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THE AMERICAN LOYALISTS IN THE BAHAMA ISLANDS: WHO THEY WERE

by THELMA PETERS

THE AMERICAN LOYALISTS who moved to the Bahama Islands at the close of the American Revolution were from many places and many walks of life so that classification of them is not easy. Still, some patterns do emerge and suggest a prototype with the following characteristics: a man, either first or second generation from Scotland or England, Presbyterian or Anglican, well-educated, and "bred to accounting." He was living in the South at the time of the American Revolution, either as a merchant, the employee of a merchant, or as a slave-owning planter. When the war came he served in one of the volunteer provincial armies of the British, usually as an officer. During the war, when the Patriots proscribed him and confiscated his property, he moved to East Florida and then found he had to make a second move as Florida was returned to Spain in 1783.

Lydia Austin Parrish's study¹ of eighty southern Loyalist families deals largely with the aristocratic planter-merchant class since she was guided by the availability of records, and educated people tend to leave more written records than do uneducated people. Of the eighty heads of families or leading individuals in this study the birthplaces of forty-six were established with reasonable accuracy. Twelve were born in Scotland, nine in England, two in the British West Indies, and twenty-three in the American colonies, eight in the North, and fifteen in the South. Most of the American-born were only one generation removed from the "Old Country." The Scottish parents of some of them had left Scotland after an abortive revolution in 1735. All eighty were of either Scottish or English ancestry with the exception of the following: Isaac Baillou, of French descent; David Zubly, born in Georgia, the son of a distinguished Swiss minister of

1. Lydia Austin Parrish, "Records of Some Southern Loyalists, Being a collection of manuscripts about some eighty families, most of whom immigrated to the Bahamas during and after the American Revolution," hereafter cited as Parrish MSS. A microfilm copy of this typed manuscript is in the Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida. The original is in the Harvard Library.

Savannah, John Joachim Zubly; John and James Armbrister of South Carolina, who claimed to be Polish with ancestry going back to Thaddeus of Warsaw; and William Wyllly, Irish.

Six of the eighty went to the Bahamas early in the war and some of these left temporarily when the Spanish gained control of Nassau in 1781. At least six others went elsewhere than to the Bahamas at the time of the evacuation, were dissatisfied, and then moved to the Bahamas. Mrs. Parrish, who was able to establish the place of death of seventy-three of the eighty, found that fifty-two died in the Bahamas, three in England (one of whom was merely there on a visit from the Bahamas), one in Scotland, four in the West Indies, and thirteen in the United States. Most of the eighty became planters in the Bahamas, since all were eligible for land grants and the desire to raise cotton amounted almost to a mania. Many of these had little aptitude and less training for agriculture, and lived in Nassau as business men, lawyers, or government officials, at least a part of the year, entrusting their plantations to overseers. Among the eighty were three medical doctors, one surgeon, one cabinet maker, two ship captains, one mariner, and one school teacher, the latter doubling as an auctioneer. The superimposing of this essentially landlubber culture upon that of the canny but uneducated seafaring Bahamians, the Conchs, led to inevitable conflict, some traces of which remain to this day.

The Parrish study does not include the humbler Loyalists, the soldiers and the free Negroes, most of whom arrived in the Bahamas from New York. These settled at Abaco, one of the northern islands, where, as long as the free food lasted, they showed a reluctance to undertake the arduous task of clearing the land. Some of the Southern slave-owning Loyalists also settled at Abaco in 1783 but most of them soon left it for the more hospitable islands farther south. The humbler ones, with no capital with which to follow the lure of cotton to the "plantation" islands south of Nassau, remained in the temperate northern islands and intermarried with the Conchs. In the long run they learned to adjust to the only practical economy of the Bahamas, one directly or indirectly tied to the sea, better than the cotton planters did, for ultimately the latter failed.

