

## Loyalists in the Richelieu Valley

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# Loyalists in the Richelieu Valley

by Raymond Ostiguy

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*Member of numerous historical societies, since 2001 he conducts extensive research in local history allowing him to present conferences on the War of 1812 and other subjects. In September 2008, as a co-author, his society publishes Saint-Mathias, un domaine en partage, no. 32 of Les Cahiers de la seigneurie de Chambly, and again in September 2014, Le temps des Meuniers, no. 38 in the series. In September 2013, Les Éditions Histoire Québec publishes his Chambly et la guerre de 1812-1814, l'année 1812, and in 2015, with Georges Aubin, his Louis-Joseph Papineau, les débuts, 1808-1815.*

After the American rebels (les Bastonnais) retreated from their occupation of Montreal and the Richelieu Valley, more and more Loyalists facing harassment and persecution began fleeing northward seeking refuge via the Lake Champlain, Richelieu River route. For many men, women, children and their servants the exile would become permanent.

First and possibly the foremost among them was Sir John Johnson (1742-1830), son of Sir William Johnson, 1<sup>st</sup> Baronet of New York, a major landowner in New York's Mohawk River Valley. Facing imminent arrest, Johnson with about 180 of his tenants left Johnstown to travel overland to Chambly. On his arrival in June 1776, at Governor Carleton's request, Johnson began raising the 1<sup>st</sup> of two battalions of the King's Royal Regiment of New York (KRRNY). His pregnant wife Mary (Polly) Watts (1754-1815), retained with their two children as hostages in Albany, managed to escape to New York City (still in British hands) where she was joined by her husband to make their way by ship to Montreal in May, 1777.

*A Return of Royalists not Incorporated in any Corps*, signed by H. Dickson, Acting Commissary of Musters at

Laprairie late in 1777<sup>1</sup>, provides the surnames of some 80 of the first wave of those refugees enumerated, among others, at St. John's (11; including John Jones (1761-1801), arriving November 15, with a wife and five children from Fort George), Ste. Therese (27), Chambly (one), and seven other locations in the district of Montreal. While permanent refugee camps were established at St. John's and Chambly, Ste. Therese proved to be merely an "in transit" location.

On the Richelieu, a major refugee camp was established throughout the war at Sorel, becoming a government seignury and permanent resettlement area at the end of the hostilities. Wives (receiving a half ration) and children (one-quarter) of men serving in corps normally accompanied their husbands where they were posted. For example, in 1780, the families of those men serving in the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the KRRNY joined their husbands at Lachine and in 1781, at Pointe Clair.

Many officers of the provincial corps as well as other refugees were accompanied by their servants. In his *Loyalist Refugees, Non-Military Refugees in Quebec, 1776-1784*, author Gavin Watt makes the following statement: "I have recorded all

servants, whether anonymous or not, as they are as much refugees as their employers, and they all contributed to the settlement of Canada. I believe it may be safely assumed that the majority were black slaves, as servant was a contemporary euphemism for slave". In his *Refugee Roll*, Watt lists 62 individuals accompanied by one or more servants.<sup>2</sup>

After the war numerous refugees will establish themselves in the Richelieu Valley and contribute to its development. From among those, five have been selected: Sir John Johnson, Abraham C. Cuyler, Jacob Glen, William Byrne and John Jones.

## SIR JOHN JOHNSON

Established in Montreal following his arrival in Quebec, Sir John will fulfill numerous military and civil functions. He is appointed Superintendent and Inspector General of Indian Affairs in 1782. In 1784, as Superintendent of Refugee Loyalists, Johnson helps resettle thousands of displaced individuals and families, testifying for many on their claims for compensation for their losses. He is appointed for the first time as Legislative Councillor in 1786, serving until the formation of the two provinces in 1791 and again for Lower Canada, in 1796.

In 1794 Johnson acquires the Seigneurie of Monnoir which he promotes and develops, establishing his country seat, manor house and family burial vault at Mount Johnson (today mont Saint-Grégoire). At the same time Sir John, having acquired lands in Chambly, builds and promotes grist and saw mills for his tenants, builds another manor house in St. Mathias (which still exists today), encourages and endows Catholic and Anglican parishes as well as schools of the Royal Institution.

Beginning in 1804, Sir John forms and commands the Eastern Townships Militia, ultimately of seven battalions. In 1815, while Provincial Grand Master (1778-1830) Johnson sells his prestigious Montreal residence to neighbour and Freemason Brother John Molson. All nine of Sir John's adult sons by his wife Lady Mary, serve in His Majesty's Forces. Two of his sons retain our attention for their contributions to Chambly and Monnoir. John (Junior) (1782-1841), Lieutenant Colonel of Militia, resides in the Manor House at St. Mathias, marries Mary Dillon, has four sons, including William George, 4<sup>th</sup> Baronet, and four daughters, as well as other natural children.

Archibald Kennedy (1792-1866), Lieutenant 100<sup>th</sup> Regiment, Secretary to the Indian Department, settles at Mount Johnson, exchanges with nephew Charles MacDonnell, sells out to seignior Rolland and moves to Upper Canada. He dies October 8 at St. Helier, Jersey.

