

# JOURNEY OF A LIFETIME

## THE TRUE STORY OF ISRAEL AND SARAH (HARRIS) HARDING, UEL

*"The unknown soldier is  
unknown only to us  
To those who loved him  
his name is  
Brother  
Son  
Daddy  
He is not forgotten"*

When one looks for and finds the path of their life back to a Loyalist or any other ancestor in their family tree, we at first are more concerned with those oh-so-important documents that "prove" by vital statistics who they were, and that they surely are who we come from. Bone of our bones, we say. After a while, though, we begin to ask ourselves, "Is that all there is?" So the journey to the sum of all the parts of who we are begins.

Before the internet evolved, obtaining documents was painstaking and often required travel and money for hiring researchers. About all of the early information passed to me through the family was referenced to George S. Brown's book ca.1900, *Yarmouth Genealogies*. For the Harding surname it begins, "*Col. Israel Harding came to Horton (NS) from New London, Connecticut a few years after the expulsion of the Acadians...*" There was the first documentation error that caused so much perplexity researching this family. 'Col' may have been a nickname, and 'Col' and 'Capt' is seen in a few old American publications, or possibly it was a title lost to time in their chaotic Revolutionary life, but extensive research turned up no designation of Colonel in any primary documents. He might conceivably have been known to his contemporaries as Captain since from his own words he owned a boat or two which he used until they were confiscated.

Israel Harding was non-military during the Revolution years. He said he worked with a Capt Nehemiah Hayden. Could he have been in a militia or auxiliary unit? His military designation of Lieutenant was earned in New London, CT. during the French and Indian uprising. Israel enlisted as a young soldier in His Majesties Service in 1755, Capt. Stephen Hosmer's Company out of New Salem, CT. Capt. Hosmer and a number of soldiers under his command served as a garrison at Pantusick, 30 miles north from Canaan, CT. until 08 September 1755. In the summer of 1756 he became a Lieutenant in the Fourth Company under Capt. John Slapp. His final assignment was *Lieutenant* with the Third Regiment, also under Capt. Slapp, from July to December, 1756. Several men of this company were captured by Indians, and at least one was carried to Canada and kept captive 18 months. (*Connecticut Historical Society records*). Soon after discharge Israel is newly married and off with his bride to pioneer in the new colony called Nova Scotia.

Sarah Harris was born 18 December 1739 the oldest child to Lebbeus and Alice (Ransom) Harris of New London, Connecticut. Alice (Ransom) Harris died and Lebbeus Harris married second Eliphal Noyes. Sarah must have admired her for she named her first daughter Eliphal. Israel Harding and Sarah Harris were married in 1759 in New London County, CT. Together with their family and friends and all they needed to start a pioneer home they soon left and sailed to Horton in Kings County, Nova Scotia with the New England Planters. In 1760 they were grantees there.<sup>1</sup>

Israel and Sarah settled as farmers on their grant in the town plot in Lower Horton. Israel was a member of the committee chosen to mark the boundary of Horton and Cornwallis Townships, "*beginning at a tree marked H...*", signed 27 March 1765. Less well

known is the fact that a little over a decade after coming to Nova Scotia for some obscure reason, Israel and Sarah left and took their children back to Connecticut to start a new life in their homeland. A few short years later they perhaps had some regrets as they were caught in the ambiguity and for them, terror and heartache, of the American Revolution.

Israel and Sarah had in total seven children, five that were born before they left Nova Scotia - two sons, **Rev. Harris** (married Mehetible Harrington of Liverpool, NS) and **Israel Jr.** (married Rachel Fowler of White Plains, New York); and five daughters **Eliphal** (married 1st, Benjamin Lee of Digby; 2nd, William Allison); **Sabra** (married Charles Dewolf of Horton, died young); **Alice** (married M.P.P. Joseph Allison Jr. of Horton); **Mary** (married Benjamin III Peck of Horton); and **Sarah** (married Joseph Starratt of Cornwallis Township, lived and are buried in Chipman's Corner). The last two children were born after the family departed Horton around 1771 to return to New London, CT., the youngest was born 1780. The children all married into local families and initially settled in Nova Scotia, but Mary and Benjamin Peck later removed to Johnston, Licking, Ohio, USA.

