

## **THE COFFIN FAMILY OF BOSTON.**

**ADMIRAL SIR ISAAC COFFIN, SIR THOMAS ASTON COFFIN, ADMIRAL  
FROMAN H. COFFIN, GENERAL JOHN COFFIN.**

The name of Coffin is widely spread over this continent; thousands take pride in tracing their descent from Tristram Coffin of Alwington, which extends along the Severn Sea, south of the boundary between Somerset and Devon, fronting the broad Atlantic.

The Coffins came over with William the Conqueror and settled there in 1066. It is said that the name Coffin was a corruption or translation of Colvinus, signifying a basket or chest, and that from the charge of the King's treasure, such employment, like royalty itself, being hereditary, the name became attached to the family. In 1085, according to the "Doomsday Book," Alwington was possessed by David De la Bere, and that the heiress of that name brought it to the Coffins. On a subject less grave this might be suspected for a jest but the authority is proof. Tristram came over to New England in 1642 and settled at Salisbury, and also at Haverhill and Newbury. He resided at these places for sixteen years and then went to Nantucket, which at that time was a dependency of New York. For 80 pounds he and his associates bought of the Indians a large part of the island. Tristram's third son, James, was Judge of the Court of Common Pleas and of Probate. James' son, Nathaniel, married the daughter of William Gayer, and niece of Sir John Gayer. William, the eldest son of Nathaniel, born 1699, removed to Boston and became proprietor of the Lunch of Grapes Tavern in 1731. It was situated on King street at the corner of Mackerel lane, the site now occupied by the Exchange building, on the corner of State and Kilby streets. It was a tavern from 1640 to 1760, when the Great Fire swept everything away.

The Coffins were strong in numbers and near neighbors, along the principal thoroughfare, now Washington street, dwelt twenty families, descended from William Coffin, or their near kinfolk, who lived in constant intercourse. The patriarch, at four score, his vigor hardly abated, lived on this street near his son's house. His daughter, Elizabeth, married her cousin, Thomas C. Amory, who had bought the house opposite her father's, at the corner of Hollis street, built by Governor Belcher for his own use. He was one of the organizers of Trinity church in 1734 and was one of the first wardens of same. He lived in honor and affluence till he died in 1774, just before the war broke out, which saved him from witnessing the exile and widespread confiscation that awaited his<sup>[234]</sup> sons. His children and their children counted about sixty when he died, but of his descendants bearing the name of Coffin, all have died out in Massachusetts. He had four sons, all staunch Loyalists, William, Nathaniel, John and Ebenezer. The daughters, Mrs. De Blois, Mrs. Amory, and Mrs. Dexter, married into the best families of Boston, and through love for their husbands took the other side. The sons were proscribed and banished by an Act of the Massachusetts Legislature.

WILLIAM COFFIN, JR., the eldest son of William, was born in Boston, April 11th, 1723. He was an Addresser of General Gage, was proscribed and banished. He accompanied the Royal Army to Halifax in 1776 on the evacuation of Boston.

SIR THOMAS ASTON COFFIN, Baronet, son of William, Jr., was born at Boston, March 31, 1754. He graduated at Harvard College in 1772. He was for a long time Secretary to Sir Guy Carleton, by whose side he sat in the last boat which left Castle Garden on the evacuation of New York, 25th Nov., 1783. When Sir Guy Carleton became Lord Dorchester and Governor of Quebec, 1784, Coffin accompanied him and by his influence was appointed in 1804 Secretary and Comptroller of Accounts of Lower Canada. At another part of his life he was Commissary General in the British Army. He went to England and died in London in 1810, very wealthy. He was grandfather to Mrs. Bolton, wife of Col. Bolton, R. A., who took an active part in the Red River Expedition of 1870.

WILLIAM COFFIN, the second son of William Coffin, Jr., was born in Boston, 1758, and died at Kingston, Canada, in 1804.

EBENEZER COFFIN, the third son of William Coffin, Jr., was born at Boston, 1763, went to South Carolina where he acquired property as a merchant and planter and was the father of Thomas Aston Coffin of Charleston, South Carolina, whose descendants, with an hereditary instinct, distinguished themselves by their chivalrous devotion to a failing cause in the late Confederate war.