Among the Loyalists who remained in the northern islands and intermarried with the Conchs was the Curry family. Joseph

Curry moved to America from Glasgow, Scotland, about 1750 and became deputy surveyor of South Carolina. He died during the American Revolution and following the war five of his sons, Joseph, John, Richard, Benjamin, and William, moved to the Bahamas. Jane Curry, the mother, and her younger son, Stephan, believed to have been too young to have provoked Patriot displeasure, remained in South Carolina. All the numerous Currys in the Bahamas today, and some of them in South Florida, are said to go back to these five Loyalist brothers.²

William Curry settled in Nassau and became a merchant. At first his four brothers lived at Harbour Island, a small north-eastern satellite of Eleuthera. Sometime after 1790 Richard and Benjamin, both of whom had married Conchs, moved to Green Turtle Cay, Abaco. Jane Curry, the first child of Benjamin and Mary Curry, was born at Green Turtle Cay February 14, 1793. A son, Benjamin, was born at Green Turtle Cay December 24, 1796. This Benjamin Curry married a Conch, Martha Albury, and their son, William Curry, was born at Green Turtle Cay September 11, 1821. This William Curry moved to Key West, Florida, in 1837 and became a leading citizen of Key West for almost fifty years. He was a merchant, a shipbuilder, a wrecker, and a public official and was known as "Rich Bill" or "Florida's first millionaire."³ During the nineteenth century many others from the northern islands, Abaco and Eleuthera, moved to Key West where their traits of sobriety and sturdiness, their knowledge of the sea, of wrecking, and of shipbuilding, made them substantial citizens.

Except for a few Conch "squatters" Abaco and its off-shore islands were uninhabited when the New York refugees arrived there in 1783. Some of the early towns established by the newcomers were Carleton, named for Sir Guy Carleton, the general in charge of the evacuation of all British forces from America; Maxwell, named for the Bahamian governor at that time; Marsh Harbour; and Spencer's Bight. All of these except Marsh Harbour have disappeared. Green Turtle Cay, Abaco, was also settled by "Yankee" refugees and their influence on this island is seen in the name of their town, New Plymouth. Abaco and

2. William Curry Harlee, *Kinfolks, A Genealogical and Biographical Record* (New Orleans, 1935), II, 1504.

3. *Ibid.*, II, 1614.

its surrounding islands have been compared to coastal New England. The people who still live there have qualities of ruggedness and resourcefulness often associated with Yankee sailors. Aloof, fiercely independent, scornful of racial mixtures, these all-white islanders still get their main livelihood from the sea, though they also maintain fruit lots and kitchen gardens. Small, tidy frame houses, picket fences, clean-swept narrow streets and tiny flower gardens suggest a Cape Cod village. A recent article in the *Miami Herald Sunday Magazine* described New Plymouth Town as "an austere community given over to frequent church-going and simple pleasures" where families still bake their own bread and where automobiles are unknown.⁴

Among the northern settlers of Abaco was Philip Dumaresq, former captain of a Loyalist privateer, the *Young Eagle*, and the son of a well-known Boston Loyalist, Sylvester Dumaresq. Soon after arriving at Abaco Philip Dumaresq was made justice of the peace by Governor John Maxwell so that he could the better defend himself and other settlers against the "Blackguards," who were presumably the Conch squatters and beachcombers who resented the intrusion of the Loyalists. Philip wrote his father that the soil was so shallow and light and the sun so hot upon the rocks as to burn the vegetables. He also said the settlers were poor, had little fresh meat, and that he found them uncongenial.⁵ Like many other disillusioned refugees Dumaresq soon moved away from Abaco in search of "greener pastures." He settled in Nassau where in 1789 he was appointed receiver-general and treasurer.⁶ That his life had been a modest one may be inferred from the small value of his estate when it was appraised, September 22, 1801. The total value was only 177 pounds and that included one slave worth 60 pounds.⁷

Political feuds between the Conchs and the established colonial government on the one side and a majority of the Loyalists on the other side lasted for about thirteen years and resulted in eventual victory for the Loyalists. Those refugees who

4. Mike Morgan "Green Turtle Cay, Bahama Isle Harbors Loyalists from America:" *Miami Herald Sunday Magazine*, October 25, 1959.

5. Wilbur H. Siebert, *The Legacy of the American Revolution to the British West Indies and Bahaamas, A Chapter out of the History of American Loyalists* (Columbus, Ohio, 1913), 25.

6. *Ibid.*, 24-25.

7. Registry Office Records, Nassau, Bahamas, O, 299. Hereafter cited as Bahamas, Reg. Of.

represented "the rich, the well-born and the able," many of whom had held office in the American colonies, were determined to gain power in the Bahamas. They succeeded but only after plots and counterplots which brought the downfall of two successive governors, John Maxwell and John, Earl of Dunmore.

