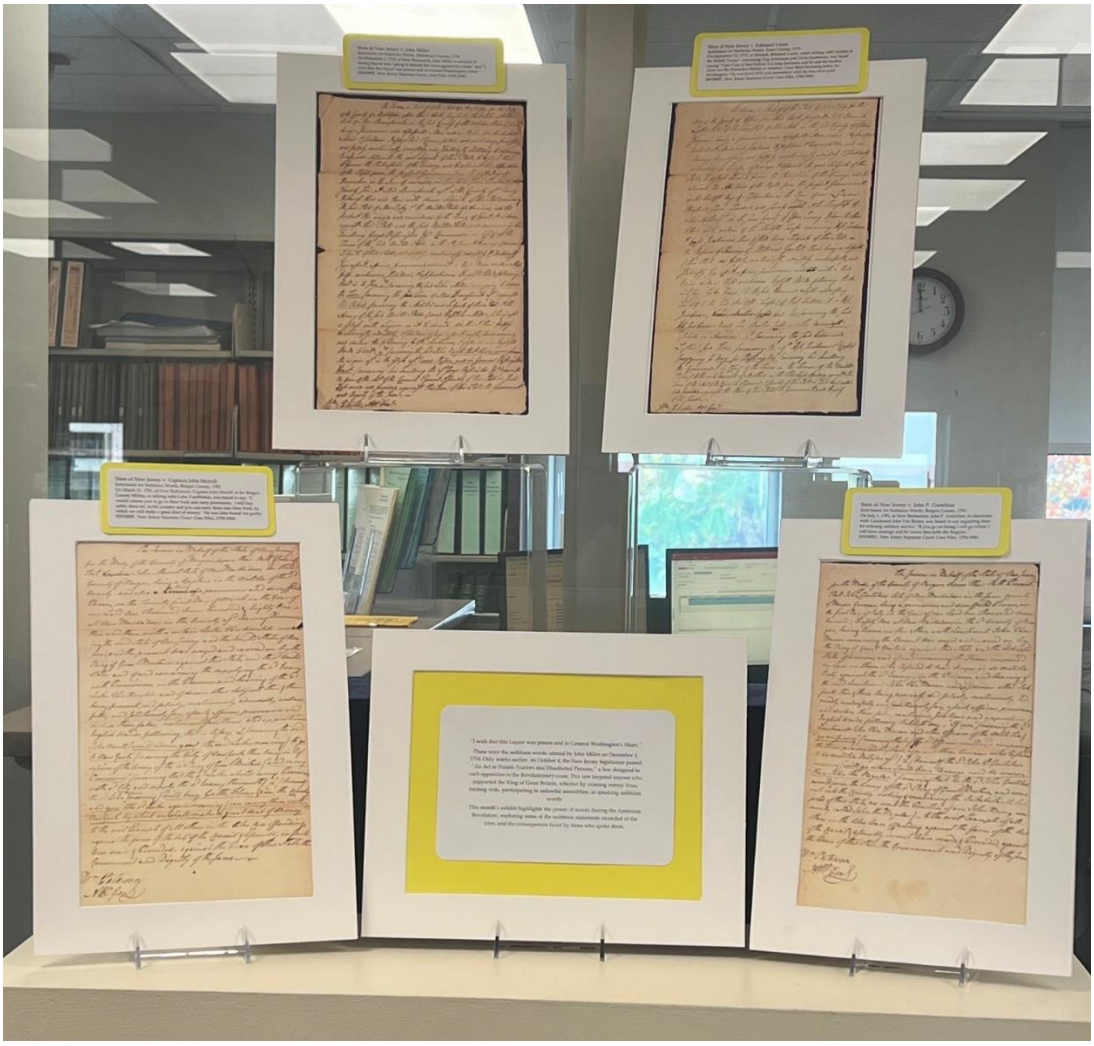
## New Jersey State Archives Mini Exhibits

