

Steadfast in Adversity: The Life of David White

— Submitted by Sandra Guinan, UE

I attended my first United Empire Loyalist Association of Canada's National Conference in Saint John, New Brunswick, in July of this year. The first speaker, Wade Wells, spoke about "Developments at Johnson Hall." This was a topic about which I knew nothing, but Wade Wells's presentation served as a catalyst, inspiring me to delve more deeply into any possible connection between my fourth great-grandfather, David White Sr. (1752–1846), and Johnson Hall.

Johnson Hall, a Georgian-style mansion built in 1763 in Johnstown, Tyron County, New York, is now recognized as a National Historic Site. Once the residence of Sir William Johnson—an Anglo-Irish immigrant, British army officer, and colonial administrator—this grand estate played a significant role in the region's history. Sir William had been appointed Superintendent of Indian Affairs and granted a baronetcy by the British crown. Upon his death in 1775, his eldest son, Sir John Johnson, inherited both the titles and his vast estate.

I am always impressed by someone who displays genuine passion for their chosen subjects. Wade Wells, Historic Site Manager of Johnson Hall, personified that passion. From age nine Wade was captivated by all matters relating to Johnson Hall. He has spent his life working on the restoration of the estate and maintaining its place in American history.

The puzzle pieces began to connect when I heard him mention two places: Johnstown and Albany. I knew that David White had lived in Johnstown, that his cattle had been stolen en route to the Albany market, and that he had assisted a Lieutenant John



Muster Roll of J. McDonnell's Company

McDonall of the 1st Battalion of the King's Royal Regiment to escape from the Albany gaol. The King's Royal Regiment itself was commanded by Sir John Johnson¹ and was primarily composed of Catholic Highland Scots—tenants whom Sir William had personally recruited.

David White was neither of Highland Scottish descent, nor is there any documented information regarding his religious affiliation. Tracing his Scottish origins to the rural landscapes of Wigtownshire, he first lived in the shadow of a prominent lineage in Scotland, and later faced the upheavals of resettlement in New York, ultimately settling in Nova Scotia.

David White lacked a fixed home for much of his youth, and his later attempts to find stability speak to his resilience amidst revolution and migration. He stated he **was born in 1752 in Galloway in the Parish of Wigtown by the Bladnoch Bridge**. Wigtown Parish is

situated in the historical county of Wigtownshire in the southwest of Scotland in what is the Galloway and Dumfries region.

Against this backdrop of displacement and change, major Scottish migration to New York occurred shortly before the American Revolution, driven by significant social and economic changes in Scotland. These circumstances prompted many individuals to accept opportunities for relocation. Sir William Johnson played a pivotal role in encouraging



Johnson Hall, Johnstown, NY

substantial numbers of Scottish immigrants to settle in the Mohawk Valley, striving to ensure their transition was both comfortable and satisfying. They “*attached to the interests of Sir William Johnson, who, by consummate tact soon gained a mastery over them. He would have them assemble at Johnson Hall that they might make merry; encourage them in Highland games and invite them to Indian councils. Their methods of farming were improved under his supervision; superior breeds of stock sought for, and fruit trees planted.*”²

After his arrival in New York, David White was forced to move frequently due to the prevailing unrest, searching for both stability and a permanent home. He likely first sought out other Scots for support and soon learned of an opportunity to settle in the Mohawk Valley, in an area which he **thought secluded from parts**. There, he leased land from Sir John Johnson and in time, collaborated with his compatriots during the war, motivated by a mix of loyalty and necessity.

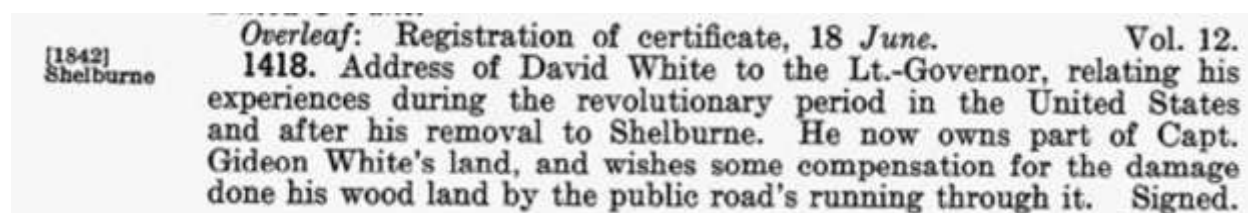
This link to Sir John Johnson turned out to be crucial to my research. It was only after revisiting David White’s Memorial Claim, submitted in Shelburne, Nova Scotia, in 1786, that the full importance of a single sentence became apparent. It read: “**Claim** for a house and 130 acres of land on permanent lease from Sir John Johnson.” That sentence—overlooked at first—proved to be the key, and I can now confirm David White’s connection to Johnson Hall.

