AN UNKNOWN VERMONTER:
SYLVANUS EVARTS, GOVERNOR CHITTENDEN'S TORY BROTHER-IN-LAW

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ON FEBRUARY 20, 1779, the Assembly of the State of Vermont joined the Governor and Council in granting to Timothy and Eli Evarts 120 acres of land in Castleton, in recompense for a debt owed by the state to their father. This would not in itself be remarkable were it not that six days later the father, Sylvanus Evarts, was proscribed as a Tory, and all of his property ordered seized for the benefit of the state. Commenting that "the sin of the father was not visited upon the children," the editor of the records of the Vermont Governor and Council in 1873 referred to this grant as a "remarkable instance of generosity".¹

A rather important fact of which the editor apparently was unaware, and which has escaped other Vermont historians, is that Eli and Timothy Evarts were nephews of Governor Thomas Chittenden, and that Sylvanus Evarts, center of an important group of Castleton Tories, was a brother-in-law of the governor. The family histories of Thomas Chittenden and Sylvanus Evarts illustrate well the fact that social standing was no sure guide in determining loyalty during the American Revolution, and that men of apparently similar backgrounds often chose opposite sides in that struggle.

The Chittenden and Evarts families had lived near each other in East Guilford, Connecticut, for at least ninety-seven years before the day in 1749 when John, Nathaniel, and Sylvanus Evarts joined some of the Chittenden family in a move to the young town of Salisbury, in northwestern Connecticut. In the group were Thomas Chittenden, a nineteen-year-old bridegroom, and his sister Elisheba, two years his senior, who was married to Sylvanus Evarts.²

The two families soon became very prominent in Salisbury community life. John Evarts was the first man to represent Salisbury in the Connecticut Assembly, where he served six consecutive terms, while Thomas Chittenden was also a representative for ten sessions before he was forty years old. Sylvanus Evarts was not as prominent, but served as tithingman and highway surveyor. John Evarts and
Thomas Chittenden were in the exclusive group of eighteen men listed at more than one hundred pounds in the Salisbury Grand List of 1759; at more than seventy pounds, Sylvanus Evarts was considerably wealthier than the average Salisbury citizen.3

When the leading men of Salisbury decided to try to gain possession of some land in the “New Hampshire Grants”, John Evarts was chosen to go to Portsmouth to apply for two townships. By redistributing the names on his list, he secured charters for three townships on Otter Creek—New Haven, Middlebury, and Salisbury. His name headed each charter, and eight other members of the Evarts family, including his two brothers, were to be found among the grantees, as were Thomas Chittenden and most of the other leading citizens of Salisbury. As in the case of most other New Hampshire grants of the early 1760’s, most of the recipients used their ownership of land in the “Grants” for purposes of speculation rather than of settlement.4

In 1773, a year before Thomas Chittenden made the move to his “Onion River” lands which was to lead to political fame, Sylvanus Evarts decided to try another frontier town. Just as Amos Bird, the real founder of Castleton, had sold his Salisbury lands to get money for his Vermont venture ten years earlier, Sylvanus Evarts now disposed of all his Salisbury property in order to acquire the valuable real estate left in Castleton when Bird had died the previous September at the age of twenty-nine. The three hundred pounds gained from the Salisbury sale on March 8, 1773, provided exactly the amount which Evarts had agreed eight days earlier to pay for the Bird farm and residence in Castleton, together with one half of the valuable sawmill and water rights at the outlet of Lake Bomoseen, then called the “Great Pond”.5

Before 1776, Oliver Evarts had joined his father in Castleton, to which village Sylvanus apparently had moved shortly after he purchased the Bird property. In February of 1776, Oliver Evarts went back to Salisbury to marry Nancy Landon, daughter of James Landon, J. P., who performed the ceremony. James Landon was one of the wealthiest men in Salisbury, and had represented that town in the Connecticut Assembly on many occasions. Within a few months after the wedding, Asa Landon, Oliver’s new brother-in-law, moved to Castleton. A fourth member of the family group in the frontier community was Gilbert Evarts, son of Salisbury’s leading citizen, Sylvanus Evarts’ brother John.6

