

STORIES of New Jersey

his position with the British authorities, for places of trust and honor continued to be conferred upon him almost to the eve of the war.

During the last years of this pre-Revolutionary period much of Stockton's thought and time was given to the development and adornment of "Morven," the charming estate which he had inherited at Princeton. This lovely place, which was given its name by his poetical wife, is one of the few houses in this country which have remained in the same family for almost 250 years. The pleasant, wide-winged structure of pinkish-red brick covered by wistaria vines stands west of the Battle Monument in Princeton in a gracious setting of lawn and trees. It was built by Richard, grandfather of the Signer, between 1701 and 1709. To this estate Stockton brought horses and cattle of the best breeds, and he assembled an art collection and a library among the finest of colonial times. He set out most if not all of the trees, including a row of catalpas on the street line.

Life at Morven was conducted in the most lavish splendor. A power in the public life of New Jersey and famous throughout the colonies and abroad, the dignified, polished Supreme Court Justice entertained frequently, and welcomed strangers as well as friends with all the elegance and formality of ancient hospitality. He was an accomplished horseman, a particularly skilled swordsman and adept in all the masculine sports which the time afforded and his wealth allowed him to enjoy. It would not be difficult to understand, therefore, if Richard Stockton had continued to counsel moderation in dealing with England. He had luxury and social position and the comfort of his family to lose. But above all, he was an essentially moderate man whose prudent opposition to the British government had kept within the bounds of his allegiance to the King. Despite all this, he followed his honest convictions and fought for independence.

Stockton resigned from the Royal Council, which was composed almost entirely of Tories and neutrals, and on June 21, 1776 was elected along with Abraham Clark, John Hart, Francis Hopkinson and Dr. John Witherspoon to represent New Jersey at the Continental Congress. The Provincial Congress, which had elected these representatives, also empowered them to join with other representatives in declaring the colonies independent. Although John Adams recorded that Stockton made "a short and energetic speech for independence," the *Public Journal* of Congress does not disclose the presence of any New Jersey delegate other than Francis Hopkinson at any time on or before July 4. The *Secret Journal* of the Congress states that the colonial representatives signed the parchment copy of the Declaration on August 2. Stockton affixed his signature at the head of the New Jersey delegation. The names of the group are at the bottom of the document in the second column from the right.

Defeated by William Livingston in 1776 for the governorship of the State after a tie on the first vote, Stockton refused to be named Chief Justice. He preferred, he said, the more active life of Congress. He served on important committees with Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Rush, Robert Treat Paine, Francis Lightfoot Lee and others, and on September 26 Congress appointed him and George Clymer to go to Ticonderoga and report upon the condition of the army to John Hancock, President of Congress. They wrote two reports, which are preserved in the Library of Congress. Both are in Stockton's handwriting but are signed by him and Clymer. Stockton wrote from Saratoga that he had found the troops of New Jersey "marching with cheerfulness" but that "a great part of the men were barefooted and barelegged. . . There is not," he added, "a single shoe or stocking to be had in this part of the world, or I would ride a hundred miles through the woods and purchase them with my own money."

Upon his return from the North he was appointed to a Congressional commit-