# Seditious Words in the NJ State Supreme Court

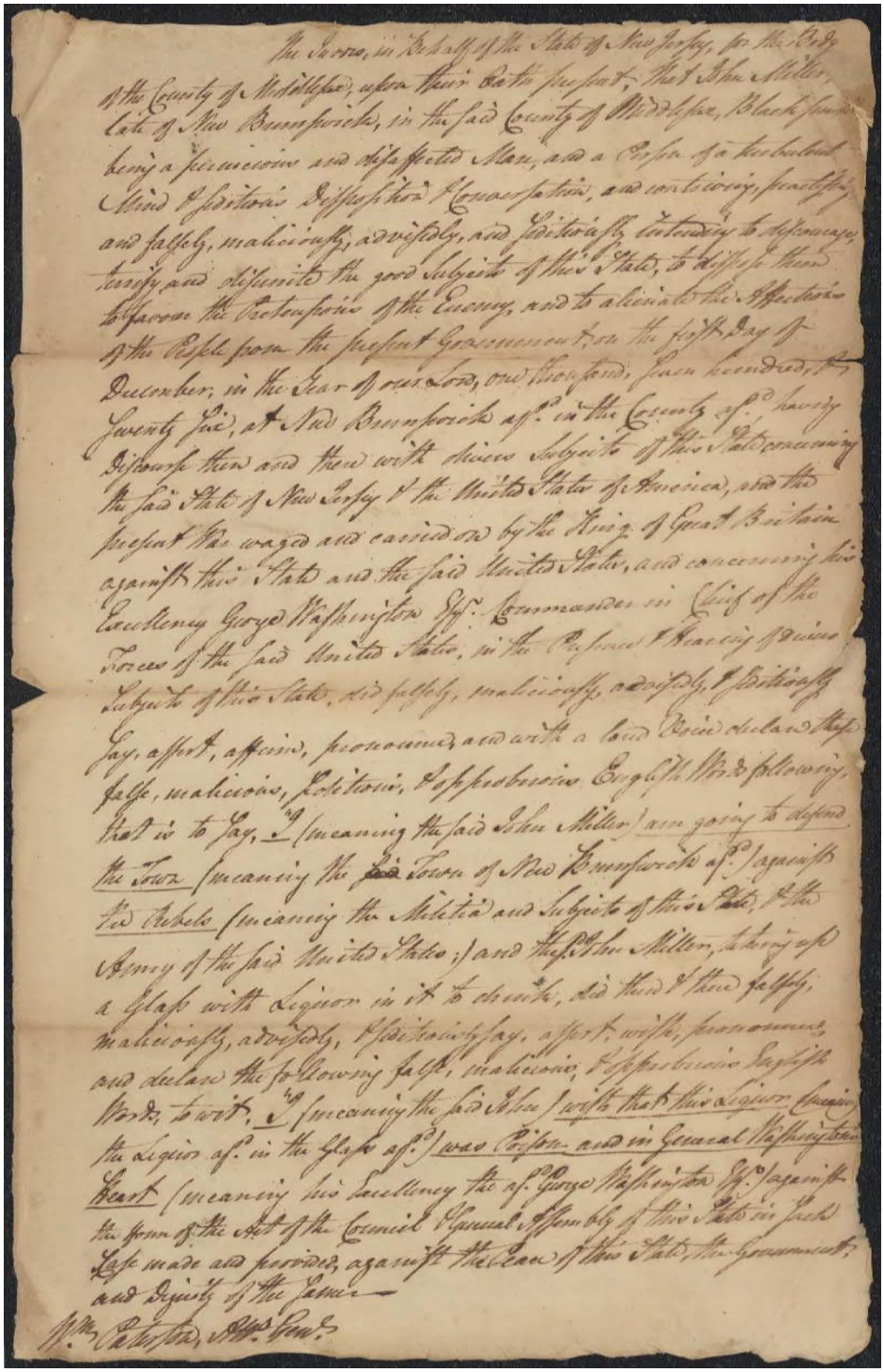
### November 2026




*"I wish that this Liquor was poison and in General Washington's Heart."*

These were the seditious words uttered by John Miller on December 1, 1776. Only weeks earlier, on October 4, the New Jersey legislature passed "An Act to Punish Traitors and Disaffected Persons," a law designed to curb opposition to the Revolutionary cause. This law targeted anyone who supported the King of Great Britain, whether by crossing enemy lines, inciting riots, participating in unlawful assemblies, or speaking seditious words.

This month's exhibit highlights the power of words during the American Revolution, exploring some of the seditious statements recorded at the time, and the consequences faced by those who spoke them.

