



Governor John Wentworth and the American Revolution: The English Connection

Paul W. Wilderson

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John Wentworth, the last royal governor of New Hampshire, is generally agreed to have been an able, honest, and forthright leader. Given his strong personal and business ties to the colony, historians and scholars have long puzzled over why, when the American Revolution came, Wentworth broke with his family and native land to become a loyalist. Paul W. Wilderson explores this question in an engaging and readable narrative of Wentworth's life and career that challenges traditional assumptions about loyalists.

Probably no governor in North America took more genuine interest or greater pride in his colony than John Wentworth. His roots were five generations deep in New Hampshire soil. As governor, he was deeply troubled by the growing rift between the colonies and Great Britain. From 1767, when he became governor, to 1775, when he left, Wentworth never agreed with colonial policies handed down at Whitehall and did not view himself as a loyalist. Why then did he abandon New Hampshire in support of British authority and imperial policies?

To answer that question, Wilderson analyzes the special connection Wentworth developed with England through his distant relative, the Marquis of Rockingham. Since Wentworth had worked closely with Rockingham, then head of the British government, to repeal the Stamp Act, he believed that a compromise with the colonies was possible. Blinded to the reality that war was inevitable and the split between Britain and American irreconcilable, Wilderson argues, Wentworth left New Hampshire in 1775 fully expecting to return to his native land.

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