

SOLOMON AUSTIN UEL

by Nancy Cutway UE

Solomon Austin was possibly born about 1744 in the area of Baltimore, Maryland although his ancestry is still disputed and discussed by descendants some 270 years later. In any event, he moved to Orange County, North Carolina and married **Joanna Thomas**. When the Thirteen Colonies voted for independence from the British Crown, Solomon was one of those who disagreed and fought on the side of the Loyalists.

In the petition for land as a Loyalist that Solomon submitted to the Lieutenant-Governor dated 17 July 1794, he wrote

That your Petitioner was one of those who took up arms in defence of His Majesty's Government in the Province of North Carolina during the Rebellion in America, from which place he is just arrived with his Family, consisting of a wife & seven children - in order to settle in this Province — proofs of his Service he could have brought had it been prudent to have applied for them - but many of the people now come in are witnesses of the truth of his [?actions] - & that he was taken prisoner at Moores Creek bridge & ill treated. Your Petitioner in consequence of his known attachment to the British Constitution has ever since been obnoxious to the present Government of Carolina...¹

The battle of Moore's Creek Bridge, on 27 Feb. 1776, was the first battle of the American Revolution to take place in North Carolina. It was planned that "Two commands of British regulars, one composed of seven regiments under Lord Charles Cornwallis and the other made up of 2,000 troops led by Sir Henry Clinton, would sail from Ireland and New England, respectively, and converge on the Lower Cape Fear River near Brunswick Town. There they would be joined by an army of Loyalists who would assist in putting down the rebellion."² About 1,600 Highland Scots and other Loyalists waded through bone-chilling water in swamps to get into position, but when they arrived near the Patriot camp they found it deserted: the Patriots had just left their campfires burning but had circled around to converge on the Loyalists. The Patriot troops had partially dismantled and greased the bridge over Moore's Creek, and were massed on the far side as the Loyalists tentatively crossed it. "Only a few Highlanders managed to make their way over the slippery remnants of the bridge, and they fell rapidly from the heavy fire coming from the Patriot breastworks. Within three minutes, the battle was over. About 70 Highlanders were killed or wounded. ... About 850 soldiers were taken prisoner."³ The British regulars had not appeared in time to meet the Loyalists, either.

The Patriots didn't want to have to tend prisoners of war, so they let most of them return to their homes, after giving their *parole* not to fight again. (We now think of parole in terms of penal institutions, but its original meaning, from French, is to give one's word to do or not do something.) Solomon took a liberal interpretation of his parole, however, and with other fellow parolees he embarked on harassment and raids during the rest of the war.

We can learn more about this from the land petition of Capt. James Ozburn, who settled in Markham [Ontario] after the Revolution. Captain Ozburn wrote⁴ that on 4 February 1776 he raised a

10
Volunteer Company, and rescued a loyalist
named John Keilly from a Rebel Gist, and a
certain Solomon Austin now ^{at} Longpoint in
this Province, was at that time with your Petitioner.
Thought that the year 1776, your Petitioner was
constantly employed in His Majesty's Service
and was engaged with the Rebels at Moore's Bridge
in North Carolina - the Campaign then broke up
and your Petitioner had to fly for his life, and
was in continual Danger and Extremity, but
always Employed in annoying the Enemy -

* Solomon Austin
then also with
of Petitioner

After some independent resistance efforts “annoying the enemy”, Solomon was able to join up with the Queen’s Rangers as they progressed from the New York/Connecticut area down towards Virginia.

According to John Graves Simcoe’s diary (vol. 4), during one skirmish with Patriots the company flag-bearer was wounded and the flag began to drop to the ground. This would have signified surrender. Solomon Austin noticed this, rushed over and grabbed the flagpole from the hands of his wounded comrade, and proudly raised it to its full height again.

After the British surrender at Yorktown, Solomon apparently returned to his farm in the hills of North Carolina and hoped to return to “normal” life. By now he and Joanna had two children, and two others were born about 1784 and 1785, before he and his Loyalist neighbours came to a decision: they could not remain in North Carolina. The Treaty of Paris (1783) had led them to believe that they would have any land previously confiscated returned to them, and then they

could go on living with their Patriot neighbours in peace.

Item 5. The Congress of the Confederation will "earnestly recommend" to state legislatures to recognize the rightful owners of all confiscated lands and "provide for the restitution of all estates, rights, and properties, which have been confiscated belonging to real British subjects" (Loyalists);

Item 6. United States will prevent future confiscations of the property of Loyalists;

However, although the federal congress gave a lukewarm recommendation to the states to make restitution, they could not order American citizens to treat former Tories with anything but disrespect and insult. Life in North Carolina became unbearable. Accordingly, the Austins and twelve other families gathered their possessions and headed north. Driving cattle and transporting all their tools and goods, travelling with numerous children the group made slow overland progress. Their exact route is not known, but it took the better part of a year to reach their destination of Newark, Upper Canada (now Niagara-on-the-Lake) where they hoped to join their former commander. Col. John Graves Simcoe of the Queen's Rangers was now Lieutenant-Governor Simcoe of Upper Canada, headquartered in Newark.

Solomon was granted 600 acres in Norfolk County. For the rest of his life he farmed in Woodhouse Township and raised nine children, all of whom lived to adulthood: an accomplishment in those days. Solomon died April 24, 1826, at about 82 years of age.

Solomon and Joanna Austin are my 4-greats-grandparents.

NOTES:

1. Petition of Solomon Austin. Library & Archives Canada, RG1, L3, V1, batch A-1, Reel C1609.

2. Information from website <https://www.ncpedia.org/moores-creek-bridge-battle>.

3. See same site.

4. Petition of James Ozburn, Library & Archives Canada RG1, 392A batch O9-1, film C2484 pp 1286-1299.