

John Vought and the Preservation Paradox

By Donald Sherblom

Abstract:

The War for Independence was both an intercontinental war and a civil war between Patriot rebels and Loyalists. Some colonists, “disaffected” with the war, sought to remain neutral. Especially in the middle colonies of New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey, the tripartite division of the population meant Patriot rebels were often an embattled minority. About two-thirds of New Jersey’s population did not support the rebellion. This raises a preservation paradox. Today, almost all preserved sites are Patriot rebel sites, which promotes a popular, simplistic narrative. The dominant story of the American Revolution overlooks both the fact that Patriot rebels were often in the minority and that most Loyalists were people of integrity, no less than their opponents. The complexity of the revolutionary experience is swept from memory.

Today in all of New Jersey, only two homes, Marlpit Hall in Monmouth County and the Vought House in Hunterdon, are interpreted as Loyalist sites. Tracing the experiences of the Vought family broadens our perspective and complicates our understanding of this crucial time and place. As we approach the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, we can present a fuller, more nuanced account of those who were disaffected, remained loyal, or took up arms, often alongside

British and Hessians troops as uniformed New Jersey Volunteers. A more balanced account may also increase appreciation of the hardships faced by Patriot rebels and New Jersey's distinctive place at the crossroads of continental war and the epicenter of civil conflict.

During the War for Independence, more battles were fought in New Jersey, between British headquarters in New York and the rebel capital of Philadelphia, than in any other province. At the crossroads of continental strife, New Jersey was also the epicenter of civil conflict. The continental war overlaid domestic conflict between rebels and Loyalists in what became America's first civil war.¹ As the notion of independency and war became imminent, North America's settler population split into three groups. Patriot rebels pursued independence while a significant number of people remained loyal British Americans, some taking up arms to help put down the rebellion. A third segment of the population was "disaffected" with the war and did not actively support either side.

Advised by Loyalists, British commanders anticipated that once royal authority was restored, large numbers of loyal subjects would help put down the rebellion. Yet many were disinterested

¹ H. W. Brands, *Our First Civil War: Patriots and Loyalists in the American Revolution* (New York: Doubleday, 2021).

in the contest. Disaffection was more widespread and had a greater effect on the war effort than either British leaders or Americans anticipated.² Hoping to ride out the crisis, the disaffected simply wished to be left alone. Some remained neutral throughout the war. Others changed their allegiance with shifts in which side controlled local territory.³ Patriot rebels viewed the disaffected as almost indistinguishable from Loyalists since neither supported the War for Independence.

Loyalists took exception to a treasonous rebellion. Some feared political separation would be a precursor to social revolution and a leveling of socioeconomic hierarchies. Rebellion would pit 13 seaboard colonies against the world's greatest naval power. This fact impelled the Continental Congress to seek an alliance with Britain's rival world power, the absolutist king of Catholic France. Loyal Americans considered this a betrayal of Protestant Britain's balanced constitution and love of liberty. After an initial two years of covert aid, with the Patriot rebel victory at Saratoga in October 1777, France agreed to a military alliance. Reigniting a seemingly perpetual global contest with Great Britain, this alliance shifted the course of the war, prompting the British to

² Aaron Sullivan, *The Disaffected, Britain's Occupation of Philadelphia During the American Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

³ Maxine N. Lurie, *Taking Sides in Revolutionary New Jersey, Caught in the Crossfire* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2022).

consolidate its forces and evacuate Philadelphia. Eventually, French troops and warships made possible the decisive victory at Yorktown, Virginia. As the locus of war shifted over eight years, from the outbreak of warfare in Massachusetts to victory at Yorktown and the Treaty of Paris, it traversed regions where the tripartite division of allegiances, the ratio of Patriot rebels, Loyalists, and the disaffected among the population, differed significantly.

Patriot rebels clearly predominated in New England but were outnumbered by Loyalists and the disaffected in large parts of the middle colonies of New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey. In colonies to the south, the contest was complicated by the exploitation of people of African descent. While coerced labor created incredible wealth for plantation owners, the enslaved population nearly equaled the number of European settlers. British commanders capitalized on this societal weakness and issued emancipation proclamations aimed at those who escaped enslavement by Patriot rebels. Notably, the offer did not extend to people enslaved by Loyalists. Among the nation's founders, Washington and Jefferson lost slaves. Tens of thousands of former slaves fought against the rebellion for the inherently universal and "unalienable" right to liberty proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence.

