CHAPTER 3

"Most of the members . . . took an early decided part in the opposition to British tyranny and oppression."

— Dr. John Beatty, 1782.[1]

Almost every member of The Medical Society of New Jersey was involved in the Revolutionary War, in one way or another. The majority of the physicians were loyal to the American cause.

It is not surprising that there were a few Loyalist sympathizers since there was considerable support for the British throughout the colonies. Most of the Tory physicians left the state during the turbulent period, some of them to the great regret of their communities.

One Tory, Dr. Jonathan Odell of Burlington, was so loved by his parishioners at St. Mary's Episcopal Church that they continued to pay his salary for some time after he was forced to leave New Jersey because of his support of the Crown. The brilliant physician-minister violated the parole of the Provincial Congress requiring him to remain within eight miles of Burlington and went to New York. Eventually, he settled with other refugees in New Brunswick, Canada, where he was chosen first secretary of the new province.[2]

Another pro-British practitioner was Dr. Absalom Bainbridge, who had been president of the Medical Society in 1773. He joined the English Army on its first invasion of New Jersey in 1776. Sir William Howe, the British commander-in-chief, set up his headquarters in the doctor's Princeton residence. Dr. Bainbridge served as a surgeon with New Jersey Loyalist troops during the war and settled in New York for the remainder of his life. His son, Commodore William Bainbridge, was later to become commander of the American frigate *Constitution* (1797).[3]

Dr. John Lawrence of Monmouth County had not joined the Medical Society before the war but was a classmate of Dr. Jonathan Elmer and one of the initial group of ten graduated from the Medical College of Philadelphia in 1768. Early in the war, when he was suspected of being a Tory, he was taken to Trenton. This caused some ladies in Perth Amboy to petition for his release "apprehending fatal and melancholy consequences to themselves, their families and the inhabitants in general, if they should be deprived of the assistance of Dr. Lawrence."

The wife of Provincial Governor William Franklin was one of the signers, and to her General Washington addressed the reply: "Madam, I am ordered by Congress to acquaint you, and through you the other ladies of Amboy, that their petition in favor of Dr. John Lawrence has been received and considered. Could any application have procured a greater indulgence to Dr. Lawrence, you may be assured yours could not have failed of success. But unhappily, Madam, we are placed in a situation that motives of commiseration to individuals must give place to the safety of the public. As Dr. Lawrence had fallen under the suspicion of our generals, we are under the necessity of abiding by the steps which are taken and are Madam, Yours &c."

Dr. Lawrence remained in New York for some years after the war, but finally retired to Upper Freehold where, still a popular bachelor, he enjoyed

fox hunting and other social activities. He died in Trenton at the age of eighty-three during a game of chess.[4]

The outspoken political views of Dr. Samuel Bard forced his retirement during the war. With five other physicians, he had founded the medical school of King's College (now Columbia University) in 1768. When the Revolution began, he moved to New Jersey, locating near Shrewsbury, where he attempted to manufacture salt, but with little success. After the war, he resumed his practice, and was engaged as family physician to General Washington while he was in New York.[5]

Other prominent Tory doctors who left the state included the Reverend Drs. Isaac Brown and his son, Samuel Brown, of Newark, and Dr. James Boggs of Shrewsbury.

Rebel fighters

It is estimated that about one-fifth of the physicians in New Jersey sided with the British. There were few neutrals. The physicians faithful to the patriots' cause who were too old or weak for military duty were busy in political and civic affairs. Some like the Reverend Dr. John Darby of Connecticut Farms, were among the "rebel parsons" whose sermons incited the congregations to active rebellion. In addition to preaching, Dr. Darby was both a lawyer and physician. He practiced medicine with such competence that in 1782 he was awarded an honorary degree in medicine from Dartmouth College.[6]

Dr. Moses Bloomfield, one of the Society's founders, served as a representative in the Provincial Congress and General Assembly; later he was commissioned senior surgeon of the United States Hospital, Continental Army. His son, Joseph, was governor of New Jersey from 1801-1812. The town of Bloomfield was named in honor of the family.

Dr. William Burnet of Newark suffered heavy losses of property, including his valuable medical library and fifty head of cattle, when the enemy sought revenge for his service as Chairman of the Committee of Safety for Essex County. Before the war ended, he was named Chief Physician and Surgeon of the Hospital Department of the Eastern District.