David White's Memorial Claim, Shelburne, NS, 1786

White, David of Johnstown, Tryon Co. **Memorial** Shelburne, NS, 1786. In 1776 he broke into Albany gaol and rescued Lieut. John McDonald of the 1st Battalion of the King’s Royal Regt. He was then forced to hide for 21 weeks in the woods at the mercy of spies. He was seized and fined and spent eight weeks in prison. When everything had been taken from him, he was allowed to return to his farm which he built up again to be able to support his family. After another 18 months, when taking his cattle to Albany market, he was plundered again by the rebels. Just before the evacuation of NY, he was required to take the rebel oath but chose to quit instead and came to NS with his family. **Claim** for a house and 130 acres on permanent lease from Sir John Johnson. Rejected. (13/25/523-528).

Determined not to overlook any crucial details, I revisited a letter written in 1842 by one of David White's grandsons on his behalf, seeking reparation for losses to his woodland. This renewed examination offered fresh perspectives and revealed new facets of David's life and hardships that had previously gone unnoticed.

The Address of David White provides a firsthand account of the **sufferings** he faced throughout his life.³ My analyses of these excerpts are shown in bold throughout this narrative. The letter is part of *The White Collection of Manuscripts*⁴, which belonged to Captain Gideon White, commander of the Duke of Cumberland Regiment. Captain White was a member of the *Port Roseway Association* and is recognized as one of the founding fathers of Shelburne, Nova Scotia. David and Gideon were not related; David merely purchased property from him.



A Calendar of the White Collections of Manuscripts (PANS)

David White was the **third son of John White and Barbara Murdock Stewart** who were married on April 9, 1738, in Wigtown, Scotland.⁵ (I suspect Barbara may have been previously married and that Stewart was her maiden name, but I won't digress.) Baptismal records exist for four of their children: John (March 18, 1739), Elizabeth (March 8, 1742), Samuel (May 15, 1744), and William (May 21, 1745).⁶ Unfortunately, no such record has been found for David. Whether his parents had additional children remains a mystery. I can only speculate that he had two older brothers who survived. No further information about his parents or siblings could be found.

Regarding his upbringing, David White recounts: **Agnew of Auchiltrie {?}. In my early infancy I was adopted by Lady Agnew, but she unfortunately died. I was promised an education by Mrs. Agnew, who subsequently passed away and was succeeded by her son Nathaniel. Nathaniel Who was in habit of being ? Minor {?} and thought but little of me.** This passage raises several questions.

Auchiltrie appears to be a phonetic rendering of "Ochiltree," which is in the Parish of Galloway, approximately 59 miles from Wigtown. The Agnew family was notably prominent in Ochiltree, serving as hereditary sheriffs for nearly three centuries. Although this system of hereditary jurisdictions concluded in 1747 following the Jacobite uprising, the Agnew family maintained their status and influence for several generations afterward.

Nathanael (sic) Agnew, son of David Agnew and Isabel Duke, was baptized in Wigtown on March 28, 1848.⁷ Later he worked as a lawyer and served as Deputy Keeper of the Register for the borough of Wigton, acquiring land throughout the Galloway and Dumfries

areas. Turning to P.H. McKerlie's authoritative work, *History of the Lands and Their Owners in Galloway*, we can find several detailed references to Nathaniel Agnew's activities.

For instance, the text notes, "*Nathaniel Agnew of Ochiltree seems to have obtained it, as we find that he had sasine on the 17th May, 1769. His name is rather prominent at this time in regard to the acquisition of lands.*"⁸ Such records paint a clearer picture: Nathaniel was not a peripheral figure, but an active and well-recognized landholder in the region. The regular appearance of his name in legal documents of the era—particularly those involving the ancient Scottish law of sasine, which referred to the formal transfer of feudal property—attests to his significant role in local affairs. This prominence would have shaped not only his own fortunes but also, indirectly, the lives of many others, including David White's.

