

“From Ignored to Honored: Changing Views of the Loyalists”¹

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Abstract: This paper traces the evolution of Loyalist historiography from the American Revolution to the present, highlighting key shifts in historical interpretation. Initially portrayed as enemies or ignored in post-revolutionary narratives, Loyalists gradually gained recognition in historical scholarship. The essay examines pivotal works and trends that shaped Loyalist studies, including early cataloguing efforts, sympathetic portrayals during periods of Anglo-American alliance, and the impact of contemporary events on historical interpretation. It explores the explosion of Loyalist studies since the 1960s, emphasizing more nuanced and empathetic approaches. The paper also discusses recent historiographical trends, including Atlantic and global history perspectives, the focus on violence in the revolution, and efforts toward more inclusive history incorporating African American and Indigenous experiences. By analyzing these shifts, the essay demonstrates how Loyalist historiography has transformed, reflecting changing academic methodologies and societal attitudes toward the complexity of the American Revolution.

My unexpected inclusion as Loyalist historian began when I read correspondence between the Anglicans Reverend Abraham Beach and exile Bernardus LaGrange of New

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Brunswick at Rutgers University Libraries Special Collections.² I quickly realized that they needed to be included in any discussion of the American Revolution if I wanted to understand its scope and destruction and how it was a Civil War in New Jersey. As Bernard Bailyn noted about fifty years ago, the Loyalists help to “make the story whole and comprehensible.”³ He emphasized this point because, at the time, they often were not included. What follows is my attempt to briefly summarize the ways in which historians’ treatment of Loyalists has changed over time.⁴

During the American Revolution, not surprisingly, Patriots portrayed Loyalists as the enemy, which for Patriots they were. A famous aphorism states “a Tory is a thing whose head is in England, whose body is in America, and whose neck ought to be stretched.”⁵ After the revolution, when not denigrated, they were most often ignored. In the process of creating a new country, the emphasis was on uniting behind the “common cause.” Thus, “the founding fathers were portrayed as flawless paragons, commanding the almost universal allegiance of the population, and the loyalists who could not be totally ignored were simply blasted into oblivion, as craven sycophants of a vicious oligarchy, parasites typical of the worst corruption of the ancien regime.”⁶

When New Englander Lorenzo Sabine wrote *Biographical Sketches of Loyalists* in 1847, he provoked considerable controversy by suggesting that there were two sides in the revolution.

² Maxine N. Lurie, “Letter/s From a New Jersey Loyalist: Bernardus [Barnardus] LaGrange, England to the Rev. Abraham Beach, America, 1783-1792,” *New Jersey Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 5, no. 1 (2019): 284–298.

³ Bernard Bailyn, *The Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), xi.

⁴ See Bailyn, *The Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson*, “The Losers: Notes on the Historiography of Loyalism,” 383–408; Eileen Ka-May Cheng, “American Historical Writers and the Loyalists, 1788-1856: Dissent, Consensus, and American Nationality,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 23, no. 4 (Winter, 2003): 491–519.

⁵ Quoted in Jim Picuch, “The Loyalists,” in Picuch ed., *Seven Myths of the American Revolution* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 2023), 162.

⁶ Bailyn, 384.

This changed later as the “imperial” historians, studying and admiring the British Empire, were more sympathetic. When the extensive influx of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe arrived, historians also reflected the biases of the period and preferred to note the Anglo-Saxon ties with Britain and western Europe. What followed were efforts to catalogue the Loyalists and write early biographies. An early New Jersey example is William Stryker’s *New Jersey Volunteers (Loyalists) in the American Revolution* (1887). An example of an early biography is Henry Lawrence Gibson’s 1920 book on Jared Ingersoll, Sr. (1722–1781) of Connecticut, who was the Stamp Act collector for that colony. He ended up a Loyalist, while his son was a Patriot.⁷

