

ISSN 0197-2103

Connecticut



Ancestry

WHOLE NUMBER 307

November 2024
VOL. 67, NO. 2

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Members of the Board of Directorsii
 Upcoming Eventsiii
 Editorial Notesiv

EDITOR NEEDED: See notice on pink page v.

Articles:

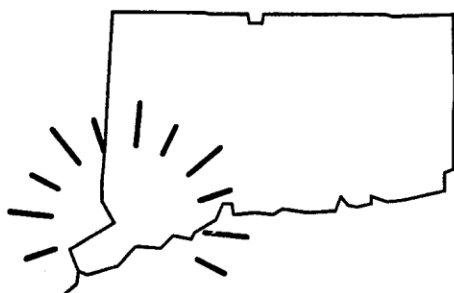
William Reed junior, New Canaan Revolutionary War Loyalist: What Became of Him?
 Brent M. Owen & Kenneth W. Rockwell 37

The Fate of the Black Loyalists of Westchester and Dutchess Counties, New York,
 Teresa Vega 53

**The Children and Grandchildren of Abraham Wood and Prudence Avery of Pound Ridge,
 Westchester County, New York,** Shawn W. Brayton, Ed.D. 65

Editor Needed for This Journal. v

Membership Form & Information (Join / Renew) vi



• *Focus on Southwestern Connecticut* •

The Fate of the Black Loyalists of Westchester and Dutchess Counties, New York

Teresa Vega

This multi-part series of articles provides the biographical sketches of Black Loyalists from Westchester and Dutchess Counties, New York who supported the British Crown during the American Revolution.¹ My previous Black Loyalists article in this journal² centered on Black Loyalists from Fairfield County, Connecticut, identifying individuals, and describing the turmoil in British-occupied New York City before their departure to Nova Scotia in 1783. This series shifts focus to those from neighboring Westchester and Dutchess Counties. Westchester County, known as “The Neutral Ground,” was a fiercely contested area between British-held New York City and the Patriot-controlled Lower Hudson Valley, while Dutchess County served as a critical base for the Continental Army and supply depots. Though this article does not aim to offer a comprehensive overview of the New York Loyalists' role in the war, it sheds light on pivotal moments that shaped the lives of Black Loyalists from these counties.³ Much like their counterparts from Fairfield County, the fates of these individuals were sealed before they left New York City.

I approach this topic as a family historian-genealogist and a descendant of enslaved and formerly enslaved African and Indigenous peoples who served as Black Loyalists and Black Patriots in Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey. Their remarkable contributions to both the United States and Britain have been overlooked. It is essential to recognize that their acts of resistance and agency positioned them as the “Founding Fathers” of both the United States and Canada.⁴ Enslaved and Free Blacks witnessed every major event that shaped the founding of this country. These individuals frequently traveled between New York City, Long Island, and surrounding towns and colonies with their enslavers and employers, whether on foot, horseback, or by ferry. They were not passive observers, unaware of their environment. On the contrary, enslaved and Free Blacks were active participants, engaging with historic events as they unfolded. *In Defiance: Runaways from Slavery in New York’s Hudson River Valley, 1735-1831* records

¹ Throughout this article, I use the terms “Black Loyalists” and “Black Patriots” to refer to people who were of African, Mixed-Race or Indigenous descent. See Teresa Vega, “Repairing Erasure: Indigenous Identity and Paper Genocide” in *The Journal of the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society*, Winter Edition, Vol 41, 2024, pp. 81-92. See also Lipman, Andrew W. *The Saltwater Frontier: Indians and the Contest for the American Coast* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2015); *Brethren by Nature: New England Indians, Colonists, and the Origins of American Slavery* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016); and Forbes, Jack D. *Africans and Native Americans: The Language of Race and the Evolution of Red-Black Peoples* (Chicago: University of Illinois press, 1993).

² Vega, Teresa. “The Fate of the Black Loyalists of Fairfield County, CT (Part 1) in *Connecticut Ancestry Society*, Vol. 66, No. 1 (August 2023), pp. 1-10 and Part 2 Vol. 66, No. 2 (November 2023), pp. 41-59.

³ See James A. Roberts, *New York In the Revolution as Colony and State*, (NY: Press of Brandow Printing Company, 1898. Additional information on Long Island Loyalists, see Gilbert, G.A. “The Connecticut Loyalists” in *The American Historical Review*, Jan 1899, Vol 4, No. 2, pp. 273-291; and Pougher, Richard, “*Averse...to Remaining Idle Spectators: The Emergence of Loyalist Privateering During the American Revolution*,” PhD Diss. (University of Maine, 2002).

⁴ See Richard S. Newman, “A Chosen Generation: Black Founders and Early America” in *Prophets of Protest: Reconsidering the History of American Abolitionism*, Timothy Patrick McCarthy and John Stoller, eds. (New York, NY: The New Press, 2006), pp. 59-79; Fisher, David Hackett. *African Founders: How Enslaved People Expanded American Ideals*. (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2022); and Proenza-Coles, Christina. *American Founders: How People of African Descent Established Freedom in the New World*. (Montgomery, AL: NewSouth Books, 2019).

that 200 people sought freedom by running away in the years between 1751 and 1780.⁵ Their fugitivity is a testament to their active resistance to enslavement.

