

Peter Lefferts

Kings County

Born: December 27, 1753

You belong to one of Brooklyn's most prominent families. You are Peter Lefferts of Flatbush, called Midwout when New York was a Dutch colony. You are of Dutch ancestry. Your great-great grandfather Pieter Janse Hagewout (1621–1661) emigrated from Holland in 1660 with his wife and four children. Before his death the following year, he received deed to land in the Flatbush area by Peter Stuyvesant, director general of New Amsterdam. Hagewout's eldest son—and your great-grandfather—was Leffert Pieterse (1645–1704), who became a successful farmer and landowner, with properties in Kings County, Queens County, Richmond County and New Jersey. For a time he was also the constable of Flatbush and a deacon in the Dutch Reformed Church. It was he who introduced the Leffert name, but it was his son, the long-lived Peter Lefferts (1680–1774), who transposed the names. His son—and your father—was John Lefferts. You are the son of John and Sarah Lefferts, born December 27, 1753.

In April of 1776, on reports of a pending British invasion of New York, you enlisted as a first lieutenant in the Kings County militia. You fought at the Battle of Brooklyn, serving under Colonel Rutger Van Brunt. Outflanked and routed, American forces in retreat destroyed anything of use to the attacking British, including the Lefferts family home.

The next year, even with the British still in Manhattan, you began rebuilding, completing work in 1783. You married Femmetie Hegeman in 1784 and expanded your estate with adjacent lands bought from the Hegeman clan. To farm the land, you purchased African slaves, as did all your neighbors, owning as many as twelve. You now possess 240 acres and are counted among the leading citizens of Flatbush.

Your public career—somewhat slender for a person of your standing—has consisted of a judgeship on the New York Court of Sessions and the Court of Common Pleas (criminal cases and civil suits, respectively).

But apparently that was service enough to secure your election to the New York State Ratifying Convention, now meeting in Poughkeepsie. You are a delegate representing Kings County, where Federalism holds sway. You thus are a Federalist and will give hearty support to Chancellor Robert Livingston (party leader) and Alexander Hamilton (party lieutenant), as they, and others of your party, endeavor to ensure that New York votes to ratify the Constitution.