

### ***North American Before 1763***

North America was explored and colonized by different nations. In the north, France had established New France, a colony that was struggling to develop. The colonists were mostly French Roman Catholics, and the population was mainly made up of voyageurs, coureurs de bois, Jesuits, and nuns. Although settlement was progressing slowly the French were moving west along waterways, exploring and expanding their colony, and trying to protect the territory they claimed in the name of their king.

During this same time the British had brought over far more settlers, and in their colonies to the south cities and towns began developing more quickly than in New France. Trade and industry developed, making the 13 colonies more and more independent as they could make their own products (such as textiles) and not rely on Britain. New York welcomed immigrants from many countries and of many religions. In Pennsylvania communities of Quakers and Mennonites settled the rich farmland outside Philadelphia. The southern plantation system required slave labour, and thousands of Africans were brought to America. By the 1700s the British colonies had thirty times the population of New France. Soon the newcomers needed more and more land.

The British Empire sought to expand their territory. In Europe, Asia, the West Indies and in North America Britain and France struggled to control trade and resources, and this led to the War of Conquest. Also known as the Seven Years' War, these two countries fought for control of North America, and by the time a treaty was signed in 1763 New France no longer existed. The British had won.

## ***The American Revolution***

After the end of the Seven Years' War there was no longer a threat of French invasion in North America, and the English colonies no longer needed the British army and navy for protection. The England demanded, however, that the colonists pay heavy taxes on their imports and trade. Colonists were unhappy with this and they wanted to be able to elect representatives to parliament as other Englishmen could. Colonists protested, and one famous riot became known as the Boston massacre when British soldiers sent to keep order killed five members of the crowd. Many rebelled by refusing to pay the taxes, and protested by dumping a heavily taxed good, tea, into Boston harbour in what became known as the Boston Tea Party. When Britain did nothing to improve the situation for colonists, they rebelled.

Not all the colonists agreed that independence was the best idea. Some people worried that Catholics would not be given religious freedom, others wanted to be ruled by the King and have the protection of the British Empire. People in each of the colonies worried that the rebels (who called themselves patriots) were dangerous and would bring about chaos, and therefore could not be trusted.

On July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1776 representatives of the colonies met in Philadelphia to issue a Declaration of Independence and announce their willingness to fight to become a separate country. Representatives from Quebec, Nova Scotia, Saint John's Island and New York refused to sign. Twelve colonies demanded that they be given the independence to rule themselves, but Britain would not give up such profitable colonies. The War of Independence began.

The American rebels considered themselves patriots fighting the British Army for their freedom. Between 1775 and 1783 battles were fought across the colonies and as far north as the city of Quebec. George Washington lead the Continental Army, fighting British soldiers, loyal British subjects and French colonists tricked into joining the British army.

The American Revolution was a catalyst for great change on the continent. By 1783 the war was over and thirteen colonies (New York had later joined) became the original states of the United States of America, a new country. The United States of America did not welcome those who had opposed the rebels during the war. The Loyalist would have to leave and their departure would greatly influence the colonies to the north, the future country of Canada.

### ***In a Nutshell***

*The Thirteen Colonies were  
New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York,  
New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina,  
South Carolina, and Georgia*

## **Who were the Loyalists?**

### **A difference of opinion**

Loyalists disagreed with the idea of the 13 colonies becoming an independent nation. Some believed that the colonies were safer if they were protected by the British Empire, and it was reasonable to pay for that protection through their taxes. Others had family in England or were recent immigrants and they were loyal to the “Mother Country.” Some had positions in the government, or businesses that depended on British trade.

## **Who were the Loyalists?**

Who were Loyalists? They came from every walk of life: they were tradesmen and clergymen, farmers, soldiers, and slaves. They were from different religions, and different countries or origin. Some were recent immigrants from Europe who feared the instability of revolution and wished to have the protection of the British Empire.

Loyalists acted on their belief that the colonies should have peace, order and good government. Some organized to fight the rebels. Others left during the war for Quebec and Nova Scotia, the British Colonies to the north. Many worked to undermine the rebels by helping the British Army, acting as spies or secret agents and giving food and shelter to the British or to other Loyalists.

Those who voiced their disagreement and angered their rebel neighbors suffered serious consequences. People who supported the British government were persecuted in a number of ways. Some were denied their rights, such as the right to vote, sell land, or sue people who owed them money. They were prevented from working as doctors, lawyers, or teachers. Worst of all, people who supported the English government

were sometimes physically harmed, stripped of their possessions and banished from their homes on pain of death.

### **No choice but to leave**

After the Declaration of Independence in 1776 Loyalists were considered traitors and they were exiled by the new government, their land and possessions taken. In 1783 Britain signed the Treaty of Paris, which ended the War of Independence and recognized the United States of America as a new country.

Loyalists had no choice but to leave. Between 1775 and 1783 over 70 000 people left the 13 colonies, with as many as 50 000 moving north to build a new life in what would become Canada.

