

Wading Through the Swamp, Swilling Rum, and Spinning Yarns

by Robert Harold Phillips U.E., B.A., M.Div.

(June 2013)

The obituary for Isaac Brock Leach 1822-1912 which appeared in the 24 January 1913 *St Thomas Daily Times*, and reprinted in the *Talbot Times*, June 2007 contains many misstatements, errors, and inaccuracies so as it could best be characterized as historical fiction. The source of the obituary narrative would have most likely been the daughter of Isaac Brock Leach, at whose home he reportedly had died. Whatever the case may be, the narrative is more about the father and grandfather than it is about the subject. I have found no evidence that Zebulon Leach, the father of Isaac Brock Leach, the grandson of James Leach, had any siblings. Thus, the statement that family still resides in the vicinity of St. John's New Brunswick is preposterous. Zebulon Leach had moved to Vermont by 1793, at which time he purchased property in Franklin County. Zebulon, and his wife, Phebe, most likely married in Vermont. It is also likely that all of their children born prior to 1810 were born in Vermont.

Marietta Leach was born 27 April 1861 to Isaac Brock and Josephine Leach, probably in Elgin County, Ontario. Isaac's family appears in the *1861 Census of Canada* at Bayham, Elgin, Canada West. At the time of Marietta's birth, her father, Isaac, was 39 years of age. Isaac's father, Zebulon, had passed on in 1834. His mother, Phebe, died in 1853. Both Zebulon and Phebe are buried in the Old Eden Cemetery, in Bayham Township, Elgin County. Zebulon's mother, Mary, the wife of James Leach, died in 1835 and is also buried there. The older generations having passed on, the probable reporter of the story never knew her grandparents, much less the actual details of her great grandparents lives.

If the source of the story was the subject himself, Isaac Brock Leach, similar circumstances surround his life. Isaac, born in 1822, was only 12 years old when his father, Zebulon passed on. He was 31 years old when his mother Phebe died. Yet, Isaac never knew or met his grandfather, James Leach, who is referred to as "Major Leach" in the narrative. James Leach died prior to 22 March 1810, at Fletcher, Franklin County, Vermont leaving an estate with more debt than assets, as evidenced by the probate records of that county. The family was forced to sell off the entire estate and move on.

Whatever the source of the old yarn, it stretches credibility to the point of leaving the reader's head spinning. The Battle of Trafalgar occurred in 1805 off the coast of Spain, when the British Royal Navy encountered and defeated a fleet of French and Spanish warships. James Leach, the styled "Major" of the narrative, would have been near 60 years of age when this battle took place, and thousands of miles away. Besides, who ever heard of a "Major" serving in the Royal Navy?

The first clue in the narrative leading to something resembling reality is the mention of landing in New Brunswick at the end of the American Rebellion. The mention of New Brunswick lands us on firmer ground. James Leach is found to have served with the Prince of Wales American Regiment from 1777 to the conclusion of that war. His memorial dated 20 April 1786 states that he was from New Fairfield, Fairfield County, Connecticut. One has to wonder if the teller of the story is geographically challenged.

Connecticut is not Virginia and never the twain will meet. Have I yet mentioned that Vermont is not Pennsylvania, nor do the two share a border? That James Leach was indeed from New Fairfield Connecticut is further evidenced by the probate record of Danuel Prindle dated 16 April 1774 wherein he bequeaths to his daughter, Mary, wife of James Leach a portion of his land.

The Barbour Collection of Connecticut Town Vital Records: Windham lists the children of Amos Leach and Mercy Martin married at Windham, Connecticut 16 May 1728. Their children are listed as: Amos born 8 December 1730, Ebenezer born 16 January 1741; Ephraim born 8 July 1744; James born 12 August 1748; Jemima born 22 August 1743; Joanna born 24 May 1739; John born 10 August 1735; Mary born 1 October 1732; Sarah born 19 January 1736/7; and Simeon born 28 March 1746. Actually, the records show two male children of Amos and Mercy named James. The first born 12 March 1728/9 who died 19 September 1747. The next male child, named James, was born 12 August 1748. That indicates six male children, of whom five survived.

Windham lies approximately 100 miles east of New Fairfield. Nine miles north of New Fairfield is Sherman. Two miles south of Sherman lies "Leach Hollow." According to the "Report ***on the Geology of Connecticut***" (1842) James Gates Percival; p. 93 "... lying East of the Porphyritic range and of the S. part of the Kent Limestone Valley ... From the Southern extremity of the later and a valley (Leach's Hollow) opens S. into Neversink Swamp, early at the same point with Osborne's Hollow ..." It is likely in this vicinity that the Leach family resided when Amos, the father of James, passed on in 1762, and likely where Zebulon Leach was born in 1771.

The next record concerning James Leach is an entry in the records of the Merritt store at Quaker Hill, in the Beekman Patent where on 14 April 1767 James purchased a gallon of rum charged to the account of his brother Ebenezer Leach (***Settlers of the Beekman Patent***; Vol VII, p. 912). Could the "little brown jug" referred to in the Isaac Brock Leach narrative be a family heirloom, a remnant of this adventure?