

SEVEN YEARS IN EXILE: THE LONG ISLAND REFUGEES

by

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(Under the Direction of Allan Kulikoff)

ABSTRACT

During the American Revolution, almost 3,500 Long Island residents fled to Connecticut to escape British occupation. Long Island residents faced persecution from their neighbors and from the British during the seven years troops occupied Long Island, and many fled their homes for safety in Connecticut. However, those who chose to leave their homes faced the harsh realities and hardships of war. The decision to evacuate and subsequent experiences in Connecticut provide an excellent example of how war affects society.

After the events in Boston in 1774, Long Island residents divided over the question of loyalty. Social, political and economic factors influenced the decision of each resident and each county responded differently to the impending crisis with England. The arrival of British troops on Long Island forced many residents who had arduously supported independence to flee to Connecticut.

However, refugees found that once they arrived in Connecticut, legal problems plagued their existence. Increasing taxes and mandatory militia service complicated their lives and made survival difficult at best. In addition, New York and Connecticut limited the refugees' ability to return home to Long Island for supplies. By 1780, many of the refugees attempted to return home, despite the fact that the British still occupied Long Island. However, upon return home

refugees frequently found their homes and property destroyed. The Long Island refugees provide an excellent case study of how war impacts society. The American Revolution, normally linked with freedom and independence, was a devastating event for many Long Island residents.

INDEX WORDS: Refugees, Long Island, Revolutionary War, American Revolution, Kings County, Queens County, Suffolk County, New York History

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Chapter 1: Seven Years in Exile

On February 9, 1790 John Foster, a former resident of Suffolk County on Long Island, petitioned the New York Senate from debtor's prison seeking relief from his debts. Before the revolution, Foster was a successful business man, but when the British invaded Long Island he fled to Connecticut, where he lost everything. According to his 1787 petition, his war time losses totaled almost £2000 and he explained that, "by supporting a large family in Conn. during the war, [he] found himself unable to pay his debts."¹ Although Foster had more to lose than many of his neighbors, his story captures the plight of many refugees who fled Long Island in 1776. So how did John Foster, a prominent business man in the shipping industry at Sag Harbor, end up in debtor's prison?

At the beginning of the American Revolution Foster was known for his successful business ventures and his support for colonial independence. In 1770, John Foster helped residents of Sag Harbor build a wharf, which turned the small town into a central shipping and whaling station. John Foster along with Joseph Conkling, a fellow refugee and privateer, owned three whaling ships, the *Good Luck*, *Success*, and the *Dolphin*, and by the early 70's, Foster became a prominent member of the shipping community in Sag Harbor.² Ironically the wharf Foster and his neighbors used to create a successful whaling town became a central embarkation point for residents fleeing British occupation.

¹ Frederic Gregory Mather, *The Refugees of 1776 from Long Island to Connecticut* (Albany: J.B Lyon Company), 719.

² Helen Foster Snow, *The Christopher Foster Family History 1603-1953*. (Long Beach, Foster Family Association), 13. Helen Foster Snow was a descendant of John Foster, and published an entire family history explaining her ancestors.

Foster used his shipping resources to support the war for independence. The events in Boston mobilized residents of Suffolk County and stirred up a revolutionary spirit determined to defend the colonies from British tyranny. On June 17, 1774, “the inhabitants of East Hampton voted that they would, to the utmost of their abilities, assert and in a lawful manner defend the liberties of America,” which included using ships to support patriots throughout the colonies.³ John Foster was instrumental in a number of shipping ventures to supply the residents of Boston with much needed supplies. In November, the Committees of Correspondence voted that “John Foster [would] have the care of procuring a vessel to call at the several harbors in this county, to receive and carry the ...donations to Boston.”⁴ Then on May 22, 1775, Suffolk County residents elected him as one of eight delegates to the First Provincial Congress, during which time he was responsible for procuring military supplies for the rebels.⁵ In addition to providing supplies for the patriots, he also served as an enlisted member of the First Regiment of Minute Men from Suffolk County, and later served as a First Lieutenant in the same regiment under the command of Colonel Smith.⁶ Foster, like many of his neighbors in Suffolk County, signed the Association in 1775.

The British invasion of Long Island changed Foster’s life, and cast him from one of Suffolk County’s most respected patriots, to one of Britain’s most wanted. Due to his involvement with carrying supplies through the British blockade in Boston, Foster became a criminal in the eyes of the British.⁷ After the British invasion and subsequent occupation of Long Island, John Foster and his family became prime targets for British hostility. In late 1775

³ Snow, *Foster Family History*, 14.

⁴ Henry Onderdonk, Jr., *Revolutionary Incidents of Suffolk and Kings Counties*, (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1849) 16.

⁵ Mather, *The Refugees*, 347-348.

⁶ Proceeding of Provincial Congress, Feb 5, 1776 quoted in Mather, *The Refugees*, 995 & Snow, *Foster Family History*, 15.

⁷ Snow, *Foster Family History*, 14.

the British “burnt his ship on the docks at Sag Harbor” in addition they “burnt his...house, barn and outhouses, and to complete the destruction of his property also destroyed some goods, books and papers.”⁸ In his petition he explained that because “he exerted himself in procuring boats, arms, &c., [he]...made himself particularly obnoxious to Gov. Tryon,” which is why he suffered at the hands of the British.⁹ This type of persecution was common for residents on Long Island who supported independence.

After the British invasion, Foster and many of his neighbors recognized the need to flee to Connecticut to maintain their freedom. Foster fled with his family to East Haddam, Connecticut on September 25, 1776.¹⁰ He evacuated a family of eleven, including his elderly father, and at least five young children.¹¹ He salvaged some personal belongings from his home before its destruction, but they were apparently not sufficient to support the family during their seven year exile.¹² Like most of the refugees, his “entire property was liable to be confiscated” after he left Long Island and it is estimated that his losses totaled 100 acres of property valued at 800 pounds.¹³ He never regained his lost wealth or status after arriving in Connecticut or returning to New York, and “rests in an unknown grave...in Southampton” Long Island.¹⁴

The Long Island refugees left their homes during the British occupation due to a complex set of social, economic and political pressures. Despite this being a sizable population movement, historians have written very little on this topic. Although a number of historians

⁸ “Journals of the New York State Senate and Assembly, 1777-1799,” quoted in Mather, *The Refugees*, 719.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 719.

¹⁰ Snow, *Foster Family History*, 78.

¹¹ “The Journal of the New York Provincial Congress, 1775, 1776, 1777,” quoted in Mather, *The Refugees*, 707.

¹² “Revolutionary Manuscripts,” quoted in Mather, *The Refugees*, 745.

¹³ Snow, *Foster Family History*, 14.

¹⁴ Mather, *The Refugees*, 348.

mention the Long Island refugees when discussing the history of Long Island, no one has focused specifically on their struggles and hardships.

One of the most important resources I used for this paper was Fredrick Mather's compilation titled *The Refugees of 1776 from Long Island to Connecticut*. Mather was a journalist, editor and author who wrote a number of historical works about New York during the American Revolution.¹⁵ The compilation concerning the refugees includes over 1,000 pages of primary materials and statistical data concerning the refugees. These primary resources include documents from the New York Historical Society Records, Journals of the New York Provincial Congress, Committee of Safety Records, Journals of the New York State Senate and Assembly, and Claims of the Refugees against New York. Mather's volumes also include the Connecticut Council of Safety Records and the Transactions of the Governor of Connecticut, giving us a brief glimpse of how their neighbors to the north viewed the struggles of the Long Island residents.

Mather's compilation is an essential starting point for discussing the lives of Long Island refugees during the war. However, Mather fails to discuss the reasons for the refugee movements or to detail their experiences while in Connecticut. Despite this lack of detail or explanation, Mather's work still helps us piece together the lives of Long Island residents. These primary sources help paint a picture of both why the refugees fled and what their lives were like while they resided in Connecticut.

As with many historical sources, the documentation available frequently highlights the experiences of the local elites. Mather's compilation certainly captures the experiences of socially prominent refugees and does not provide a complete explanation of what life was like

¹⁵ Osborn, N.G., *Men of Mark in Connecticut: Ideals of American Life Told in Biographies and Autobiographies of Eminent Living Americans*. William R. Goodspeed: Hartford, CT, 1907. Osborn explains that Mather had numerous ancestors involved in the Revolution, which may be why he spent so much time writing about the subject.

for all residents. He focuses on those who served in local politics, owned substantial livestock and household goods, and those who served in the military. Despite the focus on the local elites, these sources still give us a frame of reference for what life was like for the rest of the Long Island refugees, many of whom were not local elites.

When I began this research project, I hoped to focus on the experience of the refugees in Connecticut after their evacuation. Since, I wanted to tell the story of the refugees after they arrived in Connecticut, I focused on town records of Hartford, Saybrook, East Haddam, and Lyme. I spent a couple of weeks at the Connecticut Archives in Hartford where I reviewed town records, birth records, marriage records and newspaper accounts looking for evidence of the refugees. In many cases the town records were missing from the years of the war, and due to limited time I was only able to focus on a small sample of the refugee population. Unfortunately, this limited research led me to find little documentation about the refugees' experience in Connecticut. If I continue this project for a dissertation I would like to return to Connecticut and Long Island to continue reviewing the relevant records. For the purposes of this paper I decided to focus on the lives of the refugees prior to the war and on the hardships they faced trying to survive in Connecticut.

The primary source documents focus on the actions of the men on Long Island and give us an idea of who supported the Revolution. Although these sources do not explicitly mention the women and children on Long Island, they allow us to piece together evidence to explain how the war impacted all Long Island residents. As we look at the story of the Long Island residents, there are only a few times we see personal accounts from the women of Long Island, mostly widows who were trying to return home, but the women in this story are not silent. The evidence

still gives us insight into the experiences of women during the war and explains how they survived the British occupation.

I chose this topic because it offers an excellent case example of how war impacts society. By looking at the evidence we can surmise how devastating war was for men and women on Long Island. The Long Island refugees are not unique, but they provide an example of the refugee experience. Frequently the literature on the American Revolution focuses on the ideals of freedom, liberty and justice, rather than with tragedy, financial ruin and exile. But when we ignore the trials that many colonists experienced during the Revolution, there is a tendency to view the war as a bloodless, painless revolution.¹⁶ However, the fate of these refugees is a powerful testament to the suffering and loss Long Island inhabitants experienced during the American Revolution.

¹⁶ Sung Bok Kim, discusses the tendency of historians to ignore the tragic side of war when discussing the American Revolution in her article “The Limits of Politicization in the American Revolution,” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 80., No. 3. (Dec., 1993) 868.

Chapter 2: Mobilizing Resistance

The beginning of the Long Island refugee story starts with the increasing tensions between England and the colonies. The passing of the Intolerable Acts in 1774 and the skirmishes in Boston led many Long Island residents to question their loyalty to the crown. Party divisions began early on Long Island, and were due to a complex set of social, political and economic factors that divided the island. The eastern end of Long Island, primarily Suffolk County, had the largest percentage of the population that supported independence, while the residents on the Western end of the island frequently sided with the King.

One of the best sources of historical data concerning the loyalties of Long Island residents are the Associations. The Associations were documents explaining the desire of residents to declare their independence from the crown. As we look at the decision of residents to either support or oppose the crown we are only able to surmise their true goals and intentions. There is no neat formula to explain why some residents decided to stay loyal to the crown and endure British occupation, while others chose to flee their homes. However, the historical documents help us uncover how political ties impacted the loyalties of Long Island residents. This chapter focuses on the island's political history as one explanation for why residents divided over the question of loyalty.

Forming Committees and Associations

During the American Revolution, there were actually four parties represented in the colonies and in England. The English Tories wanted to maintain British control over the colonies and lacked sympathy for the plight of the colonists. The English Whigs understood the

complaints of the colonists and felt they should have more, if not equal, representation in Parliament. The American patriots repudiated the British constitution and pushed for complete independence while Loyalists, frequently wanted colonial rights, but within the existing framework to ensure their ties with England.¹⁷ For the purposes of this paper, I am focusing on American Whigs, who wanted Independence from England and Loyalists on Long Island who wanted to work with England to maintain British control.

Long Island's political history provides insight into how and why some Long Island residents chose to oppose the crown, while others stayed loyal to the King. At the beginning of the 18th century, New York residents had already begun questioning the King's authority in local affairs. As early as 1711, "Governor Hunter of New York declared...that there would be in New York a legislature...independent of Parliament."¹⁸ This desire to operate independently from Parliament was the foundation for many residents wanting independence from England. This tradition of self-autonomy and an increasing desire for self-rule gained popularity and legitimacy throughout the colony prior to the revolution.

During the decades leading up to the revolution, many New York colonists believed in self-government. Although there was initially not a desire to split from England, New Yorkers believed they should have control over local matters. By 1760 the local inhabitants expected the local legislatures, rather than Parliament, to "control all matters of public concern."¹⁹ The introduction of Parliamentary taxation in 1764 and 1765 strengthened the desire for New York residents to oppose the crown, and local committees gained strength and power in local affairs. A desire to decrease Parliamentary interference led to New York colonists viewing local

¹⁷ Flick, *History of the State of New York*, Vol III, 327.

¹⁸ Flick, *History of the State of New York*, Vol III, 174.

¹⁹ Flick, *History of the State of New York*, Vol III, 173-174.

committees as the natural and logical form of government. These committees were used to air colonial grievances with the King.

For Long Island the passing of the Intolerable Acts in 1774, spurred a revolutionary spirit and increased community support for the revolution. In South Haven, on June 23, 1774, the inhabitants “voted (and agreed) that the Act of Parliament for blocking up the port of Boston, is unconstitutional, and has a direct tendency to enslave the inhabitants of America, and put an end to all property.”²⁰ The same month Huntington residents explained “that it is the indispensable duty of all colonies to unite in some effectual measure for the repeal of the said act, and every other act of Parliament whereby they are taxed for raising a revenue... [and] in our opinion the most effectual means to this end is to break off all commercial intercourse with Great Britain...”²¹ These types of declarations demonstrate the strengthening resolve of local residents to protect the rights of the colonists from an increasingly authoritarian Parliament. These committees were particularly prevalent on the Eastern end of Long Island in Suffolk County where opposition to the crown was the most prevalent.

The skirmishes in Boston, and the subsequent British occupation outraged many Long Island residents, who detested the occupation of Boston and feared it was the beginning of increasing Parliamentary interference. Suffolk County Committees were the most active and by 1774 they were ready to become a formal outlet for political resistance to the Crown.²² In June 1774 residents of East-Hampton stated, “that we will, to the utmost of our abilities, assert, and in a lawful manner, defend the liberties and immunities of British America...to save us from the burdens we fear, and in a measure already feel, from the principles adopted by the British

²⁰ Onderdonk, *Revolutionary Incidents*, 13.

²¹ Mather, *The Refugees*, 1048.

²² Flick, *History of the State of New York*, Vol III, 213.

Parliament.”²³ Many Long Island residents viewed the actions in Boston as a testament to the fact that the crown no longer cared about colonial interests. As tensions between the colonies and England increased, most committees supported the idea of independence and espoused pro-Whig sentiments.

In opposition to the events in Boston, which Whigs viewed as a violation of colonial rights, local committees created Associations. Associations were legal documents signed by the local inhabitants explaining their frustrations with the King and stressing the importance of uniting for independence. In May 1775 the Continental Congress submitted the following Association for the use of all inhabitants of New York:

“Persuaded, that the Salvation of the Rights of and Liberties of America, depends, under GOD, on the firm Union of its Inhabitants, in a vigorous Prosecution of the Measures necessary for its Safety; and convinced of the Necessity of preventing the Anarchy and confusion, which attend a Dissolution for the Powers of Government; We, the Freeholders, and Inhabitants, of _____, being greatly alarmed at the avowed Design of the Ministry, to raise a Revenue in America; and shocked, by the bloody Scene, now acting in the Massachusetts Bay, DO, in the most solemn Manner resolve, never to become Slaves; and do Associate under the Ties of Religion, Honour, and Love to our Country, to adopt and endeavour to carry into Execution, whatever Measures may be recommended by the Continental Congress”²⁴

Associations were a natural extension of the local committee system, and allowed Long Island Whigs to express their distress and voice their increasing hostility towards the King.

Suffolk County was the first county on Long Island to embrace these Associations. According to the Shelter Island Association, “the Salvation of the Rights and Liberties of America, depends, under God, on the firm Union of its Inhabitants.”²⁵ By signing Associations, residents were formally declaring their support for independence. These documents became

²³ Mather, *The Refugees*, 1047.

²⁴ Mather, *The Refugees*, 1050.

²⁵ Mather, *The Refugees*, 141.

public statements of political intent and created a formal system to identify those who supported independence and those who opposed independence.²⁶ The greatest benefit of these Associations for the Whigs was the ability to identify members of their community who did not support independence.

Those who failed to sign local Associations were known as non-subscribers. These residents faced persecution and harassment from local Associators. However, persecution of non-patriots was not a local phenomenon on Long Island, both the Continental Congress and George Washington encouraged all Patriots to persecute their neighbors and ordered them to “take action against the Tories.” This type of harassment makes it difficult to ascertain if residents who signed Associations truly supported independence or just wanted to avoid persecution.

Once Long Island residents created Associations, the division between Whigs and Loyalists became more apparent and openly hostile. Long Island residents who refused to sign Associations faced intense harassment from local Whigs. On September 16, 1775, the Continental Congress ordered, “the disarming of every New Yorker who had not signed the Continental Association.”²⁷ Queens responded to such threats in December of 1775 stating, “we call upon every man who values himself upon the inheritance of an Englishman, to say what he would do in such a case. Would he suffer himself to be disarmed, and tamely confess himself and abject slave?”²⁸ Despite the Whigs determination to gain support for the Revolution, both Kings and Queens County showed considerable resistance to such Associations.

²⁶ John Staudt, “A State of Wretchedness: A Social History of Suffolk County, New York in the American Revolution” (Ph.D. diss, George Washington University, 2005) 67.