Another Society founder, Dr. John Cochran, was affectionately addressed by both Washington and Lafayette as "Dear Doctor Bones" because of a song he had sung during off-duty hours at headquarters. Washington sent the doctor one of the very few pieces of humorous writing known to have come from his pen. It was a letter written in 1779 concerning an invitation extended to Mrs. Cochran and Mrs. Livingston to dine with the General at West Point the following day.

Washington wrote, "Since our arrival at this happy spot, we have had a ham, sometimes a shoulder of bacon, to grace the head of the table; a piece of roast beef adorns the foot, and a dish of beans or greens, almost imperceptible, decorates the center. When the cook has a mind to cut a figure, which I presume will be the case tomorrow, we have two beefsteak pies, or dishes of crabs, in addition, one on each side of the centre dish, dividing the space and reducing the distance between dish and dish to about six feet, which, without them, would be twelve feet apart. Of late he has had the surprising sagacity to discover that apples will make pies, and it is a question,

if in the violence of his efforts, we do not get one of apples instead of having both of beefsteak. If the ladies can put up with such entertainment, and will submit to partake of it on plates once tin, now iron, (not become so by scouring) I shall be happy to see them." [7]

Dr. Jonathan Elmer of Cumberland County, whom the noted Dr. Benjamin Rush of Philadelphia said was unexcelled in America in medical knowledge, was another defender of the Continental cause. Physically frail, he was unable to join his young relatives, Ebenezer and Thomas Elmer, in the "New Jersey Tea Party" on December 22, 1774. On that night, men of Greenwich and the surrounding area, dressed as Indians, hauled British tea from storage and burned it in the public square. Through his influence, Dr. Jonathan Elmer saw to it that no punishment came to the participants.[8]

Dr. Isaac Smith was one of two men at Trenton designated to receive the news of the Battle of Lexington and to forward the information to Philadelphia. Almost immediately, Dr. Smith was commissioned Colonel, First Regiment, Hunterdon County. Two years later, he resigned to accept the appointment as a Justice of the Supreme Court of New Jersey.[9]

Dr. Isaac Harris served in the Revolution as Surgeon in General Newcomb's brigade, State Troops. His brother Jacob, serving as a Surgeon's Mate, dressed the wound of Count Donop, who commanded the Hessians and was fatally injured in the Battle of Red Bank, near the Delaware River in Gloucester County.

A sense of destiny must have guided the life of Dr. Nathaniel Scudder of Freehold, who assumed an early and prominent lead in plans to defy the British. He was forty-three when the war began — elderly by the standards of the day — but he served as a delegate to the first Provincial Congress and a New Jersey delegate to the Continental Congress.

Commissioned a colonel in 1776, he went through the war unscathed, only to die three days before the surrender from a shot aimed at General David Forman. The attack was made by a party of Tory refugees who had landed at Sandy Hook and marched to Colt's Neck, taking prisoners along the way. When Dr. Scudder heard of it he told his family, "There is a battle expected at Long Branch. I will go down and bind up the wounds of the poor fellows." But before he left, Dr. Scudder placed on his table a farewell letter to his son, written some eighteen months earlier.[10]

Unlike most, James Anderson benefited from the hardships of war. Young and uneducated when he was captured by the British, he was befriended by an enemy officer working with the prisoners of war on Long Island. By the time young Anderson was released, he had an apprentice's knowledge of medicine from his English instructor. He continued his studies in the years following, and in 1791 he was examined and accepted into The Medical Society of New Jersey.[11]

Of the 3,500 established practitioners in the thirteen colonies before the war, only 400 had received any formal training and only about 200 held medical degrees.[12] Yet there were forty-four college graduates among the seventy-two New Jersey physicians prominent in the Revolutionary War period. Fifty of these had military commissions as surgeons, and eleven as surgeon's mates. Many already were members of the Medical Society; others joined after the war.[13]

New Jersey could make some claim to the most noted wartime physician of all, Dr. Benjamin Rush. A graduate of Princeton College in 1760, he married Julia, a daughter of the Richard Stockton of Princeton who was one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. For some years, Dr. Rush maintained his family in Princeton. As Surgeon-General of the Middle Department of the Continental Army, he attended General Hugh Mercer when he was mortally wounded at the Battle of Princeton. Later, as a medical professor at the University of Pennsylvania, he taught numerous students from New Jersey. At his death in 1813, the Society prepared a memorial resolution and later joined other states in contributing funds for the Rush monument in Washington, D.C.

