

## NEW JERSEY IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

I AB do sincerely profess and swear (or, if one of the People called Quakers, affirm) that I do not hold myself bound to bear Allegiance to the King of Great-Britain. So help me God.

I AB do sincerely profess and swear (or, if one of the People called Quakers, affirm) that I do and will bear true Faith and Allegiance to the Government established in this State, under the Authority of the People. So help me God.

Which Oaths or Affirmations shall be administered by any Person or Persons who shall be duly authorized to tender the same by the Commander in Chief of this State. . . .

### 2 John Bray to Andrew Bray

[New Jersey Letters, Alexander Library, Rutgers University.]

When the British swept through New Jersey during the closing months of 1776, approximately 2,500 men quickly took advantage of General William Howe's proclamation of November 30 offering to pardon and protect anyone who signed a declaration of allegiance to the crown. Some signed because of Loyalist leanings, but most probably did so either because of indifference as to whether their rulers were monarchists or republicans, because of fear of the British army, or because of the apparent hopelessness of the rebellion. John Bray, a Middlesex County farmer of middling means, is representative of those motivated by the latter considerations. Sensing that the rebellion was about to be crushed and fearing that the British army would deal harshly with rebels, Bray encouraged his uncle, Andrew Bray of Lebanon in Hunterdon County, to use his influence as patriarch of the clan to encourage family members to take out British protections. (A "protection" was a statement signed by an authorized civil or military official declaring that a designated individual and his family were not to be molested in their person or property.) The "protections" proved not to be worth the paper they were written on. Hessians could not read English and the British routinely failed to heed the certificate. As a result, those who held protections often suffered as much as those who did not. Predictably, many did not scruple to switch allegiance when the opportunity presented itself (see Sec. VII, Doc. 9). Here too, the Brays are typical. The family produced many staunch patriots; Andrew saw action in the county militia, the state troops, and the Continental Line, while John served as an assistant commissary in the General Hospital of the Continental army and as a member of the Quartermaster's Department.

## XI GOVERNMENT AT WAR

Rariton Land[in]g 17th Dec. 1776

Dear Uncle

You are acquainted that the British Troops have Possession of this Place and you may depend that they will go through the Country wherever they attempt it and great destruction follows wherever they go that I would recommend it to all my Relations & friends to come in and Receive Protection. The Proclamation which no doubt you have heard of is free to all during its limitation. Great numbers flock in dayly to head Quarters which is at this place. You can come down & receive Protection & return home without molestation on the Part of the Kings Troops and you best know the Situation of the Provincial Army. Do advise Couzin Johny & Th[oma]s & Couzin Th[oma]s Jones for if they do stay out to the last they will undoubtedly fair the Worst. 40,000 Hessians have offer'd their service to the King of England of which 24,000 are to embark in the Spring but I hope the matter will be settled before that time. I have upwards of 30 [illegible] lately which if you think Proper to come down with your waggen you can have tho' I cannot recommend if for you to come with a Team yet times being so very difficult. I Expect to see you here shortly. In the Interim Remain, my Wife Joining me in Self & family.

Yr. Very H. Servt  
JOHN BRAY

### 3 A Bergen County Oath of Allegiance

[Department of Defense Records, 21, New Jersey State Library.]

When, on the heels of crushing victories over General Washington's Continentals in New York, the British army overran New Jersey in November-December 1776, many Jerseymen signed oaths of allegiance to the crown in hopes of protecting their family and property (Doc. 2). Not surprisingly, these trimmers and pragmatists switched sides as the counterattacking American army slowly regained control of the state. The state government was eager to grant unconditional amnesty to all but those who had been conspicuous in aiding and abetting the Royal Army. Prior to the formulation of an official "Act of Free and General Pardon" in June 1777, civil and military officials administered informal oaths of allegiance to formerly disaffected citizens and those suspected of Loyalist leanings. The loyalty oath was an important political device. Although the residents of Bergen County, a bastion of Loyalism, who signed the pledge below could obviously not be counted among the most reliable supporters of the republican regime, they would hesitate in the future to oppose the state openly and thereby risk the severe penalties for violation of their oath. As much as to recruit defenders, the state wished to neutralize its opponents.