In November 1776, after a series of victories at Brooklyn, Manhattan, and White Plains and guided by Loyalists to a little-known path, British troops scaled the Palisades and overran a hastily abandoned Fort Lee. They chased Washington's debilitated army across New Jersey to the Delaware River at Trenton and occupied much of the state. Their presence brought a Loyalist resurgence. "Nearly 2,500 New Jersey Volunteers, drawn from a pool of 13,000 Loyalist sympathizers provided ample manpower to pacify a conquered province."⁴ Washington famously recrossed the Delaware River on Christmas day and overwhelmed the Hessian garrison at Trenton. The rebellion was revived over the next 10 crucial days at a second battle of Trenton and the battle of Princeton. The restored state of New Jersey struggled to repel foraging parties and incursions from British headquarters in New York City, fight uniformed Loyalist New Jersey Volunteers, and subdue a population marbled with a significant number of Loyalists and the disaffected. Overall, "roughly two-thirds of the people of revolutionary Jersey were not engaged in winning American independence."⁵

⁴ Robert M. Calhoun, et al, *Tory Insurgents, the Loyalist Perception and Other Essays* (University of South Carolina Press, 2010), 207.

⁵ Dennis P. Ryan, *New Jersey's Loyalists* (Trenton: New Jersey Historic Commission, 1975), 7.

This raises a preservation paradox. Patriot rebels were an embattled minority in New Jersey, yet today, with very few exceptions, only rebel sites are preserved. This fosters a popular but distorted storyline in which “the complexity of the revolutionary experience has been washed from our memory.” The American Revolution is most often characterized as the colonists against the British. The dominant story “clings to a static, simplistic narrative populated by virtuous Patriots fighting against misguided Loyalists and oppressive British soldiers.”⁶ This perception overlooks both the fact that Patriot rebels were in the minority in New Jersey and that most Loyalists were “people of integrity who were no less courageous or honorable, no less committed to constitutional government and civil liberties than the Patriots.”⁷ Commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence would benefit from a more balanced and nuanced view of America’s first civil war. A more realistic account would also increase appreciation of the distinctive perils Patriot rebels faced in middle colonies like New Jersey during the struggle for national independence.

⁶ Donald F. Johnson, *Occupied America, British Military Rule and the Experience of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), 206.

⁷ Larry R. Gerlach, ed., *New Jersey in the American Revolution 1763–1783: A Documentary History* (Trenton: New Jersey Historical Commission, 1975), 234.

Support for the War for Independence fluctuated. Resistance to the usurpation of royal authority was strongest in New Jersey's Bergen and Monmouth Counties and in northern Hunterdon County around Allen and Turner's Union Iron Works. Bergen County was the scene of forage expeditions to supply food and wood for the British army encamped in New York City. Support for the revolution "was not universal, and in some places was a minority view. Such was the case in Bergen County."⁸ Monmouth County, across from British headquarters in Manhattan and Staten Island, was also wracked by foraging parties and civil conflict. Local farmers engaged in the "London trade," exchanging their produce for British hard currency instead of the rapidly depreciating Continental currency. Local militia augmented by Continental troops confronted both loyal provincials like the New Jersey Volunteers and irregular Loyalist forces.

Today, one of four revolutionary era sites owned by the Monmouth County Historical Society, Marlpit Hall in Middletown, is interpreted as a Loyalist site. It was the residence of Edward Taylor, a prominent Whig who became a

⁸ Todd W. Braisted, "Bergen County's Loyalist Population," Bergen County Historical Society, accessed November 21, 2022, <https://www.bergencountyhistory.org/loyalists-in-bergen>.

Loyalist. His son George joined the New Jersey Volunteers.⁹ Besides Marlpit Hall, the only other New Jersey structure intimately tied to a Loyalist family and interpreted as such is Hunterdon County's Vought House. Yet these are not the only New Jersey sites where loyalty and disaffection were an important and often neglected part of the history of America's first civil war.¹⁰ The experiences and motivations of Loyalists can best be brought to life at preserved sites where Loyalists are interpreted as protagonists and as actual people not just misguided cyphers.

In educational settings, a single Loyalist position is often opposed to a single Patriot rebel position, obscuring complexity on both sides. "Historians have struggled to explain the Loyalist experience in the American Revolution because the term is so broad. It can be applied to virtually anyone from aristocratic royal appointees to opportunistic locals whose loyalism was based only on small town or clan rivalry. And some Loyalists came to their Loyalism later than others. Many Americans who led anti-British dissent in the colonies in 1774–

⁹ Michael S. Adelberg, *The American Revolution in Monmouth County: The Theatre of Spoil and Destruction* (Charleston, South Carolina: The History Press, 2010), 58.

¹⁰ Proprietary House, the Governor's mansion built by East Jersey Proprietors, was one of two residences of William Franklin. The other in Burlington County was later deeded to his son. The Perth Amboy mansion is one of several sites where important, often neglected tales from America's first civil war could be expanded to include stories told from the perspective of Loyalists.

