

STORIES of New Jersey

tee to devise means of helping General Washington in his effort to block the progress of Lord Cornwallis across New Jersey, but the enemy was on the march through the State before counter-measures could be taken, and Princeton lay in the path. Stockton, his wife and their six children fled to the home of his friend, John Covenhoven, in Monmouth County, but betrayed by Loyalists, the Congressman and Covenhoven were arrested during the night of November 30, 1776 and dragged in bitterly cold weather to the Perth Amboy jail. From there Stockton was carried to New York and lodged in the common jail. He was treated with such severity that Congress protested, and Washington was instructed to warn General Howe that future treatment of prisoners by the American army would match that accorded captives by the enemy. Congress adopted the resolution on January 3, 1777. Soon afterward Stockton was released in an exchange of prisoners, but his health was shattered by his mistreatment, and he never fully recovered.

He returned to his beloved Morven, which had been occupied as headquarters by Cornwallis during the 1776 assault on New Jersey, to find that it had been pillaged by British and Hessian troops in the general plundering of the neighborhood. The library and papers were burned, the art treasures ruined, the furniture used for firewood, the contents of the wine cellar consumed, the land laid waste and the horses and livestock driven away. One British soldier had slashed his sabre across the throat of a portrait of Richard painted by Copley. Though the picture has since been retouched, the mark of the blade is still visible. The plate and other valuable articles had been packed in three boxes and buried in the woods some distance from the house, but through treachery two boxes were discovered and fell into the hands of the soldiers. The third escaped detection and its contents were recovered by the family.

The depreciation of the Continental currency, in which Stockton had invested heavily, gravely depleted his fortune. A cancerous infection combined with his war injuries to make him an invalid until his life ended. He was not destined to see the triumph of the cause to which he had contributed so much. He died at Morven on February 28, 1781, in his fifty-first year, eight months before the British surrendered.

The body of Richard Stockton lies in an unmarked Quaker grave in the burial ground of the Friends' Meeting House at Stony Brook, but New Jersey commemorated her famous son in 1888 by placing a statue of him in Statuary Hall in the Capitol.



Morven, Stockton's home at Princeton