The migrants from Salisbury were barely settled in Castleton
when conditions in that area, already complicated because of the argument with the “Yorkers” over land ownership, became tremendously hazardous due to the Revolutionary War and a British invasion. In May of 1775, Zadock Remington’s tavern in Castleton became the rendezvous point for the expedition for the capture of Ticonderoga planned and led by Ethan Allen, formerly part-owner of the iron “furnace” in the Furnace Pond area of Salisbury, the section in which the Evarts family had lived. The year 1776 saw the building at Skenesboro, some ten miles from Castleton, of the little fleet with which Benedict Arnold would force the postponement for a year of the British invasion from Canada, although the fleet itself would be lost in the battle of Valcour Island. The same year also saw this section of the “Grants” scourged by smallpox and other diseases caught from the remnants of the Montgomery-Arnold expedition to Canada, while those remnants were dying by the hundreds at Ticonderoga and Crown Point.

The real days of testing and of terror for Castleton came between July 6 and July 24, 1777, with Burgoyne’s invasion. On July 6, a group of Tories and Indians, led by Justus Sherwood, raided the little settlement, causing the death of Captain John Hall of Castleton and of Captain Williams of Guilford, Vermont. Ticonderoga had been evacuated early that morning, and throughout the hot July Sunday the Americans under General St. Clair had been retreating down the “Hubbardton Road”, which the American Army had constructed the preceding year. A few miles behind them came the British under Fraser and the Germans under Riedesel. By nightfall, St. Clair and the main body of the American troops were in Castleton.

Early the following morning, July 7, the British attacked the unprepared American rear guard which, under Colonel Francis and Seth Warner, had remained at Hubbardton, six miles from St. Clair’s troops. After a short but fierce engagement, the Americans were driven over the hills to the eastward, while St. Clair, learning of this defeat and also of the British seizure of Skenesboro, took his troops eastward to Rutland to avoid capture. On the following day, residents who remained in Castleton saw Riedesel and his Germans march through on their way to Skenesboro, and on Wednesday the British under Fraser followed the same route, stopping in Castleton for a gill of rum per man as encouragement against the difficult traveling. By the following Sunday, the Germans were back in Castleton, having bridged the Poultney river and cut a road through what is now Fair Haven on their return trip.7
Residents of the Castleton area who wished to preserve their loyalty to the new “United States of America” faced during the next eleven days a combination of unfavorable circumstances probably unmatched in any other section during the American Revolution. Castleton was an occupied village, with Lieutenant Colonel Breyman’s corps stationed just west of the little settlement and with Riedesel’s main force west of Breyman’s along the Castleton River. The “rebel” army had been dispersed, and if it reassembled it would be, as General Schuyler wrote, “weak in numbers, dispirited, naked . . . destitute of provisions . . . with little ammunition, and not a single piece of cannon.”

Many parts of the United States faced similar problems during the Revolution, but the position of the residents of the “New Hampshire Grants” was made much more difficult by doubts as to the legality of their government and of their land ownership. The government of “Vermont”, to which the settlers were asked to be loyal, consisted of only a Council of Safety acting rather irregularly under a hastily adopted constitution. The Congress of the United States seemed to be turning against their claims to ownership of land in the “Grants”, while the New York Committee of Safety, with which they were asked to cooperate, contained many of the men who had taken the lead in opposing the Vermonters’ land claims.

On July 10, Burgoyne summoned all citizens of the area to meet in Castleton on July 15 to receive protection from Colonel Philip Skene, whose great iron works and mills over at Skenesboro had been destroyed by the retreating Americans. For those settlers who would put a bit of paper in their hats or wear their shirts outside their coats as signs of acceptance of Burgoyne’s protection, there would be a profitable market for farm produce as well as protection from Burgoyne’s Indian allies. Remaining loyal to the rebelling colonies meant confiscation of their produce and possible destruction of their homes—the “devastation, famine, and every concomitant horror” which Burgoyne had threatened.

