



DEDICATION OF PLAQUE

MARKING

The Farmstead of

JOHN HART

Signer of the Declaration of Independence

Sponsored jointly by
the New Jersey Societies,

SONS OF THE REVOLUTION
SONS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Hopewell, New Jersey

June 14, 1959



SONS OF THE REVOLUTION



SONS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

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The JOHN HART Farmstead

Among the objectives of the two patriotic societies, the Sons of the Revolution and the Sons of the American Revolution, are the preservation and the marking of sites with historical significance, that posterity may be reminded of its inheritance from the Founding Fathers of the United States of America. Because of the prominence of JOHN HART in New Jersey history, the two societies have jointly erected this bronze tablet upon the site of the Signer's farmstead, which he purchased January 10, 1742. The last remaining parcel of this farm consists of seven acres, now owned by Lt. Colonel and Mrs. Cleon E. Hammond, who for several years have been restoring the property. The restoration is still in process at the present time.

Buildings upon the JOHN HART Farmstead only in part go back to his time. It is believed that the stone west-wing (nearest the spring) was basically part of the earlier building, although rebuilt and altered. This is supported by evidence which includes, for example, the manner in which the brick front is spliced into the older stone side-wall, the design of ceiling beams, surviving pieces of wrought-iron hardware, etc. The brick middle section of the house was built in 1805 by Joseph M. Phillips, Esq., "a gentleman of great intelligence and courtesy." It is probable that all usable materials from the original Hart house were used by Mr. Phillips, especially certain large hewn beams and the doors, which bear the imprint of their early hardware. Undoubtedly, many materials used in the barns and very likely their stone walls were here in Mr. Hart's day. The giant oak beams in the barn nearest Hart Avenue were mentioned in a writing of 1876 and described as dating back to the original days of the farmstead, as was an old apple tree from which the present ones may have descended.

It is certain that the spring near the new marker served JOHN HART as well as many Continental soldiers encamped upon this hillside, and undoubtedly it also quenched the thirst of marauding English and Hessian troops. Until recent years a picturesque old stone building served as the "spring house." A mill-stone, unearthed near the rear of the stone wing, doubtless dates to Mr. Hart's ownership of two mills. This stone is now the focal point of interest in the outside veranda floor at the rear of the building. The east-wing was added about 1887, making the total number of rooms seventeen.

THE JOINT COMMITTEE OF THE TWO SOCIETIES INCLUDES:

For the Sons of the Revolution

Lt. Colonel Cleon E. Hammond, Chairman
Kenneth Y. Atchley, Esq. *William P. Elliott, Esq.*
John B. Cole, Jr., Esq. *Bruce H. French, Esq.*
Russell P. Dey, Esq. *Dr. H. S. Murphy*
George W. Eddy, Esq. *Leslie W. Perrine, Esq.*
Robert C. Whitlock, Esq.

For the Sons of the American Revolution

Dr. D. Stanton Hammond, Chairman
J. Neil Arrington, Esq. *Dr. H. S. Murphy*
John H. Frazee, Esq. *Howard K. Porter, Esq.*
Judge Richard Hartsborne *Major Lawrence Stratton*
Judge Stanton T. Lawrence *Harold A. Sonn, Esq.*
Leon A. McIntire, Esq. *Dr. J. Harmon Wilson*
William O. Morrow, Esq. *Dr. McIver Woody*

In charge of the Hopewell Museum arrangements *John R. Wert III, Esq. S.R.*

In charge of Old School Baptist Meeting House
arrangements *J. Neil Arrington, Esq. S.A.R.*

Commander of the "New Jersey Blues" S.A.R.
Color Guard *Dr. C. Malcolm G. Gilman S.A.R.*

The societies wish to acknowledge with appreciation . . .

