“Unknown and Unlamented”: Loyalist Women in Nova Scotia from Exile to Repatriation, 1775-1800

G. Patrick O’Brien

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“UNKNOWN AND UNLAMENTED”: LOYALIST WOMEN IN NOVA SCOTIA FROM EXILE TO REPATRIATION, 1775-1800

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ABSTRACT

Between 1775 and 1784, more than 60,000 people fled the American states in order to escape the divisive civil war that tore apart communities and individual families. More than half of these people moved north to the maritime colonies of British Canada. While some of these “loyalists” were ardent supporters of the British Empire, many more found their allegiances thrust upon them due to their status as dependents.

This study examines the experience of refugee women in Nova Scotia in order to better understand not only Revolutionary-era allegiance, but also women’s important public and private roles in exile and repatriation. Although historians have portrayed loyalist women as consoling wives and daughters who dutifully submitted to men’s will, refugee women were not merely passive acceptors of their fate, nor resigned to domestic roles of support. Paying particular attention to both women’s expressions of emotion and the societal norms that governed late eighteenth-century society, this dissertation examines how loyalist women’s empathetic actions carried tremendous power in communities where loss and hardship were endemic. The widespread suffering of exile provided women the opportunity to take on important communal roles where they could both demonstrate their own fellow feeling and build the intangible networks that created new communities. Women also wielded their emotions in the home. Unhappy wives and daughters forced reluctant husbands and fathers to reconsider their families’ future as exiles, and brought many back to the United States after the war.
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INTRODUCTION

By the spring months of 1783, the first reports from agents dispatched to Nova Scotia arrived back in New York City. These accounts, which were printed in loyalist newspapers in New York and across the eastern seaboard, assured concerned British sympathizers moving north that they would find “safe and advantageous asylum.” One report promised that after the settlement of a few energetic colonists, Nova Scotia would be “ranked among the first” settlements in America.\(^1\) Although the British commander in New York, Sir Guy Carleton, continued to worry about the logistics of removing thousands of loyal British subjects, transporting them north, and supplying them through the winter, the positive depictions of Nova Scotia provided potential settlers a modicum of comfort. In late August, Joshua Upham, a Massachusetts native and an officer in the King’s American Dragoons, wrote to fellow New England loyalist Edward Winslow Jr. about his plans to move north with the next convoy. “We shall all soon be with you,” Upham confidently informed his friend, “every body, all the world moves to Nova Scotia.”\(^2\) Reeling from what one historian called “the cold awareness of defeat,” Upham’s


optimism was “a needed balm.” Although British-sympathizing colonists had lost the war, many remained hopeful in the promise of Nova Scotia and expressed enthusiasm similar to Upham’s.³

Despite his outward confidence, Upham harbored personal doubts concerning the resettlement plan. A native of Brookfield, Massachusetts Upham graduated from Harvard in 1763 and established himself as a leading attorney in the area. Far from a staunch supporter of the crown during the colonial crisis, he carefully planned his public statements to provoke as little reaction as possible. As tensions between New Englanders and Great Britain grew, he attempted to placate both sides, agreeing to both non-importation and non-consumption, while also signing his name to the public address of support for Governor Thomas Hutchinson and Lieutenant-Governor Thomas Gage. A note he wrote to the Brookfield Committee of Correspondence is perhaps most indicative of his attempt to attract the least amount of attention possible. In this letter, he vowed, “To submit and conform to the sense and opinion of the majority members of [the] community…whether agreeable to my private judgment or not.”⁴

Massachusetts law, however, worked against Upham’s attempts to disguise his ambiguous loyalties. When he refused to swear an oath of allegiance to the state in 1777, the rebellious government seized his estate and property. He accepted a commission in the British army, but only as a last resort to support his family. He worked his way

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³ MacKinnon, This Unfriendly Soil, 7-8.

through the loyalist ranks and eventually became an aid to Carleton in New York. Even as he prepared to move his family to Nova Scotia, Upham’s plans for the future remained unclear. Writing to Thomas Pickering just before his departure, Upham assured his patriot friend, “I leave this country for the winter from pecuniary considerations.” In promising the well-connected American that he was leaving due to his own finances and “not from resentment,” Upham hoped to leave open a path for repatriation should he later wish to return to the United States.

Upham’s conviction that all the best American colonists were moving north to Nova Scotia was not a profession of faith that the loyalists might still emerge from the Revolution victorious. Instead, it was false-bravado, superficial optimism that he hoped would gain him favor with his old friend Winslow, who was planning the distribution of land to accommodate the more than 6,000 troops and their families who would soon be arriving in the northern colony. “I hope you will make interest to be continued in your present employment when General Campbell shall take command,” a more candid Upham wrote to Winslow, “You will, I am sure, take care of us.” Although Upham appears to have misjudged the amount of leverage his friend could wield, Winslow was able to find Upham a reasonable plot alongside his own family in Granville, Nova Scotia.

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6 Joshua Upham to Thomas Pickering, November 18, 1783, Provincial Archives of Canada, MG 23, D1, ser.1, 4.


8 Although Winslow’s task of plotting and resettling soldiers and their families in Nova Scotia was an important one, it was also of little distinction. Much like Upham, Winslow came from an elite Massachusetts family, but despite this background, he found himself a victim of the same food and supply shortages other refugees experienced in Nova Scotia. On Winslow’s long career
Together both families witnessed the widespread hardship their fellow refugees endured during the first few years of exile. Traveling frequently to Halifax, Winslow described watching “old crippled refugees” alongside “men and women who have seen better days” line up on weekly “board days” to apply for government assistance in “language so epithetical and pathetic that ‘tis impossible for any man whose heart is not callous to every tender feeling, to refuse their requests.” By 1785, Upham too had surrendered to the hardship. As Penelope Winslow, Col. Edward Winslow’s sister, described, “Col. Upham continues miserable.” With Upham bedridden due serve bouts with rheumatism, she hoped the “mild air of May will have an happy effect” on her friend. When he petitioned for compensation from the crown in 1787, Upham noted that despite being “honoured with the approbation and thanks of the then Commander and Chief,” he never received “the smallest reward or compensation for arduous and expensive Service.” He also noted that unless he was “assisted by Government,” he would be unable to pay the heavy debts he incurred in the crown’s service. If Upham had felt any genuine optimism when he left the American states, it evaporated after a few years of living as a refugee in Nova Scotia.


10 Penelope Winslow to Ward Chipman, April 2, 1785, in Raymond ed., Winslow Papers, 286-288.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the history of the American loyalists in Nova Scotia often follows a trajectory similar to the rise and fall of Joshua Upham’s ostensible optimism. As historians have long recognized, the loyalists envisioned Nova Scotia to be a haven for British sympathizers and most believed they would be vindicated as the American states plunged into the inevitable tyranny that would accompany their new republic. But by 1791, internal divisions, squabbles with pre-revolutionary British settlers, disagreements with the colonial government, and their own changing attitudes about the United States left many embittered against their fellow refugees and cynical of the British government. Ironically, it was the loyalists who became disenchanted in their project, and the result was a mass exodus from Atlantic Canada before 1800. Dissatisfied loyalists sought better opportunities in neighboring New Brunswick, Quebec, and Upper Canada, as well as across the Atlantic in the British Isles, and for those willing to forget past animosities, even back in the United States.\textsuperscript{12}

But this familiar history, where the refugees’ “scramble over the spoils of defeat” transformed hopeful loyalists into despondent exiles, is too linear a narrative that relies on a narrow perspective.\textsuperscript{13} Not all loyalists felt, or at least expressed feeling, hopeful in the promise of Nova Scotia only to become disillusioned by its realities. Loyalist women, in particular had a much more complicated relationship with British allegiance, both during the war and as exiles in its aftermath. While the leading refugee men may have feigned an enthusiasm similar to Upham’s to demonstrate their loyalty, women were governed by a different set of often-conflicting societal rules. As enlightened conceptions

\textsuperscript{12} MacKinnon, \textit{This Unfriendly Soil}, xii.

\textsuperscript{13} MacKinnon, \textit{This Unfriendly Soil}, 183.
of human agency and individualism replaced Christianity’s emphasis on suffering as a means to virtue in the eighteenth century, fashionable public melancholy was replaced by visible cheerfulness as the accepted ideal for industrious women. In hard times, the model woman was supportive of her husband and an example of optimism for her family. But increasingly popular conceptions of the sentimental woman also obliged women to feel genuinely moved by the tribulations their families, friends, and neighbors faced. Revolutionary-era women were often caught between expectations of being resolutely positive in the face of hardship and being emotionally affected by the distressing scenes occurring all around them as the civil war tore apart the empire, communities, and even individual families.\(^\text{14}\)

Because a different set of social rules governed women’s emotions, loyalist wives and daughters did not always feel or express the same optimism as their male counterparts. Considering the evacuation of New York, Edward Winslow’s sister, Sarah, wrote north to Nova Scotia only a few months before Upham. Addressing her cousin Benjamin Marston, who had recently been appointed as a surveyor of the Port Roseway loyalist settlement in Nova Scotia, she described how she felt concerning her upcoming departure. “Our enlivening prospects for the future…are now at an end,” she began, “Sad

is the reverse, our fate seems now decreed, and we are left to mourn out our days in wretchedness.” While she had been run from her Massachusetts home earlier in the war, the impending exile from her adoptive New York caused her particular despair because it signaled the end of her dream that perhaps she would return to her prewar lifestyle. “What is to become of us, God only can tell,” she explained of her hopelessness, “In all of our former sufferings, we had hope to support us—being deprived of that now is too much.”

Unlike Upham, who wanted to embody the steadfast fortitude of a faithful British subject, Winslow had no reason to put a positive spin on her family’s imminent exile, and she conveyed none of his delusions about the promise of Nova Scotia. Where Upham expressed hope, Winslow saw only “wretchedness.” While Upham promised his American friend he harbored no animosity toward the rebels, Winslow saw the “exulting enemys” as tyrannical. Both acknowledged they would be moving on to Nova Scotia, but Upham moved north with hopes that the government would reward him for his service. Winslow, already disillusioned by the failure of the British to protect her in New England and now again in New York, only begrudgingly moved on to keep her family intact.

Women’s reactions to exile also differed from that of their male counterparts because social expectations did not allow women to fall into despair, at least not in the same way men could. When asked by her friend and fellow exile Ward Chipman to explain her “views and intentions” on her family’s prospects in 1785, Penelope Winslow documented her long struggle with loyalism and its effect on both her material fortunes and emotional outlook. “With becoming firmness I supported our first great reverse of

15 Sarah Winslow to Benjamin Marston, April 10, 1783, in Raymond ed., Winslow Papers, 78-79.
fortune,” she explained of her positive attitude after being forced to leave her home in Plymouth, Massachusetts, “I bid a long farewell to elegant house, furniture, native place, and all its pleasures with but little emotion but wounded pride.” Despite these loses, she believed her “vivacity” and “good disposition” allowed her to be “not only reconciled, but happy at New York.” Removal to Nova Scotia, however, was more complicated. “The banishment to this ruder World you are witness I submitted to with a degree of cheerfulness,” she wrote to her friend, “but alas, the shaft of affliction had not yet then reached me.” It was only after her greatest loss, “the final separation with my Father, friend and companion,” that she truly understood the pain of exile. Considering her fate, she noted, “At times life is indifferent to me and to pleasure I am a stranger.”

Winslow’s description provides a glimpse into the often-tortured position of loyalist women, who although unhappy with their fate as exiles, were also expected to be supportive wives and daughters. Her explanation also sheds light on women’s particular attention to the breakup of loyalist families and the immense pain such divisions caused. When historians describe the loyalists of Nova Scotia’s slow slip into hopelessness, they often overlook the place of loyalist women, who were caught between their own feelings and their husbands’ and fathers’ dreams of building a thriving loyalist bastion in Atlantic Canada. Considering the mutability of the past year in Halifax on January 31, 1783, nineteen-year-old loyalist Mary Robie wrote in her journal, “Which brings 1783 to period… In this world I think we have a foretaste of the joys and almost [as much] of the

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miseries of hell.”\textsuperscript{17} No doubt, many other loyalist women felt the same. What Robie’s reflection does not fully explain, however, is that women were not resigned to idly accept the highs and lows of exile; instead, many used collective hardship to their advantage.

This study explores how refugee women in Nova Scotia felt about and responded to the “joys” and “miseries” of the Revolutionary Era to more fully understand how women experienced loyalist exile and explain their vital public and private roles.\textsuperscript{18} In all, more than 60,000 British sympathizers fled the American states between 1775 and late 1783, with more than half this population sailing north for Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, which became an independent colony in 1784.\textsuperscript{19} While historians have long observed how loss, especially financial loss in terms of confiscated property, was central to the loyalist outlook, the refugees’ emotional experience was more complex. The American Revolution uprooted men, women, and families from their ancestral homes, disconnecting them from their traditional social networks. The war forced these refugees to settle with little assistance from the colonial government in a land they perceived as foreign and unwelcoming. As Maya Jasanoff notes, “The theme of loss hangs heavily

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Mary Robie, diary, January 31, 1783, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA [hereafter MHS].
\item Because this study relies on the voices of American colonists who either chose or were forced to flee their homes in the American states during and after the war, I use the term “loyalist” and “refugee” interchangeably. Although several hundred Hessians and more than 3,000 British regulars with women and children also came to Nova Scotia after the British evacuation of the thirteen colonies, the majority of settlers in Nova Scotia were refugees and exiles. On non-refugees, see MacKinnon, \textit{This Unfriendly Soil}, 54; Maya Jasanoff, \textit{Liberty’s Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World} (New York: Vintage Books, 2012), 58.
\item For the conservative estimate of loyalists fleeing the American states, see Maya Jasanoff, “The Other Side of Revolution: Loyalists in the British Empire,” \textit{William and Mary Quarterly}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} ser., 65 (April 2008), 208.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
over the loyalists’ story.” But the loss was not just in terms of property, and considerably less attention has been paid to flushing out how loyalist refugees felt as exiles, and more importantly, how these emotions shaped the loyalist perspective, the makeup of loyalist communities, and even the political and social atmosphere of early British Canada and the United States.

The study of loyalist emotions also promises to expand the scope of loyalist voices to include a number of refugee women, who have been largely overlooked in loyalist studies. Without question, the most widely used source for historians interested in the American loyalists are the records of the Loyalist Claims Commission housed in the Public Records Office in London. Established in July 1783 “to enquire into the Losses and Services of all such persons who have suffered in their Rights, Properties, and Professions, during the late unhappy Dissension in America,” the commission ultimately allocated an unprecedented £3,033,091 — the equivalent of roughly £300 million in today’s currency — to roughly 2,291 loyalists. But as Eugene R. Fingerhut noted in 1968, these petitions are “too ambiguous or devoid of the data needed for a quantitative study of the loyalists,” and even less helpful for examining loyalist women. From these


21 Jasanoff, Liberty’s Exiles, 121-138.

22 Eugene R. Fingerhut, “Uses and Abuses of the American Loyalists’ Claims: A Critique of Quantitative Analyses,” William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd ser. 25, no. 2 (April 1968): 246. Even Mary Beth Norton’s 1976 William and Mary Quarterly article, which examines the 468 petitions filed by women, only speaks to the lives and roles of colonial American women before the Revolution. As Norton notes, “In the end, all of the evidence that can be drawn from the loyalist claims points to the conclusion that the lives of the vast majority of women in the Revolutionary era revolved around their immediate households...The economic function of those households in relation to the family property largely determined the extent of their knowledge of their property.” “Eighteenth-Century American Women in Peace and War: The Case of the Loyalists,” William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd ser. 33, no. 3 (July 1976): 397. Both Janice Potter-MacKinnon’s study of loyalist women in Ontario and Beatrice Spence Ross’ dissertation on loyalist women in
petitions and other signed declarations of dependence and oaths of British allegiance, historians have been able to find out exactly who the loyalists were. These studies examine loyalist demographics, analyzing everything from occupation and economic background, to age and religious affiliation, in order to make reasonable assumptions about why certain American colonists would have sided with the British. But in studying the loyalists in broad swaths, these studies often overlook the narrative of individuals, obscuring the personal and often intangible motivations that buttressed British allegiance during the war. Historians may have painted a more accurate picture about who the loyalists were, but they have told us little about what they felt.

This study breaks down into five chapters that examine the loyalist women who fled to Nova Scotia with specific attention to how these refugees felt about exile and expressed their feelings. Collectively, examining loyalists’ emotions demonstrates how powerful emotions not only shaped British allegiance during the American Revolution, but also influenced the refugees’ perception of their adoptive home, shaped loyalist communities, and even molded power-relationships between family members. Studying the emotional dimensions of eighteenth-century British loyalism and refugee women’s subsequent experience as exiles helps answer a number of questions central to both loyalist and women’s studies. How did powerful images of the “British family,” disseminated from the metropole and repeated throughout the colonies, support imperial

Nova Scotia are exceptions to this, but as I demonstrate specifically in chapters 3 and 4, both these studies unfairly paint women as passive acceptors of their fate and resigned to the their husbands’ wills.

power in North America? How did the duties colonial women owed to both the imagined British family and their own immediate relations influence their views on allegiance? What preconceived notions about their adoptive home did British sympathizers bound for Nova Scotia bring with them, and how did these ideas affect how they envisioned their future? In what ways did loyalist homesickness affect individuals’ outlooks and the collective loyalist disposition? How did loyalist women respond to the hardships of exile, and in what ways did women’s traditional duties take on new significance in settlements where poverty, disease, and suffering were rampant? What role did mothers and daughters play in loyalist repatriation after 1783, and how did returned loyalists affect the early United States? How did white loyalists compare their own hardship with that of their black counterparts, and how did repatriating loyalists use Americans’ uncertainty about the future of slavery in the nation to their advantage? In answering these questions, this study contributes to a growing literature committed to reassessing traditional understandings of who the loyalists were and what motivated their allegiance, while also questioning narratives that fall almost submissively into tracing the rise and fall of loyalist optimism.

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Interest in the American loyalists is as old as the study of the Revolution itself. When Mercy Otis Warren penned what was among the earliest histories of the American Revolution in 1805, she like many of her contemporaries, worried that an imagined ethical foundation of the nascent American nation was crumbling. She believed politicians had become self-interested and worried the mercantile interests of the coastal elite had destroyed the public virtue on which republicanism inherently relied. Through
her history of the American Revolution, she aimed to create “a vision of an American future that would fulfill the promise of the Revolution”; that is, she endeavored to ensure the next generation of Americans could not reinterpret the Revolution outside the “ethical terms” in which she believed “the Revolution was to be understood.”

To write an inspiring narrative that also maintained the Revolution’s virtuous framework, Warren needed to not only highlight the champions of disinterested virtue but also demonize their selfish and misguided adversaries. She found her enemies in the loyalists. Focusing on one of the most despised figures from her native Massachusetts, Warren singled out Thomas Hutchinson as the archetypal British sympathizer. Repeating Revolutionary-era condemnations, Warren described the colonial governor as “dark, intriguing, insinuating, haughty and ambitious,” and noted that “avarice marked each feature of his character.”

Warren attacked Hutchinson as a thin guise for her early nineteenth-century foes. Warren intended to preserve a specific moral framework she believed was threatened by an emerging class of nineteenth-century American arrivistes, but in doing so, she also established a false paradigm between patriots and loyalists that would continue to influence the study of the Revolution through the late twentieth century. In her telling, Hutchinson and the other members of the colonial British gentry opposed the Revolution purely in defense of their status and power. In this narrative, the loyalists were not active defenders of the British Empire and its ideals; instead, they were haughty men of self-interest reacting to an uprising that threatened their place of privilege.

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effect of this depiction was twofold. First, even as historians began to investigate the principles that gave rise to the American Revolution, scholars entirely disregarded loyalist ideology because they saw the pro-British position purely in terms of social and economic self-preservation. Second, it created the idea that only the political, mercantile, and Anglican elite—in other words, those who owed their position of power to their transatlantic British connections—and those who fell under their aristocratic sway, remained loyal to Britain. Several nineteenth-century “loyalist revisionists” attempted to rescue Hutchinson’s reputation, and by proxy the character of his fellow loyalists, but their defense amounted to little more than depicting the loyalists as the undeserving targets of excessive patriot aggression, as opposed to concerned British patriots.

In 1847, Lorenzo Sabine completed the first comprehensive study of the American loyalists. Harvard historian Jared Sparks praised Sabine’s work for “rendering justice to the Loyalists while maintaining as high a Whig tone as the most zealous patriot could demand.” Readers from South Carolina to Sabine’s home state of Maine, however, condemned his work for being unpatriotic. By the time he published a second expanded edition almost twenty years later, the Revolution had fallen into the background of even more emotionally charged civil war, and most Americans accepted Sabine’s study

26 Perhaps the best evidence of a lack in historical interest for loyalist ideology is that in the wake of Carl Becker’s provocative assertion in 1909 that the American Revolution was as much a struggle for home rule as it was for “who should rule at home,” only one monograph, Lewis Einstein’s Divided Loyalties (1933), considered how the conflict between loyalists and patriots might be the indicative of the Becker’s suggestion.

without pushback. While Sabine’s work represented a momentous undertaking and a wealth of new source material, his successors fell short in advancing his findings. Instead, early twentieth-century historians broke down Sabine’s collected material into a number of provincial studies more focused on evaluating the character and motives of a few individuals than addressing the larger collective.

The approaching bicentennial of the American Revolution and the publication of Wallace Brown’s comprehensive study of the Loyalist Claims Commission in 1965 did much to reinvigorate historical interest in American loyalists. It, in many ways, rescued them from, as William Nelson put it in 1961, “Losing not only their argument, their war, their place in American society, but even their proper place in history.” Perhaps no work did more to advance loyalist studies in the United States than Mary Beth Norton’s *The British-Americans*, published in 1972. While Norton’s study of the American refugees in London made many strong arguments, most important for the future of the scholarship was her finding that the American loyalists were more similar in both their social and political outlook to their patriot adversaries than to Britons in the metropole. “Ironically,” Norton noted, “the loyalists realized how American they were only after

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they abandoned America.”31 Two years later, Bernard Bailyn published *The Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson*. Although his ambition to judge “the truth of claims laid against [Hutchinson]” represented a step backwards from Norton’s more thought-provoking study, the entrance of such a well-respected historian signaled to scholars in both the United States and Canada that the loyalists were finally getting the historical attention they had previously lacked.32

The road forward produced mixed results as historians grappled with Norton’s point that American patriots and loyalists were more similar than not, while also continuing the older trend of reevaluating the character of Tories vilified in the earlier scholarship. Two biographies published shortly after Bailyn’s work on Hutchinson best exemplify this trend. In 1977, John E. Ferling aimed to identify and explain “the loyalist mind.” Breaking from previous studies, Ferling argued that loyalist ideology was not unlike that of the patriots, and to prove it, he looked beyond the traditional New England loyalists, to Philadelphian Joseph Galloway. Ferling demonstrated that Galloway had been “a steadfast imperial patriot throughout his career,” despite his earlier support for imperial reform. Like Norton, Ferling posited there was no real ideological distinction between patriots and loyalists before 1774. Where the Tories differed, Ferling claimed, was in their unwavering commitment to the principles of constitutional union, which was

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best exemplified by Galloway’s narrowly rejected plan for a revised unification in October 1774.\footnote{33} While Ferling traced the development of Galloway’s ideology through the 1760s and 70s, Brian Cuthbertson looked to the loyalists’ post-revolutionary experience to explain the development of loyalist ideology. Like Norton, Cuthbertson saw more similarities than differences between colonial patriots and loyalists; however, his study of John Wentworth suggests the exiles in Nova Scotia were more influential in directing early Canadian development than their contemporaries in London were at influencing British policy. Wentworth had been a British supporter during the war and attempted to stem patriotic sentiment as New Hampshire’s loyal governor. But as Nova Scotia’s colonial governor between 1792 and 1808, Wentworth favored fellow refugees, many of whom were suspected of harboring feelings in favor of republicanism, over the pre-revolutionary Nova Scotian elite and even a few British officials. Cuthbertson may over-emphasize the ascendancy of the loyalist elite under Wentworth’s patronage, but his focus on the governor’s Nova Scotia tenure suggested historians of the loyalists be more aware of the connections between early American and Canadian history.\footnote{34}

\footnote{33}John E. Ferling, \textit{The Loyalist Mind: Joseph Galloway and the American Revolution} (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press 1977), 72, 97. See also Benjamin H. Newcomb, \textit{Franklin and Galloway: A Political Partnership} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972). Ferling’s most serious shortcoming is in his ambition to identify a singular loyalist ideology. While he never quite identifies what he means by ideology—was the collective loyalist mind entrenched in its support of monarchy as a form of government before the American rebels declared independence and republican government, or did those principles arise because of the circumstances?—it was the sheer diversity of the loyalist population made finding a singular loyalist mind an impossible challenge.

\footnote{34}Brian Cuthbertson, \textit{The Loyalist Governor: Biography of Sir John Wentworth} (Halifax: Nimbus Publishing, 1983). Of course Cuthbertson was not the first historian to suggest a close connection between the Canadian Maritimes and colonial New England. See John Bartlet Brebner, \textit{New England’s Outpost: Acadia Before the Conquest of Canada} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1927), and \textit{The Neutral Yankees of Nova Scotia: A Marginal Colony During the
Despite the call for a more unified study, American and Canadian historians continued to approach the loyalists from two distinct angles, each asking their own questions. In the United States, the rise of the often-protean term “republicanism” during the late 1970s and 80s helped spawn a small current of inquiry that hoped to find republicanism’s antithesis to better define the term itself. The result of these questions is perhaps best exemplified by a series of essays by Robert M. Calhoon published in 1989 under the title The Loyalist Perception. Calhoon’s studies are useful in examining how British-sympathizing colonists articulated their allegiance during the imperial crisis, through the war, and even during resettlement. But similar to the work of earlier scholars, his analysis gets distorted when he attempts to project his findings about the elite onto the broader British-sympathizing population.35

Canadian historians interested in the loyalists faced their own unique set of problems, but perhaps none has been as daunting as extinguishing the myth of loyalist founders. The loyalists in the United States have been portrayed as the losers of the American Revolution; but in English-speaking Canada—more specifically in Anglophone Ontario, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick—many believe the colonists who fled the American Revolution represented, as D.G. Bell mockingly put it in 1983, “All that is good and noble and upright, patriotic, and self-sacrificing.”36 While historians of


the 1980s and early 90s attempted to dispel these rumors, the dissimilarities between the individual loyalist settlements necessitated highly localized studies. Ann Gorman Condon pushed back against Norton’s idea that the loyalists were more American than they believed by examining how the loyalist founders of New Brunswick intended to establish a British oligarchical society ruled by wealthy landowners and former army officers. In *This Unfriendly Soil: The Loyalist Experience in Nova Scotia 1783-1791*, Neil MacKinnon argued that in contrast to the faithful subjects of loyalist mythology, the American refugees in Nova Scotia were a thorn in the side of the colonial government, a nuisance to pre-revolutionary British settlers, and even antagonistic toward their fellow refugees. But as Ian Stewart noted in a 1990 article in the *Journal of Canadian Studies*, even though these works aimed to provide a more accurate depiction of the loyalists’ influence on early Canada, in focusing exclusively on the effect of loyalist settlers on early Canadian culture, they continued to perpetuate the founding myth. Stewart argued the loyalists had little long-lasting effect, especially in Atlantic Canada, where immigrants from the British Isles and mainland Europe quickly outnumbered them during the 1820s and 30s.

One area where there has been overlap between Canadian and American historians is in the study of the black loyalists. While interest in those who escaped slavery during the Revolution began growing around the mid-twentieth century, two

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books published in 1976, one by American-born Ellen Gibson Wilson and the other by Canadian James W. St. G. Walker, encapsulated the hardships black loyalists faced in Nova Scotia. These studies demonstrated that while white loyalists faced difficulties resettling, their black counterparts encountered even more challenges as they battled not only violent attacks but also threats of re-enslavement and complete neglect from the colonial government. Walker also traced how many of the black loyalists left Nova Scotia for Sierra Leone in the 1790s. Since, a collection of essays edited by John W. Pulis and the remarkably rich archival work of Cassandra Pybus have helped illuminate how the black diaspora of the American Revolution was a truly global event. Harvey Amani Whitfield has more closely examined how the influx of black loyalists, in varying states of unfreedom, contributed to the growth of slavery in the Maritimes, which lasted until the 1820s.

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Until recently, loyalist studies have suffered from two serious shortcomings. First, the majority of scholars have aimed to answer a narrow set of questions that examine collective loyalist ideology. Hoping to address loyalist political orientation and economic interests, scholars have relied on too small a source base, privileging the voices the loyalist elite and attempting to extrapolate out from this perspective. Only Janice Potter acknowledged that the study of “loyalist thought” had been limited to determining what the upper class reported to believe, and was, therefore, not much good for understanding the collective attitude of the loyalist majority.43 Likewise, aside from another book by Potter on the loyalist women in Ontario, and a handful of book chapters and articles, the role of loyalist women has been largely neglected.44 Second, the tendency of historians to examine the loyalists in regional studies has largely obscured understanding both the motivations and the experiences of the collective loyalist diaspora.

New studies have attempted correct a number of these flaws. In order to examine the loyalists beyond the elite, Bonnie Huskins has paid particular attention to Shelburne, Nova Scotia, the largest loyalist settlement, to examine how the community there expanded often in spite of the social division imposed by the upper class. She demonstrates how the middling loyalists had ambitions that were slightly different from


those held by the more well-to-do refugees. In his 2017 dissertation, Keith Grant suggested historians look beyond the political divisions created by rival elite factions, and instead look at the connection between “varieties of ‘enthusiastic’ religion” and a “spectrum of political loyalties” to better appreciate how others understood allegiance.

Moving beyond the traditional local studies, Maya Jasanoff’s widely acclaimed *Liberty’s Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World*, challenged historians to recognize how the loyalist diaspora and “the Spirit of 1783” was as transformative for the British Empire as the patriots’ “Spirit of 1776” was for the creation of early America. In a chapter that reconsiders British loyalism in the eighteenth-century Atlantic World, Liam Riordan and Jerry Bannister remind historians of the difference between loyalism and loyalists. They suggest pinning down eighteenth-century loyalism to a single definition is equally impossible and unfruitful because loyalism “was a diffuse, complex, and potent phenomenon that traversed multiple borders.”

During loyalist women writers in the Delaware Valley, Kacy Tillman argues that by examining the personal letters and diaries of British-sympathizing women, scholars can better appreciate how many colonists held

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47 Jasanoff, *Liberty’s Exiles*.

multiple loyalties instead of a singular devotion.\textsuperscript{49} While loyalist studies may have begun focusing on small questions concerning loyalist politics, today’s historians in the United States and Canada have asked a number of questions that challenge others to look beyond identities and ideologies.

But several new studies exploring the social and cultural origins of the American Revolution continue to suggest even more avenues for loyalist studies. Much like Keith Grant’s dissertation, this study is particularly interested in examining the war, allegiance, and the resulting loyalist exile from the perspective of emotions history. Although the history of emotions only recently took hold among North American scholars, historians have demonstrated how the political revolution in the British colonies coincided with and was in part caused by, a social revolution in how late-eighteenth-century Europeans and American colonists both experienced and expressed feelings.\textsuperscript{50} Beginning in the early 1990s, scholars including Jay Fliegelman, Christopher Grasso, and Sandra M. Gustafson emphasized the important place of orators—and their ability to evoke emotional responses from their audiences—to the coming of the American Revolution.\textsuperscript{51} G. J. Barker-Benfield argued that more than a mere performance, “the cult of sensibility” lay at

\textsuperscript{49} Kacy Tillman, “Constructing Female Loyalism(s) in the Delaware Valley: Quaker Women Writers of the American Revolution,” in Brannon and Moore eds., The Consequences of Loyalism, 48-51.


the heart of middle-class women’s culture in Hanoverian Britain.\textsuperscript{52} Nicole Eustace’s *Passion is the Gale: Emotion, Power, and the Coming of the American Revolution*, combines cultural and intellectual history to more directly examine how eighteenth-century political culture and discourses of power in the lead up to the Revolution were arranged around emotional frameworks and articulated in the rhetoric of emotions.\textsuperscript{53} Where Eustace examines power and emotions in the late eighteenth century, Sarah Knott examines how transatlantic sentimental culture both informed revolutionary Americans and was fueled by the Americans’ revolution in favor of republicanism.\textsuperscript{54} As these studies have demonstrated, examining how cultures interpret emotions can provide a valuable understanding of the broader societal shifts that occurred during the Revolutionary Era. This study is interested in explaining how emotions not only influenced British allegiance but also how exiled loyalist women navigated conflicting societal pressures to use the collective hardship and suffering of exile to their advantage.

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During the American Revolution, British sympathizers experienced many different emotions in tandem. They felt genuine pride in their British allegiance, while also expressing doubts about their empire’s commitment to them. They mustered confidence as they headed into exile, but often only as an attempt to keep at bay the pangs of defeat. They worked to find comfort in community to stave off the pains of


homesickness. And when former animosities of the Revolution faded, many opened to
the possibility of reprieve through forgiveness. These were more than intangible feelings.
Men and women of the late eighteenth century believed these emotions were signs of
refined respectability, at least when properly cultivated and expressed. Of course, the
rigid guidelines that dictated the appropriate way to feel could be restricting, but as Sarah
M.S. Pearsall argues, people of the Atlantic World also “harnessed the popular languages
of feeling…to achieve their own ends.” The five chapters that follow investigate not
only how loyalist women felt about their allegiance and exile, but also how they used
these emotions to achieve their own objectives.

The dissertation is built from a variety of sources, including public documents
like newspapers, pamphlets, published sermons, government records, artwork, and the
occasional petition from the Loyalist Claims Commission. But more importantly, this
study draws heavily from the private letters and diaries of a few loyalist families who
came to Nova Scotia during and after the war. Such sources offer a way to gauge how
loyalists felt. Included are several family papers familiar to those who have studied the
loyalists in Nova Scotia, counting the Byles and Botsford family papers at the Nova

55 G.J. Barker-Benfield, The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain
(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); John Mullan, Sentiment and Sociability: The

56 Sarah M.S. Pearsall, “‘The Power of Feeling?’ Emotion Sensibility and the American
Revolution,” Modern Intellectual History 8, no. 3 (September 2011): 670.

57 On the history of emotions, see Peter N. Stearns and Carol Z. Stearns, "Emotionology:
Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards," American Historical Review 90,
no. 4 (October 1985): 813-836; Rom Harré, ed., The Social Construction of Emotions (Oxford:
Oxford University Press, 1986); Jonas Liliequist, ed., A History of Emotions, 1200-1800
(London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012); Jan Plamper, The History of Emotions: An Introduction,
trans., Keith Tribe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Barbra Rosenwein, Generations of
Scotia Archives, the Winslow papers, and the Cranch-Bond and Murray-Robins family papers at the Massachusetts Historical Society.

But one of the most enriching collections used in this study are the letters and diaries of the Robie family, which are also found in archive of the Massachusetts Historical Society. Both Thomas and his wife Mary were descendants of prominent New England families (see Appendix A). Thomas’ mother, Mehitable Sewall, was the daughter of Major Stephen Sewall, the niece of Judge Samuel Sewall, and the sister of Stephen Sewall Jr., who became an important Superior Court Judge. Thomas’ father was a renowned physician, but his death only months before his son’s birth, left the young Robie reliant on his mother’s Sewall relatives, especially his uncle Stephen Sewall Jr. Thomas’ wife, Mary Bradstreet, had been born into the prominent Bradstreet family and was the great-great-granddaughter of Massachusetts Colonial Governor Simon Bradstreet and his wife, the celebrated American poet Anne Bradstreet.58 Her father had been valedictorian of his class at Harvard, minister of the Second Congregationalist Church, and was one of the wealthiest men in Marblehead when he died in 1771.

The Revolution upended the Robie’s lives, despite their prestigious backgrounds. A promising importer of goods from England, Thomas first incurred the wrath of the patriot majority in his native Marblehead, Massachusetts when Samuel Hall used his

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58 Throughout the dissertation I refer to Thomas’ wife with her maiden name, Bradstreet, not only to highlight the tremendous pride she took in her heritage, but also to differentiate her from her eldest daughter, who is consistently Mary Robie, or simply Mary.
weekly newspaper, the *Essex Gazette*, to identify and publicly condemn merchants who failed to comply with the nonimportation agreements in 1769.  

Figure 0.1: A page from Mary Bradstreet Robie’s *Book of Common Prayer*. Mary Bradstreet inherited this book from her father in late 1771, and she recorded her children’s birthdates on the front page. The inclusion of Hannah’s birth in 1784 suggests the book was one of the few items the family was able to take with them upon leaving Marblehead in 1775. Image courtesy of private collector Matthew Schweitzer.

Thomas’ business struggled in the years that followed. Facing increasing pressure from his creditors, and uncertain of how “the troubles there beginning would end,” he

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59 In December of that year, Hall named Robie, alongside three others of Marblehead, as purveyors who continued to import and store British-made products “demonstrating to the Publick that they sordidly prefer their private interest to the public Good.” Robie published a reply weeks later; however, few of Hall’s subscribers were sympathetic to his defense. *Essex Gazette*, December 12 to 19, 1769. On Samuel Hall and his newspaper during the colonial crisis, see Benjamin F. Arrington ed., *Municipal History of Essex County in Massachusetts*, tercentenary ed., 4 vols. (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing, 1922), 1: 732-733. For Robie’s reply to Hall’s criticism, see Jonathan Sewall to Thomas Robie, January 10, 1770, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
mortgaged the family’s home for £800 in late 1774. As violence against other perceived Tories increased, he drew up his last will and testament on March 22, 1775. The patriots finally forced Thomas to flee in late April 1775, much like they had his cousin and close friend, Jonathan Sewall, in October of the previous year. Rather than seek safety with Sewall in Boston, however, Thomas Robie took his wife Mary Bradstreet and their four young children—Mary (age 11), Hetty (age 9), Simon Bradstreet (age 5), and Thomas (barely 1 year)—north to Nova Scoti. There, he believed he could reestablish his business in Halifax and benefit from the flow of capital that would undoubtedly follow the British forces to North America. Although he thought their exile would be temporary, the family remained in Halifax for the duration of the war. Their diary entries and letters not only document how a family experienced daily life in revolutionary Halifax, they also document disagreements within the family, especially between husband and wife, concerning the future of the family.

The five chapters of this dissertation break down into two distinct sections. Chapters one and two examine how loyalists, and women, in particular, felt about their allegiance and ensuing exile in broad strokes to better understand how feelings bolstered

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60 Unfinished letter Thomas Robie to Ward Chipman[?], December 7, 1786, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
British sympathies and how loyalist refugees experienced the emotional toll of exile. Chapters three, four, and five explore the loyalist community in Halifax by foregrounding a few specific families, such as the Robie and Byles families. Because of its focus on a handful of families in Halifax, this study borrows some of its methodological approach from the growing field of microhistory. As Jill Lapore notes in her consideration of microhistories as a field of historical inquiry, microhistorians differ from biographers in that they shape their study not only to trace the lives of historical characters but also to “answer important historical—and historiographical—questions.”

This study uses the experience of revolution, exile, and repatriation lived by women like Mary Robie and Rebecca Byles in order to more provide a more nuanced understanding of both the broader Revolutionary Era and the specific loyalist community in Halifax. Examining the experiences of a few loyalist women allows this study to fulfill Thomas Bender’s call for historians to synthesize truth claims with narrative. Employing what John Higham once called “the exercise of empathy” to grasp “the imbeddedness of events in a flow experience,” this study extrapolates out from seemingly routine events—including mourning at a strangers graveside and contemplating the value of family heirloom—to make larger claims about ideological loyalism, the experience of loyalist refugees, and the transformative effects of exile on both individuals and communities.

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time, the dissertation is careful to point out areas where one characters experience might not be indicative of broader trends or feelings.\footnote{On some of the pitfalls of microhistory, see Richard D. Brown, “Microhistory and the Post-Modern Challenge,” \textit{Journal of the Early Republic} 23, no. 1 (Spring, 2003): 1-20.}

This study also draws heavily from methodological insights garnered from the history of emotions and women’s history and examines the connections between the two fields. Critically for this study, emotions such as grief and longing are intimately intertwined with the distinct societal pressures placed on women and their expressions of feeling. As Nicole Eustace notes, although the biological basis for emotions is universal—that is to say that specific feelings are the product shifting chemical balances occurring within the body and do not, therefore, discriminate between different groups of people—the cultural incidence of emotion is highly varied and governed by hierarchies of power.\footnote{Nicole Eustace et al., “‘AHR’ Conversation: The Historical Study of Emotions,” \textit{American Historical Review} 117, no. 5 (December 2012): 1490.} By the late eighteenth century, the traditional understanding the relationship between emotion and the sexes had undergone a dramatic reversal. Although upper-class men had once been seen as the defenders of stoic virtue against the evils of passion, post-enlightenment thinkers replaced these men with compassionate women, who were believed to be more naturally predisposed toward benevolence.\footnote{William Reddy, “Sentimentalism and Its Erasure: The Role of Emotions in the Era of the French Revolution,” \textit{Journal of Modern History} 72, no. 1 (March 2000): 121-122.} This new understanding gave women an important role in society but it also created a strict new regimen for the proper expression of emotion where an inappropriate performance of feeling could result...
in being seen as incapable of understanding, or adhering to, societal norms. But loyalist women in Nova Scotia were in an even more precarious position because of their status as exiles. While it is no great discovery to suggest that loyalists longed for their American homes and were distraught by the breakup of the their immediate families, this study argues that women used the collective unhappiness of exile to achieve their own ends in both their homes and communities. Loyalist women’s grief and sadness were not signs of submission; rather, they became active emotions used to build bonds across class boundaries and to force their will upon their male counterparts.

The first chapter examines how British allegiance during the Revolutionary Era was intimately wrapped up in a number of emotions, but perhaps none of these feelings were stronger than the feelings associated with the idea of the British family, a depiction that had been growing in popularity since the 1740s. The idea that Britons represented a single family was more than imagery. This depiction worked to benefit both the empire, by providing a well-defined and agreed upon hierarchical structure, as well as colonists, who were guaranteed imperial protection as dependents. Although enlightened ideals concerning the specific obligations parents owed children, and the duties children owed parents began to change in the late eighteenth century, these changes increased the

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importance of familial love.\textsuperscript{72} When fighting broke out between members of the same family, both sides felt conflicted about embroiling themselves in an “unnatural” war.\textsuperscript{73} But women had a unique vantage. Eighteenth-century English culture was enamored with the role of mothers in both the nuclear family and in broader society, and women were especially conscious of the Revolution as a domestic dispute.\textsuperscript{74} Rather than see women’s allegiance as entirely dependent on the men in their lives, this chapter suggests that colonial women, on both sides, developed a unique brand of allegiance that was often more flexible than men’s because they were willing to reconsider their loyalties depending on their assessment of which side could better serve their own families.\textsuperscript{75}


\textsuperscript{73} On the idea of the “unnatural rebellion,” see Ruma Chopra, \textit{Unnatural Rebellion: Loyalists in New York City During the Revolution} (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2011). But while Chopra argues the denunciation of the rebellion as “unnatural” became a rallying cry that a number of different loyalists could agree on, this chapter traces the longer history of the word “unnatural” in English history and suggests American patriots were quicker to pick up on the powerful rhetoric due to their need to justify the rebellion.


