

VII FROM COLONY TO STATE

9 Joseph Barton to Henry Wisner

[Force, comp., *American Archives*, 5th ser., 1:139.]

Although issuance of the Declaration of Independence merely acknowledged the nature of the contest between Britain and America that had been raging for the past year, it was a turning point in the lives of many citizens. Men were now finally forced to cast their allegiance with either the mother country or the new nation and to confront the stark realities of a war for independence. Often the two things were related, as in the case of Joseph Barton, assemblyman (1775-1776) from Sussex County, owner of an enormous amount of real estate, and agent for the East Jersey proprietors. Apparently the military disadvantages facing the Americans eroded his support for independence, for he joined the British army in 1776. His cousin was not so fainthearted. Henry Wisner of Orange County, New York, served in the provincial assembly, the Continental Congress, and the convention that prepared his state's constitution.

Newton, Sussex County, Jersey, July 9, 1776

Dear Sir:

I received your favour of the 5th instant, relating to flint-stones. I have sent a sample of the flint our country abounds in. If there can be any way of manufacturing that sort of flint to any advantage, there is enough of it. . . . But, sir, we want none of the flint here: you may have them all, for we have no powder, which gives great uneasiness to the people in general, as we expect an Indian war, should our forces fail to the northward. For my own part, could I procure powder at forty shillings, [I] should embrace the opportunity. As to lead, there is a good lead-mine at Nepehoh. I have used the lead oftentimes: we could help ourselves to that article.

I pray, if in your power, you would order powder, if it were but a quarter of a pound, each man. I should rest much easier for my part, and think we could defend ourselves, if attacked by our enemies, in some measure; but now we have nothing but our axes or sticks to fight with, should we be attacked. . . .

Sir, it gives a great turn to the minds of our people declaring our independence. Now we know what to depend on. For my part, I have been at a great stand: I could hardly own the King, and fight against him at the same time; but now these matters are cleared up. Heart and hand shall move together. I don't think there will be five Tories in our part of the country in ten days after matters are well known. We have had great numbers who would do nothing until we were declared a free State, who now are ready to spend their lives and fortunes in defence of our country.

I must, my dear friend, bid you farewell. May the Supreme Judge of all things sit at the head of our affairs, and give that great and august body, the Congress, wisdom to govern us, and by their wisdom make this continent a great and happy empire. I expect a great turn one way or the other before I see you again.

I am, sir, your loving and affectionate cousin,
JOSEPH BARTON.