

Cornwallis and the Mi'kmaq

While Cornwallis' administration of Halifax was seen as relatively competent for the period, his name is one that swims in controversy. This is largely due to his actions taken against the Mi'kmaq, which have been seen as genocidal in nature. Initially, both sides attempted to make peace, but European ignorance and pride made these negotiations a disaster. While the Board of Trade in London insisted on building a good relationship with the Mi'kmaq in order to foster trade, Cornwallis feared their military strength against his small settlement, and began an undeclared war against Nova Scotia's indigenous people.

This crisis erupted in a war in October of 1749, when Mi'kmaq warriors attacked the small sawmill at Dartmouth, killing four men. Cornwallis had a brutal response, embarking on a campaign using terror tactics similar to those he used in Scotland to drive the Mi'kmaq from British land forever. The governor offered a prize of ten guineas for each Mi'kmaq scalp brought to Halifax, encouraging soldiers and mercenaries alike to slaughter any Mi'kmaq they found, regardless of sex or age. As the writer Thomas Raddall described, "...no one could be certain whether these scraps of withered skin and clotted hair belonged to man, women, or child, or whether they were English, French, or [Mi'kmaq]."



An image of British soldiers defending Halifax against Acadian and Mi'kmaq raids by the artist Charles William Jeffreys.

A Controversial Legacy

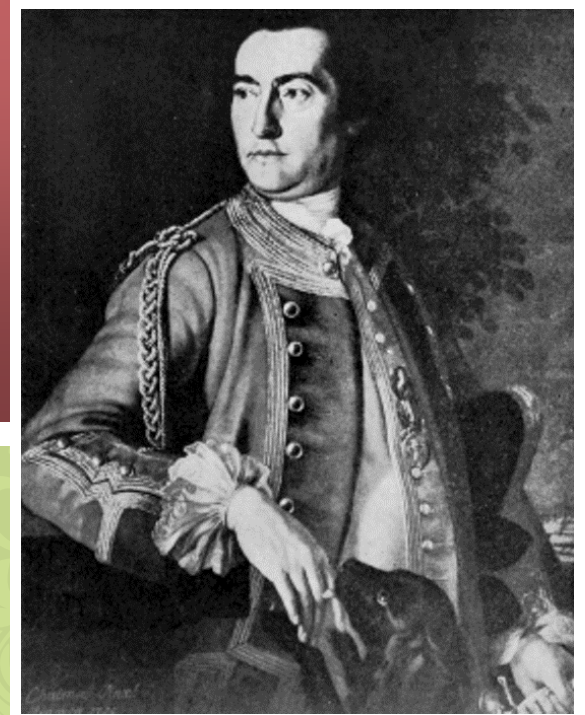
After resigning as governor of Halifax, Cornwallis faded into obscurity. He stayed in the military, though he found only shame due to his participation in two embarrassing military retreats: the failed reinforcement of Minorca in 1756 and the disastrous raid on Rochefort the next year. While Cornwallis argued that his cautious actions might have prevented the slaughter of his men, these events left a stain on his career. In 1761 he was appointed governor of the small British base at Gibraltar, where he served the Crown unremarkably until his death in 1776.



Pictured opposite is a statue of Edward Cornwallis in Cornwallis Park, South End Halifax.

Cornwallis remained an obscure historical figure, until the 150th anniversary of his landing, when Haligonians latched on to the governor as a symbol of their city's history. This lasted until the Mi'kmaq historian Daniel N. Paul published his book *We Were not the Savages* in 1993, in which he argued that Cornwallis was a genocidal leader dedicated to the extermination of Nova Scotia's indigenous people. Paul has been dedicated in attempting to change the historical perspective around Cornwallis, and he and his supporters have worked diligently in recent years to change the colonialist narrative. In 2011, Cornwallis Junior High School in Halifax was renamed Halifax Central Junior High in order to avoid glorifying what so many saw as a controversial figure.

Cornwallis: The Controversial Founder of Halifax



A 1755 painting of Edward Cornwallis by Sir George Chalmers.

