

Researching Loyalist Ancestors

History and Context

May 4, 2022



American Ancestors

by NEW ENGLAND HISTORIC GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

Meet today's presenter



Sheilagh Doerfler

Genealogist

OVERVIEW

- **Presentation (60 mins.)**
 - Who were the loyalists
 - Persecution
 - Identifying loyalists in your family tree
- **Q&A (30 mins.)**

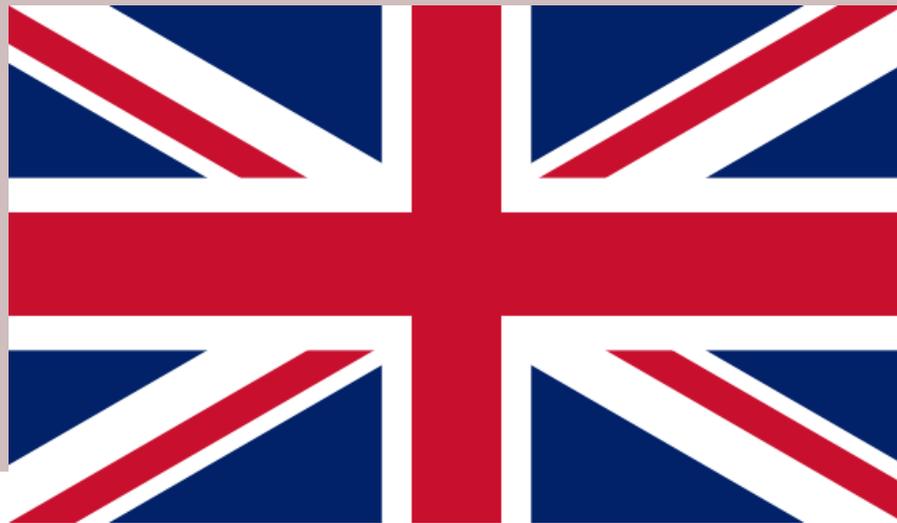
Who were the Loyalists?



Voice of
Sheilagh Doerfler
Genealogist

Loyalists

- Individuals who remained loyal to the British Crown during and after the American Revolution
- Also known as Tories and Royalists
- Later referred to as Refugees



Loyalists

- Native Peoples
 - Iroquois
- People of color
 - Black Loyalists
- New Immigrants
 - Great Britain
- Scotch Irish
- Descendants of Dutch settlers



Joseph Brant

Reasons for Loyalty

- Identified as British subjects
 - Morally wrong to oppose the British Crown
- Politically conservative
- Family ties to the British Crown
- Business relationship with the British Crown
- Personal advantage to remaining loyal
 - Property owners

Reasons for Loyalty

- Employed by the British Crown
 - Clerks, officials, etc.
- Saw Patriot cause as radical
- Former soldiers who served in British Army
- Newly arrived immigrants from Britain
- Personal reasons

Loyalists in the Colonies

Connecticut

- Low population of Loyalists
- Population clustered along the coast, in New Haven, and Fairfield County
- Mostly native born
- Hailed from farmer and merchant classes

Delaware

- Loyalist population found throughout colony, but not extensive
- Strong presence in New Castle County
- Largely isolated to wealthy merchants and commerce class

Georgia

- High concentration in Savannah; an epicenter of Loyalism
- Powerful class of Loyalists
- Wealthy landowners and merchants
- Immigrants from Great Britain

New Hampshire

- Low population of Loyalists
- Concentrated in Portsmouth
- Wealthy business or merchant class

New Jersey

- High Loyalist population
- Clustered on northern seacoast, East Jersey, and surrounding Perth Amboy
- Mostly native born
- Large percentage of farmers

New York

- Highest Loyalist population
- Very powerful Loyalists
- Concentrations in New York City, Staten Island, Long Island, Hudson River Valley, and Mohawk River Valley
- Native and foreign born
- Included farmers, wealthy merchants, and professionals

North Carolina

- Many mid-level farmers
- Some merchants
- Largely foreign born, many Scotch Irish
- Located in interior counties or near Wilmington and New Bern

Maryland

- Low population of Loyalists
- Clustered along Eastern Shore of Chesapeake Bay, Baltimore, Annapolis, and Frederick County
- Likely hailed from commerce or merchant class

Massachusetts

- Highest population of Loyalists in New England
- Native born
- Wealthy; well-connected families
- Population centered around Boston, Portland (Maine), and parts of Worcester County
- Very powerful Loyalists

