

LOYALTY IN REVOLUTIONARY PENNSYLVANIA

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Because we know how it all ended, we find it difficult to realize how hard it must have been for the people of Pennsylvania caught up in the events of the American Revolution. We must consider the evidence they left us as well as make the effort to try and think in their terms. It's a challenge!

William Penn actively recruited Europeans desiring an environment where Quaker principles of toleration, peaceful activities, and freedom of conscience were the basis of society. An early historian of Pennsylvania listed groups settling here:

There is a greater number of different religious societies in this province, than, perhaps, in any other, throughout the *British* dominions... there is not more real harmony any where known, in this respect, even under the most despotic *hierarchies*, than in *Pennsylvania*. Here are the *Quakers*, who were principally the first settlers, and, in effect the makers of the province;...The *Episcopalians*, according to the manner of the *Church of England*; and the *German* and *Swedish Lutherans*: The *Presbyterians* and *Independents*, of various kinds, or sects; and the *German Calvinists*: The *Church of Rome* and the *Jews*: The *Baptists* of different kinds; with those among the *Germans*, called *Mennonists*, and *Dunkards*, or *Dumplers*; the *Moravians* and *Schwenkfelders*; besides the *Aborigines of America*, &c. ¹

Like Quakers, many held pacifist beliefs and were against taking oaths. Where stakes are high and passions can run unchecked, those in authority often make laws attempting to sift rebels from the loyal population. One way to separate enemies from friends is to require an oath or sworn promise of support. An oath or promise given, voluntarily or otherwise, was considered binding. To ensure their support, Scottish highlanders, seeking emigration to escape high rents and poor harvests in 1774, had to swear the same oath their fathers had had to swear after their defeat at Culloden in 1745. It ended

...May I be cursed in my undertakings, family and property; may I never see my wife and children, father, mother, or relation; may I be killed in battle as a coward, and lie without Christian burial in a strange land, far from the graves of my forefathers and kindred—may all this come across me if I break my oath.²

Adhering to their oath, Scots in North Carolina rallied to the King and marched to the Battle of Moore's Creek Bridge, another defeat.

Taking or refusing to take an oath had practical consequences in Pennsylvania. Evan Thomas, for example, was disowned by the Society of Friends for administering oaths as a justice of the peace in 1767, and others for taking an oath—Isaac Zane for taking an oath of office in 1774 and Thomas Wright for taking an oath of allegiance to Pennsylvania in 1779.³

Taking an oath of allegiance is not a guarantee of compliance if commitment is lacking. Philadelphia Friends noted:

Designing men have never failed to check their ambition under specious appearance; they are ingenious at forming plausible pretexts for withdrawing their allegiance from the sovereign or state to whom they have sworn it, nor can an instance be found of oaths preventing a revolution.⁴

The Bible supported loyalty. In Ecclesiastes, Chapter 8, verse 2 we find: "I counsel thee to keep the king's commandment, and that in regard of the oath of God." In Chapter 10, verse 9, it says, "Curse not the king, no not in thy thought..." The New Testament had more. In I Peter, Chapter 2, verses 13, 14 and 17:

Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man, for the Lord's sake, whether it be to the king, as supreme;
Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well.

...
Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.

In I Samuel, Chapter 15, verse 23, there was a scary thought: "For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry." Anglicans were christened as infants and promises were made in their name by the godparents. When old enough, children learned the catechism and made the promises for themselves, including: "...To honour and obey the King, and all that are put in authority under him. To submit myself to all my governors, teachers, spiritual pastors and masters." The Thirty-Nine Articles explained, "The King's Majesty hath the chief power in this Realm...given always to all godly Princes in holy Scriptures by God himself; that is, that they should rule all estates...and restrain with the civil sword the stubborn and evildoers."⁵ The Patriots' cause could be a problem. Anglican priests had difficulties, too. The Reverend Thomas Coombe was exiled to Virginia in 1777, even though "He was friendly toward the cause of the colonists, but his ordination oath made it impossible for him to approve of the Declaration of Independence."⁶ The Reverend Jacob Duché began as a Whig supporter but changed his mind and left for England.⁷ Locally, we find William Currie, pastor of St David's Church in Radnor who "remained loyal to the British Crown, though his family supported the American cause."⁸

It was one thing when rebellion was some place else and another when it occurred on your doorstep. Intending to capture and occupy Philadelphia, General Howe landed in Maryland in late summer, 1777. Supporters of the Crown, known as Tories and called Loyalists today, were understandably comfortable with his presence and the possibility of his success. The Whigs, or Patriots, were, on the other hand, not only resistant; they wanted to remove any and all of his supporters. The Committee of Safety in Philadelphia used the Tory Act to arrest many who refused to take an oath of allegiance to the American cause. Many were held under guard in the Masonic Lodge and some were banished to Virginia without even a hearing.

