

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 Tried³ And the Reasons why we Cannot Accede to the Prop-osition of the House of Commons On the 20th day of February Last⁴ 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 & Declareing that it is not, Nor Never was their Intention to Vest Any Congress Or Body of Men Whatsoever with that Power.⁵

[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 regula-tory 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

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the Anglo-American union. There were no public referendums or opinion polls to guide the congressmen; in the final analysis; the action of the Congress turned upon the personal decisions of the individual delegates. (For example, it seems certain that the majority of Jerseymen opposed a declaration of independence in July 1776, yet the four-man delegation in Philadelphia unanimously voted for secession.) In general, the congressmen from New Jersey sincerely favored reconciliation with the mother country as long as that was a viable option. Aside from weighty congressional duties, the delegates were troubled by inattention to personal affairs at home while they were in Philadelphia. Attendance in the Congress was sporadic, resignations frequent. De Hart's resignation was probably for personal reasons, as he states, but a sense of disillusionment and frustration with the course of events was also a factor.

Elizth. Town Novembr. 13 1775

Gentlemen of the Genl. Assembly of the Colony of New Jersey,

Your resolution¹ of the 24th of January past having appointed me with others to attend the Continental Congress of the Colonies then intended to be held at Philadelphia in May following with Instructions to propose and agree to every Constitutional measure for the accommodation of the unhappy differences then subsisting between our Mother Country & the Colonies: In Obedience to the said resolution with the other Gentlemen I attended the said Congress² but have not been able by any reasonable and Constitutional measure to obtain that accommodation so ardently wished for by the House. On the contrary his Majesty seemeth to have turned a dead Ear to all the supplications of his Loyal Colonists and his Ministers & Parliament have denounced vengeance against all those in America who refuse absolute submission to Acts of Parliament in all Cases whatsoever and have caused the Blood of Members of his Majestys most Loyal American subjects to be Spilled which with other arbitrary and Barbarous Actions hath compelled the Colonies to Arm in their Own defence and hath brought them to the verge of a Civil War with the parent State so that all prospect of procuring an accommodation by constitutional Measures seemeth to be nearly at an end.

The peculiar Circumstances of my family³ hath prevented me from attending the Congress for Sometime past and the same Still continuing renders it uncertain when I shall be able to attend. This and other reasons needless to be mentioned induces me earnestly to desire and request that the Honourable House will now be pleased to appoint another to attend the Continental Congress in my Stead.⁴ I am Gentlemen your most Obliged & most Obedient humble servt.

JOHN DE HART

1. See Sec. IV, Doc. 4.

2. De Hart served during the first session of the Second Continental Congress from May 10 to August 2, and from September 13 until his departure in November.

3. It is not known what family considerations caused De Hart to resign; he

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was reelected to Congress in 1776.

4. The assembly did not appoint a replacement since any three of the five delegates were empowered to represent the colony in the Congress.

12 The Reverend Philip Vickers Fithian Describes the Martial State of South Jersey

[Robert G. Albion and Leonidas Dodson, eds., *Philip Vickers Fithian: Journal, 1775-1776* (Princeton, 1934), p. 131.]

In the aftermath of the battles of Lexington and Concord, Bunker Hill, Fort Ticonderoga and Crown Point, Jerseymen in increasing numbers put down their plowshares and took up their swords. Just before leaving the province on a missionary trip to Virginia, the Reverend Philip Vickers Fithian (1747-1776) a 1772 graduate of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) vividly described the martial spirit that pervaded rural, sparsely populated south Jersey. Everywhere he went, from Greenwich and Bridgeton in Cumberland County to Salem in Salem County, the scene was the same: men in arms prepared to pay the ultimate price in defense of their liberties. Apparently such courage and resolve deeply affected the young Presbyterian clergyman, for he subsequently enlisted in the army as a chaplain in June 1776 and lost his life in the service of the new nation (see Sec. X, Doc. 1).

November 13, 1775

We leave New-Jersey in a melancholy State! Battalions of Militia & Minute-Men embodying—Drums & Fife rattling—Military Language in every Mouth—Numbers who a few Days ago were plain Countrymen have now clothed themselves in martial Forms—Powdered Hair [&] Sharp pinched Beavers—Uniform in Dress with their Battalion—Swords on their Thighs—& stern in the Art of War—Resolved, in steady manly Firmness, to support & establish American Liberty, or die in Battle!