\textsuperscript{75} On women’s allegiance during the war being determined by the men in their lives, see Linda Kerber, “The Meaning of Citizenship,” \textit{Journal of American History} 84, no. 3 (December 1997): 840; MacKinnon, \textit{While the Women Only Wept}, xv.
The second chapter focuses on how loyalists in Nova Scotia experienced a distinct feeling of homesickness that went beyond the poverty they experienced.\textsuperscript{76} In attempting to explain the loyalists’ anguish as exiles, Beatrice Ross Buszek suggests that loyalists did not merely find their new home environmentally unfamiliar and culturally foreign, but as refugees, they also felt “a free-floating kind of fear and anxiety over their loss of place in society.”\textsuperscript{77} But as Ann Gorman Condon notes, the refugees’ unhappiness went beyond a change in status because both wealthy and destitute loyalists found Nova Scotia unwelcoming.\textsuperscript{78} In response, this chapter turns to the less tangible, but no less real, feeling of homesickness that affected all refugees in three distinct ways.\textsuperscript{79} First, the loyalists of Nova Scotia arrived with a profoundly entrenched predisposition against their adoptive home that had been built from a century of intrigue about the land to the north. Second, in exile, loyalists were torn from their native communities and social networks. As these networks provided colonists with a sense of belonging and more tangible means of assistance in rearing children, caring for sick loved ones, and clothing and feeding families, the loss of community was devastating.\textsuperscript{80} Third, loyalists also feared a lonely

\textsuperscript{76} On loyalist poverty, see Potter-MacKinnon, \textit{This Unfriendly Soil}; Jasanoff, \textit{Liberty’s Exiles}, chapter 5.

\textsuperscript{77} Buszek, “‘By fortune wounded,’” 55.

\textsuperscript{78} Condon, “The Family in Exile,” 47.

\textsuperscript{79} On homesickness as an emotion and its important place in American history, especially the history of migrant people, see Susan J. Matt, \textit{Homesickness: An American History} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

death in exile. While being removed from one’s ancestral home signaled a sort of “living death,” dying in Nova Scotia meant the ultimate and final defeat. Together, these feelings created the homesickness that plagued loyalists at least as much, if not more, than the physical hardships of poverty and prevented many from even attempting to set down roots in their adoptive home.

Chapter three explores how loyalist women were not simply submissive to the often-overwhelming hardship of exile, nor were they content as domestic creatures of comfort. As Keith Grant notes, “Early modern Nova Scotians did things with their emotions,” and in loyalist Halifax, refugee women turned their grief and suffering into action as they mourned alongside struggling others as both a symbol of their own fellow feeling and a process for building communal relationships. While historians have focused on the household roles of women who supported their husbands’ efforts, this chapter demonstrates the active public roles of Mary Bradstreet and her daughters in loyalist Halifax. From visiting newly arrived strangers as an act of compassion, to hosting a variety of transient families with whom they often shared little in common, and even serving at the funerals of strangers to assure a proper burial, the Robie women brought traditional women’s roles of support into the public sphere. The result was a large body of “elective-kin” that shared in the misery of exile together.


82 Grant, “Enthusiasm and Loyalty,” 335. Emphasis his own.

83 On “elective-kin,” see Huskins, “Remarks and Rough Memorandums,” 106. This is not to suggest that suffering was the sole Loyalist emotion; rather, Loyalist women used shared suffering because societal norms encouraged women to be sensitive to the hardships of others. On the diversity of Loyalist emotions, see Grant, “Enthusiasm and Loyalty,” 321-335. On emotional communities, see Rosenwein, “Worrying About Emotions in History,” American Historical Review 107, no. 3 (June 2002): 821-845.
The fourth chapter looks at the critical role Mary Bradstreet and her eldest daughter played in bringing the Robie family out of exile and back to Massachusetts after 1783. During the war, roughly one-fifth of the white population of the thirteen rebellious colonies supported the crown, and the majority of these colonists remained in the United States after the war, successfully reintegration into American society.\(^8^4\) While historians have paid increasing attention to the reintegration of the loyalists, no study has examined the important role loyalist wives and daughters had in bringing families out of exile and back to the United States. Unlike her husband’s commitment to rebuilding the family’s livelihood in Nova Scotia, Mary Bradstreet was willing to forget her disdain for the American patriots because she recognized her children had a better chance at achieving happiness in Massachusetts than they did in Halifax. Fearing for the life of her sick newborn in the summer of 1784, Mary Bradstreet begged her husband to allow her to travel home to New England to find medical care.\(^8^5\) Although Thomas was hesitant, he eventually acquiesced, and Mary Bradstreet, the newborn Hannah, and the younger Mary traveled back to Marblehead for the first time in July 1784. While they were forced to return to Halifax in October of that year, Mary Bradstreet’s travels in New England only

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further convinced her that the family should repatriate. Despite the Robies’ growing ties to Atlantic Canada, Mary Bradstreet began what would be a six-year petition to her husband to bring the family home. After establishing a marriage between her eldest daughter and Bostonian Joseph Sewall, Mary Bradstreet finally had the upper hand, and Thomas, along with three of the Robie children, returned to Massachusetts in 1790 demonstrating the influence wives and daughters could exert over the future of loyalist families.

The fifth chapter explores the Robie family’s interaction with enslaved people in their home, free black residents of Halifax, and the family’s continuing connections to slavery after their return to Massachusetts to demonstrate how women could deny shared experience to define the limits of community. In loyalist Nova Scotia, the difference between white and black refugees was often murky because both black and whites suffered due to their British allegiance during the war. Begging his master to allow him to join other black refugees embarking for Sierra Leone in the 1790s, one enslaved man made an emotional plea that very much resembled the homesickness of white refugees.

“Mr. Massa,” the enslaved man began, “If me die, me die, had rather die in my own country than this cold place.”

Like his white counterparts, the enslaved man found Nova Scotia a foreign land and yearned for a return home. Such commonality would have been unnerving for whites, who were accustomed to societies built on racial difference. White loyalists minimalized black suffering to “other” their experience from that of black loyalists. They turned to violence to enforce this difference. The Robie family’s records also reveal that although they had not owned slaves before their exile, they relied on

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black labor in their home during their Nova Scotian exile. The family also brought a young “servant” boy named Prince back to Massachusetts when they repatriated, not only demonstrating the their reliance on enslaved labor, but also exposing New Englanders’ compliance with slavery even after the practice was effectively banned.\(^87\)

The conclusion begins by examining how loyalist women have been remembered and misremembered in historical studies. Most importantly, it demonstrates that even historians sympathetic to the loyalist cause often misrepresent loyalist women as either passive followers of their husbands and fathers or overly-dramatic victims. What is missing from these depictions is what this study has highlighted: loyalist women used their emotions to specific ends. Refugee wives and daughters used ubiquitous grief and their own refined empathy to create commonality, while also denying a common experience among black refugees to strengthen the boundaries of their own community. They also wielded their unhappiness within the home to petition reluctant men for a return to their American homes.

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The title of this dissertation, “Unknown and Unlamented,” is taken from the nineteen-year-old Mary Robie’s diary. She recorded the odd feeling of despair and loss that washed over her as she watched an unknown stranger being buried far from her native home and without proper friends and family present to mourn.\(^88\) While it is intended to highlight some of the specific feelings refugee women encountered in Nova


\(^88\) Mary Robie, diary, October 4, 1783, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
Scotia, it is also meant to draw attention to the lack of historical scholarship on loyalist women. But of course, it is also used ironically. In serving at the funeral, Robie was ensuring the woman was not buried without attention. Centuries later, her diary has provided an invaluable look into the life and mind of a young loyalist refugee in Halifax. Robie frequently worried that she, like the unknown stranger, would be forgotten in exile. But this feeling and the similar emotions shared by other refugee women throughout the diaspora, was not symbolic of resignation. To the contrary, loyalist women used their emotions to forge a distinct and important place for themselves in their own homes and within the broader refugee community. This study highlights these critical roles in order to restore women to the loyalist narrative.
CHAPTER 1
“BLOOD OF OUR BLOOD AND FLESH OF OUR FLESH”:
THE BRITISH FAMILY AND REVOLUTIONARY-ERA ALLEGIANCE

Rumors spread quickly in late June 1776 of the large British force sailing from Halifax to capture New York. On July 7, Gold Selleck Silliman and a detachment of the Connecticut militia departed Fairfield to reinforce General Charles Lee’s troops, who had been building fortifications to protect the city since February. Although the geographical location of the city made it nearly impossible for the patriots to defend it from the land, Silliman and many others were confident the British would not be willing to sacrifice the men necessary to take the city. On July 12, however, two British ships eluded the city’s defenses. They sailed into the New York harbor with the only loss of life being seven patriot troops all killed by, as one patriot witness recorded, “Our own cannon and not by the Enemy’s shot.” A powerful thunderstorm rolled through the city a week later. Lightning killed thirteen Connecticut militiamen, and patriot fortifications suffered considerable damage. These disasters caused patriot troops to reconsider their ability to hold the city. For Silliman, the fiascos sent more ominous signs concerning the collective revolutionary movement. He feared these events were “certainly designed to bring us to


seriously consider our awfull Declensions from an holy God.” When Silliman’s account of the battle reached his wife, Mary Fish Noyes Silliman, she felt even more intimately troubled. In a letter back to her husband she expressed her fear that taking up arms against “bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh” might mean that their “glorious cause” was more of an “unnatural” rebellion.91 Although she supported her husband, and the American cause more generally, she could not easily shake the strong attachment she felt to her imagined British family. She worried that in supporting the rebellion, she had betrayed her own flesh and blood.

For American colonists, the colonial break with Great Britain was unsettling, and many, including Mary Fish Noyes, were left feeling uncertain of whether the Revolution was justified. Although some historians treat the decades before 1776 as a long prologue to an inevitable clash between the colonies and Great Britain, these studies often face a teleological problem of projection exemplified by Noyes’ worry that she supported a war against her own imagined British kin.92 As Brendan McConville notes, between 1688 and 1774, the political and social norm in the American colonies was not merely “a devotion to the monarchy,” but also a personal “relationship to the king” that was only destroyed through potent and decentralized terror against those loyal to the empire after 1774.93 But


92 For an example of this whiggish history, see Jon Butler, Becoming America: The Revolution Before 1776 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

the attachment to Great Britain was more intimate than an imagined relationship between subjects and the monarch. British identity was rooted in the belief that Britons everywhere were members of one family and shared a collective past and united future.

When Mary Fish Noyes worried about fighting against her own imagined family, she was not simply taking creative license for dramatic effect; instead, she was expressing a fear common to many American patriots in arms against Great Britain and Britons fighting against the colonists: the anxiety that the American Revolution was an unnatural rebellion occurring within the British family.

When historians talk about allegiance during the American Revolution, they most often describe the legal definition loyal subjects invoked to explain their devotion to the king, self-serving economic incentives that could push subjects in either direction or the social dynamics of specific communities that thrust loyalties onto particular groups. But

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94 On the legal definition of fidelity to both the person and cooperate king, see Thomas S. Martin, “Nemo Potest Exuere Patriam: Indelibility of Allegiance and the American Revolution,” *American Journal of Legal History* 35, no. 2 (April 1991): 205-218. An example of the social dynamics that created loyalism in South Carolina, Rachel Klein dismisses previous assumptions that lingering antagonism between backcountry regulators and Lowcountry Whigs created a number of British sympathizers in the upcountry. Klein instead asserts that the majority of rural South Carolinians followed a few prominent backcountry leaders. Because the Lowcountry elites were able to appeal to some of these leader’s political ambitions, whole neighborhoods of the South Carolina upstate were brought over to the patriot side while others remained loyal to the British cause. *Unification of a Slave State: The Rise of the Planter Class in the South Carolina Backcountry* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 78-82; Peter N. Moore, “The Local Origins of Allegiance in Revolutionary South Carolina: The Waxhaws as a Case Study,” *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 107, no. 1 (January 2006): 27. In assessing the loyalties of British planters in the Caribbean during the American Revolution, Andrew Jackson O’Shaughnessy demonstrates that not only did British colonists in the islands remain faithful to the empire during the American rebellion, but the fear of slave revolts also made the Caribbean more loyal than even the most resolute loyalists of the American Revolution. *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000). Explaining why American colonists in the settlement of Machias in the Maine district of Massachusetts rebelled while their colonial cousins in Liverpool, Nova Scotia remained
as Noyes’ fear of betraying her imagined British family demonstrates, colonial loyalties were also informed by deeply seeded emotions wrapped up in the framework of the family. This chapter examines how feelings informed colonial allegiances during the mid to late eighteenth century to make three claims that can help historians better understand allegiance during the Revolutionary Era.

First, the emergence of a collective British identity in the colonies around 1750 was intimately intertwined with the popular depiction of the empire as a family, and as such, colonial understandings of their place in the empire were wrapped up in a number of emotional frameworks related to kinship. Historians have long examined the extent to which American colonists were, or were not, British in 1775. The most successful studies have explained British identity throughout the empire as the product of a shared culture, consisting of not only a common language and shared history, but also of vehement anti-Catholicism, and even an affinity for the same fashions and material goods fostered through vibrant transatlantic trade networks. What these studies have overlooked is the importance of a shared emotional regime that was born from the idea that all Britons belonged to a singular family. More than a creative illustration of British unity, the loyal to Great Britain, Elizabeth Mancke points to the breakup of local government that occurred in Nova Scotia keeping even the most distant regions of the colony reliant on imperial power emanating from Halifax. The Fault Lines of Empire: Political Differentiation in Massachusetts and Nova Scotia, c.1760-1830 (New York: Routledge, 2004).


96 An exception to this is Keith Grant’s dissertation that examines the emotions that buttressed British loyalism throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century. As Grant notes, “It was not that patriots did and Loyalists did not employ political emotions, but rather they attempted to
eighteenth-century family was imbued with powerful emotional frameworks that went beyond reciprocal obligations to include religious duties and gendered responsibilities. By 1775, the image of the British family became perhaps the most popular representation of the British Empire and the colonists’ place within it, and the idea of a single family created an emotional attachment between Britons on both sides of the Atlantic not easily forgotten when armed hostilities began.

Second, more so than their loyal counterparts, American patriots employed propaganda intended to depict both British colonial policy and British-sympathizing colonists as the enemies of the natural British family. More than a rebellion against British patriarchy informed by enlightened ideas of familial relations, patriot printers, pamphleteers, and politicians were quick to denounce the British as “unnatural.” The accusation drew upon a specific history that connected revolutionary events to the chaos of the English Civil War and imagery that likened the British, and their supporters in the colonies, to parents who had committed infanticide. Although these accusations were mostly performative, such indictments were nonetheless powerful rhetorical weapons. By defaming British rule in America as unnatural, American propagandists encouraged other colonists to recognize that the anti-colonial revolution as not only a justifiable revolt but as Gideon Mailer argues, “an uncontrollable reaction” to heinous

mark out different kinds of emotional communities...[Loyalists] worried that the violent passions their Patriot neighbours had embraced would only serve to desensitize them to those sympathies that knit diverse people together.” “Enthusiasm and Loyalty: Emotions, Religion, and Society in British North America,” (PhD diss., University of New Brunswick, 2017), 16.

97 As more educated minds rejected the idea that parenting meant enforcing discipline and instead embraced Locke’s idea that a parent’s duty was to prepare children for their emergence into the world, colonists began to argue that Great Britain had neglected her duty as a parent. For more on colonial objections to their place as children, see Jay Fliegelman, Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution Against Patriarchal Authority, 1750-1800 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).
injustices. Following the Franco-American alliance, British-sympathizers hoped to turn the tables and use the treaty as a symbol of unnatural American hypocrisy, but by 1778 the divide between patriots and loyalists had been drawn.

Third, analyzing the emotions colonists attached to the image of the British family and the hotly contested debate about who had violated the natural order that governed the family provides a better angle for understanding how colonial women understood allegiance. American women were intimately aware of the connections between the Revolution and the family. Although historians have addressed how women played critical public roles during the imperial crisis and became more active partners with their husbands in the household economy during the war, only to become increasingly relegated to the private sphere in post-revolutionary America, these assessments do not directly address how women understood loyalty. Legal and social constraints barred

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99 Earlier in the war, the loyalists were diverse in their exact objections to the American Revolution. Only later did the importance of a unified rhetoric become important. As Ruma Chopra argues, “The defensive metaphor of the ‘unnatural rebellion’ moored the loyalist refugees who envisioned a terrifying future outside the empire. Inherently inflexible, it generated structures of feeling around which multiple emotions could cluster and set other ideas as almost inconceivable.” *Unnatural Rebellion: Loyalists in New York City During the Revolution* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 3.

women from taking public oaths of allegiance, but women still developed and expressed their own views. Because colonial women were foremost concerned with the good of their families, they developed a uniquely flexible brand of allegiance that was subject to change depending on how one side or the other could benefit their families’ interests.

Both Elizabeth Graeme Fergusson and Grace Growden Galloway subtly alluded to their position as wives and mothers to gain the clemency of the patriots after the British and their loyalist husbands evacuated Philadelphia. Even though both women made similar arguments about how their true loyalties were to family, Pennsylvania officials were ultimately more lenient toward Fergusson because unlike Galloway, Fergusson had no heir and could not, therefore, help bring refugees back to the United States after the war.

As Thomas S. Martin noted, “In a sense, ‘allegiance’ is what the American Revolution is all about.” Revolutionary loyalties were heavily informed by emotions, and perhaps no eighteenth-century institution was imbued with as much feeling as the

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This chapter suggests that allegiance was more than an ideological commitment to empire or republicanism. Colonists felt their loyalties. The idea of the British family had become fixed by the outbreak of the Revolution, and colonists on both sides championed their emotions toward the family as a justification for their cause. Furthermore, when allegiance is viewed from an emotional angle, women’s loyalties become clearer because in contrast to eighteenth-century men’s fixation on honor, women were expected to care most about the good of their families, which necessitated more flexible views on loyalty.

**The British Family in Colonial North America**

Rumors of a colonial attack on British troops in Massachusetts first began to spread through the west end of London on May 31. Violence in the colonies was not new, but many who caught wind of an organized assault on British forces dismissed the news as implausible and decided “not to believe a syllable of it.” By June 5, however, Londoners were reading in the gazette about the deaths of “upwards of 150 British subjects.” The government report labeled the event as little more than “a skirmish between some people of Massachusetts Bay and a detachment of his Majesty’s troops.” Others scoffed at such insouciance. “Good God!” Londoners read in one paper, “At what times are we arrived when our fellow subjects, blood of our blood, and flesh of our flesh,

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104 Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims*.

are set to murder and destroy one another?"106 Critically, the author was not distraught by the idea that colonists had taken up arms against the mother country; instead, he was most dismayed that Britons, a people who shared the same flesh and blood, would turn against each other.

Considering the Revolution as a civil war as opposed to simply an anti-colonial movement has revealed that the war not only situated the colonies against Great Britain, but also turned factions of colonists against one another. Civil strife thrived in regions where order broke down. Loyalist Thomas Robie described the last few months he spent in Massachusetts before fleeing to Nova Scotia as “a time of when law was in a manner utterly suspended.”107 While he was able to escape physical harm with his family, some of his neighbors were forced to “ride a rail” through town while others were beaten and tarred.108 Conditions were little better five years later in South Carolina under British control. Setting up camp in the Waxhaws District along the North Carolina border in 1780, Lord Francis Rawdon offered to pay colonists in the region £5 for deserters from his regiments if they were brought to him alive, and £10 if only their heads were turned in. His notice sparked a wave of violent attacks against not only suspected deserters but also against families believed to have patriot leanings.109 Describing what he encountered

106 Story and Humphrey’s Pennsylvania Mercury and Universal Advertiser, August 11, 1775.

107 Unfinished letter Thomas Robie to Ward Chipman[?], December 7, 1786, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston MA [hereafter MHS].


in the Carolina backcountry, Nathanael Greene summarized the chaos of the civil war that raged largely unregulated. “The Whigs and Tories pursue one another with the most relentless fury,” Greene explained, “killing and destroying each other wherever they meet.”

Although the breakdown in order happened quickly in 1774 and 1775, the emotions that fueled these passions had deep roots tied up in the idea of the British family, a depiction that had been building over the course of the eighteenth century. This section traces the evolution of the widespread and potent idea that Britons on both sides of the Atlantic constituted a single family as a way of better understanding both the extensive violence of the war and as a critical component Revolutionary-era loyalties.

On the eve of the Revolution, British colonists in North America shared not only an affinity for the crown but the belief that although diverse, colonists and their European cousins shared a common bond as British people. The image of the British family benefitted both the imperial government, in terms of providing a rigid hierarchical structure of government, and colonists, who sought protection as dependents. But the idea

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of the British family also drew upon powerful emotional frameworks that were intimately intertwined with religious conviction and masculinity. When fighting broke out between members of the British family in 1775, Britons not only lamented the devolution of familial ties, intense feelings about the family also fueled animosities and violence, while also strengthening loyalties.

The idea that all people living in the British Empire were of one family had grown slowly since the creation of Great Britain in 1707. Prior to the mid-eighteenth-century, most American colonists had only intermittently invoked a shared British identity, preferring instead to cite the famed author and travel writer Samuel Purchas’ description of the colonies as, “Englands out of England… yea Royall Scotland, Ireland, Princely Wales multiplying of new scepters to his Majestie and His Heires in a New World.”

Both American colonists and people of the British Isles only began seeing themselves as uniquely British during the 1740s as the fear of Jacobite insurrection and Charles the Pretender created the need for a unified Britain in Europe, and French designs across the Atlantic necessitated a more concrete British identity in the Americas. Because these concerns stemmed from the threat of Catholicism, the first iterations of Britishness were rooted in a shared Protestant faith and began to emerge during the second Jacobite uprising in 1745.

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But even while an early British identity was rooted in the Protestant struggle against Catholicism, it is not possible to fully explain this burgeoning conception without examining its familial origins; and at least in its earliest iterations, British identity was intimately connected to the royal Hanover family. As McConville notes, during Britain’s wars against France and the monarchy’s struggle against Jacobites within the nation, King George II and his dynasty became a tangible symbol for Britons to rally around.114 While the defeat of the insurrection had more direct implications for the people of the British Isles, rumors of Jacobite minorities joining with Catholic French colonists stoked fears in America.115 When news of Charles Stuart’s downfall on the fields of Culloden reached the Americas, several thanksgiving sermons instructed American colonists to celebrate the British triumph over the Catholic menace. Thomas Prince, of South Church in Boston, preached on the “Deliverance of the British nations” extolling King George II and “the Protestant Royal Family,” which he believed represented all Britons in the fight against popery and its history of “slavery and destruction.” Concluding his sermon, he encouraged all Britons, “both in Europe and America,” to join “in one universal chorus” of thanksgiving.116 Prince boiled down the complex question of ascendency to the struggle between two families, and he suggested that Britons across the empire see themselves embodied in the Hanover family. Although some of Prince’s Congregationalist audience harbored lingering resentment toward the royal family as the

114 McConville, *The King’s Three Faces*, 45-46.


heads of the Anglican Church, during the tumult of the 1740s even those who criticized the established church supported the Hanovers’ fight against the Catholic Stuarts.117 The Hanovers gave Britons on both sides of the Atlantic the first tangible symbol of the nation embodied in a family.

The Hanover family’s victory also set an important precedent for colonial American families: being proper Britons meant actively combating the French menace. Colonists had long fought against French designs along their northern and western borders; but when England and France became entangled in a global war in the 1750s, colonists recognized the opportunity to secure their own borders while also proving their worth as Britons. In 1758, Gilbert Tennent addressed congregations in Philadelphia, and these sermons were gathered and printed in a collection that stressed the familial ties between all Britons entitled, *Sermons on Important Subjects; Adapted to the Perilous State of the British Nation*. In these orations, Tennent emphasized that colonists were not just responsible for fielding armies that would fight against the French threat, they were also accountable for the equally important spiritual well-being of the empire. He stressed how during the war with France, all Britons shared a single fate. “O Protestants, O Briton's, O Inhabitants of Philadelphia! God is certainly angry with our poor sinful Nation,” Tennent exclaimed, “Let us then turn to God, if we have any Regard to him, or to ourselves; any Regard to our King, our Country, our Relations, Friends, Estates, Liberty, or to our Lives, and our Souls; and then we may expect Deliverance and Mercy.”

Tennent named a hierarchal list of identities, and he described the people of Philadelphia

as Protestants above all, but as Britons second. He also underlined the colonists’
obligation to uphold the faith to gain God’s favor for the whole empire. While Prince’s
sermon after the defeat of the Jacobites focused on shared celebration, Tennent stressed
the importance of duty and the idea that Americans were equally as responsible for the
upkeep of British nation as subjects across the Atlantic.\textsuperscript{118}

As the global war with France had direct implication for American colonists,
Tennent’s appeal to colonists’ spiritual contributions was more urgent in its tone than
Prince’s celebratory oration; however, Tennent, like Prince, placed colonial families at
the center of British objectives. Tennent’s Philadelphia sermons were like other Great
Awakening sermons in that they focused on personal religious experience, but he also
underscored that religious obligations were inherently familial commitments.\textsuperscript{119} He
scorned families that “neglect the Instruction of their Children and Servants,” and he
noted that these lazy colonists were detrimental to the collective empire. In order to weed
out the negligent clans that were weighing down the spiritual good of the larger empire,
he advised faithful Britons in Philadelphia to take “secret prayer and family prayer”
outdoors. Tennent believed that public familial prayer would not only shame less diligent
families into compliance, but he also hoped such demonstrations would prove that
“God’s glory is the chief end” the British Empire. In Tennent’s eyes public prayer and
national repentance were paramount to British success. The most effective way to

\textsuperscript{118} On the importance of religious difference and rhetoric in the French and Indian War, see John
Corrigan and Lynn S. Neal, \textit{Religious Intolerance in Colonial America: A Documentary History}
(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 22.

\textsuperscript{119} On Tennent’s style, see Winiarski, \textit{Darkness Falls on the Land of Light}, 147.
demonstrate the British Empire’s commitment to God’s glory was through the collective
public action of British families.\footnote{120}{Gilbert Tennent, \textit{Sermons on Important Subjects; Adapted to the Perilous State of the British Nation, Lately Preached in Philadelphia} (Philadelphia: 1758), 242-243, 179, 411.}

Emerging images of the British family also drew from structures of patriarchy and
masculinity. Addressing troops headed for Quebec from Newbury, Massachusetts, the
Rev. John Lowell not only spoke about the relationship between Protestantism and the
British nation but also about colonial patriarchs’ duty to protect their families. He
explained that men were fighting not just for their own safety, but also for the
“liberty…of all Europe and America” from the “superstitions, cruelty and blood carried
every where with the success of France.” Lowell drew from Protestants’ prejudices
against the Catholics, but he also appealed to the patriarchal structure of the family to
underline the gendered obligations of British men. He asked those assembled, “Would
you have your \textit{Country} and \textit{Nation} in such a State as they could call nothing their own,
their \textit{Wives} and \textit{Children}, any more than their \textit{Houses} and \textit{Land}?”\footnote{121}{John Lowell, \textit{The Advantages of God's Presence with His People in an Expedition Against their Enemies. A Sermon Preached at Newbury, May 22, 1755. At the Desire, and in the Audience of Colo. Moses Titcomb, and Many Others Inlisted under him, and Going with him in an Expedition Against the French} (Boston: 1755), 19-21.} If the French were
victorious in North America, male heads of households could be blamed for failing both
their national duty to protect the colonies and their fatherly duty to protect their families.
In his sermon, Lowell linked the danger French forces posed to British North America
and Protestantism with the threat they posed to British masculinity.\footnote{122}{On manliness during the French and Indian War, see Tyler Boulware, “‘We Are Men’: Native American and Euroamerican Projections of Masculinity during the Seven Years' War,” in \textit{New Men: Manliness in Early America}, ed. Thomas A. Foster (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 51-70.} In this iteration,
dutiful British men were not simply fighting because of a religious and patriotic duty to their country, but as dutiful fathers, they also fought to protect their families.

In one sense, Lowell was only a local preacher hoping to instill confidence in a congregation with whom he was intimately familiar. He designed his sermon to assure the people of Newbury that their troops had God’s blessing, and he highlighted the documented success of the local leadership as evidence of this heavenly favor. Lowell confidently guaranteed that the troops would be safe and successful in their expedition against Quebec because Governor Shirley was in command. Lowell highlighted Shirley’s “virtues and qualities,” which he had proven a decade prior when his troops successfully captured the fortress at Louisburg. New England colonists would have been familiar with Shirley’s accomplishments, and Lowell hoped he could use Shirley as an example of British Empire’s success to assure the troops they were in good hands.

Lowell also emphasized the people of Newbury’s integral place in the larger British Empire and incorporated imperial rhetoric to assure the men that they were a part of something greater. Lowell explained that as the troops headed north, they marched in tandem with men from across the Empire. Lowell explained that these unknown and unseen soldiers were, “Bone of your Bone, and Flesh of your Flesh whose Families and Interests are among you.” More than simply fellow Britons, Lowell depicted the British

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troops fighting in all theaters of the global conflict as blood relatives of the Newbury men. Lowell’s British Empire was a unified family fighting for “the Cause of King and Country,” which was also “the Cause of God.”¹²⁵ Having invoked anti-Catholic sentiment, appealed to the men’s masculinity, and assured the local people that their husbands and sons were under the command of accomplished leaders, Lowell appealed to the idea of commonality between Britons from across the empire. His emphasis on a single British family fighting for a common cause was meant to bolster the community’s confidence in the global objectives of the empire and encourage them to see themselves as part of larger kinship network. More than an imaginative conjuring, this image was infused was strong feelings of family and of common cause.

Similar to the way American colonists celebrated the defeat of Charles at Culloden, the expulsion of French power from North America 1763 was heralded across the empire not merely as a colonial victory but as a victory for the unified British family. The removal of the French from North America had direct consequences for American colonists. Sermons celebrating the French removal from North America were distinct from those of the 1740s in that they highlighted the central role of American colonists in the victory and situated the defeat of the French as the natural climax of a centuries-old struggle. In Salem, Massachusetts, Thomas Barnard extolled the defeat of the French as the culmination of the New England mission. “Now commences the Era of our Quiet Enjoyment of those Liberties which our Fathers purchased with the Toil of their whole Lives, their Treasure, their Blood,” Barnard told his congregation. But he also stressed that the expulsion of the French was not the colonists’ victory alone. While Barnard

lauded the French removal as the triumph of the American cause, he also recognized that such a victory would not have been possible without support from across the Atlantic. “Here shall our indulgent Mother, who has most generously rescued and protected us, be served and honored by growing Numbers with all Duty, Love and Gratitude, till Time shall be no more,” he explained. 126 Invoking the image of motherly Britain, Barnard reinforced the familial image. He also drew upon emerging enlightened ideals that championed loving and dutiful parents as opposed to disciplinarians. While colonists had grown to see themselves as Britons between 1745 and 1763, the war against the French had created the image of Great Britain as an “indulgent mother,” which carried its own powerful emotions.

Perhaps no one encapsulated the pride colonists felt as both Americans and Britons after the defeat of the French in North America as succinctly as Benjamin Franklin in a letter to London. Celebrating the conquest of Quebec, Franklin wrote in jubilation to Lord Henry Home, “No one can more sincerely rejoice than I do on the reduction of Canada, and this is not merely as I am a colonist, but as I am a Briton.” 127 As an American colonist, victory over the French meant the removal of an antagonistic colonial rival, an end to attacks along the northern and western border, and the opening of the American west to British expansion. While he rejoiced as a colonist, he also believed Britons without a material stake in America also had reason to celebrate. “If we keep it,” Franklin explained, “all the country from the St. Lawrence to the Mississippi will, in

126 Edward Barnard, A sermon preached before His Excellency Francis Bernard, Esq… (Boston: 1763), 44.

127 Benjamin Franklin to Lord Henry Home, January 3, 1760, in John Bigelow ed., The Works of Benjamin Franklin, including the Private as well as the Official and Scientific Correspondence, together with the Unmutilated and Correct Version of the Autobiography (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1904), 248.
another century, be filled with British people. Britain itself will become vastly more populous, by the immense increase of its commerce; the Atlantic sea will be covered with your trading ships; and your naval power, thence continually increasing, will extend your influence round the whole globe, and awe the world!” Franklin celebrated the defeat of the French not merely because it resulted in the removal of a colonial rival and worked in favor of his own material interests. He recognized the victory in America as the triumph of the British family and emphasized how the removal of the French would only increase the splendor of the empire.  

For all his enthusiasm as a cosmopolitan Briton, Franklin also voiced concerns that were uniquely American. He hoped to persuade Lord Home that a strong hand was in both American and British interest. Franklin warned, “If the French remain in Canada, they will continually harass our colonies by the Indians…your progress to greatness will at best be slow, and give room for many accidents that may for ever prevent it.” Even after the removal of French authority in 1763, American colonists recognized the threat a foreign people posed to the British family. More than 70,000 Catholic French colonists remained throughout the former French territory, and French trappers continued to exert considerable influence with native people along the western borderlands.  

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British government had enacted a bold deportation strategy to clear Atlantic Canada for British settlers, the size of the French population in Quebec rendered a similar plan impossible. Franklin warned that an attempts to bring French American colonists into the folds of the British family would spell disaster.

Ultimately, British authorities in Quebec pursued an agenda that ignored Franklin’s warning. While they did not see the French inhabitants of Quebec as their kin, British officials believed if their affections were won, the French in Quebec could be seamlessly integrated into British North America. Of his plan to win over the French, the military governor of Quebec, Sir Guy Carleton, wrote to London of a plan to appease the French habitants. “There [is] no doubt of their secret and natural affection for France,” Carleton wrote of the French in Quebec. But he advised officials to develop colonial policy that would “conciliate the affections of the conquered.” In many ways, Carlton suggested that perhaps the French colonists could, with certain capitulations, be made a part of the British family. Carlton’s advice ultimately culminated in the Quebec Act of 1774, which guaranteed the French Canadians freedom of religion and French judicial procedure, extended the boundaries of Quebec to the Ohio River in the south and Mississippi River in the west, and created an advisory council of elite French colonists and clergy members.

For many British Americans, the concessions made in the Quebec Act to gain the affections of the French had severe ramifications for territorial ambitions in the west;

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however, even those without personal designs on expansion saw the attempt to incorporate the French colonists in Quebec as an unprecedented attempt to redefine the British family. But such a betrayal was only the culmination of a growing divide. Writing to her cousin Isaac Smith Jr. in London four years before, Abigail Adams demonstrated that she and other colonists sensed an increasing distance between Great Britain and the colonies long before the concessions made in the Quebec Act confirmed such fears. Envious of her cousin’s travels to England, Adams wrote, “From my Infancy I have always felt a great inclination to visit the Mother Country, as tis call’d.” While she believed “maturer [sic] years” had tempered much of her wanderlust, she also noted that many colonists had grown suspicious of the motherly affections Great Britain had for the colonies. She noted that this feeling of distrust was born from “the unnatural treatment which this our poor America has received from her.” Adams’ reflection demonstrates how prominent the image of the British family had become by the late eighteenth century. Her reference to Britain’s “unnatural treatment” of the colonies also foreshadowed budding American rhetoric that would become a powerful emotional tool the patriots would invoke to drive a wedge between colonists and the British family.

The “Unnatural Rebellion”: Emotional Rhetoric and Allegiance

In early 1775, the New York publisher James Rivington reprinted A Cure for the Spleen; or, Amusement for a Winter's Evening; Being the Substance of a Conversation on the Times, over a Friendly Tankard and Pipe, a popular play from Boston. Written by the

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133 For example, Alexander Hamilton felt indignation upon learning the British had gone as far as to grant the French inhabitants of Quebec the rights to land as south as the Ohio River as a “violation of [the king’s] promise” to British Americans. See Harold C. Syrett ed., The Papers of Alexander Hamilton, vol. 1, 1768–1778 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 165–169.
British-sympathizing Massachusetts Attorney General, Jonathan Sewall, the piece presented a Tory’s perspective on the growing colonial crisis. Sewall believed self-interested Whigs had invented whimsical political arguments concerning representation and rights to mislead honest colonists into a treasonous. Sewall used a haughty representative recently returned from the Continental Congress, accurately named Puff, to satirize the American radicals. Throughout the play, the self-important Puff often forgets he is speaking to friends and instead addresses an imagined Congress. “Mr. Speaker! —I beg pardon—gentlemen, I mean,” Puff began one of his more verbose monologues, where he explained how tyrannical British policy had suffocated the “just rights and privileges” of American colonists. The often-misinformed Puff is quick to dismiss any opposition or questions concerning his logic with insult. “None of your unmanly reflections,” Puff snaps back at one objector, perhaps meant by Sewell to insinuate that rebellious colonists lacked the more refined qualities of women. Hoping to make peace with Puff, his friend reminds him of the old maxim, “Amantium ira amoris redintegratio est.” But Puff becomes only doubly incensed, mistaking the gesture of friendship for an affront and confusing the Latin for “French jabbering.”

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134 Sewell published the play under the pseudonym Sir Roger de Coverly in 1775, but it is unlikely the play was ever performed publically. It does seem, however, to have been performed in private company, and may have even earned Sewall the favor of John Burgoyne who was fond of satirical plays and may have based portions of his own The Blockade of Boston off Sewall’s play. Colin Nicolson and Owen Dudley Edwards, Imaginary Friendship in the American Revolution: John Adams and Jonathan Sewall (New York: Routledge, 2019), 222; Joseph Sabin, Bibliotheca Americana: A Dictionary of Books Relating to America from its Founding to the Present Time, vol. 19, Schedel to Simms (New York, 1891), 306.

135 The saying roughly translates to, “Lovers’ quarrels are the renewal of love.” Sewall, who had served as headmaster at a Latin school from 1748 to 1756, uses Puff’s ignorance of Latin to demonstrate his unfitness for politics and statecraft. John J. Teunissen, “Blockheadism and the Propaganda Plays of the American Revolution,” Early American Literature 7, no. 2 (Fall 1972): 152.
American patriot: quick to anger, erroneously informed, and perhaps most importantly, without the ability to empathize or compromise.

Sewall’s foil for Puff is the aptly named Sharp, who not only attacks Puff’s wit but also lays bare his adversary’s unfamiliarity with the principles of republicanism. Sharp, who stands as a thin veil for Sewall’s own opinions, is horrified that British law, the very foundation of British freedom, could be manipulated by self-absorbed men like Puff. “What can be conceiv’d more horrible,” Sharp asks the audience, “than to beseech the fountain of truth and justice to espouse and abet the cause of robbery and injustice?”

But Sharp’s political arguments had little effect on Puff, who continues to protest citing common colonial complaints concerning taxes, trials, and quartering.

Recognizing his antagonist is unwilling to budge from his political views, Sharp turns to a more emotional appeal. “They don’t consider what they talk of when they talk of fighting the King’s troops,” Sharp declares to the audience, “they don’t sit down first and count the costs…they don’t consider the horrors of civil war.” Although unmoved by political arguments, Puff could not deny Sharp’s emotional entreaty. Recognizing he had gained the upper hand, Sharp continues. “Such are the miseries to which this poor, unhappily deluded people are hastening apace; and all to save those liberties which their own foolish credulity, and the wicked arts of their designing leaders, have misrepresented to their heated imaginations as being in danger.” Having considered Sharp’s pointed critiques, Puff bends, “I begin to see things in a different light from what I did.” Another convert rhetorically asks the audience, “I wonder what makes my eyes water so?”

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Sewall’s play presents a humorous Tory critique of the revolutionaries and their political arguments, but it is his emphasis on feeling that sets the piece apart from other works of early Revolutionary-era literature. Through Sharp’s critique of the American patriots as “unhappily deluded people,” Sewall suggests that revolutionary fervor was intertwined with a general feeling of malaise, and he mocked the patriot leaders’ trumped up claims that a colonial rebellion could restore American happiness. While a scientific approach to understanding human emotions had been growing through the eighteenth century, many still believed that human feelings were connected to a balance, or imbalance, of the humors. Popular knowledge explained that incurable sadness, more commonly called melancholia, was the product of an over production of black bile from the spleen.\(^{137}\) In Sewall’s *A Cure for the Spleen*, reason alone failed to convince the radical Puff of his error; instead, it was Sharp’s emotional appeal that “cooled the passions” of the haughty and misguided patriot and caused him to concede that his revolutionary sympathies were born from “rashness and folly.”\(^{138}\) In his satire, Sewall notes how unhappy colonists had been led astray, and he suggests that the only cure for discontent was an appeal to emotions rather than logic.

But Sewall’s take on the origins of the colonial American rebellion was an anomaly, at least from an early loyalist perspective. Few British sympathizers recognized the power of an appeal to common emotions; instead most opted to push back against growing revolutionary sentiment with arguments grounded in law. In contrast, American


\(^{138}\) On the loyalists’ opinion of American passions, see Grant, “Enthusiasm and Loyalty,” 16.
propagandists quickly embraced emotional rhetoric, and they relied heavily on Americans’ familiarity with the image of the British family to make some of their strongest points. Jay Fliegelman traced how a revolution in ideas concerning the duties and obligations parents owed their children shaped anti-imperial rhetoric; however, the idea that the American Revolution was anti-patriarchal is only one component of the larger American agenda to depict British colonial policy as opposed to the idea of the British family. Rebellious colonists invoked the powerful history of the word “unnatural” to galvanize colonists against British rule in America. More than their counterparts in Britain, colonists were astutely aware of the importance of the idea of the British family in America, and as tensions mounted during the colonial conflict, budding American patriots began to portray the British government as an unnatural aggressor.