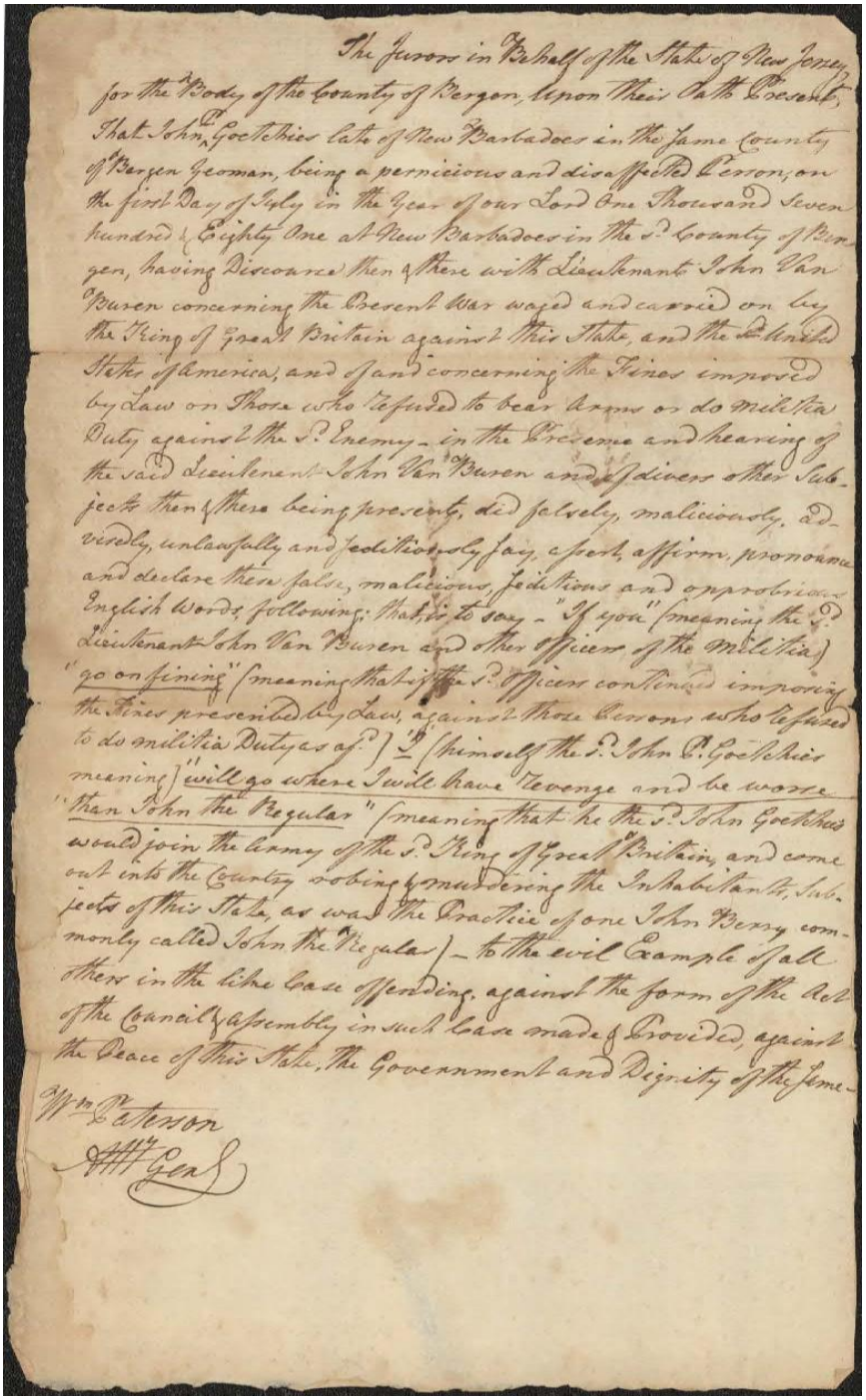


**State of New Jersey v. John Miller**

Indictment for Seditious Words, Middlesex County, 1778

On December 1, 1776, at New Brunswick, John Miller is accused of saying that he was "going to defend this town against the rebels" and "I wish that this liquor was poison and in General Washington's heart."

SSV00001. New Jersey Supreme Court. Case Files, 1704-1844.



