

## Old Holy Trinity Church & the Loyalists

By Brian McConnell\*

It is known as the "only unaltered church of its kind". (1) Old Holy Trinity Church was built at Wilmot, present day Middleton, Nova Scotia by United Empire Loyalist refugees who settled there at end of the American Revolution. Construction began in 1789 and the first service was held on August 12, 1791 by Anglican Bishop Charles Inglis. The church was fully finished with the addition of a bell tower in 1797. A bell constructed in England in 1792 was donated by William Bayard, the Loyalist in New York who organized the King's Orange Rangers in 1785. It is called Old Holy Trinity as a new church, named Holy Trinity, is in use beside the old church on the Main Street leading into Middleton. (2) The old church is cared for and maintained by the Old Holy Trinity Charitable Trust. (3)



**Old Holy Trinity Church in Middleton, Nova Scotia**

Old Holy Trinity was designed by Bishop Charles Inglis following the architecture of Christopher Wren of England. In 1787 Bishop Inglis, also a United Empire Loyalist, who had fled New York, was appointed the first Anglican Bishop for British North America. This included at the time all of Eastern Canada which later became part of Canada and Bermuda. During his time as Bishop he oversaw the establishment of over forty churches.(4) A listing of these appears in Appendix A. There are only seven still standing and Old Holy Trinity along with St. Mary's in Auburn, Nova Scotia which were both started in 1789 are the oldest.

The church was built in the Georgian tradition with its simple detailing which resembles late

eighteenth century meeting houses. There are simple flat head windows. It incorporates a traditional church plan with entrance porch, centre nave and chancel. The original palisade east windows, rear gallery, box pews, pulpit and hardware are present. Its' steeple is set on a large square tower surmounted by contrasting narrow octagonal belfry and rounded spire. Two flags hang at the east end of the church. One is the Canadian flag and the other the Loyalist Flag, or Queen Anne Union Flag, proclaimed by Queen Anne in 1707 and representing the union of England and Scotland, which was flown at the time the Loyalists came to Nova Scotia. Adjacent to the church is a burial ground which includes the graves of some of the first Loyalist settlers. The church was recognized as a heritage site when it became a provincially registered property in the Province of Nova Scotia under the Heritage Property Act on July 27, 1998. (5)



**Inside Old Holy Trinity Church**

The land upon which Old Holy Trinity was built according to the Land Registry for Annapolis County, Nova Scotia was conveyed by Deed recorded on July 23, 1790 from Benjamin Chesley to five Loyalists being "Timothy Ruggles, Thomas Barclay and Samuel Bayard, Esquires and John Ruggles and John Slocomb, the Church Wardens and Vestry for the time being of Trinity Church." (6) The consideration or price shown on the Deed was the sum of twenty shillings. A transcription of the Deed is provided in Appendix B.



Who were the five Loyalists mentioned on the Deed? Two were related. Timothy Ruggles was the father of John Ruggles. Both were from Massachusetts. Thomas Barclay came from New York as did Samuel Bayard while John Slocomb came from Massachusetts. There was a sixth United Empire Loyalist who also was active in the beginnings of Old Holy Trinity Church. He was Reverend John Wiswall, the first Rector of the Parish. He had been forced to flee his home in Maine for being a Loyalist during the American Revolution. The background and connection of each of these six to the church can be considered.

### **Timothy Ruggles (1711 – 1795) & John Ruggles (1742 - 1822)**

In "Bicentenary Sketches and Early Days of the Church in Nova Scotia" by C.W. Vernon it refers to the contribution of Timothy Ruggles to Old Holy Trinity Church. (7) It notes:

"In 1795, the church at Wilmot had the misfortune to lose one of its most enthusiastic and energetic members in the person of Brigadier – General Ruggles....He graduated at Harvard in 1732 and proceeded to study law. He distinguished himself both in his chosen profession and in politics. In 1757 he was made a justice of the Court of Common Pleas, and in 1762 Chief Justice in the same court. In 1756 he accepted a Colonel's commission in the forces raised to services on the frontiers of Canada. He was second in command at the battle of Lake George, and was also one of the commanders under Abercrombie in the attack upon Ticonderoga. Having declared himself on the side of the King at the commencement of the Revolution, he was compelled to seek refuge with the British Troops in Boston, and came to Nova Scotia in 1783. Having received a grant of land at Wilmot, he commenced to clear his land in 1784, and three of his sons settled in the county. He was buried to the eastward of the chancel of the church in Central Wilmot ( the Pine Grove Church), and the Rev. John Wiswall officiated at his service."