NATHANIEL COFFIN, second eldest son of William, was born in Boston in 1725, graduated at Harvard College in 1744, received in 1750 an honorary degree at Yale. Brought up a merchant, he was early appointed King's Cashier of the Customs and acquired considerable property. He resided on the corner of Essex and Rainsford Lane, now Harrison avenue. The tide washed up to the garden wall. Near by in front, on what is now called Washington street, was the "Liberty Tree," where Captain Mackintosh and his "chickens," met to plan outrages upon loyal citizens.

In August, 1767, a flagstaff was erected which went through and above its highest branches. A flag hoisted on this was the notice for the assembling of the "Sons of Liberty" for action. In 1775, his son Nathaniel, and his friends cut it down, much to the disgust of Mackintosh who was known as the "First Captain General of Liberty Tree." On the building occupying its site is a stone bas-relief of the tree with an inscription on it. Nathaniel Coffin held one of the most lucrative positions under the crown, his acquaintances and friends were naturally among the government<sup>[235]</sup> officials and the better class of the community. He had much to lose if he severed from his fealty to the mother country and, banishment and confiscation would be the penalty, if the disunionists succeeded.

NATHANIEL COFFIN was the last Receiver General and Cashier of his Majesty's Customs at the Port of Boston, he was an addresser of Hutchinson in 1774 and of Gage in 1775. With his family of three persons he accompanied the Royal Army to Halifax in 1776 and in July of that year embarked for England in the ship Aston Hall. In May, 1780, while returning, he died the day before the vessel arrived at New York. His wife was Elizabeth, daughter of Henry Barnes of Boston.

NATHANIEL COFFIN, JR., son of the aforesaid, was born in Boston in 1749. Was an Addresser of Hutchinson in 1774 and a Protester against the disunionists the same year. He was brought up to the bar, and succeeded well in his profession. As he took a prominent part on the side of the Government; and caused the "Liberty Tree" to be cut down, he was obliged to fly, or he would have been tarred and feathered. He employed a negro to assist him in cutting it down. A thousand dollars reward was offered by the Revolutionists for the offender, the darky informed against him, and he had to leave.<sup>[180]</sup> He was at New York in 1783, and was one of the petitioners for lands in Nova Scotia. At a subsequent period he was appointed Collector of Customs at the island of St. Kitt's and filled that position for thirty-four years. He died in London in 1831, aged 83.

WILLIAM COFFIN, second son of Nathaniel, the Cashier. An Addresser of Hutchinson in 1774; went to Halifax in 1776, proscribed and banished, 1778. Assisted his brother in destroying the "Liberty Tree." He had three sons in the British service. After the peace, he was at St. John, New Brunswick, a prosperous merchant.

GENERAL JOHN COFFIN, the third son of Nathaniel, the Cashier, was born in Boston, 1756, was sent to sea at a very early age, and at the age of eighteen was in command of a ship. In 1775, while his ship was in England, she was engaged by the government to take troops to America. He had on board nearly a whole regiment with General Howe in command of the troops, who was ordered out to supersede General Gage at Boston. The vessel arrived at Boston June 15th. Mr. Coffin landed the regiment on June 17th at Bunker Hill, and the action having already commenced, he was requested by the Colonel, "to come up and see the fun," the only weapon at hand being the tiller of his boat; he immediately, to use a nautical phrase, "unshipped it," and with equal determination, commenced "laying about" him, and "shipped" the musket,

powder and belt of the first man he knocked down. He bore an active part and distinguished himself during the rest of the action. In consideration of his gallant conduct he was presented to General Gage after the battle and made an ensign on the field, shortly after he was promoted to a lieutenancy,[236] but still retained the command of his ship. He was promised by General Howe on his arrival at Boston the command of 400 men, if he would go to New York and raise them. He accordingly went to New York when Boston was evacuated March 17, 1776, where he raised among the Loyalists a mounted rifle corps, called the "Orange Rangers," of which he was made Commandant, and from which he exchanged into the New York Volunteers in 1778. He took part in the defeat of Washington in the battle of Long Island in 1777 and went with that corps to Georgia in 1778. Here he raided a corps of partisan cavalry, composed chiefly of loyal planters. At the battle of Savannah, at that of Hobkerk's Hill, and the action of Cross Creek near Charleston, and on various other occasions, his conduct won the admiration of his superior.

At the battle of Eutaw Springs which he opened on the part of the King's troops, his gallantry and good judgment attracted the notice and remark of General Greene, the Revolutionary leader, one of General Washington's ablest lieutenants. Major Coffin with 150 infantry and 50 cavalry averted the advance on Eutaw. Colonel William Washington, a distinguished partisan leader, with numerous cavalry rashly dashed forward; he lost most of his officers and many of his men, and his horse was shot under him, and he would have been slain had not Major Coffin interposed, who took him prisoner. These two men, who had known each other well in private life, rode back to camp to share the same meal and the same tent.

