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Clergyman and Revolutionary Committeeman: Thomas Lundie of St. Andrew’s Parish, Brunswick County, Virginia

Otto Lohrenz

The social position of the clergy of the established Church of England in colonial Virginia has not been settled. Some historians hold that they were full-fledged members of the gentry. Arthur P. Middleton, for example, thinks the ministers were gentlemen who “habitually move[d] in the social circles of the upper class,” frequently “married into the most prominent families,” and “were remarkably well-to-do.”¹ Other historians, led by Rhys Isaac, assert that the candidates stemmed from inferior social levels, that as ministers they suffered from a “negative image” and “low status,” and that their “lack of rank and influence” made them dependent on the good will of the local gentry which forced them into a degrading client position.²

Both Middleton and Isaac based their judgments on general impressions. Neither did a systematic or comprehensive examination of the origins and subsequent social status of the several hundred rectors. The underlying assumption here is that generalizations should be based upon the scholarly analyses of the roots, lives, and careers of individual men of the cloth. Most of these ministers, as one authority has observed, remain “shrouded in neglect.”³ This author has made a beginning in rectifying that disregard by doing inclusive biographical studies of more than twenty clergymen of the Revolutionary generation.⁴ The purpose of this biographical sketch is to add another chapter to that project by analyzing the life and career of Thomas Lundie, rector of St. Andrew’s Parish in Brunswick County after 1769, and by ascertaining his rank and status in society.

Our subject was the son of Alexander Lundie of Inverurie, Scotland and was born in 1741. From 1759 to 1763 he attended Marischall College in Aberdeen which awarded him a Master of Arts Degree.⁵ Soon after his graduation Lundie came to Virginia and for three years was tutor in the home of Thomas Moore in St.
John’s Parish in King William County. During that time he prepared himself for the ministry and in 1767 declared himself a candidate for the priesthood in the Church of England. Henry Skyring, rector of St. John’s Parish, sent a testimonial to William Robinson, the bishop of London’s commissary in Virginia, expressing his confidence in Lundie’s character and general fitness for the ministry.⁶

Since there was no bishop in America, an ordinand had to hazard the voyage to England in order to seek the blessing of the bishop of London, the nominal diocesan of the colonial Anglican churches. In late 1767 Lundie departed on his mission, carrying with him recommendations from Robinson and Francis Fauquier, the lieutenant governor and chief executive of the colony.⁷ In London the bishop ordained him deacon on December 20, 1767 and priest the next day when he also licensed him to officiate in Virginia.⁸ Thus Lundie had established his character, orthodoxy, and knowledge to the satisfaction of the bishop. After his induction into the priesthood, Lundie also took the required oaths of allegiance and canonical obedience to the king and the Church of England.⁹

Soon after his return Lundie married Lucy Yates, who represented several leading families, including the celebrated Randolph family. She issued from the union of William Yates and Elizabeth Randolph. Her father was first rector of Abingdon Parish in Gloucester County and then of Bruton Parish in Williamsburg. From 1762 until his death in 1764 he was president of the College of William and Mary. Her mother was the daughter of Edward Randolph and Elizabeth Graves. Edward Randolph was the son of William Randolph of Turkey Island and brother of Sir John Randolph, lawyer, scholar, legislator, and one of only a very few colonists to be knighted.¹⁰

On July 22, 1769 Lundie became parson of St. Andrew’s Parish in Brunswick County.¹¹ His clerical predecessors there had not been a credit to their church or profession. The vestry dismissed George Purdie, occupant of the cure in the 1750s, for neglect of duty and scandalous behavior shortly before his death in 1760. Gonowry Owen, the next incumbent, was the noted Welsh poet, whose drinking and rioting had led to his removal as professor at the College of William and Mary. During his nine years in St. Andrew’s, the Brunswick County Court fined him several times for drunkenness and profane swearing. He died about 1769.¹² As the
historians of Brunswick has observed, Lundie proved to be a much more committed and energetic parson than either Purdie or Owen. His conscientious attention to duty lifted the spirits of the parishioners and ushered in a “burst of new activities and enthusiasm.”