In October 1769, patriotic printers across the colonies were quick to reprint the opinion of one anonymous British writer, who noted that the arrival of British troops in October of the previous year was a grave injustice. “Every human breast must shudder at the thought of anything so unnatural as the butchering of our fellow subjects in America,” American colonists read.139 Invoking similar language during the war, George Washington offered between 200 and 10,000 acres of land, depending on rank, to British soldiers willing to “quit the King’s service… rather than imbrue their hands in the blood of their best friends…[in] this unnatural and ruinous contest.”140 While loyalists learned to denounce the American rebellion as “unnatural” as a way of uniting a diverse group of

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139 “From the London Public Ledger; To the Printer,” The Salem Gazette, February 14-21, 1769.

British sympathizers, they learned the animating power of the term from their patriot enemies and too late to win over other colonists. Loyalist depictions of “the unnatural rebellion” came only after the American treaty with the French.\footnote{Chopra, \textit{Unnatural Rebellion}, 3-4.}

The use of the word “unnatural” to describe political events carried remarkable weight because of the word’s connection to the English Civil War. Although by the outbreak of the Revolution more than a century had passed since the divisive conflict, the seventeenth-century war was perhaps the most powerful historical reference for Britons because it had called into question nearly every facet of English social and political organization.\footnote{As Brendan McConville notes, “It is perhaps difficult for us to imagine that the English Civil Wars once had as strong a hold on colonials as Vietnam and World War II do on contemporary Americans.” \textit{The Kings Three Faces}, 93.} One of the most common terms English people used to describe the disorder of the Civil War Era was “unnatural.” During the conflict, a leader of a group of “clubmen”—rural defense committees that fought back against the armies of both sides as they plundered the countryside—explained that country people, more so than city dwellers, had “tasted the Misery of this unnatural and intestine war.” The misery the Englishman described was in part due to the material suffering of local peoples, who had to cope with marauding armies from both sides that devoured food stores, destroyed crops, and terrorized the people.\footnote{Quoted in Charles Carlton, \textit{Going to the Wars: The Experience of the British Civil Wars, 1638-1651} (New York: Routledge, 1992), 295. On the brutality and unnaturalness, see chapter 3.} But more intimately, the misery of the English Civil War was a product of neighbor fighting neighbor. The result was immense suffering for
all Englishmen and a black mark on the history of the nation that had for so long been spared such an internal tragedy.\textsuperscript{144}

Because of its association with the hardship caused by civil strife, Britons only used the word “unnatural” to describe the most reprehensible crimes. Many popular late seventeenth and eighteenth-century broadsides, including witch literature and the provocatively titled novel \textit{The Unnatural Mother}, described women who engaged in sexual relationships out of wedlock, gave birth without the assistance of a midwife, or most shockingly, killed their own children as unnatural. While these tales were works of the imagination, they played upon some of the people’s worst fears.\textsuperscript{145} Newspapers were quick to publish instances of these crimes in real life, and editors across the empire most frequently attached the word “unnatural” to crimes where family members killed their own kin. Both the \textit{American Weekly Mercury} of Philadelphia and Benjamin Franklin’s \textit{Pennsylvania Gazette} ran the sensational story of Eleanor Moore and Elizabeth Garretson from New Castle, Delaware, who had both been sentenced to death for the “unnatural crime” of murdering Moore’s newborn bastard child.\textsuperscript{146} Cases of infanticide seem to be most commonly deemed “unnatural” if perpetrated by women; however, in some this

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condemnation was extended to fathers. In 1738, The New England Journal reprinted a letter from England concerning the increasingly common occurrence of infanticide, which in contrast to the normal practice of blaming only the mother, also noted the propensity of fathers to take part in the nefarious practice. The author singled out and railed against “cruel and unnatural Parents” who committed “the most unnatural and shocking barbarities.”

Further demonstrating the power imbued in the term, while the press was quick to use the word unnatural to label murderous parents, it was hardly ever used to describe murders that happened outside the family, regardless of how heinous the crime. When three runaway servants killed Eliphalet Larby of Hanover Country, Virginia, articles condemned the murder as “barbarous.” What was most shocking about the crimes was the spineless manner the servants committed the murder. The runaways had shot Larby in the back with the deceased’s own gun after he had offered the fugitives safety. While the article called the killers “cowardly,” it did not depict the act as necessarily unnatural, even though the perpetrators used Larby’s own mercy against him. In 1750, a ghastly story from Williamsburg circulated the colonies detailing the gruesome murder of Col. Peter Presly. Like Larby, Presly had also been killed by servants. According to the report, he had “his Throat cut Ear to Ear” in the most “horrid” manner. The killing of a master by his servants produced outrage, especially because of the vicious nature, but it stopped short of labeling the killing as unnatural. While shocking and likely seen as a threat to the

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147 New England Weekly Journal, October 17, 1738.

order of the colonies, the killing was not within a biological family, and therefore, not against nature in the same manner as infanticide.\textsuperscript{149}

Patriots were quick to invoke the word “unnatural” to describe British rule in America to stir up emotions. Perhaps no one in the empire was as successful in employing this rhetoric than Thomas Paine. While he made a number of political arguments, Paine was most effective when he made comparisons everyday people could understand. “Children grow into men, and by setting up for themselves,” Paine explained using the image of the family to better illustrate why colonial independence was necessary, “extend and secure the interest of the whole family…Nothing hurts the affections of both parents and children so much, as living too closely connected, and keeping up the distinction too long.” Speaking directly to the people of England, Paine summarized his critiques of British rule in America by denouncing British inattentiveness to the bonds of the family. “In short, had you studied only the domestic politics of a family, you would have learned how to govern the state,” Paine accused, “but, instead of this easy and natural line, you flew out into every thing which was wild and outrageous, till, by following the passion and stupidity of the pilot, you wrecked the vessel within sight of the shore.” In Paine’s eyes, the “domestic politics of the family” provided an “easy and natural” course for government. But by deviating from that model, Great Britain had acted “wild and outrageous.”\textsuperscript{150}

Across the colonies, patriots urged fellow colonists to recognize that Britain’s unnatural rule in America was destined to result in tragedy. In an open letter to the king

\textsuperscript{149} The Boston Gazette, July 3, 1750.

printed in the *Pennsylvania Journal* in October 1774, an anonymous author warned the monarch, and the periodical’s readers, about the “sad catastrophe” that would inevitably follow the “unwarrantable and unnatural measures you are pursing.”¹⁵¹ Only a month later, an elected body from Essex County, New Jersey submitted a report to the colony’s chief justice, Frederick Smyth, explaining they would not “induce any man to damp their laudable patriotic ardour; nor lend his helping hand to the unnatural and diabolical work of riveting those chains which [the British] are forging for us” by sending troops to assist the forces occupying Boston.¹⁵² Another letter sent to Cadwallader Colden, the Lieutenant-Governor of New York, explained that the people of that province looked on with “horror and consternation” as the once “harmonious connexion” between Great Britain and her colonies slipped into “unnatural discords.”¹⁵³ The use of the word unnatural to describe both British rule in America and the relations between the colonies and Great Britain was not coincidental; instead, it conjured specific images of civil war and infanticide. Such outrages left colonists with only one response: justifiable anger that was channeled into the call for rebellion.¹⁵⁴

Having learned the power of labeling the opposition as unnatural from their American foes, British sympathizers also used the term to galvanize colonists; however,

¹⁵¹ “To the King,” *Pennsylvania Journal*, October 5, 1774.


¹⁵³ *The Pennsylvania Evening Post*, January 24, 1775.

British sympathizers came around to the idea slowly, only recognizing the full power of the appeal after 1778 and the treaty between the Americans and the French. At its core, the alliance confirmed loyalist suspicions that the Revolution was a plot orchestrated by a few self-interested colonists willing to sacrifice the very principles of the British family the Americans swore to be defending. Appearing in the British-leaning *Royal Pennsylvania Gazette* only days after the first printing of the news from France, an anonymous piece of prose drew upon powerful images of the British family torn apart by war to highlight loyalist suffering. In “The Loyalist: A Poem,” the author worried the alliance with Bourbons is little more than a French ruse to conquer America. “To French ambition Albion fall a prey/ And her free sons in chains led away,” the author grimly predicted. While the author predicted the French would use divisions to conquer their foe, the poem focused on the idea that divisions could be healed between warring family members. Turning away from strict legal arguments, the author painted a grisly scene of a family torn apart by fighting:

When by Brothers hand shall no more
Brothers fall/
Nor aged sires their sons bewail/
No more contention break that tender tie/
Nor force a tear from the poor widowed eye/
No son behold his father, mother slain/
No mangled corps ly lifeless on the plain.

While the poem denounced the patriot leaders as “upstart ministers of power,” ultimately the poem made an appeal for a restoration of the British family.155

As rector of Trinity Church in New York, Anglican Minister Charles Inglis also saw the alliance as proof that a few self-interested men had sacrificed their principles,

aroused the passions of other colonists to overthrow their British kin, and had now sided with the enemy to achieve their objectives. Quoting from Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, he warned patriots about the Whig ringleaders, cautioning, “The lust of domination is a very unruly passion.” He further condemned the alliance stating, “By throwing yourselves into the arms of France at last, and delivering this country, as far as you were capable, to the vassalage of that insidious power, you have fully manifested to the world your disregard of the liberties, welfare and happiness of America.” He predicted that the French king would never allow the two sides to reach peace, but would continually drag the war along and forced the colonists to “imbrue their hands in kindred blood.”

While loyalists had long argued that a few patriot ringleaders had duped the majority of Americans into a rebellion that benefitted only a handful of the patriot leaders, Inglis’ condemnation in 1779 was more similar to early patriot rhetoric in its focus on passions and emotions instead of law and reason.

“It is time to let Tory ladies know, that their behavior is under consideration”: Women, the Family, and Allegiance

As news of the British march toward Philadelphia spread during the late summer months of 1777, Pennsylvania rebels worried loyalists among them might aid the British advance. As Sarah Knott notes, much of this anxiety arose from an uncertainty concerning elite families’ allegiance and the influence women had over husbands, sons.

156 Charles Inglis, *The Letters of Papinian: in Which the Conduct, Present State and Prospects, of the American Congress, are Examined* (New York, 1779), 44.
and even households.\textsuperscript{157} With British troops making steady progress toward Philadelphia, Congress authorized a series of crackdowns against colonists who had resisted taking an oath of allegiance. Many patriots, however, believed these measures had not gone far enough. A notice appearing in an August 1777 issue of the \textit{Pennsylvania Evening Post} voiced the concerns of many Pennsylvanians who worried about the role women might play in aiding the enemy. “While effectual measures are taking with our principle Tories among the men,” the article explained, “The women seem to be neglected.” The critique concluded with a warning to British-sympathizing women. “It is time to let the Tory ladies know,” the author explained, “that their behavior is under consideration; and the ringleaders of them will be noticed as soon as their names can be obtained”\textsuperscript{158} Despite the ominous threat, it seems few, if any, measures were taken. When Captain John Montresor entered the rebel capital on the morning of September 26, he noted that although there were few men in town, the British were welcomed by “the acclamation of some thousands of the inhabitants, mostly women and children.”\textsuperscript{159}

Identifying colonial women’s allegiance plagued both British and American forces throughout the Revolution. As with any war, women on either side were vulnerable targets. Wives of loyalist men were not only harassed by patriots but also found their land confiscated when their husbands fled with retreating British troops. Plundering British and Hessian soldiers both physically and sexually assaulted suspected patriot wives and


\textsuperscript{158} \textit{The Pennsylvania Evening Post}, August 16, 1777.

daughters as they made their way across the rebellious colonies. But both sides were also willing to exploit women’s ability to move somewhat freely between lines. Many colonial women acted as spies. Philadelphian Quaker Lydia Darragh was influential in warning Washington of the impending British attack on White Marsh in December 1777. Fellow Philadelphian Ann Bates worked with Major Duncan Drummond in New York to infiltrate Washington’s camp at White Plains in July 1778 conveying important information about troop numbers and movements back to the British command.

While both British and American forces relied on women’s support during the war, both sides’ inability to develop effective strategies to identify the loyalties of colonial women was a major hindrance. The problem of identifying women’s allegiance stemmed from a difference between custom and practice. Following the engagements at Lexington and Concord, colonists found the only way to prove their patriotic allegiance was through public oaths of fidelity to the American cause. But common custom barred women from publicly professing loyalty. English law dictated that most women were nonpolitical entities because they were dependent on their husbands or fathers. They could not, therefore, declare their own allegiance. When states passed legislative measures requiring citizens to take oaths of allegiance, women were omitted. This does not mean, however,

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163 Anderson, The Martyr and the Traitor, 89.
that women did not harbor their own views. Recognizing a failure to address women when drafting laws concerning treason, many states avoided the gender-specific use of “he” and instead explained, “All persons abiding within any of the United Colonies…owe allegiance to said laws.” Although these laws were written to include women, because they could not swear oaths, their allegiances remained ambiguous. The message to the “Tory ladies” appearing in The Pennsylvania Evening Post demonstrates that attempts to address women’s allegiance were never completely effective.\textsuperscript{164}

The failure of both sides to directly address colonial women’s allegiance also thrust wives and daughters into a precarious position. In essence, colonial women were caught between the war and obligations to their families, both real and imagined. While the conception of the British family and its emotional ties influenced how all American colonists viewed the Revolution, more so than men, colonial wives and daughters sought to navigate between their familial obligations to husbands and fathers, and often conflicting patriotic responsibilities to the imagined British family. Ambiguous definitions of women’s allegiance forced women to confront two often-contradictory expectations. As dutiful mothers and daughters, colonial women were charged with the maintenance of the nuclear family; however, they were also expected to be obedient to the will of their husbands. As conscientious domestics, women were expected to be sensitive to threats to the home and nuclear family; but they were often asked to overlook these dangers in the name of the British or American cause.

\textsuperscript{164} Such understandings were based on traditional laws of coverture, which dictated that married women were simply extensions of their husbands and as such held the same political allegiance. See Kerber, \textit{Women of the Republic}, chapter 5. For a comprehensive analysis of married women’s allegiance, see 119-136, quote, 121.
To navigate these expectations, Revolutionary-era women developed more amorphous loyalties that could bend or change depending on circumstances. While some women, like patriot Mercy Otis Warren or loyalist Frances Wentworth, found adopting their husband’s allegiances in the best interest of the family some other women found themselves caught between the duty to their families’ wellbeing and their obligations to follow their husbands.165

Most commonly, women had loyalties thrust upon them due to their husband’s allegiance.166 During the war, Elizabeth Graeme Fergusson of Philadelphia fell into a private disagreement with her husband, Scottish born Henry Hugh Fergusson, about their loyalty. Although the majority of their friends and relations supported the American cause, Henry Fergusson was a recent immigrant and became a vocal supporter of the British cause. During the occupation of Philadelphia, Fergusson was made commissary of American prisoners, a position that made him among the most detested British sympathizers in the city. Philadelphia residents also saw his wife as a British-sympathizer. As the British withdrew, Fergusson fled too for his safety. His wife, however, remained in Philadelphia as the army left and began to assert that she had not supported the occupying forces, despite her husband’s position.167

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166 Kacy Tillman, “What is a Female Loyalist?,” *Common Place* 13, No. 4 (Summer 2013), http://www.common-place-archives.org/vol-13/no-04/tillman/.

The leading patriots of Philadelphia moved quickly to confiscate the property of citizens who had aided the British after the army’s retreat. Henry Hugh Fergusson had inherited a sizable estate just outside the city named *Graeme Park* after his marriage to Elizabeth Graeme. *Graeme Park* was among the many estates seized because although it passed on to the couple from Elizabeth’s father, it legally belonged to the loyalist Fergusson. But Elizabeth Graeme objected to her property being confiscated. She explained that because she had never harbored any British sympathies, she was entitled to maintain the property. Although the courts were initially unsympathetic, she began a lengthy process of petition where she demonstrated that she had her own allegiance, one that was independent of her husband. “May I be allow’d to touch on my own Conduct since this unhappy Contest?,” she begged the influential John Dickinson. While she acknowledged her husband’s position in the British government, she explained that none of her actions had supported the British and that she had secretly maintained American sentiments. “I have for my own part Constantly remaind [sic] on the Premisses [sic]; earnestly praying for Peace,” she explained, “But if the Sword must decide our Fates, [I] Sincerely [wish] it might be on the Side of America; which, in my short View of things, I look’d on to be the Injur’d Party.”

Not only did Elizabeth Graeme state she had maintained subtle American leanings, she also accused others of being British sympathizers in her petition to the Speaker of the House of Assembly, John Bayard. How, she asked, was her estate targeted when she could easily “enumerate a list of Names of Gentlemen in, and of Britain, that now hold landed Property here, which have

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never been Seiz’d, [even] some of whom are at this time acting in the Military?"¹⁶⁹

Convinced she had no British sympathies, and perhaps worried about who she could
name as a British supporter, the government restored most of Elizabeth Graeme’s estate.

Grace Growden Galloway, another affluent Philadelphia woman, faced a similar
conundrum following the evacuation of the British in 1778. Like Elizabeth Graeme,
Grace Growden had inherited a large country estate and a city mansion after the death of
her father. Her husband Joseph Galloway, a representative to the First and Second
Continental Congress, had ultimately chosen British loyalty following the Declaration of
Independence. When Howe’s army marched toward Philadelphia, Galloway rushed to
join their lines. During the occupation, he enjoyed favor as a loyal subject and was made
commissioner of the British police force. As fortunes turned against the British, however,
Galloway joined Henry Fergusson is full retreat while Grace remained in Philadelphia.
Like her contemporary Elizabeth Graeme, Grace Growden found both her country estate
and her city mansion on the list of proscribed properties following the British evacuation
and endeavored to get it back.¹⁷⁰

In many ways, Grace Growden’s case was more complicated than Elizabeth
Graeme’s. Foremost, while Elizabeth Graeme could reasonably claim to have never
supported the British during the occupation, Grace Growden’s diary reveals she held the
American rebels in the utmost contempt, and her public sentiments probably followed
suit. She despised the chaos of the Revolution and held a strong desire to flee “from this

¹⁶⁹ Elizabeth Graeme Fergusson to John Bayard, September 4, 1779, in Gratz ed., “Some Material
for a Biography of Mrs. Elizabeth Fergusson,” 397.

¹⁷⁰ See John E. Ferling, The Loyalist Mind: Joseph Galloway and the American Revolution
(University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania University Press, 1977), especially 44.
wicked place…this Sodom” and sail for England, a place she had never visited but referred to as “home.”¹⁷¹ But as the war turned against the British, she seemed to have a change of heart. Months after her husband and the army left, Grace Growden grieved, “Everything looks so dark that I have no hope from ye English.” Noting, “Everybody is now near giving up,” and, “Ye English [are] beat everywhere,” Grace Growden appeared to become more open to the idea of government by the American rebels. While she had despised the rebellious mob only months before, by the late autumn months of 1777, she noted in her diary that her happiness could be quickly restored “if [the revolutionary government] allowed me My Estate.” Unlike in Elizabeth Graeme’s case, however, Grace Growden’s more obvious British sympathies meant the Pennsylvania Assembly was less inclined to restore her property. Insistent that she maintained the rights to her family’s property, Grace Growden refused to leave her city mansion until she was escorted out in late August. She never recovered her property.¹⁷²

The experiences of Elizabeth Graeme and Grace Growden have another important complexity: Grace Growden’s position as a mother. In her petition to the Pennsylvania Assembly, Elizabeth Graeme seems to suggest that while she believed she was able to declare an allegiance separate from her husband’s, she recognized her most valuable bargaining chip was in presenting herself as a childless widow by circumstance. In her petition, she stated, “Secondly as I have no Child [my estate] can only (if sold at all) be put up during the joint lives of Mr. Fergusson, and myself, and I should think would sell


but for little to the State when taken into the Scale that one of the Parties is a Female, in an Indifferent State of Health; betwixt forty and fifty years of age.” Elizabeth Graeme appears to argue that even if the state did not believe she held patriotic leanings, it should still grant to her the property as it would eventually come back into the state’s hands. 173

Conversely, Grace Growden’s main objective was to preserve the family estate for her daughter. Although she had endured a turbulent marriage, she cherished her only child. 174 Given her disdain for the Americans, Growden probably wanted to follow her husband in his retreat with the British from Philadelphia. But Grace Growden remained because although her husband had taken their daughter with him to New York and then to London, he convinced his wife it was best for her to stay to save their property so that their daughter could return. While Grace Growden despised the Americans, the most sadness she felt was for her daughter. “What pain I feel to think My dearest child Must be drove from her Native Country,” she lamented, and she regretted that as a mother she was “incapable of doing anything for her.” Soon after her husband left Philadelphia, Grace Growden began to realize he had no intention of bringing the girl back and her disgust with the Americans turned to hatred for her husband. 175

But the Pennsylvania Government appears less inclined to grant Grace Growden her former property precisely because she hoped to preserve it for future generations. With her estate gone, Grace Growden contemplated her change in fortune. While she had been


174 On their unhappy marriage, see Ferling, The Loyalist Mind, 27-28.

an influential citizen before the war, with the reverse of her status, she noted, "I have Not one friend to depend Upon." Years later, from London, Joseph Galloway led the loyalist exiles in their demands for compensation from the British government. To stoke popular support, he conjured sad images of the many desperate loyal subjects in America and throughout the empire, who “through the prospect of want, have died of broken hearts.” If Joseph thought of his wife in Philadelphia, it meant little to her. Grace Growden died poor and alone in the late fall of 1779.

Despite the different circumstances of Elizabeth Graeme and Grace Growden’s experience, they shared a similar view on allegiance that was intimately wrapped up in the family. Elizabeth Graeme’s familial obligations caused her much distress and she eloquently summarized how Revolutionary-era women saw loyalty. While the British army occupied Philadelphia, like a dutiful wife, she supported her husband, even if she remained hopeful in the American cause. Not an apologist or an opportunist, Elizabeth Graeme expressed the tremendous grief she felt in being conflicted about the war that was inherently a war fought amongst the British family. “The Jewish Proverb is here fully verified,” she explained to John Dickinson, “‘The Parents have Eaten Sour Grapes and the Childrens’ Teeth are set on Edge.’” Elizabeth Graeme saw herself caught between two obligations, her wifely duty to a British-sympathizing husband, and her own passions. “The Winter the British passed in Philadelphia was the most Completely miserable I ever passd in my Life, I should prefer Annihilation [sic] to a Repetion [sic]

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of it,” she explained. During that time, she was tormented as she perpetually urged her husband to “Surrender himself up” even as he continued to make arguments in favour of “Honor and Conscience.” She concluded assuring Dickinson, “Believe me Sir, I would not Deceive you, I was ever on the Side of my Country.”¹⁷⁸

**Conclusion**

The American Revolution was not just a war fought between colonists and the empire, it was one fought between family members in both the figurative and literal sense. As such, the Revolution was awash in emotions, some of which buttressed British allegiance, others that worked to convince colonists that independence was the best option, and others that were more amorphous and depended on whether the American or British side offered the best prospects for the future. Looking at the powerful image of the British family, the condemnation of “unnatural” parents and children, and women’s more flexible views on allegiance demonstrates that during the Revolutionary Era, suggests there was a significant emotional dimension to loyalty.

Historical inquires into the loyalist and patriot mind have largely fallen short in their hope of identifying a singular unifying motive for loyalty or rebellion. These studies have primarily examined the political, legal, and even economic arguments presented by pamphleteers, but not how colonists internalized these arguments beyond political discourse. Looking at the emotions associated with allegiance sheds more light on how many colonists felt about both sides. But it also reveals that the emotions fuelling both sides were similar, if not the same. Both loyalists and patriots came from similar colonial

¹⁷⁸ Fergusson to Dickinson, September 10, 1779, Rush family papers; John Dickinson papers, LCP.
backgrounds. They understood the same image of the British family and recognized the emotional power of labeling the other “unnatural.” Allegiances were emotional, as well as rational decisions. The American patriots did a better job utilizing feeling to sway colonists to their side.

But women had more flexible views on loyalty. Unlike colonial men, women were charged foremost with looking out for the best of their families. Rather than passively follow husbands, some colonial women resisted the men in their lives because they recognized their husbands’ allegiance did not have to be there own. Such views are important when considering loyalist women’s experience as exiles and how they interacted with men.
CHAPTER 2
“MY NEW ENGLAND HEAD”:
LOYALIST EXILE AND HOMESICKNESS

The Robie family arrived in Halifax in early May 1775. Unlike other British sympathizers from the Massachusetts Bay area, who opted to wait out the turmoil in Boston with General Gage and the British army, Thomas Robie chose to head north to Nova Scotia. There, a business partner assured him, he would be able to reestablish his importing business and maybe even profit from the flow of capital that would follow His Majesty’s Navy across the Atlantic. While little documentation of the family’s earliest days in Nova Scotia survives, Thomas frequently wrote to friends and family who remained in New England. His correspondence with his cousin Jonathan Sewall provides a particularly detailed account of life in both Boston and Halifax during the earliest months of the Revolution. Circumstances were dire in both cities. Sewall wrote of the hunger, rampant inflation, and disease that plagued Boston during Washington’s land blockade. “For a month past you met as many dead folks as live ones,” Sewall explained of the immense hardship. Robie’s news from Halifax was little better. He described a

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179 Roughly 344 Tories fled Massachusetts during the summer months of 1775. Some of these early refugees chose to settle in nearby Nova Scotia and wait out the troubles, while others continued on to England. See Stephanie Kermes, “‘I wish for nothing more ardently upon earth, than to see my friends and country again’: The Return of Massachusetts Loyalists,” *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 30, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 30-49; David Maas, “The Return of the Massachusetts Loyalists,” (PhD Diss., University of Wisconsin, 1972); Aaron N. Coleman, “Loyalists in War, Americans in Peace, 1775-1800,” (PhD diss., University of Kentucky, 2008).

180 Jonathan Sewall to Thomas Robie, 15 July 1775, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
series of illnesses that afflicted the earliest refugees and their struggle to find adequate housing and provisions in the northern outpost that was far less developed than he had been led to imagine.

Despite the grim realities in Boston, and in contrast to his cousin’s anxiety, Sewall attempted to convey only confidence that British forces would soon end the American rebellion. He wrote encouragingly to his cousin in exile, “Cheer up Robie, I think I see Daylight tho’ it has been a long dark stormy night—I begin to hope the storm has almost spent itself.”181 Obligingly, Thomas adopted a more positive outlook and began searching for the appropriate accommodations for Sewall and his family, who were scheduled to depart Boston at the end of the summer to wait out the rebellion in Halifax. But even as Sewall wrote to reassure his cousin, Sewall’s conviction waned. News of smallpox outbreak in Halifax deterred him from moving north, despite his lucrative position on the Vice-Admiralty Court that operated out of the city. Instead, Sewall sailed for England, where he hoped to use his connections in London to secure a more powerful position, preferably in England, and he encouraged Robie to join him.182

In the early autumn of 1775, Robie set sail for London, leaving behind his wife, sister, and four children. Before he departed, Thomas had established a small hardware vending business, which he ran from the home the family rented not far from the town’s wharves. It is unclear exactly whom Thomas left in charge of the operation in his absence, but it was certainly not his wife, who looked disparagingly on the small

181 Jonathan Sewall to Thomas Robie, 15 July 1775, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA [hereafter MHS].

operation, refusing to even visit the shop because it was a reminder of all the family had lost.\textsuperscript{183} Despite being left alone to raise the children while her husband traveled to the empire’s more lavish capital, Mary Bradstreet supported the venture because she hoped Sewall’s connections would give the family a reason to leave Nova Scotia and substitute their ruder lifestyle for a more lavish living in the London.\textsuperscript{184}

But in Thomas’ absence, Mary Bradstreet also felt a growing sense of abandonment, which only exacerbated the distaste she already harbored for her adoptive Halifax. In early January 1776, Mary Bradstreet wrote Thomas a long letter outlining her unhappiness. Like other loyalists, she criticized her new home for several reasons, including the poor weather, the scarcity of everyday necessities, and the people, both pre-revolutionary British Nova Scotians and loyalist refugees alike, who she believed were less cultured than her former neighbors in Marblehead. But what most upset Mary Bradstreet was her belief that exile in Nova Scotia had caused an intrinsic change in her disposition. Concluding the letter to her husband she lamented, “Now if I knew what to say more I would write on by way of amusement for myself for I have no other, and if I thot that it would be any [amusement to you], and had my New England head, I believe I should. But that is not the case, and this dumb and stupid place furnishes no topick either for conversation or writing, [I] shall conclude.”\textsuperscript{185} Although she detested her adoptive home for lacking the more sophisticated qualities of her native Marblehead, in noting that she felt she no longer had her “New England head,” she explained how her removal to

\textsuperscript{183} Mary Bradstreet to Thomas Robie, 9 January 1776, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.

\textsuperscript{184} On Americans colonists’ view of London in the late eighteenth century, see Julie Flavell, \textit{When London was the Capital of America} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

\textsuperscript{185} Mary Bradstreet to Thomas Robie, 9 January 1776, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
Nova Scotia had caused a change in the way she perceived herself. More than some meaningless complaint, Mary Bradstreet’s unnerving sense that she had lost her “New England head” encapsulates the dislocation many loyalist exiles in Nova Scotia experienced and demonstrates how loyalists’ unhappiness affected their outlook for the future.

While it is unremarkable that the loyalist exiles in Nova Scotia felt sadness, Mary Bradstreet’s concern helps better qualify exactly how loyalists experienced the psychological distress of exile. The misery of exile also sheds light on why most refugees never took to their adoptive home. As Ann Gorman Condon notes, “Exiles are rootless mutilated people,” and although historians have sought to “embroider loyalist life during their years in the Maritime provinces, the fact remains that…even the loyalists who came with money, servants, and prestigious public posts found their new homes strange and alienating. The result of such sustained apprehension was, in Buszek’s words, “psychic conflict,” which loyalist refugees expressed by describing themselves as “helpless,” “distressed,” and “deserted.” The transient nature of exile and internal conflict within loyalist communities only exacerbated these feelings of vulnerability. As Keith Mason explains, forced exile and resettlement caused refugees to undergo “a series of social deaths and rebirths,” which caused them to continually redefine and reassess both personal identity and the common cause of the larger loyalist collective. While the loyalists could lean upon family, friends, and community for help reconstituting their


own ideas of self, social and political divisions within loyalist communities, and even inside individual families, impeded clear-cut understandings of identity. If the Revolution and the creation of a mutual enemy in the American rebels had provided British sympathizers a common cause, the subsequent experience of exile and the internal conflict within the diaspora only destabilized a clear definition of who the loyalists were and what they hoped to achieve in Nova Scotia.188

But Mary Bradstreet’s nostalgia for her “New England head” reveals that in addition to finding their adoptive home uninviting and feeling undermined by internal divisions, loyalists felt intense and unrelenting homesickness. While Condon suggests that loyalists held out “little hope of returning to America and neither their Christian faith nor their self-respect would permit them to give in to despair,” Mary Bradstreet’s distress suggests she never entirely abandoned the idea of returning to her New England home and openly voiced her unhappiness to her husband and possibly others. Even though mid-eighteenth-century enlightened philosophy celebrated the cosmopolitan settlers that could feel at home anywhere in the world, the loyalists, even those who had chosen to head north to Nova Scotia in search of opportunity, were refugees, not adventurers.189 Much like other displaced people across the Atlantic world, Mary Bradstreet worried her prolonged exile was having a real effect on her intrinsic personality.

This chapter examines the homesickness that American refugees in Nova Scotia experienced to better understand loyalist unhappiness and how it affected loyalist


communities in Nova Scotia. While historians have explained unhappiness in Nova Scotia as the product of, as Keith Grant stated, “political disaffection,” arising from both the humiliation of defeat in the Revolution and disappointment with the “unfeeling” policy the British adopted toward the exiles, this chapter suggests the loyalists also felt an intense longing for home that was, at least in part, the product of a deeply entrenched pre-revolutionary aversion to the northern colony.190 As Susan J. Matt explains in her work on the longing for home in American history, “Homesickness meant different things to different people at different times.” While homesickness—or nostalgia as it was more commonly called in the eighteenth century—could refer to yearning for a variety of home’s features, both tangible and intangible, loyalist nostalgia had three definable characteristics: a potent unhappiness with Nova Scotia that arose from a deeply entrenched pre-revolutionary predisposition against the environment of Nova Scotia; a feeling that exile had disconnected refugees from their ancestral pasts; and the fear of a lonely death in exile.191 More than an intangible feeling, loyalist nostalgia impeded the important process of “rooting” or “new home-making practices” that connect people to a place and to one another.192 While historians have long recognized the physical, social, and political challenges refugees encountered while attempting to rebuild their lives on


the edge of empire, the overwhelming feeling of nostalgia reveals an equally crucial emotional facet of the loyalist experience.

First, loyalist refugees felt homesick because they arrived in Nova Scotia with more than a century’s worth of popular imagery that painted the northern colony as wild and uncivilized, predisposing most refugees against their adoptive home before they even landed. After generations of imperial conflict over the American northeast, Nova Scotia loomed large in the colonial imagination. When the loyalists referred to Nova Scotia’s “frozen coast” or to the “howling wilderness” of its interior, they were not simply describing the environmental realities of the region. Instead, they thrust a popular disposition against the northern colony’s climate and geography, as well as their own personal feelings about exile, on to the landscape. Although the Rev. Jacob Bailey at first rejoiced when he first saw Nova Scotia, noting the relief he and his companions felt “to behold a country under the dominion of our lawful prince,” his opinions soon soured.\(^{193}\) Describing the Nova Scotian coast, he noted the “dark and dejecting gloom” that seemed to blanket the land and the “shrubby spruce, fir and hemlock, which by their starving and misshapen appearance sufficiently indicate the severity of the climate and the bareness of the soil.”\(^{194}\) As Bailey had come from neighboring Pownalborough, Maine, an area known for having a climate more similar “to the countries north of it…than to the states south of Cape Cod,” his visions of difference were largely imagined.\(^{195}\) Using “dejecting

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\(^{193}\) Quoted in Grant, “Enthusiasm and Loyalty,” 168.


gloom,” “starving,” and “misshapen” to describe the Nova Scotian coast, Bailey not only reiterated descriptions he had heard, he also projected more personal feelings about exile onto the environment of Nova Scotia. As Karen Ordahl Kupperman argues in her pioneering work on climate and culture, such descriptions were more than meaningless imagery. “Early modern science taught that human beings and their native physical environment normally existed in a state of ecological harmony,” Kupperman explains. Even if American colonists like Bailey essentially invented the “dejecting gloom” of Nova Scotia, they firmly believed that a gloomy and uninhabitable environment could have real effects on their personal identity, and such understandings lessened their chances of adapting to their new home.

Second, loyalist refugees in Nova Scotia believed that the process of being uprooted from their ancestral homes had stripped them of vital familial connections. James Murray evacuated Boston in 1776 and traveled with the British first to Halifax, then Newport, Rhode Island, before following the army to Philadelphia, and then New York in search of his best chance of settling. He had left his daughters behind in Boston and planned to relocate them to where he found the best opportunity. But early in his travels he realized that the disruption of war and his constant moving made communication with his family difficult. Aside from not finding a logical place to bring his family, the difficult separation made him regret ever leaving. Feeling adrift without


his family, he wrote from New York in 1777 about his desire “to return to Brush-hill [in Milton, Massachusetts] and to take that as my prison.”\footnote{James Murray to Dorothy Forbes and Elizabeth Murray, June 19, 1777 Murray-Robins Family Papers, MHS. On the Murray’s life and his revolutionary journey, see Nina Moore Tiffany ed., \textit{The Letters of James Murray Loyalist} (Boston, 1901).} Although Murray had hopes of rebuilding his family’s fortunes somewhere outside Boston, his homesickness left him a broken man. He died alone in Halifax still hoping he could reunite his family. In other families, the feeling of rootlessness spanned generations. Thomas A.C. Winslow had been born in Nova Scotia, but even he felt the weight of his family’s exile status. Having joined the Royal Navy at the turn of the nineteenth century to escape the colony’s oppressive despair, he found his new life even less desirable. “I could reconcile myself to the idea of [being] a wandering exile for the rest of my life,” the teenage Winslow wrote back to his sister in Fredericton, New Brunswick, “in preference to dragging out this slavish existence in my present profession.”\footnote{Thomas A.C. Winslow to his sisters, July 9, 1808, Raymond ed., \textit{The Winslow Papers}, 624.} Winslow’s depiction of his family as “wandering exiles” suggests even years after the family came to Atlantic Canada, the Winslows continued to see themselves as exiles in a foreign land because they were without firm connections. Both Murray and Winslow described an acute longing for kinship that was lost in the exile experience and stretched across generations.

Third, and closely related to feeling adrift, loyalist homesickness was fueled by an intense fear of a lonely death in Nova Scotia. Even though the refugees were experiencing a sort of “living death” in exile, predisposition against Nova Scotia coupled with the unraveling of kinship ties to add another level of finality.\footnote{Studies of exiles demonstrate that refugees often consider their forced removal a sort of living death. From the poet Ovid’s exile to the experience of “social death” for slaves forced across the} Many loyalists saw
death in Nova Scotia as the ultimate defeat. Not only were their bodies interred in a strange and foreign land, they were also forever separated from their familial ancestors. While some refugees could afford to shelter themselves from the worst physical suffering, death affected the loyalists of Nova Scotia indiscriminately. As a number of illnesses plagued refugee communities, the graveyards of Nova Scotia became filled with exiles. Perhaps it was no accident that when the loyalist governor John Wentworth ordered the construction of a new government house in Halifax in 1800, the building faced southwest, overlooking the final resting place of many refugees in the common burying ground across the street, and beyond that, his native New England.

The distress loyalists felt as exiles had real implication for their settlement. Describing the plight of the more than 2,000 refugees settled in Cornwallis during the fall months of 1783, the Rev. Jacob Bailey carefully documented how the new arrivals were ill prepared for settlement in Nova Scotia. “Several hundred [refugees] are stowed in our Church,” Bailey explained, “and larger numbers are still unprovided for.” The result of this unpreparedness was suffering on a massive scale. “Near four hundred of these miserable exiles have perished in a violent storm,” Bailey lamented, and he worried “disease, disappointment, poverty and chagrin, [would] finish the course of many more

before the return of another spring.”

Bailey was disappointed in the government’s failure to provide for its loyal subjects. But in ranking “disappointment” and “chagrin” alongside “poverty” and “disease,” Bailey also demonstrated that many loyalists believed their despair and homesickness could be as deadly as the government’s failure to provide.

“Nova Scarcity”: Colonial Predisposition against Nova Scotia

At the end of the Seven Years War, British officials recognized that although they had acquired a vast new section of North America from the French, the land meant little if it could not be settled, and proper maps were necessary to plan the colonial process. Military engineers, who had accompanied Wolfe on his conquest of Quebec, complained they could not plan nor build proper fortifications without detailed surveys of the region, and naval officers requested the Admiralty provide more accurate charts of the North Atlantic so they could better enforce trade policy and cut down on smuggling. Although the government sponsored two separate commissions, resulting in a long and haphazardly organized effort, by 1774 the Admiralty published the first maps of the British Empire in North America after the conquest of Canada. The majority of these new maps were attributed to and signed by Joseph Frederick Wallet Des Barres, a Swiss-born engineer, who had served alongside other “foreign Protestants” in North America as a part of the Royal American Regiment. The charts, which covered more than 15,000 miles of coast from Quebec to Newport, Rhode Island, were compiled as The Atlantic Neptune, which

cartographers and merchants alike considered the most superior maritime atlas of the period. 202

Des Barres’ had been stationed in Halifax between 1760 and 1763, and his maps reflect the close relationships he established with several leading politicians and merchants in the area. He demonstrated his attachment to prominent locals, including Montagu Wilmot and Joshua Mauger, by naming portions of the peninsula in their honor. Unlike his partner in the project, Samuel Holland, Des Barres had little interest in compiling qualitative descriptions of the regions he surveyed. While Holland kept a diary recording descriptions of the topography and detailed weather reports, Des Barres made little note of any characteristics that he believed would not directly aid British military objectives in the region. Des Barres hoped he could amass a small fortune from his unparalleled knowledge of North America as tensions increased between the American colonies and Great Britain. Sensing the opportunity to capitalize during the escalating colonial crisis, Des Barres made his way back to London in 1773. 203

Des Barres’ maps attracted the attention of a number leading British nobles invested in the war against the American rebels, but perhaps none as important as Admiral Richard Howe, who became one of Des Barres’ leading supporters. Of the original £2,993 Parliament appropriated for more surveying in 1777, Des Barres was


203 Stephen J. Hornsby, Surveyors of Empire: Samuel Holland, J.W.F. Des Barres, and the Making of the Atlantic Neptune (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2011), 3-4. Hornsby also notes that while these surveys are remarkable for their attention to detail on the coast, their knowledge of the interior is far from complete, and in many cases, incorrect. Because the maps were used to plan British conquest of the region, the surveyors had little contact with indigenous peoples or native Acadians who lived in the interior because mapping the coast was paramount for initial settlement. Interior excursions would happen in a second phase. See, 137, 144-145.
awarded £2,000, and Howe continued to secure more funding for the publishing of Des
Barres’ maps. But while his skills as a cartographer were useful to the British
Admiralty during the war, his charts and coastal views were also popular among the
British elite. Consumers rushed to buy up his prints both during and after the war to
satiate their craving for more information on North America. Des Barres’ maps not only
gratified the curiosity of interested Britons, but his coastal views also provided most
metropolitan subjects the only vision they would have of the colonies across the
Atlantic.

Des Barres’ illustrations provided viewers with more than just a glimpse of the
colonies, his sketches of North American harbors, shorelines, and landscapes also
informed Britons about the state of the colonial project. As D.W. Meinig notes, every
landscape scene is “a blend of man and nature” where the artist both captures the beauty
of the natural terrain and unconsciously inserts an opinion on the extent to which man has
affected and altered the environment. Eighteenth-century onlookers believed the
organization of the natural environment, taming of the wilderness, and general
advancement of land from its primitive state was a mark of progress. Therefore,
although Des Barres meant his coastal views to illustrate some of the more important

204 Hornsby, Surveyors of Empire, 171.
places on his maps and provide sailors with useful views of American harbors, he also imbued his drawings with his own subtle assessments concerning the British colonization project.208

Because his illustrations were primarily meant to help navigators identify harbor entrances, Des Barres sketched the majority of his coastal scenes from the perspective of the water; that is, most of his sketches are drawn from the vantage of someone aboard a ship facing land. His image of Halifax harbor (Figure 2.1), however, is markedly different in both its perspective and its focus. Des Barres sketched Halifax from the perspective of the adjacent shore, meaning that the settlement of Halifax, and not the harbor entrance, is the focus of his sketch. Looking across the harbor at the Halifax settlement, Nova Scotia’s physical landscape dominates the illustration and reflects the artist’s familiarity with the physical environment of the region where he had lived for nearly three years.

