

VI EMPIRE OR INDEPENDENCE

privileges with the rest of Mankind we have a Right to the free Exercise of them until divested thereof by some Act of our own, but that ever any people divested them[selves] of their Right of Representation is an absurdity too triffling for the [torn] of thought. We cannot conceive the wise Author of Our Existance ever de[signed?] that a certain quantity of the Earth on which we tread should be annexed to Man to Compleat his dignity and fit him for society. Was the sole design of Government either security of Land, or Money, the possession of either or both these would be the only necessary qualification for its members. But we apprehend the benign intentions of a well regulated Government extend to the security of [a] much more valuable possession—The Rights and privileges of Freemen—for the defence of which every kind of property and even Life itself have been Liberally expended. We ask, what we have in the present state of Affairs to induce us to spill our Blood? If we adopt the measures now pursuing in this province we Establish an usurpation of Every [illegible] with that [illegible] endeavoring to destroy. In defence of them we armed ourselves; when a prospect of securing them Ceases our Military Operations may be justly deemed by the World A Rapacious thirst of Wantonly shedding Human Blood.

[Forty-two signatures affixed.]

4 Joseph Brearley to David Brearley

[Department of Defense Records, 2284, New Jersey State Library.]

To not a few Jerseymen the debate over the proper constitutional relationship between Britain and America became academic after the outbreak of warfare; in the aftermath of Lexington and Concord men such as the Brearley brothers rushed to take up arms in defense of their homes as well as their liberties—if not for independence. At the time the following testimony of hardship and determination was written, Joseph (1742-1805) was serving as a captain in the Second New Jersey Regiment of the Continental Line; this regiment was a part of the Northern Army, commanded first by General David Wooster and then by General John Thomas, that attempted unsuccessfully to take the British garrisons at Montreal and Quebec in May 1776. (The Northern Army consisted of remnants of and reinforcements to the force that had earlier failed in the same mission in November and December 1775.) Joseph was promoted to major in 1777 and served for the rest of the war as an aide to General George Washington. David (1745-1790) was also a captain in the Second New Jersey, eventually rising to the rank of lieutenant colonel. He later enjoyed a successful political career, holding the positions of chief justice of the New Jersey Supreme Court (1779-1789) and delegate to the Constitutional Convention of 1787.

NEW JERSEY IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Montreal 7th March 1776

Dear Brother

I have now the pleasure of an opportunity to inform you of our arrival at this place, after a very fatiguing march of 27 days, with the loss of only 8 men by sickness on the road. Our arrival was on Sunday night last, the six days we lay at Albany are included in the 27 days.

Montreal is distant from Trenton about 500 miles, all which way our men performed with the greatest spirit imaginable.

We were obliged to lay out in the woods and on the lakes, three nights, the weather being extremely inclement. We suffered much. Eight or nine days we were crossing lakes Champlain and George, which, at the crossing places, are about 180 miles from land to land. Two days of the nine we waded through water and slush half leg deep, occasioned by a south-west storm of rain. The last of the two days, in the afternoon, the wind shifted around to the north, and brought on a most dreadful storm of snow and hail, which came directly in our faces. Here we were all near perishing, had it not been for a few hardy fellows, who pushed on to an island at about the distance of 12 miles, where they kindled a fire, and then returned for those left scattered on the lake, many of whom, when they were taken up, were helpless, but with care, they were brought along and seem now as hardy as the rest, except one, who at this time lays poorly Having plenty of provisions, seemed in some measure to mitigate the distresses.

I doubt if history can furnish us with greater performances in marching. One day with another averages nearly 24 miles. As for the lift we got in sleds, it was very trifling.

I hope our countrymen will now be convinced, that although we are young and inexperienced soldiers, we are determined to persevere with firmness unto the end, and, that they who think us Poltroons will cheat themselves. What but the Glorious cause of Liberty could induce us, and our men, to expose ourselves to the many difficulties we have already surmounted?

I have now given you a sketch of our march, and in all probability this will be the last account you will have from me, untill my adventures will afford you something more agreeable. I will therefore give you notice of what it is expected we are going to do.

General Lee¹ who is expected to take the command in the department, is hourly expected. His disposition and great spirit, will, I presume, ere long prove the valour of the troops. God grant that they may acquit themselves like soliders, and more especially the Jersey Blues! May they be crowned with fresh laurels to add to their former greatness.

There is not the most distant prospect of the garrison of Quebeck surrendering. Preperation for storming is daily making. Ladders for scaling the wall, (which carry twelve men abreast) are now ready. Nothing delays our attack but a parcell of troops. The garrison consists of about 1200 or 1400 men. We are yet only 1400 strong, but expect three times that number very soon.

Ere another month be past, expect to hear of the reduction, or at least, the siege of Quebec.

We are animated with a thirst after Honor and the welfare of our Country, and hope to acquit ourselves like noble sons of Freedom, and show the dogs of tyranny, we dare to fight for Liberty.

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Next Monday is the day we propose to set for the attack on Quebeck.

Please give my kind respects to our family, and remember me to all enquiring friends. Please to give my particular respects to Major Brearley.²

Adieu

JOSEPH BREARLEY CAPT.

1. General Charles Lee, who later figured prominently in the battle of Monmouth (see Sec. IX, Doc. 7).

2. Probably a reference to their father, David Brearley (1703-1785), who lived on the family estate Spring Grove near Maidenhead (now Lawrence Township).

5 Charles Pettit to Joseph Reed

[Reed Papers, 3:13, New-York Historical Society.]

Perhaps because of their unstable social and political orders, the Middle Atlantic colonies in general did not share the enthusiasm for independence that gripped first New England and then the South. By the spring of 1776 strong Jersey Whigs like Charles Pettit were concerned less about the opposition of the vocal royalist minority than the ambivalence of the uncommitted. While there existed a large potential base of support for independence in New Jersey, most citizens understandably faced the prospect of separation from the empire with apprehension and hesitation; they had not yet become convinced of the need for independence, and thus they were not willing to take rash steps. Time would be required to overcome the trauma of committing treason against the mother country, to demonstrate the viability of the popular front, and to expose the chimerical hopes of reconciliation whether through parliamentary action or the negotiations of special commissioners.

Amboy March 25 1776

Dear Sir

... However determined the Congress¹ may be to cut the Ligament, it would certainly be attended with Danger to do it suddenly in the present State of Things. For however right and necessary the Measure may be the People at large must individually see and feel the Necessity and Propriety of it before they will give it such an Acquiescence as is necessary to ensure it success. An explicit Declaration of it now,