

May 18: Loyalist Day in New Brunswick

The Significance Of May 18

In March 1968, the New Brunswick Department of Education announced that 18 May, Loyalist Day, was to be observed as a public school holiday in the Schools of the District of Saint John.^[1] This was the result of a request by Mrs. Muriel Teed, president of the New Brunswick Branch of the United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada. The regulation remained in effect until 1997^[2] when the Department decided that school holidays should be province wide. No sector would be given the privilege of a holiday when others were not included.

Mrs. Teed's daughter, Muriel Young, another branch president, in 1982 asked the government to recognize 18 May as Loyalist Day for the Province of New Brunswick.^[3] The following proclamation is the result:

PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS, on May 18th, 1783, men and women who had maintained their allegiance to the Crown during the American War of Independence began to arrive and to settle in large numbers in what is now New Brunswick;

AND WHEREAS, the constancy, fortitude, tenacity of purpose and sacrificial sense of public duty exemplified by those Loyalists and their descendants have been interwoven for ever in the very fabric of this province that they loved;

AND WHEREAS, May 18th has been popularly known as Loyalist Day for many years and has been celebrated for close to two centuries;

NOW THEREFORE, I, the Lieutenant-Governor, acting by and with the advice of the Executive Council, do proclaim the 18th day of May of each year as Loyalist Day and invite all the people of New Brunswick to participate in the festivities.

This proclamation is given under my hand and the
Great Seal of the Province at Saint John on May 18, 1983

.(LS)

Fernand G. Dubé, Q.C.
Minister of Justice
&
G.F.G. Stanley
Lieutenant-Governor

According to tradition, the Loyalists landed in what became Saint John on 18 May 1783. At that time, the community had a total of 420 souls, including 205 Royal Fencible Americans and their families stationed at Fort Howe.^[4] The historian, J.W. Lawrence, stated that the City of Saint John was incorporated on the second anniversary of the landing of the first Loyalists, 18 May 1785,^[5] making it the oldest incorporated city in Canada. On 27 April, about 50 ships bound for Halifax, Shelburne, Annapolis and Saint John, set sail from Sandy Hook, New Jersey. Ten of these were headed for Saint John of which The Union arrived first, on the 10 May. The other eight began to come in two days later. Unloading of about 2,150 refugees, disbanding Provincial troops and their dependents with their possessions took about a month. A total of about 10,000 landed in that year.^[6] It has been suggested that disembarking began on the 18th, coinciding with the time in which Loyalist Day is celebrated.

The New Brunswick Branch of the United Empire Loyalists' Association believes that it is important to mark the coming of the Loyalists to New Brunswick and the 18th May is a suitable time to celebrate the event.

Frances Morrisey, UE
New Brunswick Branch, UELAC
2007

References

1. Eric L. Teed to Hon. W.W. Meldrum, 1 April 1968
2. Saint John Times Globe, May 1999.
3. Ibid, 11 Dec 1982.
4. D.G. Bell, Early Loyalist Saint John, Fredericton: New Ireland (1983), p.36.
5. J.W. Lawrence, Foot Prints, Saint John, McMillan (1883), p.8.
6. D.G. Bell, Early Loyalist Saint John, Fredericton: New Ireland (1983) p.18-21.