By World War I, the United States was allied with Britain, so this sensibility increased. Edward Alfred Jones was a British historian who wrote about Massachusetts Loyalists and British artifacts. He compiled a list of New Jersey Loyalists in 1927 that is still useful (though not always accurate).⁸ This effort to catalogue continues today with Michael Adelberg’s work on Monmouth County and Todd Braisted’s collection of data on Loyalists for his extensive On-Line Institute for Advanced Loyalist Studies.⁹

⁷ Lorenzo Sabine, *The American Loyalists, or Biographical Sketches of Adherents to the British Crown in the War of the Revolution* (Massachusetts: C.C. Little and J. Brown, 1847); William Stryker, *New Jersey Volunteers (Loyalists) in the American Revolution* (Trenton: Naar, Day, and Naar, 1887); Lawrence Henry Gipson, *Jared Ingersoll: a Study of American Loyalism in Relation to British Colonial Government* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1920). Other examples: Alexander Clarence Flick, *Loyalism in New York During the American Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1901); Claude Halstead Van Tyne, *Loyalists in the American Revolution* (New York: Macmillan & Co., 1902).

⁸ Edward Alfred Jones, *The Loyalists of New Jersey: Their Memorials, Petitions, Claims etc. from English Records* (Newark, N.J., New Jersey Historical Society, 1927).

⁹ Michael Adelberg, *The American Revolution in Monmouth County: The Theatre of Spoil and Destruction* (Charleston, S.C.: History Press, 2010); Todd Braisted, “Home Page,” On-Line Institute for Advanced Loyalist Studies, Accessed Date, <https://www.royalprovincial.com>. Plus, more by each author. Also: Theodore Brush et al, *The King’s Men on Command: A Compilation of the New Jersey Loyalist Volunteers in the American Revolution* (Port Jervis, NY : Minisink Valley Historical Society, 1998); David J. Fowler, “Loyalty Is Now Bleeding in New Jersey’: Motivations and Mentalities of the Disaffected,” in *The Other Loyalists: Ordinary People, Royalism, and the Revolution in the Middle Colonies, 1763–1787*, Joseph S. Tiedemann, et al eds., (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009) 45–77.

World War II reinforced favorable views of the British. This led to leaving out conflict during the Revolution so as not to remind Americans that their enemies had changed. When the Jeffersonian Memorial in Washington, DC, was dedicated in 1943, the abbreviated text on the walls avoided particular sections of the Declaration of Independence (there is nothing about evil King George III). That year the librarian of Congress, in an introduction to a book about the document (by Princeton professor Julian Boyd), wrote that it was published “not to wound our English friends and Angloman fellow citizens,” but to “emphasize the [shared] principles of human liberty.”¹⁰ During the Cold War in the 1950s, the emphasis was again on unity, democracy, and the fight for liberty, not on disagreements during the Revolution and the views of the Loyalists.

This changed in the 1960s and 1970s, perhaps reflecting contemporary disagreements over the Vietnam War. The result was more sympathetic studies, such as Bernard Bailyn’s 1974 book, *The Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson*, on the last civilian colonial governor of Massachusetts. Bailyn approached his subject with an emphasis on Hutchinson’s intellectual ideas, picturing a conservative, wealthy man unable to understand the world as it changed around him, and in the process helping to ignite revolution. He ended his life an exile in England, in effect a man without a country, as he realized he did not belong there but could not go back to the United States. Rather than evil (as the cartoon on the book’s cover shows), he was essentially a tragic figure. At this point, interest in the Loyalists exploded and numerous studies followed, including one by Wallace Brown whose book title, *The Good Americans* (1969), says a lot.¹¹

¹⁰ Pauline Maier, *American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 209-214, especially 212.

