

## ■ MYSTERY ANCESTOR NIGHT

# American-Canadian relations could begin to get rocky

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Northumberland Today

COBOURG — Though the Revolutionary War had ended by late in the 18th century, tensions between Patriots and Loyalists brought disruption well into the 19th century.

Examples can be found among some of the forebears of members of the Lakeshore Genealogical Society, as told in presentations by several members at their annual Mystery Ancestor Night in January.

The Ash family's involvement in the Cobourg Conspiracy is an example cited by Ron Smith, one of those raids that Patriots conducted against Canadian Loyalists for years.

On the other hand, a Cobourg resident, Samuel P. Hart had lost his printing press to Loyalists because of his Reform sympathies for William Lyon Mackenzie. Hart fled to the United States and recruited Patriots to plan his revenge.

On July 27, 1838, the schooner *Guernsey* left Oswego, N.Y., carrying a trunkful of weapons (not including the pistols and bowie knives the men carried), plus matches and bottles of turpentine.

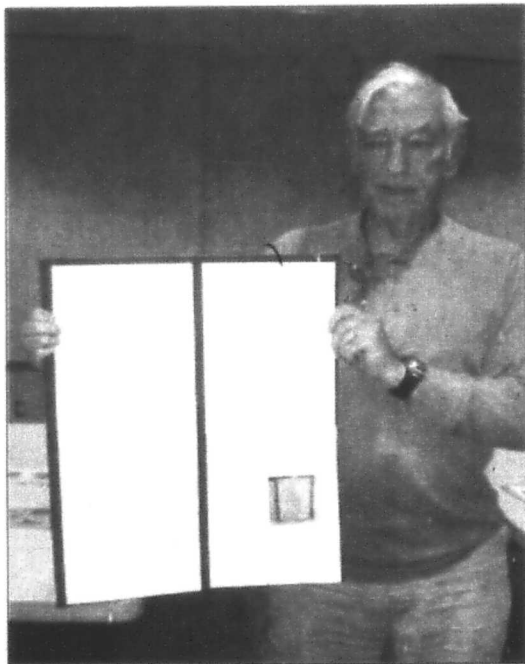
The ship was ostensibly bound for Niagara, but it headed for Cobourg instead. The talk was that Cobourg was to be burned, after the bank had been robbed and two or three individuals plundered or murdered.

Upon landing, Hart made contact with the Joseph Ash family.

As one delay after another foiled their scheme, conspirator Henry I. Moon had second thoughts and warned D'Arcy Boulton of the plans. The Ash home was raided, and Hart and Joseph Ash and his son Joseph were among those captured.

It was accepted that the Ashes played only a minor role in the skirmish, but there was little sympathy for the Patriots arrested.

Surprisingly, it was Boulton who served as defence counsel at their Sept. 13 trial. It took only 17 hours, followed by only a few minutes of jury deliberation, to



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The 1839 Cobourg Conspiracy, in which his third great uncle Joe Ash harboured the American Patriots (or pirates, depending on your point of view) and served six months for his crime, was the mystery clue presented by Ron Smith.

earn Samuel Hart a sentence of seven years' hard labour. Joseph Ash Sr. got six months in jail, and Joseph Jr. 12 months.

The Cobourg Star called the sentences "trivial in comparison with their crime."

The article went on to say, "so ended another atrocious attempt of the American pirates to murder and pillage the inhabitants of this unfortunate country, under cloak of assisting us to obtain the blessings of responsible government recommended by Lord Durham."

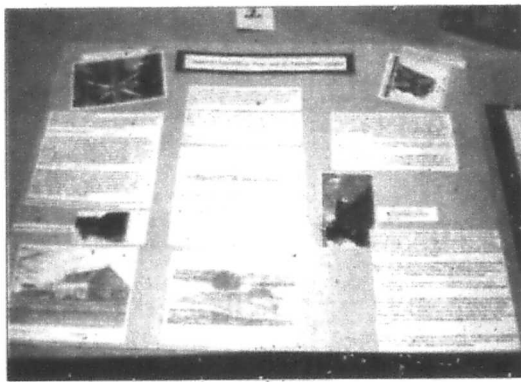
After their sentences, the Ashes moved — Joe Sr. to Oshawa, where he spent the rest of his days, and Joe Jr. probably to

Michigan.