In the Southern colonies the Revolutionists and Loyalists, waged a war of extermination, the partisans on both sides, seldom gave quarter or took prisoners. At the close of the conflict in Virginia Lord Cornwallis made him a gift of a handsome sword, accompanied by a letter conferring on him the rank of Major Brevet. Whilst Coffin was attached to Cornwallis, he was able to be of great service to him, but the bravery, not to say the extraordinary sagacity mingled with audacity of one man, could not save the army. Lord Cornwallis' army cooped up in Yorktown by a superior army of French and Americans, and blockaded by a French fleet, was in danger of starvation, and Coffin stood almost alone in successful forays, in which he frequently eluded the whole American and French army, and returned laden with the fruits of his success. In one of these raids he accidentally came to the house of a wealthy planter whose daughter was to be married that day. He quietly surrounded the house with his troops and knocking at the door, sent in word that he wished to speak with the proprietor. On presenting himself, the gentleman was courteously made aware of his condition. He was told not to make any noise, but to order sufficient turkeys, ham, wine and other provisions to be put up, to satisfy his men; if this was done no harm would happen, but on the contrary, if any resistance was attempted, everything and everybody in the house would be destroyed. Coffin's character and resolution were well known, so the planter thought it best to graciously comply with the mandate. A large quantity of provisions was thus secured.

[237]Captain Coffin supped with the wedding party, danced with the bride, and left in safety, taking care that no alarm should be given, and reached Cornwallis without accident by daylight.

Even when the enemy held Charleston, during which time he ran very great risks of being taken prisoner, he went to see Miss Ann Matthews, daughter of William Matthews, Esq., of St. John's Island, to whom he was eventually married in 1781. On the occasion of one visit, the house was searched for him by authority, and the gallant soldier took refuge under Miss Matthews' ample dress. At that time ladies wore hoops and they must have been of considerable size, when Major Coffin, who stood six feet two and was proportionately stout, could successfully conceal himself under one. At the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown, that portion of his army consisting of native Americans, he failed to obtain special terms for, in the articles of capitulation. He, however, availed himself of the conceded privilege of sending an armed ship northerly, without molestation, to convey away the most obnoxious of them. Major Coffin determined not to be taken by the Revolutionists who had offered \$10,000 for his head, so he cut his way through the lines, and reached Charleston, attracted by the charms of Miss Matthews. When Charleston was evacuated Major Coffin made his way up to New York, crossed the Hudson, having eluded all

attempts at his capture and presented himself at headquarters, to the great astonishment of his friends in the British Army. Sir Guy Carleton, Commander-in-chief, appointed him Major of the King's American Regiment, vacant by the death of Major Grant.

Previous to the evacuation of New York, and probably in view of it, Major Coffin and others who were feared and disliked by the victorious Revolutionists, and were, therefore, thrust out beyond the pale of redemption, were sent by the British Government, to New Brunswick. At twenty-seven he laid down his sword and took up his axe, accompanied by a wife delicately nurtured in a wealthy family and a warm climate, and four negroes, one woman and three men, all brought from Charleston. They arrived in October, 1783, when there were but two persons in or near the harbor of St. John. Mr. Symonds and Mr. White, fur-traders, kindly supplied the newcomers with provisions, and they immediately commenced clearing and felling timber. During the first winter they suffered great hardships, particularly Mrs. Coffin. His first mishap was the loss of his boots in crossing a swamp, now the market place of the city of St. John. Having selected some lots of ground fronting the harbor, he proceeded to explore the interior of the country. An ascent of about twelve miles up the beautiful St. John, opened out a rich and lovely landscape-hill and dale, magnificent woods, rivers and lakes, swarming with game and fish.

In this fine and fertile locality Major Coffin purchased for a trifle a tract of land from Colonel Grazier, to whom it had been granted by Government. Four men were sent up there to build a house, and in the following May, 1784, he and his wife and four black servants, took possession<sup>[238]</sup> of their new residence, and called it Alwington Manor, after the family estate in Devonshire, which belonged to them in the time of William the Conqueror. Two of the men, and the woman, proved to be good and faithful servants, and when the slaves were emancipated, still remained with the family.