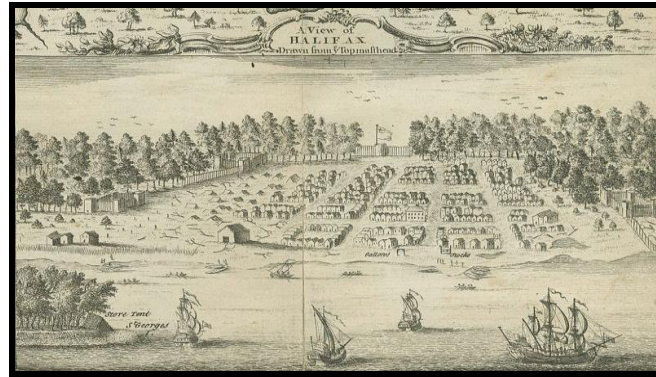
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His Early Life



As a young man, Cornwallis took part in the Battle of Culloden. This is a 1746 Painting of the battle by David Morier.

The Founding of Halifax



A view of the young colony of Halifax, sketched from the topmast of a ship in 1749.

Edward Cornwallis, the sixth son of Baron Charles Cornwallis, was born on February 22nd, 1713, in London. From an early age he seemed destined for a life of success, due to his high birth and his royal connections, for he was made a royal page to George II when he was only twelve years old. As a member of the nobility, when Cornwallis came of age he was expected to join either the clergy or the military.

In 1734 Cornwallis duly bought a commission as a captain in the British Army. Over the next twelve years, Cornwallis served in Flanders with the British army during the War of the Austrian Succession, as well as working with the diplomatic service.

In 1745, Major Cornwallis' regiment was recalled to Britain to put down a rebellion by the Highland Scots who supported the deposed Stuart dynasty. Cornwallis took part in the Battle of Culloden, in which government forces won a decisive victory and finally ended these "Jacobite" rebellions for good. Cornwallis' regiment was then ordered to loot and pillage the Highlands and terrify the Scots into submission. In recognition for his service to the British Crown, in 1749 he was promoted to Colonel and appointed as the first governor of a new British settlement in North America: Halifax.

Britain had only controlled mainland Nova Scotia since 1713, and even thirty years later few British settlers lived in the colony, which was mostly populated by the indigenous Mi'kmaq and the French-speaking Acadians. On Cape Breton Island, the French threateningly operated the Fortress of Louisbourg, which terrified the British government: in an attempt to counter the French, in 1749 the British sent Cornwallis and around 2500 settlers to build a fortress at the great harbor of Chebucto. Cornwallis selected the site of Halifax due to the nearby hill that could defend the colony if fortified. He and his fleet arrived in Chebucto Harbor on June 21, 1749, and immediately began building a settlement to survive the harsh winter.

Unfortunately for the first settlers of Halifax, the expedition was plagued with numerous issues. Most of the English settlers were from London, and were unprepared for life in the undeveloped Canadian wilderness. Furthermore, the soil around the small settlement was rocky and difficult to farm, so it became very difficult to secure a stable food supply. To keep the colony fed, food had to be acquired from New England, which was far more expensive. To make matters worse, the Board of Trade in London had improperly planned for such difficulties, and had budgeted the colony only £39000 for 1750.

A Capable Leader?

Luckily for the settlers, Cornwallis was willing to work hard for the colony to prosper. Even more remarkable, he has been described as "incorruptible" - a rare trait in colonial governors - and willing to ignore the demands of London in order to get the job done. During the first year of settlement, Cornwallis spend £174 000 to keep Halifax running (over four times his budget), and worked hard to feed the colony by recruiting more skilled farmers from Protestant states in Germany and negotiating for food with New England merchants.

Though Governor Cornwallis was able to get the internal affairs of the settlement in order, British influence in Nova Scotia was still only felt within the palisade walls of Halifax and Annapolis Royal, and many Acadians and Mi'kmaq were very opposed to the new British settlement. Cornwallis worked diligently in order to secure his young town from any threats: he fortified outposts on the edge of the Halifax peninsula to protect the town by land, and established outposts on the Isthmus of Chignecto in an attempt to end communication between the French and the Acadians, as well as to defend the peninsula from an invasion from New France.

Cornwallis continually had to argue with London for more money and supplies for his colony. Eventually, the constant demands of governorship took too heavy a toll, and he resigned his position in the fall of 1752. Though embittered by the hardships of his term, he left a colony that was able to not only support itself but also thrive in the harsh Nova Scotia environment.