

James Rogers 1 – Family Story Attachment

On a brisk January evening in the year 1784, Major James Rogers of the King's Rangers, stood on the banks of the St. Lawrence River near Montreal. As he looked out upon the snow-laden hills and across the frozen waters, he was reflecting on his turbulent past and considering, what must have seemed at the time to be, a very uncertain future. The recent war to defend the King's rights in America and to retain the Lower Thirteen Colonies, including his lovely home, as an integral part of the British Empire had ended in defeat and the cost to him personally had been great indeed.

His land holdings, all painstakingly carved over a lifetime of toil out of the almost unyielding wilderness of New Hampshire and an area recently established as Vermont had been confiscated. All his possessions were gone. His family had been subjected to vial threats and persecution, and at one point brought to the very brink of starvation; harassed by those he, at one time, had counted among his close friends, neighbours and in some cases close relations. These were among those for whom he had risked his life to secure the frontier from the threat posed by the French and their Indian allies only a few short years earlier. Where was the gratitude for his contribution to the security of his country? His current losses were due to his allegiance to the Crown, coupled with a strong personal belief in the concept that the rule of law should prevail in a civilized society.

In 1772, he had been appointed Colonel in the local militia by Governor Tryon of New York and in 1774, was elected to the Committee of Correspondence. In 1776, he had been elected and sent as a member to the General Convention at Dorset, to explore the possibility of creating a new province out of the area then known as the New Hampshire Grants.

While he supported the creation of a new colony, he could not espouse the proposed challenge to the King's legal authority that was discussed at length. British troops had been fired upon. It was not that he lacked sympathy with the concerns expressed by the so-called Patriots, but he did firmly believe there had to be another way, short of armed conflict, to resolve these issues with the crown. When hostilities broke out, he had been offered a commission as a Brigadier General in the Army of New York by the legislature but he had declined the offer because of his convictions. He was later forced to resign his position on the Committee of Correspondence when he refused to take the Oath of Allegiance demanded by the Committee of Safety. These actions forced him to flee for his own safety, leaving his family at home; believing they would remain under the protection of the State. The decision to remain on the side of the Tories had not been an easy one, but he was absolutely certain it had been the right choice, both legally and morally. The personal cost, however, had been great. He shivered as the cold north wind blew against his broad shoulders and started walking slowly toward town.

Now, at the age of 56 years, he was being forced to start once again, to carve yet another new home from the seemingly unending wilderness, this time in the harsh country north of the Great Lakes, an area that had once been occupied by the French and their Indian allies, an old enemy. He had seen the proposed area of settlement before. At the end of the last war that had resulted in control of Canada being wrestled from the French, James had accompanied his brother, Major Robert Rogers of Rogers' Rangers, to the upper Great Lakes to accept the surrender of the French posts all the way to Detroit. The year was 1760. Later, on his return to his home in New Hampshire through Montreal following the Pontiac's Uprising of 1763, he had seen the area once again. It was truly beautiful country but he never envisioned it would be a place where he would eventually settle. There was just too much wilderness and it was too far from civilization.

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He and his family had fortunately survived the war relatively unscathed, but his personal estate and resources were in total ruin. Now, with his wife and four of his children, he was making the final preparations to move further west, to the lands promised by the King. The new settlement would be near a place the French had named Cataraqui, but that shortly would be known as Kingston. There was so much to do and so little time for it to be accomplished. There were supplies to be purchased, transportation arranged and security organized for his group of settlers. His responsibilities weighed heavily upon him but he must remain strong for his family. These thoughts were also flooding his mind as he looked out across the bleak landscape of the Canadian winter.

James had been a landholder but was not an aristocrat; he was just a farmer and, like so many others, was caught up in the conflict and forced to choose sides based on his personal convictions. The financial cost of that choice had been great, but he remained convinced that the decision he had made had been justified, as dusk approached on that cold January evening and he wrapped his cloak even closer about him.

His three sisters and their families as well as two of his brothers and their families, in fact all of his siblings except Robert either had sided with the Rebels during the war or had chosen to remain neutral. They had subsequently decided to remain in the new republic and this act had created a gigantic rift in the Rogers Clan that would likely take generations to heal. His in-laws, his wife's family were the same, either siding with the Rebels or choosing to remain neutral with the intent of siding with the victor. While James respected the members of his extended family, he could not accept their inaction or acts of outright disloyalty and the abandonment of his own family in time of need. He would not have done the same if they were in distress. It was unlikely he would ever see his close relations again and this realization hurt deeply. His eldest daughter Mary, and her husband John Armstrong, had also decided to remain in the United States and this was a very painful turn of events, a bitter disappointment. It was so chilly on the January evening and thoughts of his extended family had turned frosty as well.

His brother, Colonel Robert Rogers, for all his fame and glory during the French & Indian War as commander of Rogers' Rangers, and in the more recent conflict in command of first the Queen's Rangers and later the King's Rangers, had returned to England with the defeated army. He had been broken in body, mind and spirit and had become but a shell of his former self. It was unlikely he would ever return to America. James had lost family and close friends, and the emotional cost of his personal convictions had indeed been great, yet he was steadfast in the belief that his decision had been right, as the snow started to swirl about him in the slowly fading light of the approaching sunset.

His own Regiment, the 2nd Battalion of the King's Rangers, had been disbanded the previous fall and some 300 ex-rangers and their families had expressed a desire to accompany him to the new lands provided by the King, to settle near their former commander. It seemed they would continue to be his personal responsibility and it would undoubtedly be difficult.

