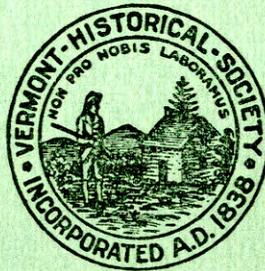


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Loyalists in Strafford
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LOYALISTS IN STRAFFORD

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The story of the Loyalists of Vermont, who they were and what happened to them, is still to be written, but this sharply focussed paper by Miss Fisher throws a definite light upon one section of the problem. While it would be too much to say that the study reveals the basic pattern for other communities in the state, it is perhaps reasonable to assume that the ebb and flow of local attitudes in the northern tier of towns is accurately stated in this study of Strafford. Miss Fisher wishes to make acknowledgment of the courtesy extended to her in the course of her research by the town clerk of Strafford, Elizabeth M. F. Chandler. Editor.

DURING the Revolution, Strafford was a frontier town with few inhabitants between it and the enemy in Canada.¹ The people living in the townships on both sides of the upper Connecticut River were conscious of the danger to which they were exposed. In July of 1776, Colonel John Hurd, member of the New Hampshire Council, wrote to General Sullivan from Haverhill, New Hampshire, "Our greatest danger, we fear, at present, is from small skulking parties of Canadians or Indians, should they take up the hatchet against us. Yet we have this good circumstance in our favour: The St. François tribe and the Caughnawaga have still some of their children at Dartmouth College, under Doctor Wheelock's tuition, which one would think they would certainly remove before they begin hostilities."² He thought that it was only the enemy's ignorance of the country and its weakness, or else lack of a sufficient number of troops in Canada, that prevented an attack.³

Evidently efforts were made to maintain good relations with the

1. In 1778, the Vermont Assembly voted to raise a force of twenty men to guard the frontier "from White River to Strafford and Corinth" and the Lakes. *State Papers of Vermont, Journals and Proceedings of the General Assembly of the State of Vermont*, III, p. 29.

2. *American Archives*, Peter Force, ed., 5th Series, I, p. 264.

3. *Ibid.*

St. François Indians. Colonel Jacob Bayley of Newbury reported that the Indians were being told in Canada that it was impossible for the Americans to supply them with articles which they needed and that in order to obtain them, they must join the side of the British in the war. Colonel Bayley had attempted to offset the enemy's plan by sending a messenger to inform the Indians "that we are ready to supply, if they chuse, at Upper Co'os, in exchange for Bever & as reasonably as they can be supplied in Canada; to inform them that we are the same to them, as twelve years past; that we wonder they should make themselves strange, that we don't mean to intreat them but to inform and undeceive them."⁴ It was known early in 1777 that the attempt to remain on friendly terms with the Indians was unsuccessful. A scout who had been sent to the St. François reported that a large number of Indians belonging to that tribe had joined the British, and it was thought that they would attack the frontier settlements sometime that spring.⁵

At the same time that these communities were fearing that they would be attacked from the outside, they realized that there was also danger from those of their own inhabitants who remained loyal to the British government. Colonel Hurd wrote that in his neighborhood, some "ill-minded" persons had proposed that unless they were sent help by New Hampshire or Massachusetts, the best way to protect themselves from attack by the Indians, would be to "send over to General Burgoyne, acquaint him of our weak condition, and ask his protection."⁶ But measures were being taken to prevent the Tories from doing any harm to the American cause. By the 15th of March, 1776, a Committee of Safety for Gloucester County had been formed.⁷ At a meeting of the Committee held on March 15, 1776, it was resolved that twenty-two inhabitants of the county should be asked "to subscribe an oath . . . in favour of America and all those that shall subscribe to be received into favour of the Sons of Liberty and those that don't comply and subscribe are to be deemed as enemies to the American cause, and are to be treated in the follow-

4. *New Hampshire State Papers*, VIII, pp. 405-406. Colonel Bayley to the Speaker of the New Hampshire House of Representatives, Dec. 4, 1776.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 510. Colonel Timothy Bedel to Ebenezer Thompson, Haverhill, New Hampshire, March 18, 1777.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 306-307.

