

CHAPTER IX.

Situation in Tryon County from the Close of the French War to the Revolution — British Oppression Causes Discontent — The Stamp Act — Duties Levied on other Commodities — The Boston Tea Party — First Congress at Philadelphia — New York Opposes the Action of Congress — Districts of Tryon County — Guy Johnson Disperses the Meeting at Caughnawaga — Attack upon Jacob Sammons — Action of Loyalists — Guy Park Fortified — General Meeting of the Tryon County Committee — Its Object — Guy Johnson Departs for Canada — Conduct of Sir John — He Fortifies the Hall and Arms the Highlanders — His Arrest, Parole and Flight to Canada — The Estate Confiscated — Character and Duties of the Committees of Safety.

THE years immediately preceding the revolution were filled with important events connected with the history of Tryon county; and in no part of which was there a greater diversity of sentiment than in that which afterward became Montgomery county.

The political situation in Tryon county during the revolution and indeed for some years previous, was at once novel and interesting, since it included influences politically antagonistic, while socially there was no animosity among the pioneers, and good will and friendship prevailed on every hand. The settlements founded by the direct influence of Sir William Johnson in the Mohawk valley were entirely under his control during his life, and their militia was subject to his command. His death, however, and the succession of his son (so far as it was possible for the latter to succeed him), caused a marked change in political events; one indeed which created not only a division of sentiment, but in many instances the rupture of friendship. Had Sir William lived a few years longer his love of America might have led him to espouse her cause, and many think his policy indicated such a purpose; but Sir John, and his brothers-in-law, Guy Johnson and Daniel Claus, were creatures of the king, having no sentiment in common with the people, being evidently imbued with aristocratic notions.

Continuing this inquiry into the condition of public matters, we are led to examine the prevailing causes of the above mentioned division, both in sentiment and action, and it also occasions a review of those

events which precipitated the war. A careful examination of the Mohawk valley at the time referred to leads to the conviction that the patriots were strongly in the majority. The taxation to which the colonies were subjected by the mother country really began almost as far back as the overthrow of the Dutch power in America, for it seems to have been the king's determination to make them self supporting, which was more than their own share toward national greatness. The burden of debt was then very heavy on Great Britain, but it was chiefly created by the wars in which she engaged on her own side of the Atlantic. That portion, however, incurred by the wars on this continent she proposed to be paid by the colonies, notwithstanding the great increase of her domain through these wars. The time, however, arrived when tame submission to such measures could no longer be endured. The colonists themselves were heavily burdened with the expenses of the late French war, which resulted so favorably to England, yet almost before the smoke of the battles had cleared away the ministry began devising plans to tax them without asking their consent. In 1764 a proposition was submitted to the House of Commons for raising revenue in the colonies by the sale of stamps, and a bill to that effect was passed in March, 1765. It was bitterly denounced in the colonies, especially in New York, and the "Sons of Liberty" were organized in opposition to the obnoxious law. This organization was closely watched by Sir William, who, as he could not but be conscious of the rectitude of their motives, made no public opposition.

So great, indeed, was the popular indignation that parliament finally repealed the act, but this was done more to satisfy English tradesmen than to relieve a distressed people; and in its place were enacted other oppressive laws, one of which required the provinces to pay for supporting the British soldiery in New York city. The colonial assembly refused to comply with the demand, and parliament in retaliation annulled its legislative powers.

In 1767 a bill was passed by parliament imposing a duty on tea, glass, lead, paper and painter's colors imported by the colonies. This renewed the opposition, and in the following year the Massachusetts assembly addressed a circular letter to the sister colonies soliciting their assistance in defending the common liberties. More retaliation followed,

for the ministry was so wrathful that a letter was sent to each of the colonial governors forbidding their assemblies to correspond with Massachusetts. This mandate, however, was ignored, and the New York assembly accompanied its disobedience with declarations of inherent rights, together with denunciations of parliament, and the people sustained their representatives and returned most of them to the new assembly of 1769.