Settlers soon flocked into the province. Ten years' residence, with Major Coffin's activity, aided by his willing men, made it a respectable and desirable settlement. He was made a Magistrate of the county and in due time a Member of the Provincial Parliament, and of the Legislative Council, which offices he filled till within a few years of his death.

In June, 1794, His Royal Highness, the Duke of Kent, the father of Queen Victoria, who was then Governor of Nova Scotia, stopped at Alwington Manor.

Although retired from active employ, he still remained in the service on half pay, and in 1804 he was advanced to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. In 1805 he went to England, where he was received with much distinction, and was presented to the King by the commander-in-chief.

The war of 1812 aroused all the warlike instincts of the old partisan; he snuffed the battle afar off, and at once offered to raise a regiment for home service. He soon had 600 men ready for service, which enabled the Government to send the 104th regiment to Canada, then hardly pressed by invasion. At the peace of 1815 he was promoted to the rank of Major-General, and the regiment disbanded and General Coffin returned to half pay once more.

He for many years alternated in his residence between England and New Brunswick. He was the oldest General in the British Army when he died in 1838, aged 82, at the house of his son, Admiral T. Coffin, in King's County, New Brunswick.

Those who knew the General well in his later days, recall with affectionate recollection the noble presence and generous character of the chivalrous old soldier, a relic of the days in which giants were in stature and in heart, true to his king and country, a humble Christian and an honest and brave man, who united to the heroism of a Paladin the endurance of the pioneer, and when he could no longer serve his Prince in the field, served him still better by creating a new realm of civilization and progress in the heart of primeval forest. His name will ever be held in honor in New Brunswick.

\*\*\*\*\*See picture in Astwood picture file\*\*\*\*\*

**ADMIRAL SIR ISAAC COFFIN.**

**Born in Boston, 1759. Died in England, June 23, 1839. From a painting in possession of the Boston Atheneum.**

Eight of the children of General and Mrs. Coffin, all natives of New Brunswick, lived to make their way in the world, thanks to a grateful government and helpful country. The eldest son, General Guy Carleton Coffin, died in 1856, a General of the Royal Artillery; John Townsend Coffin, the second eldest, entered the British Navy as midshipman in 1799 and became admiral in 1841. Under the will of his uncle, Sir Isaac Coffin, he became the owner of the Magdalen Islands in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. He died in 1882. Henry Edward Coffin, the third son, became a lieutenant<sup>[239]</sup> in the British Navy in 1814 and an Admiral in 1856. He died in 1881. The eldest daughter, Caroline, married the Hon. Charles Grant of Canada, afterwards Baron de Longueuil; their son, the present Baron, married a daughter of Lewis Trapmane of Charleston, S. C. The second daughter married General Sir Thomas Pearson, K. C. B., an officer much distinguished in Canada during the war of 1812.

A third married Colonel Kirkwood of the British Army and went to live in Bath, England.

A fourth married John Barnett, Esq., also an officer in the British Army, who subsequently occupied a high official position in the Island of Ceylon.

The fifth, Mary, married Charles R. Ogden, Esq., Attorney-General, Lower Canada.

ADMIRAL SIR ISAAC COFFIN was the fourth son of Nathaniel, the Cashier. He was born in Boston in 1759. At eight years of age he entered the Boston Latin School. He was a diligent student in a class that embraced numerous celebrities and when in Parliament he acknowledged himself indebted to the methods and discipline of the Boston schools for his apt classical quotations, then a mode much in vogue in that august assemblage. His constitution was, however, too vigorous, his animal spirits too buoyant for scholarship alone to mark his schoolboy days. He led the sports of the playground and was the leader on the 5th of November, the anniversary of the Gunpowder plot. Boston was a pleasant place to dwell in, broad stretches of tree or turf, sloping pastures, and blooming gardens, surrounded the abodes of the wealthy. Tide water fresh from the ocean, spread nearly around the peninsular. Beyond these basins, wooded heights of considerable elevation lifted themselves above boundless tree tops. For fishing, or shooting, rowing, sailing, or swimming, coasting or skating, Boston with its environs of lake, and orchard, was then the paradise for boys. It was a capital school for his play hours, and the old Latin,—the oldest school in the country,—dating from 1635, for his studies of a graver sort. There fifteen of his cousins were his school mates, a host of his own celebrities and four—Scheaffe, Moreland, Mackay, and Ochterlony—who became baronets, or generals by military service in England, he was well placed for development nor were his opportunities neglected. At the commencement of the Revolution Isaac was too young to enter into it, or to realize what it meant, but long before he entered, at the age of fourteen, the British navy, he no doubt had formed opinions of his own.<sup>[181]</sup> It was doubtless of advantage to him, quickening his faculties and maturing his character, that such events were transpiring about him at this plastic period. His sense of justice and right<sup>[240]</sup> and of what freedom signified, proved in his subsequent career that these advantages had not been without effect.

