

STORIES of New Jersey

His close attention to the affairs of the State was not relaxed while he was devoting his energies to national problems as a member of the Continental Congress. His flourishing signature is affixed to many important Congressional reports as well as to the Declaration of Independence. Yet despite the time that these reports must have taken, Governor Livingston could report to a friend that the New Jersey legislature in 1778 had "passed many valuable and spirited laws and dispatched more business than usual which is principally to be ascribed to Mr. Clark who has indeed great talents for legislation and is a man of indefatigable industry."

Though he worked hard and with seeming confidence in the successful outcome of the struggle, Clark was beset by doubts, sometimes expressed in letters to friends. "Perhaps our congress will be exalted on a high gallows," he wrote in August 1776. "It is not in our numbers, our union, our valour, I dare trust. I think an interposing Providence hath been evident in all the events that necessarily led us to what we are--I mean independent states; but for what purpose, whether to make us a great empire, or to make our ruin more complete, the issue only can determine."

Clark expected this same devotion to duty from others. Late in the war, January 1778, when dissatisfaction smouldered throughout the army, "Congress Abraham" hit at the officers who chafed under the burden of things gone wrong. "...Who that are either in civil or military departments are not weary and wish for retirement?" he asked. "This is no time to talk of ease and retirement; let us first establish our liberties--our desires of ease will be then obtained."

He never hesitated to rebuke even those in the highest positions. When General Washington ordered that all who did not declare allegiance to the Continental Congress would be treated as enemies, Clark rose furiously in defense of civil liberties. The Congress had directly opposed any such requirement. "Though I believe him honest," Clark declared of the general, "I think him fallible." He took issue frequently with Governor Livingston, too. They disagreed chiefly on the questions of complete isolation from Europe and on a loose federal government, both of which Clark favored.

An exceptional politician, Clark was intimately concerned with the nation's government. Not until the Bill of Rights had been included did he approve the Constitution, and it was on his motion that a committee drew up the law which put the Constitution into operation.

On September 15, 1804, the slender, still upright man, creasing his heavy brows before the bright sun, was watching a group of workmen build a bridge across the stream that ran through his meadow. Suddenly he collapsed, and a little later he died of sunstroke. They buried Abraham Clark in the cemetery of the Rahway Presbyterian Church, and on his gravestone was written the epitaph: "Firm and decided as a patriot, zealous and faithful as a friend to the public, he loved his country and adhered to her cause in the darkest hours of her struggle against oppression."



Here the Declaration was adopted.