If Nathaniel was an infant in 1848, there would have been approximately a four-year age difference between him and David White. However, it seems that after Mrs. Agnew's death, her son Nathaniel became David's guardian by default. This arrangement may not have been ideal, as David notes that Nathaniel **thought but little of me**. It's also telling that, in 1798, Nathaniel's own wife and the mother of his five children sought a separation, suggesting that David was not alone in his dissatisfaction.

I however{?} continued in the family until I was 21 years of age. By that time David White was already married with a small family. Documentary evidence, including the manifest of the HMS Clinton and the death record of his son David Jr., my third great-grandfather, confirms this fact.

David White ***immigrated to America (in 1774) and arrived in New York during the Public agitation before the Revolution and as the excitement increased, ... shifted from place to place.*** At this juncture, it is unknown if he were a widower left with small children. Eventually, he ***settled in Johnstowne On {in} the Mohawk.*** It was not the first time or last time he found himself in such unfortunate circumstances. While in New York, David would have heard that Sir William Johnson "*advertised leased land on his Kingsborough Patent through New York City agents and convinced 400 Scots of the Highland Clan MacDonnell to settle on his property.*"⁹ Following Sir William's death in July 1774, his son Sir John Johnson inherited his father's titles, as previously mentioned. Hence David's claim that he leased from Sir John Johnson. His escape from the ***Public agitation*** would be short-lived.

David White had been married twice. The name of his first wife remains unknown; however, it may have been Jennet, as suggested in this excerpt from his will dated 28 March 1842: "*Secondly I give to My dearly Beloved Wife Jennet White the Remainder of all the Real and Personal estate of Which I May dispose.*"¹⁰ As Jennet is neither a nickname for Margaret nor was it a known middle name for his living wife, it is plausible that this was an

unintentional error made by the elderly testator when drafting his will, possibly inferring that Jennet was his first wife's name.

The identity of David White's second wife is known. Margaret (née Gill) was the widow of Job Reynard. Margaret married Job in Kirby Malzeard, Yorkshire, England on 9 Nov 1743¹¹ and their son, Job, was baptized there on 17 Dec 1766.¹² Job Sr. supposedly died in Schenectady, New York in July 1775. Job Sr. and Margaret's son was listed on the passenger list of the HMS Clinton as "#556. Job White (16)." ¹³ Job Jr. was the first of the Raynard line in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia. He left Shelburne about 1791 and settled in Raynardton, his namesake, and raised a large family. His marker is at Tusket Lakes Cemetery in Yarmouth County, NS. He died in 1825 as a result of bloodpoisoning from an infection after pulling "*out his own tooth with a pair of pinchers.*"¹⁴



Job Reynard's Marker
Tusket Lakes Cemetery



1776

May 18 David White & Margaret Reynard, from the (Army?) Banns¹⁵



The marriage between the couple, both recently widowed and each with young children, is documented in the Dutch Reformed Church records of New York.

Upon closer review of this document, more questions about David White's possible military involvement arise than answers. Another descendant, who was the first to be certified as a UE through David, shared documentation with me. Interestingly, nowhere in those records is there mention of our David having served in the army.

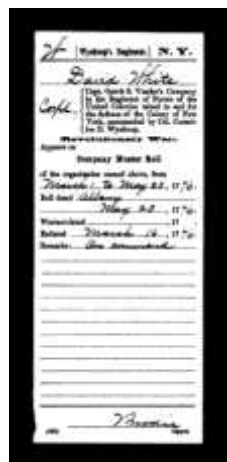
This always puzzled me, since it's hard to understand why an ordinary farmer would be involved in helping a Lieutenant escape from jail — an act more typical of someone with military ties, such as those in the King's Royal Regiment, which was composed of Sir John Johnson's loyal Scottish supporters.

Records like the *Muster Roll of Captain Gerrit S. Veeder's Company*¹⁶ and from *Willett's Regiment of Levies, 1781–1783*¹⁷ include a Corporal David White as serving in



Willett's Regiment of Levies 1781-1783

the Continental Army. The commonality of the name David White in these records might seem ambiguous, but since our David was a professed Loyalist, this is not the case.



