

Governor Wood, of Virginia.

The interesting letter I have in my hands was purchased a few weeks ago by me at an auction sale of autographs and other library wares. It was written by James Wood, and although the writer was here in Lancaster, apparently on a special mission, our local annals have no record of the event, nor, indeed, any mention of the event, whatever. The letter seemed so interesting, so important, in fact, that further investigation seemed demanded by the circumstances. That was accordingly made and with satisfactory results. But here is the letter:

“Lancaster, 13th July, 1781.

“I have just now the Honor of your Excellency’s Letter of the 9th Instant, and have Communicated the Contents to Colo. Hubley, who will take the Necessary steps to Prevent any further Preparations being made in the Neighborhood of York Town. With Respect to Accommodating the whole of the Prisoners, including those of the Convention Troops within the Picquets, I think your information Eroneous; there is at Present upwards of two Hundred men with four Hundred Twenty Seven Women and Children without the Picquets, Sheltered with Blankets and Planks procured by themselves, and yet the Barracks are exceedingly Crowded; Add to this a Malignant Fever Prevails Among them, of which Many have Died, and upwards of One Hundred are now Down with it. Upon the whole, if your Hon. Board Determine

to Keep them here, I think it will be Absolutely Necessary to enlarge the Picquets, and to Direct a Quantity of Oak Plank to be Provided, to make Shelters for themselves, and which may answer as a Temporary Expedient; Besides, I think it would be an Exceeding Proper Measure to have a House Detached from the Barracks, Appropriated for an Hospital, and to remove the Sick as they are taken Down; for the Security of which, a small Detached Guard would be Sufficient.....The Present Guards consist of About three Hundred Non Commissioned and Privates, with their Proper Officers, part of which, were intended to Guard the British to York, and a Guard for the removal of the Seamen now Confined here, to Philadelphia. I am clearly of Opinion that One Hundred and fifty Men properly Officered, will be a sufficient Standing Guard for this Post.—I am Happy to inform your Excellency that I have found a real Disposition in the Commissary of Prisoners, and the Commanding Officers of the Militia to do everything in their Power for the Good of the Service. I shall set Off tomorrow for Reading, and will return in a few Days to this Place, where I shall be ready to receive any further Orders you may think Proper to Honor me with. I am with the Greatest Respect & Esteem.

“Sir,

“Y. Excellency’s

“Very Ob. Serv.,

“J. WOOD.”

James Wood, once Governor of Virginia, was born in that Colony in the year 1750. His family was a prominent one in his native State. His father, Col. James Wood, was the founder of the city of Winchester, and County

Clerk of Frederick county, showing him to have been a person of standing and influence. The first appearance in public life of James Wood, the younger, the writer of this letter, was in the year 1774, when he was commissioned by Lord Dunmore, the Governor of the State, as a captain of Virginia troops. In the succeeding year, 1775, he was elected, at the early age of twenty-five, a member of the House of Burgesses, from Frederick county.

In the same year he was commissioned to visit, on behalf of Virginia, some Western Indians and invite them to meet Virginia delegates at Fort Pitt to agree upon a treaty. Accompanied by but a single companion he accomplished the purpose of his mission and gained the admiration and respect of those Western tribes. The able manner in which he had acquitted himself brought him new honors. In 1776, the House of Burgesses, of which he was still a member, appointed him on November 12, 1776, a full colonel in the Virginia line, and commander of the Eighth Virginia Regiment.

During the early part of the Revolutionary War he played a prominent part, serving with much gallantry the fortunes of his regiment. When Burgoyne's army was captured in 1778, the British and Hessian soldiers, which had composed it, were sent into captivity at Charlottsville. Col. Wood was placed in command of that important post. In 1781 he was commissioned superintendent of all the prisoners of war in Virginia. It was undoubtedly that fact which brought him North at that time, to Lancaster, Reading, and other localities where prisoners of war were kept in large numbers until they could be sent to Virginia out of the way of recapture.

But for that fact the letter now in evidence would never have been written and our Society remained unacquainted of the presence of this distinguished Virginian among us.

But his native State seems not to have tired of honoring him. In 1783, the War for Independence being over, the Governor of Virginia commissioned him a Brigadier General of State troops. He was also elected for several terms a member of the Virginia Council, and by seniority in that body became the Lieutenant Governor of the State. In 1789 he was chosen one of the Presidential Electors for Virginia when that State cast its electoral vote for George Washington. But a still higher honor awaited him. He was elected Governor of his native State and served in that capacity from December 1, 1796, to December 1, 1799, when he was succeeded by no less an illustrious person than James Monroe, a future President of the United States. His public services covered a period of more than twenty-five years, and in honor thereof Wood county (now included in West Virginia) was named for him.

Like his fellow-Virginians, Washington and Jefferson, Governor Wood believed slavery to be an evil, and was in 1797 elected the Vice President, and in 1801 the President of the Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery in Virginia. On October 9, 1784, he became a member of the Virginia branch of the Society of the Cincinnati, and was elected its Vice President on December 4, 1789, becoming President of the same on January 17, 1802, serving in that capacity until his death at Olney, near Richmond, July 16, 1813.

Governor Wood was married to Jean Moncure in 1775. She was born in

Virginia in 1754; was the daughter of Rev. John Moncure, an Episcopal clergyman, and a native of Scotland. She appears to have been a woman of great amiability and nobility of character. Her later years were devoted to Christian work, in which she exhibited great zeal and benevolence. She was one of the main promoters of the Female Humane Association, of Richmond, incorporated in 1811, and of which she was the first President. She was also a poetess of no small ability. A collection of her poetical effusions, entitled "Flowers and Weeds of the Old Dominion," was published in 1859.

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