Dunmore had been Virginia's last royal governor. His overbearing manner had alienated the Virginians and he was no more popular in the Bahamas except with a small clique who shared in his various schemes to grow rich. Dunmore managed to get his salary doubled, to give himself large grants of crown land, and to get a cut from ship salvage and from various fees. The more responsible element of the Loyalists, a group organized under the name of the Board of American Loyalists, finally gained enough power in 1796 to bring an end to the ten year "reign" of Dunmore.

The Board of American Loyalists was composed of East Florida refugees, especially those who were a part of the trading company of Panton, Leslie or friendly with the partners of this company. This Board was organized in Nassau in 1784 "to preserve and maintain those Rights and Liberties for which they had left their homes and possessions."⁸ The president was James Hepburn, formerly of Cumberland County, North Carolina. On at least one occasion the Board met at the home of William Panton in Nassau. At this meeting in May, 1785, the Board asked the governor to dissolve the Assembly and call a new election so that the newcomers might have a chance to be represented. The petition drawn up by the Board concluded with these words: "Resolved: That we do not consider ourselves represented in the present Assembly, and, of course not bound by any laws they may think proper to pass."⁹ The petition was signed by twenty-two Loyalists including John Wood, William Moss, James Hepburn, Peter Dean, John M. Tattnell, and John Wells, all of whom were to play important roles in the future business and political affairs of the Bahamas.

One of these men, John Wells, published the only newspaper in the colony and through the pages of this paper the Loyalists could express their grievances. One writer who signed himself "A True Patriot" and whose letter appeared in the *Bahama*

8. Bahamas, Reg. Of., M, 146.

9. *Bahama Gazette*, May 14, 1785.

Gazette, April 2, 1785, sardonically suggested a new motto for the Bahamas: "By wrangling and jangling, a country prospers." He must have had tongue in cheek when he suggested giving prizes to people "who by their violence, virulence, petulance, impertinence, partiality, locality, scurrility, and personality are best calculated to keep up a true and laudable spirit of faction in this much neglected and unbefriended country."

At the time of the general evacuation the partners of Panton, Leslie and Company, with the exception of John Leslie, moved to Nassau with as much of their inventory as they could manage to take with them. They secured a harbor-front lot in Nassau and soon opened a store. The *Bahama Gazette* for October 7, 1784, carried an advertisement for this company, offering for sale: "Porter in Barrels and Bottles, Beef, Pork, Tongues, and Tripe, together with a large assortment of European and East India goods."

The partners, William Alexander, William Panton, and Thomas Forbes were all in Nassau and all received crown grants of land. John Forbes, the younger brother of Thomas Forbes, was there also but he was only fourteen at the time of the evacuation and was not made a part of the company until 1792. William Panton returned to Florida in 1785, to run the store in Pensacola, but Alexander lived out his life in the Bahamas and the Forbes brothers continued to direct the Nassau branch of the business which came to be known as Forbes, Munro and Company.

A rival trading company was composed of John Miller, Broomfield Bonnamy, and William Augustus Bowles and had the backing of Governor Dunmore. The Miller Company was determined to destroy the Panton Company's Indian trade in Florida. The numerous clashes between the two companies in Florida were reflected in social and political division in Nassau. Panton, Leslie and Company had one big advantage, a special license from the Spanish government. The Miller Company could only operate illegally, running schooners into isolated Florida harbors.

West Floridian refugees in the Bahamas were generally snubbed by the merchant-planter East Florida Loyalists. Some West Floridians were humble people but others considered themselves as good as any East Floridian and resented being regarded as inferior. This snub may account for the fact that some of the

West Floridians lined up first with the rascally Maxwell and then with Maxwell's successor, Dunmore. Because they supported the government clique several West Floridians were soon given public positions in the Bahamas. John Miller, who had been a merchant in Pensacola before the evacuation, was appointed to the Bahama Council by Governor Maxwell in 1785. Michael Grant, who had been a British army doctor in West Florida, was appointed commissary by Dunmore in 1788 and also held the positions of member of the Council and vice-admiralty judge until his death in 1797.