There is a monument at the rear of the church which mentions General Ruggles, son John, his wife Hannah and their three children. It was erected by his great grand-daughter Eliza Bayard West and is inscribed:

IN MEMORY OF  
TIMOTHY RUGGLES  
GENERAL  
JOHN RUGGLES  
HANNAH RUGGLES  
Also their son and  
daughters  
CAPT. TIMOTHY  
ELIZA BAYARD  
FANNIE MARIA

One of his daughters, Bathsheba, who remained after General Ruggles left for Nova Scotia, became the first woman executed in 1778 by the newly independent United States of America. (8)

General Ruggles is also remembered by Ruggles Road which is situated in Wilmot and on a cairn in Centennial Park, near Macdonald Museum, on School Street in Middleton that mentions as well Loyalists Samuel Bayard and Thomas Barclay.

An obituary printed in the "Royal Gazette and Nova Scotia Advertiser" on August 11, 1795 written by friend and neighbour Reverend John Wiswall, reads in part: "Died August 4, eighty – four years old, the Honorable Brigadier – General Timothy Ruggles. He was a native of and for nearly seventy years lived in Massachusetts Bay, in which province he sustained under His Majesty the first offices of government, with distinguished ability and reputation. An uncommon share of probity and discrimination first recommended him to the choice of the people as member of the Assembly..."(9)

### **Thomas Barclay (1753 – 1830)**

After serving as an officer with the Loyal American Regiment during the American Revolution, Major Thomas Barclay who had been educated at King's College (Columbia University) and had prior to the conflict been engaged in a legal career, contemplated settling in New Brunswick but instead established his family in Wilmot Township, Nova Scotia. He then resumed his legal practice in Annapolis Royal and entered politics. He was elected to represent Annapolis County in the Nova Scotia House of Assembly. In 1793 he was appointed adjutant general of the militia which he helped to equip and train. From his reputation Barclay was appointed to the Boundary Commission to clarify the boundary between the United States and New Brunswick. During the War of 1812 he was appointed agent for the British prisoners in the United States and returned to New York. At the end of the War he served on a second boundary commission. Thereafter he returned to New York, settling in a home on Manhattan Island. On April 23, 1830 he died and was buried in the churchyard of St. Mark's Church in the Bowery. (10)

### **Samuel Vetch Bayard (1757 - 1832)**

Lieutenant – Colonel Samuel Bayard was born into a leading mercantile family in New York and rose to rank of Major in King's Orange Rangers during the American Revolution. The King's Orange Rangers were founded by his father William Bayard who went to England after the conflict ended where he died. His property was confiscated at end of war and he moved to Nova Scotia where he became commander and Lieutenant - Colonel of the Royal Nova Scotia 104th Regiment in Halifax. As a United Empire Loyalist he was granted 4,730 acres in Aylesford. He sold it off in lots and purchased 5,000 acres in Wilmot, Annapolis County where he built a house. Although he was active with construction in the early years of the Old Holy Trinity Church he later became a member of the Wesleyan Methodist Society. On his death he requested to be buried on his own property along with his wife and some of children. A memorial stone is located there surrounded with his name, his wife Sarah and daughters Aleda, Louisa, and Ethelinda. It is surrounded by a white picket fence. Nearby Bayard Road carries the family name.

