

NEW JERSEY IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Constitution should be formed for America, consistent with that idea, on just and equitable Principles. There is indeed, a Dread in the Minds of many here, that some of the Leaders of the people are aiming to establish a Republic, rather than to submit to which we have Thousands who would risk the loss of their Lives in Defence of the old Constitution, and are ready to declare themselves whenever they see a Chance of its being of any Avail.

I have the Honour to be, with the greatest Respect and Regard,
My Lord, Your Lordship's most obedient & most humble Servt.
WM. FRANKLIN

1. On July 6 the Continental Congress adopted the "Declaration of the Causes and Necessity of Taking Up Arms" which, tantamount to a declaration of war, justified defensive military action against Britain.
2. See Doc. 4.

8 Charles Pettit to Joseph Reed

[Reed Papers, 2:113, New-York Historical Society.]

As the rebellion progressed, men increasingly were troubled by a clash of loyalties. While the conflict felt by royal official Charles Pettit is obvious, it was no less traumatic than that confronting the average citizen who found himself aiding and abetting a revolt against his country. Pettit (?-1806) and Joseph Reed were brothers-in-law, the former having married the latter's half sister, Sarah. Pettit had also been a partner with Reed's father, Andrew, in the Philadelphia mercantile house of Reed and Pettit. After going out of business, Pettit became, thanks to the influence of the younger Reed, deputy secretary, provincial surrogate, and finally provincial secretary of New Jersey. The two men were the closest of friends, Reed serving as Pettit's alter ego. At the time Pettit wrote the following letter, Reed was in Cambridge, Massachusetts, serving as secretary to General George Washington, commander in chief of the Continental army.

Amboy August 10th 1775

Dear Sir

... My Prospects here are daily more clouded. My Sentiments are so different from those of my Neighbours that Society, instead of affording some Relief from

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anxious & distressing Apprehensions, is clogged with so many disagreeable Circumstances that I am obliged in a great Measure to avoid it.¹ I have more than once been told that a Person avowing the Sentiments I do ought not to hold an Office in Government, and it is not improbable that I may be told so from Authority² before many Months. I have as far it was in my Power obeyed the Dictates of Prudence in my difficult Situation; but thinking as I do (and I have formed my Judgment on the best Information I could obtain) I have seen no Alternative but the Path I have taken or to have acted a Part I despise. I shall therefore meet my Destiny in this Respect with the more Resignation, being conscious of none but the best Intentions in the Measures that have brought it on; lamenting only the peculiarity of my Situation in being placed in almost the only spot of Ground in America where a Friend to American Liberty is a disgraceful Character. We have now proceeded so far in the present Mode of Opposition, that it appears to me we cannot look back but to certain Destruction—and tho' we may not *all* thoroughly approve *every* Measure of our Leaders, we must of necessity go forward with them. It therefore appears to me a Crime no less than Treason to pull back or endeavour to divide or weaken the Powers on which we have by general Consent embarked our all. I now look forward to certain Events as probable, which some Months ago appeared to me as visionary as Fairy Tales. My Stake in the General Stock is of as great Importance to it's Proprietor as that of most others, tho' I have not much Property to lose. This, tho' it affords me some bitter Moments, does by no Means overrule the ardor I feel in my Country's Service, which on this occasion would lead me to offer a greater Sacrifice were it in my Power. It may be possible that Passion takes the Lead of Judgment on this Occasion. The Circumstances of my Situation induce me to believe it has a greater Share than I am aware of, but I have endeavoured to view the Matter as free from that Ingredient as possible.

It appears to me not improbable that if the Occasion for this Opposition is continued much longer, the Powers that are will look to all the Departments of Government and as they must of necessity exercise in some Measures a Legislative Authority, they will also find it necessary that those to whom the Execution of the Laws are entrusted are Friends to the Cause. Mr. Cox³ has pressed it upon me to lay an anchor to windward, as he expresses it, with the Congress for the Offices I now hold, in Case Such a Thing should happen. Whether such a Step would be proper or not, I must confess I do not see clearly. I mention it to you for your Consideration and would wish you to take such Part in it as you think best. While I continue in my present Situation I shall to the utmost of my Power preserve Peace with my Neighbours, but how far my Endeavours will Succeed I know not. . . .

1. Perth Amboy, eastern capital of New Jersey and home of the wealthy and conservative East Jersey proprietors as well as opulent merchants, was the bastion of royal government in the province. It was perhaps the only town in the colony where the royalists outnumbered the rebels.

2. That is, from Governor William Franklin, for whom Pettit served as private secretary.

3. Probably John Cox of Philadelphia, a close friend of both Pettit and Reed, who was active in rebel organizations in Pennsylvania.