

REVOLUTIONARY MOTHERS
“A Journey A Crosse Ye Wilderness”
CH 6- Loyalist Women in Exile
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Loyalist women usually ended up being guilty of treason by association. Their family prestige and associations with revolutionary leaders failed to protect them. For example, Esther Sewall whose husband was the Attorney general and Judge of the Vice Admiralty Courts, Jonathan Sewall, ended up having an enormous mob come to her home to try and kick her out. Although her sister had married John Hancock, and her husband was a great friend of John Adams, she was still exiled and was forced to leave to England where she spent the remainder of her days. Another example was Grace Galloway. She was the daughter of one of the wealthiest men in Philadelphia whose husband Joseph had helped the British in the occupation of Philadelphia. Grace was left behind by her husband- who fled to New York, in which her enormous estate in Philadelphia was confiscated, and she and her children were reduced to poverty and to find any place that would take her in. She tried repeatedly and defiantly for weeks to stay in her home until she was thrown out. No one would come to her rescue.¹

Committees of Safety sprung up through the colonies to enforce loyalty to the patriotic cause. Loyalist women had few choices in which they could try to seek refuge with the British, or to flee to areas outside of revolutionary control. Their husbands often left home to enlist in the British army, and these women were left to fend off the hatred that was supposed to be directed at their absent husbands. Many women suffered violence and destruction of their homes by mobs. Parents often turned against their own children. Elizabeth Bowman was one such example. Her husband and oldest son were taken prisoner, and her parents refused to take her in. She and 5 other women, along with their 31 kids were rescued by a British officer near Niagara, where only one pair of shoes was found amongst them all.²

Many women chose to leave than be persecuted in their communities. In New York and New England, many upper class Loyalist women petitioned local Patriot leaders to let them have safe passage to British territory. If allowed to go, they could only take few possessions, and would have to leave behind sons that were 12 and older for the Patriot army. Smaller children were also left behind because there was little chance for their survival on the arduous journey. This also became a threat for patriot security. Should they be allowed to join up with their traitorous husbands providing hope and morale, and what about intelligence? If the women were allowed to stay, they would be a drain on the economy. If the women lost their home, the city would be responsible for their welfare. Sometimes it was better to keep the women as bargaining chips in exchange for Patriot prisoners. In New York, an Act of Attainder was passed in 1779. It said that anyone that was disloyal to the Revolution was guilty of a felony. Any woman caught supplying information, giving food and shelter, etc. to any traitor would be jailed. This left their children to fend for themselves. Many Loyalist women openly defied this act and a few were even willing to engage in criminal acts.³

¹ Carol Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 92-94.

² *ibid*, 97-98.

³ *ibid*, 100-100.

For Loyalist women that tried to flee, where they went depended on their social class, regions, and even their husband's wishes. The wealthy ended up settling back in England. The majority of the middle-class ended up in Canada. Almost 50,000 exiles ended up in a place that they knew nothing about while longing for home. Women of modest means ended up in tents or make-shift cabins during the cold Canadian winter where there was hardly any resources, but it was better that what they had just experienced back in the colonies being treated as traitors by association. Many of the wealthier families fared much better living in Halifax, Nova Scotia. They were able to pick up where their lives left off, although their circumstances were much more rudimentary than before.⁴

Whether guilty by association or whether these women actually had Loyalist sentiments, many of them just had to make do of the situations that were handed them. They fought for what they thought was right but most of all to protect themselves and their families, even if it meant moving from the place they called home to another unfamiliar country.

⁴ *ibid*, 104-106.