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Elijah Remington, The Castleton Counterfeiter

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IN his interesting article "Counterfeiting in Early Vermont" (*Vermont History*, April, 1965), Kenneth Scott mentioned that a man named Remington was arrested in Shrewsbury in 1807 as an accomplice of Stephen Burroughs, and that Remington apparently was the man who had been arrested earlier with Burroughs in Montreal. The Remington of this incident would seem to have been Elijah Remington of Castleton, black sheep of a very interesting family which had other members with at least a few grayish spots on them.

Elijah was the son of Zadock Remington, owner of Castleton's first tavern. May 9, 1775 must have been an exciting and confusing day for Zadock Remington. On the evening of that day, 170 Green Mountain Boys left the Remington tavern, where they had made their headquarters, for their successful attack upon Ticonderoga. On the same day, Zadock Remington's wife Phebe, who probably felt somewhat neglected because of her husband's attention to the visitors who were creating the most important historical event ever to touch Castleton, gave birth to a son who was given the name of Elijah. Within a few years both Phebe and Elijah were dead, and on January 25, 1783, Zadock Remington's second wife Elizabeth gave birth to her second son, who was given the name of his dead half-brother.¹

Zadock Remington's brother David, with whom he bought Castleton land in joint ownership, had been one of the two men who supervised the building of the Hubbardton Road, but later had become Castleton's most prominent Tory, taking charge of providing transportation for General Burgoyne while he was in that area. For this Tory activity, he had forfeited all of his property to the state of Vermont in confiscation proceedings, although he was allowed to return to Vermont to live.²

Although Zadock Remington was very prominent as a town office-

1. Castleton Record Book I, 5. The information regarding the birth of the two Elijahs, whose births are noted on the same page of the Castleton records, was furnished to me by John Reil of Castleton.

2. *Vermont Governor and Council*, I, 198, 208, 281.

holder during the early years of Castleton history, his career during the American Revolution had dubious aspects, to say the least. On June 12, 1778, he was expelled from the First General Assembly of Vermont because of his supposed pro-Tory sympathy,³ and in 1833, when he was applying unsuccessfully for recompense for his supposed Revolutionary losses, he admitted that he had paid a sixty-dollar fine in 1780 to avoid receiving fifteen lashes on his bare back for deserting a scouting party to the northward.⁴ Four months after Remington's expulsion from the Vermont Assembly, however, the commissioner of sequestration of Tory property had allowed him to buy, for sixty pounds, one fourth of the valuable mill property at the outlet of Lake Bomoseen, confiscated from Sylvanus Everts of Castleton.⁵ Remington sold this property for \$2000 in 1812.⁶

Zadock Remington's religious career also was somewhat unusual. At 72, he joined the Castleton Congregational Church on June 1, 1817, in the last group of new members inspired by the great revival of that year, which added to the Castleton church a total of 171 members, almost as many as the total of all the other members joining that church in the years 1793-1828. The church records show that in 1825 Zadock Remington was one of the more generous contributors to an emergency fund raised to pay the minister's salary and to buy some wood. On October 10, 1821, however, the church had heard a complaint against Remington for breach of the Sabbath and for restraining prayer, to which he confessed four days later. Again in November of 1829 the 84-year-old man arose in church to read a confession to sins which the records of the church do not identify.

The name of Elijah Remington, son of Zadock, first appears on the records of the Governor and Council of Vermont in 1812 when, from the state prison at Windsor, he applied for a pardon from his 1810 sentence of ten years in prison for knowingly passing counterfeit money. Calling himself "late of Castleton," Elijah admitted that his trial was fair and that he knew of no extenuating circumstances, but stated that he had behaved quietly and industriously in prison for two years and eight months, and that his wife and several small children were in indigent circumstances. Declaring that he had resolved to lead an "honest and inoffensive life," the twenty-nine year old man asked that he might return to the liberty which "by his folly and wickedness he has so justly forfeited."⁷

3. *State Papers of Vermont*, III, Part I, 25.

4. Manuscript Petition in the Office of the Vermont Secretary of State, LXIII, 25.

5. *State Papers of Vermont*, VI, 380, 383.

