



Patriots, Plowshares & Post Roads: *Chapters from Our Local Journey to Independence* The Roecliff Jansen Historical Society Copake Falls, New York



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A COAT OF ARMS featuring a split shield (per pale) with crossed swords pointing downward on the left (dexter) side, nine pine trees on the right (sinister) side, and a knight's helmet (close helm) on top. What could these symbols mean?

THIS LAYOUT is highly symbolic of American Revolutionary War heritage. It heavily leans on the underground coding used by secret societies and militia groups of that era. If this design was created during or after the war, here is what the specific heraldic elements and their positioning mean:

1. LEFT SIDE (DEXTER):

Crossed Swords Facing Down. The left side of a shield is considered the position of primary honor in heraldry.

The Meaning of Swords Pointing Down:

In military heraldry, swords pointing upward indicate an active call to arms, readiness for battle, or a state of ongoing war. Conversely, crossed swords pointing downward symbolize victory achieved, peace restored, or weapons laid down after a successful struggle.

Revolutionary Context: This symbolizes a veteran status or a commemoration of the war's end—signaling that the fight for independence was won and the soldier returned to civilian life.

2. RIGHT SIDE (SINISTER): THE 9 PINE TREES. The right side of the shield brings together the exact secret symbols from early colonial resistance.

The "9" (THE LOYAL NINE): As noted previously, the number nine pays direct homage to the Loyal Nine, the elite, clandestine inner circle of Boston patriots who organized the first Stamp Act riots and eventually formed the SONS OF LIBERTY.

The PINE TREES: Symbolizing economic independence, New England's rugged defiance of the King, and the famous "An Appeal to Heaven" battle flag.

The COMBINED MEANING: Arranging exactly nine pine trees is a double-layered emblem of defiant colonial unity and secret patriot alignment.

3. ABOVE THE SHIELD: The KNIGHT'S HELMET While a knight's helmet is a classic European heraldic device, it took on adapted meanings in early America. THE CLOSE HELM: A standard knight's helmet with the visor down typically represents wisdom, defense, and military fortitude.

AMERICAN INTERPRETATION

Because America rejected British titles of nobility, early American organizations (like the SOCIETY OF THE CINCINNATI, an exclusive organization founded by Revolutionary War officers) used classical military helmets to denote gentleman-soldier status — meaning a citizen who took up arms for liberty but was not part of a permanent mercenary or royal class.

4. THE OVERALL MESSAGE OF THE SHIELD

When you read the split shield together as a single story, the coat of arms translates to: "A citizen-soldier (Helmet) who fought aggressively for colonial independence along-side the secret patriot network (9 Pine Trees), but has now laid down their weapons because victory and liberty have been secured (Crossed Swords Facing Down)."



Mrs Arnold's Tea Salon

Where Every Cup is Served with Two Lumps.

62 Gloucester Place, Marylebone, London, England.

Established 26 September 1780. Royal Warrant of Appointment Pending.



The FOLK TRADITION of THE “THREE PINES” SIGNAL

What is the symbolism of Royalists and a configuration of pine trees that designated a safe space for people loyal to the king during the AMERICAN REVOLUTION?

The idea that Royalists (Loyalists) used a specific configuration of three pine trees planted outside a home to signal a safe house or sanctuary during the AMERICAN REVOLUTION is a prominent piece of historical folklore and oral tradition, though it lacks definitive documentation in the official military record. [History Stack Exchange/HSE]

IN REGIONAL FOLKLORE—particularly along the U.S.–Canada border (such as Vermont, upstate New York, and parts of New England) and in parts of the American South—it is traditionally passed down that Loyalists fleeing Patriot persecution looked for a specific visual cue:

The MARKER: A cluster of THREE WHITE PINE TREES planted close together or in a distinct triangle right in front of a homestead.

The MEANING: This configuration signaled to travelers that the homeowner was a “Tory” or Loyalist who remained faithful to King George III. It meant a fleeing family or a British operative could find a safe place to sleep, a warm meal, and protection from hostile Patriot militias.

The COUNTER-SYMBOLISM: Because Patriots heavily used the solitary pine tree as a symbol of aggressive rebellion (on their flags and during the Pine Tree Riot), Loyalists re-appropriated the tree in a specific mathematical grouping—three—to subtly flag their own secret network without alerting neighbors. [HSE +2]

CULTURAL LEGACY/FICTION VS. FACT: While historians have noted that some old homesteads along the Canadian border feature these distinct three-

pine clusters, it remains classified as an anecdotal legend. No written, surviving “Loyalist spy manual” verifies the practice, as keeping written records of a safe-house network would have been treasonous to the local Patriot authorities.

This historical lore was notably popularized in modern pop culture by author Louise Penny in her famous Three Pines mystery novel series. Her fictional French-Canadian town of “Three Pines” was explicitly named after this exact piece of Revolutionary War folklore—founded by Loyalists who planted the three trees to mark their sanctuary.



It actually takes its roots in New Hampshire where the colonial government passed a law that forbade chopping select pines in order to keep them for masts in the vast shipbuilding industry for the British empire. This law can be traced back to 1708.



My father bought a farm just outside of the Town of Brome Lake (Knowlton - which is “Three Pines” in the Penny novels) Quebec, in the Eastern Townships in 1947 - when Louise Penny was barely alive. Our family was very familiar with many descendants of the Loyalists and among them was the knowledge passed down that if there was one White Pine planted in front of a house, that house was a haven for Empire Loyalists. Truth or lore? Therefore, I would not attribute this ‘lore’ to Louise Penny.—Anonymous