

John Sloss Hobart (1738-1805)

Colonial Representative and Jurist



John Sloss Hobart

Not all Revolutionary War heroes were soldiers. Those who helped to form the institutions that came to govern the new country were just as important. Unfortunately, their contributions are often forgotten. John Sloss Hobart of Huntington was one of those forgotten patriots.

Hobart was born in Fairfield, Connecticut in 1738. His grandfather, John Sloss, a wealthy merchant, had purchased Eaton's Neck in 1710. Hobart inherited the land following the death of his mother and aunts.

Following his graduation from Yale in 1757, Hobart studied law in New York City. In 1764, he married and shortly thereafter built a home on Eaton's Neck called Cherry Lawn. There he raised cattle and sheep.

He quickly became involved in the patriot cause. In 1765, he became a leader of the Sons of Liberty, a group formed throughout the colonies to protest British taxes.

Committees of Correspondence were also formed to help colonists share information. Hobart was a member of the Committee of Correspondence for Huntington and Suffolk County.

As a part of the Huntington Declaration of Rights, adopted in 1774, the townspeople appointed Hobart as one of three representatives "to act in conjunction with committees of other towns in the county as a general committee for the county to correspond with the committee of New York." It is unknown who wrote the declaration, which holds that "every free man's property is absolutely his own and no man has a right to take it from him without his consent," but a good possibility is the Yale educated lawyer from Eaton's Neck.

The War for Independence started the following year. In October 1775, New York's royal governor fled. Four provincial congresses were appointed to govern the state from 1775 to 1777, when the new constitution took effect. Hobart served as a representative in each of these congresses, including the fourth at which the constitution was drafted.

Hobart was active in the provincial congresses, often acting as a representative to the army. The provincial congress sent him and another representative to report on the Battle of Long Island. But by the time they reached Brooklyn, the battle was over and confusion reigned over the rebel forces. Hobart traveled to Huntington from where he attempted to regroup the Suffolk militia. But the attempt seemed fruitless and the militia members returned home without ever reaching Huntington. The British soon established a garrison at Huntington and Hobart left his home for Connecticut. From Connecticut, Hobart rallied Long Island troops to retake the Island, but General Washington called off the attack because the troops were needed elsewhere.

The new state constitution, which Hobart helped to draft, went into effect in May 1777. Hobart was appointed one of two Associate Judges of the Supreme Court, a post he would hold for 20 years until reaching mandatory retirement at age 60. Hobart also served on the Temporary Government for the Southern District (Kings, New York, Queens, Suffolk, Richmond and Westchester Counties), which governed those counties following the withdrawal of British troops in 1783. By 1787, he sold his farm on Eaton's Neck. He built a new home on Throgg's Neck in the Bronx in 1794.

In 1798, after he was compelled to retire from the Supreme Court because of his age, he was appointed by the legislature to represent New York in the United States Senate. He served only four months in the Senate, but in that time introduced legislation for the construction of a lighthouse on Eaton's Neck. He resigned from the Senate to become a United States District Judge for the District of New York.

When Hobart died in 1805, a marble monument was erected in New York's City Hall to commemorate his life. It read in part:

As a man – firm
As a citizen – zealous
As a judge – distinguishing
As a Christian – sincere.

Closer to home a historical marker at the entrance to Eaton's Neck recalls the patriot who "mortgaged all but honor to found this nation," and the Town's "Hobart Beach" was named in his honor.

For more information contact the

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