

Loyalist Collection at the University of New Brunswick: A narrative by John Peters written to a friend in London, 1786.

Sir,

I do not mean to take any pride from family, or to boast of my exploits but to relate my story in simplicity.

I was born in Hebron, Conn, in the year 1740. My father was a wealthy farmer and Colonel in the Militia; he was descended by his father from William Peters a brother of Hugh Peters, Oliver Cromwell's Chaplain, and of an ancient family of Cornwall, Old England and by his Mother from Major General Thomas Harrison, the regicide (killer of Kings).

My mother was descendant of John Phelps, a considerable man in Cromwell's party.

I had a liberal education at Yale College in Conn and received the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in 1759.

At the time of the breaking out of the American Rebellion which ended in the formation of the republic colonists to the number of over 20,000 remained true to the Royal Cause.

These gallant patriots are known to history by the name of United Empire Loyalists.

In consequence of the stand taken by them they were prescribed by their fellow Colonists and compelled to fly from their homes and seek protection under the British Flag.

Most of them fought valiantly on the royal side during the struggle, and after its close, the Various State Legislators adopted severe and highly penal instruments to prevent the return of the "Tories" as the United Empire Loyalists were called to their former homes in the Republic.

More than 10,000 of them eventually settled in Canada and their energy contributed not a little to the prosperity of this country.

Others found their way to Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Some to Great Britain and a few to the West Indies.

Conspicuous among these gallant men who stood fast allies to the Royal Cause, was Lieutenant Colonel John Peters, an officer commanding the Queens Loyal Rangers, a Regiment formed in the year 1777 by Sir Guy Carleton.

A few years after the close of the war Colonel Peters went to England on business, where he was taken ill and where his death occurred within a year in London. Descendants of his family, which remained at Baddick, Nova Scotia, are numerous, many having settled at Sydney, St John, Portland, and other places.

In 1786 he wrote a narrative giving an account of his life during the course of the rebellion. This narrative, the original M.S. of which is in the possession of Mrs. S.F. Bell of New York, was through the kindness of the correspondent of "The Cape Breton Times" Sydney, N.S.; Mr. Samuel James, Mr. Cermack of New Rochelle, Westchester N.Y., published locally some twenty five years ago.

Narrative:

In 1716 I married Anna, daughter of William Barnett, a merchant of Windser (sic) in Connecticut. She was born in the 1700 and is now the mother of eight sons and one daughter.

In 1763 I settled in Piermont, in the Province of New Hampshire on the East Bank of the Connecticut River, where I had a tract of land and built a house, saw mill and barn.

I was by Governor Wentworth appointed Captain Commandant of the Militia and Deputy Surveyor of King's Woods.

In 1770 I moved to Mooretown on the East side of the Connecticut River, where I had large parcels of land, and built a house, saw and grist mills, and carried on husbandry.

Being now in the Province of New York, I was appointed by Governor Tyron to be Colonel of the Militia, Justice of the Peace, Judge of Probates, Registrar of the county, Clerk of the Court and Judge of the Court of Common Pleas. Here I was in easy circumstances and independent as my mind could wish.

In 1774 the spirit of discord and rebellion so far prevailed as to occasion me much trouble. A congress was forming through the Colonies, the Counties of Cumberland and Gloucester, since called Vermont, desired me to attend the congress to meet at Philadelphia in 1774 which appointment I accepted of, and passing through Hebron, on my way to Philadelphia, I was mobbed with my uncles, the Rev Samuel Peters and Mr. Bemislee Peters, and Mr. Johnathon (sic) Peters by Governor Trumbulls' liberty boys, because we were

accused of loyalty. I was liberated after much ill language from the mob; the Rev Samuel Peters suffered more than I did. He and I agree in the opinion that the bankrupts, dissenting teachers and smugglers meant to [--?--] serious rebellion and civil and religious separation from the Mother country.

My uncles advised me to see the Congress and to find out what their aim was. I did so, and being certainly convinced that nothing short of independence would satisfy them, refused to take the oath of secrecy in Congress and wrote to my uncle, who had been forced to flee to England, telling him what to expect and I returned to my family in Vermont; but on my way home I was seized by three mobs, ill treated and dismissed at Wethersfield, Hartford, and Springfield. In April 1775 I arrived at my home in Mooretown when another mob seized me and threatened to execute me as an enemy of Congress.