The Book of Negroes, from which I obtained the names of the Black Loyalists described here,⁶ contains numerous errors, particularly in the spelling of names. These mistakes may reflect not only the challenges of recording names accurately at the time, but also the impact of the trauma of war on those who are displaced. Many individuals who were formerly enslaved may have forgotten the correct names of their enslavers or had difficulty recalling details amidst the chaos of their circumstances. In my work, I have made an effort to correct the historical record by identifying correct names of the Loyalist referenced whenever possible. I go farther, providing some background for the individuals, and I have taken the liberty of grouping them based on possible family or social relationships, offering a more nuanced and connected understanding of their lives. My goal is to provide a clearer, more accurate picture of the people behind these entries, restoring humanity often lost in the official documentation.

Brief review of the history of slavery in New York

Extensive scholarship exists about Black Loyalists.⁷ In 2021, Graham Russell Hodges published a new expanded edition of *The Book of Negroes* providing updated insights. Also, Harvey Amani Whitfield's recent release, *Biographical Dictionary of Enslaved Black People in the Maritimes*, and Stephen Davidson's *Black Loyalists in New Brunswick* offer valuable contributions to the field. These works reflect the current state of Black Loyalist scholarship. With the ongoing decolonization of archives and the digitization of records, more individual narratives of Black Loyalists will be discovered and they will expand our understanding of how these individuals navigated their lives.⁸ It is hoped that descendants of Westchester and Dutchess County Black Loyalists will find this genealogical evidence useful in their search for their ancestors.

In the mid-eighteenth century, New York was one of the largest slaveholding colony and one of the most active slave trading ports in British Colonial America,⁹ second only to South

⁵See Susan Stessin-Cohn and Ashley Hurlburt-Biagini, *In Defiance: Runaways from Slavery in New York's Hudson River Valley, 1735-1831*, NY: Black Dome Press), 2023, p. 20.

⁶ The British government compiled *The Book of Negroes*, a set of naval ledgers, which lists the names, ages, and a brief description of more than 3,000 Black Loyalists who were evacuated from the United States at the end of the Revolutionary War along with British soldiers. The original document is held at The National Archives in London, UK. Copies can also be found at The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in Washington, DC and the Nova Scotia Museum in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

⁷ See Graham Russell Gao Hodges and Alan Edward Brown, eds. *The Book of Negroes*. (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2021); Harvey Amani Whitfield, *Biographical Dictionary of Enslaved People in the Maritimes*. (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2022); Douglas R. Egerton, *Death or Liberty: African Americans and Revolutionary America*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009); Davidson, Stephen. *Black Loyalists in New Brunswick: The Lives of Eight African Americans in 1783-1834*. (Halifax, Nova Scotia: Formac Publishing Company, 2020); Ruth Holmes Whitehead, *Black Loyalists: Southern Settlers of Nova Scotia's First Free Black Communities*. (Halifax, Nova Scotia: Nimbus Publishing, 2013); and Mary Louise Clifford, *Slavery to Freetown: Black Loyalists After the American Revolution*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006).

⁸ See Christina Vida's "Nancy Toney's Lifetime in Slavery (<https://connecticuthistory.org/nancy-toneys-lifetime-in-slavery/>)

⁹ See Leslie Harris, ed., *Slavery in New York*, NY: The Free Press, 2005; Edgar J. McManus, *A History of Negro Slavery in New York*. NY: Syracuse University Press, 1866; Leslie Harris, *In the Shaw of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*. IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003; Graham Russel Gao Hodges. *Roots and Branches: African-Americans in New York and New Jersey, 1613-1868*, NY: University of North Carolina Press, 1999.

Carolina. By this time, New York City's population included approximately 11,000 enslaved individuals, making up 20% of its total inhabitants.¹⁰ Outside the city, the presence of slavery was also deeply felt. In 1771, 15.8% of Westchester County's population and 6.1% of Dutchess County's population were enslaved.¹¹ While enslaved people and Free Blacks in New York City were employed in various roles, including domestic servitude, skilled trades, and labor in construction and shipping industries, those in rural areas like Westchester and Dutchess Counties were forced to work as domestic servants, agricultural laborers, in mills or mines extracting copper and iron. Enslaved people were often the most valuable "property" a person owned.

Slaveholders in Westchester and Dutchess Counties profited enormously from the enslavement and exploitation of African and Native peoples. Prominent families in these counties, including the Livingstons, Van Courtlandts, Schuylers, Morrises, Verplancks, Beekmans, and Rombouts, each held between 10-30 enslaved individuals, while some wealthy farmers owned five to ten. However, most enslavers in the region typically owned one or two enslaved people.¹² The wealth and power of these settler colonizers were built not only on the backs of the enslaved but also through the monopolization of natural resources and their involvement in the West Indies, Transatlantic and New York-Madagascar Slave Trades. This system of exploitation fueled the prosperity at the expense of African and Native lives and labor.

During the American Revolution, enslaved people and Free Black people were forced to make difficult decisions about their future, torn between seeking freedom and remaining in their current conditions in all thirteen colonies. Over 5,000 Black Patriots fought for the Revolutionary cause, while more than 20,000 Black Loyalists aligned themselves with the British Empire, lured by promise of freedom.¹³ In 1783, as British-occupied New York City descended into chaos, both Patriots and Loyalists scrambled to reclaim enslaved individuals before the Loyalists' departure to Nova Scotia. Even Black Loyalists with certificates of freedom lived in constant threat of enslavement by either side.

