

## CHAPTER X

### WASHINGTON AND CLINTON ENTER NEW YORK

1780 REELECTED GOVERNOR

KIDNAPERS

CLINTON LETS SIR JOHN JOHNSON ESCAPE

SIR JOHN ESCAPES AGAIN

WASHINGTON DEPENDS ON CLINTON

YORKTOWN AND EVACUATION OF NEW YORK

NEW YORK WELCOMES WASHINGTON AND CLINTON

THEY CELEBRATE THE NEW ERA

BY 1780 George Clinton had achieved recognition as one of the greatest of the war governors. In New York he was almost universally respected and his reelection to the governorship should he consent to stand was inevitable. Rivals were few. Schuyler was no more popular than he had been in 1777 and Jay, who had been for a year president of Congress, was in 1780 on a fruitless diplomatic mission at Madrid.<sup>1</sup> Except for Schuyler the first families of New York had not succeeded in producing any war leader of the first rank to contest the leadership of the state with Clinton. Clinton expressed some reluctance to serving another three years. Yet Stephen Lush was able to write him from Albany shortly before the elections that in spite of numerous contending candidates for the Assembly who were "divided into parties," and in spite of some campaigning against the new taxes and the raising of more levies for the frontier, Clinton's name and that of Lieutenant Governor Van Cortlandt appeared on every list of candidates that he

<sup>1</sup> He was not received at court, however, and left Madrid for Paris in May, 1782.

had seen.<sup>2</sup> Clinton must have been pleased. The New York democracy had not been disappointed in the man it had chosen in 1777.

Under the provisions of the elections act of March 27, 1778, the elections were held on the last Tuesday in April and the voting was *vive voce* for senators and assemblymen but by ballot for governor and lieutenant governor. Although the voting in 1780 may have produced "some Heats," very few electors found time to visit the polling places. Some days after the balloting Robert R. Livingston was able to congratulate the governor, expressing pleasure at "the great superiority of ballots in your favor at the last election, that the people notwithstanding the endeavors of some designing men are disposed to do justice to your merrits." General Lewis Morris added to his congratulations the wish that Clinton might preside over the state for life. Clinton had won by 3264 ballots.<sup>3</sup> His second gubernatorial term began on July 1, 1780.

The Clintons were of course still living at their Poughkeepsie home, but the governor's life was a peripatetic one. Legislative sessions took him for weeks at a time to Fishkill, New Windsor, Newburgh, or even Saratoga. He pretended that he did not enjoy this roving. "One month at most, out of the last twelve, have I enjoyed the Society of my Family & that not without Interruption by claims from one quarter or another," he wrote in 1781.<sup>4</sup> Possibly on some of these trips he used the phaeton that James Bloodgood sent down to him from Albany in the fall of 1781.<sup>5</sup>

The Christmas of 1780, Governor Clinton and his wife or daughter dined with General and Mrs. Washington at the general's headquarters, the Ellison House at New Windsor. The company was a large one comprising as it did the officers of the general's staff, two French officers, and certain of the neighbors, including Mrs. James Clinton who had furnished three turkeys for the occasion. Mrs. Washington had only recently rejoined the general and this was the first occasion on which she entertained. Mr. Corning tells us that the guard band

<sup>2</sup> *Public Papers*, V, 614.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 691, 896; F. B. Hough, *New York Civil List* (Albany, 1860), 29; Lincoln, *Messages from the Governors*, II, 10.

<sup>4</sup> *Public Papers*, VI, 736.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, VII, 388.

played while the guests challenged the beef, mutton, and poultry. "After dinner spiced wine was passed round, followed by pies, puddings, apples, nuts, and cider."<sup>6</sup> Men and women ate heartily in those days.

