

# STORIES of New Jersey

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44 Chestnut Street, Newark, New Jersey

## RICHARD STOCKTON



*Richard Stockton*

Richard Stockton was the New Jersey signer of the Declaration of Independence who had most to lose by his opposition to England. He was in a position to try hardest to heal the growing break between the mother country and her colonies, but when he saw the impossibility of his task he labored to establish the new country on a firm basis with the coolness and courage for which he was famous.

Stockton came of a long line of prominent Englishmen-- public officials and Crusaders -- and was himself a link in the chain of public service that the family forged in this country. The first Stockton in America arrived in 1656 and made his home originally on Long Island and then in Burlington, New Jersey. In 1696 the first of the family's land holdings in Princeton was acquired, and this tract of 400 acres, including the property on which Princeton University and the Princeton Theological

Seminary now stand, was enlarged to 5,500 acres shortly after.

The eldest in a family of eight children, Richard represented the fourth generation in America. He was born October 1, 1730 on the "homestead plantation" of the Stockton estate in Princeton which his father had inherited.

The family possessed ample means to educate the children in the most generous measure that the times afforded, and the eldest son was sent to the academy at Nottingham, Maryland, conducted by the Rev. Samuel Finley, who later became a president of Princeton. Richard attended the College of New Jersey and graduated with high honors in 1748, the year of the first commencement. He was the only one of that senior class in a college for Presbyterian ministers who was to join another profession. Stockton entered the law office of David Ogden of Newark and was licensed as an attorney in 1754. Elias Boudinot, later president of the Continental Congress, William Paterson and Joseph Reed, all of whom became famous lawyers in New Jersey, were among a group of bright young men who read and practised with him.

The brilliance of Stockton's mind and the power and logic of his pleadings brought him, within a decade, a large practise and a reputation of being one of the most eloquent lawyers in the colonies. Unlike most members of his profession, however, he showed a disinclination as a young man to enter public life,