They carried me to the committee, Deacon Bailey being President, but such a rebel general, who ordered me to go and discharged me the same evening at 12 o'clock, because they had not found proof of my corresponding with General Carleton, on pretense of which I had been committed to Prison.

Soon after another mob attacked me and insisted that I should sign their covenant which was to oppose the King and British Army with my life and property, which I did not sign and begged for time and consideration under bonds which was granted.

In the meantime news arrived that the British troops had marched out of Boston and were murdering the inhabitants, both young and old where upon the Committee required me to give orders to the militia to be ready at an hours notice to march against the Royalists; I gave them orders. This gained me much favor for a few days with the mob; however as the report of the massacre near Boston by the Kings troops diminished away, the mob renewed their attacks upon me.

They searched my house for letters or secret correspondence with General Carleton with whom in fact I never corresponded. They took all papers found in my house, insulted and required me to sign deeds for some land I had bought, confined me to the limits of the won and threatened me with death if I transgressed their orders. The mob again and again visited me and ate and drank and finally plundered me of most of my movable effects.

Added to this my Father, Colonial Peters of Hebron, wrote against me and urged on the mobs, assigning for reason that this Uncle Peters, the clergyman who had taught him bad principals was driven out of the country and that he soon would become the friend of America if [--?] was used.

By January 1776 vexation had hurt my health and the madness of the people daily growing worse, I thought of a mode to make my escape to Canada and I applied to the rebel colonel Beadle, who had been my old and steady friend and was going against Canada. He consented to take me along as a companion and obtained the consent of the Committee.

March 1776. I left Mooretown and Colonel Beadle used me kindly and honestly and never requested me to bear arms, which we had agreed to before we left home.

I arrived at the Cedars, when I prevailed upon Colonel Beadle not to burn the town, which he was ordered to do.

I sent off to Capt (new Lieut-Col) Forster of the 8<sup>th</sup> Regiment at Cataragui; all the proper information in my power and his answer was "He would attack the Cedars on a certain day and advised me to keep out of the way".

I applied to Col Beadle to be sent to Montreal to procure provisions for the rebels; whilst I was there Captain Forster took this rebel fort at the Cedars but I got Colonel Beadle away.

Having received notice of Capt Forster's success and that the rebel party were going to attack him, I sent him information which enable him to fashion an ambuscade whereby he took and killed nearly 150 rebels.

The Indians were enraged with the rebels because some their friends had been killed in the Skirmish and they killed several Captives. To stop this outrage Captain Forster gave them eight yolks of oxen and several cows.

At Montreal, I met Mr. Franklin and other commissions from Congress. Also General Wooster and Colonel Arnold, and we dined together when Arnold said "Nothing but independences would settle these matters and he wished to God it would be done.

Dr Franklin and Colonel (sic) Wooster wrote a letter to Colonel Hazzen (sic) to let him know that Colonel de Haas was going [--?] the mountain with 700 to attack Captain Forster and Colonel Arnold with the main body was to meet Forster at Lachine with four field pieces.

I obtained this information and sent it over the mountain by Mr. Fergusen (Clerk to Mr. Doby of Montreal) to Capt Forster by which means he escaped over the river.

Arnold on his return to Montreal found Dr. Franklin and Wooster had gone toward Albany and he gave private orders to plunder and burn the City of Montreal.

I discovered this by Mr. Wheatley of Norwich in Conn who with Arnold was to share the profits and Mr. Wheatley offered me part if I would join him. I thanked Mr. Wheatley for his friendship, but desired a few hours to consider it and went and informed the authorities of the design and they set watch over the City till Arnold left it.

I next went to Sorel where General Sullivan commanded. He took me a prisoner on suspicion that I had given Capt Forster and the Indians of Caughanawaga, information of their intentions and sent me to St Johns.