The practical Clinton was no patron of the fine arts. Yet during these busy years he found time for an interesting but not always spirited correspondence with the Swiss artist, Pierre du Simitiere. The artist usually wrote from Philadelphia, explaining his plans for pencil drawings of great Americans, hinting broadly to Clinton of his wish to acquire collections of documents and of Indian relics, and complaining of Clinton's neglect. Clinton usually succeeded in finding time to write and even supplied the persistent Swiss with the desired collection of Indian relics.<sup>7</sup>

Even residence at Poughkeepsie in friendly territory did not protect the war governor from attempted kidnappings. In early August 1781, Washington wrote Clinton to warn him of a plot to seize him and take him to New York. A considerable group of British partisans were involved and the prizes offered were a hundred guineas each for the four men who were to make the actual seizure. Attempts were made to kidnap Generals Schuyler and Gansevoort at about the same time. Early in 1782 Hendrick Wyckoff warned Governor Clinton that a plan was afoot to abduct him, that the prize was two hundred guineas, and that the kidnapers had recently been routed near Poughkeepsie by the governor's guard. In acknowledging Wyckoff's letter Clinton stated that although he had no guard at present, he was not much concerned for his safety.<sup>8</sup>

For two and a half years after the fall of the Highland forts George Clinton did no active campaigning. In 1780, however, he made two last appearances in the field, both of them attempts to capture that wily Tory, Sir John Johnson. The chastisement that Sullivan and James Clinton had administered to the Indians in northwestern New York had left the Indians and Tories of the frontier momentarily subdued but thirsting for revenge, and the years 1780 and 1781 saw a succession of terrifying border raids. It was not until after the ar-

<sup>6</sup> Corning, *Washington at Temple Hill*, 59-60.

<sup>7</sup> *Public Papers*, *passim*.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, VI, 568-69; VII, 193-94; *Olde Ulster*, V, 370.

rival of news of the treaty of peace with Britain that the governor could relax his efforts to provide for the defense of the frontiers. One of the most troublesome of the enemy raids was Sir John Johnson's famous return to Johnson Hall in May 1780.

Governor Clinton was at Kingston waiting for a quorum of the legislature to gather to hear his recommendations when the news came that Sir John with five hundred Tories and Indians had entered the Mohawk Valley. They destroyed Caughnawaga and Sir John recovered some of his family plate that had been hidden at Johnson Hall. The governor delivered his message to the legislature on the twenty-fifth and then left immediately for Albany. Quite apart from the crisis in the Mohawk Valley it was a pleasant time of year for a trip into the northern woods. General Ten Broeck was ill, but Clinton ordered Colonel Van Schaick to start the pursuit of Sir John while he himself went north to Saratoga and Fort George to gather the militia.<sup>9</sup>

He had at first two primary objects: to cut off Sir John and his company and, secondly, to prepare for an expected attack by a much larger force from Canada on Fort Schuyler. But, suspecting that the attack on Fort Schuyler was a British ruse "calculated to favour Sir John's Incursion," he turned all his available militia and those which came in from the Vermont country to the task of intercepting Sir John. Van Schaick was to harass the enemy's rear to delay their retreat, yet Van Schaick lacked supplies as well as men and Clinton, realizing the colonel's ineffectiveness, planned to give himself more time by moving up from Lake George to Lake Champlain before attempting to check Sir John's march. He felt that he was making good time, but Sir John made better and embarked at Crown Point on Lake Champlain some six hours before the governor and his militia could arrive. He told Washington that while he regretted the failure to trap Sir John, he hoped that that gentleman's close escape might deter him from similar enterprises.<sup>10</sup> By June 13 Clinton was back with the legislature at Kingston writing to Abraham Yates that "Mrs. Clinton, after waiting till the alarm below and the great hurry

<sup>9</sup> *Public Papers*, V, 761, 766, 769, 818.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 819.

of Business was over very decently presented me with a fine Girl."<sup>11</sup>

That summer Washington was again in New York and General Benedict Arnold took command at West Point. When Arnold's shocking treason was discovered late in September Governor Clinton was one of the first that Washington notified. The governor's attention was, however, shortly transferred to the north, for it was only a few days after Arnold's flight to a British sloop of war that Sir John Johnson showed by a new raid that his close escape that spring had been no deterrent to similar expeditions. He came from Canada by way of Oswego with a large force of regulars, Greens, and Butler's rangers, was joined by his Indian allies at Unadilla and in mid-October fell on the Schoharie Valley. Houses and barns at Schoharie were burned, great amounts of newly harvested grain destroyed and Caughnawaga given to the flames. The frontiers were in terror. Once again the governor thought it necessary to go himself to the scene of battle. He wrote Washington on October 14 that he was leaving Poughkeepsie immediately for Albany and he appealed for Continental troops. With militia under General Robert Van Rensselaer of Claverack the governor hurried by forced marches to the threatened region and arrived on the eighteenth at Caughnawaga in time to see it burn.

