ABSTRACT

SUBJECT AND CITIZEN: LOYALTY, MEMORY AND IDENTIY IN THE MONOGRAPHS OF THE REVEREND SAMUEL ANDREW PETERS

by Joshua Michael Avery

The Reverend Samuel Andrew Peters, deracinated by the American Revolution and forced to live in temporary exile in Great Britain, published both a General History of Connecticut, in 1781, and A History of the Rev. Hugh Peters, in 1807. By examining his two monographs this thesis uncovers the philosophical assumptions and ideological values of Peters and determines how those beliefs shifted over the course of his exile in England. These discoveries offer fresh understandings about how both Samuel Peters, and other similarly exiled and repatriated Loyalists reconstructed and ‘re-remembered’ their experiences concerning loyalty to the monarch, religion, and their family past, as well as their political and social identity.
SUBJECT AND CITIZEN: LOYALTY, MEMORY AND IDENTITY IN THE
MONOGRAPHS OF THE REVEREND SAMUEL ANDREW PETERS

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Faculty of Miami University
In partial fulfillment of
The requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of History
By
Joshua Michael Avery
Miami University
Oxford, Ohio
2008

Advisor__________________
Carla Gardina Pestana

Reader___________________
Andrew R. L. Cayton

Reader___________________
Wietse T. de Boer
## Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One: The Historiography of Loyalism</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two: Great Expectations</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three: From Subject to Citizen</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Colonial Church of England Ministers, 1775–1783</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Colonial Church of England Ministers by Region, 1775–1783</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Portrait of Samuel Peters</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Image of Hugh Peters</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

The past is often contested ground and never more so than when conflict and ideology are involved. Hence, it is hardly surprising that the years following the American Revolution were accompanied by a flurry of chronicles and memoirs. Loyalist and patriots alike spilled copious quantities of ink in efforts to explain the “real” history of their former colony and its role in the war. Despite these “histories” being full of fiction and invective they often provide insights into the beliefs, fears, ideology and memories of their authors. Samuel Peters, an eighteenth-century Anglican minister from Connecticut, produced two such accounts. His 1781 *General History of Connecticut*, published in Britain during the American rebellion, attempts a wide-ranging survey of Connecticut history as well as an explanation for hostilities between Britain and the people of Connecticut. In 1807, Peters published in New York, *A History of the Rev. Hugh Peters*, the famed regicide of whom Peters falsely claims to have been a descendent.

Histories of the Revolution, Peters’ included, have traditionally been measured only for their factual veracity. Frequently these documents have been poked and probed according to conventional measures. “Has bias warped their use of sources?” “What documentation is used?” Under such scrutiny Peters’ work has been dismissed as “partisan” and “anecdotal.” Works of history, particularly from the Revolutionary era, consistently tell us more about the ways of remembering and means of self-identification used by the writer than about the period they set out to examine.

Samuel Peters is interesting historically because of the multiplicity of ways in which he and his writings may be explored, especially in deepening our understanding of loyalism in the American Revolution. This thesis uncovers the philosophical assumptions and ideological values of Peters’ two monographs, especially by examining how Peters’ beliefs shifted over the course of his exile in England.

The guiding questions that this thesis seeks to answers are: how did Samuel Peters’ ideas about loyalty to the monarch, religion, his own family past, and many other topics he addresses in his work change over the course of his exile? What do these changes tell us about the ways that loyalists who returned to the former colonies, like
Peters, perceived themselves and how may they have revised and sought new identities through ‘re-remembering’ the past?

The story of Samuel Peters is both local and national. As such his work can only be appreciated within its context of communal and imperial tensions in which Anglicans and Congregationalists, loyalists and patriots, Indians and Anglos lived in colonial Connecticut. But, it also must be examined in relation to Peters’ standing in the greater Atlantic world and his experiences as a student and later an exile in Great Britain. Despite his parochial status as a minister, his worldview was far from narrow. Peters saw himself as a person of cosmopolitan sophistication and, had the word been in use, would have doubtlessly described himself as “progressive.” Through his writings Peters hoped to convince others to hold similar opinions about him.

No study of the American Revolution is complete without an examination of the “Tories” or “loyalists,” and it is important to understand the meaning of the terms and how they will be used throughout this thesis. The terms “loyalist” and “Tory” both refer to American colonists who remained submissive to British authority. “Tory” was an epithet used primarily in a pre-Revolutionary context and “loyalist” was a term adopted by exiles in England. They will be used interchangeably throughout the thesis to refer to that segment of American colonial society that remained devoted to the British monarchy.
Maya Jasanoff, in a 2008 article in the *William and Mary Quarterly* entitled “The Other Side of the Revolution: Loyalists in the British Empire,” correctly argues that loyalists have too long been relegated to the margins of mainstream history. She insists that this little studied but substantial group of British subjects in Revolutionary North America who chose to remain loyal to the British monarch and, as a result, were forced to flee from the thirteen colonies and seek haven in Britain or its empire have often been summarily dismissed as backward or wrong-thinking. Before the end of the American Revolution at least sixty thousand loyalists accompanied by fifteen thousand slaves had fled the thirteen colonies to live elsewhere in the British world. Jasanoff borrows Gary B. Nash’s label to contend that perhaps these refugees comprise another “forgotten fifth” in the history of the Revolutionary era.¹ Jasanoff is certainly right in her contention that loyalists who were deracinated by the American Revolution have been little studied and even less understood. Like most historians of Revolutionary loyalty she also fails to appreciate that some of those exiled loyalists, such as Samuel Peters, chose to return to their native land and shifted ideological positions to fit post-Revolution political and social realties.

In spite of Jasanoff’s claims of neglect in the study of loyalty, it has not gone completely unexamined. The two decades following the middle of the twentieth century saw an unparalleled enthusiasm for scholarship concerning loyalty and also proved to be a high water mark, as the study of this vital part of the Revolutionary era has seen a sharp decline in recent years. In the early 1970s a tri-national project known as the *Loyalist Papers Project* was started under the direction of Robert A. East. The venture coincided with the United States’ bicentennial. Scholars from Canada, Great Britain and the United States worked throughout the years surrounding 1976 to publish or reproduce on micro-film “every surviving manuscript, and many of the printed sources pertaining to

the loyalists.”

This effort, combined with the bicentennial celebration, created a heightened interest in the late colonial period. These circumstances largely explain the increase in scholarship produced about loyalism during the late 1960s and 1970s.

Whatever the reasons for this post 1950s burgeoning interest in loyalism, the subject was not entirely unexamined in earlier parts of the twentieth century. Historians such as Lawrence Henry Gipson and Isaac Samuel Harrell made meaningful contributions to the historiography of loyalism in the 1920s and others, such as Leonard W. Labaree, made equally important advancements in the 1940s. Nonetheless, the majority of professional loyalist history was produced in the 1960s and 1970s. Consequently, the focus of this chapter will be on a medley of the literature produced then and since. The scholarship surrounding loyalism largely falls into two broad and often overlapping categories: general surveys and studies of “great men,”

The Scholarship

All historical writing flows from a philosophical or theoretical framework that must be understood to appreciate dominate trends in historical interpretation. From the end of the Second World War until the early 1960s the United States experienced a social and political climate of hostility toward any manifestation of uncertainty. A majority of the citizens of the western community believed themselves to be part of a life or death struggle between the “Free World” and the forces of “totalitarianism.” Many citizens of the “free” world felt that disharmony, of any type, contributed to “cynicism” which in turn weakened the American struggle against communism. The focus of that historiography came to be on what united, rather than divided, the American people.

Exemplary of this consensus school of thought is Edmund S. Morgan’s 1956 Birth of the Republic, in which he portrayed the American public as “traveling together in the same direction . . . [and] not divided so widely as the people of the Old World.” He went on to describe “Americans” of the Revolutionary period as “much of a piece . . .

---

[who] did not know what it meant to bow and scrape to a titled nobility.” This type of history was built on consensus.

The 1960s and 1970s brought change, and during this period the historical profession experienced what historian Peter Novick called a “collapse of comity.” He asserted that the 1960s were years in which societal institutions and their spokespersons were widely distrusted. Ubiquitous skepticism produced a growing incredulity, on the part of many scholars, toward any variety of “official truth” and eventually the reality of truth at all. In such an atmosphere, the concept of historical objectivity became problematic. Novick reveals that because historians could not agree on what needed to be explained, the “fundamentals” broke apart. He claims that for the “first time” there appeared in the American historical profession “substantial and systematically ‘oppositional’ historiographical tendencies.” Despite this ideological disharmony, many in the historical community still embraced a belief in objectivity, or at least a form of it, something that is important in understanding much loyalist historiography of the mid-twentieth century.

General Survey Histories

Many studies of loyalism sought to present a general overview of the topic. The works of William Nelson and Wallace Brown are exemplary of this effort. William Nelson’s 1961 work, *The American Tory*, argued that loyalists can not be simply understood as those who remained “politically” attached to Britain. Nelson, like most who would write about loyalism in this era, dedicates a portion of his work to profiling Tories. In chapter V, “The Tory Rank and File,” Nelson provides data about the occupations, interests and geographical locations of Americans who chose to remain loyal to the Crown. He argues that, on the whole, Tories tended to hold social and political positions that relied on support from the British government.

Nelson discusses members of the Anglican clergy who served the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG) and argues that these Anglican

---

5 Ibid., 415,416, 417.
ministers were supportive of the monarchy and British policy for personal reasons. Nelson points out that, aside from Anglican clergymen, most loyalists did not support British policies of taxation in the colonies. Because they were united in a “helpless dependence on Britain” Nelson avers that many colonists stayed loyal to the British government. Here, his argument seems economically deterministic. He insists that one-third of the colonists remained loyal to the King, not out of principle, but only because of economic necessity.

Despite according little agency to the Tories themselves, Nelson does seem interested in riding the growing wave of social history as his book deals, in small part, with uncovering the individual lives of Tories. Like many historians of the early Cold War era, he adopts an objectivist posture and delivers his argument from the position of the omniscient narrator. Nelson further accepts the contemporary temper of “consensus” or “comity” in society and closes his book depicting “American society” of the late eighteenth-century as a place filled with “uniformity of outlook.”

In his 1965 book, *The King’s Friends: The Composition and Motives of the American Loyalists Claimants*, Brown asks “who were the Loyalists and why were they loyal?” Rather than trying to recover the individual lives of Tories through personal accounts and other sources, he chooses to investigate the loyalists quantitatively. Providing almost no narrative, which is not uncommon for the highly quantitative histories of the 1960s and 1970s, Brown uncovers occupations, geographic origin, income, and national origin. In so doing, he attempts to create a composite image of “the Tories” and to explain why they chose to remain allegiance to the monarch.

