

Elijah Hand-Militia Colonel and Privateer Captain

J.P. Hand

Close to twenty years before the American Revolution began, the Cape May whaler, Lewis Cresse recorded the following passage in his journal:

“On the 5th day of January 1757 as Elijah Hand was agoing to the wedding of Gideon Hand and riding very fast in a turn of the roade Elijahs hors turned out which caused him to hit a tree with his head and hardly escapt death.”

As fate would have it, the 27-year-old whaler’s son would live another 33 years. During that time, Elijah would manage his plantations at Fishing Creek, Cape May County and Dividing Creek in Cumberland County; marry his second cousin, Rachel Hand and father three children, Elijah, Jr., Recompence, and Rachel (who married Philip Stites).

With the outbreak of hostilities with Great Britain, Elijah Hand would begin a military career as a Captain in the Cumberland County Militia, later attaining the rank of Lt. Col., and Colonel. He also served as a privateer captain and commander of N. J. State gunboats. Contemporary newspaper coverage of his exploits would lead to his being one of, if not the most celebrated figure from Cape May County during the war.

As a researcher, I am often amazed that some individuals from the past leave almost no paper trail while other’s leave voluminous amounts of correspondence, legal documents, ledger books, etc. On that subject I should emphasize, “surviving” paper trail. A case in point, Col. Nicholas Stillwell of the Cape May Militia, who was a prominent landowner, merchant and sea captain, rarely if at all, shows up in the newspaper

coverage of his time. His younger brother, Lt. Col. Enoch Stillwell on the other hand, is mentioned numerous times in the Philadelphia papers and others up and down the coast in regard to his capture of British prizes while serving as a privateer captain.

Cousins, Aaron Leaming Jr. and Thomas Leaming III, both natives of Cape May County, not only left a substantial paper trail in the form of legal notices posted in the Philadelphia papers, but their surviving personal papers, ledgers, and correspondence gives a detailed picture of their lives over many decades.

As far as Elijah Hand is concerned, no personal writings survive in the form of ledgers, daybooks, or personal correspondence, etc. Like many of his contemporaries, he left no will. His only surviving correspondence found to date are his eloquent and lengthy response to the British Colonel, Charles Mawhood (See Item 4). following the skirmish at Quinton's Bridge, and a brief note to his superiors on the state level, in which he requested military supplies for his men and signed the note, "Col. Elijah Hand, Headquarters, Roadstown" [Cumberland County, N. J].

Fortunately, his contemporaries recorded in detail many of the events of his life for him.

It would be hard to say whether Elijah was most celebrated in newsprint for his exploits as a militia Colonel or as a privateer captain. His efforts on both counts were published in newspapers throughout the States during the war.

Aside from the positive newspaper coverage that Elijah Hand received, one other source provides details of major incidents in the life of this complex figure. Surviving court records from multiple jurisdictions shed light on some of the Colonel's legal problems during and shortly after the

Revolution. It should be noted that the majority of the court cases from the colonial period as well as the years following the war involve individuals from every economic and social class, either suing or being sued for debts due. Cases involving Elijah Hand as both the complainant and defendant can be found in the local court records.

Two lawsuits of a more serious nature involving Col. Elijah Hand can be found in the surviving Revolutionary War era court records of the State of New Jersey. Both incidents took place during the war and the New Jersey Supreme Court eventually heard both. The first case was an indictable offense and came before the Cumberland County Quarterly Court in June 1780, when Col. Elijah Hand and Ann (Nancy) Davis were charged with adultery as shown in the following sequential indictments:

June Sessions & Term 1780

The State vs Col. Elijah Hand} Indictment for Adultery

The State vs Anne Davis} Indictment for Adultery

The State vs Job Glaspy} Indictment for a Riot Assault & Battery

Elijah Hand Jr.

