

National Humanities Center

My Neighbor, My Enemy: How American Colonists Became Patriots and Loyalists

"The Narrative of Mr. Ebenezer Punderson, Merchant; Who was drove away by the Rebels in America from his Family and away considerable fortune in Norwich, Connecticut," 1776

This rare account, published in London, chronicles the terror and suffering of a Connecticut merchant who spoke out against the anti-British resistance movement. Like Janet Schaw, he gives voice to the loyalist cause. Unhappily for him, he happened to live in one of the most radical regions of colonial America, and the Connecticut committees were not willing to tolerate ideological opposition.

Even though Punderson speaks openly against the patriot's cause, he is able to rally his Norwich neighbors to his defense. His repeated defiance of local committees of safety and news of the Battle of Lexington, however, eventually whip up mob violence against him and make him a marked man. Denied protection in Connecticut, he heads for New York, only to be captured by a mob from which he is saved by the local committee of safety. He persuades the committee to let him sign a confession more "simple than treasonable," after which he is sent back to Norwich. On his way another mob seizes him and turns him over to the local committee of safety which holds him for eight days, releasing him after he signs a slightly altered version of his confession. Walking home, he encounters a man named Bebee who is armed with a gun and a sword. There follows an almost comic minuet in which Punderson tries to stay close to Bebee so that he cannot draw his gun and shoot him. He reaches Norwich and spends thirty terror-ridden nights before news of fresh threats drives him to Newport, Rhode Island, and from there to safety in England.

Discussion Questions

1. Compare Punderson's treatment with the treatment of loyalists that Schaw describes in her journal. What accounts for the differences?
2. What roles do the committees of safety play in Punderson's narrative?

T H E

N A R R A T I V E

O F

Mr. Ebenezer Punderfon,

M E R C H A N T ;

Who was drove away by the Rebels in America
from his Family and a very considerable for-
tune in Norwich, in Connecticut.

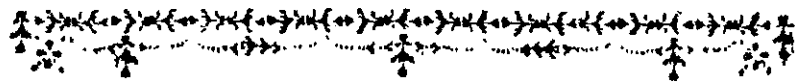
T O G E T H E R W I T H

Some Letters and Clauses of Letters, wrote to his
Family during his absence : Taken from his episto-
lary Journal.

L O N D O N :

Printed by R. HAWES, (No. 40.) the Corner of
Dorset-Street, Crispin-Street, Spitalfields, 1776.

H. J. J.
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T H E

N A R R A T I V E, &c.

WHEN the Tea was destroy'd by the Bostonians, Anno 1773, it occasioned a general dispute amongst people of every quality. The Press was presently shut to all arguments but what favoured of high Whigism, and he was the best printer that put into his papers the most untruths against the King, earl Bute, lord North, and the majority in parliament, and that in the most scandalous and reproachful terms; which many well meaning people, ignorant as to the true characteristics of those personages, received for sacred truths. As my calling brought vast numbers of people to my house, I gave them my opinion freely upon every controverted point, and the authority I had for the same. I procured the clauses of the severat American charters that related to our subjection and the parliament's right of taxing, together with divers acts of parliament enforcing subjection, raising subsidies, suppressing sitting mills, restraining or confining the Hatter's trade, and granting a bounty, on the other hand on many of our articles of exportation, encouraging or restraining as might best serve the general good of the whole nation. By which means I convinced great numbers that England had given America no just cause of complaint.

July, 1774, A message was sent me from *Stonington*, informing that they were enlisting to come and tar-feather me, and that I must immediately recant, or I should

have a visit from them. I drew up a letter in the name of the neighbouring inhabitants, representing that we were informed concerning their intentions, and that as we had ever enjoyed a peaceable and quiet neighbourhood, we should therefore resent any undue, disorderly, or riotous conduct; thinking that whoever refused to sign it, would be willing that I should be mobbed, and whoever signed, would oppose the rioters.—So it proved. I shewed it to eighty-four men, eighty of whom signed it, telling me at the same time, That they would appear on the shortest warning, and prevent any thing of that nature, even to the risk of their lives: I sealed and sent it to the sons of Liberty in *Stonington*. A captain of the standing militia hearing of the letter, sent me word, that if I should be molested he would come to my assistance, upon the shortest notice; with forty able bodied men: and great numbers besides let me know their readiness to assist me. After this the patriots could never raise a mob to come against me at my own home, till after the fight at *Lexington*, although they strove by many stratagems to do it.

In September, 1774, the New-England colonies took up arms against general Gage: which rebellious conduct I strenuously opposed, and had the satisfaction to see my neighbours stay quietly at home; for which I was called before an inquisitive mob in *Preston*. Since I had much custom from that town, I took a number of friends and appeared before them. They passed a decree that no man should trade or deal with me. After this I fell into the hands of a mob about fifty miles from home, who only abused me with provoking words and threatenings.

April 4th, 1775. I was summoned to appear before the mob's committee at *Norwich*.—I refused to attend.

April 18th, The committee proscribed me, forbidding all people to have “any intercourse or commerce whatever with me” because “I denied their authority and had drank tea since March, 1st. and had said—The congress was an illegal body, and that their petition to the king was haughty, insolent, and rascally.”

