

Gideon White Family Papers: Loyalists at Shelburne

*Introduction given by Eleanor Robertson Smith at the launching of the Gideon White Family Papers: Loyalists at Shelburne on 18 July 2008. Website
<http://www.gov.ns.ca/nsarm/virtual/white/>*

Peregrine White, the first born New England child of English parents, was born in a cabin on the Mayflower as she lay in the Cape Cod Harbour. His descendant Gideon White, one of Shelburne's founding fathers, was born in March 1753 in Plymouth, Massachusetts to Captain Gideon and Joanne Howland White. His mother was also a descendant of Mayflower passenger, John Howland.

Gideon, proud of his heritage, was both a **maker** and a **preserver** of history, as were his descendants. The papers of this "historically-minded" family were donated to the Public Archives of Nova Scotia in 1938. To-day, two hundred and forty –nine years after Captain Gideon White arrived in Shelburne his **varied, valued and unique** *Gideon White Family Papers: Loyalists at Shelburne* are presented in digitalized format to the delight of researchers of the prelude to the Revolution, the American Revolution era and the Loyalist era in Nova Scotia.

Captain Gideon White arrived in Shelburne in the spring of 1784 with twenty-two men of his Duke of Cumberland Regiment. He married at Christ Church, Shelburne, on 17 April 1787, Deborah Whitworth, daughter of Dr. Miles Whitworth of Boston. They had nine children all of whom lived to adulthood and descendants have continuously lived in Shelburne County.

In spite of natural disasters and adverse trade laws Gideon retained a positive attitude about Shelburne. A few months after his arrival Gideon wrote to a friend in Jamaica. ""You I suppose are Anxious to hear what kind of Situation we are in - in this Quarter - be assured it is dam'd hard 'tho in the Course of a few years it will be a very Eligible Situation. I am here securing my little Land &c - but shall not build 'till matters are better Regulated - We have about 15,000 Inhabitants here and but very little Justice, Owing to the misconduct or folly of those in power - In this Town are 2700 Houses - Above 2000 are framed - And business will soon be sprightly. the Whale and Cod fishys. are now attended too - One Whaleman has Arrived with 500 Barrels - next Year I expect to see great exertions - but at present every Man seems intent on a House, Wharfe, Stores &c."

This quote shows the importance of the papers. Guesstimates of the population range from 10 to 16,000. Also It is amazing the number of houses, twenty seven hundred, which were

built out of the forest in a year, on the other hand the comment about every man's ambition was to build a home , wharf and store led to one of the real problems in the settlement – the owners became real estate poor.

A friend from New York wrote to Gideon about the many erroneous reports that are circulated respecting your settlements – permit me to assure you that the present situation here is very unpleasant and our future prospects gloomy with the rents and enormous taxes we poor Tories have to pay.

There are details re shipments to and from the New England – for example White received a shipment on 20 October 1788, from Boston, of fourteen oxen aboard the sloop *Agnes*.

Examples of negligent government officials, hotly contested elections, patronage appointments, bartering fish in exchange for scarce salt, or clearing land in exchange for free rent of a property are provided. There are heart rendering descriptions of the fifteen days of disastrous forest fires in 1792. Gideon White described a dreadful scene of desolation and added - When you are informed that fifty Dwelling Houses besides Mills Barns and other Outhouse are destroyed - which belonged to the Loyal Industries Husbandmen who have for Nine Years been contending with this unfriendly Soil - to gain a subsistence - to have all these Labour and Prospects blasted in One Hour - I say knowing this to be fact - you may form some faint Idea of Shelburne" "such is my situation that it is impossible for ever to replace my Loss. This last stroke has completely knock'd down this Settlement, the 800 Negros who were carried to Sereia Leone was a serious loss but more so to me than any One - I had Eight Negro Families Tenants which had each a quantity of my Land and allow'd me rent - each had his House &c. those are all gone & the Houses destroyed - but the most serious matter is my Grist Mill - No Grist - enough of Dissagreeables - I will make the best of it - ".

Deborah, the wife of Gideon wrote to her son, Miles, "you would be hurt indeed to see the Distress of your native Town, occasioned by drough & fire...your Papa is out for the Night commanding Watch to Guard the Town, as fire is all round us, Dean is at the farm with a Party everything is out of the House (Distressing indeed) it would be a heavy stroke to your Father to Lose his House & orchard..."

These few examples of the 1561 items in this digitalized collection give you a bird's eye view of the contents. Some family researchers will find information they would prefer to ignore, all researchers will find useful data and statistics. Students at secondary, post secondary and graduate levels will be able to augment the official documents with additional facts, such as the purpose or need for the regulation and the reactions which follow from the implementation.

Gid White, whose distinctive signature is on many deeds and other records, served his community well in many capacities and has left a lasting contribution for the generations which follow him.

Gideon wrote a simple will on 13 April 1833 leaving unto my four sons Nathaniel Whitworth, Cornelius, John Dean Whitworth and Thomas Howland (Share and Share alike) to them and their heirs and assigns forever his real and personal estate. The epitaph on his Christ Church Cemetery gravestone reads: "He died in a good old age Full of years and honour".