

Remembering Prince Philip & Lennoxville, Quebec, 1989

By Brian McConnell *

Upon learning of the passing of His Royal Highness the Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh on April 9, 2021, I have reflected on his connections to Canada. Married in 1947 to the future Queen Elizabeth II he was the longest serving royal consort in British history. He travelled to Canada forty- six times, often as a patron to philanthropic causes. In particular, as a member of the United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada I am appreciative of his attendance at its' Annual Convention in 1989 held at Bishop's University in Lennoxville, a borough of Sherbrooke, Quebec. A detailed report appeared in the December, 1989 issue of the Loyalist Gazette magazine. (1) Okill Stuart, President of Heritage Branch of Montreal which along with Sir John Johnson Branch of the Eastern Townships of Quebec hosted the event from May 18 – 22, 1989, was a classmate of Prince Philip while attending Gordonstoun School in Scotland. (2) This personal connection made possible his invitation and attendance.



Okill Stuart making presentation to Prince Philip at Convention Banquet

In his speech given at the Convention Banquet, Prince Philip said: “The lesson of the Loyalists is that it is possible for people to make a new start, to integrate into a strange community and to be committed to a wider unity, without in any way betraying the principles of their predecessors.” He also added that: “It would be more foolish to take Canada’s future for granted. You have to work for it. You have to have a vision of a civilized and harmonious community and consciously work towards achieving it.”



Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh

Below is the historically interesting and inspiring speech given by Prince Philip on May 20, 1989 at the Convention Banquet:

“In 1976 The Queen and I visited Philadelphia and later Boston on the 200th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence of what was to become the United States of America.

That is the date and event that stick in people’s minds, yet they were nowhere near the end of the story. Like so much of history, it is usually the winners who get to write their version of what happened.

Revolutions, and civil wars, before and since have never been unanimous; they have always caused sharp and usually painful divisions within the community and they have usually led to violence of a particularly vicious nature. What has come to be known as the American Revolution, might more aptly be described as the first American Civil War.

It has been made to look as if every inhabitant of the thirteen colonies was united in opposition to George III and his government. That is evidently not the whole truth. Certainly there were many grievances, but what community before or since can claim that it never had cause to complain about its government?

It is represented that the Declaration of Independence was received with great rejoicing by all the whole population. This is also a false impression.

The fact is that, during the conflict, more than 50 provincial units of Loyal Americans were raised in all the colonies from Georgia to Massachusetts, and these opposed the rebellion to the end of hostilities at Yorktown in 1781.

George Stanley in his book "The War of 1812" makes this observation:

"During the war, these "Loyalists" had been regarded as pariahs by the rebels who controlled the state governments. They had been barred from exercising their civil rights; they could not collect debts, claim legal protection from slander and assault, hold land or remain in the professions. Freedom of speech and travel were denied them. Some were hanged and others exiled, imprisoned or herded into concentration camps. George Washington referred to them as "abominable pests of society", and John Adams was for hanging all who offered opposition to the Revolution. Whig hoodlums ransacked their houses, insulted their women and subjected their men to degrading brutalities. "

It is well estimated that some 100,000 American colonists were driven into exile by threats, confiscation of property and general ill – treatment; 35,000, including disbanded British troops, were taken to Nova Scotia and to what was to become New Brunswick; 10,000 went to the old Province of Quebec. Thousands more from the southern colonies, in many cases accompanied by their slaves, found new homes in the Bahamas.

As might be inspected, the majority of the Loyalists were of British origin, but only just. In fact, only just over half had their origins in Scotland (23%), England (18%), Ireland (12%), and Wales (4%). Of the remainder, 28% came from Germany, 8 % from Holland and 5 % from France, but they too wished to remain loyal to the Crown and to continue to enjoy the laws and liberties under its protection.

I am afraid I have to confess that my knowledge of Canadian history was defective, or I have a poor memory, but I was intrigued to discover that the division of the old Province of Quebec in Upper and Lower Canada was largely due to the settlement of so many Loyalists in the western part of the Province.

They were apparently dissatisfied with the terms of the Quebec Act of 1774, which guaranteed the language and customs of the original French settlers. It was the petitions by the Loyalists for English Civil Law, freehold tenure of land and an elected assembly, that brought about the partition of 1791.