That Grant had a variety of interests and hobbies may be inferred from an appraisal of his estate. Among the possessions which he left were:

- 1 microscope
- 1 Spanish dictionary
- 1 fiddle case
- 1 lot of music books
- 1 box of paints complete
- 4 Vols. Blackstone's *Commentaries*
- Shakespeare's Works
- Montesquieu, 4 Vols.
- Abbe Baynal, 6 Vols.
- Swift's Works, 13 Vols.
- Plutarch's Lives, 6 Vols.
- Prints with elegant frames
- 1 lot of bird cages
- 1 printing machine
- 2 cases of chirurgical instruments ¹⁰

That Grant also practiced his profession when occasion arose is borne out by his own words. He stated in a public record of manumission, 1796, that he had delivered his Negro woman, Betty, of a male mulatto child "which Moment I emancipated him on account of the regard I had for his father, that he should never be a slave to any person whatever."¹¹ In the opinion of the East Florida Loyalist Grant was never anything but a quack doctor.¹²

Another Loyalist who held office in the Bahamas was Adam Chrystie, once a wealthy planter of West Florida. From the evacuation until 1790 Chrystie lived in his native Scotland in

10. Bahamas, Reg. Of., E/2, 21-25.

11. Parrish MSS, 350.

12. *Ibid.*, 348.

reduced circumstances. From 1790 until shortly before his death in 1812 he served as secretary of the Bahamas and also as a member of the Council. At the time of his arrival in Nassau he wrote to George Chalmers, the Bahamian colonial agent in London, concerning conditions in the islands. He wrote:

When I arrived in the Province I found two violent and indecent factions, with which no honest man could at all times act, one headed by the governor and the other by the chief justice. They were agreed only in one thing, which was to do me all the mischief in their power and drive me out of the Province if possible. I was therefore prosecuted, fined, imprisoned; and my office rendered of no value.¹³

The governor to whom Chrystie referred was Dunmore and the chief justice was Stephan Delancey, the latter a member of a prominent Loyalist family of New York. Although by birth, position, and education Chrystie should have belonged to the "aristocratic element," the merchant-planter Loyalists, he was snubbed by this faction and this was no doubt galling to him. Three Loyalist judges, Delancey, John Martin, and Robert Sterling, fined him 200 pounds for extortion and malpractice in office. Chrystie asserted his innocence in a letter to the public in the *Bahama Gazette*, September 5, 1791. He declared that he did not intend to alter his conduct in any respect, nor submit to being defrauded of the offices which he held "whatever may be the Opinion of my Prosecutors, respecting the Impropriety and Illegality of my Conduct."

The unfriendly attitude of the East Floridians toward Chrystie may have been due to the fact he came from West Florida or it may have been due to Chrystie's tendency to lean toward the governor. Though sometimes friendly with Dunmore, nonetheless Chrystie did quarrel with the governor. On one occasion Dunmore took the official seal away from Chrystie because the latter would not apply it to a paper which he considered dishonest. Not until his death, which occurred in 1812 shortly after he had retired to Scotland, did anything good seem to be said of Chrystie. Then the *Royal Gazette*, April 19, 1812, eulogized him in the following words:

In this Gentleman, to the acquirements of the accomplished scholar were added the greatest integrity in his official

13. *Ibid.*, 205.

capacities, and the most pleasing and agreeable manners in private life. His worth being generally known, his loss will be as generally regretted in this community.

The East Floridians gradually gained some government positions. Henry Yonge, a London-born, English-trained lawyer who had held the position of Attorney General in East Florida, was appointed clerk of the Council in Nassau soon after he arrived there in the general evacuation. One of Yonge's duties was to receive the memorials of his fellow refugees regarding their Josses and claims and transmit these to the British Government.¹⁴ In 1786 Yonge was appointed secretary, a position he held until his death March 30, 1790. Afterwards this position went to Adam Chrystie.¹⁵ In 1786 Yonge was also made a notary, an appointment made by the Archbishop of Canterbury because the Church appointed all notaries. In taking his oath Yonge had to swear allegiance to King George III and renounce as a "damnable doctrine" the idea that the Pope or any authority of Rome had any "Ecclesiastical or Spiritual power in this realm."¹⁶ He also had to swear that he would never be a party to fraud. Yonge received a crown grant of 400 acres on the island of Exuma.

Henry Yonge's daughter, Alicia Maria, married at Nassau John Armstrong, the son of William Armstrong, a Loyalist from North Carolina who was one of the East Florida refugees. John Armstrong became a highly respected attorney in Nassau and at one time served as Solicitor General.¹⁷ The Henry Yonge mentioned in Bahamian records after 1790 must have been the son of the first Yonge and the brother of Alicia Maria. The younger Henry Yonge married Elizabeth Bellinger, a Loyalist from South Carolina whose uncle was Edmund Bellinger, the second Carolina landgrave.¹⁸

In 1789 Peter Edwards, a Loyalist from Georgia and East Florida, was elected clerk of the Assembly. Later he became a judge. His thirty years of service in the Bahamian government was marked by common sense and integrity. Georgia finally repealed the edict of banishment against him but he refused to

14. *Ibid.*, 31.