The rebels burnt Chambly and St Johns on their way to Isle de Motte where we rested six days and where I was at liberty because they had no proof against me, except what arose from a letter that Deacon Bailey wrote to General Sullivan: "Take care of Colonel Peters who was an enemy to American and would escape to General Carlton the first opportunity."

General Sullivan and the Army set off for Crown Point and I had returned to the woods on the Isle le Motte. I returned in the evening of June 25<sup>th</sup> to the deserted Camp where I found a canoe which Dr. Skinner (who had also escaped) and I seized it and paddled off to St. John nearly forty miles, where we met General Fraser on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June. The General received me kindly and conducted me to General Carleton at Chambly, who being satisfied with my conduct, gave me a pass to Montreal, where on my arrival the inhabitants treated me with much friendship and thanks for the assistance I had given in preserving their town and property. August 14. I met with Mr. Peter Levis, the present Chief Justice of Canada, whom I had known many years before.

Mr. Levis showed me every kind of attention that friendship and generosity could dictate and carried me to Chambly and introduced me to General Carleton as a person he knew might be depended upon.

October 1776. I went as a volunteer with General Carleton on Lake Champlain as one of the Pilots to General Fraser in the van of the Army.

After the defeat of the rebel fleet and army on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November the Royal army returned from Crown Point to St Johns.

March 1777 two deserters from the rebel Country arrived at Montreal and informed me that my property had been seized, confiscated, and myself [?dishonored] and that Mrs. Peters and the children and been sent off in a sleigh with one bed by Deacon Bailey to Ticonderoga, 140 miles through the woods, snow storms and bad roads. That Mrs. Peters, that small and delicate woman, had been compelled to travel with her young children in her arms in deep snow and rain and were almost dead when they arrived at Ticonderoga where the rebel General Gage [*My Note: On March 25 (1777) Congress resolved that Gates should repair immediately to Ticonderoga and take command of the army there. In President Hancock's letter, this same day, transmitting the resolve, Hancock underscored the words "take the command of the army."* (WP)] with the humanity and used them kindly till April when he sent them [?80] miles on their way to Canada and left them with three weeks provisions in a deserted house, nearly 50 miles from any inhabitants between them and Canada. Here she stayed eighteen days with her children only (The oldest being fourteen years) her servant having been detained by Deacon Bailey (for which Gen Gage said he ought to be damned).

At length a British [boat or scout?] discovered and carried them to a vessel and thence to St Johns where they all arrived on the 4<sup>th</sup> of May 1777 well, but naked and dirty.

May 6<sup>th</sup> 1777 I met with my wife and children at St. Johns (having been advised of their arrival there) with clothing and other necessities and carried them to Montreal.

In May 1777 I was ordered by Sir Guy Carleton to raise a regiment of which I was to be Lieut Col commanding.

June 14<sup>th</sup> I was ordered by General Burgoyne to join his army with what men I had raised and he gave my regiment the name of the Queen's royal Rangers.

June 23<sup>rd</sup> 1777 My corps for the first time was mustered at Skeensborough by Alex Campbell, Deputy Commissary of Musters. I had mustered 262 men only but I raised all 643 though, as my situation was

generally in the advance party, my men were killed off not quite so fast as I enlisted them but prevented them from being mustered as regularly as should have been.

I was in every skirmish which happened between the army under General Burgoyne and the rebels in that campaign except at Hubbardton.

August 1777 I commanded the Royalists at Bennington, when I had 291 men of my regiment with me and I lost about half of them in that engagement.

The actions commenced about 9 o'clock in the morning and continued until 4 o'clock in the afternoon when we retired in much confusion. A little before the Royalists gave away, the rebels pushed with a strong party on the front of the Loyalists which I commanded; as they were coming up I observed a man fire at me, which I returned. He loaded again as he came up and discharged again at me, crying out, "Peters, you damned Tory, I have got you".

He rushed on me with his bayonet which entered just below my left breast but turned by the bones. By this time I was loaded and I saw that it was a rebel Captain Jeramiah Post by name, an old playmate and school mate and cousin of my wife. Though the bayonet was through my body, I felt regret at being obliged to destroy him.

