

Digby's First Framed House Builder - A Loyalist Born in Ireland

By Brian McConnell, UE*



**'Holdsworth House', a Bed & Breakfast in Digby, Nova Scotia
named after Loyalist James Addington Holdsworth**

No houses remain today in Digby, Nova Scotia from its' original settlement, although Holdsworth House, a Bed & Breakfast is named after James Addington Holdsworth who arrived with other Loyalist refugees in 1783. It is located on Carleton Street which carries the name of Sir Guy Carleton, Lord Dorchester, who served as Governor General of British North America. He and Rear - Admiral Robert Digby were responsible for the evacuation of the Loyalists from New York at the end of the American Revolution. (1)

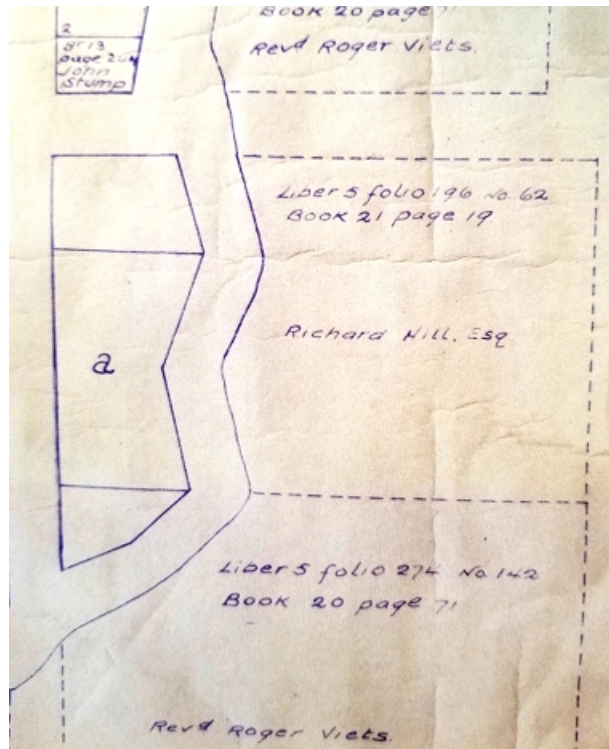
After the arrival at Digby in 1783 of some 1,200 Loyalist refugees who had remained loyal to Great Britain during the American Revolution they set about building their new homes. The first framed house was built by a man who was a native of Ireland. His name was Richard Hill.

Hill and many of the other United Empire Loyalists left most if not all of their personal effects behind when they were transported to Nova Scotia. Compensation for losses could be claimed by applying to the British Government. Thirteen fellow Loyalists signed as Witnesses a Statement in Digby in support of a claim by Richard Hill which indicated:

*"... we whose names are hereunto
subscribed do Certify, not only from Information but our own
knowledge, that he built the first framed house in this Town, that he
has ever Set a Good example to the inhabitants, has treated the
People who Came to explore the place with the Greatest
friendship, and hospitality and has made it his Study to promote
the Growth and welfare of the Town. We therefore Recommend
him as a Gentleman Worthy of Notice and Trust. " (2)*

The witnesses who signed the Statement in support of the claim by Richard Hill included several who had been in service with Loyalist Regiments during the American Revolution and also later settled in the Digby area like Major Robert Timpany of the New Jersey Volunteers who built a home at Rossway and Captain John Taylor of the same Regiment who settled near Weymouth.

There is now no trace of Richard Hill's home he constructed in Digby. His brother John Hill also came to Digby as a Refugee. Both of them are listed in the Muster Roll of Discharged Officers and Disbanded Soldiers and Loyalists for the Town of Digby, dated May 29, 1784. Captain Richard Hill is shown as head of household with three adult females, and four servants. John Hill appears with one adult female, one child under 10 and three servants. Some of the lands which the Hill brothers owned in the Town can be seen on a map compiled in 1850 indicating the early property owners. (3) On this map property of Richard Hill, Esquire is seen to be bordered on two sides by Reverend Roger Viet, another Loyalist, originally from Connecticut who became the first Minister of Trinity Anglican Church in Digby. On the other side is Water Street, and beyond that was Carleton Street, where Richard Hill also acquired property described as including two houses. His brother John located nearby. (4)



