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THE COLONY  
OF MASSACHUSETTS LOYALISTS  
AT  
BRISTOL, ENGLAND

BY  
PROF. WILBUR H. SIEBERT  
OF THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

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## THE COLONY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOYALISTS AT BRISTOL, ENGLAND

THE port of Bristol, England, early became a resort of American loyalists, and continued so both during and after the Revolution. Thomas Hutchinson, recently governor of Massachusetts Bay and himself a fugitive in England, made a brief visit there with his son Elisha on January 10, 1775, and found another New England refugee, one of the Waldos, already living there. After viewing the town, the governor declared it to be "well accommodated with well built houses for lodgings," but outside of three or four small squares he discovered no elegant residences "fit for a first-rate tradesman to live in."<sup>1</sup> The attractiveness of Bristol for Americans was expressed by Hutchinson after a second visit, which he made to the place over two years later, when he remarked significantly: "The manners and customs of the people are very like those of the people of New England, and you might pick out a set of Boston Selectmen from any of their churches."<sup>2</sup> The fact that living was cheaper there than in many other communities was an additional attraction of weight.

Already in 1775, loyalists were landing at Bristol or passing through on their travels about the country. Col. Benjamin Pickman of Salem arrived in April or May, having sailed from his home town five weeks earlier.<sup>3</sup> A Boston shipmaster, by the name of Johnson, also came in this year with his wife and children;<sup>4</sup> and before the summer was over a group of New Englanders, consisting of "Mr. Amory and wife, Quincy, Greene, Sears, and Callahan and wife," visited Bristol—probably having just arrived from America—and thence made an excursion to Aylesbury, the place where Sir Francis Bernard was then residing.<sup>5</sup> Before the lapse of the year, the

<sup>1</sup> Hutchinson, *Diary and Letters*, I. 346.

<sup>3</sup> Stark, *Loyalists of Massachusetts*, 266.

<sup>4</sup> Hutchinson, *Diary and Letters*, II. 271.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* II. 148.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* I. 513.

nucleus of a loyalist colony had formed at Bristol, its members being James Boutineau and family of Boston, one of the Auchmutys, Mrs. Borland and family of Cambridge, one of the Waldos, already mentioned, and possibly others.<sup>1</sup> During the next two years this group was evidently growing, for the Salem refugee, Samuel Curwen, who was an occasional visitor at Bristol and at times a resident there, mentions additional names of his fellow colonials who were living in the town.<sup>2</sup> Under date of September 29, 1777, he reports having spent the evening at Mr. Henry Barnes', "where he took tea with thirteen Americans";<sup>3</sup> and a week later he writes to his friend, the Rev. Isaac Smith at Sidmouth: "The number of our country folks here is eighteen, viz.: Mr. Boutineau and lady, Mr. Benjamin Faneuil and lady, Judge Sewall and lady, Mr. Barnes and lady and neice, Mr. Fenton and daughter and son, Mr. Fr. Waldo, Mr. Timmins, Col. Hatch's two daughters at school, and myself."<sup>4</sup>

The variation in names given by Mr. Curwen in his references at various periods to calls, teas, dinners and evenings at quadrille, shows that the loyalist circle in Bristol was enlarging, although removals to other towns and occasionally death tended to keep down the number. It is also noteworthy that the names which appear in Curwen's *Journal* are almost exclusively those of exiles from Massachusetts. From other sources, however, we know that loyalists from other American colonies dropped into Bristol, though there is no evidence to show that they became permanent residents there. In December, 1778, Judge Howard (probably Chief Justice Martin Howard of North Carolina) arrived from New York;<sup>5</sup> late in the following July, Lieutenant Governor William Bull of South Carolina was in Bristol;<sup>6</sup> as was also Peter Van Schaack of Kinderhook, New York, about three and a half months later still.<sup>7</sup>

Two years after the list of eighteen names given above, Curwen begins (September 24, 1779) a new series of entries relating to Bristol: the new names are readily recognized as

<sup>1</sup> Hutchinson, *Diary and Letters*, I. 536; II. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Curwen, *Journal and Letters*, 74, 76-77, 78, 141, 143-144.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 155.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 156.