²⁷ Tiedemann, “Revolution Foiled,” 428. For a discussion of Loyalist persecution in New York see Flick, *Loyalism in New York*, and Ranlet, *New York Loyalists*. Both provide specific examples of how Whigs systematically persecuted.

²⁸ Mather, *The Refugees*, 1051.

Queens County residents continued to avoid Associations and increased their support for the King. In December of 1775, Queens County residents signed a declaration stating, “we, freeholders and inhabitants of Queens County...have not the most distance design or inclination to injure or offend any of our fellow-subjects...we wish only to remain in peace.”²⁹ Only sixteen individuals from Queens County signed the original Association in 1776, and Suffolk County residents quickly labeled all inhabitants who failed to sign as Tories.³⁰ In January 1776, Colonel Heard with a group of 900 men, sent by the Continental Congress, raided Queens County residents.³¹ These raids were nothing more than a harassment technique designed to encourage support for independence. Colonel Heard’s troops seized more than “1000 muskets, and other fire arms...from the disaffected,” during their raids in Queens County.³²

On October 26, 1776 Queens County residents presented the following address to Governor Tryon, “We, the freeholders and inhabitants of Queens Co...look forward to the period when the disobedient shall return to their duty, and the ravages of War cease to desolate this once flourishing country. That we may be restored to the King’s most gracious protection.”³³ Then in December 1776, Queens County residents signed a declaration “asserting their right to carry arms, and asking to be let alone.”³⁴ However, these requests went largely unnoticed by their neighbors to the east in Suffolk County who were the most ardent supporters of the revolution.

Eventually three hundred and sixty three inhabitants of Queens County, or more than ten percent of the white male population over sixteen, signed Associations. However, this is a relatively small percentage of the male population, and most signed as a result of coercion and

²⁹ Mather, *The Refugees*, 1051.

³⁰ Mather, *The Refugees*, 1051.

³¹ Onderdonk, *Queens County*, 45.

³² Mather, *The Refugees*, 140.

³³ Mather, *The Refugees*, 1054.

³⁴ Mather, *The Refugees*, 140.

did not truly support the cause. In this Association Queens County residents declared their support for the cause of American independence and they submitted to Patriot authority. The following is an excerpt from the Association they signed.

“We, the subscribers, do most solemnly and sincerely promise, that we will, hereafter, in all cases, implicitly obey all orders and instructions enjoined on us by our Provincial and Continental Congresses,--that we will act...in the defence of American liberty, -- that we will never take up arms against the Americans,--and that we will not, directly or indirectly, countenance, aid, assist, or by any means join with, any of his Majesty’s troops in the present contest between Great Britain and America.”³⁵

In addition to the typical loyalty oath, the Queens County Association contained an additional clause stating the residents had given all their firearms to Colonel Heard, and had “not destroyed, concealed, or otherwise disposed of, any of [their] said arms or ammunition, in order to evade or obstruct the execution of...orders from the Continental Congress.”³⁶ In addition to agreeing to support the cause of American Independence they had to submit to Patriot authority. Not surprisingly this form of coercion led to weak support of independence from Queens County residents and when the British invaded, many residents in Queens County “took the oath of allegiance in good faith, and observed it,” supporting the crown.³⁷

Kings County residents faced similar pressures from their neighbors, but they were more unyielding. They remained loyal to the King and continually refused to sign any documents stating their loyalty to the Continental Congress.³⁸ Concerned about their loyalty, the Provincial

³⁵ Mather, *The Refugees*, 1052.

³⁶ Mather, *The Refugees*, 1054.

³⁷ Onderdonk, *Revolutionary Incidents of Suffolk and Kings Counties* (Kennikat Press, Port Washington, NY, 1849), 6.

³⁸ See Edward Countryman, “Consolidating Power in Revolutionary America,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol 6., No. R. (Spring, 1967). He argues that Kings County was completely Loyalists, as does Martha B. Flint, in her book: *Long Island before the Revolution* (Port Washington, Long Island: Ira J. Friedman, Inc). However, Phillip Ranlet in his book: *The New York Loyalists*, (New York, University Press of America, 2002) argues that Kings County residents were patriots because there was no formal opposition to the committees and the British questioned the loyalty of that part of the country.

Congress decided to take military action. On August 10, 1776, they ordered troops into Kings County “to secure the disaffected; to remove, or destroy the grain; and if necessary, to lay the whole country waste.”³⁹ Fortunately, for Kings County residents, these troops never arrived in Kings County due to the British invasion on August 22.

Increasing persecution led some Long Island Loyalists to flee their homes for New York City. Early in the war, a Committee of the New York Provincial Congress passed a law affecting the families of Tories. Although this decree had no date, it explained, “because of the information given to the enemy by wives of those who had fled...the Commissioners of Conspiracies, shall give notice to the said wives to depart this State...within 20 days, with their children not above 12 years of age. If they fail to depart, they are to be treated as enemies of the State.”⁴⁰ Whigs targeted wives and children of loyalists who fled, and took over their homes and businesses. These men, often employed by the crown, escaped punishment but their families who remained on Long Island continued to suffer.

The Numbers

To understand the Associations’ significance in terms of population statistics it is important to look at available demographic data for each county on Long Island along with the numbers of Association signers and refugees. The following three tables show the breakdown of residents by county in 1771 as well as the number of Association signers and refugees from each county. Eligible signers included all white males over the age of 16.

³⁹ Mather, *The Refugees*, 29.

⁴⁰ Mather, *The Refugees*, 143.

Table 2.1: 1771 Long Island Census Data for Whites⁴¹

County	Males			Females		Totals
	Under 16	16-60	Over 60	Under 16	Over 16	
Kings	548	644	76	513	680	2,461
Queens	1,253	2,083	950	2,126	2,332	8,744
Suffolk	2,731	2,834	347	2,658	3,106	11,676
<i>Totals</i>	4,532	5,561	1,373	5,297	6,118	22,881

Table 2.2: Long Island Population by County⁴²

County	Whites	Blacks	Totals
Kings	2,461	1,162	3,623
Queens	8,744	2,236	10,980
Suffolk	11,676	1,452	13,128
<i>Totals</i>	22,881	4,850	27,731

⁴¹ Greene & Harrington, *American Population Before the Federal Census of 1790* (Glouster: 1966) 103.

⁴² Greene, *American Population Before the Federal Census 1790*, 103.

Table 2.3 Association Signers and Refugees from Suffolk⁴³

Suffolk County Residents	Signers	Non-Associators	Refugees
<i>General</i>	222	UNK	121
<i>County Hall</i>	384	1	180
<i>Brookhaven</i>	864	83	147
<i>East Hampton</i>	237	UNK	77
<i>Huntington</i>	406	39	81
<i>Islip</i>	35	15	7
<i>Shelter Island</i>	42	UNK	15
<i>Smithtown</i>	100	17	32
<i>Southampton</i>	86	2	34
<i>Totals</i>	2376	157	694

Table 2.4 Association Signers and Refugees from Queens and Kings County⁴⁴

Queens & Kings County	Association Signers	Non-Associators	Refugees
Queens County 1776	48	446	29
Kings County 1776	No Records	470	No Records

Political Divisions

Tories on Long Island frequently included colonial military and civilian officials appointed by England, wealthy landlords, Anglican clergy and many wealthy merchants.⁴⁵ Political pressure from highly placed Loyalists increased support for the crown in Kings County. There were a number of Loyalists who fled to Kings County from New York City in the summer and fall of 1775 and they became some of the most prominent men opposing the Revolutionary spirit on Long Island. Governor Tryon, Chief Justice Daniel Hordsmanden and Mayor Daniel

⁴³ Mather, *The Refugees*, 1052-1065

⁴⁴ Mather, *The Refugees*, 1050-1053

⁴⁵ Flick, *The American Revolution in New York*, 203.

Matthews all encouraged Kings County residents to remain loyal to the crown.⁴⁶ Their presence encouraged continuing loyalty to the King, and limited Whig propaganda in Kings County.

There were a few residents from King County that joined the Provincial Congress and local Committees dedicated to American independence. However, after the British invasion they claimed this was not out of loyalty for the cause, but due to a “danger of the County being desolated...by repeated threats a short time ago.”⁴⁷ On December 4, 1776, the members of the Provincial Congress in Kings County submitted to British rule by agreeing to “dissolve ourselves, rejecting and disclaiming all power of Congress and Committees, totally refusing obedience thereto, and revoking all proceedings under them whatsoever, as being repugnant to the laws and constitution of the British empire.”⁴⁸ Most of the patriots in Kings County submitted to British authority after the occupation.

In November 1776, Kings County residents were publicly declaring their faithfulness to the King.⁴⁹ 402 residents took the following oath:

“I do sincerely promise and swear, that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to His Majesty, King Geo. the Third, and that I will defend his crown and dignity, against all persons whatsoever. So help me God.”⁵⁰

Then in December 1776, 470 Kings County residents sent a memorial to Governor Tryon explaining their loyalty to the crown and to the royal governor. In this declaration they told the Governor they were looking forward to the “blessing which we formerly enjoyed under Your Excellency’s just and mild Administration...which we ardently wish to have renewed” and

⁴⁶ Tiedemann, *The Other New York*, 23

⁴⁷ Onderdonk, *Revolutionary Incidents*, 171.

⁴⁸ Onderdonk, *Revolutionary Incidents*, 171.

⁴⁹ There is some debate about the loyalties of residents in King County. Ranlet argues that Kings County had few Tories, arguing that no formal opposition to committees developed in his book *The New York Loyalists*, (New York, University Press of America, 2002) 63.

⁵⁰ Onderdonk, *Revolutionary Incidents*, 167-171.

explained that they wanted to “restore this County to His Majesty’s peace.”⁵¹ According to the 1771 census there were 720 males over the age of 16 that would have been eligible to sign such a declaration, meaning more than half of the male population supported the King.⁵²

Queens County had a somewhat different approach to the war. Prior to the Revolution, members in the community were increasingly apolitical. Participation in local government continually declined and by the 1770’s most residents failed to participate in local politics.⁵³ This apathy towards all things political explains why many residents did not consider the impending war with England important. However, those who were active in local politics were outspoken loyalists. There was a small, but influential Loyalist population in Queens, including Lt. Governor Caldwell, New York Supreme Court Justice George Ludlow, and Gabriel Ludlow, a Colonel in the Queens County militia.⁵⁴ Such men encouraged residents to support the crown and discouraged Whig propaganda. In 1774 and 1775, “Loyalists in Queens and Richmond counties were the nosiest and most obdurate.”⁵⁵

Queens County residents demonstrated their resolve not to support a conflict with Britain and ignored their neighbors to the east. In April 1775 the New York Assembly requested that Queens County residents choose deputies for the Provincial Congress, but after a vote of 747 to 221, only two out of the five towns responded to the request.⁵⁶ Then on December 6, 1776 residents signed a Declaration explaining their frustration with the Patriots, whom they categorized as rebels. They justified their actions to the New York Governor in a declaration explaining, “we have not the most distant design or inclination to injure or offend any of our

⁵¹ Mather, *The Refugees*, 1050

⁵² Greene & Harrington, *American Population*, 103.

⁵³ Tiedemann, *The Other New York*, 46.

⁵⁴ Tiedemann, *The Other New York*, 48

⁵⁵ Flick, *History of the State of New York*, Vol III, 338.

⁵⁶ Tiedemann, *The Other New York*, 46, Ranlet, *New York Loyalists*, 63.

fellow-subjects; but if, in exercising the essential privileges of freemen, we unfortunately differed with our brethren as to the mode of bringing the present troubles to a happy conclusion.”⁵⁷ Queens County residents continually maintained their desire to stay out of the war.

There is some controversy regarding the loyalty of Queens County residents. Some historians, like Flint argue that all the inhabitants were loyal to the King, and Countryman claims problems in Queens County were not due to internal division, but due to overwhelming “Tory sentiment.”⁵⁸ However, during the war only 26.8% supported the Loyalists, while 12% of the male population supported Independence.⁵⁹ It is true that those who considered themselves Loyalists outnumbered Whigs 2 to 1, but what is more striking is that most of Queens County residents preferred to remain neutral, with 60.3% of the residents not choosing sides.⁶⁰ Regardless of their true allegiances, their refusal to support the local Associations infuriated their neighbors to the East. On December 11, 1775, a local committee man from Huntington, Jesse Bush, informed the Provincial Congress that “the loyalists in Queens County were numerous, and had been armed...were ready to crush the Revolution; and that they were holding their fat cattle for the British Army.”⁶¹ Such assertions led many Whigs to target Queens County residents.

In Suffolk County a few prominent families dominated local politics, but unlike Queens and Kings County, Suffolk County’s prominent families wanted independence. Five families in Huntington controlled the local government from 1694-1776, and in Smithtown the Smiths held

⁵⁷ Mather, *The Refugees*, 1051

⁵⁸ Edward Countryman, “Consolidating Power in Revolutionary America,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol 6., No. R. (Spring, 1967) 651& Flint, *Long Island*, 340

⁵⁹ Joseph S. Tiedemann, “A Revolution Foiled: Queens County, New York, 1775-1776” *The Journal of American History* Vol. 75, No. 2. (Sep., 1988), 419.

⁶⁰ Tiedemann, “Revolution Foiled”, 419.

⁶¹ Flick, *History of the State of New York*, Vol III, 338.

twelve out of the nineteen town offices.⁶² These families had considerable influence over their neighbors and were the first to join Associations. Hostile actions committed by British troops and proclamations threatening Suffolk County residents only intensified Whig sentiment. In 1775, British ships carried off stock and supplies from Suffolk County multiple times, at one point taking “40 or 50 cattle and 1100 sheep” from Fisher’s Island.⁶³

In Brookhaven many of the well-to-do class sided with England, and on the 27th of June 1775 a “Committee of Observation,” declared, “we express our loyalty to His Majesty King George III., and acknowledge him as our rightful lord and sovereign.”⁶⁴ Most often Loyalists in Suffolk County had political ties to the King and wanted to maintain their positions of power. The few Loyalists families in Suffolk included Dr. George Muirson, Colonel Richard Floyd and Parker Wickham.⁶⁵ These men not only owned large amounts of land in Suffolk County, but held positions of authority based on royal appointments. However, despite their presence most residents resisted their lead and chose to support independence.

⁶² Tiedemann, *The Other New York*, 64

⁶³ Onderdonk, *Revolutionary Incidents* 20.

⁶⁴ Bailey, *Long Island*, Vol I, 286.

⁶⁵ Tiedemann, *The Other New York*, 65

Chapter 3: Choosing Sides

Political alliances probably had less to do with true political beliefs and more to do with the economic and social pressures Long Island residents faced. Both economic and social factors impacted the political views of each county. Suffolk County tended to support independence, while both Kings and Queens' counties had strong commercial ties with the British through Atlantic trade, and were more likely to resist the revolution than their neighbors to the east. On the eastern end of the island, residents were active in the fishing and whaling industry and worked closely with their neighbors to the north in Connecticut. Many who supported independence hoped a new colonial government would improve their economic lot and social standing in the community. These economic differences explain why some were more willing to support independence from England than others.

These social networks influenced every decision that Long Islanders made from choosing to sign Associations to actually fleeing to Connecticut. Religion and kinship ties both played a strong part in shaping the views of Long Island residents. Typically, Presbyterians supported independence while members of the Anglican and Episcopal churches supported the King. These religious differences followed geographic lines due to church placement and social networks in place, rather than just from religious ideology.⁶⁶ Such social pressures must be examined to understand why the population movement affected certain geographic areas more than others and to explain why the movement for independence was supported more heavily in Suffolk County.

⁶⁶ The majority of Presbyterian churches were on the Eastern end of Long Island in Suffolk County, while the Anglican Churches were more prominent on the Western end. John K. Wright, *Atlas of the Historical Geography of the United States* (Washington: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1932), Plate 82.

Economic Realities

Prior to the revolution, New York residents wanted European exports. As the demand for goods such as tea, silk, pottery, and citrus fruits increased, so did the prosperity of local merchants. Colonial economic expansion linked British manufacturing to colonial consumers. By 1772 forty-two percent of England's exports arrived in the colonies and increased import activity on Long Island.⁶⁷ This activity created a merchant class on the western end of the island that relied on British goods to supply the growing consumer population on Long Island and in New York City.

This merchant class relied heavily on trade with England to maintain their commercial ventures and their position in society. City merchants remained loyal to the crown in part because they linked overseas commerce and prosperity of the empire with their future economic gain.⁶⁸ Both Kings and Queens County residents were able to take advantage of New York City's Atlantic trade business to improve their economic lots, and relied on continued to support their lifestyle. In 1774 New York Congressional delegates supported the idea of "Firmness without Violence" and pushed for a non-importation agreement. At a meeting of the inhabitants of East Hampton on June 17, 1774 they voted to "abide by the cause and interests of their countrymen" and agreed to a "non-importation agreement through the colonies."⁶⁹ Their neighbors pushing for non-importation of English goods threatened their economic status.⁷⁰ Practical financial considerations made it essential for eminent wholesalers to support the crown because of their business connections and their family connections to London, which had made

⁶⁷ Matson, *Merchants and Empire*, 208.

⁶⁸ Matson, *Merchants and Empire*, 279.

⁶⁹ Hedges, *Tracing the Past*, 24.

⁷⁰ Countryman, *People in Revolution*, 105.

their success possible.⁷¹ Reliance on England encouraged merchants on the western end of the island to voice their resolve to support England.

In sharp contrast, the Eastern end of Long Island relied on local production and trade with the West Indies rather than British commerce for survival. The market economy on the Western end of Long Island depended on foreign markets and continued British trade for survival.⁷² Sag Harbor in Suffolk County was a shipping station for farm products, hides, tallow, beef, pork, cattle, horse, shoes, and grain supplied from the eastern end of Long Island.⁷³ Rather than trading with the British, those on the eastern end of Long Island traded with their Connecticut neighbors and with the West Indies.

Economic independence from England was a way to improve their economic standing. Commercial newcomers and younger merchants realized supporting independence provided them with greater economic opportunity. Lesser merchants frequently supported non-importation as a way to increase domestic production and development, rather than on the British to supply their needs.

