



COL. WILLIAM MARSH
Vermont Patriot & Loyalist

Jennifer S.H. Brown
Wilson B. Brown

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 Englanders bought grants from the colony of New Hampshire and settled on lands between the Hudson and Connecticut rivers. These “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 joined the British army, seeing 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.

Jennifer S.H. Brown, professor emeritus of history, University of Winnipeg, earned a Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of Chicago, and went on to teach and write extensively on aboriginal people, fur traders, and missionaries in northern North America; among the best known of her several books is *Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country* (1980). She is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada. Of Canadian parentage and holding dual citizenship, she and her husband, Wilson Brown, enjoy retirement in Denver, Colorado, where she curates and researches a rich mine of family records—a legacy left by three generations of letter-writers and authors, published and unpublished.

Wilson B. Brown earned a Ph.D. in international affairs at the Fletcher School, Tufts University, and taught economics and business at several universities, retiring from the University of Winnipeg in 2004. He held Fulbright grants to Lima Peru, and Chiang Mai,

Thailand, and has published several texts and articles on international economics and business—notably, *Markets, Organizations, and Information* (1992). An avocational botanist and photographer, he is a skilled and experienced family historian who advises and consults widely with a network of genealogists across North America on families of mutual interest.

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