Under the circumstances, it is not surprising that General Schuyler reported to Washington that “a very great portion of the residents of the New Hampshire Grants” had accepted protection from Burgoyne, nor that many residents of Rutland county furnished provisions for the British. Their real feelings are harder to determine; Riedesel reported that four hundred persons accepted protection at Castleton, but he felt that many of them were insincere, and really served as spies against the true loyalists. A German soldier reported that “Castle-town” was “one-third royalist and two-thirds rebel” and that
“very few consent to take the oath of allegiance, a number agree to neutrality, perhaps because of our proximity and their property.”

After the British had gone, persons who had accepted Burgoyne’s protection reluctantly or insincerely were treated gently by the Vermont government, but Sylvanus Evarts and his family were not in this group. In January 1776, Oliver Evarts apparently was working closely with the “Green Mountain Boys” when he was named one of three assistant secretaries at the Dorset Convention, but in 1777 his attitude was quite different. He was later to assert that he “gave all assistance in his power to the Army under the Command of General Burgoyne,” furnishing provisions, fat cattle, and forage, and his team to transport provisions, “procuring and clearing a Road through the Woods from Castleton to East Bay.” Sylvanus Evarts, Gilbert Evarts, and Asa Landon must have joined Oliver Evarts in enthusiastic support of the British army, for when the Vermont Court of Confiscation first met in April of 1778, these four men were in the first group of Tories whose real and personal property was declared forfeit to the state by reason of their treasonable conduct. The presiding officer of this court was Governor Thomas Chittenden, Sylvanus Evarts’ brother-in-law; the clerk was Matthew Lyon, whose wife was Sylvanus Evarts’ niece; a third member of the five-man board was Timothy Brownson, a former Salisbury neighbor who, like Chittenden, had secured his Otter Creek lands through the activity of Gilbert Evarts’ father.

It was under these circumstances that the Governor and Council and the Assembly of Vermont voted to give to Eli and Timothy Evarts 120 acres of land for a debt due to their father from the state. This land was part of the Amos Bird farm which their father forfeited, and the commissioner of sequestration also sold to Eli Evarts an adjoining plot of one hundred acres, likewise forfeited by Sylvanus. Timothy and Eli together bought other confiscated property worth seventy-two pounds.

Of all the property confiscated in Castleton, the most valuable single item was Sylvanus Evarts’ half of the “mill lot”, with its share of the water power of the Lake Bomoseen outlet—the one stream in the area which provided dependable power throughout the summer. The disposal of this property shows something of the narrowness of the line which on some occasions distinguished the “Tories” whose land was confiscated from the “patriots” who were allowed to buy it. For sixty pounds each, James Claghorn, commissioner of sequestration, sold this mill interest to another commissioner, George Foote,
and to Zadock Remington, each of whom thus gained one quarter of
the water right.\textsuperscript{16}

The Revolutionary record of George Foote, captured by the British
during Burgoyne's invasion, could hardly be questioned, but Zadock
Remington does not seem to qualify as the sort of sincere revolutionist
to whom the commissioners were expected to sell Tory property.
Although the expedition which captured Ticonderoga in the spring of
1775 had assembled at his tavern west of Castleton village, his Tory
sympathies soon became legendary in the little community. Less than
four months before he was allowed to purchase the confiscated mill lot,
the Assembly of Vermont had voted that "Mr. Zadock Remington be
dismantled or expelled this House", apparently for his pro-British views.\textsuperscript{17}
Even when applying for remuneration for his supposed losses in the
Revolution, he had to admit that he had paid a fine of sixty dollars in
1780 to avoid receiving fifteen lashes on his bare back at Castleton
fort after a court martial had sentenced him for deserting a scouting
party to the northward.\textsuperscript{18}

