

Hannah Ingraham

Loyalist Refugee

D. Peter MacLeod

Every war produces refugees. Some flee a few hundred metres out of the path of an advancing army, others cross oceans and continents in search of safety. From the Huron survivors of Iroquois attacks in the seventeenth century to African and Asian victims of war in the twenty-first, generation after generation of refugees have built new lives in Canada.

During the American Revolution (1775-1783) many Americans, known as Loyalists, supported the British government. When the war ended in an American victory, about 40,000 Loyalists became refugees and made their way to Canada. One of these refugees was Hannah Ingraham.

Born in the British colony of New York, Hannah Ingraham was three years old when the American Revolution broke out in 1775, eleven when it ended in 1783. Growing up in a Loyalist family, trapped behind enemy lines, she passed her childhood facing privation, separation from her father, harassment by her neighbours, and persecution by "Committee men" dispensing revolutionary justice.

While fleets sailed, armies clashed, and diplomats bickered, Hannah Ingraham and her mother waged a quiet, desperate struggle for survival in an ugly civil war where freedom was for the politically reliable and mothers and children became enemies of the state. After the war, the family fled to Canada.

Thousands of American children endured similar traumas during the war. Yet if Hannah Ingraham's childhood was typical, her story is exceptional. In the mid-nineteenth century, when she was an old woman, Hannah dictated her reminiscences to a neighbour, Cornelia Tippet.



An early instance of what we today would call "oral history", Cornelia "wrote it down as nearly as possible in the language of the narrator."¹ The result was a powerful memoir that allows us to see the Loyalist experience in the American Revolution through the eyes of a frightened child.²

Hannah Ingraham's story begins in New Concord, New York, where her parents, Benjamin and Jerusha Barrit Ingraham were committed Loyalists.³ In June of 1776, when local rebels began a roundup of politically suspect adult males, Benjamin fled to the forest and joined a band of Loyalist partisans.

On 5 October 1776, Hannah witnessed the arrest of her father when he came home for a clandestine visit. Condemned to imprisonment until the end of hostilities, he escaped five days later and returned to the forest.⁴

When the onset of winter made concealment in the forest more difficult, the partisans made their way to British-held territory. There, Benjamin enlisted as a private in the King's American Regiment on 20 December 1776. Raised by a warrant dated 11 December 1776, this regiment served with distinction in New England, New York, and the South. Placed on the British Establishment 25 December 1782, it disbanded on 10 October 1783 after the end of the Revolutionary War.⁵

While Benjamin served, the persecution of the Ingraham family continued. Superbly organized at the local level, the rebels formed "District Committees" or "Committees of Safety," empowered to take any action necessary to suppress dissent, including arbitrary arrest and confiscation of property. The "Committee men" of King's District inflicted both these measures

upon Ingraham non-combatants. After Benjamin's departure, "the rebels confiscated his farm of 93 acres... They left his wife 1 cow and 4 sheep, and made her pay rent for the use of the farm."⁶

Hannah's grandfather, Benjam Ingraham senior, age 63, was arrested in 1777 by the King's District Committee and held in the notorious "Fleet Prison." Confined aboard ships anchored in the Hudson River, the Loyalist prisoners suffered starvation and severe abuse. On 4 October 1777, unable to endure this treatment any longer, Hannah's grandfather took an oath of allegiance to the rebel government and won his release.⁷

Other rebels were content simply to insult and humiliate Hannah's family. American soldiers passing the Ingraham farm, "used to fire at a tree, and wish it was Ben Ingraham."⁸

When the fighting ended in 1783 with a rebel triumph, there was no place for Hannah and her family in the new United States. The soldiers of the King's American Regiment and their families were evacuated from New York on the *William* and *King George*, part of the "Fall Fleet" that reached Saint John on 4 October 1783.⁹ From there, the Ingraham family made their way up the Saint John River to St. Ann's, the site of the future Fredericton. Here they settled down to live in peace for the first time in seven years.