The Jurors in Behalf of the State of New Jersey for the Body of the County of Bergen, upon their Oath Present, That John P. Goetchies late of New Barbadoes in the same County of Bergen Yeoman, being a pernicious and disaffected Person, on the first Day of July in the Year of our Lord One Thousand Seven hundred & Eighty One at New Barbadoes in the s.d County of Bergen, having Discourse then & there with Lieutenant John Van Buren concerning the present War waged and carried on by the King of great Britain against this State, and the United States of America, and also concerning the Fines imposed by Law on those who refused to bear Arms or do Militia Duty against the s.d Enemy - in the Presence and hearing of the said Lieutenant John Van Buren and divers other Subjects then & there being present, did falsely, maliciously, advisedly, unlawfully and seditiously say, speak, affirm, pronounce and declare these false, malicious, seditious and opprobrious English Words following: that is to say - "If you" (meaning the s.d Lieutenant John Van Buren and other Officers of the Militia) "go on fining" (meaning that if the s.d Officers continued imposing the Fines prescribed by Law, against those Persons who refused to do Militia Duty as aforesaid) "I" (meaning the s.d John P. Goetchies meaning) "will go where I will have Revenge and be worse than John the Regular" (meaning that he the s.d John Goetchies would join the Army of the s.d King of great Britain, and come out into the Country robbing & murdering the Inhabitants, Subjects of this State, as was the Practice of one John Berry commonly called John the Regular) - to the evil Example of all others in the like Case offending, against the form of the Act of the Council & Assembly in such Case made & Provided, against the Peace of this State, the Government and Dignity of the same.

