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The Quit Rent Acts of 1786 & 1787
A God Send to Small Farmers, Historians, & Genealogists Alike

After the 8-year Revolutionary struggle between Great Britain and the inhabitants of New York, many small farmers found themselves in overwhelming economic distress. The burdensome cost of this extended war resulted in heavy taxes being imposed on New York's remaining residents in 1786 and 1787. Many small farmers of the Mohawk and Schoharie Valleys had been driven from their farms by forces under the direction of the Crown during the conflict, and were thus barely able to sustain their own families, yet alone pay the taxes that were continuously being raised to pay off New York's massive war debt. Among these taxes were the "quit-rents", payable each year to the Treasurer of the Colony and/or State of New York.

The annual quit-rent, long assumed by many historians to be nothing more than a nuisance tax, was £0-2-6 (two shilling six pence) per 100 acres per year. The easiest way to relate to the total financial load of the annual quit-rents on an individual land owner is to use a June 10th 1777 payroll calculator developed for the use of Brigadier General Nicholas Herkimer (New York State Library Manuscript Collection Manuscript Collection #11965, Folder 1), which lists a full colonel's pay at £1-0-0 (one Pound Sterling). In January of 2011 the monthly pay of a full colonel in the US Army was listed as \$5094.00 per month (<http://www.us-army-info.com/pages/ranks.html>). Reducing this mathematically we arrive at a equivalency of approximately \$254.70 per shilling. Thus, in numbers we can relate to, the annual quit rent was roughly \$6.37 per acre per year, regardless of whether the land was occupied or vacant, good or poor.

Recognizing the land-owners' potential inability to pay the annual quit-rent for the period of September 29th, 1775 through September 29th, 1783, primarily due to mandatory Militia service, the New York State Legislature saw fit to grant a forgiveness of quit-rents due upon all lands for the length of the war. A forgiveness of quit-rents in arrears upon all estates seized from Loyalists was also enacted. But, the greatest benefit of the April 1, 1786, "*Act for the Collection and Commutation of Quit-Rents*" came as an exemption from the payment of the arrears of quit-rents for any person or persons who were driven from the farm whereon they actually resided during the war, provided that the said farm did not contain more than one hundred & fifty acres.

The verbiage of the 1786 Act was specific in denoting that any person claiming such exemption must provide the Comptroller's Office a certificate, signed by an Inferior Court Justice of the county wherein they resided, specifying that he or she was obliged to quit his or her farm on account of the War, and specifying the number of acres in said farm. While it would be reasonable to assume that this opened a great opportunity for fraud and deceit on the part of individual land owner's, the very fact that the Inferior Court Justices who were required to affix their names upon these certificates were, during the war, their neighbors and/or local Militia officers minimized that potential. A man who was known or suspected of having been sympathetic to the Crown was often the subject of very close scrutiny by the very Justices who were being asked to attest to

their sufferings at the hands of the Crown: In essence, an individual farmer's dedication to the 'Rebel Cause'. As a result of this act, hundreds of Quit-Rent Remission Certificates were produced. Collectively they point out the precise location and size of a few hundred eligible farms.

On April 11, 1787, "*AN ACT to amend an act entitled an act for the collection of and commutation of quit-rents*", forgave all future quit-rents due upon farms specified in the 1786 Act.

The 1786 Quit-Rent Act came about at a time when personal taxes were being imposed upon the property owners of New York's individual counties. Thus the 1786 Tax Assessment Rolls provide us with a crude census of the remaining Rebel families remaining within the State. A result the Quit-Rent Remission Certificates generated under the aforesaid Act can be used to pinpoint the locale of various individuals upon an individual tax list, allowing a historian to literally track a tax assessor's movements through a community.

By using maps generated prior to, during, or immediately following the war, many of which can be found upon www.fort-plank.com's "Mohawk Valley Maps and Sketches" page, historians can pinpoint the location of many of these farms within Tryon County. Thus, areas where the enemy depredations were the greatest can be readily identified. The pinpointing of these farms is also useful in locating various military installations, taverns, and stages named in military correspondence, personal journals, and Revolutionary War Pension Applications.

The bulk of the data from the Quit Rent Certificates generated as a result of these two specific acts have been abstracted and can be found in either "The Bloodied Mohawk", published in June of 200 by Picton Press of Rockport, Maine or on Ken D. Johnson's website: www.fort-plank.com under "Additional Partisans Discovered after The Bloodied Mohawk was Published." All of the known certificates are found within the "Public Domain" in either the Montgomery Land Deeds in the Montgomery County Clerk's Office in Fonda, New York, the Garrit Y. Lansing Papers (SC13324) of the Manuscript Division of the New York State Library, and/or in Collections A1211 & A1228 of the New York State Archives in Albany, New York.