

The Lives of Justus Azel Seelye and Mehitable Bennett
Historical Activity for June 28, 2008 JASFO Reunion

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EVENT 1 – BIRTH DURING AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY WAR

Justus Azel Seelye is born 17 November 1779 in New Milford, Litchfield, Connecticut

(Actors: Justus William Seelye, Sarah Seelye, Baby Doll Azel, George Washington and King George III)

Narrative by Narrator: The time is fall of 1779. The American Revolutionary War has been going on for over three years. The issue of whether to remain loyal subjects to the King of England or to sever ties with England and become a new nation has divided families. The family of Justus William Seelye and Sarah Stewart, who live in New Milford, Litchfield, Connecticut have chosen to remain loyal to the King of England. In November 1779, as Sarah is preparing for the birth of their 5th child, Justus William Seelye determines that he must show his loyalty to George III, King of England, and travels to Long Island, New York to enlist in the British army. While Justus William is away, Sarah gives birth to a baby boy in New Milford, Connecticut, on November 17, 1779, whom they name Justus Azel Seelye. This baby boy is the ancestor of most of us here today.

Narrator: How many of you consider yourself to be loyal, extremely religious, and patriotic? Are you a person who has great passion for his country, tradition and heritage? (Raise your hand)
Now by raise of hand those who loves adventure and freedom? Are you an independent thinker, willing to walk away from tradition and heritage and for a good cause? (Raise your hand) Now I need you all to choose one side or the other and line up on that side. Think very seriously about this choice.
If you can't choose, it may be comforting to know that it was a difficult decision for the colonists. Families were divided on this issue and loyalty went back and forth. About 1/3 were neutral, 1/3 revolutionists or patriots and 1/3 loyalists. After the Revolutionary War about 80,000 loyalists left the Colonies and moved to Canada.

LOYALISTS - You are true to your homeland of England and your heritage. You are religious and believe being loyal to the King is comparable to being loyal to God for when a King is christened he is ordained to act as God on earth and represent the "King of Kings." You will be lead today by **King George III**.

REVOLUTIONISTS or PATRIOTS – You are willing to fight for a good cause. You are rebelling from the King of England who wants to subject you to excess taxation. You will be lead today by **George Washington**.

Activity: This is a mock battle in the Revolutionary War. If you are hit with water you must sit down. Remember what you are fighting for.

Narrator: Let the war begin!

EVENT 2 – EXILE TO NEW BRUNSWICK, CANADA

Narrative by Narrator: The last battle of the American Revolutionary War ended with surrender by the British Commander, Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown, Virginia in October of 1781. The war officially ended with the signing of the Treaty of Paris in September 1783. Things did not go well for those who had been loyal to England. Persecution became so bad, that many of the British loyalists in America were banished or chose to leave. Over 80,000 loyalists left the States and moved to Canada at this time. As Loyalists, Justus William and his family probably traveled by boat up the Atlantic seaboard to a large cove north of Maine later named “Seeley’s Cove”. The Seeley family around the time of 1883, consisted of Justus William, his wife Sarah, and their five sons, the oldest being about sixteen years of age. Our common ancestor, Justus Azel, was the youngest son and would have been just shy of his 4th birthday when they left the colonies.

Narrator: We need 5 Seelye Boys. You are going to help get your family travel by boat to Canada.

Activities:

1. Seelye Family moving to New Brunswick, Canada. Family pushes boat (wagon) up stream.
2. Audience of Colonists making unkind remarks with picket signs: Go Back to England
Freedom Fighters Only, Loyalists Out- Republic In, No BRITS

EVENT 3 – RETURN TO UNITED STATES AND MARRIAGE

Narrative by Narrator: Land in New Brunswick, Canada was not very good for farming. The geology of the area is a huge granite shelf with only a few inches of topsoil on top of the granite. This made it difficult to farm and provide for the needs of a family. Justus William Seelye’s older brother, Abner, who was a patriot during the Revolutionary War had moved to central Pennsylvania. At some point Justus William and brother, Abner resolved their differences over the war. Abner must have told Justus William about the rich Pennsylvania farm land and invited him to move to Pennsylvania to be near Abner’s family. In about 1795, Justus William Seelye and his wife, Sarah took two of their sons, Justus Azel then being about sixteen, and left their three married sons and Canada. In the States, George Washington was now President and the new country was struggling to make this a Republic succeed. The return trip to the states was more difficult than the ocean voyage to get to Canada. This time the family had to travel a considerable distance inland, across rivers, and lakes to settle by the Susquehanna River in upper Pennsylvania. It was well worth the hardship involved in moving, for about five years after arriving in Pennsylvania, Justus Azel met and fell in love with a beautiful young lady named Mehitable or “Hettie” Bennett. After a short courtship, Justus Azel and Mehitable were married on April 9, 1800 in Lucerne County, Pennsylvania – Justus Azel was 21 years old and Mehitable was 20 years old.