At the age of fourteen Isaac entered the Royal navy under the auspices of Rear Admiral Montague. By him he was confided to the care of Lieutenant William Hunter, at that time commanding the Brig Gaspee and who then spoke of his pupil, "Of all the young men I ever had the care of, none answered my expectations equal to Isaac Coffin. He pleased me so much that I took all the pains in my power to make him a good seaman, and I succeeded to the height of my wishes, for never did I know a young man acquire so much nautical knowledge in so short a time." After serving on the Gaspee he served as midshipman on the Kingfisher, Captain, Diligent, Fowey, Le Pincon and the Sybl, frigate. In 1779 Coffin,

now Lieutenant, went to England and joined the *Adamant*. His next appointment was to the *London* of 98 guns, the flagship of Rear Admiral Graves on the coast of America, from her he removed into the *Royal Oak* where he acted as signal lieutenant in the action off Cape Henry, March 16, 1781. By following such traces the naval histories of Great Britain afford of these several ships, we can reasonably conjecture the part Coffin took in the Revolutionary War. We learn what duties were performed by him on each of them, and we have no reason to doubt, from his rapid promotions, of his efficiency and zeal. We know that his patron, Admiral Montague, protected the rear of Howe's retreat from Boston in 1776, that the ships were often engaged with the enemy, and that they captured several valuable prizes in which action he participated. The events of the first four years of the war from 1775 to 1779 are sufficiently familiar. D'Estraing's repulse at Savannah and Prescott's evacuation of Newport in 1779, its reoccupation by Tiernay in July 1780. The reduction of Charleston, defeat of Gates at Camden. Capture at sea of Henry Laurens, president of Congress. After the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown to the combined French and American armies and French fleet, De Grasse hastened to the West Indies intending to join the Spaniards, and capture Jamaica and drive the English out of the West Indies. After the battle of March 16 at Cape Henry, on the return to New York, the *Royal Oak* took several valuable prizes, and then went to Halifax for repairs. In the middle of June a vessel arrived from Bristol with the remains of his father, who died the day before. Having held an important government position, his obsequies in New York on Broadway showed due regard to his memory. Isaac was placed soon after in command of *Avenger*, the advanced post of the British up the North River, which he held during the autumn till he exchanged with Sir Alexander Cochrane, for the *Pocahontas* and joined Admiral Hood at Barbados and served on his flagship, the *Barfleur*. Soon after Coffin joined him he learned that De Grasse was at St. Kitts, after an engagement there in which the French lost one thousand men, Hood joined Lord Rodney's fleet.

For two days the hostile fleets manoeuvred in sight of each other<sup>[241]</sup> near Dominica. In number the fleets were equal, in size and complement of crew the French were immensely superior; they had twenty thousand soldiers on board to be used in the conquest of Jamaica; a defeat at this time would be England's ruin. The English Admiral was aware that his country's fate was in his hands. It was one of those supreme moments which great men dare to use and weak ones tremble at. At seven in the morning, April 12, 1782, the signal to engage was flying at the masthead of the *Formidable* Rodney's flagship. The Admiral lead in person and in passing through the enemy's line engaged the *Glorieux*, a 74, at close range. He shot away her masts and bowsprit and left her a bare hull. All day long the cannons roared and one by one the French ships struck their flags or fought till they sank. The carnage on them was terrible, crowded as they were with troops. Fourteen thousand were reckoned as killed besides the prisoners. The *Barfleur*, Hood's flagship, on which was Coffin engaged the "*Ville de Paris*," the flagship of the French Admiral, the pride of France, and the largest ship in the world. After fighting valiantly all day, after all hope was gone, and a broadside from the *Barfleur* had killed sixty men, she surrendered. Her decks above and below were littered over with mangled limbs and bodies. It was said when she struck there were but three men on the upper deck unhurt, the Count was one. The French fleet was totally destroyed, and on that memorable day Yorktown was avenged, and the British empire was saved. Peace followed but it was peace with honor. The American Colonies were lost but England kept her West Indies. The hostile strength of Europe all combined had failed to wrest Britannia's ocean sceptre from her. She sat down, maimed and bleeding, but the wreath had not been torn from her brows. She was and is still the sovereign of the seas. After the battle Captain Coffin went in his sloop to Jamaica, where through the influence of Hood, he was appointed by Lord Rodney captain of the *Shrewsbury*, of 74 guns; he was then only 22 years of age. This indicated the estimate of both Hood and Rodney of the value of his services in the late famous battle. Peace soon came, but there was much to discourage him. His family was broken up. The remains of his father lay in their last resting place in New York. The *Shrewsbury* was paid off, and he was put out of commission. He was his own master with abundance of prize money. Many of his family and friends from Boston had taken up their abode in London, and the refugee loyalists formed there a large circle. They all liked Isaac, a handsome young fellow with pleasant ways, generous and unpretending and loaded