Unlike his other harbor approaches, in highlighting the Halifax landscape, Des Barres meant to provide an illustration of the physical geography of the region; and although he depicted the harbor bustling with ships during wartime, his sketch of the landscape is more foreboding. Much like Bailey’s description of the rock-strewn coastline, Des Barres placed a few scraggly trees in the illustration’s foreground, which grew tortuously against the North Atlantic wind. The town rises up from the shoreline but

208 In many ways, Des Barres’ illustrations can be read like Virginia land advertisements. As Camille Wells notes, when wealthy Virginians advertised property in colonial newspapers, the language and vocabulary they used to describe the natural landscape and human improvements demonstrated the way colonists organized the landscape in their minds. Des Barres’ illustrations also show not only how he saw they physical land, but also how he viewed progress in the region. “The Planter's Prospect: Houses, Outbuildings, and Rural Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia,” Winterthur Portfolio 28, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 1-31, especially 23-31.
remains only a small scattering of dwellings on a distant hillside. The shadow of a cloud moves in on the right side of the image, possibly meant to symbolize the encroaching wilderness. Des Barres’ perspective thrusts both the harbor and the town into the distant background, and the unruly nature of the trees and the rocky coastline dominate the image. While a British flag is posted in the bottom right of the image, a canoe crewed by indigenous rowers suggests that while the British may have maintained an informal claim on territory, a native presence was still visible. Taken as a whole, Des Barres’ coastal view of Halifax depicts a small outpost amid the imposing wilderness. While the British had made inroads, the disorder of the natural world continued to transcend the “civilizing process” of British colonization.\footnote{209}

Des Barres’ depiction of Halifax as a small outpost against the imposing wilderness is made all the more apparent when compared to his portrayals of Boston. While Des Barres also depicted the Boston harbor (Figure 2.2) teeming with ships, the Massachusetts port appears far more established than its northern counterpart. Unlike the forbidding wilderness that surrounded Halifax, ships coming into Boston entered between protecting cliffs that bear striking resemblance to the cliffs of Dover.\footnote{210} Additionally, although the Halifax harbor is significantly larger than its southern counterpart


\footnote{210} If indeed Des Barres did intend the cliff surrounding Boston to resemble the cliffs at Dover, he would have been drawing upon an important and popular image of British security against the chaos and unwanted influence of Europe that continues to this very day. Tony Kushner, \textit{The Battle of Britishness: Migrant Journeys, 1685 to the Present} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 14.
(approximately 4.7 square miles compared to roughly .8 square miles) the perspective Des Barres’ employed in his depictions makes the harbor at Boston appear significantly larger than its northern neighbor, which contemporaries would have understood as meaning Boston was more profitable, and therefore more important. In another view of Boston (Figure 2.3), Des Barres suggests the British military presence was also much more evident in Boston than in Halifax. Unlike Halifax’s lonely British flag, a ship approaching Boston passes directly between Castle William and Governors Island where a British flag sits prominently welcoming trade into the harbor while protecting it from unwanted visitors. None of Des Barres’ images of Boston include any indigenous people, an indication that Massachusetts was safer and more civilized.

Des Barres was not American born, but his illustrations reflect both the formative years he spent in North America and the common American conception, which had been building throughout the eighteenth century, that the northern colony of Nova Scotia was wild and unruly. The first descriptions of Nova Scotia were disseminated by colonial
troops returning to New England after the capture of Port Royale, the colonial French capital of Acadie, in 1710. Many soldiers echoed the negative sentiments of one commanding officer, who described the region as, “The most miserable place I ever saw.” Opinions sank even lower as rumors spread that the Governor, Samuel Vetch, was treating soldiers stationed at the renamed Annapolis Royal “more like slaves than anything else” and using his command to amass personal wealth. When New England sailors and soldiers returned from the victorious campaigns to capture the French fortress at Louisburg on Cape Breton Island in 1745 and again in 1758, their successes were shrouded by their own denunciations of the region. The men who returned questioned why they had made such tremendous sacrifices for a region that one officer noted was little more than “a rock covered over in moss.”

These negative descriptions were widely circulated and colored many colonists’ impressions of the newly acquired northern territory. In an effort to rebrand Nova Scotia in the 1750s and draw land-hungry New England settlers north, the colonial government


213 Quoted in John Greener, The Far Reaches of Empire: War in Nova Scotia, 1710-1760 (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 35. These soldiers involved in the 1745 capture were especially enraged when the British returned the fortress to French hands in 1748 Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle.
offered potential “Nova Scotian Planters” a series of incentives. Such enticements included: “one hundred acres of wild wood land” to new heads of family willing to move north and fifty additional acres for “every white or black man, woman, or child of which such person’s family shall consist at the time of making the grant.” The grants were generous and promised that no rent would be owed on the land for the first ten years and only one shilling sterling for every fifty acres thereafter. While the proclamation was generous, Nova Scotia’s Lieutenant-Governor Jonathan Belcher, a native of Boston, recognized grants would not be enough to lure wary New Englanders north to a land they had come to believe was desolate and untamed. Belcher commissioned a survey to accompany the land grants that could be published in New England and London to dispel the negative image of the region.

The opening line of the report sets the overly laudatory tone that would continue throughout. “The Town of Halifax,” the surveyor reported, “is situated on one of the finest harbours in the universe.” Despite the native woodlands’ thickness, which

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214 “A Proclamation: Whereas Since the Issuing of the Proclamation Dated the Twelfth Day of October 1758, Relative to Settling the Vacated Lands in This Province,” enclosed in a letter from Lawrence to Lords of Trade, February 5, 1759, CO 217, vol. 16. Furthermore, The grants only required that settlers improve or enclose a third of their property in ten years, another third in twenty years, and the final third in thirty years. This rebranding process was part of a larger effort to “civilize” Nova Scotia by reorienting power toward the British and away from the Indigenous-Acadian alliance. See John Mack Faragher, *A Great and Noble Scheme: The Tragic Story of the Expulsion of the French Acadians from their American Homeland* (New York: W.W. Norton Press, 2005).

215 *Boston Evening Post*, May 1, 1749. See also, “A Proclamation: Whereas Since the Issuing of the Proclamation Dated the Twelfth Day of October 1758, Relative to Settling the Vacated Lands in This Province,” enclosed in a letter from Charles Lawrence to Lords of Trade, February 5, 1759, CO 217, vol. 16, NSA. The grants also included generous improvement clauses. The proclamation only required settlers only improve or enclose a third of their property after ten years, another third after twenty years, and the final third after thirty years.
hampered both farming and travel in the colony, the surveyor explained that almost insatiable need for “boardwood” in England meant settlers would have an inexhaustible export market for the trees they felled. He believed if settlers could sell their cleared trees, they would generate profits “sufficient to pay the charges of clearing.” Although the survey noted several regions primed for producing grain, the real promise in the eyes of the surveyor was in the colony’s lucrative fishing grounds. New England fishermen had been fishing in the region for decades, but the surveyor argued, “The harbours about this coast are much more handy,” and “the branch of the [fishing] business will be transferred from New England to this coast in a few years.”

For the second sons of New England farmers struggling to find land and opportunity, Nova Scotia would have sounded promising for a number of reasons. Near 8,000 settlers moved to Nova Scotia hoping to capitalize on the lucrative offers.

Despite the generous terms of the land grants, the surveyor’s lofty praise for the fertile land and promises for lucrative economic opportunities reports from those who moved north told a starkly different story. The first indications of trouble from Nova Scotia came not from the New England Planters, but from earlier British settlers who came to build Halifax. Men “discharged from the King’s Work” reported “money to be very scarce” in the colony, indicating that despite promises for growth, little capital was

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216 “A Description of the Several Towns in the Province of Nova Scotia with the Lands Comprehended in and Bordering Upon Said Towns, Drawn in Order of Hounrable Jonathan Belcher Esq. Lieutenant-Governor and Commander in Chief of the Said Province” enclosed in a letter from Jonathan Belcher to The Lords of Trade, January 11, 1762, CO 217, vol. 18, NSA.

available to fund the proposed expansion.\textsuperscript{218} Although there were rumors of shipbuilding in Halifax and farming in the Annapolis Valley, news printed in the New England papers only further strengthened the negative testimonies streaming south from the nascent northern colony.\textsuperscript{219}

While potential settlers would have seen a lack of economic opportunity as disappointing, the reported indigenous presence in Nova Scotia would have been more alarming, especially for New Englanders. Reports of clashes with native people sent a message to colonists that the colony remained wild, dangerous, and unfit for settlement. In early September 1763, an account of a “number of St. John’s Indians” who fired on a fort in the St. John River Valley, “killing several people thereabout,” was printed in newspapers throughout Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut. The colonial government in Nova Scotia later informed readers of the same papers that these accounts were “without foundation and no hostilities whatever [had] been committed,” but the initial reports had been enough to spark worry.\textsuperscript{220} Fears of Indian attack reemerged the next month when intelligence of French store-ships traveling up the St. Lawrence River “to supply the Indians &c. with Necessities for carrying on another war” again circulated in the New England papers.\textsuperscript{221} Despite the issuing of oaths of allegiance and the deportation of thousands of Acadian colonists, the fear of French Catholics in Nova

\textsuperscript{218} The Boston Post-Boy & Advertiser, July 4, 1763.

\textsuperscript{219} For one particularly humorous account of a bridge collapse, which retarded commercial activity for month even though miraculously neither carriage driver nor oxen were harmed, see The New-London Gazette, November 16, 1766.


\textsuperscript{221} The New-Hampshire Gazette and Historical Chronicle, October 28, 1763.
Scotia also sparked worry. In September 1765, a Boston paper published news of a group of natives led by a Catholic priest poised to attack Fort Cumberland on Nova Scotia’s Isthmus of Chignecto.222 With tales of early eighteenth-century native attacks on the western frontier still fresh in the imaginations of many New Englanders, reports of similar disturbances in Nova Scotia only strengthened colonial Americans’ belief that the region remained dangerous.223

Descriptions of the region’s frigid winters and the widespread understanding that climate could affect one’s disposition only further added to Nova Scotia’s unappealing depiction. Although an appreciation of meteorology as a science had been growing since the Enlightenment, traditional superstitions continued to inform colonists’ opinions on climate and place. The idea that poor weather was an indicator of God’s displeasure remained widespread among colonial American people.224 Sensational stories of the bitter cold in the northern colony were common, but the winter of 1766-7 stands out as being exceptionally brutal. “Yesterday at ten o’clock in the morning, by Fahrenheit’s Thermometer, the Mercury sunk to 7 below 0,” read one report from Halifax, “[temperatures] did not rise above 3 for the whole day.” Another description explained how all the “Brandy, Rum, Spirits of Hartshorn, and Sal Volatile [had] frozen.” Even in

222 *The Boston Post-Boy & Advertiser*, September 5, 1765.


late March 1767, soldiers in Halifax recorded frost “plainly observable” 52 inches into
the ground at a place “where no snow had remained for anytime during the winter.”225
While Boston also experienced extreme cold that winter, New Englanders appeared to
have believed that the winter in Nova Scotia was somehow far worse and rendered the
region uninhabitable.226

More than just sensational stories, newspapers from across the American colonies
also printed several seemingly trivial events from Nova Scotia that when paired with the
belief the region was wild and unfit for settlement, worked to confirm popular suspicions.
In February 1767, *The New York Gazette* informed readers of the suicide of William
Johnston, “a native of England, who for many years kept a tavern at Halifax.” Having
found only despair and financial ruin in Nova Scotia, Johnston had “hanged himself in
the cellar of his house.” The suicide of a transplanted Briton would not have been lost on
settlers considering the move north. The same issue also ran news of a soldier, who while
traveling between Halifax and Fort Sackville, “dropt down on the road and immediately
expired.”227 Although mundane in their circumstances, colonial American readers would
have recognized that these events indicated the unnatural state of Nova Scotia. New
England newspapers reported an earthquake that struck the St. John River Valley
sometime in early November 1764.228 Although later colonists would come to understand

225 *The Boston Evening-Post*, January 26, February 16, April 6, 1767.

226 Most interestingly, even though the winters in Boston were also particularly brutal around
1766, New Englanders actually found the cold weather, and the uptick in snowfall was good for
New England business. As one report explained, more snow was “good [for] Sledding” and
meant less difficult transportation between “Town and Country.” *The Connecticut Courant*,
January 2, 1776.


228 *The New-Hampshire Gazette and Historical Chronicle*, November 16, 1764.
earthquakes were not unpredictable signs of providentialism thanks in large part to the work of English natural philosopher John Mitchell and the Dutchman Johan Drijfhout, such a calamity in Nova Scotia would have stood as evidence that settlement in Nova Scotia was ill-fated. Collectively, these signs informed American colonists that settlement in the far American northeast was not only undesirable but perhaps even providentially predestined to fail.

While British colonists, especially those who settled in tropical environments believed colonial climates could degrade their minds and morals, the loyalists of Nova Scotia were especially sensitive to the climatic differences between their Nova Scotia and their American homes and wrote incessantly about their unfavorable impressions. Like previous eighteenth-century New England transplants, Mary Bradstreet blamed the “dark and rainy Halifax weather” for the changes in her disposition. Describing the region’s climate and landscape, another loyalist described how he found the land and environment was even worse than he had been told. “All our golden promises have vanished,” he began one letter, “We were taught to believe this place was not barren and foggy as had been represented, but we find it ten times worse…it is the most inhospitable climate that ever [a] mortal set foot on.” Left without adequate supplies and only scraps of “rotten pork and unbaked flour,” the refugee explained how the settlers had little chance against the elements. “The winter is of insupportable length and coldness, only a few spots [are]

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230 Mary Bradstreet to Thomas Robie, 9 January 1776, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
fit to cultivate, and the land is covered with cold, spongy moss, instead of grass and the entire country is wrapt in the gloom of perpetual fog.”

Mather Byles Jr. painted a similar image in his letters to Boston. Echoing the New England soldiers who returned from Annapolis Royal in 1711, Byles described the Nova Scotian landscape as “the most contemptible my Eyes ever beheld.” The similarities between the loyalists’ depictions of Nova Scotia and previous settlers’ representations suggest that generations of despairing reports predisposed later arrivals against the idea of settlement in Nova Scotia. Furthermore, many reports of the weather conditions described surprisingly mild temperatures. Alexander Houston, a native of Galloway, Scotland who had immigrated to Virginia in 1760s and fought on the side of the British during the Revolution, came to Shelburne in late 1783. Far from the horrible weather most American born loyalists described, Houston found Nova Scotia to have “fine moderate weather.” In December 1787 he noted, “We did spend Christmas very agreeable, more so than any I remember. The weather is amazing good and most open season I ever did see in America.” In contrast to the unrelenting winter most loyalist described, in January 1788, Houston noted, “This Winter has been very favorable to the poor. The common parent of Nature is kind to his creatures.” The discrepancy

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231 Quoted in Raymond B. Blake et al., Conflict and Compromise: Pre-Confederation Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 129.
232 Quoted in Wallace Brown, “BYLES, MATHER,” in DCB.
233 Alexander Houston, diary, November 17, December 25, 1787, and January 15, 1788, Alexander Houston Fonds, Nova Scotia Archives, Halifax, NS. “The common parent of nature” was a common term used to explain how God created both man and weather and looked after faithful people through good weather. See Simon Browne, The Close of the Defense of the Religion of Nature and the Christian Revelation: In Answer to Christianity as Old as Creation in an Address to Christian Ministers and Christian People (London: Richard Ford, 1733), 32.
Houston’s diary provides suggests that many of the perceived differences in climate and geography were largely imagined.

But even if loyalists invented or exaggerated the dramatic climatic and geographic differences between their American homes and their adoptive Nova Scotia, they sincerely believed the disparities they described could affect society and even alter their personal identity. While most colonists blamed warmer climates for creating laziness, loyalist writings indicate that colonists also assumed cold climates could be equally stifling.\(^\text{234}\)

Recognizing his time in England was growing short, Jonathan Sewall wrote a letter to his friend Edward Winslow in New York outlining several reservations he had about moving to Nova Scotia. Sewall was disappointed that he was unable to secure a profitable commission in London, forcing him to take a less desirable commission in either Nova Scotia or New Brunswick. He concluded his list of grievances with a reservation that stemmed from all the unfavorable descriptions he had heard about northern climate. Explaining how accounts of life in Nova Scotia impacted his views on moving there, Sewall wrote, “I fear the cold, inhospitable, Lilliputian Region of Halifax.” In associating “cold” and “inhospitable” with “Lilliputian,” Sewall suggested that the region remained a small outpost where trivial matters often divided the few inhabitants because the cold climate retarded growth. He worried not only about the harsh climatic difference between his adoptive London and future home in Nova Scotia but also about how the climate would impede his personal designs for advancement.\(^\text{235}\)


Those on the ground in Nova Scotia also felt the ruder lifestyle was affecting their disposition. In one of the more intriguing loyalist letters, Mather Byles III wrote to his aunts in Boston about an encounter he had with a “New England shoemaker” residing outside Halifax. Byles explained that he stopped by this family’s home “to see their manner of living and amuse myself with a little right down Yankeeism.” It is unclear precisely who this shoemaker was, but Byles’ emphasis on his New England roots and simple manner of living suggests he was a prerevolutionary settler. In one sense, Byles’ description is evidence of the class-oriented outlook common among the loyalist elite. Like other upper-class refugees, Byles saw himself above the prerevolutionary settlers’ more meager way of life and stopped by to amuse himself with a style of living that was far different from his own or that of the other loyalist elite.

But his emphasis on the family’s New England roots also suggests he also saw commonalities between them, and Byles may have worried that they shared a similar fate. Much like Mary Bradstreet’s fear that her prolonged exile was stripping her of her “New England head,” Byles believed the New England shoemaker’s extended stay in Nova Scotia had stripped him of his more refined qualities, laying bare his “downright Yankeeism.” Although he stopped by for amusement, it is likely that Byles hoped he could avoid a similar fate.

Victorious patriots were keen to mock the loyalists’ bad fortunes with jokes made to highlight the terrible environment of Nova Scotia. While the loyalists often made

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comparisons between their fate and famous historical victims of misfortune—Edward Winslow and other refugees often referred to the loyalist encampment in New York before 1783 as “the Valley of Hadad,” drawing an allusion to the biblical place of Jerusalem’s suffering and mourning—the patriots’ jeers were less nuanced.  

Those called the king’s or loyal refugees…[are] now getting all they can to carry off with them to Nova Scarcity,” read newspapers from Philadelphia to Boston, using refugees’ own complaints about the lack of available resources against them. Not only were resources scare, the author poked fun at Nova Scotia’s climate. He warned potential settlers that in Nova Scotia one could expect to find “nine months winter and three months cold weather in the year.” A Boston newspaper printed the names of refugees from Massachusetts Bay known to have died while in exile. The author mockingly wondered how the “flourishing Government of Nova Scarcity” could allow such hardship. Such insults were meant to not only remind the loyalists of having chosen the wrong side but to heighten their suffering and accentuate the difference between the land of their exile and the homes they left behind.

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238 In the King James Bible, Zechariah 12:11 states, “In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon.” Although the reference was to Jerusalem’s mourning for King Josiah of Judah in the year 609BC, as John Day suggests, modern Christians drew connections between the Old Testament story of suffering and hardship and the coming of Armageddon as foretold in the Book of Revelations. “The Origin of Armageddon: Revelation 16:16 as an interpretation of Zechariah 12:11,” in Stanley E. Porter, Paul Joyce, and David Orton eds., Crossing the Boundaries Essays in Biblical Interpretation in Honour of Michael D. Goulder (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), 315-328.

239 The Freeman’s Journal: or, The North-American Intelligencer, June 18, 1783.

Loyalist homesickness was also intertwined with the refugees’ strong familial consciousness and fear that exile worked to disconnect loyalists from their families, both living and dead. Even if refugees remained with their immediate relations, being uprooted from their towns, the loyalists were disconnected from the more deeply rooted communal-kinship networks that served as the backbone of the colonial order in the late eighteenth century. For many loyalists, the physical towns they left behind consisted of not only the material structures but also an emotional attachment to their own ancestors, who had lived and died in these same towns. What developed among many loyalist refugees in Nova Scotia was an acute sense of being adrift in exile without any firm connection to family. The loss of familial identity and the destruction of kinship networks were both significant aspects of refugee homesickness.

As the war turned against them, British sympathizers increasingly understood that evacuation and resettlement would break apart families and communities. While she had enjoyed living in loyalist-controlled New York City, Sarah Winslow recognized peace meant that she and her family were destined to “mourn out our days in wretchedness.” She decried the treachery of the peacemakers, writing despondently, “This ‘peace’ brings none to my heart.” She felt the British government, the very people she and her family had sacrificed so much for, had betrayed her. But the uncertainty of where her friends and family would settle following evacuation bothered her more. “We are parting with numbers who have formed a most delighted society,” she explained, “and when they have

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taken their departure, new scenes will be there to hurt my feelings every hour.” The most poignant agony came as she bid farewell to her brother Edward. Before his ship set out, Winslow sobbed that she hoped “never again to be separated.” Considering the continued loss of so many friends and relations she gave up her desire to remain in New York. “I would gladly embark for Nova Scotia,” she declared, expressing her desire to live as an exile with her family over remaining in her new home.242

The refugees of the American Revolution were scattered between the remaining North American British colonies, the Caribbean, and the British Isles. Loyalists agonized over the challenge of attempting to maintain contact with a dispersed kinship network.243 Even before the war’s end, loyalists complained about the difficulty of keeping track of their friends’ and families’ whereabouts. From New York in 1778, loyalist Ward Chipman exclaimed his excitement upon hearing from his good friend Edward Winslow. Chipman believed Winslow to be in Philadelphia, but when news arrived from the captured capital without word from Winslow, he worried perhaps he was mistaken. Having finally gotten a letter from his friend, Chipman was reminded of William Shenstone’s advice, which noted “that the best time to answer the letters from a friend is at the moment of the receipt of them,” and he wrote furiously of all that had transpired in


his life and of news he heard from across the colonies. Unsure of when they would next hear from each other, the loyalists wrote long and detailed letters.244

Jonathan Sewall lost touch with his cousin once Robie departed London in late May 1776. On Aug 17, having not heard from Robie in months, Sewall wrote him a quick letter hoping he would reply and alleviate his fears. “God grant that you have not fallen into the hands of the Rebels,” he wrote, and perhaps figuring his own letter might be intercepted he could not resist a jab at the rebellious Americans. “I had rather hear the Devil had got you: for I believe he has more honesty, honor, virtue, and humanity than they,” he explained.245 Six months later, Sewall was still without word from Robie and was certain he would next letter he received from him would be postmarked from the “Boston goal [sic] or Simsbury Mines.” Worse, he feared his beloved cousin might be “as dead as a smoked herring.”246 Although Sewall joked about the difficulties of tracking down family dispersed across the Empire, others found the undertaking profoundly painful. While her husband traveled to find a way of settling back in America, Elizabeth Stoughton, a loyalist living in Britain, wrote to a friend, “I have flattered myself with hopes of seeing him every month for this year past, and now I quite despair of that pleasure, he has been gone almost two years.”247 As loyalists traversed the British Atlantic world, keeping track of friends and family members increased the longing for home and the comfort of knowing loved ones’ whereabouts.

244 Ward Chipman to Edward Winslow, February 15, 1778, in Raymond, The Winslow Papers, 22.
245 Jonathan Sewall to Thomas Robie, August 17, 1777, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
246 Jonathan Sewall to Thomas Robie, March 12, 1777, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
247 Elizabeth Stoughton to Elizabeth Amory, December 6, 1784, Amory Family Papers, MHS.
Loyalists relied on rumors, which only exacerbated the unease they felt. Word of mouth often spread more quickly than correspondence, and refugees quickly learned they could not trust all the information they received. In a letter to a friend, Edward Winslow described a particularly emotional meeting with his father in Rhode Island. Only weeks before Edward arrived in Rhode Island, a stranger had given his father a “particular account of [his son’s] death and burial.” As Edward approached the shore, he saw his father distraught, sitting on a rock believing he would soon have his worst fears confirmed. “Figure to yourself the venerable old man,” Winslow relayed to his friend, “collecting all his fortitude, strengthening himself by anticipation and struggling against a variety of feelings tender and distressing.” Seeing his son, the elder Winslow threw himself on the ground. Edward, moved by his affection, lay down beside his father. Describing the scene he explained, “There were present rebel officers and rebel soldiers, King’s officers and King’s soldiers, sailors of both denominations and Negroes—not a heart among them did not melt.”248 Winslow’s reunion account, especially his emphasis on the power of emotion to affect patriots, loyalists, and African Americans equally, demonstrates how disruptive the Revolutionary War was for all colonial peoples, but the larger story sheds light on how transient loyalist families were often bombarded with misinformation.249

The longing for kin was, of course, not solely a loyalist experience, and examining how other Revolutionary-era Americans experienced homesickness only


further elucidates how central the feeling was to the revolutionary experience. Some of
the earliest accounts of families broken up by war come from the patriot side of the
conflict. The American army bound for Quebec assembled in Newburyport,
Massachusetts at the end of August 1775 before boarding a transport bound for the
Kennebec River in Maine. One soldier noted how their procession through town caused
the assembled crowd to be “much affected.” Pondering the visible sadness on the faces of
onlookers, the soldier, for the first time, considered the gravity of the journey the men
were embarking on and wondered if the crowd’s dismay was a sign that “many of us
would not return.” Like the later refugees in Nova Scotia, the untrained and untested
troops marching north through Canada found the northern land unruly and were unnerved
by reports of “hordes of Indians” that had taken up with the British.250 Hundreds deserted.
General Richard Montgomery criticized his troops for their constant complaining about
being so far from home. But while he demeaned his troops for their weakness, their
longing appears to have affected the general. “I wish it were well over, with all my
heart,” he wrote home to his wife, “and I sigh for home like a New Englander.”251 Like
his troops, the general missed his wife and children, and he hoped to return home soon.
But by associating homesickness with New Englanders, he suggested that the nostalgia
these soldiers felt was unique. Perhaps, much like many of the later loyalists in Nova


Scotia, the New England troops under Montgomery’s command brought with them a special affinity for the land of their birth connected to broader community’s mission.\textsuperscript{252}

Loyalist letters from Nova Scotia, especially those written by New England exiles, also demonstrate that the longing for home was not just about missing family members, but a feeling of being removed from one’s familial legacy and its connection to the American colonies. Writing from Marblehead to Halifax, Mrs. Lee, a close family friend of the Bradstreet family, doubted that the Robie family would ever return to Massachusetts. Nonetheless, she hoped Mary Bradstreet would not forget her family’s connection. Writing to Mary Bradstreet about her children, she explained, “I hope they will continue to be your comfort, and by treading in the steps of sobriety & virtue, be an ornament to their name and ancestry.”\textsuperscript{253} Like many others, Mary Bradstreet had deep roots in colonial America, and the letter to Halifax drew upon the immense pride the Bradstreets had in their colonial heritage. The daughter of Simon Bradstreet, the Congregationalist minister for Marblehead’s Second Congregationalist Church, the Bradstreet family was among the most prominent in Marblehead. As a direct descendant of revered seventeenth-century Governor Simon Bradstreet and his wife, the celebrated

\textsuperscript{252} Montgomery’s critique of the New Englanders may also reflect his own political connections. He began his career as in the British Army and fought in the Seven Years War at Quebec and in the Caribbean. Upon selling his commission, he moved to New York and married into the prominent Livingston Family of New York. Although he had Whig political leanings while in the army, his marriage to the more radical Livingston family brought him to the side of the American rebels. His marriage also brought him into the sphere of New York politics, which were often at odds with more radical New England ambitions. On the nineteenth-century origins of New England exceptionalism, see John Conforti, *Imagining New England: Explorations of Regional Identity from the Pilgrims to the Mid-Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

\textsuperscript{253} Mrs. Lee to Mary Bradstreet Robie, July 26, 1779, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
poet Anne Bradstreet, her family also enjoyed renown throughout Massachusetts.\textsuperscript{254} She viewed her lineage with a sort of religious reverence and often wrote about her legacy in letters to her family and friends.\textsuperscript{255} She also demonstrated her pride in more public displays. Although common English practice dictated that the first-born daughter bear the name of the maternal family and the first-born son be named for the father’s side, the Robies reversed the custom and named their first-born son Simon Bradstreet in honor of his maternal grandfather and his mother’s lineage.\textsuperscript{256} The naming of her eldest son after her own ancestors was both a symbolic gesture to the family’s former prominence and a statement about who the family would be in the future.

The letter Mrs. Lee sent to Halifax suggests Mary Bradstreet was worried that her removal from Massachusetts could sever the connection she had to her cherished past. Even though Mary Bradstreet was in a state of mourning as an exile, Mrs. Lee emphasized that she needed to persist in her vital role as a mother and in the rearing of


\textsuperscript{255} One of the best examples comes in one letter from Mary Bradstreet to her husband relaying the news of her daughter Mary’s betrothal. Mary Bradstreet celebrated the joining of two celebrated families and explained to Thomas that he should approve of the marriage because it was between “The grandson of good Dr. Sewell and Granddaughter of good Mr. Bradstreet.” Mary Bradstreet to Thomas Robie, July 28, 1788, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.

respectable children. But more than just a motherly duty, Mrs. Lee also suggested raising children could provide Mary Bradstreet a measure of comfort. By nurturing sober and virtuous children, Mary Bradstreet could protect elements of her New England character that she might have felt were eroding in exile. Stressing the significance of Mary Bradstreet’s role as a mother to the preservation of “their name and ancestry” reveals the importance of familial lineage to late eighteenth-century colonists and also suggests that this connection was even more critical to those who had been removed from their ancestral homeland.257

As a fellow Massachusetts loyalist with deep colonial roots, Mather Byles Jr. expressed a similar unease about the perceived loss of a familial legacy. Born the son of a prominent minister, poet, and satirist, Byles Jr., could also trace his family to the founding generation. As the great-grandson of Increase Mather and the grandnephew of Massachusetts Governor Jonathan Belcher, Byles had deep connections to the New England Puritan elite.258 Although his family had fallen from prominence during the Revolutionary Era due to their British sympathies, Byles nonetheless cherished their legacy. Before leaving Boston, his father had gifted him a watch to take to Nova Scotia. Byles cherished his father’s token as a lasting reminder of his New England origins. Replying to an inquiry about the condition of the prized heirloom, Byles described his affection. “My watch is very safe,” he explained, “there is not the least chance of me parting with almost the only memorandum I have, that I ever had an Ancestor.”259 He valued the watch as a gift from his father, but in exile, it took on a special significance it

257 Mrs. Lee to Mary Bradstreet Robie, July 26, 1779, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.

258 Wallace Brown, “BYLES, MATHER,” DCB.

259 Mather Byles Jr. to Polly and Kitty Byles, November 22, 1783, Mather Byles Papers, NSA.
did not have in Massachusetts. The watch came to represent a symbol of his prized ancestral home and a reminder of his roots.

Perhaps to offset the dramatic severing of familial ties, many refugees attempted to reconcile their exile by envisioning themselves as followers in their colonial ancestors’ footsteps. Mather Byles Jr. saw his venture to Nova Scotia as similar to his ancestors’ errand into the wilderness. Describing the fellow New England refugee Rev. Walter’s attempt to establish a Congregationalist Church for the settlers of Shelburne, Byles wrote to his sisters in Boston, “He proposes, in imitation of his ancestors, to plant a church in the howling wilderness, among a people who I believe are as contentious as the first settlers of New-England & who have been much more cruelly persecuted.”

Not only did Byles equate the loyalist settlement of Nova Scotia to the heralded founding of New England, he actually believed the loyalist refugees were more deserving of praise than the seventeenth-century Puritans. While he did not enjoy being a refugee, much like the Puritan undertaking, he believed there was promise in the loyalist settlements of Nova Scotia. He compared the loyalists’ “solemn ordination vows of loyalty” to the piety of the founding generation. Much like early Puritans, Byles wrote that he too believed the loyalists’ faithfulness would earn them “their full reward.”

For Byles, the comparison was not only apt but could have also comforted a man who felt homesick for his family and his place in pre-revolutionary Massachusetts.

Byles’ confidence in the loyalist settlers of Nova Scotia was short-lived. Upon his departure from Halifax for the settlement of St. John in 1789, he unflatteringly called the

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260 Mather Byles Jr. to Polly and Kitty Byles, November 22, 1783, Byles Papers, NSA.

261 Mather Byles Jr. to Polly and Kitty Byles, October 27, 1783, Byles Papers, NSA.
people he had encountered in the area, “the most irreligious People I ever knew.” A far cry from the deserving loyalists he likened to his own Puritan ancestors less than a decade before, Byles now saw many of his fellow refugees in less gratifying light. For Byles, the people of Nova Scotia “were at the same Time the most ignorant, the most stupid, & the most unhappy” he had ever encountered. These settlers were, of course, the same people Byles knew when he first wrote of the admirable refugees. Prolonged interaction with refugees eroded the romanticism of the loyalist cause and made Byles harshly critical of the people he encountered. While he may have no longer seen these people akin to the noble settlers of New England, their remained one constant: he still longed for home. He left behind Nova Scotia for the promise of New Brunswick where he hoped to find more agreeable refugees that shared his vision and maybe even his desire to recreate New England.

A Lonely Death in Exile: Death and the Exile Experience

Exacerbating the pain of homesickness was the fear that the condition was permanent. The specter of a “lonely death” in exile, which represented the ultimate defeat of self, haunted the refugees. Death was clearly visible among the loyalist settlements in Nova Scotia. Beginning with the arrivals of 1775-6, the town of Halifax saw a slow but steady wave of refugee American colonists land on the town’s docks during the war. This trickle, however, became a deluge as tens of thousands disembarked from New

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262 Quoted in Wallace Brown, “BYLES, MATHER,” DCB.

York in the summer and autumn months by 1783. Among the migrants, sickness was rampant. Devastating diseases, including smallpox, struck nearly all loyalist settlements. Scenes of death and dying were more common in the loyalist settlements of Nova Scotia than they had been in the towns the refugees left behind. The burying grounds of Nova Scotia were soon filled with American loyalists and grieving family members.

The epidemics that plagued Boston during Washington’s land blockade followed the refugees north to Nova Scotia. Although the more well-connected loyalist elite could afford to relocate to London, many less fortunate families had no choice but to head north to Nova Scotia, where the ill-prepared and underfunded colonial government could do little to provide for the tens of thousands of arrivals. A government official in Halifax wrote to London explaining how he was forced to house refugees in the military barracks to prevent them from “perishing in the streets.”

By early 1784, impoverished refugees

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264 Governor John Parr estimated that by November around 25,000 people had come to the colony that year with the overwhelming majority landing in Halifax before being distributed throughout the colony. T.B. Akins, *History of Halifax City* (Halifax: 1895), 85.


267 John Campbell to Secretary of State Sydney, 1 September 1784, NSA, CO 217 vol. 41.
lined the streets of Halifax waiting in line for food and clothing hands outs from the British government. Exposed to the elements of the Nova Scotia winter and the diseases that followed refugees north, thousands of these refugees perished.

Although late eighteenth-century colonists were no strangers to death, loyalist refugees soon found that death in exile carried an unsettling feeling of finality. As many refugees continued to hold on to the hope that they would be returned from the land of their captivity, death signaled an end to this optimism and a reminder to fellow refugees of their own mortality. Throughout the year of 1783-4, Mary recorded attending at least five different funerals and seeing or learning of those who had died on several different occasions. In his letters to Boston, Mather Byles Jr. also records attending funerals for both the loyalist elite and more ordinary refugees. While their attention to the number of funerals they attended suggests they stood at the graveside more often than they had before their life in Nova Scotia, it is their thoughts about death that are most revealing of the strangeness of dying in exile. After observing the funeral of former Royal Governor of South Carolina Lord Charles Montagu in February 1784, Byles explained how strange it was to contemplate that such a well-respected political official died without fanfare “in a little hut in the woods of Nova Scotia.” Although he noted the military pomp that accompanied the nobleman’s ceremony, he could not quite overcome the idea that Lord Charles had died alone in the woods and was being buried alongside other common refugees. For the loyalists of Nova Scotia, death was ever-present and unprejudiced.

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268 Mary Robie, diary, 31 December 1783, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS; on the lines of refugees, see James S. Macdonald, “Richard S. Bulkeley, 1717-1800,” in Collections of the Nova Scotia Historical Society for the Years 1899 and 1900, Vol. XII (Halifax, 1901), 78.

269 Mather Byles II to Kitty Byles, February 10, 1784, Byles Family Papers, NSA.
Mary Robie's graveside reflection at the burial of one young loyalist demonstrates how refugees perceived the sadness of death in exile. “This was a young woman of six and twenty,” Mary began, “who after a short illness was cropped, as it were, in the flower of her age in a strange place unknown [and] unlamented, except by her brother and sister who could not but be greatly affected.” Although Mary described the whole scene as “awful” and “gloomy,” the most unsettling aspect was that the young woman had died removed from home with few mourners present who actually knew her in life. As the young girl was lowered into the grave, Robie recalled, “There was something so shocking in the appearance that I shall never erase the idea of it from my mind.”

Certainly all death was sad, but for the loyalist refugees in Nova Scotia dying in exile represented a special finality and the enduring permanence of homesickness.

Sickness and death within her own home unnerved Mary Robie even more. As her younger brother Thomas battled a severe illness and lingered on the verge of death, the whole Robie family fell into deep despair. Mary, however, was most distraught. Having been confined by illness for more than a week, on July 3, 1783, Thomas’ took a turn for the worse. Fearing the boy had little time, the family began a frantic search for a doctor. While Thomas was still gravely ill, good friends called upon the Robie sisters to serve in the funeral of one of their children who had died of a similar illness. Mary saw the request as a bad omen but was also torn about her obligation to friends. “Mr. and Mrs. Pyke sent me to be a Bearer to their daughter tomorrow,” Mary explained, “I could not refuse tho it is an office I could not at any time think of engaging in without uneasiness, but more especially at present when my own brother is so ill. However, we must do many

270 Mary Robie, diary, October 4, 1783, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
things disagreeable to us in conforming to the customs of the world.” While Mary understood she had a duty to her family friends, the illness her brother battled made her second guess her other obligations. “It is impossible to describe my feelings at the idea of losing the poor little fellow,” she explained. While Thomas later recovered, his sister did not attend the funeral because she found herself unable to face death with her brother lying ill. Almost a week later, Mary still continued to contemplate her decision. “I sent directly word I could not attend the funeral. I would not have gone for the world,” she explained, “I said in the height of my grief I do not think I could have summoned the resolution sufficient.” Mary was forced to neglect her obligation to fellow sufferers, and although she was “sorry to disappoint them,” she also noted, “It was unavoidable.”

In many ways, death in exile was the ultimate culmination of so many aspects of loyalist homesickness. Being buried in a strange land meant refugees’ bodies were interred in the very wilderness they despised. Although the majority of refugees had a firm belief in the afterlife, dying separated from loved ones aroused fears that they may never be reunified with family. Death was, of course, upsetting no matter where it occurred; however, for the refugees of Nova Scotia, the pain of death was intensified because it represented the ultimate defeat and the permanence of the exile. The specter of a lonely death in exile meant loyalists would never return to their ancestral homes or reunite divided families. Watching an exile lowered into her grave, Robie noted, “There is something so awful in death, that we could not look upon [the scene] unmoved.” But while she empathized with those who came to mourn, she could not help but worry if she,

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271 Mary Robie, diary, July 3–July 8, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.

272 On Said’s opinions of death and exile, see Reflections on Exile, 555.
or someone in her family, would be affected in the same way. Mulling over death, she asked herself, “Are we prepared?”

### Conclusion

Explaining loyalist unhappiness in Nova Scotia, Anne Gorman Condon argued, “The fact that the Loyalists were exiles, not simply immigrants, had important psychological repercussions.” While previous historians had focused on loyalists’ sense of betrayal, conflict with pre-revolutionary Nova Scotians, and infighting among themselves as the source of loyalist unhappiness, Condon alluded to a less tangible sadness that plagued loyalist communities. While it is unsurprising that refugees felt sad, examining specific elements of loyalist homesickness, including a predisposition against Nova Scotia, the loss of kinship networks, and the fear of a lonely death in exile, provides a clearer picture of the “psychological repercussions” Condon alluded to.

These feelings were clearly observable in the collective loyalist psyche. Mather Byles’ denunciation of his fellow refugees in Nova Scotia as “the most ignorant, the most stupid, & the most unhappy” people he had ever encountered was more than the rant of an elitist refugee looking disparagingly on less well-to-do settlers. Much like Mary Bradstreet’s fear that she had begun to lose her “New England head” in exile, Byles feared that his protracted exile was having an effect on his personal character. As a psychological disorder, the loyalists feared the grief of nostalgia could manifest itself in

273 Mary Robie, diary, 4 October 1783, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.


275 MacKinnon, *This Unfriendly Soil*. 
tangible changes to their disposition. Ultimately, they were correct. While infighting among the loyalists was no doubt born out of political and class differences that existed among the refugees before their arrival in Nova Scotia, the collective angst and unhappiness of homesickness exacerbated these divisions. By 1784 Mary complained to her husband “I shall never be content to live in the way I have done [in Halifax].”

Mary Bradstreet’s discontent was in part due to her displeasure with Halifax’s gloomy weather and some of the difference between life in her native Massachusetts and her adoptive Nova Scotia. More poignantly, however, Mary Bradstreet’s unhappiness was born from an overwhelming feeling of homesickness that not only lessened her attachment to Halifax, but also created in her a longing to return to New England.

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277 Mary Bradstreet to Thomas Robie, August 8 1784, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
CHAPTER 3  
“GILDED MISERY”: 
WOMEN AND THE COMMUNITY OF SUFFERING IN EXILE

On the afternoon of October 4, 1783, nineteen-year-old Mary Robie and her younger sister Mehetable—or “Hetty” as her family and friends affectionately knew her—made the short walk from their home on Granville Street to the Halifax burying ground. Although the sisters were traveling to a funeral, Mary thought more about the deteriorating weather conditions than about the somber event she was attending. “As it was a person we had no regard for nor had ever seen,” she explained, “we imagined that we should be unaffected.” As she watched the corpse being lowered into the grave, however, Robie acknowledged that the “gloomy awful scene” left her “exceedingly affected.” Mary and her sister spent that evening with their mother and aunt at the home of one of their neighbors. While such visits were not uncommon, Mary noted that after attending the funeral, the time spent with her family and friends helped “dispel all the gloomy thoughts which the awful scene had given birth to.”

Like so many others, Robie found a reprieve from the hardships of daily life through the comfort of family.