The economic reality was that Agriculture and whaling still played a major role on the eastern end of the island, thus Suffolk County residents were not commercial linked to England in the same way their neighbors in Queens and Kings Counties were. In Suffolk, as in many colonies, a large percentage of the population relied on agricultural activity.⁷⁴ Men on the Eastern end of the island were soldiers, hunters, fishermen, oystermen, whalers and farmers not

⁷¹ Matson, *Merchants and Empire*, 310

⁷² Edward Countryman, *A People in Revolution: The American Revolution and Political Society in New York, 1760-1790* (Baltimore, MD: John's Hopkins University Press, 1981) 105-107.

⁷³ Hedges, *Tracing the Past*, 251

⁷⁴ In most early American colonies 80-90% of the economy depended on agriculture, *The Economy of Early America*, 5.

merchants, but they depended heavily on their crops and their livestock for survival.⁷⁵ Land not only provided food and shelter, but also supplied, beef, pork, wheat, rye and whale oil, which were used for subsistence, barter and trade.⁷⁶ This complex web of community dependency meant peer pressure on the Eastern end of the island was certainly a factor when choosing sides.

Social Institutions

As the divisions on Long Island increased, both Whigs and loyalists recognized the importance of using their standing social ties and social institutions to try and influence their neighbors who were undecided. Connecting faith with the revolution became a common tactic of both sides in an effort to exert social pressure on Long Island residents to side with the King or against him. Even before the war, clergy members used their pulpits as a political platform. Many church leaders were active in local politics, thus when the revolution began these men used their social status in local congregations to voice their political intent.⁷⁷ Historians such as Bauer, argue religion was one of the primary forces which influenced colonists to support the revolution.⁷⁸ This was probably not due to a set of religious beliefs but rather due to a social network and peer pressure. And although large segments of the population did not attend church regularly, clergy members distributed these political messages through the local communities by way of the pulpit.

In Suffolk County, Presbyterians were the most likely to espouse pro-Whig sentiments and they frequently linked religious freedom to political freedom. This trend followed national patterns, and according to Middlekauf, “passionate Protestantism” encouraged the use of

⁷⁵ Gabriel, *The Evolution of Long Island*, p 28.

⁷⁶ Gabriel, *The Evolution of Long island*, p 31.

⁷⁷ Robert McCluer Calhoun, *The Loyalists in Revolutionary America 1760-1781* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1973), 109.

⁷⁸ Jerald Brauer, Sidney E. Mead, Robert N. Bellah, *Religion and the American Revolution* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976) 2.

religious language to link faith with “liberty” and virtue.⁷⁹ Presbyterians’ desire to support the fight for independence was also due in part to their strained relationship with the Church of England.⁸⁰ Presbyterians on Long Island hated the privileged status of the Anglican Church in Queens County.⁸¹ They feared the British were planning on creating an Anglican Episcopate in the colonies to increase the power of the Church of England in the region.⁸² Thus in their minds, failure to exert political and economic as an independent colony would eventually lead to the elimination of religious freedom that was essential to many Long Island residents.

While the Presbyterians were encouraging their congregations to support the Revolution, Episcopal and Anglican clergy members preached on behalf of the King. In Suffolk many of the leading loyalists belonged to the Anglican Church, and in Huntington most loyalists attended St. John’s Episcopal Church, where the members were encouraged to fight against their rebellious neighbors.⁸³ James Lyon, the Episcopal minister in Brookhaven continually supported the loyalists. In August 1775, Lyon was one of thirty-one residents who refused to sign the Association in Brookhaven.⁸⁴ General David Wooster, who commanded the Continental troops on Long Island, claimed that Lyon was “the main spring of all the tories on that part of Long Island.”⁸⁵ Wooster described him as “indefatigable, both by writing and preaching, and in every other way in recruiting loyalists.”⁸⁶

From their pulpits, clergy members on both sides presented sermons designed to motivate the inhabitants, but the Presbyterians were especially adept at using religious rhetoric to push for

⁷⁹ Mark A. Noll, The American Revolution and Protestant Evangelicalism, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 23, No. 3. p 625.

⁸⁰ John Staudt, “A State of Wretchedness,” 76.

⁸¹ Tiedemann, *A Revolution Foiled*, 423.

⁸² Staudt, “A State of Wretchedness,” 76.

⁸³ Staudt, “A State of Wretchedness,” 77.

⁸⁴ Mather, *The Refugees*, 1059.

⁸⁵ Ranlet, *New York Loyalists*, 63.

⁸⁶ Ranlet, *New York Loyalists*, 63.

independence. In Huntington, Reverend Ebenezer Prime, known as a “fearless advocate of American Independence,” gave sermons encouraging resistance against the British as a holy cause.⁸⁷ Reverend Samuel Buell, the head pastor of the Presbyterian meeting house of Easthampton in Suffolk County from 1746 until 1798, also encouraged his church members to support the patriots. As early as January of 1775, he was encouraging his congregation to “pray hard for the ‘Nation and Land’ while it ‘labored under the awful calamities of the times.’”⁸⁸ Buell not only used his pulpit as a tool to fight the British, but he also took an active role in Whig politics.

On May 5, 1775 Buell signed the Easthampton Association, publicly claiming allegiance to the patriot cause, and continued to use his status as a local Reverend to challenge British rule.⁸⁹ Although he understood the need to appease Governor Tryon of New York to maintain his congregation, he continued to resist British authority. In one incident, Buell cancelled a militia drill Governor Tyron had ordered for the town. After being questioned by Governor Tryon for the reason of the cancellation he explained to the Governor that “he was the ‘commander of this people on that day’ [Sunday]” and told the Governor he “countermanded the order” to muster.⁹⁰

His revolutionary involvement was not limited to the pulpit. Buell also served as an agent of the Provincial Congress, where he reported on movements of the British fleet stationed on the east-end of Long Island.⁹¹ He also joined the local militia during alarms.⁹² His continued

⁸⁷ Mather, *The Refugees*, 514.

⁸⁸ Staudt, “A State of Wretchedness,” 73

⁸⁹ Mather, *The Refugees*, 1061.

⁹⁰ Flint, *Long Island*, 249.

⁹¹ Staudt, “A State of Wretchedness,” 73.

⁹² Staudt, “A State of Wretchedness,” 73.

push for independence from the pulpit as well as his continued involvement in the Whig cause certainly influenced members of his congregation.

Reverend Joshua Hartt of Smithtown in Suffolk County was also extremely outspoken against the British. Hartt, a Long Island native, quickly chose to support the patriots. He was ordained in 1772 by Suffolk's presbytery and took over as Pastor in Hempstead in 1772 and at Smithtown in 1773.⁹³ Although his name does not appear on any Suffolk County Associations, he clearly supported the patriot cause.⁹⁴ He continually preached against the injustice of the British policy explaining:

“Liberty sounds pleasant in the ears of all mankind and neither men nor devils have the right to tyrannize it over men. God has never delegated power to either of them to act the tyrant and lord it over either the bodies or consciousness of men. God has a right to rule as an absolute sovereign but not man. For no man is equal to the task.”⁹⁵

His sermons and actions led to his arrest and imprisonment in New York City after the British occupation, but they motivated his congregation to fight for Independence.⁹⁶

On Long Island we can link Presbyterian congregations with Whig ideals and Anglican congregations to Loyalist sentiments. At the beginning of the war, the Anglican Church had over three hundred parishes operating in the colonies, and over two hundred and fifty ministers. On Long Island these congregations were the most politically active in Kings County. Dr. Myles Cooper the recognized clerical leader of the Loyalists, linked loyalty to the Crown to Biblical mandates. He argued “God...established the laws of government, ordained the British power

⁹³ Mather, *The Refugees*, 387.

⁹⁴ Mather, *The Refugees*, 1052-1067.

⁹⁵ Staudt, “A State of Wretchedness,” 75.

⁹⁶ Mather, *The Refugees*, 387.

and commanded all to obey authority.”⁹⁷ Thus both sides effectively used propaganda and biblical mandates to encourage congregational action.

Leonard Cutting was Hempstead’s Anglican minister during the Revolution. He continually encouraged his congregation to support the Crown, and publicly supported the Tories by refusing to sign the Association in Queens County in January 1776.⁹⁸ In January 1777, he sent a letter to The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) explaining that “in his whole parish there were not above three who called themselves Churchmen among the malcontents: and as there was no settled Presbyterian Teacher to inflame...the people, the dissenters were left to their own.”⁹⁹ The clergy recognized the power of the pulpit to incite their neighbors against their rivals. The situation became so volatile that in 1776 Reverend L. Cutting wrote to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel explaining that he could no longer travel from Queens County to Suffolk County because it was too dangerous.¹⁰⁰

Unlike the Presbyterians and Anglicans, the Society of Friends did not use religious rhetoric to incite action, but rather to encourage peace. During the Revolution, many members of the Society of Friends on Long Island were unwilling to take sides based on their doctrine. In 1660 George Fox, the Society of Friends leader, presented a “Peace Declaration” to the King stating

"OUR principle is, and our practices have always been, to seek peace and ensure it; to follow after righteousness and the knowledge of God; seeking the good and welfare, and doing that which tends to the peace of all. We know that wars and fightings proceed from

⁹⁷ Alexander Clarence Flick, *Mass Violence in America: Loyalism in New York During the American Revolution* (New York: Arno Press & the New York Times, 1969) 9.

⁹⁸ Mather, *The Refugees*, 1052-1053

⁹⁹ Ranlet, *New York Loyalists*, 62.

¹⁰⁰ Staudt, “A State of Wretchedness,” 76.

the lusts of men, as James iv 1--3, out of which the Lord hath redeemed us, and so out of the occasion of war.”¹⁰¹

This document laid the biblical foundation for rejecting war, and explains the Quaker viewpoint during the Revolution. In Suffolk, at least 26 families of Quakers refused to sign Associations despite immense social pressures.¹⁰² These social pressures help us identify why Long Island residents made the decision to support the crown or independence.

¹⁰¹ George Fox, “A Declaration from the harmless and innocent people of God...” *Fox's Journal*, London: Friends' Tract Association, 1891. Available at <http://www.qhpress.org/quakerpages/qwhp/dec1660.htm>

¹⁰² Mather, *The Refugees*, 1062-1064.

Chapter 4: Leaving Long Island

Demographic data also explains who left Long Island and why. As expected many of the Association signers fled to escape political persecution. The British arrival and subsequent occupation of Long Island led to the flight of nearly 3,500 Long Island residents. The data available concerning the evacuation of Long Island residents indicates most residents who fled were political activists or colonial militia members under the age of 50. These men were in good health and had the resources required for the trip to Connecticut. Suffolk County contained the highest number of evacuees, while Queens County contained around 30 refugees and Kings County contained few. Limitations on African Americans and women also impacted the number of refugees that fled Long Island since these two groups typically followed the white male population. Looking at these demographic break downs we get a better understanding of who the refugees were.

Once we understand who left Long Island, we can begin to look at why leaving made sense and was a logical and practical choice. First, deteriorating conditions on Long Island encouraged many residents to flee. After the British invaded, the King's troops declared martial law on Long Island. The British not only dissolved the local committees and Associations, but they also administered loyalty oaths to the King to all remaining Long Island residents. British troops continually harassed residents by taking livestock, crops, and buildings for royal use. Such actions outraged Long Island residents and led to an evacuation of many Long Island Whigs. Survival on Long Island became difficult for those who supported independence after the British arrival and fleeing to Connecticut was a welcome escape.

Leaving their homes

The majority of Long Island residents who left for Connecticut were from Suffolk County. Suffolk County had a larger percentage of its population sign Associations than either Kings or Queens Counties and a greater percentage of Associators fled when the British arrived. On August 29, 1776, they issued a proclamation to “the inhabitants of Suffolk County” ordering anyone “acting under the authority of the Rebels, immediately to cease and remain at their respective homes, that every man in arms lay them down forthwith and surrender themselves on pain of being treated as rebels.”¹⁰³ However, such threats had little effect on the Whigs. By the time the British invaded Long Island on September 15, 1776, most of the inhabitants had chosen sides, and Suffolk County residents firmly supported American Independence.

There is some debate about the number of residents who actually left Long Island. Mather estimated that more than 5,000 residents left for Connecticut.¹⁰⁴ However, this is probably slightly high. There were more than 700 heads of households from Suffolk County that left for Connecticut. Based on a family size of 5, which is a conservative estimate, it brings the evacuation numbers to at least 3,500. Regardless of the exact number, the refugee population was substantial.

In most townships in Suffolk, the population that left represented more than 40% of the Association signers. Those that had voluntary Associations had the highest percentage of evacuees, with as many as 54.5% of signers leaving for Connecticut. Townships who forced all residents to sign Associations had a smaller percentage flee. Good records concerning the refugees exist for Southold, Brookhaven, East Hampton, Huntington, Islip, Southampton, and

¹⁰³ Onderdonk, *Revolutionary Incidents*, 45.

¹⁰⁴ Population statistic based on the 1776 census of Suffolk County listed in Greene & Harrington, *American Population*. Fredrick Mather compiled refugee statistics and he estimates as many as 5,000 refugees left for Connecticut.

Shelter Island. On the initial Association signed in Suffolk County in May 1775, of the 222 residents who signed, 54.5% left for Connecticut. In Southold, 384 residents signed the Association in May 1775, 180 of them or 46.8%, fled during the British occupation. These percentages support the assertion that Associators who freely signed were more likely to face persecution from their British invaders and thus fled.

In towns where the entire population signed the Association a smaller percentage fled. In East Hampton all of the males were required to sign, and the committee chairmen boasted that, “these [lists] may certify that every Male in the Town of East Hampton, have signed the Association, that are capable of bearing arms.”¹⁰⁵ Here a smaller percentage of the signing population left with only 32.6%, or 77 out of 236, of the signers leaving. However, these percentages still represent a large number of refugees. Not surprisingly almost all those listed as non-associators remained on Long Island after the British occupation.

Most residents of Kings County refused to sign associations and few, if any, left. In Queens County, Whigs coerced residents to sign Associations, but only 26 left during the British occupation. Residents listed as non-associators publicly declared their neutrality or opposition. This population had an extremely low evacuation rate. Out of the 164 Suffolk County residents who refused to sign the Associations only 4 left during the British occupation.¹⁰⁶

Kings County, unlike its neighbors to the east, contained few if any refugees who left for Connecticut. There were two primary reasons for the limited number of refugees from this region. First there was little support for the revolution in Kings County. Residents of Kings County not only failed to sign Associations, but they quickly submitted to British authority, which impressed British leaders. Lord George Germaine wrote a letter praising the loyalty of

¹⁰⁵ Mather, *The Refugees*, 1062

¹⁰⁶ Mather, *The Refugees*, 1054-1065.

Kings County residents and complemented them on “their zeal for success of His Majesty’s measures.”¹⁰⁷ Their commitment to the King was encouraged and supported by British troops, which certainly discouraged many from leaving Long Island.

Geographic considerations also limited the evacuation from Kings County. Unlike, their neighbors to the east who evacuated easily from Sag Harbor, residents of Kings County would have had to cross to the eastern end of Long Island to reach the embarkation point. This journey across Long Island was difficult even when British troops were not on the island, and the presence of royal troops as well as Loyalists watching for evacuees made this journey virtually impossible. Thus, few if any Kings County residents left for Connecticut.

Queens County had a higher percentage of refugees who left for Connecticut, but it did not make up a significant proportion of the refugee population. Only 26 Association signers from Queens County fled during the British occupation.¹⁰⁸ Most Queens County residents signed Associations as a result of coercion, and quickly claimed allegiance to the King when the British arrived on Long Island, thus few felt the need to leave their homes for the safety of Connecticut. Like their neighbors to the west, they accepted British rule.

British troops imprisoned prominent Whigs in Queens County and prevented their escape to Connecticut. These men included Association signers, Thomas Thorne who was “seized” and died on a prison ship. The British imprisoned Cornelius Van Wyck, who was a member of the Provincial Congress, and John Smith, and John Thurston, who both signed local Associations.¹⁰⁹ According to one bystander, “as fast as the Whigs were seized, they were put in

¹⁰⁷ Onderdonk, *Revolutionary Incidents*, 172.

¹⁰⁸ For a complete list of association signers and for a list of those who fled in 1776 refer to Mather, *The Refugees*, 1052-1053.

¹⁰⁹ Onderdonk, *Queens County*, 103-107.

the Presbyterian church till a sufficient number [were] collected to send...to the prison ship.”¹¹⁰

In October 1776, over 1200 Queens County residents claimed allegiance to the King, it is unclear if they truly supported the crown or if they wanted to avoid persecution from the British troops.

Political Refugees

Others fled to avoid taking loyalty oaths to the crown. Most refugees had signed the Associations, stating their loyalty to the Continental Congress before the British arrived. After the British occupation, authorities required oaths both from “those whose loyalty was unshaken” and those who supported the “Convention of New York and the Continental Congress.”¹¹¹

The following was a common oath administered by British authorities.

“I do swear upon the evangelist of Almighty God, that I hold true and faithful allegiance to his Majesty King George the Third of Great Britain, his heirs and successors; and hold an utter abhorrence of congresses rebellions etc., and do promise never to be concerned in any manner with his Majesty’s rebellious subjects in America. So help me God.”¹¹²

Such oaths were serious and unavoidable. According to Flint many residents “complied through fear” while others chose to flee Long Island, but those too sick or unable to escape took the oaths with great hesitation.¹¹³ Just as Washington had encouraged these oaths to “distinguish friends from foes,” now the British used loyalty oaths to determine those who supported the King.¹¹⁴

The British quickly targeted ardent Whigs. As early as September 2, 1776, Oliver DeLancey, the Major General of the Militia in the Southern district of New York, ordered “that those who have taken up arms against the King, to lay them down and take the oath of allegiance to the King, and sign a role of submission, disclaiming and rejecting the orders of Congress or

¹¹⁰ Onderdonk, *Queens County*, 108.

¹¹¹ Flint, *Long Island*, 419.

¹¹² Mather, *The Refugees*, 116.

¹¹³ Flint, *Long Island*, 419.