It is not clear why they returned to Connecticut, but by 1771 Israel was buying and selling land in at least Colchester County, CT. and in 1774, Israel appears to have come to Horton to settle their affairs, as in a lengthy complex deed Israel then sold their grant land in Kings County, NS to two Nesbitt men from Windsor, NS, witnessed by Sarah's sister-in-law's parents. This deed is telling of their early distress and supports his later claims of Rebel harassment. He says, *"To all People unto whom these Presents shall come Greeting. Know ye that I, Israel Harding, late of Labanon in the County of Windham now of Saybrook in the County of New London in the Colony of Connecticut, Yeoman..."* Another deed shows he bought and sold a certain same parcel of land all in the same year. Norwich and Windham counties inland were where suspected Tories were detained. To the interested, read the excellent and colourful book, *The History of New London Connecticut*, by Francis M. Caulkins (1895), particularly pp. 503-4,<sup>†</sup> which explains the historical events of 1777 and why a Tory in New London, CT or any other Colony, would fear for his life.

For instance, he would not have been able to get provisions for the family such as were promised to the families of the Continental soldiers. If citizens "unnecessarily expend any gunpowder at game or otherwise" they were to be fined "20 shillings ...for every musket charge" and were generally restricted.<sup>2</sup> These happenings were often not recorded, but were voted on and enforced by the Committee of Correspondence. The author goes on to explain what the various Continental "Committees" were about. Further, the very meeting house where the Rebels had planning meetings was in the neighbourhood of the old Harding farm.

Caught in the cross currents of Rebel and Tory family members, those years must have been a very difficult time for Israel and Sarah. While Israel saw no reason to reject the British rule and saw the Tories as those, in his own words, *"whose greatest crime if it may be deemed so has been love for their King and affection for the Parent Country"*<sup>3</sup>.

Of the five known sons of Stephen, born in 1733 Israel was the youngest, and the only one who continued to support the British side. It is clear the family who came to Nova Scotia united were deeply divided later both geographically and politically. His oldest

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<sup>†</sup> [https://archive.org/stream/bub\\_gb\\_HgIPz4OPYNoC#page/n523/mode/2up](https://archive.org/stream/bub_gb_HgIPz4OPYNoC#page/n523/mode/2up)

brother, Capt. John Harding removed to the frontier of Kentucky. It is said he dropped the 'g' from his name and the Hardin line there is well known; Capt. Stephen II removed with his family to the infamous Jenkins Fort in Wyoming Valley frontier. Abraham settled in PA, also a frontier then, and is the ancestor of US President Warren G. Harding, and Thomas seems to have stayed quiet or neutral in Colchester. Many years before, Israel's father, Captain Stephen Harding Sr. had purchased a 400 acre farm in Waterford, CT between 1729 and 1736 and retiring from sea life, moved his young family from Providence, RI. This is said to have "remained the center of the Harding family for many years."<sup>4</sup>

In July 1778 the Battle of Wyoming occurred and Israel's brother, Stephen Harding's two innocent sons Benjamin and Stukely were brutally killed by Indians near Fort Jenkins while working in the corn fields, sparking the Wyoming massacre. The Wyoming incident left much bitterness toward the British. It is clear the war events divided this family politically and geographically forever. By about 1781 Israel had fled to New York with a permit from the Governor at the request of his brother Thomas. Later he was joined by Sarah and their seven children. They lived in a Rebel's house assigned to them by General Robertson.<sup>5</sup>

In September the same year the town of New London was attacked by General Arnold who by now had defected to the British, and the consequence was that the town was burned.<sup>6</sup> In Colchester 1783, an advertisement for the sale of over 288 acres of "*that very valuable land known as the Harding farm*" appeared in the *Connecticut Gazette*. It was not in the ownership of a Harding anymore. Israel stated he had his own homestead in Saybrook, CT confiscated and later sold for \$800 dollars. No record was found. Saybrook is closer to the coast than Waterford where the old Harding farm was located, and more suited to the activities he participated in with his boat to assist the British troops and navy in Gardiner's Bay.

Israel assisted the British Fleet and Army by supplying them with fresh provisions & delivering messages.

