

LETTER OF THOMAS LEAMING, JR., TO
HON. WILLIAM PATERSON, 1789.

Contributed by CHARLES H. BROWNING.

[The letter of Mr. Leaming is so autobiographical in character that it will only be necessary to state, that he was born September 1, 1748, in Cape May County, New Jersey, and died of yellow fever October 29, 1797, in Philadelphia.]

Philadelphia 17th Feb^r 1789.

Dear Sir,

The Acquaintance I have had with you induces me to solicit your Vote and interest to appoint me Prothonotary of the Federal Court in Pennsylvania, whenever that Court shall be instituted, hoping that I may be deemed capable of serving the office with Propriety, having studied Law regularly with the late President M^r Dickinson, was admitted to practice in Pennsylvania, and licenced in New Jersey in 1772—did practice till the Courts were stoped by the Revolution, and about 18 months ago resumed it in this City. With respect to Merit shall readily admit that many in the Union have had much more than I, but apprehend many have less in supporting the Measures in favour of the late Revolution, who have been or will be honour'd with Publick employments, which encourages me to make this Application. As you may not have been fully acquainted with my situation or much of my Conduct previous to and during the Revolution, beg leave to give you some account thereof a Part of which you will doubtless recollect. After having finished my Studies in Philad^a. I returned to Cape May in order to give some attention to the Affairs of my Father and the Affairs of an Uncle from whom I had some Expectations which both duty and Interest induced me

to, as they were both so infirm as not to be able to attend to much Business and living there I practiced the Law 'till the Courts were shut early in the War. I happened to be in Philad^a when the first Information came of the Battle of Lexington I immediately joined a Company as soon as formed under the then Cap^t Mifflin & now President of Pennsylvania, in order to have Military Exercise to enable me to instruct the Inhabitants of Cape May: being then fully convinced that the Contest must be determined by the Sword, (and apprehending that the utmost unanimity was especially necessary amongst all the People of America, and that I could be most useful in the County where I resided). As soon as I considered myself capable of giving Instruction, I returned to Cape May to endeavour to instruct and unite the People and devoted a very large Share of my Time to Military Duty, serving on Committees &c: I handed an Association Paper to most of the Inhabitants of Cape May, and had the Pleasure to say, that only one Man in that County refused signing it, and do conclude that much of their Unanimity for which they were so remarkable during the whole War, for altho' a Frontier County, no one of them having joined the Enemy, or were known to be concerned in the New York Trade, was owing to my Exertions. In 1776, you doubtless recollect that I had the Honour of meeting you in the Convention as a Deputy from that County, at a Time when the Deputies in a particular Manner risked every thing that was dear and valuable to Mankind on Earth, for had the British conquered, Halts most likely would have been our Portion. This was a Scene too trying to many good Men, as the Enemy had just landed 33,000 Men on Staten Island, as it was said, and the Americans had very few, if any regular Troops in the Field. In this Situation, I most heartily joined you and others in determining to stand or fall with the

Liberty of our Country and instructed Congress to declare it Independant. The Language being that we had better risque the Halter, or seek Refuge in the Wilderness among the Savages than submit to Great Brittain. In the Fall of 1776, finding the Enemy were likely to over-run New Jersey, I did not stay there to take the chance of a Protection as many others did, I came to Philad^a and joined the City Troop of Light Horse, at a Time too, when they were much broken up, occasioned by different causes, for when we Marched to Camp only about 12 or 15 Men (besides officers) out of between 40 and 50 went.* With this small Number I went, and we joined General Washington in the Rear of his broken flying Army, in his Retreat near Princetown, Cornwallis then at Kingstown, said to have 10.000 Men & next morning drove us over the Delaware. Our little Troop remained with the General nearly all that Winter,† until after the Continental Troops of Regular Horse were formed, when he permitted us to return to Philad^a, first having offered Commissions in the New Corps to any of us who should chuse to accept them. From that time to this, I have continued in the Philad^a Troop and never missed a single Tour of Duty, during the War, when called on, in which no Allowance was ever asked by me, or made either for Pay or Horses, and Generally paid our own Expenses. As the War shut up the Courts, I entered into the Mercantile Business in Philad^a where I settled and have remained ever since (except when the Enemy had it) and did a large share of Business during the Whole Time Continental Money was in Circulation, which I ever gave the fullest Credit to as long

* The Pay Roll of the Troop shows, that from December 1, 1776, to February 1, 1777, twenty-five members and one trumpeter were on duty, and the total pay, £242.11.3.—*Ed. Penna. Mag.*

† The Troop was dismissed by Washington, January 23, 1777.—*Ed. Penna. Mag.*

as Congress did, being of Opinion that the Fate of the War depended on it; by which I suffered very greatly indeed for altho' I had a large sum in Trade, and was very lucky in Arrivals, and also in Privateering (which I considered the most beneficial Way, in which I could serve Myself and the Publick). The Depreciation was so rappid that my Losses were great, and the Publick the only Gainers by my Risque and Exertions, as I was concerned in the Importation of Considerable Quantities of Amunition, Salt, and other Necessaries, and also in the Capture of near 50 Prizes large and small; in which more than 1000 Prisoners were taken, which served to exchange for American Prisoners in the Hands of the Enemy. By one of the Privateers, which I built and held a Principle share in, about 500 Hessian-English Soldiers were taken in there Vessels within a few Days. This would have been deemed an Acquisition by the Army even if they had lost half the number in affecting it and yet it did not cost the Life of a Man or the Publick, One Shilling. Exclusive of this I was concerned in lending large Sums to the Publick, at different Periods on Loan Office Certificates which by Depreciation was compelled to part with the principal Parts of, at a Loss, and the small sum remaining can now only receive the Interest or in Depreciated Paper, and that only in partial Payments, as is the Case with a considerable Quantity of Provisions which the House I was concerned in, lent out of their own private store for the use of the Army, about the Time of the Revolt, when it was near starving, and the Publick had neither Money or Credit to purchase with, this Provision was designed for the use of our own Vessels, and which we were obliged to replace by paying the Cash for—even a higher Price than we were allowed afterwards in Certificates, which even now are not worth more than 5/ in the Pound.

Should you be of Opinion that I am Capable of filling the office and deserve it, as well as any other aplicant, I have to ask the Favour of your Vote and Interest, promising that if I should be honoured with appointment, that I shall endeavour to do Justice to it. Have to beg you will please acknowledge the Receipt of this when at leisure and if you should think Favourable of my Application beg you would inform me (previous to my Appointment to that office being made), of the Time when its likely to take Place. I'll endeavour to attend the Senate at such Time—concerning that in the Arrangement of the Judicial Department under the new Constitution, suit Court will be instituted and of course suit and Officers must be appointed. Your Compliance will confer the Highest obligations on Sir, your Most Obedient & very Hble Serv^t

Tho^s Leaming Jun^r

Hon. William Paterson Esq.
Brunswick.