*The Good Americans: The Loyalists in the American Revolution* published in 1969, similarly relies on quantitative data. Here again Brown argues that quantifiable sources, such as the records of the royal claims commission, are “a primary source of information about the loyalists, especially the rank and file.” He would have no doubt agreed with the 1973 assertion of historian Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie that “tomorrow’s

---

historian will have to be able to programme a computer to survive.”10  It should be noted that Brown does fit, at least in part, the prevailing pattern set by contemporary social historians. That is to say that his work, while highly quantitative, does seek to understand more than just the “great men” of loyalism, but also how working people, such as tanners, cobblers, laborers and even servants, shaped Revolutionary-era loyalism. Brown is not the only historian to use composite data in an effort to capture the experience of more than just a few prominent Tories.

Mary Beth Norton’s 1972 work, The British Americans, is an exploration of loyalists who chose to flee the colonies for other parts of the empire. In it Norton makes some quantitative analysis. By tabulating the arrival times of loyalists exiles to Britain, she is able to hypothesize about their movements. While the book is far from completely devoted to quantifiable means of exploring the Tory population, the narrative is buttressed with statistical data in a way that historians of an early generation might not have thought necessary or even possible. Norton also departs from much of the contemporary trends in the historiography about loyalism to attempt “history from below.” Since most loyalist history tended to focus on “great men” or was highly political, Norton’s book The British Americans breaks this mold.

Norton examines the exile community of around 7,000 loyalists who fled to Britain during and before the American Revolution. Through this effort, she intended to “illuminate both the loyalist experience and the Revolution as a whole.”11  She argues, unlike many other historians of loyalism, that only after 1774 can any colonist be called a “loyalist.” This way of thinking, in addition to her inclusion of marginalized voices, sets her text apart from many other Revolutionary histories. Many of Norton’s written sources force her to consider the opinions and insights of the Tories from the upper-stratum, yet she manages to uncover the ways all loyalists, regardless of socio-economic status, experienced their exile. Norton describes the parks, amusements and activities in which loyalists of even the lowest social rank partook. Her focus on the refugees is draws from social history. Norton’s concentration on loyalists from lower socio-economic

circumstances proves the exception to the prevailing approach, which was to focus only on great men.

In recent years general studies concerning loyalism in Revolutionary America have slowed to a trickle. The studies that have been produced are much more influenced by contemporary trends in historical thought than their earlier counterparts. Quintessential of this development is a 1994 collection of essays titled *Loyalist and Community in North America*. The essays express an interest in understanding loyalists’ “ideology” and other cultural and social traits of North American loyalism in the late eighteenth century. Several of the essays are “micro-histories” of small towns or cultural units throughout the colonies, and others examine women or men who had been rarely studied. The essays, for the most part, are social or cultural histories and attempt to gain an understanding about loyalism by investigating the Revolutionary era in a more synthetic manner. In the context of an overall decline in interest, the few recent examples of loyalist scholarship fit the cultural trend dominant in the profession.

**Studies of “Great Men”**

Many loyalists of the Revolutionary era could in no way be described as “little people.” Often they were either wealthy, influential, highly educated or all three. As a result, much of the scholarship dealing with loyalism produced in this period defied the cutting edge historiographical trends, which tended to focus on the marginalized or doing history from the “bottom up.” In many of these studies of loyalism, blacks, women and other minorities simply do not exist. Repeatedly these histories focused on “profiles” of Tory or loyalists Americans, with a goal of explaining what loyalism was and how it looked by examining various loyalists (usually all white, wealthy and male). Exemplary of this type of historical prosopography are works by Lawrence H. Leder, Robert McClure Calhoon, Robert A. East, Jacob Judd and Kenneth S. Lynn.

In 1971 Lawrence H. Leder edited a collection of essays titled *The Colonial Legacy*, Volume 1: *The Loyalist Historians* that dealt with the historians of the Revolutionary era writing about loyalist historians. Leder claims that the “diversity of loyalist attitudes” is reflected in the histories they wrote. He goes on to aver that because

---

loyalists were the “obverse” of the Revolutionary movement, the “American character” can be more fully understood by an examination of their ways of thinking about the American Rebellion. Here he most clearly defies the trend of “consensus scholarship” found in much of the post-war historiography. By arguing that the American character was the product of a “diversity” of attitudes and beliefs, Leder openly challenges consensus scholars such as Edmund S. Morgan. Leder’s rejection of the notion that Americans were an evolving people with few differences marks a significant change in Revolutionary era scholarship.

Robert M. Calhoon’s five-hundred plus page tome, *The Loyalists in Revolutionary America*, follows a similar formula of focusing largely on “profiles” of “great men” to render the loyalists intelligible. Published in 1973, Calhoon’s book, like most loyalists histories, seeks to explain and identify the Tories. The book shows sensitivity to the critique offered by social historians like E.P. Thompson. One of the book’s many goals is to provide an understanding for the “motivation – the compelling reasons, influences, predispositions, and dictates of self-interest, temperament, conscience, intellect, fear, and plain confusion – that impelled the loyalists to act as they did.” This line of questioning, taken from the preface, would seem to suggest that Calhoon has written a social history concerned with the patterns of loyalists’ lives. In part that is true, although much of his work favors loyalists who in no way represent the “average” colonist, despite his stated goal of explaining the whole of loyalism. In short, Calhoon’s work is an exemplar of much of the scholarship produced in the 1970s about Tories of the Revolutionary period. It acknowledges contemporary trends in scholarship, while in practice it is a more traditional method of historical inquiry.

In 1974 Robert A. East and Jacob Judd co-edited a collection of essays titled *The Loyalist Americans: A Focus on Greater New York*. In an apparent reference to the consensus ideology of the early cold-war era, the editors argue that “with the approach of the Bicentennial celebration of the American Revolution” Americans must accept the

---

“painful” reality that “some Americans . . . disagreed with the revolutionary fervor.”\textsuperscript{15} Their selections for “profiling” are all, save one, white, upper-class Tories. All the essays, like the bulk of Tory historiography, focus primarily on uncovering who the loyalists were by profiling a selection of elite Tories. Several of the essays argue that some Tories were reluctantly loyal to British governance, remaining so only out of religious and moral principle, not economic motive.

A year prior to the publication of \textit{The Loyalist Americans} East had published a work on the loyalists of Connecticut. East sees loyalism in Connecticut arising from two sources: religious and military. He does not claim that many Connecticut loyalists adopted their particular position “on philosophical grounds alone.” Rather, he argues, most “loyalists” gave in to a particular tide of events beyond their control.\textsuperscript{16} East largely focuses on the leading figures of Connecticut society, such as Anglican minister Samuel Peters. East’s work is not entirely devoid of social history, as he sprinkles it with sources drawn from storekeepers, farmers and other members of the lower echelons of society.

Not all history of the era was written with strictly traditional means of analysis. In 1977 Kenneth S. Lynn published \textit{A Divided People} in which he argues that one can understand the allegiances of people in Revolutionary America through an examination of their relationships with their fathers or paternal surrogates. Rather than ideology, economic background or religious devotion, it was the way that fathers raised their sons which determined their proclivity for liberty or loyalty. Lynn argues that sons whose fathers were harsh and demanding tended to be Tories, while those who experienced less astringent treatment at the hands of their progenitors were more likely to enjoy an unbroken “spirit of independence” and to be patriots.\textsuperscript{17} Whatever the merits of this particular theory, Lynn certainly confines his study to “great men.” While his psychological approach to the study of loyalism represented a new addition to the field, his methodology (choosing “great men” for analysis) largely conformed to tradition.

\textsuperscript{15} Robert A. East and Jacob Judd ed. \textit{The Loyalist Americans: A Focus on Greater New York, Some New Perspectives on the Adherents to the British Government and the Followers of the British Army Commonly called Tories who hoped for the Failure of the Republic and a return to the Fold of the British Monarchy} (Tarrytown, NY: Sleepy Hollow Restorations, Inc., 1975), xi.
\textsuperscript{17} Kenneth S. Lynn, \textit{A Divided People} Contributions in American Studies, Number 30 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977), 100.
Narrative and other long-established forms of historical presentation were (and are) used in studies of loyalism. Most historians of the American Revolution, especially those who wrote about loyalism during the 1970s, continued using a more traditional narrative method of presentation. Perhaps the best and most widely read example of a narrative is Bernard Bailyn’s excellent biography of *Thomas Hutchinson*, published in 1974.

To refer to this work only as a “great story” would be misleading. Bailyn disagrees with those historians who would argue that narrative should be “primarily descriptive” and not “analytical,” though he does seek to focus on what he describes as balance over argument. Bailyn portrays the Revolution through the prism of Hutchinson’s mind, the mind of a conservative unhappy to be living in an age of revolution. Bailyn believed, as did most historians working in the mid-1970s, that cumulative historical efforts whether quantitative, cultural, social, political or economic, could be viewed as bricks in a larger wall. Once completed, it would provide an almost complete picture of the past. Bailyn saw his book as part of the effort to make sense of the Rebellion as a whole by uncovering the “experience of the losers in the American Revolution.”

Freely admitting that he was doubtlessly influenced by “the course of American politics in the 1960’s and the early 1970’s,” Bailyn seems to acknowledge the critique of scholars such as Charles Beard who claimed that “all statements about history are connected or relative to the position of those who make them.” Bailyn, however, firmly reminds his readers of his belief that the past can be understood with some measure of objectivity and without presentism when he claims that his work concerns “Hutchinson’s time, not our own.” Like the preponderance of histories about “the loyalists,” Bailyn’s work focuses on another member of the colonial elite, Thomas Hutchinson. The very nature of Hutchinson’s social and economic position places Bailyn’s work squarely in line with the majority of 1970s loyalist literature, which hardly engaged in history “from the bottom up.”

---

With the exception of a handful of articles and monographs, the past decade has seen an almost complete neglect of the study of loyalism in the American Revolution, and no studies have sought to understand those exiled loyalists who, like Samuel Peters, returned to their native land while shifting ideological positions to fit post-Revolution political and social realities. During that decade scholars of early America have explored identity and its construction; perhaps the best sample of this is collected in a series of essays titled *Through a Glass Darkly*. Memory, too, has become a tool in the historian’s chest and *Memory and American History*, edited by David Thelen, as well as Sarah Purcell’s 2002 *Sealed with Blood: War, Sacrifice and Memory in Revolutionary America* both serve as bright examples to the constructive ends of which the study of memory may serve. Neither of these areas of analysis has been employed in the service of understanding loyalty to the Crown in the context of the American Revolution, a historiographical vacuum this thesis attempts to fill.

