

Loyalist Trails
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Loyalists and Canada's First Residential School
Part One: New Brunswick

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It is a sad fact of Loyalist history that Canada's first residential school for Indigenous children was overseen and staffed by Loyalists. As Canadians now begin to acknowledge the Native ownership of the land on which they live, it is also important that those of Loyalist descent recognize the role played by their ancestors in trying to mold Indigenous children into Europeans. It is a story that begins in the very first colony founded by Loyalists – New Brunswick.

After operating a number of schools for Indigenous and Black students in the New England colonies, the London-based *Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England and Parts Adjacent in America* decided to open schools in New Brunswick "for educating and civilizing the Indians in this province". The colony was just two years old when the *New England Company* (its shorter name) appointed its first commissioners on June 14, 1786 to oversee the creation and staffing of the Indigenous schools.

Except for Thomas Carleton, New Brunswick's lieutenant governor, all of the school commissioners were Loyalist refugees: **Jonathan Odell, William Paine, John Coffin, Jonathan Bliss, Ward Chipman, George Leonard, Isaac Allen, and George Duncan Ludlow**. These men were paid by the New England company to hire and pay teachers, as well to provide books, clothes and implements "*for such of the Indians as should profess the Protestant religion, and to place such Indians in English families or with English teachers to be instructed in the English language and in the trade and mystery of some lawful calling and in other liberal arts and sciences.*" By the following year, the commissioners had established seven schools (or *stations*) across the colony in Meductic (Woodstock), Fredericton, Sheffield (near Maugerville), Westfield (outside of Saint John), St. Andrews, Sussex Vale (now Sussex Corner) and Chatham. All but one of the headmasters appointed by the New England Company were Loyalists.

Within five years, this arrangement was "not deemed satisfactory, and the system was radically changed". Six of the schools were closed, and the "academy" at Sussex Vale became New Brunswick's central Indigenous school. Because it was the only "college" for Native children in the colony, it was --of necessity-- a residential (or boarding) school.

For the most part, very little is known about the six Indigenous schools that were replaced by the one in Sussex Vale. **James Frazer** the headmaster of the **Chatham** school may be the Loyalist who received two town lots in Saint John in 1786. **Benjamin Gilbert** has left no other trace of his name in historical records except for the fact that he taught at the **Fredericton** school.

The fact that the Loyalist **Henry Barlow Brown** was the teacher appointed

to instruct Native children in St. Andrew's was ultimately of so little significance that it is not mentioned in his biographical information. What we do know of this Bostonian refugee was that he sought sanctuary in **St. Andrew's** in 1776. He was single when he assumed his teaching responsibilities, as we know that he married **Rebecca Appleton** in 1790 when she was 25 and he was 26. After serving as a registrar of deeds and a judge of probate in the Loyalist town, he left New Brunswick in 1811, and made his home in Woodstock, Vermont where he died at the age of 93.

The only teacher of Indigenous students who was not a Loyalist was **Gervas** (Gervais/Gervis/Gervice) **Say**, a New England Planter who had settled along the St. John River in the 1760s. During the American Revolution, Say was among 19 other settlers in Maugerville who refused to sign the resolutions of rebel sympathizers. He served the crown as a negotiator with the Wolastoqiyik people, helping to secure their loyalty during the war.

(The first European settlers called the Wolastoqiyik people "Maliseets", a derogatory term meaning "imperfect speakers". It was the name given them by the Mi'kmaq people of present-day Nova Scotia. *Wolastoqiyik* means "People of the Beautiful River" in their own language.)

As Loyalists began to disembark at the mouth of the St. John River in 1783, the commander of Fort Howe appointed three newly arrived refugees and Say (the only "old settler" representative) to discover who already had farms along the river valley and where land was available for Loyalists. It would seem that Say's service was rewarded by his 1786 appointment to the Indigenous school established in Sheffield just down the river from Maugerville. Of all of the teachers hired to work with First Nations children, Say is the only one who had previous experience with the Wolastoqiyik – and he would champion their cause outside the classroom as well.

