

Loyalists & the British Connection Background

During the American Revolution the people of the 13 American colonies fell into three categories: those in favour of independence from Britain, known as Patriots or Rebels depending on one's point of view; those who wanted to retain their ties with Britain, generally called Loyalists or Royalists or Tories; and those who would have liked to remain neutral. The population has been estimated at 2.5 million people and, according to **John Adams**, an active participant in the events of the times, and later the second president of the USA, about a third of the population fell in each category.¹ Others have suggested that the proportion of Loyalists was actually about 20 percent. Even that lower proportion would indicate that a sizable 500,000 Americans were from Britain.²



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Loyalists demonstrated their support of the British connection in various ways. Many quietly provided intelligence to British officers or harboured spies. Some spoke out against independence and suffered accordingly at the hands of the rebels.

About 19,000 joined roughly 50 provincial or Loyalist regiments or corps,³ usually recruited by prominent leaders such as Sir **John Johnson** and **Oliver DeLancey**.

During the war most units were under the jurisdiction of the British headquarters in New York City. After the peace treaty of 1783 these units were mainly resettled in the Canadian Maritimes. Several regiments such as the King's Royal Regiment of New York, the King's Rangers, Jessup's Loyal Rangers, Butler's Rangers, and the First Battalion of the Royal Highland Emigrants were part of the Canadian Command under Gen. **Frederic Haldimand**. When the war was over they stayed in Central Canada, at that time the colony of Quebec, which later became Upper and Lower Canada, then Canada West and East, now Ontario and Quebec. There are no precise statistics on the number of Loyalists who left America during and immediately

after the end of the Revolution. It is believed that from 70,000 to 100,000 went into exile and began new lives in Britain, the West Indies, the Canadian Maritimes and Central Canada.⁴ About 35,000 came to Nova Scotia, which was divided in 1783 into Nova Scotia as we know it today and New Brunswick; two groups went on to Quebec under the leadership of **Michael Grass**⁵ and **Peter Van Alstine**.⁶ In later years some Loyalist settlers who were unhappy with the conditions in the Maritimes also relocated to Ontario. Many came overland from New York and Vermont to join refugees who had come to Quebec during the war, bringing the total number of Loyalists there to about 10,000.⁷ For a number of years after the peace treaty of 1783 many more continued to arrive; they are often referred to as "late Loyalists" either because they could not leave earlier or because they were attracted by the offer of free or cheap land grants.

There is a widespread misconception that all the Loyalists were WASPs - white, Anglo-Saxon (English), and Protestant. Nothing opposed to separation could be further from the truth. There were many black and red skins in addition to the white Loyalists and they were of numerous religious faiths - Lutherans, Presbyterians, Jews, Roman Catholics, etc. as well as Anglicans or Episcopalians. There were Loyalists of Dutch, German, French, Irish, Scottish, and English origins. While no specific inform-

ation is available on the numbers of British origin, two separate estimates indicate that probably about half of them came from England, Ireland, Wales and Scotland.

Wallace Brown, based on an examination of the claims for compensation, thinks that about half of the new settlers in Canada were native born Americans and about 90% of the others were from the British Isles.⁸ In the introduction to *Loyalist Lineages of Canada 1783-1983* **Audrey** and **Robert Kirk** have concluded that 28% were from Germany, 23% from Scotland, 18% from England, 12% from Ireland, 8% from Holland, 5% from France, 4% from Wales, and the re-mainder from Switzerland, Denmark and Sweden.⁹ It seems likely then that about 25,000 had origins in the British Isles.

Genealogical Handbooks

There are good reference books available for those interested in tracing Loyalist ancestry. **Patricia Kennedy's** *How to Trace Your Loyalist Ancestors* provides excellent advice. There are helpful sections in **Terry Punch's** *Genealogical Research in Nova Scotia*, **Brenda Merriman's** *Genealogy in Ontario*, and **Angus Baxter's** *In Search of Your Canadian Roots*. Small but packed with useful information is **Janine Roy's** *Tracing Your Ancestors in Canada*.

Lists of Loyalists

There are many records and books which provide lists of Loyalists and discharged British troops. *Tracing Your Ancestors in Canada* by **Janine Roy** details the major records in the National Archives of Canada and elsewhere. There are extensive lists in **Marion Gilroy's** *Loyalists and Land Settlement in Nova Scotia* with notations showing the place of settlement, rank, unit and in some instances the American colony of origin. **Esther Wright's** *The Loyalists of New Brunswick* and **D. G. Bell's** *Early Loyalist Saint John* provide similar information for New Brunswick settlers. **Mary Beacock**

Fryer and William A. Smy's *Rolls of the Provincial (Loyalist) Corps* has good coverage of Quebec and Ontario people who are listed in muster rolls of various regiments that served in Canada. Note that N. B. or N. Britain means North Britain or Scotland in some rolls and that "Old England" does not mean England in the British Isles; it refers to a part of Tryon (now Montgomery) County in New York State. **E. Keith Fitzgerald's** *Loyalists Lists* shows from what colony many came during the war. My *Early Ontario Settlers* lists the settlers mentioned in ration or provisioning lists in Ontario during the 1780s and **Fitzgerald's** *Ontario People: 1796-1803* reflects much the same population about 10 years later.