Castleton settlers had been influenced further against the Remington
family by the activities of Zadock's brother David, former surveying
partner of Ira Allen. David Remington had been one of the two men
who supervised the building of the "Hubbardton Road" by American
soldiers in 1776, but when the British arrived in Castleton, he took
charge of providing transportation for the baggage of the Hessian
soldiers and of securing extra horses for Tories. His prominence
among Castleton Tories is illustrated by a letter written by Philip
Skene on July 10, 1777, addressed to "Mr. Remington and the other
Inhabitants of the places adjacent".\textsuperscript{19} After the British left, all of
David Remington's property was confiscated, but he was later allowed
to return to live in Vermont.\textsuperscript{20}

Despite this popular suspicion of Zadock Remington and of his
family, he acquired and retained half of Sylvanus Evarts' lot and
water right. The last 196 acres of Evarts' land were sold to Isaac
"Old Rifle" Clark, who had aroused bitter controversy by killing a
Tinmouth settler who had taken protection from Burgoyne. Clark had
lost a brother at Bennington; his wife was one of Governor Chittenden's daughters, and therefore a niece to Sylvanus Evarts.\textsuperscript{21}

Three-fifths of Oliver Evarts 250-acre plot was sold to Reuben
Moulton, who apparently took the oath and accepted British pro-
tection reluctantly during the period of occupation. Moulton also
bought fifty acres of Asa Landon's confiscated land, while Castleton
selectman Perez Sturtevant secured the use of Gilbert Evarts' farm
for twenty-two pounds rental. Other entries in the records of the
confiscation commissioners report the sale of “a wooling wheele”, a
“Linning Wheele”, a pine meat tub, and “one wooden Bole”, all
formerly the property of Oliver Evarts, and the sheep, corn, leather
and household goods of Gilbert Evarts. George Foote and Reuben
Moulton were especially active in making purchases at the latter sale,
which disposed of such homely articles as two pillions, a “Hetchell”,
a “jug”, a trammel, some bedrope, and three chests.22

Once the Revolution was over, the Tories faced the prospect of
starting out anew somewhere or of returning to the homes from which
they had been driven. Some indication of the reception they might
receive in their old homes is to be found in the records of the Castleton
town meeting of April 23, 1784. Gaylord Hawkins, son of a man who
had once owned eight hundred acres near the center of Castleton,
had fled back to Connecticut to avoid prosecution by the Vermont
Council of Safety. The town’s action was brief and revealing when
Hawkins returned to Castleton: “Then the moderator Desired that
those who would Except [sic] of Mr. Gailard Hawkins to be an in­
habitant in this town would be on the East end of the House the
Inhabitants that were voters Seperated [sic] the moderator de­
clared that it was no vote”.23

The younger Tories generally left Castleton. Gilbert Evarts went
to Salisbury, Vermont, where he still owned land granted to him some
twenty years earlier; here he became the only original grantee ever
to live in the township.24 Oliver Evarts went to Canada, where in
1787 he filed with the British commissioners investigating Tory
claims the required evidence of his Revolutionary losses. He states
that he had joined the British when they arrived at Ticonderoga,
and that after the British left Castleton he was “robbed and plundered
by the rebels of all his Movable Effects, his Life threatened and
obliged to flee to Canada with his family”. In 1780 he had become a
clerk in the Engineers’ Department at St. Johns, where he was work­
ing in 1787.25

Oliver Evarts showed the commissioners the pass given to him by
Philip Skene in July, 1777 and presented an inventory of losses which
provides some interesting information as to the possessions of an
upper class resident of frontier Castleton. Along with the usual farm
tools, cheeses, cattle, pewter, brass, and gallons of rum, Evarts claimed
the loss of two suits, one of them being of superfine broadcloth and
worth more than eight pounds, two pairs of buckskin breeches and
two pairs of cloth breeches, four white linen shirts worth fifteen shil-
lings each, a beaver hat worth thirty shillings, two silk handkerchiefs, and books which had cost him twenty-five dollars. Oliver Evans claimed that he had purchased his father’s sawmill interest in 1775 for seventy pounds, and presented an affidavit from his father as proof. Rejecting this claim for lack of proof of ownership and rejecting or whittling down many of Evarts’ other claims of loss, the commission finally granted him one hundred eight pounds out of total asserted loss of over one thousand pounds.

