

Bio: Captain John Evans

John Evans was a high-ranking officer in the British Royal Navy during the latter 17th and early 18th centuries. During Governor Benjamin Fletcher's service in the colony of New York (1692 - 1698), Evans and his ship "Richmond" were sent as a "guard" for the port city of New York. John Evans and Benjamin Fletcher must have been fast friends, for in 1694 Fletcher made a sizable land grant to Evans. The "Evans Tract" was situated just north of the Wawayanda Patent that was issued to Peter Mathews and eleven others in 1703.

. . . So early as 1684, the Governor of the Province [New York], Colonel Thomas Dongan, purchased from its original owners, the Indians, two large tracts of land comprising territory now included in three counties- Ulster, Orange and Rockland, when this tract of land fell into the hands of Captain John Evans, some years later, to which he gave the high-sounding name of "The Lordship and Manor of Fletcherdon", to honor his friend and benefactor, Governor Fletcher, he claimed that it extended from New Paltz to Stony Point, and for thirty miles inland. We have noted also that Captain Evans was not permitted by the English Government to retain this vast amount of territory, and that later it was divided into smaller sections with patent rights . . .

[source] Concise History of Orange County (NY) reprinted from "Southeastern New York" by Zimm.

John Evans was a member of a English family that moved into Ireland in the mid-17th century, as part of the Cromwellian settlement. Sources tell us that he is the same as John Evans of Miltown Castle in county Cork Ireland. "This gentleman was bred at Grays Inn but embraced a military life at the Revolution. He subsequently entered the Navy, and obtained the rank of Commander." Richard Coote, Lord Bellomont, who followed the practice of denigrating the family backgrounds of his enemies, once commented on John Evans, "'Tis wonderful to see how insolent men of mean beginnings can be. This man's father was a shoemaker in Ireland, and, turning grazier, has got into a good estate."

John Evans' brother (some sources say nephew) was George Evans of Bulgaden Hall in county Limerick Ireland. Further detail on brother, George Evans, might be helpful for future research: Right Honorable George Evans (1658 - 1720) married, in 1679, Mary Eyre, daughter of Colonel John Eyre and Mary Bigoe. He was a barrister-at-law, and a privy counsellor. He served as a member of parliament from Charleville, county Cork, and also county Limerick. His home was Bulgaden Hall in county Limerick Ireland. George Evans and Mary Eyre were the parents of three sons - George Evans (c.1680 - 1749, became First Baron Carbery), Eyre Evans, and Thomas Evans; and five daughters - Elizabeth, Jane, Emilia, Catherine (died 1768), and Mary Evans.

The Evans family of Ireland lived in the same general area as my own Markham family of the counties of Tipperary, Kilkenny and Cork. They associated with, and intermarried with, some of the same families. My 6xgreat-grandfather, John Markham, immigrated to New York from county Kilkenny just after 1730 - about thirty-five years after John Evans' sojourn into New York.

There is one other Evans and Markham connection that might prove of interest. During the years that Captain John Evans was in New York, he married Catherine (Katherine) McGregorie. She was the daughter of Patrick McGregorie, who brought a group of Presbyterians from Scotland, into Orange county New York. There is no evidence that John Evans and Catherine McGregorie had children. But, Catherine McGregorie Evans is probably the same "Mrs Catherine Evans" who appears in the 1726 Will of Joanna Markham. Joana Markham was the widow of William Markham, governor of Pennsylvania. Sometime after her husband's death in 1704, Joana Markham removed to New York City. I have long contemplated a relationship between the families of William Markham, governor of Pennsylvania, and my own Markham family (John Markham who married Catherine Mathews). This connection between Markham and Evans may be coincidence, but it is curious. See complete Will of Joanna Markham, under her name in this database.

In his book, *Captain Kidd and the War Against Pirates*, author Richard Ritchie gives an account of John Evans exploits in New York:

For five years the "Richmond", under the command of Captain John Evans, had remained on station to protect New York from privateers and pirates. Evans was something of a joke, for he guarded New York as pirate ships came to the city to disgorge their booty and as the "Jacob" returned full of loot and was turned over to Governor Fletcher. The governor found nothing strange in all of this, and the merchants certainly never looked askance at their gold. Captain Evans closed his eyes to everything, and probably profited from his blindness. His (William Kidd) ship went into winter quarters in October and did not stir until March at the earliest. Meanwhile, his men went to work in the community and he himself ran an alehouse and bakery. Evans typified the navy of his day. Captains used their ships for trade to supplement low wages and, like Evans, saw nothing wrong with this . . .

