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# THE DISPERSION OF THE AMERICAN TORIES

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BY  
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## THE DISPERSION OF THE AMERICAN TORIES<sup>1</sup>

Norfolk and Charleston, Savannah and St. Augustine, Philadelphia and New York, Boston, Penobscot, Fort Niagara and Detroit were, during their days of occupation by the British, the most important centers to which were drawn, as by powerful magnets, those elements of the colonial population which were forced out of their various localities by the intolerance and conflict of a struggle that was marked by the characteristics of civil war both in the populous sections and in the back country. The list of such centers might be greatly lengthened by including those Canadian towns and villages that were near enough to our northern frontier to be used by the English as military posts and magazines, and by the same token were accessible to numbers of fugitive adherents of the crown whose zeal found vent in joining loyalist regiments. But the loyalist regiments in Canada would have filled but slowly, if they had depended entirely on voluntary enlistments. From various posts recruiting officers were sent into the enemy's country to bring in Tory groups to be armed and employed on marauding and rescue expeditions. In these ways not less than ten corps of American loyalists, several of which reached a maximum of five hundred or six hundred men, were formed and maintained throughout the Revolution in what was called the Northern or Canadian Division.

Large numbers of these recruits proceeded northwards by way of the Hudson River and Lake Champlain to one or another of the chain of posts along the Richelieu. Not all loyalists, however, followed this direct course: many entered Canada along routes, of which there were five in general use, running from the Hudson to points between Oswego and Montreal, the refugees being quartered at various places on both sides of the river St. Lawrence. Not infrequently the recruiting agents led

<sup>1</sup> This paper was read at the meeting of the American Historical Association at Charleston, South Carolina, December 30, 1913.

in women and children with the men, some arriving, we are told, "in a state of nakedness and great want." In other instances families were brought in under flags of truce, a system that was in operation on Lake Champlain from the fall of 1778 if not earlier, and was regularly employed throughout the remainder of the contest. As the British were in control of the lake, their vessels and bateaux were in constant requisition for the conveyance of aggregations of families from Pointe au Fer, Mill Bay, Skenesborough, Crown Point, and other convenient places to St. John, north of the lake, whence they were sent under guidance to various localities in the province of Quebec to join husbands and fathers from whom they had been separated for longer or shorter periods. Sometimes these fatherless groups braved the severities of the winter season in order to reach the goal of safety and loyalty where fugitive or exiled kindred already awaited them.

Many of these refugees were from Charlotte and Tryon counties and the city of Albany in New York state, while a smaller proportion came from New England. Not a few — probably no less than 1800 — had enlisted under Burgoyne, but had been left at the catastrophe to look after themselves. In truth, Burgoyne blamed his Tory contingent for his defeat, and completely ignored it in his articles of capitulation. This deliberate neglect was partly remedied by the Tories themselves, for, the night before the surrender at Saratoga, some of them decided to make their escape, and struck out through the woods or followed the Indian paths to Canada. Others, however, awaited the formal capitulation, and consequently did not find another opportunity of getting to the desired haven for weeks or months afterward. As Burgoyne carried with him blank commissions under which to enrol new regiments of refugees, and as he detached Baum's men in order to fill these regiments, his treatment of the loyalists must be regarded as reprehensible to the last degree.

Later on, expeditions were sent out for the express purpose of rescuing parties of loyalists from hostile communities. At least three such expeditions were authorized by Governor Haldimand for the year 1780. Two of these were led by Sir John Johnson who delivered 150 loyalists from the Mohawk Valley



