

Hugh Ledlie to John Lamb, Hartford, 15 January 1788

The length of time since our acquaintance first commenced in New York about the years 1765 and 1766 makes me almost diffident whether you continue the same patriot and friend to your country. I then found you together with [Isaac] Sears, [Thomas] Robinson, [William] Wiley, [Gershom] Mott, [Edward] Light [Laight], [John Morin] Scott, [Jonathan?] Hazard, etc., etc., and many others whose names I have forgot, a committee for opposing the diabolical and oppressive Stamp Act, when [Lewis] Pintard, [Charles] Williams, etc., were brought to the stool or rather stage of repentance for acts of high crimes and misdemeanors committed against the then Sons of Liberty throughout the continent. But to return, I say, I should not have dared to venture a line to you on the subject I am about to say a few words upon, if I had not accidentally seen your name with others (good men) in some of our public newspapers handled in a very rough, ungentlemanlike manner—but even then I remained ignorant who those scurrilous, defamatory, backbiting writers meant, until a few days since being in company with General James Wadsworth who first told me it was you, and added an anecdote. The other day, or some time since, a gentleman, one Mr. [Alexander] Hamilton, meeting you in the street, asked you how you could be so much against the new Constitution, for it was pretty certain your old good friend General Washington would in all probability be the first President under it. To which you replied, that in that case all might be well, but perhaps after him General Slushington might be the next or second President. This, sir, was the very first hint I had of your opposing it and was confirmed in the same by the opprobrious, indecent, and, I believe, false speeches made use of at our late Convention in this place by some sly, mischievous insinuations, viz., that out of the impost, £8000 was paid by this state annually to the State of New York; out of which you received upwards of £900, which enabled you and others to write the Federal Farmer and other false libels and send them into this and the neighboring states to poison the minds of the good people against the good Constitution. They say a [John] Lamb, a [Marinus] Willet, a [Melancton] Smith, a [George] Clinton, and a [Robert] Yates's salaries are paid by this state through your state impost. The late Convention, which met in this town the 3d instant and voted the new Constitution the 9th in the evening and finished the 10th, was carried on, by what I can learn, with a highhand against those that disapproved thereof. For, if I am not misinformed, when the latters were speaking, which by the bye were far from being the best orators (a few excepted), they were browbeaten by many of those Ciceroes, as they think themselves, and others of superior rank, as they call themselves, as also by the unthinking deluded multitude, who were previously convened as it is thought by many, for that purpose; which together with shuffling and stamping of feet, coughing, talking, spitting, and whispering, as well by some of the members as spectators, with other interruptions, etc., etc., too many to be here enumerated, which I am told is true, for I was not there myself, being at that time confined by a slight touch of the gout. All these menaces and stratagems were used by a junto who tries to carry all before them in this state, as well by writing as every other diabolical and evil pretense. And as the presses in this state are open to them, but evidently shut against all those that would dare and presume to write on the other side against the new Constitution, they have greatly the advantage and, by these means, stigmatize everyone they think acts or

