A SHORT HISTORY
OF THE UNITED EMPIRE LOYALISTS

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Over two hundred years ago the American Revolution shattered the British Empire in North America. The conflict was rooted in British attempts to assert economic control in her American colonies after her costly victory over the French during the Seven Years War. When protest and riots met the British attempts to impose taxes on the colonists, the British responded with political and military force. Out of the struggle between between the Thirteen Colonies and their mother country emerged two nations: the United States and what would later become Canada.

Not all the inhabitants of the Thirteen Colonies opposed Britain. The United Empire Loyalists were those colonists who remained faithful to the Crown and wished to continue living in the New World. Therefore, they left their homes to settle eventually in what remained of British North America.

WHO WERE THE LOYALISTS?

The Loyalists came from every class and walk of life. Some depended on the Crown for their livelihood and status and had considerable wealth and property. Many were farmers and craftsmen. There were clerks and clergymen, lawyers and labourers, soldiers and slaves, Native Americans, college graduates, and people who could not write their own names. Recent immigrants from Europe also tended to support the Crown.

They had little in common but their opposition to the revolution. Their reasons for becoming Loyalists were as varied as their backgrounds. Some had strong ties with Britain: others had simply supported what turned out to be the losing side. Local incidents, fear of change, self-interest, political principles, emotional bonds - one or any combination of these influenced their decision to remain loyal to the Crown. The common thread that linked these diverse groups was a distrust of too much democracy which they believed resulted in mob rule and an accompanying breakdown of law and order. The Reverend Mather Byles mused, "Which is better - to be ruled by one tyrant three thousand miles away or by three thousand tyrants one mile away?" Loyalists believed that the British connection guaranteed them a more secure and prosperous life than republicanism would.

Historians estimate that ten to fifteen per cent of the population of the Thirteen Colonies - some 250,000 people - opposed the revolution; some passively, others by speaking out, spying, or fighting against the rebels.

Because of their political convictions, Loyalists who remained in the Thirteen Colonies during the revolution were branded as traitors and hounded by their Patriot (rebel) neighbours. Such an incident occurred in 1775:

At Quibbleton, New Jersey, Thomas Randolph, cooper, who (as the Patriots said) had publicly proved himself an enemy to his country, by reviling and using his utmost endeavours to oppose the proceedings of the continental and provincial conventions... was ordered to be stripped naked, well coated with tar and feathers, and carried on a wagon publicly around the town - which punishment was accordingly inflicted. As soon as he became duly sensible of his offense, for which he earnestly begged pardon, and promised to atone, as far as he was able, by contrary behaviour for the future, he was released and suffered to return to his house, in less than half an hour.

Patriot authorities punished Loyalists who spoke their views too loudly by stripping them of their property and goods and banishing them on pain of death should they ever return. They coerced others into silence with threats. Throughout the Thirteen Colonies that were under Patriot control, Loyalists could not vote, sell land, sue debtors, or work as lawyers, doctors, or schoolteachers. To be fair, in Loyalist-controlled areas, supporters of the Revolution met with similar treatment at the hands of British authorities.

Approximately 70,000 Loyalists fled the Thirteen Colonies. Of these, roughly 50,000 went to the British North American Colonies of Quebec and Nova Scotia.

For some, exile began as early as 1775 when "committees of safety" throughout the Thirteen Colonies began to harass British sympathizers. Other responded by forming Loyalist regiments: The King's Royal Regiment of New York, Skinner's New Jersey Volunteers, The Pennsylvania and Maryland Loyalists, Butler's Rangers, Rogers' Rangers and Jessup's Corps were the best known of some 50 Loyalist regiments that campaigned actively during the war.

The signing of the Treaty of Paris (1783), which recognized the independence of the United States, was the final blow for the Loyalists. Faced with further mistreatment and the hostility of their countrymen, and wishing to live as British subjects, Loyalists who had remained in the Thirteen Colonies during the war now were faced with exile. Those who wished to in North America had two choices; Nova Scotia (Maritimes) or Quebec (Ontario-Quebec).

EXODUS TO AN UNKNOWN LAND

Fleeing in panic and confusion, forced to leave behind most of their possessions and burdened with the prospect of building a new life in a new land, the Loyalists faced unpromising beginnings. The lands they were to settle were isolated, forbidding and wild.

"It is, I think, the roughest land I ever saw... But this is to be the city, they say... We are all ordered to land tomorrow and not a shelter to go under", Sarah Frost, a Loyalist from New York wrote in her diary as she contemplated the land that she and her husband were about to settle.

In addition to the anguish of defeat and the trauma of exile, Loyalists had to face isolation and feelings of helplessness. The grandmother of Sir Leonard Tilley, one of the fathers of Confederation, expressed what many Loyalists felt when she wrote:

> *I climbed to the top of Chipman's Hill (Saint John) and watched the sails in the distance, and such a feeling of loneliness came over me that though I had not shed a tear through all the war, I sat down on the damp moss with my baby on my lap and cried bitterly.*

Shortages, harsh living conditions, and worry plagued the Loyalists in the hastily erected refugee camps. Many had to live in tents during the first winter. The wife of a soldier on the Saint John River wrote:

> *We pitched our tents in the shelter of the woods and tried to cover them with spruce boughs. We used stones for fireplaces. Our tents had no floors but the ground... how we lived through that winter, I barely know...*

Many didn't live through the first winter; many left with the relief fleets when they set sail the next spring. Those who did survive had to deal with delays in completing land surveys and shortages of tools and provision. But the Loyalists' determination and resourcefulness assured the ultimate success of many of the new settlements.