Then followed a series of inexcusable errors and delays for which General Van Rensselaer was probably directly responsible as Clinton had placed him in command of the expedition. But the governor as commander-in-chief of the militia possessed the authority, if not the wisdom, to prevent Van Rensselaer's blunders and must to some degree share the blame with that lackadaisical officer. Van Rensselaer ordered Colonel John Brown to attack Sir John but failed to support him and in the ensuing skirmish Brown was killed and his little force routed. Sir John then found time to desolate Stone Arabia and pillage the countryside. On the twenty-first the Americans came on the enemy at Klock's Field, near Canajoharie, defeated them, but again allowed them to get away. Van Rensselaer's pursuit brought him to Fort Herkimer just behind Johnson, but he soon gave up and the enemy returned to Canada by the Oswego route. The governor overtook his general at Fort Herkimer but did not, it is said, even then inter-

<sup>11</sup> Platt, *Poughkeepsie*, 52.

ferre in the command. The expedition accomplished its prime purpose of running Sir John Johnson out of the state but with proper direction it might have captured or destroyed the whole enemy force.<sup>12</sup> Somewhat mortified with the results, Clinton returned to Schenectady and Albany, spent the night of October 27 with Colonel Livingston and was back to Poughkeepsie on the 28th.<sup>13</sup> Not only mortification but also a bad siege of rheumatism followed the trip.

Two months later Washington called on Clinton for assistance in what might have proved a very serious emergency. Washington wrote the governor from New Windsor on January 4 that there had been a mutiny in the Pennsylvania line stationed near Morristown. If there should be further outbreaks it would be necessary to depend entirely on the militia. Knowing Clinton's influence with the militiamen, Washington thought it "indispensably necessary that your Excellency should be as near the posts as possible" and added that "your advice upon such an occasion would be of infinite service to me. . . . If the Session [of the legislature soon to assemble at Albany] can be carried on by the Lieutenant Governor, I shall be glad to see your Excellency as soon as possible." Clinton replied the next day that he would give up his Albany trip, and on January 6 he was with Washington at the New Windsor headquarters. He returned to Poughkeepsie before Washington was satisfied that the Morristown mutiny was completely disposed of, but he promised Washington that if necessary he could throw a thousand militia into West Point in three or four days.<sup>14</sup>

George Clinton was in conference again with Washington at Peekskill late in June when he agreed to the withdrawal of the Continental regiments at Albany provided he could get reënforcements for Albany from Massachusetts. Washington promised six hundred Bay State militia but found it easier to promise than to produce them. Governor Clinton was, however, as insistent as Governor Hancock was reluctant.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *Public Papers*, VI, 291-338; Benson John Lossing, *Empire State* (New York, 1887), 306-07; Stone, *Joseph Brant*, II, 115-23.

<sup>13</sup> *Public Papers*, VI, 345-47.

<sup>14</sup> *Public Papers*, VI, 547-50, 572.

<sup>15</sup> John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *Diaries of George Washington* (4 vols., Boston and New York, 1925), II, 229, 247.

There was of course great rejoicing and much exchanging of congratulations upon the arrival of the great news of Yorktown in October 1781. At Poughkeepsie the legislature convened in the Dutch church to offer thanks while the good folk of the town expressed gratitude in bonfires and salutes. Chancellor Livingston wrote enthusiastically to the governor; General Heath asked him to join the army on October 31 in its celebration of the great event; and Colonel Hamilton called on him early in November with first-hand news from Virginia.<sup>16</sup> The news must have given great satisfaction to the governor who could develop a deal of satisfaction over any event that he could consider "humiliating to British pride and arrogance."

