

## **Lot Hall of Yarmouth, Cape Cod** **Patriot, Privateer, Prisoner of War, Politician** By Dorothy Bowering Robinson

As our country prepares to commemorate the semiquincentennial anniversary (250<sup>th</sup>) of the American Revolutionary War, there will be opportunities to learn about and acknowledge the services of countless brave citizens who served in various capacities. One Cape Cod hero is Lot **Hall** from Yarmouth, who had an adventurous life spanning numerous years as a privateer, prisoner of war, patriot, and later as a judge and politician in Vermont.

As the agitation leading up to the war with Great Britain gained ground, many people in Yarmouth were in sympathy with the popular cause. In addition to an active group of the Sons of Liberty, there was a committee to see that no tea was consumed in town, a committee formed to keep watch for surprise British attacks, and in April 1775, the town voted money to purchase arms and ammunition for Boston inhabitants. It was into this spirited fervor that Lot **Hall** and his fellow compatriots were soon to become involved.

Lot was born in Yarmouth, Barnstable, Mass. 2 April 1757 to Lot **Hall** Sr. and Hannah (**Doane**) **Hall**. He could trace his ancestors back to the emigrant John **Hall** who arrived from England in 1630 and settled in Charlestown, Mass. by 1633. John and Bethia (**Farmer**) had twelve sons and no daughters. By 1640 John has removed to Barnstable and became a resident of Yarmouth in 1653 where the **Hall** family remained for many generations.

The town was a pleasant place to grow up in. The local Yarmouth school taught reading, writing, and “cyphers”, and according to a family account, Lot had a “good education.” In 1765, the town had a population of about 1,740, which grew to 2,678 in 1790, before East Parish set off as the separate town of Dennis in 1793. He had brothers and friends from long-established local families who responded to the call for the nation’s independence.

By 1776, the British Navy was the most powerful fleet in the world and flexing its muscle. How could a fledgling nation, with limited naval resources, defend its ships and shores? Because the American naval forces did not have adequate resources to confront the Royal Navy on its own terms, a time-honored practice of privateering was encouraged. Private citizens risked their lives and resources for financial gain, with a hint of patriotism, by engaging in privateering to harass British shipping.

Congress passed a resolution in July 1775 recommending that each colony provide for the protection of its own harbors and navigation by “armed vessels or otherwise.” States were sanctioned to individually outfit vessels of war to protect their coastline while Congress slowly established a navy. More than 2,000 privateers, commissioned by the Continental Congress and individual states, preyed on British shipping, severely disrupting its economy. South Carolina took this decree seriously and began to recruit able-bodied seamen from the north by offering wages of \$8 per month, an immediate bounty of \$9, and \$5 upon reaching South Carolina.

In May 1776, 19-year-old Lot **Hall** procured enlisting orders from Lieutenant Elijah Freeman **Payne** who was on a 20-gun ship, the *Randolph*, commanded by Captain Robert **Cochran**. The ship was slated for the defense of the South Carolina coast, and **Cochran** was sent to recruit seamen from the north. What prompted this decision on **Hall**’s part to join a maritime response rather than go with fellow young men from Yarmouth who chose a role in the militia or the Continental Army?

**Hall** was promised a lieutenantancy by **Payne** in the “marine department” if he should enlist fifteen men and transport them to Providence R.I., which Hall did successfully. Actually, he enlisted twenty-nine men and a boy, all residents of Barnstable County, and procured a schooner commanded by Captain Samuel **Gray**. After conveying his recruits to the Rhode Island port, he went to Stonington, Conn. to purchase a schooner of 50 tons. Deciding that this ship would not be swift enough to give chase or retreat, he procured another in Stonington named the *Eagle*. Once fitted with provisions, **Payne** and **Hall** left in June for Charleston to join the *Randolph*.

In August Lieutenant **Hall** and the others were successful in capturing British merchant ships. They seized the *Venus*, the *Caledonia*, and a third ship, name unknown. These captured British ships were manned by the seamen from the crew of the *Eagle* and set sail for port of Boston. As the third prize was being convoyed, the *Eagle* encountered and captured a British ship, the *Spears*. All the prisoners on both the *Eagle* and the unknown named prize were put aboard the *Spears* with Lieutenant **Hall** as prize-master. Captain **Payne** commanded the *Eagle* and successfully reached Boston, turning the captain of the *Spears* over to the authorities. The *Venus* and *Caledonia* arrived in Boston at the end of September.

