

TIMOTHY RUGGLES (1711-1795) The Rise and Fall of a Massachusetts Loyalist

Timothy Ruggles was a prominent leader in the Massachusetts colony during the time immediately preceding the American Revolution in 1775. Had he not been a Loyalist, he might have been one of the founding fathers of the new nation.

He was born in Rochester, Massachusetts in 1711, the son of Reverend Timothy (Harvard College 1707) and Mary Ruggles and was the fifth generation of his family born in America. His father wanted him to be a learned man and sent him to Harvard. However, he did not follow his father into the ministry because he did not have the reserved temperment of a clergyman. Instead, he was more inclined towards the adversarial disposition of a lawyer. Consequently he studied law and graduated in 1732. Upon graduation, he opened up a practice in his home town of Rochester where he was also elected as a Representative of the General Court, or Assembly, at the age of 25. From the beginning, he was ambitious and driven towards success. Being over six feet tall, he projected a commanding presence over his much shorter associates.

His practice took him to County Courts in Plymouth and Barnstable. When traveling to Cape Cod, he usually stayed at the Newcomb Tavern in Sandwich. It was the first inn to open in Sandwich and the building still stands as a private home on Grove Street. The tavern was being run by Bathsheba Bourne Newcomb, a beautiful, dark skinned and wealthy widow with 7 children. There must have been an instant spark of passion between these two fiery personalities because they were married within five months of Bathsheba's burying her first husband. Neither cared about the opinions of others. Timothy (age 25) and Bathsheba (age 32) were wed in 1736 by her father, Judge Melitiah Bourne, the wealthiest man in Sandwich. The fact that she was beautiful, independently wealthy and from a prominent family; must have played a role in his decision to become the instant head of a large family. He was no stranger to a house full of children because he was the eldest of 12.

They resided at the inn in Sandwich and immediately began a family of their own. However, Timothy initially kept his official residence in Rochester because of his re-election to the General Court from that town. The unexpected death of lawyer Nathaniel Otis created a need for an attorney in Sandwich and Ruggles filled the void and officially became a Sandwich resident in 1739.

Ruggles hung his lawyer's shingle outside the inn and maintained the dual role of attorney and inn keeper. In 1821, a family descendent wrote, "He was social, witty, profane, wise about human nature, and quick to drop ceremony and

convention when they ceased to be of social value." Hard manual work was not beneath him and he personally attended both the stable and the bar. Oddly enough, he was a virtual teetotaler who only drank an occasional small beer.

All the while, he continued to expand his law practice and was recognized as one of the leading lawyers in the province of Massachusetts. He served as a representative of the Crown for a fixed fee which often brought him into opposition with James Otis Sr., a Cape Cod neighbor from Barnstable who was representing individuals who had charges brought against them by the authorities. Later in his career, Ruggles would find himself vying against James Otis Jr., a strong advocate for the cause of independence, but that would happen many years later.

In the meantime, Ruggles political career continued to move forward and among the many posts he held was that of Excise Collector for Barnstable County. He remained popular among his new townspeople and was elected to 6 terms as Sandwich's Representative to the Assembly in Boston during the 17 years he lived there. During his time in Sandwich, he not only built up his practice, but also his family. He had seven children with Bathsheba, 4 girls and 3 boys.

In 1753, at age 42, he was seeking a grander life style and he moved his wife and their 7 children to Hardwick, a new town outside of Worcester, Massachusetts. The relocation had been in the planning stage for some time and Ruggles acted in concert with 6 other Ruggles families who moved to the area where they had acquired a very large tract of land. Timothy was by far the richest and most well known person in the new town. Bathsheba's children from her first marriage were now older and some were married and they did not make the move to Hardwick. William Newcomb Ruggles now ran the Sandwich tavern.

Ruggles began a life style commensurate with his wealth and that of English country gentlemen. He entertained his guests in a lavish style and conducted hunts on the property and hosted many grand dinners. Surprisingly, it was around this time that he stopped eating meat and became a vegetarian. Russell Lovell's book about Sandwich gives us a good description of the Ruggles 400 acre farm. He writes:

"Timothy and Bathsheba established no ordinary farm in Hardwick. He laid out a deer park and stocked it. He bought imported and local horses of excellent breeds and developed splendid hunting and riding horses. He bought prize bulls and developed a dairy herd. He laid out a large orchard with many fruit varieties. In all these activities, especially the selection of stock, the breeding patterns of his animals and the grafting and propagation of his trees, he displayed the greatest interest and observation in advanced scientific practices. He was able to entertain in baronial style, and his home became a magnet for travelers from all over the state."

