

*“Americans who called themselves
Patriots taunted, then tarred and
feathered, and finally, when war
came, killed American Tories.”*

—Thomas A. Allen

PETER KEMBLE

A Tory

by Arthur Mierisch

In 1777, Peter Kemble, a steadfast Tory, feared for his life. At age seventy two, he was ordered to appear before the Court of Quarter Sessions in Morristown, accused of circulating General Howe's pardons and oaths of allegiance to England. He must have been disappointed with his judges for not considering his lifetime contributions as a public servant. Peter Kemble had served dutifully on Jersey Governor Franklin's Council. He always supported the King's and the Governor's directives. At least the ones that best served the colony. After moving to Morristown, he enjoyed being a Justice of the Peace and a member of the Supreme Court. Both were dignified positions for an educated man and a loyal citizen. The rioting and mayhem throughout the colonies since 1766 disturbed him. After all, Jersey was where he made his fortune, built his home and raised a family. Why should he side with mobs bent on robbing, burning, tarring and feathering, and even hanging his fellow countrymen? Now his life was threatened.

On that fateful day, he stood with his son Richard before an unfriendly court, seeking a way to survive and to protect his family and property. He had other sons, but they could not help. Three were officers in the British army and away somewhere trying to put down the rebellion. He thought of his daughter Margaret and how proud he was when she married the gallant General Thomas Gage. But she could not help—last year her husband had her suddenly removed to England. Even George Washington, his long time friend could not be found. Only Richard stood by his side. What could they do?

While the weak Continental Army fought the mighty British Army, citizens became involved in their countries first civil war. Not everyone survived the chaos of the late 1700s. Neighbors distrusted each other and gathered in homes and alleys after dark to express their political beliefs—and to plot against their oppressors. In 1776, patriots living in the cities of Boston and New York were forced to abandon their homes. As the tide of war changed, it was the loyalists turn to flee fearing the wrath of the patriots. Outside of the cities, once friendly neighbors took up sides. Everyone worried about being evicted, imprisoned, tortured, and worst of all, hung. Each side confiscated the others land, animals, hous-

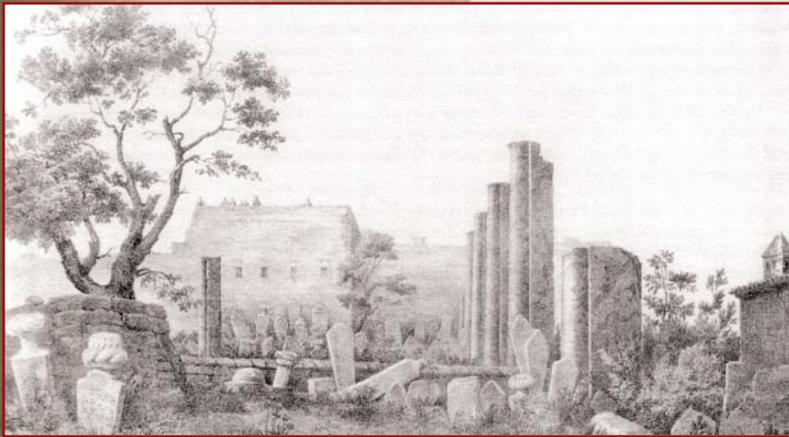


The Loyalists saw themselves as the true “patriots”—true to their country of Great Britain. “Patriot” was a relative term. In this illustration, “Reception of the American Loyalists by Great Britain in the Year 1783,” Engraving by H. Moses (after Benjamin West), Britannia welcomes those who remained loyal. In reality, Loyalists were not always so welcomed in England.

es and possessions. Homes were burned, and people died in prisons. Thousands left the colonies on their own seeking a new home away from the cruelty. However, Peter Kemble was determined to stay in New Jersey where he lived for the past forty seven years.