**Samuel Peters**

Locating Samuel Peters within the context of this scholarship suggests some basic connections. In many ways Samuel Peters fits the profile that emerges of a typical “loyalists” that emerges in general loyalist studies. He was part of the rural elite, and his position as a priest in the Church of England meant he was dependent on the British sovereign for his financial well-being. Then, too, a study of Samuel Peters might appear, superficially, to fall into the “great men” category, and to an extent he could be seen as a “minor” great man. This thesis does not provide simply another “profile” of a loyalist, nor does it use traditional means and methods to analyze his life and work. Instead it offers fresh insight into how loyalists, such as Peters, may have been changed by the experiences of war and exile. Peters himself has largely been overlooked, and no scholar has produced a book-length treatment of his life or works to date. Peters was an amateur historian, a folklorist and satirist capable of penning barbs about what he viewed as religious bigotry that would have impressed Samuel Clemens. Not only Peters’ life, but, to a lesser extent, his native Connecticut has also been neglected.

---

The intention of this thesis, however, is not to write a biography of Samuel Peters, or to correct an imbalance in the geographical focus of loyalist scholarship. Rather, this thesis explores loyalists’ ideology, sense of identity and ways of remembering the past as presented by Peters in his *General History of Connecticut* and *A History of the Rev. Hugh Peters*. Peters wrote, published and reprinted his *General History* before the last shot of the American Revolution had been fired. Hence, it offers a “time capsule” of his ideas before and during the war. Many of the arguments that Peters made in his *History of Connecticut* were “re-remembered” in his *History of Hugh Peters*, not published until well after the Revolution. This post-war publication allows for insight into changes, and continuations, in Peters’ perceptions both about himself and his loyalty to the Crown as well as how he uses the story of a fabricated relative as a vehicle for recasting some of his pre-Revolution views.

Peters’ works are not of value simply because both he and they have been little written about, but also because Samuel Peters is an excellent representative of the type of loyalism that was espoused by Connecticut Anglicans. While many colonists, and most loyalists for that matter, were not members of the clergy, the majority did subsist in agrarian-based communities like Peters’ Hebron. Like the preponderance of colonists, Samuel Peters lived outside of the major colonial cities of New York, Philadelphia and Boston, and his work provides insights into loyalism that other contemporary writers, like the urbane Thomas Hutchinson, fail to offer. By appreciating Peters’ views on race, class, religion and the monarchy, and by placing these judgments in their social, political and religious context, we can more fully comprehend both one of Connecticut’s most famous loyalists and his revelations concerning what, to him, loyalty in Connecticut was and should have been.
Chapter Two
Great Expectations

The Reverend Samuel Andrew Peters, one of the most controversial loyalists in Connecticut, had a fairly typical childhood for a boy in the rural New England elite. Born in Hebron in the late autumn of 1735 to John and Mary Peters, he spent his early years in this small town in the eastern part of the colony. His parents were farmers and like other children of the region Peters probably grew up learning how to cultivate grains such as wheat, rye, oats or barley as well as fruits such as apples, pears, peaches or plums. The town was incorporated in 1708, and John Peters, having arrived a few years later, helped to establish its first Episcopal Church, a major decision in a colony almost entirely Congregational in affiliation. St. Peters Church opened in 1734 amongst considerable communal tension. The first pastor, John Bliss, and the majority of its congregants had left the Congregationalists, the only other denomination in Hebron.23 While the Church of England was the official church of the empire, its status was certainly second class in Congregational Connecticut. In the eighteenth century it was becoming the spiritual home for many better off colonists.

Despite growing up in a mixed atmosphere of agrarian tranquility and religious tension Peters flourished as a student, and in the fall of 1753 left Hebron for Yale College in New Haven.24 Yale, then still under the authoritarian rule of President Thomas Clap, offered Peters a highly structured education. Being a member of the Church of England meant Peters was in a minority at Congregationalist Yale. It was not until 1757, his final year, that students were permitted to attend Episcopal worship on Sundays. He occasionally wrote fondly of his days as a collegian, even inventing a distant relative named Thomas Peters whom he credited with founding the institution.25 In spite of

25 Cohen, Connecticut’s Loyalist Gadfly, 38; Samuel Peters, A History of the Rev. Hugh Peters, A. M. Arch –Intendant of the Prerogative Court of Doctors Commons; Member of the Celebrated Assembly of Divines at the Savoy, Westminster; and Principle Chaplain to the Lord Protector and to the Lords and
wistful memories about his days at Yale, Peters retained a lifelong skepticism toward the institution, often claiming it promoted “bigotry.” He especially loathed Yale’s third president, Ezra Stiles, whom he derided as an “attic scholar” and a “crack-brained disgrace.”

The hostility toward Stiles on the part of Peters may have had little to do with Stiles’ academic leadership and much to do with his familial background which, unlike Peters, genuinely included founders of Connecticut. Peters longed to discover in his ancestry some of the “first families” of Connecticut; when his genealogical investigations failed to bear fruit he resorted to mendacious claims to boost his declarations of familial pedigree. Equally odious to Peters was Stiles’ position as a “friend of American liberty” during the Revolutionary period.

Soon after completing his degree Peters sought to assist his “poor and unfortunate” brethren in his hometown by seeking ordination. Hebron was in dire need of a minister its three previous appointments had either died or been imprisoned by the French while on their journey to England for ordination. Peters easily gained letters of support from Anglican churchmen in Connecticut and a petition to the SPG on his behalf from the vestry at Hebron. Once approved Peters and his traveling companion, fellow candidate and Yale classmate, James Scovil, sailed for Britain in the fall of 1758.

In the next few years, Peters seeming came into his own. Arriving in London in 1758, Peters was made a deacon the same year. He was later ordained a priest in the

---

House of Commons, from the Year 1640 to 1660. With an Appendix (New York: Printed for the Author, 1807), 89 in Cameron, Works of Samuel Peters of Hebron, 128.


29 There is some controversy surrounding exactly when Peters arrived in London. Peters’ claims to have arrived in late 1758, though other sources seem to indicate he may have arrived in early 1759.
Church of England. He returned to the colonies in 1760. In that same year Peters received an M.A. from Yale and married Hannah Owen. By this time Peters had no doubt grown to his full height of almost six feet. His eyes were blue and his hair, as was the custom, hung slightly above his shoulders. His face was “strongly marked,” a testament to his surviving a severe attack of smallpox while living in Britain.30 The deaths of his father and a brother in the autumn of 1754 brought about a large financial windfall.31 This sudden turn of events meant that Peters, until the Revolution, controlled amounts of land and capital far larger than the average country parson. Scholars are unsure of exactly how wealthy Peters was, though once in exile he informed the claims commission, which had been set up to British government to indemnify American loyalists for losses suffered in the Revolution, that his total worth was around £22,500.32 This was a large sum indeed and is likely what led him to refer to his neighbors as members of the “peasantry” and himself firmly among the “noblesse.”33 With education, position, property and marriage, Peters was set on the course that he expected would occupy his adult years.

After his marriage and return to Hebron in 1760, Peters spent the next few years doing missionary work in the employ of the SPG. His labors did not go unnoticed. In 1763 he was awarded the Master of Arts from King’s College in New York, which, unlike Yale, was an Anglican institution. By 1767 he joyfully wrote to London with the news that “Twelve heads of families have joined the Church in this town” with the prospect of increase “considerable.”34 Peters was not the only member of the Anglican

31 Cohen, Connecticut’s Loyalist Gadfly, 7.
32 Cohen, Connecticut’s Loyalist Gadfly, 35; £40,000 is the number given in data from American Loyalists: Transcripts of the Manuscript Books and Papers of the Commission of Enquiry into the Losses and Services of the American Loyalists (60 vols.; New York Public Library) XLI 453 cited in Brown, The King’s Friends, 61.
33 Samuel Middlebrook, “Samuel Peters: A Yankee Munchausen” The New England Quarterly, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Mar., 1947): 76-77; Samuel Peters, “History of Jonathan Trumbull, the present Rebel Governor of Connecticut, from his Birth, early in this Century, to the present Day: His real father certified. Jonathan’s progress in life; his various occupations; turns new lights; his political vicissitudes; history of a Connecticut law-suit; Jonathan’s method of paying his creditors; a sketch of the republican principles that have prevailed in Connecticut since its first settlement; Jonathan’s inveteracy against Churchmen and Loyalists; Account of Jonathan’s sons and daughters; Jonathan’s person and character described.” Political Magazine, II (Jan., 1781), 6-10 in Cameron, Works of Peters, 166.
34 Cohen, Connecticut’s Loyalist Gadfly, 11.
clergy in the colonies experiencing such success. During the 1760s and 70s the Church of England was rapidly spreading throughout much of colonial America and especially in Connecticut. Between 1761 and 1774, Anglican congregations in Connecticut more than doubled, and by the end of the American Revolution, a fairly sizable percent of all Church of England ministers in America had pastored in Connecticut. Episcopacy was a growing presence there.\textsuperscript{35} Because of his personal fortune and awareness of the excellent opportunities for building an Anglican congregation, it is unsurprising that Peters would be willing to accept a flock that he described as “poor and unfortunate.”\textsuperscript{36}