Lundie’s primary duty as minister was to conduct Sunday services according to schedule in the three worship centers of the parish, which, according to the minutes of the vestry, were the Lower chapel, the Middle church, and the Upper chapel. None of the structures survived the early nineteenth century. Lundie officiated at baptisms, marriages, and funerals for which he received perquisites. Virginia law provided that the minister receive an annual salary of 16,000 pounds of tobacco, plus the percentages for cask and shrinkage, and that he have the use of a glebe of at least two hundred acres with a suitable dwelling and appropriate outbuildings for agricultural production. The glebe house was apparently in poor condition when Lundie came because the vestry allowed him twenty pounds Virginia currency per annum in lieu of a rectorate. By 1772 repairs and improvements were completed and the Lundie family was able to occupy the residence.

There is no surviving sermon, fragment or text of a sermon, or reference to Lundie’s preaching by contemporaries, but the renewal of interest in church affairs in St. Andrew’s upon his arrival indicates that he did well both in and out of the pulpit. There is no record of incidents or complaints by the vestry or parishioners.

Lundie actively involved himself in clerical activities in Virginia. He was a trustee for the Fund for the Relief of Distressed Widows and Orphans of Deceased Clergymen from 1773 until 1779. The subscribers of the Fund met each spring at the College of William and Mary and heard morning and afternoon sermons, and contributed their annual fee, a pistole. The money was then distributed to needy survivors of clergymen. Lundie witnessed the controversial attempt by some of his peers to petition the king for an American bishop in the early 1770s. In 1774 he attended a clerical convocation which prepared a petition to the legislature advocating a bishop, but it was not presented since the governor prorogued the Assembly because of Revolutionary issues. Whether Lundie favored or opposed the formal request is not known.

Lundie revealed interest and concern for the future of his church. When the Anglican Church in Virginia was disestablished
in the mid-1780s, the clerical and lay leaders met in convention in Richmond to organize the Protestant Episcopal Church of Virginia and to supervise its early development. Lundie, representing both St. Andrew's and Merherrin Parishes, was one of the thirty-six clergymen to attend the initial meeting in 1785.20

Another indication of Lundie's commitment to his calling and church occurred in the early years of the Revolution when the new Virginia state legislature first suspended and then terminated clerical stipends from public sources as of January 1, 1777.21 The cessation of church taxes really disestablished the Church of England, although final steps separating church and state were not completed until 1785 with the enactment of Thomas Jefferson's famous Statute for Religious Freedom. After 1776 salaries had to be raised by subscription from parishioners unaccustomed to voluntary contributions, often leaving the minister with very little income.

In 1781 James Madison, rector of James City Parish, president of the College of William and Mary, and later the first bishop of the Virginia diocese, considered leaving the ministry and the college for the practice of law, because "Divinity . . . will starve a Man in these times."22 John Page, prominent public figure and a leading churchman, reported in 1785 that James Maury Fontaine, rector of Ware Parish, had "been almost starved," and that Robert Andrews, rector of York-Hampton Parish had left the ministry "to avoid starving."23 In 1783 Alexander Balmain, rector of Frederick Parish, wrote that "the Revolution . . . has been fatal to the Clergy of Virginia. From a fixed salary they are reduced to depend on a precarious subscription for bread."24 No doubt some donations were forthcoming, but Lundie hardly carried on his ministerial duties because of material inducements. That he persisted as rector of St. Andrew's until old age or death underscores his loyalty and dedication to the Anglican-Episcopal Church of Virginia.