15. Bahamas, Reg. Of., M, 370.

16. Bahamas, Reg. Of., M, 270.

17. Parrish MSS., 101.

18. *Ibid.*, 452.

return to the United States.¹⁹ Daniel McKinnon, who visited the Bahamas in 1803, found Edwards doubling as judge in at least two courts, an inferior court and a vice-admiralty court. He reported Edwards as "an amiable and very estimable gentleman of the profession."²⁰

Three Armbrister brothers, James, John, and Henry, once of Charleston, went to the Bahamas from East Florida. From that day until this the Armbristers have been prominent in positions of leadership in the Bahamas. For twenty years James Armbrister was assistant to the secretary or registrar general as the office was also called. He was the assistant of Adam Chrystie. That Armbrister and Chrystie were friends as well as government associates may be inferred from the fact that Armbrister named his son Robert Chrystie. This son, Robert Chrystie Armbrister,* and Alexander Arbuthnot, a Bahamian merchant, were the two men executed by Andrew Jackson in Florida in 1818 as an example to other Indian traders and filibusterers who were keeping Florida in turmoil.

The Bahamians were stunned by the execution of Arbuthnot and Armbrister and James Armbrister, the heart-broken father of Robert, called it a "flagitious mockery of justice."²¹ Robert was described as an intelligent, fine-looking boy of about twenty. The *Royal Gazette* of June 17, 1818, stated that Arbuthnot went to Florida to sell drygoods and to pick up some skins and corn, valued at 4,000 pounds, which had been stored for him at an Indian village but which Jackson had discovered and seized. As for Armbrister the *Gazette* stated:

It is well known here that Mr. Armbrister did not take any arms with him - Powder in small quantity he might have had - and how is an Indian to hunt or even exist without it? Mr. Armbrister was a high-spirited young man, and his pursuits probably were not of a mercantile nature - he had

* *Editor's Note:* In most American records, textbooks, and biographies of Andrew Jackson, the man's name is Robert C. Ambnster. In the English and Bahamian records, the name is Armbrister. Tracking down the source of the error (Andrew Jackson?) might make an interesting project for a historian or interested student of history.

19. *Ibid.*, 253-260.

20. Daniel McKinnon, *A Tour through the British West Indies, in the years 1802 and 1803, giving a Particular Account of the Bahama Islands* (London, 1804), 225.

21. P. W. D. Armbrister, handwritten manuscript in Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida.

served along with the Indians under Colonel Nicholls in the late War and bore a commission in the Royal Colonial Marines. He made friends with the Indians and being taken with them became a sacrifice to the revenge of the American General. . . .

This atrocious act, we trust, will not be overlooked by our government, and the perpetrator brought to that just punishment which he deserves.

When Alexander Wyly, one-time speaker of the colonial assembly of Georgia, was attainted and suffered confiscation of property he fled with his family first to the West Indies and then to the Bahamas. His daughter, Susannah, about eighteen years old when they arrived in Nassau, soon married John Anderson, another Georgia refugee, who had served with a British volunteer division during the Revolution and had then received a grant of land at Long Island, Bahamas. John, who became a planter, and Susannah lived out their long lives in the Bahamas, John dying in 1838 and Susannah in 1845. Both are buried in the cemetery which surrounds St. Matthews Church in Nassau. Together their two tombstones contain about three hundred words of biographical information. Such tombstones are a boon to historians in contrast to noncommittal modern grave markers. The son of Susannah and John, George Anderson, became chief justice of the Bahamas.

But it was Susannah's brother, William Wyly, a former captain in the Carolina Rangers, who became the most controversial figure in Bahama politics for a period of thirty years. His hot Irish blood got him into trouble on more than one occasion. He held a number of government positions, one being the office of attorney general. At one time while attorney general Wyly fortified his beautiful three-storied mansion, known as "Clifton," with Negro slaves bearing arms in order to protect himself from arrest. The Assembly, exceeding its authority, had ordered his arrest because they thought he was secretly plotting with the mother country to end slavery in the Bahamas. A writer in the *Royal Gazette* of February 5, 1817, called Wyly's arming of his own slaves a "dreadful example to the slave population of these islands," and accused Wyly of stirring up the fires of insurrection at a time when "the West India Colonies tremble for their existence." The fear of the plantation owners in 1817 that their way of life was threatened was real and foreshadowed what did

happen in 1834. When Great Britain freed all the slaves in the empire the plantation system of the Bahamas crumbled completely.

