

Biography of Loyalist Rev. John Beardsley

REVEREND JOHN BEARDSLEY, born April 23, 1732 at Ripton (now Huntington), Connecticut, died April 23, 1810 at Kingston, King's County, New Brunswick, just 78 years of age to the day. Graduated from King's (now Columbia) College, New York with the degree B.A. in 1761. His first public services were as a Lay Reader, when he "read prayers and sermons to very good acceptance". Rev. Dr. Punderson (father of Sylvia Punderson, his first wife) recommended him to the "Society for the propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts," organized in 1711, and the successor of one organized in 1711, and the successor of one organized in 1648 to extend the Gospel in New England, as a person suitable for missionary work. In the spring of 1761 he, with two others, sailed for England to secure ordination.

Immediately after his return he was appointed missionary at Norwich and Groton, a position which he filled satisfactorily for five years. October 26, 1766, he was transferred, by his own request, to Poughkeepsie, New York, which parish had been organized on the 23 instant, previous, and was incorporated by Royal Charter March 9, 1773. In addition to Christ Church, Poughkeepsie, he had charge of Trinity Church, Fiskill. He remained there over eleven years.

Upon the outbreak of the American Revolution, he deemed it his duty to remain loyal to the King of England, as he had sworn allegiance at the time of his ordination. Shortly after, the Committee of Safety arrested him as a Tory and confiscated his property. He, with his family, took refuge in New York City December 16, 1777. The following year he resided on Long Island.

Colonel Beverley Robinson, a prominent Loyalist, had been his parishioner at Fiskill, and upon his raising the "Loyal American Regiment for the King's service," the Rev. John Beardsley, on April 1778 was appointed Chaplain of the regiment. He shared its fortunes during the war, and at the close accompanied it to New Brunswick.

On the 19th of April, 1783, the transport "Union" sailed from New York City with 209 Loyalists on board, and landed May 10 - 14 days later - on the rugged rocks where the city of St. John, New Brunswick, now is sited.

He was the first clergyman of any denomination to minister, spiritually, to the needs of those "exiles". He did not confine his labors to this one locality, but, on foot and in canoes, he went wherever settlers had gone, doing the work of a godly pastor.

He was Chaplain of the "King's New Brunswick Regiment" from 1793 to 1802, and during his natural life received a Chaplain's half pay from the British Government.

He was an enthusiastic Mason and organized the first Masonic Lodge in New Brunswick, of which he was the Worthy Master.

In July, 1805, he visited his old missions at Poughkeepsie and Fiskill, and probably his numerous relatives in New Jersey.

The Grand Historian's Notebook: by R:W:Bro David "Bud" Gillrie: Right Worshipful Brother
The REVEREND JOHN BEARDSLEY:

By 1772 in the Thirteen Colonies it is estimated there were about 100 Masonic lodges, and there may have been a Masonic membership of 2,000 to 10,000, of a population of around 2,000,000.

The American Revolution was also a civil war and possibly one-third of the colonists were opposed to the Declaration of Independence, these were the so-called Loyalists or Tories. After this strife they were scattered: some to England, to the West Indies, with at least 42,000 moving into exile in Canada; 35,000 to the Maritimes, 1,000 to Lower Canada and 6,000 to Upper Canada. Some of them were Masons. One Masonic Historian tracked all known Loyalist Masons he could find and had a total of 236 names who settled in the Maritimes. Proportionately the same as there were in the Colonies.

Amongst these Loyalists was the Reverend John Beardsley.

[The following is an excerpt from an article on "Loyalist Masons During the American Revolution," by Wallace McLeod, U.E. , and published in *The Grand Design: Selected Masonic Addresses and Papers of Wallace McLeod* (Highland Springs, Virginia: Anchor Communications, 1991), pp. 149-162.]