on his first incursion but was thwarted by the Americans on his second, the Tories being confined in the forts while the danger lasted. The third expedition, under Majors Carleton and Houghton, succeeded in bringing in a number of families from south of Lake George, in whose train others followed, including one group of "about 230 souls."<sup>2</sup> These and the other expedients of border warfare produced results as unmistakable as they were dreadful: they finally reduced the border lands to a state of desolation. A year and a half before the close of the war it was estimated that Tryon County alone had lost two-thirds of its inhabitants, of whom 613 were reported as having deserted. Of those remaining, 380 were widows with a proportionate number of fatherless children. The number of farms left uncultivated was placed at 12,000.<sup>3</sup> In March, 1783, the single district of Montreal, which lay just north of New York state, contained its maximum number of refugees (not including enlisted loyalists), namely, 1,700, who were distributed at 17 posts and magazines within the district. During the following summer, fleets of transports sailed up the river St. Lawrence on their way from New York City to Quebec, bearing over 1,300 more. Seven hundred of the latter were sent on to Sorel, a fortified place at the mouth of the Richelieu, where they remained until lands could be assigned them for permanent settlement. This took place during the year 1784. A census of that year shows that approximately 5,500 disbanded troops and loyalists received grants in the province of Quebec. Of these about one-fourth were settled east of the St. Lawrence, that is, at 3 posts on the Richelieu, and on the eastern and southern shores of the Gaspé Peninsula. Most of the others, or about 3,000 married and single men, were sent up the St. Lawrence, being assigned lands in a series of townships laid out for them west of Montreal in what is now the province of Ontario. The residue either scattered among the older communities or, despite the opposition of Haldimand, located on seigniorial lands along the Vermont frontier. Immigration continued during the sub-

<sup>2</sup> See the author's paper on "The American Loyalists in the Eastern Seigniories and Townships of the Province of Quebec," in Royal Society of Canada, *Transactions*, 1913.

<sup>3</sup> F. W. Halsey, *The Old New York Frontier, 1614-1800* (New York, 1901), 313.

sequent years, the English population in Lower Canada reaching about 20,000 by 1791, due chiefly to the influx of loyalists.

The process of segregating this element from New Hampshire, Vermont, and eastern New York, which was performed by the military posts of Lower Canada, was duplicated for the back country by Fort Niagara and Detroit. At Fort Niagara this process began soon after Captain John Butler arrived there from Montreal in November, 1775, accompanied by several other refugees from Tryon County. As a devoted loyalist, an experienced leader of war parties, and an interpreter at Indian councils, Butler was well qualified to transform Niagara into a hotbed of Toryism, to help win the active support of the Six Nation Indians, and conduct operations against the border settlements. From among the loyalists who took shelter at the fort and those brought in by his emissaries, he began the organization of a corps of rangers, which the authorities at Quebec decided should consist of 8 companies. Despite losses and occasional desertions, he had 6 full companies enrolled by December, 1778. Two months later (February 12) over 1,300 persons were drawing rations at Fort Niagara, of whom 445 were Indians and 64 were members of "distressed families," chiefly from the Mohawk Valley. After Sullivan's raid up the Genesee River, the number of savages at the post increased to more than 5,000 (September 21, 1779), and as Sullivan had destroyed 40 Indian villages with their fields of maize, 3,000 of these aborigines found themselves homeless and dependent on Niagara for clothing and provisions all winter. A scarcity of supplies, the severity of the season, and starvation brought the only relief possible to many. Another consequence of Sullivan's raid appears to have been the approximate completion of Butler's Rangers, notwithstanding the earlier casualties in every company. If space permitted, I might tell further of the constant arrival of fugitives at the fort from various quarters, including the Ohio country. Suffice it to say that on October 1, 1783, there were 2,000 troops, loyalists, and Indians at Niagara, of whom about one-half were loyalists.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> E. Cruikshank, *Butler's Rangers and the Settlement of Niagara* (Welland, 1893), 27 *et seq.*; F. H. Severance, *Old Trails on the Niagara Frontier* (2d ed., Cleveland, 1903), 56 *et seq.*

This number probably did not include the inhabitants of a refugee settlement which had been begun 3 years before by Haldimand's instructions on the west side of the Niagara River. That settlement was still small, numbering scarcely more than a hundred persons at the beginning of December, 1783.<sup>5</sup> In June of the following year, Butler's regiment was disbanded and the little colony opposite the fort suddenly gained a population of 620 rangers and others.<sup>6</sup> By the end of another twelvemonth the increase amounted to 20 per cent more, or a total of 770.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, before the close of the year 1784, most of the Six Nations, or Iroquois Confederacy, had removed to the reservation which had been set apart for them along the Grand River. This lay west of the Niagara colony, its settlers numbering about 1,000, not counting a few disbanded soldiers who made their homes among the Indians. Another reservation, situated on the north side of Lake Ontario near Cataraqui (now Kingston), was occupied by a part of the Mohawk tribe.

