

BENJAMIN INGRAHAM

by Earle and Faith Thomas

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Barbara Bradfield introduced the guest speakers, Dr. Earle Thomas and Mrs. Faith Thomas who gave a joint presentation based on the diary of Mrs. Thomas's great-great-grandfather Benjamin Ingraham [read by Earle] and his daughter Hannah's reminiscences [read by Faith]. The diary in Mrs. Thomas's possession was on display at the meeting.

Benjamin served seven years in the King's American Regiment during the American Revolution and did not see his family all that time. He fought in battles from Newport, Rhode Island to Savannah, Georgia. Hannah's Reminiscences based on her childhood were written down by the wife of a minister in Fredericton where the family settled after fleeing from their home in New Concord near Albany, New York.

Earle: "When the American Revolution erupted in the Thirteen Colonies, Benjamin Ingraham was a young farmer in New Concord, New York about 20 miles southeast of Albany, near the Massachusetts State Line. During the months before the Declaration of Independence in 1776 the people of New Concord split, some of them very reluctantly, into two hostile political camps. It was impossible to remain neutral - 'either you are with us or against us'. Benjamin, his father and his three brothers came out on the side of the King but were so outnumbered that the men of that side had to skulk in the woods to avoid imprisonment. Benjamin and his brother joined the King's American Regiment in New York and his wife and two children, Hannah aged 4 and John aged 3, were left to fend for themselves among once friendly neighbours now turned hostile. They were not to see him again for seven years.

Benjamin's father was arrested and kept in chains on a filthy prison-ship on the Hudson. Benjamin's mother rode 50 miles in one day to take him some money for a few comforts. He was later released provided he serve in the militia. Many who did so did not go on active service.

While in the army, Benjamin kept a diary "in the ... convoluted handwriting and casual spelling of the day." Unfortunately only part of it survived. It was found in his son Ira's house at Queensbury, 25 miles up-river from Fredericton, the house in which Faith grew up.

Faith: This was the house Hannah lived in most of her long life. After her parents died, she moved in with Ira and his wife to help them with their large family. Many interesting stories were handed down about Hannah. When she was old, she told her reminiscences to Mrs. Tippet, wife of the local minister, who was careful to preserve Hannah's own words.

This manuscript was lost until Faith, doing research in Albany, came across the *National Genealogical Quarterly*, Vol. 5., p. 38 which states that these reminiscences were given by Mrs. Tippet's daughter at the Toronto Branch U.E.L. Association on February 9, 1911 and were published in the *Transactions of the*

Association Vol. 6, 1904-13, pages 29 and 115-121. Faith gave parts of this very article in her share of the presentation.

Hannah's Reminiscences begin: "My father lived in New Concord, N.Y. on a very comfortable farm. We had plenty of cattle and sheep but when the war began and he joined the regulars, the rebels came and took it all away. They took everything and forced my mother to pay rent for her own farm."

Earle: Benjamin meanwhile in New York tells of efforts to maintain a minimum of comfort that winter - going into billets, ripping up the docks for fuel, rationing, subsisting on "poor oatmeal" bread until a sloopload of corn (wheat) arrived; supply ships from Britain were late, but finally they were favoured with good eight-pound loaves and cod and 'ayl'.

Faith: Hannah continues: "Grandfather in prison suffered a paralytic stroke and never fully recovered. Father was taken prisoner, but escaped and wandered in the woods for two months before finding his battalion again. Mother didn't even hear from him for four years. Anyone 'would be hanged right up' if they were caught bringing letters. At last a neighbour received a letter from her husband with one from father inside it."

Benjamin meanwhile had made every effort to contact his family. He had his fill of the horrors of war. On one occasion he wrote: "Numbers of prisoners are brought in every day by our privateers. The prisoners die very fast." Another entry February 24, 1783 describes a dream he had about the coming peace: "I dreamed and beheld three men walking clothed in scarlet and gold, with proclamations of peace and restoration of laws of the nation to the inhabitants ... a large white fowl walking before them ... the most beautiful bird in the world ... the white bird and a black eagle fought ... the white one was killed and lamented by many. I awoke and it was a dream."

Faith: Hannah describes Father's return: "Father came home on September 13 (1783) and said we were going to N.S." She pictures for us their preparations - threshing and sacking wheat (20 bushels), candle-making, packing the butter tub, etc. Father is arrested again, but is finally cleared. Then they are off to New York by sloop.

Earle: Some cities of the time: "Hannah was excited at the thought of seeing New York but her father had seen enough of it and others: Newport, Charleston, Georgetown, Savannah. Newport, RI, was the scene of a very disturbing event. The Regiment completed its term of enlistment on December 12, 1778 and demanded the Colonel send their petition for discharge to the Commander-in-chief. Instead when the Colonel received the petition for discharge, he threatened the troops with the provost. The consequences were no more recruiting there, about a hundred deserters, and a colonel who never marched with his regiment again!"