After the British victories at Brandywine and Germantown, and Howe's occupation of Philadelphia, Tories like Joseph Galloway rose to political power. He was "chief civil officer...during the British occupation..."⁹ He employed a number of Loyalists: Andrew Fursney, John Jackson, Samuel Kirk, James Smyther, and Jonathan Walter were all hired as spies.¹⁰

In addition to those whose allegiance was known, there were those presumed to be on one side or other. People have assumed Quakers were Tories. Sally Wister's family moved to Gwynedd to escape the military occupation of Philadelphia. American officers were in and out of the house in a very friendly fashion. Sally recorded the following conversation on 2 June 1778:

[Capt. Dandridge, a Virginian] "Miss Sally, are you a Quaker?"
"Yes."
"Now are you a Quaker?"
"Yes, I am."
"Then you are a Tory."
"I am not, indeed."
"Oh, dear," reply'd he, "I am a poor creature, I can hardly live."¹¹

There were perceptions about the loyalty of people other than Quakers. Anglicans have already been mentioned. Roman Catholics, considered loyal by many, were as divided as the Quakers. Peter Latchford was imprisoned for refusing to take up arms against the king; later, he enlisted in "...a [British] Company of Roman Catholic Volunteers."¹² Ferdinand Farmer, a Roman Catholic priest, refused to sign on as chaplain to such a group.¹³ Protestant ministers got involved: David Jones, the pastor of the Baptist Church in the Great Valley, served Americans as chaplain. In Chester County, people swore to their losses in depositions taken after the war. Andrew McIntire of New Garden Township lost three horses, valued by him at £41.¹⁴

His loss is understandable, given the conditions of war, but should we assume that he was a British supporter because he provided for their army? The wanton destruction suffered by others could have occurred because the soldiers viewed the owners as Patriots. James Pennell, Chichester Township, had his springhouse and its contents destroyed, value £3.15.¹⁵ A dead man's account books were "Wantonly Cut & Destroyed to the amt of £300.00.0."¹⁶ Much of what was taken was food. Some saw this as support rather than marauding: "...a great Number of the Inhabitants of the county of Chester...supplied Provisions to the enemy during their Progress thro' that County... These Persons can be considered in no other Light than as Traitors to this State, & avowed enemies to the United States,..."¹⁷

The Revolution was like the American Civil War and it took a long time for divisions to heal. In April, 1778 Congress had "...recommended to the good and faithful Citizens of these States to receive such returning Penitents with Compassion and Mercy, and to forgive and bury in Oblivion their past Failings and Transgressions."¹⁸ However, five years later, the following was published in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*:

[Tories were]...miscreants and malevolent wretches ...domestic incendiaries ... traitors and rebels to their country...[and should not] enjoy the blessings of a free and independent state...purchased by unexampled perseverance, indefatigable toil, and the most trying scenes of danger and difficulty, with the expense of such blood and treasure...they would be continual remembrancers of their traitorous [sic] and deceitful practices, and cause former wounds to bleed afresh, so that harmony and mutual friendship could not exist.¹⁹