¹¹ Wallace Brown, *The Good Americans: The Loyalists in the American Revolution* (New York: Morrow, 1969). Also, William H. Nelson, *The American Tory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961); Mary Beth Norton, *The British Americans: The Loyalist Exiles in England, 1774–1789* (Boston: Little Brown, 1972); Robert Calhoun, *Loyalists in Revolutionary*

Other biographies and books deal with New Jersey Loyalists with similar efforts at understanding rather than condemning, including several on William Franklin, the last royal governor of the colony. Sheila Skemp has written books looking at Benjamin Franklin and his son William, *Patriot and Loyalist*, the most comprehensive being her biography *William Franklin: Son of a Patriot, Servant of a King* (1990).¹² There are others by Daniel Mark Epstein and Willard Sterne. Included here can also be S. Scott Rohrer, *The Folly of Revolution: Thomas Bradbury Chandler and the Loyalist Mind in a Democratic Age* (2022), a recent effort to understand the ideological and religious ideas behind his loyalism. Donald Sherblom's work on the Vought Family, a German immigrant family from Clinton whose house is being turned into a Loyalist Museum, can also be added.¹³ It should be noted that Chandler and the Voughts returned after the war.

Recent studies (such as those by Robert G. Parkinson, Holgar Hoock, and Woody Holton) have emphasized the violence of the revolution.¹⁴ They also have been critical of the Patriots, saying they were excessively violent, owned slaves, expelled women, confiscated property, and mistreated prisoners. (I must add the British and Loyalists did the same to the

America 1776–1781 (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973); Carol Berkin, *Jonathan Sewall: Odyssey of an American Loyalist* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974); and more.

¹² Sheila Skemp, *William Franklin: Son of a Patriot, Servant of a King* (New York: Oxford, 1990); Sheila Skemp, *Benjamin and William Franklin, Father and Son, Patriot and Loyalist* (Boston, MA: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1994); Daniel Mark Epstein, *The Loyal Son: The War in Ben Franklin's House* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2018); Willard Sterne, *A Little Revenge: Benjamin Franklin and His Son* (Boston: Little Brown, 1984).

¹³ Donald E. Sherblom, *The Vought Family: Loyalists in the American Revolution* (Annandale: 1759 Vought House, 2008); Donald E. Sherblom, "A Loyalist Homestead in a World Turned Upside Down," in *The American Revolution in New Jersey: Where the Battlefield Meets the Home Front*, James Gigantino II, ed., (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 165-189.

¹⁴ Robert G. Parkinson, *The Common Cause: Creating Race and Nation in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University North Carolina Press, 2016); Robert G. Parkinson, *13 Clocks: How Race United the Colonies and Made the Declaration of Independence* (Chapel Hill: University North Carolina Press, 2021); Woody Holton, *Liberty Is Sweet: The Hidden History of the American Revolution* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2021); Holgar Hoock, *Scars of Independence: America's Violent Birth* (New York: Crown, 2017).

Patriots). Note Gregg L. Frazer's *God Against the Revolution: The Loyalist Clergy's Case Against the American Revolution* (2018), who spends a lot of time on Thomas Bradbury Chandler of Elizabethtown (while mistakenly saying he was from New York). He argues the Patriots were irrational, illegitimate, while the "Loyalists were denied freedom of speech, press, religion, due process" and "other rights." He concludes "Whatever one's view of the Revolution, it is difficult to put a friendly gloss or make excuses for the oppressive actions taken by the Patriots against the Loyalist ministers." This ignores that many, if not most, of the Anglican ministers in the south were Patriots.¹⁵

Other recent trends have impacted how the Loyalists are studied. The move to Atlantic History and then global history has broadened the perspective. Maya Jasanoff's *Liberty's Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary War* (2011) follows their spread across the globe where they proved to be troublesome citizens.¹⁶ Although they left to escape the revolution and its aftermath, she argues they never forgot the importance of liberty and demanded it in their new homes. She emphasizes and tries to enumerate those who left, where they went, and in the process mentions some from New Jersey. In contrast, other recent works—for example, Rebecca Brannon on South Carolina, Thomas Ingersoll on New England, and my work on New Jersey—emphasize those who stayed or returned.¹⁷

The efforts for more inclusive history have led to increased attention on the role of African Americans, particularly those who remained and those who fled to the British and ended

¹⁵ Frazer (2018), 181, 200.