Jona Parsons

Legget Smith

The dozen or so entries concerning the indictments which can be found in the Cumberland Quarterly Court records gives us a relatively clear picture of the events leading up to and following the trial. The court transcripts leave some questions unanswered, but it can be assumed that the events occurred to wit;

Anne's husband, Job Davis made a claim concerning his wife against Elijah Hand. Both the Colonel and Anne Davis were indicted for adultery, which didn't sit well with his men, including his oldest son Elijah Jr. The rioters likely resorted to some sort of vigilantism to settle the score or defend their Colonel's honor, (Job Davis was required to post bond in the amount of 50 pounds to guarantee his appearance to testify against Elijah Sr.) There may be more to this story than an alleged illicit romance, as at least two of Job Davis's relatives, Jonathan Davis and Elnathan Davis had been charged with offenses indicating their Loyalist sympathies. The charge could have been a convenient attempt to embarrass the celebrated local militia commander.

There can be no doubt though, that Job Davis had issues with his wife's behavior as he posted the following legal notice in the Pennsylvania Journal, (Philadelphia) of March 15 1780, just a few months prior to the indictments:

WHEREAS my wife, NANCY DAVIS, [Anne] having absconded from my bed and board, and otherwise misbehaved, I do hereby forbid all persons trusting her on my account, as I am determined on not paying any debts of her contracting from the date hereof. JOB DAVIS Cumberland, N. Jersey, March 2, 1780.

The outcome of the case surely wasn't the one that Mr. Davis had hoped for. His wife, Anne pled guilty to adultery and was sentenced to be whipped or pay a fine of thirty pounds, (we can assume she chose the financial burden). Elijah Hand Jr. initially pled not guilty to the charges of rioting and assault and battery, later changing his plea to guilty and was ordered to pay a fine of five pounds. This change of plea was likely on the advice of his father and his father's attorney, Joseph Bloomfield who would later become the fourth Governor of New Jersey.

Col. Elijah Hand pled not guilty to the charge and opted for a jury trial. The trial was held during the February 1781 Term and those giving evidence for the State were, Anne Davis, Job Davis, and Benjamin Smith. Elijah Hand's witnesses included, William Shickliss, Job Glaspy, Uriah Mayhew, Priscilla Glaspy, Charity Wickward, and Sarah Cobb.

The jury returned the verdict as follows:

"Jury came into Court & being called all appeared & being asked by Stephen Clark there foreman that they are agreed of there verdict and farther say that the Defendant Elijah Hand is not guilty of the Charge as laid in the Inditment and so they say all."

Interestingly, the foreman of the jury, Stephen Clark, at the time of the indictment, had along with Benjamin Mulford signed as sureties for Elijah's bond of 2000 pounds. Elijah had filed a suit against Job Davis in November 1780 prior to his jury trial, but the record is unclear as to whether it related to this case or was a separate civil complaint. Insert image 053

Two years later a civil lawsuit was filed against the Colonel regarding an incident that occurred while he was serving as "Captain" Hand, commander of the gunboat *Enterprize* (See Item 1). The event that led to the suit was reported in most of the Philadelphia papers including the *Pennsylvania Packet*, (Philadelphia) of June 4 1782:

"Capt [Elijah] Hand in the armed boat *Enterprize*, off Cape May, in company with another boat, commanded by capt. [Enoch] Willets, on the fifth ult. [the preceding month] chased ashore, the refugee boat *Old Ranger*, mounting seven swivels and one three pounder, and

commanded by one Tryan, with twenty five men, bound to the capes of Delaware, and up the same as far as Christiana, with orders to take prisoners whom they pleased. They afterwards fell in with and took a schooner loaded with corn, commanded by one Miller, on a trading voyage from Virginia to New York; and on the eighteenth of May they fell in with and took a schooner laden with lumber, commanded by one Shaw, supposed also for New York.”

