

Reply from UELAC's First Honorary Fellow

Nathan Tidridge MSM, Honorary Fellow, UELAC

Thank you.

I cannot understate what it means to have been appointed the first Honorary Fellow of the United Empire Loyalist Association of Canada. As both a history teacher and writer I am proud of my relationship with the Loyalists, a relationship that goes back to an address I gave at the invitation of the Hamilton Branch on United Empire Loyalists' Day in 2002. As an educator, inspired by colleagues like Ruth Nicholson UE, I have told my students about the Loyalists every semester I have taught at Waterdown District High School. The King's Colours are displayed in my classroom, and I make sure to include the UELAC's beautiful armorial bearings and their symbolism in my lessons. Five years ago, I was honoured to speak at the 2013 AGM hosted by the Hamilton Branch. Surrounded by friends, it was a wonderful evening for my wife, Christine, and I.

That David Kanowakeron Hill's nomination mentioned my work exploring the relationship between the Crown and Indigenous Peoples was very humbling. I have always been interested in the Crown, and as I learned more about the institution I kept on encountering Indigenous Peoples and the Treaties binding them with the Sovereign. The closer I looked the more I came to realize that the Crown provided a conduit with which Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples communicated with one another in order to coexist on the land. For centuries, these relationships – manifested in Treaties - worked, but Confederation and the creation of such instruments as the 1876 Indian Act (still the law of the land) and residential school system, left a Canadian State unaware of these foundational relationships. The general lack of knowledge most Canadians have regarding the Crown's role in this country has added to the schism between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Peoples, as well as an alarmingly poor understanding of the fundamentals of our democracy itself.

However, Indigenous Peoples have not forgotten these relationships, and neither have the Loyalists.

As refugees the United Empire Loyalists depended on their kinship (Treaties require words used to describe family in order for them to be properly understood) with their Indigenous partners in order to survive on these lands. These relationships were articulated in Treaties such as the Treaty of Niagara (1764) which created frameworks for coexistence as settlers headed into

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Indigenous territories. These original frameworks would be perverted into the written treaties, or land surrenders, which are often cited by governments today.

As Kanowakeron Hill points out in his wonderful article in the Bridge Annex Times "Haudenosaunee-British Alliance during the American Revolution," some nations came to these lands as allies of the Crown. The story of the Haudenosaunee, and the Mohawk Nation within that ancient confederacy, includes a distinct Loyalist heritage. "This heritage," Hill writes, "is as much a part of the history of how and why the Haudenosaunee arrived and began to live in what would become Canada as it is of those non-Native comrades who chose to be loyal as a matter of preference or simply conscience." Regardless of how it was perceived and used, the Crown has been a catalyst in these lands.

McGill Professor Charles Taylor's seminal work, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, introduced me to the idea that the natural desire to define ourselves requires us to have metaphorical signposts from which we can stand and look out to the rest of the world. These signposts can be anything: stories, people, places, faith, and events. As collections of people, countries also desire to define, and redefine, themselves.

For Canada, one of its most important signposts remains the Crown.

For the Loyalists, the Crown is a defining part of your identity – the impetus that brought you to these lands. For other Canadians, the relationship with the Crown may be subtler: military service, a brush with royalty, a memory focused round one of Canada's many "Victoria Parks" or "King Streets." The Crown is so prevalent in this country that most fail to even notice it, and yet if we pause to consider its place in our lives each of us would be able to draw out a story or two. Some of these stories would extol the virtues of the Crown, some would denounce the institution, while most would simply mention it as part of the background. As John Fraser points out in his book *The Secret of the Crown*, "We have a Queen who can rule our hearts if we let her, but who leaves our minds to wander and speculate wherever they will."

The teachings I have been fortunate to receive from Indigenous elders, knowledge keepers and friends have told me that the Crown – and specifically the Queen herself – is an integral part of the Treaties that are woven into these lands. They are inseparable, and it is the responsibility of non-Indigenous Canadians to learn

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about these quintessential relationships. By renewing our Treaties and holding them up as the signposts they were meant to be, we will make our society closer to the one we aspire it to be. The relationship between the Sovereign and Indigenous Peoples remains a template, a kinship based on teachings that are applicable in everyday life that remains relevant in the 21st century (perhaps more now than ever). Last year, in an address to Lakehead University, Ontario's Lieutenant Governor Elizabeth Dowdeswell said:

Treaties are relationships –they are living things that, in many cases, predate Confederation and Canada. When we see Treaties as the relationships they are, certain words are evoked when defining them: trust, honesty, communication, integrity, and love. This last word is the most important.

The love that is meant is often described as kinship –that the Crown is bound in kinship with Indigenous Peoples. Relationships, particularly those between family members, have a flexibility that allow for disagreements and even estrangement. However, no matter the conflict, with family there is always a path left open for reconciliation. Such relationships must have elements of the abstract if they are to work properly.

The Crown exists in a metaphysical space. The monarchy requires us to have an understanding of symbolism and words that often stray into an abstract realm and are imbued with history and subtleties. Exploring the institution of the Crown often steers us toward the same language that must be used in order to properly describe Treaty.

So many perspectives compete to define the Crown in Canada that it can be overwhelming. Charles Taylor writes “. . . our identity is deeper and more many-sided than any of our possible articulations of it.” Such is the Crown. The Crown is a signpost that we can stand at, look out into the world, and try and make sense of the stories that define who we are as a society. Like a Treaty, this is a process that has no end. In fact, sifting through a multitude of perspectives in the hopes of finding out who we are as a society might be whole point of the Crown itself.

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