

## **Loyalist Masons**

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1. *Introduction:* Patriotism is a splendid virtue, justly admired by Freemasons. To love your country and to be proud of its origins is a fine thing. For the last ten years the people of the United States of America have been privileged to indulge in an orgy of self-congratulation with hundreds of publications commemorating the American Revolution. Freemasons, as is right, have shared in this emotional outpouring. The Masonic Book Club has published Bro. Heaton's *Masonic Membership of the Founding Fathers*. The Short Talk Bulletins of the Masonic Service Association have included such titles as "1776 - You are There" and "Freemasons at Yorktown." The Philalethes has run more than one series on the people and the events of two hundred years ago. It has doubtless been a wonderful experience for those five million Masons who happen to be American citizens. For the rest of us, all this literature has been not quite so fascinating. It is proper to remind ourselves that there may be more than one way of looking at things. The "enemy" during the Revolution did not consist entirely of red-coated British regulars or mitred Hessian mercenaries. There were Americans, native-born Americans, on the losing side, and some of them fought for their cause in such units as the King's American Dragoons and the King's Royal Regiment of New York. They were not all scoundrels or villains, but they did have a different perspective. An example or two will show that even today their attitudes are not extinct. In 1775 the Continental Congress sent an army of liberation into Quebec in order to make it into "the fourteenth colony." At least, that is the American view. A recent Canadian newspaper sees it otherwise: "One of the first acts of the fledgling United States in 1775 was to invade another country.... Hardly a pacific beginning." According to a new book the ringing proclamation that "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights...." applied only to "white, male, adult, Protestant heads of property owning families." In a review of this same book the man whom you call "the Father of his country" is cited as a "Virginia slave-owning traitor." These quotations are not intended to be offensive, but should serve to remind you that some of our patriotic posturings are based not on the simple facts, but on a subjective interpretation of historical events. War at the best of times is hideous, even when waged in a distant land against people who speak another language or look different. How much worse when it pits neighbour against neighbour, brother against brother, friend against friend! The American Revolution, do not forget, was a civil war. Those who wanted to remain loyal to the authority of the crown "were regarded as traitors and were treated as such. In many of the colonies their property was confiscated, they were fined and heavily taxed, large numbers of them were imprisoned, others were banished, and several were put to death. A favourite method of dealing with them consisted in 'tarring and feathering...'" It seems like a harsh way for people who pay lip service to the rights of the individual to deal with those who happen to hold political views that differ from theirs. Perhaps the confusion between terrorists and freedom-fighters is not as new as we have thought. After the war some 50,000 of the "Loyalists" came north to Canada, where they could remain under the British flag. In due course they founded the provinces of New Brunswick and Ontario, and this year marks the bicentenary of their arrival. Their number, like the ranks of the rebels, included some Freemasons. A civil war poses ethical problems for all concerned. For Masons, one in particular is raised by the second of "The Charges of a Free-Mason," which has appeared in every book of Masonic Constitutions printed since 1723. "A Mason is a peaceable Subject to the Civil Powers, wherever he resides or works, and is never to be concern'd in Plots or Conspiracies against the Peace and Welfare of the Nation, nor to behave himself undutifully. . If a Brother should be a Rebel against the State, he is not to be countenanced in his Rebellion, however he may be pitied as an unhappy man...." One wonders what Bro. George Washington was thinking as he violated this charge, or Bro. Benjamin Franklin, or Bro. Joseph Warren, or (before he saw the error of his ways) Bro. Benedict Arnold. The Loyalist brethren, whatever other worries they may have had, at least had clear consciences in this regard. Perhaps it is fitting for us to look at a few of them from time to time.