¹¹⁴ Sanford Levinson, “Constituting Communities through Words that Bind: Reflections on Loyalty Oaths”, *Michigan Law Review*, Vol 84, No. 7. (Jun., 1986) 1450.

Committees, and to obey the legal authority of Government.”¹¹⁵ As one commentator pointed out, Long Island residents had few choices “what should they do? Take the oath and live? Refuse, and die?”¹¹⁶ Some Patriots, especially those who had signed the associations, fled to protect their lives from the British and their Loyalist neighbors.

The British also dissolved all means of political resistance. By November 28, 1776 Governor Tryon had put an end to all town committees on Long Island. These committees allowed Whigs to mobilize effectively prior to the British occupation and their destruction limited the Whig propaganda on Long Island. The following letter from Brookhaven shows the impact the British authority had on Long Island.

“We the Committee of the County of Suffolk...do hereby dissolve ourselves, and do disclaim and reject the orders of Congress and Com’s; and totally refusing obedience to them; revoking all our proceedings under the Congress, and being desirous to obey the legal authority of Gov’t rely upon your Excellency’s clemency, hoping that you will pass by our former conduct, and be graciously pleased to protect us.”¹¹⁷

Once the town committees had dissolved there was little protection from the troops, and few ways to support the fight for independence.

Whig politicians active in the revolution quickly became refugees. The British government recognized the importance of neutralizing Whig sentiment on Long Island and focused on those in leadership positions in local committees. On Nov 23, 1777, Governor Tryon expressed his frustration with residents who had supported the war for independence. He wrote

“I should, were I in more authority, burn every committee-man’s house within my reach, as I deem those agents the wicked instruments of the continued calamities of this country;

¹¹⁵ Onderdonk, *Suffolk and Kings Counties*, 45.

¹¹⁶ Mather, *The Refugees*, 117.

¹¹⁷ Onderdonk, *Revolutionary Incidents*, 60.

and in order sooner to purge the country of them, I am willing to give 25 silver dollars for every acting committee-man, who shall be delivered up to the King's troops."¹¹⁸

Those who were most active in local politics were often the first to leave town. John Sloss Hobart, not only signed the initial Association, but also was a member of the Sons of Liberty as well as a member of the Provincial Congress.¹¹⁹ Ezra L' Hommedieu, served as the Clerk for the Committee of Suffolk County, and worked to secure supplies for Boston residents.¹²⁰ He also served in the Provincial Congress from 1775 to 1777 and in the State Assembly from 1777 to 1783. Ezra fled to Connecticut with his wife and mother, where he continued to work with the Committee of Safety.¹²¹ Thomas Dering was a delegate to the Third Provincial Congress in New York, but fled to Connecticut when the British arrived.¹²²

Community involvement prior to the British occupation increased the likelihood of residents being targeted by British troops. In East Hampton, many of the evacuees held positions of power and served as trustees, constables, and assessors in the town prior to British occupation. At a town meeting held on April 2, 1776, the committee appointed 16 men as trustees, constables, and assessors for East Hampton. Of these 16 men, 7 left for Connecticut.¹²³ Colonel Abraham Gardiner, served as an East Hampton trustee, signed the Association, and was a member of the Committee of Correspondence. He fled Long Island on September 9, 1776 with his family of seven.¹²⁴ Almost half of those who served in East Hampton left for Connecticut, including Thomas Wickham and Jeremiah Gardiner, who both held positions of authority in

¹¹⁸ Onderdonk, *Queens County*, 113.

¹¹⁹ Mather, *The Refugees*, 402-403.

¹²⁰ Mather, *The Refugees*, 446-448.

¹²¹ Bailey, *Long Island*, Vol I, 152.

¹²² Bailey, *Long Island*, Vol I, 174.

¹²³ East Hampton, *Town Records*, 235.

¹²⁴ Mather, *The Refugees*, 351.

Suffolk. Wickham later served with John Foster as a Committee of Safety auditor for refugee claims, and Jeremiah Gardiner served in Colonel Smiths Regiment after he left Long Island.

Those who had been actively involved with the Whigs faced the harshest consequences. Governor Tryon sent an address to Suffolk county explaining what rebels needed to do “preserve their lives and estates,” which included turning over all their arms to the King’s troops and enlisting in “the regular service for the term of the present war.”¹²⁵ Additionally, inhabitants were also encouraged to “secure and deliver up all persons known to be active enemies” of the crown.¹²⁶ Most residents feared losing their freedom and refused to fight for the crown. Their best alternative was to leave their homes.

Physically Able

Men under the age of 50 had two reasons to leave. First, they were the most likely to be physically able and to have families they wanted to keep safe. They were also eligible for military service for the Crown, which many wanted to avoid. Men under the age of fifty headed many of the families who left Suffolk County. Not only were these men fit, they were frequently active in both politics and the colonial militia prior to the British occupation. Their prewar activities made evacuation logical.

For instance, 139 out of the 218, or 64 percent of the refugee households from Southampton were under the age of fifty, while 46 out of 72 heads of households, or 64 percent, in East Hampton were under the age of fifty.¹²⁷ These men were also all of legal military age, and probably left in part to avoid military service in the Loyalist militia. On September 5, 1776 General William Howe authorized General DeLancey to “raise a Brigade of Provincials solely

¹²⁵ Onderdonk, *Suffolk and Kings Counties*, 59.

¹²⁶ Onderdonk, *Suffolk and Kings Counties*, 59.

¹²⁷ Staudt, “A State of Wretchedness,” 144. For a complete list of heads of households see Mather, *The Refugees*, 704-710, 1054-1065. Census statistics can be found in Greene and Harringtons’ work “*American Population Before the Federal Census*, 102-103.

for the defence of this Island...to apprehend, or drive all concealed rebels from among His Majesty's well-affected subjects...it is hoped the inhabitants of the county will cheerfully raise the men wanted for the service."¹²⁸ Such orders made it difficult for eligible men to avoid military service under the British.

The British declared a state of martial law when they invaded Long Island and the entire island fell under the control of royal troops. It was common for the British soldiers to take over Whig homes for use as supply storehouses and barracks for troops. The British used the home of Captain Elias Pelletreau, a refugee who fled to Simsbury, Connecticut, as a commissary. While the home of Maltby Geltson, was used to quarter British troops, who "used his bedroom as a stable."¹²⁹ British troops stationed in Huntington, "took possession of the church, tore up seats and used it as a depot for military stores."¹³⁰ Accounts filed by Huntington residents "for property taken by the British, supported by receipts of British officers, or other evidence, amounted to £7249.9.6," which only represented about 25% of the actual damages.¹³¹

When the British arrived on Long Island, the Whigs were the first to lose their property. After the occupation grain, hay, livestock, homes, and churches became property of the King. These supplies were essential for the eighteenth-century army, which needed hay, grain, livestock and other supplies to move or fight.¹³² As early as September 1776, John Morrison, working for the Commissary of Forage, compelled Long Island residents to turn over supplies. He sent the following address to Suffolk County:

"Sir:--You are to desire the Justices of the Peace to summon the farmers of their Districts...to demand of each, what grain and straw he can spare—as to hay we must

¹²⁸ Onderdonk, *Suffolk and Kings Counties*, 47.

¹²⁹ Staudt, "A State of Wretchedness," 155.

¹³⁰ Onderdonk, *Suffolk and Kings Counties*, 63.

¹³¹ Onderdonk, *Suffolk and Kings Counties*, 110.

¹³² Fischer, D. H., *Washington's Crossing*, 352.

have the whole...The whole of the grain and forage of Rebels in arms is to be seized for the King's use."

Then on September 5, 1776, General Oliver DeLancey, commander of the militia in the Southern district of New York, ordered men to send all the "fat cattle and sheep in Suffolk Co" to supply the Kings troops in Jamaica.¹³³ Since the British were unable to bring sufficient supplies with them from England, they turned to the colonies as a legitimate source.

Such actions encouraged residents to leave Long Island with their livestock and supplies. Prior to the British invasion, residents of Suffolk County were encouraged to remove supplies and livestock from the Island or to provide them to the continental militias. In July the New York Convention decided "the stock should be driven to the interior of the Island in charge of the troops... [and] that the commanding officer might destroy the stock to prevent its capture by the enemy."¹³⁴ Thus when Long Island residents left for Connecticut, they frequently took as many supplies with them as possible. This not only allowed them to pay for transport to Connecticut, but also kept the British Army from requisitioning them.

Almost all of the records provided by ship Captains who transported the refugees off Long Island include notations about livestock and crops. In September 1776, Daniel Chamier, ordered British troops to "take into...custody all the grain, forage, and creatures you can find on L.I., being the property of persons in actual rebellion, or who have deserted their habitations."¹³⁵ Thus any property that rebels left automatically fell into the hands of the British.

Many refugees took their livestock as a source of food or labor, such as one horse, or one cow, but other families fled with large herds, flocks and crops. Robert Hempstead, who had

¹³³ Onderdonk, *Suffolk and Kings Counties*, 47.

¹³⁴ Mather, *The Refugees*, 692.

¹³⁵ Onderdonk, *Suffolk and Kings Counties*, 55.

served as the chairman of the Suffolk County Committee, fled with 11 cows and 29 sheep. While neighbor John Edwards left with 6 oxen, one cow, 55 sheep, and four hogs.¹³⁶ James Corwin left Long Island with 16 bushels of wheat and a load of corn and John Dickenson brought a load of Indian corn, 1/3 load of flax, 14 bushels of wheat, 3 bushels of potatoes and some oats with him.¹³⁷ Refugees used their shipments to pay ship captains for passage and as a source of supplies for their families once they arrived in Connecticut.

The British plundered stock and homes from Long Island residents and appropriated any items that were useful for supporting the British Army. The British authorized the Justices of the Peace of each county to “impress boats, wagons, horses, drivers, mills, barns and...other conveniences...for the benefit of His Majesty’s service. On September 2 1776, British troops impressed a Mr. Tunis Bogart and Mr. Daniel Luyster, both Long Island natives, as they were traveling through Lloyd’s Neck.¹³⁸ The King’s troop required the two men to drive their wagons to New York City hauling cart cannons and other artillery pieces for British troops. Such actions infuriated residents, and encouraged many to leave for Connecticut.

Family Business

Typically refugees fled with their immediate families, including spouses and children. A few, such as Major King who fled to Saybrook with “his aged parents,” traveled with extended family.¹³⁹ By looking at the claims of the ship captains who transported residents, as well as claims made by the refugees to both Connecticut and New York, it is clear that most of the families left together and remained together once they arrived in Connecticut.

¹³⁶ Mather, *The Refugees*, 396, 751, 768.

¹³⁷ Mather, *The Refugees*, 762, 765.

¹³⁸ Onderdonk, *Suffolk and Kings Counties*, 256.

¹³⁹ Onderdonk, *Suffolk and Kings Counties*, 91.

Although the historical records only include the names of the men that left for Connecticut, they shed light onto the experiences of the women on Long Island. The social structure of the time meant women were responsible for the domestic work on the farms on Long Island. They were responsible for spinning all the linen and wool for the household and keeping their families clad.¹⁴⁰ The diary of Mary Cooper, a Long Island native, explains the women on the island prepared and preserved food, cleaned the house, washed dishes and took care of domestic production. When their husbands decided to leave for Connecticut, most women followed.

These women certainly helped maintain the households once they arrived in Connecticut. Domestic production including the making of thread, soap and candles was essential for survival in Connecticut.¹⁴¹ Since most refugees arrived with very little these types of domestic chores continued and women were expected to maintain the comforts of home. In an agricultural society the farmers' wife and daughters spun, "pillow cases, sheets and blankets, the comfortable, quilts and counterpanes, the towels and table cloth."¹⁴² Women had few alternatives to following their husbands to Connecticut when the British arrived on Long Island.

Although traveling with a family was the most common, some refugees were not so fortunate. Captain Nathaniel Norton of Brookhaven and Ensign Azariah Tuthill of Southold both remained separated from their families for most of the war, while they served as soldiers in Connecticut.¹⁴³ Others, such as Zebulon Hallack, Elias Howell, and Benjamin Prime left aged

¹⁴⁰ Hedges, *Tracing the Past*, 75. & For a more detailed look at the lives of Long Island women prior the Revolution, read *The Diary of Mary Cooper* published by Oyster Bay Historical Society, 1981.

¹⁴¹ Cooper, *The Diary of Mary Cooper*, ix.

¹⁴² Hedges, *Tracing the Past*, 75.

¹⁴³ Mather, *The Refugees*, 482, 610.

parents behind when they left for Connecticut.¹⁴⁴ Leaving parents behind was a difficult choice for refugees.

Even when families did not travel to Connecticut together, refugees remained concerned for their family members who remained on Long Island. Refugees filed numerous petitions in both Connecticut and New York attempting to secure supplies or provide help for aging parents who had remained on Long Island. Some refugees such as, Seth Overton wanted to bring his parents off Long Island as conditions deteriorated. In a petition filed in October, 1780, Overton wanted to “bring over from Southold to Chatham his aged parents who are insulted by the British.”¹⁴⁵

Some refugees requested permission to return home temporarily to help ailing parents on Long Island. Joseph Topping, like many Associators, fled to Connecticut in September 1776 after the British occupation. When he fled from Bridge Hampton to Middletown, Connecticut, he took his wife and children, but his father remained on Long Island.¹⁴⁶ Topping’s father, like many Long Island residents suffered during the occupation. On May 12, 1780, Topping petitioned the Connecticut General Assembly for permission to return to Long Island stating, “that he hath a Farm and Aged Father on Long Island, who want his Service & his Assistance & his said Father hath desired him to return & live with him.”¹⁴⁷ The committee granted him permission to return.

William Lawrence had a particularly complicated ordeal during the Revolution. Prior to the British invasion, Dr. Lawrence was working in Albany trying to collect money and supplies for the inhabitants of Boston. When the British landed on Long Island, he was unable to return

¹⁴⁴ Mather, *The Refugees*, 904.

¹⁴⁵ Onderdonk, *Suffolk and Kings Counties*, 91.

¹⁴⁶ Mather, *The Refugees*, 602.

¹⁴⁷ Mather, *The Refugees*, 915-916, Adams, *Southampton*, 177.

home and remained in Northcastle for a number of months. During his absence his “aged mother...and children were insulted very much by the Tories and [his] property destroyed.”¹⁴⁸ However, his absence, followed by his return to Long Island, looked suspicious to many of his rebel neighbors who accused him of having British sympathies.

Lawrence’s experiences continued to worsen throughout the war. The Whigs on Long Island imprisoned Dr. Lawrence, and kept him in “the guard house” on Oyster Bay “without any hearing.”¹⁴⁹ Eventually the Whigs released him, and he proved that he was a loyal patriot. William Worthington sent a letter to Governor Clinton in 1779 explaining that Dr. Lawrence was “very Serviceable in procuring intelligence from the Enemy while he lived” in Southampton Long Island.¹⁵⁰ He argued that “he is Surely a fixed friend to the American Cause and Deserves favour.”¹⁵¹

In 1779, Lawrence finally fled to Connecticut for safety. Although there are some accounts of his wife and sister in law traveling to Connecticut with him at least part of his family remained on Long Island. One account explained that Lawrence “fled to Saybrook leaving his family when enemy possessed E. End of Island.” In October 1780, William Lawrence, petitioned to “bring his family off L.I.” which he had left on the Island “12 months ago.”¹⁵² The committee initially denied his request to move his family to Connecticut, so instead he requested permission to return to Long Island because his wife was ill.¹⁵³ During the British occupation families often remained separated.

African Americans

¹⁴⁸ Mather, *The Refugees*, 718.

¹⁴⁹ Mather, *The Refugees*, 718.

¹⁵⁰ *Clinton Papers*, vol V, 368.

¹⁵¹ *Clinton Papers*, vol V, 368.

¹⁵² Onderdonk, *Suffolk and Kings Counties*, 90.

¹⁵³ Onderdonk, *Suffolk and Kings Counties*, 91.

The data is also somewhat silent on the lives of the African American living on Long Island. There was a relatively substantial African American population on Long Island when the British arrived in 1776. According to the 1771 census, there were 4,850 blacks residing on Long Island, and the 1776 statistics show there were 939 blacks residing in Suffolk County when the British invaded.¹⁵⁴ This African American population consisted of both slaves and freed blacks.¹⁵⁵ African Americans faced many of the same hardships as their white neighbors.

The historical data is not completely silent when it comes to the African American experience during the war, it does give us some insight into what African Americans on Long island faced during the British occupation. There are records from the ship Captains indicating that many families fled with the few slaves they owned. Other accounts indicate that some remained on Long Island to look after their master's property. There are also historical documents providing records of African Americans serving both in the colonial militias and in the British Army.

Connecticut law limited the number of slaves who fled from Long Island. Prior to the American Revolution Connecticut had the largest slave population in New England, with approximately 6,464 slaves and Connecticut's economy depended heavily on slave trade and slave intensive industries. However, in 1774 they passed legislation ending the importation of slaves to the colony.¹⁵⁶ It is unclear if this importation restriction applied to Long Island residents and their slaves. Connecticut also required slaves to carry passes when they left their own homes or towns, limiting their movement. If Long Island slaves arrived in Connecticut, they probably fell under these restrictions.

¹⁵⁴ Green and Harrington, *Population*, 103.

¹⁵⁵ Adams, *Southampton*, 121.

¹⁵⁶ Gwendolyn Evans Logan, "The Slave in Connecticut During the American Revolution" *The Connecticut Historical Society*. Vol 33, No. 3., 73.

Some of the Long Island refugees took their slaves with them when they left for Connecticut, although the records are somewhat difficult to piece together. The New York convention “recommended to the Inhabitants...to remove as many of their women, children, and slaves...as they can”, but it is unclear if families actually took their slaves with them when they left.¹⁵⁷ Claims made by ship Captains shed little light on slave movements. Most of the claims, like those made by Peter Bonticou refer to “person” or “persons” when discussing passengers.¹⁵⁸ While other Captains, like Benjamin Conkling, refer to “passangers,” but fail to give exact details of who was on their vessels.¹⁵⁹ These incomplete claims make it difficult to tell exactly how many slaves left with their masters.