Military hospitals

New Jersey has been described as the cockpit and the crossroads of the Revolution; its lay citizens as well as its physicians were involved both as combatants and as suppliers of food and materiel for the troops. The *Pennsylvania Journal and Weekly Advertiser* of July 17, 1776 carried a notice addressed to "The good people of this city and province, and of the province of New Jersey," asking them to send old sheets and other linen to Dr. Shippen Jr. for the use of the Jersey Hospital. The New Jerseyans were asked to direct their donations to Dr. John Cowell in Elizabeth Town. The article added, "None will refuse complying with this request, when they consider that the lint and bandages made of this linen may be used in dressing and curing the wounds of their own fathers, husbands, brethren, or sons." [14]

The newspapers of the country in June, 1777, were asked to publish an assurance of improved medical treatment for the American soldiers. The announcement declared, "The liberal provision made by Congress in the new medical arrangement, Joined with a humane desire to prevent the repetition of the distresses which afflicted the brave American soldiers in the last campaign, have drawn men of the first abilities into the field, to watch over the health and preserve the lives of the soldiers. . . .

"Under these [medical officers] none but gentlemen of best education, and well qualified, are employed as senior Physicians, Surgeons, etc. . . . The public may depend on it, that the greatest exertions of skill and industry shall be constantly made, and no cost spared, to make the sick and wounded soldiery comfortable and happy. As a consequence of the above liberal arrangements of the Honorable Congress, we do, with great pleasure, and equal truth, assure the public (notwithstanding the many false and wicked reports propagated by the enemies of American liberty, and only calculated to retard the recruiting services) that all the *military* hospitals of the United States are in excellent order, and the *Army* enjoy a degree of health seldom to be seen or read of."

It was signed by W. Shippen, Jr., Director General of the American Hospitals, and Dr. John Cochran, Physician and Surgeon General of the Army in the Middle Department, while both were at Headquarters, Middle Brook, N.J.[15]

There were almost no hospitals in America before the Revolution, and, despite newspaper announcements, those which were developed

This reconstructed log hospital enables visitors to see how Revolutionary War soldiers were cared for in the camp at Jockey Hollow, near Morristown, N. J. (*Courtesy of National Park Service, Morristown National Historical Park, Morristown, N. J.*)

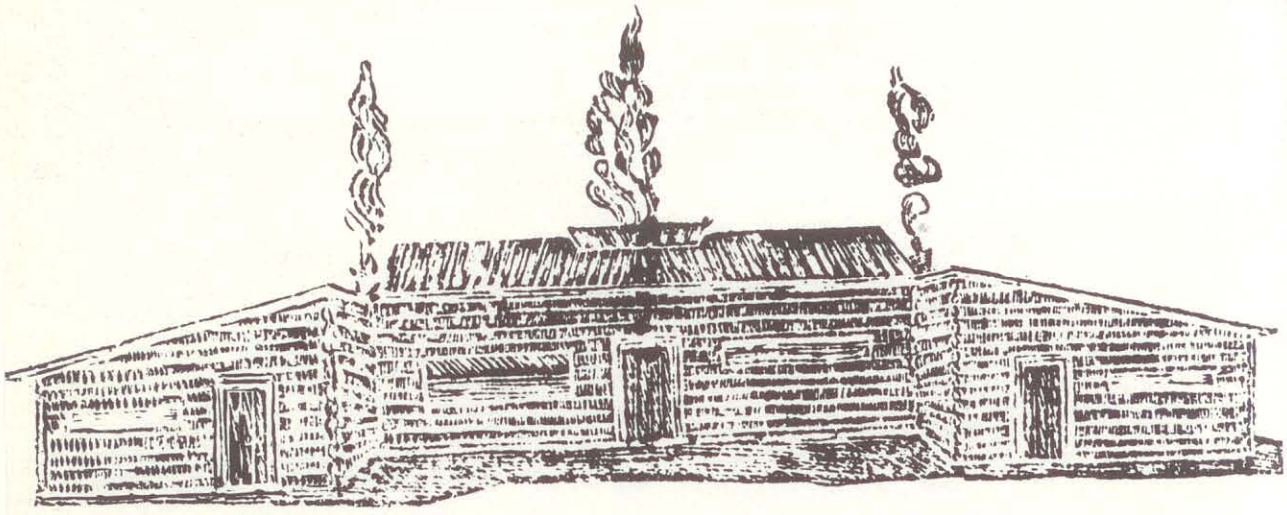
to care for the soldiers were makeshift affairs. After the battle of Long Island, a hospital first established in New York was moved to Hackensack.