Let me cite a family named Vanderburgh, a Dutch family that had settled in New Amsterdam in 1653. About sixty years later they moved up the Hudson to Poughkeepsie. ... Henry Vanderburgh (1717-1792) was known as Judge Vanderburgh. He was a Justice of the Inferior Court and a Warden of Christ Church, Poughkeepsie. The minister of his church, the Rev. John Beardsley, was a native of Connecticut, educated at Yale and Columbia. The minutes of the Masonic lodge at Poughkeepsie record that he preached the St John's Day Sermon in 1771, 1772, and 1774, and on one occasion the brethren formally passed a vote of thanks and presented him with a large folio Bible.

Rev. Mr Beardsley was opposed to the Revolution, and received "repeated insults" from those who supported it. His church services were suspended from 13 July 1776. When he persisted in his refusal to take the Oath of Allegiance to the State, he was confined to his farm, being permitted only "to go and Visit the sick & Baptize Infants where requested."

In his trouble, Beardsley was associated with Judge Henry Vanderburgh, whom we mentioned a minute ago. Early in December 1777 the Commission for Detecting and Defeating Conspiracies in New York reported that the more radical revolutionaries might actually inflict physical harm on Mr Beardsley and Mr Vanderburgh, and they therefore requested permission to send them through the lines to New York, which was in British hands.

Finally on 13 December the Governor of New York granted permission for the Reverend John Beardsley and his family and Mr Henry Vanderburgh and his family, "with their Wearing Apparel & necessary Bedding for the Family & Provisson for their Passage," to go down the Hudson to the city in a sloop-of-war under a flag of truce.

In June 1778 in New York Beardsley became Chaplain of the newly organized Loyal American Regiment. Soon afterwards he was initiated into a Masonic Lodge in New York. In 1781, when a new Provincial Grand Lodge was formed, Bro. Beardsley was unanimously chosen Junior Grand Warden, an office which he filled until the Loyalists left the city in 1783. Before the departure, he and seventeen other clergymen met together and signed a "Plan of Religious and Literary Institution for the Province of Nova Scotia." This eventually led to the foundation of the University of King's College, Halifax.

Together with many other Loyalists Rev. John Beardsley (aged 51) and Judge Henry Vanderburgh (age 66) gave up everything; they lost their homes and property, and went into exile, settling in the unoccupied part of what is now New Brunswick. Beardsley was "the first clergyman of any denomination to minister to the spiritual needs of the exiles." On 9 March 1784 the Masons invited him to become the first Master of the earliest lodge formed under local authority in this part of the province.

He built the first church to be consecrated in the province. He continued active in Masonic affairs as late as 1803, when he preached a St John's Day sermon on the text Hebrews 13:1, "Let brotherly love continue". He died in 1809.

Beardsley is regarded as the Founder of Freemasonry in the Province of New Brunswick. In 1916 the Grand Lodge of New Brunswick unveiled a brass memorial tablet to his memory in the church where he is buried, and in 1968 it instituted the Rev. John Beardsley Medallion, awarded every year for outstanding contributions to the Grand Lodge and to the advancement of Freemasonry.

The following Church Records reporting on the claim of Reverend John Beardsley to loss and claim commission advancing his claim for recompense of losses suffered for being a 'Loyalist'. Great Britain, Public Record Office, Audit Office, Class 13, Volume 21, folios 20-21.

Memorial of John Beardsley

To the Honorable Thomas Dundas and Jeremiah Pemberton Esquires, two of the Commissioners appointed by Act of Parliament for enquiring into the losses and Services of the American Loyalists.

The Memorial of John Beardsley, late of Poughkeepsey in the County of Dutches and Province of New York Clerk, but now of the Township of Maugerville in the County of Sunbury and Province of New Brunswick.

Humbly Sheweth,

That your Memorialist previous to the late unhappy War in America was Rector of the Parish of Poughkeepsey Dutches County Province of New York.