thinks to the contrary of what they say or do. Witness our late Landholder [Oliver Ellsworth] and some others of the same class against Richard Henry Lee, Esquire, Mr. [George] Mason, Mr. [Elbridge] Geary, etc., etc.; yet, notwithstanding all their long labored, scurrilous, vindictive, bitter, malicious, and false insinuations, there was found in our Convention forty-one [forty] righteous men that did not bow the knee to Baal, but, in the midst of all the storms of reproaches, etc., etc., stood their ground firm tho 127 [128] of those (called by some, of the first rank by their soft, smooth speeches) just at the close voted for the new Constitution, a Constitution that in the end will work the ruin of the freedom and liberty of these thirteen disunited states. I am not alone in this opinion, for there are many of the first abilities in this and the neighboring states with whom I correspond, as well by letters as otherways, besides the above 41, that think this new Constitution a gilded pill. But some of them, notwithstanding the gilding is so artfully laid on, can discern the arsenic and poison through the outside coloring—and our good printers (after the nag was stolen, I think after they had spent all their venom which came from the quills of the junto in favor of the new Constitution and just before the sitting of our Convention) then and not till then they published a pompous libel, that then and at all times they would publish on both sides. But the D[evi]l trust them, says many that from principle are against the new Constitution, and so none that I know of was ever sent them, well knowing it must run the gauntlet through all these infernal grub street, hireling, scurrilous scribblers, that watch and guard the posts of the printers' doors in this town, and who are daily attending for the selfsame purpose of disjointing, mangling, and torturing every piece that don't please their palate. This, sir, is some of the reasons why so few or none are sent. Another reason is, they have got almost all the best writers (as well as speakers) on their side, tho we vie with and, I believe, overbalance them in point of honesty and integrity. The piece alluded to as above teems with trying to sow discord and contention between the United States by insinuating that Richard H. Lee, Esquire has [been] and is a great enemy to General Washington, and that he endeavored to get his cousin, General [Charles] Lee, to be commander of our late army, etc., etc.⁷ In short, they leave, as the old saying is, no stone unturned, but they compass sea and land. They rake H[el]l and skim the D[evi]l to make one proselyte, and when they have found him, they make him twofold more the child of h[el]l than he was before. This proverb is of late verified by their turning from light to darkness—Copper [Joseph Hopkins], Wimple [William Williams], and some others, whom at present I'll forbear to name. We that are against the new Constitution are stigmatized by those mighty men of Moab by the opprobrious name of Wrongheads. If they are named right, I believe there is a majority in this state against the new Constitution, for it is thought by the best judges that if the freemen, etc., of this state could be convened together in one body, the greatest number would vote against the new proposed Constitution, notwithstanding all that is held out to the people at large in the public newspapers in this state. We wish here we had some of your good writers and a free press. We would souse some of our upstart sons of Apollo that pretend to great things.

One worthless man that gains what he pretends
disgusts a thousand unpretending friends
trials light as air,—are to the jealous confirmation strong

as proofs of Holy Writ—the wise too jealous are
fools too secure—Beware, beware, beware
for I apprehend a dreadful snare
is laid for virtuous innocence
under a friend's false pretense.

Now, sir, on the whole let me tell you that those gentlemen, at least those that I can unite with, have no greater hope (besides that of an overruling Providence) than in the virtue and wisdom of your state together with that of Virginia and Massachusetts not adopting the new Constitution; and I have heard some of the first characters that composed our late Convention say that if nine states did adopt the Constitution and New York rejected it, they would remove into your state, where they could enjoy freedom and liberty, for which they had fought and bled heretofore. And if your state is not by that means one of the most populous, flourishing states on the continent, I am much mistaken, not by emigrants only that are or will be dissatisfied with the new Constitution from the different states, but also from Europe. I myself, if I am able to buy a small farm in your state (somewhere about the South Bay, Fair Haven, Crown Point, up the Mohawk River, German Flats, Fort Stanwix, Wood Creek, the Oneida Lake, Trois Rivieres on the Onondaga River, Schohary-skill, Bradstreets Island in Lake Ontario, in the mouth of the River St. Lawrence, Oswego only excepted, Niagara, and above all somewhere on the south banks of Lake Erie—most or all of those places I am acquainted with), and if the proposed Constitution takes place and Providence permits, I will with others remove into your state, provided you do not adopt it; for many of the Convention that attended it (for as I said before, I did not attend myself in person) told me that the Convention was one of the most overbearing assemblies that ever set in this state, and as the new Constitution gives all the power both of the sword and purse into the hands of the Congress, our people reckon it leads to and opens a door for despotism, tyranny, anarchy, and confusion, and every evil work. I am afraid, sir, for want of knowing whom to put confidence in, you (if you sent any) sent your books into the wrong hands, as they never appeared or could be seen except a few sent to General J[ames] W[adsworth]. I never could see one until a few days before our Convention sat. The rest, besides those sent as above, were all secreted, burnt, and distributed amongst those for the new Constitution in order to torture, ridicule, and make shrewd remarks and may [make] game of, both of the pamphlet and them that wrote and sent them, all which they did not spare to do in our public newspapers by extracts and detached sentences just such as served their vile, malignant purposes long before I or any against the Constitution ever saw, I mean the Federal Farmer. On the whole, should be glad to know who those gentlemen are whom our heads of wit takes in hand to vilify in our public papers besides yourself. Pray, sir, who is Mr. Willet, Mr. Smith, Mr. Clinton, and Mr. Yates? Is Mr. Willet he that defended so nobly at Fort Stanwix in the late war? Also, who is Mr. Smith, and is Mr. Clinton your worthy governor—and pray who is Mr. Yates? Two of those names, viz., Judge Yates and Malankton Smith, Esquire, lodged at my house upwards of 20 days in December 1787 together with Mr. [James] Duane, your mayor, Chancellor [Robert R.] Livingston, Judge Herring [John Haring], Mr. [Egbert] Benson, your attorney general, and Mr. [Simeon] DeWitt, your surveyor general. [I] should be glad to know which or whether all or any of the above gentlemen are against or for