The first Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada was John Graves Simcoe, former Colonel of The Queen's Rangers (1st American Regiment); one of those 50 Loyalist units that had fought with the British during the Revolution.

Eventually, of course, Upper Canada, became the Province of Ontario and the remainder reverted to the Province of Quebec.

The Revolution, and the subsequent Treaty of Separation in 1783, had other far - reaching consequences. What had been British North American was divided into two countries, and it also had a critical influence on the outcome of the War of 1812.

When the United States declared war on Great Britain in 1812, just as she was engaged in a life and death struggle with the French under Napoleon, the population of Upper Canada was about 100,000, four-fifths of whom were American born. The Upper Canada Militia and many Indians and, of course, many French Canadians joined with the British regular troops to resist the invasion, and it was largely due to their success that Canada was able to develop as a nation from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

I think this is a measure of the strength of feeling that was aroused by the Revolution and how much these people valued their rights and freedoms under the Crown. It is also a clear demonstration of the fact that life means more to people than property and income. Only strongly held convictions can make martyrs.

This is, of course, a very important year for the United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada. It is the 200th anniversary of the Order in Council, which gave special recognition to the "First Loyalists" and defined them as those "who adhered to the Unity of the Empire, and joined the Royal Standard in America before the Treaty of Separation in 1783".

The Order was signed in the City of Quebec in 1789 by Lord Dorchester, the Governor-in-Chief of British America – perhaps better known as General Sir Guy Carleton, who, as Commander-in-Chief had been left with the unpleasant task of evacuating some 35,000 Loyalist troops and civilians from New York after the Treaty of Separation.

As you all know well enough, this is also the 75th anniversary of the incorporation of the United Empire Loyalists' Association by Act of the Canadian Parliament in 1914.

Last, but by no means of least significance, this is the first Annual Convention to be held in the Province of Quebec. Just a cursory glance at the place – names on the map of this part of the Province is enough to suggest that a good many Loyalists must have also settled in this area.

The town of Sherbrooke owes its origin to a later phase of the conflict with the new republic. Sir John Coape Sherbrooke was in command of the military forces in Nova Scotia during the War of 1812 and he was the leader of the successful amphibious expedition to capture the town of Castine on the Coast of Maine in 1814.

Every nation has events in its history that are either embarrassing or a source of pride. If each succeeding generation is to use the lessons of the past to build a better future, then all these events must form part of their consciousness.

The lesson of the Loyalists is that it is possible for people to make a new start, to integrate into a strange community and to be committed to a wider unity, without in any way betraying the principles of their predecessors.

The world has changed a very great deal since the days of the Loyalist migration, even though human nature has remained much the same. The challenge today is to grapple with the awesome power, and often fatal attraction, of modern science and technology, and to bring it under the control of human judgement and wise management in the interest of future generations.

Otherwise we shall end up like the sorcerer's apprentice and be overwhelmed by the consequences of thoughtless greed and ambition.

You are all descendants of people who had such an influence of the development of Canada, and I know that you are all very proud of the fact; but basking with pride in their reflected glory is not what your ancestors would expect of today's Canadians. Patriotism, unlike nationalism, is not a negative and exclusive, it is positive and creative.

It would be more foolish to take Canada's future for granted. You have to work for it. You have to have a vision of a civilized and harmonious community and consciously work towards achieving it.

That, I believe, is what the Loyalists would expect of their descendants. It is a tremendous challenge and one that is worthy of the vision of those who held the value of unity above self – interest.”

After his speech Prince Philip was given two gifts. Okill Stuart presented him with a bound copy of the book “The Loyalists of Quebec, 1774 – 1825, A Forgotten History.” He also received a beautiful hand-carved Canada Goose by Robert Cadman of Calgary, Alberta.

Notes:

- Article prepared by Brian McConnell on April 9, 2021. He may be contacted at email brianm564@gmail.com
- (1) “The Loyalist Gazette”, Vol. XXVII, No. 2, December, 1989
- (2) Okill Stuart passed away on August 28, 2019 at the age of 98. He served as the President of the United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada from 1994 – 1996 and was a direct descendant of Reverend John Stuart (1740 – 1811), United Empire Loyalist.