## **Leaving Home**

### **How did Loyalists travel? Where did they go?**

Some Loyalists left for Nova Scotia on ships the British government provided. Many of these people settled along the St John River, which would later become the city of St John, New Brunswick. Loyalists also settled St John's Island (now Prince Edward Island) and Cape Breton in what would become Nova Scotia. At one point the population of New Brunswick was 90% Loyalist.

Other Loyalists had a more challenging escape, traveling by foot, on horseback, in wagons, and on rafts heading north to Quebec. Some would settle in Quebec, others would travel on to what would become Upper Canada and still later be known as Ontario.

Some Loyalists chose to return to Britain rather than settle in the wilderness of the colonies to the north, and some chose to settle in the Bahamas, another British colony. Some Black Loyalists, who had been promised freedom if they joined the army and fought, later moved on from British North America to settle in Sierra Leone.

### **Danger on the road**

Wherever they settled, Loyalists had to flee with their homes and livelihoods with the few possessions they could carry. Some traveled openly, others were pursued by rebels seeking revenge and had to travel at night, along Indian trails and down rivers as far from settlements as possible. Capture meant imprisonment, so families had to be very careful. Sometimes large families separated so their pursuers would have a harder time identifying them, and they would use fake names and invented stories to hide their identities.

On the road Loyalists sometimes had the help of other British sympathizers. It was very dangerous to aid a Loyalist, but some other settlers and Native people provided food, shelter, and medical assistance for those escaping and helped them along their route by identifying the direction to travel.

The terrain was often rough, the traveling dangerous, and the weather adding to their difficulties. Having no choice, Loyalists pressed on north to safety.

## **Arriving in a New Land**

### **Where did they live when they arrived?**

During the war some Loyalists came first to Montreal, where men enlisted in the Loyalist Regiments and returned south to fight the rebels. They left their families in Montreal, dependant on the help of the British government. They lived in crowded barracks, eating rations of meat and bread given by the army. In such close quarters sickness and diseases such as small pox spread easily. When the war was over these refugees were relocated to uninhabited areas where they were given land to clear and farm. Those who depended on the government rations had no choice but to move when the war was over, but those who had their own income could settle where they liked.

Those who arrived in the Maritimes lived in tents provided by the army for weeks or months, some even through the cold first winter. Such cramped, uncomfortable conditions were a further hardship.

### **How was land surveyed?**

Land was surveyed and partitioned in to lots. Teams of men were responsible for this job. Surveyors drew maps; deputy surveyors organized the axe men, chainmen and picket men, giving them their pay, equipment and rations.

The process was long. All of the surveying was done with a few simple tools: a sextant, a magnetic compass called a circumfrentor, and a steel chain measuring sixty-six feet. The surveyor used a sextant to find the location of one end of the baseline, and then used the circumfrentor to start the baseline. Then axe men felled trees in the way of that line. A picket man drove in a stake at the start of the baseline, and one chainman held

the first link of the chain while his partner walked down the baseline until the chain was stretched tight. A picket man then drove in another stake.

The basic unit of Loyalist land was 200 acres, measuring 30 chains wide and 68 chains deep. Every four or six lots this size the team measured one chain length to make a road.

Each row of 24 lots was called a concession.

A township was usually 24 lots wide and six concessions deep.

Another road was usually planned for every two concessions.

Once the township was surveyed, a settler received a piece of paper showing the location of his land grant. It might read: "Township No. 1, concession 3, lot 12."

*Reference: Life of the Loyalists (1995) by Rosemary Neering and Stan Garrod*

## **Land**

Land was given by lottery. A settler's name was called and he drew his lot from those available. The land might be good for planting, but often it would have to be cleared, backbreaking work that would take years to finish. The family would have to live in a rough log house for years while they cleared land, planted crops, built a barn and acquired livestock.

For families who had had fine houses made of sawn lumber with wood floors and proper glass windows this was a very difficult transition. Their furniture left behind, they built only what they needed. Many had never worked a farm before. For some it would be many years before their quality of life returned to what it was before they left their homes in the thirteen colonies.

## **Settlement**

### **First Homes**

Most Loyalists built houses as soon as possible, choosing land that had been “burned over” or in a marsh to avoid having to fell trees. These first log cabin homes were quite small. Fifteen or 20 feet square, they had eight-foot high walls and only one window made of glass given by the army. Some had mud or clay-lined wood chimneys; others had simply a hole in the roof for the smoke to escape. The floor was trampled earth or rough boards cut as smooth as possible with an axe. Sometimes the door was just a blanket.

Once a family had a home they turned their attention to clearing land, planting food and building barns and enclosures for their animals. Only after such things were done would a family begin to build a more comfortable house. The first home was then used as a chicken coop or pigsty.

### **Help from the government**

Since many had left with so few possessions, they needed basic materials and tools to begin their lives in British North America. New arrivals were given a blanket, a tent for every five people, and one kettle for each tent. Tools necessary for cutting and building, such as saws, chisels, hammers, axes and sickles were also given to the Loyalists.

For the first three years families were given rations of pork, peas, beef, flour, butter, and salt. They added to this by hunting and fishing, and as soon as they could they planted wheat, peas, corn and potatoes from seeds given by the government.