the new proposed Constitution.⁹ Our 41 members of Convention that opposed the Constitution went home very heavy-hearted and discouraged to think that by one stroke they had lost all their liberty and privileges, both civil and sacred, as well as all their property, money, etc., etc., by a set of men whose aim is entirely popularity, as they think will please the bulk of the people and procure them places, salary, and pensions under the new Constitution, as I am informed that many who are now in office and who, it is said, were decidedly against it until they came to this town to Convention. Then they were told plainly that if they did not turn and vote for it, they must not expect any places either of trust or profit under the new Constitution. Thus this capital stroke was reserved for the finishing blow, as those concerned well knew the pulses of these sort of men, for—as one of your city said at the beginning of the late war, he then being on Long Island and settling some affairs from this state, that he could buy any councillor in this state for a half joe or a piece of Irish linen—there is nothing that works so effectually as interest. So it is well verified as to some of our great men in the present case, some of whom I believe I could call by name, but at present I'll forbear, only that I will add one sentiment more and have done until I hear from New York, viz.: That I verily believe we have some of the most selfish, avaricious, narrow, contracted set of mortals that now exist in these thirteen disunited states. You'll please to excuse some low, scurrilous, vulgar language [and] the want of diction and grammar, as I am not a man of a liberal education and only follow the plow, having no other employ to get my bread but by the sweat of my brow, for I enjoy neither place nor pension, as they that are for the new Constitution in this state; and I am sure I shall never have any except I turn to their side, which at present I have no thoughts of. Sir, you'll please to forgive this lengthy, unconnected scrawl, as it hastily flew from one of the pens of the family of the Wrongheads, so called by the Tory Roundheads. We this way fear this new Constitution will work much mischief before it is adopted, and the destruction and ruin of the thirteen states if it takes place. Please to give my compliments to all the before-named gentlemen and Hugh Hughes, Esquire, being one of the old committee, more especially to those that are decidedly against the new Constitution.

P.S. Sir, General James Wadsworth is one of the many steeds that has behaved in character against the new Constitution and stood firm and intrepid, notwithstanding all the scoffs, flirts, browbeatings, flings, coughs, shuffles, threats, and menaces of the opposite faction in Convention. The sophistry, coloring, and smooth speeches of those great men which spoke last gave a turning cast to the whole and thereby gave the weaker brethren a different turn of mind from what they had when they came from home and or the instructions they received from the towns to which they belonged. But further, these forty-one good men in the minority say, in the name of common sense, why was the people in the different states so blind to their own interest as, at first, to choose and send to the General Convention at Philadelphia men then belonging to Congress; but more especially, afterwards, to send those very men to the state Convention to confirm their own dear acts and doings at Philadelphia. It is beyond all conceptions that wise men should act in this form as to send the very men whose interest it is to vote themselves places of honor and trust, profit, and money into their own pockets. Just so, things were managed at our late Convention in this town. The very men that framed the new Constitution at Philadelphia, together with our present governor, lieutenant governor, judges of our superior and inferior courts, present delegates to Congress, judges of probates, lawyers,