As the terms of the 1783 Treaty of Paris, many Black Loyalists realized their hopes for a better life in Nova Scotia were fading, with their service to the British reduced to expendable labor.¹⁴ The growing class divisions among Loyalists, evident even before they left New York, were inevitable, as the difficulties of rebuilding their lives in a new and uncertain land became apparent. The British government, unprepared for the large influx of Loyalists, misjudged the harsh conditions in Nova Scotia. Many Black Loyalists, unaware of what awaited them, likely believed that, as full British citizens, they would find stable employment with Loyalists. Yet within a year they faced disenfranchisement, re-enslavement in Canada, or being sold to the West Indies and elsewhere. Delays in land distribution and inadequate provisions led to starvation and death for many, exacerbating tensions with White poor and working-class Loyalists. Black Loyalists became scapegoats, as the frustrations of their White counterparts boiled over. As we shall see, history is cyclical.

¹⁰ Hodges (1999), pp. 272-275.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² See New York Colony, Census of Slaves 1755, downloadable at <https://www.familysearch.org/library/books/records/item/437117-census-of-slaves-1755>.

¹³ See <https://www.philipsemanorhall.com/blog/the-philipsburg-proclamation>

¹⁴ Though 3,000 Black Loyalist embarked to Canada in 1783, the number of Black Loyalists who were marched across the Northern border on foot and those who sailed to Canada on unregistered ships by fleeing Loyalists remains unknown.

A Precursor to Nova Scotia: The 1766 Tenant Revolts

The 1766 Tenant Revolts in the Lower Hudson Valley, particularly in Dutchess and Putnam Counties, resulted from a growing resentment toward a feudal landownership system in which absentee landowners profited from tenant farmers' labor while demanding rent. Initially, tenant leases lasted 21 years and were inheritable, and rents were paid in crop yields or livestock. Tenants were expected to improve the land's value.

However, after the French and Indian War (1754-1763), landowners began demanding cash rent and offered non-inheritable leases of seven years, which allowed them to evict tenants easily and seize their meager possessions. These exploitative changes pushed tenant farmers to the brink, leading to widespread revolt.

By the end of 1766, landowners managed to suppress the uprising using violent armed forces and legal maneuvers, leading to the arrest and imprisonment of tenant organizers.¹⁵ The revolt enabled many tenants to hone their political mobilization and leadership skills, fostering a sense of empowerment in their collective struggle. Some tenants chose to relocate to the New Hampshire Grants, seeking to become independent landowners, free from the restraints of the feudal landownership system.¹⁶

In Westchester and Dutchess Counties, enslaved labor was crucial to the large estates owned by the landlords with tenant farmers also depending heavily on enslaved and Free Black labor for household, agricultural, mining, and maritime tasks.

Both enslaved and Free Blacks endured highly oppressive conditions. Their involvement in tenant uprisings would have exposed them to harsher punishments than those faced by the tenant farmers. The brutal repercussions of the 1712 New York Slave Revolt and The Conspiracy of 1741¹⁷ would still have loomed large in their collective memory. These earlier uprisings led to public executions by hanging and burning at the stake, deportations to the Caribbean, and the imposition of more restrictive slave codes.¹⁸

The parallels between the 1766 Tenant Revolts and the experiences of Black Loyalists and poor White Loyalists in Nova Scotia are striking. In both instances, economic inequality and the manipulation of rents and labor fueled class tensions. Just as tenant farmers revolted against landowners who profited from their labor, poor and working-class Loyalists in Nova Scotia

¹⁵ The story of William Prendergast and his wife Mehitable Wing clearly shows why tenant revolted against the aristocracy. See <https://prendergast-rent-war.blogspot.com/2015/05/from-peaceful-farmer-to-rebel-leader.html>

¹⁶ Before Vermont became a state, it was a disputed territory between New Hampshire and New York. Between 1749-1764, the New Hampshire governor offered low-cost land grants to settlers. Some of the settlers became "Green Mountain Boys," who vigorously protected their land from New York settlers.

¹⁷ In the Slave Revolt of 1712, 20 people were hanged, one was burned at the stake, others were subjected to being broken on a wheel or being burned at the stake. There were also six suicides. No White people were punished in this way. In contrast, the Conspiracy of 1741, involved 30+ Black men executed, 4 White people (including 2 women), 13 Black men burned at the stake, and over 70 people (Blacks and Whites) deported to the Caribbean islands and elsewhere to work on brutal sugar plantations. See Jill Lepore, *New York Burning: Liberty, Slavery, and Conspiracy in Eighteenth Century Manhattan*, NY: Alfred A. Knoff, 2005.

