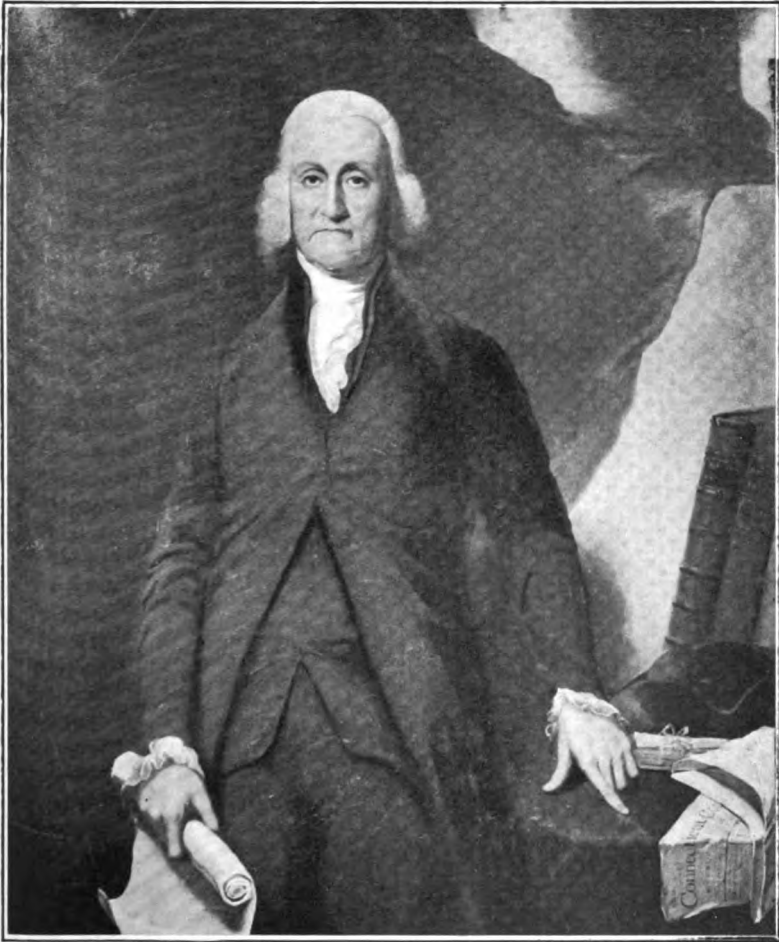


The
SIXTEENTH GOVERNOR
of
C O N N E C T I C U T
was
JONATHAN TRUMBULL

The son of a country storekeeper in Lebanon who studied theology, and then while a clerk in his father's store acquired law and was elected to the legislature twenty-three times, and became the distinguished war governor of Connecticut and friend and adviser of General Washington



John Trumbull

J O N A T H A N

T R U M B U L L

JONATHAN Trumbull, the first war governor of Connecticut, is pre-eminently known in history as the brave patriot who presided over the destinies of his native state during its most critical period. His other brilliant qualities fade away before that magnificent patriotism which made Connecticut worship her noble son.

He was born in the town of Lebanon on October 12, 1710, and was the son of Joseph Trumbull, a well-to-do merchant and farmer who had moved to the little town ten years previous. At thirteen years of age Trumbull entered Harvard College and was graduated in the class of 1727. Early in life his family and friends discovered the young man's fine talents, and a professional life was planned for him. He studied theology, which was thoroughly agreeable to his tastes, and in a few years was licensed to preach. His career in the ministry was brief, but it is pointed out by good authorities that if he had continued in the profession Jonathan Trumbull would have become, without doubt, a conspicuous figure in the church.

His plans in life were changed abruptly in 1731 when an older brother left his father's store in Lebanon and Trumbull

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resigned from the ministry to carry on the business. While attending to his duties in the store Trumbull studied law, and two years later, in 1733, was elected a member of the General Assembly, which marked the opening of his long public career. In this body he became such a leading spirit that in 1739 he was elected speaker and occupied the office with such success that during the following year he was chosen as assistant. Trumbull was re-elected to this position twenty-two times, and was looked upon as one of the soundest men in the colony. He afterward became judge of the County Court, and assistant judge of the Superior Court, and chief judge of the latter body from 1766 to 1769. In the year 1767 Trumbull was elected deputy governor and held the office for a year, when he succeeded William Pitkin as governor, upon the latter's death in 1769.

His utter abhorrence of the Stamp Act was abundantly demonstrated in 1765 when he absolutely refused to take the oath required of every official to support the obnoxious act. Bancroft remarks concerning this period that Trumbull "was the model of the virtues of a rural magistrate; profoundly religious, grave in manner, discriminating in judgment, fixed in his principles." Professor Johnston says that for several years Trumbull had been at the head of the popular volunteer organization known as the "Sons of Liberty," which patrolled the country, "overawed those who were inclined to support the British government, and making ready to

resist the execution of the law." When Jared Ingersoll rode from Hartford to New Haven to put the Stamp Act into operation he found fully a thousand of these "Sons of Liberty" ready to resist to the last degree.