According to a letter written to Sir Guy Carleton by Israel from New York in June 1783, and later his application to the British Commissioners for Compensation in 1786, Israel supported the British during the American Revolution and their life became difficult. Basically, he was a civilian spy and supplier. His depositions in his Loyalist compensation claim state he worked with his oldest son, Harris and a Capt. Nehemiah Hayden who states he met him in 1777 when Israel was imprisoned in New England. No court, committee, or confiscation records have been located. His brother, Thomas was more sympathetic to Israel's situation. After years of harassment, being dragged before courts and committees, imprisoned in 1777, and no doubt his nephews' death the following year, made Israel's situation unbearable. By about 1781, Israel had to leave Sarah and their seven children, one an infant, and flee to Long Island to the British for protection. Later she joined him, but even while there living in a Rebel home assigned by General Robertson, a rebel party (whom they knew) found them and one midnight again broke the door down, insulting and frightening the family, and robbed Israel.

His job during the revolution was to observe the French Fleet and rebels at Rhode Island or elsewhere and pass dispatches as requested. In Israel's own words, "*at the hazard of his life he often assisted in supplying the British Fleet and Army with fresh provisions and other supplies for which services and for being averse to the measures carrying on in America*

*against His Majesty's government, he became obnoxious to the Americans, was apprehended, imprisoned, harassed, dragged from place to place by files of armed men and Constables, leaving a wife and seven children behind with no way to support them but by what money I had, which with defending myself before courts and committees and other expenses arising therefrom, amounted to a sum of five hundred and twenty dollars; also two boats which were taken from me I made use of in carrying sheep and cattle from Connecticut to the Fleet and Army. That after your memorialist escaped to Long Island he had a house assigned him by Government from which house he was taken by Capt. Elijah Smith and a party of men, and robbed of goods, wearing apparel, and other effects to the amount of one hundred and twenty eight dollars; that your Memorialist by his attachment to His Majesty was dispossessed of a house and land in the Town of Saybrook in Connecticut which was afterward sold for eight hundred dollars...."*

They had escaped to Long Island, New York some two years before sailing back to Nova Scotia.

In 1783 when Israel knew they had to leave New York he tried to get a small vessel for his own use to bring the family to Nova Scotia "by the East", but instead found it necessary to spend £40 for their passage on the *Symmetry*, and altogether this left him nothing to take care of the family's needs. After the peace, while he was in the city to get promised support and arrange to get out of New York, Mr. Gillson the Rebel home owner, came to his house and the waiting Sarah and children were robbed "*of cash and moveables ... claimed for rent owed*" worth about £75. Recently a copy of a letter was obtained from the Carleton Papers, Harriett Irving Library, University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, dated 5 June 1783 and written by Israel Harding, now aged fifty years old, from on board the British Transport *Symmetry* in Sag Harbor, Long Island, New York waiting to sail for River St. John in Nova Scotia (Saint John, NB). It is a Petition to "*His Excellency, Sir Guy Carleton, Chief of all His Majesty's Forces in North America*" outlining their dire circumstances. His family was all together on board *Symmetry*, but "*in a sickly condition and distressed situation*". He states they have been living on Long Island "*close to two years*" at the invitation of Admiral Arbuthnot, staying in a house assigned by General Robertson. He prays for relief from his very great suffering. \$100.00 was awarded his petition by Mr. I.A. Coffin on the order of the Commander in Chief, Sir Guy Carleton.

According to the petition, the *Symmetry* was to sail 9 June 1783 for River St. John, Nova Scotia (now New Brunswick). Israel never intended to go to River St John. Though he was awarded a 200 acre grant in Queens County, NB it took little time once they arrived there for him to find transportation across the Bay of Fundy, once again going straight to the same Horton Landing where they had arrived 23 years before in 1760. They had come full circle. One can only imagine the surprise and joy of Major and Mrs. Lebbeus Harris, who had remained in Nova Scotia when the Hardings' returned to Connecticut, when his daughter and family arrived all together after surviving who knows how many years of separation and lack of communication. Many stories were shared around the warm home fires that winter!

In December 1783 Israel applied for and in January 1784 he received a 950 acre land grant somewhere between Horton and New Minas running between the Cornwallis and Gaspereau Rivers "next to Col Foster's Farm, so-called". This remained their family's central home during the remainder of his life. In 1786 he attempted to claim compensation for his

losses as a Loyalist before the Royal Commission in Halifax, but he was too late and did not have any documents to show for his losses. He had only four letters of deposition, but it was insufficient. His claim was rejected. Israel frequently "lamented" his losses and having his claim rejected.