Asa Landon was living in Oswegatchie, Canada, in 1787, as were Justus Sherwood and many other former Vermont Tories. Although his claims of loss were much more modest than those of his brother-in-law, he received almost exactly the same amount from the British government.

Eli Evarts also left Castleton immediately after the Revolution, in spite of the considerable amount of land which he had acquired there. He found a new frontier in the adjoining town of Fair Haven which, partly because of doubt that it would lie in Vermont even if the New Hampshire grants were made good, was not granted until 1779 and was first surveyed in 1780. In 1781 Eli Evarts went back to Salisbury, Connecticut, for a wife, and by 1784 they were living in a log cabin on land which he had bought from Isaac Clark, one of the two men chiefly influential in securing the Fair Haven grant. By 1793 Eli Evarts was a selectman in Fair Haven, where he apparently lived for the remainder of his life.

The name of Sylvanus Evarts is not to be found among those of the Tory exiles who were recompensed by the British government for their sufferings. Fifty-six years old in 1777, he already had moved into two frontier towns and probably felt himself to be too old to face the wilderness for a third time. The story of his later years is told in a petition which Eli Evarts presented to the Vermont legislature in 1808.

In this petition, the son recounted the story of Sylvanus Evarts losing a “considerable estate” by joining the British at a time when Eli was taking “an active & decided part in favor of American independence,” and of his father’s return to the United States at the end of the Revolution. Eli reported that he had supported his father since that time, and that for the last fifteen years the old man had been almost helpless, unable to earn anything from his labor. The son had given bond to the town of Fair Haven to guarantee the expense of his father’s support, and now claimed that he had no means in his power to “discharge that legal and moral obligation which the duty
of a Son to an unfortunate father demanded”. He claimed that Sylvanus Evarts had no other relative capable of supporting him, and that the petitioner could no longer do so without depriving his family of a "necessary and comfortable subsistence".30

Perhaps aware that in granting land to Eli and Timothy Evarts in 1779 the legislature had specified that this action should end any claim on the part of Sylvanus Evarts,31 the 1808 legislature took no favorable action on Eli Evarts’ petition.

Four years after this petition was filed, Zadock Remington sold one half of Sylvanus Evarts’ former mill interest for two thousand dollars—a sum which would have kept the old man in comfort for many years at early nineteenth-century prices.32

Few men can have had family histories more similar than were those of Thomas Chittenden and Sylvanus Evarts at the period in which the two men first moved to Vermont. The decisions which Thomas Chittenden made and the leadership which he showed during the next few years brought him prosperity and repeated elections to the governorship of Vermont. The decision made by Sylvanus Evarts during that crucial July of 1777 brought him to disaster.

1 Vermont, Records of the Council of Safety and Governor and Council of the State of Vermont, ed. E. P. Walton (3 vols., Montpelier, 1873-4), I, 285. The spelling “Evarts” will be used in this article, as the accepted family spelling; records of the Revolutionary period often spell it as “Everts” or “Everits.”


3 Salisbury Town Records, Volume I, 68, 71, 76, 81, 91; Volume labeled 1767— , 53-61; Volume II, 16-18. (No grand lists for the years 1759-1773 seem to be available). Each town sent two representatives to each of two yearly sessions of the Assembly.


5 Castleton Record Book, I, 56; Salisbury Land Book IV, 583.

6 Historical Collections Relating to the Town of Salisbury, Litchfield County, Connecticut, (2 vols., The Salisbury Association, 1913-1916), II, 64. Asa Landon sold his Salisbury land in May, 1776 (Salisbury Land Book V, 170). Oliver Evarts had bought a store in Salisbury in 1773 (Ibid., V, 9), but was at the Dorset Convention in Vermont in January, 1776. It is perhaps not without significance that the section around the James Landon home in Salisbury became known as “Tory Hill.”