What happened to Pennsylvania loyalists? James Molesworth was hanged as a spy.²⁰ John Roberts and Abraham Carlisle were found guilty of treason and hanged.²¹ Joseph Galloway, previously mentioned, left for England where he became spokesman for American Loyalists. His wife, Grace, left a diary chronicling the seizure of her husband's property and her problems as a result.²² Samuel Shoemaker, appointed Justice of the Peace during Howe's occupation, went to England, but in 1786, he returned to settle briefly in Burlington, NJ and then came back to Philadelphia where he died in 1800.²³ Samuel Fisher returned to Philadelphia where he was imprisoned until 1780. Benjamin Chew was under house arrest during the war until paroled. From 1791 until 1808, he was "...a judge and president of the High Court of Errors and Appeals of Pennsylva-

nia.”²⁴ Miers Fisher came home and “... resumed his law practice” and was active in local politics.²⁵ Edward Shippen, whose daughter had married Benedict Arnold, served as Chief Justice of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court from 1799 to 1805.²⁶ Phineas Bond, junior, an Anglican lawyer and Loyalist, returned from exile in Virginia, followed Howe to England and returned in 1787 as British Consul from the Court of St. James to the United States of America.²⁷

If you examine English history from the death of Queen Elizabeth I to the Declaration of Independence, you'll find a series of rebellions, uprisings, revolts, religious persecutions, torture, executions, and other activities threatening people throughout the realm. The same was true in Europe. The experiences of settlers - their own and those of members of their families over generations and kept alive through oral history - led many of them here, searching for an environment in which they could remain neutral or stay outside of the conflict. They found themselves regarded with mistrust, if not outright hostility by many: “If one objects with a mere word, one is told: You are a Tory...Those on the other side say: You are rebels.”²⁸ As in so many cases, it is difficult to make any kind of general statement about loyalty in revolutionary Pennsylvania. To conclude, individuals held different views and must be considered individually. I leave you with this thought: if you had been living here then, which side would you have been on?

NOTES

1. Robert Proud, *The History of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Zachariah Poulson, 1798), Vol. II, pp. 337-338.
2. Elizabeth Janet Gray, *Meggie MacIntosh* (New York: The Viking Press, 1930), p. 133.
3. Elaine Forman Crane, ed., *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), "Biographical Directory", pp. 2219, 2233, 2234.
4. Thomas Gilpin, ed., *Exiles in Virginia* (Philadelphia: Published for the Subscribers, 1848), p. 255.
5. The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion (London: Church of England, 1571)
6. *Who Was Who During the American Revolution*. Compiled by the editor of *Who's Who in America*, with Jerry Kail. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1976), p. 322.
7. Gregory Palmer, ed., *Biographical Sketches of Loyalists of the American Revolution* (Westport, CT and London: Meckler Publishing, 1984), p. 236.
8. Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania, *Parish History Project*, Section 1, p. 18. Information provided by Steve Dittman, independent scholar.
9. Crane, op. cit., p. 2152.
10. Palmer, op. cit., pp. 301-302; p. 429; p. 466; p. 808; p. 904.
11. Albert Cook Myers, ed., *Sally Wister's Journal* (Philadelphia: Ferris & Leach, 1902), p. 160.
12. Palmer, op. cit., pp. 475-476.
13. *Who Was Who...*, op. cit., p. 328.
14. *A Register of Damages Sustained by the Inhabitants of Chester County By the Troops and Adherents of the King of Great Britain During the American Revolution*. Unpublished transcript, Chester County Historical Society, p. 181.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
17. Letter from Richard Peters, War Office to Thomas Wharton, President of the Council of Pennsylvania, October 1777. Samuel Hazard, *Pennsylvania Archives*, (Philadelphia: Joseph Severns & Co., 1853), Vol. VI, 1776-1777 p. 686.
18. "Extract from the Minutes..." (Yorktown, PA: Hall and Sellers, 1778); facsimile reprint by Continental Broadside, Another Red Tape and the Revolution Document Set.
19. *Pennsylvania Gazette*, December 3, 1783.
20. Crane, op. cit. p. 224.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 333.
22. Grace Growden Galloway, "Diary" in Elizabeth Evans, *Weathering the Storm: Women in the American Revolution* (New York: Paragon House Publishers, 1989), pp. 190-239.
23. *Dictionary of Quaker Biography* (Unpublished collection in The Quaker Collection, Haverford College, Haverford, PA).
24. *Who Was Who...*, op. cit., p. 320.
25. Crane, op. cit., p. 2148.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 2211; *Who Was Who...*, op. cit., pp. 376-377.
27. Crane, op. cit., p. 2117.
28. Henry Muhlenberg, in: Leonard Gross and Jan Gleysteen, *Colonial Germantown Mennonites* (Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, co-published with Herald Press, Scottsdale, PA), p. 30.