For the expanse of country at the west end of Lake Erie, Detroit served the same purposes during the period as Fort Niagara at the east end: it was the center of tribal gatherings, the asylum of Tory refugees, and the source of successive raids into Ohio, Kentucky, and Virginia. In March, 1777, Sir Henry Hamilton, the lieutenant governor at Detroit, was empowered to raise as many loyalists and savages as possible to send out against the neighboring communities. From this time may be dated the embodiment of the corps known as the "Detroit Volunteers," which gained leadership on the arrival, in 1778, of Simon Girty, Matthew Elliot, and Alexander McKee, all of whom were fugitives from Fort Pitt. Girty in particular was the instigator of war parties in which the Wyandot and other tribes coöperated with the royalists in harrying the frontier and gathering in adherents of the crown. When peace returned the colonization of the region east of the Detroit River followed. The officers commanding the king's ships on Lake Erie were soon authorized to transport free of expense such disbanded loyalists as chose to settle at the mouth of the river just named. At the same time

<sup>5</sup> Canadian Archives, B. 169: 1.

<sup>6</sup> Canadian Archives, B. 168: 33-41.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

McKee, Girty, and a few others, including Captain William Caldwell of Butler's Rangers, secured from the Ottawa Indians deeds to Colchester and Gosfield townships (known as "The Two Connected Townships") on the lake front and opened them to colonization. Under the rule that grants of this sort could be made only by the crown, the Indians were induced to reconvey these districts to the Canadian government; and in 1788, Major Mathews, who had been sent from Quebec to Detroit for the purpose, laid out the two townships in 109 lots, and confirmed the original squatters in their possessions, although the final adjustment was not reached until five years later. During this period a land board, whose members were chiefly American loyalists, was in control, carrying on surveys on Lake Erie and the Detroit and Thames rivers, correcting conflicting claims and making grants. Those who were to have participated in the formation of "The New Settlement" in the townships on the lake were to have received provisions and tools, like loyalist settlers elsewhere; but long delays discouraged many, and the promoters of the settlement were forced to witness the return of perhaps a hundred or more to the states. Others, who had drawn lots in The Two Connected Townships, preferred to locate on the River Thames, where the soil was of a better quality. Thus, the land board of the district of Hesse had plenty to do in dealing with the accumulation of nearly 300 petitions that were before it in 1791. The New Settlement began about five miles east of the Detroit River and extended for a distance three times as great along Lake Erie. The region next to the river remained for a time unsettled, partly because of its marshy character and partly on account of doubtful claims. In January, 1793, however, Lieutenant Governor Simcoe and his council took action constituting this tract the township of Malden and granting it to McKee, Elliot, and Caldwell, while at the same time confirming the possession of those settlers who had already made improvements there.<sup>8</sup>

In the spring of 1791, when Patrick McNiff, deputy surveyor at Detroit, laid out four townships on the River Thames, two on each side of the stream, he found twenty-eight families already

<sup>8</sup> A. Fraser, *Third Report of the Bureau of Archives for the Province of Ontario*, 1905 (Toronto, 1906), 222, 223.

there. These people appear not to have been molested, presumably on account of their previous adherence and services to the crown, and by February, 1793, the land board had granted certificates for all the lots surveyed in this region, extending to two and one-half townships in length. Among those who found homes here and in The New Settlement was a considerable group of Butler's men. Other refugees took up lands along the Detroit and St. Clair rivers, and in localities nearby. The trials of these people in obtaining lands is illustrated by the experience of Frederick Arnold, who chose lots for himself and his son on the Thames at the time of the survey, but testified before the land board in the fall of the same year (1791) that these lots had been occupied by others. He also testified that he had brought in twenty-five families in 1784, none of whom had yet been able to "procure an establishment on the King's waste lands" and were threatening to return to the states.<sup>9</sup>