Hospitals were established at Amboy, Elizabethtown, Fort Lee, New Brunswick, Trenton and Newark. On November 1, 1776, Dr. Shippen listed the patients in the two hospitals at Amboy as ninety sick and seven wounded; at Elizabethtown, fifty-four sick (three wounded and twenty-five sick from Canada); at Fort Lee, seventy-three "of our own" (New Jersey) sick, nine wounded, and nineteen sick and wounded from New England troops. At New Brunswick, six sick; at Trenton, fifty-six sick.

There were another 2,000 "scattered up and down the country in cold barns who suffer exceedingly for want of comfortable apartments," Dr. Shippen said, because Dr. John Morgan had not yet turned them over to his supervision.[16]

These figures confirmed reports by Dr. James Tilton of Delaware, a surgeon general in the Army and later president of the Delaware State Medical Society. He said infectious diseases were more deadly than cannon, and that more surgeons died in the American service in proportion to their number than officers of the line.[17]

This sketch of Dr. James Tilton's military hospital at Morristown was contained in his book *Economical Observations on Military Hospitals,* published in 1813 at Wilmington, Del. The picture is provided through the courtesy of the National Park Service, Morristown National Historical Park, Morristown, N. J. The drawings, floor plan and observation left by Dr. Tilton enabled the government to reconstruct the early military hospital.



Dr. Tilton, who served at the Army hospital in Princeton, recognized the hazard to the soldiers when he added, "Many a fine fellow have I brought into the hospital for slight syphilitic affections, and carried out dead of a hospital fever."

The college building at Princeton, Dr. Jacob Green's church in Hanover, the Tennent Church in Monmouth County, and the churches and Meeting Houses near a battle were requisitioned for shelter and treatment for the wounded.

While caring for the sick and underfed men in the vicinity of Trenton, Dr. Tilton radically modified the hospital system by dividing the patients into small groups and keeping each in a well-ventilated, individual hut.

Of all the contagious diseases, the most feared was putrid fever — variously known as jail, camp or hospital fever — which probably included both typhus and typhoid. At Morristown, where he was in charge during the bitter winter of 1779-80, Dr. Tilton had cabins built of rough logs, somewhat in the style of Indian huts. He explained, "The fire was built in the midst of the ward, without any chimney, and the smoke circulating round about, passed off through an opening about four inches wide in the ridge of the roof. The common surface of the earth served for the floor.

"Patients laid with heads to the wall . . . their feet all turned to the fire. The wards were thus completely ventilated. The smoke contributed to combat infections, without giving the least offense to the patients; for it always rose above their heads."

The bedding in these houses or in hospital tents consisted of a bunk or cradle, a sack or bed tick of coarse linen filled with straw, and a blanket or two.[18]