75 became Loyalists afterwards.”¹¹ Even some who joined the congressionally authorized invasion of Canada in the winter of 1775 found independence a bridge too far. For example, Billy Allen, the youngest son of William Allen, who with Joseph Turner founded the Union Iron Works, joined the invasion of Canada in 1775 but “returning from Ticonderoga, soon after the Declaration of Independence, immediately resigned his commission of Lieu* Col ; as he always determined to do in case of such declaration” and raised a Loyalist battalion.¹²

The Loyalist Vought House in Hunterdon County meets all four criteria for inclusion on the State and the National Register of Historic Places. Christoffel Vought or “Christopher” as he was known to generations of men who carried his name, built this house around 1760. Its rare architectural features, especially the decorative plaster walls and ceilings built on a “wattle” of woven twigs reveal the builder’s Palatine heritage. He and son John Vought were locally prominent men who played a major role in the turmoil in this part of Hunterdon in the mid-1770s. This historic gem reveals a great deal about life in rural 18th century New Jersey. The combination of a rich

¹¹ Michael S. Adelberg, *The American Revolution in Monmouth County: The Theatre of Spoil and Destruction* (Charleston, South Carolina: The History Press, 2010), 57.

¹² “The Diary of James Allen, Esq., of Philadelphia, Counsellor-at-Law, 1770–1778,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 9, no. 2 (July 1885): 176–196.

material culture and a neglected historic narrative makes the Vought House one of New Jersey's most significant revolutionary era sites. It provides insights on the civil conflict as lived experience, contingent and unpredictable. Tracing one family's experience as neighbors became enemies, as John Vought's resolute actions cost the family farm, and as the vehement enmity spurred by war appeared to lose relevance in the new republic, increases our appreciation of what life was like in revolutionary New Jersey.

In 1759, Christopher Vought purchased 285 acres of limestone-rich land from the West Jersey Society and built this impressive stone house near Thomas Jones's tavern along the great road from New Brunswick to Easton. The Vought family grew acres of wheat and corn and raised sheep and hogs. The nearby Union Iron Works provided a ready market for their farm products, but they probably exported most to Caribbean islands via New Brunswick. The Vought family prospered. Before the war, Christopher purchased an adjacent 203 acres of woodlands to the north and a 2,000-acre parcel in upstate New York as an inheritance for his son and daughter.

Christopher and John Vought repeatedly signed Thomas Jones's license applications for his tavern, which is where township business was enacted. Christopher was a road commissioner and John the township clerk in 1773 and 1774, when in response to the destruction of tea in Boston, Parliament

passed the Coercive Acts, closing the port and imposing martial law. British Americans had struggled for nearly a decade to reconcile their inherent right as Englishmen to govern themselves and their subservient status as colonists. This seemingly irreconcilable dilemma was voiced at John Ringo's tavern in July 1774. "Freeholders and Inhabitants of Hunterdon County" did "expressly declare, recognise and acknowledge his Majesty King George the Third, to be the lawful and rightful King of Great Britain." They were obliged to "bear faithful and true allegiance to his Majesty" yet also resolved to preserve the "undoubted hereditary right of an English subject to give and grant what is absolutely his own, either by himself or his Representative; and that the only lawful Representatives of the freemen of this Colony are the persons they elect to serve as members of the General Assembly thereof."¹³

In October the Continental Congress in Philadelphia decided that rather than relying on merchants to forgo profits, an association would enforce nonimportation. Local associations would publicize the names of anyone who purchased proscribed British imports and ostracize them as an enemy to American liberty. This brought the crisis roiling

¹³ "Hunterdon's Role in the Revolution: Published July 22, 1976 in Honor of Our Nation's Bicentennial Year on the Occasion of the Celebration of the 150th Anniversary of the Hunterdon County Democrat," *Hunterdon County Democrat*, July 22, 1976.

colonial seaports home to rural communities. John Vought later testified that he was among those who “signed an Association and attended the training of the militia” as he “durst not declare his sentiments.”¹⁴

A second Continental Congress, set to convene in early May, was upstaged in April 1775 when Massachusetts militia skirmished with British regulars at Lexington and Concord. Attempts at reconciliation receded over the next year amid military conflict that started with the battle near Bunker Hill in June and ended with the ill-fated invasion of Canada that winter. Printed in January 1776, Thomas Paine’s immensely popular *Common Sense* ridiculed the very concept of monarchy and made the case for independence and a social revolution. In May, the Continental Congress recommended that colonies create governments where royal government had collapsed. John Adams raised the stakes with a preamble: “Whereas his Britannic Majesty, in conjunction with the lords and commons of Great Britain, has, by a late act of Parliament, excluded the inhabitants of these United Colonies from the protection of his crown . . . It is necessary that the exercise of every kind of authority under the said crown should be totally suppressed, and