7 Anburey, Thomas, Travels Through the Interior Parts of America, (London,

8 Sparks, Jared, ed., *Correspondence of the American Revolution* (Boston, 1853), I, 394 (letter of July 7, 1777).

9 Ira Allen later emphasized these dark prospects when he wrote of conditions in Vermont in 1777. (Vermont Governor and Council, I, 134-135).


13 Loyalist Transcripts (New York Public Library), XVII, 325-326.

14 *State Papers of Vermont*, VI, 15-17. From Oliver Evarts statement, it seems likely that members of the Evarts family were in the group of which Colonel Brownson complained on October 23, 1776, at the time of the earlier British invasion threat, when he wrote from Castleton that “the Tories begin to grow very bold. We have been hindered here these two days by men that are unfriendly, but at length we have sent them under guard to work at the block-houses and on the road through Otter Creek.” (Peter Force, *American Archives*, V, II, 1207).

15 *Vermont State Papers*, VI, 185, 186, 346-47. It seems probable that Oliver Evarts, Sylvanus' Tory son, was an older half-brother of Eli and Timothy by Sylvanus' first wife, and therefore not a nephew of Governor Chittenden. (Salisbury Historical Collections, I, 43; The Chittenden Family, comp. Alvin Talcott (New Haven), 32, 236; Smyth, *op. cit.*, 26).

16 *State Papers of Vermont*, VI, 380, 383; Castleton Record Book I, 20, 146. Claghorn was yet another Salisbury man who had secured a Vermont land grant through the activity of John Evarts.


18 Manuscript petition in the office of the Vermont Secretary of State (Vol. 63, p. 25). In this petition, Remington claimed the court-martial was illegal, since he had never enlisted. Rev. Joseph Steele, who referred to Remington's notorious Tory sympathies in the article which he wrote for Miss Hemenway's *Gazetteer*, vouched for his character in connection with this 1833 petition, which failed.


20 *Vermont Governor and Council*, I, 198, 208, 281.

21 *Vermont State Papers*, VI, 430. More than seventy-five years after the event, a bitter dispute raged in the *Rutland Herald* as to whether Clark killed the Tinmouth settler in rescuing a captive militiaman, or whether it was unjustified murder. (March 30, April 7, 1855).

In taking over Sylvanus Evarts' property, the state took over his debts as well, and in 1781 paid a Castleton widow 15 shillings 3½ pence for some cloth woven for Evarts in 1774. (MSS State Papers, Vt., VIII, 19.)

22 *Vermont State Papers*, VI, 245; 267; 390; 430. From the fact that he was the only Moulton living in the area mentioned, it would seem that Reuben Moulton must have been the man of whom Ebenezer Fletcher wrote in *The Narrative of Ebenezer Fletcher* ed. Charles Bushnell, (New York: 1866), 27-33. This Moulton took the British oath, sold them milk and rum and lent them utensils, and was
pressed into their service to haul supplies from Skenesboro. Fletcher remembered him as expressing a common sentiment in unlikely terms: "It is true they have forced me to take the oath of allegiance to the king, but I sincerely hope the Americans will finally prevail." (29).

23 *Vermont Governor and Council*, I, 202; Castleton Town Meeting Records.

24 Hemenway, *op. cit.*, I, 90.

25 *Loyalist Transcripts* (New York Public Library), XXVII, 325–333; XI, 142–43; XXXII, 465. Among witnesses supporting his claim were his brother-in-law Asa Landon and former Green Mountain Boy Justus Sherwood, who had led the Tories and Indians in their attack on Castleton, July 6, 1777.


29 Andrew N. Adams, *A History of the Town of Fair Haven, Vermont* (Fair Haven, 1870), 45–46; *Salisbury, Connecticut, Historical Collections*, II, 64.

30 *Vermont State Papers*, VI, 184–85.

31 *Vermont State Papers*, III, Part I, 60.

32 Castleton Record Book IV, 358. For this and for other information on land ownership in early Castleton, I am indebted to John Reil of Castleton, a real authority on early Castleton history.