At first glance the second incident mentioned in the news account appears to be a relatively common occurrence for the year 1782; another Cape May privateer captures and makes a prize of an American vessel trading illegally with the British. In this case, “a schooner loaded with corn, commanded by one Miller, on a trading voyage from Virginia to New York”. The major details of the event were clear; Elijah Hand in the “barge”, *Enterprize* and his first cousin, Capt. Enoch Willets in the privateer boat, *Quick-Time* were on a “cruise” hunting for prizes along the southern coast of New Jersey. After an encounter with a Loyalist privateer vessel, they spotted a small trading vessel, the *Dolphin*, lying at anchor in Barnegat Bay. Elijah Hand and some of his men boarded the vessel, he then questioned the crew and later the master, Joseph Miller (who had been ashore), as to why they were so far north of any port with which they could legally trade.

Captain Miller informed Hand that they hailed from Maryland with a cargo of Indian corn bound for the “Forks of the Mullica” where they intended to trade the corn for hollowware cast at the furnace at Batsto. He claimed that he and his crew overshot the inlet leading to the Mullica due to their unfamiliarity with the Jersey coast. Miller then produced a permit from a naval official in Maryland authorizing the voyage. Elijah Hand accused the captain of forging the permit and that Miller’s intention was to sell the corn to the British in New York.

Elijah Hand told the Maryland captain that if he and his vessel accompanied the privateers down to Cape May that they would receive a

fair trial. Captain Miller refused and warned Hand that he was legitimate and if Hand took his vessel as a prize he would later pay for it.

Meanwhile, representatives of the local militia came aboard and when informed that Capt. Hand intended to condemn the vessel and cargo as a prize, insisted that they should have it. The militiamen claimed that they had held the schooner under guard for 24 hours while awaiting a local justice to decide whether it could be condemned as a prize and that they only left the vessel upon sighting the two Cape May vessels and fearing that they were the enemy. Eventually, the local militiamen and the privateers agreed to split the cargo between them and the vessel would stay where it was. As the *Enterprize* and *Quick-Time* headed back out to sea, the militiamen with Capt. Miller and crew sailed the *Dolphin* up the bay towards the village of Forked River. The militiamen held the *Dolphin* at Forked River while awaiting condemnation proceedings. A few weeks later, the vessel and its remaining cargo was burned by "refugees".

Keep in mind that by 1782 the British had abandoned their occupation of Philadelphia but still held the city of New York. At that time, any merchant vessel found above the inlet at Little Egg Harbour, which led to the "Forks of the Mullica", was assumed to be heading for New York where they could expect to sell their cargo to the British at exorbitant prices. Due to the fact that Miller and the *Dolphin* were so far above the port that they claimed was their intended destination, (22-23 miles), Elijah Hand may have honestly believed that the Maryland vessel was heading to New York. If that were the case then Elijah Hand had every right to take the vessel and its cargo as a prize. Perhaps the privateer captain was so eager to take a prize that he chose to assume the worst of the Maryland captain.

The case was in the hands of the State Supreme Court during the years 1782-1785.

In July of 1785, both parties agreed to have the matter settled by arbitration. One month later, the two “referees” deliberated the evidence including affidavits from witnesses for both sides and rendered the following decision:

“...do find that the said Elijah Hand is guilty of the Trespass charged against him by the said Joseph Miller, and we assess the Damages of the said Joseph Miller by occasion of the said Trespass, over and above his Costs and Charges by him about this suit in that Part expended, to One hundred and Sixty Six Pounds five shillings, and those costs and charges to Six Pence.....”

Most likely, neither Joseph Miller nor Elijah Hand were happy with the verdict. Miller and his attorney had sued for 600 pounds in damages; including the loss of his vessel at 350 pounds, 150 pounds for the “tackle, apparel, furniture and appurtenances”, and 75 pounds for the cargo of “indian corn”.

After waiting three years to recoup his losses, Capt. Miller received less than a third of his claim. Capt. Elijah Hand may have thought that the uncertainties of the war and his reputation as a patriot would help his case, and maybe it did. He surely wasn't pleased with the 166 pounds plus attorney fees he now owed, but it could have gone much worse for him. It is interesting that no criminal charges were lodged in a case such as this.