There were a handful of claims made by refugees concerning their slaves. On January 10, 1777, the Connecticut Council of Safety granted permission for “Colonel Mulford’s negro Jack...to return to L.I.”¹⁶⁰ Jack made it to Connecticut, presumably with Colonel Mulford, but the claim made by Captain Isaac Sheffield is vague. In September 1776, Sheffield submitted a claim “for Transporting Sundry familys household goods...from Sagharbour...to Stonington.”¹⁶¹ According to his claim Colonel Mulford brought 13 cows, 1 passenger, and a horse to Connecticut. It is unclear from this claim if Colonel Mulford had another shipment arrive from Long Island, or if the passenger refers to Jack.

Residents of Kings County feared British troops would encourage slaves to escape and rebel. In Kings County, where the slave population was the largest, this was particularly worrisome for residents. Many feared “this county...is full of slaves who probably may already

¹⁵⁷ Mather, *The Refugees*, 695.

¹⁵⁸ Mather, *The Refuges*, 749.

¹⁵⁹ For a complete list of claims made by Captains transporting refugees from Long Island to Connecticut, refer to Mather’s compilation of “Accounts of the Auditors, and claims of the Refugees,” *The Refugees*, 730-874.

¹⁶⁰ Onderdonk, *Suffolk and Kings Counties*, 70 and Mather, *The Refugees*, 875.

¹⁶¹ Mather, *The Refugees*, 867.

have been tampered with.”¹⁶² When slaves did run away, residents issued rewards for slaves in local papers. Widow Lott, from Kings County offered anyone “£5” for providing information about a slave who “ran away to city of N.Y.”¹⁶³ To make matters worse General Clinton, commander-in-chief of Royal forces, issued a proclamation giving any “Negro who shall desert” protection and provisions in 1779.¹⁶⁴ This infuriated residents, and increased racial tensions throughout Long Island.

The British government recognized that slaves and freed blacks offered a source of labor for Loyalists units in the colonies. Colonel Livingston sent a report to Governor Trumbull explaining that the British troops in Brookhaven were already recruiting “Negroes as well as whites into Loyalist companies.” Troops not only served as soldiers for the British, but also as messengers. John Thompson, a free black from Riverhead worked for Colonel Edmund Fanning, who was secretary to Governor Tryon. His service probably helped him during the war, but he fled Long Island with other loyalists when the war was over.¹⁶⁵ The British troops also promised slaves who left their rebel masters “full security to follow within their lines any Occupation which he shall think proper.”¹⁶⁶ Many African Americans served as guides, couriers, cart men and quartermasters.

British use of African Americans as troops encouraged Whigs to recruit African Americans as well. Lord Dunmore’s Proclamation of 1777 spurred Congress to use African Americans to fill troop quotas from each colony.¹⁶⁷ During the revolution there were over 5,000 African Americans serving in the Continental Army, and some of them came from Suffolk

¹⁶² Ranlet, *Loyalists*, 117.

¹⁶³ Onderdonk, *Suffolk and Kings*, 188.

¹⁶⁴ Tiedemann, *The Other New York*, 31.

¹⁶⁵ Staudt, “A State of Wretchedness,” 94.

¹⁶⁶ Staudt, “A State of Wretchedness,” 95.

¹⁶⁷ Logan, *The Connecticut Slave*, 74.

County. Pomp, a slave from Shelter Island, served in Connecticut, while a number of slaves served in Captain John Hulbert's company in Sag Harbor.¹⁶⁸ These troops received the same bounty, supplies and rations as white troops. Many also hoped service by African Americans would lead to their emancipation after the war.

By September 1776, the British controlled Long Island and residents had reason to fear persecution and political action against them not only from the British, but from their Loyalist neighbors. Whig persecution of their Loyalists neighbors prior to the British occupation was common. Loyalists lived in fear of their rebel neighbors, and often suffered great indignities because of their political allegiance to the King. However, after the British occupation Loyalists gained the upper hand and persecuted their Whig neighbors, who chose to leave rather than fight.

The decision to leave Long Island was difficult for residents. Those who left did so for a number of reasons. Many who left were politically active and physically capable of leaving, while others left to escape the conditions of British occupation. Loyalty oaths and military service were impossible to avoid, and many staunch Whigs found both of these conditions unbearable. Many fled with their families to protect them from the harsh rule of the British troops. Refugees recognized the importance of removing supplies from Long Island. The British frequently seized crops and livestock from Long Island residents regardless of their political affiliation. Residents who wanted to avoid British rule and occupation turned to their neighbors in Connecticut for relief.

¹⁶⁸ Staudt, "A State of Wretchedness," 94.

Chapter 5: Connecticut Bound

When Long Island residents decided to leave their homes, Connecticut was the most logical choice for evacuation. The long standing economic and social ties with their neighbors to the North meant Long Island residents had friends and family there to turn to when the British invaded. Most of the refugees could trace their roots to their New England neighbors, and town life was similar in Connecticut. Connecticut offered an unoccupied safe-haven, and reflected the values and lifestyle of many Suffolk County residents.

More importantly Connecticut was capable of providing transportation and shelter for those leaving Long Island. Long standing commercial trade with Connecticut provided pre-determined routes of escape and well-established shipping lanes along with ferry service facilitated a quick and orderly escape for refugees. Connecticut also provided provisional support for refugees that arrived in Connecticut. Their neighbors to the North wanted to help Long Island residents escape the British occupation. Connecticut's quick response and material support for the refugees made it possible for nearly 3,500 Long Island residents to flee.

Connecticut's Appeal

Social ties and commercial interests connected Suffolk County residents to Connecticut and the similarity between Connecticut and Long Island strengthened social bonds. During the Revolution, almost 3,500 refugees sought shelter in Connecticut. One of the most important reasons residents turned to Connecticut was its proximity. Long Island residents understood it was more advantageous to flee north to Connecticut rather than west across Long Island. The voyage from Sag Harbor to the southern border of Connecticut was only a few miles across the

Long Island sound, and typically took a few hours. The journey to New York City took days to complete, and once the British arrived on Long Island meant traveling through occupied territory.¹⁶⁹ As early as September 7, 1776, “it was reported that the enemy was trying to prevent the exodus of persons and cattle from Long Island.”¹⁷⁰ The western end of Long Island was also loyal to the King, and the British had ordered residents to report all rebels, making a journey across Long Island difficult and dangerous. A short trip across the Long Island Sound to unoccupied Connecticut was an excellent choice for Long Island residents ready to leave their homes.

New England residents founded a number of the towns on Long Island, and although they were initially independent provinces, in 1662 the General Court of Hartford annexed the towns of Long Island to Connecticut. They remained part of Connecticut until the colonial government of New York annexed them in 1664, but even after this annexation they remained strongly tied to Connecticut.¹⁷¹ Suffolk County residents also depended on their neighbors for information concerning the war. The Connecticut Gazette and the New-London Gazette were the primary newspapers for Suffolk County residents. These helped unify residents and strengthened the bonds between the two colonies.

Infrastructure

Due to the continued commercial ventures between Long Island and Connecticut a strong infrastructure was in place to aid in the evacuation. Suffolk County residents had traded almost exclusively with Connecticut, rather than sending their supplies to New York. Commercial trading across Long Island Sound reinforced social connections and kinship ties.¹⁷² By the

¹⁶⁹ Staudt, “A State of Wretchedness”, 31.

¹⁷⁰ Mather, *The Refugees*, 695.

¹⁷¹ Flint, *Long Island*, 283.

¹⁷² Staudt, “A State of Wretchedness,” 31.

eighteenth century the port towns of New Haven and New London were shipping centers for both New York and British imports.¹⁷³ These towns were two of the major ports of entry for evacuating refugees. Suffolk towns had continually maintained ferry services to Connecticut, and in 1772 they added stagecoach service for travelers headed to New London. Refugees utilized these transportation systems to leave Long Island.

Connecticut residents provided transportation back and forth across Long Island Sound for those wanting to leave. Most residents left from Sag Harbor, which was a prominent shipping port on Long Island. Prior to the war, the harbor had provided commercial shipments of farm products, livestock, and supplies from the eastern end of Long Island.¹⁷⁴ However, once the British invaded Long Island, residents used the port to escape. One account noted that the “wharves at Sag Harbor crowded with emigrants.”¹⁷⁵ The local authorities, organized by Lt Col Livingston, chose Sag Harbor as the central clearing point for all refugees. This central location not only provided temporary lodging and protection for those waiting to leave, but served as a rallying point for ship Captains who volunteered to help shuttle passengers to Connecticut. These refugees waited for private vessels, including schooners, sloops, and whaleboats operated by Captains from both Connecticut and Long Island to take them to safety.

The effort to relocate 3,500 Long Island residents was a joint effort between New York and Connecticut. Initially Lieutenant Colonel Henry Livingston, commander of the Fourth New York Line stationed on the eastern end of Long Island, was responsible for the refugee evacuation. Livingston’s operation was so successful that the British offered a £500 prize for

¹⁷³ Staudt, “A State of Wretchedness,” 32.

¹⁷⁴ Prior to the war Sag Harbor was the second largest port in New York, next in importance to New York City. The war changed all that. British troops took over the stores and houses and seized most of the products and livestock that were shipped from the eastern end of the island. These actions virtually cut off the Eastern end of Long Island to the outside world. Mather, *The Refugees*, 166.

¹⁷⁵ Onderdonk, *Revolutionary Incidents*, 48.

anyone who could capture or kill him.¹⁷⁶ However, the New York Provincial Congress quickly realized they could not accomplish the evacuation on their own and turned to their Connecticut neighbors for assistance. The New York State Convention sent a request to the Committee of Saybrook “desiring them Immediately to Afford all the Assistance in their Power to forward the Removal of the Stock from Long Island and Provide for them...and to lend their Aid to Such of the Inhabitants as might wish to Remove.”¹⁷⁷ In response to this request, the Connecticut Council of Safety quickly appointed Capt Richard Dickinson and Capt John Cockran “to Provide Vessels for the Removal of the Inhabitants...and when brought over to Provide for them until they could be Removed from the Place of their first landing.”¹⁷⁸

On August 31, 1776, the Committee of Inspection in the Town of Guilford Connecticut decided that it would provide assistance to the refugees and complied with the request from the New York Provincial Congress. During the months of September and October, Captain David Landon on the sloop *Polley* transported 237 Long Island residents and their effects to Connecticut.¹⁷⁹ Over the course of those two months, Captain Landon made “5 trips...from hence to Long Island and back to Guilford, bringing horses, cattle, sheep, hogs, people household goods &c.”¹⁸⁰ These trips were expensive for the owner of the sloop, a Mr. Samuel Brown, who authorized the Guilford town committee to use his vessel to transport refugees and their goods to Long Island.

Connecticut residents quickly opened their arms to their neighbors to the South. Refugees eventually settled in Guilford, Saybrook, Lyme, East Haddam, and Stonington. Each of these towns welcomed refugees and attempted to provide for their neighbors. The provision

¹⁷⁶ Staudt, “A State of Wretchedness,” 141.

¹⁷⁷ Mather, *The Refugees*, 766

¹⁷⁸ Mather, *The Refugees.*, 766, 875.

¹⁷⁹ Mather, *The Refugees*, 169.

¹⁸⁰ Mather, *The Refugees*, 696.

of refugees was costly, and the Connecticut government requested that New York help defray such costs.¹⁸¹ New York quickly agreed to help fund the venture, but the mounting costs of war for both colonies eventually limited local support.

Connecticut Support

Many hoped that the British occupation would not disrupt their lives. On September 7, 1776, the New London committee informed Governor Trumbull that while they had removed a number of inhabitants and their livestock, the remaining residents had “Determin’d to Remain and Submitt on as good termes as they can get.”¹⁸² However, those who remained quickly realized that leaving their homes made more sense than serving the British troops. The New London Gazette published the following statement on September 22, 1779:

“Last Friday 35 young men came from L.I. to Saybrook, who left their homes on account of being ordered to work on the fortifications on the west end of L.I., apprehending they should be ordered thence to the West Indies.”¹⁸³

So while most of the 3,500 refugees fled from the initial invasion in 1776, others continued to join their neighbors throughout the British occupation.

Connecticut captains made evacuation possible for Long Island residents. The vessels that took the refugees back and forth across Long Island Sound operated continuously for months. Captain Thomas Robinson provided transportation for over a dozen families from Long Island. His passengers included Association signers Jonathan Havens, Elias Halsey and John Mulford. He provided passage to multiple passengers between both East Hampton and Southampton Long Island to East Haddam and Stonington Connecticut. Other ship captains

¹⁸¹ In 1777 the New York Provincial Congress appointed a Board of Auditors to provide for the claims made by the refugees and ship captains. The “Accounts of the Auditors, and Claims of the Refugees against the State of New York,” are reprinted in Mather, *The Refugees*, Appendix C, 730-873.

¹⁸² Mather, *The Refugees*, 886.

¹⁸³ Onderdonk, *Suffolk and Kings Counties*, 87.

including Capt. John Minor and his nephew transported 15 refugees and their goods to Stonington, Haddam and Saybrook between the months of September and November 1776. While, Captain Amos Pendleton and his son Ephraim transported over fifty families to Connecticut from September to October. Their passengers left from Sag Harbor and Southampton and settled in Stonington and New London.¹⁸⁴

Various Captains and vessels transported refugees fleeing to Connecticut, and 129 Captains or Masters of ships from both Connecticut and New York made claims concerning the transportation of Long Island residents. Of these Captains, 81 were from Connecticut, but the remaining 48 were refugees, who like their neighbors were fleeing from the British.¹⁸⁵ Most captains from Long Island were responsible for smaller shipments than their Connecticut neighbors. A typical shipment for a Long Island Captain, like that made by Gamaliel Bayley, included his own goods and those of a neighbor. His claim totaled 3 loads of household goods, 30 bushels of grain, and 40 bushels of Indian corn.¹⁸⁶ However some of the refugees, like Zebulon Cooper, were more active in transporting refugees and their supplies.

Zebulon Cooper was the most active Captain from Long Island, transporting more than 171 Long Island refugees and their possessions from Sag Harbor to Saybrook Connecticut.¹⁸⁷ An original signer of the 1775 Association, he fled on September 2, 1776, with 93 passengers and household goods of other refugees including John Foster. In the next three months, he made an additional 5 trips, filing claims for each. His total claims included at least 1000 barrels, 48 cattle, over 500 sheep, 17 hogs, and 32 loads of household goods. On February 6th, the auditors awarded Cooper “one hundred thirty seven pounds eighteen shillings Lawfull Money of

¹⁸⁴ Mather, *The Refugees*, 239-240, 248-250.

¹⁸⁵ Mather, *The Refugees*, 239.

¹⁸⁶ Mather, *The Refugees*, 264, 747.

¹⁸⁷ Mather, *The Refugees*, 313.

Connecticut,” as compensation for his trips. However, on October 31, 1777, he filed a second claim stating he had only received “Sixty eight pounds nineteen shillings Lawful money being one half the sum & ful of my part of the Acct delivered to the Committee.”¹⁸⁸ Typically Captains received their full reimbursement for transporting the refugees and their goods.

Not all of the ship captains were simply trying to help their neighbors. Many sailors faced economic limitations during the British blockade and found shipping their neighbors to Connecticut extremely profitable. Many quickly recognized the economic benefits and possibilities of helping relocate the refugees and expected payment for their services. The Connecticut Governor and Council of Safety resolved,

“that the Committees of Inspection in the several Towns where such distressed people come, be and they are hereby advised to provide such things as they shall judge necessary for the support of the people aforesaid, until the sitting of the General Assembly...keeping an exact account of their expenses thereof.”¹⁸⁹

The system in place required ship Captains to keep detailed records of their trips, including the number of passengers and the type of cargo they were carrying. These receipts were then turned into the Council of Safety, who reimbursed the Captains for their expenses.

Unfortunately, many of the Captains were not willing to wait for payment from the government and instead forced the refugees to pay for their services immediately. This led to an increased demand on Long Island residents, and probably limited the movement to those with cash and supplies, which were traded for passage to Connecticut. According to a letter sent from Colonel Livingston to Governor Trumbull, some of the captains were charging Long Island residents enormous sums by “shamefully” forcing them to turn over livestock and household

¹⁸⁸ Mather. *The Refugees*, 760-761.

¹⁸⁹ Mather, *The Refugees*, 167.

goods as payment for transport.¹⁹⁰ Most Captains felt their fees were reasonable because of the risks and costs involved in transporting refugees.

Ship Captains made multiple claims for damages and costs associated with taking the Long Island residents to Connecticut. According to claims filed by the owner of the sloop Polly, during her five voyages across the Long Island Sound, the sloop sustained considerable damages. These damages included loosing a “340lb anchor...that was lost by the cable being cut off with rocks” in addition the “rigging wore out” and had to be replaced.” He requested that the government reimburse him for such expenses.¹⁹¹ Outfitting the vessels was expensive, and supplies were hard to find. Ship Captains also incurred operating expenses including providing for the “victualing, drink, and more” of workers and paying high wages to day workers.¹⁹² Paying for operating expenses left many Long Island residents without resources to survive in Connecticut.

¹⁹⁰ Staudt, “A State of Wretchedness,” 142.

¹⁹¹ Mather, *The Refugees*, 697.

¹⁹² Mather, *The Refugees*, 697.

Chapter 6: Trying to Survive

Surviving in Connecticut was difficult for Long Island refugees. They were unable to bring enough supplies with them to support their families for the duration of the war, and their ability to travel to Long Island for additional supplies or to buy them in Connecticut was limited. Initially, the Connecticut legislature and local inhabitants welcomed their New York neighbors and provided transportation, food and shelter. However, as the war continued, Connecticut residents were less willing and less able to support the refugees, and refugees had to find new ways to support themselves. Refugees often turned to their homes on Long Island as a source of provisions and income. However, the process of returning home for their goods, household belongings, and family members was arduous.