Born in Turkey

Peter Kemble's grandfather Richard, an Englishman, was an alderman in London in the 1600s. He indentured his first son, Richard, to a Turkish merchant who educated and sent him to Smyrna, Turkey, for the last two years of his servitude. Richard married Mavroccordata, a woman from the Isle of Scio. Peter Kemble was born there in 1704. In 1714, at age ten, he attended a prestigious Westminster school in England. There he became friends with Thomas Gage, a man destined to influence the lives of Peter Kemble and his family. Four years later in 1718, Peter, now fourteen years old, was sent to Rotterdam, Holland, to become an apprentice wine merchant—a noble and lucrative profession for the time. He found the work to his liking and quickly prospered.



An 1843 illustration of the then-recently discovered ancient ruins of an agora, or meeting place, in Smyrna, Turkey, where Kemble was born.

In 1730, at age twenty six, Peter Kemble, arrived in America and settled at Piscataway Landing, near New Brunswick. Why did Peter Kemble come to the Jersey? He might have been encouraged by letters from other Kemble's who had settled in Burlington in the 1630s. Possibly they tempted him with stories of business opportunities abounding in the colony. He opened a business and became a noted importer and exporter of fine wines and linens. His home became a popular stopping point for travelers journeying between Philadelphia and New York. He became close friends with George Washington, Lewis Morris, Robert Morris, William Alexander (Lord Stirling) and General Thomas Gage of the British Army. They enjoyed sumptuous meals, libations and conversations with other educated and wealthy men. Being well spoken and prosperous, Peter Kemble quickly entered into high society. Within four years he married Gertrude Bayard, the daughter of Samuel Bayard



An unsigned portrait of Governor Lewis Morris (1671-1746) painted c. 1726. Peter Kemble became a close friend of Morris and was appointed to his Council.

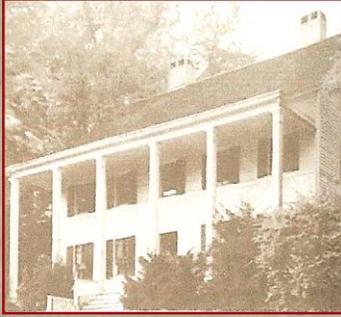
and Margaret van Cortlandt. He was now connected to two of the most influential colonial families in New York and New Jersey. Soon he became a prolific parent, fathering ten children. With Gertrude, he had five sons and two daughters. After Gertrude died in the 1740s, he married Elizabeth Tuite of Trenton and had a son and two daughters.

Peter Kemble Enters Politics

From 1702 to 1776, the Royal Jersey colony was owned by the Crown of England. Englishmen, who were in the favor of the King or Queen, were given governorships in the colonies. Such positions were sought by royalty who wanted to impress the monarch with their managerial ability and to personally prosper from the colonial trade with England. A Governor's term lasted as long as it suited the Crown. Governors not performing to the monarch's satisfaction were quickly replaced and recalled to England.

New Jersey was ruled by a Royal Governor who reigned supreme managing its economic, political, judicial and military affairs. He appointed a royal council, assembly, and courts composed of trusted colonials who advised and assisted in the creation of laws, and the prosecuting of criminals. The Governor established committees that built and maintained roads, bridges, churches, and military and public buildings. The Council, composed of prominent local citizens, advised him about the welfare of the colony—theoretically, they represented the people's interests. But, Councils that displeased the Governor were quickly replaced with more agreeable members. Directives were to be followed without exception—although at times there were councils that successfully opposed the Governor's mandates. The King considered each colony as a business. The Governor was its business—as well as military and civil-manager. He was responsible for shipping raw materials to England in exchange for British manufactured goods. The Governor daily faced a normally receptive and cooperative council and assembly. However, after the French and Indian War (1754—1763), the colonial's attitudes changed. Legislatures became unruly opposing all new taxation—and the Governor began to fear for his safety. Fearing the local militias, he trusted only the English military.