April

April 21st. 1775. I was at a court in *Stonington*, when the above advertisement came there, and at the same time the news of the fight at *Lexington*; which battle was so wickedly misrepresented, to the disadvantage of the British troops, that it raised a perfect frenzy in the people wherever the news went. A mob instantly gathered and were very fierce to take me, but were dissuaded by several justices of the peace then present. Word was carried to the militia, who called their God to witness, that I should be instantly drawn in quarters before the Liberty Pole. They joined the mob; and, for three hours, it was with the utmost difficulty that the said authority could keep them from violence.

April 22d. Three men (that had met that day at a muster in *Preston*) came to my house, each one not knowing of the other's coming, and told me that my life was in imminent danger, even that very instant. They were men of probity and undoubted veracity.— Early next morning I rode to *Lebanon* and waited upon *Jonathan Trumbull Esq*; governor of *Connecticut*, and told him that my life was in danger and I begged his protection. He asked me whether I had acted inimical to America? I answered no, but had constantly endeavoured to convince people that Great Britain had given America no just cause of complaint. The governor refused me any kind of protection whatever. I then begged that he would give me a pass that I might retire to *New York*, this he likewise refused. However I set off for *New York* in a road not much travelled, but was soon taken up in the town of *Colchester*, where was instantly a mob of three or four hundred people. The committee of safety were sitting, in the midst of whom *John Watrus*, a justice of the peace, was chairman, and also a representative in the assembly. After I had told them the cause of my flight, they asked me whether I would take arms and go to *Boston*, as there was a number of armed soldiers had just then joined the mob, who, being on their march to *Boston*, begged that I might be delivered up to them. I told them that I would suffer any death rather than take up arms against my king; one soldier said, Put him four rods from the people, and I will soon

put it out of his power to hurt our cause : Another says, Ay, let us take the charge of him.

I begged that I might be with the committee alone ; it was granted. I then begged of Mr. *Watrus* that he would take me under his protection and as he would attend the general assembly the next day, let me go with him, and I would beg protection from the assembly : this he refused, and said, The assembly will give you no protection. He then proposed that I should sign the continental covenant, which obliged the signers to take up arms against the king's troops &c. This I refused. Whereupon the soldiers were called in. From the violent temper that they had shewn before, and their ferocious looks now convinced me, that I might not be nice in the terms of reconciliation. I begged the committee would draw the most moderate confession that they would receive, saying, that a forced confession was no confession. The soldiers were ordered out, and a confession drawn up, rather simple than treasonable, which I signed. After nine hours spent with the said committee and mob, I was sent to the Norwich committee of inspection, under a guard, with the paper I had signed. When we had rode about 10 miles, we stopped at an Inn to refresh ourselves, where a man suspecting that he knew me, made it known after we were gone ; they then procured two extraordinary horses, upon which two men pursued us, overtook, and rode by us to town, it being 12 o'clock at night. They rallied a mob, and lay in a narrow place where we were coming. The committee were called out of their beds, and when we came there, the mob ordered us before the committee. I shewed them my confession, which they altered a little and I again signed it.

Here I was obliged to stay eight days till my confession was published in the News Papers.

Walking home in the evening of the eighth night, I fell in company with one *Bebee* who had his gun, sword, and other accoutrements with him. From his very odd address, I suspected that he intended mischief. I kept a strict eye over him, and so close to him that he could not level his gun against me ; happening to look on one
side

hide a little, and suddenly on him again, his drawn sword dropt to the ground. I stopped, keeping my eye upon him till he pickt it up and put it into its sheath. I still kept close to him as we walked, watching him narrowly. When we were come against a house, he turned towards it and said, he would go in. I bade him good bye, and walked forward; when suddenly looking back, he was stopped, had put his gun in a proper position for charging and had his powder horn in his hand. I ran back to him, and told him, that since he did not go into the house, I would wait and walk with him. He returned his horn, shouldered his gun, and I kept close side of him till we overtook a lad; when *Beebe* turned to the wall under pretence to make water, and said he would overtake us. After I had walked a few steps, I stopped, and told him that I would wait for him, he had again put his gun in a proper position for charging: he stood some minutes, and finding that I would not leave him, shouldered his gun, without offering to make water, and walked with us a little way, when he suddenly clapt his gun to his face, said he could see to take good aim, and went forward upon a run. I kept my eyes upon him, till by the darkness and his distance I could see him no longer. Suspecting that he would load his gun and way-lay me, I stepped out of the road and went the rest of the way home through lots and inclosures.

A day or two after, I saw the lad, and asked him if he met with *Beebe* again that night? he told me that said *Beebe* came from behind a certain rock to him. N. B. The lad knew nothing of my suspicions. That rock was three quarters of a mile forward of where *Beebe* left me, and so situate, that had I kept the road, I must have gone within three yards of it.

I got home, where I kept close for the space of thirty nights, and upon my guard in the day, during which time my aged mother was frightened almost into fits, and my wife and children in perpetual fears.

May 28th. An Inn-holder told me, that a number of soldiers, who were the other night at his house, told him, that I had but a little time to live; for that a
number

number of them had sworn to take my life before they went to Boston, and they expected to march the next day. Whereupon, at 12 o'clock that night, I got into a small open boat and rowed myself about six leagues, intending to get into the first coasting vessel that I could find sailing to *New York* or *New Port*. The next day I was taken up by a Coaster and carried into *New Port*. I went on board his majesty's ship *Rose*, *James Wallace* Esq. commander, who was civil and kind to me. I stayed with captain *Wallace* four months, then sailed for England to pass the winter, and arrived in London Nov. 19th. 1775.

End of the Narrative.