¹⁶ Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World* (New York: Knopf, 2011).

¹⁷ Rebecca Brannon, *From Revolution to Reunion: The Reintegration of the South Carolina Loyalists* (Columbia: University South Carolina Press, 2016); Thomas N. Ingersoll, *The Loyalist Problem in Revolutionary New England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Maxine N. Lurie, *Taking Sides in Revolutionary New Jersey: Caught in the Crossfire* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2022). In the November 17, 2023, panel, Eric Olsen, historian at Morristown National Historic Park, noted Loyalists in the Morristown area during the Revolution.

up in Canada or Sierra Leone. For New Jersey, this includes the extensive work of Graham Hodges (especially on Bergen and Monmouth Counties), James Gigantino II, and others.¹⁸ Particular attention has been paid to Black Loyalist “Colonel” Tye in recent years.¹⁹ Also, there has been increased interest in indigenous history. Relevant here is Colin G. Calloway’s *The American Revolution in Indian Country* (1995), in which he concluded that the war was a “disaster for most American Indians” no matter which side they took. For New Jersey, the work of Gregory Dowd and Lorraine Williams is important.²⁰

Gregg Frazer has written that “The voices and ideas of the losers—of those who remained loyal to England during the American Revolution—are virtually unknown.”²¹ While this was true immediately after the Revolution, today this is simply nonsense. New studies continue to appear.²² Loyalists have gone from ignored to honored; today it is often the Patriots who are denigrated.

¹⁸ Graham Hodges, *Black Resistance in Colonial and Revolutionary Bergen County, New Jersey* (River Edge, NJ: Bergen County Historical Society, 1989); Graham Hodges, *African Americans in Monmouth County During the Age of the American Revolution* (Lincroft, NJ: Monmouth County Park System, 1990); Graham Hodges, *Slavery and Freedom in the Rural North: African Americans in Monmouth County, New Jersey 1665–1865* (Madison, WI: Madison House, 1997); James J. Gigantino II, *The Ragged Road to Abolition: Slavery and Freedom in New Jersey, 1775–1865* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

¹⁹ On the November 17, 2023, panel, Colonel Tye was noted by panelists Jennifer Cox and Thomas Hoffman National Park Service historians working on interpretations at Sandy Hook.

²⁰ Colin G. Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country: Crisis and Diversity in Native American Communities* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 291; Gregory Evans Dowd, “Declarations of Dependence: War and Inequality in Revolutionary New Jersey, 1776–1815,” *New Jersey History* 103 (1985): 47–67; Lorraine E. Williams, “Caught in the Middle: New-Jersey’s Indians and the American Revolution,” in *New Jersey in the American Revolution*, Barbara Mitnick ed., (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 101–112; Richard S. Grimes, *The Western Delaware Indian Nation, 1730–1795: Warriors and Diplomats* (Bethlehem, PA.: Lehigh University Press, 2017). On the November 17, 2023, panel, Claire Garland discussed Native American involvement in the Revolution.

²¹ Frazer, 1.

²² For example, see: Jim Piccuch, “The Loyalists,” in *Seven Myths of the American Revolution* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 2023), 162–192. Also noteworthy are published and republished narratives: James Moody, *Narrative of His Exertions and Sufferings in the Cause of Government, Since the Year 1776* (1782, 1783; reprint New York: Eyewitness Accounts, New York Times, 1968); Wade S. Kolb III and Robert M. Weir, *Captured at Kings Mountain: The Journal of Uzal Johnson, A Loyalist Surgeon* (Columbus: University of South Carolina Press, 2011); and the biography by Susan Burgess Shenstone, *So ObstinateLY Loyal: James Moody, 1744–1809* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2000).

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