In 1770 Lord Dunmore succeeded Colden as governor, and brought with him royal approval of the act authorizing the issue of the colonial bills of credit. The duties had meanwhile been removed from all articles except tea, and colonial affairs for a time moved more smoothly, but in July 18, 1771, William Tryon became governor, and soon afterward the old difficulties were again renewed. The East India Company, conscious of the injustice in placing a duty on tea, tried to have the latter removed, but in vain, for the ministry still adhered to its boasted right to tax the colonies. This was soon followed by the destruction of the tea shipped to Boston, an event which has ever been known as the "Boston Tea Party." The ministry, whose rage was still more excited by the bold defiance, again retaliated by closing the port of Boston against all commerce—an outrage which awoke national indignation. Public meetings were held for the consideration of the common grievances, and among the plans suggested for mutual protection was the assembling of a Colonial Congress.

The "Continental Congress" (as it has ever been termed) was held at Philadelphia in September, 1774, and having adopted a declaration of rights, it added a petition to the king and an appeal to the people of Great Britain and Canada. The New York assembly was the only one that did not sanction these proceedings; instead of which it addressed a remonstrance to parliament, which was treated with disdain.¹

Let us now return to the county of Tryon and mark how these measures affected the people, and how the latter co-operated for the common weal. The reader must remember that Tryon county was then

¹On the 12th of January, 1775, at a cabinet council, it was declared that there was nothing in the proceedings of Congress that afforded any basis for an honorable reconciliation. It was therefore resolved to break off all commerce with the Americans; to protect the loyalists in the colonies, and to declare all others to be traitors and rebels.—Lossing.

a new creation named in honor of the governor, but young as it was it displayed a full degree of power. The enormous extent of the county led to its division into five districts—the first, beginning at the east, was the Mohawk district, embracing Fort Hunter, Caughnawaga, Johnstown and Kingsboro; next was Canajoharie district, embracing the present town of that name, with all the country south, including Cherry Valley and Harpersfield; third was Palatine district, north of the river, and including the settlement known by the same name, together with Stone Arabia and its immediate precinct; fourth was German Flats and Kingsland, and other western settlements.

Many of the people were zealous and earnest in the patriotic cause and were open in their approval of the proceedings of the Continental Congress, but on the other hand, their district contained Sir John Johnson, who, having succeeded to his father's military title (though never to his popularity and influence), warmly supported the British interests. In carrying out this policy Sir John was seconded by Guy Johnson and Daniel Claus, whose efforts were directed to the complete alienation of the Indians from the whig colonists, and also to bring into submission all of the settlers that might yield to their influence. This attempt, however, did not succeed to any considerable extent, though the immediate dependents and tenants on the Johnson estate were kept in subjection. The Mohawks of course were friendly to the crown, for they loved the father too well to oppose his son. Prominent among them were the notorious leaders, John and Walter Butler, and also the chief, Joseph Brant, all of whom became infamous from their bloody deeds during the revolution, and yet their pillage and slaughter was generally described to the instigations of the Johnsons.

Sir John and his fellow loyalists did not limit their schemes to Tryon county; they sent emissaries to the Six Nations and all other Indians within their reach, the object being to induce them to take up the hatchet against the Americans. In this effort they were too successful, for all except the Oneidas and a few other friendly Indians joined the British. The tory sentiment, however, which was so general in the Mohawk district, did not prevail throughout the country and this was especially true of the Germans in the Palatine district, whose patriotic zeal corresponded with the worth of the cause, and whose example had

an inspiring influence throughout the entire region. They were proof against the machinations of the Johnsons and the still more seductive influence of British gold.

One of the first mass-meetings of the Whigs in Tryon county was held at Caughnawaga soon after the opening of congress, its purpose being to express public approval of the policy pursued by the colonies, and to adopt such measures as might be required by the common weal. On this occasion the animosity of Sir John and his associates was fully manifested, for no sooner had the proceedings begun, than he appeared on the ground with Guy Johnson, Colonel Claus, Butler and a crew of retainers, armed with swords and firearms. Guy Johnson acted as speaker for the tories. Mounting a high stoop, he addressed the throng (which included about 300 patriots), setting forth the power of the crown and the weakness of the colonies. In the course of his speech he so incensed Jacob Sammons, son of the pioneer Sampson Sammons, that the latter retorted with the epithets of "liar and villain." Enraged at this response the tory colonel leaped down and struck the offender a blow which felled him to the ground. Recovering consciousness, young Sammons found one of Johnson's servants sitting astride his body, but the latter was quickly thrown off and the quarrel renewed. Jacob received further injuries, pistols were pointed to his breast, he was again knocked down, and finally was compelled to retire and depart for his father's house, the place being long known as Sammonsville.