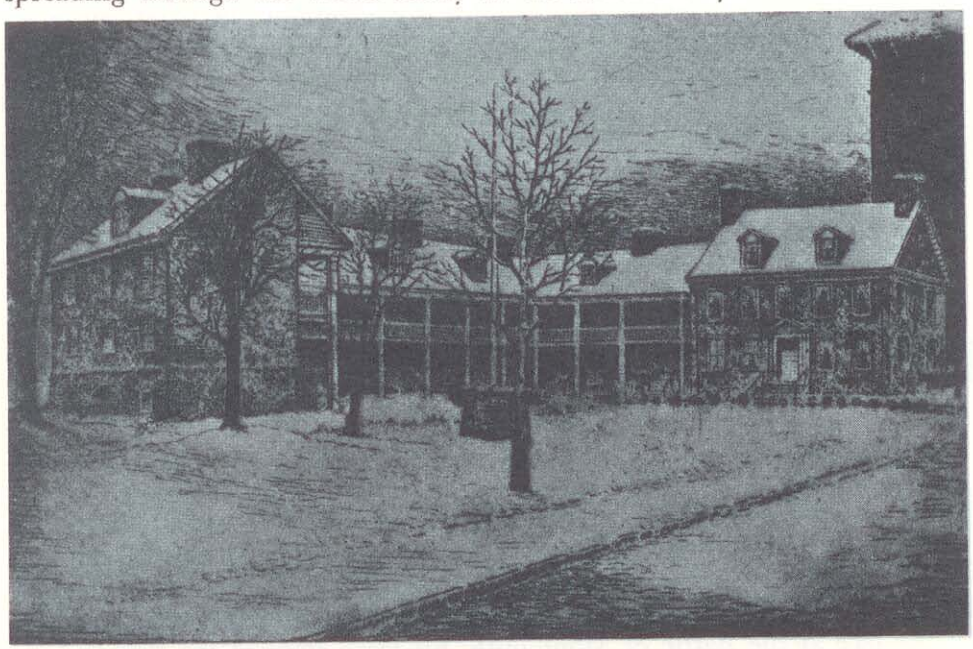
Smallpox at Morristown

There was little knowledge or equipment to combat the spread of disease, and smallpox was almost as much to be dreaded as typhoid. Smallpox appeared in Morristown five days after General Washington arrived, on January 6, 1777. Some said the disease had been introduced deliberately by British authorities. The first victim was Martha Ball, a widow. There were two more deaths within the month, and sixty-eight by the end of the year.

When the disease first appeared, Presbyterian and Baptist churches were converted to emergency hospitals, and it was not uncommon to find one or more bodies under the pews in the morning. During this period, church services were held in private homes or out-of-doors.

Smallpox was common among the soldiers camped on the outskirts of Morristown and in Jockey Hollow. The Reverend Dr. Timothy Johnes, Dr. Jacob Green and other physician-clergymen designated nearby farm houses as inoculation stations where civilians as well as soldiers were to apply. The religious leaders dictated procedure with an authority few parishioners dared to disregard. Resistance to inoculation diminished appreciably after it became apparent that most of those who took smallpox "in the natural way" died, while those who had been inoculated almost invariably recovered.[19]

In February, General Washington wrote to Congress, "The smallpox has made such head in every quarter that I find it impossible to keep it from spreading through the whole Army in the natural way. I have therefore



"The Barracks," Trenton, was constructed to house soldiers during the French and Indian War and was occupied during the Revolutionary War alternately by Hessians or British, and Americans. General Washington, in February 1777, designated it as a hospital where Continental recruits were to be inoculated against smallpox. (Etching by George A. Bradshaw, Trenton, N.J.)

determined not only to inoculate the troops now here that have not had it, but shall order Dr. Shippen to inoculate the recruits as fast as they come to Philadelphia. They will lose no time because they will go through the disease while their clothing, arms, and accoutrements are getting ready." [20]

Dr. Shippen promptly conveyed Washington's orders, and a copy of a letter, dated February 17, 1777, addressed to Dr. Bodo Otto, directed him to report to Brigadier General Rodney at Trenton to inoculate Continental troops and take charge of the military hospital. That hospital is now known as the Old Barracks in Trenton. It faces Willow Street, to the southeast of the state capitol. A copy of the Shippen letter and a portrait of Dr. Otto are among the items on display in the historic structure.

In November, 1781, the Barracks again served as a hospital as Colonel Matthias Ogden effected the transfer of 1,600 invalided and sick troops from Yorktown, Va. The state legislature intervened, however, and directed that 1,000 of the patients be sent to Burlington, which offered more facilities for their care and convalescence.[21]

Almost no surgery, except of an emergency character, was performed in the colonial period in America. Dr. C. Malcolm B. Gilman of Red Bank, writing in the *Journal of The Medical Society of New Jersey* (August 1960) on military surgery in the American Revolution, related the interesting discovery by one of his ancestors concerning the use of alcohol as a disinfectant. The earlier Dr. Charles Gilman, of Woodbridge, serving as a major with the Continentals noted, "At the battle of Harlem Heights, I received a crease wound to the back of the hand. Painful, it would not heal and exuded laudable pus. In camp at Newburgh, I spilled [some rum on the hand] quite accidentally – for I had had too much [to drink] . . . I covered [the wound] and in two days I noticed no odor. I removed the cover and the wound was healing. Thereafter, all wounds were soaked in rum cloths before covering."