7. *Proceedings of the Vermont Historical Society*, 1923, 1924 and 1925, p. 193. Gloucester County Court Records.

ing manner (viz) They are to be stroped of all warlike weapons and are to be under the inspection of the Committee of the Towns to which they belong and they are not to hold any correspondence with any that are deemed as Tories."⁸ Eight of these twenty-two men were inhabitants of Strafford. They were William Pennock, James Pennock, James Pennock, Jr., Samuel Pennock, James Bean, John Bliss, Daniel West and Elihu Northrope.⁹ There is no record which indicates whether or not these men subscribed to the oath.

Loyalist activities, however, apparently continued in the neighborhood. In the summer of 1776, Colonel Hurd reported to the New Hampshire Committee of Safety that a careful watch was being kept on the men who "proposed sending to General Burgoyne or into Canada for assistance," but that it was thought wise to take no action against them at that time.¹⁰ That the Loyalists had some form of organization in these frontier towns is evident from the contents of an intercepted letter, dated at Thetford on June 17, 1777, and addressed to Benjamin Brooks of Claremont, New Hampshire.¹¹ In it the writer said that he had just received news from Canada, where "they are making all preparations to come down & I would have you all stand in readiness to help; your arms are all ready for you and will be sent to some secure place." The writer would inform Brooks in a few days where he should go to receive them. He asked Brooks to give encouragement to "all friends for Government" and to keep everything secret, "for our lives depend upon it . . . & if there [are] any more that have sworn allegiance to the King since I talk'd with you, I sh'd be glad to know it for I must make a return how many we can raise. . . . I hope in six weeks we shall be able to clear all our friends from Bonds & Imprisonment; for God's sake let everything be carried on with secresy & I doubt not thro' the justice of our cause we shall overcome the Damned Rebels."¹² The letter was written at the time when Burgoyne's expedition must have filled the Loyalists with hope for their cause.

The capture of Ticonderoga by the British forces on July 6, 1776,

8. *Ibid.*, p. 194.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 193.

10. *American Archives*, 5th Series, I, p. 625.

11. Captain Benj. Brooks and Benj. Brooks, Jr., were both among the inhabitants of Claremont, New Hampshire, who refused to sign a declaration in favor of the "United American Colonies," May 30, 1776. *American Archives*, 4th Series, V, p. 879.

12. *New Hampshire State Papers*, VIII, p. 589.

naturally strengthened the Tory party. A letter from Ira Allen, Secretary of the Vermont Council of Safety, to the New Hampshire Committee of Safety, written immediately after the capture of the fortress, shows why its loss increased the number of men who deserted to the enemy in frontier towns like Strafford. He wrote, "By the surrender of the Fortress Ticonderoga a communication is opened to the defenceless inhabitants on the frontier, who having little more in present store than sufficient for the maintenance of their respective families, and not ability to remove their effects, are therefore induced to accept such Protections as are offered them by the Enemy; . . . You . . . will be at once sensible that every such Town as accept protection, are rendered at that instant forever incapable of affording us any further assistance, and what is infinitely worse, as some disaffected persons eternally lurk in almost every Town, such become double fortified to injure their country. . . ." ¹³

The situation became worse with the spreading of the rumor that General Burgoyne was sending troops across Vermont to the Connecticut River.¹⁴ Apparently the people of Strafford who were adherents of the American cause had a special reason for being terrified by the news of the approach of the British and Tories. According to the account of Richard Wallace of Thetford, "There were a number of tories in that town [Strafford]. There were eight brothers in one family went over to the British at once, and they carried some others with them; and their property was all taken and sold for public use. Those who remained true to their country's cause expected the vengeance of these enemies."¹⁵ Apparently the rumor of the approach of Burgoyne's troops resulted in further desertions to the enemy. Colonel Hurd reported from Haverhill, on July 21,

13. *New Hampshire State Papers*, VIII, pp. 632-633.

14. Joel Matthew to General Bayley: "Sir—I have this moment received intelligence from Otter Creek of the motion of the Enemy, viz. That yesterday they were at Rutland . . . with an intent to march to No. 4, also another detachment to march to Cohos. This intelligence comes by way of Windsor to me. . . . Hartford, July 19th, 1777." *Ibid.*, p. 642.