¹⁸ See Oscar William and Graham Russell Hodges, ed., *African Americans and Colonial Legislation in the Middle Colonies*, (NY: Routledge), 2012.

found themselves at odds with wealthier Loyalists, all while Black Loyalists were blamed for post-war failures which led to virulent racism and discrimination.¹⁹

The Biographical Sketches of the Black Loyalists, Loyalist Transporters and Enslavers

It would be a misconception to suggest that every Black Loyalist shared the same destiny.²⁰ The following biographical accounts vividly demonstrate how the Black Loyalists of Westchester and Dutchess Counties charted distinct paths, shaped by their individual roles as skilled laborers or domestic servants, as well as their strong family bonds and the nascent social networks forged through their collective Loyalist experience in New York City. In the aftermath of the War, while New York City was a turbulent urban landscape, it also served as a poignant backdrop against which Black Loyalists reconnected with kin, established new familial ties with individuals, both enslaved and free, hailing from various corners of the British Empire, and crafted new survival strategies to navigate a perpetually shifting environment. Moreover, their diverse religious beliefs offered a wellspring of resilience and community support.

Besides identifying Black Loyalists who went to Canada, these sketches identify the enslavers and the men who transported the Black Loyalists to ports in Maritime Canada. Please note that not all Loyalist transporters were enslavers. Each Black Loyalist had to be escorted to Nova Scotia. In this section I grouped Black Loyalists by family ties or by the ships they embarked on as this demonstrates further family/kin and social network tie. In addition, I grouped enslavers and some Loyalist transporters as their family and social ties are evident. In Part 1, I refer to Black Loyalists as “refugees” and “fugitives.” Legally, Black Loyalists were “fugitive enslaved people,” though some were, in fact, born free. However, these Black Loyalists, after serving the British crown, saw themselves as “refugees,” a status no different from White Loyalists. Their decision to fight for the British was motivated solely on their desire to be free from slavery.

Enslaved individuals and Free Blacks were frequently owned by the founding families of Westchester and Dutchess Counties. Through marriage, inheritance, and indenture, enslaved people were often transferred within families—to relatives and in-laws—or sold to other local families. In some cases, Free Blacks would indenture or apprentice their children to former enslavers or trusted acquaintances to retain some knowledge and control over their children’s whereabouts, at least to a certain extent.

The principal families that enslaved people in Westchester and Dutchess Counties included those with the surnames Halstead, Purdy, Brown, Knapp, Merritt, Budd, Dickinson, Fowler, Odell, Van Wyck, Delancy, Philipse, Van Courtland, Guion, Devoe, Underhill, Theall, Morgan, Seaman, Bush, Lyon, Willet, Van Wart, and Ogden.

¹⁹ See Stephen Davidson, *Black Loyalists in New Brunswick: The Lives of Eight African Americans in 1783-1834*, Halifax, Nova Scotia: Formac Publishing Company, 2020; Walker, James W. St. G. *The Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone 1783-1870* (New York, NY: Africana Publishing Company, 1976) and Whitfield’s *North to Bondage: Loyalist Slavery in the Maritimes* (Vancouver, British Columbia: UCB Press, 2016).

²⁰ For additional biographical sketches on Black Loyalists, see Whitfield (2022); Davidson (2020); and Ruth Holmes Whitehead, *Black Loyalists: Southern Settlers of Nova Scotia’s First Free Black Communities*, Halifax, Nova Scotia: Nimbus Publishing, 2013.

In addition, much like the owners of Black Loyalists of Fairfield County, many enslavers and those involved in transporting enslaved individuals were from prominent merchant mariner families from Long Island.

1. Gilbert Dickinson and Sam Dickinson

GILBERT DICKENSON was 22 years old and “stout” when he boarded the *Lady’s Adventure* bound for St. John’s, Nova Scotia, on 23 April 1783. The ship carried 404 men, women, and children of the King’s American Dragoons, and included no fewer than forty-five Black trumpeters, pioneers, and officers’ servants.²¹ The vessel was commanded by Captain Robert Gibson, a Patriot spy who acted as a Loyalist, who more than ninety years after the Revolutionary War, would be accused of being a Loyalist himself.²²

GILBERT was born free in North Castle, New York in 1761. While the details of his parentage are unclear, it’s possible that his parents were Free Blacks or his mother was Indigenous, which could explain his free birth. The 1755 Slave Census lists Robert Dickinson as holding one enslaved person named Dick.²³ Could Dick the father of Gilbert and Sam? Or were they fathered by a Dickinson enslaver, as it was common for enslavers to emancipate children they fathered with African and Indigenous women? The Dickinson Family, prominent merchant mariners from Oyster Bay, Long Island and were known slaveholders.

Like his Fairfield County counterpart Black Loyalist **EDWARD LLOYD**, Gilbert also caught the attention of Col. Benjamin Thompson, an ardent Loyalist from New England. Thompson also served in England, where he rose through the ranks to command the Kings American Dragoons regiments.²⁴ From the start, these regiments were racially integrated and included formerly enslaved Black trumpeters. Some of these Black trumpeters continued to serve with him in South Carolina and New York. They “were not so much for entertainment but rather for relaying commands in battle, in camp, and on the march.”²⁵ **GILBERT DICKINSON** was recruited as a trumpeter in the Kings American Dragoons. One must wonder if **EDWARD** possessed some kind of musical ability. Did he already play the trumpet? If the British won the war, Col. Thompson had great plans for the Kings American Dragoons.²⁶

SAM DICKINSON age 24 years old, was described as “stout and tall” when Captain Daniel Kipp captured him in 1776. *The Book of Negroes* notes that Sam was formerly enslaved to Thomas Hunt of Philipse Manor and was in the possession of Robert French when he boarded the *London*, a frigate destined for Port Roseway, Nova Scotia. However, questions arise about Robert French’s identity. Was this Robert French, the Georgia Loyalist who may or may not

²¹ Ibid.