¹⁴ William Gordon Ver Planck, *The Vought Family; being an Account of the Descendants of Simon and Christina Vought* (New York: Press of Tobias A. Wright, 1907), 9.

all the powers of government exerted, under the authority of the people of the colonies.”¹⁵

Elections became a referendum on independence. Pennsylvania’s Attorney General, William Allen’s son Andrew, was a delegate to the Continental Congress. His brother James Allen was elected to Pennsylvania’s provincial congress. Moderates in Hunterdon County elected John Allen, who operated the Union Iron Works, to New Jersey’s provincial congress. All three Allen brothers resigned within a few weeks as the momentum for independence proved unstoppable. By June 1776, as Patriot rebels prepared to defend New York, Hunterdon County was in turmoil. As John Vought testified, local farmers and iron workers were ordered “to serve in the Militia, when to a man they refused to turn out. After this he was ill-used as they blamed him and Captain Lee for the company not serving.”¹⁶ Joseph Lee, supervisor at the Union Iron Works, would later become a captain in the New Jersey Volunteers and John Vought his lieutenant.¹⁷ In late June, a witness wrote to William Livingston, head of the state’s militia

¹⁵ “Preamble to Resolution on Independent Governments, 15 May 1776,” Founders Online, accessed November 21, 2022, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/06-04-02-0001-0006>.

¹⁶ William Gordon Ver Planck, *The Vought Family, being an Account of the Descendants of Simon and Christina Vought* (New York: Press of Tobias A. Wright, 1907), 9.

¹⁷ Damon Tvaryanas, et al., *Hunter Research, Phase I & II Cultural Resource Investigation, Christoffel Vought Farm Site*, April 2005, 3–44.

and later its governor, that instead of bringing muskets to a militia muster held “to Recruit men, one half of two companies came with Clubs, Colonel Johnson was knocked down by them and was Afterwards Obligated to Retreat, the Same day one of the Capts. was much beat by them.”¹⁸

On Friday, June 21, New Jersey’s congress resolved that “a government be formed for the regulation of the internal police of this Colony, pursuant to the recommendation of the Continental Congress of the fifteenth of May last.”¹⁹ John Allen’s negative was his last vote before returning home. On Monday night, June 24, John Vought and Joseph Lee led two dozen club-wielding men to the tavern of provincial congressman and militia captain Thomas Jones. According to Jones’s deposition to the provincial congress, the mob encountered and started beating John Shurts. Hearing Shurts’s cries for help, Jones grabbed his gun and ran upstairs from the basement. He trained his gun on the mob and ordered them to disburse or he would “blow their Brains out. They answered Gd Dam him he presents his gun at us, & twisted it out of his hands & beat him on the head and sundry parts of his body w’ their

¹⁸ Edward Thomas, “From Edward Thomas Lebanon Township about 40 miles W . . . June 30: 1776 Hunterdon County,” in Carl E. Prince ed., *The Papers of William Livingston, Volume 1, June 1774–June 1777* (Trenton, NJ: New Jersey Historical Commission, 1979), 59.

¹⁹ *Minutes of the Provincial Congress and the Council of Safety of the State of New Jersey* (Trenton: Naar, Day, & Naar, 1879), 470, 471.

Clubs.” Jones broke away and ran into the house. The club men “broke open the outside door and several inside doors . . . and threatened to kick his wife if she did not tell them where he was.” After they left, Jones staggered down the stairs to find 20 pounds had been stolen from the bar.²⁰ New Jersey’s congress ordered these men arrested. Joseph Lee and Christopher and John Vought paid fines of 100 pounds each while the other men paid smaller fines. All were released in early July, about when the Continental Congress declared independence and as British troops landed on Staten Island.

The battle of Brooklyn at the end of August began a series of Patriot rebel defeats in New York that culminated with the surrender of nearly 3,000 men at Fort Washington. In November, British troops crossed the Hudson River. Guided by Loyalists to a little-known trail, they scaled the Palisades and overran a hastily abandoned Fort Lee. As Washington’s beleaguered army retreated across New Jersey ahead of British and Hessian troops, the state’s militia largely failed to turn out. Over 2,500 people signed General Howe’s loyalty oaths. The rebel government relocated a few times, then disbanded. Washington’s retreat was immortalized by Thomas Paine as “the times that try men’s souls” in the first of his series called the *American Crisis*.

²⁰ “Deposition of Thomas Jones,” Hunterdon County, New Jersey, miscellaneous court record number 5716.