Another movement of loyalists into the Lake Erie region that can be definitely traced resulted in the colonization of Long Point. As early as September, 1792, Lieutenant Governor Simcoe proposed a plan for a military settlement here, stating that those to be brought in should be brave and determined loyalists. Although this project was approved by the British government several years later, it was frustrated by Governor General Dorchester who objected on the score of the needless expense involved. Meantime, a few squatters, mostly loyalists, had wandered in and, finding the region to their taste, had cleared farms for themselves to which they were not able to secure legal title. It was not, indeed, until Simcoe had departed for England (in 1796) that proclamations were issued inviting settlers into this district, and appealing especially to the United Empire loyalists. The immigrants who responded were chiefly of this class from Lower Canada and New Brunswick, the great majority having lived in the latter province for a decade or longer. Some came by land, following the Indian trails; but most of them came in open boats, coasting along the northern shores of Lake Ontario and Lake Erie. If courage and determination were deemed necessary qualifications for the pioneers of Norfolk County, surely these qualities cannot be denied to the forty-seven fami-

<sup>9</sup> Fraser, *Third Report Bureau of Archives*, 152.

lies who are known to have made the long and hazardous journey to Long Point between the years 1792 and 1812 and to have distributed themselves throughout five of its townships.<sup>10</sup>

Before 1783 there had been but little settlement in Upper Canada; but the closing year of the Revolution witnessed the arrival in this section of 10,000 loyalists; during 1784 this population doubled, and by 1791 it was estimated at 25,000. The records of the land office of Ontario indicate that no less than 3,200,000 acres had been granted to this class of people who had settled in Upper Canada before 1787.<sup>11</sup> It is, of course, significant that in 1791 Parliament passed the Constitutional Act separating the western province from the old province of Quebec.

If now we turn to those towns on the Atlantic coast which the British held for longer or shorter periods, we find that they also were the asylums of refugees, a fact made clear as they were successively evacuated. There were, to be sure, flights of individuals and families in considerable numbers from these coast towns from 1774 on. When Judge Samuel Curwen, a refugee from Salem, Massachusetts, arrived in London in July, 1775, he found — to use his own words — “an army of New Englanders” already there. A month later he wrote to another fugitive from Massachusetts, who with wife and children had gone to Halifax, that the “army” of exiles in London were “lamenting their own and their country’s unhappy fate.”<sup>12</sup> Evidently, then, the English metropolis was already a city of refuge for many American loyalists, and Halifax was beginning to shelter some of the same class. Only seven months later, however, the capital of Nova Scotia was to experience such a visitation of refugees as London itself had probably not yet experienced; for when Howe’s fleet sailed from Boston in March, 1776, it was accompanied by over eleven hundred hapless exiles. As Lieutenant Governor Oliver had carefully estimated the number of loyalists under his charge towards the end of the previous January at “upwards of 2,000,” we may fairly suppose that many anticipated the evacuation by an earlier departure to Nova Scotia,

<sup>10</sup> Ontario Historical Society, *Papers and Records*, 2: 43-47, 68, 69.

<sup>11</sup> Fraser, *Third Report Bureau of Archives*, *passim*.

<sup>12</sup> Samuel Curwen, *Journal and Letters* (G. A. Ward, ed. — New York, 1845), 31, 34.

to Penobscot, or to Great Britain. Three weeks after the arrival of the Boston contingent in Halifax, Oliver wrote to Lord George Germain of the colonial office describing the distressing situation of his protégés in Nova Scotia, forced as they were to pay "six fold the usual Rent" for miserable lodgings and "more than double the former price for every Necessary of Life." Such relief as could be had came only from the abundant supply of fish in the harbor and the issuance of fuel and provisions to loyalists as well as soldiers. The result was that many of the principal refugees applied to Howe forthwith for a passage to Europe at the expense of government, and were promised the first transport that could be spared for the purpose.<sup>13</sup> Ample evidence shows that various companies of Bostonians sailed from this port for England at different times, their successive arrivals being recorded by Curwen and by Hutchinson, the refugee governor of Massachusetts, from early in June to near the close of July, 1776.<sup>14</sup> Philadelphia, at its evacuation, witnessed the departure of almost three times the number carried by Howe to Halifax. So great was the concourse of inhabitants which withdrew from this place that the fleet in the Delaware could accommodate none of the evacuating troops, who took up the line of march for New York City. The fleet sailed for the same destination, which was already the mecca of persecuted loyalists, northern and southern, and remained so throughout the war.<sup>15</sup>

For some time William Knox, a Georgia loyalist who was under-secretary in the colonial office in London, had cherished the plan of establishing a separate province for these proscribed fellow countrymen of his; and at length, in September, 1778, General Clinton was ordered to secure a post on the Penobscot River as the first step to that end. In the following June and July, the post was duly established and soon became, in the picturesque language of the Massachusetts leaders, a "viperine

<sup>13</sup> R. Frothingham, *History of the Siege of Boston* (Boston, 1849), 311, 312; Lieutenant Governor Thomas Oliver to the Earl of Dartmouth, Public Record Office, Colonial Office, 5.21:297; Lieutenant Governor Oliver to Lord George Germain, Halifax, April 21, 1776, *ibid.*, 5.21: 159.