The first Revolutionary crisis to face Lundie as rector of St. Andrew's was that created by the Coercive Acts passed by Parliament in 1774. One reaction by the House of Burgesses to this legislation was to call for a day of prayer, fasting, and humiliation on June 1, the day the Boston Port Bill, one of the objectionable acts, was to go into effect. This display of defiance caused Governor Lord Dunmore to prorogue the House. Thereupon most of the Burgesses gathered in Raleigh Tavern and drafted and signed the Third Virginia Association. The associators protested British
policies, resolved on a boycott of trade, and recommended the convening of a general congress of all the colonies. In many counties the whigs followed this example by preparing their own resolutions of association and placing their names beneath them. One of the gazettes reported receiving the "resolves" of Brunswick, and several other counties, but regretted not having the "time nor the room" to print them. Thus the resolutions with signatures of Brunswick are not extant. Since Lundie became chairman of the Brunswick committee of safety in a few months, it seems reasonable to assume that he endorsed the county's resolutions and possibly also played a role in their formulation.

The general committee structure emerged in Virginia after the Continental Congress organized the Continental Association, an intercolonial boycott of British commerce, in October 1774. The voters in each unit of local government in the several colonies were to choose these committees to execute the Association within their respective jurisdictions. The patriots in virtually all of the counties in Virginia complied with this directive. The freeholders in Brunswick conducted their first election in either late 1774 or in January 1775. A complete roster has not survived, but Lundie became the chairman and James Alexander Watson the clerk. Congress had not fixed the number of individuals to constitute a local committee, and in Virginia the membership ranged from thirteen to an unwieldy seventy. In August 1775 the Third Convention, one of Virginia's extralegal assemblies, decreed that "twenty one of the most discreet, fit and able men" would comprise each committee in the province. In all likelihood this necessitated a new election in Brunswick; a membership list of the second committee is not extant either but Lundie was the chairman and Daniel Fisher the clerk.

These committees assumed vast local power during their existence from 1774 to 1776. Their chief duties were to gather endorsements of the Continental Association and to take action against suspected violators of the trade embargo with Great Britain; to discourage "idle" pleasures, gaming, and "extravagance;" to promote the non-consumption of British goods, especially of tea; to encourage frugality and economy, and to promote agriculture and manufacturing, especially of wool; and to make certain that prices of goods did not exceed prevailing prices of the previous year. Committees also censured those who criticized the patriots and their cause, or who spoke or wrote in favor of the British; collected
gunpowder, salt, and lead; raised military manpower, appointed officers, administered oaths, and reviewed companies; and corresponded and cooperated with committees of counties in the district and with provincial leaders. The committees, moreover, also took over the general local law-enforcement obligations which previously had been the responsibility of the justices of the peace and the county courts. 31

The selection of Lundie as chairman of both committees reveals that his fellow countians held him in high regard. He was apparently an accepted member of the upper stratum of local society, for scholars have found that the ruling gentry controlled the elections, and limited membership to those belonging to “the traditional power structure of the counties” 32 His university education and cultural style, his general abilities, the dignity and influence of his clerical office, the force of his moral character, and his excellent personal attributes had evidently earned him a considerable measure of good will in the five years he had been a resident in Brunswick. Important family relationships, as students have noted, were very helpful in achieving leadership in Virginia, and Lundie’s kinship connections with the Randolphins and related eminent families contributed to his local social stature. Wealth was an important qualification for membership in the local ruling elite and Lundie was gradually becoming a large land owner in Brunswick. 33

As Brunswick’s chairman, Lundie no doubt occupied himself with many of the functions associated with Revolutionary committees, although there are only a few references to the committee’s activities in the records. The committee met on February 2, 1775, “with the Rev. Mr. Thomas Lundie in the chair,” to consider the reports that Allan Love, a merchant, had “uttered several injurious and reproachful expressions against the Americans, and the [Continental] association.” After hearing the witnesses and Love in his defense the committee concluded that “the charges alleged . . . were not well supported.” The committeemen, moreover, could find no “instance” that Love had violated the Association which he had endorsed. Love expressed concern that the unsubstantiated charges would be prejudicial and damaging to his good name and reputation and he therefore requested that his exoneration “be laid before the public.” Thereupon the committee transmitted a copy of the proceedings to
the newspaper for publication. A few weeks later the item appeared in one of the gazettes.34

