

# NOVA SCOTIA AND LOYALIST POLITICAL IMMIGRATION INTO BRITISH NORTH AMERICA: A MILESTONE WITHIN COLONIAL HISTORY

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## ABSTRACT

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Most people studying American History learn at an early age that the “Thirteen Colonies” revolted in 1775 and after eight long hard years won their independence with the Treaty of Paris in 1783. What most of them weren't taught is that the British actually founded 14 colonies on the Atlantic coastline of North America. Twelve colonies were founded in the 1600s, the 13th colony, Georgia, was not settled until 1733, a void of sixty three years. The 14th and last was Nova Scotia founded in 1749. The American Revolution not only created one country but two: The United States of America and British North America, later Canada. This event was followed by a great influx of refugees from South to North, a displacement of people among equals, who either did not want to live in a different state or with a different allegiance or were forced to leave because of its convictions.

**Keywords:** American Revolution, British North America, Loyalists, inn migration.

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## Introduction

What really was? Which one did the United States or the other thirteen colonies want it to be? And which one wanted to be called so?

The American Revolution did not only test the illustrated ideas before they reach their highest point at the French Revolution but it also shaped the face of North America into two geopolitical realities; the United States of America and British North America, later Canada.

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colonies were founded in the 1600s, the 13th colony, Georgia, was not settled until 1733, a void of sixty three years. The 14th and last was Nova Scotia founded in 1749.

Fierce campaign was carried out during American Independence war to bring Quebec into the Continental confederation as another colony and free the Canadians from British “tyranny.” Events on both sides of the border rapidly went from peaceful diplomatic overtures to a sizable armed intervention in America’s first foreign war of liberation and resulted in the Continental Army’s decisive expulsion from Canada.

Vermont, geographically nestled between New York and New Hampshire, was, without any doubt, part of the number that cast off British control of the colonies. Both geographically and evidenced by their full participation, they were as much a colony, that arose from the conflict as, any of other thirteen colonies.

The defeat of British forces in American Revolution also brought a great flow of people towards British North America, present Canada; all those Americans pioneers who wanted to remain as British subjects immigrated up North establishing New Colonies or shaping the face of others.

There was for long time a wrong idea about all Americans being in favour of independence. According to Professor Freeman from Yale University, about fifteen percent of the colonists were active for the crown and 35% showed sympathy for this option and wanted to work further into sensible “Representation”.

### **What was the 14th British Colony?**

Not long before the Revolution, Britain's Thirteen Colonies in America were joined to their north by a fourteenth: Nova Scotia.

Nova Scotia had been a French colony — Acadia — to varying degrees beginning in 1604, but finally came entirely under British control with Britain's second capture of the Fortress of Louisburg in 1758, not two decades before the onset of the American Revolution. (Nova Scotia included present-day New Brunswick until 1784, and until 1769 included present-day Prince Edward Island.)

By the time of the Revolution, Nova Scotia was not an established, developed commonwealth like the first thirteen, but a still-fledgling frontier colony being re-settled by British subjects, predominantly from New England. Little Nova Scotia was nonetheless home to a disproportionately large Royal Navy base and later an entire regiment of the British Army intended specifically to enforce loyalty to the Crown, so that the British government had a military influence in Nova Scotia unparalleled in the other colonies. Plus which Nova Scotia was not connected contiguously to the settled

regions of those other colonies and was thus estranged from the Revolutionary activity to the south.

This is not to say Nova Scotia saw no Revolutionary activity. A stack of hay bound for British forces in Boston was set afire, privateers raided the coasts with some frequency, and locals laid siege to Fort Cumberland, unsupported by the Revolutionary Continental Army and thus unsuccessful. But the Nova Scotia Assembly had not dispatched a delegation to the Continental Congress, for the practical reason that a movement of that nature was made impossible by the British military presence, and absent official Nova Scotia participation in the Continental Congress, then-General George Washington declined to support any Revolutionary efforts in Nova Scotia. They do say that decision came to be Washington's greatest regret.

So Nova Scotia was largely left out of the Revolutionary War, and after the American victory and founding of the United States, carried on as a British colony.

### **The Loyalists**

The term could be associated to many scenarios such as the American Revolution, the American Civil War and the Irish Civil War; the case we deal with refers to the very first one.

Loyalists were American colonists, of different ethnic backgrounds, who supported the British cause during the *American Revolution* (1775–83). Tens of thousands migrated to America during and after the revolutionary war — boosting the population and heavily influencing the politics and culture of what would become Canada.

### **Why Loyalists?**

As American rebels fought for independence from Britain, Loyalists supported the "mother country" for different reasons. Many felt a personal loyalty to the Crown, or were afraid that revolution would bring chaos to America. Many agreed with the rebels' view that America had suffered wrongs at the hands of Britain, but believed the solution could be worked out within the British Empire.

