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Learn More About Fairfield County History

Patriots and Loyalists

During the Revolutionary War period political loyalties divided those people who wished to remain subjects of Britain from those who believed fighting for independence was necessary for the greater good. The consequences of supporting either position were profound, and the resulting conflict sharply divided communities, and even families. The American Revolution was, in many ways, a civil war.

Advocating independence from Britain could be dangerous, resulting in loss of property, harassment, or worse. In 1777, Loyalists from Long Island burned William Palmer's Mill River home, and kidnapped his daughter. During the night of May 2, 1779, Loyalist neighbors of Brigadier General Gold Selleck Silliman, the head of Connecticut's militia, assisted in a plot to kidnap him from his home on Holland Hill in Fairfield. Silliman was taken by whaleboat to Long Island where the British held him captive for almost a year. Connecticut officials denied Silliman his salary during that time, contending that he was not on duty when he was kidnapped.

Although history has cast Fairfield as an ardently patriotic town whose residents endured loss and suffering at the hands of the British, Loyalist families lived here as well, and they too suffered. The Reverend John Sayre, Fairfield's Anglican Church minister and an outspoken supporter of British rule, pleaded with British commander General Tryon on behalf of his fellow citizens to stop the burning of homes in July 1779. Sayre, who was also the town's surgeon, was indebted to patriot Fairfielders who had secured his release from Old Newgate Prison two years earlier. Ironically, his church, located in the road where Old Post Road and Old Field Road meet, was burned to the ground as the troops departed Fairfield. The town had become a dangerous place for Loyalists, and Sayre fled with Tryon. Other Loyalists had their property confiscated, and at the close of the war, they were "evicted" from their homes and forced to leave the country. Many departed from New York harbor on British ships sailing to New Brunswick, Canada, where they began their lives anew on land grants from the King of England.