

Resources for Teaching Loyalist History in the American Revolution

Primary Sources

Proclamation concerning Persons Swearing British Allegiance, 25 January 1777:

<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-08-02-0160> (Announces that those who will not swear loyalty to the Revolutionary Government at military posts must leave their homes or be declared enemies of the State)

From Alexander Hamilton to William Livingston, 29 April 1777:

<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-01-02-0149> (Hamilton describes the treatment of Loyalists. Portions of this letter were later crossed out)

To Alexander Hamilton from Gouverneur Morris, 16 May 1777:

<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-01-02-0161> (Morris advises Hamilton on the proper treatment of Loyalists, including public execution)

“At a meeting of the True Sons of Liberty, in the City of New-York, July 27, 1774, properly convened; present, John Calvin, John Know, Roger Rumpus, &c. &c. Uc. [15 resolves] By order of the meeting Ebenezer Snuffle, Secretary” [New York, 1774]: <https://www.loc.gov/item/rbpe.10602600/> (A Loyalist Parody of the Sons of Liberty, reflects how many Loyalists saw the Sons of Liberty.)

“Loyalists & the Defeat of Britain in the American Revolution Selections from Letters, Petitions, Narratives, and Poetry, 1782-1786”:

http://americainclass.org/sources/makingrevolution/war/text8/loyalistsdefeatbritain.pdf?sm_au=iVVvnQ6jv4Qtj2kM (Selected documents about Loyalist experiences at the end of the Revolution)

“An American’s Experience in the British Army: Stephen Jarvis and the American Revolution”:

<http://lib.jrshelby.com/jarvis.htm> (A detailed account of a young man who joined the Revolution, and then became a Loyalist soldier during the war)

Secondary Sources

“Establishing the Tory Myth”, by Taylor Stoermer: <https://allthingsliberty.com/2013/07/establishing-the-tory-myth/>

“Patriots Turned Loyalist—The Experiences of Joseph Galloway and Isaac Low”, by Richard J. Werther: <https://allthingsliberty.com/2018/02/patriots-turned-loyalist-experiences-joseph-galloway-isaac-low/>

“Agrarian Revolt in Colonial New York, 1766” by Irving Mark www.jstor.org/stable/3483742

Questions for Consideration

- In the “Proclamation Concerning Persons Swearing British Allegiance”, Washington gave Loyalists thirty days to withdraw behind British lines, or be treated as “common enemies of the American States”. Why might some Loyalist families remain where they were? What could happen to people who remained to become Enemies of the State?
- In the letter from April 29th, 1777, Alexander Hamilton wrote to William Livingston that the Revolutionaries needed to “strike a terror in the disaffected.” What does he mean by this? How did the Revolutionaries use fear and violence against Loyalists to further their cause?
- In the May 16th, 1777 letter to Alexander Hamilton, what did Gouverneur Morris mean when he said “...nothing short of occular [sic] demonstration can convince these incredulous beings that we really do hang them.” Why did the Revolutionaries have to fear people speaking out against the Revolution?
- What fears did Loyalists have as the Revolutionary war ended? Why were they concerned about these things?
- Who was William Prendergast? Why did so many people revolt against the land-holding families of the Hudson Valley in 1766? How do you think many of these people might have felt about the Revolution in New York, largely led by the same land-holding families, ten years later?
- Why did American Revolutionaries call Loyalists “Tories”? Would Loyalists consider themselves Tories?
- Today, people refer to the American Revolutionaries as the “Patriots”, and those who supported the British government as “Loyalists” or “Tories”. What is a patriot? By using these words to describe two different sides, how does this influence how we think about the Revolution?
- People from all different parts of society were Loyalists during the Revolution. Discuss why the following people might choose to support the British government: A merchant, a tenant farmer, and an enslaved person.
- Many people tried to remain neutral during the Revolution. Think about what your status or occupation might have been during the Revolution. Do you think that you would have remained neutral, or would you have taken a side? What reasons might you have to join the revolutionaries? What reasons might you have to become a Loyalist?
- The last paragraph of Alexander Hamilton’s letter to William Livingston from April 29, 1777, was later crossed out. Why do you think that might be? How do you think changes like this affect the way the American Revolution is taught today?
- What is the most surprising thing that you have learned from reading these sources? How does what you have learned differ from what you have read about the American Revolution before? What questions do you want to learn more about?

Ian Mumpton is a historical interpreter at Schuyler Mansion State Historic Site in Albany, NY. His primary areas of research there include New York Loyalists in the American Revolution, Philip Schuyler's relationship with the Six Nations of the Haudenosaunee and other Native Peoples, and the histories of people enslaved by the Schuyler family. He also studies Medieval European martial culture, and practices historic European and North American martial arts from the 14th through early 20th centuries.

Copyrighted by Ian Mumpton, 2018