

Loyalist Settlers of Atlantic Canada

By Michael J. Leclerc

The Loyalists were perhaps one of the most influential groups to immigrate to Canada, settling there after their defeat in the American Revolution. During the battle for independence, many individuals remained loyal to the British crown. After the war was over and Britain ceded to the thirteen colonies their independence, these individuals were faced with a choice.

Remaining in the colonies would prove difficult in many areas. They would be open to persecution for their support of the losing side during the war. Many had already lost their land and possessions during the various battles and other events of the war. These unsettling conditions would be the same for both those who actually fought in battle and private citizens who merely supported the effort. Britain provided strong incentive for these individuals to move to Canada by offering land and other enticements. These incentives proved very successful, and thousands of families moved north for a new start.

In addition to those who moved north for their political views, there were many who settled there for other reasons. Many who at least paid nominal tribute to the Crown relocated because they felt there would be better opportunities for them there than in the fledgling United States.

At the time, the area north of the thirteen American colonies was divided into two parts: the colony of Québec and the colony of Nova Scotia. Nova Scotia consisted of the Isle of St. John (now Prince Edward Island), Cape Breton, the Nova Scotia peninsula, and the part of the mainland that is now the province of New Brunswick. The colony of Québec contained the lands north and west of Nova Scotia and north of the newly formed United States. The actual boundaries of these territories would not be settled for decades, often making it difficult to conduct research in the areas in the immediate vicinity of the border.

Prior to the Revolution there were three major townships in the north of the area that is today New Brunswick. Cumberland and Sackville were located on the Bay of Fundy, while Maudsland was on the St. John River. To the south were the smaller settlements of Hopewell, Hillsborough, and Monckton, as well as the Memramcook district. The sum total of population for these areas prior to the arrival of the Loyalists was about 1,500.

It is estimated that about 28,000 Loyalists (including men, women, and children) settled in the old province of Nova Scotia after the Revolution. Of these, about 14,500 came to the area around the Bay of Fundy that is today New Brunswick. In her 1955 work *The Loyalists of New Brunswick* (Fredericton, 1955), Esther Clark Wright provides a great deal of information on these individuals. It is one of the most detailed studies of Loyalist settlers in Canada available.

Wright studied the names of the individual families and was able to determine their origins as follows:

Percentage	Colony of Origin
40%	New York
22%	New Jersey
12.9%	Connecticut
7.7%	Pennsylvania
6.1%	Massachusetts
2.3%	Maryland
1.9%	Rhode Island
1.6%	North Carolina
1.5%	South Carolina

1.2%	New Hampshire
1%	Virginia
.3%	Delaware
.3%	Georgia

Most of these people came from families that had been established in the American colonies for several generations. [i]

Wright was also able to crush the long-standing myth that all Loyalists belonged to upper class and merchant families. By studying admittance records and other lists, she was able to determine that the vast majority of these individuals practiced the trades of the working class: yeomen (farmers), carpenters, cordwainers, tailors, blacksmiths, mariners, shipwrights, etc. While there were a few members of the higher classes in each settlement, the vast majority of individuals were average colonists. [ii]

Tensions began to develop between the settlers in the western part of the province and those on the peninsula. Many of the Loyalists were desirous of forming their own government and creating a new province. On May 29, 1784, notice was given that the king had granted the partition of the colony. The peninsula, Cape Breton Island, and the Island of St. John would remain Nova Scotia while the western part would form the new province of New Brunswick.

Wright's book provides great detail on these refugees to a new territory. She also includes one of the most comprehensive lists of names of New Brunswick Loyalists available, which also gives information on their military and political connections.

Marion Gilroy compiled a list of Loyalists residing in the new province of Nova Scotia in *Loyalists and Land Settlement in Nova Scotia* (Public Archives of Nova Scotia Publication No. 4, Halifax, 1937). Her information came from land grants, warrants, escheats, and other records in several branches of provincial government. Broken down county by county, she abstracted information from over 8,200 land transactions dealing with the Loyalists.

We now turn to the western province of Québec. This territory had only been conveyed to Great Britain in 1763. Now, two decades later, it would prove a haven for thousands of Loyalist families from New York and New England. The towns of Sorel, Chambly, and St. John's on the southern side of the St. Lawrence River (between Montréal, New York, and Vermont) were initial magnets for settlers. Another area of vast interest was the western side of Missisquoi Bay containing Foucault (or Caldwell's Manor) and Noyan (or Christie's Manor), slightly to the north of it. These areas were very fertile with lots of woodland.

Although initially opposed to communities located too close to the border with the United States, the provincial government eventually relented and allowed such settlements. Over time they spread eastward for more than fifty miles into the present-day counties of Missisquoi, Brome, Shefford, Stanstead, and Sherbrooke. This area is known as the Easter Townships.

So many Loyalists had flooded into Québec that by 1791 the English population had grown to about 20,000. [iii] This sudden influx put even more stress on an already strained political situation. In 1791 the Constitution Act was passed to separate Québec into two provinces: Upper Canada and Lower Canada. The territory to the west, Upper Canada, was primarily filled with Loyalist settlements. To the east, Lower Canada contained most of the original settlements of the province of Québec. It was allowed to retain law under the Paris custom in order to appease the French -speaking residents and hopefully prevent another military crisis in North America.

Many individuals filed petitions with the provincial government to get land in compensation for their losses during the war. Petitions submitted to the Land Committee of the Executive Council in Québec and Lower Canada between 1764 and 1841 have been organized and microfilmed and are available at NEHGS and the Archives Nationales de Québec. These documents include many reports, schedules, minutes, and testimony for Loyalists settling in the province.

In 1904 the Bureau of Archives in Ontario published a two-volume set of materials in their collections pertaining to the Loyalists. They contain information on thousands of individuals who settled throughout Canada in the post-war years. Vast amounts of genealogical data are available in these records. Here is one example of testimony, from the case of

Mary Browster, late of Huntingdon, Pennsylvania. She swore the following statements to be correct:

Says she lived at Niagara in 1783. Her late Husband, Joseph Browster was a native of Ireland, & was settled in America many years before the rebellion broke out.

In 1775 he lived in Westmoreland, Pennsylvania, and was always a friend of Gt. Britain. In Septr., 1780, he set out to get into Detroit but was killed by the Indian who had undertaken to be his guide. She came to Detroit in 1782 with their children. She lived ther until 1783, after which she lived a year at Niagara & from thence to Sorel where she now resides. She has 3 children with her, viz., Margt, 12 years old; 2nd, Simon, ten years; 3rd, Martha, 6 years old.... [iv]

Descendants of the Loyalists are eligible for membership in the United Empire Loyalists' Association in Canada. This organization provides education, programs, publications, and other activities pertaining to the Loyalists. More detailed information can be found on their [website](#).

[i] Wright, p. 154-159.

[ii] Ibid., p. 160-164.

[iii] Fraser, Alexander, *Second Report of the Bureau of Archives for the Province of Ontario* (Toronto, ON: L.K.Cameron, 1904; Reprint Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1994), p. 1-2.