Hannah Ingraham told her story when she was an elderly adult. The simplicity of her language and the narrowness of her focus reflect a child's perspective. Yet the general accuracy of her recollections is not in question. Another Loyalist, Mary Fisher, married to Lodewick (Lewis) Fisher of the New Jersey Volunteers, followed the same route from New York to Fredericton, and produced a narrative that both verifies many of Hannah Ingraham's assertions and adds numerous details.¹⁰ Some of Mary's own recollections will be interspersed here with Hannah's as they complement Hannah's and add further detail to the story of the loyalist refugee experience in New Brunswick.

Hannah Ingraham's reminiscences describe how war affected a child and her family. They lie at the heart of the story that will be told in the new Canadian War Museum: how war shaped Canada.

Reminiscences of Hannah Ingraham 1776-1783

My father lived at New Concord,¹¹ twenty miles from Albany. We had a comfortable farm, plenty of cows and sheep. But when the war began and he joined the regulars, they (the Rebels) took it all away, sold the things, ploughs and all, and my mother was forced to pay rent for her own farm. What father had sown they took away, but what mother raised after she paid rent they let her keep. They took away all our cows and sheep, only let her have one heifer and four sheep.

Uncle [Abijah Ingraham, Benjamin's brother] had given me a sheep, and when he found we were like to lose all, he took it away, and kept it for me.

Little John, my brother [John Ingraham, born 20 May 1773¹²], had a pet lamb, and he went to the Committee men and spoke up and said, "Won't you let me have my lamb?" He was a little fellow, four years old, so they let him have it.

My father was in the army seven years. They took grandfather prisoner and sent him on board a prison ship. Mother rode fifty miles on horseback in one day when she heard it to go to see him and take him some money to buy some comforts. He had a paralytic stroke when he was there, and he never recovered, poor grandfather.

My father was taken prisoner once but he escaped. The girl who was sent to take him his supper one night told him she would leave the door unbuttoned, and he got off to the woods, but was wandering most two months before he found the army again. Mother was four years without hearing of or from father, whether he was alive or dead; any one would be hanged right up if they were caught bringing letters.

Oh, they were terrible times!

At last there was talk of peace and a neighbor got a letter from her husband, and one inside for mother to tell her father was coming home.

1783

He came home on Sep. 13th it was Friday, and said we were to go to Nova Scotia,¹³ that a ship was ready to take us there, so we made all haste to get ready.

A Map of the Great River St. John & Waters by Robert Campbell. Engraved by S.I. Neele. London: Robert Campbell, 1788.

Killed the cow, sold the beef, and a neighbor took home the tallow and made us a good parcel of candles and put plenty of beeswax in to make them hard and good.

Uncle came down and thrashed [sic] our wheat, 20 bushels, and grandmother came and made bags for the wheat, and we packed up a tub of butter, tub of pickles, and a good store of potatoes.

And then one Tuesday, suddenly, the house was surrounded by rebels and father took prisoner and carried away. Uncle went forward and promised them who took him that if he might come home then he would answer for his being forthcoming next morning. But no, and I cried, and I cried, and I cried enough to kill myself that night. When morning came they sent to say that he was free to go.

We had five wagon loads carried down the Hudson in a sloop, and then we went aboard the transport that was to bring us to St. John.

I was just eleven years old when we left our farm to come here. It was the last transport for the season, and had in it all those who could not leave sooner.

The first transport had come in May, and so had all the summer before them to get settled.

But this was the last part of September, we had a bad storm in the Bay [of Fundy], but some Frenchmen came off in a canoe and helped us.¹⁴

There were no deaths on board, but several babies were born. It was a sad, sick time after we landed; in St. John we had to live in tents, the Government gave them to us and rations too.¹⁵ It was just at the first snow then, and the melting snow and rain would soak up into our beds as we lay. Mother got so chilled with rheumatism that she was never very well afterwards.

Mary Fisher's account: "Our ship going the wrong tack was nearly lost. When we got to St. John we found the place all in confusion; some were living in log houses, some building huts, and many of the soldiers living in their tents at the Lower Cove."¹⁶

We came up the river at last in a schooner and were nine days getting to St. Ann's¹⁷ [Fredericton] near what is called Salamanca.



Mary Fisher's account: "We reached our destination on the 8th day of October [1783], tired out with our long journey, and pitched our tents at the place now called Salamanca, near the shore. The next day we explored for a place to encamp, for the winter was near and we had no time to lose"¹⁸

It was two months from the day we left our home at Concord till we reached St. Ann's.