2. *Rev. John Beardsley (1732-1809)*: At the outbreak of the Revolution, the Anglican (Episcopal) minister in Poughkeepsie, New York, was Rev. John Beardsley. He had been born in Ripton, Connecticut in 1732, to an English family that had been in the New World since 1635. He was educated at Yale College and King's College (now Columbia University), and was ordained in England. He came to Poughkeepsie in 1766, and his efforts were responsible for the building of Trinity Church in Fishkill, close nearby (1768-69) and Christ Church in Poughkeepsie (1774). The minutes of Solomon's Lodge, No. 1. Poughkeepsie, record that he preached the St. John's Day Sermon for them in 1771, 1772, and 1774, and on one occasion the brethren formally passed a vote of thanks and presented him with a large folio Bible. Rev. Mr. Beardsley was opposed to the Revolution, and received "repeated insults" from those who supported it. His church services were suspended from 13 July 1776. When he persisted in his refusal to take the Oath of Allegiance to the State, he was confined to his farm, being permitted only "to go and Visit the sick and Baptize Infants where requested." In his troubles, Beardsley was associated with one of his parishioners, "Judge" Henry Vanderburgh, another influential citizen of Poughkeepsie. (The writer may here claim your indulgence for a moment of irrelevancy, since he counts Henry Vanderburgh as an ancestor. Henry was a Justice of the Inferior Court and a Warden of Christ Church. He came of an old Dutch family that was split by the Revolution. His brother James Vanderburgh was an ardent rebel, Colonel of the 5th Dutchess County Militia, a Deputy at the 3rd Continental Congress, and a personal acquaintance of General Washington. Colonel James was a Freemason, and his gravestone bears a Masonic emblem, but enough of that.) Early in December 1777 the Commission for Detecting and Defeating Conspiracies in New York reported that the more radical revolutionaries might actually inflict physical harm on Mr. Beardsley and Mr. Vanderburgh and they therefore requested permission to send them through the lines to New York, which was in British hands. "Beardsley himself thinks he is in danger here: desires that if he is to be sent to New-York, that it may be soon, and that he may be permitted to carry with him his household furniture." Five days later the Commission enquired "whether Mr. Beardsley and VanDeBergh are at liberty to sell effects to pay just debts due to the inhabitants...." but the Council of Safety replied, "it is evident they can have no such indulgence .... All the property they are to leave behind, must be subject to disposition by the authority of the State." Finally on 13 December the Governor of New York granted permission for the Reverend John Beardsley and his family, and Mr. Henry Vanderburgh and his family, "with their Wearing Apparel & necessary Bedding for the Family & Provision for their Passage," to go down the Hudson to the city in a sloop-of-war under a flag of truce. In June 1778 in New York Beardsley became Chaplain of the newly organized Loyal American Regiment, which was to serve throughout the War. Soon afterwards (the exact date is not known, but it was in 1779 or 1780) Beardsley was initiated in the Antients' Lodge No 210, New York (later Temple, No. 4); the membership was drawn largely from British officials and Tory sympathisers stationed in the city. Beardsley's Colonel, Beverley Robinson, belonged to the lodge, as did other officers of the Regiment. At a convention held on 23 January 1781 to form the new Provincial Grand Lodge. Bro. Beardsley was unanimously chosen Junior Grand Warden, an office which he filled until he left the city in the general evacuation of 1783. Before the departure, he and seventeen other clergymen met together and signed a "Plan of Religious and Literary Institution for the Province of Nova Scotia." This eventually led to the foundation of the University of King's College, Halifax. Together with many other Loyalists Beardsley departed from the Thirteen Colonies, and settled in the unoccupied part of Nova Scotia, in Paratown, at the mouth of the Saint John River. He is said to have been "the first clergyman of any denomination to minister to the spiritual needs of the exiles." On 9 March 1784 the Masons invited him to become the first Master of the earliest lodge formed under local authority in this part of the province, Hiram Lodge, later warranted as No. 17 on the Provincial Register of Nova Scotia. On 16 August 1784, because of the large influx of settlers, the colony of New Brunswick was detached from Nova Scotia and given a separate administration: its lodges continued under the Provincial Grand Lodge of Nova Scotia for another two generations. Later in 1784 Beardsley moved up-river to Mougerville, where he remained as rector until 1803. There he built Christ Church, the first church to be consecrated in the province. He soon joined St. George's Lodge, which had come north as a military lodge in the 3rd Battalion of DeLancey's New Jersey Volunteers, carrying New York Antients' Warrant No. 2. In 1789, when it took out a Nova Scotia Warrant, Beardsley served as the Constituting and Installing Master. He continued active in Masonic affairs until as late as 1803, when he preached a St. John's Day Sermon on the text Hebrews 13.1, "Let brotherly love continue." He died in 1809.

Beardsley is regarded as the Founder of Freemasonry in the Province of New Brunswick. In 1916 the Grand Lodge of New Brunswick unveiled a brass memorial tablet to his memory in Trinity Church, Kingston, N.B., where he is buried. In 1968 the same body instituted the Rev. John Beardsley Medallion, awarded every year for outstanding contributions to the Grand Lodge and to the advancement of Freemasonry.

