

Nicole Hughes
2022 UELAC Loyalist Scholarship Award Recipient

The 2022 UELAC Loyalist Scholarship was awarded to Nicole Hughes, a PhD student in Interdisciplinary Studies at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton. She received her Hons. BA, Anthropology from Brandon University in Manitoba in 2017 and her MA, Anthropology at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton in 2020.

Since 2017, Nicole has been excavating as a field osteologist at the Rochefort Point Cemetery located within the Fortress of Louisbourg (1713 – 1758), a National Historic Site, on Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. The project is led by Dr. Amy Scott (Anthropology, UNB) in collaboration with Parks Canada in response to ongoing coastal erosion that is destroying our shared cultural history at an alarming rate. This fieldwork actively excavates and analyzes individuals interred at Rochefort Point to protect the remains from coastal destruction while exploring the lived experience of individuals who were a part of the Louisbourg community during its occupation.

The Fortress of Louisbourg was a French colonial settlement operated primarily as a military stronghold but was also the seat of the French cod fishing industry. During its short history, the Fortress became the third busiest port along the transatlantic trade route after New York and Boston and as a result, the Louisbourg population quickly diversified with French colonists and soldiers, Basque fishermen, Caribbean and New Englander merchants and traders, Swiss, German, and Spanish soldiers, English, Irish, and Scottish residents, and free and enslaved African, African-Canadian, and Indigenous peoples.

Under the supervision of Dr. Amy Scott, Nicole's PhD research will explore the genetic ancestral diversity of those living at the Fortress of Louisbourg in Cape Breton to better understand the social and cultural complexity of this 18th century colonial site beyond the historically documented French and English influences. Her three primary research questions are: **1)** can ancient DNA be successfully extracted from archaeological human remains from the Fortress of Louisbourg skeletal collection? **2)** how does the DNA diversity of this population compare with historical records, stable isotope data, and burial goods? Is there consistency between these different data types as to who was living and dying at Louisbourg? **3)** how does the integration of ancient DNA analysis help us better explore the relationships between different ancestral groups in 18th century Louisbourg?



This research will further validate DNA extraction methods from archaeological human remains and will be the first to identify DNA ancestral groups within an Atlantic Canadian archaeological population. The Euro-washing of colonial records from this period has largely underrepresented the diverse, non-European population at Louisbourg, obscuring our understanding of these non-power groups and their important contribution to the Louisbourg community. This research will provide a unique insight into the local biological diversity of the Louisbourg region during the 18th century of which many Loyalists were a part of and would be immigrating into. Broadly, this project will highlight the heterogeneous nature of colonial Canada, leading to a better understanding of the diverse lived experiences and unique narratives of these historically underrepresented groups.

Since beginning her graduate work at UNB, Nicole has contributed to various research projects including the design and structure of projects, organizing and collecting data from human remains, discussing and researching potential interpretations of data, and co-writing and editing papers for publications and conferences. Additionally, Nicole has been a contract academic instructor in the Department of Anthropology since fall 2020 where she has been able to explore her passion for teaching which centres the fostering of student creativity and in-depth interaction with Anthropology. Nicole was the Treasurer and is currently the Vice-President of the Graduate Anthropology Society which hosts a bi-annual Open Lab Day where the university and public community can view archaeological and burial artifacts as well as human skeletal remains from the Fortress of Louisbourg to learn more about the historic site, the excavation, and the lived experience of individuals interred at Louisbourg.