Among the earliest loyalist refugees to Nova Scotia, the Robie family was spared much of the physical suffering later loyalist arrivals experienced. The thousands of soldiers, sailors, and refugees that either passed through Halifax during the war years, or

278 Mary Robie, diary, 4 October 1783, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA [hereafter MHS].
settled in the region after peace was reached, created a steady demand for the hardware products Thomas Robie sold and the family established themselves among other upper-class residents of Halifax. But even the most well-connected refugees were not immune to the intangible hardships of exile. The distress of being uprooted from ancestral homes and forced into a strange environment had long-lasting effects on the loyalist perspective. Facing the seemingly unrelenting pangs of loss and grief, loyalists leaned heavily on their immediate family members for comfort. In these circumstances, husbands and fathers expected their wives and daughters to be loving and supportive companions.\(^{279}\)

But as the Robie sisters’ service at the stranger’s funeral demonstrates, loyalist women did not simply accept their fate “bravely and silently.”\(^{280}\) As Keith Grant notes, “Early modern Nova Scotians did things with their emotions,” and for loyalist women of Nova Scotia like the Robies, the collective grief of exile offered an opportunity to achieve two objectives, one for themselves the other for the general public.\(^{281}\) First, women did not stand stoically in the face of hardship; instead, they embodied grief through physical expressions, such as gathering publicly to mourn, as a symbol of fellow feeling. Rather than symbolizing resignation, however, women used public grief to demonstrate the quality of their character. Grieving was active, and women used their


pain to express sensitivity for the struggle of others. Because the ideal eighteenth-century woman was expected to be acutely perceptive of the feelings of those around her, loyalist women in Nova Scotia were more attentive than their male counterparts to the “lived experience” of revolution and subsequent exile, especially the destruction of social networks and the widespread visible suffering of refugee communities. They felt a heightened sense of fellow feeling toward unknown others, and rather than surrender to the relentless hardships of exile, loyalist women harnessed fellow-feeling to demonstrate their own refinement. 

Women also used grief to take on public roles that extended well beyond the front door of their own homes. For the grieving loyalist population, women’s empathy carried tremendous emotional power. Women’s empathic displays built connections

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283 As Sarah M.S. Pearsall demonstrates, a variety of people from across the Atlantic World, “harnessed the popular languages of feeling…to achieve their own ends.” “‘The Power of Feeling?’ Emotion Sensibility and the American Revolution,” Modern Intellectual History 8, no. 3 (September 2011): 670. This contrasts with the idea that loyalist women Condon explains that despite the refined performance of Loyalist women, “they were domestic creatures… their personal world did not extend beyond the front door.” The narrative of the Robie women demonstrates that in using shared emotion to build community, women inherently needed to extend domestic practices to the public sphere. Condon, “The Family in Exile,” 48.

284 The Robie women never explicitly use the word the word “empathy” to describe how they felt or their actions because the term is a construct of the twentieth century. But as many scholars have demonstrated, the eighteenth-century idea of sympathy as defined by David Hume in his highly influential A Treatise of Human Nature (1738) was nearly identical to the modern understanding of empathy. As such, I describe the Robie women’s actions as “empathic” rather than “sympathetic” because they were not simply understanding of other’s feelings; rather, they expressed that they intimately felt what others felt. On empathy in the eighteenth century, see
with unknown strangers and across political divides. The result was an emotional community based on shared grief. By visiting newly arrived strangers, hosting a several itinerant families at their home, and serving at the funerals of young men and women they had never met, the Robie women were practicing traditional roles of familial support in public. The result was a large body of “elective-kin” that shared in the


285 As Barbra Rosenwein explains, “emotional communities are not just coterminous with just any group. A crowded street does not constitute an emotional community. An emotional community is a group in which people have a common stake, interests, values, and goals.” See, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 24. She elaborates defining an “emotional community” as, “Precisely the same as social communities—families, neighborhoods, parliaments, guilds, monasteries, parish church memberships—[connected through] systems of feeling: what these communities (and the individuals within them) define and assess as valuable or harmful to them; the evaluations that they make about others' emotions; the nature of the affective bonds between people that they recognize; and the modes of emotional expression that they expect, encourage, tolerate, and deplore.” “Worrying About Emotions in History,” *American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (June 2002): 842. For a background in the history of emotions see Peter N. Stearns and Carol Z. Stearns, *Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards*, *American Historical Review* 90, no. 4 (October 1985): 813-836; Rom Harré, ed., *The Social Construction of Emotions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

misery of exile together through a common emotional regime, or a system of actions that make certain moods feel natural.\textsuperscript{287} In his study on the affectionate relations between men, Richard Goodbeer emphasizes how loving friendships between men were characterized as a form of intimacy that was instrumental in building communities in early America.\textsuperscript{288} But examining community development in loyalist Nova Scotia suggests that women became the prime agents of community building through their empathic service to suffering others.

Expectations of Women in Exile

In 1812, John Eardley-Wilmot sat for a portrait by the American-born historical painter Benjamin West. A founding member of the Royal Academy in 1768, its president in 1792, and “Historical Painter to the King” in the 1770s, West had left the American colonies to study painting in Italy in 1760. Much like his American-born contemporary John Singleton Copley, West gained a reputation among the British elite for being too American in his obsession with making money. Satirist “Anthony Pasquin” (John Williams) publicly denounced the greed of the two famous American painters, noting,

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\textsuperscript{288} Richard Goodbeer, The Overflowing of Friendship: Love Between Men and the Creation of the American Republic (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2009), 8, chapter 2.
“To talk of any man possessing genius, who is immodestly fond of money, is preposterous.” He even created a mock oath that West supposedly swore, in which the painter agreed to “never take one hundred pounds for a picture, when [he could] get one hundred guineas.” As the difference between the pound and the guinea was marginal—the guinea was worth roughly £1.05 or 21 shillings at the turn of the nineteenth century—the fictional oath Williams created was meant to make West appear miserly.²⁸⁹

Instead of denying his American origins, West attempted to display his intrinsic British identity through his paintings. West’s desire to paint Eardley-Wilmot, who had served as the commissioner for the Loyalist Claims Commission, amid the heightened tensions with American states in the early nineteenth century, best exemplifies the artist’s yearning to prove himself as authentically British. In his portrait (Figure 3.1), West depicted Eardley-Wilmot as stoic and judicious. Eardley-Wilmot retired from Parliament in 1804, and West depicted the statesman more as a writer than a politician, sitting among his papers, which may have been meant to represent both the loyalist claims and drafts of the manuscripts he was composing.²⁹⁰

But the most striking feature of West’s portrait is the other painting that sits prominently on Eardley-Wilmot’s table. Although the image, entitled Reception of the American Loyalists by Great Britain in the Year 1783, no longer survives and probably never existed on its own, the powerful image is meant to depict Eardley-Wilmot as a


²⁹⁰ By the time of his death in 1815, Eardley-Wilmot had published three manuscripts, which included two biographies, one of his father and one of Bishop John Hough who had opposed King James II’s appointment of Samuel Parker as president of Oxford in 1687, and An Historical Review of the Commission relative to the American Loyalists, which served as a historical account of the Loyalist Claims Commission from the perspective of commission and Eardley-Wilmot’s memoir.
champion of the American loyalists. In the image, West depicted a warrior Britannia extending her protection over the loyal colonial subjects, led by William Franklin, Benjamin’s loyalist son, and Massachusetts loyalist William Pepperell. Two figures, representing “Religion” and “Justice,” hold Britannia’s mantle, as the loyalist refugees march toward the King’s crown, which sits prominently on an altar just below Britannia’s shield. West also situated himself and his wife beside Britannia and the crown as a symbol of his own fidelity.291

Although the image depicts the loyalist aristocracy leading fellow refugees into Britannia’s embrace, the most dramatic characters are West’s minority figures. An indigenous man stands in the middle, arms raised to the heavens and toward Britannia’s outstretched hand. Behind him, former African slaves also reach out toward the freedom Britannia offered. West intended his allegory to both emphasize Eardley-Wilmot’s work on behalf of the American loyalists and as propaganda for the British government. The loyalists initially criticized the British government for its slow response to the refugee crisis and for failing to compensate loyalists for their lost property. Both Parliament and the Crown would have welcomed West’s flattering tribute.292


Yet for all the attention paid to the many characters of West’s allegory, the suffering widow he depicted at the heart of the loyalist refugees has received noticeably less consideration. Unlike both the native man and the formerly enslaved Africans, the widow’s arrival is not triumphant. Instead, the veiled woman keeps her gaze downward, still visibly grieving. Standing in front of orphans, the widow represents the families torn apart and the children left fatherless in the wake of the Revolution and exile. As her compatriots celebrate a heroic welcome, the Madonna-like widow stands as a stark reminder of the cost of loyalism. In her hand, she clutches her handkerchief, a symbol of the tears she shed, and her suffering. Although West’s scene is one of triumph, he does not allow his female character to experience joy the same way as the others. He instead portrayed the widow as simultaneously in a public state of mourning and as steadfast.

leader of orphaned children. Her grief is a tribute to the husband she lost and a reminder to both fellow refugees and the empire of the loyalists’ sacrifices.

Figure 3.2: Benjamin West, Sketch, *The Reception of the American Loyalists by Great Britain in the Year 1783*, printed in John Eardley-Wilmot, *Historical View of the Commission for Enquiring into the Losses, Services, and Claims of the American Loyalists...* (London: J. Nichols, Son, and Bently, 1815).

West’s *Reception of the American Loyalists* encapsulates the different roles assigned to loyalist men and women, and his grieving widow sheds light on how loyalist men expected their wives and daughters to react to their fate. Following the Peace of 1783, loyal British subjects from the American colonies felt a strong sense of betrayal. Many believed Great Britain had failed to defend those who “by their exercises and sacrifices, [had] more than fulfilled the conditions of Civil Society.”

Refugee men in Canada, the Caribbean, and the British Isles met in coffeehouses, taverns, and other public places to develop a strategy of petition to recover lost property. Those

293 *The Case and Claim of the American Loyalists Impartially Stated and Considered* (London: 1783), 37.

assembled in and around London elected a group of leading refugees to represent their claims to Parliament. Collectively, these men developed a “discourse of grievance,” which eventually gave rise to demands that the British government pay sufficient reparations to those who had suffered on behalf of the empire’s negligence. Although a number of loyalist widows petitioned the crown for compensation, women were not the primary architects of the political movement. While the loyalist men of West’s sketch are depicted bringing forward their petitions, his allegorical widow’s only symbol of her loyalty is in the handkerchief she carries.

Even if they did not draft petitions to the crown, loyalist women were equally as unhappy with their situation as their husbands and fathers, and as Beatrice Ross Buszek suggests, many felt “a double sense of betrayal” after being misled by both the empire and their husbands. Their sex, however, prevented women from expressing discontent in the same fashion as their male counterparts. Men expected women to adhere to cultural norms dictating that women toe a fine line between being emotionally affected by their distressing situation and resolutely optimistic in the face of adversity. Husbands and

the Shelburne administration had been working on since 1782, theoretically guaranteed a restoration of loyalist property; however, loyalists rightly observed that the wording only required the United States to recommend to the individual states that property be restored. Such an outcome was unlikely given both the inability of the British to enforce the return of property and the lack of federal government over the American states.

For the use of the term “discourse of grievance,” see Maya Jasanoff, “An Imperial Disaster? The Loyalist Diaspora after the American Revolution” (unpublished lecture given at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, October 20, 2010).


The eighteenth century marked a change in British emotional culture from a fixation on melancholy to an increasing preference for good cheer in both the American colonies and the
fathers expected the women in their lives to be sensitive to the events occurring around them as a sign of their respectability without falling into complete despair. Visible signs of mourning and grief, especially weeping and tears could be symbols of the refined civility men prized.  

Women were not, however, supposed to be self-absorbed; that is, women were only expected to respond emotionally to the plight of others, or to situations that affected the broader community, rather than wallow in their own pity. Concerning personal matters, men expected women to remain resolute and even cheerful, and in loyalist Nova Scotia this meant that husbands and fathers expected women to be pillars of support and encouragement for the family as they experienced the emotional hardships and physical suffering of exile. Describing her life in Halifax, Penelope Winslow wrote, “My resolution is miserable, my spirits at a low ebb.” But she also noted how she endeavored to maintain the cheerful disposition expected of her. “The banishment to this ruder World, you are witness, I submitted to with some degree of cheerfulness,” she wrote from Halifax to her friend Ward Chipman. Winslow’s feelings reveal how women were pressured to regulate their emotional responses. Women were expected to demonstrate that they could comprehend the sadness of the larger diaspora through justifiable sadness,


299 Eustace, Passion Is the Gale, 161-162.


but also display a degree of persistence in the face of adversity that represented the firmness of character necessary for the maintenance of the family and the rearing of dutiful children. Commenting on the pressure she felt to conform to often-conflicting demands, Winslow noted, “I feel myself a mere machine.” Winslow’s reflection demonstrates how women felt restricted by the rigid eighteenth-century societal expectations dictating the proper expression of emotion.

Despite the often-constraining pressures of proper emotional display, Loyalist women in Nova Scotia could use public mourning to demonstrate the personal refinement expected of proper eighteenth-century wives and daughters. Like West’s sorrowful widow, loyalist women could use grief to display their refined character. Loyalist women felt sadness, especially homesickness, in a variety of ways; however, they could not grieve openly about being homesick because that would represent self-centered thought. But they could grieve for and alongside others, and many did so enthusiastically. As Nicole Eustace demonstrates, emotional displays were not merely representative of individual subjectivity. Grief was also an act of social communication. Therefore, when Mary Robie was “greatly affected” at the graveside of a young woman she had never met, her sadness was not a symbol of defeat. Instead, she could use her grief to communicate to the larger loyalist population that she recognized the despair of their collective


303 Penelope Winslow to Ward Chipman, April 2, 1785, in Winslow Papers, 286-268.
status. Her grief was not symbolic of resignation to exile; instead, it was a public display of her own refinement and personal reputation as a sensible woman.

These public displays of fellow feeling went well beyond the graveside of strangers and often stood as signs of similarity between refugees who shared little else in common. Late eighteenth-century Nova Scotia became a transition point for a sizeable peripatetic refugee population, and loyalists often gathered on the docks of towns like Halifax and Shelburne to bid tearful farewells to friends and family bound for other regions of the empire. Having been busy all day visiting with her mother, Mary Robie noted in her diary that she was too tired to join some of her other friends in bidding farewell to one member of the group, a “Miss Rea,” who was leaving Halifax with her family. Later in the evening, however, her friends returned to relate visions of the sad scene. They explained that having bid their goodbyes to Miss Rea, she became “a great deal affected leaving Halifax.” Robie had always seen a difference between herself and less affluent Rea family. She noted that like other lower-class refugees, in her opinion, the young Miss Rea only needed a “good education to make her a very fine woman.” But when she heard that the Miss Rea had been moved to tears upon leaving her friends, Robie thought differently. “I wish her every blessing heaven can bestow,” she commented when considering the young woman’s future. While she had once seen her friend as less sophisticated than herself, she now noted, “She has a good head and an excellent understanding.”

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304 Eustace, Passion is the Gale, 497.

305 Mary Robie, diary, September 14, 1783, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
friend lacked some of the more polished qualities that could have been developed through proper schooling, her friend had all the makings of more refined women like herself.

Aware of the importance of proper emotional responses, Robie was careful to record how the often-overwhelming sadness affected her. Discussing the impending departure of her close friends, the Shaw family, Mary explained, “Hetty squeezed my hand, we could neither of us speak.” Over evening tea with guests, Mary spoke openly about the emotional distress of watching so many of her friends leave Nova Scotia. “The idea of parting with so many of our friends was painful,” she explained as she wept.  

Throughout her diary, Robie recorded how sad scenes of exile and resettlement affected the daily rhythms of loyalist Halifax.

In part, crying over the loss of friends or gathering to mourn the death of a stranger are natural responses to hardship; but in loyalist settlements where grief was rampant, these visible acts also became choreographed performances intended to signal to others one’s refinement.  

Robie’s distress at the funeral of the unknown girl was in part due to her consideration of her own mortality and her similar position as a refugee. Likewise, when she considered losing friends to resettlement in different regions of the empire, she was saddened by how her connections decreased. But as a proper eighteenth-century woman, her sadness could not only be a product of self-reflection. Instead, she needed to use her tears as a symbol to others gathered that she understood the pain of others and suffered along with them as a fellow refugee. Having felt the distress of her

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306 Mary Robie, diary, September 14, August 23-25, 1783, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.

brother’s near-death experience, Robie personally understood the sadness of death in exile and the disruption it had on refugee families.\textsuperscript{308} She channeled her grief carefully, presenting a calculated display of empathy for a young woman she had never met.\textsuperscript{309}

Loyalist women’s desire to be viewed as emotionally sensitive to the plight of others around them can be seen most clearly when contrast against loyalist men’s more stoic performance of manliness. In January 1784, both Mary Robie and Mather Byles Jr. attended the funeral of the Rev. Daniel Rodgers. Originally of Littleton, Massachusetts, Rodgers had been chased from his home in early 1775 much like both the Robie and Byles families.\textsuperscript{310} In Byles’ mind, the sole connection between the two men was their Massachusetts roots. Recording the funeral in his diary, Byles simply noted, “I attended the Funeral of a Son of the Rev. Mr. Rodgers of Littleton, who has left a widow and eight children.”\textsuperscript{311} Byles’ note on Rodgers’ widow and his many children suggests he felt for the grieving family and recognized that in the absence of the patriarch, the family would struggle. But his entry lacks any indication that he felt a shared emotion. Although both men were preachers, and despite Byles’ familiarity with Rodgers’ family, Byles’ expressed only the resolute fortitude expected of both a loyal British subject and proper eighteenth-century man.\textsuperscript{312}

\textsuperscript{308} On the illness that threatened to kill her brother, see Mary Robie, diary, June 1, 1783, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.

\textsuperscript{309} On tears a performance, see Lutz, \textit{Crying}, chapter 5, especially 194-195.

\textsuperscript{310} On Daniel Rodgers, see Historic Marker at 280 King Street, Littleton, Massachusetts, Littleton Historical Commission.

\textsuperscript{311} Mather Byles Jr. to Polly and Kitty Byles, February 10, 1784, Byles Family Papers, Nova Scotia Archives, Halifax, Nova Scotia [hereafter NSA].

\textsuperscript{312} Harvey C. Mansfield, \textit{Manliness} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), chapter 7, especially 198-201.
Mary Robie’s diary entry is more descriptive and demonstrates the centrality of empathy to her role in the community. She begins her description for January 12, 1784, “Mr. Rodgers is dead. Such is the lot of all mankind. Be still my heart and cease to flow my tears.” Unlike Byles’ unfeeling record of events, Robie used her diary entry to record how her friend’s death caused her immense pain, and she was careful to document the physical response this pain elicited. The pain Robie felt over the loss of her family friend, however, paled in comparison to the immense sorrow she felt considering the state of Rodgers’ widow. “Yet not the bare knowledge of his death could affect me like viewing the indescribable distress of his wife. How hard is her lot,” she explained.\(^313\) Again, the sadness Robie felt considering Rodger’s death was at least partially due to self-reflection. Almost a week later, she still recorded feeling the gloom of death hovering over her. “[I am] Still reflecting on dissolution with Mr. Rodger’s image before me,” she explained, “I cannot attend to visitors or anything else. Everything seems trifling.”\(^314\) But her attention to the “indescribable distress” of Rodgers’ widow demonstrates Robie’s sensitivity to others’ suffering. Unlike Byles’ simple entry, Robie’s specific documentation of her grief demonstrates how this feeling was central to her worldview. “Every friend we lose must lessen our attachment to this world,” she noted, “mine I find every day decreases.”\(^315\)

\(^313\) Mary Robie, diary, January 12, 1784, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.

\(^314\) Mary Robie, diary, January 16, 1784, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.

\(^315\) Mary Robie, diary, January 12, 1784, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS. Although these ideas were entries made in a private diary, as Kacy Tillman notes, such private writings were not only testing grounds for ideas, but also demonstrative of public displays. See “Constructing Female Loyalism(s) in the Delaware Valley: Quaker Women Writers of the American Revolution,” in The Consequences of Loyalism: Essays in Honor of Robert M. Calhoon, eds. Rebecca Brannon and Joseph S. Moore (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2019), 48-51.
Because of the overwhelming reliance on men’s accounts of exile, loyalist studies have skewed the depiction of men and women’s reactions to the struggles of exile. Building from the male assessment, and often relying on journals or private letters, these studies suggest that men, most of whom had become disillusioned with Great Britain’s failure to provide for their loyal subjects, were overcome when they considered their own despair and that of their fellow refugees. For example, Jacob Bailey documented many sad scenes through his poetry and in his journal. He also hoped to help alleviate some of the people’s suffering. But like most other men, Bailey kept his sadness private. He could be angry with the government, but not defeated in his circumstances.

Loyalist women, however, not only could express their own sadness, they were expected to. The contrast between Mary Robie’s despair and Mather Byles’ stoicism suggests that it was refugee women who embodied the grief of loyalist. This performance, however, was not a sign of submission; instead, it was an active choice that allowed women to demonstrate refined fellow feeling. As a sensible eighteenth-century woman, Robie experienced the Rev. Rodger’s death differently than Byles. While Byles lamented the loss, Robie more intimately felt the tremendous sadness of Rodgers’ death, and she embodied this sadness as a sign of her own refinement.

Grief and the Public Role of Loyalist Women

But women’s displays of fellow feeling were not only self-serving. To the contrary, refugee women’s public grief also served a communal purpose as it helped create a common emotional regime based on public grief and empathetic response that generated commonality between disparate groups of refugees. The emotional toll of exile

316 For a thorough account of Bailey’s sadness, see Grant, “Enthusiasm and Loyalty,” 171-176.
did not confine women to the home as they supported their family; instead, it provided them the opportunity to forge connections through a shared experience. Women’s public roles of grief and empathy, which included visiting the homes of newly arrived strangers, discussing collective loss while entertaining, and mourning at the funerals of unknown strangers, gave loyalist women a powerful place as community builders.

Most loyalists were constantly aware of the sadness imbued within their society, and the despair of exile permeated even the more joyous occasions. Shortly before Christmas 1783, Mary Robie attended a ball at the Governor’s Mansion. While she usually detested the “stiffness and ceremony, which generally prevails in public places,” she could not help but admit, “It [gave] me pleasure in a large company to look around and see the appearance of happiness on every face.”

Perhaps the assembly gave Robie a reason to break from her usual routine. Or, maybe the large gathering was one of the few times the community came together in celebration. Regardless, she also recognized the contentment she observed was merely a façade. “But I never dare to draw back the curtain to look what is behind all this apparent happiness,” she explained, “lest I should find some times only gilded misery.”

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317 On Robie’s aversion to public gatherings, see Mary Robie to Mehetable Robie Sterns, January 28, 1788. For the ball in Halifax, see Mary Robie, diary, December 11, 1783, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.

318 In her diary, Robie records several balls and dances held in Halifax, including on the King’s birthday, on the Queen’s birthday, and the one shortly before Christmas. Although such gatherings were the highlight of the elite’s social calendar, similar festivities held around the region suggest they were also attended by more middling people and several sailors and soldiers. In addition to religious services, these balls would have been the few times a variety of the Halifax population came together in one place. For a similar instance in Shelburne, see Huskins, “Remarks and Rough Memorandums,” 110-111.

319 Mary Robie, diary, December 11, 1783, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
grief that lay just below the ball suggests loyalists were always sensitive, even in the happier moments, to the inescapable sadness imbued in loyalist society.

But for the loyalist women of Halifax, the “gilded misery” that Robie described was not merely a varnish applied to mask the challenges of exile; instead, it was an important and pervasive system of feeling that buttressed the community in Halifax. More than a sense of bitterness or discontent, Robie’s remarks demonstrate she believed that collective sadness could be useful. As historian Joanne Burke argues, emotions have the power to “align individuals with communities.” In loyalist Halifax, it appears women like the Robies recognized they could use the collective “gilded misery” of exile to build connections with one another.320

One of the most common public roles of support women played in loyalist Halifax was in visiting newly arrived strangers. Women’s visits to homes of unknown new arrivals were so typical that not traveling to meet these new residents was seen as odd. Writing back to his aunts in Massachusetts, Mather Byles III noted that in contrast to her peers, his sister Rebecca, “Never goes to see a stranger that arrives because she supposes they are like all the rest.”321 While Byles’ comment highlights some of the class divisions between different loyalist settlers in Halifax, his remark also speaks to his recognition of the many women who traveled to visit newly arrived refugees and how visible these practices were to others.

Although visits to refugees’ homes were domestic affairs, Byles’ comment also demonstrates that these visits were public knowledge. In visiting neighbors, both friends


321 Quoted in MacKinnon, This Unfriendly Soil, 86.
and strangers alike, women practiced “extra-domestic sociability,” a form of community building that blurred the lines between private and public practice. In early October 1783, Mary Robie described the busy day her mother had visiting newly arrived families throughout Halifax. Mary noted that although these families were “strangers,” they were also “people of character,” and “Mama visited them from a motive of compassion as they knew nobody here.” While “people of character” might suggest Mary Bradstreet was visiting only the more refined arrivals, a scan of contemporary newspapers shows that loyalists used the term “people of character” to mean other British-sympathizers. Visiting these newly arrived strangers was a marked change from Mary Bradstreet’s usual social calls. Before 1783, the family mostly kept company with fellow New England refugees, many of whom had also come from Marblehead and the surrounding area during the late 1770s. But the strangers that she visited in October 1783 were


323 Mary Robie, diary, 4 October 1783, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.


325 Mary Robie’s diary and her father’s letters reveal the most common visitors to the Robie household were other New England refugees like Benjamin Marston, Ward Chipman, Rev. Mather Byles Jr., the Shaw family, and Jonathan Sterns, among others. Choosing to keep company with refugees from the same region was not unusual or characteristic of only the Nova
likely refugees from British New York, which had been evacuated over the summer months, and the majority of these arrivals had no connection to the Robie family or their network of fellow New Englanders.\textsuperscript{326}

In visiting, loyalist women were not merely imagining a more exciting lifestyle or recreating “the glory” of their pre-revolutionary situations; instead, the visits they made had significant personal and public functions.\textsuperscript{327} From a personal angle, visiting strangers reinforced a positive image of self-identity in refugee women. For Mary Bradstreet, being a good neighbor was equally crucial to her role as mother and wife. A century before Mary Bradstreet visited the strangers in Halifax, her ancestor, Anne Bradstreet, wrote an epitaph for her mother that highlighted the importance of being kind to neighbors:

\begin{quote}
Here lyes,
A worthy matron of unspotted life,
A loving mother and obedient wife.
A friendly neighbor to poor,
Whom she oft feed and clothed with her store.\textsuperscript{328}
\end{quote}

Anne Bradstreet situated being a thoughtful neighbor alongside the importance of being a loving wife, and her descendant Mary Bradstreet recognized that she could serve those around her by making calls to newly arrived strangers. Visiting these refugees became a

\textsuperscript{326} On the British evacuation of New York and the ways in which the New York Loyalists differed from earlier exiles, see Ruma Chopra, \textit{Unnatural Rebellion: Loyalists in New York City During the Revolution} (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2011), chapters 6 and 7.


way Mary Bradstreet could not only assist others in their transition to exile, but also
demonstrate that she too possessed the generosity central to her family’s legacy.

Their male counterparts had little interest in helping fellow refugees. Most loyalist
men only welcomed new arrivals because increasing numbers of refugees meant greater
political power. For instance, although Mather Byles III was glad to see so many
American refugees arriving in Halifax, his interest in these new arrivals had nothing to do
with services he could provide for them. Instead, he welcomed the clout these tens of
thousands of refugees would bring to the loyalists’ collective political voice. Writing to
his aunts in Boston, he explained, “Our Refugee Party will be very strong this winter”
due to the increasing number of loyalist arrivals.\(^{329}\) In his mind, the growing loyalist
population was significant only because it tipped the political balance of power away
from the pre-revolutionary Nova Scotians and in favor of his own party.\(^{330}\) Byles looked
down on the prerevolutionary British Nova Scotians, and while he had his own
reservations about some of the lower-class refugees, he believed the influx of loyalists
would help transform Nova Scotia into a proper British colony.\(^{331}\) For Byles, the arrival
of loyalists represented only political opportunity, not the chance to serve others or build
communal ties.

In contrast to Mather Byles III’s attention to the political climate of loyalist Nova
Scotia, Hetty Robie, like her mother and sister, reveled in the new social opportunities the
loyalist influx created for loyalist women. “I have become a complete gadder abroad,”

\(^{329}\) Mather Byles III to Aunts, December 24, 1783, Byles Family Papers, NSA.

\(^{330}\) For the most comprehensive assessment of the loyalist versus pre-revolutionary Nova Scotia
political feud, see MacKinnon, *This Unfriendly Soil*.

\(^{331}\) On Byles III’s dismissal of the pre-revolutionary British Nova Scotians, see MacKinnon, *This
Unfriendly Soil*, 69-70.
Hetty explained, “there is not a day [that] passes [where] I am not sent out for two or three different places either to dine or drink tea.”\textsuperscript{332} Although Hetty explained that she enjoyed the more refined aspects of social calls, her mother’s visits to the homes of strangers makes it reasonable to assume that Hetty also spent much of her time visiting the homes of refugees she had not met. Unlike Mather Byles III’s emphasis on growing political representation, Hetty found that the influx of strangers gave her a new sense of purpose. As she traveled from home to home empathetically visiting new arrivals, she delighted in her public function even though the connections she was making were built from a shared experience of exile.

From the public perspective, women’s visits helped build “an environment of mutual benevolence, fictive kinship, and friendship” that had been lost as traditional structures of community broke down in the exile process.\textsuperscript{333} Perhaps nowhere was this breakdown in community structures more evident than in the religious division that existed across the settlements of loyalist Nova Scotia. Given their allegiance to the crown, a large number of refugees were members of the Church of England; however, even within the Anglican Church of Nova Scotia, many colonials felt a distinct divide between Anglicans from the American colonies and emigrants from the British Isles.\textsuperscript{334} Despite the Anglican majority, there was also significant religious plurality among the refugees. One exile in Shelburne counted “persons of very various characters,

\textsuperscript{332} Hetty Robie to Mary Robie, undated [1784] letter, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.

\textsuperscript{333} Huskins, ““Remarks and Rough Memorandums,”” 106.

\textsuperscript{334} It should be noted that despite the divide created between Congregationalists and Anglicans around the Revolution, during the majority of the seventeenth century, the Anglican Church had made serious inroads in New England and had many Congregationalists had joined its ranks. See Jeremy Gregory, “Refashioning Puritan New England: The Church of England in British North America,” \textit{Transactions of the Royal Historical Society} 20 (2010): 85-112.
dispositions, and religious sentiments.” This religious miscellany would have been a marked change for some rural colonists accustomed to more homogenous local communities.

Religious differences among refugees often caused squabbling, which only exacerbated the feeling that Nova Scotia was a markedly different place than the American homes they left behind. Mary Robie had such an experience. In Halifax, the region’s most populous settlement, there were only two established churches during the Revolutionary Era. Loyalists in Halifax could choose between St. Paul’s Anglican Church, and the dissenter church, which New England Congregationalists had established in the 1750s, but by the Revolutionary Era war home to Scots-Irish Presbyterians.

Since their arrival, the Robies had attended St. Paul’s Anglican Church, despite the family’s Congregationalist background. They probably avoided the dissenter church because of the provocative preaching of the Rev. John Seccombe, a 1760s New England emigrant who preached sermons at nearby Chester in favor of the American rebels and often preached at St. Paul’s. Regardless of the reasons for the family’s decision, the young Mary Robie developed mixed feelings about the change. On the one hand, Robie noted how attending Anglican services caused her mother, who took immense pride in her Puritan lineage, incredible distress. But the younger Robie also appreciated the sermons delivered by the Rev. Dr. Breynton. Considering both her family’s background

335 Dr. Walter to Secretary of State, NSA quoted in MacKinnon, This Unfriendly Soil, 77.


337 S. Buggey, “SECCOMBE, JOHN,” DCB.
and her fondness for the Anglican services, she concluded that she was not a staunch Congregationalist. Instead, she noted, “Were there preachers of equal merit at both places [in Halifax] I might then consider which appeared best.”

338 Not all of the Robie family, however, shared Mary’s enthusiasm. After an argument with her family concerning the differences between the two churches where she was reprimanded for having “said enough for today,” Mary locked herself away and recorded that the whole exchange made her feel “remarkably foolish.”

339 While religious communities played a critical organizational role in colonial America, in loyalist Nova Scotia many refugees found the atmosphere divisive, which only exacerbated feelings of distress.

340 In many ways, women’s visits were meant to recreate and replace the social networks that had been lost or complicated in exile and resettlement, and what the loyalists lacked in common background, they made up for in the shared experience. For the newly landed refugees, Mary Bradstreet’s visits provided a vital link to their new home. She was a well-connected earlier arrival, and she would have been a valuable source for information. In her parlor on Granville Street, Mary Bradstreet hosted some of the most prominent figures in the colony including Lieutenant-Governor Edmund Fanning, Benjamin Marston, surveyor of the Port Roseway settlement, Mather Byles Jr., the chaplain to the army at Halifax, Dr. John Breynton, minister of St. Paul’s Anglican Church, the Rev. Peter De la Roche of Lunenburg, and the Rev. John Wiswall of Cornwallis. When she visited new families, she provided them with some of the

338 Mary Robie, diary, August 27, 1783, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.

339 Mary Robie, diary, August 3, 1783, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.

340 For a list of visitors to the Robie home, see Mary Robie, diary, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS. On the importance of hosting in the colonial Maritimes, see Ann Judith Poole, “Taking Tea
insights she gained from conversing with these elite figures in her own home. Mary Bradstreet benefited from these new settlers as well. Through her visits, she was able to both learn about life in the other loyalist strongholds and assess the new arrivals’ potential benefit to her own inner circle.

Women also opened their own homes to transient refugees and entertained a diverse group of visitors. Mary Robie often lamented the tedium of her daily routine, which consisted of little more than taking walks, playing cards, and “talk[ing] seasonal fashions or discuss[ing] the more interesting points of beauty,” but a key component of her schedule was helping her mother host. Entertaining in loyalist Nova Scotia was almost exclusively the duty of women. While men attended the gatherings at the Robie home, Mary’s record demonstrates that women planned and hosted the get-togethers where many families came together in congregation, some of whom were well acquainted with one another, while others were newcomers. Far different from the business calls men like Thomas Robie and Mather Byles’ Jr. paid to other loyalist men, these social gatherings were a time for discussion where the loyalists reflected on how their lives had changed since arriving in Halifax. Robie’s diary demonstrates that during the year 1783-4, the family entertained itinerant preachers, sailors, soldiers, colonial officials, and


Mary Robie, diary, May 22, 1783, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.

As a prominent merchant, Thomas Robie often met with government officials, including Lt. Governor Fanning; however, these meetings were private and seem to be solely for conducting business. When Fanning arrived to see Thomas Robie during dinner, Mary recorded feeling surprised “at his coming at so unseasonable a time,” but she never even saw him as “Papa took him in to the shop.” These meetings were private male-only affairs, and although the exact discussion that occurred in such meetings eludes the historical lens, it can be assumed that the men discussed their finances and business plans. Mary Robie, diary, September 22, 1783, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
several Loyalist families. Visitors were so frequent that Mary listed, “To have company at home” as one of the more regular parts of her routine.\textsuperscript{343}

Visitors to the Robie household came from many walks of life, but the discussions Robie recorded were routinely focused on loss. Most commonly, visitors discussed the families that had recently departed Halifax, or those that would be leaving soon.\textsuperscript{344} They also engaged in more abstract conversations of loss and suffering where they imagined a connection with suffering others throughout the empire. In one of the livelier discussions that took place while entertaining, Captain Rutherford and Mr. Dickinson, both members of the Royal Navy, entertained guests with stories of their travels. They included a tale they had overheard from sailors recently arrived from British India where they had observed “women burning themselves upon the death of their husbands.” While others found the “horrid crime” uncivilized, the young Mary was more sympathetic to the actions of the imagined fellow sufferers. She “did not think it required any great effort of resolution” for grieving wives to “quit the world of sorrow, pain, and disappointment for the realms of unceasing bliss and a reunion with the partner of their hearts.”\textsuperscript{345} Although likely tinted by her affinity for sentimental literature, the young woman’s ability to empathize with imagined widows nonetheless demonstrates the centrality of grief to her perspective and speaks to how other loyalist women saw expressions of extreme sorrow. That the guests would converse about such a morbid topic with such fascination further demonstrates the place of grief in the loyalist community.

\textsuperscript{343} Mary Robie, diary, May 22, 1783, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
\textsuperscript{344} Mary Robie, diary, August 25, 1783, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
\textsuperscript{345} Mary Robie, diary, September 8, 1783, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
Through their visiting practices, loyalist women also learned of other problems afflicting refugee families. On one trip, Mary Bradstreet learned of the recently arrived Wood family and the death of the eldest daughter. The twenty-six-year-old woman had been separated from her parents during the war and was left to care for her younger brother and sister. While she brought the family to Halifax, she had died of a fever only a few weeks after arriving. Survived by only her younger siblings, the young woman had no one else to mourn her death. Having lived through the struggles of settling in Halifax herself, Mary Bradstreet represented an empathetic figure to new arrivals, and sensing the opportunity to both alleviate the suffering of another family and demonstrate her own compassion, she volunteered her daughters to mourn alongside the family.

Mary Bradstreet offered up her daughters to mourn, hoping to spare the deceased the shame of being buried without proper attendance. On the evening of October 3, 1783, Mary and Hetty Robie received a request “to serve as pallholders to a Miss Wood.” Robie observed, “We had never any connection or even knew there was such a person here,” but after learning of the family’s plight, the Robie sisters consented to visit the family. Being asked to serve at the funeral of young men and women they had never met was not entirely uncommon for young Loyalist women of Halifax. Both Mather Byles Jr. and his twenty-year-old daughter Rebecca attended the funeral of another recent arrival on February 4, 1784. Rebecca, who was serving as “bearer” for the stranger, was given special clothing, a white gown with a hood that covered her face, which her father noted was a part of “the usual prerequisites” for funerals in Loyalist Halifax.346 Mary Robie also recorded the particular mourning rituals of Halifax. “The pall was held by six young

346 Mather Byles Jr., diary, 4 February 1784, in Mather Byles Jr. to Polly and Kitty Byles, 10 February 1783, Mather Byles Papers, NSA.
Women dressed in white with Hoods that covered their faces and the corps was lowered only by males,” Robie explained of one funeral, “Everything was conducted with decency as [the deceased] had left directions.”³⁴⁷ As Robert V. Wells notes in his study of deathways during times of epidemics in eighteenth-century Boston and Philadelphia, “Rituals may become distorted or abandoned in the face of fears induced by unfamiliar and often loathsome forms of death.”³⁴⁸ Byles and Robie’s description of Loyalists’ grieving practices, especially the unique clothing mourners wore, suggests the refugees developed their own customs for mourning in exile. But the women’s service at the graveside of strangers also reveals the vital public role women played in loyalist Halifax. For the deceased, of course, the presence of mourns meant little, but to the broader community of loyalist exiles, such service was a sign of solidarity and comfort to others who worried that even if they died in exile, there would be friendly, even if unfamiliar, faces.

Conclusion

Although the pain of exile was often overwhelming, it also offered loyalist women the opportunity to demonstrate fellow feeling beyond the boundaries of their own

³⁴⁷ Mary Robie, diary, 4 October 1783, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.

families and homes. Rather than demonstrate stoicism in the face of adversity, loyalist women embodied the grief of those around them and used a shared system of feeling to create bonds among a diverse group of refugees. Women who arrived before the influx of 1783-4 helped new arrivals acclimate to loyalist Halifax through their visiting practices. Combining communal service with private practices of visiting, loyalist women in Halifax became public figures of fellow feeling beyond the home. Visiting new arrivals also provided these migrants with connection to the established social networks of previous arrivals. Visiting women also learned of life in the other loyalist strongholds of North America and were able to assess the character of their new neighbors.

Through their visiting practices, loyalist women also learned of the specific hardships new refugees faced. Having lived through the experience of exile and resettlement, women created support systems for fellow suffers. Perhaps most visibly, loyalist women served as mourners at the funerals of young men and women they had never met to prevent the deceased from being buried “unknown and unlamented.” Women who attended these funerals were deeply moved by the sad scenes they witnessed. As fellow refugees, they worried they too would die permanently removed from their home and families. But when women wept at the graves of people they had never met, their tears were symbols of their fellow feeling and displays of shared suffering vital to the creation of a new loyalist community in exile.
CHAPTER 4
“WHAT FOOLS WE WERE TO LEAVE SUCH A PLACE”: 
THE ROBIE WOMEN AND LOYALIST REPATRIATION

Writing from Halifax in early September 1788, Hetty (née Robie) Sterns could spare only a few moments to respond to her mother’s letter. Apologizing for her brevity, Sterns described the illness that had reduced her daughter “to a mere skeleton” over the past few weeks. Fortunately, the sickness had dissipated, and Hetty expressed relief before turning her attention to the “shocking” and “unexpected” news she received from her mother in Massachusetts. Describing her sadness, she wrote, “My tears flow as I write. I must take my leave. It is wrong to allow myself to dwell upon the subject.” She rhetorically asked, “What shall I say upon the subject of losing my dearest sister?”

Despite Hetty’s mournful language, her older sister Mary was not dead; instead, she had recently agreed to marry Joseph Sewall of Marblehead and would not, therefore, be returning to Halifax. For Mary Bradstreet, the engagement was a joyful occasion, and she believed the marriage gave her eldest daughter “a greater chance at happiness” than she had once imagined possible for any of her children. In Halifax, Hetty realized her sister’s impending nuptials meant only an increased divide between the two sisters, and she worried her family’s growing ties back to New England meant she would lose more relatives to repatriation. Mary Bradstreet warned Hetty against sharing her concerns with

349 Mehitable Sterns to Mary Bradstreet, September 6, 1788, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA [hereafter MHS].
her sister. “Make no objections as it will only hurt [your] sister, who can hardly bear to think of quitting [you],” she instructed. But Hetty could not be consoled. “Happiness is not the lot of many in this world,” she wrote as her family’s connections to Halifax began to decrease.