Map showing lands of Richard Hill, Esq. in Digby

The Hill family had relations in Ireland. Richard Hill in his Memorial for Losses during the American Revolution made in Digby on October 2, 1786 to the two Commissioners appointed by the British Government stated he was “a native of Ireland and came to America in 1772...at the request of Crean Brush who was his relative and had considerable tracts of land on the Connecticut River.”(5)

Crean Brush was a grandson of John Brush who served as an Officer in a Dutch Regiment against the Jacobites in the major Irish battles at Londonderry, Aughrim, and the Boyne. He was rewarded for his military service with a number of properties near Omagh in County Tyrone. He later purchased properties in County Meath and in Dublin City. (6) After the death of the wife of Crean Brush during childbirth, he placed his daughter with a sister in County Down and sailed to New York where he had obtained employment as a government official. He became licensed as an attorney and engaged in a land speculation business in the unsettled parts of the province of New York.

A Memorial of Richard Hill made to two British Commissioners of Loyalists Losses who were visiting Digby in 1786 provides an interesting insight into his experience and losses during the American Revolution. Below is a transcription with comments added in brackets:

Digby 22 October 1786
Ray's Tavern, Digby, Nova Scotia.
(Operated by Loyalist Robert Ray from New York)

Evidence on the Claim of Richard Hill, Esquire
late of Westminster, New York Province

Claimant Sworn

Says that in the fall of the year 1783 he
delivered his claim to Elias Hardy who promised that
they should be delivered (one copy by himself and one
to be put to his Partner John Le Cheveliar Roome) to the
Commissioners in London for which claimant promised
that Hardy should be paid.

(Elias Harding and John Le Cheveliar Roome set up a business in New York collecting Loyalist claims to be sent on to the Commissioners appointed by the British Government for decision).

Produced Letter from Governor Tryon dated
20th May 1785 in which he says that he received his
Letter of the 16th December last with Certificates which
shall be laid before the Commissioners.

(Governor Tryon was Governor of NY from 1771 - 1780 after which he returned to England)

Claimant is told that if his name appears on the List of Persons sent home by Elias Harding & John Le Roome he will stand on the same footing which they do.

He is a native of Ireland and came to America in 1772, came to New York in the month of September of that year.

He came out at the request of Crean Brush who was his Relative and had considerable Tracts of Land on the Connecticut River.

At the Commencement of the Troubles he resided at Westminster in Cumberland County now Vermont and uniformly declared his sentiments in favour of Great Britain.

Produced depositions of William Pateman, Sheriff of Westminster County To Claimants being active in dispersing a Mob which attacked the Courts of Justice, and of S. Gale, Clerk of the Court to same effect.

Likewise Copy certificates from many officers Navy and Army to Claimants Loyalty and good conduct as Inspector of Brooklyn Ferry.

(Losses)

*Property No. 1 900 acres on Connecticut River, Vermont
Purchased this from Crean Brush at the rate of one Dollar an acre in 1774 and had paid 200 Dollars of the Purchase money; there is no cultivation on this, and he is lately informed that this with other Property of Crean Brush is in the possession of Ethan Allen who married the daughter in law of C. Bush.*

- No. 2 *In 1775 his House was broke into and
Plundered in the amount of 60 pounds sterling because
he had opposed the Rioters*
- No. 3 *Crops...wheat, Indian Corn, and stok taken by the
Rioters at the time he refused to take arms ..100 pounds sterling*
- No. 4 *Was taken on his passage at the evacuation of Boston
150 pounds sterling*
- No. 5 *Pay a dollar per diem while acting at Boston
Under Crean Brush and offences in jail
135 pounds 2 shillings*

*Digby 23 October 1786
Ray's Tavern, Digby Nova Scotia*

Further Evidence in the Claim of Richard Hill

*James Hughston witness sworn
(Loyalist from Queens County, New York)*

*Says that in 1775 when Mr. Hill went to
Boston from New York he left Mrs. Hill at witnesses
House on Long Island which was set on fire by
the Rebels, when her bedding and clothes were burnt.
Thinks her loss might be 20 pounds.*

*Digby 24, October 1786
Ray's Tavern, Digby Nova Scotia*

Further Evidence on the Claim of Richard Hill

*Says he was in New York in 1772
when Claimant came to this country from Ireland
Says he brought household furniture,
bedding and linen what was necessary for his family
He was with him at Westminster when Claimant
lived with Mr. Brush.*

He has no farm of his own, he never cropped Mr. Brush's farm. When he went to Boston he carried five chests and three Trunks Says he was employed by Crean Brush to collect Rebel Property at Boston. They did collect enough to load Brig. Elizabeth. The Brig was taken on her passage to Halifax, believes the Captain is a Rogue.

