

RB essay was read by David Beasley at Christ Church Cathedral, Hamilton ON, at Sunday morning service on October 2, 2011 on the occasion of the honoring of Richard Beasley burial place behind the Church with the United Empire Loyalist dedication plaque by the Hamilton branch of the United Empire Loyalist Association.

Talk on Richard Beasley

Should the Resurrection take place now and Richard Beasley walk out of his grave to confront us, followed by his wife Henrietta, who went by the name Hannah, and their son David, he would be delighted that we are honoring him with a plaque as a United Empire Loyalist. He would see the designation as a recognition by generations succeeding him of the privations, hardships, struggles both violent and political, and vision for an independent country that he, his wife and his son undertook in building for a future.

Richard lived long for his day, 80 and a half years. Hannah, 15 years younger, lived as long. David died rather young, but he was the city coroner and contracting disease was a hazard of his occupation. All three would regale us of the beauty of the Head of the Lake. When Richard first settled here it was a vast forest of wild game which he hunted and trapped and predators such as wolves hiding in the ravines running to the lakeshore. From his cabin on the shore of Maccassa Lake he could watch the nomadic Mississauga Indians ice-fishing in the winters. The changing names of the Lake reflected the changes in his neighborhood as other Loyalists such as the Springers, his wife's family, settled here, followed by Americans and Britons looking for land—Lake Geneva, Little Lake, and finally Burlington Bay as it was christened by Governor Simcoe when this part of Quebec became Upper Canada under English law.

Richard, if he were standing here, would tell us that at this point in 1791, the added dimension of nationhood entered his life. He was no longer concentrating on just surviving as a fur-trader and merchant. He was made a magistrate with control over a large area stretching from the Head of the Lake south beyond Grimsby and a Judge in the Court of the Quarter Sessions and a Deputy-Lieutenant of the Province with many responsibilities, one of them to build a militia to defend the country against an American invasion, which was a constant fear. Governor Simcoe inspired him with a grand vision for the province requiring him to act as agent for immigration companies in Markham and Waterloo Counties.

In one of my pamphlets on Richard I included a wash painting by Lady Simcoe in 1796 featuring the shore of Burlington Bay with Richard's houses and members of Richard's

family standing by. Three years later he built a palatial brick home on the Heights above these houses. His merchant business had brought him prosperity but his attempt to bring in settlers was met with government opposition and drove him into such debt that he had to offer his new home for sale. Government opposition was so intense that slander pursued his reputation until the present day when through archival research the true picture has emerged.

A word on the need to save documents of the past which mean to a nation what memory means to an individual. Many early Hamilton newspapers were not preserved because citizens did not recognize their value as history. Even when persons were far-sighted, they could be thwarted by fate. Richard Cockerell who preserved all the issues of his Phoenix newspaper from Ancaster as a record and left them to a daughter would have been devastated if he had known they would be lost in a house fire. Sometimes records are kept by chance such as Richard's accounts of his merchant transactions which came down to the Jones sisters from their ancestor, one of Richard's daughters. The sisters, as girls, had pasted cards into these account ledgers but at least retained them. Through them, after they were cleared of the cards, I was able to see that one of my favorite historical characters John Norton, Chief Teyoninhokowaren, who succeeded Joseph Brant as leader of the Six Nations, was a customer. I was able, thereby, to establish his connection with Richard in my book *From Bloody Beginnings; Richard Beasley's Upper Canada* so necessary to a writer's confidence in his creation.

Richard fought the opposition first as an Assemblyman and then as a leader in the reform movement in which he risked everything for the welfare of the farmer in the years following the devastation visited on the province by the War of 1812. As a descendant I am proudest of Richard's standing up to Lieutenant-Governor Maitland when Richard was Chairman of the Convention of Friends to Enquiry into the state of the province and writing to him that the people who had shown too little attention to the character of those elected to public office had been "roused to a just sense of this trifling and indecency; they see their property reduced a full half, from the maladministration of good laws; they see prosperity completely checked; they witness discontent and poverty, under the most genial clime and rooted in the most fertile soil; they fear subjection to a foreign power, if war should again be waged; they dread a separation from the mother country, which they would most grievously lament; they wish to make an effort of recovery from all this disgrace and danger; they entreat your instant and earnest aid to assist them." When Governor Maitland in retaliation deprived him of his public offices and threatened anyone professing reform with loss of his livelihood, Richard did not succumb like a lap dog as did many of his prominent Reformist colleagues. He became the first

representative from Halton to the Assembly, where he led the reversal of all the draconian restrictions against reformers. With John Rolfe he led the Assembly in adopting 17 Civil Right Resolutions and persuaded the British parliament to sanction them, thus defeating his enemies and sending the discredited Maitland off to Quebec.

I admire too his forbearance during the War of 1812 when, as Colonel of the 2nd York militia, he had to put up with the arrogance of the British officers of the regular forces who looked down on colonial militia as inferiors. General Vincent, leading the forces in the Niagara region, commandeered his home and forced his family and servants to find shelter in the village of the Head of the Lake, to which thousands had fled from the Lake Erie and Lake Ontario settlements making accommodation hard to come by. Richard, well on in his fifties, fought in many of the battles, sometimes hand to hand as well as fulfilling other duties such as caring for farms abandoned by disaffected settlers, who fled to the states, and sitting on courts martial. One can imagine the desperation of the Canadians fighting the much greater numbers of invaders, defending their homes and families under all kinds of hardship yet being suspected of subversion by the British officer mentality, who considered all efforts had to be bent to the welfare of their regiments, regardless of the suffering of the people.

As an Anglican Richard opposed attempts to have Anglicanism declared the state religion. He had seen the reaction of other religions in Albany, New York, when Anglicans seemed to be garnering power politically, and, fearing the loss of their civil liberties, the dissenters made it a cause of the American Revolution. Anglicans were persecuted and their churches closed. Richard attended the earliest Anglican Church, St John's, in Ancaster and contributed to the erection of the Anglican Church in Grimsby. He was one of the founders of this Christ Church Cathedral.

As a ten-year old I delivered the *Hamilton Spectator* in downtown Hamilton and my route took me by this Church. I admired the grassy plot behind it with its majestic tombstones dedicated to Richard and some of his family. It was a quiet oasis away from the street traffic. Later that traffic claimed the grassy plot and the bones of Richard, Hannah and David were dug up, some being misplaced according to newspaper reports. If the Resurrection did happen at this moment, Richard may well appear lacking an arm or a leg, Hannah without a foot and David possibly without a head, but that would not prevent them from expressing their gratitude for this signal honour from persons who cherish the principles by which they lived.