

## **Barnhart Island** **by G.B. Stidwill**

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In 1709, Johannes Barnhart was a young man of 24 years who with his wife and two children were refugees from the Palatinate. Through the kindness of good Queen Ann, these unfortunate people were provided with shelter in London and became naturalized British subjects. The next year they immigrated to the New World and settled in the Catskills.

The Barnhart family, like so many others, was split over the issues of the American Revolution and a grandson, George, served with the New York Royal Rangers as a Loyalist. His wife and four children under six preceded him to Canada by escaping down the Richelieu River in open boats in October of 1780. George, who had been taken prisoner, joined his family later and settled just west of Cornwall. He leased Barnhart Island from the St. Regis Indians in 1796, and some of the Barnharts left the mainland to move over onto the island.

The Treaty of Ghent closed the war of 1812 and set up a boundary commission to decide upon the title to the islands in the St. Lawrence. The British Commissioner wanted Wolfe Island to become British territory because of the naval yards and forts at Kingston so he arranged a swap whereby Barnhart Island became American territory.

Following this event, an American named Ogden applied to the American authorities and was allowed a grant to the island which he represented as unsettled. The Barnharts thereupon had to buy back their own island from Ogden and it took them many years to clear the debt upon their land. Eventually, the error became known and the New York State Legislature generously passed a special Bill recompensing the Barnharts for their unwarranted expense.

George Barnhart, his wife Catherine, and many of their family were buried in the old family cemetery on the island. Their descendants went on to make names for themselves, both in Canada and the United States. When the American authorities were clearing the island in 1957 previous to flooding, they reverently removed the remains in the cemetery and re-buried them in a special section of the cemetery at Massena, New York.

That is as it should be, and yet one cannot help wondering what George and Catherine Barnhart would have thought when they were fleeing down the Richelieu if they could have known that one day their bones would return to a final resting place on the mainland of the United States.

G.B. Stidwill