JONATHAN LAW

JONATHAN LAW, twelfth governor of Connecticut, was born in Milford, August 6, 1674. Richard Law, his grandfather, was king's attorney and emigrated to this country in 1635.

Jonathan Law studied at Harvard College and was graduated in the class of 1695. After studying law he commenced practice in his native town in 1698, and with such success that he was soon made chief judge of the New Haven County Court. He held this office five years, when, in May, 1715, he was chosen as an associate judge of the Superior Court. In this capacity Jonathan Law demonstrated his thorough knowledge of the law, so that his ability was rewarded two years later when he was chosen as a governor's assistant. He held this office eight years, until 1725, when he resigned, having been elected lieutenant governor of the colony. During the same year Law was made chief justice of the Superior Court, an office he held for seventeen years.

Upon the death of Governor Talcott, in 1741, Jonathan Law succeeded as acting-governor until the time of the regular election in the spring, and he succeeded himself annually until his death in 1751.

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After the election of Governor Law it was the rule in Connecticut that a governor hold office until he died or refused to serve longer, when the deputy governor took his place for a like term.

The administration of Governor Law was uneventful, except for the expedition against Louisburg, commanded by Roger Wolcott, and for which Connecticut furnished a thousand men. Governor Law was a strong opponent of the preaching of Rev. George Whitefield and the other revivalists, and signed an act "prohibiting any itinerating clergymen or exhorter from preaching in a parish without the express desire of the pastor or people." Under the provision of this law such preachers as the Rev. Samuel Finley were driven from Connecticut as vagrants.

The governor had an extensive farm near Cheshire, and he was one of the first to plant mulberry trees and introduce the raising of silk-worms. This industry Governor Law advocated and advertised in a public manner by appearing in 1747 wearing the first coat and stockings made of New England silk. Dr. Aspinwall of Mansfield and President Stiles of Yale College were both deeply interested in the industry and the latter wore a gown made of Connecticut silk at the next commencement. From this humble beginning developed the extensive silk industry in Connecticut.

Governor Law died on November 6, 1750, and at his funeral Dr. Ezra Stiles pronounced a eulogy in Latin which is still in print.

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He referred to the dead governor as "a most illustrious man and the great patron of Yale College."

A biographer wrote: "He was unquestionably a man of high talents and accomplishments, both natural and acquired. He was well acquainted with civil and ecclesiastical subjects, and gradually rose by the force of his own exertions to the highest honor in the state. He was of a mild and placid temper, amiable in all the relations of domestic life, and seems to have well discharged the duties imposed upon him."

A son, Richard Law, LL.D. (1733–1806), was graduated at Yale in 1751, and practiced law in New London. He was a delegate to the Continental Congress in 1777–78, and 1781–84, and mayor of New London for twenty years. The leading lawyer of that section of Connecticut, Richard Law was made chief justice of the Supreme Court, and Washington appointed him judge of the United States District Court. Richard Law and Roger Sherman revised the laws of Connecticut.

THE GOVERNORS OF CONNECTICUT, 1905 >>
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