In early December, Thomas Jones helped collect boats along the Delaware River, above and below Trenton, to speed the army's escape to relative safety in Pennsylvania. Meanwhile Joseph Lee and Christopher and John Vought led 85 Hunterdon County men to join British troops sweeping across New Jersey. They were briefly intercepted by local militia. "Samuel Sutphin, a slave who entered into service in the local militia as a substitute for his owner, recounted the engagement . . . fell in with them at the 2 Bridges, junction of the N. and S. branches of the Raritan; had a fight with them. Wm. Van Syckle of our Co[mpany] was wounded in the head; they out and ran to a fording place near Cornelius Van Derveer's mill on the N. Branch, where they crossed and made their way toward Brunswick. Ten Eyck's Co[mpany] took one prisoner, who was mounted, and Capt. Ten Eyck took his horse."²¹ After this skirmish, the band of Loyalists made their way to New Brunswick, where Captain Lee and Lieutenant John Vought recruited men into the Sixth Battalion of the New Jersey Volunteers. These uniformed and disciplined provincial troops numbered more than 2,450 men. Loyalist hegemony in New Jersey was short-lived, undermined by the indiscriminate plundering of Hessian and British troops that alienated the

²¹ Richard F. Veit, "Archaeological Investigation of the Two Bridges Battlefield Site, Branchburg, New Jersey," (American Battlefield Protection Program/prepared for the Branchburg Historical Society, July 2008).

population and facilitated the successful return of Washington's army. Two weeks after his army escaped to Pennsylvania, Washington recrossed the Delaware River on Christmas day, and with victories at Trenton and Princeton over the next 10 days resuscitated the rebel cause.

With their husbands away stationed on Staten Island, Christopher's wife Cornelia and John's wife Mary Grandin Vought were left to operate the family farm, a major challenge given the vicissitudes of the wartime economy, the hostility of neighbors, and uncertain actions of the fledgling state. New Jersey's legislature created a Council of Safety to legislate, execute, and adjudicate laws while the legislature was in recess. Governor Livingston and the council traveled to areas where the judiciary was deemed unreliable and incarcerated suspected Loyalists.

In October 1777, the wives of 10 Hunterdon Loyalists were ordered to appear before the governor and Council of Safety "to shew cause why they should not be removed with their children, into the Enemies lines according to Law, and on default of their appearance that they be removed accordingly."²² Cornelia Vought appeared before the Council of Safety. Mary did not, which suggests she had already crossed enemy lines to join her husband on Staten Island. The man and woman

²² "Minutes of the Council of Safety of the State of New Jersey, Jersey City, NJ: Printed by John H. Lyon, 1872," 155–157.

enslaved on the Vought farm probably accompanied Mary, since they did not appear on the list of moveable goods confiscated and auctioned by Patriot rebels in 1778.²³ The council interrogated these wives of Loyalists and “having enquired into their respective Circumstances & Situation were unanimously of opinion, That it would not be expedient to remove them for present.”²⁴

That same month, Governor Livingston learned that former Governor Penn and Chief Justice Benjamin Chew, expelled from Philadelphia as British troops approached the city, had been allowed to take up residence at the Allen family’s Union Forge. Governor Livingston wrote to the Continental Congress expressing his dismay that

persons of their political caste and rank in life should have been sent into this state, which is nearly encircled by the enemy to say nothing of our domestic foes. Wherever the enemy go they never fail to make friends and abettors, or at least to call up such into active life in their favor as during their absence remained in the sort

²³ Records of the man and woman they enslaved are quite limited, a reference in the Lebanon Store book before the war, two “servants” recorded on the ship that carried the Vought family to Nova Scotia. It is unlikely they went with Christopher and John in 1776. If they accompanied Mary, their presence is unrecorded, like that of Mary’s daughter Christiana and nephew who also probably accompanied her across the lines to Staten Island.

²⁴ “Minutes of the Council of Safety of the State of New Jersey, Jersey City, NJ: Printed by John H. Lyon, 1872,”157.

of inactivity. . . Of all Jersey, the spot in which they are at present is the very spot in which they ought not to be. It has always been considerably disaffected, and still continues so, notwithstanding all our efforts, owing, we imagine, in part to the interests, connection, and influence of Mr. John Allen, brother-in-law of Mr. Penn, who is now with the enemy.²⁵

In 1778, the New Jersey Legislature mandated county commissioners sell the belongings of confirmed Loyalists and lease their real estate. The Vought's household furnishings—tables, chests, beds, and their great clock—and farm tools and livestock were auctioned at Jones's tavern. Cornelia Vought bought back 10 hogs, 15 pigs, and 2 cows, one with a calf, providing her with milk and pork. Her son from a prior marriage, Henry Traphagen, bought a cow and four calves, and he rented the farm, not for himself but for his mother's use. The family lost 51 sheep, 25 cows, and 6 horses to their neighbors.²⁶

Sympathetic local men came to the aid of Loyalist wives. James Parker, a prominent Loyalist exchanged for a Patriot, had returned to Shipley, his 650-acre estate 3 miles from

²⁵ *New Jersey in the American Revolution 1763-1783, A Documentary History*, ed. Larry R. Gerlach (Trenton: New Jersey Historical Commission, 1975), 374–375.