<sup>5</sup> Sabine, *American Loyalists* (ed. 1847), 369; Curwen, *Journal and Letters*, 207.

<sup>6</sup> Hutchinson, *Diary and Letters*, II. 269.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* 293.

those of Massachusetts loyalists.<sup>1</sup> In a letter written April 19, 1780, Curwen presents another census of Americans in Bristol as follows: "Col. [Thomas] Oliver [late lieutenant governor of Massachusetts] and six daughters; Mr. R. Lechmere, his brother Nicholas, wife and two daughters; Mr. John Vassal, wife and neice, Miss Davis; Mr. Barnes, wife and neice; Mr. Arbuthnot; Mr. Nathaniel Coffin, wife and family; Mr. Robert Hallowell, wife and children; Judge Sewall, wife, sister, and two sons; Samuel Sewall, with his kinsman, Mr. Faneuil, and wife; Mr. Francis Waldo and Mr. Simpson, together with Mrs. Borland, a son and three daughters." Curwen concludes his list with the statement: "I send this by young Gardner, who with Mr. Leavitt and Capt. Carpenter leaves us to-morrow, and will shift for their passage to America as they can."<sup>2</sup> According to this census, the Bristol colony had now reached between forty and fifty members.

The list could not have been complete: for George Inman and wife of Philadelphia arrived in Bristol from London in March, or about a month before Curwen wrote the letter above quoted. There they remained "for the greater part of the time till after Christmas." Mr. Inman relates that he and his wife met many of the American families settled in the town, and gives the following names: "Thomas Oliver, John Vassals, Lechmere, Sewal, Bob Holbrook, Nat. Coffin, who died soon after, Mrs. Borland, Mr. Simpson, Mr. Fennel [Faneuil], Mr. Barnes, Mr. Coulson, and Mrs. Merchant, our friend Betsy Davis who resided with her aunt Mrs. Vassall. But [with] some of these," he goes on to remark, "by some means or other, a coolness took place, after which my visits to them were more out of form than friendship." He adds that "in August of this y'r [1780] R. Temple arrived at Bristol in a flag of truce from Bost. with his family, whom I saw and spent an evening with at the White Lyon."<sup>3</sup> It is notable that several of the names mentioned by Inman, in addition to his own, do not appear in Curwen's list.

<sup>1</sup> Curwen, *Journal and Letters*, 221, 224-226, 235, 236.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 237, 238.

<sup>3</sup> George Inman, "Narrative of the American Revolution" in *The Penn. Magazine of Hist. and Biog.*, vii. 246, 247. A letter from Jonathan Sewall of August 24, 1780, also mentions the arrival of Mr. R. Temple and family at Bristol "in thirty-two days from Boston." Curwen, *Journal and Letters*, 271, 276.

In the same month in which Mr. Temple and his family came to Bristol, James Russell was reported as a prospective settler. Curwen communicates the multiplied good fortune of this gentleman, who, he says, "by lucky captures by a letter of mark has realized fifteen thousand pounds sterling, is soon to be settled a Bristol merchant, and bound in the matrimonial chain to Mr. R. Lechmere's second daughter, Mary."<sup>1</sup> Whether many members of the colony engaged in the commerical activities of this thriving centre, we do not know. It is likely that the majority of them had private resources which they were able to supplement, in some instances at least, with an annuity from the government. For example, Governor Oliver, Curwen, and Samuel Sewall were recipients of pensions from the royal treasury, although we learn that the Governor's pension was "lessened £100, out of £300," when the revision of allowances to loyalist refugees was effected early in 1783.<sup>2</sup> Those who were without private resources found it very difficult to get along. A case in point was that of Robert Hallowell, of whom his brother Benjamin wrote to Edward Winslow, February 10, 1784: "Your worthy friend Bobby continues still at Bristol on account of the cheapness of living, and being amongst a number of friends who use every means in their power to be of service to him, the little money which he has been able with great industry to pick up added to the allowance of £120 a year Government, he is able to rub along."<sup>3</sup>