In 1696, as the Board of Trade was gathering evidence against John Evans, this document appears:

Captain Thomas [John?] Evans, Commander and purser of H.M. frigate Richmond at New York in the year 1694 and since, keeps a common brew-house and bake-house at Fresh Water near New York, as several witnesses can testify. Captain Cales, master of a brigantine which arrived not long since, is either the mate or some other officer belonging to the Richmond. He can say from whom he took his bread and beer for his voyage, and whether he is discharged from the frigate or still on the purser's books. He can also inform you how many men were usually aboard the frigate, and he and others can tell whether Captain Evans and his family do not live ashore, and how he carries himself to gain the masters of ships and others to be his customers. The informer does not put his name to this paper lest he should fall under a displeasure which he cannot bear. 9 Nov. 1696.

[source] British History Online website; Board of Trade. Plantations General, 4. No. 15.

In 1698, Governor Benjamin Fletcher, and Captain John Evans were recalled to England to defend themselves against charges levelled primarily by Richard Coote, Lord Bellomont. Both

men were accused of conspiring with pirates, and Fletcher was charged with making excessive land grants. In 1699, Evan's patent of land was withdrawn from him. This was the start of years of wrangling to reclaim the land, and his investment in it.

John Evan's petition of 1711, gives an interesting picture of the proceedings:

4 Sept 1711; Petition of John Evans, Captain of H.M.S. Defiance, to the Queen. Petitioner being Commander of the Richmond man of war in 1693, was sent to attend the Province of New York, where he continued almost 6 years, and performed considerable service for the benefit of that Colony. Col. Benjamin Fletcher, then Governor, in consideration thereof, and of £500 paid to him by petitioner in lieu of his established fees upon grants of lands, by letters patent under the Great Seal of that Province granted petitioner a large tract of unappropriated land call'd Murderer's Creek, containing 18 miles in length fronting on Hudson's River, and 30 miles backward, which had been bought by Col. Dongan when Governor of New York from the Indian natives for £70. On which tract petitioner expended great summs of money in clearing severall places for farms, and planted several familys of Scots and Irish under annual rents, intending to retire thither himself when there should be a happy and lasting peace. After Col. Fletcher and petitioner were commanded from New York to England, Governor Lord Bellomont, having conceived some prejudice to them both, and designing to take to his own use and profit several tracts of land which had been granted by Col. Fletcher to petitioner and others, in order thereunto procured an Assembly to be chosen of ignorant, necessitous and profligate persons, (most of them Dutch) who by his direction passed an Act for destroying extravagant grants etc., whereby petitioner was stripped of his lands and improvements, but the said Act being sent over for the confirmation of the late King, H.M. upon a true representation of the ill practices used to obtain that Act, refused to confirm it, but not rejecting it, the same continued in force till repealed by a subsequent law. Upon the arrival of Governor Lord Cornbury, the inhabitants of the Province, thinking their titles precarious whilst such an Act remained in force, apply'd for redress to the first Assembly conven'd by his Lordship, who by another Act unanimously repealed it, whereby petitioner was restored to and enjoyed his lands till your Majesty sent a great number of Palatines to New York, when your Majesty having not been truly informed how those Acts were obtained, was prevailed on to confirm the Act of Assembly made in Lord Bellomont's time and to reject the Act of repeal, and to grant petitioner's lands to those Palatines, by which means petitioner who has been in your Majesty's sea-service during your whole reign etc. is deprived of his property, and of an estate for which he had been offer'd £10,000 sterling in England, without being heard in his defence, or having the least notice thereof, till at his late return from ye streights, he was inform'd of it to his great surprize. Prays to be restored, there being other unappropriated lands in New York sufficient to receive the Palatines, or that he may be given an equivalent.

[source] Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies - September 1711; Cecil Headlam (editor), 1925; Institute of Historical Research. Located at British History Online.

Though formal charges were drawn up and presented in England, against Benjamin Fletcher and John Evans, there is no evidence that they were ever found guilty, or received punishment. John Evans did continue in his naval career. In 1705-6 he is noted as the Captain of the Bermuda privateer, Dolphin. His name is coupled with "The Defiance" in 1711. And, another record, undated, connects him with the HM Phoenix, and the Spanish Wars. In the years 1720-

1723, a Captain Evans is petitioning for a land grant on the island of St Lucia. Questions remain as to whether he is the same Captain Evans who was murdered by his boatswain, near Grand Cayman in 1724.

In 1742, John Evan's nephew petitioned in New York concerning his uncle's property:
New York; Read an Order of the Lords of the Committee of Council, dated November 24th, 1742, referring to this Board the petition of the Honourable George Evans, Esquire, relating to two tracts of land bounding upon Hudson's River, granted in the year 1694 by Colonel Fletcher, under the Great Seal of the province, to the petitioner's uncle, Captain John Evans, who then commanded the Richmond man-of-war on that station, and is since dead.

[source] Journal, December 1742: Volume 50; Journals of the Board of Trade and Plantations, Volume 8: January 1742 - December 1749 (1931); located at British History Online.

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