The Revolutionary War doctor discussed amputation, declaring, "A good dose of tincture of opium followed by ample rum, together with a very sharp knife and sharp saw, and ears covered with lamb's wool, and then the ears bound [against the noise] results in little discomfort to the man." Dr. Gilman suggested searing the stump with a hot iron and then using pressure bandages rather than suture.

Snake bites were common among the foot soldiers, and for these the doctor recommended "cross cut and let it run, be sure the cuts pass thru the bites, then cup." In gun shot wounds, he thought it wise to remove the ball if possible, adding, "but don't probe too long."

For fractures, Washington himself was familiar with the practice of extending the broken leg or arm, then exerting traction against the lower posts of a four-poster bag. One of the General's diaries also contained a sketch of a horse suspended by belly bands while weights drew down the broken leg.

Tight compression was the treatment for bayonet wounds and to staunch the flow of blood. When Woodbridge Sergeant Charles Gamberton was shot in the face at the Battle of Monmouth, his teeth stopped the ball and he spat it out. Dr. Gilman wrapped Gamberton's face tightly with a compression bandage, and the cheek wound healed quickly.[23]

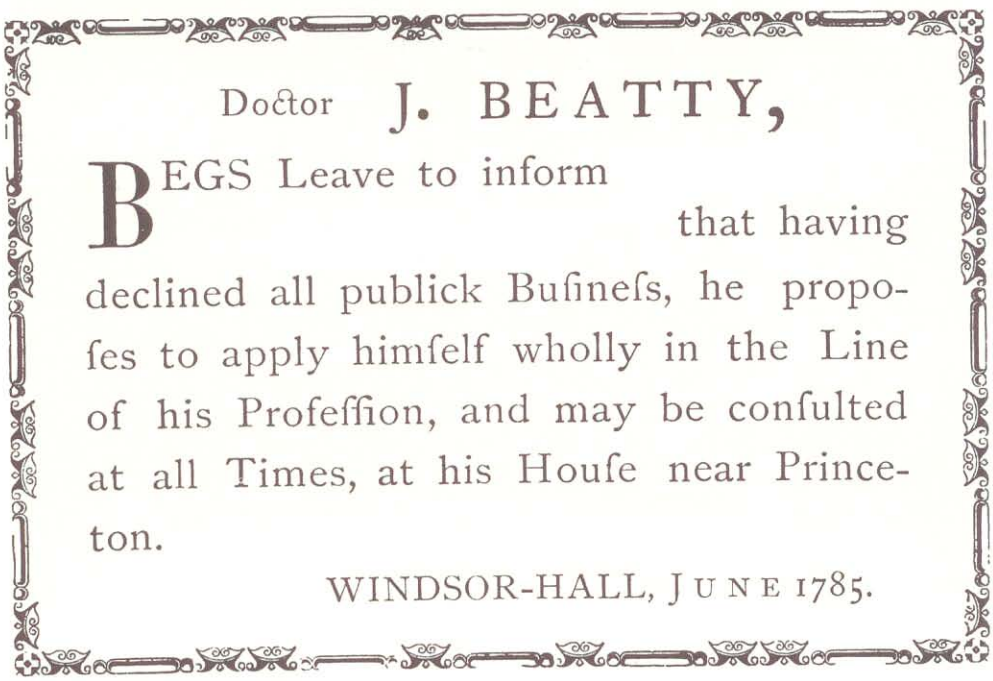
How much the profession of medicine suffered or gained in the six years of the Revolution no one could measure. One thing was certain: there was