Ruggles continued to be active in politics and like he had done in his other

communities, he was elected as Hardwick's Representative to the General Court in 1754; a position he would hold for the next 17 years. He was also appointed a judge in Worcester.

The French and Indian War against the British and its American colonies broke out shortly after his move to Hardwick. His leadership skills and loyalty to the cause were quickly evident when he raised a regiment of colonial volunteers from Worcester County and he assumed their command as Colonel. It was not long before he participated in a joint Colonial-British regulars attack on Crown Point in the Lakes region of New York. It failed and Ruggles was vocal in rebuking the British tactics of marching columns of troops against entrenched enemy positions. The English, under the command of Sir William Johnson, did not appreciate criticism from a colonial volunteer.

The next year, 1756, the all Provincial American forces won a significant victory at Lake George and this time Ruggles was second in command. He continued to fight in the campaigns of 1756, 1757 and 1758 and was subsequently named Brigadier General in charge of Provincial forces from Massachusetts and Rhode Island. In 1759, as second in command to Lord Amherst, the joint British and Provincial forces attacked Fort Ticonderoga and wrested it from the French. Fort Ticonderoga would later play an ironic role in his life. He participated in campaigns in each season through 1762 when the battles largely ended in America. Ruggles had achieved wide spread recognition as a fine officer who demonstrated exceptional leadership skills and whose troops would willingly serve under him.

After the war, he triumphantly returned to Hardwick and was amply rewarded by the Crown for his efforts. He was named Survey-General of the King's Forests receiving 300 pounds per year and was also granted 1500 acres in nearby Princeton. His political career blossomed and he was named Chief Justice of the Worcester Superior Court. Not only did he continue to represent Hardwick in Boston, but he was named Speaker of the House in 1762/1763. Around this time, young John Adams wrote in his journal, "Ruggles grandeur consists in the quickness of his apprehension, steadiness of attention, the boldness and strength of his thoughts and expressions, his strict honor, conscious superiority, and contempt of meanness. People approach him with dread and terror."

Up until this time, the colonists considered themselves as staunch Englishmen as they had done for the last 150 years. Circumstances were about to change and so would the attitudes of some and later many of the colonists.

The French and Indian War had cost a huge sum of money and England insisted that the American colonies help pay the debt of 147 million pounds accrued during the war. England also had a 10,000 man army still stationed on the western borders of the colonies to protect against Indian attacks and possible French encroachments. The Crown wanted the colonies to help bear the costs. Consequently Parliament passed the Stamp Act in 1765 that taxed legal

documents, newspapers and playing cards. The stamp was evidence that the tax had been paid. Stamps were familiar in England adorning all kinds of documents and they generated 300,000 pounds per year for the Crown. However, this was the first time Parliament had placed an external tax on the American colonies.

Ruggles, who fought in the war, appreciated the price that England had paid in lives and pounds. He was a Tory and loyal to the King and thought it was a reasonable approach and cautioned for moderation. He was in the minority. Many in the colony openly rebelled against the tax. People in New York, Virginia and Philadelphia took to the streets in protest. Mobs in Rhode Island hanged the tax officials in effigy. New Englanders called for a boycott of British goods. In Boston, the Sons of Liberty destroyed the home of Lieutenant Governor Hutchinson. James Otis Jr., a Ruggles opponent and the son of his old adversary on Cape Cod, called it a violation of the colonists' constitutional rights. When Otis was elected as a member of the Assembly, Ruggles confided to a dinner guest, "Out of this election will arise a damned faction which will shake this province to its foundation".