During this period of success Peters authored a pamphlet publicizing one of Connecticut’s most famous converts to Episcopacy: \textit{Reasons why Mr. Byles Left New-London, and Returned into the Bosom of the Church of England}. Here Peters described how the Reverend Mather Byles, grandson of Increase Mather and a former Congregationalist minister,\textsuperscript{37} grew weary of the “overzealous Forefathers” of Connecticut and their “unreasonable Bitterness against the Church of England.” Peters alleged that it was this inexplicable bitterness, as well as Byles’ love of “truth,” that drew the minister back into the arms of the “venerable Church of England” which “like the Father of the Prodigal Son . . . rejoices upon our Return.”\textsuperscript{38} The tract proved popular with Anglicans, though it was, unsurprisingly, given equal, albeit negative, attention by his Congregationalist neighbors. One parodist referred to Hebron’s missionary as the very “tempter” who had led Byles away. Before the pamphlet even appeared Peters was complaining of “little conventicles” that he believed to be scheming against him and by 1768 he feared that he would be “judged too cheap a victim to pacify . . . [the] belching stomachs” of “a fanatic mob.”\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{35} Rhoden, \textit{Revolutionary Anglicanism}, 19, 89.
\textsuperscript{36} Morgan, “Stiles, Ezra.”
\textsuperscript{37} Information about the genealogy of Mather Byles is available from Mary Rhinelander McCarl. “Byles, Mather” (\textit{American National Biography Online}, Oxford University Press, 2000); available from http://www.anb.org.proxy.lib.muohio.edu/articles/01/01-00126.html; Internet; accessed 2 November 2007.
\textsuperscript{38} Samuel Peters, \textit{Reasons why Mr. Byles left New-London, and returned into the bosom of the Church of England; and the volumes which were mentioned by Mr. B. &c. In a dialogue between minister and people. By T.S. A present evidence}. (New London, Conn: Printed by Timothy Green, 1768), 6 [database online]; available from \textit{Early American Imprints Series I}. American Antiquarian Society and NewsBank, inc. Record Number: 0F2FD2E676DFCA60.
\textsuperscript{39} Cohen, \textit{Connecticut’s Loyalist Gadfly}, 11.
Colonial Church of England Ministers

1775 – 1783

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Loyalists</th>
<th>Patriots</th>
<th>Neutrals</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Colonies</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>123</strong></td>
<td><strong>88</strong></td>
<td><strong>107</strong></td>
<td><strong>318</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 1. Anglican ministers in Connecticut were, after 1775, totally loyal to the British Parliament. Data from Nancy L. Rhoden, *Revolutionary Anglicanism: The Colonial Church of England Clergy during the American Revolution* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 89.

Colonial Church of England Ministers

1775 - 1783

Fig. 2. Anglican ministers from Connecticut composed seven percent of the Revolutionary era total. Data from Nancy L. Rhoden, *Revolutionary Anglicanism: The Colonial Church of England Clergy during the American Revolution* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), Appendix.
Worries other than for his own safety filled the 1760s for the Reverend Peters. In the early autumn of 1765 his wife Hannah and two of their three children died, leaving the grief-stricken Peters with only one young daughter, Hannah Delvena. This same year also saw Parliament’s passage of the Stamp Act. The act angered great numbers of colonials, many of whom were already outraged over the Sugar and Currency Acts of 1764. Anglicans in Hebron and elsewhere, whom many townsfolk assumed supported British policy, bore the brunt of their neighbors’ ire and found relief only when the act was repealed in 1766. This break in the political, and personal, tension that seemed to surround Peters’ life would prove to be short-lived. In 1769 Peters married Abigail Gilbert, only to see her die nineteen days later. Upon her tombstone was inscribed: “A wedding changed to Lamentation – ye greatest grief in all creation – a mourning groom in desperation.”

Perhaps to escape his grief, or to enhance his growing reputation as a zealous promoter of episcopacy, Peters led a missionary tour along the more remote regions of the Connecticut River. He spent several months preaching in the region that would later be known as Vermont and before leaving even baptized a number of families. Much later, in 1807, Peters claimed to have named the area “Verdmont.” He insisted that in the presence of witnesses, and while atop “Mount Pisgah,” he poured a bottle of alcohol over a large rock on the pinnacle of the mountain and baptized the whole territory, consecrating it to “God manifested in human flesh.” All throughout his life he referred to the region as “Verdmont” and, in the angry and exaggerated fashion which marked his work, wrote that the state’s decision to adopt the name “Ver-mont” or “Mountain of Maggots,” as he derisively translated it, was proof of Vermont’s desire to be seen as a “mountain of worms” rather than embrace the beauty of his name for the “ever green mountain.”

Peters eventually returned to Hebron and in 1773 was wed to Mary Birdseye. After giving birth to their only child, William, Mary died in 1774.

Like the majority of Anglican clergymen serving in the New England colonies Peters was American born, ministered in the service of the SPG and supported the Hanoverian monarch. He believed that most Congregationalist ministers, or “sons of

40 Ibid., 13.
Oliver” as he pejoratively referred to them throughout his correspondence, were bigoted and unworthy of their office. Unlike other members of the Episcopal clergy, Peters voiced his opinions in ways that seemed almost calculated to irritate many of his neighbors. In the late summer of 1774, Peters spoke out in a Hebron town meeting in support of the Boston Port Act. He insisted that the citizens of Boston were fully culpable for their behavior and richly deserving of “the rod” for the “riotous” conduct that had led to the closing of the port and other repressive measures. This was not Peter’s first experience with controversy, and it certainly would not be his last. Early that same year Jonathan Trumbull, the Governor of Connecticut, backed a petition to raise money in support of the Bostonians as they labored under the Coercive Acts. Peters successfully led the opposition to the petition in Hebron. In so doing, he earned enmity from Trumbull and ill will from many of his fellow townsmen, whose feelings of frustration toward Peters would soon be manifest through violent action.

On Monday, August 15, 1774 Peters awoke to the sounds of an angry crowd demanding that the gates and doors of his home be opened. Following some negotiation, both he and the crowd agreed that only a small committee would be allowed to enter and search the minister’s residence. Afterwards the intruders, who - according to Peters - never formally accused the priest of anything, pronounced him “not guilty of any crime.”

In spite of this brush with violence, Peters, in early September, again made inflammatory comments, this time regarding Hebron’s “Son’s of Liberty.” Less than seven days later a more volatile crowd appeared outside his home. Peters asserted that the angry mob fired guns into his house and after breaking down the door, seized him and tore off most of his clothes, including his “hat, whig . . . and cassock.” It is significant that all three of these items were indicative of his status as a gentleman and clergyman. A few days later Peters fled east, and in late October of 1774 the thrice-widowed parson boarded a ship and slipped out of Boston.

---

42 Peters, History of Connecticut, 111.
45 Peters, “History of Jonathan Trumbull.”
Peters was in exile for more than thirty years and during that time his worldview and way of remembering both his own and Connecticut’s past changed. Understanding his situation while abroad is important for gaining a deeper appreciation of how and why his views were amended during the almost three decades between his *History of Connecticut* and his *History of Hugh Peters.*

Like most exiles of middling status, Peters fled to the British Isles rather than Canada or another crown colony; and like many loyalists who fled from New England, he ended up in London. In late December of 1774 Peters was grateful to be safely in England but worried about what his new life might bring. He voiced these concerns in a letter to his daughter when he noted that his “situation and Prospects are far different from what they once were” and insisted that he was only alive by the “Bread of Charity.” Peters was hardly the only refugee to find himself in reduced circumstances. Jonathan Sewell, brother-in-law of John Hancock and a former Attorney General for Massachusetts, echoed Peters’ concerns when he complained that even with an income of £500 a year, his expenses would hardly be met. Samuel Curwen, a former admiralty judge of Boston, and someone whose means likely far exceeded Peters’, was by the summer of 1776 worried over the “lessening” of his personal finances. By December of the same year Curwen wrote that his “little bark is in imminent danger of being stranded,” lest some future reader not decipher his veiled words of despair he further noted, “In plain English, my purse is nearly empty.”

During his stay in England as a refugee, Peters experienced worries familial as well as financial. Shortly after his arrival in England, a letter he had written to his mother was discovered by his enemies and published in a Connecticut newspaper. As a result, his brother Jonathan Peters was captured by a crowd and claimed to have been ill treated then placed on a rail and called “a Tory a Tory a Cursed Damned Churchman.” Added to this setback were Peters’ concerns about his own children and other relatives and friends. A compounded sense of loss must have filled his mind at learning that some of

---

those he counted as friends no longer regarded him as such. His mother warned him to abandon corresponding with some of his relatives as they had become “your enemy . . . [and] try to hurt you all they can.” Hence his forlorn analysis that “from a Plenty, I am reduced to Poverty” encompassed not only the feared loss of his property and real loss of his fortune, but the gnawing anxiety that he might soon list the affection of those he held dearest among his many permanent privations.

Peters eventually did receive a pension and was able to engage, on at least one occasion, in the sacerdotal activities of his vocation. Mauger such small triumphs he was never able to find the success he had hoped for and spent much of the rest of his time in England honing the art of “not dying upon so small a Pittance.”50 In conjunction with these pursuits he wrote his General History of Connecticut. As was common for the era, he did not publish it under his own name. He also wrote a few short articles for The Political Magazine and Parliamentary, Naval, Military and Literary Journal.

After the 1783 proclamation of peace, Peters spent several more years in England seeking an appointment as a bishop in the state of Vermont. In spite of an invitation by a committee representing the Episcopal Church in Vermont and scores of pleading letters to anyone he thought would be of help, including the Archbishop of Canterbury, he was denied a bishopric. After a quarrel with William Pitt in 1804, which resulted in the loss of his pension, Peters has few options but to leave the “ruined Island,” his home for almost three decades, and sail for America.51 Despite of the circumstances under which he had left Connecticut, Peters was, at heart, an American and loved his land of birth. This affection is evident in his boastful descriptions of the flora and fauna native to his homeland; still, the circumstances under which he would again see his home were hardly of his choosing. Peters had longed to “make himself of much Importance” when first he arrived in England, but by 1805 a seventy year old Peters arrived in New York, no doubt feeling a sort of socio-political Rip Van Winkle.52

When Peters had snuck out of Boston in the fall 1774, the first Continental Congress was still in session, the ‘shot heard round the world’ was months from being

---

fired and Thomas Jefferson would not pen the Declaration of Independence for almost two more years. Needless to say, the “Unites States” had not been conceived. Upon Peters’ return, in 1805, the Unites States had a fully ratified Constitution and its third president, Thomas Jefferson, was preparing for his second term. Doubtlessly Peters, the once loyal and proud member of the British Empire, encountered many twenty-somethings on the streets of New York for whom the idea of subjection to a monarch seemed only slavish and anachronistic. Peters was hardly the first loyalist to repatriate, as others, such as Samuel Ogden and Theodore Sedgwick, sought shelter in New York in the late 1780s. By the time of Peters’ return, in the early nineteenth century, anti-loyalists passions had cooled and he had little to fear from formerly vindictive mobs and legislatures.

