



## *William Bull and Sarah Wells*

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*Two wars in the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century had a profound impact on members of the Bull family. The French and Indian War terrorized small rural communities throughout the colonies. There were many tales of Indian atrocities, and attacks on frontier communities with all the inhabitants being either murdered or kidnapped weighted heavily on the minds of the people of Orange County.*

*A few years later, long-standing differences between the colonies and Great Britain blew up into a full scale War of Independence. Looking back now, and knowing the outcome, makes it easy to overlook the great uncertainty and anxiety that was felt by every family. There were complex competing interests, both economic and social, and every individual was forced to choose a side.*

### **War Comes to Orange County**

The French and Indian War, which had begun in 1754, reached disturbing proportions on

the frontiers of Orange and Ulster Counties by 1756.

Encouraged by French successes on Lake Champlain and Lake George, the Indians attacked several border settlements, killing the inhabitants and burning their homes and fields. The

Orange County Militia, under Col. Vincent Matthews, son of the old patentee Peter Matthews, was called out to protect the settlers. In the Journal of the New York Assembly we find records relating to this service, including the names of Ensign Thomas Bull in 1756, and that of Capt. John Bull in 1757-58. In Jan. 1757, Capt.

John Bull with others was employed building a line of block houses to help secure the western part of the county against further Indian encroachments. Although the attacks

were confined to the frontier areas west of the Wallkill, the whole county lived in continual terror that hostile war parties might at any

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time penetrate into the more highly populated easterly areas. During this period, the Stone House was used as a fort and place of refuge for inhabitants of the neighborhood for miles around, especially at night. Wooden blocks were provided to cover the windows to protect against attack. For safety, the horses and cattle were often kept in the basement, at times as many as thirteen being stabled there.

The house was a stopping place for messengers of the government traveling to and from the frontier. One amusing story that has come down to us tells of such a

messenger who lost his way toward dusk and spent the night floundering around in the swamp south of the house, much greater in extent then than it now is. Next morning,

covered with mud, the unfortunate man came stumbling into the yard. Asked where he had been, he exclaimed in disgust he'd "been in Purgatory." Ever since, the swamp has been known by that colorful name.

Though it was well known that the Bull house served as a focal point for neighborhood defense, the site was never attacked nor any inmate ever molested. This was due in part to the friendliness of the local Indians, for whom the Bulls had performed many kind offices, but was also due to the distance of the house from the frontier by that time. The war continued sporadically until peace was finally negotiated in 1763, and life could return to normal.

Little more than a decade passed and again the haunting specter of war arose as the American colonies began the struggle to free themselves from the control of England. Unlike the French War, however, the conflict with England engendered a split in loyalties among the people of Orange County, as elsewhere in the State. Where the previous war had been a clear-cut invasion, the present conflict had the character of a civil war.

Many people remained sympathetic to the royal government while others avidly espoused the course of rebellion. There was a large body of Tory sentiment in the county led by such notable families as the Coldens, which the English settlers tended to follow. The hotbed of rebellion was to be found among the Dutch, Scotch-Irish, and German settlers, led by the Clintons, who had very little use for the English government. The Bull family displayed this same state of divided loyalty, as can be seen by the following listing.

John Bull, whose captaincy in the French War was still respectfully recalled, remained neutral. Though he was fined for his Tory son William going over to fight in the British army,

his sons Ebenezer and Samuel and son-in-law Richard Earl served in the local militia.

William Bull died before the conflict, but his sons William, Moses, and Charles served in the Ulster County Militia. William Jr. later became a captain in the New York Line and was at Valley Forge.

Sarah's husband George Booth served in the militia, as did his sons-in-law Jason Wilkins and Joshua Wells, while son-in-law Hugh Lindsey was in the New York Line .. Son William Booth, suspected of being a Tory, turned out to be an undercover friend of the American cause.

Thomas Bull, who also served in the French war, spent a year in the jails of Goshen and Poughkeepsie for his loyalist sentiments. His son Absalom was a Tory organizer and son George served as a captain in the British army. Yet a younger son, Daniel, served in the Ulster County Militia.

Isaac Bull served in the Orange County Militia, as did his sons Peter and John, and sons-in-law Silas Pierson Jr. and

Gideon Coleman.

Esther's husband John Miller died just prior to the war, but her son-in-law Hendrick VanKeuren served as a captain in the Ulster County Militia and her son Johannes, only 17, served in his company.

Mary's husband Benjamin Booth was a Tory and escaped to Long Island where he died, but Mary herself remained home and supported the American cause.

Margaret Bull seems to have been the reverse of her sister Mary, being a Tory at heart, while her husband Silas Horton went off to fight the British against her wishes.

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Catherine's husband James Faulkner served as a lieutenant in the Ulster County Militia.

Ann's husband William Eager, though lame, was an ardent supporter of the Revolutionary cause, and supplied provisions to the Highland forts.

Richard Bull remained loyal to the British and actively tried to enlist his neighbors in support of the royal government.

Eleanor's husband Wilhelmus Weller served in the Orange County Militia.

At the end of the war, when the British forces were preparing to evacuate New York City, some members of the family who had been active loyalists found it expedient to emigrate to Canada, settling in New Brunswick on land provided them by the British government. These included Richard Bull and his nephews William (son of John) and George (son of Thomas). Though divided politically from their relatives remaining in Orange County, they nevertheless retained a sense of the family bonds which continues to this day among their descendants. This is most graphically displayed in a poignant letter, now preserved in the Stone House, from the above William Bull, who had served with the British at Bunker Hill and elsewhere, to his cousin Peter back home:

Mr. Peter Bull, Hamptonburgh  
N. York, October ye 5th 1783

Sir

With the greatest pleasure we embrace this opportunity of sending you these few scribbling lines hoping they may find you in health of body & peace

*In our next installment, we learn about two things that were made by William and Sarah during their lifetimes that give us a tangible sense of their skill and craftsmanship. For Sarah, we have a handmade wedding dress that she probably made for one of her daughters. For William, there is the great stone house itself.*

**"Tales from the Blue Book", the William Bull and Sarah Wells Stone House Assn., edited 2015 by Robert Eager**

Source: Emma McWhorter, Dolly Booth, Philip Seaman, History and Genealogy of the William Bull and Sarah Wells Family (Printed by The Service Press, Middletown, NY, T. Emmett Henderson, Publisher), pp 88-93.

of mind as we are at present, thank God for it. We have embarked on Board the Ship Sally & do expect to sail within a few days to St. Johns River in Noviscotia, that most Loyal and Happy Government as they say. Be pleased to give our Kind love & Respects to all inquiring friends.

*Now we must leave our Native Shore  
And Cross the Roaring Ocean o'er  
Unto a land we ne're did see  
all for the Sake of Loyalty.  
But yet we hope to Se the day  
When we may Return and dare to Say  
We've come to hold Community  
for we're all the friends of Loyalty.*

*Now for awhile we bid adieu  
to all our friends whose hearts are true  
and pray to God to Bless you all  
accept our wishes altho but Small.*

P.S. We hope if ever you Should Come to se us Again we may be under a Capacity of Giving you Better entertainment than in a (sc)oth Hog Sty Amongst a p(ancel)l of Soldiers. As it hapened the last time we saw you. But we Beg you will excuse. Your Loving Cousins and Humble Serts.

Wm. Bull  
Wm. Welling  
Peter Welling"

(Peter Bull's mother's sister, Mary Mulliner married John Welling. These were probably their sons.)