Sir John Johnson, Commander of the King's Royal Regiment of New York, and son of Sir William Johnson, had asked that James look after the affairs of some of his men. His regiment was to settle in the same area as the Rangers. All James wanted was to be left alone; to attempt rebuild his life and provide as best he could for what remained of his family, but as a leader he could not ignore his responsibilities.

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He had answered the call to arms and fought for his King and country whenever called upon in every conflict since his family first arrived from Ireland in 1728. It seemed he had been fighting almost continuously his entire life and in reality, he had. A great deal had happened over a lifetime and some of the memories would likely be painful for years to come. Yet in spite of all this, he remained convinced that the decision to remain loyal to his Sovereign and true to his own convictions had been right and honourable!

He had recently returned to his former home and found destruction at the hands of his friends and neighbours. The peace had made certain assurances for the protection of the Loyalists, as they were now called, but the policy was unenforceable and the slurs and insults were difficult to bear. He felt at the time that he and his men had been abandoned by the Crown and left to their own devices. It was bitterly cold on that January evening and the future was uncertain but he had a deep personal assurance that he had done what was absolutely justified before God and his King. These were the thoughts of reflection in his mind as he increased his pace through the crisp snow, the warm comfort of his family being his destination.

Margaret sat quietly rocking by the fireplace in their lodgings awaiting James to return home from his walk. This was not the first time he had withdrawn unto himself. She had seen the signs before and she knew the man she loved with all her heart, soul and mind was suffering from the weight of the years. The war had taken its toll but in spite of all the hardships, she was, as from that very first day, fully supportive of his decisions and vowed to remain at his side whatever the cost. The war had been very hard on her as well, and on more than one occasion, she seriously doubted she would survive, but for the sake of her children, she persevered.

She and James were married in 1761, shortly after his return from the old French War and they had built a fine home and farm in Londonderry, New Hampshire. In 1763, James was again called to action to deal with the Indian problem out west near Detroit and she saw him off with a small child in her arms, their first. She was reluctant to see him leave but she knew of his devotion to duty and prayed for his safe return. In 1772, she had been at his side when he had decided to acquire the new township of Kent, knowing the cost of that decision. There would be a number of hardships in clearing land and it would be years before she had such a fine home again, but she trusted James and knew he would take care of his family. She got up to light the candles while she awaited her husband on that cold evening as the dusk descended.

By 1775, they had been well established in the new settlement but then their difficulties really began. When James took his stand to remain loyal to the King, she supported him fully, and was left behind with the children when he was forced to flee. She could not have imagined just how cruel her neighbours and friends had been and there were many evenings she had gone to bed with tears, but never in front of the children. Then the sheriff had come with a document that said their farm and all of their possessions were seized by order of the Committee of Safety and were to be sold at auction. She and the children were placed on a small farm with little more than a shack in which to live, with barely enough supplies to sustain them and with no tools with which to work the soil. At the time, her children were 14, 11, 7, 4 and 2 years. They were helpers but it was difficult. These thoughts flooding her mind caused her to remember that supper must be prepared and the children fed. How they had grown in the last 8 years. She got up to stir the fire and prepare the evening meal.

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She remembered that had it not been for her two brothers, both of whom had served in the Continental Army and who had little good to say about her husband, she would surely have perished. Her brother Robert McGregor was aid-de-camp to General Stark and she had learned both her brothers had been with Stark at the Battle of Bennington in 1777 when James had been with the British forces. It was such a shame. The Rogers brothers, the sons of David McGregor and the Starks had all played together along the banks of the Merrimack River near Londonderry as children; and later fought together in the Rangers to quell the Indian threat, but then came the Revolution. James had escaped from Saratoga when the army of Burgoyne surrendered and was later given a commission in a regiment called the Royal American Reformers. A year later he was appointed a Major under his brother Robert in a new unit, the King's Rangers, which was intended to operate from Quebec. Fortunately, James had been able to rescue their eldest son during the winter of 1782 to prevent him from being totally corrupted by the rebels and pressed into their service.

In the spring of 1783, she and the children were finally able to travel across the country in secret with the help of a close friend. They joined James at Fort St. John's, on the Richelieu River and, after seven long years of war, it was a happy reunion in spite of all the trials. They were a family again and they were all safe. After Yorktown, all indications were the fighting would soon be over and the outcome was all but certain. They were on the losing side and would have to begin yet again.

Last fall James had returned to their farm to recover whatever he could and settle his affairs. He was given a very poor reception despite assurances by the new government but he held his head high and she was never more proud of him than at that moment. Now he was off for his evening walk on this cold night, preparing for the next phase of their lives. After all the hardships, she still trusted that God would see them through and give them the strength to carry on. She knew James would be in charge of moving to the new settlement and that their future was secure in his hands. A peaceful thought. At that moment, the door opened with an icy blast. James stepped into the warmth of his loving family and all was right with the world.

James Rogers, Lieutenant Colonel of Militia, died on his new farm some six years later at the age of 62, still steadfast in his convictions. It was difficult in the new colony, especially in the years of the crop failures, 1786 and 1787, when the settlement almost starved. He was the leader and it was his responsibility to get the Governor to personally intervene. They needed support from the King's stores to prevent disaster and failure of the settlement. James never saw his brothers or sisters again, but his daughter Mary and her family eventually joined them on the Bay of Quinte and his grand children brought considerable joy to the remainder of his life. Margaret died three years later in 1793 at the age of 68, still supportive of the decisions made by her husband and with no regrets. The Revolutionary War had exacted a high personal, financial and emotional price but the family had survived. They had had a life of bitter disappointments yet, like generations before them, they *Rose above their Circumstances*, took control of their lives and stepped into the future rather than succumbing to depression and despair.