Military Record
Corporal David White

The rest of the title of the muster roll reads: *“in the Regiment of Forces in the United Colonies raised in and for the Defence of the Colony of New York commanded by Colonel Cornelius D. Wynkoop dated Albany 23 May 1776.”*¹⁸ This clear link to the Continental Army and its timeframe in Albany explains why confusion can arise from these records.

At that time, Albany was a hotbed of revolutionary activity, and records show that David White was present there on at least two occasions in 1776: once for his marriage, and another for helping Lieutenant John McDonall escape from the Albany gaol, though the exact date of the latter event is unknown.

Interestingly, David White’s own Memorial Claim does not indicate that he ever held an official military rank, this absence does not entirely preclude the possibility of his involvement in some auxiliary capacity. During the upheaval of the Revolution, many civilians—especially those loyal to the Crown and intent on safeguarding their interests—were drawn into local militias or informal groups of like-minded supporters, operating just beyond the periphery of formal military engagement.

David White left New York – 7 in family in H.M.S. Clinton in 1783 and arrived in Shelburne (?) with the Refugees.

38	Families of Loyalist Refugees Transported New York to Nova Scotia By HMS “Clinton” Oct 1783 and Dec 1783				Page 38 of 39
Pass.#	Surname	Given Name	Spouse	Children	Note
380	White	David	488 - Margt White	558 - Wilfm White [11]; 590 - David White [13]; 557 - Dan'l White [14]; 589 - Edw'd White [14]; 556 - Job White [16]	Passengers on HMS Clinton, picking up 14 Nov 1783 East River, NY, delivered to Port Roseway NS 13 Dec 1783. Women and children have been assigned to families based on surnames and may not be correct.

Muster Table HMS Clinton

The children listed on the HMS Clinton manifest were a mix from both families. #556, Job White (14) was Job Raynard Jr. #557, David White (13), was my third great-grandfather. #557, Dan'l White (14), refers to Daniel Raynard, baptized in Kirby Malzeard, Yorkshire, England, on March 1, 1769.¹⁹ I can't say for certain who Edward and William's parents were—some online trees suggest Edward was a White and William a Raynard, but there's no definitive proof.

David Jr., son of David White, sailed on the HMS Clinton at age 13. He died of old age in Plymouth, Yarmouth County, Nova Scotia, on March 23, 1872, with his occupation recorded as cooper. His age at death was listed as 101 years, 1 month, and 17 days,²⁰ making his birth date February 6, 1771

If David White **arrived in New York in 1774**, then his son David Jr. would have been born in Scotland. Notably, David Jr.'s death record presents two inconsistencies, which was not unusual for documents of that era. First, it gives his birthplace as *the State of New York*, which is simply where he was raised. Second, it names *Margaret* as his mother, when in fact she became his stepmother in 1776, at a time when David Jr. was still a young child.

David White and his family **suffered extreme hardship the First winter** in Shelburne, Nova Scotia. Like many Loyalist settlers, his family faced primitive conditions upon arrival, relying on makeshift shelters that offered little protection from the harsh Atlantic winds. The rapid influx of thousands of refugees created its own set of challenges. Supplies were scarce, conditions unsanitary and disease was prevalent.

Initially, the British authorities distributed rations such as flour and salted pork. However, these provisions were quickly depleted, leaving the refugees to fend for themselves amid the unfamiliar, rocky terrain and the unrelenting forces of nature. With the dense forests needing to be cleared by hand and the bitter cold ever-present, survival itself became a daily challenge.

Despite his staunch allegiance to the Crown, David White received little tangible support from British authorities. Land grants were slow to materialize and in David's case, his petition was ultimately rejected. Countless Loyalists, like his family, struggled for years to rebuild their lives.

In 1842 David White was **90 years of age. Poor and without other assistance**. He is thought to have lived four more years, though this is unverified. Probate records from July 1846 exist. His life was marked by poverty and hardship.

What emerges is a vivid description of a man steadfast in his resolve, yet often at the mercy of circumstances beyond his control. David White appears as a pragmatic and resilient individual—a regular farmer striving to support his family and build a life amidst instability. Even as he worked the land and tended to his domestic affairs, he could not escape the reach of public unrest. His own words, ***much harassed by the Rebels on account of my known loyalty and succor I gave to my countrymen***, suggest a man whose sympathies and actions made him a target during the revolution.