²² Donna Hay, “Moses Doan and Robert Gibson and the Immortality of a Reputation,” *SAR Magazine*, Vol 111, No. 4, Spring, 2017, and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doan_Outlaws

²³ See <https://www.familysearch.org/library/books/records/item/437117-census-of-slaves-1755>

²⁴ The Kings American Dragoons were a British military unit that was sent to assist American Loyalists during the Revolutionary War.

²⁵ Tood W. Braisted’s “*Such As Are Absolutely Free: Benjamin Thompson’s Black Dragoons*” (<https://allthingsliberty.com/2021/02/such-as-are-absolutely-free-benjamin-thompsons-black-dragoons/>).

²⁶ Ibid.

have been an enslaver?²⁷ Or could Sam have confused him with Jeremiah French (1742-1820), a Loyalist from Stratford, CT who joined the Loyalist cause in 1777 after settling in the New Hampshire Grants in 1764?²⁸

The United Empire Loyalist Directory lists Jeremiah French suggesting that this might be a case of mistaken identity.²⁹ Additionally, was Sam the brother of Gilbert? Was he a Free Black who was enslaved during the Revolution and forced into Loyalist service? These questions are important to consider, especially since many Free Blacks were kidnapped and coerced into service on both sides of the conflict.

Captain Thomas Hunt, a Westchester County Patriot, came from a prominent family of merchant mariner, one of the earliest English settlers of Westchester County, including Eastchester and parts of the Bronx. The Hunts enslaved numerous Africans and Native Americans over multiple generations. As merchant mariners, they relied on enslaved men to serve in various maritime roles, including as pilots, navigating larger vessels around New York City.³⁰ Was SAM DICKINSON perhaps pressed into service by the Loyalists during the Battle of Pell's Point in October 1776 or another skirmish?

Captain Daniel Kipp is listed as having taken SAM DICKINSON by force. However, this may have been a mistake on the part of Sam's memory as no information can be found on Captain Daniel Kipp. The captain Sam referred to was actually Captain Samuel Kipp (1753-1803) who was born in North Castle, NEW YORK and joined the Loyalists after the Battle of Long Island. He later served as a captain under Col. James Delancey's regiment of Westchester Light Horse.³¹ He died in Montreal, Quebec where his two daughters lived with their French-Canadian husband. It should be noted that Samuel Kipp married Mary Knapp (1766-1838), daughter of Captain Moses Knapp, who served in the same regiment as his son-in-law Sam and embarked to Nova Scotia with him. The Knapp family was originally from White Plains, but at the time of the American Revolution, they rented a farm in Dutchess County on land rented from Col. Roger Morris.³²

2. *Caesar (Casar) Nicholls*

CAESAR NICHOLLS, described as "stout and Black" was a 22-year-old holding a General Birch Certificate³³ when he departed for Port Roseway aboard the *Ann* in 1783. Former-

²⁷ Robert French was probably this Georgia Loyalist whose property was confiscated in 1784. See <https://sites.rootsweb.com/~gataylor/loyalist.htm>

²⁸ <https://uelac.ca/projects/jeremiah-french-tomb-stone/#:~:text=At%20the%20beginning%20of%20the,a%20list%20of%20proscribed%20people.&text=Jeremiah%20French%20fought%20at%20the,taken%20prisoner%20August%2016%2C%201777.>

²⁹ https://uelac.ca/loyalist-directory/detail/?wpda_search_column_id=3012

³⁰ The southeastern tip of Ward's Island was known as "Negro Point" because many Black sailors were used to pilot ships around New York City.

³¹ See pp. 14-29 in Lewis Richard's "Samuel Kipp (1753-1803) and his descendants: A biographical and genealogical study" (<http://www.kipp-blake-families.ca/SamuelKippEng.pdf>)

³² *Ibid.*, p. 42.

³³ British General Samuel Birch issued certificates of freedom to Black Loyalists who fought for the British during the American Revolution. These certificates provided safe passage to Canada, the West Indies, England, Germany, and Sierra Leone as well as British citizenship.

ly enslaved by Dr. Theodorus Van Wyck of Fishkill in Dutchess County, CAESAR escaped around 1779. He was transported to Nova Scotia by Loyalist William Hill.

The Van Wyck Family were among the original Dutch settlers of Dutchess County. Corneilus Van Wyck (1694-1761) purchased land from the Rombout family who held the original land patent. During the American Revolution, General George Washington ordered the property—now known as the Van Wyck Homestead Museum—to be used as the Fishkill Supply Depot due to its strategic location along the Hudson River. It served as a military camp where supplies were delivered. General Israel Putnam also hosted key Patriot leaders at the site, including Washington, Lafayette, Hamilton, Jay, and others.

Dr. Theodorus Van Wyck (1730-1789), born in Flushing, Queens, New York, served as a Lieutenant in the Dutchess County Militia, Regiment of Levies, during the American Revolution.³⁴ CAESAR seized his chance for freedom in 1779 when the Loyalists began launching raids across Westchester and Dutchess Counties.

