

NEW JERSEY IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

would take a generation or more for Jerseymen to overcome the bitter legacies of the Revolution.

The Loyalists were tragic heroes. They were for the most part (there were scoundrels on both sides) people of integrity who were no less courageous or honorable, no less committed to constitutional government and civil liberties than the patriots. But unlike their rebellious neighbors, they preferred reform to revolution, compromise to confrontation, law and order to disrespect for government and disregard for laws. They simply misread the historical realities of the times and consequently cast their lot with the losing side in the first anti-colonial war for independence in modern history. As a result they paid the price of verbal and physical abuse, lost property and shattered dreams, imprisonment and exile—and even death—for their principles. Even after the war most of those who remained in or returned to New Jersey were a people apart—second-class citizens who endured ostracism, discrimination, and shame. But the real losers were the refugees, for their reward for service to the crown was often only financial distress and exile in a foreign country (Docs. 17 and 18).

1 James Moody, The Making of a Loyalist

[*James Moody, Narrative of the Exertions and Sufferings of Lieut. James Moody, in the Cause of Government since the Year 1776* (London, 1783), pp. 1-6.]

James Moody (1746-1809), a wealthy Sussex County farmer who owned approximately 500 acres of land near the Delaware River, was one of New Jersey's most notorious Loyalists. In April 1777 Moody, who had opted for prudent neutrality with the onset of the Revolution, fled behind British lines with seventy-three friends and neighbors. He joined Brigadier General Cortlandt Skinner's First New Jersey Volunteers (Loyalist), quickly rising to the rank of lieutenant because of his daring raids and successful recruiting in his native state. Captured by General Anthony Wayne and imprisoned at West Point in August 1780, the elusive Moody escaped a month later and resumed military activities briefly before embarking for London. (His brother John was not so fortunate; he was captured and hanged as a spy in Philadelphia in 1781.) Soon after the publication of his memoirs in 1783, Moody migrated to Nova Scotia. In the excerpt that follows, he recounts his reaction to the events leading to independence and the factors that prompted him to side with the British.

[1774-1777]

Choice and plan, it would seem, have seldom much influence in determining either men's characters, or their conditions. These are usually the result of circumstances utterly without our controul. Of the truth of this position, the Writer's own recent history affords abundant proofs.

Seven years ago, few human events seemed more improbable, than that he, a plain, contented farmer, settled on a large, fertile, pleasant, and well-improved farm of his own, in the best climate and happiest country in the world, should ever beat his ploughshare into a sword, and commence a *solider*. Nor was it less improbable that he should ever become a *writer*, and be called upon to print a *narrative* of his own adventures. Yet necessity and a sense of duty, contrary to his natural inclination, soon forced him to appear in the former of these characters; and the importunity of friends has now prevailed with him to assume the latter.

When the present ill-fated Rebellion first broke out, he was, as has already been hinted, a happy farmer, without a wish or an idea of any other enjoyment, than that of making happy, and being happy with, a beloved wife, and three promising children. He loved his neighbours, and hopes they were not wholly without regard for him. Clear of debt, and at ease in his possessions, he had seldom thought much of political or state questions; but he felt and knew he had every possible reason to be grateful for, and attached to, that glorious Constitution to which he owed his security. The first great uneasiness he ever felt, on account of the Public, was when, after the proceedings of the first Congress¹ were known, he foresaw the imminent danger to which this Constitution was exposed; but he was completely miserable when, not long after, he saw it totally overturned.

The situation of a man who, in such a dilemma, wishes to do right, is trying and difficult. In following the multitude, he was sure of popular applause; this is always pleasing; and it is too dearly bought only when a man gives up for it the approbation of his own conscience. He foresaw, in its fullest force, that torrent of reproach, insult, and injury, which he was sure to draw down on himself and his family, by a contrary conduct; nor does he wish to deny, that, for some time, these overawed and staggered him. For himself he felt but little; but he had either too much or too little of the man about him, to bear the seeing of his nearest and dearest relatives disgraced and ruined. Of the points in debate between the parent-state and his native country, he pretended not to be a competent judge: they were studiously so puzzled and perplexed, that he could come to no other conclusion, than that, however real or great the grievances of the Americans *might* be, rebellion was not the way to redress them. It required moreover but little skill to know, that rebellion is the foulest of all crimes; and that what was begun in wickedness must end in ruin. With this conviction strong upon his mind, he resolved, that there was no difficulty, danger, or distress, which, as an honest man, he ought not to undergo, rather than see his country thus disgraced and undone. In spite therefore of incapacity, in spite of disinclination—nay, in spite even of concern for his family—with the most ardent love for his country, and the warmest attachment to his countrymen, he resolved to do any thing, and to be any thing, not inconsistent with integrity—to fight, to bleed, to die—rather than live to see the venerable Constitution of his country totally lost, and his countrymen enslaved. What the consequences of this resolution have been, it is the intention of the following pages to describe. . . .

Of the true causes that gave birth to this unhappy quarrel, Mr. Moody is

NEW JERSEY IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

unwilling to give any opinion. He is no politician; and, therefore, by no means qualified to reconcile the contradictory assertions and arguments of the contending parties. This only, as an individual of that description of people of whom the greatest part of every community must consist, he thinks it incumbent on him to declare, that it did not originate with the *people* of America, properly so called. They felt no real grievances, and therefore could have no inducement to risk substantial advantages in the pursuit of such as were only imaginary. In making this declaration, he is confident he speaks the sentiments of a great majority of the peasantry of America. But, in every country, there are multitudes who, with little property, and perhaps still less principle, are always disposed, and always eager for a change. Such persons are easily wrought upon, and easily persuaded to enlist under the banners of pretended patriots and forward demagogues; of whom also every country is sufficiently prolific.

In America, these popular leaders had a set of men to assist them, who inherited, from their ancestors, the most rooted dislike and antipathy to the constitution of the parent-state; and, by means of *their* friendly co-operation, they were able to throw the whole continent into a ferment in the year 1774, and maddened almost every part of the country with *Associations, Committees, and Liberty-poles*, and all the preliminary apparatus necessary to a *Revolt*. The general cry was, *Join or die!* Mr. Moody relished neither of these alternatives, and therefore remained on his farm a silent, but not unconcerned, spectator of the black cloud that had been gathering, and was now ready to burst on his devoted head. It was in vain that he took every possible precaution, consistent with a good conscience, not to give offence. Some infatuated associations were very near consigning him to the latter of these alternatives, only because neither his judgment, nor his conscience, would suffer him to adopt the former. He was perpetually harassed by these Committees;² and a party employed by them once actually assaulted his person, having first flourished their *tomahawks* over his head in a most insulting manner. Finding it impossible either to convince these associators, or to be convinced by them, any longer stay among them was useless; and an attempt made upon him soon after, rendered it impossible. On Sunday 28th March 1777, while he was walking in his grounds with his neighbour Mr. Hutcheson,³ he saw a number of armed men marching towards his house. He could have no doubt of their intention; and endeavoured to avoid them. They fired three different shots at him; but happily missed him, and he escaped. From this time, therefore, he sought the earliest opportunity to take shelter behind the British lines; and set out for this purpose in April 1777. Seventy-three of his neighbours, all honest men, of the fairest and most respectable characters, accompanied him in this retreat. . . .

1. The First Continental Congress, which met in Philadelphia September 5-October 26, 1774. For the background of the Congress and the implementation of its program in New Jersey, see Sec. III.

2. For the efforts of committeemen to enforce the Provincial Association in Sussex County, see Sec. V, Doc. 9.

3. William Hutchinson, who, like his three brothers, served with Moody in the New Jersey Volunteers.