with laurels. He was held in high estimation by the great naval celebrities and by the public, their attention might have turned the head of one less sensible.

Sir Guy Carleton, who had been created Lord Dorchester, could hardly have saved Canada for the Crown in 1775 without the aid of the Coffins, was now appointed Governor of Canada. It was probably at his request that Isaac was appointed to the command of the *Thisbe*, to take him and his family and suite to Quebec in 1786. While on his way<sup>[242]</sup> up the river to Quebec the *Thisbe* was becalmed off the Magdalen Islands, and struck by their appearance, perhaps the more attractive from the autumnal splendor, Coffin requested, probably not in very serious earnest, that Lord Dorchester as representative of the Crown, would bestow them on him. This request seemed reasonable to the governor, and eventually letters patent were granted to him on the Islands. The records recite the grant of the islands to him for his zeal and unremitting persevering efforts in the public service. At Sir Isaac's death he left the island by will to his nephew, Admiral John T. Coffin, who died in 1882. On his return to Europe he was employed in many branches of the service. In 1794 he was in charge of the *Melampus* frigate, in 1796 he was resident commissioner of Corsica. From Elba he removed to Lisbon, to take charge of the naval establishment there for the next two years. He was then dispatched to superintend the arsenal at Port Mahon when Minorca fell into the hands of the British, and from there to Nova Scotia, in the *Venus* frigate. At Halifax and afterwards at Sheerness, as resident commissioner, he was employed till April 1804, when appointed rear admiral he hoisted his flag on the *Gladiator*, and the following month was created a baronet.

March, 1811, he married Elizabeth Browne, but within a few years satisfied of their utter incompatibility, they very amicably, on both sides, arranged for independence of each other. She was said to be addicted to writing sermons at night to the disturbance of the slumber of her rollicking spouse. The fault was certainly not hers, for she was a clever and exemplary woman. She lived nearly as long as he did, but they rarely met, though he made repeated overtures to reconciliation, some rather amusing. It is the reasonable ambition of all Englishmen, whose conditions and circumstances justify such aspirations, to be permitted to take part in the legislation and government of the country, and when Sir Isaac's health and peace rendered active service in the navy no longer desirable, his wish was gratified by his return to Parliament in 1818 for the borough of Ilchester for which he sat till 1826. His reputation and experience, gave considerable weight to his opinion when he took part as he frequently did in debates on naval affairs. He was tall, robust, but of symmetrical proportions, his voice powerful, and his countenance expressive and noble. Sir Isaac died at Cheltenham in Gloucestershire, June 23, 1839, at the age of 80. Lady Coffin preceded him to the tomb on the 27th of January that year. His brother, General John Coffin, died the year previous, June 12, 1838, in New Brunswick. Sir Isaac made frequent visits to his native town, having made more than thirty voyages to and from America. The many brilliant gentlemen of Boston in professional life, or among its merchant princes, affluent and convivial, were pleased to have him as their guest. Loyalty to the mother country died out slowly, and a Boston born boy, who had attained great distinction, whose kinsfolk had ample means for hospitality, had much attention paid him. His kinsman, Thomas C. Amory writes, "Often when at my<sup>[243]</sup> father's, who resided in Park street, where now is the Union Club house, the festal entertainments extended into the small hours, and those upon whom it devolved to sit up to receive the roisters, would gladly welcome from far off his shout of 'Home ahoy!' breaking the silent watches of the night."

His prize money amounted to considerable. This he entrusted to his cousin Amory in Boston, and the income finally equalled the original deposit.