The ideological and political realities of 1805 could not have been different than those of 1774. During the administrations of the United States first two presidents—George Washington and John Adams—those who supported a strong central government and argued that power was the guarantor of liberty, rather than its natural enemy, rallied under the name Federalists and engaged in a vicious and protracted struggle with the Jeffersonian Republicans who supported limited government and were less afraid of what some Federalists called “excessive” democracy. The political turmoil that had plagued the burgeoning American republic culminated in the “revolution of 1800” in which Thomas Jefferson, a committed republican, peacefully assumed the presidency following a tough election and bitter struggle in the House of Representatives. For the first time in the history of the United States control of the federal government was, without serious violence, passed from one political party to another.

The election of 1800 was significant, not only because it proved that the young republic could successfully withstand severe political strife and emerge united and powerful, but also because it was a harbinger of change in America’s political direction. Jefferson correctly insisted that the election of that year was “as real a revolution in the principles of our government as that of 1776 was in its form” and would foreshadow “the

---

new establishment of republicanism” in the United States.\textsuperscript{54} This establishment of republicanism was hailed by Jefferson’s decidedly simple inauguration, hardly the kind of celebration Samuel Peters, or any other former loyalists, would have expected from a leader. Ruffles and a sword, the garb Peters once most admired, this was not. Jefferson stressed the importance of the yeoman farmer, whom he saw as possessing the qualities necessary for democratic citizenship. This too must have seemed unreasonably democratic to Peters, who once dismissed his farmer neighbors as “peasantry.”

Despite this completely alien political and social climate, one which likely challenged Peters self identity in ways unimaginable in the 1780s and 1790s, he adjusted and radically so. For it was out of these very circumstances of loss and forced adjustment that Peters published his final work, \textit{The History of Hugh Peters}. Hugh Peters was to be Samuel Peters’ means of recasting his image and ideas and allowing the former loyalist to re-introduce himself to the American people. Unfortunately for Peters few Americans were interested in the aging priest or even the radical preacher about whom he wrote. The book sold poorly and Peters spent his last years pursuing a land scheme in the territory that would become Wisconsin. When Congress finally disallowed his petitions regarding the territory in 1825, he was still subsisting in New York in poor economic and physical circumstances. That same year Peters received a request from his nephew, the Governor of Connecticut, to move back to Hebron. He declined, insisting he would rather “die first.” The next year, at the age of ninety-six, he did. Samuel Peters was buried in Hebron.\textsuperscript{55}

Fig. 3. Samuel Andrew Peters, date unknown, from Kenneth Walter Cameron, *The Papers of Samuel Peters: A Survey of the Contents of His Notebooks – Correspondence During His Flight to England, Exile, and the Last Years of His Life* (Hartford, CT: Transcendental Books, 1978).
Chapter Three
From Subject to Citizen

In tandem with the buckets of blood spilled in resistance to and defense of the British Empire in North America, gallons of ink were lavished in equal amounts toward the same antithetical ends. Revolutionary and post-war America was nothing if not saturated with varying accounts, recollections and histories of the years surrounding the American rebellion. Both loyalists and patriots alike produced them and, while they took a variety of forms, almost all were strongly partisan. Frequently loyalists who wrote histories were no longer living in their native colony by the time their work was completed. Peters’ work would be the first proper history of Connecticut, or at least the first to offer a sustained, narrative solely devoted to the years between the colony’s founding and 1787. In contrast, non-loyalists wrote scores of histories that comprehensively analyzed the American Revolution. The loyalists’ histories that do exist, while mindful of the Rebellion and its causes, tend to characterize only their respective colony and its particular involvement in the war.56

These histories were produced in a context shaped by earlier historical accounts about the colonies. Often these earlier texts were produced by Congregational authors for whom history was a study of God’s revelation. According to Urian Oakes in 1673, the chronicling of events was only a way to serve as a “Recorder” of “the mercies of the Lord.” Perry Miller described history of this style as “not only philosophy teaching by example, but theology exemplified.” Many patriot histories, written from the winners’ perspective, embrace a reconfigured puritan belief of providence in history, in which providence or the “invisible hand” appears in two basic ways: as a program for human history, in which American independence was the inexorable product of God’s preconcertion; and as causal agent, affecting change in the course of human events, albeit suddenly and often contrary to expectations.57

Loyalists’ histories repudiate this traditional way of interpreting actions as an unfolding of divine will. The fact that they were written by the losers might serve as

explanation for this rejection. Tory authors were hardly seeking to legitimate their exalted status. Rather they sought make to sense of their staggering loss. Identity is not always created from a position of hegemony. It can be, and often is, rooted in fear and a perceived loss of individuality and group cohesion. Peters’ histories come out of just such a position of angst and self-perceived weakness.

A General History of Connecticut firmly fits into the category of loyalists’ histories that focus on a particular colony and its role in the war. The History of Hugh Peters also largely rejects the traditional providential framework and draws instead on the Enlightenment concept that humans can act in ways that shape events. Despite this, the latter still includes trace elements of the opinion that the Divine has a hand in human affairs. Perhaps Samuel Peters dabbled in this older form of historical analysis of Hugh Peters’ because the circumstances of Hugh’s life allowed him to write from the perspective of the winner, albeit temporarily, of a revolution.

**Texts**

A General History of Connecticut is over four hundred pages, the majority of which are in, some way or another, combative. Peters began by lamenting the lack of due attention to Connecticut and proclaimed his native colony the most “flourishing” province in North America. He asserted that too much attention had been paid to Massachusetts and far too little to Connecticut. Peters’ complaint of oversight on the part of his native province was correct, as his study proved the first significant history of the colony ever produced.58

The book was widely read and well received both in London, where it was originally published in 1781, and other parts of the Anglophone world. It was reprinted only a year after its initial publication, likely the result of high demand. By the end of 1782, Peters was grateful to learn that two Nova Scotian clerics were expressing interest in obtaining copies.59 By 1784 the History of Connecticut was being sold in New Haven at Isaac Beers’ bookstore, and in 1791 Peters learned that Connecticut’s Secretary of State, George Wyllys, read the book “last thing when he goes to bed & first thing when

---

he arises.” The popularity of the monograph seems to indicate that Peters’ view, and formulation, of an Anglican identity resonated deeply with many North American loyalists. Not all reviews were so positive. Many patriots, and even some loyalists, dismissed the book as “injudicious.” By 1876 J. Hammond Trumbull, the State Historian of Connecticut, wrote in The True-Blue Laws of Connecticut that Peters was “still read as history,” compelling him to produce a volume dedicated to revealing the “truth” about the early legislation of Connecticut.

Peters’ second and final work, A History of the Rev. Hugh Peters, proved less popular but equally controversial. The work was intended to give an account of his ancestor and provide “correspondence between the churches of Vermont and Dr. S. A. Peters [himself] Bishop Elect of that state.” Bundled up with the letters were Peters’ hopes that the epistles might “hurt the College of Bishops as they call themselves.” This vindictive intention arose from Peters’ deep resentment against the bishops in London, who had denied him what he believed to be his rightful bishopric in Vermont. This chord is continually struck through the monograph and provides a significant clue to his post-exile representation of the Church of England.

Leonard Tennenhouse, in his essay “A Language for the Nations: A Transatlantic Problematic,” argues that the debates over the relation between a spoken and literary language that took place in both the United States and Britain during the waning years of the eighteenth century were affected, and strongly so, by the aftermath of the American Revolution. While Tennenhouse’s essay does not strictly concern itself with post-Revolutionary histories, its assertion that revolutionary ideology was translated into strategies of linguistic and literary representation is useful in understanding Samuel Peters’ final work. He was well aware of the changes in cultural, religious and political realities and sought to incorporate these realities into his History of Hugh Peters.

---

60 Cohen, Connecticut’s Loyalist Gadfly, 33; Rev. Bella Hubbard to Samuel Peters, January 5, 1791 in Cameron, The Papers of Samuel Peters, 82.
Why might Samuel Peters choose the Reverend Hugh Peters as the subject of his final book? On the surface the choice is far from obvious, as Hugh Peters was exactly the type of “Oliverian” that Peters had so vehemently castigated in his *History of Connecticut*. Yet, retelling the story of Hugh Peters served for Samuel as a way to score points he desperately needed in his transition into republican society even as it allowed Peters to strike back at the Bishops whom he felt had denied him a Vermont bishopric. In addition to these factors, Samuel Peters seems to have been drawn to the life of Hugh Peter for at least three main reasons: to clarify his position about the American Revolution by exploring his thoughts and attitudes toward rebellion within the “safety” of a distant conflict; to increase his personal standing by linking himself to a famous person; and to recreate for himself a more relevant identity in context of the radically republican society into which he found himself thrust.

Further clarity about Samuel Peters’ choice of Hugh for the subject of a biography requires some background about the subject himself. Hugh Peters was born in Fowey, Cornwall in 1598 and ordained a priest in 1623. After his 1625 marriage and a decade living in the Netherlands, Peters sailed for New England. In 1641, the General Court sent Peters to England as an agent to lobby for aid and a greater recognition of Congregationalism. Peters was in the country for the beginning of Charles’ war with Parliament and immediately sided with the legislature. After Charles was defeated in two civil wars and held captive by Parliament, Peters pushed for his execution, though he played no direct role in the regicide. Prior to his own execution upon the restoration of the House of Stuart, Peters had risen to the rank of chaplain to the Council of State, even receiving a large income and lodgings in Whitehall.64 Because he was a religious figure of prominence, a promoter of the Parliamentary cause, and a member of the founding generation of New England, Hugh Peters was likely to have been widely known, even respected, throughout Congregational New England. Peters no doubt hoped to exploit

---

this popularity, or at least his perception of it, to ingratiate himself with the people of the Northeastern states.

Peters hoped to capitalize on more than Hugh’s popularity to restore his personal credibility; Hugh Peters also served Samuel as a means to re-configure his political heritage. By 1807, the year Peters published his biography, the United States had long been engaged in constructing a collective memory of its own Revolutionary war via sermons, newspapers, monuments, parades and songs. These stories and images tended to promote a culture of republicanism and celebrated ideas such as military heroism and self-sacrifice. Hence, Samuel Peters’ decision to write the life of Hugh, in which he proclaimed himself a relative, was almost certainly calculated to appeal to the contemporary American zeitgeist of pro-republican ideology and “war-hero” nostalgia.