*Castoro Brothers, Hopewell, for transporting the marker stone from
the Sourland Mountains*

*Hardy Nurseries, Mount Rose Road, Pennington, for plantings
around the marker stone*

*Mrs. Letta Blackwell, Trustee of the Old School Baptist Church for
making the Meeting House available*

*Captain Keith Robertson, President, and the Board of the Hopewell
Museum for opening the museum to the societies*

*Chief of Police Thomas F. Fillebrown, Hopewell, for traffic and
parking arrangements*

*The Hopewell Valley News for photographs and the production of
this booklet*

PROGRAM

This function is scheduled for Sunday, June 14, 1959. In the event of rainy weather, the date will be Sunday, June 21st. If in doubt, telephone HOPewell 6-0829 or (Patterson) LAMbert 3-5189.

- 12: Noon Picnic at Hopewell Valley Golf Club (There will be no picnic if weather necessitates postponement until June 21st.)
- 3: P.M. Dedication ceremonies on the lawn of the JOHN HART Farmstead, 60 Hart Avenue, Hopewell, N. J. (Guests must provide own seating, if desired.)
- 4: P.M. Visitation of Old School Baptist Meeting House, JOHN HART grave and the Hopewell Museum.

Because of the many problems unavoidable in the opening of a private residence to so large a group of visitors, the Joint Committee of the two societies decided that the house should not be open to inspection and that this function should be limited to the exterior premises.

DEDICATION CEREMONY

- WELCOME *Lt. Colonel Cleon E. Hammond, Co-chairman of the Joint Committee for the Sons of the Revolution*
- COLORS *Dr. D. Stanton Hammond, Co-chairman of the Joint-Committee for the Sons of the American Revolution c
Sons of the American Revolution Color Guard*
- INTRODUCTION
OF OFFICERS *Dr. D. Stanton Hammond*
- ADDRESS *Russell P. Dey, Esq., formerly General President of the Society, Sons of the Revolution, HART descendant*
- COLORS TO MARKER *Sons of the American Revolution Color Guard*
- UNVEILING OF
MARKER *William T. Elliott, Esq., President of the New Jersey Society, Sons of the Revolution
Wilbur A. Stevens, Esq., President of the New Jersey Society, Sons of the American Revolution*
- RETIRING OF COLORS *Sons of the American Revolution Color Guard*
- END OF CEREMONY

* * *

The Old School Baptist Meeting House, through the courtesy of the church's Trustees, is open for this occasion. The Meeting House is built upon land donated by JOHN HART, who is buried nearby. The Hopewell Museum, through the courtesy of the Museum Trustees, is open for this occasion. The Museum contains several relics related to JOHN HART, as well as an unusual display of memorabilia concerning the early history of this area.



JOHN HART
Signer of the Declaration of Independence

Farmstead site of the Signer, who lived here 1742-1779. Without formal education, consulted by many, respected by all, "Honest John Hart" gave his property and his life for the cause of Liberty. Farmer, miller, Judge, Speaker of the First New Jersey Assembly, ever the prey of enemy patrols which sought his life and ravaged his property. Broken in health from privation and exposure, he died May 11, 1797, age about 69.

Guided to this roadless hillside by John Hart's sons Jesse and Nathaniel, Washington's army camped here June 23-24, 1778, before the Battle of Monmouth. The spring from which they drank flows nearby.

* * *

This marker jointly placed by the New Jersey Societies, Sons of the Revolution and Sons of the American Revolution 1959.



JOHN HART is one of the obscure Signers of the Declaration of Independence. Although his participation in events before and during the American Revolution is authenticated in public documents and official minutes of the various civic bodies with which he served, only the briefest information has come down concerning the man himself. If he is mentioned at all, virtually the same paragraph or two describes the Signer in the various

biographical dictionaries. Unfortunately, errors perpetrated by some early reporter have been compounded repetitively over the years, so that many of the paragraphs concerning Mr. Hart are not quite accurate. For example, so factual a matter as the year of his death is often stated as 1780 (and thus appears on the 1865 monument in the Old School Baptist Burial Ground) although in fact he died May 11, 1779, two and a half years before the end of the war. Although a man of tremendous stamina and courage, the combination of privation, exposure and illness were too much for one in his late sixties. And doubtless, the loss of his wife, Deborah, and devastation of his property took their toll upon him, as well.

