abilities and virtues are entitled to the most distinguished honours of their country. He presided twice successively in the presidential electoral college of Virginia, with great distinction and applause. His political opinions were always firmly republican. He died, after a short but very excruciating sickness, on the 8th June, 1806, in the eighty-first year of his age.

President Jefferson, who was the friend of his age, and his compatriot through life, thus draws the portrait of this extraordinary man: "No man ever left behind him a character more venerated than George Wythe. His virtue was of the purest kind; his integrity inflexible, and his justice exact; of warm patriotism, and devoted as he was to liberty, and the natural and equal rights of men, he might be truly called the Cato of his country, without the avarice of the Roman; for a more disinterested person never lived. Temperance and regularity in all his habits, gave him general good health, and his unaffected modesty and suavity of manners endeared him to every one. He was of

easy elocution, his language chaste, methodical in the arrangement of his matter, learned and logical in the use of it, and of great urbanity in debate. Not quick of apprehension, but with a little time, profound in penetration, and sound in conclusion.

His stature was of the middle size, well formed and proportioned, and the features of his face manly, comely, and engaging. Such was George Wythe, the honour of his own, and model of future times."

By his last will and testament he bequeathed his valuable library and philosophical apparatus to his friend Mr. Jefferson, and distributed the remainder of his property among the grandchildren of his sister, and the slaves whom he had set free. He thus wished to liberate the blacks not only from slavery, but from temptations to vice. He even condescended to impart to them instruction; and he personally taught the Greek language to a little negro boy, who died a few days before his preceptor.

WASHINGTON, GEORGE, first president of the United States, and a distinguished patriot, hero, and statesman, was born at the seat of his ancestors, in Westmoreland county, Virginia, February 22, 1732. He was educated under the care of a private tutor, and after making rapid progress in the languages, mathematics, and engineering, he embraced the military profession. His abilities were first employed by governor Dinwiddie, in 1754, in making remonstrances to the French commander on the Ohio, for the infraction of the treaty between the two nations, and he afterwards negotiated a treaty of amity with the Indians, on the back settlements; and for his honourable services received the thanks of the British government. In the unfortunate expedition of general Braddock,