In the summer of 1776 the committee dealt with a counterfeiting ring with activists in the counties of Brunswick in Virginia and Hertford and Chowan in North Carolina. On June 23, a Sunday, messengers from the patriots of the North Carolina counties appeared with letters informing Lundie, who was “then at church,” that Henry Lightfoot was involved in the forging and passing of North Carolina paper money. Lundie, who could not act because he was conducting the service, immediately dispatched Captain John Maclin to apprehend Lightfoot, but before he could accomplish his purpose the culprit made good his escape. There was reason to suspect that one William Wall had warned Lightfoot of his impending arrest. Lundie and his committee summoned Wall to appear before them on July 29 when he confessed that he “was the means of giving intelligence to Lightfoot,” enabling him to make his get away.35

After reviewing the evils of counterfeiting and declaring that it was an “atrocious crime” with “fatal consequences,” the committee decided that both Lightfoot and Wall should be exposed “to the displeasure and contempt” of the public. Therefore they forwarded an account of events to the newspaper. This was the standard notice given by patriots to invite the ostracism of active tories by the general public. They also offered a reward of ten pounds for the seizure of Lightfoot because “so base and mischievous an offender [should] be brought to condign punishment.”36

By the time the committee’s report was published, Henry Lightfoot had been captured. On August 7, 1776 Virginia’s Council of State noted the reception of a letter from Henry Tazewell, the leading patriotic and political figure in Brunswick. According to his communication, an “armed force” had taken the “Gentleman of reputation” of Brunswick who was under suspicion of counterfeiting North Carolina bills of credit and had transported him “into that Government.”37 Presumably the authorities in North Carolina tried and punished Lightfoot. That North Carolina’s patriots considered the crime to be a most serious one is revealed by an early state law which made “the forging or counterfeiting of Bills of credit” a felony punishable by death.38 Counterfeiting was plaguing Virginia’s treasury to the point that some of the leaders were ready to dispense certain death upon conviction of the perpetrators.39
As a committeeman in 1774-1776 the parson of St. Andrew’s was not in a unique position because the freeholders elected at least twenty-eight other reverends to the local Revolutionary committees. Ten, including Lundie, were chairmen and two were chairmen pro tempore. These local patriot leaders, especially the chairmen, can hardly be considered clients of the elite, as Isaac alleged. Previously, scholars have failed to note and appreciate the rise in prestige and power of the clerics at the end of the eighteenth century.

In all likelihood Lundie honored the several fast days called for by the Virginia Conventions and legislature and the Continental Congress by conducting special services with appropriate sermons. No doubt he also promoted the interests of the patriots from the pulpit during Sunday services. Philip Vickers Fithian, the well-known tutor in Westmoreland County, noted in his diary on July 10, 1774 that all sermons in the Anglican churches reportedly were “in the forensic style, and on political Subjects.” Nicholas Cresswell, the English traveler in Virginia in the mid-1770s, heard a number of clerics preach. While in Alexandria on Sunday, October 20, 1776, he railed that the Anglican clergy were “mere retailers of politics, sowers of sedition and rebellion, [and] serve to . . . excite the people to arms.”

Surely, Lundie was not an exception to the observations of Fithian and Cresswell. Lundie is also known to have supported the public cause by collecting and furnishing military supplies, for which he was later compensated.

