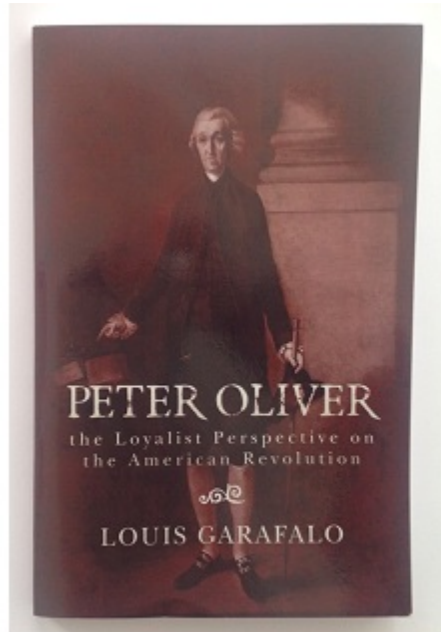


Louis Garafalo's "Peter Oliver - the Loyalist Perspective on the American Revolution"

A Book Review by Brian McConnell, UE *



This recent book by author Louis Garafalo describes the life and times of Loyalist Peter Oliver, a close associate of Governor Thomas Hutchinson, the last British appointed Governor of Massachusetts before the American Revolution. It is the fourth book by Garafalo, who was born and raised in Middleborough, Massachusetts, a community which Peter Oliver also came to make home. The book was offered to me for review and I was quite pleased to have the opportunity.

"Peter Oliver - the Loyalist Perspective on the American Revolution", includes images of four portraits, three of Oliver and one of his wife, Mary Clarke Oliver, acquired from the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the Social Law Library in Boston, and the Frick Collection at the Frick Art Reference Library in New York City as noted by the author in his note at the beginning of the book dated August, 2015. The book is 139 pages, which is divided into 27 chapters, plus a six page Bibliography. Footnotes are used throughout the book to reference historical sources.

Peter Oliver was born into a successful merchant family in Boston. He attended Harvard where he delivered the valedictory address in 1730. Later he was appointed a Justice of the Peace and served as the last Chief Justice of the Massachusetts colonial court system. With the declining fortunes of the Loyalists during the American Revolution in Massachusetts he was evacuated with others from Boston to Halifax in 1776. From there he went on to England where he spent the remainder of his life. This book brings to life the world and times in which he lived and his reactions to them.

The beginning chapters deal with the rank and family associations of Peter Oliver. It is noteworthy and of interest to those interested in Nova Scotia history that his uncle was Jonathan Belcher, colonial Governor of Massachusetts, New Jersey, whose son Jonathan was Chief Justice of the Nova Scotia Supreme Court and Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia. Oliver was also related through marriage of one of his children to the Hutchinsons of Boston. His son Peter Jr. married Sarah Hutchinson, daughter of Massachusetts Governor Thomas Hutchinson. Foster Hutchinson, brother of the Governor, with his family were also evacuated from Boston and settled in Halifax. They are interred in the Old Burying Ground of that city.

After introducing us to Peter Oliver and his associates the times in which they lived in Massachusetts are described in chapters that include the Stamp Act, Tea, Smuggling, and Tar and Feathers. The author also discusses the siege of Boston and the Battle that did not occur from both the American and the British perspectives. The decision by the British to evacuate has Peter Oliver accompanied by his niece Jenny Clark arriving in Halifax on April 3, 1776. Five weeks later they departed for England.

In answering the question who were the Loyalists, Garafolo refers to the varied and revealing composition of the list of 305 citizens of the Massachusetts colony on the '*The Banishment Act of the State of Massachusetts, 1778*'. It included 19 mariners and seamen, 16 farmers (yeoman), 7 laborers, 6 clerks, 4 shopkeepers, 4 blacksmiths, 4 printers, 4 distillers, 3 bookkeepers, 2 cabinet makers and one of each of the following: baker, bookmaker, candle maker, carpenter, cobbler, saddle maker and tailor. These were in addition to 68 lawyers, 55 merchants and traders, 20 gentlemen, 12 officials of the Royal Government, and 9 physicians. Fifty-four others did not have a defined occupation.

Another chapter which may be of particular note to Maritime Canadians, due to shared geography and history, is the one on New Ireland. Garafalo mentions the British scheme implemented in 1778 to establish a colony between the Penobscot River of central Maine and the Canadian border, which was then Nova Scotia (now New Brunswick) to be used to settle displaced Loyalists. A Fort was built and by 1780 there were 37 houses as well. Peter Oliver was to be offered the position of Governor. However, as the war progressed and other concerns dominated the British government it did not proceed. At the negotiations to end the Revolutionary War it was made an absolute requirement by the American negotiator John Adams that the New Ireland colony be eliminated.

In the concluding chapters, Garafalo deals with the activities of Loyalists living in England and their treatment. After the preliminary peace with the Treaty of Paris signed on November 30, 1782 and finalized by all parties on September 3, 1783, many Loyalists including Peter Oliver were waiting for compensation. The work of the Commission established by the British in 1783 to investigate property losses sustained by Loyalists and approve compensation lasted for six years. When the final figures were provided in 1790 it showed that 3,225 claims had been received from Loyalists in England and Canada. A total payout of 3,033,091 pounds was approved for 2,291 claims. Payments averaged about 37 % of what was requested.

Finally, the book ends with some interesting comments on the aftermath of the American Revolution which left the condition of the new country exhausted and so short of funds it had to print money. It is wondered what would Peter Oliver have done if he ever returned to America. If circumstances had been different and the Loyalists had been more welcome to return, it is suggested he would have contributed to development. The last chapter contains a colourful description of the home built by Peter Oliver which he left in Middleborough, Massachusetts called Oliver Hall. It was 'one of the finest country residences outside of Boston...built after the style of an old English mansion...the estate contained a large variety of fruit, ornamental and forest trees, which grew luxuriously over the hills...In their diaries Judge Sewell and John Adams speak of the beauty of the place and the pleasure they had in visiting the Hall.'

On the back cover of Garafolo's book it states: "History is truly written by the victors and this book attempts to give the perspective of the Loyalists, the "losers" of the American Revolution, through the experiences of this most interesting man." In this attempt it has succeeded.

The book is available for purchase online from amazon.com in either paper or Kindle formats.

* Completed on February 15, 2016 by Brian McConnell, UE. who is the President of the Nova Scotia Branch of the United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada. He has a website called "Loyalist History of Nova Scotia & Canada" at <http://www.brianmcconnell.info/loyalisthistoryofnovascotia/> To contact him please email: brianm564@gmail.com

