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The Refugee Loyalists of Connecticut

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The Refugee Loyalists of Connecticut

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(Read May Meeting, 1916.)

Loyalists began to flee from Connecticut to New York and Long Island as early as the summer of 1775 and continued to do so during the next four years. During this period also there were a few flights to Great Britain, Thomas Dare, tide surveyor, and Duncan Stewart, collector of customs, both in the port of New London, departing for England in 1776 and 1777, respectively; while John Saltmarsh of Norwich, glover and dyer, went to Ireland in March, 1779, after spending two years with the British fleet.¹ As most of the Connecticut Loyalists lived in the county of Fairfield, where the Episcopal Church had its strongest hold, it was from this region that the large majority of flights took place, the shore towns of Stamford, Norwalk, Fairfield, and Stratford, contributing notable numbers of refugees.

The vigilance of local committees of safety impelled many Tories to cross Long Island Sound and find shelter within the British lines. The establishment of a post on Lloyd's Neck, opposite the islands and coves lying between Norwalk and Stamford, shortly after the British took possession of New York in September, 1776, was especially advantageous to the Tories of Fairfield County. The inhabitants of the region between the two towns were partly Episcopalians and partly Quakers, all being Loyalists of sufficient devotion to afford asylum and supply passage to those wishing to cross the sound. Walter Bates of Stamford, who was early driven into the mountains and forests for refuge and in the fall of 1778 fled to Long Island, tells us that his "three brothers and hundreds of others passed by night almost continually to the British Garrison" at Lloyd's Neck. Some of the more zealous and influential of these refugees were promptly sent back with commissions, or promises of commissions, to recruit men for the Loyalist corps which began to form at once. Already by the opening days of July, 1776, Stephen Hoit of Norwalk had raised a full company for Brigadier-General Montfort Browne's Prince of Wales American Volunteers, and according to his sworn statement before the Commissioners of Loyalist Claims some years

¹ Sec. Rep., Bur. of Arch., Ont., Pt. II, 1904, 1184, 1156, 1155.