"An American scouting party came in [to Charlestown, N. H.] with . . . prisoners. . . . Upon these prisoners were found papers, purporting that three detachments of British soldiers and tories were to be sent out to the Connecticut valley, one to Newbury, one to Royalton and one to Charlestown, N. H." Rev. Grant Powers, *Historical Sketches of the Discovery, Settlement, and Progress of Events in the Coos Country and Vicinity*, principally between the years 1754 and 1785, p. 146.

15. Powers, *Historical Sketches*, etc., p. 146.

1777, that a letter had been received from Strafford, asking for immediate assistance because "one half of that Town had gone off to the Regulars." Hurd thought that these desertions indicated that the English troops were marching toward the Connecticut valley because "we apprehend these people, who have been known to be Tories some time past, have held correspondence with the Regular Army and know their designs of marching in towards this River."¹⁶ On the same day Colonel Bayley of Newbury wrote that about thirty men from Thetford and Strafford had deserted to the enemy.¹⁷ The remaining inhabitants of Strafford sent an express to the New Hampshire towns on the east bank of the Connecticut, asking for help. The members of the committee which was sent to investigate, in reporting to the New Hampshire Assembly, wrote, "we . . . found the remainder of the inhabitants determined to remove so that this day they have retreated to this River with more than 200 head of Cattle and about the same number of sheep."¹⁸ Richard Wallace of Thetford described the exodus: "men, women and children, who had forsaken houses and lands and everything which they could not conveniently carry; some in carts, some on sleds, some in sleighs in mid-summer; some on foot. They had their hands full of light articles of clothing, and packs stuffed upon their backs and were driving before them cattle, horses, sheep and swine. The mixed noise of these different kinds of animals and the cries of women and children, who expected to be overtaken every minute, murdered and scalped by the infuriated Indians, tories and British, were enough to affect the stoutest heart."¹⁹

There is no account indicating when the inhabitants returned to Strafford.²⁰ They probably felt safe to do so after the surrender of Burgoyne. They must have suffered very much from the circumstances of having to leave their farms at a time of the year when their crops were in special need of attention.

16. *New Hampshire State Papers*, VIII, pp. 643-644. Colonel Hurd to Mesch Weare, Haverhill, July 21st, 1777.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 644.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 644. Letter from Colonel Israel Morey and Colonel Jonathan Child. Undated. In his letter of July 21, 1777, Colonel Bayley said that they were obliged to move "at least twenty familys, and at least four hundred cattle and sheep across the river at Lyme; neither can we secure what is left at Strafford without help. . . ." *Ibid.*

19. Powers, *Historical Sketches*, etc., pp. 146-160.

20. There are no town records for Strafford in 1777.

There are records which throw some further light on individual Loyalists and their treatment in Strafford. Senator Justin Smith Morrill says, "In the fierce controversy which the 'New Hampshire Grants' had with New York and other colonies, . . . some of the Pennocks and Beans espoused the cause of New York, and finally became so much alienated from their fellow-townsmen in the struggle against British rule as to be identified with those who called themselves loyalists and were called by others tories. During the invasion of Burgoyne in 1777, a few of these men abandoned their homes, and it is supposed joined the enemy."²¹ The statement made by Richard Wallace, that eight brothers deserted to the enemy from Strafford, has been mentioned. It seems probable that the eight brothers referred to were members of the Pennock family. Among the earliest settlers in the town were James Pennock and his eight sons, William, Samuel, Aaron, Peter, Heman, Oliver, Jesse and James, Jr.²² There is no indication among the early records of Strafford that there was any other family in the town with as many as eight adult sons. That four of the Pennocks, James, James, Jr., William and Samuel, were included on the list of those who were to be asked by the Gloucester County Committee of Safety to subscribe to an oath "in favour of America," and that there is no indication of whether or not they subscribed to the oath, has already been mentioned. There is additional evidence that two of the Pennocks were considered to be Loyalists. One hundred acres of land in Strafford belonging to Captain James Pennock were confiscated,²³ and Samuel Pennock also had property confiscated.²⁴

21. *The Vermont Historical Gazetteer: A Magazine Embracing a History of Each Town, Civil, Ecclesiastical, Biographical and Military.* Abby Maria Hemenway, ed., II, pp. 1066-1090.