It can be inferred that Lundie repudiated his ordination vows to the king. On July 5, 1776 the Fifth Virginia Convention altered the liturgy in the Book of Common Prayer, ruling that henceforth rectors pray for the magistrates of Virginia rather than, as formerly, for the king and royal family. Since he continued to officiate it is evident that Lundie utilized these new prayers. After the assumption of statehood, the Virginia legislature ordered all adult males to renounce their allegiance to the king and to swear true fidelity to the Commonwealth before October 10, 1777. Recusants could not hold office and since clergymen were officers of the state church until the completion of disestablishment in the mid-1780s, they could not officiate without taking the test. Since Lundie served as minister until his retirement or death it is apparent that he took the oath.

William Meade bishop of the Episcopal diocese in Virginia from 1741 until 1762 and well-known historian of its colonial Anglican
Church, stated that Lundie “became a minister of the Methodist communion” after 1785. Subsequent writers have repeated that undocumented assertion, which is an error. On August 22, 1785 the justices of Brunswick, in accordance with the new marriage law, granted Lundie, “a Minister of the Protestant Episcopal Church,” a license to “Solemnize Matrimony.” Lundie is listed as rector of St. Andrew’s on Bishop James Madison’s ministerial roster for 1787. From 1783 to 1792 Lundie performed 174 marriage ceremonies and in his returns to the Court he always identified himself as “Rector, St. Andrew’s Parish.”

In 1796 according to George MacLaren Brydon, a more recent historian of Virginia’s established church, John Dunn represented St. Andrew’s as a clerical delegate to the diocesan convention, suggesting to Brydon that he was Lundie’s curate. With the consent of the vestry, the rector appointed his curate and paid him out of his own pocket. Had Lundie been a Methodist minister he would hardly have engaged the services of an Episcopal curate. In his will, recorded on February 20, 1798, Lundie requested that “some benevolent friend read the [Episcopal] funeral Service when my body is interred, and if such cannot be found, my desire is that no further ceremony be performed.” This instruction clearly indicates that Lundie considered himself an Episcopalian. Possibly Meade simply meant that Lundie cooperated with the Methodists and adopted some of their preaching techniques.

Whether Lundie continued to officiate in St. Andrew’s until his retirement or death in 1798 can not be definitely determined. As is generally known, the Episcopal Church declined sharply in Virginia at the end of the eighteenth century and this was also the case with St. Andrew’s. At the same time the dissenters, the Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists, were growing in numbers of congregations and adherents. The chroniclers of Brunswick County conjecture that the Episcopal Church languished after 1787 and question whether services were being held at all after that date. Since John Dunn served as curate in 1796, two years before Lundie’s death, it is apparent that Lundie was at least the nominal rector at that time and that the Episcopal Church was not entirely dormant. It is probable that no permanent successor to Lundie in St. Andrew’s could be found and so, from virtual necessity, he kept technical charge of the parish, conducted the ceremonies of baptism, marriage, and burial, and delivered periodic sermons until his death or until he became too enfeebled to continue. There
was a severe shortage of Episcopal ministers in Virginia after the Revolution and the disestablishment of the church.\textsuperscript{55}

Lundie signed his will on April 11, 1797 and the Brunswick County Court recorded it on February 20, 1798. To his wife, Lucy Lundie, he granted the use of his "mansion-house," 250 acres of land, and four named slaves during her lifetime or widowhood. To each of his four sons — William, Alexander Ferguson, David Greenway, and Thomas Yates — he bequeathed a designated portion of land, one or two slaves, a horse, and small personal items. His will did not indicate how much land was involved but, according to the Land Tax Books, it was 2,283 acres. To each of his four daughters — Elizabeth Bland, Clara, Susanne Randolph, and Anne Jean Simmons, who was evidently married — he devised four named slaves. In all he named twenty-one slaves. The other personal property which remained after all accounts were settled Lundie granted "to all my children equally."\textsuperscript{56}

Lundie reached the age of fifty-seven. The place of his interment is not known. His widow did not remarry but lived in Brunswick until her death in 1823, her will being recorded on February 24 of that year.\textsuperscript{57} Most of Thomas and Lucy Lundie's eight children married and left offspring.