<sup>14</sup> Siebert, *The Flight of American Loyalists to the British Isles* (Columbus, 1911), 6, 7.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 8, 9.

nest" which they tried to destroy, though without success. The fortress attracted Tories and their kindred from Maine and Massachusetts, became crowded to overflowing, and a village of substantial cottages, with wharves and stores, sprang up under its shadow. When the contest ended, Massachusetts was able to obtain by the unyielding diplomacy of her son, John Adams, what she had not secured by military siege: Penobscot was surrendered by the British, and a hundred and fifty families, together with part of the garrison, were removed to Passamaquoddy Bay, there to be joined by various associations of loyalists from New York and elsewhere. As most of these groups were still within disputed territory, a boundary question arose which was not solved for many years.<sup>16</sup> Knox's scheme of a loyalist province failed, it is true, but it is also true that the people who were its beneficiaries participated in the settlement and organization of a greater loyalist province a little to the eastward of the one proposed, namely, the province of New Brunswick.

At the time when Passamaquoddy was settled, New Brunswick was still a part of Nova Scotia, and as such shared with that province in the great immigration from New York. According to the official enumeration of the British commissary general, dated November 24, 1783, 29,244 persons sailed from that port for various parts of Nova Scotia.<sup>17</sup> Of this number about 12,000, including 11 royalist corps, settled north of the Bay of Fundy; and before another year elapsed succeeded in having that region erected into an independent province. Meanwhile, the remaining or peninsular portion of Nova Scotia gained 17,300 colonists, all from New York, besides 5,000 or more from other quarters. Their settlements, of which upwards of a score may be counted, took form chiefly along the southern shore of the peninsula; and a large part of the lumber, with which they

<sup>16</sup> S. F. Batchelder, *The Life and Surprising Adventures of John Nutting, Cambridge Loyalist* (Cambridge, 1912); G. A. Wheeler, *Castine, Past and Present, the Ancient Settlement of Pentagöet, and the Modern Town* (Boston, 1896), 311-313; Maine Historical Society, *Collections*, ser. 2, vol. 1: 395-400; W. F. Ganong, "A Monograph of the Evolution of the Boundaries of the Province of New Brunswick," in Royal Society of Canada, *Transactions*, ser. 2, vol. 7, sec. 2.

<sup>17</sup> Fraser, *Second Report of the Bureau of Archives for the Province of Ontario*, 1904 (Toronto, 1905), 11.



built their habitations, was supplied by the industry and commercial enterprise of their fellow exiles at Passamaquoddy Bay.

Only a few hundreds of the southern loyalists went to the maritime provinces. The early reverses which the British suffered in Virginia sent Governor Dunmore and numbers of his sympathizers aboard the shipping at Norfolk in December, 1775. After a delay of nearly eight months the crowded vessels set sail for various destinations, one for Glasgow, others for England, and still others for Antigua, Bermuda, and East Florida. About the same time refugees from the Carolinas and Georgia began finding their way into the two Floridas, many taking service in the provincial regiments there. At length, in July and December, 1782, the evacuations of Savannah and Charleston, respectively, took place. Three months after the former event a census showed that the population of East Florida had been nearly doubled by the influx of 3,340 whites and blacks from Georgia, exclusive of those who had arrived before the evacuation. Simultaneously with this census, numbers of loyalists, military and civilian, began embarking from Charleston for St. Augustine, among these being the North and South Carolina regiments and a body of merchants and planters. Then, on December 14, came the formal evacuation of Charleston, with the result of the sudden trebling of the population of East Florida; and by May, 1783 (according to the figures of General McArthur, who was in command in that province) it quadrupled, reaching a total of 16,000, of whom McArthur estimated 5,400 were whites and 9,600, blacks. In the meantime, the merchants who had come in were accommodated with houses in St. Augustine, the planters were placed on unoccupied lands in the country, and a little town sprang up at the bluff on St. John's River. As provisions and tools were badly needed the authorities exerted themselves to furnish these supplies.