When the newly minted colonial government conducted a survey in 1789 that threatened to impinge on Indigenous land, the local Wolastoqiyik turned to Say to resolve the situation. At that time, he was described as being the "Indian agent". Again, in 1792, Say petitioned New Brunswick's lieutenant governor on behalf of several Wolastoqiyik families to secure land along Grand Lake that would provide them an opportunity to become farmers. The Indian agent gave "some small donations" to the families, including corn, "clothing, axes, and hoes, with ammunition to kill their own meat, as their poverty is such that it is impossible for them to go forward without help." Gervas Say's petition resulted in land being allotted to the Indigenous families.

Burrows Davis, who instructed Native children at **Westfield**, had his name appear in a *Canadian Educational Review* article titled "New Brunswick Schools of the Olden Time". Featured in the piece is a contractual agreement signed on January 28, 1791 between Davis and **Joseph Maductick**, a Wolastoqiyik leader.

Maductick agreed to "give up" his family to Davis for one whole year "to be educated by him after the English manner" on the condition that his wife and children would be supplied with food, "comfortable and sufficient clothing", while he would be provided with powder and shot for hunting and tobacco. These were the kind of incentives regularly used by the New England Company to encourage

Indigenous People to enroll their children in school. As for Burrows Davis, his name last appears in documents of the era when he died in a shipwreck in December 1801.

While details are practically nonexistent concerning the Indigenous schools that were established in Chatham, Fredericton, St. Andrew's, Westfield and Sheffield, the school founded in Meductic near present-day Woodstock, New Brunswick has left posterity with a clearer understanding of its operations. The story of Frederick Dibblee and Meductic's Indigenous school will be told in next week's *Loyalist Trails*.

Loyalists and Canada's First Residential School

Part Two: The Meductic Model

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Within three years of the creation of the Loyalist colony of New Brunswick, seven schools for Indigenous children had been established by the *Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England and Parts Adjacent in America*. The New England Company appointed commissioners to oversee the schools and to hire teachers – all but one of whom were Loyalist refugees.

While little is known of the day to day operations of the schools in Chatham, Fredericton, St. Andrew's, Westfield and Sheffield, a number of historical records shed light on the “station” that operated in **Meductic** near Woodstock, New Brunswick. As the New England Company sponsored all of these schools, it is reasonable to assume that the colony's Indigenous institutions of learning would have operated along the same lines as the Meductic school.

Its teacher was **Frederick Dibblee**, a Connecticut Loyalist who would go on to become Woodstock's first Anglican minister. His mandate was to teach the children of such *“Indians as should profess the Protestant religion, and to place such Indians in English families or with English teachers to be instructed in the English language and in the trade and mystery of some lawful calling and in other liberal arts and sciences.”*

Dibblee opened the Meductic school in 1788. In addition to children, Wolastoqiyik adults (old, young, married and single) attended classes in a log building that measured 26 feet by 22 feet. It had a window on each side, three doors, and a log-lined cellar for storing the various supplies that were distributed to students and their families.

The Wolastoqiyik, the Indigenous Nation that lived along the St. John River, had once been the allies of the Acadians. Many had adopted the Roman Catholic faith, and so were wary of the Protestant, English-speaking Loyalists who were establishing settlements along the upper river.

Therefore, Frederick Dibblee's job description included creating good relations with the Wolastoqiyik, and much of this was done – as one historian put it—by *“his personal influence and judicious distribution of presents and provisions... The supplies of provisions and clothing served the purpose intended, securing the*

confidence and good will of the natives and paving the way for the establishment of a school ... Whatever may have been the prejudices of the Indians against receiving instruction at the hands of English teachers, the charms of the ... goods provided by the New England company proved irresistible."