22. *Ibid.* Senator Morrill says that James Pennock and six of his sons settled in Strafford in 1768.

23. Deed of sale by Matthew Lyon to John Powell of Strafford, October 27, 1783. "A certain farm in the township of Strafford . . . containing about one hundred acres . . . being the . . . lot formerly owned and occupied by Capt James Pennock as his home lot and being the same lot I bought of Timothy Bartholomew, Commissioner for sales of confiscated lands." Manuscript volume of records of town meetings and land deeds of Strafford. The town meetings are of the years 1779-1782. The deeds are dated from 1768 to 1786, p. 15. Hereafter this volume will be called *Strafford Records*, II.

24. "An act directing the return of such obligations taken from Samuel Pennock by the Court of Confiscation as are now in possession of said court

Isaac Baldwin joined the British and lost his land in Strafford through confiscation.²⁵ It is possible that James Bean also suffered for his political opinions. Senator Morrill mentioned the Beans with the Pennocks as Tory families of the town and James Bean's name was on the list of Tory suspects in Gloucester County. Apparently, however, he was living in Strafford between 1778 and 1783. During that time he bought and sold land in Strafford,²⁶ and in the year 1778 he was elected surveyor of highways by the town meeting.²⁷ There is no indication that he was in any sort of difficulty until the year 1784, when he lost some land as a result of a lawsuit.²⁸ In the same year two town meetings were held in Strafford, "to see what the town will do respecting James Bean's children."²⁹ Apparently their father had left town or been sent away because one of the suggestions voted upon was that the children be sent to their parents.³⁰ It is, of course, possible that James Bean's departure from Strafford had nothing to do with his political opinions. The fact that he was elected to office during the war seems to indicate that he had signed the oath demanded of him in 1776 or, in some other way, removed the suspicion that he was a Tory. On the other hand, we have the statement of Senator Morrill that the Beans were Tories. Enoch Bean also may have been considered a Tory, although he was not asked to sign the oath and was elected to office in Strafford during the war. In 1779 he was on a committee to "lay out all the un-

. . . read, accepted and sent to the Governor and Council." *State Papers of Vermont, Journals and Proceedings of the General Assembly of the State of Vermont*, IV, p. 98. "An act directing certain persons named therein to deliver up certain obligations to Samuel Pennock was read and concurred," October, 1788. *Records of the Governor and Council of the State of Vermont*, III, p. 174.

25. Petition to the Assembly by Elizabeth Baldwin, widow of Isaac Baldwin of Strafford, "who did some time since join the enemy," asking for relief as "the estate of her late husband . . . has been confiscated to the use of this State." *State Papers of Vermont, Journals and Proceedings of the General Assembly of the State of Vermont*, III, p. 204.

26. *Strafford Records*, II, pp. 36, 47, 90, 94, 95, 101, 154, 155.

27. Manuscript volume of records of town meetings and land deeds of Strafford, marked "D." Town meetings of the years 1778-1788. On page 127 it is stated that the volume is a transcript made in 1821 "from records . . . in danger of becoming unintelligible and on loose pieces of paper," p. 9. Hereafter this volume will be called *Strafford Records*, III.

28. *Strafford Records*, II, pp. 182-183.

29. *Strafford Records*, III, p. 42.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

divided land in sd Town."³¹ In the same year it was voted "that Enoch Been be a Committee man to act in Behalf of the proprietors to proceed to New York . . . to get the Charter of this town. . . ."³² Between 1776 and 1780 there are records of his having bought and sold land in Strafford.³³ But in 1794 the Vermont legislature passed an act "restoring Enoch Bean to his Law."³⁴ Another possible Loyalist was Jonathan Wood. In 1783 a special town meeting was called in Strafford to "see what the town will do respecting Jonathan Wood and family" and at the meeting, it was voted "that Mr Jonathan Wood be released from the bonds he is laid under by the selectmen and that he is at liberty to act for himself in all cases as a freeman of the state."³⁵ The land records show that Wood was living in Strafford in 1778,³⁶ and that in 1779 he sold some land.³⁷

