

At My Quarters,  
Derryfield, 31<sup>st</sup> July 1809  
My Friends and Fellow Soldiers:

I received yours of the 22<sup>nd</sup>, instant, containing your fervent expressions of friendship, and your very polite invitation to meet with you, to celebrate the 16<sup>th</sup> of August, in Bennington.

As you observe, I “Can never forget that” I “commanded American Troops” on that day in Bennington,--They were men that had not learned the art of submission, nor had they been trained to the art of war. But our “astonishing success” taught the enemies of Liberty, that undisciplined freemen are superior to veteran slaves. And I fear we shall have to teach the lesson anew to that perfidious nation.

Nothing could afford me more pleasure than to meet “the Sons of Liberty” on that fortunate spot. But as you justly anticipate, the infirmities of old age will not permit; for I am now fourscore and one years old, and the lamp of life is almost spent. I have of late had many such invitations, but was not ready, for there was not oil enough in the lamp.

You say you wish your young men to see me, but you who have seen me can tell them that I never was worth much for a show, and certainly cannot be worth their seeing now.

In case of my not being able to attend, you wish my sentiments,--then you shall have them as free as the air we breathe. As I was then, I am now--The friend of the equal rights of men, of representative Democracy, of Republicanism, and the Declaration of Independence, the great charter of our National rights: -- and of course the friend of the indissoluble union and constitution of the States. I am the enemy of all foreign influence, for all foreign influence is the influence of tyranny. This is the only chosen spot for liberty, -- this is the only Republic on earth.

You well know, gentlemen, that at the time of the event you celebrate, there was a powerful British faction in the country (called Tories), and a material part of the force we had to contend with was (at Bennington, Hoosick) Tories. This faction was rankling in our councils, till they had laid the foundation for the subversion of our liberties. But by good sentinels at our outposts, we were apprised of our danger; and the Sons of Freedom beat the alarm -- and, as at Bennington, “They came, they saw, they conquered.” But again the faction has rallied to the charge, and again they have been beaten.

It is my orders now, and will be my last orders to all volunteers, to look well to their sentries; for there is a dangerous British party in this country, lurking in their hiding places, more dangerous than all our foreign enemies. And whenever they shall appear openly, to render the same account of them that was given at Bennington, let them assume what name they will; not doubting that the ladies will be as patriotic, in furnishing every aid, as they were at Bennington in ‘77, who even dismantled their beds

to furnish cords to secure and lead them off.

I shall remember, gentlemen, the respect you, and “the inhabitants of Bennington and its neighborhood” have shewn me. Till I go to the country from which no traveler e’er returns. I must soon receive marching orders.

*John Stark*

P.S. I will give you my volunteer toast: Live Free or Die, Death is not the greatest of evils.

(Copied from the *Bennington Banner*, 16 August 2007, and submitted by Philip Pappas.)