He was very generous to his native land. Soon after the war ended he established a schoolship in Massachusetts waters, for mates and skippers to learn the art of navigation. The barge *Clio* which he purchased for the purpose, was commanded by his kinsman, Captain Hector Coffin, who was imprudent enough in 1826 to go up in her to Quebec with the American flag flying and act in a very indiscreet manner, and when his brother, General John Coffin, of New Brunswick, urged him to abandon what gave umbrage at home, he acquiesced in giving up what had cost him several thousand pounds. He also sent

over to the land of his birth famous race horses and cattle to improve the breed; also fish, rare fruit and plants.

He was warmly attached to Nantucket, where his ancestors and their descendants had dwelt for many generations. He visited the place and became acquainted with his kinsfolk and in 1826 appropriated \$12,000 afterwards increased till now it is upwards of \$60,000, as a fund for a school for the instruction of the posterity of Tristram. This includes nearly every native born child of the island. The Duke of Clarence, William the Fourth, who succeeded his brother George to the throne, through his long connection with the navy, attached to him the officers who had grown old with him. It is said the King had Sir Isaac upon his list as Earl of Magdalen and intended to make him Governor of Canada, and the only obstacle that prevented it was the attachment he had for the land of his birth.

This memoir of a Boston boy, who by dint of his own native energy attained a title, and the highest rank in the British navy, and a generous benefactor, whose works still bear witness to the noble impulse that prompted them, will ever be kindly remembered and cherished by his countrymen.

Jonathan Perry Coffin, Sir Isaac's youngest brother, born in Boston in 1762, was a barrister of repute in London.

JOHN COFFIN, the third son of William and Ann Coffin, was born in Boston, August 19, 1729, and was brother of Nathaniel, the Cashier, and uncle of General John, and Admiral, Sir Isaac Coffin. In the confiscation Act he was described as distiller, and combined this business, no doubt, with that of merchant and ship owner. Loyal to the core, and knowing that he was a marked man, he resolved early in 1775, to place his family in safety. Embarking, therefore, his household goods, his wife and eleven children, on board his own schooner, the Neptune, he<sup>[244]</sup> brought them around safely to Quebec where on the 23d August, 1775, he bought from "La Dame Veuve Lacroix" a piece of land at the *pres de ville*, well known during the siege which followed as the "Potash." He went to work with characteristic energy to establish a distillery, when his work was interrupted by that celebrated event. In the autumn the Revolutionary forces under Arnold and a former British officer, Montgomery, invaded the Province, and Quebec was invested. Late in the year John Coffin joined the Quebec enrolled British militia and the building he had designed for a distillery, became a battery for the defence of the approach from Wolfe's cove. The battery was armed with the guns of a privateer frozen in for the winter. Her commander, Barnsfare, and his seamen handled the pieces, and by his side John Coffin, the Boston Loyalist, shared the merit of the defence.

Before that battery, on the memorable morning of the 1st January, 1776, fell, General Montgomery, and the chief officers of his staff, and with them the last hopes of the Revolutionary cause in Canada.

In a paper prepared by his nephew, Lieutenant-Colonel Coffin of Ottawa, read before the Literary and Historical society of Quebec Dec. 18, 1872, it is shown on the testimony of Sir Guy Carleton, then Governor of Canada, and of Colonel Maclean, Commandant of Quebec, "that to the resolution and watchfulness of John Coffin, in keeping the guard at the *pres de ville* under arms, awaiting the expected attack, the coolness with which he allowed the rebels to approach, the spirits which his example kept up among the men, and to the critical instant when he directed Captain Barnsfare's fire against Montgomery and his troops, is to be ascribed the repulse of the rebels from that important post where, with their leader, they lost all heart."

There can be no question but that the death of Montgomery and the repulse of this attack, saved Quebec, and with Quebec, British North America to the British Crown, and that of the brave men who did this deed John Coffin was one of the foremost.

John Coffin died September 28, 1808, aged 78, as the record of his burial has it, "One of His Majesty's Justices of the Peace of the City of Quebec and Inspector of Police for said City."



He had thirteen children born to him, 11 survived him. Directly, or indirectly, all thrived under the fostering protection of the Crown and a grateful government. The eldest daughter, Isabella, married Colonel McMurdo. Her sons served in India, a grandson was captain in the Royal Canadian Rifles, when that fine regiment disbanded at Kingston in 1870.

