

# Address to President John Adams from the Citizens of Lancaster Borough and County Supporting the Government in its Attitude Toward France

By WILLIAM FREDERIC WORNER

IN THE proceedings of the Lancaster County Historical Society of October, 1924, appears an article entitled, "John Marshall in Lancaster." In that paper is described the unsuccessful attempt of the three American envoys, Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, Elbridge Gerry and John Marshall, to establish diplomatic relations with the French Republic.

The first dispatches of the envoys, sent from Paris October 22nd, 1797, reached Philadelphia on the night of March 4th, 1798. The next morning, President Adams informed Congress of their arrival; and two weeks later, sent to that body his startling message, declaring that the envoys could not succeed "on terms compatible with the safety, the honor, or the essential interests of the nation;" and "exhorting" Congress to prepare for war.

The effect of this information upon public opinion was instantaneous and far-reaching. Marshall's disclosures in the dispatches "produced such a shock upon the Republican mind as had not been seen since our independence." Public meetings were held everywhere, and "addresses, from all bodies and descriptions of men," poured "like a torrent on the President and both houses of Congress."

On April 11th, 1798, at a meeting of the merchants, traders and underwriters of Philadelphia, an address to the President was adopted, expressing regret at the failure of the negotiations with France, and the determination of the business men of Philadelphia to support the government. Following this, a meeting of the select council was held, "expressing to the President of the United States the highest approbation of his conduct relative to the existing differences with the French Republic." Similar meetings were held elsewhere and popular indignation at the conduct of France was rapidly intensifying.

Following the example of Philadelphia, "a large number of respectable inhabitants of the borough and county of Lancaster" met in the court house on Thursday, April 19th, 1798. General Edward Hand occupied the chair, and John Hubley, Esq., acted as secretary. An address declaring confidence in the President of the United States, and the determination of the gathering to support the government, was agreed to and submitted to the people for signature.

The address was as follows:

TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES. THE ADDRESS OF THE INHABITANTS OF THE COUNTY OF LANCASTER, PA.

At this alarming crisis in our political existence, we approach you, Sir, to express our cordial approbation of the measures adopted by the Executive for the preservation of the neutrality and peace of our country. The firm reliance we have had on your patriotism and attachment to the genuine principles of liberty, as guaranteed to us by our excellent Constitution is (if possible) strengthened and enlarged by a policy so congenial with the character of the Chief Magistrate of a free people.

Whatever may be the real or imaginary pretensions of an ally which derogate from a state of amity, the distinction and honor of the aggressing

nation require an investigation of the supposed infractions of friendship upon the basis of equality. A demand of a preliminary submission acknowledging the commission of an offence — a stipulation for pecuniary compensation anterior to the discussion of the causes of discord, are debasements of national dignity, totally incompatible with the sovereignty and independence of a nation.

Holding these to be self-evident truths, which men nursed in the bosom of freedom can by no mean permit to be gainsaid, we feel ourselves forcibly drawn to acknowledge to you a thankfulness for the earnest endeavors you have used in your diplomatic intercourse: to cultivate and nourish harmony with the FRENCH REPUBLIC: For the sincere, candid and unequivocal manner with which you have displayed the fair and upright principles of the United States in the proposed negotiations with that Republic: And for your nomination (as Commissioners to France) of three of our fellow-citizens, whose energy of mind and love of country, have enabled them to resist terms of conciliation degrading to the national character and dishonorable to the government.

If, unhappily, the United States be driven into hostility by the injustice and insatiate ambition of the French Republic, we trust that that benign Being, whose aid in our keenest distress we have so frequently experienced, will again become auxiliary to the arms of freemen honestly contending for the liberty and independence of their country. We assure you, Sir, for ourselves, personally, that in such a conflict no consideration of ease to our estates or safety to our persons, shall deter us from the exertion of every power we possess in the support of the government.

We fervently implore the Supreme Disposer of Events to continue your health of body, fortitude of mind, and mature wisdom, that you may be imperoed in your arduous station to lead us through this perilous era with honour to yourself and an accession of glory to the American name.

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The Lancaster Journal of Saturday, May 5th, 1798, informed the public that the address had been transmitted to the President of the United States. It contained upwards of 1800 signatures. At the time the paper was issued, several returns from the townships had not been made, but, judging by those that had been received, it appeared that the number would exceed 2000.

Author: Worner, William Frederic.

Title: Address to President John Adams from the citizens of  
Lancaster Borough and County supporting the government  
in its attitude toward France / by William Frederic  
Worner.

Primary Material: Book

Subject(s): Adams, John, 1735-1826.  
Lancaster (Pa.)--History--1775-1865.  
France--History--Revolution, 1789-1799.

Publisher: Lancaster, Pa. : Lancaster County Historical Society, 1928

Description: 53-54 p. ; 23 cm.

Series: Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society ; v. 32,  
no. 3 & 4

Call Number: 974.9 L245 v.32

Location: LCHSJL -- Journal Article (reading room)

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