It is unclear how CAESAR came into possession of William Hunt, but it may have occurred on Long Island or in New York City. William Hill, who transported CAESAR, was originally a baker from Boston. He served in the 14th Regiment in Boston and later evacuated to Long Island. There, he continued his service with Loyalist army regiments on Long Island and New York City, until he sailed for Port Roseway in 1783. In 1784, he received a land grant and settled in Shelburne, Nova Scotia, eventually becoming a coroner there.³⁵

Unfortunately, CAESAR's fate remains unknown. He may have been re-enslaved or sold again, or perhaps he emigrated to Sierra Leone or perished during his early years in Nova Scotia.

3. Christopher Halstead, Phillis Halstead, and Peggy Halstead

CHRISTOPHER HALSTEAD, described as “feeble” at 50 years old, was formerly owned by Philomon Halstead of Rye, New York, whom he left in 1777, heading to Annapolis and St. John, Nova Scotia. Joining him on the *Clinton* were his 35-year-old wife **PHILLIS HALSTEAD** and their 2-year-old daughter **PEGGY HALSTEAD**, who was born behind British lines. Phillis had been enslaved by Benjamin Drake of Eastchester, New York, before escaping in 1776. Both **CHRISTOPHER** and **PHILLIS** were holders of General Birch Certificates, affirming their status as free individuals.

The white Halstead Family, one of the founding families of Rye, New York, were prominent enslavers. They passed enslaved people down to their descendants and often hired them out or sold them to their in-laws, perpetuating the system of slavery across generations.³⁶

³⁴ In April of 1760, an enslaved man named James ran away from Theodorus Van Wyck. He was described as 22 years old, stout, and a good English speaker. Van Wyck mentioned that he had been taken up near Livingston Manor but escaped and was probably trying to join the Army near Albany. See Stessin-Cohn and Hurlburt-Biagini, p. 39.

³⁵ See https://uelac.ca/loyalist-directory/detail/?wpda_search_column_id=12723.

³⁶ My extended Lyon-Green-Merritt Family descends from multiple enslaved and Free Blacks who labored for the Halstead Family and their collateral lines like the Brown, Purdy, Budd, Merritt, Lyon, Morgan, Devoe families among others. Some of our direct ancestors were the siblings of Thomas, Charles, and William who were Patriots, like Bristol Budd Sampson (<https://allthingsliberty.com/2017/08/tireless-pension-pursuit-bristol-budd-sampson/>)

In 1785, CHRISTOPHER received a land grant and settled in Digby, Nova Scotia. Poor and working-class White Loyalists received only 100 acres of land, but Black Loyalists like CHRISTOPHER only received one acre of land.³⁷ Despite this, Digby was one of the first Free Black settlements, and some level of freedom was achieved. Trinity Church records show that CHRISTOPHER AND PHILLIS had three daughters —PEGGY, JENNY, and JEMIMA— who were baptized there on 09 January 1790.³⁸ This is the last known record of the Halstead family. Their fate beyond Digby remains a mystery.

4. Bristol Storms, John Cox, Mary Coles, Nelly Cox, and Andrew Cole

BRISTOL STORMS, JOHN COX, MARY COLES, NELLY COX, and **ANDREW COLE** were also aboard the *Clinton* when it departed in 1784 for St. John, Nova Scotia. All three Black Loyalists were described as “stout,” indicating that they would have been highly valued as laborers.

BRISTOL, a 40-year-old man, had been enslaved by Garret Storm (1722-1801) of Fishkill, Dutchess County, before fleeing from his captivity. Garrett Storm’s ancestor, Dirke Goris Storm, was one of the original Dutch settlers of Sleepy Hollow, New York. The Storm family had deep roots on both sides of the Hudson River in Dutchess and Orange Counties, New York. Initially, they acquired land in Fishkill where they later founded the town of Stormville. The family also established a cemetery for their enslaved people and Free Black individuals who had likely worked for them. What became of Bristol after he arrived in St. John remains unknown. Whether he was eventually freed by General Storm is a question we will never be able to answer.

JOHN COX was 31 years old and formerly enslaved by Eleazor Goddin of Mamaroneck. In 1776, he fled with his wife MARY COLES, 23 years old and described as being “a stout wench.” Mary was born free in Musketa Cove (Glen Cove), Long Island, which indicates she may have had Indigenous (Mantinecock) descent.³⁹

Questions arise regarding Eleazor Goddin, as there are no census records or documents linking him to either Loyalist or Patriot activities. Could this be a transcription error? Perhaps John’s enslaver was actually Eleazor Gidney III (1687-1783). Born in Mamaroneck, Gidney lived in “Saw Pitts” (modern-day Port Chester) in Westchester County, where he conducted business with England and France. He also owned property in Newburgh, Orange County. Did John decide to leave when Gidney was in Orange County or possibly abroad? Was John in communication with his two Black Loyalist brothers, Michael and Peter Cox, who had already escaped their enslavers?⁴⁰ Those two and other Black Loyalists from Fairfield County also re-

³⁷ Marion Gilroy, compiler, Public Archives of Nova Scotia Publication No. 4, *Loyalists and Land Settlement in Nova Scotia*, no date or city, Board of Trustees of the Public Archives of Nova Scotia, reprint, (Baltimore: Clearfield Company (Genealogical Publishing Co.,) 1995, Annapolis County grants, 13; “Loyalists and Land Settlement in Nova Scotia,” database and images, Ancestry.com.