Others saw themselves as weak or threatened within American society and in need of an outside defender. These included linguistic and religious minorities, recent immigrants not fully integrated into American society, as well as *Black* and Aboriginal people. Others were simply attracted by free land and provisions.

Sympathy for the Crown was a dangerous sentiment; those who defied the revolutionary forces could find themselves without civil rights, subject to mob violence, or flung into prison. Loyalist property was vandalized and often confiscated.

During the *Revolution* more than 19,000 Loyalists served Britain in specially created provincial militia corps, accompanied by several thousand Aboriginal allies. Others spent the war in such strongholds as New York City and Boston, or in refugee camps such as those at Sorel and Machiche, *Québec*. Between 80,000 and 100,000 eventually fled, about half of them to Canada.

### **Who Were They?**

The vast majority of Loyalists were neither well-to-do nor particularly high in social rank; most were farmers, labourers, trades people and their families. They were of varied cultural backgrounds, and many were recent immigrants. White Loyalists brought large numbers of slaves with them. Until 1834, slavery was legal in all British North American colonies but Upper Canada, where the institution was being phased out.

Free Blacks and escaped slaves who had fought in the Loyalist corps, as well as about 2,000 Aboriginal allies — mainly Six Nations Iroquois from New York State — also settled in Canada. In 1789, Lord Dorchester, governor-in-chief of British North America, proclaimed that the Loyalists and their children should be allowed to add "UE" to their names, "alluding to their great principle, the Unity of Empire." As a result, the phrase "United Empire Loyalist," or UEL, was applied to Loyalists who migrated to Upper and Lower Canada. (The term was not officially recognized in the *Maritimes* until the 20th century.)

In determining who among its subjects was eligible for compensation for war losses, Britain used a fairly precise definition: Loyalists were those born or living in the American colonies at the outbreak of the Revolution who rendered substantial service to the royal cause during the war, and who left the United States by the end of the war or soon after. Those who left substantially later — mainly to gain land and to escape growing racial intolerance — are often called "late" Loyalists.

### **Settlement**

The main waves of Loyalists came to what is now Canada in 1783 and 1784. The territory that became the *Maritime Provinces* became home to more than 30,000. Most of coastal *Nova Scotia* received Loyalist settlers, as did *Cape Breton* and *Prince Edward Island* (then called St. John's Island). The two principal settlements were in the Saint valley in what is now *New Brunswick*, and temporarily at *Shelburne*, Nova Scotia.

The Loyalists swamped the existing population in the Maritimes, and in 1784 the colonies of New Brunswick and Cape Breton were created to deal with the influx.

Of about 2,000 who moved to present-day Québec, some settled in the *Gaspé*, on Chaleur Bay, and others in Sorel, at the mouth of the *Richelieu River*. About 7,500 moved into what would become *Ontario*, most settling along the *St. Lawrence River* to the Bay of Quinte. There were also substantial settlements in the *Niagara Peninsula* and on the *Detroit River*, with subsidiary and later settlements along the *Thames River* and at *Long Point*. The *Grand River* was the main focus of Loyalist Iroquois settlement.

The Loyalist influx gave the region its first substantial population and led to the creation of a separate province, *Upper Canada*, later Ontario as we have already mentioned, in 1791. Loyalists were instrumental in establishing educational, religious, social and governmental institutions.

Though greatly outnumbered by later immigrants, Loyalists and their descendants, such as *Egerton Ryerson*, exerted a strong and lasting influence. Modern Canada has inherited much from the Loyalists, including a certain type of conservatism, a preference for "evolution" rather than "revolution" in matters of government, and tendencies towards a pluralistic and multi-ethnic society.

### **Conclusion**

The American Revolution not only created one country but two: The United States of America and British North America, later Canada. This event was followed by a great influx of refugees from South to North, a displacement of people among equals, who either did not want to live in a different state or with a different allegiance or were forced to leave because of its convictions.

This brief approach may show how Canada still, as it was at its birth time, a country of refugees; a receiver of political immigration among equals. Also, it recalls to me one issue, as facts and events are going in Catalonia; in the remote case of independence, what would be the role of those opposing independence; would they be forced to leave or it might develop into somehow of an attitude of racism.

I have heavily focused on historical facts but those are supported, as well, by a whole of literary works, mostly diaries and memories from people who lived at that time and suffered the shift of fortune; from being considered good neighbours into enemies, from established homes within a community into displacement and a fierce violence which finally forced them to leave.

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## Illustrations



The American Revolution and Its Consequences in Canada (University of Ottawa)