The first shipment of these supplies included 50 blankets, a barrel of gunpowder, 100 lbs. of lead and 50 flints. The second consignment included 50 blankets, 100 lbs. lead and flints, blue blanket fabric, 40 bushels of corn, 2 barrels of pork and 4 bushels of salt. The third consignment included 50 blankets, a barrel of gunpowder, 200 lbs. of lead, more blanket material, 4 hoes and 4 axes.

In a report that Dibblee completed in November of 1789, he noted that there were 337 Wolastoqiyik in Meductic – 98 men, 74 women and 165 children. (The number of Loyalist families who had settled in nearby Woodstock was only about twenty.) The Loyalist schoolteacher had a total of 22 students: five married men, two married women, five girls and ten boys. The eight families whose members attended the school lived in tents on the school property.

This early experiment in Indigenous education was *not* a residential school where children were separated from their parents. The children returned to their homes each afternoon where they could live and speak as Indigenous people. Although Dibblee taught his lessons in English, he is noted as having made "considerable progress" in learning the Wolastoqiyik language and was "able to converse with them quite readily after a time".

Dibblee was pleased with the progress of his "scholars". He reported that *"They are constant in their attendance and exceeding quick in receiving instruction, five of them in particular are amazingly so, having made great improvements both in spelling and writing. They are continually making applications to be received and there are now thirteen who are making their wigwams with the idea of becoming scholars and receiving provisions and clothing. I believe there is no doubt but there will be a constant school, for their prejudices are removed and they appear to be ambitious of learning, and the whole of them will become scholars if they can receive provision and clothing."*

The regular provisions supplied by the New England Company certainly made an English Protestant education appealing to the Wolastoqiyik. Dibblee noted that his students *"receive for five persons one bushel of corn and one piece of pork per week, and there are forty-seven individuals. They often want beans and potatoes, and then they are deducted out of the corn, half a bushel of beans and two of potatoes equal to one of corn — which is the difference when they purchase them. They have received 2.5 yards of blue cloth for coats and stockings, and 2.5 yards of linen for shirts, and thread each; hats and books what I had received."*

While some students applied themselves to their studies and learning skills, others recognized that living at Meductic was a "comfortable and profitable way" of getting through the harsh New Brunswick winter. It was a practical solution to the negative consequences of Loyalist settlement as land was being cleared for farms and the number of game hunted for food began to decline.

Dibblee's report indicated Wolastoqiyik families were small, averaging only two or three children. **John Manduelmet** and his wife had nine children, but the families in which there were more than five children were exceedingly rare.

During his first three years as a teacher of Indigenous students, Dibblee spent at least \$2,000 for the benefit of the Wolastoqiyik, “of which by far the larger part went for provisions and supplies”. After the school was established, only those families who had members enrolled as students were entitled to receive goods from the New England Company.

This more benign form of Indigenous education did not last. By the early 1790s, the commissioners for the New England Company decided to close six of the colony’s Indigenous schools and make the school at Sussex Vale the central academy for Wolastoqiyik students. Because it was far from the Native communities along the St. John River valley, the Sussex Vale site became a residential school.

Henceforth, it would provide room and board for Wolastoqiyik youngsters whose only chance for an English Protestant education necessitated living far from their families. It would be the first Indigenous residential school in what is now Canada – and was a foreshadowing of an all too familiar program of assimilation that would be repeated in the centuries that followed.

The story of how the Loyalist teachers of New Brunswick’s residential school tried to assimilate its Wolastoqiyik students through a program of instruction and apprenticeship will be told in next week’s *Loyalist Trails*.