Clothing was also given to settlers. Men and boys were given coats, waistcoats, breeches, shirts, legging, stockings and soles for shoes. Women and girls were also given stocking and shoes soles, but instead of pre-made clothing they were given yards of cloth and had to make their own dresses. They made additional clothing from the skins of animals they hunted and trapped.

## **Community**

In the three years during which the government aided the settlers families did their best to become independent. People came together to work, the women quilting, carding wool or shelling corn together to make boring jobs more fun, men working together to clear land, build barns or do other jobs too difficult to complete without many workers. Children would have a chance to see each other while they played and helped with what jobs they could. There was much work to be done, but communities found ways of working together and finding time to socialize and support each other.

Neighbours also helped each other in times of need. When there was illness, and accident or a baby about to be born, neighbours would be sent for and would come to help.

Community was important in times when pulling together was the only means of survival. When the rations ended some families had a hard time providing for themselves, and 1788-1789 became know as the “Hungry Year.” At the same time that the rations ended crops failed to thrive due to lack of rain, and by mid-winter many families had little to eat. Some families were desperate enough to risk returning south, but those who stayed depended on each other to work together.

## ***Loyalist Children***

### **Little time for games**

In Loyalist times most families had many children. Being part of a big family meant having lots of playmates, but pioneer children had little time to play.

Children had many jobs, and even the youngest members of a family would have chores to do. Children tended crops, collected berries, and if the family had any livestock they took care of the animals by collecting eggs, milking cows, and cleaning their enclosures. Girls helped their mothers cook and clean the house and learned early how to sew. It took many hours of work to feed and clothe a family, tend a farm and clear the land. Every person had to do their share.

Few children were able to bring toys with them to their new country, so most children had to amuse themselves with simple objects they found. When an adult had a chance to make a toy from wood a child could have a puzzle, toy boat, wagon, and whistles. Dolls could be made from wood or from corn husks. Many games are still played today, such as jumping rope, jacks, tag, tug-of-war, hide and seek and hopscotch.

### ***Black Loyalists, Enslaved Black People***

In 1775 Lord John Dunsmore, Royal Governor of Virginia, offered freedom to rebel-owned slaves who joined the Army. Four years later this invitation was extended to all slaves of rebels, and hundreds of Black slaves fled behind British lines to freedom. Black Loyalists numbered about 3000, many of whom migrated to Nova Scotia after their service in the army. They found, however, that the promises made to them during the war were not honoured.

The British promised to treat Black and White Loyalists the same way, but Blacks received less land of poorer quality. They did not receive the same provisions for as long, and having come from slavery had fewer possessions than Whites, and so began their new lives in poverty. The government of New Brunswick imposed restrictions on Black people, forcing them to form Companies to develop land and increasing their allotment only when they proved they could develop it. No such restrictions were made on White settlers. Unable to farm the land in these conditions, some Black settlers moved near towns in the hopes of finding work as labourers and servants, but even this attracted the anger of Whites and race riots broke out in the Maritimes. Although free, Blacks found that their activities could be limited by city charters, such as the charter of Saint John which required Blacks to have special licenses to reside in the town and engage in trade or business.

Disenchanted with the treatment they received, 1 196 free Black loyalists decided to resettle in Sierra Leone and left Halifax in January of 1792. Given free passage to Africa by the Sierra Leone Company they chose to move to a British colony which would be governed by Blacks and in which there would be no slavery.

Some Loyalists brought slaves with them when they moved north, and many settlements in Upper and Lower Canada had slaves. According to historical documents only a few dozen free Black Loyalists settled between Cornwall and Windsor. Many Blacks who came to Upper and Lower Canada fought in the war alongside their masters but then came north as slaves, not granted land for their loyalty to the British crown.

At least one free Black settler was captured and returned to slavery in the United States, prompting the government of Upper Canada to introduce a law freeing slaves in 1793. Although the law was modified due to the objections of slave owners, a law was passed stating that no more slaves could be brought into Upper Canada and children of slaves were to be freed when they reached the age of 25. Although slavery continued for some time, Upper Canada was the first British Territory to legislate against slavery.

## **Women and War**

While one often thinks of the experience of men who fought in the war, the contribution of women is often overlooked. During the war, women followed the troops, and their participation was critical. Women nursed the men, made hospital supplies, cooked for them, spun and wove cloth, mended their clothes, made musket balls, brought troops supplies, and carried baskets of kettles, pots and utensils from one battleground to the next. They did these jobs while giving birth on the road and caring for children. It is clear that soldiers needed these women both to fight and survive.

Other women stayed home to care for farms, homes, and businesses. Many Loyalist women aided the British cause by providing information on rebel activity, feeding troops, and housing or supplying Loyalist and British soldiers. They were aware that should they be caught they would be imprisoned or worse. While men were at war families stayed on farms until their land was confiscated, and women and children were given twenty days to leave the area or be imprisoned. These women would have to make their way to British territory and find aid as refugees.

Little is written about how difficult life was for these women, or how many of their babies and children died from hunger or lack of warmth and protection. Little is known of the lives of widows left to bring up children alone after their husbands died at war. There are many stories of courageous women who struggled to overcome the hardships and were triumphant. Fewer are the stories of those who were less fortunate.