Lieutenant Israel Harding was deceased by 18 July 1794 when his wife, Sarah, and children were awarded Probate Administration of his estate in Horton, Nova Scotia. The 950 acre farm was listed in the Inventory. His resting place is unknown, but he may have been buried with extended family and others in the Lower Horton old Planter cemetery, which became overgrown. There was no headstone when it was transcribed in the 1960's (Kings County Archive, Kentville).

In my search for their burial place, to my surprise we discovered Sarah later moved to Digby County, Nova Scotia to live with her daughter, Eliphah (Lee) Allison. After a remarkable life journey, there in a peaceful rural setting she attained the good old age of 96 years. She died 26 March 1836 at the home of her daughter, Eliphah. Dying in 1851, Eliphah herself out lived two husbands and lived to the age of 86 years. Mrs. Sarah Harris Harding is buried with her family on the side of the hill, in the old part of the beautiful, pastoral Hillgrove United Baptist Cemetery. Her stone has not survived. At least part of this cemetery was bequeathed by Israel and Sarah's grandson, William Henry Lee, Barrister at Law. In his will in 1860, five acres were bequeathed to the Baptist meeting forever, being "... the small piece of land on the side of the hill so called, for a burial ground". It is still in use today.

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**HARDING, ISRAEL:** - 6.7.1784 - \*Lived Queens county, N.B., before moving to N.S; A farmer from CT., arrived at aint John, NB with Civilian Company 4 on board the 'Symmetry'. Family on board listed as one man & woman, 6 children above 10 years, one child below 10 years and one servant. Family on arrival was one man & woman, 5 children 10 and above and 1 child under 10. Granted 200 A., lot 8 on Saint John River, Wickham Parish, Queens County, N.B., 6.7.1784\*\* -(Vol. I, # 5) \*(Source lost, possibly Esther Clark Wright.)

**AMERICAN LOYALIST CLAIMS**, 1980, by Peter Wilson Coldham, pg. 215-16 (Quote): **ISRAEL HARDING**, Saybrook, CT during war was driven from place to place because of loyalty, detained from his business, and had two boats (used to supply British) taken from him by rebels. In 1777, was imprisoned in N.E.; after being held under guard in several places, had to leave family and settle in Long Island. While there rejoined by family, served government by carrying cattle and provisions. While on L.I. with wife and 7 children was robbed by raiding party headed by Capt. Elijah Smith. Was also responsible on L.I. for receiving and forwarding despatches; worked with Capt. Nehemiah Hayden, formerly of Saybrook, and now of Chester, N.S., and Harris Harding, formerly of Saybrook and now of Cornwallis, N.S. Memorials: by claimant 20 Apr 1786 Horton; by Alice Harding 8 Mar 1786, Horton; Claim: House and land in Saybrook. Evidences: Deposition 8 Mar 1786 Cornwallis by Harris Harding [son] that he knew claimant. Deposition 28 Mar 1786, Chester by [Capt] Nehemiah Hayden, that he has known claimant since 1777. Deposition 10 Apr 1786 Horton by Sabra Dewolf [daughter] that she was at claimant's house on L.I. Sept 1781 when Capt. Elijah Smith of Haddam, CT broke down his doors at midnight, threatened family, and plundered house. Rejected. (AO13/25/262-270) [He had no documents to prove losses; could not go back or they were destroyed]

## REFERENCES

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<sup>1</sup> Acadia University Library, Planter Studies Center, Wolfville, Nova Scotia:

<http://libguides.acadiau.ca/content.php?pid=4546&sid=27980> (Acadia University Library)

<sup>2</sup> History of New London Connecticut from the first survey of the Coast in 1612 to 1860; (1895), pg. 503, Francis M.

Caulkins. (Online) [https://archive.org/stream/bub\\_gb\\_HgIPz4OPYNoC#page/n523/mode/1up](https://archive.org/stream/bub_gb_HgIPz4OPYNoC#page/n523/mode/1up)

<sup>3</sup> *Petition of Israel Harding*, British Headquarters Papers, Document #7894 - pgs. (1) & (2); (AKA Carleton Papers), Harriett Irving Library, University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada: dated 1783/06/05: Personal collection.

<sup>4</sup> Harding, Wilbur Judd, *The Hardings in America: a genealogical register of the descendants of John Harding, of England, born A.D. 1567*. Keystone, Iowa: Harding Print Co. (1925).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. See Reference #3.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. See Reference #2.

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