In 1738, Peter Kemble became a close friend of Governor Lewis Morris. He imported fine European wines and linens for



The Kemble Manor home was built at the north-west corner of Mount Kemble Avenue (Rte 202) and Tempe Wyck Road (the Road to Jockey Hollow). The house sold in 1840, was moved to 665 Mount Kemble Ave. The Glen Alpin House, in the Gothic Revival style now occupies the property. Both homes are seen from Mount Kemble Avenue

the Governor and other merchants. In 1745, Kemble was appointed to the Governor's Council—Governor Morris described Kemble as “a considerable merchant.” The Governor must have referred to Kemble's ability to purchase and distribute foreign luxuries (wines and linens). Although Governor Morris died the following year, Kemble remained on the Council serving to the satisfaction of succeeding governors.

In 1747, as part of his Council duties, Peter Kemble, became the manager of a building lottery charged with constructing a nearby church. Lotteries of the 1740s financed public works. He completed the construction of New Brunswick's first Episcopal Church and Parsonage within a year. The community thanked Kemble for his efforts—attending Church was a weekly requirement in the 1700s. Peter Kemble was respected for his organizational and leadership ability. Two years later the Council honored Kemble by electing him their President and Speaker. His prestige amongst the colonists continued to grow and, in 1753, he was chosen to become a judge in the colonies Supreme Court. He remained there for twenty three years until 1776, when the patriots took control of the government.

In the 1750s, Peter Kemble purchased 1,250 acres along the “Road to Baskingridge” (today known as Mount Kemble Avenue, Rte. 202) and became the wealthiest man in Morris County. He named his home “Mount Kemble,” and on the property he raised sheep, horses and cows for meat, hides, transportation, and dairy products. He grew corn, wheat, oats, rye and vegetables for consumption. In his library he had an extensive collection of classics and books about history, religion, and philosophy.

In the 1750s, the Kemble family established themselves as loyal British subjects. At the outbreak of the French and Indian War in 1753, Peter Kemble purchased British army commissions for his sons, Samuel, Stephen and William. His son Peter attended the “college in Philadelphia,” now the University of Pennsylvania. He studied history, mathematics, European languages, and Greek and Roman philosophy. After graduation he opened an import/export business in New York.

Great Britain and France fought the French and Indian War over trading rights in America. At first, the fighting took place on colonial and Canadian soil. In 1756, it became a world-wide conflict known as the Seven Years War. During



General Thomas Gage (1719-1787). He enjoyed meeting "women of rank and fortune."

Detail of an oil on canvas, by the American artist John Singleton Copley



Margaret Kemble Gage (1734-1824). She was considered "a well-known beauty."

Detail of an oil on canvas, by the American artist John Singleton Copley

the Battle of the Monongahela, Colonel George Washington and General Thomas Gage distinguished themselves, exhibiting bravery under fire. In December of 1757, General Amherst, the commander of the British forces, impressed with Gage's tactical ability, sent him to New Brunswick. His assignment was to organize a newly conceived light-armed infantry regiment. That winter, Gage was invited to many dinners and socials at Peter Kemble's home, his classmate in England. Here is where, thirty eight year old General Thomas Gage met and wooed twenty three year old Margaret Kemble. A romance quickly blossomed—both were the educated children of wealthy parents, and Margaret was attractive. Gage successfully recruited both a regiment and a wife. In December of 1758, Gage married Margaret Kemble in Boston. It has to be wondered if Margaret was really anxious to marry someone fifteen years her elder, or if it was an arrangement to cement familial relations?

Peter Kemble, the Speaker for the Council

In the spring of 1766, William Franklin, the New Jersey Governor, was concerned about possible riots in the colony over the Stamp Act—news of which had been met with violence elsewhere. His fears eased in the summer when Parliament partially rescinded the Act and a temporary peace settled over the colony. At the July 3rd Council meeting, Peter Kemble thanked Parliament and Franklin for their decision. He pleaded for restitution of the colonists penalized by the Acts. His Council presentations were eloquent and he always complemented Franklin for decisions and mandates favorable to the colony. His oratories displayed his loyalty to England while emphasizing the needs of New Jersey. He often warned of conditions harmful to the Royal image. His words that day were:

May it please your Excellency. We His Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects of New Jersey, beg leave to return our Thanks for your Speech at the Opening of this Session. We most sincerely rejoice with your Excellency on the Repeal of the Act for granting certain Stamp Duties in America; an Event, as it so greatly conduces to the Peace and Happiness of His Majesty's American Dominions, and not but excite in us the utmost Gratitude and Thankfulness for this fresh Instance of His Majesty's Royal

Favour, and of the Wisdom and Justice of the British Parliament. An Indemnification to those Persons who have incurred the Penalties of the late Stamp-Act must be considered as a further Mark of Lenity and Indulgence of the Sovereign.