When Trumbull became governor the people of Connecticut were convinced that in him the colony had found the man the people needed at that time. Before Trumbull doubt and hesitation fled in the twinkling of an eye. He threw his whole soul into the impending struggle, and while the war clouds were not as black in Connecticut as in the neighboring colony of Massachusetts where Trumbull's classmate, Hutchinson, was governor, yet the crisis called for a man in whom craven frailty was an unknown quantity.

Trumbull, with many other worthy men, was committed to the idea that extreme measures in dealing with existing difficulties were unnecessary; that it was neither wise nor expedient to separate from Great Britain, and he personally thought the troubles between the colonies and the mother country ought to be settled "by gentle and insensible methods rather than by power and force."

His private opinions were quickly set aside, however, when the declaration of war came; and from that time Trumbull was laboring day and night for the cause for which the colonies were making such a sacrifice.

A correspondence soon ensued between Governor Trumbull and General George Washington. It gradually assumed

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a close personal cast, which was continued after the Revolution.

In August, 1776, when Washington wrote Governor Trumbull concerning the weakness of the Continental army, the latter immediately called together the council of safety and supplemented the five Connecticut regiments already in the field by nine more, which proved to be of incalculable benefit to the cause.

The governor's pertinent injunctions to those who had not left the fields for the war have come down to us ringing with his magnificent patriotism. He said: "Join yourself to one of the companies now ordered to New York, or form yourselves into distinct companies and choose captains forthwith. March on; this shall be your warrant: May the God of the Armies of Israel be your leader." It is no wonder such words as these inspired many a Connecticut farmer to leave the harvest fields unfinished, and begin the weary tramp to New York where they arrived in the nick of time. Washington wrote to Trumbull that he had "full confidence in his most ready assistance on every occasion, and that such measures as appear to you most likely to advance the public good, in this and every instance, will be most cheerfully adopted."

Trumbull's advice to the great commander-in-chief, and the latter's implicit confidence in the governor's uncommonly sound judgment, has been treated at length by historians. When Washington implored the governors of the New England States in 1781

to raise more men, Trumbull sent back word that he should have all he needed. Jared Sparks, the biographer of Trumbull, wrote that Washington relied on Connecticut's governor as one of his main pillars of support, and often consulted him in emergencies. The epithet "Brother Jonathan," applied to Governor Trumbull, originated with Washington, who according to a learned writer, when perplexed or in any emergency used to exclaim, "Let us hear what Brother Jonathan says."

Governor Trumbull was elected every year for fifteen consecutive years, and his term of office covered the whole Revolutionary period. When the war with Great Britain had reached an end Governor Trumbull, who had been in continuous public service for fifty-one years, asked the General Assembly to allow him to retire. His speech before that body in October, 1783, was a memorable one, and referring to his proposed retirement he said: "I have to request the favor of you, gentlemen, and through you of all freemen of the state, that after May next I may be excused from any further service in public life, and from this time I may no longer be considered as an object for your suffrages for any public employment. The reasonableness of this request, I am persuaded, will be questioned by no one. The length of time I have devoted to their service, with my declining state of vigor and activity, will, I please myself, form for me a sufficient and unfailing excuse with my fellow citizens."

The Governors of Connecticut

At the next election Governor Trumbull was retired, and he never again entered public life. His services were recognized by both Yale College and the University of Edinburgh, both of which conferred upon him the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws. Governor Trumbull died at his home in Lebanon on August 17, 1785, in the seventy-fifth year of his age.

During his life the governor made a large and valuable collection of historical papers and manuscripts which was presented to the Massachusetts Historical Society after his death. He had four sons, Joseph, Jonathan, David and John. Joseph, born in 1737, was a member of the Continental Congress and commissary general in the Revolutionary War. He died at Lebanon in 1778. Another son, Jonathan, born in 1740, was a distinguished soldier and aide-de-camp to Washington. He was afterward governor of Connecticut. The family has been one of the most distinguished in the history of this state. John Trumbull, another son, was the renowned painter whose "Battle of Bunker Hill," and "Death of Montgomery" brought him unceasing fame. His nephew, Joseph, was a congressman and afterward governor of Connecticut. The family also includes John Trumbull, the poet and author of "McFingal;" Rev. Benjamin Trumbull, author of the "History of Connecticut;" James Hammond Trumbull, the philologist; Henry Clay Trumbull, the leader in Sunday school work; ex-Senator Lyman Trumbull of Illinois, and Jonathan Trumbull, the prominent librarian of Norwich.