Acknowledgements Public Papers of George Clinton, 2 (New York 1900) 574-575. Collections of the New York Historical Society 57 (1924) 315, 58 (1925) 445-449. R.V. Harris, "Rev. John Beardsley (1732-1809), Founder of Freemasonry in New Brunswick," PCMRA 32-33 (1956). C.A. Pincombe, Dictionary of Canadian Biography 5 (1983) 58-60. M.S. Speight, Grand Secretary, Grand Lodge of New Brunswick.. Loyalist Masons by W. McLeod, MPS, One of a continuing series of articles on this subject

3. *Colonel John Butler*: John Butler was baptized in New London, Connecticut, on 25 April 1728, the son of Lieutenant Walter Butler, who had come out from Ireland as a soldier in 1711. About 1733 Walter Butler moved to the Mohawk Valley, and his family followed him a few years later. They settled in Butlersbury, not too far from Johnstown. John learned enough of the Indian languages to become an interpreter, and served in the French and Indian War as a Lieutenant in the Indian Department. In fact he was present at the capture of Fort Niagara (1759). He was named a Justice of the Peace in 1762, and was commissioned as a Lieutenant Colonel of militia in 1768. He continued to work with the Indians, and they clearly trusted him. At the very beginning of the Revolution, in 1775, Butler declared for the King, and left his home. He was posted to Niagara and arrived there on 17 November 1775. His wife and younger children were imprisoned as hostages in Albany until an exchange could be arranged. Butler persuaded the Indians first of all to remain neutral in the face of rebel blandishments, and then, when policy changed, to fight actively for the British. In 1777 he raised a regiment of Loyalists called Butler's Rangers, who became well known for their ability as woodsmen and skirmishers. They followed to the letter the Plan of Discipline laid down by Robert Rogers during the French and Indians War: traveling light, walking in single file with scouts on all sides, never camping before dark, and so on. This made them awesomely effective in the woods. Just one example: in 1782, in the Ohio country, at the ford over the Licking River Butler's Rangers ambushed and killed or captured three-quarters of a force of Kentuckians sent after them under Colonel Daniel Boone, himself a notable frontiersman. Butler maintained his headquarters near Fort Niagara, and from there he sent out, and sometimes led out, expeditions to harry the frontier settlements. There were two good military reasons for this: to deprive the rebel armies of food supplies, and to draw rebel forces away from the coast. In both he was successful. He continued in Niagara after the war, and was given the responsibility of finding suitable settlers from among the Loyalist refugees. He founded a village there which he named Butlersbury, after his old home. It later became Niagara, and is now called Niagara-on-the-Lake; parts of it have been maintained as of old or restored to their former condition. In some ways it evokes, on a smaller scale, the spirit of Williamsburg. John Butler was the first patron of St Mark's Parish Church in Niagara. He was a Judge in the District Court, Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs, and a colonel of militia. In 1785 he submitted to the government a full account of his services during the revolution. His commanding officer gave him a testimonial asserting that "the decided part which the Six (and consequently the other) Indian Nations took in favour of the King's Government was in a great measure effected by the laborious and unremitting Exertions of His Influence with that People." He died 13 May 1796. He became a member of Union Lodge, No 1, P.R.N.Y., Albany, apparently on 10 April 1766. Then in the Charter of St Patrick's Lodge, No 8, P.R.N.Y., Johnstown, 23 May 1766, he is named as the Charter Secretary. After the Revolution, when there came a time of relative ease, he petitioned for a Lodge to be formed at Niagara - the second in the settlement - and a Provincial Warrant was duly issued from Quebec on 10 October 1787 to St John's Lodge, No 19, P.R.Q., Niagara; the Charter Master was John Butler. The first lodge room erected in Ontario for Masonic purposes was Freemasons' Hall at Niagara, built by the Land Board in 1791. Butler, the most distinguished citizen and most experienced Mason there, must have supervised the building. Until the church was completed, the hall was used for divine services; it was also the meeting place for the first elected representative legislature of the colony in 1792. After several years Butler's Lodge No 19 amalgamated with the neighbouring lodge; the new body held its first meeting on 24 May 1795, with John Butler in the Chair. When the first Provincial Grand Lodge became active, in August of that year, Butler was installed as Provincial Senior Grand Warden. On 20 November 1795 a new provincial warrant was issued to Butler's lodge, as No. 2; it later took the name of St John's Lodge of Friendship, and is still working today, as

Niagara Lodge, No 2. G.R.C. Only four loyalist officers of field rank settled in Ontario; Butler was one. He is one of the earliest Freemasons to have settled here (1775). He was a loyal officer of the king for over 30 years, a trusted friend of the Indian people, a skilful warrior and administrator, who obviously found scope for his talents in Freemasonry. He deserves to be remembered as one of the founders of the Craft in Canada.