Loyalists and Canada’s First Residential School **Part Three: Sussex Vale**

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Appointed by a board of Loyalist commissioners in 1787, **Oliver Arnold** was the first teacher at the Indigenous residential school in Sussex Vale, New Brunswick. Three years later, he became an Anglican missionary, but continued to be involved in the school as the educational superintendent for the New England Company. This charitable British society was responsible for establishing schools for the purposes of “*educating and placing out the heathen natives and their children in English families, in some trade, mystery or lawful calling.*”

Oliver Arnold was a Connecticut Loyalist who had graduated from Yale College in 1776. Following service as a lieutenant in the Volunteers of New England, he came to New Brunswick as a 28 year-old bachelor in the spring of 1783. Three years later he married **Charlotte Hustice**, the widow of a Loyalist doctor.

Although Arnold made an attempt to learn the Wolastoqiyik language and train an Indigenous teacher, he lost any enthusiasm he might have had for working with his students, complaining that it was an “unpleasant task”. As the historian Judith Fingard points out, Arnold created the impression among his fellow Loyalists that the Indigenous students were “at best exploitable, at worst dispensable”.

Arnold benefited more from his position as superintendent than his Wolastoqiyik students did. Over time, the funds from the New England Company intended for teacher salaries and the costs of Indigenous apprenticeships found their way into the pockets of the Loyalist clergyman. Arnold failed to pay the Sussex

Vale teachers their full salaries. His family lived in a house provided by the New England Company, and he received £20 a year for each Indigenous apprentice he had working his land.

John Coffin, one of the Loyalist commissioners put in charge of New Brunswick's residential school, described Arnold as "rapacious in the extreme" who was more like "a mad dog after his prey than a clergyman in the habit of praying for things requisite and necessary".

Following the consolidation of New Brunswick's seven schools for Indigenous students into one institution in 1791, the original Sussex Vale building had to be expanded to accommodate students who would be living there throughout the school year. When the **Rev Charles Inglis**, the Anglican bishop for the Maritimes, visited the school a year later, he reported that there were between 20 and 30 white students and 8 Indigenous students. *"The latter were boarded and clothed in the school as well as instructed there."* Inglis reported that the *"Indians learned as fast as the whites, and were fond of associating with them"*.

Three years later, the school was enlarged to 80 by 30 feet to house *"English children as well as the natives"*. It included an apartment for the teacher and his family. It was described as being *"quite long and low and uncouth in appearance."*

In 1823, Bishop Inglis wrote a second report that provides posterity with an idea of how New Brunswick's first residential school functioned.

"The young Indians are taught in the same room with the scholars of the parish, but in separate classes. The number of them is only fourteen and they ... appear to make good progress in reading and writing. So far this institution seems well constituted and guarded ...The plan of the college is, that when the children are admitted and clothed, they are apprenticed out to different families in the settlement, who have their services as servants, on condition that they send them at certain times to the college or school for instruction.

Several Indians who have been brought up at this college, and are now grown to manhood, are settled in the parish as farmers or mechanics, and seem to manifest no disposition to return to their roving and savage habits. There is a considerable quantity of land belonging to this institution, but the building itself is almost in a state of dilapidation and will soon require material repairs..."

The residential school saw a number of teachers come and go over its history. After Arnold changed careers from teacher to rector, **Elkanah Morton** took his place for a year. Despite having lost a leg in an accident at a militia review in Cornwallis, Nova Scotia, this farmer's son had a range of careers from ship building and teaching in New Brunswick to serving as the justice of the peace in Digby, Nova Scotia.

Following Morton's departure, there was no regular teacher at the residential school until **Jeremiah Regan**, a "person of some local importance", was hired in 1797; he taught until his death in 1815. He was succeeded by **Walter Dibblee**, the nephew of Frederick Dibblee who had taught at Meductic's Indigenous school 20 years earlier. Walter had been a teacher in a variety of New Brunswick communities since 1789, so he brought some educational experience to the Sussex Vale school.

Following Dibblee's death in 1817, **Joseph R. Leggett**, a New York Loyalist was hired. Destined to be the school's last teacher, Leggett was noted as possessing

a good education, literary tastes and refined manners. His talents were wasted in a school program that spent more time hiring out its Indigenous students than actually providing them with educational basics.