William Wyly's brother, Alexander Campbell Wyly, once an Oxford student, returned to Georgia from the Bahamas about 1800. When he got a chilly reception at his old home, Savannah, he moved to St. Simon's Island and there ended his days in peace.

Among the Loyalist cotton planters in the Bahamas was an inventor who rivaled Eli Whitney. Like many inventors he remained unsung and is today forgotten. Joseph Eve, probably born in South Carolina, was living in Pennsylvania at the time of the American Revolution and was thought to have been a Quaker. He and his brother, Oswell Eve, moved to the Bahamas with the general evacuation and became cotton planters on Cat Island. At this time cotton was ginned by a simple instrument composed of two parallel rollers spiked with nails and turned in opposite directions by either a hand- or a foot-operated crank. Joseph Eve invented a machine turned by wind and he advertised that he could make one to be turned by cattle or even by water power where there was an inlet through which the tide flowed.²² Eve's machines must have been quite complex for they were costly. An appraisal of the "True Blue Estate" of William Moss in 1797 listed a "cotton machine of Eve's to go by wind or cattle" and put the value of 175 pounds.²³ Eve advertised that once a machine had been purchased he would keep it in repair at an annual rate of four guineas. The machine was able to gin upwards of 360 pounds of cotton in one day. A glowing testimonial to the efficiency of the machine was written by a fellow planter of Eve's, Charles Dames, and was published in the *Bahama Gazette* of May 1, 1794:

Dear Sir, . . . This is now the third year in which I have enjoyed the benefit of your most useful machine for cleaning Cotton. The favorable opinion I conceived of it on the first trial, must be in your recollection. . . . Preparing our Cotton for market was formerly considered as the most tedious, troublesome, and laborious part of the agricultural process in this country. To you we are indebted for its having been rendered pleasant, easy, and expeditious.

22. *Bahama Gazette*, November 28, 1793.

23. Bahamas, Reg. Of., E/2, 44.

Oswell Eve died at Cat Island in 1793 and Joseph Eve moved back to the United States about 1800. There was then no one to build the gin or to keep it in repair. According to the journal of a cotton planter in 1831 the ginning of cotton was again done by hand.²⁴

At least three Loyalists were shipbuilders. One of these was John Russell formerly a shipbuilder of St. Johns in East Florida. He moved all of his tools and equipment to the Bahamas in a brig of his own building, the *Live Oak*. Having located a good place for careening boats on Hog Island, across the harbor from Nassau, he established a shipyard. The others were William Begbie and Daniel Manson formerly of Hobcaw, South Carolina. According to the *Bahama Gazette* of March 5, 1785, Begbie and Manson launched a brigantine of 200 tons burden, the *Nassau*. The following year they completed a fine ship of 300 tons, the *Polly*, built for a Georgia mercantile company, Crookshanks and Spiers.²⁵ The *Polly* was the largest ship built in the Bahamas up to that time. Shortly after the *Polly* was finished Begbie and Manson apparently sold out their business to John Russell and returned to South Carolina.²⁶

During the time East Florida belonged to Britain one of the most important plantations was Rollestown located on the east bank of the St. Johns River near the present city of Palatka. The owner of this plantation was an English gentleman, Denys Rolle. At the time of the evacuation Rolle hired a scow, the *Peace and Plenty*, and moved slaves, livestock, dismantled houses, and other possessions to Exuma Island in the Bahamas. There two new plantations were established, Rolleville and Steventon. Denys Rolle's son, John Rolle, inherited the title, Lord of Stevenstone, from his uncle, Denys's older brother, who had no children of his own. In 1797, when Denys Rolle died in England, this son, Lord Rolle, inherited the plantation at Exuma. When Great Britain freed the slaves in 1834 Lord Rolle gave this property to the Negroes whom he had owned. All of them took the surname Rolle and it was the custom for all men marrying into the clan to also take that name.²⁷ Today several thousand Bahamian

24. Charles Farquharson, *A Relic of Slavery, Farquharson's Journal for 1831-32*, edited by Deans Peggs (Nassau, 1957), 13.