While the referees for the State Supreme Court found, Elijah Hand guilty of the charge, the surviving court record doesn't give any clues as to how they reached their decision regarding the damages

awarded Joseph Miller. Perhaps they took into consideration the fact that Capt. Hand only took part of the cargo of the schooner *Dolphin*, and then relinquished the vessel, the remaining cargo, and rigging, apparel, etc. to Captain Price and the Monmouth County Militia who had custody of the vessel when it was burned by Tory privateers.

The affidavit testimony provided to the court gives conflicting information regarding Elijah Hand's behavior on that day. One of Captain Miller's crewmen, Nathaniel Crapper, "age 15 or 16", testified that:

"the said [Captain] Hand, who called the said Miller and the deponent a couple of damned villains, said they had wherein themselves forged, or procured some person to forge the said Permit also that they were bound to New York with supplies to the British Army--- that the said Hand did refuse to listen to any supplications from Mr. Miller, swore much and behaved with great roughness and violence" "That Hand Thereupon said he would set her on fire, rather than leave her in Possession of the said Miller, and finding that he could not get her off, [from being grounded] he ordered some combustibles into the Cabbin and a match to be lighted which was done that Miller expostulated with Hand as on so rash and unnecessary a Destruction, upon which he called him a damned Rascal, and said he would confine him and the Deponent on Board, and burn them up with the Boat that a Person who was with the said Hand, and seemed to have some Influence with him, persuaded him not to set the Boat on Fire, observing that the Corn was wanted on the Coast, and the Boat might be got off and be useful at Cape May".

The deposition of one of the crewmen of the, *Enterprize* gives a more favorable description of Capt. Hand's behavior on that day. Daniel Stites of Cape May in his sworn affidavit reported the following events:

“.....That on or about the 25th Day of May 1782 he was a hand on board the Barge Enterprize commanded by Elijah Hand, on a cruise bound Home towards Cape May””Capt Hand asked where the vessel was from; he answered from some Part of Maryland, inquired whither she was bound, he answered to Little Egg Harbour Capt Hand asked how it happened they were 22-23 miles to the Eastward of their Port, he explained they were unacquainted with the coast and overrun their Port Capt Hand said it was a remarkable Port, and he admired they should overrun it” “Mr Hand told him if he was going to Little Egg Harbour, he had better go with him, Mr Miller declined it on account, as he said, the Sound was so shoal it would be difficult to get through, and rather inclined to stay and dispose of his Cargo there Mr Hand said it was his opinion that he intended to go to New York by what he could discover and that if he did not choose to go he would take the vessel to one of the Egg Harbours [Great Egg or Little Egg Harbors] and him with her where he should have a fair Trial Mr Hand ordered Mr Miller’s vessel to be got under way , which was done but after running her near half a mile she got aground Mr Hand left three men on board and took Mr Miller and his hand with him in the Enterprize and went down to the Beach about 7 miles where Capt Enoch Willets was with his Privateer-Boat Quick-Time Deponent staid on Mr Miller’s Boat when she was aground and three of the Militia came aboard Liut Brown a Mr Soper and Capt Price..... they claimed Property and asked what was intended to do with her that they [the militia] had her under guard 24 hours before Mr Hand came that taking Mr Hand’s boat to be an Enemy they had left her when the Gallion [Enterprize] came in sight and that they had sent for Abel Akin Esq to come and see whether she could be condemned or not the two boats of Mr Hand and Mr Willets then came up from the Beach and Mr Hand said he would take out the Boats load of Corn to lighten her that she might the better get through the Sound the hands then went to taking out the Corn into the two boats the three militia as above mentioned claimed property again Mr Miller said if he must be taken he had rather be in the hands of the Militia Mr Hand then told Mr [Capt.] Price if he would take the Schooner, and what corn was left and the people [captain and crew] and give a legal Trial he would give her up they leaving him of any other Trouble and he would have the corn that was taken out -- this was agreed by Mr Hand and the Militia then they hove off the Boats and left her, and before the two Boats got out of sight they saw the Schooner float and make sail into