The conclusion of the American Revolution brought tens of thousands of refugees north to Nova Scotia. But peace also initiated a period of reconciliation where those on both sides of the conflict made amends. The fissures of war could be observed in communities across the new nation and within colonial families. Britons in the metropole also debated questions of rebellion, reform, and colonial independence with many sympathetic to their colonial cousins’ cause. The fighting in the colonies had been violent. Following the British surrender, many wartime grudges remained. But the news of lasting peace in 1783 began what would become the final outpouring of anti-Tory sentiment. As the states began to rebuild, they confronted a serious issue: what

350 Mary Bradstreet to Thomas Robie, July 29, 1788, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.

351 Mehitable Sterns to Mary Bradstreet, September 6, 1788, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.


would be the place of British sympathizers in the new nation? Most Americans agreed that the reintegration of the Tories after the Revolution was not only possible but in most cases, desirable. Many loyalists who had fled the war early in the conflict not only made their way back to the American states but also found the same people who had forced them out years earlier, welcomed their return.354

In addressing the reintegration of the American loyalists, historians have primarily focused on the American perspective, examining the economic and social factors that convinced postwar Americans it was in their best interests to welcome back those who wanted to return. Scholars have directed significantly less attention to the loyalist perspective of repatriation. Why would exiles want to return? What did the repatriation process look like? How did refugees overcome obstacles to resettling in America? What role did women and families play in returning to the American states?

This chapter explores how the Robie women, in particular, matriarch Mary Bradstreet and her eldest daughter Mary, created the personal and pragmatic opportunities that eventually brought the majority of their family back to New England in early 1790. The Robie family’s narrative shows the many obstacles to repatriation, the drawn-out process of resettlement, and the important role women played in leading families back to the United States. Mary Bradstreet returned to New England three times between 1784 and 1789. With her husband decidedly against a permanent move back to

Massachusetts, she began a sustained five-year campaign to bring the family out of exile. In this ongoing exchange with her husband, Mary Bradstreet veiled her arguments for repatriation in the voice of a concerned mother. During each of her three trips to Massachusetts, Mary Bradstreet attempted to convince her husband that returning to their American home was in the family’s best interest, even as their ties to Nova Scotia grew stronger. Only after Mary Bradstreet had created a permanent connection to New England through the marriage of her eldest daughter to the promising young merchant Joseph Sewall was she confident enough to demand a return to New England. The Robie women worked to reestablish the ties that allowed the family to return to Massachusetts and reintegrate into American society despite their revolutionary reputation and Thomas’ continuing disapproval.

The central role Mary Bradstreet and her daughter played in bringing their family back to New England again demonstrates that loyalist women were neither resigned to exile, nor cheerful followers of their husbands and fathers. When peace offered refugee women an opportunity to return to their American homes, many leapt at the opportunity and worked to convince more stubborn men that repatriation was best. Mary Bradstreet’s role, in particular, suggests late eighteenth-century women could effect their will through delicate protest, especially by using arguments that championed the good of the family. The role the Robie women played in repatriation reveals the vital family roles of loyalist women that went far beyond only supporting and encouraging the men in their life.

“Poignant uncertainty”: The Loyalists Look to their American Homes

Mary Bradstreet gave birth to her final child, a daughter named Hannah, on March 12, 1784. While the family celebrated the child’s birth as a blessing, Bradstreet closely watched the deteriorating conditions around loyalist Halifax with apprehension. The peace of 1783 had effectively flooded the ports of Nova Scotia with new refugees from the last bastions of British America. The influx stretched already sparse resources to the extreme. As overcrowded transports delivered new settlers monthly, available housing throughout the colony became nonexistent, and destitute refugees lined the Halifax streets. Amid the disorder of loyalist resettlement, several diseases plagued the newly arrived and more established settlers without distinction and inundated the few medical professionals in the region. Hannah’s birth rekindled in her mother an immense longing for her New England home. Despite the community they had built in exile, Mary Bradstreet and a number of other refugees came to believe that a return to their American homes was preferable to life as a refugee.

During the early months of 1784, Mary Robie recorded the ominous and unsettling mood that seemed to settle over loyalist Halifax. This feeling was due in part to the unfavorable outcome of the war in the American states. The refugees were unhappy with the disadvantageous terms reached between the United States and Great Britain, especially the ambiguous language concerning the restoration of loyalist property.356

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356 Although the British had pushed for the restoration of loyalist property in the United States, the terms of the treaty only called on Congress to “recommend” that the states return or compensate British sympathizers for their losses during the war. In addition, it was unclear about who exactly counted as a loyalist that could petition for compensation. For one of the clearest iterations of loyalist anger concerning the unclear terms of the Treaty of Paris, especially concerning their American property, see Joseph Galloway, *The Claim of the American Loyalists*
Loyalists in Nova Scotia were not only bitter about the terms of peace but also increasingly disillusioned with London’s commitment to assisting them in settling Nova Scotia.\(^{357}\)

The depressing mood in loyalist Nova Scotia at the beginning of 1784 permeated deep into the collective consciousness, which Mary Robie reflected in her diarying. She began her entry for February 29, 1784, with a frightening scene. “Thank heaven this [day] is past, for we have had two dreadful predictions, one public the other private,” she explained. Since the British colonies adopted the Gregorian calendar in 1752, leap years were known to excite superstitions among even the more enlightened colonists.\(^{358}\) For the loyalists of Halifax, the leap year of 1784 coincided with the disastrous end of the war and haphazard resettlement of refugees. Within this calamitous atmosphere, a rumor

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\(^{357}\) British policy makers were seemingly unaware of the full extent of the refugee crisis unfolding in Nova Scotia. Hoping to continue to populate the region with British settlers and loyal “foreign Protestants,” London continued to send “settlers” to Nova Scotia, often in lieu of the supplies that were desperately needed. In one of the more egregious instances, the British government in London dispatched the ship Sally to with settlers bound for Cumberland, Nova Scotia in early 1784 along with a title for land grants that Governor John Parr was to honor. However, when the ship arrived, officials quickly realized that the people on board were not fit British subjects; instead, it appeared the ship had been loaded with what were probably the debtors and poor of London. Of these colonists, 39 had died in transit and another 12 within days of arrival. Similar shiploads of poorly provisioned and sickly settlers arrived at Annapolis Royal and Halifax. On populating Nova Scotia, see Winthrop Pickard Bell, The “Foreign Protestants” and the Settlement of Nova Scotia: The History of a Piece of Arrested British Colonial Policy in the Eighteenth Century (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961); Bernard Cottret, The Huguenots in England: Immigration and Settlement, c. 1550-1770 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 188–90; Katherine Carté Engel, “Connecting Protestants in Britain's Eighteenth-Century Atlantic Empire,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser. 75, no. 1 (January 2018): 47-50. On the case of the Sally see John Parr to Secretary of State Sydney, September 1, 1784, CO 217, vol. 57, Nova Scotia Archives, Halifax, NS [hereafter NSA].

gained considerable traction. “It was predicted that the day was to be as dark as night,” Robie explained, “[and] that there was [to be] a most violent storm, and that the greatest part of the city was to be overflowed by inundation.” She dismissed the prophecy as little more than the “frolick of a few idle fellows,” perhaps referring to the great number of unemployed refugees, who mulled about the city stirring trouble, or the trifling banter of the aristocratic elite. But the menacing prophecy unsettled many others. Her younger brother Thomas confided in his sisters that he had “dreamt he was going to die on the twenty ninth of February,” which was made “all the more extraordinary as it was a leap year and he knew it not.” Robie felt considerable distress as she “had heard several stories of people who had foretold the time of their own death.” Despite her concern, she decided to “keep it carefully from [her] mother,” who was expecting the birth of her child any day. Mary’s decision to hide her concern demonstrates the power of rumor in the late eighteenth century and also suggests that the gloom of Halifax was pervasive enough that Mary did not want to further upset her mother with such an awful forecast.

Loyalists across Nova Scotia recorded feeling a similar sense of unease and despair. During the immediate postwar period, loyalist propaganda had celebrated the opportunity of settling Nova Scotia as a bastion for British law and order in North America. A newspaper in New England ran the opinion of one loyalist refugee in

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359 On the frivolity of the loyalist elite the resulting friction between other loyalists and native Nova Scotians, see Bonnie Huskins, “‘Shelburnian Manners’: Gentility and the Loyalists of Shelburne, Nova Scotia,” Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal 13, no. 1 (Winter 2015): 151-188.

360 Mary Robie, diary, February 29, 1784, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.

361 On the power of rumor in the eighteenth century, see Wim Klooster, “Slave Revolts, Royal Justice, and a Ubiquitous Rumor in the Age of Revolutions,” William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd ser. 71, no. 3 (July 2014): 401-424.
England who praised his friend’s decision to move north rather than remaining in America “where civil-discord, high taxes, and national debt will reign a thousand years, to the total ruin of that once most happy country.” But those on the ground in Nova Scotia knew better. Captain Philips Callbeck, who had come to St. John’s Island (present-day Prince Edward Island) in the 1770s and had also lived in Halifax, refused to congratulate Edward Winslow on his arrival in Nova Scotia. He explained, “[It] would be a very chilly an unmeaning compliment, the Country you have left is in every respect (but to Loyalty) a Paradise in comparison.” Citing a similar discontent, a Philadelphian newspaper wrote of the many refugees who had written back to their friends and family still in the United States advising them, “By no means come to [this] place.” Feelings of dissatisfaction seemed to engulf the loyalist settlements of Nova Scotia much like the thick fog that Connecticut loyalist Sarah Frost described as her transport from New York neared the entrance to the Bay of Fundy in 1783.

Hannah Robie was born into this fog of uncertainty. Her birth had been difficult for the aging Mary Bradstreet, and although the baby was born healthy, the long and laborious delivery mixed with the despair of exile, left the family feeling a “poignant

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362 “Extract of a letter from a gentleman of character (a loyalist) in England to his friend in Nova-Scotia,” The Massachusetts Spy, or Worcester Gazette, September 25, 1783.


364 Cited in MacKinnon, This Unfriendly Soil, 69.

uncertainty.”

Mary Bradstreet’s recovery from Hannah’s birth was slow, but not unusual for upper-class women of the period. By May 8, the mother was dining with the family, and her daughter noted that her health and spirits were both “remarkably well.” However, the health of both Mary Bradstreet and the young Hannah took a serious turn for the worse toward the end of the month. The child’s condition was so poor that the family rushed to have her baptized on May 28.

The exact cause of the sickness that plagued mother and child remains unclear, but in Mary Bradstreet’s eyes, both had fallen victim to the disease spreading among the destitute refugees of Halifax and into the homes of even the more affluent settlers. Mary’s diary reveals that Hannah suffered from a reoccurring fever while her mother developed a condition that left her extremely fatigued and sore, especially when she nursed. Such illnesses were not uncommon for newborns and their mothers, but Mary Bradstreet worried that the family was being afflicted by one of the many rampant sicknesses that came north from the American states. During the summer and fall of 1783, a measles epidemic, the first recorded in British Nova Scotia, swept through Halifax and Liverpool, another popular relocation site for American refugees. In spite of

366 Mary Robie, diary, March 12, 1784, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.


368 Mary Robie, diary, May 8, 1784, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.

369 Mary Robie, diary, May 28, 1784, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
inoculations that had taken place in 1775, the arrivals of 1783 brought with them another epidemic of smallpox that lasted through the end of the 1780s.\textsuperscript{370}

The younger Mary was also aware of the diseases spreading through Halifax and worried immensely about her own family’s health. Describing the widespread illness, she wrote in her diary, “I have been a great deal engaged in some painful and melancholy scenes, which have almost effaced the pleasing ones…If I look round me, what thousands I may I see more wretched than myself.” Robie’s description of the pervasiveness of sadness and suffering again demonstrates her sensitivity to the hardships of others. But when illness penetrated her own home, the fear of losing a member of her own family once again forced Mary Robie to grapple more seriously with death, much like when her youngest brother Thomas lay ill the summer before. Although she had mourned the passing of strangers and friends alike, as disease progressed through her own home, she felt more helpless. “Gracious God,” she began one entry, “Protect [my mother] and support her.” While she had been a pillar of support for fellow sufferers, the thought of burying her mother like she had so many other refugees tormented Mary June, and she often spent all night attending to her mother and infant sister’s needs.\textsuperscript{371}

Adding to the feelings of powerlessness, many refugees, including the Robies, were unable to find proper medical attention. In 1784, there was no civilian hospital in Nova Scotia, and while 66 trained physicians were scattered throughout the colony, the


\textsuperscript{371} Mary Robie, diary, June 4-5, 1784, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
Robies lacked access. Their inability to find care demonstrates how the flood of new arrivals changed life in loyalist Halifax. When the family first arrived in 1775, Mary Bradstreet was able to consult a physician about a simple toothache; however, in 1784 the family seemed unable to find a proper doctor as Mary Bradstreet lay confined in her bedroom by a debilitating illness. With little treatment, the Robies, like other refugee families, turned several home remedies for measles, child’s cough, and various other ailments published in the *Halifax Gazette*. These therapies offered the family some consolation, but the homemade treatments did little to improve the health of either child or mother.

Lacking proper medical attention and fearing the worst for both her own health and that of her newborn, Mary Bradstreet became increasingly vocal about her desire to exchange disease-ridden Halifax for her native Massachusetts. Her husband, however, was adamantly against the idea. Like many other refugees, he may have feared that his former neighbors would take revenge on his wife and children. Or, he may have worried that his sickly spouse and young child would not survive the notoriously rough crossing between Nova Scotia and New England. The son of a famous New England physician and Harvard tutor, Thomas was not unfamiliar with disease and measures of

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372 Marble, *Surgeons, Smallpox, and the Poor*, 141-144.

373 Shortly after the family arrived in 1775, Mary Bradstreet had written of a terrible toothache and worried when Thomas returned from London, he would find his wife without teeth. Although she found the doctor less than qualified, she continued to use his proscribed wash in the hopes it would alleviate her pain. See Mary Bradstreet to Thomas Robie, January 9, 1776, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.

374 *Nova Scotia Gazette*, September 16, 1783, NSA.

prevention. In March 1773, he had himself and his family inoculated against smallpox alongside roughly eighty-three other Marblehead residents. The act enraged the Marblehead patriot majority, who feared British sympathizers were attempting to spread the disease among the townspeople. In response, patriots attacked the doctor who administered the inoculations, James Latham. Robie authored a public advertisement in the *Essex Gazette* defending Latham as a man of “Politeness, Courtesy, and an easy unaffected Civility” and denounced the attacks against him as “uncivil behavior.”

While the inoculations benefitted the Robie family when smallpox hit Halifax especially hard during the summer of 1775, the newborn Hannah lacked such preventative measures, and Thomas certainly worried she would fall victim to the plague.

Thomas did agree that a change of scenery might do his family, especially his sick wife and child, some good. On June 25, 1784, the family took a carriage from Halifax to the home of one of Robie’s business associates in Sackville, roughly twelve miles north. For the younger Mary, the family’s journey into the country was an adventure. Unhappy that she had only “been 4 miles out of town” since she arrived nine years earlier, she welcomed the opportunity of seeing other regions of Nova Scotia. The excursion had no effect on Mary Bradstreet or Hannah’s health, and the younger Mary’s diary indicates

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376 Thomas Robie’s father, also named Thomas, was among the leading American scientists of his day and a renowned Harvard instructor. He published his positive opinions concerning smallpox inoculation as suitable method of preventing the disease. See Dr. Thomas Robie Sr., “Part of a Letter from Mr. Thomas Robie, Physician in New-England, to the Reverend Mr. Derham, F. R. S. Concerning the Effects of Inoculation; The Eclipse of the Sun in November 1722; And the Venom of Spiders,” (Boston: 1753).


378 Mary Robie, diary, May 24, 1784, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
both mother and child’s health continued to decline upon their return to Halifax in early July. After the failure of his country excursion, Robie yielded to his wife’s wishes and prepared arrangements for her passage back to New England. Even though he relented to his wife’s demands, he was unwilling to submit entirely. He packed with her a number of bills due to him totaling “over 500 Dollars.” Robie’s interest in collecting these debts both suggests he had no intention of returning, and may also indicate that while Mary Bradstreet worried about her and her child’s health, perhaps she coupled her concern with an appeal to her husband’s financial interests.379

In early July 1784, Mary Bradstreet, her eldest daughter, and the newborn Hannah boarded a ship destined for New England. Their voyage was the family’s first excursion back to the American states since their exile almost a decade before. The twelve-day sail between Halifax and Massachusetts could prove challenging for seasoned seamen, but as the younger Mary noted, for a mother and her three-month-old child, the crossing was excruciating.380 Before embarking, she explained how all the passengers aboard the New-England-bound ship “tremble[d] at the idea of the long passage” with the wind against them. The journey was arduous, and although the younger Mary escaped the “sea sickness” that plagued nearly all aboard, her mother and young sister suffered tremendously. After landing in Massachusetts, both mother and newborn fared little better, and Robie spent days tending to them. “In my heart I dedicated to writing you

379 Thomas Robie to Mary Bradstreet, July 26, 1784, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.

[earlier],” she explained in a letter to her sister in Halifax, “but Mama and the baby, having been both rather indisposed, necessarily engaged all of my attention.”

In Halifax, Thomas worried about how his family would be received. For Americans, one of the most vexing questions at the end of the war concerned the treatment of British sympathizing citizens, like the Robies, who had not necessarily taken up arms against their fellow colonists. Early in the war, the patriots issued several acts aimed at punishing British sympathizers for their allegiance. Beginning in 1776, states began issuing test acts, which required men to publically declare or sign an oath of allegiance. While all test acts resembled each other in their requirements, they differed considerably in punishments for violation. Some states restricted non-oath takers from holding office, while more stringent laws, like those of Pennsylvania, jailed those who refused without the possibility of parole. Massachusetts was the first state to confiscate loyalist property and moved to freeze all assets of absconded citizens as early as May 1775. While considerable debate surrounded the idea of seizure, the legislature passed two encompassing confiscation acts in April 1779. By 1781, the sale of loyalist property

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381 Mary Robie to Hetty Robie, July 20, 1784, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.

in Suffolk County Massachusetts had netted a total of £57,768 in Massachusetts state currency, and Thomas Robie was one of the loyalists named in the legislation.\textsuperscript{383}

Following Cornwallis’ surrender at Yorktown, most states moved to copy the laws of Massachusetts.

Because they were outnumbered in most regions, the loyalists exerted considerably less power to exact revenge; however, this does not mean they did not try. Following Burgoyne’s defeat at Saratoga, loyalists in Philadelphia and New York clamored for retribution against the rebels. Decrying the weak British leadership, these loyalists promised “unexampled carnage and devastation” in retaliation.\textsuperscript{384} Seeing the rebels as increasingly less British every day, one loyalist writer believed, “Positive orders should immediately be given to his Majesty’s ships . . . to sink every privateer in the service . . . without saving a man.”\textsuperscript{385} As the war in the colonies went on, loyalist confidence in a decisive British victory faded into intense feelings of hate for their treacherous neighbors and a desire for revenge.

Ultimately, however, the American conflict dragged on longer than either side had imagined, and most Americans desired peace above all. Although both sides were outraged by the acts of the other, by the time the ink dried in Paris, bringing the war to a formal conclusion, a number of jealousies had subsided. The majority of confiscation acts

\textsuperscript{383} Richard D. Brown, “The Confiscation and Disposition of Loyalists’ Estates in Suffolk County, Massachusetts,” \textit{William and Mary Quarterly}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} ser., 21, no. 4 (October 1964): 534-550. Although the sum seems large, in reality the fiscal consequences were minimal. The social consequences, on the other hand, were rather large. Within the city of Boston, roughly 8% of property changed hands and roughly 11% of all the value of Boston realty.


\textsuperscript{385} “A Friend to Peace and the British Constitution,” \textit{Royal Pennsylvania Gazette}, April 28, 1778.
were far less wide-reaching than the laws in Massachusetts. In South Carolina, for example, only 232 people faced the full force of the law, and a fourth of the condemned were absentee landowners and British merchant houses. Similar laws in other states were amended after 1783 to target only the most outspoken and unpopular British sympathizers.\(^{386}\) Within the loyalist garrison towns like New York, more moderate heads also prevailed as many colonists worried increasing aggression was destroying a middle ground where reconciliation could be reached. Instead of seeking revenge, levelheaded loyalists argued for “guard[ing] against either extremes of despondence or rashness.”\(^{387}\)

While not all suspicions were buried, there were far fewer acts of retaliation during the postwar period than there had been during the war.

But even if Thomas worried about continuing retribution, his letters to New England suggest his most pressing concern was about his wife’s designs for a more permanent return. Having never warmed to her adoptive home, Mary Bradstreet appears to have spoken both to her husband and close friends about her desire to leave Halifax after the war. In his first letter to Massachusetts, Thomas described an interesting exchange of letters he had recently had with the Anglican minister of Annapolis Royal, Jacob Bailey.\(^{388}\) “I have just received a letter from Mr. Bailey,” Thomas explained to his wife, “wherein he informs me that about two months ago he heard of my being removed

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\(^{386}\) Brannon, *From Revolution to Reunion*, 35.


\(^{388}\) Bailey had fled his congregation in Pownalborough, Maine in the summer of 1779 after local patriots made a number of violent attacks against the loyalist Anglican minister. He landed first in Halifax where Dr. John Breynton, the Anglican minister at St. Paul’s and good friend of the Robie family, gave him assistance. Although Bailey left Halifax in October 1779, he appears to have remained in contact with a number of the Robie circle, including Jonathan Wiswall, Dr. Breynton, and Thomas Robie. See Julie Ross and Thomas Vincent, “BAILEY, JACOB,” DCB.
to Boston with the Family.” Robie could not fathom why Bailey would think he would return to Boston. “What could give rise to such a story I don’t know,” he pondered, “unless it was your talking of your intended visit sometime before you left.” While Robie had been opposed to the idea of return, the news he received from Annapolis suggested that his wife had spoken candidly of her intentions to bring the family back to Massachusetts. Robie did not scold his wife for spreading the idea that the family would repatriate, but in mentioning the odd correspondence, he made it clear that he maintained some level of unease concerning his wife’s travel back to New England. He hoped that by simply mentioning that the letter he received from Bailey was strange, he could demonstrate to his wife that her plan for a return was out of the question.

Thomas was not alone in his apprehension. As peace allowed refugees to imagine return, many loyalists throughout the empire noted with despair that some of their friends and relations had or were considering a return to their American homes. In the summer of 1783, his sister, the widow Mehetable Higginson, had come with the family to Halifax in May 1775, decided to return to Massachusetts rather than continue living in Halifax on her brother’s charity. Jonathan Sewall, after receiving a letter from Higginson in Massachusetts, joked from London, “When I saw your letter dated Salem…I was as much astonished as if it had been dated at Calcutta or on the moon.” Sewall’s surprise at his cousin’s return to Massachusetts reveals that in early 1783 few if any, loyalists seriously considered returning to the United States. But by the end of the 1780s, refugees were streaming out of Nova Scotia, mostly to the neighboring colony of New Brunswick,

389 Thomas Robie to Mary Bradstreet Robie, July 26, 1784, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
390 Jonathan Sewall to Mehitable Higginson, September 10, 1783, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
or across the Atlantic to the British Isles. Some families, however, looked to the United States. Rodger Viets, a Connecticut loyalist and Anglican minister at Digby, Nova Scotia, was so alarmed by the outpouring of colonists that he wrote to his friend in London describing “the great emigration from this province to the States.” In Shelburne, where census records reveal the most complete data tracking the rise and fall of the refugee population, there were 710 rate-paying citizens in the 1786 census. A decade later, the town only registered 125. Aware of his wife’s preference for New England over Nova Scotia, Robie undoubtedly worried she was hoping to join the ranks of those returning to Massachusetts.

If his first letter to New England was not clear enough, Robie remained constantly vigilant to head off any of his wife’s arguments about returning. While he hoped she would enjoy “the great plenty of the Necessaries and Conveniences of life… which N.E. has the advantage of N.S.,” he reminded her not to let these conveniences “lessen [her] desire of returning” to Halifax. Each letter to her reiterated his insistence that removal to New England was only a temporary fix. “I must repeat my desire,” he wrote forcefully to his wife, “that you find a [wet] Nurse for Miss Hannah” “as you are now in a Land flowing with Milk if not with Honey.” If Mary Bradstreet had considered remaining in

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392 Rodger Viets to Samuel Peters, October 12, 1787, Peters Family Papers, vol. 3, NSA.

393 Huskins, “Shelburnian Manners,” 166.

394 Thomas Robie to Mary Bradstreet Robie, July 13 and 24, 1784, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS. Emphasis his own. Thomas insistence that his wife find a wet nurse might also suggest that an inability to breastfeed without pain may have been part of Mary Bradstreet’s poor health. See Nora Doyle, “‘The Highest Pleasure of Which Woman's Nature Is Capable’: Breast-Feeding and
Massachusetts, her husband in Halifax was quick to dispel such notions. Thomas instructed his wife to set sail for Nova Scotia “by the first week of September” before the “violent gales” typical of early fall made the journey even more dangerous. While he wished his wife a speedy recovery, he wrote that he anticipated a happy reunion “when you do return.” Thomas’ continued emphasis on his wife’s return demonstrates that his primary concern was reminding his wife that he called the shots concerning the family’s future.

By August 8, Mary Bradstreet was well enough to write Thomas a short letter, but her response did little to quell her husband’s fears. Robie was confident that once his wife returned to New England, she would recognize how much better life in Halifax was than in their former American home and would “come back in good spirits.”395 To the contrary, Mary Bradstreet wrote that she found life in New England was far superior to her experience in Halifax. She assured Robie that if he joined her, “You would never wish yourself in H[alifa]x again.” Being back in New England confirmed what Mary Bradstreet had imagined all along, and having tasted happiness again for the first time in years, she had no desire to return to Nova Scotia. “In short you must come here or I shall elope again,” Bradstreet threatened her husband, “for I shall never be content to live in the way I have done there.”396 Her ultimatum was clear. She could never be satisfied living in Halifax, and if her husband refused to bring the family back to New England, she would continue to push for repatriation.

395 Thomas Robie to Mary Bradstreet Robie, 26, July 1784, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS. Emphasis his own.

396 Mary Bradstreet to Thomas Robie, August 8, 1784, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
Even though Mary Bradstreet was confident the family’s best interests lay in Massachusetts, during her travels in 1784, she faced two distinct challenges to repatriation. First, even within her family, she was alone in her desire to return to Massachusetts. Like her father, the younger Mary did not necessarily agree that the family could not find happiness in Nova Scotia. Mary had felt a sense of relief and joy similar to her mother’s when she landed back in New England. “I cannot pretend to tell you how we felt when we first saw land, or of my emotion of coming ashore,” she wrote to Hetty back in Halifax, “I am certain your heart will give you a much better idea than my pen.” But while she rejoiced in her family’s return to New England, her outlook on the future was starkly different from her mother’s. Mary had built a group of good friends in Halifax and still felt a strong connection to the loyalist community in exile. Her diary is full of entries describing how shared suffering had brought a many loyalist families closer together. Contemplating the happiness she felt on arriving in New England, and the joy she felt with her community in Halifax, she wrote, “I could be contented here [in Massachusetts] as formerly; however, I by no means wish it. My Halifax friends still have too much hold on my heart.”

Mary Robie had come to Nova Scotia at a much younger age than her mother, and she had grown up as an integral part of the community. While she recognized the happiness she felt being back in her native home, the bonds she had formed with fellow sufferers formed a much tighter grip on the young girl than on her mother.

Second, as a dutiful eighteenth-century woman Mary Bradstreet understood she could not simply return to Massachusetts on her own. Having used her position as a

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397 Mary Robie to Hetty Robie, July 20, 1784, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
concerned mother to convince her husband to let her travel back to New England for her and her child’s health, it would be nonsensical to then leave her family behind in Halifax. But more than just not wanting to be a hypocrite, Mary Bradstreet also recognized she would not be fully content in Massachusetts without those she loved. From New England she wrote to Thomas, “My love to the children. I hope you are attentive…tho [I am not] superstitious, [I am] anxious, and should anything happen, I should be more unhappy than if I had not left home.” Three of her children and her husband remained in Halifax, and she knew she belonged with them.

Recognizing the obstacles that continued to prevent the family’s repatriation, Mary Bradstreet relented. Assuring her husband that she was his still his loving and dutiful wife, she promised to return to Nova Scotia after the gales of September were over. But while she surrendered, she did not entirely abandon the idea of repatriation, nor was she willing to let her husband think he had won. She signed her last letter from Massachusetts, “You know I shall (not withstanding what I have said above) prefer being with you, wherever you think it will be best.” Further, she reminded him that in his efforts to provide for the family when they first came to Halifax, she had been fully supportive, and she subtly chastised him for not supporting her efforts. She also emphasized that in her travels to New England, she was not only recovering from her illness but also acting on his financial behalf. “You certainly forgot that I took the voyage for our mutuall benefit,” she scoffed. Although she was returning to Halifax, Mary Bradstreet was not folding to her husband’s will, nor was she going to give up her fight for repatriation.398

398 Mary Bradstreet Robie to Thomas Robie, August 8 and 20, 1784, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
The Robie Women Build Their New England Connections

Unfortunately for Mary Bradstreet’s ambitions for return, her family’s connection to Nova Scotia grew only tighter after coming back to Halifax. Some time in late 1784, Hetty Robie agreed to marry close family friend, and fellow Massachusetts refugee, Jonathan Sterns. Fifteen years Hetty’s elder, Sterns had been a frequent visitor to the Robie household, and as an established lawyer and political representative of the loyalist faction in Halifax, Thomas Robie looked favorably on his daughter’s connection. By December 1785, Hetty had given birth to her first child, and the Robies’ eldest son, Simon Bradstreet, was studying law under the direction of his new brother-in-law.399

At the same time, Thomas purchased property through his connection with fellow Marblehead exile Benjamin Marston in the growing settlement of St. John in the newly independent colony of New Brunswick. Marston encouraged Robie to bring his hardware business to New Brunswick, explaining that not only did Robie’s land sit on the “only Passage through which all the waters of that mighty [St. John] River flow into the Ocean,” but also that the new settlement had both “Good Soil & Good Government,” which “certainly exceed[s] you[rs] in Nova Scotia beyond all degrees of comparison.” Furthermore, Marston assured Robie, “The best People among you are all looking toward this New Province.”400 With favorable prospects, Thomas considered moving with other unhappy Nova Scotians to New Brunswick.401

399 On Sterns, see Barry Cahill, Philip Girard, Jim Philips eds., The Supreme Court of Nova Scotia, 1754-2004: From Imperial Bastion to Provincial Oracle (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 66-70, 99; MacKinnon, This Unfriendly Soil, 126-134. For the birth of the Robie’s first grandchild, Thomas Robie to Unknown, December 7, 1786, Robie-Sewall Family, MHS.

400 Benjamin Marston to Mary Robie, May 15, 1785, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS. Emphasis his own.

401 Condon, The Envy of the American States.
On top of all of this, in 1786 Thomas learned that the Massachusetts courts had ruled against his real estate claims, meaning that he could not recover the family’s Marblehead home. Early in 1775, Thomas had a difficult time collecting money owed to him and was thus unable to pay several debts. “Not knowing how the troubles there beginning would end,” Thomas, “voluntarily and unask’d,” mortgaged part of his real estate to Champion, Dickinson, and Co. for £800 “thinking it would be a security to them in case of the worst.” In the weeks that followed, however, the family was forced from town, and Robie explained that Champion, Dickinson, and Co. “never informed me whether they would or would not accept this mortgage.” Upon the war’s conclusion, he learned his creditors “took a formal possession of the Estate [and put] in a Tenant…in the person of William Burgess.” Although Robie sued to reclaim his estate, the company had strong ties to the state’s House of Representatives. Because the judges deciding the case were “entirely dependent for their salaries on the House of Representatives,” Robie believed he had been cheated out of his estate and condemned the whole affair as an unfair and “vexatious lawsuit” that ended “much worse than [he] had reason to hope for.”

With their Marblehead home lost and their ties to Nova Scotia increasing, Mary Bradstreet recognized she needed to develop a new strategy to convince her husband to bring the family, at least those not bound to Nova Scotia, back to New England. Knowing Thomas’ business had slowed since the conclusion of the war, Mary Bradstreet hoped to entice him with a financial opportunity. On her previous trip to New England, she

402 Thomas Robie to Unknown, December 7, 1786, Robie-Sewall Family, MHS.

403 An unfinished letter from Thomas to a partner suggests that his sales continued a steady downturn after because of a lack of investment from the British military. While Robie “still
recorded how the Massachusetts market was growing. “The town is upon the rise,” she explained of Marblehead in 1784, “all the men say on the wharf, ‘Oh if we had but Mr. Robie’s shop to go to.’” She reiterated these sentiments in 1787, and knowing Thomas was considering a move to the more lucrative market of St. John, she urged him to at least test the markets in New England. Thomas agreed to let his wife return to Marblehead to sell some products he was having trouble moving in Halifax. Mary Bradstreet, her daughters Mary and Hannah, and a young black servant boy named Prince sailed for Marblehead in October 1787.

Perhaps learning from the struggles of his wife’s first voyage, Robie was far more proactive in planning his family’s second trip to New England than he had been during the rushed visit of 1784. Most critically, Robie arranged for a distant relative, Joseph Sewall, to meet his wife and daughters upon their arrival and assist them in setting up shop. A newly established merchant on his own, Sewall acted as the family’s advisor, helping Mary Bradstreet collect debts owed to the family and settle outstanding credits, especially a rather large sum Robie owed the town. He also found the family lodging. In

hope[d] [for] better times for trade…[when] articles of export will gradually supply the place of that flood of money, which the Peace has put a stop to,” he was also concerned that profits would never return to the wartime levels. Thomas Robie to Ward Chipman[?], December 7, 1786, Robie-Sewall Family, MHS.

404 Mary Bradstreet Robie to Thomas Robie, 8 August 1784, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.

405 I use the word “servant” to preserve the family’s own explanation of the boy’s status. It is abundantly clear that Robies owned slaves in Halifax, but the young boy’s exact legal status is unclear. Most likely, the Robie’s brought a young boy back to Massachusetts because the state had outlawed slavery in 1783, and the boy’s age kept him dependent on the Robies even if he could not be legally enslaved. On the Robie’s ownership of slaves in Nova Scotia, see Mary Robie, diary, June 5-6, 1783, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS. On abolition in Massachusetts, see Chernoh M. Sesay Jr., “The Revolutionary Black Roots of Slavery’s Abolition in Massachusetts,” New England Quarterly 87, no. 1 (March 2014): 99-131. On the status of “servants” in revolutionary Nova Scotia, see Harvey Amani Whitfield, North to Bondage: Loyalist Slavery in the Maritimes (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2016).
her first letter to Halifax, Mary Bradstreet rejoiced in being once more at home with “all
the people here [who are] so glad to see us,” even if she was less than content paying £18
to lease a few rooms in a small house not far from their much preferable former home.406

Mary Bradstreet quickly established herself as a hardware vendor out of the same
home her family rented. By early November, she was writing back to Halifax about
business. Although they sold “not a farthing” the whole first week, by the second week,
she was making around five dollars a day, and she believed they could make much more
if her husband would send her some more hard-to-find items, including “brass files and
hinges.”407 While business was not as profitable as she hoped, she continually
emphasized how welcoming the townspeople were and encouraged her daughter to do the
same. “Every body in this Town would be glad to have you return,” Mary Robie
obligingly told her father, “former animosities were all forgot.”408 “Mr. Martin says you
would do much better here than where you are,” Mary Bradstreet wrote about one
competitor, “and so many others, they all say…your things are better than what they get
of others and you was honest.”409 In an effort to lure him away from Halifax, Mary
Bradstreet’s letters to her husband were repeatedly positive, even if business was not as
lucrative she had hoped.

Mary Robie, while remaining positive about the family’s welcome back, relayed a
much more sobering account of the business. While her mother had requested that more

406 Mary Bradstreet to Thomas Robie, November 1, 1787, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
Bradstreet was particularly perturbed because the man who occupied their old home, paid only
£24 a year to lease the whole house.

407 Mary Bradstreet to Thomas Robie, November 12, 1787, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.

408 Mary Robie to Thomas Robie, October 29, 1787, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.

409 Mary Bradstreet to Thomas Robie, November 1-5, 1787, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
items be sent from Halifax, the younger Mary believed it “more advisable” for her father to try and sell them in Nova Scotia as “everything of that kind is much lower here than at Halifax.” She also contradicted her mother’s description of their competitors. She worried about their sales, especially because she found it difficult to compete with Mr. Hale and Mr. Scooby, both of whom she noted, “Undersells every body.” “Every thing here sells under the sterling cost,” she explained and warned her father, “I find nothing that will bear so great a profit here as at Halifax.” While Mary Bradstreet was careful only to relay all the well wishes and positive news, his daughter’s intelligence more accurately described the low cost of goods and competitive market in New England.\(^4\)

Despite her pessimistic outlook, the younger Mary took control of the shop and began a close study of the market in New England. Throughout the early months of 1788, she continued to correspond with her father about the price of goods and requested that he send specific items she believed would easily sell in Marblehead. Her diligence paid off, and before long, her store was selling a good deal of hardware items imported from Halifax. Noting the tendency of other vendors, especially her close friend Joseph Sewall, to sell items “so cheap [that] others are forced to sell cheaper or not sell at all,” she only requested hardware she knew could not be found in other stores.\(^5\) Having sold all of the small and large pins Thomas had initially sent from Halifax, she requested he send more, along with “White Chapel Needles” that she believed “would sell quite well here.” She also advised her father to secure “knives and forks,” “Horn combs,” and “Knitting Needles.” She closely monitored other vendors, carefully learning what prices she could

\(^4\) Mary Bradstreet to Thomas Robie, November 17 and 24 1787, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.

\(^5\) Mary Bradstreet to Thomas Robie, February 3, 1788, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
charge to entice customers away from the competition while still asking for prices close
to those her father requested.

Even with her growing expertise in the dry goods business, Mary Robie longed
for Halifax. By the early spring months of 1788, Mary had been away from Nova Scotia
longer than she had ever been before, and her letters to her father began to reflect her
desire to return. “I hope that you continue to take your evening Walk whenever the
weather will admit of it,” Mary wrote to her father. She hoped he would remember her to
the many families he would visit while making his way through town. She concluded that
she intended to be back with her friends and family soon.412 In a letter addressed to Hetty,
Mary described the beautiful sights of the early spring. While the blooming flowers
brought her a sense of joy, she felt she could not be fully content. “Absent from my
Friends so dear,” she explained, “the most delightful scenes lose half their charms.”413 As
the months pressed on, Mary looked back to Halifax for her happiness.

Aware of her daughter’s growing desire to return to Nova Scotia, Mary Bradstreet
became increasingly anxious about their time in New England. She had become less
involved in the business as her daughter’s interest in the market increased, and if the
younger Mary decided it best to close shop and return to Halifax, there would be little her
mother would be able to do to stop it. She could, however, find a suitor for her unmarried
daughter. The younger Mary had developed a friendly contest with local competitor
Jonathan Sewall. Robie often joked to her father that Sewall’s expertise as a merchant
threatened to drive her business under. Sewall probably felt similarly. He had arrived in

412 Mary Robie to Thomas Robie, March 25, 1788, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.

413 Mary Robie to Hetty Sterns, May 5, 1788, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
Marblehead from Boston in November 1785 with “a small assortment of goods” which
did not exceed £300. By 1788, Sewall estimated his annual profits to be a modest “£800
to £900” and total property worth another £900. Although he only turned a small profit
each year, Sewall recognized that combining his venture with Robie’s would help corner
the market in the region and give him access to better quality goods coming in from
Halifax. He no doubt cared for Mary but also recognized that their merger would benefit
both families’ business operations. Sewall proposed marriage to the twenty-five-year-old
Mary in early July 1788.

Mary Bradstreet appears to have played a significant role in encouraging Sewall
to propose. Although Sewall had wanted to ask Mary to be his wife, he was aware that
Mary’s continued connection to friends and family in Halifax made a New England
marriage undesirable. When Sewall wrote to Thomas in Nova Scotia, he explained his
hesitations, but also noted that Mary Bradstreet had encouraged him to ask for her
daughter’s hand. “I should not have presum’d Sir, to make this application,” he wrote, “if
I had not had some degree of encouragement from Mrs. Robie, for whom I shall ever
entertain the most grateful regard.” Mary Bradstreet also wrote to Halifax explaining she
had already given her consent, and she warned her husband, “You will not object.” While
she admitted, “It will be a hard blow to me and all her friends at H[alifax] to part with
her,” she also stressed, “we should all give up self when she is to be the gainer.” She
implored her husband to remember the “endearments of a tender father” and consent to
his daughter’s lasting happiness.414 While the business venture had been less than
successful, it had produced a marriage. Mary Bradstreet again emphasized the good of

414 Joseph Sewall to Thomas Robie, July 29, 1788, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
the family and played to her husband’s role as father to cement a connection back to New England.

Thomas seemed to understand that his distance from Massachusetts meant his wife and daughter had to act without his consent. He also agreed the marriage was in his daughter’s best interest. But as a dutiful father, he was sure to write his daughter with “one or two hints” regarding “that new relation you now sustain.” Perhaps reflecting some of the quarrels he had with his own wife, Thomas instructed his daughter, “Never affect to have your own way or persist with your husband by any other method than a decent and mild endeavor to persuade him…[and] by all means give way rather than appear to contest.” While not out of line with eighteenth-century marriage ideals, Thomas’ comments to his daughter were likely born out of some of his own frustrations with his own marriage. Perhaps he also recognized that through the new union his wife had finally gained the upper hand.