The recently restored Johnson Family Vault contains the remains of Sir John and Lady Johnson, sons William, Robert, John, Adam and son-in-law Edward MacDonnell, father of Charles, as well as unidentified infant children.

#### ABRAHAM CORNELIUS CUYLER

Born in Albany, like his father, Abraham C. Cuyler (1742-1810) becomes mayor of Albany for six years in 1770, six years after marrying Jane Elizabeth Glen (1734-1817). In June, 1776, Cuyler is apprehended and sent to Connecticut where, in December, he escapes to New York.

The 1779 New York Confiscation Act specially attaints some 59 individuals, including Cuyler and Sir John Johnson, whose estates are forfeited and their persons banished, under penalty of death if they return. In October, 1782, Governor Haldimand

appoints Cuyler Inspector of Refugee Loyalists and to serve prisoners of war from both camps. Cuyler is in England in 1784 to promote his and other claims for losses and to seek assistance for a settlement of 630 families (3150 persons) on Cape Breton Island, a project which will not prove entirely successful. In 1799 he is back in Montreal. In part for his losses, Cuyler obtains for his family extensive lands in the new Township of Farnham. In 1806 and 1808 Cuyler acquires two 2 x 25 arpents farms on the Richelieu in the Parish of St. Therese. Buried in the family plot on his property in 1810, a Chambly Canal (it passes through his lands) worker will find his tombstone there in the 1950s.

#### JACOB GLEN

A native of Schenectady, N.Y., Jacob Glen (1761-1843), nephew of Abraham Cuyler, enlists as an Ensign in the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the KRRNY. While in Montreal he meets and marries Frances Southouse before leaving to conduct business in New York. In 1801 he returns to settle in Chambly with his family: Catherine Frances (1785-1861), John (1786-1855), Sophia (1795-18--), and Edward (1787-1850). Captain and Adjutant of Sir John Johnson's Eastern Townships Militia he is appointed Justice of the Peace. Jane Anna (1804-1861) and Jacob Junior (1807-1837) are added before John leaves to find fortune in Barranquilla, Columbia, around 1809. There he will befriend Liberator Simon Bolivar before returning to Chambly in 1839 to marry the widow of Charles de Salaberry, the Hero of the Chateauguay. He oversees the establishment of the toll plank road between Chambly and Longueuil and administers the declining fortunes of his wife's family, including Hermine, widow of his deceased brother Jacob, before returning forever to Barranquilla and his natural family.

Edward joins the De Meuron Regiment, joins John in Barranquilla and obtains (but never proceeds with) a toll bridge over the Richelieu.



Restored Johnson Family Vault, mont Saint-Grégoire, 2014



Jacob, a medical doctor, leaves one son, Charles (1836-1913), to follow in his footsteps. Father, mother, Frances, Edward, Jane, Jacob, Charles and granddaughter Myra Dupuy are all interred in the St. Stephen's cemetery.

### WILLIAM BYRNE

At the formation of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the KRRNY, William Byrne (-1824) is commissioned Ensign, later Captain in the 2<sup>nd</sup>. In 1792 Byrne and his adopted son Phillip (-1830) operate Sir John Johnson's grist and saw mills on the Raisin River. Phillip will continue such operations in St. Mathias and Argenteuil before becoming Johnson's agent, both to grant concessions and to collect rents

in both Argenteuil and Monnoir. Appointed Justice of the Peace and Returning Officer he acquires significant properties near St. Jean Baptiste (Byrneville). Adjutant and Captain under Sir John, he also serves in the Embodied Militia in 1812-13. Shareholder in the Chambly steamboat Richelieu, in 1826 he replaces John Johnson Junior as Lieutenant Colonel of the local militia.

### JOHN JONES

It is Robert Jones (1791-1874), grandson of Barrack Master John Jones (1730-1801) who is the developer that interests us. A resident of Stanbridge, in 1826 he obtains the rights to a toll bridge over the

Richelieu at St. John's which remains in the family until 1901. In 1831 he joins Edward Glen in the failed Chambly toll bridge project. Perhaps his efforts with Jason Pierce in 1831 to initiate works on the first railroad between Laprairie and St. John's are responsible, although in 1831 he is also named a Legislative Councillor.

### Endnotes

- 1 [1777] Library and Archives Canada (LAC), Manuscript Group (MG)13, War Office (WO) 28/10, pt.1. (Arrivals between September 3 and December 20, 1777).
- 2 Global Heritage Press, 2014, 329 pages, p. 90, Refugee Roll references, pp. 97-305.



Saint-Antoine-sur-Richelieu, un village  
de culture et de patrimoine,  
vous souhaite un bon congrès et vous  
invite à venir découvrir nos maisons,  
monuments et sites qui  
ont marqué l'histoire du Québec.

Denis Campeau, maire



Glen family tombstones, St. Stephen's Anglican Cemetery, Chambly, 2015



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