Each refugee had to file petitions to travel to and from Long Island and both New York and Connecticut limited their travel opportunities. Both colonies not only feared free passage would open their borders to raids, but they also wanted to keep their supplies within their borders. The refugees posed a problem because they often carried supplies back and forth from Connecticut to New York and some engaged in illicit trade with the British. British patrols along the shores of Long Island also made the journey for supplies extremely difficult and arduous.

Some refugees gained support from family and friends, while others found jobs to support their families. Those with family in Connecticut were the most fortunate, but most had to find other means to support their families. Two of the most common career fields for refugees were medical and military service. Long Island physicians often continued their medical careers in Connecticut through the Hospital Service or in local practices, while other refugees served as

Privateers or in the military. However, as the war continued many refugees found they were not able to support their families in Connecticut.

Survival

Connecticut initially welcomed their neighbors to the South and provided them with essential supplies. On September 18, 1776, the Connecticut Council of Safety recognized the Long Island refugees were “in a destitute and helpless condition” and they ordered the committees of inspection in various towns to “provide such things as they shall judge necessary for the support of the people.”¹⁹³ This support initially included transportation, shelter and food, all of which were costly ventures. The New York legislature agreed to help with the costs associated with transporting and supplying the refugees, and each committee of inspection kept a record of their expenses. Initially this system worked well, but eventually both New York and Connecticut were unable to financially support the growing number of refugees. By 1780 the Connecticut government was virtually bankrupt, and providing for the refugees was not a priority.

New York’s efforts to provide for the refugees were limited and insufficient during the war. As early as October 1776 John Sloss Hobart, a delegate of the New York Provincial Congress who fled to Connecticut, explained the dire situation of most of the refugees to the New York Committee of Safety. He argued that “the provision made by the Convention is inadequate to the purpose of maintaining the indigent from the island.” The fast removal of refugees from Long Island and the fees many of the Captains charged Long Island residents limited the amount of household goods and produce the refugees possessed when they arrived in Connecticut. Hobart aptly explained that many of the refugees came to Connecticut “without the means of support with them” and he quickly recognized that providing for them would be “too

¹⁹³ *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut*, (Hartford: Brown & Parsons, 1850-1890), 522.

great a charge upon the charity of individuals” in Connecticut.¹⁹⁴ His prediction was accurate and as the war continued the refugees drained the local Connecticut economy.

Refugees who prospered on Long Island often suffered while they resided in Connecticut. As with many refugee populations, the Long Island refugees went from affluence to indigence. Due to the circumstances of their evacuation, many were not able to fully prepare for the journey. Most took limited supplies with them, and others sold or bartered away their possessions to gain passage to Connecticut.¹⁹⁵ Refugees like James Corwin, a successful ship owner a Long Island resident who owned “26 acres of good Land...with a dwelling House Barn & Considerable Stock,” arrived in Guildford, Connecticut with no place to go and no shelter. His family lived outside when the first arrived, since they had no place to turn. John Lloyd Jr. was one of the managers of the three thousand acre estate of Lloyd Manor on Huntington Bay, Long Island. However, his social status changed dramatically while in Connecticut, where he owned “nothing more than two horses and two cows and was unable to pay his taxes.”¹⁹⁶ These experiences explain how difficult it was to survive and prosper in Connecticut for even the wealthiest Long Islanders.

Help from Home

As their neighbors cut back on their financial support, many of the refugees turned to their prior homes and farms as a source of support for their families. Initially Connecticut recognized the importance of allowing refugees to travel to and from their homes on Long Island

¹⁹⁴ *New York Provincial Records*, 671.

¹⁹⁵ For a complete discussion about common problems faced by political refugees see Barry N. Stein, “The Refugee Experience: Defining the Parameters of a Field of Study.” *International Migration Review*, Vol 15, No. ½, *Refugees Today* (Spring-Summer, 1981) 320-330.; Cheryl Benard, “Politics and the Refugee Experience,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 101, No. 4 (1986) 617-636.; and Jeremy Hein, “Refugees, Immigrants, and the State,” *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol 19 (1993) 43-59.

¹⁹⁶ Connecticut General Assembly Records quoted in Mather, *The Refugees*, 893 and Staudt, “A State of Wretchedness,” 147, 161.

to collect supplies. They offered not only permission for refugees to return home, but encouraged the local town committees to provide assistance. On February 20, 1777 the Governor and Connecticut Council of Safety published the following resolve to the committee men at Saybrook and Stonington:

“on application...by any such refugees for any boats or vessells to bring off any of their effects...[the committees] are hereby authorized and impowered to allow and license any boats or vessells and hands to assist in bringing off goods from Long Island to the main...during the term of six weeks.”¹⁹⁷

However, this six week period quickly ended, and difficulties associated with traveling to Long Island increased. Refugees not only had to gain permission from their Connecticut neighbors for boats and vessels, but also had to ask for permission to remove stock and supplies from New York.

The inability of Connecticut to continue providing for the refugees increased the refugees' desire to depend on New York for help. In 1779, nineteen residents petitioned Governor Clinton of New York, explaining that “the people among whom we dwell either cannot or will not furnish us with Supplies.” They explained their existence in Connecticut had been, “reduced to a want of Bread” and to fix this problem they requested a “Permitt to purchase in the State of New York...Bread or Species of bread which to Support & only to Support our families is absolutely necessary.”¹⁹⁸ Obadiah Jones from Southampton and Capt Zebulon Cooper, who had brought over 171 refugees from Long Island, filed multiple petitions on behalf of the refugees.¹⁹⁹ New York granted their request and allowed Jones to bring supplies back to Connecticut for the refugee families.

¹⁹⁷ *Connecticut Public Records* February 20, 1777, Hartford, CT, 179.

¹⁹⁸ *Clinton Papers* Vol V, 439-440.

¹⁹⁹ Mather, *The Refugees*, 313 & 431.

The most common petitions filed were for permission to return to Long Island to bring off supplies and produce. In July 1778, the Connecticut Assembly granted Benjamin Hunting the “liberty...to go or send for and bring from Long Island his property, goods and effects into this State.”²⁰⁰ On October 27, 1778 David Parsons, who had fled from South Hampton, petitioned the Connecticut Assembly to return to Long Island to “import salt and German Steel” which he planned to exchange for farm produce he still had on Long Island.²⁰¹ In April 1780 William Floyd petitioned the Council to “send agents to bring over any stock or personal property they can find on his estate,” while Capt John Conklin filed a petition to “get leather & woolen cloth” from Long Island.²⁰² These petitions continued throughout the war, and although the committees usually granted these requests, they explain how vital supplies from Long Island were for refugees.

Not all requests to travel home were to get household supplies or farm goods. Other requests included permission to return to Long Island for family business. John Hudson fled to Connecticut with his wife and son in late 1776, but his mother had remained on Long Island. Deteriorating conditions on Long Island led him to petition the Connecticut Assembly in 1779 to return home to “bring off his mother with her household furniture, provisions and money.”²⁰³ Others simply requested permission to return home to care for ailing parents. Jonathan Corwin petitioned the Governor to return home to take care of his parents who due to “reason of old Age & Infirmity are unable to take care of them Selves.”²⁰⁴ Requests to return for family business increased as the war continued and families attempted to reunite.

²⁰⁰ *Public Records of Connecticut*, Hartford CT, 107.

²⁰¹ *Council of Safety Records*, Hartford, CT, XIII: 190-191, and *Public Records of Connecticut*, Hartford CT, 150.

²⁰² *Council of Safety Records*, Hartford, CT, XX: 20-21, 24-25.

²⁰³ *Public Records of Connecticut*, Hartford CT, 345.

²⁰⁴ *Council of Safety Records*, in Mather, *The Refugees*, 919.

Other requests simply reflect how Long Island refugees attempted to maintain a normal life during the war or recover after the war. On November 3, 1779 Nathaniel Shipman of Saybrook was “permitted to go to Long Island for the purpose of marrying a wife.”²⁰⁵ Shipman’s request explains how even normal life events became complicated during war. In 1783 John Lloyd Jr. attempted to recover some of his possessions after the war. He wanted to return to Long Island to collect “debts due from persons in L.I. & N.Y.,” and he hoped the Council of Safety would grant him permission to “bring off what he can collect from his debts in specie & salt.”²⁰⁶ In the years from 1776 to 1783, the Connecticut Council of Safety approved over 100 requests for refugees to return to Long Island.²⁰⁷ Although returning home provided one source of income, not all refugees relied on free passage back and forth to provide for their families.

Many refugees relied on relatives and friends who lived in Connecticut to support them when they arrived. Joseph Conkling evacuated from Long Island with his brother on September 13, 1776. When they arrived in Connecticut they moved in with relatives in Saybrook. Jerusha Gardiner, daughter of Samuel Buell, fled to Connecticut with her two sons and her cousin Elias Buell in September of 1776. They moved into her family’s house while they were in Connecticut. Rev. John Storrs had served as a minister in Southold prior to the war, but after the British occupation he fled Long Island with his family of eight in October 1776. He was one of the fortunate refugees whose family was from Connecticut. When his family arrived in Mansfield, they simply moved back into the family home where they remained until 1782 when

²⁰⁵ *Connecticut Public Records*, Hartford CT, XXVI: 440.

²⁰⁶ *Council of Safety Records*, Hartford, CT, XXVI: 226-227.

²⁰⁷ *Connecticut Council of Safety Papers, 1780-1783*, in Mather, *The Refugees*, 978-988.

they returned to Southold.²⁰⁸ During his stay in Connecticut he became an Army pastor and continued to support the Revolutionary cause.²⁰⁹

New Careers

Those not fortunate enough to have family or friends in Connecticut, turned to a variety of careers to support themselves. Medical and military careers were two of the most common career choices for refugees. These helped refugees provide for their families and allowed them to continue aiding the war effort. The medical field was open to a number of physicians who fled Long Island. Nine refugees who fled to Connecticut served in the Hospital Service during the war including Jonathan Havens from Shelter Island, David Conkling from Southold; Silas Halsey Jr., and William Lawrence from Southampton. Benjamin Prime, who evacuated to Connecticut from Huntington with his family, practiced medicine in New Haven Connecticut throughout the war.²¹⁰ Dr. Gilbert Potter, from Huntington, joined Washington's Army and served as a surgeon during the war.²¹¹

Most of these physicians had been successful on Long Island, but a number of them had a difficult time surviving in Connecticut. Both Silas Halsey and Jonathan Havens served in the Hospital Service while residing in Connecticut, and both felt unable to provide for their families. Silas Halsey petitioned the Council of Safety in April 1780 to return home because he was unable to support his family in Connecticut. He explained that in 1776

“he left his habitation where he was in full practice of physic[ian]...came over to Killingworth in this State with his family, household furniture, and some other moveable

²⁰⁸ Biographical sketches found in Mather, *The Refugees*, 285, 305, 353, 581. For a description of the turmoil refugees faced in Connecticut see Staudt, “A State of Wretchedness,” 146-149.

²⁰⁹ Bailey, *Long Island*, Vol I, 152.

²¹⁰ A list of Hospital Service members and a complete list of claims made by each of these physicians can be found in Mather, *The Refugees*, 178-181 and in the Connecticut Colonial Records, in Mather, *The Refugees*, 514.

²¹¹ Bailey, *Long Island*, Vol II, 366.

effects, and hath resided here ever since, and having expended the greatest part of his said effects, and in no business whereby to support his family.”²¹²

Thus he requested permission to return home with his family to South Hampton because he believed if he remained he would “likely be chargeable to the public or suffer want.”

Jonathan Havens filed the following petition explaining his circumstances in Connecticut:

“he brought over from Sd. Long Island Some household stuff...[livestock], and Sundry other Small Articles most of Which Articles he Sold when he first came over for Continental Money Which depreaciated so fast in his hands, that it purchased but a very little for the Support of his family...and that he has now become very Needy and indigen his Children, and family are allmost naked and have but a very few of the Necessaries and none of the Conveniences of life; and that he and his family must immediately become a burden to this State unless he can return to Sd. Long Island.”²¹³

Despite their medical background both men feared they would become dependent on the State of Connecticut if they could not return home. The Council granted both of them permission to return home, and while Dr. Halsey returned to his patients, Dr. Havens simply returned home to “spend the latter part of his life, in quiet, and in an Obscure retreat.”²¹⁴

Refugees also served in the military while they resided in Connecticut. Both New York and Connecticut raised troops for Colonial defense, and both colonies recruited refugees for service. Many of the refugees chose to serve in the New York military. Capt John Wickes fled Long Island and fought as a member of the 4th New York Line.²¹⁵ The First Regiment of the Line in New York included over sixty refugees including John Foster and Joseph Havens, while

²¹² *Public Records of Connecticut*, Hartford CT, 538.

²¹³ The Connecticut Council of Safety, in Mather, *The Refugees*, 902.

²¹⁴ *Public Records of Connecticut*, Hartford CT, 538 & Connecticut Council of Safety, in Mather, *The Refugees*, 902.

²¹⁵ Staudt, “A State of Wretchedness,” 99.

the Second Regiment of the Line included over ninety refugees, including Joseph Conkling and Joseph Griffing.²¹⁶

Long Island refugees also served for Connecticut during the war. James Allen, who fled from Queens County, served under Captain Simeon Sheldon from Guilford, CT in 1779.

Jonathan Corwin left Southold in 1776 and settled in Norwich Connecticut. During his time in Connecticut, he served in two campaigns in the 1st Connecticut Line. Where he “served well through two campaigns until he was honorably Discharged merely on account of Inward weakness and Infirmity of Body”²¹⁷ Upon the completion of service, he married Hannah Hazen a Norwich native on February 4, 1778.

Military service did not protect family members from hardship while in Connecticut. The families of soldiers often suffered while their husbands and fathers served in the military.

Nathaniel Norton signed the Association in 1775 and evacuated his family to Connecticut when the British arrived. He served as a Captain in the Army in a variety of posts in the New York Line, until its consolidation in 1781.²¹⁸ Azariah Tuthill evacuated with his family in 1776 and served as an ensign under the Third Regiment from New York.²¹⁹ While they were away fighting, their families returned to Long Island to escape increasing problems in Connecticut. In January 1780, both men, who had settled in Guilford requested permission to return to Long Island because their “families in their absence had been under the disagreeable necessity of going on to Long Island” since they were “very destitute of clothing and have little or no interest in this

²¹⁶ The New York Line Records, in Mather, *The Refugees*, 1013-1014.

²¹⁷ Connecticut Men in the Revolution, in Mather, *The Refugees*, 1027, Council of Safety of Records, in Mather, *The Refugees*, 919

²¹⁸ The New York Line Records, in Mather, *The Refugees*, 1013-1014, Biographical sketches in Mather, *The Refugees*, 482-483.

²¹⁹ Records of the Continental Regiments in the State of New York, in Mather, *The Refugees*, 1014.

State.”²²⁰ Military service not unlike the medical career field, did not guarantee economic success.

A number of refugees set up their own businesses in Connecticut. Elias Pelletreau left Long Island with his wife and two sons in September 1776. When he arrived in Simsbury, Connecticut he set up his shop as a Gold Smith, where he “performed his business to universal satisfaction” of the town members.²²¹ However, despite his success in Connecticut he requested to return home in September 1780, four years after he left Southampton. Paul Reeve left Long Island with his family of six and settled in Saybrook. During his stay in Connecticut, he served in the 4th line and more importantly helped refugees from Connecticut relocate. A number of Long Island refugees who settled in Connecticut later decided to move to Dutchess County New York in an effort to survive. The Committee of Safety hired Reeve to transport those families wishing to leave.²²²

Privateering also became a particularly popular choice among refugees. Privateers were ship Captains commissioned by the colonial government to provide additional support for navy forces. These boats operated under rules of warfare and attempted to capture enemy ships and disrupt British supply lines.²²³ The Connecticut Council authorized commissions for Private Ships of War and encouraged Captains to not only patrol Connecticut’s border, but to raid Long

²²⁰ *Public Records of Connecticut*, Hartford CT, 489.

²²¹ In Sept 1780, residents of Simsbury vouched for Capt Pelletreau’s work during his residence in Connecticut, and recommended the council allow him to return home to Saybrook. Found in Mather, *The Refugees*, 501.

²²² Staudt, “A State of Wretchedness,” 148; Mather, *The Refugees*, 526.

²²³ Joseph S. Tiedemann, “Patriots by Default: Queens County, New York, and the British Army, 1776-1783.” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser. Vol. 43., No. 1. (Jan, 1986) 46.

Island.²²⁴ Many of the Long Island refugees, especially those with shipping experience became privateers in Connecticut.

Suffolk County refugees were extremely active as Privateers and quite successful at disrupting the enemy. During the war, over fifty Long Island refugees acted as ship Captains and many more served as crewmen of boats. Captain William Rogers was one of the most active privateers. He commanded fifty-six men aboard the *Montgomery*, and in 1776 he along with his crew captured at least six merchant vessels carrying British goods. From 1775 to 1783 Joseph Conkling commanded over forty men aboard the *Whim*, which he outfitted with 12 guns. He also commanded eighty men aboard the *Revenge*, which the British destroyed in 1779. His brother Edward Conkling commanded the *Eagle* which included a crew of 30 men.²²⁵ Refugees who acted as Rangers, who were Connecticut Privateers, were extremely successful because they knew the details of Long Island's coast and coastal towns.

Privateer raids disrupted British ship movements, and by the end of the war Lloyds of London estimated that five hundred of the 3,000 British ships taken during the war ended up in Connecticut's ports through the efforts of privateers.²²⁶ One Loyalist account from Huntington, explained how disruptive these raids were. He observed that, "the rebellious part of the inhabitants in this Town, who were kept in awe, while the troops were stationed east of us, are now become more insolent than ever, and publicly threaten to have all the loyalists carried off to Connecticut".²²⁷ These rebels often supported the privateers against the British. Zephaniah Platt

²²⁴ Connecticut Council of Safety, Sept 2, 1777, in Mather, *The Refugees*, 877. Also for first hand accounts of whaleboat warfare see Benjamin Tallmadge, *Memoirs of Colonel Benjamin Tallmadge* (New York: 1858).