We were brought as far as Maugerville in a schooner, but we had to get the rest of the way, twelve miles, walking, or any way we could, because the schooner could not get past the Oromocto shoals.

How did we get to our lots? This way:

Capt. Clements¹⁹ hired a row boat of a man at Oromocto for 3s[hillings] a day for three days, and he sent up his folks and their goods the first day. We did not know how long they would be, but they got there and back the same night, so he told us to get in. We were ready, goods and all, by sunrise, so we started. There were plenty of single men ready to row us for their passage up, but the man who had let the boat hollared [sic] after us (he was riding along the shore on horseback). Bring back that boat, he could get 9s[hillings] a day for her, but the men



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The Ingraham family's first home in Canada was a Loyalist refugee camp in New Brunswick, similar to this cluster of tents at Johnston (now Cornwall, Ontario) on the St. Lawrence River.

rowed on and did not mind his words, so he went away; you see Capt. Clements had hired the boat for three days and paid for it so we had a right to it, for this was only the second day.

(Capt. Clements was our next neighbour when we got to St. Ann's.)

At last we got to our land, pitched our tent and the boat went back for more.

When the boat got back to Oromocto the schooner was gone and had landed the last of the passengers.

Mary Fisher's account: "Soon after we landed we joined a party bound up the river in a schooner to St. Ann's. It was eight days before we got to Oromocto. There the Captain put us ashore being unwilling on account of the lateness of the season, or for some other reason, to go further. He charged us each four dollars for the passage. We spent the night on shore and the next day the women and children proceeded in Indian canoes to St. Ann's with some of the party; the rest came on foot."²⁰

There was a poor widow with four children waiting to come, but none of the men there had the courage to put her aboard the boat, or even to go aboard themselves, though we had a right to the use of it for another day, for it was paid for, and that poor woman had to sleep in a barn till the ice covered the river and then some of the neighbors took a handsled and hauled her up to St. Ann's, twelve

miles. There were no roads then you see, and the river was the only way of traveling.

Mary Fisher's account: "The season was wet and cold, and we were much discouraged at the gloomy prospect before us. Those who had arrived a little earlier had made better preparations for the winter; some had built small log huts. This we could not do because of the lateness of our arrival. Snow fell on the 2nd day of November to the depth of six inches. We pitched our tents in the shelter of the woods and tried to cover them with spruce boughs. We used stones for fireplaces. Our tents had no floor but the ground. The winter was very cold, with deep snow, which we tried to keep from drifting in by putting a large rug at the door. The snow, which lay six feet around us, helped greatly in keeping out the cold. How we lived through that awful winter I hardly know...Sometimes a part of the family had to remain up during the night to keep the fires burning, so as to keep the rest from freezing. Some of the destitute ones made use of boards, which the older ones kept heating before the fire and applied by turns to the smaller children to keep them warm. Many women and children, and some of the men, died from cold and exposure. Graves were dug with axes and shovels near the spot where our party had landed, and there in stormy winter weather our loved ones were buried."²¹

We lived in a tent at St. Ann's till father got a house raised. He went up through our lot till he found a nice fresh spring of water, he stooped down and

pulled away the fallen leaves that were thick over it, and tasted it; it was very good, so there he build [*sic*] his house. We all had rations given us by the Government, flour and butter and pork; and tools were given to the men too.

One morning when we waked we found the snow lying deep on the ground all around us, and then father came wading through it and told us the house was ready and not to stop to light a fire then, and not to mind the weather, but follow his tracks through the trees, for the trees were so many that we lost sight of him going up the hill; it was snowing fast, and oh, so cold. Father carried a chest and we all took something and followed him up the hill through the trees to see our gable end.

It was not long before we heard him pounding, and, oh, what joy.

There was no floor laid, no window, no chimney, no door, but we had a roof at last.

Mary Fisher's account: "The first summer after our arrival all hands united in building their log houses... Our people had but few tools and those of the rudest sort. They had neither bricks nor lime, and chimneys and fireplaces were built of stone laid in yellow clay. They covered the roofs of the houses with bark bound over with small poles. The windows had only four panes of glass."²²

A good fire was blazing on the hearth, and mother had a big loaf of bread with us, and she boiled a kettle of water and put a good piece of butter in a pewter bowl, and we toasted the bread and all said, "Thank God, we are no longer in dread of having shots fired through our house. This is the sweetest meal I have tasted for many a day."

