

The "Stone for Sarah" Revisited

by Edgar Clow, UE

In 1950 and again in 1977, the late Dr. H. C. Burleigh published monographs unrolling the exploits of Sarah Kast McGinness, for twenty years a widow in the Mohawk valley who espoused the Loyalist cause in the American Revolution. Dr. Burleigh was a physician who practised in the town of Bath and in retirement lived in Kingston. Annually he used to spend time in New York State where he researched the Loyalist families who settled in the Lake Ontario Counties of Ontario.

In the February 1989 issue of *The Loyalist Gazette*, Lieutenant Colonel Wm. A. Smy under the title "A Woman's Service in the Revolution" quoted correspondence from David Claus, Indian agent, to General Haldimand, Commander in Chief of the British and Loyalist forces in Canada. In it Claus explained Mrs. McGinness' unique relationship with the Six Nations Indians, her loss of property to the rebels and her return to the Mohawk valley at Claus' request, to keep up the morale and loyalty of the Six Nations Indians after the defeat of Burgoyne in 1777.

Encouraged by Smy's article Mrs. Evelyn Drew of Picton, a long time member of Bay of Quinte Branch, and Edgar Clow, of Brockville, Col. Edward Jessup Branch, both descendants of Sarah, commenced laying plans to spearhead a campaign to erect a memorial to Sarah and made their intention known in a letter to *The Loyalist Gazette* in the spring of 1990. Mrs. Drew and Clow invited contributions from fellow descendants. A memorial, it was hoped, would be in place in September, 1991, to coincide with the 200th anniversary of Sarah's death.

In the spring 1991 issue of *The Gazette*, Barbara Hopper of Nepean, another descendant who had joined the original team, wrote a complete, well researched article on the life of Mrs. McGinness, entitling it "A Stone for Sarah". This phrase became the rallying cry for the project, which now had another descendant on board in the person of Mrs. Catherine Evans of the Kingston branch. It was Mrs. Evans' research that resulted in the eventual placing of "the Stone" in

Editor's Note: I am especially pleased to present this update on the Sarah Kast McGinness Story, because one of the last applications that Angela and I put through while we were the Dominion Genealogists, was Mr. Diminie's Sarah Kast McGinness submission. We had been promoting some changes in the genealogical area, that would make it easier for documented Loyalists such as Sarah to be recognized, and it is wonderful to have had a small part in that process. Sarah was also featured in past Gazettes: page 28/29, spring 1991 and an article by this author on page 25 of the spring 1992 issue.

St. John's Cemetery in Bath.

Meanwhile, plans were taking shape for the memorial itself, the wording of the plaque, the participation of the then Ontario Ministry of Culture and Communications, which helped fund the plaque, the plans for the unveiling ceremony on the 200th anniversary of Sarah's death, September 8th, 1991.

In the end, close to 150 descendants from across North America banded together to erect the memorial and participate in the unveiling ceremonies. As Edgar Clow wrote in **Sarah Kast McGinness Honoured** in *The Loyalist Gazette*, Spring 1992: "*The event had the classic earmarks of the Loyalist creed, crystallized into action in a unique way... 'to preserve the history and traditions ... of the Loyalist families before it is too late ... to erect monuments, memorials ... to perpetuate the memory of the United Empire Loyalists'...*".

The unveiling ceremony was preceded by a church service in St. John's Anglican Church. The rector of the time, Rev. Kenneth Blaber extolled the virtues of Sarah's loyalty and sacrifice, hymns of the 1700s were sung, and a later generation of Loyalists, Meribeth Clow, Donald Drew and Kevin Hopper were responsible for the psalm and scripture selections. At the unveiling ceremony which followed, officers of Bay of Quinte Branch, under whose auspices the event was conducted, participated, assisted by Arnold Nethercott of London, president of the Dominion Association. The memorial, a cast bronze plaque mounted on a rough cast slab of Leeds County granite, was unveiled by Barbara Hopper, her 11-year-old daughter Victoria Hopper, Catherine Evans and Verna Hill. Mrs. Hill was also

the keynote speaker, revealing Mohawk philosophy including the place of women, and the mutual kindred spirit of loyalty and respect spanning most of Sarah's lifetime. A tribute to Mohawk friendship is a line on the plaque reading "Sken non Enhsatonrishen" the Mohawk equivalent of reading "Rest in Peace".

Descendants and friends were generous in their contributions to the project, and from the proceeds, Sarah's name is perpetuated in the United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada, through an endowment fund of \$1,000 presented at the Association's annual meeting in Ottawa in the spring of 1992.