Forked-River that some weeks afterwards, perhaps June, being on another Cruize Mr Hand put into Forked River, and inquired of Luit Brown what had come of the Vessel and the Men Luit Brown said the Men had gone Home, and the Refugees had been in and burnt the Schooner before they had time to try her [condemnation proceedings] that She was burnt about two weeks after she had been left as aforesaid – as near as he can recollect Daniel Stites

Sworn before me on the 28 July 1785

David Brearley

We can imagine what a complex figure Elijah Hand must have been, the man who penned what might be the most eloquent letter ever written by a native of Cape May. The letter in which Col. Hand compared the infamous British, Col. Charles Mawhood, “to a barbarous Atilla, and not of a gentleman, brave, generous, and polished, with a genteel European education.” The man who as alleged by a crewman of a boarded prize, “swore much and behaved with great roughness and violence”.

Elijah served the last two years of the war fighting at sea with his youngest son, Recompence and young cousin, Jeremiah Hand among his crew. At some point during that service, Elijah Hand and his crew were captured and sent to the notorious prison ship, *Jersey* in New York Harbor. The same fate befell quite a few of the other Cape May privateer captains including Elijah Hand’s second cousin, Enoch Stillwell and Stillwell’s brother-in-law, Moses Griffing. Fortunately for these men and their crews, the efforts of another distant cousin, Thomas Leaming Jr. resulted in their being exchanged for British and Hessian prisoners held by the Americans. Insert image 051

Almost 50 years after the end of the war, (June 7, 1832), Congress passed an act authorizing pensions for the relatively few remaining veterans of the Revolution. These aging veterans, who were mere boys during the conflict included, Cape May County natives, Recompence Hand, Henry Iszard, Jeremiah Hand, Nathaniel Holmes Sr., and others.

After the war, Col. Elijah Hand and his wife, Rachel retired to their plantation at Cape May. In 1789, just 6 years after his last wartime service, Elijah died intestate at the age of 60. Rachel died in 1795 leaving behind their three children and 13 grandchildren. At the present time there are thousands of the descendants of this couple living in South Jersey and throughout the United States.

9. Colonel Charles Mawhood to *Colonel Elijah Hand* March 1st 1778

Colonel Mawhood, commanding a detachment of the British army at Salem, induced by motives of humanity, proposes to the militia at Quintin's Bridge and the neighbourhood, as well officers as private men, to lay down their arms and depart, each man to his own home. On that condition, he solemnly promises to re-embark his troops without delay, doing no further damage to the country; and he will cause his commissaries to pay for the cattle, hay, and corn that have been taken, in sterling money.

If, on the contrary, the militia should be so far deluded, and blind to their true interest and happiness, he will put the arms which he has brought with him into the hands of the inhabitants well affected, called Tories; and will attack all such of the militia as remains in arms, burn and destroy their houses and other property, and reduce them, their unfortunate wives and children, to beggary and distress. And, to convince them that these are not vain threats, he has subjoined a list of the names of such as will be the first objects to feed the vengeance of the British nation. *

Given under my hand, at head-quarters, at Salem, the twenty-first day of March, 1778

- The names given are: Edmund Keasby, Thomas Sinnickson, Samuel Dick, Whitten Cripps, Ebenezer Howell, Edward Hall, John Bowen, Thomas Thomson, George Trenchard, Elisha Cattel, Andrew Sinnickson, Nicholas Kean, Jacob Hufty, Benjamin Holmes, William Shute, Anthony Sharp, and Abner Penton

Colonel Charles Mawhood to *Colonel Elijah Hand* March 21, 1778

It is remarkable that Col. Mawhood's letter and Col. Hand's reply, (letter #10) survived the American Revolution. How the letters ended up in the hands of a patriotic newspaper publisher is unknown. What is known is that the letters were written one day apart, and within a month both were published in numerous American newspapers under the following heading:

From The New Jersey Gazette.
To the Printer.