The foregoing incident correctly illustrates the feelings of Sir John Johnson towards those who differed with his opinions and interests, but while his retainers in the Mohawk district numbered more than a thousand (including settlers and Indians) his influence never extended beyond them nor were his views respected in those parts of the country that were less subjected to his power.

The proceedings of the Continental Congress (held in Philadelphia in the spring of 1775) naturally surprised and even alarmed this boastful tory, and he determined to counteract their influence so far as possible, and at the same time to convince the crown of his unshaken allegiance. Accordingly, at a court held in Johnstown in the spring "a declaration was drawn up and circulated by the loyalists of Tryon

county, in which they avowed their opposition to the measures adopted by congress." Some debate and warm discussion followed this refractory measure, but the document was signed by most of the grand jury and nearly all the magistrates; a very natural thing indeed, for the county was fully controlled by the Johnson interest.

The influence of the Johnsons as has been mentioned was chiefly limited to the Mohawk district, and no sooner had their conduct become known throughout the country than meetings were held in other localities, notable in the Palatine and Canajoharie districts, upon which occasions the recent outrages were condemned, and the people were urged to firmness in the cause of liberty. The most alarming feature in the public situation was the fortification of Guy Park, whose proprietor had placed swivel guns on each side, and had furnished arms to the tenants and also to the neighboring Indians. More than this, he had stopped and searched two New Englanders, being suspicious that they were emissaries from Massachusetts to the Six Nations whose purpose was to make them allies to the American cause.

At this time the Johnson party was alarmed by the suspicion that a body of New Englanders was coming to effect their arrest, but however well founded their suspicions may have been, there was no such intention at that time on the part of the colonial authorities, and Guy Johnson's defense may have been due to the fear that he might be attacked by the indignant people of the valley, on account of his enmity to liberty. It should be said, however, in justice to Johnson, that he avowed that he was not so much in fear of the settlers in the valley as of assault from the New Englanders. This may be seen by an extract from one of his letters: "You have been misinformed as to the origin of the reports which obliged me to fortify my house, and stand on my defense. I had it from undoubted authority from Albany, and since confirmed by letters from one of the committee at Philadelphia, that a large body of men were coming to make me prisoner."

On June 2, 1775, there was held a general meeting of the committees of safety for several districts of Tryon county, at which was present for the first time the Mohawk committee, they having heretofore been restrained from taking part in the proceedings through fear of the Johnsons. The representatives present on this occasion were as follows:



James Shanahan

From the Palatine district, Isaac Paris, Christopher P. Yates, John Frey, Andrew Fink, Andrew Reeber, Peter Wagner, Daniel McDougall, Jacob Klock, George Ecker, jr., Harmanus Van Slyck, Christopher W. Fox, Anthony Van Veghten; Canajoharie district, Nicholas Herkimer, Ebenezer Cox, William Seeber, John Moore, Samuel Campbell, Samuel Clyde, Thomas Henry, John Pickert; Kingsland and German Flats district, Edward Wall, William Petry, John Petry, Augustin Hess, Frederick Ovendorf, George Wentz, Michael Ittig, Frederick Fox, George Herkimer, Duncan McDougal, Frederick Helmer, John Franck; Mohawk district, John Marlatt, John Bliven, Abraham Van Horne, Adam Fonda, Frederick Visscher, Sampson Sammons, William Schuyler, Volkert Vedder, James McMaster, Daniel Lane.