David White outlined in his Memorial Claim his harrowing experience of being *“forced to hide for 21 weeks in the woods at the mercy of spies. He was seized and fined and spent eight weeks in prison.”*²¹ As a young man—newly married and responsible for a growing family—he endured unimaginable trials. Throughout the course of his life, he was repeatedly confronted with overwhelming hardships. His resilience was nothing short of extraordinary.

His personal life was no less complicated. David White's early years were far from easy. Adopted as an infant by a woman of prominent stature, he was later raised by her son,

who regarded him with little esteem. Married twice, with the identity of his first wife lost to history and his second marriage intertwining the lives of two families.

David White's story is one of endurance through loss and new beginnings. His move to America, restless search for security, and eventual settlement in Johnstown on the Mohawk and then later in Nova Scotia all reflect a determined spirit and a longing for peace—qualities severely tested by that strife-ridden era.

Not celebrated as a war hero or for notable deeds on the battlefield, David White is remembered as a man “harassed” for his convictions. He was, perhaps, representative of many in his generation. His actions epitomize conviction and unyielding principles, even in the face of great personal risk.

Marked by migration, hardship, unwavering loyalties, and lingering questions, his life offers a compelling portrait of an ordinary man navigating extraordinary times. His character, as glimpsed through the fog of history, is defined by perseverance, courage and resilience.

I am proud to be his descendant and hold the utmost respect for him. Though I speak only for myself, I find profound meaning in his legacy—an enduring example of hard work and steadfast values that future generations should aspire to emulate.

¹ “Loyalist Regiments.” The On-Line Institute for Advance Loyalist Studies, 2001, <https://www.royalprovincial.com/military/rlist/rlist.htm>

² “Highland Settlement of the Mohawk.” Settlements of Scotch Highlanders in America, <https://electricscotland.com/history/highlands/chapter8.htm>. Accessed 20 Jul 2025.

³ White Family Nova Scotia Archives MG1 Vol. 956 No. 1516

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ancestry.com. Scotland, Select Marriages, 1561-1910 [database on-line].

⁶ Ancestry.com. Scotland, Select Births and Baptisms, 1564-1950 [database on-line].

⁷ History of the lands and their owners in Galloway; with historical sketches of the district. <https://archive.org/details/historylandsand01mackgoog/page/100/mode/2up?q=nathaniel+agnew>

⁷ “Sir William Johnson brings Scots over” by Bob Cudmore, 2008, in

⁸ History of the lands and their owners in Galloway; with historical sketches of the district. <https://archive.org/details/historylandsand01mackgoog/page/100/mode/2up?q=nathaniel+agnew>

⁹ Bob Cudmore, “Sir William Johnson brings Scots over,” 2008, <https://mohawkvalleyweb.com/index.php?id=204>

¹⁰ David White, will, 1842, Nova Scotia Probate Records, Public Archives of Nova Scotia. (copy of original will, personal records.)

¹¹ Ancestry.com. *England, Select Marriages, 1538-1973* [database on-line].

¹² Ancestry.com. *North Yorkshire, England, Church of England Baptisms, Marriages and Burials, 1558-1812* [database on-line].

¹³ Muster Table HMS “Clinton”, Document # ADM 36/9966 Public Record Office, Kew, Surrey, England. Copied by Frank Davis, transcribed by Mette Griffin

¹⁴ “Early Raynardton.” <http://www.yarmouth.org/villages/raynardt/history/index.htm>. Accessed 20 Jul 2025.

¹⁵ Ancestry.com. Dutch Reformed Church Records. Holland Society of New York; New York, New York; *Albany, Vol IV, and Jamaica, Book 4*

¹⁶ Ancestry.com. U.S. Compiled Revolutionary War Military Service Records, 1775–1783. Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2010, Provo, UT, USA. Original data: National Archives, Washington, D.C., War Department Collection of Revolutionary War Records, Record Group 93, Series M881

¹⁷ Ancestry.com. U.S., Revolutionary War Rolls, 1775-1783 [database on-line].

¹⁸ U.S. Compiled Revolutionary War Military Service Records, 1775–1783.

¹⁹ Ancestry.com. North Yorkshire, England, Church of England Baptisms, Marriages and Burials, 1558–1812 [database on-line].

²⁰ Nova Scotia Death Registers, 1872, Book 1818, Page 68, Entry Number 33.

²¹ Coldham, P. W., *American Migrations 1765–1799*, p. 52