Plans were for the *Spears* to keep company with the *Eagle* on the sail to Boston. After ten days of following the prescribed course and using private signals to stay in touch, the *Spears* became separated from the *Eagle* by a gale and fog. The prisoners on board the *Spears* mutinied and outnumbered **Hall**'s men. The mutineers on the *Spears* headed for Newfoundland to procure provisions before sailing across the Atlantic to Scotland. Acquiring supplies from a British ship in the Grand Banks, they set sail for Glasgow, and upon arrival, **Hall** was taken into custody and confined in prison.

In a unique encounter, Lieutenant **Hall** and the mayor of Glasgow, who were both Freemasons, became acquainted, sharing a common bond that proved beneficial to **Hall**. The mayor provided him with clothing and writing materials as well as some freedom to walk beyond the prison walls. We know from the records of **Hall**'s captivity that he made use of these materials to write his mother on Cape Cod from Scotland.

On 5 April 1777, Captain **Lamont**, formerly of the *Spears*, arrived in Glasgow from his captivity in Boston, and in an exchange, **Hall** was discharged from imprisonment. Now the issue for Lot was how to return home. **Hall** looked for a vessel hoping to sail to France or the West Indies but was not successful. He returned to Scotland and took passage to Ireland. In August, he went from there to the West Indies on the ship *Glorious Morning* and then to Barbados in October, followed by stops in the islands of Antigua and St. Eustatia.

From St Eustatia, he arranged passage with Captain **Hinson** on the merchant sloop *Duke of Grafton* for Virginia, only to be captured on 28 December by the *St. Albans*, a British man-of-war with 64 guns, commanded by Captain Robert **Onslow** that had been lying in wait in Hampton Roads. **Hall** was once again a prisoner. This captivity lasted about ten days, but his time aboard the *St. Albans* was harsh.

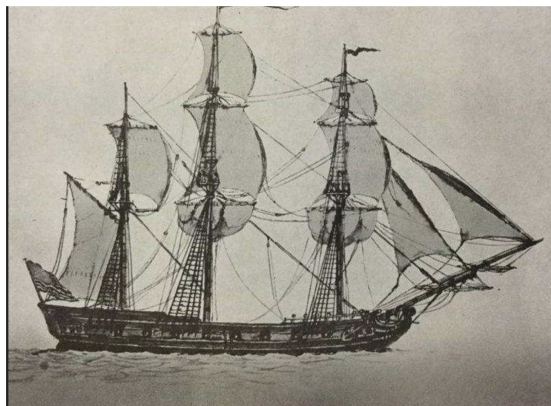
Patrick **Henry**, governor of Virginia, arranged a prisoner exchange to free **Hall** and provided him with a horse and money for his journey home. When **Hall** reached York, Pennsylvania, on 23 January 1778, he met with Congress to recount the 18 months he had endured and ask for a position on a continental vessel -- a remarkable request, given the hardships he had just endured in the service of his new country. He tried to obtain back pay allowed by the naval establishment for officers of his rank, but failed to receive any pay. It took the assistance of friends to help him reach Yarmouth on 22 February 1779.

Lot **Hall** had fought the enemy for two years, acquired a severe wound in his left arm which troubled him for the greater part of his life, and was held a prisoner in Scotland for a year with no compensation. It would take until after his death for his widow to be compensated in small part for his role.

Lot was not the only member of the family who fought in the war. **Hall's** brother, Daniel who was a lieutenant on board the brigantine *General Arnold*, perished in a storm off Plymouth Harbor 26 December 1778. The *General Arnold* was a privately owned privateer outfitted as a war ship in search of British prizes and was issued letters of Marque by the Province of Massachusetts, entitling them to legally take prizes. A massive blizzard overtook the ship as it sought to seek refuge in Plymouth Harbor, but unfortunately the storm worsened, making it impossible to enter the harbor. The severe drop in temperature caused icing, and massive waves roared over the decks. The ship could not reach safety nor could help arrive. Seventy-seven men froze to death off Cape Cod on that fateful December day in 1778, including 21-year-old Daniel **Hall**. Eleven of the crew who perished were from Barnstable including Boston **Crocker**, a Negro servant.

Lot **Hall's** imprisonment and difficult journey from Scotland back home to Yarmouth apparently did not dampen his commitment to the Patriot cause. Military records cited in the authoritative "*Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the Revolutionary War*" volumes indicate that Lot **Hall** of Barnstable served two more stints as a prize master -- in 1779 aboard the *General Putnam* commanded by Captain Daniel **Waters** and again in 1780 aboard the *Essex* commanded by Captain John **Cathcart**. Lot was once again involved in battling the enemy on the seas, risking capture again at a time when it was well known among American sailors that imprisonment in the notorious British military jail system in the New York City area was an almost certain death sentence.

