

## NEW JERSEY IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

### 10 A Burlington County Petition to the Legislature on Reconciliation

[Manuscript Collection, 82, New Jersey State Library.]

To most Jerseymen, even as late as the fall of 1775, the whole point of the resistance movement that had developed during the past decade was a redress of grievances coupled with reconciliation between Britain and America. Rebellion and independence were to be avoided if at all possible. Thus the signers of the petition that follow, most if not all of whom were Quakers, voiced the sentiments of a considerable number of their countrymen. The petitioners were apparently farmers, for they expressed concern about the taxation of real estate to support the contest with Britain. Significantly, they addressed their appeal to the legislature, which in addition to being the representative branch of the duly constituted government was increasingly considered the one body capable of halting the torrent of revolution. In all, the assembly received four petitions signed by 133 residents of Burlington County denouncing independence.

[November 1775]<sup>1</sup>

The Petition of Divers Freeholders of the County of Burlington Respectfully  
Sheweth

That your Petitioners are Deeply Impressed with a Sense of the Calamitous State of Publick Affairs in the Unhappy Contest Which At present Subsists Between Great Britain and Her Colonies; That they Sincerely Lament that Either Country Should Dwell So much on their Own dignity or Importance As to Delay For One Moment to make Such Reasonable propositions As Should Lead to a Happy Reconciliation of the Present Differences; That Your Petitioners are Greatly Alarmed At the Sentiments Of Independency which are Openly Avowed by too many People At this time, Your Petitioners Conceiving that Should Such An Event take place the Consequence Would be the Destruction of the Interests of the Whole British Empire And a perpetual Barr to Every Door of peace & Reconciliation Between the Parent State and the Colonies; That Your Petitioners Conceive that the Expences Of the Opposition Against the Oppressive Measures Of the British Ministry & Parliament will Fall most Heavy on the Landed Interests being the Only Permanent Estate And that Your Petitioners as a part of that Interest Have An Undoubted Right to be heard, And their Reasonable Requests Consider'd With that Attention Which Their Scituation Peticularly Merits; That in the Opinion of Your Petitioners An Effectual Opposition may be made Against the Measures Now pursuing by the Ministry and Parliament of Great Britain Without Changeing The Constitutional Form of Government In the British Empire Established; And that Your Petitioners have not the Least Desire that the Union of the Colonies in that Opposition Should be broken Which they think the Establishment Of An Independency Would Effect; That as the King has Objected to the Receiving Of the Petition Of the Congress<sup>2</sup> (as we Suppose)

## V FROM RESISTANCE TO REBELLION

Because It Did not Come through the accustomed and Constitutional Channel with Due Submission to the Honourable house, It is the Sense of your Petitioners that That mode Ought to be Tried<sup>3</sup> And the Reasons why we Cannot Accede to the Proposition of the House of Commons On the 20th day of February Last<sup>4</sup> should, Modestly be Set Forth, At the Same time Declaring Our Desire Of a perpetual Union and Our Willingness to Contribute Our Just Proportion to the Support Of the Whole Empire According to the Utmost of Our Ability Whenever Constitutionally Required So to do.

Your Petitioners therefore Pray that Your Honourable House will Take Into Consideration the Subject Matter of this Petition, And Make Such Resolves as may Discourage an Independency Should Such a Measure be Attempted, And Also make Such provision For the Support Of the Civil Government Of this Colony as Heretofore. Your Petitioners hereby making Their Solemn Protest Against the Change of The Form of Government as by Law Established & Declaring that it is not, Nor Never was their Intention to Vest Any Congress Or Body of Men Whatsoever with that Power.<sup>5</sup>

[Thirty-two signatures affixed.]

1. The petition is undated, but it was probably circulated sometime in November, for it was first read in the assembly on the twenty-third.

2. The "Olive Branch" Petition drafted by Joseph Galloway and adopted by the Continental Congress on July 5; George III refused to receive the appeal for a cessation of hostilities and instead proclaimed the colonies in a state of rebellion.

3. The assembly prepared a petition to the king, but an appeal on December 5 by a delegation from the Continental Congress prevented its adoption.

4. On February 20 Lord North presented a conciliatory plan to the House of Commons under which Parliament would refrain from imposing any but regulatory taxes on any colony that taxed itself to provide for its common defense and civil government. The House of Commons formally endorsed the proposal on February 27.

5. For the response of the assembly, see Doc. 13.

## 11 John De Hart to the General Assembly

[Lloyd W. Smith Collection, 291, Morristown National Historical Park.]

The men named to represent New Jersey in the Continental Congress carried a tremendous responsibility. After all, it was they, not the people in general, who would ultimately decide the course of the rebellion and the fate of