The group of loyalists at Bristol held together for some years after the close of the American Revolution, and continued to enjoy social intercourse among themselves in an unpretentious way. Among them were Mr. and Mrs. Henry Barnes of Marlborough, Massachusetts, who lived first in Canon's Marsh and afterwards in a "grand old edifice" on King Street, from which they could view "the Play House, the Assembly House, the Merchants Hall and the Merchants Library." While limited in means, they were nevertheless able to participate in the "routs" and other social diversions of the time. Some of the letters of Mrs. Barnes contain entertaining accounts of the New England circle in which she moved. On April 1, 1786, she wrote to her friends, the Misses Barker: "Wee have seven-

<sup>1</sup> Curwen, *Journal and Letters*, 264.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 367, 368.

<sup>3</sup> Raymond, *Winslow Papers*, 166.

teen American familys in Bristol, very Genteel well bred People, all of one heart and one mind. In this circle we are treated with Cordiality and respect, being quite upon a footing with them in the stile of Vissiting which is no more than Tea and cards — a little parade (to be sure) is nessisary upon these ocations in order to keep up the Ball, but as it is not attended with much Expence we readily consent to follow the Lead.”<sup>1</sup>

Death began to invade the ranks of this group early in its history. James Boutineau died before the middle of May, 1778,<sup>2</sup> Robert Temple before 1783,<sup>3</sup> and Nathaniel Coffin about a year later.<sup>4</sup> Other members survived for some years. Harriet, the wife of Lieutenant Governor Thomas Oliver and daughter of Colonel John Vassal, passed away in 1808,<sup>5</sup> and was followed on May 6, 1811, by Samuel Sewall.<sup>6</sup> The decease of Lieutenant Governor Oliver occurred on November 29, 1815,<sup>7</sup> while that of Joseph Waldo came the next April, the latter being ninety-four years of age.<sup>8</sup>

Most of these persons, like most of their fellow-countrymen in Bristol, were from Boston. But other towns and other colonies were represented. Governor and Mrs. Oliver, Colonel and Mrs. Vassal, and doubtless Mrs. Borland were Cambridge people. Judge Jonathan Sewall came from Charlestown, Massachusetts, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Barnes from Marlborough, Massachusetts, Thomas Coulson from Falmouth, Maine, John Fenton from New Hampshire, and John Inman and wife from Philadelphia. A number of them, if not the great majority, had been transported to Halifax with the British troops at the time of the evacuation of Boston in March, 1776, and from there had gone to England. This was the case with Lieutenant Governor Oliver and Robert Hallowell.

Among the members of the Bristol colony we find former merchants, lawyers and officials, including a clerk in the court of common pleas, a cashier and a comptroller of the customs at Boston, two mandamus councillors, and the last royal lieutenant governor and president of the council of Massachusetts. Some

<sup>1</sup> Tiffany and Lesley, *Letters of James Murray, Loyalist*, 259.

<sup>2</sup> Hutchinson, *Diary and Letters*, II. 205.

<sup>3</sup> Curwen, *Journal and Letters*, 497.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 484.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* 515.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* 506.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* 515; Sabine, *American Loyalists*, 492, 497.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* 483.



of the most eminent and respectable families of New England were represented at Bristol, among these being the Sewall, Vassal, Russell and Oliver families. Of the subsequent careers of individual members we know but little: Jonathan Sewall emigrated from Bristol to New Brunswick in 1788, where he was chosen judge of admiralty. Sabine reports that he died in that colony in 1796.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sabine, *American Loyalists*, 609.



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