His Obituary published in the Acadian Recorder on June 9, 1832 , page 3, stated:

"On the 24th ult. after a severe illness of 24 hours, at his residence in Wilmot, Nova Scotia, Lieutenant Colonel Samuel Vetch Bayard, in the 75th year of his age. Col. B. served his king with

fidelity and zeal during the American revolutionary war stimulated by the example of his Loyal Father, whose inflexible attachment to the standard of his sovereign was followed by the confiscation of an ample and extensive property. In the life of Col. B. was exemplified every christian and social virtue, and he was in the proper sense of the terms, a gentleman, a scholar, and a christian. He was one of the most humble, meek, devoted, faithful and holy men of God of the present age. His time, talents, influence, and property were all uniformly and constantly consecrated to the service of the Lord. It was "his meat and drink to do the will of his heavenly Father." The spirit of deep piety by which he was animated, and the unction of divine love which emanated from him in every circle in which he moved made his company and conversation greatly to be desired, not only by the pious of every denomination, but also by people of every description. He was a zealous member of the Wesleyan Methodist Society for upwards of thirty years of which society he not long since said, that "her doctrines and disciplines are the most pure of any church upon earth." Viewing ministers of the gospel as servants of the Most High and Messengers of Salvation, he esteemed them highly in love for their work's sake, insomuch that the very best accommodation which his mansion could afford, was at their service and it was with difficulty he could be restrained from performing the humblest offices to promote their comfort. As a magistrate upon who devolved the principal part of the business of the Township in which he resided, he was a terror to evil doers, and a praise and support to those who did well. "By his removal, his family has sustained an irreparable loss, the cause of religion has also been deprived of an illustrious ornament and able advocate, the Bible and Temperance Societies of a warm and zealous promoter, and the poor of a sympathizing friend and generous benefactor. But God said, it is enough – he has been called from the labours and sufferings of the church militant, to the glory and joys of the church triumphant." "Servant of God well done! "Mark the perfect man and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace." (11)

William Bayard, father of Samuel, sent as a gift from England the church bell. It is inscribed:

"This bell the gift of William Bayard, Esq. to the  
Trinity Church at Wilmot, Nova Scotia as by Law  
established Tho's Mears of London Fecit."

The bell was made Whitechapel Bell Foundry, a foundry in a borough of London, England, that was in business for almost 450 years until it closed in 2017. It also made the Liberty Bell, a famous symbol of American Independence, and re – cast Big Ben which rings from the north clock tower at the Houses of Parliament in London.(12)

It is also believed that a small pewter chalice and paten that were used as a traveling set by Reverend Wiswall were a gift of John Bayard, a brother of Samuel.

### **John Slocumb (1754 – 1832)**

He was born in Wrentham, Massachusetts and settled in Wilmot, Nova Scotia with other Loyalists where he received a land grant of 300 acres. When he died on October 30, 1825 he was buried in the Baptist Church graveyard at Wilmot. Joshua Slocum, born at Mount Hanley, Annapolis County,

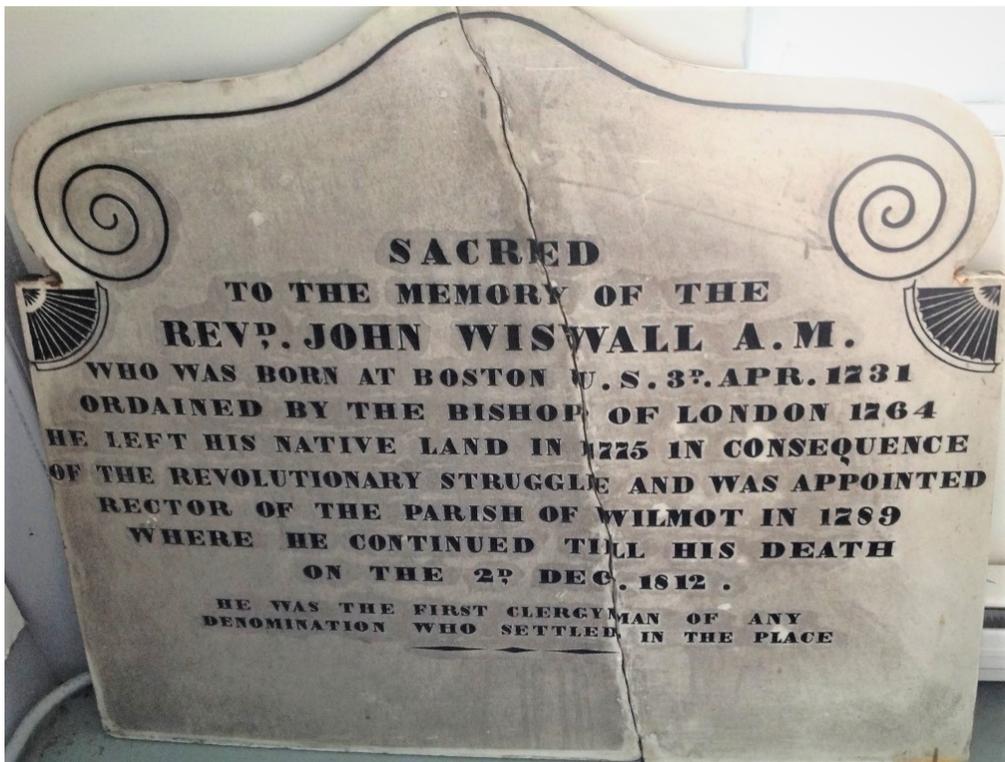
Nova Scotia, who was the first person to sail single - handedly around the world from 1895 to 1898, was his great - grandson.

