

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.

NEW JERSEY IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

January 28, 1777

To all Whome it may Concern. Whereas we ye Subscribers has by Compulsion Choice or Otherwise taken Protection¹ from ye Ministerial officers or tools of arbitrary Power, But Now being in our own Free & Independent state of New Jersey in ye Presents of Almighty God; & the now Presents Sons of Liberty² Present before the Parsons Now Present that hence forth we will Bare true Allegiance to the thirteen United States of America & that we will obey all Laws Orders & Commands of the State of New Jersey or any Other of the said thirteen United States of America we may hereafter heppen to Reside in—Or Forfit all our Estates Real & Parsonel, Life, Freedom & Previledge in the Afforesaid thirteen United States of America.³ Given under our hands this 28 of Jenuary 1777.

[Twenty-six signatures affixed.]

1. See Doc. 2, headnote.
2. Reference to the patriotism of the persons administering the oath, not to the pre-1776 protest organization.
3. "An Act to punish Traitors and disaffected Persons" passed by the legislature on October 4, 1776, declared that anyone who aided and abetted the British army or defended the authority of Great Britain was guilty of treason and liable to fine and imprisonment; there was no confiscation act until December 1777. *Acts of the General Assembly of the State of New Jersey, August 27, 1776-March 17, 1777* (Burlington, 1777), Chap. V.

4 General George Washington to the New Jersey Legislature

[Fitzpatrick, ed., *Writings of George Washington*, 7:82-83.]

Throughout the war New Jersey governmental officials had to contend with the troublesome problems of deserters from the Continental army as well as defectors from the militia. (British and German soldiers also deserted in droves, but that is another matter.) There was no way to cope effectively with the undisciplined citizen soldiers who comprised the various militia units in the state; they simply left the ranks almost at will to attend to personal affairs (or to avoid combat) and then as often as not returned to their outfits. The exodus increased during planting and harvest time. Of greater concern was desertion from the regular army. Inadequate supplies, low and late pay, and the drudgery of military duty prompted many Continentals to leave the service without authorization. Moreover, the desertion rate rose as American military