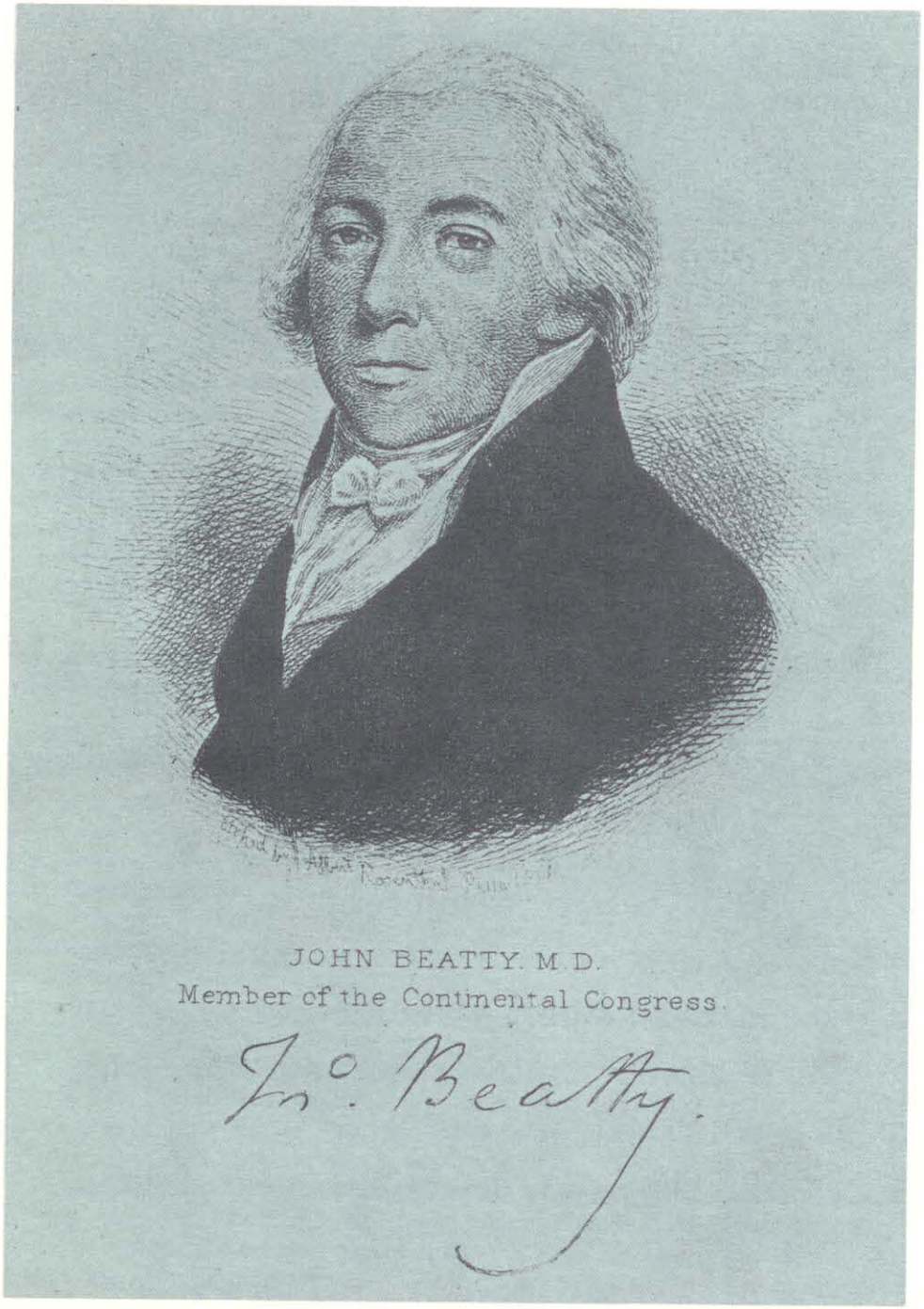
no abatement in the enthusiasm of members of the Medical Society for meetings to exchange information that might lead to better public health. Cornwallis surrendered on October 19, 1781, and in November, "agreeable to advertisement," The Medical Society of New Jersey reassembled.

Assigned to report on the "State of the Society since 1775," Dr. John Beatty, ever sensitive to public opinion, explained ". . . with regret we observe the vacation of six years in the Journal of this Society; and to prevent any reflections which might arise, unfavorable to its reputation in the minds of uninformed or disingenuous persons, it is thought necessary to assign here the cause and reason of this suspension in medical erudition.

"The war (which has been productive of the happy Revolution in America) having claimed the attention of all ranks of Freemen, most of the members of this Society took an early decided part in the opposition to British tyranny and oppression, and were soon engaged either in the civil or military duties of the state." [23]

This professional card used by Dr. John Beatty of Princeton and Trenton was printed on the back of a playing card. (From Stephen Wickes' *History of Medicine in New Jersey,* Dennis & Co., Newark, N. J., 1879, p. 139)





Etching by Albert Rosenthal, Philadelphia, Pa., 1888. (From *The Trenton Banking Company—A History of the First Century of Its Existence,* MacCrellish & Quigley, Trenton, N. J., 1907, p. 62.)