

PLYMOUTH IN THE REVOLUTION: Political leaders, Patriots & Loyalists

PATRIOT / REBEL: James Warren (1726-1808)

[John Hancock and James Warren] have been equally firm in their manly Opposition to Ministerial Measures; and neither of them have in the least Degree swerved from Principles in the Judgment of their Constituents, of true Patriotism

On Warren's election as Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Province of Massachusetts, 1769



Silver tankard belonging to James Warren.

A gentleman farmer and merchant, James Warren had not played an important role in town politics until the Stamp Act crisis. Perhaps inspired by his outspoken brother-in-law James Otis, Warren helped draft Plymouth's protest. In 1766, Warren was elected as Plymouth's representative to Massachusetts' General Court. In 1769, when Governor Hutchinson vetoed the nomination of John Hancock as Speaker, Warren was chosen in his place. Warren, credited by some as the originator of the Committees of Correspondence established to facilitate Revolutionary communication, served on Plymouth's Committee.

Many of Plymouth's leaders were related (and most were Pilgrim descendants). Warren's cousin William Sever was representative for nearby Kingston and served on its Committee of Correspondence. Warren's main opposition in Plymouth came from his other "Rascally Cousins," the Winslows.

In 1774 Warren represented the town at the Massachusetts Provincial Congress, the recently-established Patriot alternative to royal government, alternating with William Sever as president of the Congress. In 1775, Warren was appointed colonel of a regiment of Massachusetts militia, and promoted to Major General the following year. He later served as Paymaster General to the Continental Army and on the Navy Board. Reluctant to leave his home, Warren refused several military and political appointments although he was a state legislator through the 1780s and 1790s.

LOYALIST / TORY: Edward Winslow, Senior (1714-1783)

By his attachment to the cause of Government he has experienced transition from the most comfortable situation to a state of poverty and distress ... he has received every species of insult and abuse.

Request to the British government for compensation
for Edward Winslow, Senior, of Plymouth

Edward Winslow, Senior (great-grandson of Mayflower Pilgrim Edward Winslow) was an important civil servant and politician in Plymouth. He held the offices of Clerk of the Court of Common Pleas, Deputy Port Collector, and Notary Public for the Port of Plymouth. Winslow sided with the King and in his position as a port official obstructed local Patriots in their efforts to evade paying the Royal duties.

Once the war started, Winslow lost his political positions and his income. He was repeatedly questioned by local Patriots, who tried to make him recant his loyalty to the King. His daughter Sarah testified in London in 1793 that "The Mob in 1775 took him out of his House and carried him to take the Oaths which he refused and they confined him to the Town for two Years and to his House for one Year."

Without an income, Winslow soon fell into debt. In 1781, he and his family and servants left for British-occupied New York City, where his son Edward Junior was serving in the British forces as a Loyalist. Winslow's Plymouth mansion was sold at auction to pay his debts. Edward Winslow Junior arranged for his family -- including his father -- to settle in Nova Scotia. Edward Winslow Senior died as a refugee in Halifax in 1783.

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PATRIOT / REBEL: Mercy Otis Warren (1728-1814)

A contest now pushed with so much vigor, that the intelligent yeomanry of the country, as well as those educated in the higher walks, became convinced that nothing less than a systematic plan of slavery was designed against them. They viewed the chains as already forged to manacle the unborn millions.

Mercy Otis Warren,
History of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the Revolution, 1805 1805

Mercy Otis was born in Barnstable, child of James and Mary Allyne Otis. As the daughter of a powerful local judge and politician, Mercy received a gentlewoman's education, including needlework. Unusual for her time, she received a gentleman's education as well, studying Classical writings with her brothers. Mercy moved to Plymouth when she married James Warren in 1754. In addition to managing a household and raising four sons, she found time to write by balancing "the world of intellect and the world of domesticity." A woman of many accomplishments, she was a political critic, poet, dramatist and historian.

Mercy's family was active in politics. Her brother, James Otis of Boston, led the protest against the Stamp Act. Her husband James served as Plymouth's

representative to the General Court, and leader of Plymouth's Committee of Correspondence.

While, as a woman, Mercy could not hold political office, she participated with her pen. She satirized Tory leaders (including Peter Oliver) in plays and wrote patriotic poems. She corresponded with both George and Martha Washington and with John and Abigail Adams. Her book, *History of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the Revolution*, was published in 1805. in politics. Her brother, James Otis of Boston, led the protest against the Stamp Act. Her husband James served as Plymouth's representative to the General Court, and leader of Plymouth's Committee of Correspondence.

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LOYALIST / TORY: Peter Oliver (1713-1791)

I took my leave of that once happy country, where peace and plenty reigned uncontrolled, till that infernal Hydra Rebellion, with its hundred Heads, had devoured its happiness, spread desolation over its fertile fields, and ravaged the peaceful mansions of its inhabitants.

Oliver's opinion of the Revolution,
from his book *Origin and Progress of the American Revolution*

Judge Peter Oliver was a leading Tory in eastern Massachusetts. Raised in Boston, Oliver moved in the 1740s to Middleboro (in Plymouth County), where he built an iron slitting mill on the Nemasket River. He built Oliver Hall, where he lived with his family and servants. He served as Middleboro's representative to the General Court and, in 1747, was appointed as judge of the Court of Common Pleas for Plymouth County. In 1756, he was appointed to the provincial Superior Court of Judicature.

Oliver supported the Stamp Act, believing it appropriate for the colonies to pay for British troops to defend their frontier. His brother Andrew, who had been appointed collector of revenues for the Stamp Act, narrowly missed being killed when his Boston house was destroyed by an angry mob in 1765.

As tensions grew, many Patriots boycotted courts because judges were paid by the crown. In 1774, a mob dragged Oliver from the Bench. He returned to his job, but needed an armed guard to do so.



Stamp for 2 shillings, 6 pence.

Oliver stayed in Boston during the British siege of that city and left for Nova Scotia when the British evacuated Boston in March of 1776. Not finding Nova Scotia to his liking, Oliver and his family moved to England. "Thanks be to

heaven," he wrote, "I am now in a Place where I can be protected from the Harpy Claws of that Rebellion which is now tearing out its own Bowels in America." The Olivers never returned to America.