LOYALIST SETTLEMENTS IN BRITISH NORTH AMERICA

NOVA SCOTIA

In the spring of 1776 the first shipload of Loyalists left the Thirteen Colonies for Nova Scotia. The British government gave them free passage and permitted them to take necessary articles with them.

By 1783 there were about 50,000 Loyalist leaders and refugees living in New York. Although the peace treaty signed that year promised them safety, the Loyalists heard that the Patriot victory had increased persecution. Therefore, up to 30,000 decided to leave for Nova Scotia. Many of the settlers were members of disbanded Loyalist regiments. Colonel Edward Winslow who came from New England was an aristocrat. There were representatives of such minority groups as Dutch, Huguenots and Quakers, and a number of Loyalists brought slaves with them.

Many of the Black Loyalists were members of an exclusively Black corps of the British army who had been promised their freedom if they would support the Crown. Among their numbers was Henry Washington who had run away from the service of George Washington. Assuming their equality with white soldiers, the Black Loyalists expected similar treatment. Sadly, this did not turn out to be the case since benefits in the form of land provisions were not distributed equally. Doomed to a life of subservience, if not actual slavery, about half of the Black Loyalists soon left for Sierra Leone.

Approximately half of the refugees settled near the Saint John River, in what was to become New Brunswick, with a concentration at the mouth of the river around an

excellent harbour. This developed onto the city of Saint John. There were also settlements along the coast of the peninsula at Lunenburg, Shelburne and Digby.

The Loyalists did not mix well with the older settlers and preferred to live in groups by themselves as far away as possible. They doubted the loyalty of these people who had called themselves "Neutral Yankees" during the war, and they resented their monopoly over government appointments. Consequently they began to petition the government to separate Loyalist settlements in the Saint John River valley, as well as smaller settlements on St. John's Island (Prince Edward Island) and Cape Breton Island, from the government in Halifax. The British government granted their requests in 1784. New Brunswick, whose population was 90% Loyalist became a separate colony with its capital 90 miles upriver from Saint John. The first lieutenant-governor, Thomas Carleton, named the settlement Fredericton in honour of Frederic, the Duke of York.

QUEBEC

Although there was some Loyalist migration into what is today the Province of Quebec, by far the greatest numbers came to present-day Ontario. The disbanded Loyalist regiments provided the majority of settlers. Colonel John Butler, a powerful landowner in the Mohawk Valley of New York, organized Butler's Rangers and fought along with Native Loyalists. He led his followers to the west bank of the Niagara River when the regiment disbanded in 1784. Some families moved farther west from this settlement to the shores of Lake Erie, the Detroit River, and the Thames River. Colonel Butler continued his association with the Natives as Superintendent of Indian Affairs and head of their militia.

Native Americans, and notably members of the Five Nations in New York, tended to side with the British because they believed the British were more likely than the Patriots to protect them. Approximately 2,000 followed Thayendanegea (Joseph Brant) into British North America after the war. The majority settled in the valley of the Grand River; smaller groups went to the head of Lake Ontario and to the shores of the Bay of Quinte.

Disbanded Loyalist Regiments also settled along the St.Lawrence River upstream from Montreal and along the North shore of Lake Ontario. At their request they were settled according to nationality and religion. The majority of the settlers had been frontier farmers before the revolution and they were used to wilderness conditions, but they had lost almost everything they owned when they fled from their homes. The government gave them a limited amount of support with the most extensive reward being in the form of free land. They granted land to the heads of households according to their military rank and extended grants to wives and children born and unborn.

The Loyalists brought with them the tradition of freehold land tenure, British Laws and representative government. They did not want to give up these rights by living under the Quebec Act which guaranteed the seigneurial system of landholding and denied an elected assembly to the people of that colony. Shortly after their arrival,

Loyalist representatives petitioned the government to alter the system of holding land in Quebec to freehold tenure similar to that of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.

In 1791, the British Parliament passed the Canada Act, usually known as the Constitutional Act, which provided for the division of Quebec into Upper and Lower Canada. Both colonies were granted an elected assembly and the freehold system of land tenure went into effect in Upper Canada (later Ontario). These laws clearly show the influence of the Loyalists.

THE LOYALIST HERITAGE

Of less practical value than land and supplies, but of more lasting significance to the Loyalists and their descendants, was the government's recognition of the stand that they had taken. Realizing the importance of some type of consideration, on November 9, 1789, Lord Dorchester, the governor of Quebec, declared "that it was his Wish to put the mark of Honour upon the Families who had adhered to the Unity of the Empire...". As a result of Dorchester's statement, the printed militia rolls carried the notation:

> ***N.B. Those Loyalists who have adhered to the Unity of the Empire, and joined the Royal Standard before the Treaty of Separation in the year 1783, and all their Children and their Descendants by either sex, are to be distinguished by the following Capitals, affixed to their names: U.E. Alluding to their great principle The Unity of the Empire.***

The initials "U.E." are rarely seen today, but the influence of the Loyalists on the evolution of Canada remains. Their ties with Britain and their antipathy to the United States provided the strength needed to keep Canada independent and distinct in North America.

The Loyalists' basic distrust of republicanism and "mob rule" influenced Canada's gradual "paper-strewn" path to nationhood, in contrast to the abrupt and violent upheavals in other countries.

In the two centuries since the Loyalists' arrival, the myths and realities of their heritage have intertwined to have a powerful influence on how we, as Canadians, see ourselves. Truly, the arrival of the United Empire Loyalists not only changed the Course of Canadian history by prompting the British government to establish the provinces of New Brunswick and Ontario, but is also gave them special characteristics which can be seen today. Perhaps the most striking of these is the motto on the Ontario coat of arms: Ut incept sic permanet fidelis that is, "As she began, so she remains, Loyal".

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