"I enclose you a copy of Colonel Mawhood's letter to Colonel Hand, and of Hand's answer to his insolent demand, both of which have accidently fallen into my possession, and which I shall be obliged to you for inserting in your paper as soon as possible." (Connecticut Journal, May 6, 1778)

Why, Colonel Mawhood, (1729-1780) chose to address his letter to Colonel Elijah Hand of the Cumberland Militia instead of the commander of the Salem militia, Colonel Benjamin Holme, may never be known. It may be that due to the fact that Col. Hand had taken command of the American position after his arrival or was perhaps a personal slight towards Col. Holme, whose men were in retreat when Hand arrived.

Lt. Col. Mawhood served under British General William Howe during the American Revolution. He was the commander of the British garrison during the Battle of Princeton, and though he was a courageous and competent officer, he was on the losing end of that conflict. That American victory took place close to a year before his letter to Colonel Hand was written.

In March of 1778, Mawhood led a force of about 1200 men into the town of Salem, N. J., to the east of town, the Salem County Militia under, Colonel

Benjamin Holme had set up fortifications on the opposite bank of Alloway Creek at Quintons Bridge.

On March 18, some of the British forces advanced to the bridge, then feigned a retreat; which led to Captain William Smith and a good portion of the Salem Militia to cross the bridge and give chase. Smith and his men had fallen into the British trap and were forced to retreat with a loss of 30-40 of their men killed or wounded.

Mawhood's force then attempted to cross the bridge and overrun the American position as the remainder of the Salem militia fled. Fortunately, at that moment, Colonel Elijah Hand and his Cumberland County militia arrived with two cannons in tow and repulsed the British advance. Hand was a Cape May native and owned plantations in both Cape May and Cumberland Counties. He was the son of the whaler, Recompence Hand, (letter #4) and brother of Jonathan Hand Esq. who served in the last Royal Assembly and first New Jersey State Assembly with the outbreak of war with Britain.

The following day Mawhood threw his entire force against the militia fortifications at Quintons Bridge, now under the command of Elijah Hand. The British were unable to break the American's defenses and withdrew. On March 20th, (the 21st according to Col. Hand's letter), Major Simcoe led a group of Tories and British regulars in a surprise attack on the militia men garrisoned at the house of Judge Hancock at Hancocks Bridge two miles downstream. The British and Tories stormed the house, catching most of the men asleep, and offering no quarter, proceeded to bayonet to death 20 or more men.

In his reply to Mawhood, Col. Hand let his contempt for the actions of the British and Tories be known with the following words:

“... denying quarters, but butchering our men who surrendered themselves prisoners, in the skirmish at Quinton's Bridge, last Thursday, and bayoneting, yesterday morning, at Hancock's Bridge, in the most cruel manner, in cold blood, men who were taken by surprise, in a situation in which they neither could nor did attempt to make any resistance, and some of whom were not fighting men, - are instances too shocking for me to relate, and I hope for you to hear. ...”

Sometime after his service in southern New Jersey, (after 1778), Charles Mawhood returned to England, where he was held in high esteem despite his defeat at the Battle of Princeton. Back home, he was charged with raising a new regiment for service defending the British garrison at Gibraltar against the French and Spanish, (The Great Siege of Gibraltar). Colonel Mawhood died on August 29, 1780 during that siege after suffering from a gallstone.

