

“Resurgam” - The Motto of Nova Scotia Loyalist Brigadier - General Timothy Ruggles

*By Brian McConnell**

It could be written Brigadier - General Timothy Ruggles personified the Latin Motto of Nova Scotia Loyalists “Resurgam” - “ I shall rise again”. Loyalty to the British Crown during the American Revolution cost him family and property. He relocated to Nova Scotia to start over. In 1795 he died at Wilmot and was buried at the Old Holy Trinity Church in Middleton.(1)



Old Holy Trinity Church, Middleton, N.S., established 1789

At the end of the American Revolution, Brigadier - General Timothy Ruggles was among the 20,000 Loyalists who were relocated to Nova Scotia by the British. For his service to the Crown he was granted 1,000 acres in Wilmot on the Bay of Fundy where he built an estate and farmed until his death at the age of 83.

Ruggles was described by his cousin, John Quincy Adams, as “a high minded man, an exalted soul”. He was born the eldest son of Reverend Timothy Ruggles in 1711, a fifth generation American, and graduated from Harvard College in 1732 before beginning the practice of law in Rochester, Massachusetts. In Rochester, his birthplace, he was also elected as a Representative of the General Court, or Assembly, at the age of 25. (2)

In 1736 Ruggles married Bathesheba Bourne Newcomb, who was the daughter of Judge Melitiah Bourne, the wealthiest man in Sandwich. They moved to Sandwich where he expanded his law practice and became recognized as a leading lawyer in Massachusetts. His political career also advanced as he was elected to six terms as Sandwich's Representative to the Assembly in Boston. The family grew and he had seven children with Bathesheba, four girls and three boys.

At the age of 42, Ruggles moved with his wife and family to Hardwick, a new town outside of Worcester, Massachusetts. Six other Ruggles families also made the move to the area where they had acquired a large tract of land. He was elected as Hardwick's Representative to the General Court in 1754 and also appointed a Chief Justice in Worcester.



Timothy Ruggles

Shortly after the move to Hardwick, the French and Indian War broke out and he raised a regiment of colonial volunteers. From 1755 - 1765 Ruggles was Colonel of the first Provincial Regiment of two battalions and commander-in-chief of all troops in Massachusetts. He was promoted to Brigadier - General from Colonel after he distinguished himself at the Battle of St. George where he captured the defeated French General Dieskau.

Ruggles was chosen Speaker of the House of Representatives in 1762 and when the Stamp Act Congress met in 1765 he was elected President. However, the Assembly voted opposition to the King, he refused to agree and left the Congress. Ruggles, having fought in the war, appreciated the price England had paid in lives and cost and believed the external tax imposed on the American colonies was reasonable. He was loyal to the King and cautioned for moderation.

As far as Ruggles was concerned, the movement for independence was being driven by an unruly mob and he rejected their violent efforts for separation from England. His opponents saw him as obstinate and inflexible, but he saw himself as a man of uncompromising principles. His loyalty to Britain was unbending and it was not his nature to change sides.

In a letter to a Boston Newspaper in 1774, Ruggles wrote:

“And if attended to and complied with by the good people of the province, might put it in the power of anyone very easily to distinguish such loyal subjects to the King and are to assert their rights and freedom, in all respects consistent with the laws of the land from such rebellious ones as under the pretence of being friends of liberty, are frequently committing the most enormous outrages upon the persons and the property of such of his Majesty’s peaceable subjects who from want of knowing whom to call upon, in these distracted times for assistance, fall into the hands of bandits, whose cruelties surpass those of savages.” (3)

Ruggles loyalty to the Crown brought him many enemies and he was denounced and his life threatened. In 1775 he left for Halifax, from where he continued serving faithfully, returning to the Colonies with British forces until the end of the war when he abandoned New York with the remaining Loyalists. His estates were confiscated and he was named in the Massachusetts Banishment Act. On a list of the top 300 Tories, Ruggles was third.

Sir John Wentworth, formerly Governor of New Hampshire, and later Governor of Nova Scotia, in support of the claim of Brigadier - General Ruggles for a land grant wrote : “ He was the means of more persons remaining loyal in Massachusetts than any other man. The King’s American Dragoons were raised principally by his influence...” (4)

At the age of 70, Ruggles was still vigorous and cleared land and built a homestead in Nova Scotia. With the fellow Loyalist, Charles Inglis, who became the first Bishop of Nova Scotia, he was responsible for developing the yellow “Bishop Pippin” apple. (5) The location where Ruggles selected for his house was on the face of and near the top of the North Mountain, in the Annapolis Valley of Nova Scotia. During his lifetime and for a few years afterwards it bore the name of “Ruggles Mountain”. It is better known in present times as “Phinney Mountain, after the late Lot Phinney, who purchased the property on the death of Ruggles. (6)

Three of Ruggles' sons, Timothy, John, and Richard, followed him into exile and settled in Annapolis County but his three daughters and his wife did not. Timothy later was elected to the House of Assembly of Nova Scotia. His four daughters were married and stayed in Massachusetts. One of his daughters, Bathsheba Spooner, who had been behind enemy lines, became the first woman to be executed in 1778 by the newly independent United States of America. She was hanged while pregnant for the crime of plotting, with three British soldiers, the death of her husband, Joshua Spooner. (7) The hanging took place in Worcester, very close to the court house where her father had been the Chief Justice.

In his senior years Ruggles was bothered by a hernia and in August 1795 on the occasion of a visit by guests while taking them on a tour of his garden he aggravated his poor health. Four days later he died and was buried on the eastward side of the church which he had been a major financial contributor in Middleton. A monument was later erected to his memory by his great granddaughter, Eliza Bayard West.



Monument to Brigadier - General Timothy Ruggles

NOTES

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1. See Old Holy Trinity Church in www.historicplaces.ca at:
<http://www.historicplaces.ca/en/rep-reg/place-lieu.aspx?id=3805>
2. "Timothy Ruggles (1711-1795) The Rise and Fall of a Massachusetts Loyalist", by Bill Daley, 2008 at <http://sandwichhistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/Timothy-Ruggles1.pdf>
3. "General Ruggles 'personification of motto of Loyalists' Association' by Ray H. Blakeney, published in Halifax Herald Newspaper, 1983
4. Brig. Gen. Timothy Ruggles (1711-1795) at <http://sackettfamily.info/tekdatabase/g3/p3273.htm>
5. "So Obstinate Loyal - James Moody 1744 - 1809", by Susan Burgess Shenstone, published by McGill - Queen's University Press, 2000, p. 207.
6. "History of the County of Annapolis" by W.A. Calnek, published by William Briggs, Toronto, 1897, pp 584-92.
7. See "Bathsheba Spooner" by Deborah Navas at <http://bathshebaspooner.com/>