Also in 1992 under the auspices of the Secretary of State for Canada, the Canadian Committee on Women's History acting for the Status of Women, produced for Women's History Month a large chart carrying the names of women famous in Canadian history. Sarah McGinness was among the earliest anglophone women listed.

Nor did the accolades cease in 1993: significant treatment was given to Sarah's exploits by one of her long-standing champions in While the Women Only Wept by Janice Potter McKinnon.

Fortunately the Dominion Association took steps earlier this year to officially recognize Sarah as a Loyalist in her own right: henceforth her descendants joining the association as regular members can name her as their ancestor. The first certificate so issued was presented to Donald Diminie, current president of the Bay of Quinte Branch. Mr. Diminie, along with the original "sponsors" would still welcome hearing from other descendants, both in Canada and elsewhere, especially from the younger generations.

Addendum: Sarah Kast McGinnis

by Donald W. Diminie, UE

Earlier this year, just before Convention time I received my certificate as a descendant of Sarah Kast McGinnis. While not a collector of UE certificates, I was especially happy to get this one. You see, Sarah, as far as we know, killed no one in the American Revolution, wasn't a soldier and perhaps never ever carried a weapon. But, as documentation shows, she was as much a Loyalist as any soldier. It was Sarah who twice went back into enemy territory to influence the Mohawk people to remain on the British side in that civil war. This of course was at the request of British authorities. Sarah had grown up living close by the Mohawk in that New York valley of the same name. She lost her husband, Timothy, fighting for the British cause in the Seven Years' War at the Battle of Bloody Pond. Still a widow in 1775, it is most important to understand that in a time when women often had no voice in matters of import, Sarah made her *own decision* to remain loyal to the Crown!

Like other Loyalists her decision cost her dearly, losing all her property, being alienated from friends and extended family members, as well as deaths of members of her family. When safely in Canada, she was twice asked by the government to help influence the Mohawk people favourably, she agreed and succeeded. Sarah *never* got a land grant nor any other recognition that we know of. She was paid only a small portion of her monetary claim! I found Sarah when searching for the parents of a G-G Grandfather, Nicholas Hartman, whose mother was Margaret Staring who was the daughter of Catherine McGinnis and Adam Joseph Staring. Catherine McGinnis was the daughter of Sarah Kast and Timothy McGinnis.

I must thank a cousin I have not as yet had the pleasure of meeting: Barbara Hopper, UE, who was responsible for setting ablaze my interest in Sarah. I had read Barbara's article about Sarah in a back issue of *The Loyalist Gazette*, (that Edgar Clow mentions in his article) and also Barbara's story in the Herkimer County Almanac, Legacy entitled, "Sarah Kast McGinnis: A Loyalist Legend". A lot of follow-up here and in New York

State on my part happened also. My goal was foremost, to have Sarah recognized, acknowledged finally as a Loyalist. Secondly, to make it known to other descendants that they also may obtain their UE standing by proving descent from her. After all, some people may only be able to track one Loyalist ancestor. If that is so, I can think of none bet-

ter than Sarah Kast McGinnis. I believe there are likely other women who demonstrated their support of the British cause in the Revolution. If you find such an ancestor, applying for your UE certificate as a descendant is a way of gaining deserved recognition for her.

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Wedding Bells

Actually there weren't any bells and the service was outside on May 16, 1998. There wasn't any music either, unless a good crisp musket volley is music to your ears. It was the wedding of Christopher Nicholas and Frances Baxter. The occasion was a reenactment of the 'buckskin' sort, rather than a gathering of Loyalist regiments. The groom wore buckskin. The best man wore even more buckskin, and the bride and maid of honour were dressed in their best pioneer costumes. Ameliasburgh Museum in Prince Edward County ON was the location, and the service was conducted by Rev. Maurice McLeod of Belleville, himself a

Loyalist descendant and member of Bay of Quinte Branch. The service was based on a 1790 model.

The bride, Frances, is a descendant of William Ketcheson Sr., UE (British Legion), who settled in Sidney Township in Upper Canada, after having a brief residence in the Maritimes. During his service with the British Legion, he had the dubious distinction of being captured at Yorktown.

Christopher, as well, may have a Loyalist ancestor in Timothy Porter, UE (Loyal Rangers), who died in Murray Township in 1815. Don't look, however, to see the happy couple at UEL meetings in the near future. They spend all their spare time at reenactments.

Best of luck to them!

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