The principal object of this gathering was to cement more strongly the friendship of the settlers, and to discuss the best means to be adopted for the general welfare. At the same time a committee was chosen to prepare and send to Col. Guy Johnson a letter, setting forth the sentiment of the people as declared by the representatives, and requesting that he, as superintendent of Indian affairs, should use his best efforts to dissuade the Indians from taking up arms against the settlers, rumors then being in circulation that Johnson's retainers had been instigating them to attack. In reply to this letter Colonel Johnson most emphatically denied the charge, and expressed a desire to promote peace between the Indians and the inhabitants. He also called a second council of the Indians in the western part of the county, and, under pretense of there meeting them, moved his family from the Park to Crosby Manor, a little above German Flats. After remaining for a time in the upper part of the valley, he and his followers moved westward as far as Ontario, thence to Oswego, and eventually to Montreal, where he remained during the war, still acting as agent and superintendent, and whence using British gold as a stimulating influence, he sent out parties of Indians to fall upon the settlements in their usual bloody and merciless manner. The people of the valley, being aware of his departure, were both surprised and alarmed by the movement, but were powerless to prevent it, for they were comparatively unorganized and were destitute of either arms or ammunition.

In the party which accompanied Guy Johnson were John and Walter Butler and Joseph Brant, but the larger part of the loyalists remained

behind, placing themselves under the protection of Sir John, whose house and property now became their principal place of rendezvous. Between this party and the committees of safety there occurred incessant contentions. Among the loyalists was Alexander White, sheriff of Tryon county, who had made himself peculiarly obnoxious to the committees, and who was bitterly hated because of his prominence in the assault upon Jacob Sammons and in breaking up the meeting at Caughnawaga. The committee refused to recognize the authority of White as sheriff, and procured the election of John Frey in his stead. White left the country and went to Canada, but returning the next summer he was arrested, though afterward released on parole.

Between Col. Guy Johnson and Sir John, after the former had reached Canada, there was a continual correspondence, their letters being carried secretly by the Indians. Sir John was no less inimical than his brother-in-law, but to draw out clearly his sentiments and test his loyalty, the general committee addressed him a letter, requesting to know whether he would allow the inhabitants of "Johnstown and Kingsboro to form themselves into companies, according to the regulations of the Continental Congress, for the defense of our country's cause; and whether your honor would be ready to give personal assistance to the same purpose; also whether you pretend a prerogative to our county court-house and jail, and would hinder or interrupt the committee making use of the same to our want and service in the common cause."

To this letter Sir John replied: "That as to embodying his tenants, he never did or should forbid them; but they (the committee) might save themselves further trouble, as he knew his tenants would never consent." Concerning his own intentions, he said, that "sooner than lift his hand against the king, or sign any association articles, he would suffer his head to be cut off."

From the tenor of this reply there could be no mistaking the sentiments of the baronet. He claimed the ownership of the court-house and the jail until he should be reimbursed the sum of \$700, but said that he would not deny the use of the latter for the purpose for which it was intended. In regard to Sir John's asserted ownership of the county buildings it may be stated that the committee of congress had information that Sir William Johnson had conveyed the same to two persons

in trust for the county. The committee advised, however, that in view of the bad consequences that might follow if the buildings were attempted to be used for the confinement of the tories, the local committee should engage some other building for their purposes. Accordingly a private house was secured in which several tories were confined, while others were sent to Albany and Hartford.

During the winter of 1775-6, the people of the county were alarmed by the news that Sir John was making preparations to fortify Johnson Hall, and to arm his tenantry and concentrate his entire force in the vicinity; also that he was to garrison his forts with 300 well-armed Indians. There was much truth in this rumor, as the baronet did construct two forts, both of stone, for the defence of the Hall. One of these is still standing, while the other has been removed, as it impaired the beauty and convenience of the mansion, which still stands as securely and substantially as when built in 1763. A more complete description of the Hall and its surroundings will be found in the History of Fulton County.