Thus far, in considering the withdrawal of the British from Charleston and Savannah I have accounted for less than half of the numbers who left these two ports, for in each case less than half went to East Florida. Of the 7,000 who sailed from Savannah, Governor Wright, other officers, and part of the garrison disembarked at Charleston; General Alured Clark and part of the British regulars sailed for New York, and the re-

mainder — loyalists and their Negroes — proceeded to Jamaica. Of the 9,121 persons, white and black, who left Charleston (not counting the troops) nearly 3,900 embarked for Jamaica; 470, for Halifax, and smaller numbers for St. Lucia, England, and New York. The Georgians and Carolinians who settled in Jamaica were joined by other refugees from Honduras and the Mosquito Coast, from Pensacola and St. Augustine, from New York City, and after 1785 from Shelburne in Nova Scotia. The fact that Jamaica made a gain of 11,500 white inhabitants alone between the years 1775 and 1787 is explained in no small degree by the continual inflow of American loyalists during that period. Several of the smaller islands of the British West Indies (St. Lucia, St. Christopher, Antigua, and probably others) experienced accessions that were relatively large for them.

The conquest of West Florida by the Spanish in May, 1781, resulted in the departure of many of its provincial defenders to New York City and of a few to Jamaica, as already mentioned. After the treaty of Versailles, by which both East and West Florida were ceded to Spain and the Bahamas were obtained in exchange, the loyalists in the eastern province were left only the choice between submitting to Spanish rule and preserving their fealty by withdrawing to a British possession. What was more natural, then, than that the Bahamas should be regarded as the true Land of Canaan by the thousands awaiting a second or even a third expatriation in East Florida. But this did not prove to be the case. The loyalists did not propose to pass through the ordeal of another general exodus without adequate knowledge of their destination in advance. Meanwhile, two shiploads departed for England. At length, in the fall of 1783, Lieutenant Wilson of the engineers was dispatched from St. Augustine to make the round of the Bahama Islands and report on their availability for colonization. His report was reassuring: it ascribed their uncultivated condition to the indolence of the inhabitants, who it declared contented themselves with whatever nature produced by her unaided efforts. The opportune arrival of some government transports (September 12) started the movement, and from that time a steady stream of refugees poured into the Bahamas, unoccupied lands being granted them free of quit rents for ten years. Upwards of fifteen hundred persons

from St. Augustine engaged to settle on Great Abaco Island, and we know that an almost equal number embarked at New York for the same place in August and September, 1783. New Providence, Cat, Long, and Crooked islands, and doubtless others, profited by this migration; but it is difficult to arrive at a correct estimate of the total increase of the Bahama population due to this movement. A committee of the House of Assembly of the islands reported in 1789 that the increase for the years 1784 and 1785 amounted to twelve hundred loyalists and thirty-six hundred colored people, the latter brought in by the former; but we are not informed how many came in during 1783. Perhaps it is safe to say that the Bahamas gained between six thousand and seven thousand of both races as the result of the exodus from the mainland.<sup>18</sup> It has been estimated that before 1783 England received about two thousand from New York alone;<sup>19</sup> but it should not be forgotten that other American ports, both northern and southern, together contributed certainly no less a number before the war closed, and that needy Tories from over the sea continued to seek financial relief in London for some years after the war. In this paper only casual reference has been made to the political and other effects of the dispersion of the American loyalists. Without attempting to discuss this subject at the present time, it must suffice to say merely that the accession of these people marked an epoch in the history of Jamaica and the Bahamas, the maritime provinces, and Lower and Upper Canada. Their work was essentially that of sturdy pioneers and political organizers; and, while their strain lasts, England need have no fears concerning the loyalty of her American provinces.

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<sup>18</sup> Siebert, "Legacy of the American Revolution to the British West Indies and Bahamas" (Ohio State University, *Bulletin*, 17, no. 27 [Columbus, 1913]).

<sup>19</sup> A. C. Flicik, *Loyalism in New York during the American Revolution* (New York, 1901).

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