Peters began his biography of Hugh Peters with a lengthy jeremiad in which he sought to affix blame for the English Civil Wars. After reviewing a parade of options, he landed upon Charles I as the most culpable. He complained that the character and reputation of Hugh Peters was the victim of envy on the part of the bishops of the Church of England and compared Hugh in zeal, success and unjustified persecution to “Whitfield, Wesley, and other modern methodists.” The bulk of the text seeks to prove that Hugh Peters, while well meaning, was overly influenced by “noble feelings and sentiments,” much like “Dr. Laud,” whom Samuel Peters set up as a sort of literary nemesis to Hugh. It is undoubtedly not an accident that Peters juxtaposed Hugh Peters and William Laud, a supporter of Charles I and a man far superior to Hugh Peters in the Church of England hierarchy, as equals. Peters no doubt relished the image of his being the progeny of a man who occupied the exact suite of the defeated Archbishop of Canterbury – the very ecclesiastical position, which over a decade earlier, proved Peters’ final and insurmountable challenge to a bishop’s mitre.

The English Civil Wars, the execution of the King and the American Revolution, as well as Hugh Peters’ life, and death, seemed to Peters akin to his own experiences of high expectations followed by crushing loss. Peters, among other things, set out to

66 Peters, History of Hugh Peters, 7-8, Peters offers a mini essay inside a footnote in which he insists that John Wesley and other of his Methodists ilk have been unjustly treated by the Church of England, hence Peters’ decision to link Hugh with the Methodists, whom he views as equally mistreated; 22.
restore the reputation of Hugh Peters, whose character he described as “far superior to all the clergy in the seventeenth century,” and to resist all charges that he was a “hypocrite.” Peters also sought to disprove the charge that his subject was a regicide, presenting him as “zealous” rather than “prudent or humane.” Finally, Peters decided Hugh’s death sentence to be unjust.67 While Peters’ choice of Hugh as subject worth championing seems strange in both the present and, taking the popularity of the book into account, in 1807 as well, but Peters saw Hugh as a means of making sense of republican society and easing his transition into his “new” country.

The author of a General History of Connecticut and a History of Hugh Peters seems in many ways like a different person. While writing his history of Connecticut, Peters was still unsure as to the outcome of the American Rebellion. At the time he was doubtlessly frustrated as a “loser” of his family and land, even if he assumed the loss to be temporary. Typical of his attitude toward the inhabitants of Connecticut is his exemplification of the “sons of Oliver,” as inheritors of a puritan tradition which can only be described as “dangerous.” He saw them as weak men who, upon their arrival in New England, “out-pop’d” the Pope in their persecution of dissenters.68 After thirty years of financial disappointment s—many stemming directly from members of Parliament—and the failure of his dreams of a Vermont bishopric, Peters seems to have entered a sort of liminal space in which his conception of himself and his identity was unset and multivalent.69 In his History of Hugh Peters he described the puritan founders of New England as the victims of harassment “in the most cruel manner, for no other crime but their non-conformity to ecclesiastical ceremonies which were not worth injunction, and not worth rejection.” Peters offers us a clue in decoding his change over the course of his exile when he insists that Hugh Peters found success and “all histories tell us, that success constitutes right, and changes rebellions into revolutions.”70 Here, early in his narrative of Hugh’s life, we are able to catch a glimpse into the “post-exile” Peters and his inchoate, even unsteady, but decidedly pro-republican mentality. For a deeper and more

67 Peters, HOHP, 3-4 in Cameron, Works of Samuel Peters of Hebron, 103.
69 For more on historical liminality see Hoffman, Through a Glass Darkly, introduction.
70 Peters, History of Hugh Peters, 15.
nuanced understanding of the changes and similarities in Peters’ constructions of the past we turn now to a comparison of the several key themes and ideologies found in his texts.

**Contexts**

The *History of Connecticut* and the *History of Hugh Peters* serve for Peters as means of exploring and providing commentary on specific actions as well as general theories and ideas. He tackles issues such as settlement and legitimate conquest, divine and elected monarchs and even the relationship of the church and state. For Peters these topics were not remote abstractions but rather were current realities that many people in the British Empire were deeply engaged in sorting through.

Growing up in mid-eighteenth century rural Connecticut no doubt meant that Native American and Anglo relations were never far from the minds of Peters and his neighbors. Hence, it is unsurprising that Indians feature prominently in his history of Connecticut, though Peters’ largely sympathetic treatment of them may seem more so. Many of the Eastern Woodland tribes, specifically the Iroquois, sided with Britain in the Revolutionary war and this no doubt confirmed Peters’ largely positive feelings about America’s autochthonal peoples. Additionally, the ill treatment Indians received at the hands of Connecticut’s Congregationalists founders provided Peters with another way of critiquing the Congregationalist majority of his own day that supported the Revolution and were equally unsympathetic to Britain’s native allies. Native support of the British Empire no doubt helped to endear Connecticut’s Indians to Peters, though his attitude toward Native Americans seems to have also been influenced by the philosophy of the Romantic Naturalism and Primitivism movements.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, one of the most prominent writers and influential thinkers during the Enlightenment, and a proto-Romantic, began *Emile*, his 1762 philosophical treatise with the declaration, “Tout est bien, sortant des mains de l’auteur des choses: tout dégénère entre les mains de l’homme” (Everything is good leaving the hands of the author of things; everything degenerates among the hands of man).\(^7\) Rousseau argued that primitive man (*bon sauvage*) is to be envied as his life is unhindered by the civil state

---

This theory, most forcefully expressed by Rousseau, that man was best served by regaining some of the spontaneity and naturalness of his early ancestors, found expression in a great deal of art and literature in the late eighteenth century and is frequently referred to as the idea of the “noble savage.” The noble savage was in circulation in European intellectual circles well before Rousseau, the term having actually been coined by Marc Lescarbot in 1609. It was also common in the American colonies. It was even used in the 1724 trial of John Checkley, an Anglican found guilty of libel in a Boston court. Hence, it certain that by the time Peters wrote his monograph he would have been familiar with the idea and that his positive sentiments toward Native peoples were thoroughly informed by this, and similar, theories.

Not all colonists, or even all loyalists, agreed with the tenets of the Romantic movement. Other loyalist writers, such as Thomas Hutchinson, emphasized prevailing beliefs in the treacherous and hostile nature of Indians, pointing out the willingness of native men to support, if not perpetrate, the rape of “English” women. Peters responded to these images of native peoples as sexual aggressors by describing them as “the most chaste . . . people in the world,” adding that none of them were addicted to the vices of “fornication,” save for the ones who abandon their traditional ways and “turn Christian.” He further claimed that native peoples often took women captives without violating any “laws of chastity.” This he insisted could seldom be said of the French or English in their encounters with female prisoners. Peters did view the native peoples as savages and

---


73 Ter Ellingson, *The Myth of the Noble Savage* (London: University of California Press, 2001), 12; John Checkley, *The speech of Mr. John Checkley, upon his tryal: at Boston in New-England, for publishing The short and easy method with the deists: To which was added, A discourse concerning episcopacy; In defence of Christianity, and the Church of England, against the deists and dissenters. To which is added, the jury's verdict; his plea in arrest of judgment; and the sentence of court* (London, 1738), 14.

74 Thomas Hutchinson, *The history of the colony of Massachusetts-Bay: from the first settlement thereof in 1628 until its incorporation with the colony of Plimouth, province of Main, &c., by the charter of King William and Queen Mary in 1691.* 2d. ed., vol. 1 (London: Printed for M. Richardson, 1765-1823), 112. [database on-line]; available from *Sabin Americana*. Thomson Gale, Thomson Gale Document Number CY105974003.

undeveloped specimens of humanity but largely sympathized with their plight as marginalized and mistreated peoples.76

While he defended Native Americans, he also embraced the European view that they needed to become Christians, stressing the need for evangelization. Peters implicitly critiqued native practices, though he blamed those who evangelized for many of the problems faced by indigenous tribes. He even insisted that the “greatest King in North-America,” an Indian “sachem” named “Connecticote,” and his entire kingdom was brought to ruin by the “pious fathers” of the colony through their spread of small-pox. Peters implied that these Congregationalist founders intentionally infected the natives’ community to gain a nefarious advantage. He claimed that these early missionaries attempted to coerce natives into conversion by telling them that similar calamities would befall them unless they accepted the Gospel of Jesus Christ.77 Peters did not limit his lamentation for the fate of New England’s native peoples there. He insisted that much of Connecticut is on land that was wrongly taken from Indians. Peters argued that the Massachusetts Bay Colony, from which the settlers of Connecticut received their “title to the soil,” had no right to offer up such commission as Massachusetts was without legal, or ethical, right to the land. Peters’ claimed that the settlers of Connecticut acted in unjust ways towards the native peoples on whose land they wrongly settled, sparking a war between themselves and the regional tribes in which a door to “king-killing and king-making violence, and injustice, in America” was opened. This appears to be an allusion to the execution of Charles I as well as to the persecution of Tories during the American Rebellion against Britain. Peters averred that the white emigrants, after the war, produced documents in which they claimed the native owners of the land had sold the land to the settlers. Even these claims Peters disputed, offering instead that the natives who truly “owned” that land were killed by the English and would never have given any deed of land to the “Dutch or English.” After disputing the legality of the founders of Connecticut’s bill of sale, Peters attacked those who had written histories of the region’s settlement by arguing that their assertions that the land was in a “state of nature” was untrue. He insisted, while giving tacit credence to the state of nature theory, that

77 Ibid., 53-54.
Connecticut was “cultivated and settled by its Indian inhabitants, whose numbers were thousands” and as such was not legally available for settlement by whites.\(^{78}\)

While Peters seemed to offer more sympathy toward native peoples in New England than did many of his contemporaries, he simultaneously embraced the idea that evangelization and even the invasion of Indian lands could be warranted, though only with legal authority. He lamented the decline of what he calls the Indians of Connecticut and their “king of kings” hinted that “authority” could be derived from the King of England that would allow settlers to “conquer the Indians.”

The *History of Hugh Peters* is startlingly void of any mention of Native Americans. Certainly Hugh Peters was just the type of colonist that Samuel Peters severely castigated in his *History of Connecticut* for wrongly taking native land. However, by 1807 Peters’ was deeply involvement in a land scheme in what would be Wisconsin, on land that would require taken from Indians in much the same way that Connecticut had previously been seized. For Peters, Native Americans were no longer allies of his beloved monarch, but only obstacles to western settlement. No doubt his hopes for founding a settlement he planned to name “Petersylvania” in land that, at the time was held by Indians, proved enough to overcome potential criticism of the United States hostile and repressive policies toward Native Americans.\(^{79}\) Much of Peters’ concern about native policy centered on legal and legitimate rights to perform certain actions, such as conquest, but he was also concerned with the source of those rights.