**Reverend John Wiswall (1754 – 1832)**

Within the Old Holy Trinity Church is a commemorative tablet to Reverend John Wiswall which for many years hung on an inside wall.

It reads:

SACRED  
TO THE MEMORY OF THE  
REV.D JOHN WISWALL, A.M.  
WHO WAS BORN AT BOSTON, U.S. AT 3rd APRIL 1731  
ORDAINED BY THE BISHOP OF LONDON 1764  
HE LEFT HIS NATIVE LAND IN 1775 IN CONSEQUENCE  
OF THE REVOLUTIONARY STRUGGLE AND WAS APPOINTED  
RECTOR OF THE PARISH OF WILMOT IN 1789  
WHERE HE CONTINUED TO HIS DEATH  
ON THE 2nd DEC. 1812  
  
HE WAS THE FIRST CLERGYMAN OF ANY  
DENOMINATION WHO SETTLED IN THE PLACE



Reverend Wiswall was a missionary in Falmouth, Maine when in 1775 facing increasing hostility for being a Loyalist he was placed under house arrest with orders not to leave the area. However, he managed to escape to Boston and then spent the next six years as a chaplain in the British navy. In 1782 he began two years of service in England as a curate in three rural parishes. Then he emigrated to Nova Scotia and took up a large mission that included Horton, Cornwallis, and Wilmot. He was appointed to the newly created smaller mission of Aylesford and Wilmot in 1789, the same year that construction began on the Old Holy Trinity Church.

Some years later in making his report in a letter of November 26, 1810 he wrote:

"Last winter I obtained a correct list of the number of settlers in this township, there are 120 families exclusive of 30 young men who are forming settlements on the wilderness lands. Allowing 7 to a family to which add the 30 young men the amount is 1500 a vast increase in the space of 27 years, for in the year 1783 when I first visited this country there were no more than 8 or 10 settlements in the whole township, about four fifths of the inhabitants are Baptists or Methodists."(13)

Reverend Wiswall had been appointed as Rector of the Kings County mission which included both Wilmot and Aylesford when it was originally formed in 1782. He conducted services in private homes and schoolrooms until in 1789 the construction of churches was begun in Wilmot at Middleton of Old Holy Trinity and in Aylesford at Auburn of St. Mary's. (14) He resided in a home he built some six miles from Old Holy Trinity Church. As well he oversaw a glebe which included many acres of cultivated farmland.

In 1801 Reverend Wiswall was seriously injured in a fall from his horse. Earlier that year he had been notified that the Wilmot and Aylesford churches were to be separated with each having its own Rector. Reverend John Inglis, son of Bishop Charles Inglis was appointed Rector of St. Mary's Church in Aylesford at Auburn and Wiswall remained with the church at Middleton. After his fall his activities were reduced. He continued with preaching at Old Holy Trinity Church when invited to do so until his death.