JOHN HART was probably the oldest Signer of the document, for he was about sixty-six years old on that July 4th, 1775. The exact date of his birth is not known. As a member of the New Jersey Committee of Safety, Speaker of the New Jersey Assembly and member of numerous committees, he undoubtedly contributed much time, thought and energy that were never matters of record. One may easily visualize the tremendous price exacted from this man for his contribution to the cause of Liberty. At best, it was rigorous traveling by horseback to and from the various places the New Jersey Legislature convened, depending upon the imminence of the enemy. Good food and lodgings were not to be counted upon, even at inflationary prices. Mr. Hart suffered greatly from kidney stones, the discomfiture of which was certainly not helped by his life-on-the-run exposure to all types of weather and living conditions. The burden of having a price on his head, dead or alive, demanded unrelaxed alertness against ambush by a British patrol from Trenton or Princeton . . . or a Tory neighbor, of which there were many. Concern for the health and welfare of his wife, their younger children and his aged mother must have weighed heavily upon his mind during his many absences from home. Considerable fortitude must have been demanded to accept repeated vengeance against his property by enemy patrols, and to see the fruits of many years' toil damaged practically beyond repair. There was concern, as well, for the condition and welfare of three sons and a son-in-law who served militarily. Overshadowing all of this, of course, was uncertainty concerning the outcome of the struggle, in spite of spasmodic heroic efforts, with the possibility that the only reward might be the gallows. Such a combination of responsibilities, problems and hardship demanded a stout heart and strong shoulders. It would be understandable, therefore, if this aging man were weary when his illness forced his retirement from public life late in the Fall of 1778, about five months before his death.

JOHN HART presented a striking appearance. He was a straight, well-proportioned, handsome man with dark hair, dark complexion and blue eyes. Although extremely practical and level-headed, his was a warm personality . . . cheerful, with a good sense of humor. His wife, Deborah, was described as a lady of "great amiability of character," an important virtue, no doubt, for the mother of twelve children.

It has been erroneously printed, hence much repeated over the years, that JOHN HART was illiterate. Certainly, this was not so. Although his education was sparse, it is obvious that he read and wrote as well as most of his contemporaries. His writings are better composed, spelled and punctuated than the average of his time. Unusual for that period, too, he owned a library that included a law dictionary and "sundry other books" valued at nearly forty pounds at the time of his death. How these escaped destruction by Hessian raiders invites interesting speculation. It is unlikely that the royal governor would have appointed an "illiterate" man to be Justice of the Peace and later Judge of the Court of Common Pleas for Hunterdon County. Nor is it credible that one who could not read or write would be selected by his peers to be the Speaker of their Assembly.

For any time or place, JOHN HART would be considered a successful, capable business man. Indeed, he was consulted for all manner of business advice throughout old Hunterdon County, which then included Trenton. Basically, he was a farmer, and he owned virtually the entire hillside of which his farmstead was approximately the center. Like most prosperous farmers of his time, Mr. Hart owned several slaves. Aside from farming, with a brother he jointly owned one grist and fulling mill at Glenmoore (near the present Hopewell Valley Golf Club) and another at Rocky Hill.

Although he is claimed by both Presbyterians and Baptists, JOHN HART's religious life is somewhat ambiguous. His father, Captain Edward Hart, was a staunch Presbyterian; hence the infant son John was baptized in the Presbyterian Church in Maidenhead (now Lawrenceville). It is recorded that JOHN HART contributed to the Presbyterian Church in Pennington. He did, however, donate to the Old School Baptists the land upon which they erected their Meeting House and burial ground. From this it has apparently been assumed that he worshipped as a Baptist, in what was essentially a Baptist community at that time. The records do not support this, however, for his name is not listed at any time as a member of the church; nor is the occurrence of his death, an event certain to have been recorded. Finally, he was not originally buried in the Baptist cemetery, but instead in the "old Hunt burial ground" near Woodsville, about four miles from Hopewell. Why this burial place was selected by John's sons may be the fact that his wife, Deborah, was placed there at the time of her death in October 1776, when the countryside was "beset with enemy and infested with Tories." She may have died in that vicinity during one of the times that she and her younger children fled from their home to escape enemy reprisals. In any event, the remains of Mrs. Hart still lie in the old Hunt cemetery, although the body of the Signer was removed to Hopewell in 1865.

