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csac.history.wisc.edu > Ratification at a Glance > New Hampshire > A Farmer (AF) and Alfredus (F) Essays

Note on “A Farmer” and “Alfredus” Essays

The publication of the antifederalist “A Farmer” essay set off an exchange in the *Freeman’s Oracle* between “A Farmer” and “Alfredus.” On 18 January “Alfredus” responded to “A Farmer,” who then replied on 1 February. “Alfredus” then responded again on 8 February. “The Farmer” waited until 6 June to respond to “Alfredus,” who answered “A Farmer” on 13 June. After this initial exchange both writers resorted heavily to scurrilous assaults on each other. The exchange ended on 18 October.

On 13 June “Alfredus” identified “A Farmer” as Thomas Cogswell (1746–1810), a native of Massachusetts who rose to the rank of lieutenant-colonel during the Revolutionary War and served as Wagon-master General. After the war, Cogswell settled in Gilmanton, N.H., near his wife’s father (General Joseph Badger). In 1784 Cogswell was appointed chief justice of the New Hampshire court of common pleas and served until his death in 1810. (On 13 June “Alfredus” also identified Cogswell as the author of “The Anti-fœderalist No. II.”)

After crossing out two other handwritten names, someone indicated that “A Farmer” was “Thos Cogswell” in the 11 January issue of the *Freeman’s Oracle*. The name was also handwritten in the issues of 1 February, 6 June, and 18 October, where subsequent essays by “A Farmer” or “The Farmer” appeared. These particular issues of the *Oracle* were once owned by William Plumer and are now at the Boston Athenæum. The same person identified “Alfredus” as “Samuel Tenny MD” in the *Oracle* of 18 January, 8 February, and 13 June. “The Farmer’s” highly critical essays noted, or at least implied, that “Alfredus” was both an officer in the Continental Army and a medical doctor during the Revolutionary War, which match Tenney’s career.

Tenney (1748–1816) was a 1772 graduate of Harvard College and a Massachusetts native. After graduation, Tenney studied medicine and began practice as a physician in Exeter. During the Revolutionary War, he served as a surgeon. Tenney returned to Exeter after the war, and in 1791 he was a member of the state constitutional convention. He was judge of probate for Rockingham County, 1793–1800, and a member of the U.S. House of Representatives, 1800–1807.

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