³⁸ Canada, Nova Scotia, Church Records, 1720-2001, Cumberland County, Digby, Church of England in Canada Trinity church, Baptisms, marriages, burials 1786-1839, image 20/106, familysearch.org. <https://tinyurl.com/4r28r82a>

³⁹ See Vega, Teresa, “Repairing Erasure: Indigenous Identity and Paper Genocide” in *The Journal of the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society*, Winter Edition, Vol 41, 2024

⁴⁰ Vega, “The Fate of the Black Loyalists of Fairfield County, Connecticut, Part 2,” *Connecticut Ancestry*, Vol. 66, No. 2 (November 2023), pp. 57-59.

ceived land grants in the Milkish Settlement. JOHN COX (later known as Jacob Cox) and ANDREW COLE (recorded as Andrew Coal) and thirteen other land grantees received 50 acres of land in 1787. These Black Loyalists settled on the Nerepis River, outside the city of Carleton.⁴¹

ANDREW COLE was 26 years old and was enslaved by Benjamin Cole of Mamaroneck when he departed for Nova Scotia. He boarded the ship *Clinton* in 1783 with his 33-year-old wife, NELLY COX, and their 2 children—one four years and the other only six months. Nelly had been enslaved by Paul Burtis, a farmer who may have remained neutral during the war. His family was among the founders of Musketa Cove (Glen Cove), Long Island. Tragically, Nelly Cox died onboard the day before the ship reached its destination on 31 August 1783, according to the *Clinton* passenger list.⁴² The cause of her death was not reported. Was her death related to complications from childbirth, especially since she may have been breastfeeding both children? Did the scarcity of provisions or unsanitary conditions of the transport ship contribute to her death? Did she contract a communicable disease on the ship? *The Book of Negroes* records her as being in good health, but the reality of her physical state remains unknown.

5. Jenny Cole and Abraham Dalton and Henry Cole

JENNY COLE described as “ordinary” was 36 years old when she boarded the *Elizabeth* alongside 18-year-old ABRAHAM DALTON, who was described as “likely.” Both were headed to St. John and had been enslaved by David Dalton of North Castle, New York. They escaped captivity in 1779 amidst the Loyalist raids that devastated Fairfield County in Connecticut and parts of Dutchess County. HENRY COLE also described as “ordinary,” traveled with them. He was 33 years old and carried a General Birch Certificate, signifying his status as a free citizen. Henry had been previously enslaved by Lt. Jacobus James Van Gaasbeek (1737-1825) of Esopus (Kingston) and fled from him in 1777. Lt. Van Gaasbeek served in Captain Tobias Van Buren’s company from Ulster County.⁴³

It is likely that all three individuals—JENNY, ABRAHAM, and HENRY—were in the service of Lt. Col. Charles McPherson (1753-1823).⁴⁴ McPherson was born in Perthshire, Scotland, moved to Kingsbridge, New York, in 1776 and married Catherine McCleod in 1779. He served in Colonel Delancey’s Brigade led by Lt. John Harris Kruger. After evacuating his family in July 1783, McPherson established the St. John’s Exchange Coffee House in August 1784.⁴⁵

Several questions emerge regarding these three Black Loyalists. What was the nature of their relationship? Was Abraham Jenny’s son? Were Henry and Andrew Cole also family members? Certainly, JENNY, ABRAHAM and HENRY would have been highly valuable as domestic servants and laborers. Yet, we know little about their fate after they arrived in New Brunswick.

⁴¹ See Davidson (2020)

⁴² <https://uelac.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Clinton-ship-muster-July-1783.pdf>

⁴³ Ancestry.com. *North America, Family Histories, 1500-2000* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2016, p. 182.

⁴⁴ Ancestry.com. *Scots in the Mid-Atlantic Colonies, 1635-1783* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2006, p. 96.

⁴⁵ Davidson has written two online articles about Charles McPherson and the St. John Coffee House. See <https://uelac.ca/loyalist-trails/loyalist-trails-2021-47/#Davidson> and <https://uelac.ca/loyalist-trails/loyalist-trails-2021-48/>

6. *Dick Van Wart, Sam Van Wart, Rachel (___?___), and Susannah Van Wart*

DICK VAN WART described as “stout,” boarded the *Elizabeth* bound for Port Roseway. He was carrying a General Birch Certificate and was listed as being “M” which indicates he was a “Mulatto.” Dick had been enslaved by John (Johannes) Van Wart (1735-1775) of Tarrytown (Philipsburg Manor) whom he fled in 1776. He was in the service of Robert Merritt.

SAM VAN WART, Dick’s brother, was 44 years old, and described as “ordinary” when he boarded the *Hope* in 1783 headed for Annapolis, Nova Scotia. He had formerly been enslaved by Jacob Van Wart (1738-1801) of Philipsburg Manor, Westchester County. Accompanying him were his wife **RACHEL**, 40, also described as “ordinary,” and their daughter **SUSANNAH**, an 11-year-old, who was described as a “likely” child. Both Rachel and Susannah were said to be “born free.” Would it be possible that Sam was also born free but became enslaved at some point? Or was Rachel of Native American descent which would have made Susannah free? All three Black Loyalists, **SAM**, **RACHEL** AND **SUSANNAH**—were in the service of Thomas Rapelje.