A Final Push for Repatriation

With her daughter wed in Massachusetts, Mary Bradstreet arrived back in Halifax in early November 1788 with a tangible connection to New England and an “exceedingly anxious” desire to hear all the news coming from Massachusetts. Back in Halifax, she again took up her visiting practices but remained fixated on her return to New England. She wrote of her daughter’s many friends, who reprimanded her for “leaving such a fine woman…in New England.” She jokingly hoped those upset with her would “punish her”

415 Thomas Robie to Mary Sewall, November 17, 1788, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
416 Thomas Robie to Mary Sewall, November 17, 1788, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
by sending her back. With a familial link to New England, Mary Bradstreet also felt emboldened to push her husband for a permanent return. Although she acknowledged that her friends and relations “don’t like [when] I should talk of returning,” she already had plans to come see Mary in the spring and insisted her husband come as well.\footnote{Mary Bradstreet to Mary Sewall, November 13, 1788, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.}

Considering the wonderful time she had in Marblehead during the past year she criticized their previous decision to leave. “What fools we were to leave such a place,” she explained of the couple’s previous willingness to abandon their New England home.\footnote{Mary Bradstreet to Thomas Robie, July 28, 1788, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.}

With his daughter wed in New England, Thomas too began to see the merit in repatriation. His business connection in Massachusetts provided him with some extra income, but even though Mary Bradstreet brought back some items, which allowed Robie to “alter the shop much for the better” and stock it “full of goods,” business in Halifax remained slow. Mary Bradstreet left Halifax again after a short six months stay, to help her daughter in Marblehead through her first pregnancy. This time, she brought her youngest son, Thomas, with her to help care for the young Hannah. Although it is unclear what arrangements she had worked out with her husband, with most of her family back in New England, she probably had little intention of returning to Nova Scotia.\footnote{Mary Sewall to Thomas Robie, May 12, 1789, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.}

Mary Bradstreet’s voyage in 1789 marked her last trip between Massachusetts and Nova Scotia. The same day she arrived in Marblehead, she wrote back to her husband in Halifax, “If you ever expect to see me again, you must come here. It will be greatly for your interest to come and the sooner the better.”\footnote{Mary Bradstreet to Thomas Robie, May 21, 1789, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.} She had been describing
the superiority of life in New England over Nova Scotia since her first trip back in 1784, but with her eldest daughter married, she had the concrete connection she needed to build a life for the family in Massachusetts. During this trip, Mary Bradstreet acted much differently than she had on her previous visits. In order to convince her husband to let her run the small shop in the autumn months of 1787, she had promised she would live frugally, even refusing to buy “a fine turkey [for] 8 coppers a pound” on Thanksgiving, assuring Thomas “she was not so extravagant” as to spend their small earnings on something so trivial. But in 1789, she found it less prudent to live economically and more important to build a home for the family. Most bothersome for Mary Bradstreet was her less than ideal boarding situation. Rather than “living with and upon” her daughter and son-in-law, she rented a few rooms for her and the two children in a nearby home where they lived alongside another family. She despised “living with another person’s family” and begged her husband to purchase her a home. She reiterated to him that he “would do as well as there,” and since “the town increases dayly,” he might even do better. In many ways, her arguments were the same; however, with her daughter in Massachusetts, she became all the more insistent. “You must come. I will not be denied,” she demanded.421

Thomas remained unmoved in Halifax. Approaching September 1789, Mary Bradstreet worried he might cut off her funding. She could not continue in the rented home through the winter months without his financial support, and she prayed her husband would not force her “to cross the water this fall.” Growing more desperate, she once again championed the collective family’s best interests. She had been unable to find a proper apprenticeship for the young Thomas “without paying a board,” and she noted

421 Mary Bradstreet to Thomas Robie, November 20 and May 24, 1789, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
she was “afraid he will be ruined if he remains in idle state.” Although Mary Sewall had given birth to a healthy baby girl, Mary Bradstreet explained that her daughter was “not so well as I wish she was,” and begged to be allowed to stay longer. Considering all the ties she had to New England she wrote dramatically to her husband, “[I] had much rather die” than return to Halifax.\(^{422}\) She seemed to recognize that if she could not convince her husband to come to Massachusetts now, she would never be able to.

The unexpected death of Mary Sewall’s child that October delayed Mary Bradstreet’s return to Halifax and may have finally demonstrated to Thomas that his wife was never going to give up her insistence on repatriation. Thomas agreed to leave Halifax sometime in late 1789. He landed in Portsmouth, New Hampshire in the early weeks of June 1790. Although long opposed to repatriation, upon arriving, he echoed his wife’s sentiments on the superiority of New England. “I can’t be but took with the surprising contrast between New England and New Scotland,” he said of initial impressions, “for although the necessities of life were vastly lower [in Halifax], the difference is yet astonishingly great.” For Thomas, it was only after his disembarkation in New England that he recognized the folly of his past stubbornness. While he admitted he once held “a partiality” for the city of Halifax, upon returning to New England he mocked the foolishness of the “hard inhabitants” of Nova Scotia and their insistence on building lives within the British Empire.\(^{423}\)

\(^{422}\) Mary Bradstreet to Thomas Robie, August 27, 1789, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.

\(^{423}\) Thomas Robie to Mary Bradstreet, June 12, 1790, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS. To mock the inhabitants of Nova Scotia, Thomas chose to quote from Alexander Pope’s “Of the Nature and State of Man, with respect to Himself as an Individual,” “What happier natures shrink at with affright; the hard inhabitant contends it right.”
After Thomas landed in New England, none of the family expressed any desire to return to Nova Scotia. Even Mary Sewall, who had worried about missing her friends after her marriage, believed the widespread happiness she found in her new home made it “unnecessary to make a fair comparison” between life in Massachusetts and Nova Scotia.\textsuperscript{424} The family returned to life much as it had been before their forced exile. The Sewalls eventually moved their young family to Boston, while her parents settled in Salem, where Thomas began another small hardware business.\textsuperscript{425} For Hetty, who remained behind in Halifax, it must have felt as if her prophecy of “losing her dear sister” had been fulfilled and expanded to encompass the entire family. With the family removed to New England and her husband continually traveling to London in search of political appointment, she was left almost entirely alone. Upon learning that her father would also leave Halifax, Hetty fell into despair. She called the removal of her family to New England “a loss which I shall ever deprecate as one of the greatest in my life.”\textsuperscript{426}

**Conclusion**

Mary Bradstreet and her eldest daughter played a pivotal role in bringing the Robie family back to Massachusetts. Having left Halifax first to escape the disease that afflicted both her and the newborn child, Mary Bradstreet became only further convinced that the family could only find true happiness at home in New England. But she was also aware her husband would not be easily swayed. Returning to Massachusetts in 1787, both Mary Bradstreet and Mary Robie became active agents for the family business in New

\textsuperscript{424} Mary Sewall to Hetty Sterns, February 5, 1799, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.

\textsuperscript{425} Joseph Sewall to Mary Sewall, August 15, 1797, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.

\textsuperscript{426} Hetty Sterns to Mary Sewall, October 26, 1789, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
England. The younger Mary in particular, became a quick study of the hardware trade and was able to both record prices and sell several pieces for profit. But even as she excelled in business, she began to yearn for a return to her friends and family in Nova Scotia. Worried she may not have another chance to return to Massachusetts, Mary Bradstreet encouraged business associate Joseph Sewall to marry her daughter and created a permanent tie back to New England. The role these women played in bringing their family back to Massachusetts demonstrates how refugee women did not passively accept exile but worked to build better futures for their families.

In Massachusetts, both Mary Bradstreet and Mary Sewall took on more private lives than they had in loyalist Halifax. Mary Bradstreet replaced visiting strangers with long walks in her garden where she could observe “the beautiful presence of the trees in full bloom [and the] effect on [her] grateful heart.” Mary Sewall traded serving at the funerals of unknown refugees with caring for her growing family. She grew increasingly focused on the household, especially organizing the hired staff, which she described as “careless, dirty, and lazy” without her supervision. Having removed herself from the hardware trade and immersed herself in the home, Mary took pride in her new role as mother. Her marriage to Sewall proved especially lucrative. Joseph went on to have a successful career as a merchant and later became treasurer for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The couple’s second son, Samuel Edmund Sewall, had an even more distinguished career. He served in the state senate, helped found the Massachusetts Anti-

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427 Mary Bradstreet to Thomas Robie, May 24, 1789, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.

428 Mary Sewall to Mary Bradstreet, February 13, 1789, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
Slavery Society in 1831, and was one of the first supporters of *The Liberator*, a small newspaper run by friend, and fellow abolitionist, William Lloyd Garrison.\(^{429}\)

The family’s fortunes in Halifax were more mixed. Through an apprenticeship with his brother-in-law, Simon Bradstreet established himself as a lawyer and one of the leading politicians of the loyalist faction in Nova Scotia.\(^{430}\) Hetty, on the other hand, felt her grief only expanded. A political rival savagely beat her husband to death in the streets of Halifax after a disagreement in 1798.\(^{431}\) To further worsen matters, shortly after Sterns’ death, Mary received word from Halifax that Hetty was both severely ill and advanced in pregnancy. Mary wrote to her grieving sister, hoping she would join the family in New England. But Hetty would not join her family because her “long residence at Halifax” had created “a strong attachment” between her the city. Hetty died in Halifax removed from her family.\(^{432}\) Only the youngest Robie continued to maintain relationships between New England and Nova Scotia into the nineteenth century. Having never married, Hannah spent her life traveling between her brother’s residences in Nova Scotia and her favorite nephew’s home in Boston.\(^{433}\)

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\(^{431}\) On the disagreement between Sterns and Attorney-General Richard Uniacke, see Peter Orlando Hutchinson ed., *The Diaries and Letters of His Excellency Thomas Hutchinson, Esq* (London: 1883), 342.

\(^{432}\) Mary Sewall to Joseph Sewall, June 11, 1798, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.

CHAPTER 5
“A COUNTENANCE OF INSENSIBILITY AND A HEART UNMOVED”:
THE RACIAL LIMITS OF SUFFERING

Mary Robie was no stranger to the Halifax burying ground. Each time she stood at a graveside, she could not shake the idea that death while in exile carried a unique finality. And no matter how routine the funerals became to her weekly regimen, Robie was never able to overcome the sadness that inevitably overwhelmed her sensitive disposition. Considering the seemingly inescapable despair she felt as she contemplated the death of friends and strangers alike, this experience was distinct from the others because it provoked relief rather than the usual despondency. After observing the burial of a young black servant girl who lived in the family’s household, Robie noted, “I was far from being affected… Death appear’d without his terrors, the friendly hand that puts a period to pain.” Unlike the devastating grief or crushing dread she felt at the graveside of fellow white refugees, Robie saw the young servant girl’s death as a merciful release—even if the girl had only been sick for a little over a week.434

That Mary Robie saw the death of a black servant as distinct from the demise of one of her fellow white loyalists is unsurprising. After all, even the most progressive eighteenth-century white minds believed blacks and whites were inherently destined for

434 Mary Robie, diary, June 5-6, 1783, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA [hereafter MHS].
different paths in life, as well as in death. But perhaps recognizing her own insensitivity, Robie felt as if she needed to justify why this girl’s death left her feeling differently than all the others. “Is it not natural to suppose I wished her suffering to end?” Robie asked herself rhetorically. As the girl came closer to death, Robie noted, “I earnestly desired, I almost say pray’d for it.” In sharp contrast to the pity she felt for the woman buried “in a strange place, unknown and un lamented,” or the fear that struck her during her own brother’s brush with death, she explained how she approached the servant girl’s passing with “a countenance of insensibility and a heart unmoved.” Robie even admitted that the girl’s death was a welcome relief from her own anguish. After learning the girl had died, she made a quick note in her diary: “I felt a burden remov’d from my mind.”

While the contrast between Robie’s feelings might be unsurprising, her need to minimize black suffering highlights the racial limits of shared grief and fellow feeling in loyalist Nova Scotia. The contrast between how Robie felt about her fellow white loyalists and her feelings toward black refugees helps illuminate the subtle ways in which loyalists could use fellow feeling, or lack thereof, to deny commonality between suffering

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436 Mary Robie, diary, June 6, 1783, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
whites and blacks in Nova Scotia. The story of the young girl’s death also sheds light on the Robie family’s way of dealing with slavery in Nova Scotia and suggests that loyalists were more entangled with slavery, both while in exile and during repatriation than once imagined.

Although the northern climate made plantation agriculture nearly impossible in Nova Scotia, both pre-revolutionary settlers and white loyalists relied on a sizable enslaved population for both labor and domestic work. Owners put enslaved people to work clearing the rocky soil of the Nova Scotia countryside or working to repair the slowly failing series of dams left in disrepair after the removal of the Acadians. In the cities, slaves worked equally laborious jobs hauling goods to the docks. As Nova Scotia had no official laws on slavery, loyalist masters endeavored to keep the legislature from abolishing it. In contrast to the neighboring New England states, slavery was not formally abolished in Nova Scotia until 1821.

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437 In this chapter I refer to the black population who fled the American states as both refugees and loyalists following the lead of James St. G. Walker who noted that these people often referred to themselves as loyalist.

438 While it’s difficult to assess the size of the prerevolutionary black population, studies suggest the loyalist refugees brought with them between 1,500 and 2,000 free and enslaved African Americans from the southern American colonies during the war. See Bonnie Huskins, “New Hope” in Shelburne, Nova Scotia: Loyalist Dreams in the Journal of British Engineer William Booth, 1780s-90s,” in The Consequences of Loyalism: Essays in Honor of Robert M. Calhoun, Rebecca Brannon and Joseph S. Moore (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2019), 118-119.

The free black population of Nova Scotia fared little better. As the loyalists grew increasingly disillusioned with both the colonial government’s apparent lack of interest in the plight of refugees and the lack of economic opportunities in the region, many refugees turned their anger toward the free black communities. The black settlement at Birchtown, just outside Shelburne, became the target of white violence as surrounding communities blamed black workers for unemployment and low wages. In urban areas, both refugees and pre-revolutionary settlers feared the black population brought with them disease—including smallpox—and forcefully discouraged black loyalists from living within the city. A number of free black loyalists built their homes in embankments around Point Pleasant on the southern tip of the peninsula, which lay just beyond the limits of white Halifax. While these families may have found a reprieve from white attention, their small huts offered little protection from the Atlantic gales that swept across the Point. These people may have been free, but they found that life in post-revolutionary Nova Scotia proved to be just as violent and restricting as life in the American states.⁴⁴⁰

In an effort to make two contributions to the study of free and enslaved blacks during the Revolutionary Era, this chapter explores the Robie family’s involvement with enslaved people both in loyalist Halifax and in post-revolutionary Massachusetts after their return from exile. First, as Mary Robie’s thoughts on the death of the family’s young servant demonstrate, although the community of suffering that refugee women

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helped create could unite a diverse group of refugees, white loyalists gave grief racial boundaries. As Joanne Pope Melish notes, “‘Difference’ was the cornerstone of slavery in the New England colonies as everywhere else in the Americas.”441 But in loyalist Nova Scotia, both white and black refugees suffered, even if not equally, because of their allegiance.442 As Maya Jasanoff noted, the black settlement at Birchtown was “parallel Loyalist community” to the white settlement at Shelburne. Although the black settlers were not equal to the whites at Shelburne, the white loyalists would have seen a large free African settlement as yet another reminder of the difference between their native homes and Nova Scotia, and may have possibly even recognized that as refugees, both shared a common fate.443 In order to “other” the black experience and reestablish difference, white loyalists actively minimalized the suffering of their black counterparts. Although this process was at least in part subconscious, when white loyalists like Mary Robie categorized black suffering as somehow different than their own misery, they created two separate categories of hardship, thereby excluding their black counterparts from the community of suffering.444 When the visible despair of black refugees challenged the


442 In many ways, the black population was actually more loyal than the white refugees. Roughly 1/3 of the black refugees had served among the British lines during the war, and nearly all held personal loyalties to the British cause because British decrees had offered freedom. See Philip D. Morgan and Andrew Jackson O’Shaughnessy, “Arming Black Slaves in the American Revolution” Arming Slaves: From Classical Times to the Modern Age, eds. Christopher Leslie Brown and Philip D. Morgan (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 200.


white monopoly on hardship, white loyalists responded with targeted violence to reinforce the boundaries of their own vulnerable community.445

Second, this chapter examines the connection between slaveholding in the Canadian Maritimes and the continuation of slavery in New England after the Revolution. As Harvey Amani Whitfield notes, many loyalists took their enslaved property with them into exile, re-enslaved free blacks in Nova Scotia, and vehemently defend their rights to own slaves in the Maritimes through the 1820s.446 But repatriating loyalists also took human property back to the American states after the war. Although the institution was waning in New England after the war, as Melish demonstrates, the end of slavery in the region was “ambiguous” and “protracted.”447 During their return to New England after the Revolution, the Robie family appears to have used New Englanders’ uncertainty about the future of slavery to their advantage. During Mary Bradstreet and her daughters’ second trip back to Massachusetts, they brought with them a young black servant boy named Prince.448 While Prince’s exact legal status is unclear, he appears to have been around ten years old and would have been entirely dependent upon the Robies, which the family seems to have used to keep the boy in their servitude. Prince’s story only further proves that so-called servants working in loyalist homes in Nova Scotia were

445 The most infamous of these attacks was a series of riots that broke out in July 1784 when the residents of Shelburne attacked neighboring Birchtown. Although scholars posit that frustrated whites attacked the nearby town due to depressed wages and a lack of resources, these accounts often omit that Shelburne residents also targeted sympathetic whites like William Booth who saw more in common with the free black laborers than he did with some of the more elite white loyalist settlers. Huskins, “New Hope,” 116.
446 Whitfield, North to Bondage, chapter 5.
447 Disowning Slavery, 7, 64-83.
448 Mary Robie, diary, June 5-6, 1783, MHS.
more enslaved than free, and his removal to New England illuminates how white families in post-revolutionary Massachusetts were complicit in continuing slavery through more subtle forms of ownership—even after the institution was largely outlawed.449

Like other studies of free and enslaved people of African descent in late eighteenth-century, this examination of the Robie family and the enslaved people who labored in their home is drawn from a fragmented archival record. In areas where the sources are silent, I supplement the Robies’ experience with similar documented instances to build the most complete narrative possible. Although this investigation necessitates a certain amount of speculation, this chapter both demonstrates how black loyalists complicated the narrative that white refugees wanted to tell about suffering and loyalism and examines how the Revolution, exile, and repatriation shaped the lives of both white loyalists and their enslaved property.

“Our slumbers be as sweet on a bed of straw as of down”: The Racial Boundaries of the Community of Suffering

The Robie family’s connection to slavery was intimately intertwined with the Revolution and their subsequent exile. Slavery was common in the bustling colonial port of Marblehead, Massachusetts. One of the wealthiest colonial towns before the Revolution, Marblehead had been built by both sailors and traders involved with two important seaborne industries: cod fishing and the increasingly lucrative shipping

449 According to the census of 1800, there were at least 1,488 enslaved people still living in New England at the turn of the century; however, as Melish also notes, “In New England, the effect of [the Revolution on slavery] was fatal…[the Revolution] disrupted patterns of production and trade in the very areas in which slave labor was most heavily engaged.” Although formal law had not abolished the institution of slavery when the Robies returned with Prince, slave ownership was declining. See Disowning Slavery, 56.
business, both of which relied on black labor. Over time, Marblehead became home to a number of free African Americans, many of whom were transient and made their living on the sea, as well as a sizeable enslaved population. Runaway slave advertisements suggest that although the majority of the enslaved population of Marblehead was owned by a few of the town’s most wealthy residents—among them representative to the state legislature John Gallison and businessman Nicholas Bartlett—less wealthy residents also owned slaves. In July 1770, James Mugford placed an advertisement in the *Boston Gazette and Country Journal* offering a reward of four dollars and associated expenses for the return of a young slave woman. Although Mugford was a ship’s captain, four dollars represented a considerable sum and suggests that the runaway was a valuable part of his estate. In February 1772, fisherman Christopher Bubier offered a five-dollar

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452 Gallison offered to pay eight dollars plus associated fees for the return of his runaway slave, while Bartlett offered a similar reward for the return of his slave Caesar. See *Boston Evening-Post*, November 11, 1768 and *Essex Gazette*, February 2, 1772. On the usefulness of runaway slave advertisements, see David Waldstreicher, “Reading the Runaways: Self-Fashioning, Print Culture, and Confidence in Slavery in the Eighteenth-Century Mid-Atlantic,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser. 56, no. 2 (April 1999): 243-272.

453 *Boston Gazette and Country Journal*, July 2, 1770. Mugford would gain nation-wide fame during the Revolution for leading a daring capture of the HMS *Hope*, a British “powder ship” *Hope* bound for Boston in May 1776, during which he was shot and killed. See Thomas Jefferson
reward, more than half a month’s wage for a New England mariner, for the return of one of his runaway slaves.\textsuperscript{454} Both of these advertisements conclude with a warning to the many captains passing through Marblehead, who were eager to exploit the runaways’ desperation by hiring them on their ships for low wages.

By the mid-1770s, the Robies were among the more elite families of the town, but do not appear to have owned slaves. Unlike other business owners, Thomas Robie did not purchase slave labor to assist in his hardware business, nor does the family appear to have relied on black labor within their household. The answer as to why the Robies differed from their Marblehead peers may lie in Thomas’ precipitous rise to wealth in the years leading up to his ultimate demise. Robie was born in 1730, the youngest son of Dr. Thomas Robie Sr., who had died only months before his son’s birth.\textsuperscript{455} The son of a Boston constable, Robie Sr. was admitted to Harvard, where he graduated in 1708.\textsuperscript{456} After teaching for a short stint in Watertown, he returned to Harvard where he served as a fellow, librarian, and tutor until 1723, when he left to practice medicine in Salem. Robie’s scientific pursuits, especially his observation of a solar eclipse on November 27, 1727—which he summarized in a newspaper article entitled “For the Entertainment of


\textsuperscript{455} New England Weekly Journal, September 1, 1729.

\textsuperscript{456} Oliver Ayer Roberts, History of the Military Company of the Massachusetts... (Boston: Alfred Mudge & Son, Printers, 1895), 274.
the Country and the Promoting of Knowledge”—made him among the most well-respected names in early American science.\textsuperscript{457} Despite his renown, when Robie Sr. died suddenly at the age of 41, he left his newborn son very little in the form of an inheritance.\textsuperscript{458}

But what the newborn Thomas lacked in a patrimony, he made up for in familial connections. The young Robie had a number of influential relatives, especially on his mother Mehitable Sewall’s side, and given his lifelong friendship with his cousin Jonathan, who was also left without an inheritance at a young age, it is probable that Thomas Jr. and his older sister were brought up in Boston alongside a number of their Sewall relatives.\textsuperscript{459} Although Robie lacked the influential Sewall surname that provided his cousin Jonathan with so many advantages, his close association with the Sewalls paid dividends throughout his life. Unable to follow his cousin to Harvard, Robie apprenticed with the Boston hardware merchant John Spooner, leaving some time during the mid-1750s to open his own shop in neighboring Marblehead.\textsuperscript{460} Robie’s fortunes changed for

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\item \textsuperscript{458} An advertisement for the auction of Dr. Thomas Robie’s “very valuable books” suggest that in order to pay for the young Robie’s upbringing and education, the family needed to sell the elder Robie’s expansive collection. \textit{New England Weekly Journal}, September 1, 1729.
\item \textsuperscript{459} Jonathan Sewall’s father, who bore the name, and Mehitable’s were both the siblings of Judge Stephen Sewall, and given Thomas Robie and Jonathan Sewall’s life long friendship, it is likely both were brought up together in Boston under the patronage of their uncle. See Carol Berkin, \textit{Jonathan Sewall: Odyssey of an American Loyalist} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), \textit{Jonathan Sewall}, 2-4.
\item \textsuperscript{460} On Robie’s early life, \textit{The Diary of William Bently: Pastor of the East Church Salem, Massachusetts}, vol. 4, January, 1811- December, 1819 (Salem, MA: The Essex Institute, 1914), 73. John Spooner was a wealthy Boston trader with connections to Thomas Robie Jr.’s grandfather. On Spooner, see Deborah Navas, \textit{Murdered by His Wife: An Absorbing Tale of}
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the better around 1758 when he married Mary Bradstreet, the youngest daughter of the Rev. Simon Bradstreet. Aside from being a descendant of the famed Massachusetts governor, Bradstreet was among the wealthiest men in Marblehead. He had been elected pastor of Marblehead’s Second Congregational Church in 1738, succeeding the Rev. Edward Holyoke, who left to become president of Harvard. Bradstreet received an annual salary of £140 and built a grand home in town.\footnote{Clifford Shipton, ed. Biographical Sketches of Those Who Attended Harvard College in the Classes 1726-1730 with Biographical and other Notes. (Westmoreland, NH: Hurley Books Inc, 1951). Although it is unclear exactly how Robie came into favor with Bradstreet’s daughter, it is likely that Holyoke, who had been a good friend of Dr. Thomas Robie Sr. introduced the two. See “The Diary of Samuel Sewall: 1674-1729, vol. 2, 1699-1700-1714,” in Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, vol. 5, Fifth Series,” (Boston: 1829), 398.}

Shortly after his marriage, Robie began to expand his import business from simple hardware items, including tin plates and nails, to a range of merchandise from cheese and glass to stationery and gunpowder—all of which he sold from his shop at the bottom of Training Field Hill in Marblehead.\footnote{John Mein, A State of the Importations from Great Britain into the Port of Boston from the Beginning of Jan. 1769 to Aug. 16, 1769... (Boston: 1769), 92-96; Essex Gazette, May 21, 1771.}

Although Robie’s business would have earned him a comfortable living, it was his important connections that elevated him into the orbit of the town’s elite. Robie’s close friend and cousin, Jonathan Sewall, became an early ally of rising political star Thomas Hutchinson, who took office as Massachusetts Lieutenant-Governor in 1761.\footnote{On the political controversy that surrounded Hutchinson’s appointment and Sewall’s fidelity to the rising political star, see Berkin, Jonathan Sewall, chapters 3 and 6.}

Although Hutchinson’s authority in Massachusetts had been waning since he assumed the role of acting governor in 1769, Sewall used his position of influence to have Robie

appointed as Justice of the Peace for Essex County in early May 1770. But it was the death of his father-in-law, Simon Bradstreet, in 1771 that significantly altered Robie’s future. As executor of the Bradstreet estate, Robie amassed a small fortune. Using his newly acquired wealth, he moved his family from the smaller shop on Training Field Hill to the town center, where he purchased a substantial brick home alongside some of the other Marblehead elite. It was from this home that Robie also ran his business.

If Robie’s new wealth was more directly connected to his wife’s ancestry, he continued to take most of his cues from his Sewall relatives, especially concerning enslaved property. While Simon Bradstreet left his daughter Mary and her husband a small fortune, he bequeathed his two slaves, Phillis and her son Chance, to his daughter Rebecca and her new husband Isaac Story, who would also succeed him as minister of the Second Congregational Church. Growing up around the Sewall family, Robie probably harbored mixed feelings about the institution of slavery. In 1700, Samuel Sewall, Robie’s great-uncle, published The Selling of Joseph—a publication which was among the first pamphlets in North America to condemn the slave trade. Although the work fell into relative obscurity until being republished in 1863, it embodied New Englanders’ growing unease with the region’s continuing participation in the slave trade.

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464 Boston Chronicle, Aug 17, 1769. It is unclear why Sewall had his untrained cousin appointed; however, it was likely to increase Sewall’s own authority in order to buttress his benefactor Hutchinson’s waning authority in the Essex County.

465 Essex Gazette, April 14, 1772.

466 Essex Gazette, December 12, 1772.

trade. But not all New Englanders agreed with Sewall’s position. Even within the Sewall family, there were some objectors. Samuel’s brother, for example, placed a series of advertisements in the *Boston Gazette* in 1728 offering “three very likely and healthy negro girls and one negro man to be sold” along with “good Barbados sugar.” Apprenticing with John Spooner in Boston, Robie would have also worked alongside Spooner’s two slaves, Prince and Venus.

While Robie would not have had the capital to purchase slaves when he first opened his hardware business, as his fortunes grew, the fact that he did not own slaves—or may have actively opposed inheriting them—set him apart from the other wealthy gentry of Marblehead. Perhaps Jonathan Sewall, upon whom Robie often relied for legal advice, urged his increasingly wealthy cousin to avoid slave labor. In 1769, Sewall represented an enslaved man, named only as James in the court records, in a lawsuit against his owner, Boston rum importer Richard Lechmere. James was suing his owner for his freedom, and Sewall argued that under the colony’s charter, all people born or residing in the colony were free. Lechmere settled out of court before the case could go to

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472 Robie often relied on Sewall to settle trade disputes. After losing one case, in which Robie questioned Sewall’s advice, he eventually admitted to his cousin that the law was “too profound to be fathom’d by… the lay gens.” See Berkin, *Jonathan Sewall*, 17.
trial, and even paid the now-free James £2 to cover Sewall’s fees.\textsuperscript{473} Although Sewall’s legal career evaporated following his flight from Massachusetts, his two sons became influential lawyers and politicians in Quebec, where they supported antislavery legislation, suggesting that Sewall had had a longstanding opposition to slavery.\textsuperscript{474}

Robie’s feelings about slavery are unknown, but following Lord Mansfield’s ruling in 1772 that slavery had no precedent in English common law, he probably appreciated his cousin’s advice to avoid investing in human chattel.\textsuperscript{475}

Like so many other aspects of Robie’s life, the Revolutionary War and the family’s resulting exile changed his relationship with slavery. Thomas’ early arrival in Halifax allowed him to profit from the seemingly endless influx of capital into Halifax during the war years, and the Robie family’s personal writings reveal that they employed at least one black family who lived in their home. Unlike later loyalists who brought their slaves with them to Nova Scotia, the Robies do not appear to have carried human property north. Instead, the Robies became slave owners for the first time while in exile.

Because no set laws on slavery existed in Nova Scotia, loyalists and other whites intentionally labeled their human property “servants” to disguise their status.\textsuperscript{476} Mary Robies’ writings provide a few illustrations of how Flora and other servants operated in the home. In early June 1783, Mary recorded how Flora worked to take care of the


\textsuperscript{474} F. Murray Greenwood and James H. Lambert, “SEWELL, JONATHAN,” DCB.

\textsuperscript{475} George Van Cleve, “‘Somerset's Case’ and Its Antecedents in Imperial Perspective,” \textit{Law and History Review} 24, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 601-645.

\textsuperscript{476} Whitfield, \textit{North to Bondage}, 119.
youngest Robie child, who had recently come down with measles. This was not the first time nine-year-old Tomas had been sick, and it is reasonable to assume that Flora had helped care for him during several other illnesses. But while she tended to Thomas, Flora’s own young daughter, another servant who worked for the Robies, came down with a fever, which confined her for a week and caused fits that were so violent that Robie recorded, “We did not expect she could live.” Three days later, the young girl was dead, and Mary detailed how the Robies paid to have the young servant girl buried.

Robie’s description of Flora’s work caring for the sickly Thomas and the death of her own child reveals how the “servants” in the Robie household operated more like slaves. Likely, Flora’s child became ill because of her mother’s interaction with the sickly Thomas, demonstrating how enslaved people’s work put both themselves and their families at risk. Robie’s intimate knowledge of the young girl’s rapid deterioration suggests that Flora and her daughter lived alongside their white masters inside the Robie family home. Finally, the teenage Mary Robie noted in her diary, “We had a funeral from the family,” suggesting that the family felt responsible for the burial of the young girl who lived in their home. While she felt no remorse for the young girl’s death, like other New England slaveholders, she considered Flora and her daughter to be a part of

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477 Mary Robie, diary, June 1, 1783, MHS.

478 Thomas Robie was a sickly child often confined to his room. On many occasions, his eldest sister believed he would not survive another sickness. Ultimately, Thomas died shortly after the family returned to Marblehead on January 2, 1792 at the age of eighteen.

479 Mary Robie, diary, June 2, 1783, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS. On the importance of enslaved women as nurses, especially to young children, see Jessie W. Parkhurst, “The Role of the Black Mammy in the Plantation Household,” Journal of Negro History 23, no. 3 (July 1938): 349-369.

480 Mary Robie, diary, June 5-6, 1783, MHS.
the Robie extended family. This does not mean she cared for the servants in the same way she did for her own relations, but it does suggest that Flora and her daughter had no other relations in Halifax other than the Robies. It is more than reasonable to assume Flora and her daughter functioned more like slaves than servants in the Robie household.\footnote{On the incorporation of enslaved families into white masters’ homes, see Melish, \textit{Disowning Slavery}, 27; William Dillon Piersen, \textit{Black Yankees: The Development of Afro-American Subculture in New England} (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 27; Allegra Di Bonaventura, \textit{For Adam’s Sake: A Family Saga in Colonial New England} (New York: W.W. Norton, 2013).}

Considering Flora and her child’s daily interaction with the family, Robie’s uncharacteristically detached reaction to the young girl’s death reveals how differently she saw the black experience from her own experience as a refugee. When her brother lay near death and in tremendous pain, she never considered that his death might be a release from his pain; instead, she described the tremendous anxiety she felt and how she “rose at two to sit with Tommy.” She even neglected to write in her journal for more than a week because her brother’s sickness had “thrown everything [into] confusion.” When the doctors explained to the family that the young boy’s fever had broken, Robie explained, “I know not how to describe what I felt when they said they had hopes, but my heart bounded with joy.”\footnote{Mary Robie, diary, July 3 and 8, 1783, MHS.} In Robie’s eyes, there was a difference between her brother’s suffering and the pain endured by the young servant girl even though they withered under the same roof, and likely because of the same illness. Her brother’s death would be devastating to the young Robie, not only because they were blood relations, but because she believed his untimely death was a sad and unjust end for a young boy with so much promise. In contrast, she actively prayed for the servant girl’s death as a merciful end to
her agony. Also, while she was constantly aware of how the death of loved ones affected others, Robie excludes any mention of Flora’s reaction to the death of her daughter. These differences, although subtle, point to how white loyalists sought to draw a distinction between the common experiences of black and white refugees.

When Robie differentiated the young servant girl’s suffering from her own brother’s hardship, she may have merely been describing her own views of relations within the family’s home; however, she also sought to differentiate the broader black refugee experience from that of the white of population. While the Robies owned black labor in their home, they also interacted with free and enslaved people of color throughout Halifax. As the Nova Scotian winter gave way to the milder temperatures of spring, the Robie sisters took advantage of the better weather to escape the confines of their home. The melting snow meant that Mary and Hetty, usually accompanied by a several men interested in courting the sisters, were free to take longer jaunts away from the prying eye of their parents. “Especially fine weather we had yesterday,” Mary began her diary entry for April 20, 1784. “I have just returned from walking with my Aunt, Mr. Sterns, and Hetty.” While she was excited to escape the tedium of her winter hibernation, she was especially curious about a discovery they had made on Point Pleasant.483

483 Indigenous Mi’k Maq people had used Point Pleasant Park, located on the southeastern tip of the Halifax peninsula at the mouth of the harbor, as a summer fishing camp for generations. Tasked with establishing a more permanent English settlement in the region to offset the Indigenous-Acadian alliance, Edward Cornwallis intended to build the civilian town and military fortification where the park is presently located. However, after clearing some trees in 1749, he found the location too exposed and moved the settlement inland. Stephanie Robertson, “Point Pleasant Park: A History,” http://www.chebucto.ns.ca/environment/FPPP/history.html (accessed April 23, 2019); Ian McKay and Robin Bates, In the Province of History: The Making of the Public Past in Twentieth Century Nova Scotia (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2010), 57.
“We have been looking into a poor miserable hovel covered in sod,” Robie explained of their recent adventure. Having spent time observing the dwelling place, the group determined that “it was the abode of some negros.” Although the others considered the home to be unfit for proper living, gazing upon “a cheerful fire” blazing inside, Mary imagined a measure of commonality between her own situation and that of the resident black family. “I could not help but fancying,” she wistfully mused, “that even in such a wretched dwelling, one might be happy.” Perhaps sensing the absurdity of what she had written, she clarified, “I do not mean one alone. But I think it possible with the company of those most dear to us.” She believed as long as one was surrounded with friends and family, it was possible to “live contentedly as in a palace, and our slumbers as sweet on a bed of straw as of down.” She continued further explaining that, despite the low opinions of her companions, she believed that, “The inhabitants of such apparently miserable dwellings may not be so wretched as at first view we are apt to imagine them.”

While the young Mary could draw a parallel between her own plight and that of the black family living in destitution, the similarities ended in her imagination. Robie felt no inclination to help alleviate the black family’s suffering in the same way she had served so many other white loyalist families. To the contrary, the fictional family Robie envisioned was happy in their situation, and therefore, not in need of her help. Robie’s concern for the black family she encountered reflect her desire to conform to social mores of fellow feeling. In drawing a similarity between her own position and that of the black family, she exhibited a measure of worldliness championed in popular sentimental

484 Mary Robie, diary, April 20, 1784, MHS.
literature.\textsuperscript{485} But by imagining that the family living in the hovel could be content, Robie subtly, and perhaps even unconsciously, dismissed their suffering. Much like the contrast between Robie’s optimistic approach to the death of young servant girl and her misery after the passing of fellow white loyalists, by suggesting the black family could be happy despite their miserable situation, Robie implied that the black experience was somehow different. While blacks suffered alongside whites, she naturalized black suffering. Common suffering could work to bring a diverse group of loyalist refugees together, but by suggesting that suffering people might be happy, Robie excluded those she believed to be less than desirable.

\textit{“There will be no difficulty about him”: Loyalist Repatriation and Slavery in New England}

Mary (née Robie) Sewall spent the first week or so after her marriage to Joseph with him in Boston and returned to Marblehead on November 8, 1788. Upon arriving home, she quickly retired to write her mother in Halifax. She enjoyed her new situation, but it was a dramatic change from spending every day with her family. She hoped her mother would remember her to her “dearly valued friends,” and she expected to be kept informed of the events of Halifax so that she could “hear of their happiness” as a complement to her own. She also missed her youngest sister Hannah. She admitted that even though she had been apart from Hannah for weeks, she found herself “expecting her home from school every day at noon.”\textsuperscript{486}

\textsuperscript{485} Julie Hedgepath Williams, \textit{The Significance of the Printed Word in Early America: Colonists Thoughts on the Role of the Press} (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 55-58.

\textsuperscript{486} Mary Sewall to Mary Bradstreet, November 8-17, 1788, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
While Sewall missed the presence of her younger sister, her home was not without a young child, and she was grateful for the one small reminder of her past life in Nova Scotia: a young servant boy named Prince, who had come with the Robies from Halifax and now lived in the Sewall household. Before she was able to steal away to write her mother, Sewall explained how Prince greeted her at the door with the news that he had lost the crown piece she had gifted him before they left for Boston. “This was told with such a fair [sic] of woe,” Sewall explained, “that I could scarcely help pitying him.” She learned from the other household help that Prince had lost the fourth-shilling piece within three hours of her departure, and despite the assistance of another young black servant named Becky, he had failed to recover his gift. “How many cares does money bring us Mortals,” Sewall reflectively pondered, “and yet we prize this bane of ease and tranquility.”

Although only a brief aside in Sewall’s letter back to Halifax, the instance raises important questions about the tenuous state of slavery in post-revolutionary Massachusetts and how ambiguous laws benefited repatriating loyalists bringing their human property with them.

Who exactly the young Prince was is unclear, but Mary Robie recorded how the family came to own him. Her diary entry for May 9, 1784 records, “A fine day. Received an addition to our family, a little black presented us by Mrs. Flora.” While this young boy may have been another one of Flora’s children, Robie made no mention of Flora giving birth. Considering her normal attention to matters in the household, such an omission suggests the young boy was not Flora’s children but may have been an orphan.

487 Mary Sewall to Mary Bradstreet, November 8-17, 1788, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
488 Mary Robie, diary, May 9, 1784, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
who came to live with her and work in the Robie household. As Whitfield notes, roughly 8% of the loyalist refugees to Halifax in 1783 were recorded to be servants, and while Flora appears to have lived in the Robie household for a number of years, it is possible the young boy had either arrived without a family or had been orphaned in the process of resettlement.\textsuperscript{489}

Regardless of how Prince came to live in the Robie household, he accompanied Mary Bradstreet, Hetty, and Hannah on their second trip back to Massachusetts in 1787. A letter from Mary Robie back to her father not only records that Prince had arrived safely in New England, but that the family also worried about the reaction to their ownership of the young boy. While she meticulously detailed the duties she paid on the hardware goods they had brought from Halifax, she was deliberately ambiguous when she wrote to her father about Prince’s status. “There will be no difficulty about him, they tell us,” she wrote of her neighbors’ reaction to the young boy living with family.\textsuperscript{490} Mary’s note suggests that the Robies worried locals might be opposed not to the return of a loyalist family, but to their ownership of a young black slave. It also shows that despite such fears, the neighbors guaranteed them they would not encounter any challenge to their ownership of the boy, despite the de facto abolition of slavery in the region.

Prince’s return to New England also reveals that his family had also come from the region during the war. Having arrived in Marblehead, Mary Bradstreet noted that Prince “enquired for his grandmother.” While it is difficult to date Prince’s age,


\textsuperscript{490} Mary Robie to Thomas Robie, October 29, 1787, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
references to his behavior and education suggests Prince could not have been older than about ten. Therefore, Prince was almost certainly born in Nova Scotia, or only months before the family left Massachusetts, and would not have had any memory of a grandmother he left behind in New England. Equally revealing, Mary Bradstreet hoped to lie to the young boy about his grandmother’s identity. She hoped an elderly black woman named Phillis, who also worked in their home, would tell Prince that she was his grandmother, and she was angry when Phillis would not lie to the boy. “I gave great offense to Phillis,” Mary Bradstreet explained, “in telling her I wish’d she had made him think she was his grandmother, she being a widow and upon the lookout.” While Mary Bradstreet may have been hoping to create a grandmother figure for young Prince, even if fictional, to provide the young boy some sense of family, it is also possible the Robies had misled Flora when they took Prince away by promising her they were going to reunite the boy with his American family.491 Whatever the arrangement, Mary Bradstreet appears to have gifted the young boy to her daughter upon her marriage to Sewall.492

Prince joined the Sewalls when Mary married Joseph in 1787. He joined at least two other black servants living in the home and was mostly left in the care of a black woman named Becky. While Mary Sewall was often complimentary of Prince, she was highly critical of Becky. “I have not as much time to sew and [unintelligible] as when you was here,” she wrote to her mother, “as I am obliged to look into the kitchen, oftener than I [should] as there is little confidence to be placed in Becky who is careless and extravagant.” When her sister-in-law wanted to visit the couple on one of her trips to

491 Mary Bradstreet to Thomas Robie, November 1, 1787, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
492 Mary Sewall to Mary Bradstreet, November 8-17, 1788, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
Marblehead, Mary declined, explaining that she could not while she “had a servant such as Beck” because the household was in constant need of attention. She found Becky’s presence in the household insufferable, explaining, “She is a plague, and if some people had her, they would fret themselves to death.” “But I am patience itself,” she not so humbly remarked, “for I know what can’t be cured, must be endured.” Like other New England women, Sewall looked down upon her hired help but feigned some sentiment of obligation towards the woman. It is telling that she wished Becky were more like the servant she had had in Halifax. She scolded her mother, “You say nothing about Flora in your letter. I hope she is well and as good a servant as ever.”

Sewall eventually dismissed Becky and replaced her with the older woman, Phillis, whom she found “needs almost as much attention from me as Beck.”