We retreated from Bennington to the reinforcement that was coming up which was soon attacked and obliged to retreat to the Bridge at the Mills in Cambridge, which I broke up after the troops had retreated over it and the same evening we retreated toward the camp, which we reached the next day.

General Fraser received me very kindly and as I was wounded in the breast and also lame with a hurt I had received in a skirmish the day before, the action by a ball greasing (sic) my foot and was much fatigued and for some time had been harassed with fever and ague, he generously gave up his bed for the night and laid himself by his cloak on a bench. I received his and General Burgones' (sic) approbation for my conduct in this action.

The report of the defeat of the Royal Troops at Bennington reaching Montreal General McLean of the 84<sup>th</sup> regiment went to Mrs. Peters and told her that news had come from General Burgones' camp and she must expect to hear of many killed and wounded but if Col Peters and her son were among them she must hold up with good courage and not despond, as he would see to care being taken of her and her family that they should never want.

After some conversation in tlike manner, Genl McLean thought proper to let her know that Col Peters and his son were both wounded and since dead; Mrs Peters said "My calamities are very great but thank God they died doing their duty to their King and Country. I have six sons left who, as soon as they shall be able to bear arms, I will send against the rebels which I and my daughter will mourn for the dead and pray for the living."

September 7<sup>th</sup> the rebels made an attack on the royal army marching from Saratoga toward Albany. They were repulsed with great loss of killed and the Royal Army also suffered much.

The royal Army kept their ground at Stillwater till Sept 19<sup>th</sup> when the rebels attacked our ranks in Morning and the attack continued till dark. The Royal army having suffered much and General Fraser being mortally wounded we retreated to Saratoga. Sept 27<sup>th</sup> we burnt some of our tents and the 25<sup>th</sup> did the same. Here we remained until the 8<sup>th</sup> of October hoping every day the royal army would attempt to force their way to Fort George.

Cessation of hostilities took place, treaties went on between the royal and rebel Commanders.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of October in the A.M. when it was expected the capitulation was nearly concluded, as I was in great anxiety and distress of mind knowing how impossible it was, that any capitulation would provide for my security, I met General Phillips, who asked me why I remained there, as I had been told before no articles would protect me. I answered that whatever might be the event, I would not go without orders in writing for that no one would be able to say that I had left them in the hour of distress. He said that he would get me the orders. In the afternoon he met me again and seemed surprised at my being still there. I reminded him of what he had said, on which he carried me to the General's tent and he brought me out a written permission to take as many of my officers and men as I thought could not be protected and were willing to go. I accordingly got together as many as I could meet with in that condition who chose to make the attempt.

While I was preparing for our departure a person who had left the rebel colonies for having counterfeited their paper money came to me and begged to be of party. I did not much like his company but I saw the poor creature in such a trembling situation for the certainty of being hanged if taken.

As soon as it was dark enough we set out, being thirty-five in number and each carrying two days provisions. I ordered Lieutenant Holiburt to my regiment to lead as he knew the woods in the dark better than I did; I followed next and ordered all the rest to follow in single file and in perfect silence, my son and Major Wright in the rear. We steered at first South westward.

We had not gone very far when the money maker began to be very troublesome with his fears; I ordered him to be placed between Major Wright and my son and ordered the Major if he made any noise to put his bayonet in to him and leave him dead. Notwithstanding this he was very troublesome.

When we had traveled two or three miles from royal Camp we were challenged by a party of rebels. I replied from General Gates and we're in pursuit of some Tories who have fled from Burgones' camp.

The rebels demanded the counter sign and who commanded. The answer was "Colonel Peters with 1800 men and they might fire as soon as they pleased was the countersign".

The darkness and the surprise caused the rebels to take prudent care of themselves for that night, but next day they pursued us with about one hundred men, whom we saw at a distance from a hill but whether they saw us or not I cannot say.

When we thought we could safely do so, we turned North westerly and then Northerly. On the 16<sup>th</sup> at the beginning of the night we found ourselves on the Western bank of the Hudson River. The moon was just rising and close under us on the same bank; at the mouth of the brook, was a man in a canoe going to fish. I called to him and by fear of our firearms obliged him to come to us but as only three could go at once in the canoe and one was always obliged to come back to fetch two more, and we were obliged to paddle as gently as possible for fear of being heard; in case of nay scouts of the rebels were at hand: it was midnight before we all got over.