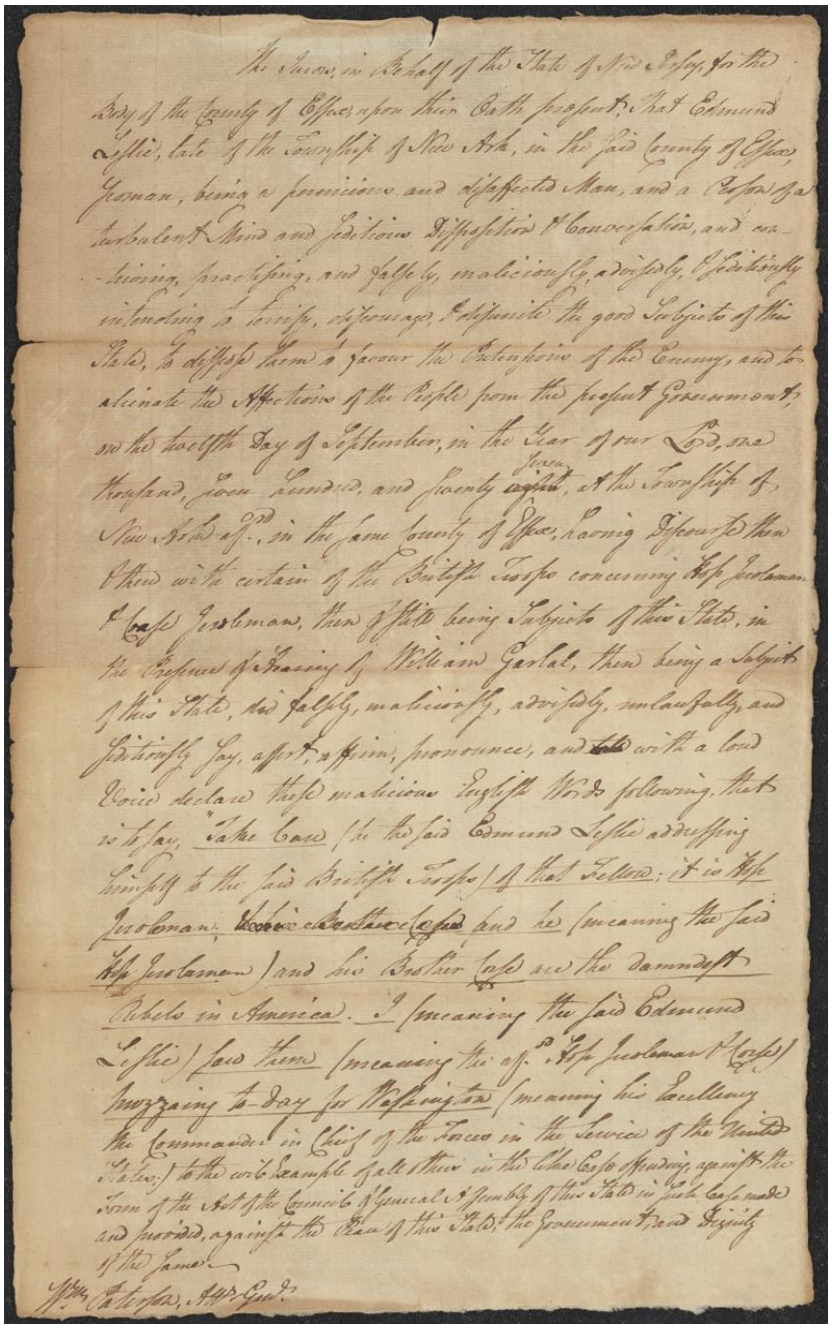
Wm Paterson
Att'y Gen.l

**State of New Jersey v. John P. Goetchies**

Indictment for Seditious Words, Bergen County, 1781

On July 1, 1781, at New Barbadoes, John P. Goetchies, in discourse with Lieutenant John Van Buren, was heard to say regarding fines for refusing military service: "If you go on fining I will go where I will have revenge and be worse than John the Regular."

SSV00001. New Jersey Supreme Court. Case Files. 1704-1844.



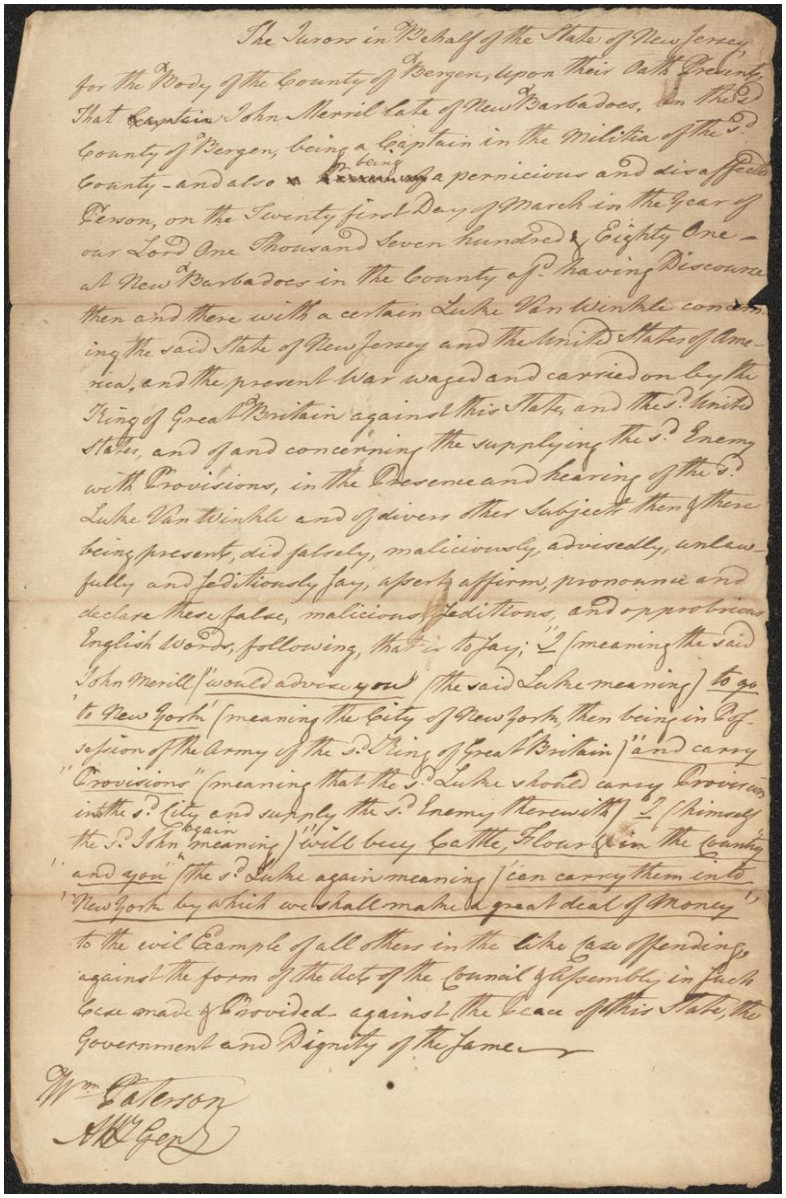
The Jurors, in Behalf of the State of New Jersey, for the Body of the County of Essex upon their Oath present, That Edmund Leslie, late of the Township of New Ark, in the said County of Essex, Yeoman, being a pernicious and disaffected Man, and a Person of a turbulent Mind and seditious Disposition & Conversation, and contriving, practising, and falsely, maliciously, advisedly & seditiously intending to disturb, disparage, & disquiet the good Subjects of this State, to disaffect them & favour the Intentions of the Enemy, and to alienate the Affections of the People from the present Government, on the twelfth Day of September, in the Year of our Lord, one Thousand, seven Hundred, and seventy eight, at the Township of New Ark aforesd, in the same County of Essex, having Discourse then & there with certain of the British Troops concerning Hop Jerolaman & Corse Jerolaman, then & still being Subjects of this State, in the Presence & Hearing of William Gerlal, then being a Subject of this State, did falsely, maliciously, advisedly, unlawfully, and seditiously say, assert, affirm, pronounce, and with a loud Voice declare these malicious English Words following, that is to say, "take Care" (to the said Edmund Leslie addressing himself to the said British Troops) "of that Fellow; it is Hop Jerolaman, Corse Jerolaman (and he) (meaning the said Hop Jerolaman) and his Brother Corse are the damndest Rebels in America. I (meaning the said Edmund Leslie) saw them (meaning the aforesd Hop Jerolaman & Corse) huzzaing to-day for Washington" (meaning his Excellency the Commander in Chief of the Forces in the Service of the United States) to the evil Example of all others in the like Case offending against the Form of the Act of the Council & General Assembly of this State in such Case made and provided, against the Peace of this State, the Government & Dignity of the same.