At the time of his death Lundie was well-to-do and among the wealthiest planters in Brunswick County. Richard Beeman, in his highly acclaimed history of Lunenburg County, concludes that planters in that county who owned twenty slaves and possessed a thousand acres belonged to the "Economic Elite" of the county.\textsuperscript{58} Lundie met both criteria. Since Lunenburg and Brunswick were adjoining counties in Virginia's Southside, it can be inferred that Lundie belonged to the upper social and economic stratum in Brunswick.

It can be concluded that Lundie was a worthy, capable local rector who performed his parochial duties faithfully without recorded complaint or incident. His continued service without a regular salary after the termination of church taxes underscores his commitment. His involvement in provincial church affairs shows that he was dedicated to his profession and church. Clearly the scenario put forward by Middleton best fits the case of Thomas Lundie. He married into one of the first families, became a prosperous planter, and moved in the circles of the gentry. His election as chairman of the Brunswick Revolutionary committees plainly indicates that he did not suffer from a negative image and
low status, as Isaac alleges. His position of leadership also makes it evident that he was not a client of the local ruling party. How representative of his clerical generation was Lundie? A close scrutiny of their lives and careers would in all likelihood reveal that many of Lundie’s fellow ministers were also accepted and respected members of the elite of their respective counties.

NOTES

9 Bell, “Anglican Clergy,” 104.

11 Brunswick County, St. Andrew’s Parish Vestry Book, 1732-1798, 127, reel 54, Virginia State Library, Richmond (VSL hereafter).

12 George MacLaren Brydon, Virginia’s Mother Church and the Political Conditions Under Which It Grew (Richmond and Philadelphia, 1947-52), 2:287, 324-25, 340; Goodwin, Colonial Church, 296, 300-01.

13 Gay Neale et al., Brunswick County, Virginia, 1720-1975 (Brunswick County, 1975), 93.


15 Neale, Brunswick County, 85.

16 Purdie and Dixon’s Va. Gaz., May 7, 1772, Mar. 11, 1773, May 5, 1774; Dixon and Hunter’s Virginia Gazette (Williamsburg), Mar. 11, 1775, May 18, 1776, Mar. 28, 1777, Apr. 24, 1778, Apr. 16, 1779; Pinkney’s Virginia Gazette (Williamsburg), Mar. 9, 1775; Purdie’s Virginia Gazette (Williamsburg), May 24, 1776, Mar. 28, 1777.


19 Hening, Statutes at Large, 9:164-66, 10:197-98.


22 Alexander Balmain to John Balmain, May 8, 1783, Buckley, Church and State. 83.


26 Hening, Statutes at Large, 9:57.

27 Pinkney’s Va Gaz., Aug. 16, 1776.


29 Hening, Statutes at Large, 9:57.

30 Pinkney’s Va Gaz., Aug. 16, 1776.


34 Dixon and Hunter’s *Va. Gaz.*, Mar. 25, 1775.


36 Ibid.

37 Henry R. McIlwaine et al., eds., *Journals of the Council of the State of Virginia* (Richmond, 1931-82), 1:112.


43 Public Service Claims, Brunswick County Court Booklet, 22, photocopy, VSL.


49 Brunswick County Order Book, No. 14 (1784-1788), 213, reel 34, VSL.

50 *The Virginia Almanack for the Year 1787* (Petersburg, Va., [1786]).


53 Brunswick County Will Book, No. 6 (1795-1804), 135, reel 22, VSL.

54 Neale, *Brunswick County*, 103.

56 Brunswick County Will Book, No. 6 (1795-1804), 133-35, reel 22, VSL; ibid., No. 7 (1804-1812), 408-14, reel 22, VSL; Brunswick County Land Tax Books, 1782-1799, n. p., reel 45, VSL.
57 Brunswick County Will Book, No. 9 (1818-1824), 290, reel 23, VSL.