Finding the Place of Origin

Once a Loyalist has been identified, there is a possibility that the place of origin may be found in some compiled Loyalist genealogies. The foremost books are the three *Loyalist Lineages* volumes produced by the Toronto Branch of the United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada in 1984 and 1991. Examples: from the 1984 book, **Joseph Robinson** was born in 1749 in W. Bromich Stafford, England,¹⁰ and **Angus Macdonald** was born in 1759 in Tulloch Lochaber, Scotland;¹¹ from the two 1991 volumes, **James Cowell Turner** was born about 1743 in Yorks, England,¹² and **Garrett Miller** was born in October 1738 in Courtmatrix, Ireland.¹³ If these major compilations do not produce the desired information, there are a number of similar publications produced by other branches of the Association such as *Loyalist Vignettes and Sketches* - **Robert Og Macdonald Leggett** was born on the Isle of Skye in Scotland in 1741,¹⁴ *Loyalist Ancestors: Some Families of the Hamilton Area* - **Donald Daniel MacCrimmon** was born in 1745 at Borreraig, Isle of Skye, Scotland;¹⁵ and *Loyalist Families of the Grand River Branch U.E.L.* - **Walter Anderson** was born about 1753 in Edinburgh, Scotland.¹⁶ Other useful sour-

-ces are **Lorenzo Sabine's** *Biographical Sketches of Loyalists of the American Revolution*, **Sharon Dubeau's** *New Brunswick Loyalists*, and the *Second Report of the Bureau of Archives for the Province of Ontario*. Although the last-named book was produced by the Ontario Archives, it lists the claims of Loyalists from all colonies and in all parts of Canada; it contains a wealth of family information, including in some cases details of the places of origin. There are also books about Loyalists from almost every state and region in the United States and they often supply details of the residence or place of origin. Two examples are *The Loyalists of New Jersey* and *Connecticut Loyalists*. **Robert S. Allen's** *Loyalist Literature* provides excellent coverage of writings about the Loyalists.

Records in the Place of Residence in the United States

If the search in Loyalist-related records is unsuccessful, look in the Family History Locality Catalogue in the American place of residence under such topics as vital records, immigration-emigration, genealogy, etc. Often the place of residence is noted in Loyalist lists mentioned above. For example, **Bell's** *Early Loyalist Saint John* shows that some New York Loyalists came from Staten Island, others from Dutchess County, and others from Westchester County. Most New England towns and many towns in New York and other states have excellent town or county local histories which frequently provide information on the origins of early families. Also look for a marriage or death record; sometimes the clergyman will note the place of birth. Similarly tombstones will at times show the place of origin, especially for Scottish settlers and occasionally for Irish settlers. Consult omnibus indexes such as **Filby's** *Passenger and Immigration Lists Index*, indexes to *The New England Historic and Genealogical Society Register*, indexes to *The New York Biographical and Geneal-*

ogical Society Record, Periodical Source Index, and **James Savage's** *Genealogical Dictionary of the First Settlers of New England*. Other useful sources are **Henry Fitz-Gilbert Waters' Genealogical Gleanings in England, and the footnotes in **French's** *Gazetteer of New York* which frequently offer helpful information on the early settlers in New York.**

Discharged British Soldiers

In addition to the roughly 45,000 Loyalists there were about 5,000 discharged British and German soldiers who decided to remain in Canada. Although technically not Loyalists, they settled among and intermarried with Loyalists and received much the same benefits from the British Government. An important exception was the decision in Ontario to grant free land to the children of Loyalists only. British veterans are included in many of the documents cited in Lists of Loyalists, usually with an indication of their regiment such as **Donald Mallock** in the 57th Regiment of Foot.¹⁷ Any who were discharged with an army pension should appear in War Office 120 volumes 35, 69 and 70; an index to these volumes is in my *British Army Pensioners Abroad*. For soldiers discharged without a pension, consult **John Kitzmiller's** *In Search of the "Forlorn Hope"* for advice on tracing British servicemen - for example it shows that the 57th Regiment of Foot during the American Revolution was the West Middlesex Regiment and was largely recruited from Middlesex County in England.¹⁸

In Conclusion

In Canada and the United States there may be several million descendants of Loyalists of British origin. Locating the Loyalist ancestor is a challenge but there are many resources to assist the diligent searcher. Tracing the Loyalists further back to their origins in Britain is a much more difficult task and it is therefore all the most rewarding when the research is successful. Persevere!

NOTES

1. Brown, *Victorious in Defeat*, p. 11.
2. Brown, *Victorious in Defeat*, p. 11.
3. Brown, *Victorious in Defeat*, p. 68.
4. Brown, *Victorious in Defeat*, p. 32.
5. Turner, *Voyage of a Different Kind*, p. 35.
6. Turner, *Voyage of a Different Kind*, p. 15.
7. Brown, *Victorious in Defeat*, p. 163.
8. Brown, *The Good Americans*, p. 239.
9. *Loyalist Lineages of Canada 1783-1983*, p. xvii.
10. *Loyalist Lineages of Canada 1783-1983*, p. 549.
11. *Loyalist Lineages of Canada 1783-1983*, p. 396.
12. Macnab, Dorrine Robertson, ed. *Loyalist Lineages of Canada*, p. 1147.
13. Macnab, Dorrine Robertson, ed. *Loyalist Lineages of Canada*, p. 758.
14. *Loyalist Vignettes and Sketches*, p. 64.
15. *Loyalist Ancestors*, p. 159.
16. *Loyalist Families*, p. 68.
17. Wright, *The Loyalists of New Brunswick*, p. 320.
18. Kitzmiller, *In Search of the "Forlorn Hope"*, p. 461.

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Books by the author published by the Genealogical Publishing Company, Inc., 1001 North Calvert Street. Baltimore MD 21202-3897:

Early Ontario Settlers: A Source Book \$25US;

Ontario People (with E. Keith Fitzgerald) \$25US;

British Army Pensioners Abroad \$35US.

Add p&h - first book \$3.25US, and each additional book \$1.25US.