Notes

1. Mary V. Tippet, ed., "Story of U.E. Loyalist: Reminiscences of Hannah Ingraham, who was born about 1772 and died in 1868, in her 97th year," The United Empire Loyalist Association of Canada, *Annual Transactions*, 1904 to 1913. (Brampton, 1914), p. 115. (Mary Tippet was Cornelia's daughter.)
2. Mary V. Tippet read this memoir before a meeting of the United Empire Loyalist Association of Canada in 1904 and the Women's Canadian History Club of Toronto in 1911. It was first published as "Reminiscences of Hannah Ingraham" by the Women's Canadian Historical Society of Toronto in 1912. Mary

- V. Tippet, ed., "Reminiscences of Hannah Ingraham," Women's Canadian Historical Society of Toronto, *Transactions*, vol. 11 (1911-1912), pp.24-31; Tippet, ed., "Story of U.E. Loyalist," pp.115-121.
3. Benjamin Ingraham was born 20 April 1748 in Darby, Connecticut. Jerusha Barrit married Benjamin Ingraham on 8 April 1771. John Benjamin Nichols, "Family Record by Benjamin Ingraham (1748-1810)," *National Genealogical Society Quarterly*, (June, 1937), p.61.
4. Earle Thomas, *Greener Pastures: The Loyalist Experience of Benjamin Ingraham* (Belleville, 1983), pp.44-45.
5. *Ibid.*, pp.42-49.
6. William H. Tippet, "Ingraham, U.E.L.," The United Empire Loyalist Association of Canada, *Annual Transactions*, 1904 to 1913. (Brampton, Book Department, 1914), p.121.
7. Thomas, *Greener Pastures*, pp.59-61, 73-74.
8. Mrs. George Ingraham to M.A.E. Hammond, 6 November 1906, cited in Nichols, "Family Record by Benjamin Ingraham, p.61.
9. Two weeks later, the "October Fleet" carried the last Loyalists to leave New York in a mass evacuation. D.G. Bell, *Early Loyalist Saint John: The Origin of New Brunswick Politics, 1783-1786* (Fredericton, 1983), pp.28-32.
10. W.O. Raymond, ed., "The Grandmother's Story," in Peter Fisher, *Sketches of New Brunswick containing an account of the First Settlement of the Province, with a brief description of the Country, Climate, Productions, Inhabitants, Government, Rivers, Towns, Settlements, Public Institutions, Trade, Revenue, Population, &c.* (Saint John, 1825), reprinted as *History of New Brunswick by Peter Fisher, as originally published in 1825 (With a few additional Explanatory Notes)*. (St. John, 1921).
11. Now part of Columbia County, New York.
12. Nichols, "Family Record by Benjamin Ingraham," p.61.
13. New Brunswick was then part of Nova Scotia.
14. "Piloted I suppose." Note by Mary V. Tippet.
15. Each Loyalist over ten years of age received a weekly ration of about 2 kilos of bread or flour, 1.2 kilos of salt beef, 600 grams of salt pork, 200 grams of butter, 600 grams of pease, and 900 grams of oatmeal. Younger children might receive two-thirds or one-half of adult rations, or have to share their parents' provisions. Esther Clark Wright, *The Loyalists of New Brunswick* (Fredericton, 1955), p.94.
16. Raymond, ed., "The Grandmother's Story," p.126.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.* In the St. John River, near Oromocto, New Brunswick, about 25 kilometers southeast of Fredericton.
19. Captain Peter Clements, formerly of the King's American Regiment.
20. Raymond, ed., "The Grandmother's Story," p. 126.
21. *Ibid.*, pp. 126-127.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

Peter MacLeod holds a Ph.d from the University of Ottawa and is the author of *The Canadian Iroquois and the Seven Years War* (Toronto, 1996). He is currently the historian in charge of developing the galleries in the new Canadian War Museum covering the period from 5000 years ago to the 1885 Rebellion.