Says he never heard this property had been collected without authority.

Mr. Hill had several chests and trunks of furniture and clothes. These were taken by the rebels when this Brig. was taken.

The evidence put by Richard Hill before the Commissioners indicates that after arriving in New York in 1772 he settled at Westminster with his relative Crean Brush. In Ireland he had experience in the malting and distilling business and had recruited tradesman in New York and bought stills there to ply his trade in Westminster. He was made Sheriff of Cumberland County in 1775. In March of that year he raised a posse and defeated a lawless assembly at Westminster but then was imprisoned and treated cruelly. His experience and losses were described in a Claim he made in March, 1775. (7) After his release, in September 1775 he fled on board HMS Asia.

Richard Hill went to Boston in 1776 and served as Lieutenant of an Independent Company. On the evacuation he took passage on a ship that was captured by privateers. After his escape he made his way back to New York. In New York he was made inspector of the Brooklyn Ferry, but in May 1780 broke his thigh bone. Since then he was required to walk with crutches. On the departure of the Loyalists from New York he traveled to Digby where he built a home for his family.

Soon after his arrival in Digby Richard Hill was made a Justice of the Peace and became one of the first judges. He also was one of the first Vestrymen of Trinity Anglican Church and one of the three present when Reverend Roger Viets was inducted as the first Rector on August 28, 1786. The others present were James Wilmot and Isaac Hatfield. (8)

It is believed Richard Hill died about 1803 and was buried in the cemetery beside Trinity Anglican Church in Digby. Although he has no gravestone there is one for his wife Jane who died on 6th June 1800. It reads:

“Here lieth the body of
JANE HILL
Consort of Richard Hill
Died 6th of June, 1800, aged 60 years
Born in Ireland. Descended from the noble
families of Bruce and Stuart.
Her life was exemplary and pious.”



**Gravestone of Jane Hill, wife of Richard Hill in
Trinity Anglican Church Cemetery, Digby, NS**

* This article was completed on March 2, 2020. Brian McConnell, UE is a Loyalist author and researcher. He can be contacted at brianm564@gmail.com

(1) G. P. Browne, "CARLETON, GUY, 1st Baron DORCHESTER," in Dictionary of Canadian Biography, vol. 5, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–, accessed March 6, 2020, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/carleton_guy_5E.html

(2) Claim dated at Digby, 23 February 1784. The 13 witnesses were: Capt. Alex. McDonald, Major Robert Timpany, Major Joseph Van Dike, Captain William Totten, Joseph Munford, Captain John Hatfield, Captain Ebenezer Ward, Captain Israel Young, Captain Joseph Hooton, Captain John Taylor, Captain William Thomas, Benjamin James, and Captain Neill McNeill. (Source: GB, PRO, AO13, Vol. 107, folio 77) Also transcribed at <http://www.royalprovincial.com/military/mems/ny/clmrhill2.htm>

(3) Compiled Map of Town of Digby, Crown Land Records, compiled from records in 1850 based on original plan prepared in January 1784.

(4) Deed from Samuel Milligan to Richard Hill dated 15 October 1790 registered in Land Registry for Digby County, Nova Scotia on 17 March 1791 in Book 1B at Page 344. Also see lands of John Hill as described in Mortgage from John Hill to Benjamin Hunt dated April 19, 1791 and recorded April 27, 1791 in Book 1B at Page 357.

(5) The National Archives of the UK; Kew, Surrey, England; American Loyalist Claims, Series I; Class: AO 13; Piece: 023

(6) Eugene A. Coyle and John J. Duffy "Loyalty and Its Rewards in Eighteenth-Century New England and County Down: The Cousins Crane Brush" in Eighteenth-Century Ireland, Vol. 16 (2001), pp. 118-134

(7) The National Archives of the UK; Kew, Surrey, England; American Loyalist Claims, Series II; Class: AO 13; Piece: 013

(8) Vestry Minutes of Trinity Church, July 16 - August 28, 1786 and as referred to in "The Loyalists and the Victorians Build a Church: Trinity Anglican, Digby, Nova Scotia" by Doreen Evenden, Scallop Boat Press