

DANIEL FRASER
by Hugh Henderson

This report of a talk given by Hugh Henderson on his ancestor first appeared in
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Daniel Fraser was born in Pennsylvania in 1735. His first wife was Sarah Conklin. Their first son Daniel Jr. was born in New York Province. Daniel Jr. was also married twice. It was his son Richard from whom Hugh's family was descended. Richard's daughter Emily married Zachariah Henderson as already mentioned. Their son Orton Bruce was Hugh's grandfather and his son Bruce was Hugh's father. Who came to Ernestown? The family, except for Daniel's son John, whom the rebels held in Albany jail, and Abraham and Andrew who were working on farms and were held in their jobs. Abraham did not arrive for 15 years and Andrew for nearly 50 years after.

When the Revolution began, Daniel Sr. was a farmer and wheelwright, a well-established solid citizen on a farm at Half Moon hamlet at the Mohawk-Hudson river junction. He is first mentioned as being on active service in 1777, but was certainly not new to the military. He had fought to defend his province in the French and Indian War, 1756-1763 and saw so well in 1777 the new threat to a settled way of life. He accordingly joined McAlpin's Corps and was commissioned an ensign to serve on the bateaux which supplied Burgoyne's army. Burgoyne was advancing up the Richelieu to Lake Champlain and the Hudson with Albany as his objective and New York as his long range goal.

Daniel was assigned as wheelwright to the artillery supporting the German mercenaries commanded by Col. Baum. That unwritten law "An army marches on its stomach" explains Burgoyne's defeat at Saratoga. His supply lines – 300 miles long – were stretched past the limit. He planned to take Albany, before his supplies ran out altogether. It was necessary to take Bennington first which was just over the border in Vermont. These troops were not used to fighting in the woods and so "were badly mauled." Daniel's brass cannons were captured. Hugh says two of them are now in front of the Vermont State capitol in Montpelier and he plans to see them one of these days. He hopes that meanwhile they are keeping them well polished!

With hindsight we can say that Burgoyne ought to have withdrawn to Ticonderoga instead of advancing on Albany. He was driven back by the rebels, who using the woods for cover, completely surrounded him and forced him to surrender with great loss at Saratoga. This sounds like what happened to Braddock at Pittsburgh in 1756. It was said that the British were slow to learn to fight in the woods, but there was one notable exception: the 60th, which was experienced in forest tactics.

Meanwhile the Revolutionary Committee had its eye on Daniel and his son John, who had recently joined the McAlpins, for suspected skulking activity. The semantics of the word "skulk" need explanation. The rebels used it to describe someone who failed to work zealously for the rebel cause. It implied such people were secretly recruiting for the Loyalist side and passing it information about the rebel plans. This is exactly what Daniel Fraser was doing very successfully "right under the rebels' noses."

But he did get caught and so did his son John and they were confined in Albany jail from the winter of 1777 until the fall of 1778. Prisoners' meals were not provided by the Committee, only by prisoners' relatives living within reach. Prison conditions were very bad from extreme overcrowding and lack of sanitation. Daniel became very ill but did recover sufficiently to escape the next fall by the old trick of cutting through the bars.

During the remainder of 1778 and through 1779, he made frequent, secret visits to his home at Half Moon, where the family carried on the farm while he became very active in carrying reports of rebel activities to the British troops around Ticonderoga. Then when capture seemed likely he transferred his activities to the Richelieu Valley for the next two or three years. His daylight activities, however, were building mills and blockhouses.

In the summer of 1783 while the peace treaty was being drafted the rebels struck and confiscated everything Daniel and Sarah owned except, as June Fraser says, "two books, a dozen spoons and a pair of dancing slippers."¹ By the fall Sarah and six of the children escaped to Sorel. As previously mentioned, John, Abraham and Andrew were held back. That winter in Sorel was so severe that one daughter, Rebecca, died. Daniel checked his Ernestown land grant to see that it would make a satisfactory farm and then fetched his family in the spring. They landed at Parrot Bay (Millhaven).

The Frasers depended on government rations for the winters of 1785 and 1786. In the summer of 1787 government supplies of food were cut off and the Hungry Year followed. The following spring, Daniel's wife Sarah died. In 1793 Daniel married Elizabeth Davis, widow of a fellow Loyalist. Their son, born in 1794, they named George, a fine name for the son of a Loyalist couple!

Later on they moved to the lakeshore where there was a growing community. Daniel's new interest in public affairs led to his being appointed Magistrate. He also continued his service in the militia almost to the end of his life in 1812. Daniel and Elizabeth had good reason to be proud of their family. In military service Isaac was an ensign and Daniel Jr., a lieutenant. Abraham, who didn't arrive until 1798, served in the War of 1812. After a number of years at Parrot Bay (Millhaven) Daniel and Elizabeth moved to Sophiasburgh in Prince Edward County. After the war three of Daniel's sons returned to carpentry and millwright work. It is recorded that they bid on a contract to restore Kingston Mills. Isaac was so successful with his mill south of Odessa that he came to be known as "the squire". That mill, since called Asselstine's, is now at Upper Canada Village.

¹*Skulking for the King: A Loyalist Plot* by June Fraser (Erin ON: Boston Mills Press, 1985). ISBN 0-979183-20-1. It is an intriguing and easily read story of Daniel Fraser. Appendix of claims and losses list of McAlpine's men; notes 16 pp, maps, illus, index, 142 pp