Peleg Wiswall, son of Reverend Wiswall, resided in Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia where he was a lawyer and elected to represent Annapolis County in the Nova Scotia House of Assembly from 1812 to 1816. Afterwards he was appointed an Associate Judge of the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia. When he died on September 18, 1836 he was buried in the Garrison Graveyard at Annapolis Royal where his gravestone can be viewed.

## APPENDIX A

### Churches established in Nova Scotia during Episcopate of Charles Inglis (1787 - 1816)

Shelburne	Christ Church	1788	Burned, 1791
Digby	Trinity	1788	Demolished, 1877
Windsor	Christ Church	1788	Demolished
Aylesford	St. Mary's	1789	<b>Standing</b>
Wilmot	(Old) Holy Trinity	1789	<b>Standing</b>
Granville	1st All Saints	1790	Demolished, 1811
Granville	Christ Church	1789	Demolished, 1882
Weymouth	St. Peter's	1790	Demolished
Guysborough	Christ Church	1790	Demolished
Parrsborough	St. George's	1790	Demolished
Sackville	St. John's	1790	Demolished
Sackville, 2nd church	St. John's	1807	Burned
Preston, NS	St. John's	1790	Demolished
Granville	Christ Church (formerly called St. Paul's)	1791	<b>Standing</b>
Clementsport	(Old) St. Edward's	1793	<b>Standing</b>
Newport	St. James	1793	Demolished, 1856
Rawdon	St. Paul's	1794	Demolished, 1847
Chester	St. Stephen's	1794	Demolished, 1840
Mount Watley (Cornwallis)	St. Mark's	1794	Sold 1881, demolished
Port Williams (Cornwallis)	St. John's	1804	<b>Standing</b>
Yarmouth	Holy Trinity	1805	Demolished, 1870
Granville	2nd All Saints	1811	Demolished, 2013
Annapolis Royal	2nd St. Luke's	1814	<b>Standing</b>
Falmouth	St. George's	1815	Demolished

As well 17 churches opened in New Brunswick including ones at Saint John (Trinity started in 1788, burned in 1877), Fredericton (St. Anne's, 1788, demolished), St. Andrew's (St. Andrew's, 1788, demolished), Kingston (Trinity, 1789, still standing), Gagetown St. John's, 1790, demolished), Long Island (St. Stephen's, originally called St. George, moved to Wickham, 1857, demolished), Maugerville

(2nd Christ Church, 1790, demolished), Belleisle (Christ Church, 1792, demolished), Westfield (St. Peter's, 1794, demolished), Sussex Vale (Trinity, 1796, burned), Queensbury (Trinity, 1805, demolished), St. Stephen (Christ Church, 1805, demolished), Hampton (St. Paul's, 1810, demolished), Lower Woodstock (Christ Church, 1810, demolished), Burton (1810, demolished), Norton (Christ Church, 1811, demolished) and one in Prince Edward Island at Charlottetown (St. Paul's, 1800, demolished).

## APPENDIX B

**Book 8 Page 297 Document # 80297, Annapolis County, Nova Scotia Property Online  
Recorded on the 23rd of July 1790 at 3 o'clock in the afternoon on the oath of Joseph Ruggles**