6. Castleton Record Book IV, 358.

7. Manuscript State Papers of Vermont, XLVIII, 14.

To lend support to Remington's request, 97 citizens of Castleton signed a petition in the same month, stressing that justice had been served and that Remington's aged parents had only one sickly son at home and one in the "Continental Army."⁸ Despite this support, and despite a statement from the board of visitors at the state prison that Elijah Remington had behaved well, his petition was rejected by the Council.

A year later, Elijah Remington sent another petition to the Council,⁹ and this one was supported by even more Castleton residents, for it contained no less than 193 signatures. Nearly all of the leading citizens of Castleton had their names on one or the other of the petitions in favor of Remington: Reverend Elihu Smith, Deacon Nehemiah Hoit, Deacon Enos Merrill (whose cobbler shop is preserved by the Castleton Historical Society), Deacon Joel Colver, Deacon Erastus Higley, and such leading citizens as Thomas R. Dake (Castleton's famous "house-joiner"), attorneys Robert Temple and Chauncey Langdon, Ebenezer Southmayd the pewterer, Ebenezer Langdon of the oil mill, Benjamin Carver of Carver's Tavern, Jesse Belknap, Reuben Moulton, Noah Hoit, Josiah Harris, Arunah Woodward, and John Mason. (One man named Remington signed the petition, but his handwriting does not make it clear whether his first initial is Z, for Zadock, or is some other letter.) In their second petition, the Castleton citizens stressed the sufferings of Remington's "aged father and young family of children," his "prudence and propriety" while in prison, and their belief "that he has reformed and will, if liberated from his confinement, pursue an honest and industrious life."¹⁰

Receiving also a strong endorsement from the board of prison visitors, who described Remington as penitent and as "one of the best of the prisoners," the Council granted the pardon. In the achievement of this happy result, R. C. Mallary, who soon would become one of Vermont's most popular members of the national House of Representatives, probably was not without influence, for his name appears on the petition of the Castleton citizens as well as in the report of the action taken by the Council, of which he was secretary.¹¹

Freed from the state prison, Elijah Remington seems to have ceased

8. Manuscript State Papers of Vermont, XLIX, 30. The petitioners apparently were referring to the United States Army of 1812 in the phrase which they had used thirty years before in referring to the Revolutionary forces.

9. Manuscript State Papers of Vermont, *Ibid.*, 205.

10. Manuscript State Papers of Vermont, *Ibid.*, 137.

11. Another Castleton counterfeit-passer, Abiather Smith, aged twenty-five, who had been in prison for nearly five years, applied for a pardon at the same, but without similar community support. His petition was rejected. (Manuscript State Papers, *Ibid.*, 181.)

to try to pass counterfeit money, but after thirteen years the Governor and Council received another petition from him. The hope of his Castleton friends that he would "pursue an honest and industrious life" had not been fulfilled, for he had been in the county jail for nineteen months, unable to procure bail or to pay a fine of two hundred dollars and costs levied upon him by the county court after his conviction on charges of adultery.¹² In support of his petition for forgiveness of this penalty, two physicians testified that his health was so poor that longer confinement in jail would be likely to endanger his life. Once again Castleton friends came to Elijah Remington's support, and leading citizens Samuel Moulton, John Goodwin, and Erastus Higley signed a statement that he had been "for a number of years in indigent circumstances" and that he was "unable to raise any part of the money to pay the fine." The jailer testified that he had been "quiet and peaceable," behaving "in the most orderly manner." Once again the Council showed mercy, and issued an order to forgive the fine and free the prisoner.

With this discharge from the county jail at the age of forty-three, Elijah Remington, destitute, disappears from Castleton history, for his name does not show up in any church or village records or even upon a cemetery stone. His old father, Zadock Remington, who had been thirty years old when the Green Mountain Boys gathered at his frontier tavern for the Ticonderoga expedition, finally died in 1838 at the age of ninety-three, and was buried in the Castleton cemetery.

12. Manuscript State Papers of Vermont, LVIII, 255.