It affords us great Satisfaction, that the wise Measures pursued by your Excellency, during the late alarming Period, were attended with the good Efforts of preserving the public Peace of the Colony. The Tenderness, Lenity and Condescensions of His Majesty, and the Wisdom and Justice of the British Parliament, in removing the Danger that lately threatened the Colonies, cannot but excite in all His American Subjects the strongest Sentiments of Loyalty, and will necessarily contribute to advance the general Interest and Happiness of the British Empire, which we shall ever strenuously endeavour to promote.

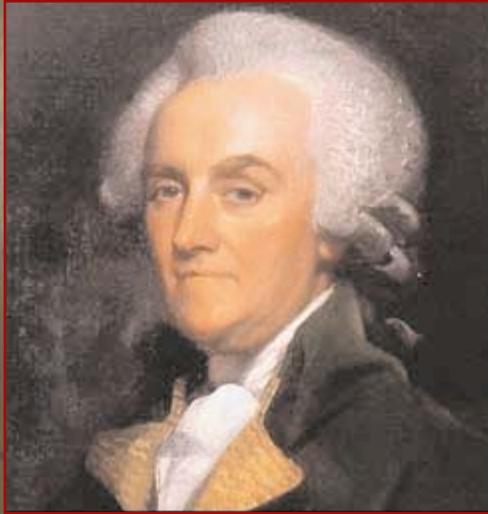
*By Order of the House, Peter Kemble,
Speaker*



A 1766 cartoon celebrating the repeal of the hated Stamp Act..

During a Council meeting in June 1767, Kemble expressed his displeasure over Parliament's failure to create a paper currency for the colonies. He hoped that one specie would replace the multitude of ever changing exchange rates that burdened colonial transactions. Kemble used terms as "It would have afforded us the highest Satisfaction" and "numberless Advantages must necessarily result thereby to the inhabitants" of the colony. He also spoke of apprehending the persons responsible for the murder of peaceful Iroquois Indians who were trading with Jersey merchants:

It would have afforded us the highest Satisfaction to hear from your Excellency, that our Hope on the Subject of a Paper Currency, in America; as we humbly conceive from the long Experience we have had of the Utility of that Measure, and from our peculiar Situation and Circumstance, numberless Advantages must necessarily result thereby to the inhabitants of this Colony. We highly applaud your Excellency's Prudence and Justice in recommending a Reward for the Persons By whose Activity and Resolution the Murders of the Indians in



New Jersey's last Royal Governor, William Franklin, was implicated, along with East Jersey Treasurer Stephen Skinner, in a 1768 embezzlement of £6,570 from the colony.

this Province were apprehended. We and every Inhabitant of this Colony have Reason to rejoice that Justice has been executed on such abandon'd Villains."

A puzzling robbery, that received the attention of New Jersey, Pennsylvania and New York, severely dampened Governor Franklin's reputation. Stephen Skinner, the East Jersey Treasurer, in 1768, reported that his office was robbed of over £6,570 (about \$1,104,000) in bills and coin. The colony was upset over the loss. Skinner, Franklin and others accused of embezzlement were not arrested for lack of evidence. Franklin stopped his investigation and accused a group of known counterfeiters as the culprits. Skinner denied that he was the embezzler and said that he did not know who took the money. The public continued to demand action, to no avail. The following year, Peter Kemble criticized the Governor's efforts. He complimented Franklin's enthusiasm in pursuing the criminals and then assured him that the Council would assist his investigation. Perhaps he felt that the Governor was not anxious to catch thieves. At a combined meeting of the Council and Chamber in October 1769, Peter Kemble commented:

...The Ardour with which your Excellency hath pursued every Step which seemed likely to produce a Discovery of the Perpetrators of the villainous Robbery committed on the Eastern Treasury, hath given us great Pleasure; and we assure you, we shall most heartily continue to assist your Excellency with our utmost Endeavours, to affect this important Purpose; and join in every reasonable Proposal for the further Security of the public Money...