The other inhabitants of Strafford whose names were on the Gloucester County Committee of Safety list of suspected Tories were John Bliss, Daniel West and Elihu Northrop. The Strafford records which mention John Bliss show only that he was living in Strafford in 1774³⁸ and in 1790.³⁹ Daniel West was probably living in Strafford in 1773,⁴⁰ and in 1784 he was a selectman of the town.⁴¹ The only indications that he was a Loyalist are the facts that his name was on the list of the Gloucester County Committee of Safety and that he was the son-in-law of James Pennock.⁴² The only

31. Manuscript volume of records of the Proprietors of Strafford. On the first page is written, "The Book of Records of the doings of the Proprietors of the Township of Strafford, Folio first," p. 10. Hereafter this volume will be referred to as *Strafford Records*, I.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

33. *Strafford Records*, II, pp. 39, 65, 103, 176, 217.

34. *Records of the Governor and Council of the State of Vermont*, IV, p. 72.

35. *Strafford Records*, III, p. 41.

36. *Strafford Records*, II, pp. 54, 105.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

39. *Heads of Families at the First Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1790, Vermont*, Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census, p. 33.

40. *Strafford Records*, II, p. 33. Daniel West witnessed a deed in Strafford in 1773.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 149.

42. *Vermont Gazetteer*, Hemenway, II, pp. 1066-1090. Daniel West married Amy Pennock.

references to Elihu Northrop show that he was in Strafford in 1774⁴³ and on January 3, 1777.⁴⁴ After that date there is no further mention of him in the Strafford records, which possibly indicates that he was one of the men from Strafford who joined General Burgoyne.

There is information in the town records which throws further light on the treatment of Loyalists in Strafford. At a town meeting held on March 18, 1779, it was voted "that those tores and their famaleys that this town had Leve to send a way should not Return and in habet this town again."⁴⁵ But in general the Tories seem to have been treated comparatively leniently. Lorenzo Sabine, in *The American Loyalists*, says that many Loyalists deserted General Burgoyne before his surrender.⁴⁶ Possibly some of the Strafford men were among this group and were later allowed to return to the town.

If, as seems probable, the eight brothers who went over to the British at one time were the Pennocks, the close connection with Strafford of the subsequent careers of several of them, is interesting. James, the father, was a justice of the peace in Strafford in 1779.⁴⁷ In 1780 he was elected by the town meeting to serve on a committee for regulating the mill.⁴⁸ In 1784 he deeded land to three of his sons.⁴⁹ It is possible that he regained possession of his land which had been confiscated.⁵⁰ He died in 1808 at the age of 96 and is buried in Strafford.⁵¹ His son Aaron was an inhabitant of Strafford in 1771.⁵² In 1784 he sold some land in the town⁵³ and was elected

43. *Strafford Records*, II, p. 40. Elihu Northrup witnessed a deed.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 32. Elihu Northrup witnessed a deed.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

46. Lorenzo Sabine, *The American Loyalists, or Biographical Sketches of Adherents to the British Crown in the War of the Revolution; Alphabetically Arranged with a Preliminary Historical Essay*, p. 59.

47. *Strafford Records*, II, p. 40.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

49. *Ibid.*, pp. 156, 161, 184.

50. "A petition from Col. Matthew Lyon stating that he purchased a . . . farm in the town of Strafford . . . of one Timothy Bartholomew, a late Commissioner of Confiscation . . ., taken from one Capt. James Pennock . . . and that he . . . has lost said farm by another claimant and by due course of law . . ." October 9, 1795. *Records of the Governor and Council of the State of Vermont*, IV, p. 86.

51. Gravestone in Old City burying ground, Strafford.

52. *The Documentary History of the State of New York*, edited by E. B. O'Callaghan, IV, p. 709. List of the heads of families in the County of Gloucester in 1771.

53. *Strafford Records*, II, p. 124.