The Massachusetts Assembly called for a meeting of all of the colonies to discuss and act upon the Stamp Act. In June, 1765, representatives of 9 of the 13 colonies met in New York. It was the first national convention of the colonies and it was convened without the approval of the Crown. Massachusetts sent 3 representatives with the two more important being Timothy Ruggles and James Otis Jr. The Royal Governor of Massachusetts awaited instructions from London, but knew that the colonial congress would be completed by the time he received direction. Therefore he attempted to mitigate the situation by using his leverage to have Loyalist Ruggles made President of the Congress. The fact that his peers voted him President indicates that loyalty to the Crown was still a moderate and popular position to most Americans in 1765. Ruggles had reached the apex of his career.

The Congress sent a deferential petition to the King and Parliament stating the "Essential Rights and Liberties of the Colonists." Among many items, they listed 2 privileges essential to freedom; 1) - that they are free of all taxes unless consented to by their representatives and 2) - that they are entitled to a trial by their peers (and not by the Admiralty Court). It was a moderate document in that it did not either reject or acknowledge Parliament's authority. Nevertheless, Ruggles was 1 of 2 representatives who refused to lend his signature to the proceedings. This was the beginning of his down fall from popularity along with all other Tories and he would eventually face virulent attacks. One of the earliest denunciations came in the form of a censure from the Massachusetts Assembly, led by James Otis Jr., for the Brigadier's refusal to approve the actions of the Stamp Act Congress despite his being President of the group.

Within a year Parliament repealed the Stamp Act due to the protests in the

colonies and the political pressures brought by the English merchant class who were experiencing large losses due to the colonial boycotts. However, the strains and tensions between the colonies and England would continue to grow in the ensuing years. The inhabitants of Massachusetts would move from a quiet accommodation with the British imperial system to massive rebellion against it. Despite Ruggles' censure, the Brigadier would continue to be elected as the Representative from conservative Hardwick and was re-elected to the General Court as late as 1770.

England was still in a quandary as to how to pay for the war debts and the new Chancellor of the Exchequer levied the Townsend Act upon the American Colonies which taxed common goods imported into the colonies. Once again it was vehemently opposed by the Americans who boycotted English goods and smuggled in other products to avoid the tax and threatened violence against the custom officials. "Taxation without representation is tyranny", a phrase credited to Otis, was on the lips of many colonists. Like its predecessor, the Stamp Act, it too was quickly repealed - except for a symbolic, small tax on tea. In December 1773 the Sons of Liberty, furious about even a small tax, conducted the Boston Tea Party and dumped 40 tons of British tea into the harbor. It would be the prelude to the Revolution.

The British responded rapidly and harshly to the deteriorating situation in Boston. In 1774, England closed the port of Boston, the busiest port in America, as the Crown tried to isolate the rebellious locals. General Gage arrived in the city, declared martial law and was made Governor General of the colony. He ended the native democracy of the colony by refusing to convene the Assembly. Furthermore, he changed the nature of the Governor's Council. Instead of its members being nominated by the Assembly, Gage personally appointed 36 Tories to the Governor's Council. Many of the appointees declined the position because the practice was fiercely opposed by the populace and because they faced violence from the Sons of Liberty.

Ruggles was one of the appointed councilors and stubbornly he said he would accept the position. When his Hardwick townsmen found this out they ordered him to immediately leave town. The next morning, just after daybreak, he rode out of town alone fleeing to the safety of the British encampment in Boston. He was met at a bridge by his brother, Benjamin who had taken the Patriot side. It was reported that the Brigadier said, "I shall come back at the head of 500 soldiers if necessary" to which his brother replied, "If you cross this bridge today, you will never cross it again alive." It was August 1774 and he never returned.

Timothy Ruggles was now a vilified figure. The appointment of the 36 councilors by General Gage prompted Mercy Otis Warren, sister of James Otis Jr., to write her satirical play, *The Group* in late 1774. One of the lead characters is Brigadier Hateall, a ferocious warmonger who is married to a lowly tavern woman, "nut-brown Kate, the buxom dowager." Hateall says he would not abandon his

position in the Governor's Council even to save his wife, family and friends. He boasts of beating his wife and recommends the same course be taken to other wives if they object to quartering British soldiers in their homes. Mercy's friend, John Adams, had the play published anonymously and the Patriots read it with delight. She reveled in savaging her former Cape Cod neighbor, a Tory and lifetime opponent of her brother and father.