Tedious as this was it was much better than the noise we should have made, and the time we should have consumed in felling and making a raft of trees to pass over upon.

Whilst this was transacting such of us as went over detained the man which we assured him was only to prevent discovery. He seemed surprised at this having taken us for rebels and to our surprise informed us that (he) and his father were sincere loyalist and, on his mentioned his name, one of the party recognized him.

After we had all got over he carried us to his father who received us very kindly and offered us all he had—some bear's flesh and some dried moose and Indian corn and informed us there were tow parties lying on the way we expected to pass and that perhaps in the morning they might visit his house, as they frequently did; there fore it would be necessary for us to be away very shortly; but he would accompany and lead us directly over the mountains so as to void these two parties and go between them.

He accordingly called us early in the morning and although the mountains seemed impracticable, yet he led us over safely and clear of the two parties and then book leave of us.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> in the woods we heard firing of canon at Saratoga, which we knew to be in consequence of the surrender of the British Army to the rebs (sic). It went to my heart to hear it but I knew it to be the case.

We kept northerly so as to avoid any path.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> we thought we were sufficiently north and stood East in order to strike Lake George but to our surprise we suddenly came in sight of houses which obliged us to steer West again and then Northerly and we steered on so until we were pretty sure we were out of danger.

Then we stood East and on the 19<sup>th</sup> of Oct. near sunset when we were almost famished we struck Lake George where Major Irwin of the 47<sup>th</sup> Command.

He received us very uncivilly till I produced my written order. He then treated me with great kindness and humanity, giving us food and ordered boats to carry us to Diamond Island about five miles where Major Aubry of the 47<sup>th</sup> Commanded and had one good service.

He treated us with all possible goodness and s I was ill with fever and ague with which I had been troubled for some time before I quitted the camp and much fatigued, he was so good as to make me sleep in his bed while he went somewhere else for the night.

Next day he gave us boats which carried us across the lake; from whence we marched to Ticonderoga where we remained under Command of General Powell till the fort was evacuated when we returned to

Montreal and soon after to Quebec where General Carleton received my approbation but could not pay me until he had official accounts from Gen Burgoyne. Hitherto I had received no pay from the King for my Services.

General Carleton had put me on the sustenced (sic) list.

In 1776 General Haldimand took command in Canada to whom I was introduced by General Carleton. His Excellency ordered me to command a party of 200 white men and (?400) Indians and to march to Cohoes; on the Conn river and destroy the settlement there.

Having arrived at Lake Champlain on my way to the Cohoes, General Haldimand's letter overtook me, which gave to all my party to return that chose to do so, but permitted me to pay a visit to the Onion River. He also directed me to leave my orders.

We all went on by waster one day and landed at the river La Mile (sic) and marched up that river when some got discouraged and returned with all the Indians and white men except thirty-four, with whom I proceeded to the head of the Onion River and following it down we destroyed the block house, and all the buildings on it for about 30 miles as I was ordered after which I returned with my 34 men to St Johns on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August 1776 (sic) [*note: actual year was 1778*].

In 1779 I again requested General Haldimand to pay me for my services under General Burgone (sic) in 1777.

His Excellency said the mater had been transacted before he took command and he could do nothing until he should have official returns but he continued me in the subsistence list where General Carleton had placed me.

I wrote to the Rev Samuel peters in London who applied to Lord George Germaine in my behalf and his Lordship wrote to General Haldimand to settle my accounts and others in like situations.

General Haldimand seemed to be offended and accused me of complaining home against him which in truth I had not done, or thought of nor hitherto had any reason.

He appointed a board of officers to examine my claims but ordered the Commissioner not to allow any pay for men that were killed or taken in the year 1777 for [?] and forage or for any money advanced by me, or my officers to the man, in the Campaign of 1777, [?] had not returned to Canada. I produced Gen Burgones' orders that all Provincial troops should be paid the same as the British troops.

