

JOEL STONE
by Earle Thomas

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Joel Stone is an interesting though somewhat puzzling character, whose activities help us to know him. He was born in 1749 and brought up in Connecticut where he planned to make business his career. Because of his views on the situation in 1776, the rebels confiscated his property. He fled to New York and fought with the British forces until captured in 1778 and was imprisoned in Fairfield near Bridgeport, where he suffered very cruel treatment until he managed to escape to New York again, this time with a price on his head. He became a captain in the militia and married the lovely Leah Moore.

He left for Britain in 1783 leaving behind Leah and their young son to fend for themselves while he fought the London bureaucrats for compensation for his losses in Connecticut. Endless delays prevented his reaching Quebec until 1786.

He settled temporarily in Cornwall, a base for this search for the ideal spot--good land, river transport, water-power, a fine vista for a home. In the spring of 1787 he found it where the Gananoque River joins the St. Lawrence and had his agent at Quebec submit a memorial to the Land Board for 500 acres on each side of the river mouth.

Unfortunately this land was also requested by Sir John Johnson, Loyalist leader, former commandant of the KRNNY, and superintendent of the Indian Department, generally expected to be appointed lieutenant governor of the new province of Upper Canada. Johnson seems to have been in search of land grants to bolster his prospects and already had acquired Amherst Island and the tract between Lake St. Francis and Williamstown. Unaware of Joel's memorial, he petitioned for exactly the same lots.

It seems to have taken all the Land Board's talent for bungling and incompetence to create a dilemma out of what was a simple matter of recognizing Joel's prior claim. ... Joel would not easily believe that Sir John would deprive him unjustly of his right to the property. It would be so uncharacteristic of him who had been his friend. In fact, he had received a letter from Sir John acknowledging his right.

But there were problems in the Quebec Land Office and also in the Joel Stone household in Cornwall that were to affect his hopes. Shortly after this his marriage collapsed. Leah just couldn't stand the wilderness. He sent her back to New York and applied for a legal separation. The other problem was at the Land Office: it was about to grant Sir John Johnson's petition when it discovered Joel's prior claim.

After arguments and correspondence with the Land Board, Sir John received 1000 acres on the east side of the Gananoque river mouth, and Joel Stone received 700 on the west side, enabling him to erect saw and grist mills to take advantage of the Gananoque River. The other conflict, the

domestic one, concluded with an ad in the *Montreal Gazette* which was "to forbid anyone to credit my wife, Leah Stone, on my account as I will not pay any debts she may contract." He removed his children, William and Mary, to a school in Hartford, Connecticut and settled alone at the west side of the Gananoque river mouth. There he was to become the founder of the town.

Joel did remarry, a lady from Sarnia, Abigail Dayton, who was an excellent help and looked after him well, including "making a Methodist of him." He lost his son through tuberculosis - a grief he never got over. His son-in-law was a great help with the mills and expanding business.

Joel Stone became a prominent official in the new town and a stickler for good order and good standards. He also became the local J.P. in 1800 and later a colonel in the Leeds Militia.