The *General Putnam* was part of the ill-fated Penobscot Expedition that took place from 25 July to 15 August 1779. The threat of the British establishing a naval base on the Penobscot peninsula caused the Massachusetts General Assembly to send an American fleet of 19 armed vessels and 24 transports, with more than 1,000 ill-prepared militia meant to retake the area. With seven heavily armed British warships facing them, the American fleet began a retreat up the Penobscot River where the entire fleet was scuttled or burned by their own men to prevent the enemy from acquiring them. After wrecking the vessels, Captain **Waters** and crew began the long journey on foot back to Boston.



The *General Putnam* Privateer from a painting.

Leaving behind his life on the sea, Lot chose to study law in Barnstable from 1781 to 1782 where he interned in the office of Shearjashub **Bourne** before moving to Bennington, Vt. **Bourne** was a

well-known Cape lawyer who later served in the Massachusetts House of Representatives and Congress. In 1783 Hall removed to Westminster, Vt. and served as secretary pro-tempore for the proceedings of Governor Thomas **Chittenden** and the Governor's Council.

Lot and Mary (**Homer**) were married 13 February 1786 by the Reverend John **Clark** in Boston when Mary was fifteen years old. Mary, known as Polly, was born 1771 to Captain Benjamin **Crowell Homer** and Mary (**Parrot**) **Homer**. Both the **Homer** and **Parrot** families were early emigrants to New England. Benjamin also descended from the **Crowells**, who were first founders of Yarmouth, citing grandparents John **Crowell** and Bethia (**Sears**) **Crowell**. Born in 1731 in Yarmouth, Benjamin was a merchant in Boston and ship owner with his brother John. While travelling from Montreal on horseback, he was killed 30 March 1776 in Farmington, Conn. when an earth slide fell on him; he is buried in Farmington.

Polly's mother, Mary **Parrot**, was the daughter of Bryant **Parrot** and his third wife Ruth (**Wadsworth**). **Parrot** was a wealthy Boston merchant who is buried in his own tomb in King's Chapel burial ground. Mary died three years after her husband Benjamin on 4 March 1779 leaving young Mary/Polly orphaned at eight years old. There is no record of where Polly lived or with whom for the intervening seven years before she married Lot, who was fourteen years older. She outlived her husband and died 21 February 1843 aged 72 years. Both are buried in Old Westminster, Vt. Cemetery.

Lot served as Judge of the Supreme Court of Vermont from 1794-1801. He apparently developed a respectable law practice and had an honorable reputation with numerous laudatory comments from colleagues about his fairness and honesty. He served in the General Assembly for years 1789, 1791, 1792 and 1808, and was a Fellow of Middlebury College from 1 November 1800, remaining in that position until his death. In 1792 he was a Presidential elector and with colleagues cast their votes for George **Washington** and John **Adams**. Lot **Hall** was appointed in 1799 to the Council of Censors, which met every seven years to review acts of the Governor and Legislature and to ensure their constitutionality.



In the fall of 1808, during a session of the General Assembly at Montpelier, Judge **Hall** was seized with a violent catarrhal affection, and the lingering effects of the infection caused his death on 27 May 1809 at age 53. In his will, his estate was divided between wife Polly (Mary) and his four children:

#### Children of Lot and Polly Hall

- i. Mary Parrot Hall 1790-1863 married Job Lyman, Windsor, Vt.
- ii. Timothy Hilliard Hall 1792-1796. d.y. unm.
- iii. Benjamin Homer Hall 1793 m. Olivia Rice
- iv. Daniel Hall
- v. Timothy Hilliard Hall (1803-1858)

#### Post Script:

The pension records for soldiers in the American Revolution are a story in themselves, and I am indebted to John (Jack) Duggan of Yarmouth for his extensive research into this topic and assistance with the article. There were numerous Yarmouth soldiers who did not receive their payments until years long after the event and/or their demise. The Historical Society of Old Yarmouth convened a committee of

researchers from Dennis and Yarmouth in 2021 to prepare for the commemoration of the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the American Revolution. One goal was to identify Yarmouth residents who had served or participated in the war.

Hall's widow Polly was awarded a belated survivor's pension, according to military records. Part of the evidence for that award came from Samuel **Taylor** of Yarmouth, who himself was a five-year veteran of the Continental Army and militia and after the war a "blue water" ship master. **Taylor** provided a pension deposition describing Hall's naval and marine service during the War, his severe wound, and a visit which **Taylor** made in 1798 to Hall's new home in Westminster.

### References

Hall, Benjamin H. *History of Eastern Vermont: From its Earliest Settlement to Close of Eighteenth Century*. Appleton: NY. 1858. [Benjamin Homer Hall is son of Lot Hall, Jr.]

Hall, David B. Rev. *Halls of New England; Genealogical and Biographical*: Joel Munsell's Sons. Albany, NY 1883.