Yorktown was not the end of the war. There was nevertheless after the surrender of Cornwallis a very natural feeling in the states that the war was virtually over and that further sacrifices in the Continental cause were not essential. In spite of this let-down of morale George Clinton worked, much as before the victory, to raise and maintain troops and to keep the always threatening frontiers adequately defended. The problems of supplies and finance were more pressing perhaps than ever. "I sincerely wish the people would be persuaded to forego the use of Luxuries & even of Articles which habit has in some measure made the Necessaries of Life & apply the monies they expend in that way to the support of the War," the governor told Gouverneur Morris in 1782.<sup>17</sup> He must have been gratified when Steuben wrote him in April of that year: "I have the pleasure to inform your Excellency that the appearance of the New York line which I inspected last week does them the greatest honor. The men are exceedingly well cloathed, and armed & by the attention of their Officers I have reason to believe they will be disciplined the ensuing campaign equal to any troops in the army."<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, the decision of the Continental Congress to refuse James Clinton a commission as major general on the ground that the New York line

<sup>16</sup> Platt, *History of Poughkeepsie*, 53; *Public Papers*, VII, 459; Heath to Clinton, October 30, 1781, letter in Huntington Library; Livingston to Clinton, October 27, 1781, photostat in Library of Congress.

<sup>17</sup> *Public Papers*, VIII, 23.

<sup>18</sup> Letter of April 10, 1782 in State Museum, Newburgh.

was not entitled to a second major general probably did not increase the governor's fondness for that body.<sup>19</sup>

There was time during these months for the less serious duties of war. Among the more frivolous was a splendid dinner of five hundred plates that Washington gave at West Point to Governor Clinton and other gentlemen on May 31, 1782. The occasion being the celebration of the birth of a Dauphin, eight of the thirteen toasts were to France and the alliance.<sup>20</sup> Late in June the governor accompanied the commander-in-chief on a visit to Albany, Saratoga, and Schenectady. Schuyler entertained them royally at Albany and wherever they went their trip became a kind of triumphal progress. In the fall Washington and Clinton were received with similar acclaim in Kingston where Washington viewed "with indignation the marks of a wanton and cruel enemy," but rejoiced that Kingston's calamities had only added to its patriotism.<sup>21</sup>

The preliminary articles of peace with Great Britain, which were signed at Paris on November 30, 1782, and ratified by the United States the following April, provided among other things that his Britannic Majesty should "with all convenient speed, & without causing any Destruction or carrying away any Negroes," withdraw all his armies, garrisons and fleets from every port, place and harbor within the United States. The provision also appeared in Article VII of the definitive treaty which was signed at Paris on September 3.<sup>22</sup> Yet to persuade his Britannic Majesty to evacuate southern New York occupied a good deal of George Clinton's time in 1783 and it was to be nearly thirteen more years before his still reluctant majesty could be induced to yield up the western posts which included Niagara, Oswego, Oswegatchie, and two stations on Lake Champlain in New York.

Even before the ratification of the preliminary articles of peace the impatient governor sent Egbert Benson, his attorney general, to New York City to congratulate Sir Guy Carleton on the peace and to sug-

<sup>19</sup> Burnett, *Letters . . . Continental Congress*, VI, 322, 554; *Public Papers*, VIII, 55.

<sup>20</sup> *New York Packet*, June 6, 1782.

<sup>21</sup> *History of the State of New York*, Flick, ed., V, 72. *New York Packet*, December 5, 1782.

<sup>22</sup> *Treaties and Other International Acts of the United States*, Hunter Miller, ed., II (Washington, 1931), 96, 151.

gest politely a speedy evacuation of the parts of New York held by the British. Carleton was courteous but evasive. He thought that the initiative in formulating plans for evacuation should come from the governor. Washington then took a hand in the negotiations and Sir Guy agreed to meet the American commander-in-chief at Tappan. Governor Clinton accompanied Washington at this conference, which took place on May 6, but the two together succeeded only in getting Sir Guy to promise to withdraw from Westchester County. Six days later, after some further urging by Clinton, Carleton wrote the governor that his troops were leaving Westchester.<sup>23</sup> That was something.

