

Letters of Members of the Continental Congress

EDITED BY
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our Country from being desolated by the Hand of Tyranny. General Howe having taken Possession of Staten Island, and the Jerseys being drained of their Militia for the Defence of New York, I am directed by Congress to request you will proceed immediately to embody your Militia for the Establishment of the flying Camp, and march them with all possible Expedition, either by Battalions, Detachments of Battalions, or by Companies, to the City of Philadelphia.²

The present Campaign, I have no Doubt, if we exert ourselves properly, will secure the Enjoyment of our Liberties for ever. All Accounts agree that Great Britain will make her greatest effort this Summer. Should we therefore be able to keep our Ground, we shall afterwards have little to apprehend from her. I do therefore most ardently beseech and request you, in the Name and by the Authority of Congress, as you regard your own Freedom, and as you stand engaged by the most solemn Ties of Honour to support the Common Cause, to strain every Nerve to send forward your Militia. This is a Step of such infinite Moment, that, in all human Probability, your speedy Compliance will prove the Salvation of your Country. It is impossible we can have any higher Motives to induce us to act.—We should reflect too, that the Loss of this Campaign will inevitably protract the War; and that in order to gain it, we have only to exert ourselves, and to make Use of the Means which God and Nature have given us to defend ourselves. I must therefore again repeat to you that the Congress most anxiously expect and request, you will not lose a Moment in carrying into Effect this Requisition with all the Zeal, Spirit, and Dispatch which are so indispensably required by the critical Situation of our Affairs.

I have the Honour to be
Gentlemen

your most obed. and very hble svt.

JOHN HANCOCK, President.

To The Honble Convention of Maryland.

To the Assembly of Delaware Government.

757. ABRAHAM CLARK TO ELIAS DAYTON.¹

PHILA. July 4th, 1776.

My Dear friend,

Our Seeming bad success in Canada, I dare say gives you great uneasiness. In Times of danger, and under misfortunes true Courage and Magnanimity can only be ascertained. In the Course of Such a War we must expect some Losses. We are told a Panick Seized the Army. If so it hath not reached the Senate. At the Time our Forces in Canada were retreating before a Victorious Army, while Genl. Howe with a Large

² See the *Journals*, July 4. The action appears to have been taken in consequence of a letter from Washington, July 3, *Writings* (ed. Ford), IV. 200; Force, *Am. Arch.*, fourth ser., VI. 1234.

[757]¹ Hist. Soc. of Pa., Dreer Coll., Signers, I. 112. Facsimiles are in Brotherhead, *Book of the Signers* (1861), p. 39; Smith, *Am. Hist. and Lit. Curiosities*, second ser., pl. LXI. The letter is addressed: "To Elias Dayton Esqr. Colonel of the third battalion of N. Jersey Forces,—at Johns Town Mohawk River, or Crown point. to be forwarded to their Station from Albany. Free Abra: Clark."

Armament is advancing towards N. York; Our Congress Resolved to Declare the United Colonies *Free and independent States*. a Declaration for this Purpose, I expect, will this day pass Congress. it is nearly gone through, after which it will be Proclaimed with all the State and Solemnity circumstances will admit. It is gone so far that we must now be a free independent State, or a Conquered Country.²

I am among a Consistory of Kings as our Enemy says. I assure you Sir, Our Congress is an August Assembly, and can they Support the Declaration now on the Anvil, they will be the greatest Assembly on Earth.

I am Dr Sir,

Yours and Mr Caldwells most Obedient and Hum Servt.

ABRA: CLARK

758. CAESAR RODNEY TO THOMAS RODNEY.¹

PHILADA. July the 4th 1776.

Sir—

. . . . I arrived in Congress (tho detained by thunder and Rain) time Enough to give my Voice in the matter of Independence.² It is determined by the Thirteen United Colonies, without even one decenting Colony. We have now Got through with the Whole of the declaration, and Ordered it to be printed, so that you will soon have the pleasure of seeing it. Hand-bills of it will be printed, and sent to the Armies, Cities, County Towns etc. To be published or rather proclaimed in form. Don't Neglect to Attend Closely and Carefully to my Harvest and You'l oblige

Yours etc.

CAESAR RODNEY

The appearance of the Declaration of Independence in the printed *Journals* under July 4, with the names of the signers appended, naturally gives the impression that the instrument was signed on that day by those whose names are attached to it. Attention however to the complete journals and to other easily demonstrable facts shows that this could not have been the case.

Considering first the journals note must be taken of certain entries which are not found in the *Journals* as originally printed but which are essential for the history of the signing of the Declaration.

On July 4 it was

“Ordered, That the declaration be authenticated and printed.

“That the committee appointed to prepare the declaration, superintend and correct the press.”

² Cf. the letter to Dayton, July 14, in the next volume. In a letter to Dayton, Aug. 6, Clark says: “As to my title, I know not yet whether it will be honourable or dishonourable: the issue of the war must settle it. Perhaps our Congress will be exalted on a high gallows. We were truly brought to the case of the three lepers: If we continued in the state we were in, it was evident we must perish; if we declared Independence we might be saved—we could but perish.” Force, *Am. Arch.*, fifth ser., I. 785.

[758]¹ Henkels, *Catalogue*, no. 1236, item 86 (facsimile opposite page 1).

² See McKean's letters to Dallas and to Caesar A. Rodney, nos. 759, 760, *post*. In the first of these McKean says that the fourth of July was a rainy day.