This Indenture made the Seventh day of June in the year of our Lord One thousand seven hundred and Ninety. Between Benjamin Chesley of Wilmot in the County of Annapolis and Province of Nova Scotia Yeoman of the One Part and Timothy Ruggles, Thomas Barclay, and Samuel Bayard, Esquires and John Ruggles and John Slocomb Yeoman all of the Township County and Province aforesaid as the Church Wardens and Vestry for the time being of Trinity Church in the Township aforesaid of the other part. Witnesseth that the said Benjamin Chesley for and in consideration of the Sum of Twenty Shillings lawful money of Nova Scotia to him in hand paid at and before the ensealing and delivery of these presents the receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged hath granted bargained and sold and by the Presents doth Grant bargain and sell unto the said Timothy Ruggles, Thomas Barclay, Samuel Bayard, John Ruggles and John Slocomb Church Wardens and Vestry as aforesaid and their successors in Office All that certain Lof of Land situate lying and being in the Township of Wilmot aforesaid on the North side of the Post Road (or Highway) and is bounded as follows: Beginning at the South Western most bounds of Robert Nielys land on the north side of the said Road running thence South Eighty Degrees West sixteen Rods, then North ten degrees West twenty Rods thence East ten Degrees North sixteen Rods and thence South Ten Degrees East twenty Rods or to the place of beginning containing two acres together with and all singular the heriditments and appurtences to the same belonging or in any ways appertaining and the reversion, revision and remainder and remainders, rents, taxes, and profits of the said Premises and every part and parcel thereof and all the Estate, Right Title Interest Property claim and Demand whatsoever of him the said Benjamin Chesley at Law or in Equity of in and to the same and all and singular the premises above mentioned and every part and parcel thereof with the Appurtenances unto the said Timothy Ruggles, Thomas Barclay, Samuel Bayard, John Ruggles, and John Slocomb and their Successors in Office for ever and the said Benjamin Chesley for himself and his heirs the said lot of land and premises and every part thereof against him and his heirs and against all and every person and persons whatsoever - to the said Timothy Ruggles, Thomas Barclay, Samuel Bayard, John Ruggles, and John Slocomb and their Successors in Office shall and will Warrant and For Ever Defend by these Presents. In Witness Whereof the parties to these presents have hereunto interchangably set their hands and Seals the day and years first above written.

Sealed and Delivered

in the presence of:

John Brishark     Joseph Ruggles

Benjamin Chesley

**Notes:**

\* This article was completed by Brian McConnell, UE, B.A. (Hons.), LL.B.. on June 27, 2022. To contact him please email [brianm564@gmail.com](mailto:brianm564@gmail.com)

- (1) "Old Holy Trinity Church – A Treasured NS Heritage Site" booklet by Katrina Demchenko, published 2019
- (2) "A Brief History of the Parish of Wilmot" <http://parishofwilmot.ca/wp/our-history> accessed June 25, 2022
- (3) "Old Holy Trinity Church" <https://oldholyltrinitychurch.ca/wp/> accessed June 25, 2022
- (4) Cuthbertson, Brian, "The First Bishop", Halifax: Waegwoltic Press, 1987, pp. 271 – 273
- (5) Canada's Historic Places, "Oldy Holy Trinity Church", accessed June 24, 2022 at <https://www.historicplaces.ca/en/rep-reg/place-lieu.aspx?id=3805>
- (6) Nova Scotia Property Online, Annapolis County, Book 8 Page 297, Document #80297 accessed June 27, 2022
- (7) Vernon, C.W., "Bicentenary Sketches And Early Days of the Church in Nova Scotia", Halifax: Chronicle Printing Co., 1910, pp. 208 – 209.
- (8) McConnell, Brian, "Resurgam – the Motto of Nova Scotia Loyalist Brigadier – General Timothy Ruggles" accessed June 25, 2022 at <http://www.uelac.org/Loyalist-Info/extras/RUGGLES-Timothy/RUGGLES-Timothy-by-Brian-McConnell.pdf>
- (9) McConnell, Brian, "Loyalist Cemeteries & Churches of Nova Scotia: Annapolis & Digby Counties", published, 2020, pp. 27 – 28.
- (10) Tullock, Judith, "Barclay, Thomas Henry," in Dictionary of Canadian Biography, vol. 6, University of Toronto, accessed June 25, 2022 [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/barclay\\_thomas\\_henry\\_6E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/barclay_thomas_henry_6E.html)
- (11) Acadian Recorder, June 9, 1832, p. 3
- (12) Whitechapel Bell Foundry accessed June 26, 2022 at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whitechapel\\_Bell\\_Foundry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whitechapel_Bell_Foundry)
- (13) Wiswall, Reverend John Wiswall, " Journal of Rev. John Wiswall, M.A., an Episcopal clergyman who spent the greater part of his ministerial life at Wilmot, Annapolis County", accessed June 26, 2022 at <https://archives.acadiau.ca/islandora/object/research%3A473>
- (14) DeCoste, John A. And Robar – DeCoste, Twila, "The Little Wren Church", Hantsport, Lancelot Press Limited, 1990