**God and Government**

Peters, views about a monarchy and its source of authority, were, like those of many conservatives of his era, both traditional and unsettled. He was engaged in a conversation dating to before the English Civil Wars about the source of true and legitimate authority on earth and how Kings received that authority. This conversation distilled into primarily three streams of thought about legitimate monarchical governance: divine appointment, hereditary right, and election. Divine right monarchs claimed God’s appointment as the source of their authority. This position was summed up quite neatly by James I in 1609 when he argued before Parliament that “kings are not only God’s

\(^{78}\) Ibid., 21-23, 28.

\(^{79}\) Cohen, *Connecticut’s Loyalist Gadfly*, 35
lieutenants upon earth, and sit upon God’s throne, but even by God himself . . . are called Gods.”

Under this system both the church and state drew their sovereignty from a mutual source. This theory lost a great deal of popular credence in post-interregnum England, language and symbols related to this belief continued to be used into the era of the American Revolution.

According to the second theory, monarchs ruled by right of inheritance. Authors who based monarchical authority on hereditary right insisted that traditions of property and power supported an authority that had been initially established by conquest or, what some believed to be, providential appointments. Such monarchs traced their authority to human events and understood the continual transference of the Crown as a further legitimization of their power.

Less common, but more relevant to Great Britain’s and, by extension, Samuel Peters’ assumption about the best type of kingship, was that of a monarchy established by election. Such a method of king-making became crucial in Anglo-American political discussions between 1688 and 1776 because both William and Mary and the House of Hanover owed their seat on the throne largely to Parliament. Election of a monarch had medieval origins and was practiced in the Holy Roman Empire, Poland and various smaller principalities throughout Western Europe.

All three of these justifications for monarchy appear in Peters’ first monograph. He certainly is not a proponent of the divine right of kings, thought he does seem to find the idea of interest, and possibly even legitimate. His ambivalent attitude toward divine kingship clearly fits a larger pattern of belief among Episcopalians. Both Whigs and Tories in the eighteenth century reinterpreted the theory of the divine right of kings to suit shifting political realities. Peters implied early in his History of Connecticut that a “created king” might be a less respectable leader should he lack “royal blood in his veins.” He also hinted that hereditary precedent might indicate divine approval, or at least legitimate right, to a position of power. Peters referred to an “Emporer” and “King

---

81 McConville, The Kings Three Faces, 19.
82 Ibid., 19.
of Kings” named Connecticote whose family had enjoyed leadership for “time
immemorial.” Because of this status Peters continually intimated that Connecticote was a
legitimate authority. While Connecticote’s actual existence is unconfirmed, Peters’ belief
that American Indians, who were neither Christian nor Protestant, could hold legitimate
title to leadership provided they were the inheritors of ancestral claims strongly indicates
his acceptance of the hereditary rights of a monarchy.84

Peters certainly accepted an elected monarchy, although he seemed to prefer only
one with “royal blood.” He showered praise on George III, as a king that “honours his
Crown, and prefers Justice to Policy.” However, he offered a caveat as to just who may
elect a king. In his criticism of mid seventeenth-century Connecticut he scorned those
who believed “a multitude of free people may elect and ordain a King over them although
they were . . . not possessed of Kingly power.” Peters insisted that only certain
individuals with pre-possessed power may legitimately chose a king.85

In spite of his belief in the necessity and legitimacy of monarchy, Peters strongly
opposed the idea that kings should rule unchecked by a legislative body such as the
British Parliament. He actually blames the Connecticut colonists’ relationship with the
King, or at least their understanding of it, as part of the reason for the colony’s
longstanding desire for independence from Britain. He insisted that their refusal to
discriminate between the power of the “King solus” and “an act of the King, Lords, and
Commons conjointly” was problematic. According to Peters the colonists, in their own
interests, held up the power of the British Crown “higher than the constitution allowed.”
This belief led them down the error-filled path of equating their local assembly with the
power of Parliament, and put them in conflict with both King and Parliament as early as
the late seventeenth century. Peters was in no way intimating that the King may be
disobeyed and rather extolled the merits of a Congregationalist minister who taught that a
“Bishop might dress with ruffles . . . and a sword . . . and all true Christians would obey
their earthly king.”86 He was simply leaving room for properly channeled resistance
toward royal decree.

85 Ibid., 19, 37.
86 Ibid., 84-86, 223.
How do Peters’ views toward monarchy change over the course of the decades following the Revolution and his exile to Great Britain, with all of its difficulties? They change a great deal. Between Peters’ writing of his first book and his second, the American Revolutions had ended and the French Revolution had run its course. The United States had been formed with a fully ratified constitution and had Peters received treatment he believed to be unfair at the hands of the British government. These realities are fully reflected in his History of Hugh Peters.

Peters’ opened his History of Hugh Peters with a fierce diatribe about who was most guilty, Parliament or the King, in the matter of the English Civil Wars and determines that both Crown and Parliament acted contrary to “to the English law and constitution.” Following this exploration of guilt, Peters discussed situations that would justify rebelling against the King. He clearly stated that Parliament was justified in its defense of English law against Charles I, and implied that the King’s death was unjustly dealt at the hands of a “theocracy.”

It is important to note, however, that Peters leaves room for rebellion when the sovereign makes use of a tax or law that is repugnant to the constitution, but closes off the possibility of legitimate regicide.

Peters does repudiate divine right, something he had, as least implicitly, embraced prior to his time in exile. He insisted that those who attempted to “spread and establish the divine and hereditary power of kings . . . over the colonies in North America” were, in spite of their “Royal, aristocratical and prelatical promises” unable to deceive the people who “extirpated [them] . . . out of America.” He praised the former colonists who upon ridding themselves of the “English monarchy” along with aristocracy and hierarchy “wisely passed a law which banished forever kings, hereditary nobles, and the British hierarchy.”

Peters has not completely given up on the idea of any kind of monarchy, yet he urged his readers to pray that a “true spirit of patriotism” might seize “our present senators” in the hope that they would amend the “present laws” so that “we might know how to act without . . . using those men who live on our spoils.”

This change in thought is significant and indicates that Peters’ sojourn in Britain and subsequent return to America produced a radically altered worldview. Never again

---

88 Ibid., 62.
would he express happiness that those who “inculcated the divine right of the people to resist kings” should find themselves in a “starving condition under the exertion of that boasted right.” 89 Peters, prior to his exile, not only supported a political hierarchy as the best way to order society, he also expressed confidence in the belief that an episcopacy, in conjunction with government, offered the ideal ecclesiastical structure. This belief also changed.

Religion and Society

Samuel Peters had never known a world in which the government did not influence or overtly support a particular sect or denomination, often in preference to other religions or theological positions. Yet, his change in attitude about the importance, even the necessity, of state sponsored religion would prove to be one of his most startling.

Within England the position of the Church was hegemonic and remained so until the early nineteenth century. In the American colonies the picture was much different. By 1776 the Church of England was reduced to a minority position in every colony and especially so in Connecticut, which had never been an Anglican stronghold. Even in colonies where the Church was nominally established, any type of hegemony was highly insecure. In such a climate any unrest, or revolution, that threatened to divide society along parochial lines was of great significance to all members of society. The American Revolution proved, for many colonists, to be just the type of turbulence to provoke (or at least highlight) religious conflict. Ambrose Serle in the fall of 1776 wrote that “The War is . . . at the Bottom very much a religious War.” 90 Peters could not have agreed more. He often claimed that his poor treatment at the hands of his neighbors was related less to his political views than to his religious convictions. While it may be easy to dismiss these claims as rhetoric calculated to enhance his status as a victim, and doubtless that was to some extent the case, they are not without veracity. In colonial Connecticut, the bifurcation of religious beliefs and political opinions was not always accepted practice. A plurality of Anglicans and Congregationalists alike believed that Catholicism encouraged absolutism, and most would have agreed with Increase Mather who had

89 Peters, History of Connecticut, 358.
earlier argued that “Popery, Slavery and Arbitrary Power” were of a piece. Many Congregationalists, at least after the Stamp Act Crisis, would have further argued that Episcopacy and tyranny were as closely linked as were Catholicism and despotism.

In 1774 Jonathan Parsons, a Presbyterian minister from New England, complained of what he termed the ‘spiritual tyranny’ of Congregationalists. He also asserted that it was not they, but the Presbyterians, who most closely conformed to the doctrines of Calvin. Peters was uninterested in theological squabbles, but could not have agreed with Parsons more in his link between tyranny and Congregationalism. In his History of Connecticut, Peters argued that Congregationalists were much worse than merely spiritual tyrants, but also legal despots. He insisted that their religion was descended from a “fanaticism turned mad” and that they were bent upon codifying their idiosyncratic beliefs. Peters was consumed with the belief that he was not so much a victim of political as religious persecution.

Peters was not the only Tory to espouse this belief. Peter Oliver, brother of Massachusetts Lieutenant Governor Andrew Oliver and himself the Chief Justice of the colony, continually framed his analysis of the Revolution in religious terms. Oliver categorizes the dissenting clergy in the Massachusetts area as “Mr. Otis’ black Regiment” and clearly intimates that the entire Revolution was a result of the trickery of a few colonial leaders and a “duped” set of “Priests.” He repeatedly casts Samuel Adams as “the Devil,” ready to transform himself into an “Angel of Light with the weak Religionists,” and refers to Joseph Hawley, a colonist who supported James Otis’ bid for a judgeship, as “like the red Dragon of Revelation.” Like Peters, Oliver especially harbored resentment of Congregationalists and believed they inherited an aversion to Episcopacy. Oliver considered it a dreadful mistake on the part of the Church of England to ask the colonies for their consent to a bishop residing amongst them as it proved “the direct Step to a Refusal; for all such Proposals from the Parent State, whether of civil or a

---

91 Increase Mather, A brief relation of the state of New England, from the beginning of that plantation to this present year, 1689: in a letter to a person of quality: licenced [sic], July 30th, 1689 (London, 1689), 12. [database on-line]; available from Sabin Americana. Thompson Gale, Thompson Gale Document Number CY100604274.

92 For more about the linking of the Anglican Church in America with despotism in the minds of many non-Anglicans see Carl Bridenbaugh, The Mitre and Sceptre: Translantic Faith, Ideas, Personalities, and Politics 1689 – 1775 (NY: Oxford University Press, 1962), especially chapter IX.

