

LT. HENRY SIMMONS

by Russell Simmons

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Mr. Russell Simmons [speaking at the March meeting] retraced history right back to the final days of the Revolution when the family was well established at Claverack in the lower Hudson Valley. He described the trip his Loyalist ancestor, Lieutenant Henry Simmons took from Claverack to Quebec City in 1777-1778. For this part of the family history he had the help of Lieut. Simmons' Journal.

It is interesting to see how Henry became involved in momentous events of the times, how the chain of events from the siege of Quebec by the rebels in 1775 to the second battle of Saratoga in 1777 led to Henry's painful flight northward. The siege of Quebec was raised in the spring of 1776; by November the rebels were driven south by way of Lake Champlain; the British under General Carleton ended the campaign by occupying Crown Point. Then a British army under General Burgoyne headed for Albany.

The Loyalists who had been persecuted, fined, and imprisoned, flocked to the Royal Standard as Burgoyne proceeded southward. Henry left Claverack on August 16, 1777 with 27 men and travelled 75 miles northward hiding in thickets by day. They went to the King's Loyal American Regiment commanded by Lieut. Col. Jessup. Henry became a lieutenant in Christian Wehr's company. Henry's group was without uniforms and several were without arms. Two of his men spent 23 days going back to Claverack for an additional 18 men, bringing Henry's strength to 45.

In October 1777 the second battle of Saratoga was fought. The British were surrounded and being short of supplies were forced to surrender. By the terms of surrender all Americans who had joined Burgoyne had to proceed to Canada. There was nothing else they could do--all their property had been confiscated. There was nothing else for them to return to.

Their walk through the wilderness in late October with rain and snow and chilling winds was a wretched experience. Still, they did average 10 miles a day on foot and 12 miles a day for a total of 80 miles on the waters of Lake Champlain. At St. John they entered the French Community. They were now 4 months and 275 miles from home. They reached the St. Lawrence just west of Lachine at the end of December and Quebec City by spring. So ends Henry's Journal.

Six years later, in 1784, Lieut. Simmons and 437 men, women and children of Jessup's Loyal Rangers came as the first settlers in Emestown. The men numbered 143, the women 68, and the children 198. Of the original 27 men, 11 settled there. Among these were Henry, John, and Baltus Simmons, Henry Finkle, Andrew Miller, Jacob Hess, Frederick Baker. John and Peter Asselstine, Jacob and David Huffman. Nine of these men were in their teens and 10 were in their 20s.

Henry was granted 1300 acres--lots 36 through 42. On Nov. 22, 1811, Henry sold to his son Nicholas parts of lots 37, 38, 39 for £500. In Nov. 1826 Nicholas died leaving five boys, three

girls, his widow Sarah and no will. The 5 boys agreed that Henry, the eldest should have the farm and the others should each receive 70 acres from lots 38 and 39 subject to a dower for their mother. Austin being the youngest eventually owned the mill property. The Simmons Mill could be said to have produced the village of Wilton.