

An Assembly of Demigods

Roger Sherman

John Adams: Diary, September 15 & October 10, 1775

Sherman's Air is the Reverse of Grace. There cannot be a more striking Contrast to beautiful Action, than the Motions of his Hands. Generally, he stands upright with his Hands before him. The fingers of his left Hand clenched into a Fist, and the Wrist of it, grasped with his right. But he has a clear Head and sound Judgment. But when he moves a Hand, in any thing like Action, Hogarths Genius could not have invented a Motion more opposite to grace. It is Stiffness, and Awkwardness itself. Rigid as Starched Linen or Buckram. Awkward as a junior Bachelor, or a Sophomore. . . . Dyer and Sherman speak often and long, but very heavily and clumsily.

Nathaniel Greene to Samuel Blachley Webb, Camp, Precknees near Paramus, July 4, 1780

The Congress are dreaming as usual; your very good friend Sir Roger is playing his old game of little tricks, and pursuing his former scale of penny happen politics; and unfortunately for America, he finds enough of his kidney to join him, to form a majority in the House.

Nathanael Greene to Jeremiah Wadsworth, Camp Tappan, N.Y., August 14, 1780

Roger Sherman is doing all the mischief he can in Congress, he is at the head of this affair. It appears to be his intention to get our public affairs in as bad a train as possible at the time he leaves Congress; that the confusion and disorder that will follow, may appear to be owing to his having left the house. I am of opinion that he is one of the most wicked and ignorant politicians that ever disgraced an Assembly or that had such an extensive influence.

Jeremiah Wadsworth to Rufus King, Hartford, June 3, 1787

I am satisfied with the appointment [to the Constitutional Convention]—except Sherman, who, I am told, is disposed to patch up the old scheme of Government. This was not my opinion of him, when we chose him: he is as cunning as the Devil, and if you attack him, you ought to know him well; he is not easily managed, but if he suspects you are trying to take him in, you may as well catch an Eel by the tail.

William Pierce: Sketches of Members of the Constitutional Convention

Mr. Sherman exhibits the oddest shaped character I ever remember to have met with. He is awkward, un-meaning, and unaccountably strange in his manner. But in his train of thinking there is something regular, deep and comprehensive; yet the oddity of his address, the vulgarisms that accompany his public speaking, and that strange New England cant which runs through his public as well as his private speaking make everything that is connected with him grotesque and laughable,—and yet he deserves infinite praise,—no Man has a better Heart or a clearer Head. If he cannot embellish he can furnish thoughts that are wise and useful. He is an able politician, and extremely artful in accomplishing any particular object,—it is remarked that he seldom fails. I am told he sits on the Bench in Connecticut, and is very correct in the discharge of his Judicial functions. In the early part of his life he was a Shoe-maker,—but despising the lowness

of his condition, he turned Almanack maker, and so progressed upwards to a Judge. He has been several years a Member of Congress, and discharged the duties of his Office with honor and credit to himself, and advantage to the State he represented. He is about 60.

Benjamin Rush's Sketches

A plain man of slender education. He taught himself mathematicks, and afterwards acquired some property and a good deal of reputation by making almanacks. He was so regular in business, and so democratic in his principles that he was called by one of his friends "a republican machine." Patrick Henry asked him in 1774 why the people of Connecticut were more zealous in the cause of liberty than the people of other States; he answered "because we have more to lose than any of them." "What is that," said Mr. Henry. "Our beloved charter" replied Mr. Sherman. He was not less distinguished for his piety than his patriotism. He once objected to a motion for Congress sitting on a Sunday upon an occasion which he thought did not require it, and gave as a reason for his objection, a regard of the commands of his Maker. Upon hearing of the defeat of the American army on Long Island, where they were entrenched and fortified by a chain of hills, he said to me in coming out of Congress "Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains" (Jeremiah 12:23).