Three years later, in 1771, the money still was not found. Peter Kemble, most likely believing that Skinner and Franklin were involved, demanded that the Governor join the Council "to bring the Treasurer to account for, and to pay to the colony, the sum said to be stolen." Before the Governor would approve a trial for Skinner, he appointed Conference Committees of the Council and Assembly. The Council Committee, with Peter Kemble a member, recommended that a trial not be held—there was insufficient evidence. The Assembly Committee failed to submit a recommendation. Why? Was the Assembly involved?

In 1773, Skinner implicated Samuel Ford, a convicted coun-

terfeiter awaiting execution, as the person most likely to have committed the robbery. Ford claimed innocence. He said that “Ford” was a common name in the New Brunswick area, and insisted that another Ford probably stole the money. Governor Franklin was further implicated when he pardoned Ford and the other counterfeiters. Immediately Ford left the area never to be seen again and Skinner suddenly departed for Nova Scotia. A year later, the Rivington Press (New York) proposed that Skinner and Ford were friends and that they stole the money in collaboration with Franklin. In 1774, revolutionary war clouds diverted attention from the robbery. The criminals were never apprehended and the money never recovered. So who had the money?

A Spy in Boston!

King George III, in 1768, named Thomas Gage the Governor of Massachusetts and promoted him to General, Commander-in-Chief of the British Army in America. Margaret Kemble Gage accompanied her husband to Boston, where for the next seven years they enjoyed an active social life, attending many balls and banquets given in his honor. Gage’s military assignment was to quell the rebellious activity in the colony and to enforce the Stamp, Townshend and Intolerable Acts. His staff included trusted loyalists and several of Margaret’s brothers and a cousin. Stephen Kemble, Margaret’s brother, became Gage’s Deputy Adjunct General of the Forces in North America—he was Gage’s principal intelligence officer informing him of rebel activities. Samuel Kemble, another brother, was Gage’s confidential secretary. Captain Oliver De Lancey, Margaret’s cousin, became an aid-de-camp.

General Gage’s strategy, in 1775, was to deprive the rebels of armaments by confiscating their gunpowder, muskets and cannons. In April, on the advice of Stephen Kemble, Gage decided to send an armed expedition to Concord to seize the rebel’s supplies. Their first stop was Lexington. Seeing the militia, the British quickly formed a



A 19th century—and inaccurate—depiction of the Battle of Lexington. What is true is that the Battles of Lexington and Concord were the beginnings of war and went surprisingly bad for the British.



Dr. Joseph Warren in a 1765 portrait by John Singleton Copley. Did he receive advance intelligence of the British assault on the militia's munitions from Margaret Kemble Gage?

battle line and advanced across the town square. The militia began shooting and the British returned fire. Overwhelmed by the Red Coats, the militia quickly retreated into the woods. Further on at Concord, the British were again stubbornly resisted. They managed to capture the rebel storehouses and were perplexed to find them almost empty! On the return march to Boston, the Red Coats were continually harassed by the rebels who fired at them from behind trees and stone walls. After firing, the rebels quickly vanished into the countryside only to fire again from another vantage point. Gage's force lost nearly a thousand men compared to the rebel's ninety dead and wounded. Why? What went wrong?

