

An Assembly of Demigods

John Langdon

Marquis de Chastellux: *Travels in North-America, in the Years 1780, 1781, and 1782*

After dinner we went to drink tea with Mr. Langdon. He is a handsome man, and of a noble carriage; he has been a member of Congress, and is now one of the first people of the country; his house is elegant and well furnished, and the apartments admirably well wainscoted; he has a good manuscript chart of the harbour of Portsmouth. Mrs. Langdon, his wife, is young, fair, and tolerably handsome; but I conversed less with her than with her husband, in whose favour I was prejudiced, from knowing that he had displayed great courage and patriotism at the time of Burgoyne's expedition. For repairing to the council chamber, of which he was a member, and perceiving that they were about to discuss some affairs of little consequence, he addressed them as follows: "Gentlemen, you may talk as long as you please, but I know that the enemy is on our frontiers, and that I am going to take my pistols, and mount my horse, to combat with my fellow citizens"; the greatest part of the members of the council and assembly followed him, and joined General Gates at Saratoga. As he was marching day and night, reposing himself only in the woods, a negro servant who attended him, says to him, "Master, you are going to fight for Liberty; I should suffer also patiently if I had Liberty to defend." "Don't let that stop you," replied Mr. Langdon, "from this moment you are free." The negro followed him, behaved with courage, and has never quitted him.

William Pierce: *Sketches of Members of the Constitutional Convention, 1787*

Mr. Langdon is a Man of considerable fortune, possesses a liberal mind, and a good plain understanding.—about 40 years old.

Otto's *Biographies, Fall 1788*

One of the most interesting and most amiable men in the United States; a former governor of New Hampshire and the head of a very powerful party which is opposed to General [John] Sullivan.* Mr. Langdon made a great fortune in commerce and is the Robert Morris of his state. He likes to spend money and has attached many citizens to him because of his generousities. He was one of the principal members of the Philadelphia Convention but he attended Congress only a few days. Some of his colleagues have offered him the presidency [of Congress]. He didn't want to stay here [in New York City] because he had in mind the governorship of New Hampshire and his commercial affairs don't permit him long absences. He is sincerely attached to France and even predisposed to our customs and manners. To propagate a taste for our furniture, he has imported some very beautiful things from Paris. It is said that he is jealous of his wife, which is rather rare in America. Many French officers have seen to their chagrin that his jealousy was not well-founded.

*This opposition is only personal and means nothing in political matters. These two antagonists are equally attached to their country, to the Revolution, and to France; but Sullivan is the man of the people and Langdon the protégé of gentlemen. One has the gentlemen of the country for him, the other the merchants. Whatever may be the success of their intrigue, the commonwealth can never destroy it and the principles of government will rest with them. In Society, Mr. Langdon far outweighs his adversary. But it is necessary to see Sullivan as a lawyer and as the head of the militia.

Mr. Sullivan likes us very much and if he returns to Congress we can be sure to learn all that happens from him. He is only a little indiscreet and he likes to see that men have confidence in him.