²²⁵ "Connecticut Men in the Revolution", in Mather, *The Refugees*, 214-219, 1026 and Staudt, "A State of Wretchedness," 190-192.

²²⁶ Staudt, "A State of Wretchedness," 191.

²²⁷ Mather, *The Refugees*, 175.

of Smithtown helped conceal two whale boats of Connecticut raiders in his barn.²²⁸ Although he was later imprisoned by the British for this action, it shows how willing many of the Long Island residents were to help their former neighbors.

As with many refugee populations, the Long Island refugees found that survival in their new homes was extremely difficult. Many chose to leave Long Island when the British invaded, but most were unprepared for an extended stay in Connecticut. There were those fortunate enough to find support from family and friends, but as the war continued it strained local economies. Within a couple of years, the refugees found that Connecticut and New York could no longer provide them assistance. Survival became a major concern for those who had left their homes.

²²⁸ Onderdonk, *Suffolk and Kings Counties*, 68.

Chapter 7: Legal Impediments

The Long Island refugees faced multiple legal problems, which complicated their survival efforts. Survival for many of the refugees depended on the ability to return to Long Island to collect supplies and provisions from their homes. Both Connecticut and New York continually restricted this process, which posed a problem for refugees throughout their seven year exile. Permits were difficult to obtain and required refugees to petition the government each time they needed to return home. These permits often took months to process, limiting the refugee's access to much needed goods. Although Connecticut eventually formed a committee to hear their petitions, the process was time consuming. And occasionally the committee denied refugees the right to return home.

One of the consequences of the British invasion, for the Long Island refugees, was the loss of a political voice. Many of the refugees who fled Long Island were active in the New York colonial government, and viewed their political freedom as an essential right. However, their flight to Connecticut severely limited their political involvement, since neither colony allowed them to easily participate in politics. New York refused to give them a voice because they were no longer residing in the state, while Connecticut had significant land requirements which made it difficult for refugees to meet the voting requirements. While Connecticut did not expressly deny refugees the vote, most refugees did not own property in Connecticut, and thus did not meet the voting requirements. These legal restrictions not only affected refugees, but all residents of Connecticut of lesser means.

Connecticut considered refugees permanent residents of the state when they arrived, and expected them to pay taxes and serve in the militia. The war drained Connecticut's economy, and by 1780 taxes became an important source of revenue. Refugees who had found property in Connecticut were then subject to poll taxes on their property. Refugees felt the militia requirements limited their ability to provide for their families, and they filed numerous petitions seeking relief from both military service and annual taxes. Such problems made survival in Connecticut extremely arduous.

Legal Problems

Provisions from Long Island were essential for the survival of many refugees, but there were numerous legal roadblocks that limited their mobility and access to their homes. Refugees quickly realized the importance of gaining permission from New York and Connecticut to return home to gather supplies. On April 10, 1777, 170 refugees petitioned with the New York Convention to find a way for them to return to Long Island for supplies.²²⁹ The Convention sent back a "favorable answer" noting that once the "form of Government is Settled" they would help the refugees find a way to gather supplies from Long Island.²³⁰ However, on June 12, 1777, 45 refugees once again petitioned the New York committee of Safety explaining that they had "waited patiently for the form of Government to be Settled...having no Instructions further from the Convention...we Applied to the Honourable the Governor & Counsell of this State." Since the New York Convention failed to act, the refugees turned to their Connecticut hosts for a solution to their traveling problems.

The refugees petitioned the Connecticut government to find a way to gain access to travel permits. The refugees petitioned the Connecticut Council to return to Long Island "for the

²²⁹ The Journal of the New York Provincial Congress, April 10, 1777, in Mather, *The Refugees*, 700.

²³⁰ The Journal of the New York Provincial Congress, June 12, 1777, in Mather, *The Refugees*, 702.

purpose of bringing off necessaries for their suffering families.” More importantly they explained that “the Strictest prohibition of passing to Long Island to get over any thing to support ourselves” was increasing their problems in Connecticut. To resolve such issues they requested permission to “obtain permits to pass and Repass as Opportunities may present to take over to the Relief of our families.”²³¹ Included in this petition to New York was a letter from Governor Trumbull signed May 5, 1777, explaining that while he thought the petitioners should again “apply to the State of New York for Direction about the Removal of any of them Back to the Island” that he was willing to “Readily assist & help them.”²³² The pressure from the Connecticut Governor and the insistence of the refugees encouraged the New York Council to take action.

Initially all requests were heard by the New York Council, but increased petitions led the Council to create a separate committee to review refugee requests. This committee was composed of three Long Island refugees, who acted on behalf of the Council in reviewing refugee requests. On June 27, 1777 the New York Council issued the following proclamation:

“Resolved that (provided His Excellency Governor Trumbull shall approve) Obadiah Jones, John Hulbert, and Thomas Dearing, or any two of them, do give permits to such of the refugees from Long Island as reside in Connecticut as they shall think proper.”²³³

This committee authorized passage to and from Long Island for any refugee who had legitimate business.²³⁴ While the committee normally granted permits for refugees, the process was slow and tedious.

Most refugees filed petitions and gained legal permits to travel back to Long Island, but there were consequences for refugees who decided to return to Long Island without permits. In

²³¹ The New York Committee of Safety, June 12, 1777, in Mather, *The Refugees*, 702.

²³² The Journal of the New York Provincial Congress, May 5, 1777, in Mather, *The Refugees*, 704.

²³³ *New York Provincial Records*, 979.

²³⁴ New York Council of Safety, June 27, 1777, in Mather, *The Refugees*, 703.

November 1782 Samuel King, a refugee who had fled from Bridge Hampton to Middletown Connecticut was “petitioned showing he was convicted of going to L.I. without a permit & sentenced to 3 months imprisonment.”²³⁵ In addition to the imprisonment, King had to pay a fine for his confinement in the sum of £20. On May 15, 1783, King filed a petition to the committee requesting that they release him so he could find work and pay his fine in the future.²³⁶ The committee granted King’s request, but his experience is an example of the legal problems refugees faced if they failed to file a petition.

Illegal actions and attempts to profit from trade during the war complicated the permit process. Some refugees attempted to sell goods illegally without attracting the attention of either colonial government. These men hoped to capitalize on the chaos of war. Others were more upfront about their intentions, and petitioned to ship British goods. On October 12, 1778 James Sayre, who had fled from Bridge Hampton to East Haddam after the British invasion, petitioned the New York Assembly to allow him to participate in “illicit trade,” which included bringing over additional supplies with the intention to sell them to other refugees and Connecticut residents.²³⁷ Although Governor Clinton denied his request, he did allow Mr. Sayre to return to Long Island for his own possessions. Clinton granted Sayre passage home in the following letter.

“Mr. James Sayre, a Refuge from Long Island, having left at his former Place of abode Household furniture & other Property which he is desirous of bringing off, is hereby permitted to pass to Long Island & return for the above Purpose. This Permission is not to be considered a licence to bring off from the Island any Articles for the Purpose of Traffic.”²³⁸

²³⁵ *Council of Safety Records*, Hartford, CT XXVI: 241, 242.

²³⁶ Connecticut Council of Safety, in Mather, *The Refugees*, 965.

²³⁷ Journals of the New York State Senate and Assembly, 1777-1799, in Mather, *The Refugees*, 719.

²³⁸ *Clinton Papers*, Vol I, 512-513.

Illicit trade included everything from raiding Long Island towns to supplying the British troops with goods for revenue. This fear of illegal trade complicated the process for refugees and made it difficult to return to Connecticut with supplies and household goods for survival.

Both the Connecticut council and the New York Governor feared that free passage back and forth from Long Island to Connecticut, would not only be dangerous for those who sought passage, but also threatened the Patriot cause. Governor Trumbull warned against misuse of permits by stating, “I shall Not Give Nor advise you to Give any Permits for such...Remov[al] of Stock [which] will be Serving the Enemy.”²³⁹ To help prevent this process the Connecticut government set up an inspection station in Saybrook, in New Haven designed to prevent “illicit trade.” Refugees were granted passage if they agreed to have their “said effects under the careful inspection...going and returning.” This inspection was meant to ensure that “no illicit trade or doings be carried on.” Although the inspectors allowed refugees to bring over provisions “for the use and consumption of their own families,” they could not travel with money or provisions to Long Island. The inspectors also seized all British goods brought over from Long Island during return trips.²⁴⁰

The legal problems concerning the mobility of refugees were the most difficult for them to deal with, but other legal issues also complicated their lives. The voting rights of refugees were limited, and most Long Island residents were not able to participate in politics either in New York or Connecticut. On April 6, 1777, the New York Convention made it impossible for Long Island refugees to vote in New York. They ruled that:

“That every male inhabitant of full age, who shall have personally resided within one of the counties of this State, for six months immediately preceding the day of election, shall at such election be entitled to vote for Representatives of the said county

²³⁹ The Journal of the New York Provincial Congress, May 5, 1777, in Mather, *The Refugees*, 704.

²⁴⁰ Connecticut Council of Safety Records, in Mather, *The Refugees.*, 882, 884, 885, also see Staudt, “A State of Wretchedness,” 150.

General Assembly, if during the time aforesaid he shall have been a freeholder, possessing a freehold of the value of twenty pounds within the said county...and have been rated and actually paid taxes to this State...shall be entitled to vote for the Representatives in Assembly.”²⁴¹

These residency and property requirements made it impossible for Long Island refugees to continue participating in politics. This declaration prompted immediate action from refugees in Connecticut, and on April 10, 1777, 170 refugees from “Suffolk , now in Haddam, E. Haddam, Lyme, Saybrook, Killingworth and Guilford” petitioned the New York Legislature to “Address our Convention, that some Mode may be pointed out, whereby we may be Represented as Inhabitants of the State of New York.”²⁴² However, the New York convention never answered their petition and the refugees failed to gain a political voice in New York. Many then turned to Connecticut as a logical choice for political freedoms, but the legal system blocked many refugees from gaining a voice.

Voters in Connecticut were white males who owned property. Connecticut’s requirements for voting stipulated that all voters had to be freemen, which only included white males with property holdings valued at over 50 shillings.²⁴³ These land restrictions meant it was difficult for refugees to gain substantial enough property holdings in Connecticut to qualify for the franchise. Most of their assets were in New York, thus most were unable to gain the appropriate social status to have a political voice. To make matters worse, Connecticut considered Long Island refugees residents of their state and required them to pay taxes and serve in the Connecticut militia.

²⁴¹ New York Provincial Records, 867.

²⁴² Mather, *The Refugees*, 700 and Onderdonk, *Suffolk and Kings Counties*, 70.

²⁴³ Cohn, “Connecticut Constitutional History”, <http://www.cslib.org/cts4cc.htm#3>

Taxes and Military Service

Taxes and mandatory military service continued to complicate the lives of the refugees who either could not afford taxes on land they were able to find, or found leaving their families for militia duty an extreme burden. In May 1776, the Connecticut government adopted a poll and property tax to help with colonial revenue. They declared a “tax of eight pence on the pound...be levied on all the polls and ratable estate in this Colony...which tax shall be collected and paid into the Colony treasury by the last day of December 1780.”²⁴⁴ Although this tax was essential for Connecticut, it created a hardship for many refugees.

Petitions sent to the Connecticut Assembly for tax relief for refugees became common during the years of 1779 and 1780. Taxes became an issue for many refugees not only from Long Island, but from New York City as well. In February 1779, Governor Trumbull addressed the issue of taxes concerning refugees from New York City, who filed one of the first petitions for tax relief. Trumbull decreed that no taxes on personal property other than real estate were required of New York City refugees unless they had “done business in a mercantile way.”²⁴⁵ However, it is unclear if this order applied to the Long Island refugees, and they filled numerous petitions explaining how economically devastating these taxes were for them.

In May 1779, James Corwin petitioned the General Assembly of Connecticut for relief from taxes. Corwin was a former resident of Southold, in Suffolk County, where he owned “26 acres of good Land...with a good dwelling House Barn & Orchard...also with Considerable Stock.” The following letter explains his troubles and shows why he requested exemption from Connecticut taxes.

²⁴⁴ Hoadly, *Public Records of Connecticut*, 307.

²⁴⁵ Mather, *The Refugees*, 895.

“In September 1776 rather than to be Subjugated to their Arbitrary powr...I sold part of my Stock at a low price and then takeing my Familey...and part of my Houshold goods I removed to Guilford...ye listors of ye town, the last year thought it their duty to call on me for a list of my estate real and personal; ...I complyd with ye requisition and gave my bill; thinking it not Reasonable for a person in my circumstances to pay taxes on his pole and stock...and if your Honours think it Reasonable....order that I may be [ex]empted from paying taxes.”²⁴⁶

The Connecticut Assembly approved Corwin’s exemption stating that James Corwin “is hereby exempted from paying taxes on his pole and personal estate in said year (1778).”²⁴⁷

In the next few months thirty four refugees petitioned the Connecticut Assembly for relief of taxes.

The poll tax also caused considerable consternation. In January 1780, 16 Long Island refuges petitioned the Connecticut General Assembly for tax relief. Although the Assembly had approved the appeals of over 30 refugees to avoid estate taxes, the poll tax continued to frustrate refugees. Capt John Conklin, Ezekiel Wickes, and Carl Ketcham along with 13 other refugees were frustrated because according to them they had been “lately...informed that they are considered Inhabitants of this State, and liable to taxation, not only for the little Estate they possess, but that they are also be liable to a Poll Tax.” They petitioned the General Assembly for “Temporary Asylum” from both Poll and estate taxes, but especially the Poll Tax which they described as a “hard ship” and “kind of Oppression.”²⁴⁸ They also feared New York would tax them for their real estate and property on Long Island to help support the war, which did occur after the war. Although Connecticut granted them relief, they never made an official statement about taxes for refugees.

²⁴⁶ *Council of Safety Records*, Hartford CT, XIV: 331-332 & Connecticut General Assembly Records in Mather, *The Refugees*, 891-892.

²⁴⁷ *Town Records of Connecticut*, Hartford, CT 335.

²⁴⁸ Connecticut Council of Safety Records, Jan 7 1780, in Mather, *The Refugees*, 899.

Former Long Island residents continued to request relief from taxes throughout the war. On February 28, 1781, John Lloyd requested exemption from “payment of taxes for this Pole of his family & said two horses and two Cows.”²⁴⁹ Although Lloyd owned substantial property on Long Island, his ability to pay taxes in Connecticut was limited and taxation remained an issue for refugees throughout their exile. This was a common problem for refugees throughout the war.

Refugees had the same status as all Connecticut residents, thus they were required to pay taxes and perform military service. In 1776 Connecticut passed the Acts and Laws Regulating the Militia, where

“all male Persons from Sixteen Years of Age to Sixty, not included in the part of the Militia called the Train-band, or exempted from common and ordinary Training, shall constitute an Alarm Lift in this State.”²⁵⁰

Connecticut exempted members of the Connecticut Council, members of Congress, the Treasurer and Secretary of State, ministers of the Gospel, and Yale College professors and students.

Connecticut exempted Negroes, Indians and Mulattoes from militia service, but Connecticut required refugees to respond to alarms. Those who failed to show up for alarms were responsible for paying a fine. On February 4, 1777 Trumbull addressed the refugees stating they “ought not to be Enroled with the Militia for common Duty but [only] in Case of an alarm.”²⁵¹

Refugees repeatedly petitioned the Connecticut Assembly to avoid all military service. Many refugees petitioned the Connecticut Assembly and the Governor for exemption of all military service, which they felt was a burden on their families who were already suffering. On

²⁴⁹Connecticut Council of Safety Records quoted in Mather, *The Refugees*, 945.

²⁵⁰ *Connecticut Session Laws 1776: Acts and Laws Regulating the Militia Passed by the General Court or Assembly of the State of Connecticut*. December 18, 1776. 442.

²⁵¹ Connecticut Council of Safety Records quoted in Mather, *The Refugees*, 895.

June 8, 1779 Joseph Blackwell requested that he “be exempt from military drafts.”²⁵² Then in October 1782, Joseph Moore, explained that he while he was “willing to pay Taxes for the little estate” he owned he thought that “considering his great Losses, Trials & Inability, that he should be exempted from doing military Duty...for the year 1781.”²⁵³ The Connecticut Convention agreed with his petition and declared that Moore “is hereby Exempted from Doing Military Duty...for the year 1781 and for the Present year & During the present War or untill he Can with Safety to the Publick & himself return to or take the Benefit of his Estate on sd Long Island.”²⁵⁴ Petitions requesting exemption from military duty almost always included examples of why military service burdened the refugees.

One of the most overlooked pieces of the refugee story is the legal problems they faced. However, it is impossible to understand their situation without acknowledging the litany of legal problems that plagued refugees during their entire seven year exile. They faced problems traveling to their homes in Long Island, which they depended on for provisions and income. Even when refugees decided to return home rather than remain in Connecticut the various committees frequently denied them, which made them virtual prisoners in Connecticut.

One of the reasons refugees left Long Island was to escape political persecution, yet when they arrived in Connecticut they faced difficulties trying to gain political freedom. These rights were essential to most Suffolk County residents, and those who were able to find property in Connecticut faced increased taxes. Families also faced hardships due to continued military service. These legal problems encouraged many residents to return home before the British left Long Island.

²⁵² “The Connecticut Archives, Revolutionary War” quoted in Mather, *The Refugees*, 892.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 958.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 958.

Chapter 8: Returning Home

Returning home was as difficult for the refugees as the initial trip to Connecticut. The Connecticut Council of Safety required refugees to ask for permission to return home. Refugees sent numerous petitions justifying their request to return to Long Island and listing the supplies they wanted to take home with them. They also had to find ship Captains willing to provide passage across the sound to enemy occupied territory. Once they returned to Long Island they fell under martial law until the British surrender and evacuation in November 1783.²⁵⁵ Despite these harsh conditions, many refugees found going home more appealing than remaining in Connecticut where they were unable to prosper.