The council for the southern district of New York, which had been rather prematurely appointed by the legislature in 1779 to take over the administration and policing of the southern counties when they should be evacuated, met at Poughkeepsie on May 20 and viewed with regret Carleton's failure to hasten evacuation. The council, of which the governor was a member, reviewed Clinton's correspondence with Carleton and approved the governor's action. Encouraged, Clinton returned to the attack. He urged the evacuation of Long Island, rebuked Carleton for his refusal to turn the records and archives of New York City over to young Scott, the son of the secretary of state, and complained that patriot property was still kept from its rightful owners and even leased by the British authorities. Not until November 12 did Sir Guy yield and write Clinton that he expected to retire from New York and Long Island on November 22. It was as a matter of fact the 25th before the Americans could enter the metropolis.<sup>24</sup>

It was only natural that the governor of the sovereign state of New York should share the honors with the Continental commander-in-chief when the American forces entered New York. Shortly before the time set for evacuation Washington came down from his Newburgh headquarters to meet Governor Clinton and his staff and General Knox with his troops at Harlem. On the 25th Knox led the troops amid cheers down Bowery Lane and Chatham Street into the city as the British withdrew, leaving their flag, it is said, nailed to a

<sup>23</sup> *Public Papers*, VIII, 134-40, 156-68, 176.

<sup>24</sup> *Public Papers*, VIII, 183, 186, 203, 207, 211, 239-40, 278-83, 298; James Grant Wilson, *Memorial History of the City of New York*, III (New York, 1893), 10-12.

greased pole. The city having been occupied, Knox and a group of citizens proceeded to the Bull's Head in the Bowery to call for Washington and Governor Clinton while the citizens who were to march afoot assembled "at or near the Tea-water-Pump at Freshwater." Then took place a triumphal progress through the city. A troop of horse led the procession, followed by Washington with Clinton at his side, Lieutenant Governor Van Cortlandt, the members of the council for the temporary government of the southern district, other notables, and a body of citizenry. The troops marched up Broadway and the gentlemen and officers through Queen Street to join forces at Cape's Tavern.<sup>25</sup> The citizenry that crowded the streets to welcome the American conquerors to the harassed little city that had suffered two major fires since the British occupied it in 1776, seems to have been properly enthusiastic. The thousands who regretted the departure of the red coats discreetly held their peace.

The climax of the day was a dinner given at Fraunces' Tavern by Governor Clinton to Washington and his officers. Here at Samuel Fraunces' the assembled guests consumed, among other things, ten pounds' worth of punch, 24 bottles of spruce, 24 of porter, 16 of port, 18 of claret, and 75 of Madeira, which was always Clinton's favorite. And an even more lavish dinner was given by Clinton and his council to the Chevalier de Luzerne, the French Minister, and to General Washington a few days later at Cape's. The dinner must indeed have been a gay one for the 120 diners broke 60 wine glasses and made away with 135 bottles of Madeira alone, not to speak of 36 bottles of port, 60 of English beer, and 30 bowls of punch. There was coffee for the few who wished it; fruits, nuts, and music for all. The state received from John Cape a bill for £156/10.<sup>26</sup>

Little wonder that Clinton and his fellow Whigs forgot frugality, and possibly temperance too, in the jubilation of that great moment.

<sup>25</sup> Broadside of November 24, 1783 in Edward Ten Broeck Perine, *Here's to Broadway* (New York, 1930), opp. p. 14; Humphreys, *David Humphreys*, I, 283-84; *Historic New York*, edited by Maud W. Goodwin and others (2 vols., New York and London, 1897-99), II, 261. James Clinton was among the officers present. John Romeyn Brodhead, *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York* (Albany, 1853-87), VIII, 806.

<sup>26</sup> The itemized bills for both banquets are printed in E. C. Knight, *New York in the Revolution*, 167.

For eight years certainly, and possibly for fifteen, Clinton had fought to make his New York the cornerstone of a new-world republic. To him and his fellow democrats, naive and confident as they were, monarchy meant tyranny, corruption, absentee government and all that was reprehensible. Republicanism, on the other hand, would bring liberty, justice, and civic virtue; it would open the door of opportunity to all men—excepting only Tories; and it would make possible government based upon the social contract, that good government of, by, and for the people that had been the goal of Clinton and his radical Whig compatriots since 1776. It was perhaps too simple and democratic a faith that these men possessed, and some disillusionment was certain to follow. But in December 1783 Clinton and his democrats were jubilant in their belief that a new era had dawned.