The Van Wart family of Dutchess County were among the original Dutch settlers in the region. **DICK** may have taken the opportunity to escape enslavement after John Van Wart’s death in October 1775. Could **DICK** have used his enslaver’s passing as a chance to pursue freedom? **SAM**, on the other hand, may have been held by John’s brother, Jacob, a Loyalist who settled in New Brunswick after the war with two other brothers, William and Isaac.⁴⁶

The Rapelje family were among the original Dutch settlers of the region, but the surname has led to some confusion due to variations in spelling over time. The Dutch surname “Rapelje” eventually morphed into “Robblee.” The Thomas Rapelje mentioned as having transported Sam’s family was actually Thomas Rublier (also known as Thomas Robblee) who was born in Huntington, Long Island, in 1736 and died in Granville, Annapolis, in 1796. He was the son of William Andrew Rublier (1702-1770) and Abigail Brush (1705-1770).⁴⁷

The fate of **SAM**, **RACHEL**, and **SUSANNAH**, like that of so many Black Loyalists, remains unknown. We don’t know if they were among those who survived the brutal first winter and went on to settle in one of the earliest Free Black communities near Annapolis.

7. *Dinah Brown, Bill Brown, and their young child (___)*

DINAH BROWN, described as a “lusty, squat wench,” is listed as “B,” indicating that she was recorded as Black, though she was born free because her mother was Native American.⁴⁸ Dinah’s records state that she served her time with Edmund Palmer (1744-1777) of Fishkill. Accompanying her to Port Roseway on the *Ann & Elizabeth* were her husband **BILL BROWN**, a

⁴⁶ Sabine, p. 381. See also The National Archives of the UK; Kew, Surrey, England; American Loyalist Claims, Series I; Class: AO 13; Piece: 026. Please note that their cousin Patriot Isaac Van Wart played a key role in the capture of General Andrea during the Revolutionary War.

⁴⁷ For Rapelje-Robblee genealogy, see https://www.robleesonline.org/pdf/Robblee_John_desc_Sept_2018.pdf

⁴⁸ See Teresa Vega, “Repairing Erasure: Indigenous Identity and Paper Genocide” *The Journal of the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society*, Winter Edition, Vol 41, 2024.

“stout” 24-year-old who had been enslaved by Jacob Arnold (1749-1827) of Morristown, New Jersey, in 1780, and their young child.

It is important to note the roles of both enslavers deserved to be mentioned. Like many Free Blacks at the time, Dinah was most likely indentured by her parents despite being born free. As was common, she would have been required to serve a term of 21 years. Palmer may employed her as a paid worker after her indenture ended. Edmund Palmer was a Loyalist, notorious as a “Cowboy” who terrorized the Neutral Ground.⁴⁹ He was also a British spy. His execution, approved by General George Washington, took place on 07 August 1777 in Fishkill witnessed by hundreds of locals.⁵⁰ His hanging served as clear warning to other Loyalists. It is possible that DINAH witnessed this event, which may have influenced her to seek a new life.

BILL BROWN’s former enslaver, Col. Jacob Arnold, was a well-known Patriot and Captain of the Morris Militia Light Horse Cavalry. Arnold also owned Arnold’s Tavern in Morristown, which served as General Washington’s headquarters on multiple occasions during the Revolution.⁵¹ The tavern also hosted General Nathanael Greene and other military dignitaries. While serving at Arnold’s, BILL may have overheard discussions regarding the exclusion of Black people from military service. Was he in communication with other Black Loyalists, or had he already joined their cause? The activities of New Jersey’s Black Brigade add another layer of mystery. While the specifics of BILL’s decision remain unknown, we know he eventually escaped to fight for the British.

DINAH and BILL likely met in British-occupied New York City during one of DINAH’s trips as a free woman, possibly traveling on her own or with an employer. Both were valuable laborers, who would be highly sought in Canada. DINAH was probably skilled in domestic work: cooking, and childcare as well as textile production and agriculture. BILL, with his experience at Arnold’s Tavern, would have been familiar with domestic service, stagecoach driving, stable work, and blacksmithing.

According to Davidson, “Nicholas Brown [BILL BROWN’s Loyalist transporter] eventually operated a bakery on St. John’s Street in the loyalist settlement that was renamed Shelburne, a fact that was noted in the census of 1787. Bill Bowne, the Black Loyalist, is last mentioned in public records in the 1784 muster of Birchtown and Shelburne. Sadly, although wives and children were listed in the muster, the names of Dinah Brown and her infant are not recorded. It would seem that she died during the loyalists’ first year of settlement in Shelburne.”⁵²

To be continued

⁴⁹ The term “Cowboy” refers to Loyalist raiders who specialized in stealing livestock, crops, clothing, household goods, and other valuables from Patriot-owned farms within the Neutral Zone. Their Patriot counterparts, known as “Skinners,” targeted Loyalists and individuals suspected of Loyalist sympathies. Both groups were widely regarded as outlaws, motivated by personal gain.

⁵⁰ Sabine, p. 13.

⁵¹ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arnold%27s_Tavern .

⁵² See <https://uelac.ca/loyalist-trails/loyalist-trails-2016-51/>