

Loyalist Edward Foster of Boston

In March 1776, the patriot siege of Boston had finally forced the British military governor of Massachusetts, General William Howe, to abandon the city. On the 17th of that month, one hundred and twenty ships carrying 11,000 people sailed out of Boston harbour. One tenth of them were loyalists with the remaining being British soldiers and their families. Among the loyalists were Edward Foster and his family¹.

In Boston, Foster was a successful blacksmith and a Freemason. On January 12, 1764, the Lodge of St. Andrew voted to purchase a house for the use of its membership and Edward was one of the lodge members appointed to the Committee to undertake this task. On March 31st of that year, the Green Dragon Tavern, situated on the border of a millpond on what is now Union Street in and near the corner of Hanover Street in Boston, was purchased². In the years that ensued, the Green Dragon Tavern was the site of innumerable social and political public and private gatherings. It has been suggested that many of the most important and eventful of the political transactions preceding the Revolution were if not inaugurated, then discussed, matured and put into execution at the Tavern. Well known patriot frequenters of the location included Paul Revere and John Hancock. Given Edward's eventual relocation in Nova Scotia, it is highly unlikely that he would have been present for these discussions. It is however interesting to note that the political choices of Foster and Revere did not seem to preclude economic association as evidenced by the presence in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston of a punch ladle made by Paul Revere for Edward Foster³.

Foster was a Sandemanian by religion¹. This Christian sect, whose followers were originally called Glasites, was founded about 1730 in Scotland by John Glas (1695–1773), a Presbyterian minister in the Church of Scotland. Robert Sandeman, Glas's son-in-law, came to be the recognized leader of the sect, whose members were called Sandemanians in England and America. The first congregational meetings of the Sandemanians in Boston were held at the home of Edward Foster. Each congregation had several elders, pastors, or bishops, who were chosen according to St. Paul's instructions, as interpreted by the Sandemanians, without regard to education or occupation. The Lord's Supper (communion) was observed weekly, and each Sunday noon, a feast was held that was attended by every member. Foot washing was also practiced. They believed that the accumulation of wealth was unscriptural and improper. The oddities of Sandemanian tenets and practices made them objects of ridicule and suspicion. Throughout the pre-Revolutionary period, Sandemanians came under increasing scrutiny from their neighbours for not joining in the popular protests against Parliament's measures which appeared to violate American's constitutional rights as Englishmen.

Foster made no secret of his loyalties and had been working for the British forces since their arrival in Boston in the early 1770s. He was a signer of the May 28, 1774 *Address of Merchants and Traders of the Town of Boston* expressing support for the administration of Governor Hutchinson⁴.

On July 20, 1775, a Patriot mob seriously damaged the Boston lighthouse making it difficult for the British ships to enter the harbour safely. Edward Foster volunteered his assistance

along with that of his employees to aid the British army in repairing the lighthouse; the work was done in just two days ^{5,9}.

It was also said that during the siege while the British army occupied Boston, Edward Foster's blacksmith shop made a quantity of horseshoes with three prongs which were distributed all over "the Neck" for the purpose of wounding the cavalry, should the rebels venture to attack ⁶. The Neck is a narrow strip of land that connected the then-peninsular city of Boston to the mainland.

These kinds of activities made Foster "obnoxious to the rebels" and he was "much insulted and threatened" ⁵. By the time Boston was about to be captured by the patriots in 1776, it became obvious that the blacksmith could not stay in the city. As a result he and his family fled the city, leaving his home and brick workshop in the care of his brother, Benjamin⁵.

In 1778, Foster was banished and proscribed under the *Banishment Act of the State of Massachusetts* that was enacted to "prevent the return to this state of certain persons therein named and others who have left this state or either of the United States, and joined the enemies thereof" ⁷. According to records of the Suffolk registry of deeds, Edward Foster's estate was confiscated in 1781 ⁸.

According to *Nova Scotia Immigrants to 1867 Vol. 1*, Edward brought his wife Martha and the following children from Boston: Edward Jr., William, John, Elizabeth, Mercy, Milton, Polly, and Joseph ¹⁰. Through these children, the Fosters are linked by marriage and blood to many well known Haligonian families of the time including Howe, Albro, Creighton, Lawson, Fairbanks and Piers. According to Sabine, Edward and Martha had thirteen children¹¹, some of whom stayed in the U.S.

In the early 1800s, Edward Foster Sr. built his blacksmith shop on the Halifax waterfront where the Carpenter's Shop on Upper Water Street in Historic Properties is now located⁶. Foster and his sons earned a living repairing ships, mills, houses, anchors and tools. He was awarded several parcels of land in recognition of his loyalty to the King^{12,13,14}.

This Edward Foster family is included in the Foster Genealogy¹⁵ by Frederick Pierce however other researchers have advised me that some of the early connections made for them are inaccurate. I have not been otherwise able to confirm any early information on Edward or Martha. Also their dates and places of death have not been unconfirmed.

By Sandi Corbin of Nova Scotia in 2014

Sources

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