tagrag and bobtail, with some reverend divines, and placemen, salarymen, sinecures, and expectants of every denomination whatsoever were the men chosen in this state to attend our Convention, and who voted to a man for the new Constitution. Only the honest forty-one, who enjoyed none of the above lucrative places, posts, or pensions, etc., etc., etc., and that stood free and unbiased in their minds and were the only honest disinterested men that voted in the negative. We this way hope that if a convention is formed in your state (which we hope will not be), that none of this sort of self-interested gentry may be chosen, which was evidently the case here, which in the opinion of many honest, good, and disinterested men disaffected the honest, true, and simple desire of not only framing a good constitution at Philadelphia, but adopting the Constitution in our late Convention in this town. Now, sir, I don't mean to be understood that there was not a number of worthy characters (provided they had been disinterested) that voted for the new Constitution. But, in the name of common sense, how can these men [be disinterested], who it is said has their chests and trunks, etc., filled with public securities bought up by their emissaries heretofore from 1/3 to 6/8 on the pound; and the moment the new Constitution takes place, they are all to be made good (as they imagine with interest from their date) and equal to gold and silver—so that the poor first proprietor will be obliged to work perhaps at hard labor to pay 20/. and the interest thereon for what he sold for 2/6.—in short, these and many other iniquitous practices that has been and now is carrying on by many of those great and mighty men that has heretofore made their jack out of flour, and beef, Long Island plunder, etc., etc. You'll be so good as not to let anyone from this quarter see this letter and indeed no one except some select friends, and please [not?] to give or let anybody have or [see?] any copy, extracts, or detached sentences, as you may well learn the malevolent, vindictive tempers of some of these harpies, at least I have found it so against anyone that dare either write, speak, or act or even think against their new Dagon Constitution. Now, sir, as I told you before that you must not look for either diction, grammar, or even connection from a plowman; but this much I can say, that whatever inaccuracies or incoherence or sentiments thrown together, that they come from a staunch republican Whig who can trace his pedigree in that line much farther back than Charles the 2d even in Shropshire near Ludlow Castle, down to Henry the 2d and before, 14 miles above the city of Berwick on the banks of the Tweed. Adieu, my dear old friend and acquaintance. Please to write how and by whom you receive this and how the land lies in your state touching the new Constitution, etc., and what help we may depend on from the known virtue, wisdom, and good policy of your state in opposing the new Constitution. You may depend on it, you have many good and honest friends this way notwithstanding the many scurrilous, inflammatory pieces published of late in our partial public papers, for it is evident everything was published that was in favor of the new Constitution, but on the contrary, everything huggermugged and suppressed that was truly alarming against it. I believe by this time I have tired your patience; therefore to make any further apology would be to add to the length of this long epistle, therefore [I] shall conclude.

N.B. There is five gentlemen of the first characters on the continent that I formerly occasionally and now with some of them that are now living correspond with (viz.), Dr. [Benjamin] Franklin, Governor [William] Franklin, Governor [William] Livingston, now of the Jerseys, the Honorable William Smith and Sir Henry Moore, formerly of your city, Dr. [William Samuel] Johnson of this

state, and the Honorable Samuel Adams of Boston, all of whom, the latter excepted, I fear are decidedly against me as to the new Constitution. What Governor Livingston's opinion is I can never learn as it is somewhat above two years since I received a letter from him on account of the commutation and Cincinnati affairs. I wish I could know what part he takes as touching the new Constitution. If I did, I would write him as well as my old friend Samuel Adams, who by the bye is on the right side of the question, and whose opinion in all cases of government, etc., especially when it coincides with my weak opinion, I value much. I wish you would write which side of the question Governor Livingston takes. Sir Henry Moore, William Smith, Esquire, Phillip Livingston and William Livingston, esquires were formerly some of the greatest and best friends I ever had in America, but my old friend William Smith, Esquire, taking the wrong side of the question, from whom I had a letter some time since. I, from these connections and correspondents, heretofore received great satisfaction in both church and state, more especially from Governor Livingston when he occasionally corresponded with me when writing against the Bishop of Landaff, etc. Dr. Johnson, who is at present one of the best friends I have in this state, last May, before he went to the Convention at Philadelphia, was so kind as to spend part of two afternoons with me and now an evening the 5th instant. In May, we talked much of the intended Convention at Philadelphia. The other evening more particularly of the new Constitution; but, altho we differed widely in sentiments about and concerning the new Constitution and the doings of our then-present Convention, so far as they had then transpired, yet all these (as the old saying is) broke no squares in all our other politics or friendship. I have not seen or corresponded with my old friend Dr. Franklin since October 1775 then at Cambridge at General Washington's house and at Roxbury—on turtle I had the pleasure of dining with him, the General, etc., etc., two days. This journey I made particularly by the Dr.'s desire when the Colonel Harison [Benjamin Harrison] and Mr. [Thomas] Lynche, [Sr.] went [as] a committee through this town from Congress to General Washington, etc., at Cambridge, except that I wrote the Dr. last May by Dr. Johnson.

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