

THE JESSUPS, ADIRONDACK LAND BARONS

About 1764, Edward and his younger brother Ebenezer moved to Albany. There they formed a partnership, and over the next decade the two engaged in land speculation on a grand scale in the upper Hudson River area. On 14 August 1767 a petition was filed on behalf of the brothers and others, asking for a grant of 4100 acres of land. This would become Jessup's Patent on which Lake Luzerne is now located. A land grant for what now includes the Towns of Corinth, Luzerne and Hadley.

The Jessups built sawmills at "The Big Falls" on the Hudson and rafted logs down stream to their mills. They named the community Jessup's Landing, now Corinth. Above this point they maintained a ferry and a road which followed the river upstream five miles to Jessups Falls, now known as Rockwell Falls at Luzerne and Hadley.

They built spacious log homes and entertained such royalty as Sir William Johnson and Governor Tryon. Ebenezer was a client and business associate of Sir William. As shrewd businessmen the Jessups were among the sharpest and most colorful land speculators ever to live in Warren County. In their speculations they were no doubt aided by their close relationship with Sir William Johnson and John Butler. They resided on the upper Hudson in a sort of backwoods feudal magnificence until the American Revolution.

In 1771 Jessups, secured additional patents for about 15,000 acres in what is now the central and northern sections of the Town of Luzerne. In 1772, not content with their extensive holdings, the two promoters engineered the famous Totten and Crossfield Purchase of 800,000 acres, lying mostly north of Warren County, but embracing all the present Town of Johnsbury and part of the Town of Chester. The Mohawks and Caughnawagas ceded this tract during a grand council at the home of Sir William Johnson.

In 1774 the Jessups obtained another grant of 40,000 acres to what are now the Towns of Warrensburg and Thurman. Until their lands were confiscated, the Jessups held title to practically all of what is now western and northern Warren County. The Jessups also held grants as far west as the West Canada Lakes. They prospered and became the first of the great lumber barons of the Adirondacks.

By the early 1770s the groundswell of the American Revolution, had begun to make itself felt. The chief base of operations and gathering place for Loyalists had become that of the colony of the politically-favored Jessups. While the Jessups took note of the increasing unrest among the colonists, they and other Loyalists formulated plans as they quickly lost favor among the American rebels.

During the winter of 1775, although the war had not officially been declared, the colonists began to burn the mills at the landing and to destroy the ferry. The mills were closed down, workmen laid off, and provisions packed. At the threat of death, at the hands of the Americans, the Jessups fled up the Sacandaga River on snowshoes where they joined with John Johnson and other Loyalists at Fish House. From here the party continued up the West Branch and over the Long Lake Military Road and on to Canada.

In the summer of 1776, when Sir Guy Carleton succeeded in driving American forces out of the province of Quebec, the Jessups led a party of some 80 Loyalists to join him at Crown Point. The Jessup party became attached to Sir John Johnson's King's Royal Regiment of New York.

On 6 May 1777 Colonel Gordon in command of the Continental Militia in the Ballston Spa district, pursued and captured 31 Loyalists on or near Jessups' Patent. All admitted they were on their way to join Burgoyne and thus escape taking the oath of allegiance to Congress. Local tradition has it that at this time Edward Jessup, hotly pursued, made good his escape by leaping across a gorge in the Hudson where the stream then measured but twelve feet in width. The location of that gorge is at Rockwell Falls (Jessups Falls). Blasting away of rocks during the lumber era to permit passage of logs has widened it.

Jessup then made his way across Queensbury by an old road that paralleled the present route from French Mountain to Fort Ann. He would have crossed the trail over West Mountain. The route would be to the north of what today is known as the Halfway Brook, and crossed the military trail leading from Fort George on Lake George to Fort Edward in the vicinity of the Outlet Malls on Route 9, just to the north of the Great Escape. On the military trail, Fort Amherst had a location to the south where it crosses Halfway Brook in the vicinity of Route 9. Today, just to the north on Route 9, as you start to travel on a lengthy grade uphill, exists an historical marker depicting the location as the old boundary of New France.

From the location of the Outlet Malls east (through the Town of Queensbury) to Fort Ann Edward would have stayed to the north on high ground above the wetlands on what is today known as the Farm to Market Road, Rt. 149. In the area known as Fort Ann, the Halfway Creek joins Wood Creek leading to Skenesborough (Whitehall). In Washington County, Halfway Brook becomes Halfway Creek.

Edward continued to travel northward through Skenesborough to Burgoyne's camp at Willsborough Falls. Here he joined his brother, Ebenezer, who had fled rebel fury some months earlier and had received a commission in Burgoyne's army.

In the summer of 1777, General Gates dispatched militia under a Lieutenant Ellis, to raid the Jessup colony. The Loyalist leaders had long since fled, but the militiamen destroyed their homes, burned the grain fields, and left nothing standing but the mills. The dwellings of the Jessups had previously been pillaged and their elegant and expensive fittings carried away. Soon the site of the once bustling settlement grew up to weeds and bushes, the abandoned clearings becoming again a part of the wilderness from which they had been wrested by the toil of the pioneer followers of the Jessup brothers.

On 7 June 1777, with Ebenezer as lieutenant-colonel and Edward as captain in command of the bateaux service on the Hudson, the King's Loyal American corps took part in John Burgoyne's campaign. By October the Jessups surrendered with the remainder of the army at Saratoga, and then marched across country to reach refuge in Canada.

On the first day of October, 1778, Major Christopher Carleton of the 29th British Regiment with a detachment of 800 Regulars, a company of German levies, 200 Loyalists and 175 Native Americans embarked in 34 vessels at St. John's. His Loyalist battalion, commanded by Colonel Ebenezer Jessup, contained Loyalists, who would act as guides and make certain that not even the most isolated farmhouse would escape the wave of destruction. In 1779, the Jessups, now included among those attainted of treason by the State of New York, would be condemned to death if they appeared in New York. The State confiscated their properties. Ebenezer now moved with his family to live in safety in Quebec, part of which would later become the province of Ontario.

By 1780 heaps of ashes and stump-blackened clearings were almost the only evidences of attempted civilization in a land abandoned. In October of that year and again the following fall, Edward would participate in raids into New York. With these services and his administrative capacities, Governor Haldimand chose Edward as major commandant of the new corps of Loyal Rangers, created 12 November 1781, from a number of smaller military formations, including the Loyal Americans.

The new corps became known as Jessups Rangers. Exiled from Albany and from his lands upriver, Edward sent his family to safety in Canada while he led loyalist rangers in two incarnations. In April of 1783 hostilities ceased, and the corps was ordered to disband in December 1783.

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- Source – 1. Brown, William H. “History of Warren County, New York”.
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