

# Researching Loyalist Ancestors

## *Class 1: History and Context*

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### Who were the Loyalists?

- Individuals who remained loyal to the British Crown during the American Revolution
- Also known as Tories, Royalists, and later, Refugees
- Lived in all thirteen colonies and hailed from all political, social, and economic groups
- Approximately 15-20% of the population
- Included Native Peoples, immigrants, and people of color

### Reasons for Loyalty

- Identified as British subjects
- Politically conservative
- Family ties to the British Crown
- Business relationship with the British Crown
- Personal advantage to remaining loyal
- Employed by the British Crown
- Saw Patriot cause as radical
- Former soldiers who served in British Army
- Newly arrived immigrants from Britain
- Personal reasons

### Events leading to the Revolution

Debts incurred by the British Crown after the Seven Years' War and the French and Indian War prompted British to raise revenue from their colonies. In turn, the British government taxed the thirteen colonies, e.g., Revenue or Sugar Act of 1764, Stamp Act of 1765, Townshend Acts of 1767. Met with wide disapproval in the colonies, these forms of taxation helped to sow the seeds for independence. The Tea Act of 1773 was passed to subdue financial difficulties of the East India Company, which allowed the company to avoid a tax and sell the tea at a reduced rate in the colonies. Outrage leads to the Boston Tea Party. To punish Massachusetts, Coercive Acts are passed, which closed the port of Boston and revoked the Massachusetts charter. A quartering act was also included, which required colonists to provide food and housing for British troops.

The First Continental Congress met in September of 1774, where the Articles of Association were adopted and the ban on the importation and consumption of British goods. Many local committees were established to enforce the Association and ban. Those found guilty of subversion were publicly slandered and renounced. The Articles of Association were seen as a catalyst in the formation of two groups: those supporting the patriot cause and those against, or Whigs versus Tories.

## **Persecution and Life in the Colonies**

Test laws were passed in all colonies requiring an allegiance to the patriot cause. Those who refused faced imprisonment, banishment, loss of legal rights, or even execution. Further laws limited freedom of speech, increased taxes, confiscated property, and criminalized loyalty to the British Crown.

Life in the colonies proved difficult for those with loyalist sympathies. Faced with violence, many fled to Britain, Canada, or to more secure locations within the colonies. There, they found protection and opportunity amongst stronger numbers of loyalists. Others joined the provincial units of the British Army where they fought alongside other loyalists.

## **After the Revolution and Resettlement**

The Treaty of Paris was signed in September of 1783, ending the war. The British worked to withdraw troops from southern colonies to New York City, leaving loyalists in those colonies vulnerable. Many fled to the Bahamas and Jamaica. The largest population of loyalists that remained was in New York City; evacuation transportation was organized by Sir Guy Carleton. Meanwhile, officials in other provinces worked to ready lands and supplies for the influx of loyalists. In Nova Scotia, private lands were reacquired, and timber, tools, and rations obtained. Officials, engineers, clerks, and surveyors worked to prepare new communities. Large numbers of loyalists also settled in New Brunswick, Ontario, Quebec, and lesser so, Prince Edward Island.

## **How to identify Loyalists in your Family Tree**

*Study your ancestor's location and residence*

- Where did they reside? When did they reside there?
- Create a timeline of your ancestor's life
  - Use vital records, deeds, court, town, and tax records to track residences
- Note family, associates, and neighbors
  - Research all
  - Loyalist? Patriot?

*Important questions*

- Did your ancestor live in a town, county, or colony with Loyalist leanings?
- Were family members Loyalists?
- What about neighbors or associates?

*Loyalist Population Rankings (by numbers, not percentage)*

- |                   |                   |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1. New York       | 8. Virginia       |
| 2. South Carolina | 9. Georgia        |
| 3. Massachusetts  | 10. Maryland      |
| 4. New Jersey     | 11. Rhode Island  |
| 5. Pennsylvania   | 12. New Hampshire |
| 6. North Carolina | 13. Delaware      |
| 7. Connecticut    |                   |

*Loyalist strongholds*

- |                 |                             |
|-----------------|-----------------------------|
| • Savannah      | • Baltimore                 |
| • Boston        | • Newport, Rhode Island     |
| • Charleston    | • Philadelphia              |
| • Annapolis     | • Portsmouth, New Hampshire |
| • New York City |                             |

*Timing*

- Did your ancestor arrive in what is now Canada in the 1780s?
  - Ontario
  - Quebec
  - Nova Scotia
  - New Brunswick
  - Prince Edward Island
- Did they receive a land grant in 1783 or after?

**Beware!** Not everyone who settled in what is now Canada in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century were Loyalists. Many were drawn to the region by economic opportunity and available lands.

*How can I tell the difference?*

- Settlement
  - Loyalists often settled amongst themselves
  - Geography
  - Military
- Land grants given in and after 1783
- Who did they interact with?
- Identify and research all associates!

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