Two days before the march, Dr. Joseph Warren received intelligence from a spy in Boston about a large British force preparing to march to Concord. He passed this information on to rebel leaders who rallied the militia. Margaret Kemble Gage was immediately suspected of being the spy. She once related that "she felt herself profoundly torn as Lady Blanche in Shakespeare's *King John*." Earlier that year, Margaret confided that "she hoped her husband would never be the instrument of sacrificing the lives of her countrymen." A noted clergyman wrote that Dr. Warren's spy was "a daughter of liberty unequally yoked in the point of politics." Many British officers believed that General Gage was "betrayed on this occasion by someone near to him." Even General Gage, once "devoted to his beautiful and caring wife," believed Margaret to be the spy. He immediately "ordered her away from him." Margaret was quickly removed to England in August—never to return to America. Was Margaret the spy? Or was it her brother Stephen?

General William Howe took command of all the British forces in America in September. Next month, General Gage was recalled to London. He was sympathetically received by King George III and viciously attacked in public and in private writings. He was blamed for Britain's defeat by an undisciplined mob of rebels.

Peter Kemble Survives

In 1777, Peter Kemble and his son Richard traveled the three miles from their Mount Kemble home to Morristown. They were going to be tried by the Committee of Safety for not swearing allegiance to the United States. The Kembles'

Richard Kemble decided to take the oath of allegiance to the United States. He immediately became a turncoat and an enemy of the King. However, Peter Kemble refused.

lives and property were in jeopardy. They had seen the Committee cruelly punish those who remained loyal to the King. When the Committee entered the room, the Kembles must have personally known the members. Perhaps they wondered why their friends now referred to them as despots. Even Peter Kemble's long time friend, General Washington was not there to speak for him. Did Washington forget about the hospitality at Mount Kemble?

We'll not know how long the Kembles stood before the Committee? Hopefully it was brief. Both men must have anticipated the worst. Richard Kemble decided to take the oath of allegiance to the United States. He immediately became a turncoat and an enemy of the King. However, Peter Kemble refused. Being a loyal Englishman he saw no need to change allegiance. Richard then pleaded in his father's behalf. He probably spoke of his father, coming to New Jersey forty seven years ago. And how his father quickly prospered in the export/import business, built a home and raised a family. He most likely told of his father being a judge, and a revered Council leader elected by his peers. His father was a respected citizen who supported the needs of his colony. He certainly requested leniency for himself, his father and other Kembles living nearby. But then, the Committee must have already known of the Kemble family. How would they decide?

The Court was satisfied. They considered Peter Kemble's past service and reputation, and the contribution of his children, Richard and Margaret to the patriot cause. They made their decision. The Court released the Kembles! Richard was made responsible for his father's good conduct. Peter Kemble was not allowed to take part in loyalist activities. He was forbidden to circulate the King's oath of allegiance or recruit for the English army. He was not to frequent Morristown. Peter Kemble's life and property were saved. He survived—for a while.

Three years later, Peter Kemble was again in jeopardy. During the winter of 1780—1781, the Continental Army occupied Morristown. Washington made his headquarters in the stately Ford Mansion—a desirable location close to the Morristown taverns. His staff officers commandeered homes in town, evicting families and confiscated possessions. Several of Washington's fighting Generals eyed Peter Kemble's home. It was a large, well furnished house with a

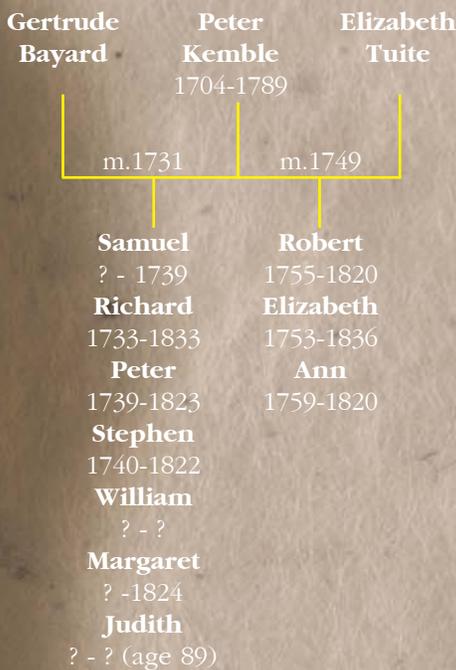
stable for their horses. It was conveniently located a mile from the Jockey Hollow encampment and three miles south of Morristown—and none of the Continental Army’s highest ranking officers were about to reside at Jockey Hollow. So they enjoyed the comforts of local mansions and the social activities in town.