Perhaps it was her affinity for Flora that made Mary Sewall feel a sense of duty toward Prince. Sewall held the young boy in high regard. In a letter written to her family in Halifax in February 1789, Sewall requested that her mother send Prince’s “Spelling Book” because he was showing signs of being “an apt little scholar.” She was especially fond of his “mother wit,” noting his propensity for sharp “bon mots and reparties.” She even hired a tutor, Rebecca Porter, to come to the house to give him lessons. Sewall also provided him with many gifts that set him apart from the other servants. Shortly before Christmas 1788, Sewall surprised Prince with a new “bed-steed” and recorded that

493 Mary Sewall to Mary Bradstreet, December 22, 1788, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
494 Mary Sewall to Mary Bradstreet, February 13, 1789, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
495 Mary Sewall to Mary Bradstreet, February 19, 1789, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
the young boy was excited to “sleep like a king.” She also had Becky sew the boy new stockings, which she gave him along with new shoes, mittens, and a coat.\textsuperscript{496}

Despite Mary Sewall’s fondness for the young boy, Prince’s household duties illuminate the limitations the family placed on his freedom. In one letter back to Halifax, Mary Bradstreet described how the young Hannah Robie, almost four years old in November 1787, did not feel at home in their new accommodations. Perhaps most bothersome for the young girl, as she explained to her mother, was how she had to interact with the servant. “I got no bell,” the young girl complained, “I must knock with the chair to call Prince.” Being charged with responding to the needs of a three-year-old who beckons by bell only further demonstrates Prince’s status in the Robie household.\textsuperscript{497} Furthermore, although Sewall hired a tutor to teach Prince “all she knew,” she noted that the tutor had quickly given up on the young boy due to his misbehavior. Rather than seek another tutor, Sewall noted, “He has lost this opportunity and probably never will have such another.”\textsuperscript{498} The Sewalls may have placed Prince above the other servants in the household, but he was not equal to the white family members. The young boy was still expected to perform a number of services for the family.

It is unclear exactly what became of Prince, but Mary Sewall’s letters to Halifax suggest that Mary Bradstreet brought Flora with her from Halifax when she made her last trip between Halifax and Marblehead in 1789. Having promised to come to help her daughter through her first pregnancy, Mary Bradstreet wrote on April 6, 1789, that she hoped she would soon be with her in Marblehead. “I cannot help beginning now to think

\textsuperscript{496} Mary Sewall to Mary Bradstreet, December 22, 1788, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.

\textsuperscript{497} Mary Bradstreet to Thomas Robie, November 1, 1787, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.

\textsuperscript{498} Mary Sewall to Mary Bradstreet, February 19, 1789, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
I shall soon see Mama,” she wrote to her father on May 12. When news came of a ship in the harbor and rumors “that she was from Halifax” arrived at the Sewall home, everyone buzzed with excitement. None, however, was more excited than Prince. After being careless in his morning duties, he confessed to Sewall that the news had “taken away all his senses,” and with her permission, he quickly “ran up to the Garret to see the vessel in hopes of seeing ma’am upon the deck.” A later note from Halifax to Marblehead, in which Hetty wrote to Marblehead asking Mary to remember her to “all friends, not forgetting Flora,” confirms that Flora had come to New England.

Reunited, both Prince and Flora disappear from the Robie and Sewall family letters. Perhaps, like other New England elites during the early 1790s, the family was distancing themselves from their former human chattel. Shortly after her brother-in-law’s death in Halifax, Mary Sewall penned a letter to her widowed sister informing her that if she wished to move to New England, a home could be “hired at 80 to 100 Dollars per annum” and “a tolerable female servant hired for 3/ or 3/6 per week,” indicating that the family still hired help but no longer relied on the work of a young boy reliant upon them.

Conclusion

On July 31, 1836, the brig Chickasaw arrived in Boston from Baltimore. Before passengers could disembark, Baltimore police officer Matthew Turner ordered the ship’s captain not to let them do so. Turner, who had traveled north in search of runaway slaves,

499 Mary Sewall to Thomas Robie, May 12, 1789, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
500 Hetty Sterns to Mary Sewall, October 29, 1789, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
501 Mary Sewall to Hetty Sterns, February 5, 1799, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
boarded the *Chickasaw* looking for the enslaved property of the plantation owner John B. Morris. Having identified Anna Patton and Mary Finckney as Morris’ property, Turner requested the captain detain the two women while he “returned to town to take such legal steps as would enable him to reconvey [sic] them back to Baltimore.” Fearing for the women’s safety, a friend alerted local abolitionists to Turner’s intent, and a group of lawyers moved quickly to secure a writ of *habeas corpus*, which delayed the transfer of the women into Turner’s custody and forced all parties to meet the following morning.502 One of the leading lawyers in this case was Samuel E. Sewall, Mary Sewall’s youngest son.

The next day, a mostly black audience packed the Supreme Court in Boston to hear Chief Justice Lemuel Shaw’s decision regarding the fates of Patten and Finckney. At the core of the controversy was whether the ship’s captain had the right to detain the women while Turner began legal proceedings to bring them back to Baltimore. As counsel for the claimant, A.W. Fiske argued that under the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793, the state was bound to consider Morris’ claim to his enslaved property and asked for a postponement in order to bring proof of Morris’ ownership up from Baltimore. In reply, Sewall argued that the captain did not have the power to detain fugitive slaves on mere suspicion of being runaways. Further, Sewall noted that all human beings were born free and had a natural right to their liberties, to which the mostly black crowd responded to with applause.503 Shaw ruled in favor of Sewall.

502 “From the Boston Chronicle and Patriot, August 2,” *Connecticut Currant*, August 8, 1836.

But Fiske was not done. With the women about to be released, Fiske stood and began to make a motion to more formally arrest the women under the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793. But a moment of pause from the judge provided the audience the window they needed. “There was a simultaneous rush,” newspaper reports read, “of most of the blacks in the room towards the door, situated nearly behind the Judge’s seat.” Despite Shaw’s demand that the two officers of the court restore order, the crowd continued to exit the courtroom, and the two women were “hurried down the stairs, and into School-street, where they were placed in a carriage…and rapidly driven off.” “We are not informed whether they have since been heard from,” the paper informed its readers.504

The trial and the ensuing so-called “Abolition Riot,” catapulted Sewall to the forefront of the abolition movement in New England. A month later, the papers reported that Lt. George Adams of the Navy, who was a friend of Morris and had come to Boston to assist Turner in his continuing pursuit of the two women, entered Sewall’s office on State Street and asked him “why he interfered with the property of strangers; and in particular, why he made himself so busy in the rescue of the female slaves.” When Sewall responded with “violent words,” the two men began to scuffle and Adams “exhibited a cowhide and applied it eight or ten times” to Sewall’s back. Hearing the commotion, Ellis G. Loring, another attorney with an office in the building, came to Sewall’s aid and together they “roughly handled” Adams before the man could extract himself to leave. Mocking Adams’ violent behavior, Sewall and Loring joked to reporters, “[We are as] decidedly opposed to cowhide as law as we are to Lynch law,”

504 “From the Boston Chronicle and Patriot, August 2,” Connecticut Currant.
and Sewall noted further that Adams’ behavior was only further vindication of the Abolition Society’s efforts to protect former slaves from other “rascal[s]” like Adams. 505

Samuel E. Sewall reflected both his Robie and Sewall background. He took tremendous pride in his ancestry. According to his favorite aunt, Hannah Robie, Sewall had read his ancestors’ anti-slavery pamphlet, The Selling of Joseph, at a young age, and she believed it had had a formative effect on him. Having been called to the bar in 1821, Sewall dedicated his career to abolishing slavery. In 1827, The Christian Examiner published Sewall’s first essay, “Remarks on Slavery in the United States,” where he, much like his ancestor, took a stand on the evils of chattel slavery in the nation. On July 4, 1829, Sewall attended a public address by budding abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison. Although Sewall was both uncomfortable with the “abusive language” Garrison was “always pouring out” and opposed with the idea that “no slaveholder can be a Christian,” he was electrified by the man’s fervent commitment to abolition and his denunciation of less radical organizations like the American Colonization Society. Sewall was instrumental in convincing Garrison to settle permanently in Boston and was also among the first patrons of his new newspaper, The Liberator. 506

But while Samuel fashioned himself in the image of his Sewall ancestors, the family member he was closest to was his aunt Hannah Robie, and he absorbed a bit of his


506 On Sewall the origins of his anti-slavery sentiments, see Nina Moore Tiffany, Samuel E. Sewall: A Memoir (Boston: 1898), 33-38. Although Sewall and Garrison would not always see eye to eye, they remained good friends throughout their lives. See, Bruce Laurie, “Putting Politics Back In: Rethinking the Problem of Political Abolitionism,” in William Lloyd Garrison at Two Hundred, ed. James Brewer Stewart (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 81-84.
mother’s background through this connection. Hannah was fifteen when Samuel was born, and she enjoyed looking after the young boy when her sister was busy. Having never wed, Hannah saw her nephew as one of her own children. She was especially proud when he began to excel in school. He performed so well that his aunt wrote to his mother that she worried “he is in danger of becoming a little vain.”

Sewall entered Harvard in 1813 just shy of his fourteenth birthday and was a member of the first class of Harvard Law School, where he finished his studies in 1821. That summer he took his first trip out of New England to visit his uncle in Halifax and to take in the city where his mother had been raised. Far from the “dumb and stupid” Halifax citizens his grandmother had described forty-five years earlier, the twenty-one-year-old Sewall explained how he was impressed with the grandeur of life in the colonial capital. Staying with his uncle Simon Bradstreet Robie, who was at that time Speaker of the House of Assembly, he was initially turned off by the locals’ attention to “rank and titles.” But over the two-month stay, he developed a fondness for life in Nova Scotia. “The more I see of this place, indeed, the better I like the whole style of living here,” Sewall explained. Comparing Halifax to his native Boston, he wrote, “The people of Halifax certainly understand the art of society better than my own countrymen.”

Sewall also developed an interest in how the law in Nova Scotia differed from his native Massachusetts, and his passion for legal studies endeared him to his uncle, Simon Bradstreet. The two remained in close contact for the next few decades.

507 Hannah Robie to Mary Sewall, December 26, 1805, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
508 Tiffany, Samuel E. Sewall, 15-16.
509 While Sewall’s main passion was abolition, he also took a strong interest in comparing British law with American law and published a number of works that analyzed the relationship between
His rise to political prominence often caused him to confront his family’s connection to slavery. Only weeks after his involvement in the case that led to the “Abolition Riot,” Sewall took on the case of an enslaved girl in Boston. Earlier in the year, Mary Aves Slater arrived in Boston from Louisiana to visit her father with a six-year-old enslaved girl named Med. Much like the Robies had done with Prince, Slater attempted to claim the girl was not enslaved property, but a servant for the family. When members of the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society visited the Aves’ home under the guise of a Sunday School Committee, they were able to determine the girl was indeed one of Mary Slater’s slaves. Together with Rufus Choate and Loring, Sewall argued once again to Chief Justice Shaw that enslaved people brought to Boston were legally free. Shaw again sided with the abolitionists in the landmark *Commonwealth v. Aves* case, which became precedent for similar cases throughout the region during the 1850s.510

Born in 1799, a decade after Flora arrived back in Massachusetts, Sewall probably never knew the young boy who had served his family in both Halifax and Marblehead. While he had been raised in a home with black servants, it is unclear how aware he would have been of the family’s previous dabbling in slavery. Like other Massachusetts abolitionists, Sewall saw New England as a bastion for freedom in the young United States and blamed the southern states for continuing to practice the institution after the

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Revolution.⁵¹¹ He appears to have been blissfully oblivious of the many enslaved people who still labored in Halifax when he visited.⁵¹²

But Sewall’s passion for freeing children brought north as slaves suggests that he knew of, or perhaps only suspected, his family’s past involvement with ambiguous forms of slavery after the Revolution. Few would have realized how important the precedent would be for southerners intending to bring their human chattel north, but from the beginning, Sewall brought a particular zeal to the case. In his notes, Sewall questioned why the state had “destroyed the slave property of thousands of slaveholders in this State” if they were unwilling to apply the same principle to a foreigner. Unlike both Choate and Loring, Sewall went out of his way to find similar cases after Shaw’s ruling. In 1841 he worked to free an eight-year-old-boy, who had been brought from Arkansas. In another, he attempted to free a girl brought from Louisiana, but the judge ruled that the girl “appeared to be happy and contented,” and allowed her to be brought back south. Frustrated as a result of this loss and unwilling to lose another, Sewall defied the opinion of more radical abolitionists like Garrison and helped to raise the funds necessary to purchase the freedom of runaway slave George Latimer in 1842, rather than see him suffer a similar fate.⁵¹³ While abolitionists praised Sewall’s dedication to the cause as a symbol of his own character, perhaps Sewall’s efforts on behalf of these enslaved people were born, at least in part, from a more personal desire to expiate a previous wrong.


⁵¹² Whitfield, North to Bondage, 106-109.

⁵¹³ On Sewall and rescuing young children, see Tiffany, Samuel E. Sewall, 66-70.
CONCLUSION

Sometime in 1832, an aging Mary Sewall scribbled a note in the back of the diary she had kept nearly fifty years earlier as a teenager in Halifax. Although she would live another two years, the sixty-eight-year-old woman was battling an illness that had kept her bedbound, and she began delegating some of her personal possessions to her closest friends and relations. She addressed the note in her diary to her youngest sister, Hannah, whose birth in March 1784 she had recorded in its pages. “I have left this my dear sister [unintelligible] for your perusal,” she began, “not that I think it worth reading, but as an expression of the feeling of regret that I have continually since [experienced] that I did not give it to you to read…after the death of our dear mother put it in my hands.” She explained further that it was not a “want of confidence” that had kept her from handing over the diary, but “the idea of its extreme insignificance and [a] feeling of mortification.” Rather than destroy the diary, Sewall decided her sister would benefit from reading about her family’s time in Nova Scotia and passed the journal on to her. After her husband and children had finished reading it, Sewall instructed Hannah to burn it, along with some of the letters she had saved because she believed “there is little worth preserving.”

Sewall’s humility was common of other early nineteenth-century women, and although she recommended the diary be destroyed, her description of its contents’ importance suggests it meant more to her, and to the family than she let on. Mary Bradstreet had died sometime around 1812, meaning that not only had the women’s
mother kept the totem to herself for decades after the family returned from Halifax but once she had given it to Sewall, she too had withheld the journal for twenty years. What is more, although Sewall humbly explained the “feeling of shame” that overcame her when she thought about the writings of her youth, she had grown fond of “occasionally” thumbing through the diary as a reminder of her previous life. She also admitted, “Many pages have been torn out merely to spare you the trouble of reading, such as the daily weather, names of visitors, and other things equally trivial.” While she was fond of some of the more exciting aspects of her life as an exile, she was equally careful to edit the truly regrettable instances that may have painted her, or other members of the family, in a less than positive light. Although Sewall humbly suggested the journal be burned, she knew her sister would see through her performance of modesty.

Mary Sewall’s note reveals that she believed her account of the family’s time as refugees in Nova Scotia, with some exceptions, would be elucidating for members of the family who had not experienced, or had no memory, of their time as exiles. Although she expressed embarrassment over her “trifling” writing, that she endeavored to keep the diary, take the time to edit it, and write an accompanying explanation, demonstrates that she recognized its importance to her family’s future understanding of where they had come from. She was not ashamed of the family’s past or her time as a loyalist refugee in Nova Scotia. To the contrary, she wanted to preserve an account of her family’s exile, especially the role of the women in the family, suggesting it was the hard times and her family’s efforts to overcome them that she believed were most important to the family’s story.\footnote{Mary Sewall, diary, n.d. 1832, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA [hereinafter MHS].}
Unfortunately, the vital public and private roles of loyalist women have largely been lost in both public memory and scholarly analysis. On May 23, 1929, a crowd gathered at Prince's Square in front of the Wentworth County Court House in Hamilton, Ontario for the unveiling of a new statue celebrating Empire Day. The sculpture (Figure 6.1), a gift of Hamilton resident Stanley Mills, depicted a loyalist family taking in the land that had been assigned to them by a government surveyor. In many ways, the sculpture embodied Canada up to that point. Mills was himself a descendant of the late-loyalists—those who left the United States between the conclusion of the Revolution in 1783 and the end of the War of 1812. He had made a small fortune opening and managing Stanley Mills & Co. as the consumer economy of southern Ontario exploded after 1900, and he probably meant his gift to complement the book he published three years prior, which documented the arrival of the loyalists in Upper Canada and his family’s prominent role through the 1920s. The celebrated English sculptor Sydney March designed the figure and forged it in the studio he operated with his brothers in Teddington, England. Five years later, the monument was the inspiration for a stamp issued on Dominion Day, to celebrate the sesquicentennial of the United Empire.

515 The year after Mills established his department store, the population of Hamilton was 44,299. In 1919, the year before the store was sold to a larger competitor, the population nearly tripled to 110,137. On the growth of Hamilton, Mills’ ownership of the department store, and the Mills’ family from 1776 through the late 1910s, see Stanley Mills, Genealogical and Historical Records of the Mills and Gage Families, 1776-1926, 150 Years (Hamilton, ON: The Reid Press, Ltd, 1926). On consumer culture in Canada at the turn of the twentieth century, see Donica Belisle, “A Labour Force for the Consumer Century: Commodification in Canada's Largest Department Stores, 1890 to 1940,” Labour / Le Travail 58 (Fall 2006): 114-117, and Retail Nation: Department Stores and the Making of Modern Canada (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2011), especially chapters 1 and 2.

516 Tarah Brookfield, Our Voices Must Be Heard: Women and the Vote in Ontario (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2018), 11-12.
Loyalists’ arrival in what would become Canada.\textsuperscript{517} The words quoted on the statue’s front panel inscription are evocative of burgeoning Canadian nationalism, which had been growing since the First World War, and are supposed to have been said by Lady Emily Tennyson, the wife of the Poet Laureate of the United Kingdom. “You Canadians should be proud of the founders of your country,” the onlookers read, “No country ever had such founders, no country in the world. No not since the days of Abraham!”\textsuperscript{518}

Although Mills intended the statue to be a tribute to Canada’s promising future as much as it was a nod to the nation’s historical past, it drew heavily from the deeply entrenched founding mythology. The idea of the loyalist founders in Ontario differed in many ways from its Maritime equivalents. Unlike the myth in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, the Ontario version included popular indigenous characters like Joseph and Molly Brant and emphasized Upper Canada’s military role in resisting the Americans in the War of 1812. Despite these significant differences, the idea behind the myths in Ontario and the Maritimes was identical: British sympathizers brought with them the civilizing processes of the British Empire to the land that would become Canada.

\textsuperscript{517} Douglas and Mary Patrick, \textit{Canada’s Postage Stamps} (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1964), 69-70.

But the Mills statue also demonstrates how the loyalist myth in Ontario appealed to a much different set of emotions than its Maritime counterpart. Mills’ self-sacrificing loyalist family bears little resemblance to the more triumphal depictions that became popular in the Maritimes during the late nineteenth century. Working during the centennial celebration of the loyalist arrival in 1884, Henry Sandham, a Canadian-born artist residing in Boston, painted “The Coming of the Loyalists” (Figure 6.2) to celebrate the close commercial and cultural relations that developed between Atlantic Canada and New England during the nineteenth century. Unlike Mills’ loyalist family prepared to forge a new life in the wilderness, Sandham’s refugees ceremoniously disembark in their new Canadian home dressed in the finest attire. They were not the victims of American

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persecution; instead, Sandham’s loyalists were the refined and respectable champions of the empire. In contrast to the prim and proper loyalists of Sandham’s painting, the south panel on Mills’ statue reminded viewers that their loyalist ancestors had forsaken “every possession excepting their honor [and] set their faces towards the wilderness of British North America to begin, amid untold hardships, life anew under the flag they revered.”


While historians of the loyalist myth in Canada have long recognized the discrepancies between the founding loyalist narratives in Ontario and the Maritimes, little attention has been paid to the place of women in these myths. Loyalist women, or more specifically refugee mothers, are at the center of both Sandham’s painting and Mills’ statue. True to their respective myths, the two prominent women in Sandham’s painting are meant to exemplify the aristocratic elite, who brought with them the refined civility of

520 South panel text, United Empire Loyalist Monument, 1929, Hamilton, Ontario.
the British Empire to the rocky coast of the Maritimes, while the mother in Mills’ statue surveys her lot with a mix of apprehension and hope. Both renditions depict two loyalist children, a young boy and girl, symbolic of the future of the empire in Canada. While the women differ in their approach to exile, in both depictions, they are passive followers of their male counterparts. While Sandham no doubt meant to use his female characters to demonstrate the grandeur of the loyalist arrival, both of his main female characters are welcomed to their new home by gallant male figures. Mills may have wanted the loyalist mother in his statue to resemble his own matriarchal ancestors, who he explained had adopted “more than their full share” of the “hardship and self-sacrifice” of the resettlement process; but his character is being comforted by her husband, who perhaps a bit assertively, pulls his wife closer to him to protect her from the elements. While the artists may have placed refugee women at the center of their works, these female characters were not meant to represent the rugged selflessness of the loyalist founders; instead, these women were symbols of Britain’s virtue, and as such, they needed to be protected by the central figures of the loyalist diaspora, dutiful and loyal British men.

A misremembering of loyalist women can also be found in American history. Shortly after the turn of the twentieth century, James Henry Stark felt compelled to write a fair and comprehensive history of those Massachusetts colonists who sided with the British during the American Revolution. Having researched extensively at the New England Historic Genealogical Society and the state archives of Massachusetts, and after immersing himself in the Record Commissioners’ Reports on the City of Boston, the Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society, and “the numerous town histories

and ancient records published in recent years,” Stark believed New England’s historians had misrepresented the region’s loyalists. In the introduction to his 1910 work, *The Loyalists of Massachusetts and the Other Side of the American Revolution*, Stark explained how he was shocked to find “that for more than a century our most gifted writers had almost uniformly suppressed or misrepresented all matter bearing on one side of the [revolutionary] question.” He explained, “In these days we are recognizing more fully than ever the dignity of history, [and] we are recognizing that patriotism is not the sole and ultimate object of this study.” Hoping to balance the existing study of the loyalists with a more accurate narrative to elucidate what previous scholars had “intentionally concealed,” Stark dedicated his book “to the memory of the Loyalists of Massachusetts Bay, whose faithful services and memories are now forgotten by the nation they so well served.”

Despite his self-important tone, Stark was not the first to attempt a more accurate depiction of colonists who maintained British allegiance during the war. The majority of writers who examined the loyalists through the mid-twentieth century depicted British sympathizers in an unfavorable light, but as Eileen Ka-May Cheng documents, a few “loyalist revisionists” challenged the prevailing negative conception as early as the 1820s. Early nineteenth-century scholars focused on the loyalists’ steadfast adherence to their beliefs, which often put them in danger of physical harm and jeopardized their economic prospects. These revisionists argued that despite these colonists’ British allegiance, revolutionary dissenters could be considered patriots because of their genuine

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concern for their country. But as Cheng also notes, even in their reexamination of the revolutionary loyalism, these early revisionists only championed dissent as an integral part of American culture because it furthered “their own social, party, and regional interests.”

While Stark hoped his study would be an unbiased recollection of the facts, like those who came before him, he too used his publication to grind his own personal axes. Born in the southwest of England in 1823, he came to America to live with his father at the age of nine. In Boston, Stark became an American citizen, but his British birth made him a perpetual outsider. Excluded by his peers during the few brief years he attended the prestigious Boston Latin School, he dropped out to learn the trade of stereotyping and electrotyping. Unable to secure the capital to support his own business, he took to the sea as a sailor to support himself. He came back to Boston and opened his own stereotyping shop in 1870, but two years later he lost his business, alongside nearly everything he owned, when the building that housed his enterprise was blown-up to create a firebreak during the Great Fire of 1872. In the fire’s aftermath, Stark went back to sea, sailing in the winter of 1783-4 for Florida and the next year on a 35-ton schooner to explore French and Dutch Guiana. As a member of an expedition that discovered a substantial deposit of

523 Perhaps none of Cheng’s examples of this point are more illustrative as her use of the canning of Charles Sumner in 1856. In this example, she traces how Sumner drew on fellow New Englander and early loyalist revisionist Lorenzo Sabine’s depiction of rampant loyalty in South Carolina to cast doubt on the state, and by proxy, Andrew Butler’s allegiance. After Preston Brook’s violent attack on Sumner, southern writer William Gilmore Simms believed Sabine was directly responsible for Sumner’s cudgeling and compared the mistreatment of southerners to the mistreatment of the revolutionary loyalists. 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): 492-493, and The Plain and Noble Garb of Truth: Nationalism & Impartiality in American Historical Writing, 1784-1860 (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2008), chapter 5, especially 228-236.

gold east of Cayenne, Stark reinvested the profits in a new business, and together with William H. Mumler, established the Photo-Electrotype Company, which was among the first to make engraved plates by photography. Stark remained an avid sailor, spending the winter months in the West Indies, but he also used his newly acquired wealth and printing business to publish several illustrated books and histories, including *A Stranger’s Guide to Boston* (1881), *Antique Views of Boston* (1882), and six volumes of *History of and Guide to the West Indies* (1893). He also used his growing fortune to endow a few societies. He became president of the British Charitable Society, vice-president of the Victorian Club, and a member of the New England Genealogical Society.525

But Stark remained relatively unknown outside a small circle in Boston until the publication of *The Loyalists of Massachusetts* in 1910. In New England, feedback was generally negative. Although he claimed to provide a more balanced examination that tamed what he believed was an unjust defamation of British sympathizers, Stark’s work reads less like a reappraisal, and more like a personal vendetta against the most prominent Massachusetts patriots and their descendants. He frequently referred to the Sons of Liberty as “The Sons of Despotism,” depicted Benjamin Franklin as a “post-office thief,” and condemned the Cabot’s of Beverly for becoming wealthy during and after the war through acts of “rapine and plunder.”526 Many in Boston brushed off Stark’s analysis. Readers labeled the book “the joke of the season.” When questioned about Stark’s portrayal of John Hancock as fumbling and inept during his time as the treasurer

525 For a short but informative description of Stark’s life, see “Memoirs,” *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register* 64 (Boston: 1920), lxii-lxiv.

526 Stark, *The Loyalists of Massachusetts*; for “The Sons of Despotism,” see 54-55, 128, 179, 264, 318, 334, 421, 452, 461; on Franklin, see 163-165; on the Cabots, see 254.
of Harvard, the university’s president, Abbot Lawrence Lowell, “laughed heartily” and explained that Hancock’s successes and failures while at the university were already well known.

Others, however, were less amused. Former Massachusetts Governor Samuel A. Green, who had written a hearty endorsement for Stark’s earlier state history, expressed his outrage concerning the portrayal of New England patriots. “I am not at all in sympathy with an American who casts [negative] reflection upon any or all of our patriots,” he explained, “it cheapens the heroic self-sacrifice of those who made this republic possible.”

Green had not yet read the work for himself, but he was quick to point out that Stark was a different kind of American. “He is a man of English birth,” Green reminded readers, “he looks at things in a little different light than perhaps you and I do.”

Despite Stark’s focus on the New England loyalists, his work garnered attention outside the northeast. While those in New England saw his critiques as unfair, The Richmond Palladium offered an opinion that perhaps Stark’s treatment of the revolutionaries, although damming, was precisely what the hagiography of the New England elite needed. Under the headline, “Altars Erected to New England Patriots Doomed,” the southern newspaper highlighted the passages that detailed the New England revolutionaries’ often-unmitigated violence. The newspaper, which was eager to point out how New Englanders were equally as intolerant as they claimed southerners to be, was sure to include passages where Stark juxtaposed eighteenth-century American

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patriotism to assaults against Catholics and abolitionists that occurred in antebellum Massachusetts.\footnote{“Altars Erected to New England Patriots Doomed,” \textit{The Richmond Palladium and Sun Telegram}, February 15, 1910, page 8. The paper highlighted Stark’s portrayal of the Boston Tea Party, which he noted was an “illegal seizure of tea” parallel to the so-called ‘respectable mob,’ which on the seventh day of August 1834 destroyed the Charlestown convent and a year later nearly killed [William Lloyd] Garrison.”} Newspapers as far from New England as Texas and the Dakotas carried similar coverage of Stark’s accusations, carefully demonstrating how Stark’s analysis was no doubt influenced by his own British background, but also refreshing in his critiques of the New England elite.

Few papers offered their readers Stark’s rebuttal. Replying to assaults on his character, Stark denied having applied to the Franklin Fund for compensation after the Boston Fire, which would have been hypocritical for someone who so vehemently denounced Franklin in his book. He also explained that he was a patriotic American citizen, who had worked diligently to naturalize roughly thirty-five thousand British subjects.\footnote{“Stark Amused,” \textit{New York Tribune}, February 17, 1910, page 7.} As to attacks on the validity of his material, Stark responded, “I have not made a single statement in my book that cannot be backed up by documentary proof.”\footnote{“Arraigns Patriots,” \textit{Marion Daily Mirror}, February 16, 1910, page 4.} He also noted that he had little time for what he believed were petty critiques. Responding to one reporter’s question about his future plans, Stark stated, “I intend to leave Boston to-morrow for an extended stay in the West Indies and will leave my case in the hands of my friends.” Stark never published again.\footnote{“Stark Amused,” \textit{New York Tribune}, February 17, 1910, page 7.}

Stark had wanted to revitalize interest in the loyalists, but he lost the central argument of his book in his over-zealous critiques of the New England patriots and their
descendants. He had hoped his exposé would resurrect the often-vilified British sympathizers and demonstrate that far from spineless traitors, the loyalists “represented the best class of people in the American colonies.”\textsuperscript{533} Instead, most readers focused only on his pointed attacks, which obscured the loyalist characters he was trying to revive. Ironically, he had proved himself correct in demonstrating that “false history and crude one-sided history” were damaging to accurate historical understanding.\textsuperscript{534}

Stark was among the last of the self-taught “historians” in an era that saw a growing demand for the professionalization of history as a discipline.\textsuperscript{535} His study resembles a number of nineteenth-century studies of the American Revolution in that, even if they are poor works of historical accuracy, they reveal a great deal about the period in which they were written. Throughout the nineteenth century, the American Revolution took on a variety of meanings for a varying group of Americans. In Boston during the early 1800s, egalitarian dimensions of the Revolution were erased in favor of a movement that was led by more distinguished gentlemen. Only once the hegemony of the Whig elite appeared secure in the 1820s and 30s could more plebian acts of resistance like the Boston Tea Party reemerge as a foundational aspect of the Revolution’s


\textsuperscript{534} Stark, \textit{The Loyalists of Massachusetts}, 6.

\textsuperscript{535} Most historians agree that the founding of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association and the instillation of James Franklin Jameson in 1907 marked the triumph of the professional academic historians over the avocational vision. See, Stephen G. Hall, \textit{A Faithful Account of Race: African American Historical Writing in Nineteenth-Century America} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 189-190; David D. Van Tassel, “From Learned Society to Professional Organization: The American Historical Association, 1884-1900,” \textit{American Historical Review} 89, no. 4 (October, 1984): 929-956.
memory. For black Americans, the hypocrisy of crying freedom while holding others in bondage during the Revolution became a central component of the abolition movement as best exemplified in Frederick Douglass’ 1852 Address “What to a Slave is the Fourth of July?” In each of these instances, groups chose specific elements of the American Revolution to highlight, expunge, or manipulate. Each group adopted its own revolutionary narrative to achieve a particular agenda.

While Stark’s exhumation of the Massachusetts loyalists is not a great work of historical accuracy, like other works of the era, it does expose a great deal about the political culture in Boston at the turn of the twentieth century. Taking the side of British sympathizers, Stark explained that the statue memorializing the Boston Massacre erected on the Boston Common in 1887 improperly commemorated a “brutal and revengeful

536 Young, The Shoemaker and the Tea Party.


attack of reckless roughs upon the soldiers.” While his analysis fits his common
description of the American patriots as outlaws and rouges, he also added his own
opinion on the statue, stating that he believed it was a “waste of public money”
“instigated [by] John Boyle O’Reilly and the negroes of Boston.” In Stark’s eyes, the
statue, which highlights the death of African American Crispus Attucks and still stands
today, was so appalling that even Governor Oliver Ames admitted he would have vetoed
its construction if such an action would not have “cost the Republican Party the colored
vote.” Stark’s assessment of the monument reveals much more about his disdain for
the Irish-born poet and activist O’Reilly and people of color in Boston than it does inform
his readers about the events of that unfolded on the night of March 5, 1770.

Stark’s condemnations of O’Reilly and the African American population of
Boston are glaring, but his analysis is also colored by several other subtler biases. In a
work that is in every way overly adulatory of individual loyalists, scattered among his
praise are certain critiques. But it is his treatment of loyalist women that best
demonstrates how historical biases have shaped the Revolutionary narrative. Loyalist
wives and daughters almost always fall into the background of Stark’s narrative.
Although many women took on active household roles when their husbands left to join
the British lines, Stark is silent on women’s roles. He prefers instead to flatten the study

Stark, The Loyalists of Massachusetts, 47.

On racial tensions surrounding remembrances of the Boston Massacre during the late
eighteenth century, see Craig Bruce Smith, “Claiming the Centennial: The American Revolution's
Boyle O’Reilly was one of the most prominent voices for Irish culture and Irish independence in
late nineteenth-century Boston. Sent to Western Australia in 1867 for 20 years of penal servitude,
O’Reilly came to Massachusetts and served as editor of The Pilot where dedicated his time to
exposing civil rights violations of all kinds in Massachusetts and throughout the country. James
M. O’Toole, Fanatic Heart: A Life of John Boyle O’Reilly, 1844-1890 (Boston: Northeastern
University Press, 1997).
and depict them simply as “helpless” or “defenseless.” Many women in his narrative follow the example of Mrs. William Sheaffe, who he explained, “Bore many trials with pious resignation.”

Of course in his eyes, labeling loyalist women “helpless” would not have been dismissive; instead, he intended his depiction of patriot attacks on vulnerable women to further validate his driving thesis that the American rebels were guilty of committing “the most cruel and vindictive acts of spoliation recorded in modern history.” But while Stark admired women like Mrs. Sheaffe and used stoic women as examples of loyalist heroics, he was less understanding of British-sympathizing women he believed did not live up to the ideals of motherly virtue and piety. Perhaps nowhere is this prejudice more evident than in his illustration of the day Mary Bradstreet Robie and her family departed Marblehead. Stark describes the commotion that followed the Robie family as they prepared to depart the town for good. “Crowds of people collected on the wharf to witness their departure,” Stark explains, “and many and irritating and insulting remarks were addressed to them concerning their Tory principles and their conduct toward the Whigs.” Unlike her husband and the many other Marblehead loyalists, who bore insults with “fortitude and silence,” Stark makes a point to record that Mary Bradstreet rejoined the rebels’ abuses with her own condemnation. As she left the docks, Stark reports that

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541 In Janice Potter-MacKinnon’s study of the loyalist women who settled present day-day eastern Ontario, she highlights the many loyalist wives who took on active roles maintain the household in their husband’s absence. Many wives became acting heads of household when their husbands did not return. See for example the case of Alexander and Susannah McDonell. While the Women Only Wept: Loyalist Refugee Women (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1993), 71.

542 Stark, The Loyalists of Massachusetts, 439.

543 Stark, The Loyalists of Massachusetts, 93.
Mary Bradstreet yelled to the crowd, “I hope that I shall live to return, find this wicked rebellion crushed and see the streets of Marblehead run with rebel blood.” In his telling, it was only her “sex that prevented them from doing her person injury.”

It is not entirely clear where or when the legend of Mary Bradstreet’s provocative riposte originated. Stark’s wording suggests he copied the story from Samuel Roads Jr.’s *The History and Traditions of Marblehead* (1881). In Roads’ account, Mary Bradstreet’s retort is even more incendiary. Not only did she wish to see the streets of Marblehead run with blood, but she also hoped the streets would be “so deep with rebel blood that a long boat might be rowed through them.” Mary Bradstreet’s words were reprinted in other contemporary publications as well, including in a piece titled “A Study of Old Marblehead,” which was printed in 1895 editions of *The New England Magazine* and *The Bay State Monthly*. Modern studies of the American Revolution have also used her words to exemplify loyalist outrage. In the appendix of the 1973 edited volume of Ashley Bowen’s journals, Mary Bradstreet is recorded to have not only “screeched” her denunciation at the townspeople, but the editor also chose to inform readers that her words were saturated “with un-Christian sentiments,” which he believed to be

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545 Samuel Roads Jr., *The History and Traditions of Marblehead* (Boston: 1881), 126. I suggest Stark copied from Roads because his use of wording is identical in many places, and he too suggests that others of Marblehead bore insults with more “fortitude and silence” than Mary Bradstreet. Roads, who was a lifelong resident of the town and also served in the Massachusetts Senate, is often credited with being among the towns first historian. “Samuel Roads. Jr., Obituary,” *Boston Herald*, January 29, 1904, page 14.

“unbecoming the daughter of a man of the cloth.”\textsuperscript{547} While these examples used Mary Bradstreet’s words to demonstrate what might have been justifiable loyalist anger, the vindictive nature of her comments and how she expressed them are also suggestive as to the authors’ views on the proper place of eighteenth and nineteenth-century women.\textsuperscript{548}

More than a brief episode of loyalist outrage, these same writers document that the people of Massachusetts did not soon forget Mary Bradstreet’s outburst. Stark explains that during April 1783, rumors of loyalists wanting to return sparked outrage in the streets of Marblehead. The result was a town meeting where it was decided that all loyalists caught trying to return would be given six hours to leave, and those who remained longer would be taken into custody “and shipped to the nearest port of Great Britain.” Typical of the dramatic fashion of many of these late nineteenth-century histories, only hours after the measures were passed, a ship “from the provinces” appeared in the Marblehead harbor, and the town’s residents discovered “the detested Robie family was on board.” “With the dreadful wish uttered by Mrs. Robie at her departure still rankled in the minds the people,” Stark explained how hundreds gathered on the docks “to give the Robies a significant reception.” According to this narrative,


\textsuperscript{548} Of course anger itself was not wrong. To the contrary justifiable anger was expected of civilized people. Publically displaying anger, even if justifiable, however, was seen as unlady like. On anger and expectations for eighteenth-century women, see Linda A. Pollock, “Anger and the Negotiation of Relationships in Early Modern England,” \textit{The Historical Journal} 47, no. 3 (September 2004): 567-590; Anna Bryson, \textit{From Courtesy to Civility: Changing Modes of Conduct in Early Modern Britain} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Edward Muir, \textit{Mad Blood Stirring: Vendetta and Factions in Friuli during the Renaissance} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).
after the quick thinking of a few “influential citizens,” the Robies snuck ashore at night and remained hidden until “the excitement subsided.”\textsuperscript{549}

Although there are several factual errors concerning Stark’s interpretation of the Robie flight from and return to Marblehead, including the date of the Robies’ return and people of Marblehead’s opinion of the family, they all derive from the inflammatory remarks Mary Bradstreet was alleged to have said upon being chased from town. But there is no evidence that Mary Bradstreet ever made such remarks. Nowhere in any of the Robie family’s correspondence is there even a mention that Mary Bradstreet made any comment while being run from town, nor do any of the town’s papers record the incident. To the contrary, while Mary Bradstreet could be forceful in conversations with her husband, she appears to have refrained from voicing her opinion concerning political issues, especially in mixed company. During one evening’s conversation, while entertaining at the Robie household in Halifax, the discussion turned to the merits of dueling. The younger Mary recalled her disagreement with the men in the room, who all “agree[d] that it was not commendable, yet it was unavoidable.” Unlike those gathered, she believed it better for someone challenged to a duel to “reduce himself to indignation, rather than run the chance of destroying a human creature or ending either himself or his adversary.” Not one to normally keep her comments to herself, Robie explained why she kept quiet. “I did not say this as I thought it would be unbecoming of me to join in the conversation as it was chiefly carried on by the gentlemen, and Mama was silent.”\textsuperscript{550} In contrast to the vindictive and hateful loyalist Stark and others painted her to be, the

\textsuperscript{549} Stark, The Loyalists of Massachusetts, 458-459.

\textsuperscript{550} Mary Robie, diary, August 6, 1783, Robie-Sewall Family Papers, MHS.
This study has demonstrated that far from passive acceptors of their fate as exiles or the vindictive-minded losers of the Revolution, loyalist women had prominent roles in both their communities and their families, and they were active in bringing reluctant husbands and fathers back to the United States. Because women were expected to be dutiful mothers above all, many viewed the American Revolution through the lens of the family and were mindful of how the reorganization of power in the American states might affect family structure. Unlike the men, who felt bound by abstract ideas of honor and fidelity, Revolutionary-era women were also more willing to change allegiances depending on which side could best benefit their families’ interests. The wives and daughters of British-sympathizing men were deeply troubled at the war’s end. Many had no choice but to follow men into exile. Although the colonial government of Nova Scotia was unprepared for the influx of tens of thousands of refugees, most of whom lacked adequate supplies or shelter, the exiles also brought with them several their own reservations about their adoptive northern home and feelings about exile that may have contributed to the exiles’ plight as refugees.

As exiles, women were not merely domestic creatures of support; instead, the collective hardship of exile provided many women the opportunity to both demonstrate their fellow feeling and contribute to the broader community. Refugee wives and daughters became public figures of empathy for the loyalist community in Nova Scotia. They expressed grief both to exemplify their own refinement and also to assist other
families through the difficult process of resettling. Through their public service, loyalist women created a community based on shared hardship where empathy served as a common language. But even as shared hardship became the basis for community in loyalist Nova Scotia, this community had real racial limits and women helped enforce difference between white and black refugees by minimalizing black suffering. Although women did not actively take part in the violent attacks against black settlements in Nova Scotia, by othering the black experience, they contributed to the enduring prejudice.

Even as women contributed to the forging of communal bonds among a socially diverse group of refugees, many retained a desire to escape exile and return home. When peace between Great Britain and the United States offered the loyalists a path back to their ancestral homes, it was the women who jumped at the opportunity. Using their position as concerned mothers, women like Mary Bradstreet worked to reestablish ties to their American homes and forced more reluctant fathers and husbands to return. Back in the United States, the same women who had been active community members found comfort in more domestic roles.

When Mary Sewall penned the note in her old diary, she believed she was close to death. Perhaps she found comfort in rereading about her time as an exile because it reminded her of her past struggles. Maybe she was reminded that all hardship, all separation, is only temporary. While her diary is full of descriptions of adversity, her final words invoke a subtler hopefulness that may have carried her through all the hardship. “Adieu my beloved sister, my husband, my children, till we meet in that happy state…that happy state where we shall meet to part no more.”

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APPENDIX A:
BRADSTREET, SEWALL, AND ROBIE FAMILIES

The Bradstreet Family