Another infamous "blot on the 'scutcheon'" appeared before the evacuation of Charleston when the general, field officers, and garrison naval officers - 47 altogether - sat down to a 6-guineas-a-plate dinner at the London Coffee House. Benjamin writes a graphic description of Charleston itself: "It has five churches with steeples, a fine County House, one large market, sundry small

ones, a provost, a jail, an Exchange abounding in merchandise, trades and crafts." He also gives his impressions of the place: the buildings are old, the streets mostly unpaved, the town area about two miles square. There were two rows of brick barracks built by the rebels. He also notes that the harbour was dangerous in hurricanes and from the sandbars which allowed nothing bigger than a frigate to come ashore. The crops are tropical fruits, vegetables and com. The work is done by blacks who outnumber the whites 10 to 1. He says the white men are "small, payl, and ill-favoured". The ladies, on the other hand are of 'an exceedingly polite and warm disposition', but they dress extravagantly, mainly in silks and velvets.

Earle mentioned a tour conductor there who told the bus passengers that the palmettos seen everywhere had screened the rebels from the British musketry in the Battle of Charleston. The inference was that British musketeers couldn't hit the broad side of a barn! It got a great laugh from the Americans - and from the Thomases (who were probably thinking of the outcome of the 1780 battle instead!)

Faith: Storms: In late September, the Ingrahams got their passage from New York to St. John. This left little time to prepare for winter. Still worse they experienced a very severe storm on entering the Bay of Fundy. Hannah says: Some Frenchmen came out in a canoe (pilots, I suppose).

This was the end of Benjamin's many experiences of severe storms on his coastal voyages. One of the worst was between Charleston and New York in December 1782. One of his comrades tells us: at 11 o'clock (at night) was the most shocking storm of winds, rain and hail that I ever endured at sea. It continued to rage with such violence that I thought it impossible to continue above water! Benjamin's own words are more nonchalant. He just mentioned that it drove the fleet off shore for two days. Perhaps the worst tropical storm was at Tybee Island just off Savannah in July 1782 when a fellow soldier wrote: "The lightning struck near the camp with such force as to melt (a patch of) sand." Benjamin merely says: "On July 11, we left the town and encamped on Tybee Island except for a corporal and three men who stayed to deliver up the town. Earle says: He seemed more concerned over the logistics of evacuation than the vagaries of the weather.

Faith: Hannah's Moving into the House in N.B. They had a very hard time after reaching St. John. They were in tents with winter coming on; the melting snow and the rain soaked their bedding. Mother got so serious a case of rheumatism that she was never very well after. It took nine days to go from St. John to St. Ann (Fredericton) by schooner.

Earle: Benjamin's Travels with the Troops (continued). By the summer of 1781 Benjamin, now a sergeant, was with his Regiment in South Carolina. They marched from Georgetown on the coast to Camden in the interior, ever on the look-out for "the Swamp Fox" (Francis Marion). He describes Camden with the eye of an experienced soldier. It is a small town 160 miles from Charleston, defended by a stockade and six redoubts. It lies on a small river (the Wateree) and a swamp which is 'unpassable' by horse or foot ... in the south is a plain and open fields, defended by a creek on which is a com mill, which grinds meal for the troops. A field-piece in the loft helped to beat back several enemy attempts to storm it. He says they had a couple of

(comparatively!) pleasant months there before it became obvious they would have to evacuate. They did so having first destroyed the barracks, the mill and the main buildings.

Earle mentioned that on a research trip to the area, they met a curator engaged in restoring the original buildings who was having great difficulty in pinpointing their location. He offered help from Benjamin Ingraham's diary and on returning home sent copies of the relevant passages. In the eighteen years since there has been no acknowledgement. Some southern curators are very much laid back!

Considerably greater was Benjamin's ordeal in his return from Camden down the Santee and Congaree rivers with continuous ambushes, battles, and skirmishes from which he suffered several wounds, some of them serious. As a result he was forced to stay at Charleston until able to follow the Regiment to Savannah. All he says in his diary is: "The 7th day of August I arrived at Savannah after recovering from my wounds so as to be able to walk." He does not mention the musket ball in the hip which he carried the rest of his days.

Faith: Hannah, now eleven, says: "We lived in a tent in St. Ann till father got the log house raised. He went up through the lot till he found a nice fresh spring of water; so there he built his house. We had rations and tools from the government. One morning when we awoke, there was snow on the ground and all around us, and father came wading through it and told us the house was ready and to follow him back to it. It was snowing fast and oh so cold! There was no floor, no window, no chimney, no door, but we had a roof at last and a blazing fire on the hearth. Mother had a big loaf which we toasted. This was the sweetest meal we had had for many a day. Thank God we were no longer in danger of shots fired through our house."

Earle: Benjamin's family increased by two, he acquired more land and lived out his days in Fredericton. His sons married and set up farms at Queensbury, 25 miles up-river. In his new life he stayed out of politics and the military for he had had his fill of both and hated waste and abuse of power.

Faith: There are more stories in Hannah's narrative of her early life in Fredericton. "My great-great-great aunt Hannah died at the age of 97 on February 23, 1868. Memories of her live on." In a cemetery overlooking the St. John river her headstone says: "She came to this country in 1783."

Earle: Benjamin Ingraham died in Fredericton in 1810 at the age of 62. His last will and testament made in the uncertainty of human life says: "I commend my soul to the great God whom I serve ... in the firm hope that it may be permitted to enter Heaven."

The Thomas's presentation drew many questions and interested comments from the audience. As Barbara Bradfield said in thanking them, they were fascinated by the Ingrahams' heroic efforts in the face of terrible adversities and how vividly the presentation brought them to life for us.