That his early and steady Attachment to his Majesty's Person and Government in opposition to the measures of the American Congress soon rendered him Obnoxious to

the aiders and abettors thereof, and was by the usurped authority of their Leaders made Prisoner at different periods in the year 1776 and 1777 and otherwise with his Family cruelly insulted, and finally in the Month of December 1777 was by an Order of the said Usurped powers Banished with his Family into the City of New York, then Garrisoned by his Majesty's Troops, and was suffered only to bring in with him his Library and his Family's wearing Apparel and Bedding leaving behind him a Considerable Real and Personal Estate which together with his Professional Losses and Annual Income of his Real Estate is Contained in the Schedule hereunto Annexed.

That in the Month of April 1778 your Memorialist received from His Excellency Sir Henry Clinton then Commander in Chief of his Majesty's Forces in America the appointment of Chaplain in his Majesty's Loyal American Regiment.

Continued doing duty as Chaplain with said Regiment until the Evacuation of New York in the Summer of the year 1783, when he removed with his Family to that part of the Province of Nova Scotia which by the late division is in the Province of New Brunswick.

That the Real and Personal Estate of your Memorialist as stated in the Schedule hereunto annexed has been Confiscated by an Act of the Legislature of the State of New York, and the Real Estate located upon and the Personal Estate sold, and the Sallary which your Memorialist had received from his Parish has been withheld since the 25th December 1775, as well as the Annual Rent of the Glebe or Church Farm which he lived on, since the time of his Banishment.

Your Memorialist therefore prays that his Case may be taken into your Consideration, in order that your Memorialist may be enabled, under your Report, to receive such aid or relief as his Losses and Services may be found to deserve.

'John Beardsley'
Maugerville (New Burnswick)
28th January 1786.

The Loyal American Regiment

This corps was raised almost entirely by the efforts of Colonel Beverley Robinson, a wealthy citizen of Dutchess County on the Hudson river. Its officers and men were nearly all natives of the Province of New York. A few months after its orgnization the regiment took part in the expedition of Sir Henry Clinton against Forts Clinton and Montgomery. The loyal Americans, though little more than raw recruits, formed a part of the column that stormed and captured Fort Montgomery. After their return to New York they formed part of the garrison there.

They took part in the campaign in Pennsylvania and assisted in the capture of Stoney Point on the Hudson River May 30th, 1779. Afterwards they were engaged in the campaign in the south under Lord Cornwallis. They suffered very heavily at the disastrous battle of King's Mountain where a band of the loyalist troops, out numbered by their enemies and surrounded on all sides, were obliged to surrender.

Col. Robinson had, as his Lieutenant Colonel, his son Beverly Robinson and others of his sons were officers in the king's service in one or other of the provincial corps. Thomas Barclay was major and Rev. John Beardsley rector of Poughkeepsie on the Hudson was chaplain. At the close of the war part of the Loyal American Regiment went to Nova Scotia and the remainder settled on the St. John river in New Brunswick.

Col. Beverley Robinson died in England. His son, Lieut Col. Robinson at the peace went with other loyalists to Shelburne but afterwards removed to New Brunswick and settled at Nashwaaksis in the parish of Douglas where his descendants still reside. Many of the officers and men of this corps who settled in the province made their influence felt in their respective communities. Rev. John Beardsley was rector of Maugerville. He was the ancestor of the Beardsleys of Woodstock. Dr. Peter Huggeford, a surgeon of the corps, was in early days a leading physician at St. John. Captain Christopher Hatch was a magistrate and colonel of militia at St. Andrews where he died in 1819 aged 75 years. Capt. Lemuel Wilmot, grandfather of the late Lieutenant Governor L. A. Wilmot, settled near Fredericton. Lieut. Anthony Allaire settled at Douglas, York County, where he died in 1839 aged 84 years; his diary which he kept during the southern campaign has been lately published by Dr. Lyman Draper in his book on "King's Mountain and its heroes."

The name of Reverend John Beardsley appears many times in the Legislative Papers of the Province of New Brunswick requesting the formalization of masonic Lodges throughout the Province.

(Contributed by Ian T. Fraser)