93 Quoted in Clark, Language of Liberty, 205.
Religious Nature, were construed into Timidity by the Colonists.”  It is important to note that Oliver and many colonists agree on one point: the strength of the Church of England in America and the power of Britain in the North American colonies were linked.

Peters, in his *History of Connecticut*, argued that loyalists were not the only people to frame their arguments in religious language. He wrote that many people in Connecticut related their struggle with Parliament in biblical terms. He claimed that the repeal of the Stamp Act saw colonists rejoicing at such a victory over “the beast and his mark” and added that the “King’s friends” were branded as “papists.” He further described Stamp Act mobs that roared through the town destroyed the property of “Churchmen” and crying out “No Bishops! no popery! nor ‘Kings, Lords, and Tyrants!” It is significant the Peters framed his descriptions of the violence surrounding the American Revolution in religious terms. In his *History of Connecticut* Peters expressed disgust that the founders of his native colony refused to make proper distinctions between “the clergy and laity.” He is further outraged at their insistence that they may “elect and ordain a king over them” despite their not possessing “kingly power.” For Samuel Peters, religious and political dissent went hand in hand.

Peters longed for a more prominent role for episcopacy in North America’s religious circles and angrily disapproved of the Church of England clergy who “joined the dissenters of New England” against the appointment of an American bishop. He believed that throughout Europe, the clergy, along with the lawyers and merchants, played a vital role in holding society together and seeing that mankind did not fall into an even worse state of depravity. He expressed frustration with the Anglican hierarchy in London for its refusal to send a bishop to America and bewailed his plight in a colony founded by the descendents of those who sent agents to England “to assist in the murder of Charles I. and the subversion of the Lords and Bishops.” He complained that since the restoration of Charles II” there had been a “lukewarmness of the Bishops in

94 Douglass Adair and John A. Schutz, eds. Peter Oliver’s Origin and Progress of the American Rebellion: A Tory View (San Marino, CA: The Huntington Library, 1961), quotes from 41, 148-49, 37 and 42-43; Note: The “Angel of Light” is a biblical reference for Satan or Lucifer and refers to a way in which he may disguise himself.

95 This “beast and his mark” are a reference to the book of Revelation. In this book of the Bible an “Anti-Christ” who controls the world will not allow humans to “buy or sell” without a particular type of “mark.”

general.” Peters insisted that the English and Dutch should be more like the “French and Spanish” who refused to allow their colonies to be subjected to religious persecution. One can hardly imagine stronger support for a powerful relationship between church and state than a recommendation for the one which existed in both France and Spain. Both were largely viewed in the British Empire as semi-tyrannies overly influenced by the Pope and his cardinals. Peters’ 1781 reflection on those religio-governmental systems as worthy of imitation is indeed telling of his deep longing for a politically, socially and ecclesiastically strong Church of England.

By 1807, his views were remarkably different. In Peters’ *History of Hugh Peters*, the bishops and other leaders of the Church of England are cast as rabid and abusive persecutors, not the puritans who, Peters insisted, were treated in a highly “cruel” manner. He described them as forced to flee their “cultivated country . . . to the wilds of America” rather than “be called the sons of Pharoah’s daughter, with all the glories of Egypt.” This is high praise indeed for people whom less than two decades prior Peters had likened to maniacs. He insisted that “kings, bishops, and hereditary noblemen” believe toleration to be “inconsistence with the good of the state and church” and lavished praise on the newly independent American nation which he claimed offered “the most degrees of happiness” for the most number of religious sects. Peters added further that, should America cease to be a place of “liberty, learning and piety . . . a union between church and state will take place . . . and a hierarchy in the church.”

Peters’ virulent rejection of a state church seems extreme, almost a sort of religious and political bi-polarity. Toward the end of his account of Hugh Peters’ life he provides insight into his change of mind when he complained that some “who fought for the king [in the American Revolution], have received no compensation or thanks from those they served.” Like many loyalists, deracinated by the Revolution and stripped of their religious, political and even social identity, Peters found Britain to be a less welcoming place than he had hoped and longed to return to a familiar land. When he did return, in 1805, the land he found could hardly be described as “familiar.” Gone was the hierarchy of the eighteenth century and under severe attack was the notion that birth,

---

98 Ibid., 66.
wealth or title proved reliable in judging human worth. The system of patronage that Peters, like all motivated men of his generation, had relied upon for a lifetime was seen as elitist and anachronistic in the America of 1805. Religious practice, culture and political systems were all different from what Peters would have remembered in his days as young man during mid-eighteenth century. Nevertheless, he chose to adapt to rather than resist republican society and even trumpeted aspects of its ideology he likely considered extreme.

Peters certainly drastically changed his thoughts, perceptions and deeply held opinions over the course of his exile and subsequent return to America, but he should not be thought of as an ideological bumblebee, flitting from one position to the next. Nor should he be skeptically viewed as politically Machiavellian, adapting his theories and attitudes to achieve a calculated result. Rather, Peters represents adaptation and flexibility, two traits rarely ascribed to eighteenth-century Tories. In the face of defeat and loss, Peters, like many other loyalists who would return to the former colonies, chose to reconstruct his identity and viewpoints in ways that were distinctly American using means such as memory and writing that are distinctly human.
Conclusion

Peters Stearns in his essay “Why Study History?” argues that history is important because it helps humans understand “how the society we live in came to be.”99 Precisely for this reason studies of exiled loyalists have garnered little popularity with American audiences. Those who opposed the American Revolution are not seen as part of the American past. At the same time, teachers, librarians and publishers recommend to Canadian children such books as *Honour Bound*, a “gripping story of the Avery Loyalist Family forced to leave their home” and start afresh in Ontario.100 The forced migration of thousands of Crown supporters from the American colonies into Canada is rightly seen as part of their nation’s shared historical heritage, while the reality of the exodus, and subsequent repatriation, of many loyalists has failed to permeate the broader American consciousness. Although loyalism seems a historical dead-end in the context of the United States, its study is worthwhile. Moreover, the American Revolutionary period can not be fully understood without gaining a deeper and more nuanced appreciation for the causes, consequences and changes in colonial and post-colonial American loyalism.

Sheldon S. Cohen in his short history of Peters argues that “The United States of America remained anathema” to Peters and was a “reality which he never fully accepted.”101 This claim hardly seems justified when juxtaposed with Peters’ unrealized dream of founding a town west of the Mississippi river—Petersylvania—and his praise for “our congress.” Peters did come to accept the United States and radically altered his views to embrace and support that new reality, an adaptation which is made very clear in his *History of Hugh Peters*.

Samuel Peters’ *History of Connecticut* offers insight into the humiliating frustration many loyalists, especially those in exile, felt over the rebellion in the colonies and their determination to see the British Empire in North America restored. Peters story of financial, ecclesiastical, familial and even ideological loss provides a microcosm of

100 *Honour Bound* is fiction, though the surname “Avery” was prevalent among American loyalists’ exiles to Canada; for more see Mary Alice Downie and John Downie, *Honour Bound* (Kingston, Ont.: Quarry Press, 1991).
how loyalists felt, and in many ways were, let down by the empire that they had once been proud to call their own. Many chose to fashion new lives and identities for themselves in Canada, the Caribbean and other parts of the empire, but some, like Peters, eventually chose repatriation to the former colonies. By any standard, their stories are a vital part of the American past. Little is known about their collective experience and even less about their methods of negotiating the radically new political and social realities they faced. Hence, Samuel Peters’ *History of Hugh Peters* gives us a chance to witness one such negotiation and serves as an invaluable tool in exploring the difficulties that many former loyalists would have faced upon their return. Peters’ texts offer the viewpoint of a former supporter of the Hanoverian monarch who arrives at an acceptance of the burgeoning United States through recasting and re-remembering his political, social and familial identity in order to carve out a place for himself in the new American republic. It is difficult for modern Americans to imagine how truly radical this process was. It is one that can not go unexplored.

Samuel Andrew Peters does not simply offer us one man’s experience. Rather his story gives us useful insight into the process of identity formation, and the recasting and reshaping of that same identity with the shifting tides of the Atlantic world.
A GENERAL HISTORY OF CONNECTICUT,
FROM ITS First Settlement under GEORGE FENWICK, Esq.
TO ITS Latest Period of Amity with GREAT BRITAIN;
INCLUDING A DESCRIPTION OF THE COUNTRY,
And many curious and interesting ANECDOTES.

To which is added,
An APPENDIX, wherein new and the true Sources of the present Rebellion in America are pointed out; together with the particular Part taken by the People of Connecticut in its Promotion.

By a GENTLEMAN of the PROVINCE.

Plus apud me ratio valebit, quam volgi opinio.
C. I. C. Parad. i.

LONDON:
Printed for the AUTHOR;
And sold by J. Bew, No. 28, Pater-Nofter-Row,
MDCCCLXXI.

Fig. 4. The front cover of Samuel Peters’ General History of Connecticut, first edition.
A

HISTORY

OF THE

REV. HUGH PETERS, A. M.

ARCH-INTENDANT

OF THE PREROGATIVE COURT OF DOCTORS COMMONS;

MEMBER

OF THE CELEBRATED ASSEMBLY OF DIVINES AT THE SAVOY;

WESTMINSTER; AND

PRINCIPAL CHAPLAIN

TO THE LORD PROTECTOR AND TO THE LORDS AND

HOUSE OF COMMONS, FROM THE YEAR

1640 TO 1660.

WITH AN APPENDIX.

BY THE REV. SAMUEL PETERS, LL.D.

"Let us praise famous men, and our fathers who begat us: the Lord
hath wrought great glory by them."  Ecclus. xliv.

NEW-YORK:

PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR.

1807.

Fig. 5. The title page of Samuel Peters' first edition to his History of Hugh Peters.
Fig. 6. Image of Hugh Peters from Samuel Peters’ History of Hugh Peters.
Bibliography


Checkley, John. The Speech of Mr. John Checkley upon His Tryal, at Boston in New England : For Publishing the Short and Easy Method with the Deists ; to which was Added, a Discourse Concerning Episcopacy, in Defence of Christianity, and the Church of England, Against the Deists and the Dissenters; to which Is Added, the Jury's Verdict, His Plea in Arrest of Judgment, and the Sentence of the Court. 2d ed. London: Printed by J. Applebee, 1979.


Hutchinson, Thomas. *A History of the Colony of Massachusetts's Bay, from the First Settlement Thereof in 1628, Until its Incorporation with the Colony of Plimouth, Province of Main, &c*. The second ed. London: Printed for M. Richardson, 1765.