Wm. Paterson, Atty Genl.

**State of New Jersey v. Edmund Leslie**

Indictment for Seditious Words, Essex County, 1779
On September 12, 1777, at Newark, Edmund Leslie, while talking with "certain of the British Troops" concerning Hop Jerolaman and Corse Jerolaman, was heard saying: "Take Care of that Fellow; it is Hop Jerolman and he and his brother Corse are the Damndest Rebels in America. I saw them huzzaing today for Washington." He was fined £150 and committed until his fees were paid.

SSV00001. New Jersey Supreme Court. Case Files, 1704-1844.



The Jurors in Behalf of the State of New Jersey, for the Body of the County of Bergen, upon their Oath Present, That Captain John Merril late of New Barbadoes, in the County of Bergen, being a Captain in the Militia of the S.d County - and also being a pernicious and disaffected Person, on the Twenty first Day of March in the Year of our Lord One Thousand Seven hundred & Eighty One - at New Barbadoes in the County aforesd having Discourse then and there with a certain Luke Van Winkle concerning the said State of New Jersey and the United States of America, and the present War waged and carried on by the King of Great Britain against this State, and the said United States, and of and concerning the supplying the said Enemy with Provisions, in the Presence and hearing of the said Luke Van Winkle and of divers other Subjects then & there being present, did falsely, maliciously, advisedly, unlawfully and seditiously say, assert & affirm, pronounce and declare these false, malicious, seditious, and opprobrious English Words, following, that is to say; "I" (meaning the said John Merill) "would advise you" (the said Luke meaning) "to go to New York" (meaning the City of New York, then being in Possession of the Army of the said King of Great Britain) "and carry Provisions" (meaning that the said Luke should carry Provisions into the said City and supply the said Enemy therewith) "I" (meaning the said John again meaning) "will buy Cattle, Flour &c in the Country and you" (the said Luke again meaning) "can carry them into New York by which we shall make a great deal of Money" to the evil Example of all others in the like Case offending against the Form of the Acts of the Council & Assembly in such Case made & provided against the Peace of this State, the Government and Dignity of the same

Wm Paterson
Att'y Gen'l

**State of New Jersey v. Captain John Merrill**
Indictment for Seditious Words, Bergen County, 1781
On March 21, 1781, at New Barbadoes, Captain John Merrill of the Bergen County Militia, in talking with Luke VanWinkle, was heard to say: "I would advise you to go to New York and carry provisions. I will buy cattle, flour etc. in the country and you can carry them into New York, by which we will make a great deal of money." He was later found not guilty.

SSV00001. New Jersey Supreme Court. Case Files, 1704-1844.

**To search for other seditious words cases, check our Supreme Court Database and type "Seditious Words" into the Case Type field.**