²⁶ Damon Tvaryanas, et al., “Hunter Research, Phase I & II Cultural Resource Investigation, Christoffel Vought Farm Site,” April 2005, 3–54.

the Vought farm on the road to Pittstown. He wrote in his journal that “Doctr Smith solicited my contribution to the relief of some women, the wives of some persons that had gone in to the British lines and had all their effects sold, by purchasing for them a cow apiece and their beds.”²⁷

In 1779, the legislature approved bills of attainder that, without court proceedings, convicted Christopher and John Vought and others of treason. Their real estate could then be legally seized and sold. Allen and Turner had begun to subdivide the vast Union Iron Works in 1773, selling individual parcels to farmers. Since William Allen’s sons were well-known Loyalists, he deeded parcels to his grandsons to avoid confiscation. Allen and Turner were also declared traitors, making their remaining property available for confiscation and sale. Iron works manager Robert Taylor purchased the slitting mill. He later wrote to Benjamin Chew that the “times are greatly changed for the worse in Iron Works in particular the Slitting Mill, I have not sold one Bundle Rod Iron for cash since the first may last.”²⁸

²⁷ “Shipley: The Country Seat of a Jersey Loyalist, Charles W. Parker,” *Proceedings of New Jersey Historical Society* XVI, no. 2 (April 1932): 132.

²⁸ Historical Society of Pennsylvania, “Chew Family Papers,” Collection 2050, New Jersey Land Papers, Box 766, folder: *Hunterdon County Correspondence – Robert Taylor to Benjamin Chew* [re: Patton’s refusal to pay wages to Negroes]. The folder is mislabeled. Chew was to receive the wages of these enslaved persons.

The 1783 Treaty of Paris ended the War for Independence, although the American revolution continued. Women, Africans, and wage workers struggled for centuries to realize the equality and universal rights proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence. The violent displacement of Native Americans had just begun. But with peace, once-fatal animosities fostered during the war became less salient. For post-colonial societies to mend, Patriots would need to reverse characterizations of their domestic foes. As late as June 1776, Christopher and John Vought and Joseph Lee had received mild punishment. They were jailed briefly and fined for leading the clubman attack at Jones's tavern. A few months after the Declaration of Independence, in early December, they led men who joined the New Jersey Volunteers. As the conflict intensified, so did the rhetoric. Loyalists were labeled "Tories" and the meaning of that term quickly shifted to signify malevolent demons.²⁹ As the continental army retreated through New Jersey, Thomas Paine asked, "Why is it that the enemy have left the New England provinces, and made these middle ones the seat of war? The answer is easy: New England is not infested with Tories, and we are. . . . And what is a Tory? . . .

²⁹ Historians sometimes adopt the terms "Whig" and "Tory" when referring to rebels and Loyalists, but these British political parties do not match partisan divisions in America. The inaccuracy of these terms was also warped by wartime propaganda and these intentionally negative connotations still adhere.

Every Tory is a coward, for a servile, slavish, self-interested fear is the foundation of Toryism.”³⁰ In a letter to George Washington in 1777, New Jersey Governor William Livingston opined that “a Tory is an incorrigible animal: and nothing but the Extinction of Life, will extinguish his Malevolence against Liberty.”³¹

This extreme wartime propaganda complicated peacetime healing. A “successful reintegration required Americans to soften the radical appeals to virtue and focus instead on the more moderate strands of republican thought that stressed the rule of law and toleration.”³² Under Article 5 of the 1783 Treaty of Paris, Congress would recommend that states allow Loyalists to reenter “any of the thirteen United States and therein to remain twelve Months unmolested in their Endeavors to obtain the Restitution of such of their Estate.” Article 6 prohibited the prosecution of Loyalists asserting that “no Person shall on that Account suffer any future Loss or Damage, either in his Person, Liberty, or Property.”³³ These sections of

³⁰ Thomas Paine, *The American Crisis*, 1776.

³¹ Carl E. Prince and Dennis P. Ryan, eds., *The Papers of William Livingston, Volume 2, July 1777–December 1778* (Trenton: New Jersey Historical Commission, 1980), 86.