In 1821, Leggett reported that he had 21 Wolastoqiyik students under his “tuition and inspection”. But he had doubts about the merits of the ways in which his students were “educated”.

He described his students and their program in a report to the New England Company, saying *“They were of ages ranging from nine years to nineteen, and averaging thirteen years and nine months; and, although the majority were placed in families near enough to the academy to admit of their daily attendance on the classes there, yet several were bound out as far distant as Penobsquis {14 km} and Norton {20 km}. It can hardly be supposed that under these circumstances they received a great amount of systematic training; indeed, no mention is anywhere made of any attempt at any time to teach them more than the catechism and the arts of reading and writing.”*

Matters finally came to a head when **Walter Bromley**, a representative of the New England Company, visited Sussex Vale. He was appalled to discover that exploitation of the Wolastoqiyik students was given priority over their religious instruction and vocational training.

Another report by **Dr. John West** was also critical of the methods used at the Sussex Vale school: *The principle that was adopted of apprenticing their children at an early age to different settlers I found was not generally approved by the Indians themselves, nor has the plan proved beneficial to their morals. ... Their naturally high and independent spirit must be consulted in an attempt to do them good ...”*

A year after West’s inspection of the residential school, the New England Company shut down Sussex Vale College on March 24, 1826.

A history of the school written in 1892 concludes with these words: *The greater proportion of the Indians departed from Sussex soon after their {apprentice} allowances ceased, and all speedily abandoned the church which had made such exertions and outlay for their civilization and conversion; and, indeed, but for the pathetic little wooden crosses in Ward’s Creek cemetery, one would now hardly know that the few Indians remaining in this vicinity had ever heard of Christianity.”*

The Loyalists’ attempts to assimilate the Indigenous population of New Brunswick had failed. Sadly, Sussex Vale would not be the last residential school.

Loyalists and Canada’s First Residential School

Part Four: Indigenous Apprentices

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Two Loyalist refugees that settled in the Maritimes following the American Revolution had two very different perspectives on the effectiveness of Canada’s first residential school in Sussex Vale, New Brunswick.

Bishop Charles Inglis had only positive things to say: *“This college, if*

properly managed, might be productive of much good. So far from the Indians manifesting any jealousy or dislike to the plan, they voluntarily bring their children from the woods for admission; the committee have not to seek for or to entice them to come. There are generally more applicants than can be admitted.” Inglis seems to have been unaware of the fact that the school’s original intentions of providing education and vocational training had been twisted into a system that provided cheap Indigenous labour for local farmers and tradesmen.

Joseph Leggett, the last teacher at the residential school, condemned the practice of indenting his Wolastoqiyik students as apprentices, saying *“It can hardly be supposed that under these circumstances they received a great amount of systematic training; indeed, no mention is anywhere made of any attempt at any time to teach them more than the catechism and the arts of reading and writing.”*

The trusting parents of the Sussex Vale students regularly signed indentures of apprenticeship in the hope of giving their children a better life. The 1806 indenture of 17 year-old **John Ketch Sis** to the family of the **Rev. Oliver Arnold** may be the only surviving document from the school that illustrates how the local Loyalist settlers exploited Native students.

Arnold, the original teacher at Sussex Vale and then its subsequent superintendent, not only received a salary from the New England Company that operated the residential school, he also employed a number of its students as his indentured apprentices—having up to as many as seven Wolastoqiyik children at a time. One writer described this as the Loyalist minister taking *“his full share of the duty of teaching the natives the art and mystery of a farmer”*, but failed to mention that Arnold received a premium of £20 a year from the New England Company for each apprentice. (The residential school teacher’s annual salary in 1806 was only £16.) As the historian Judith Fingard observed, about Arnold, *“That he benefited more from his position than the Indians did from his care seems unquestionable”*.