JOHN HART was born in Stonington, Connecticut about 1710-1712. His father, Captain Edward Hart soon thereafter moved to New Jersey, where his brothers had preceded him, and he settled in Ewing Township, southeast of Pennington about two miles, on a farm now owned by Kenneth Y. Atchley, S.R. Captain Edward Hart organized a company of volunteers in 1759 from Hunterdon County, during the war with France. His troops were referred to as the "New Jersey Blues," a traditional designation that has descended to present New Jersey militiamen.

A chronology of events in the life of JOHN HART demonstrates the broad scope and versatility of this busy man. This begins in 1739/1740 when he was about thirty years old, having just married Deborah Scudder of Ewing.

- 1741 First child born: Sarah
- 1742 Son Jesse born. Purchased jointly with his father the farmstead.
- 1747 Gave land to the Baptist Church.
- 1751 Purchased jointly with brother the Glenmore mill on Stony Brook.
- 1753 Made final payment on farmstead.
- 1755 Justice of the Peace of Hunterdon County.
- 1761 Elected to 20th Assembly (Colonial Legislature) where he served annually for ten years.
- 1765 Assisted in election of delegates to the Stamp Act Congress.
- 1766 Sold the Glenmore mill.
- 1768 Elected to the 21st Assembly and continued until its dissolution in December, 1771.
- 1770 Boston Massacre.
- 1771 Freeholders of Hunterdon County instruct their representatives (Hart and Tucker) to protest against the quartering of King's troops within the colony.
- 1773 Boston Tea Party.
- 1774 Appointed (by royal governor) Judge of the Court of Common Pleas. Elected to First Provincial Congress of New Jersey and served continuously until sent to Continental Congress in June, 1776. Aided in the preparation of estimates for defense, in formulating a method of issuing bills of credit, and was chairman of committee which erected a Court of Admiralty.
- 1775 Appointed to Committee of Correspondence and later appointed to Committee of Safety.
- 1776 Elected to Continental Congress along with Stockton, Witherspoon, Hopkinson and Clark. Soon after signing the Declaration, chosen Speaker of the New Jersey Assembly. Deborah died. Reward offered for him, dead or alive. Country was infested with enemy and Tories.
- 1778 Ill health forced him to retire from public life in the late Fall.
- 1779 May 11th, Mr. Hart died.

Almost typical of the character of the man himself, the story of his passing was simply, yet with dignified eloquence, reported in the New Jersey Gazette:

"On Tuesday the 11th instant, departed this life at his seat in Hopewell, JOHN HART, esq; one of the Representatives in General Assembly for the County of Hunterdon, and late spaker of the House. He had served in Assembly for many years under the former government, taken an early and active part in the present revolution, and continued to the day he was seized with his last illness to discharge the duties of a faithful and upright patriot in the service of his country in general, and the county he represented in particular. The universal approbation of his character and conduct among all ranks of people, is the best testimony of his worth, and as it must make his death regretted and lamented, will ensure lasting respect to his memory."

Mr. Hart was buried in a grave marked only by a field stone upon which Deacon Hunt, himself a soldier of the Revolution, cut an identifying mark, saying that men of future times would want to know where the remains of JOHN HART rested.

* * *

The photo of JOHN HART reproduced herein is from the earliest known painting of the Signer, done by H. B. Hall in 1869 under commission to Dr. T. A. Emmet, a wealthy collector of documents, letters and pictures of the Signers. It is believed that this painting was based upon an earlier "woodcut," but this is not authenticated. The Hall painting is now in the Emmet Collection at the New York Public Library. Other paintings of Mr. Hart (Independence Hall, etc.) were based upon the Hall painting. The search for an earlier or better-authenticated likeness continues.

(The above sketch was written by Colonel Hammond, who is gathering material for a full biography of the Signer.)

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MR. STEWART K. SUTTON
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