Carol Evans told the story of Associated Loyalist Peter Van Alstine, her fifth-great-grandfather, who also came out of the conflicts on the short end.

Associated Loyalists were members of temporary companies formed under military supervision to facilitate the evacuation of New York City at the end of the Revolutionary War in 1783. But he was move involved in this seven-year conflict than that.

Peter, who came from a moneyed Tory family, married a woman from a Whig family. He was a magistrate when Patriots were causing trouble in the area



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Lakeshore Genealogical Society member Richard Randall nailed the connection between Carol Evans and her fifth-great-grandfather Peter Van Alstine, an Associated Loyalist who ultimately settled in the Adolphustown area.

of Kinderhook. He ended up among a group that was jailed 17 days for no written reason. Upon his release, he went underground and managed to arrange certain incidents that made life difficult for the Patriots. A 100-pound price was put on his head, dead or alive.

Peter put together a group of men to offer their services to John Burgoyne, the British Army officer. He accepted them as batteaux men, who would take on the arduous and dangerous task of providing a food-supply line for the army. They especially made easy targets for the Patriots when they were in the water, and not all the batteaux men survived.

While he served, his farm and home were confiscated, leaving his wife and children at the mercy of friends and family for support.

When Burgoyne finally surrendered at Saratoga, all the sailors, batteauxmen and drivers attached to the Canadian supply line (including Peter) were sent to Canada.

In 1777, Peter was listed as a captain in a Return of Conventioneer in Quebec City. The following summer, he

returned with most of his batteauxmen to New York, where the group formed under Abraham Cyster's Corp on Long Island. Peter was a major in Cyster's Corps at Smithtown, where his wife and children joined him to work a small holding. The Patriots again stripped them of all their gains, another great personal loss.

The largest group of Loyalists settled in Canada's Eastern provinces. A small group of Associated Loyalists headed for Kingston in July 1783. Major Peter's group of 194 (72 men, 45 women, 62 children and 15 servants) departed on Sept. 6 — he would have left sooner but for "recurring difficulty of trying to obtain financial compensation for his activities under General Burgoyne."

The group spent the winter in barracks in Sorel, with little in the way of blankets, clothing or food from General Sir Frederick Haldimand.

On May 24, 1784, all were mustered and sent to Montreal to be set into batteaux (with the necessary supplies to follow). Peter's group headed for Adolphustown, though he asked to stay behind with his ailing wife Alida to care

for their children until all could be well enough to travel. Haldimand denied his request, and he was ordered to Adolphustown.

He got as far as Montreal, on June 7, when he turned back. He discovered his children stricken with measles and his wife dying. She passed away Aug. 3, and only three of his five children survived.

Peter went on to Adolphustown, where he settled on a 170-acre plot of land. He built the early mills at Lake On The Mountain which, according to records, were grist and carding mills built in 1796. He also built the stone mills at the Marysburg ferry landing and was the earliest ferry owner at Glenora.

He became a magistrate again, traveling between Adolphustown and Kingston to serve on the Court of Quarter Sessions for both towns. He was also on the land boards for Lennox & Addington, Hastings and Prince Edward County, and was part of the first elected assembly in 1792.

Eventually Peter would stand before the British commissioners to request compensation. He had suffered enormous losses. He testified that the Patriots had confiscated 600 acres of land in Kinderhook, a brick house worth 400 pounds, three enslaved Africans, 20 sheep, 20 cattle, six horses, 10 hogs, sacks of grain and a sled. Although he had three deeds and his father's will with him, the compensation board still demanded that a witness verify his claim.

It is widely written that he died in 1811, though other documents give that date as 1800. It is thought that he was laid to rest in the Loyalist burying ground near the spot of their first arrival at Adolphustown.

There is no surviving painting or picture of Peter, but he is described as a stout, robust man of Dutch extraction with a dark complexion, not of military bearing.

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