Nevertheless, the 1806 indenture of apprenticeship signed by the Rev. Oliver Arnold and the father of John Ketch Sis serves to demonstrate the best hopes of Wolastoqiyik parents who wanted their children to prosper in the Loyalist colony – and the power that Loyalist masters had over their charges.

As part of the indenture agreement, the Arnold family promised to teach John the “art” of farming on the condition that the New England Company paid them £20 a year for the “care, trouble and expense” of having the teenager in their home for the next four years.

The Arnolds were responsible for providing the Indigenous youth with *“sufficient meat, drink, apparel, lodging and washing fitting for an apprentice ... and shall also endeavor to teach or cause to be taught the said apprentice to read and write, by providing him with proper schooling for that purpose during the said term, and shall also endeavor to teach or cause to be taught or instructed the said apprentice in the principles of the Protestant religion”*

When John Ketch Sis’ indenture came to an end, the Loyalist family was to *“furnish, supply and give to the said apprentice one full suit of clothes without any compensation therefore, and also one pair of steers worth eight pounds sterling money of Great Britain, one cow worth four pounds like money, one axe worth seven shillings and sixpence like money, and one hoe worth four shillings like money, for all which*

said last mentioned articles the said company in London shall pay.”

For his part, John was to faithfully serve Arnold “*and his lawful commands everywhere readily obey*”. The teenager was to “*do no damage to his said master, nor see it to be done by others without letting or giving notice thereof to his said master; he shall not absent himself day nor night from his said master's service without his leave, but in all things behave himself as a faithful apprentice ought to do during the said term.*”

Since the New England Company was a partner in this apprenticeship indenture, it reserved the right to stop paying Arnold his allowance if it felt that he failed to comply with the terms of the contract. It also was at liberty “*to remove or cause to be removed the said apprentice to any academy, school or college that may be by the said company instituted or established in the said province for the better educating and instructing the said heathen natives.*” This is an interesting clause as there were no other schools for Indigenous youth in New Brunswick. Their one and only best hope for advancement in white society was to enter into an indenture arrangement.

The majority of the Sussex Vale students did not complete their apprenticeships, and so they did not receive the stock and tools promised in their indentures. Ultimately, it was the local Loyalists who received all of the benefits of the apprenticeship program. They used the Indigenous children as workers on their farms and received an annual allowance from the New England Company. The students, who left the farms after enduring a demanding work environment for one, two, or three years, received nothing for their years of service other than the day-to-day necessities spelled out in the indenture contract.

The historian Judith Fingard noted that the residential school's program took students out of their classrooms and away from their teacher, making “*the indentured children ... virtual slaves to the leading families of Sussex Vale*”.

A different approach to Indigenous education would have been far less expensive for the New England Company and much more beneficial to the Indigenous youth they wanted to help. As an outside observer commented, “*The principle that was adopted of apprenticing their children at an early age to different settlers I found was not generally approved by the Indians themselves, nor has the plan proved beneficial to their morals.*”

Happily for John Ketch Sis, one of the small minority that completed a four-year apprenticeship, he received the £13 worth of articles that were promised in his indenture agreement. Whether he ever made use of his training, the tools and the livestock that were his apprenticeship earnings has been lost to history.

By 1826, the New England Company closed down the Sussex Vale residential school, admitting its lack of success. Its Loyalist teachers and the Loyalist settlers in its vicinity had failed to achieve the company's objectives. “*It is not by such means {the apprenticeship program} ... nor any similar forced process that has been acted upon, nor any means that compel {the Native children} to be “hewers of wood and drawers of water” in a menial capacity, that a just expectation can be raised of any conversion in their state.*”

The failure of the Sussex Vale residential school for Indigenous students offered the Loyalist settlers of the Maritimes and their kin in Canada an opportunity

to learn valuable lessons from this flawed model of education. Sadly, no one paid attention, and Indigenous communities would bear the consequences of those lost lessons for the next two centuries.