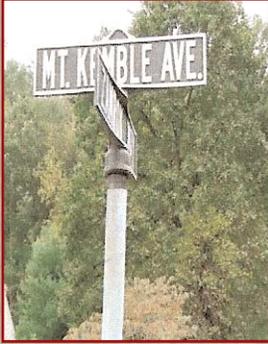
The Kembles feared for their home and property, but Peter Kemble was again saved—Washington himself must have interceded. Kemble was not allowed to leave Mount Kemble while the army was in Morristown. He was confined, under guard and shared his house with General Anthony Wayne and other generals—how many secret conversations did he overhear? And could not tell!

After the deciding Battle of Yorktown in 1781, Peter Kemble, at last, was a free man. He remained in his home until he died in 1789. He is buried on the property next to his second wife Gertrude, three children and a cousin. A plaque now marks the burial site. Members of the family lived in the home into the nineteenth century. Other loyalists who more actively supported the British cause were not as fortunate. They feared for their lives and panicked. Packing only what they could carry, they hurried to Charleston and New York and sailed to Canada, Nova Scotia, England, Florida (then a Spanish possession), and the Caribbean. Thousands departed from what was once their homeland and left behind family, property and possessions. Years after the war, only a few returned seeking loved ones and lost property.

Samuel, Stephen, William, Robert

Peter Kemble was fortunate. He and most of his family remained. However, three of his sons who served in the British Military were forced to leave the country. Samuel, once a New York tax collector for the British, moved to the East Indies where he died in 1796. Stephen served in the British Army in North America. In 1782, he was reassigned to the West Indies, the Spanish Main and Nicaragua. In 1805, he returned to America and settled in New Brunswick, in the house in which he was born. He died in 1822. William, a Captain in the British army, died in England sometime after the revolution. Robert served in the British army during the revolution. He remained at Mount Kemble after the war where he died in 1820.





Richard, Peter

Richard inherited Mount Kemble and died there in 1823. Peter Kemble's son Peter married into the wealthy Gouverneur family of New York and established an import/export business with two of his wife's brothers. He died in 1823. Peter's son Richard inherited Mount Kemble from his uncle Richard and sold the estate in the 1860s. His daughter Mary married Robert Parker Parrott, an honor graduate of the West Point Military Academy. Parrott with his brothers purchased a furnace from the Kemble family in 1839, and manufactured the rifled Parrott gun. It looked more like a huge cannon! It weighed 26,000 lbs and fired a 300 pound projectile. In the 1860s, both the Union and Confederate armies used the weapon.

Margaret, Judith, Elizabeth, Ann & Other Kembles

Margaret remained with her husband in London after the war. She had eight children, most of who married into British aristocracy. She passed away in 1824. Margaret's sister Judith married a Philadelphia merchant. She had eighteen children and lived to be eighty-nine. Margaret's half sisters, Elizabeth and Ann, stayed at Mount Kemble and died in 1836 and 1820.

There are newspaper accounts of Kemble's living near Morristown during the 1800s. As reported by *The Palladium of Liberty*, a Peter Kemble of Hackettstown married Frances McDougal of Flanders in 1819.

In 1875, *The Jerseyman* reported the death of Sarah, wife of Zenas Kemble. After Sarah's passing, Zenas must have despaired and went off the deep end, unable to keep his name out of the papers. He died in 1891. Also, the marriages of Frances Kemble and Edith Kemble were reported in the 1890s.

Mount Kemble Avenue

The Kembles led challenging lives. They succeeded in business, public and military service; they married well into wealthy, influential and innovative families. Even though the Kemble name faded from Morristown history by the end of the nineteenth century, their heritage was memorialized when Mount Washington became known as Mount Kemble and the road to Basking Ridge was changed to Mount Kemble Avenue. The street sign is a reminder of the Kemble family's contribution to our history.



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