The second daughter, Susannah, married the Hon. John Craigie of Quebec, Provincial Treasurer, a brother of Lord Craigie, Lord of Sessions in Scotland. One son, Admiral Craigie, died in 1872. A daughter married Captain Martin, who led one of the storming parties at the capture of Fort Niagara in 1814.

MARGARET, the youngest daughter, married her cousin, Roger Hale<sup>[245]</sup> Sheaffe. At the time of the marriage he was major in Brock's regiment. That gallant officer was slain at Queenstown Heights at 7 o'clock in the morning. At noon Colonel Sheaffe moved up from Niagara, attacked the American forces and hurled them from the rocks into the river. For this great service he was made a Baronet.

Of John Coffin's sons, the oldest, JOHN, born in Boston in 1760, died Deputy Commissary-General at Quebec, March, 1837.

WILLIAM, the second son, born in Boston, 1761, obtained a commission in the 1st Battalion of the King's Royal Regiment. Subsequently through the kind influence of His Royal Highness, the Duke of Kent, he obtained a commission in the regular army and served half the world over. He retired from the service in 1816 a captain in the 15th Regiment and Brevet Major, and died in England in 1836. His son WILLIAM FOSTER COFFIN, was Commissioner of Ordnance and Admiralty, Land Department of the Interior, Canada. This gentleman married, in 1842, MARGARET, second daughter of Isaac Winslow Clarke, of Montreal, who, in 1774, was the youngest member of the firm of Richard Clarke and Sons of Boston, to which was consigned the historical cargo of tea. He rose to the rank of Deputy Commissary General, and after 50 years service died in 1822.

The third son, THOMAS COFFIN, born in Boston, 1762, was a member of the Legislative Council of Lower Canada, and Lieutenant-Colonel of Militia. He married a Demoiselle de Tonancour and lived and died at Three Rivers, 1841. A son of his was for many years Prothonotary for the District of Montreal.

The fifth son, FRANCIS HOLMES COFFIN, born in Boston, 1768, entered the Royal Navy and served during the long war with France, and died an Admiral in 1835. His eldest son, General Sir Isaac Coffin, K. C. Star of India, died at Black Heath, October, 1872.

The fourth son, NATHANIEL COFFIN, born in Boston, 1766, lived and died in Upper Canada. In the war of 1812 he joined the volunteer companies and was aide-de-camp to Sir Roger Sheaffe at the battle of Queenstown Heights, where General W. Scott was taken prisoner. He became Adjutant General of Militia in Upper Canada. He died at Toronto in 1835.

The sixth son, JAMES, born in Boston, 1771, died at Quebec in 1835, Assistant Commissary-General.

These Boston men and women, sons and daughters of brave John Coffin, are all living instances of the loyal faith in which they were born, and of its honorable and just reward of a grateful and kind government, and is but one case of many which goes to show that the Americans who were loyal, as a body fared infinitely better than the Revolutionists who were successful. It is proverbial that republics are ungrateful.

Today their descendants are organized as the United Empire Loyalists and count it an honor that their ancestors suffered persecution and exile rather than yield the principals and the ideal of union with Great<sup>[246]</sup> Britain. They have made of the land of their exile a mighty member of the great British empire, they begin to glory in the days of trial through which they passed.

LIST OF JOHN COFFIN'S CONFISCATED ESTATES IN SUFFOLK COUNTY AND TO WHOM SOLD.

To Christopher Clark, Aug. 9, 1783; Lib. 139, fol. 151; Land in Boston, Essex St. S.; Short St. W.; Joseph Ford E.; Thomas Snow N.

To Moses Wallack, Mar. 12, 1785; Lib. 146, fol. 260; Land in Boston, Essex St. S.; said Wallack W.; S. and W.; Blind Lane N.; Thomas Downes and Samuel Bradley E.

To Edward Jones, Feb. 13, 1786; Lib. 155, fol. 111; Land in Boston, Essex St. N.; the sea S.; sugar house and land of heirs of Thomas Child deceased E.; Mary Pitman and heirs of Samuel Bradley W.; with flats to low water mark.

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**Title: The Loyalists of Massachusetts  
And the Other Side of the American Revolution**

**Author: James H. Stark**

"History makes men wise."—Bacon.

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To The Memory of the Loyalists of The Massachusetts Bay

WHOSE FAITHFUL SERVICES AND MEMORIES ARE NOW FORGOTTEN

BY THE NATION THEY SO WELL SERVED, THIS

WORK IS DEDICATED BY THE

AUTHOR

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