

PLYMOUTH IN THE REVOLUTION: **The Plymouth Homefront**

The Wreck of the *General Arnold*, 1778

Plymouth's worst shipwreck occurred over Christmas of 1778, when the American privateer *General Arnold* wrecked in Plymouth Harbor.

The inhabitants of this town were called to witness a catastrophe, truly appalling to humanity. The brig General Arnold, mounting 20 guns, having a crew of 105 men and boys, commanded by Captain James Magee of Boston, sailed from that port on Thursday, the 24th December, found on a cruise. On Friday, anchored off Plymouth harbor, being destitute of a pilot. In the night heavy gale drove her on the White Flat. She soon filled with water... A tremendous storm of wind and snow came on, and a considerable number of men died on Saturday afternoon and in the night...



Mug recovered from the *General Arnold*

On Monday [December 28], the inhabitants passed over the ice to the wreck. Here was presented a scene unutterably awful and distressing. It is scarcely possible for the human mind to conceive of a more appalling spectacle. The ship was sunk ten feet in the sand, the waves had been for about 36 hours sweeping the main deck, the men had crowded to the quarter deck, and even there they were obliged to pool together dead bodies to make room for the living.

70 dead bodies frozen into all imaginable postures were strewed over the deck... Those bodies that were to be deposited in coffins were first put into the town brook; a considerable number were floating on the water, fastened by ropes, that their form might be made to conform to the coffin. But about 60 were thrown into a large pit... on the southwest side of the

burial ground.

Joanna White Winslow (c1744-1829)

I am told... that there can be no difficulty in obtaining a grant of land and rations for myself and two little girls ...

You are aware of the sacrifices Mr. Winslow made to his loyalty. I was just on the point of going to Nova Scotia when news reached me that a violent fever had ended Mr. Winslow's life, which ... sunk me into despair...

Here I have no prospect but beggary - every article of furniture taken.

Joanna White Winslow to cousin Benjamin Marston in Nova Scotia, 1783

Many women were left in difficult circumstances when their husbands left for war. Joanna White Winslow, wife of banished Tory Pelham Winslow, suffered when her husband was declared an enemy of the state. Pelham, nephew of Loyalist Edward Winslow Senior, was a barrister who had made a reputation for himself as "an obnoxious Tory." He had fled to Boston to serve with the Loyalist forces at the beginning of the war, leaving Joanna to support their two young daughters. After being declared an enemy of the state in 1778, Major Winslow's possessions, including his law books and dining room table, were confiscated.

After her husband's death in New York in 1783, Joanna took her children to Nova Scotia, entreating Loyalist relatives to help her find a means of support. She returned to Plymouth a few years later and opened a millinery shop in her parents' house. Her daughter Mary married distant cousin Henry Warren, son of Plymouth Patriots James and Mercy Warren. Their marriage helped to heal a family which had been torn apart by war.

Polly Watson Hutchinson (1754-1803)

Joy to my dear Polly - Joy to myself - Joy to this happy morn, which blest the world and me, with a child like thee. When we look back, one or two years only, what cause for gratitude! what shall we say then to seventeen Years full of goodness?

The war separated parents from children, husbands from wives. The Hutchinsons were separated by the Atlantic Ocean for many years. Elisha Hutchinson of Boston and Mary ("Polly") Watson of Plymouth were married in 1772, when Polly was only 18. The couple was very much in love as can be seen from Elisha's letters.

The couple had strong ties to local Loyalists -- Polly's grandfather was the unpopular Judge Peter Oliver, and Elisha's father was Massachusetts Royal Governor Thomas Hutchinson. Elisha was disliked because his father had named him one of the official distributors of Boston tea. The couple's family connections made them very unpopular with Patriots in Plymouth. When they visited Polly's parents there in January of 1774, an unruly mob surrounded the Watson house and demanded that the couple leave immediately, in spite of a fierce snow storm.

Later that year, Elisha sailed for England for financial reasons. Polly, who was pregnant with their second child, stayed in Plymouth with her parents. Their daughter Margaret was born in 1774. Soon after, Polly returned to Boston. Even though he was homesick for New England, Elisha was unable to return because of his Loyalist politics. Polly, who had served as president of a club of Loyalist women while trapped in besieged Boston, finally joined her husband in England in 1777. Margaret stayed in Plymouth with her grandparents until the end of the war.

After the war, the Hutchinsons lived for a while in France, then returned to England and settled near the Olivers. They never went back to Massachusetts.

Townpeople suffered as the wartime economy went from bad to worse. Continental currency plummeted in value. Sarah Sever of Kingston wrote to her father William in January of 1776 "I almost despair of the means of Subsistence by the Calamitys of the times." Inflation was so bad that a farmer was said to have sold a cow for \$40 in the spring and then paid \$40 that fall to buy a goose for Thanksgiving! In 1777, the Provincial Congress met to fix prices to "prevent monopolies and oppression."

Voted to raise the sum of twelve hundred pounds Lawfull money for supplying the Soldiers and their Familys with the necessarys of life as they want agreeable to a late order of the General Court.

Records of the Town of Plymouth, August 24, 1779

Many families endured hardship with husbands and fathers away at war. More than 600 soldiers from the Plymouth army served in the military. Several towns were obliged to provide assistance for needy families of soldiers.