



Col. William Marsh Vermont Patriot and Loyalist

By Jennifer S.H. Brown, Wilson B. Brown

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This engaging and carefully researched book tells, for the first time, the story of William Marsh (1738-1816), an intriguing but little-known Revolutionary figure whose life crossed borders both national and political. It contributes importantly to the literature on American loyalists about whom few book-length biographies have been written. It traces through myriad sources the life of a founder of Vermont long overshadowed by the ample attention paid to his famed associates, Ethan and Ira Allen. The book also places Marsh in his family context, tracing the Marshes from Connecticut in the late 1600s to Upper Canada where many descendants found new homes after the American Revolution. In doing so, it explores the roots of his values, actions, and choices in the dramatic events through which he lived. Before the war, Marsh and several thousand other New Hampshire Grants settlers faced grave challenges to their land titles from New York which laid claim to the territory that was to become Vermont. A colonel in the Manchester (VT) militia, Marsh supported the Green Mountain Boys' paramilitary actions against the Yorkers' moves to dispossess the settlers. As the Revolution began, he played a key role in uniting the Vermont towns as they organized to request the American Continental Congress to recognize them as a state. When the congress refused, and when the British proposed to offer them recognition and support, Marsh turned to the British as offering the best prospects for Vermont as it struggled to survive on its own. Present at the British defeat at Saratoga in October 1777, Marsh was sent into exile in Canada. He next surfaced at Fort St. John, north of Lake Champlain, doing intelligence and refugee work for the British secret service under General Frederick Haldimand. Although the British failed to make Vermont into a British colony, Marsh and other Vermont loyalists and partisans secured Vermont's neutrality in the later years of the Revolution, protecting it from the severe British raids unleashed against New York. After the war, Marsh documented to the Loyalist Claims Commission the confiscation of most of his Vermont lands and secured grants for himself and offspring in Upper Canada. In the meantime, his father's Vermont holdings preserved a base for the family in their homeland. Returning finally to Vermont, Marsh spent his last twenty years out of the public sphere, rebuilding his life and livelihood among both old friends and enemies, while retaining on his own an attachment to Freemasonry reflected in his remarkable gravestone in

Dorset, Vermont. Most of his children found success in Canada, even as they endured fresh economic challenges and troubled times through the War of 1812. A genealogical appendix adds substantially to the family's history, filling gaps and resolving numerous old questions that have beset the many descendants who have sought to trace their Marsh roots. Review by Tyler Resch, Research Librarian, Bennington Museum, Bennington, VT: This new biography opens the reader's eyes to the political and economic hardships of Vermont's settlers during the era of the American Revolution, a time when many were justifiably troubled about where their loyalties should reside. Its subject has lingered in obscurity until now, but Col. William Marsh: Vermont Patriot and Loyalist by Jennifer S.H. Brown and Wilson B. Brown, demonstrates that Marsh worked and associated with many well-known figures in early New England and nearby Canada. In revealing Marsh's little-known role in the creation of the feisty and independent state of Vermont, and his later work with the British on its behalf, the book makes a major contribution to its history, telling "the Vermont story" in fresh and readable ways and making sophisticated use of a wide variety of sources.

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Kent Brown:

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Connie Curtis:

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