Worsening conditions in Connecticut encouraged many refugees to return home despite the fact that Long Island remained under the control of the British until 1783. Those who were unable to gain employment or those who suffered from illness often petitioned the Council of Safety to return home to Long Island permanently. The most common requests included descriptions of how difficult life was for refugees in Connecticut. John Mulford Esqr., petitioned the council explaining that since he was “very infirm” and “has no means of support in this State” that he wanted to “return with his family and some stock, for the recovery of his health and support of his family” to Long Island.²⁵⁶ The council approved his request and granted him a permit to return with his family, one cow, and tne horse.²⁵⁷ Abigail and Bethiah Terry petitioned the Council to return home on September 27, 1780, and explained that although they had “experienced much kindness from the Inhabitants of this State Yet being in the Decline of

²⁵⁵ Staudt, “A State of Wretchedness,” 2.

²⁵⁶ Mather, *The Refugees*, 875.

²⁵⁷ Mather, *The Refugees*, 479.

Life, not having any House of their own in this State to dwell in, And it being difficult to obtain many necessaries for their Comfortable Subsistence” that they wanted to return to Long Island.²⁵⁸

These requests became more and more common as conditions in Connecticut deteriorated. Table 7.1 shows the number of petitions refugees filed each year and the Committee of Safety approval rate for such requests. The requests increased as the war continued, and by 1780, a number of the refugees began their return home when the British pulled out of the eastern end of Long Island. Arranging a trip home was as difficult as gaining ordinary passage to Long Island.

²⁵⁸ Council of Safety Papers, Sept 27, 1780, quoted in Mather *The Refugees*, 926-927.

Table 8.1 Return Requests & Approval Rates

Month/Year	Families Represented	Denied	Granted	Total Requests
April 1780	12	1	7	8
May 1780	18	2	9	11
June 1780	2	1	1	2
Sept 1780	1	0	1	1
Oct 1780	4	2	1	3
Nov 1780	4	0	2	2
Feb 1781	21	4	3	7
May 1781	2	1	1	2
July 1781	2	0	1	1
Sept 1781	2	0	2	2
Jan 1782	1	1	0	1
Feb 1782	1	0	1	1
Mar 1782	5	0	5	5
Oct 1782	10	0	9	9
Nov 1782	5	0	5	5
Jan 1783	7	0	7	7
Feb 1783	3	0	3	3
Mar 1783	9	0	9	9
TOTALS	109	12	67	79

The Connecticut government screened all petitions to ensure refugees had legitimate reasons to return home. Refugees such as Hannah Cooper and Phoebe Tillinghast explained their desperate situation in a petition filed in May 1780 requesting permission to return to Long Island with their families. Their petition explained that in 1776, “our Husbands With us your memorialist...left our pleasant and Profitable Dwelling places at South Hold on Long Island...sence which time the Almighty God...hath been pleased to take our Husbands from us by Death and we are Now Left with the Care of a number of small Children to bring up in Each of our Families.”²⁵⁹ The Council permitted them to return with “Two Cows three Swine Two

²⁵⁹ Mather, *The Refugees*, 913.

Barrils and Six Bushels of flower and two Barrils of fish.”²⁶⁰ The Connecticut Council of Safety granted over sixty requests for permission to return to Long Island from 1780 to 1783.²⁶¹

One of the responsibilities of the Connecticut Council of Safety was to ensure those returning home would not aid the enemy. Many refugees addressed this concern in their requests to return home. In April, 1780, Weldon sent a petition to the Connecticut General Assembly in Hartford, reading,

“Tho his [Weldon's] circumstances would be far from affleuent on said island but there is fish and clams and many other things that he may obtain for his family (in this day of trouble) that he cannot obtain here, where the cold hand of charity seems to slack. He promises your honours that he will take no active part against the United States, but wishes to live a quiet life in obscurity.”²⁶²

The Assembly granted his petition, and Weldon returned home to Long Island.

The Eastern end of Long Island suffered the greatest destruction during the British occupation. Sheep and cattle were raided, property was stolen and forests were destroyed. The British destroyed homes, churches, fields and livestock. According to one New York Loyalists the British had completely destroyed all buildings in Long Island so “no one could make proper use of them.”²⁶³ Sag Harbor, suffered greatly at the hands of the British who seized its wharves and warehouses.²⁶⁴ As residents made the journey home from Connecticut they found there was not much left.

To make matters worse, most of the refugees had sold most of their possessions to survive while they were in Connecticut, and the rest lost considerable property during the war.

²⁶⁰ Mather, *The Refugees*, 914.

²⁶¹ Mather, *The Refugees*, 908-959.

²⁶² DeWan, “*Seeking Refuge from the British*” Newday, Long Island History found at <http://www.newsday.com/community/guide/lihistory/ny-history-hs407c,0,6698947.story>

²⁶³ Staudt, “A State of Wretchedness,” 158.

²⁶⁴ Bailey, *Long Island*, Vol 1, 222

Mortgage records indicate that most returning refugees borrowed money to pay off war time debts with any remaining assets the British had not destroyed. Men who had been wealthy before the war, like John Foster, borrowed against their land or sold it to new families.²⁶⁵

To complicate matters, British troops failed to reimburse Long Island residents for property they had taken during the war. The British took supplies from every county and family in Long Island with little regard to which side of the conflict Long Island residents supported, and most residents lost at least some property or livestock. Thomas Deering fled from Shelter Island to Middleton Connecticut in 1776 and served as a member of the Committee of Safety during his time in Connecticut. When he returned home to his 1200 acre estate on Long Island in 1783, “he found that great depredations had been made upon his woodlands while the Island was in possession of the British.”²⁶⁶ His loss included almost 4000 cords of wood, which General Clinton procured for British ships and troops during the war. Such losses were common for refugees who returned home

There were some measures taken to reimburse residents for damage British troops had done. After the war, the British established a Board of Commissioners to take care of reparations but “the Board sailed for England without attending to them.”²⁶⁷ Claims from the town of Huntington alone amounted to £7249, 9s. 6d. These claims included less than one fourth of the property actually taken during the war in that town. According to estimates, wartime losses on Long Island “exceeded \$500,000”.²⁶⁸ But neither the New York Government nor the British rulers provided any recourse for Long Island residents.

²⁶⁵ Mather, *The Refugees*, 193.

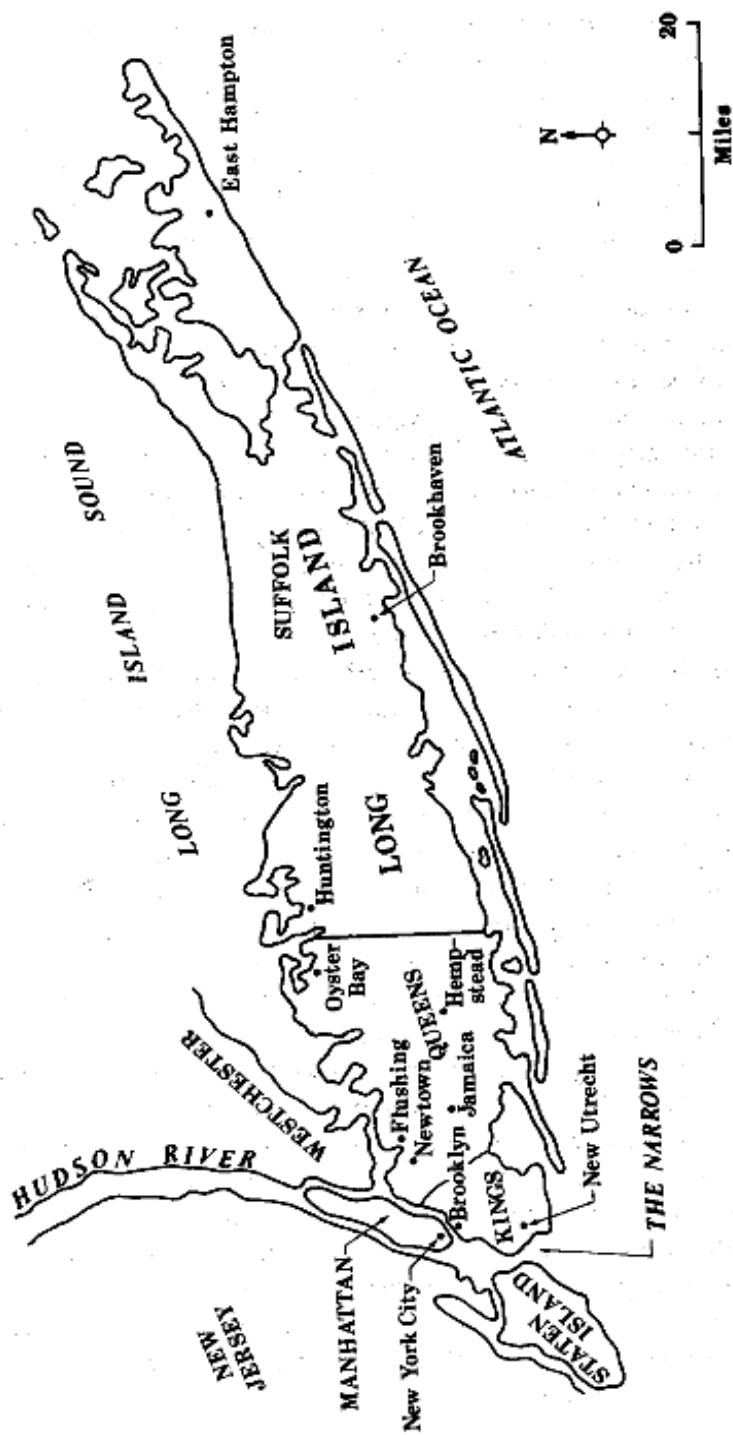
²⁶⁶ Matther, *The Refugees*, 330.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 194.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 194.

In 1776, when the Long Island refugees fled their homes, most believed they would return quickly to their homes and farms. However, the seven year exile and the devastating impact the British Army had on Long Island ruined the lives of most of them. Certainly the New York and Connecticut governments were unaware of the complications 3,000 refugees would create for both states. Although the states found ways to transport, shelter, and provide for the refugees temporarily, the task of providing for these people drained both economies.

Refugees faced harsh conditions in Connecticut and suffered as they attempted survive in their new homes. Those who survived the war and returned home found they had to start their lives over again. The British had destroyed most Patriot property, and refugees who still owned land often sold it to provide for their families after their return. Many never recovered economically. The story of the New York refugees explains how the American Revolution impacted thousands of non-combatants throughout the country.



SOUTHERN NEW YORK
Adapted from Adams and Coleman, eds., *Atlas*, 70, 79.

Figure 1: Geography of Long Island in 1776

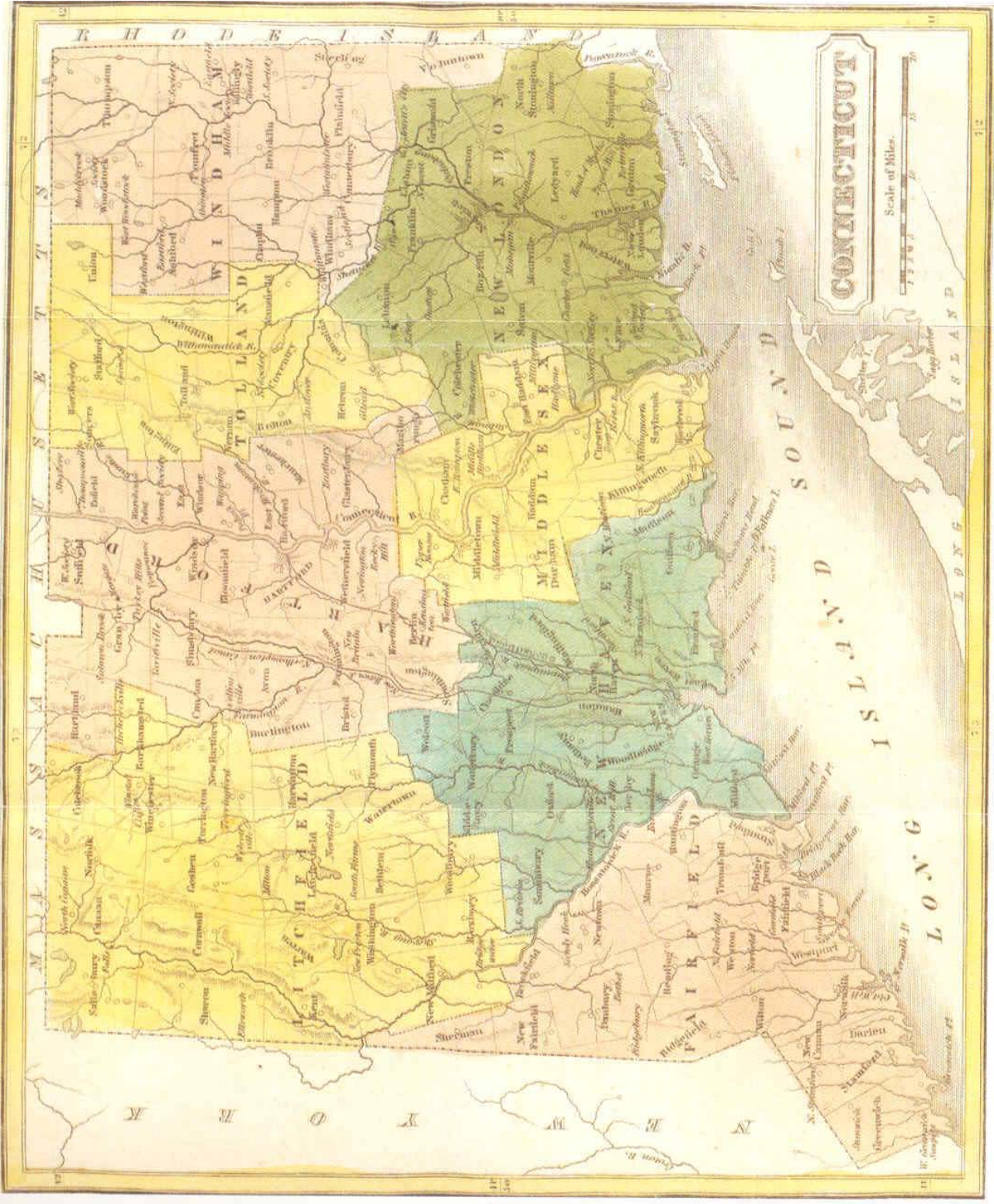


Figure 2: Connecticut Geography in 1776

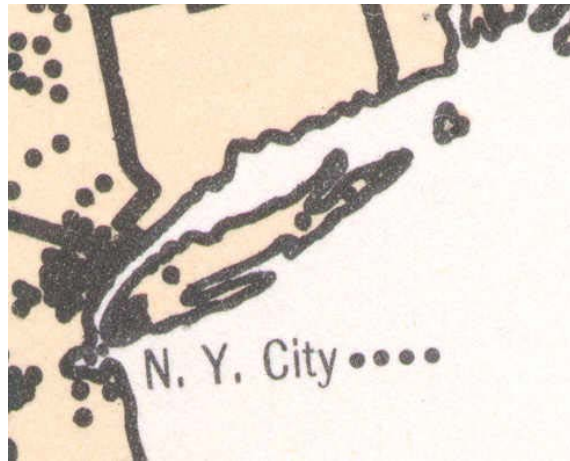


Fig 3: Dutch Reformed Churches

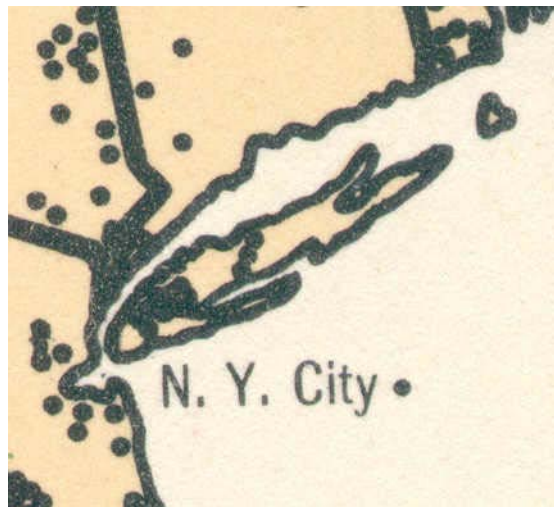


Fig 4: Quaker Congregations

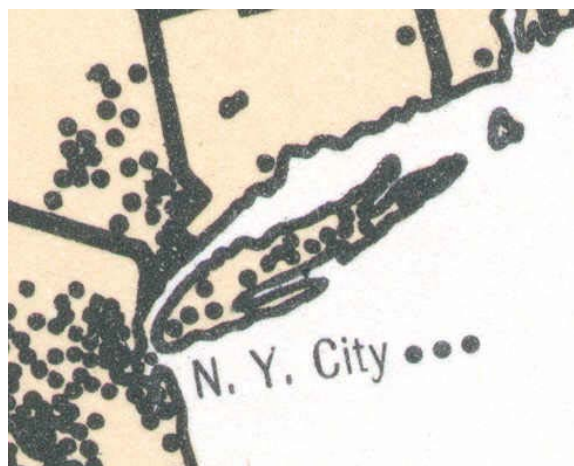


Fig 5: Presbyterian Congregations



Fig 6: Episcopal Churches



Fig 7: Congregationalists

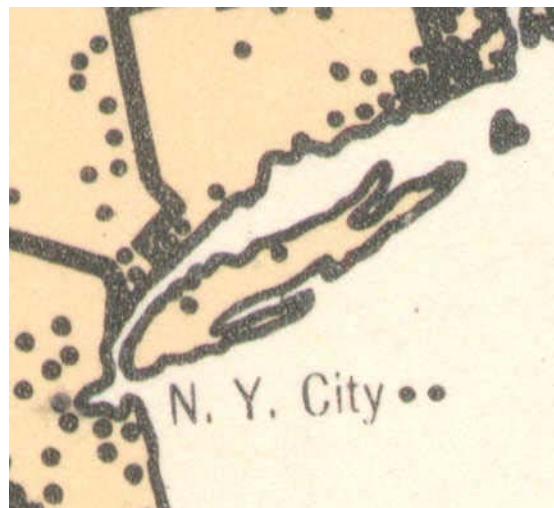


Fig 8: Baptist Congregations

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