Narrator: (Couple on stage) To this couple soon came children: Can we have some children? First born were twins, Rachel and Mehitable, however, only Rachel survived infancy. The twins were followed by Rebecca, then John. John, you were born six months prior to the prophet Joseph Smith, in 1805, but unfortunately you only live to the age of 21. Then came Elizabeth and Mary. Elizabeth, who married John Young and later Elijah Mayhew is the ancestor of some you here today.

Activities:

1. Reconciliation of Justus Azel and Abner Seelye
2. Justus Azel (dark jacket) and Mehitable with veil getting married
3. Couple joined by 6 little children

Event 4 – Move to Ontario, Canada

Narrative by Narrator: Great Britain made land available in Canada to those Americans who had been loyal to Britain during the Revolutionary War. Pennsylvania seemed quite populated and Justus qualified as a loyalist to receive the free land. Sometime around the time of the War of 1812, between 1807 and 1811, Justus and Mehitable move with their young family from the States to the area of Pickering, in Upper Canada. This area is now known as Ontario, Canada, and is located on the northern shore of Lake Ontario. For the next thirty-one years, the family has struggles but seems to prosper. In Canada, Justus Azel and Mehitable, have four more children: William Stewart, Justus Wellington, Sarah and David, making them parents to a total of six girls and 4 boys. William Stewart and Justus Wellington are the ancestors of most of us here today, unless we descend from Elizabeth. Justus Azel first made a living by farming but later developed a sailing business, operating boats on Lake Ontario. Always enterprising and industrious, during the winter when the lake was frozen, he worked as a cooper making barrels.

Narrator: Can we have four more children for this great family? (Put on signs)

Activity: Four more children join the family from the audience and put on name tags.

Event 5 – Conversion to the Gospel of Jesus Christ

Narrative by Narrator: Missionaries from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints traveled to what was then called Upper Canada and the area where Justus' family lives early in 1838. The Seeley's listened to the message of the gospel and believed it. Justus Azel and we believe his wife, Mehitable, and most of his children were baptized some time around February 15, 1838 probably by Elder Almon W. Babbitt. (Missionaries enter and put white shirt on Justus Azel)

Records of early baptisms were often not kept or maintained so the exact dates of the baptisms are uncertain. We do know they accepted the gospel with a full commitment. It is interesting to note, that Justus Azel, unlike his father, was a Patriot in Canada, and became quite active in supporting Canadian independence from Great Britain. It is probable that the dynamics of the political strife coupled with the family's recent conversion to the LDS Church, helped Justus Azel determine his family needed to follow the Prophet and move to Zion.

Activity: Missionaries teaching the gospel. Missionaries put a white shirt on Justus Azel.

Event 6 – Move to Missouri and Nauvoo Area to be with the Saints

Narrative by Narrator: Justus Azel, Mehitable and their family, now comprised of 15 members, were determined to join with the body of the Church, which in 1838, was scattered across Missouri. The Seeley's had no idea of the problems in Missouri as they divided their family and made plans to leave their beloved Canada. Two boys, Justus Wellington and David, left overland with wagons filled with household goods and supplies. The remainder of the family went by boat and were to meet in DeWitt County Missouri. As the family separated, imagine the feelings of the parents as they faced the unknown. Tradition says a prayer was offered and later recorded by a descendant. These are the highlights of the prayer offered that day on the banks of Lake Ontario as Seeley's left Canada, never to return:

Props: Missionary Jackets and Badges White Shirt

EVENT 6 – Move to Missouri and Nauvoo Area to be with the Saints

Actors: Justus Azel Seelye (Older – reads a part)

Family in Boat: Mehitable, Rachel, Rebecca, John, Elizabeth , Mary, Sarah and David.

Boys on Stick Horses: William Stewart, Justus Wellington,

Props: Wagon with family (Boat to Missouri) Large Sail on a stick someone holds

Two Stick horses with two boys riding - waving white hankies

Event 7 – Expulsion from Nauvoo and Trek to the West

Actors: Seeley Family

Props: White hankie, Signs: Family: Zion or bust Daughters: Iowa My Home

Pioneer Bonnets

Event 8 – Settlement in Battle Creek and Death

Actors: Justus Azel and Mehitable