Lister by the town meeting.⁵⁴ He was living in Strafford in 1790.⁵⁵ Senator Morrill wrote of him, "Aaron was for many years one of the leading men in town and was many times elected to offices of trust and responsibility."⁵⁶ There is no record of his having lost land by confiscation, and it is only because he was one of the eight Pennock brothers that it is presumed he was a Loyalist. The first mention of Heman Pennock is in 1784, when his father deeded a tract of land to him; at that time he was described as a yeoman of Strafford.⁵⁷ In 1787,⁵⁸ 1790⁵⁹ and 1792⁶⁰ he was still living in Strafford. As in the case of his brother, Aaron, there is no record of his having lost property through confiscation.

On January 3, 1777, after his name had appeared on the list of Tory suspects but before Burgoyne's expedition, James Pennock, Jr., was living in Strafford.⁶¹ After that date there is no indication that he was in Strafford and some time before 1785 he died.⁶² The only facts which appear concerning Jesse Pennock are that he was living in Strafford in 1771⁶³ and in 1775⁶⁴ and that by 1785 he also was dead.⁶⁵ Oliver Pennock's name is not mentioned until after the war; in 1786 he registered his claim in the proprietors' records to a lot of land in Strafford.⁶⁶ In 1790 he was living in Strafford.⁶⁷

After 1774, when he was living in Strafford,⁶⁸ Peter's name disappears from the records until the year 1784, when he was a selectman of Strafford.⁶⁹ He represented Strafford at the Convention for adopting the federal constitution in 1791⁷⁰ and lived in Strafford

54. *Strafford Records*, III, p. 40.

55. *Heads of Families at the First Census, 1790, Vermont*, p. 34.

56. *Vermont Gazetteer*, Hemenway, II, pp. 1066-1090.

57. *Strafford Records*, II, p. 184.

58. *Strafford Records*, III, pp. 30-36.

59. *Heads of Families at the First Census, 1790, Vermont*, p. 34.

60. *Strafford Records*, III, p. 8.

61. *Strafford Records*, II, p. 32.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 201.

63. *Documentary History of New York*, IV, p. 709.

64. *Strafford Records*, II, p. 222.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 206.

66. *Strafford Records*, I, p. 42.

67. *Heads of Families at the First Census, 1790, Vermont*, p. 34.

68. *Strafford Records*, III, p. 18.

69. *Strafford Records*, II, p. 149.

70. *Records of the Governor and Council of the State of Vermont*, III, p. 466.

until his death in 1821.⁷¹ Senator Morrill wrote of him, "Peter, usually called 'Esquire Peter,' continued in public life to a comparatively late period. Many years he was one of the leading justices of the peace; he was selectman eight years. . . ." ⁷² After Samuel Pennock was listed among the Tory suspects in Gloucester County in 1775, he is never again mentioned as an inhabitant of Strafford and some of his possessions were confiscated by the government. In 1785, however, he was allowed to sell some land which he owned in Strafford.⁷³ William, the third of the Pennock brothers who was on the Gloucester County list, apparently remained in Strafford during the war; the land records show that he was there in 1778⁷⁴ and in 1779;⁷⁵ in 1780 he was elected to serve on a committee to regulate the mill in Strafford;⁷⁶ by the year 1782 he was dead.⁷⁷

It may be said of the nine Pennocks that four of them (James, Sr., James, Jr., Samuel and William) were definitely suspected of being Tories in 1776. Of these four, two (James, Sr., and Samuel) had property confiscated which they may have subsequently regained. Two (James, Jr., and Samuel) of the four had apparently left Strafford by 1777, and never returned. But James, Sr., and William were not only in Strafford before the end of the war but were also elected to town offices during the war. Aaron, Heman, Jesse, Oliver and Peter were not on the Loyalist list, and none of them, apparently, had property confiscated. There is, however, no record to show that any one of them was an inhabitant of Strafford during the war. After the war all five of them were living in Strafford, and two of them (Aaron and Peter) held important offices in the town.

71. Gravestone of Peter Pennock in the Old City burying ground.

72. *Gazetteer of Vermont*, II, pp. 1066-1090.

73. Samuel Pennock of Woodbury, Connecticut. *Strafford Records*, II, p. 204.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

75. *Ibid.*, p. 142.

76. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

