

George Barnhart, a Loyalist forgotten by the British

New York Loyalists

Some of the Loyalists from New York State almost seem to be a different genre than their compatriots from New England. They knew or cared little about taxation issues or republican sentiment. They were, by and large, farmers - people of the soil. To them, revolutionary fervour was seen as disloyal nonsense from radicals out of Boston and Philadelphia. Surely, they thought, such misguided energy could be snuffed out by people of principle taking up arms against the miscreants. There was a purity and simplicity about their service to "God, King and Country", which is reminiscent of the legions of Canadians who served in the two World Wars.

One such Loyalist was Sergeant George Barnhart (1737-1811). He served well, but was inadvertently forgotten by the British, posthumously, when the War of 1812 was settled by the Treaty of Ghent, and his 999-year dream of a loyal family dynasty in Canada was shattered, just three years after his death.

Beginnings

At the time the troubles began in the area, in late 1774, George Barnhart was a successful tenant farmer of 180 acres on the Nine Partners Patent, on land owned by Samuel Van Plank (Vanplanksburgh) near Pentacton, Ulster County, on the Delaware. He spoke out against the rebel movement whenever possible, and just in case fighting should erupt, he joined the Turloch Militia under Captain Jacob Miller, and served from 1775 to 1777. When he saw that it would be impossible to avoid a fight, he assisted Col. John Butler, and was imprisoned for a time. (details from *his claim before the Loyalist Commissioners*, page 1904, January 29, Montreal, 1792). He enlisted with the King's Royal Regiment on 2 Dec 1780, and offered his sons for enlistment, namely Jacob who was then age 12, and Nicholas who was born in 1771, "being 9 years old, and 4'6" tall". George had married Catherine Sharpstone, who was a daughter of Jacob Sharpstone, 2nd Lt., U.E.L. Both the Barnharts and Sharpstones had emigrated from Germany in the previous generation. The British Colony of New York was a dream destination for them, and they were not about to give this dream up easily.

Greater love hath no man, than to offer himself and his sons in service.

George Barnhart was born in Loonenburg, Greene, New York, in 1737, first son of Johannes Barnhart (1715-1779) and his wife Maria Gertrude Rau (b. 1719). Johannes was also a Loyalist in arms, serving with Joseph Brant on scouting expeditions, and was with him at the battle of Minisink, July 22, 1779, and in one engagement was wounded. He joined the King's Royal Regiment on 1 February 1780, serving with Munro from 1781-83. He also settled in Canada.

The Peace Comes

Peace, but dejection and uncertainty, came in 1783. After the long winter of 1784, Regimental, Associated and unincorporated Loyalists were mustered at several posts in Quebec for their journey to their new homes. The Crawford purchase (1783) of Mississauga (Ojibway) lands along the front of eastern Lake Ontario preceded the resettlement. The first battalion of the King's Royal Regiment of New York, under Sir John Johnson, was settled in the first five of the Royal townships on the St. Lawrence River west of the seigneurie of Longueuil. At their own request the settlers were divided by race and religion so that the Catholic Highlanders, Scottish Presbyterians, German Calvinists, German Lutherans and Anglicans were generally assigned to the townships later named Charlottenburgh, Cornwall, Osnabruck, Williamsburgh, and Matilda.

Resettlement

After living briefly at the military camp at Sault de Recollets, at Montreal, where daughter Catherine was born in early 1784, George and his family took up residence at Cornwall. Before the birth of Catherine, George and his wife Maria had seven children born in New York. Counting daughter Catherine, George

and Catherine also had seven more children in Canada. To discover all of his children, I had to reconcile the report in "Sons and Daughters of American Loyalists", page 16, with his will of March 2 1811 (Film No. 0201748 Land Records, County Stormont, Upper Canada, 1808-1816, Vol. C, Page 400, Item No. 268), and with later OC land petitions as found in the Upper Canada Land Books. As with many cases in genealogical research, no one single source provides all of the information.

George Barnhart's Dream

In 1811, in his will, George Barnhart describes himself as "*I, George Barnhart of the Township of Cornwall in the County of Stormont in the Customs District of the Province of Upper Canada, Innkeeper*". From a reading of his will, one can see that prosperity and success had reached George in his later years. The values learned on the soil and in dedication to his principles had paid off. He had built and operated a successful inn to serve the hard working and hard drinking sailors who had worked their way up and down the Lakes and the St. Lawrence. He had married off most of his older children to the children of other Loyalists. He had accumulated funds, and had set his eyes on a 999-year family dynasty.

The Family Dynasty

George Barnhart had leased a 1700 acre island in the St. Lawrence, which he referred to in his will as "Barnhart Island" This island was leased to him by the Mohawks at St. Regis 1796 and renewed in 1806 for 999 years for \$60 a year. The will bestows land on sections of the island to several of his children, in considerable detail.

Barnhart Island

In its heyday, the island boasted two roads, a school/church, saw, grist and woollen mills, and cheese factory. There were two general stores, a horse ferry to the Canadian shore and treadmill scow to the U.S. Boasting 20 families, 2,000 maple trees and 700 cows, other island names were Hickey, McDonald, Layo, Gallinger, Pitts, Cline, Eamer, and Seldon. These names will be well known to Canadian Loyalist researchers.

The Crushing of the Dream

In 1814, at the end of the War of 1812, the island was exchanged for strategically important Wolfe Island, protecting Kingston Harbour, as part of the provisions of the Treaty of Ghent. This was not the only island given up by the British as a result of this treaty, all aimed at protecting Kingston. Carleton Island in Lake Ontario was also surrendered, with the ruins of the large Fort Haldimand, where the graves of about 25 unnamed British are said to be buried.

In the ensuing territorial exchange, the title to Barnhart Island was given to American brothers named Ogden, in 1823. Immediately the Ogdens made the Barnharts purchase the homesteads they had pioneered, for \$10,000. In 1850 the State of New York realized the injustice of this sale and recompensed the Barnharts. The island continued on a diminished scale for another 56 years, but in 1906, the Frontier Corporation began making surveys to dam the Long Sault Rapids. In 1922, the island was purchased with plans to build the dam. During World War II the U.S. government built a small power plant and barracks. Finally in November 1950, the last permanent island resident, Edgar Mullarney, moved to Massena.

Now uninhabited, the island was destined to become the American anchor of the Moses Saunders International Power Dam when the Seaway was finally built in 1958, while the island was turned into a park.

The Barnhart descendants, under many surnames due to marriages of daughters, gradually moved away. Many in fact moved back to America, as if they had forgotten the quest and dream of their forebear, George Barnhart the Loyalist. Such is the way with many descendants of Loyalists. It is possible to see Canada after the end of the Revolutionary War, as *the America that would have been, if the republicans had lost the war*. Many descendantsof Loyalists, of gentler politics, saw the two countries as interchangeable.

An interesting challenge exists for genealogical researchers. Technically, Barnhart Island was a part of St. Lawrence County, New York, after 1814, and when looking for families in later census returns, one must look at nearby towns and villages in US census returns. Some people born on Barnhart Island report later that they were born in Canada, and others say they were born in New York.

Few descendants of Sergeant George Barnhart who are living today, even know that they are descended from a determined and idealistic Loyalist, especially those now living in America. It is up to us of UELAC, to keep the dreams of those Loyalists alive.

- Richard Ripley UE