

# Loyalist David Dinsmore

By William Lindsey

This is the story of a young married man who came to Charleston, South Carolina, in 1767 as a Northern Irish immigrant, and who then took the British side when revolution broke out, finding himself exiled to Nova Scotia as a result. When David Dinsmore went to Canada, his wife Margaret and their children remained in South Carolina. All evidence suggests that, after he went to Nova Scotia, David never reunited with his family. War and exile sundered this family decisively.

David and Margaret (maiden name unknown) appear in the list of passengers who arrived in Charleston aboard the *Earl of Donegal* on 10 December 1767. This ship had sailed from Belfast on 7 October. Prior to its sailing, notices of its impending voyage appeared in the *Belfast News-Letter* stating that it was recruiting passengers in Ballymena and Ballymoney, Co. Antrim, as well as in Belfast — and it's likely that David and Margaret hailed from one of those places. The list of passengers recorded in the South Carolina Council Journals on its arrival gives David's age as 17 and Margaret's as 20.

On 22 December, the Council Journals record land grants to the ship's passengers. Under the colony's bounty act, David received 100 acres and Margaret 50. The land was in Craven County, later Ninety Six District and finally Spartanburg County. South Carolina Colonial plat books show the land lying south of the Tyger River with a branch running to Jamey's Creek originating on it. The land was certified to David on 27 February 1768.

At some point after that date, David sold his land grant and bought 250 acres on 10 December 1774, also on Jamey's Creek, on which the family then settled. A 1769 land grant shows a Chesney family, apparently from Ballymena, on an adjacent tract. By the end of 1774, David and Margaret had had children James, Mary, and John, with two more to be born later, a daughter Mary Jane and a daughter whose name is not known.

Then the Revolution arrived. When David would file his land claim for Loyalist service in Halifax, Nova Scotia, on 19 April 1786 he would state that in 1775 he had taken up arms under General William Cunningham, joining Colonel Archibald Campbell in Georgia. From 1780 forward David was in Zacharias Gibbs's Spartan or Upper Regiment of South Carolina. Gibbs, who appears in David's records in Nova Scotia, lived in Ninety Six district and recruited largely from there. The revolution was in that part of South Carolina a virtual civil war, with citizens about equally divided between the opposing sides.

Under Campbell, David took part in British campaigns in Georgia before his service under Gibbs had him at the battle of Kings Mountain in October 1780. His pay abstract for service in Gibbs's militia states that he was paid for accompanying Lieutenant Colonel John Harris Cruger as he

evacuated Loyalists from Fort Ninety Six to Orangeburg following the fall of Ninety Six to the Americans in June 1781.

After Ninety Six fell and the South Carolina Loyalists retreated first to Orangeburg and then to Charleston in the latter part of 1781, they began making arrangements to leave the colony. David's Loyalist land claim states, "At the Evacuation of C. Town he came to this Province and is now settled in Rawdon." By mid-August 1782, 4,200 Loyalists had registered to leave South Carolina, including nearly 2,500 women and children with 7,200 enslaved Africans and African-Americans. Prior to their departure, on 18 April, Zachariah Gibbs and other Loyalists prepared a petition to the Crown indicating that a large number of Tories had been murdered by the Whigs in the colony, with the majority of these in Ninety Six District.

Ships began leaving Charleston for East Florida in September and October, and a fleet set sail for Nova Scotia under Colonel Samuel Campbell of North Carolina in late October heading for Halifax with 500 Loyalists, among whom were included 50 enslaved persons. On 21 November the ships *Free Briton* and the *John and Bella* arrived in Halifax carrying many of the South Carolina refugees. More than twenty of the families and as many single men, all from South Carolina, then settled at Rawdon in Hants County, about 60 miles north of Halifax.

More Loyalists from both North and South Carolina followed into the winter months, with 500 refugees arriving in Halifax from South Carolina during the winter of 1782, a particularly cold winter for which many of these new settlers were ill-prepared as they arrived from a much warmer climate without many of their possessions. By 1788, 74 Southern backcountry men and their widows had obtained land grants at Rawdon, constituting almost the entirety of the settlement. The large majority of these were from Ninety Six District in South Carolina, and of Ulster Scots origins. Also settling at Rawdon initially was Zachariah Gibbs, who first went to East Florida and then Jamaica after Charleston was evacuated, but finally settled (briefly) at Rawdon.

David was indubitably among those Loyalists who sailed from Charleston to Halifax in the fall and winter of 1782, and at some point after his arrival, it's clear he settled at Rawdon, since when he filed his Loyalist land claim in 1786, he noted Rawdon as his residence. The land claim states that, in addition to taking arms under Cunningham in 1775 and joining Campbell in Georgia, he had been imprisoned for five months.

He had, he stated, forfeited 250 acres on James Creek for which he had paid £ 100 and one enslaved woman. He had cleared 47 acres and had a house and barn, and had considerable stock including horses, cattle, hogs, and sheep. He did not know in whose possession his farm was in 1786, but believed his wife and five children were in South Carolina being taken care of by supporters of the American cause.

David requested that the Crown grant him 250 acres in Nova Scotia to recompense him for his loss. He was, instead, granted 100 acres in the southeast section of Rawdon township in Brushy Hills. On 9 January 1787 David sold this land to Thomas Parker with Zachariah Gibbs as one of the witnesses to the deed. Prior to this, on 24 August 1786 he had bought 300 acres at Noel Shore in

Hants County from a William Densmore who appears to have been his kinsman. This tract was out of a 1780 grant of 1,500 acres to William's father James Densmore, who came to Nova Scotia from Co. Londonderry, Ireland.

David's sale of his Rawdon grant in January 1787 is the last record I have been able to find for him. Zacharias Gibbs proved the deed on 3 June 1788. Gibbs left Rawdon late in 1792 and is said at some unspecified date not long after this to have set sail from Nova Scotia to Ulster with William Meek, also from Rawdon, and an unnamed traveling companion. Gibbs and Meek were not heard from again, and it's assumed their ship sank.

By 1790, David's wife Margaret appears on the U.S. federal census as head of their household in Spartanburg County, South Carolina, and in 1800, when she moved with her children to Kentucky, she and son John sold the family's land in South Carolina, an indicator that the land then legally belonged to Margaret and her children. No records indicate that the family was ever reunited after David left South Carolina for Nova Scotia.