25. *Bahama Gazette*, February 4, 1786.

26. Parrish MSS, 133-134.

27. *Ibid.*, 4.

Negroes, and their relatives who have moved to Florida, bear the name of Rolle.

The most important single contribution of the Loyalists to the cultural life of the Bahamas was the *Bahama Gazette*, probably the first newspaper ever published in the islands. Its editor, John Wells, was among those who went to Nassau from St. Augustine. In the latter city from February 1, 1783, to March 22, 1784, he had published the *East Florida Gazette*.²⁸ John was the son of Robert Wells, a prominent publisher and bookseller of Charleston and a Loyalist who had fled to England at the beginning of the war and remained there, later becoming a successful London merchant. John's sister, Louisa Wells, who ran the Charleston publishing business after her father went into exile, and whose later escape to England is delightfully told in her journal,²⁹ later married one of her father's apprentice printers, Alexander Aikman. Louisa and her husband, also a Loyalist, moved to Jamaica where they published the *Royal Gazette*. Like a modern career woman Louisa understood the printing business almost as well as did her husband. Another member of the family, Charles Wells, brother of Louisa and John, was the one who actually moved the printing press from Charleston to St. Augustine and reassembled it with the aid of a Negro carpenter.³⁰ At the evacuation Charles went to Europe where he made a distinguished name for himself as a physician and scientist.

John Wells published the *Bahama Gazette* in Nassau from 1784 until his death in 1799. It was a four-page paper, in format identical to the *East Florida Gazette*, and was issued twice a week. Wells joined the Board of American Loyalists in Nassau and used his paper to publicize government abuses and to aid the Loyalists in their fight for political rights. The paper had an exceptionally good coverage of European and United States news and a high literary quality. One can, for instance, follow the French Revolution, the adoption of the Constitution of the United States, the visit of "Citizen" Genet to America, and other events in its pages. It was a kind of sustained beacon of culture

28. Douglas C. McMurtrie, "The Beginnings of Printing in Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XXIII (October, 1944), 67.

29. Louisa Susannah Aikman, *The Journal of a Voyage from Charleston, S.C., to London undertaken during the American Revolution by a daughter of an eminent American Loyalist in the year 1778* (New York, 1906).

30. "The Memoirs of Charles Wells," *Nassau Royal Gazette*, August 12, 1818.

in an environment which had long been indifferent to the rest of the world. It cannot be supposed that the Conchs admitted to an appreciation of this good newspaper, since their tendency was to regard all innovations with suspicion, but those who could read no doubt read it. To the Loyalists, who soon felt the dreary isolation of the Bahamas, especially after they had scattered to distant plantations, the *Bahama Gazette* was a valued link with the outside world and with one another. The newspaper had a representative to take subscriptions in each of the main islands and it is also interesting to note that the paper circulated in Charleston, Savannah, and Bermuda.

Although Wells opposed both Maxwell and Dunmore and was a strong advocate of reform he got the contract for government printing. He also ran a book and stationery store. Among the newly-received books advertised for sale in the *Bahama Gazette* of June 3, 1786, were the following:

- Hayley's Essay on Old Maids, 3 Vols.
- Gibbon's Roman Empire, 6 Vols.
- Rousseau's Confessions, 2 Vols.
- Rousseau's Works, 10 Vols.
- Sheridan's Rhetorical Dictionary

Wells was also a first lieutenant in the Nassau Volunteer Company of Infantry formed in 1797 because of the war between England and France.

Wells died October 29, 1799, at the age of forty-seven. His friends, who continued to run the paper, eulogized him as "popular, benevolent, and good-humored." His writings were described as "energetic and forcible as well as correct and elegant" and his style was compared to that of "Gibbon the Historian." He was buried in the churchyard of St. Matthews Church in Nassau under a stone bearing the inscription: "In him the public have lost a respectable and useful member of society."

Cotton growing in the Bahamas was not successful for long. The soil was too thin, attacks by insects too frequent. The few Loyalists still struggling with their plantations in 1834 when the slaves were freed must have felt a sense of relief that the losing game was over. The compensation which they received for their slaves may have enabled a few to leave the colony. Most of them remained in the islands and turned at last to an acceptance of the Conch way of life, a garden patch ashore, a ship at sea.