The conduct of Sir John in prosecuting warlike measures, together with his often repeated treasonable utterances, at last attracted the attention of the provincial authorities, and they decided to bring them to a close. For this purpose, in January, 1776, General Schuyler, accompanied by General Ten Broek and Col. Varick, marched a military force into Tryon county, and at the same time General Herkimer called out the militia, and a combined demonstration was made, their rendezvous being Major Fonda's, where Fonda now stands. Negotiations were held with Sir John and continued two or three days, and the result was that he disarmed his tenants and surrendered himself a prisoner. He was taken to Fishkill, but soon after released on parole. This pledge of honor however, he violated, for in the following May he and his tenants left the Hall, proceeded stealthily by way of Sacandaga and took up his abode in Montreal, whither Col. Guy Johnson had preceded him. During the war that followed, Sir John commanded a troop of his faithful servants and tenants, which were known as "Johnson's Greens."

The flight of the last of the Johnson family removed from Tryon county the most dangerous element against which the struggling colon-

ists had to contend. Thenceforth, so far as local government was concerned, there was no dispute in old Tryon, for the whole people were united in the common cause; and if toryism occasionally manifested itself it was quickly subdued and even followed by arrest. Sir John's servant concealed much of his plate and treasure, but afterward recovered it. The vast Johnson estates, however, were confiscated and sold, and the county thus relieved of the possibility of a "manorial tenure."

Before concluding the present chapter it may be well to explain the necessity of appointing committees, and also the method by which they were formed, and the powers and duties entrusted to them.

Governor Tryon, in whose honor the county was named, was not at all in sympathy with the feelings and actions of the American colonies, and this is the reason why the New England colonies were so much more incensed at the conduct of the Johnsons than the New York authorities. In fact, between the executive of this province and the Johnsons there was the greatest harmony of thought and sentiment; both were the creations and the creatures of the king, and their policy was in subservience to the royal command.

It could not indeed be otherwise than that Tryon should remain faithful to his sovereign, for his office was the direct gift of the crown, and all that the Johnsons possessed came from the same source.

This allegiance to the king on the part of the governor and nearly all others in high office and influence in this province operated materially against the patriots, and forced them into such a position that they were compelled to act through a specially created and self constituted body called the General Committee of Safety, which in turn reported to and received instructions from the Continental Congress. In each of the counties of this province, the chief body was the Council of Safety, while in the several districts (towns or township as now known) were more local organizations, each called the Committee of Safety. The principal duty of the latter was to learn the condition of the district; to ascertain who were friendly to the crown and to watch their movements; also to learn whether the tory element was making any preparations for either aggressive or defensive operations, and the nature of such proceedings. In short the district committee was supposed to

know whatever was taking place in its territory and to report the facts to the Council of Safety. Each of the districts had one of these committees. It was the meeting held at Caughnawaga under the direction of the Mohawk district committee which was attacked and dispersed by the forces of Guy Johnson, of which mention has already been made in this chapter.

CHAPTER X.

Beginning of the Revolution — The British Influence — The Iroquois — Oneidas Remain Neutral — Organization of Militia in Tryon County — St. Leger Invades the Mohawk Valley — The Battle of Oriskany and Fort Schuyler — The British Defeated — The First Pension — Indian Depredations in 1778 — Campaigns of Sullivan and Clinton in 1779 — Sir John Johnson Invades the Valley in 1780 — Visits Johnstown and Secures his Plate — Details of his Raid.

THE flight of the last of the Johnsons from Tryon county restored partial tranquillity among its inhabitants, for while a few Tories still remained they were awed into silence by the determined action of the committees of safety. To such a class their property was a far greater sacrifice than the surrender of their principles.

In 1776 the war had become national instead of colonial and on the 4th day of July independence was formally declared. The long period of seven years of hardship, suffering and conflict which had begun in the battle of Lexington in April, 1775, was closely followed by the daring exploits of Allen and Arnold, both at Ticonderoga and on Lake Champlain, but it was some time before old Tryon county was made the scene of war. All through the Mohawk valley the greatest fear of the people arose from the probability of an Indian invasion, instigated by the Johnsons, and hence all possible preparations were proposed both to prevent a surprise and resist an attack.

The policy of the Americans had been to secure simply the neutrality of the Indians, but their success was limited to the Oneidas, while the British made undisguised efforts to unite them in close alliance with the royal cause. One of their officers exclaimed: "We must let loose the