**10. Colonel Elijah Hand to Colonel Charles Mawhood
March 22nd 1778**

Sir

I have been favored with what you say humanity has induced you to propose. It would have given me much pleasure to have found that humanity had been the line of conduct to your troops, since you came to Salem. Not denying quarters, but butchering our men who surrendered themselves prisoners, in the skirmish at Quinton's Bridge, last Thursday, and bayoneting, yesterday morning, at Hancock's Bridge, in the most cruel manner, in cold blood, men who were taken by surprise, in a situation in which they neither could nor did attempt to make any resistance, and some of whom were not fighting men, - are instances too shocking for me to relate, and I hope for you to hear. The brave are ever generous and humane. After expressing your sentiments of humanity, you proceed to make a request, which I think you would despise us if complied with. Your proposal that we should lay down our arms, we absolutely reject. We have taken them up to maintain rights which are dearer to us than our lives; and will not lay them down till either success has crowned our arms with victory, or, like many ancient worthies contending for liberty, we meet with an honorable death. You mention that, if we reject your proposal, you will put arms in the hands of the tories against us. We have no objection to the measure, for it would be a very good one to fill our arsenals with arms. Your threats to wantonly burn and destroy our houses and other property, and reduce our wives and children to beggary and distress, is a sentiment which my humanity almost forbids me only to recite; and induces me to imagine that I am reading the cruel order of a barbarous Attila, and not of a gentlemen, brave, generous, and polished, with a genteel European education. To wantonly destroy will injure your cause more than ours; it will increase your enemies and our army. To destine to destruction the property of our most distinguished men, as you have done in your

proposals, is, in my opinion, unworthy a generous foe; and more like a rancorous feud, between two contending barons, than a war carried on, by one of the greatest powers on earth, against a people nobly struggling for Liberty. A line of honour would mark out that these men should share the fate of their country. If your arms should be crowned with victory, (which God forbid!) they and their property will be entirely at the disposal of your Sovereign. The loss of their property, while their persons are out of your power, will only render them desperate; and, as I said before, increase your foes and our army. And retaliation upon tories, and their property, is not entirely out of our power. Be assured that these are the sentiments, and determined resolution, not only of myself only, but of all the officers and privates under me.

My prayer is, sir, that this answer may reach you in health and great happiness.

Given at Head-Quarters, at Quinton's Bridge, the twenty-second day of March 1778

Elijah Hand, Colonel

Colonel Elijah Hand to Colonel Charles Mawhood
March 22, 1778

I first "discovered" this letter published in the *Historical Collections of the State of New Jersey*, Barber and Howe, (1846) while writing an article about Elijah Hand (1730-1789) and his experiences as a militia colonel and privateer in the American Revolution. At that time, another direct descendant of Elijah Hand (he was my 4th great-grandfather) confided in me that she had doubts as to whether our ancestor had actually written the letter. I believe that she felt that the son and grandson of whaler-yeomen in the sparsely populated county of Cape May in the 18th century, would not have had the education enabling him to write such a formal and eloquent letter.

Later research showed that the letter had been published in several contemporary newspapers within weeks of Col. Hand's authorship. While my original source was a history written almost 70 years after the fact, evidence of the letter's provenance from shortly after the skirmish at Quintons Bridge seems to settle that question.

Elijah Hand's reply to the British colonel is possibly the most eloquent letter ever written by a native of Cape May County. The words and form he chose in his defiant response to Mawhood's demand that he and his men surrender, are a tribute to whatever primitive education system was in place at Cape May in the mid 18th century; or perhaps to his own intellect and ability to educate himself.

We can only imagine how, Mawhood felt while reading the letter of a "country bumpkin" and "traitor", in which, Elijah Hand compares the English officer to "a barbarous Attila" and issues his own threat; "...And retaliation against tories, and their property, is not entirely out of our power..."

With the British evacuation of Philadelphia and surrounding areas in June of 1778, the threat to the southern counties of Jersey and their militias was greatly reduced. That in turn may have influenced many local militia officers to turn to privateering during the later years of the war. Elijah Hand was one of these as were his first cousins, Capt. James Willets and Enoch Willets, and his more distant cousins, Lt. Col. Enoch Stillwell and Colonel Nicholas Stillwell. Colonel Hand became "Captain" Hand while serving as master of a vessel. Hand and Capt. Nicholas Kean of the Salem militia commanded gunboats of the State of New Jersey, and reportedly captained privateer vessels as well. Elijah was the son of Recompence Hand Sr., (see letter 4)