³² Aaron Nathan Coleman, “Justice and Moderation? The Reintegration of the American Loyalists as an Episode of Transitional Justice” in *The Consequences of Loyalism, Essays in honor of Robert M. Calhoon* (University of South Carolina Press, 2019), 182.

³³ See National Archives, Milestone Documents, accessed on November 20, 2022, <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/treaty-of-paris>.

the treaty angered Patriot rebels. Fueled by recent wartime fatalities and virulent propaganda, they urged retribution.

A successful re-integration into postwar society might begin by distinguishing between active Loyalists, those who fought to put down the rebellion, passive Loyalists, and the disaffected segment of the population. “John Jay, the lead negotiator on this issue, distinguished two types of Loyalists. One group would never receive American forgiveness due to their actions during the war.” This included men like John Vought who had taken up arms against Patriot rebels. “Americans would never ‘suffer them to live in their’ country.”³⁴ The others, disaffected neutrals and those who remained loyal to Great Britain “but took little part in the war” should rest easy as they might expect leniency. “As it soon became clear, most Americans disagreed with the negotiators conclusions.” Throughout the former colonies, “state legislatures and other groups visited legal and physical violence upon Loyalists in hopes of purging them from the community,”³⁵ Hunterdon County’s petition against Loyalists’ return was not unique. It deemed Loyalists unworthy of re-entry since they had joined the king’s forces voluntarily and had “Done All in their Power to Subjugate us to the Tyranny Of

Coleman, “Justice and Moderation,” 182.

³⁵ Ibid., 183.

Britain” and should they return, might undermine the new republic.³⁶

Yet only nine years after the 1783 Paris Peace Treaty, when John Vought, who had become a captain in the New Jersey Volunteers, brought his family back to upstate New York, they received a surprisingly warm welcome. During their 1792 return from Nova Scotia, John Vought’s eldest daughter Christiana kept a travel journal. In New York City, “Pappa introduced us to A Mr. Covenhoven from Jersey who gave us some account of our friends there, also to A Mr. Bell from Halifax, also to Capt. Bogart with whom we are to go to Albany.” Christiana wrote to an aunt in New Jersey, evidently her mother’s sister, since her father’s only sibling, her namesake, had died from childbirth a few months before Christiana was born. Her journal also mentions a “Mr. Younglove from Albany Who told Mamah he had Come to Welcome her to his Part of the World.”³⁷

John Bogart was captain of the Hudson River sloop Magdalena, on which they sailed from New York City to Albany. During the war, he had ferried Patriot rebel troops and cargo up and down

³⁶ Larry R. Gerlach ed., *New Jersey in the American Revolution 1763–1783, A Documentary History* (Trenton: New Jersey Historical Commission, 1975), 268–270.

³⁷ William Gordon Ver Planck, *The Vought Family; being an Account of the Descendants of Simon and Christina Vought* (New York: Press of Tobias A. Wright, 1907), 23.

the Hudson River. Now the Bogarts welcomed John Vought's family into their home. When they reached Albany, Christiana recounts that "Early in the Morning Capt. Bogart Went to his Father's (Who lives in the City) and Brought his Brother Garet on board to introduce him to our family." They invited the Vought family to dine with them. "Just as we were finishing breakfast Came in Mr. Gurst and with A Mr. Wright, Who after they were set down and welcom,d us to Albany said he has Come to invite Mamah and Family to dine with him." She responded "I am much obliged to you sir, I am engaged to Mr. Bogarts."

The Vought family "went with Capt. B. to his Fathers; we met the old lady (his Mother) on the Porch Who Conducted us in a well furnished room then turn.d about 'your welcom here' said she." "When diner was ready we were bid in, Garet and Miss B. did the honours of the table; their Parents is old People wich I expect is the reason they take this on themselves—After Tea Miss Bogart Took My sister & I thro the Most Capital Streets of the City. When we returned Mr. Garet asked us if we would not walk up to the Springs (this is a Spring about 3 quarters of Mile out of Town where many walks about Sun set and after). 'I have no objection' was the General answer; accordingly we went and saw A Number of People there Drinking of this Very Cold Water—We all sup.d at Mr. Bogarts and then returned to the Sloop where we Lodged."