In April 1775, the battles at Lexington and Concord were waged and the war had begun. In June, the British forces decided to attack the colonialists atop Bunker Hill. General Gage let it be known that he thought the rebels would run at the sight of British cannon. Ruggles believed he was wrong and that the Americans would fight bravely. When the battle ended in disaster for the British, Ruggles was reported to have told him, "My God sir, your folly has ruined your cause." The Revolution was fully underway and Boston, under control of the British, became the only safe place for the 1500 Tories who fled to it. Among them was Ruggles who organized 200 Loyalist men called the Loyal American Volunteers. There is no evidence that Ruggles ever fought against the American Forces.

The British and Loyalists continued to be hemmed in Boston by General Washington's forces and the stalemate continued until a young Colonel Knox pulled, pushed and dragged cannon from the recently seized Fort Ticonderoga to Boston. When the British realized their fleet was in jeopardy, they had no choice but to evacuate Boston. On March 17, 1776, the British and Loyalists sailed away having been driven out by the cannon from the fort that Timothy Ruggles had helped capture 20 years earlier during the French and Indian War.

Ruggles evacuated to the English strong hold in New York and stayed on Staten Island and later Long Island. While in New York he began a series of unsuccessful efforts to gain British support for a Loyalist company. But the British saw them as "colonists" and not their equals as "Englishmen". His habit of informing the British officers of their stupidity did not help his cause. A fellow Loyalist, Edward Winslow, wrote at the time: "There was such a mixture of virtue even with his obstinacy that while we depreciated it as unfortunate to ourselves we dared not oppose it."

At the end of the war, Timothy Ruggles was among the 30,000 to 40,000 Loyalists who were relocated to Canada by the British. The Crown rewarded him for his service by granting him 1,000 acres in Wilmot, Nova Scotia on the Bay of Fundy where at age 70 he built a new estate. He resided there until his death at age 83 in 1795.

Tories, for the most part, were people with entrenched power and wealth. They were the office holders, large land owners, clergymen of the established church, and judges. An inordinate number of Massachusetts Tories also were Harvard graduates. They were conservatives who were reluctant to accept change and were certainly opposed to a revolution that rejected the King and Parliament.

They thought of themselves as Englishmen who wanted stability in the colonies and harmony with their mother country. They were proud of the British Empire and they considered themselves as Englishmen and part of the most powerful and most free nation on earth.

The Brigadier was descended from a long line of Ruggles who were ministers, lawyers, and representatives in the legislature. He was an integral part of the power structure. As the clashes between London and the colonies increased, he was resolute in his defense of the Crown. He was unbending in his loyalty to Britain and he could not bring himself to cross over to the other side. As far as he was concerned, the movement for independence was being driven by an unruly mob and he rejected their violent efforts for separation from England. While his opponents saw him as obstinate and inflexible, he saw himself as a man of uncompromising principles. It was not in his nature to change sides.

Had he done so, his leadership skills, military expertise, and judicial ability would have put him in a position to play a prominent role in the development of a new country.

When Massachusetts in 1778 published a list of the top 300 Tories, Timothy Ruggles was 3rd on the list (behind Governor Hutchinson and Tax Collector Oliver). They were officially exiled from Massachusetts, their property seized and they were forbidden to return on pain of death.

The Revolution split the Ruggles family. When he fled to Boston, Bathsheba did not go with him and she never joined her husband in exile. Over the years their relationship had withered and any bond between them was now gone. Perhaps his nearly 7 year war time absence drained the relationship and added further to Bathsheba's independent spirit. Their 400 acre farm was confiscated by the authorities and she went to live with her son Timothy III until her death. On the other hand the Brigadier had the loyalty of his 3 sons. John and Richard would join Ruggles in Boston and ultimately in Nova Scotia. Timothy III also moved to Nova Scotia after the death of his mother and later became a member of the House of Assembly of Nova Scotia. His 4 daughters were married and stayed in Massachusetts.

His favorite daughter, Bathsheba, met a tragic fate. On July 2, 1778, she along with her 3 accomplices was hanged for murdering her husband. The incredible spectacle of the quadruple hanging took place in Worcester, very close to the court house where her father had been the Chief Justice.

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