By this injustice I lost what was due me on British pay from the last of August to the 24<sup>th</sup> of December 1783 when were disabled.

Nov 12<sup>th</sup> 1781 General Haldimand drafted the Provincial Corps; and out of them formed a Corps which he named "Loyal Rangers" and appointed Edward Jessup to be Majer (sic) of it and at the same time gave out in general orders, that he had appointed Lieut Col John Peters of the Queens Loyal Rangers as Captain of Invalids.

This cruel degrading change was worked while I was at Skeensborough where I had been sent by General Haldimand with a flag and rebel prisoners, with a view to gain intelligence from the southern army which I performed and reported to him.

On my return to Quebec I complained of the hard measure to the General, which he had dealt out to me by degrading me below those who had been under my command in 1777.

Mr. Matthews, Secy to General Haldimand gave me for answer that I had a wife and eight children and I might starve if I refused Captains' pay, besides I should not be allowed rations if I refused. My substence (sic) money being stopped I was obliged to accept the pay of Capt until Dec 24<sup>th</sup> 1783 or perish with my family.

1784. General Haldimand owning land at the Baie of Cataraqui in Canada where they built some houses and cleared some land, but Gen Haldimand sent Lieut Buckley of the 29<sup>th</sup> to burn their houses and bring off the Settlers. The Loyalists then petitioned the Governor for leave to settle in Cape Breton and not at the Bay of Chaleur.

The Governor having heard that I had drawn up the petition sent for me and told me that I was the supposed author of it and in a passion treated me with great indignity. I told him no man but the Commander in Chief should treat me so and he added "I will allow the Loyalists nothing; they shall settle in those lands which I have allotted to them, or I will send them back to the rebels."

His threatening terrified some, and they settled on such lands as he chose, but I and my family left Canada in Oct 17<sup>th</sup> 1784 with many others to get rid of such a petty tyrant and we arrived in Cape Breton. Here I left my wife and family in a fisherman's house under the protection of Peter, the Indian King of Cape Breton (who had more honor than two Swiss Governors) and I went to Halifax.

August 1785. Sir Charles Douglas who knew me in Canada, generously brought me with him to England.

I first borrowed a hundred pounds for my family and drew on a friend in London for it.

On my arrival in London I applied to the Lords of the Treasury for sustenance and they gave me temporary support of a hundred pounds per annum, notwithstanding General Haldimand's refusal of a certificate of my loyalty and services through they had been so conspicuous for the ten years past.

One thing I omitted respecting my sons who had served His Majesty against the American Rebellion. My son, John, the oldest Ensign in the Queens Loyal Rangers was neglected by General Haldimand when he drafted the Provincial Corps in Canada and a son of Major Jessup's, quite a boy who had never seen any service, was appointed Lieutenant over my son and all the other ensigns that had served during the whole of the war.

Andrew, my second son, was midshipman during the war on the Lakes under commodore Chambers and had no subsistence.

Samuel, my third son, has been a volunteer since 1778 and all the reward given me and my sons by General Haldimand is: he returned me to the War office in these remarkable words: As Captain of the Invalids and my son John, as Ensign in the Loyal Rangers under Commander Major Jessup, which as Lieut Colonel I had commanded in 1777 and afterwards until he was put over in this astonishing manner.

I cannot say I look back with regret at the part I took from motives of loyalty and from a foresight of the honor and miseries of independence though I never imagined they were as great as they are now. Yet I thought the part I took right and I certainly think so still from love of my country as well as duty to my Sovereign; and not with standing my sufferings and services and the scandalous treatment of General Haldimand, I would do it again if there was occasion.

It is true I see persons who were notorious on the rebel sides, who are now here and taken notice of and advanced, while I am neglected and deprived of what is justly due me, but with the consciousness of having done right, I can look with disdain at the triumph of successful villainy.

Should you desire any further information I shall willingly attend to your command either *viva voca nil scriptia* (sic).

I have the honor to be, Sir, your faithful friend and obliged servant.

J Peters

[Dukes Row?], No. 3

Plimico (sic) [Pimlico], June 5<sup>th</sup> 1786

transcribed by Mr Philip Murphy  
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