The reception of a former enemy combatant, John Vought and the Vought family, runs counter to our expectations. Their welcome seems to have exceeded the spirit of reconciliation in the peace treaty and the possibility of acceptance advocated by their former neighbors in 1783. Their experience demonstrates the possibilities for social healing advocated by Alexander Hamilton. “No American explained the connection of Loyalist reintegration and the objectives of the Revolution better than Alexander Hamilton. In early 1784, Hamilton published two lengthy newspaper essays (later published as a pamphlet) under the pseudonym of Phocion.”³⁸ The classical reference “signaled to his readers that Patriots needed to accept their former enemies.” He tied “the peaceful reintegration of the Loyalists and enforcement of the treaty to the success of the revolution. Hamilton opened by noting that a stirring of ‘passions’ was common during the war but with the war now over New Yorkers—and by extension all Americans—had to replace them with policies of ‘equity and prudence’ and the end of the ‘indiscriminate guilt’ assigned to Loyalists.”³⁹

The day after the Vought family dined with the Bogarts, Christiana journaled that at “Eleven o’clock we left Albany, at 2 o’clock din,d 7 mile from Albany, at 9 in the evening we

³⁸ Aaron Nathan Coleman, “Justice and Moderation,” 182.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 185

arrived at the Vought Patton our Place of residence.” The Vought family had had their household furniture, farm tools, and livestock confiscated and sold. John and Christopher were declared traitors by a bill of attainder and the real estate sold. The family was forced into exile in September 1783 when Christiana was 10 years old. Yet nine years later, they were welcomed and reintegrated into Albany society. As they had sailed up the Hudson River on June 10th, Christiana Vought wrote of the captain: “We find him more agreeable as we are more acquainted with him.”⁴⁰ She and John Bogart married at the Dutch Reformed Church in 1796.

Historians sometimes cast the British-American conflict as starting with Parliamentary Acts to raise revenue after the 1763 victory in the French and Indian War and continuing to the War of 1812 heralded in our national anthem. Christoffel and John Vought fought alongside British troops in the War for Independence. John Vought’s son Christopher, born on Staten Island a few months before the family sailed to Nova Scotia, fought as a captain in the New York militia against Great Britain in the War of 1812.⁴¹ Today, descendants including the present-

⁴⁰ William Gordon Ver Planck, *The Vought Family; being an Account of the Descendants of Simon and Christina Vought* (New York: Press of Tobias A. Wright, 1907), 23.

⁴¹ Donald Sherblom, “A Loyalist Homestead in a World Turned Upside Down” in James J. Gigantino II ed., *The American Revolution in New Jersey, Where the Battlefield Meets the Home Front* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 185.

day namesake of the original Christopher Vought live in the United States that emerged from the War for Independence.

As the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence approaches, we are challenged to increase public awareness of the multiplicity of allegiances that defined New Jersey during these early formative years. As a middle colony, New Jersey is uniquely situated to promote a more balanced and more finely nuanced view of the tripartite division of Patriot rebels, Loyalists, and the disaffected. By preserving diverse historic sites and amplifying stories that reflect the various opinions and actions taken, our narratives can more fully reflect this time of continental war and civil strife in New Jersey, crossroads of the American Revolution and epicenter of America's first civil war.

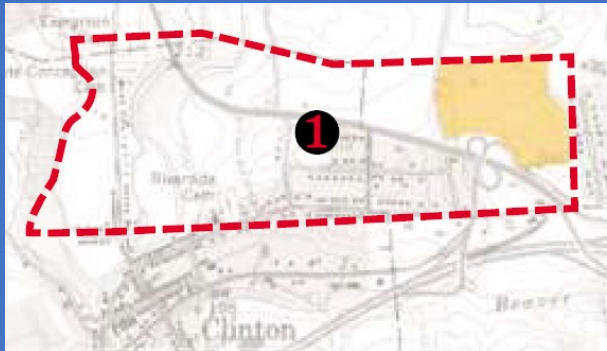
Donald Sherblom earned a PhD from the Graduate Faculty of the New School for Social Research. Publications include a chapter titled "A Loyalist Homestead in a World Turned Upside Down" in The American Revolution in New Jersey: Where the Battlefield Meets the Home Front edited by James J. Gigantino II and published in 2015 by Rutgers University Press. He is a member of the Hunterdon County Cultural and Heritage Commission and participates in the restoration of 1759 Vought House in Clinton Twp. to its period of significance. This 18th Century historic gem is online at VoughtHouse.Org

The Vought House is on the National Register of Historic Places due to:

- 1) The locally prominent Vought family
- 2) Events during the American Revolution
- 3) The home's unique architecture
- 4) What it can show about life in 18th Century rural New Jersey.

The 1759 Vought House
PO Box 369
Annandale, NJ 08801

A 501 (c) 3 tax deductible non-profit.
100% of donations help restore this local historic gem & promote its historic narrative.



Today, the Vought House sits on 2.3 acres adjacent to Clinton Twp MS in right corner.

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Become a friend of the Vought House; stay informed on its restoration. You are invited to join us as we expand awareness of the local clash of Patriot rebels and Loyalists in the run up to the War of Independence.

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