Pennsylvania

- Sizable population
- Concentrated at Philadelphia and surrounding counties
- More likely to be an immigrant
- Likely part of commerce or business class

Rhode Island

- Centered around Newport
- Hailed from wealthy merchant and business classes
- Native born

South Carolina

- Probably second highest population of Loyalists after New York
- Charleston a Loyalist stronghold
- Also found at Camden and Ninety-Six
- More likely immigrants

Virginia

- Low population
- Mostly British or Scottish
- Clustered at Norfolk, Williamsburg, Petersburg, and Portsmouth
- Wealthy, likely merchant or business class

QUESTIONS?

Events leading to Revolution

Taxation

- British Crown in debt after Seven Years' War and French and Indian War
 - Wars ended in 1763
- Needed to raise revenue from thirteen colonies
 - Revenue or Sugar Act of 1764
 - Stamp Act of 1765
 - Townshend Acts of 1767

Escalation

- British Crown sought to subdue Colonies
 - Tea Act of 1773
 - Coercive Acts of 1774
- Bolstered Patriot cause



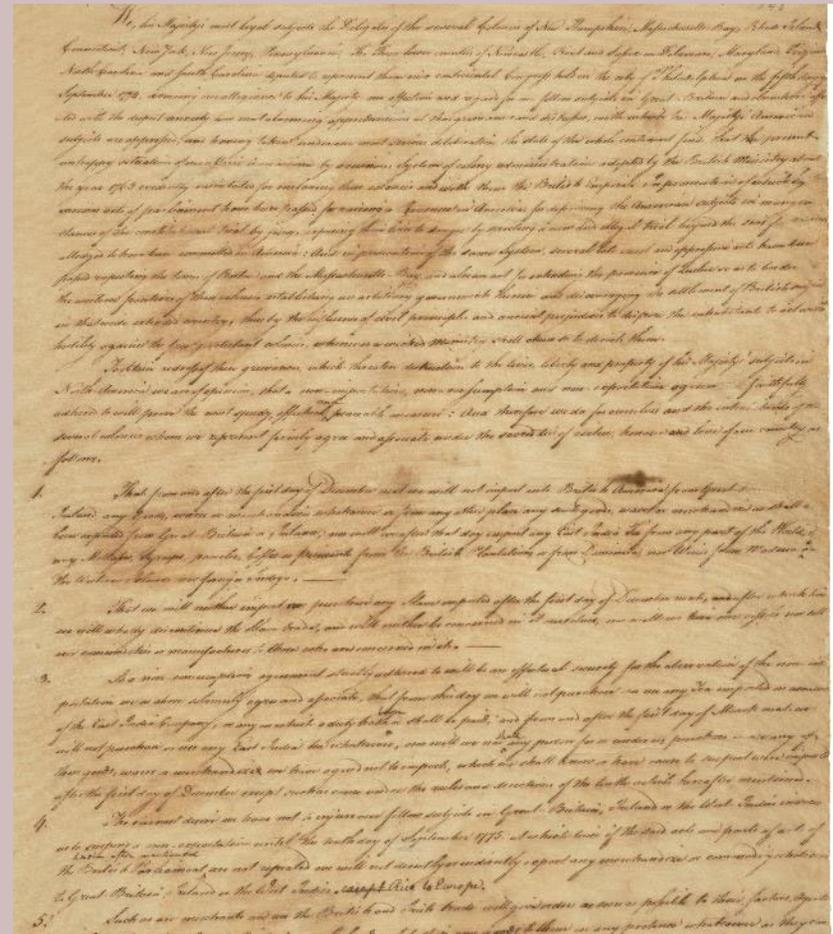
*Americans throwing the Cargoes of the Tea Ships into the River,
at Boston*

First Continental Congress

- Delegates from twelve colonies meet on September 5, 1774 in Philadelphia
- Adopt Articles of Association
 - No importation of British goods
 - No consumption of British goods
- Local committees established to enforce the Association

Articles of Association

- Those found guilty of subverting the Association were publicly renounced
- Names published in newspapers
- Publicly slandered



Emergence of Loyalists

- The Articles of Association were seen as catalyst
- Forced colonists to take a side
- Two groups emerged
 - **Whigs:** Supporters of Patriot cause
 - **Tories:** Supporters of British Crown

Battles of Lexington and Concord

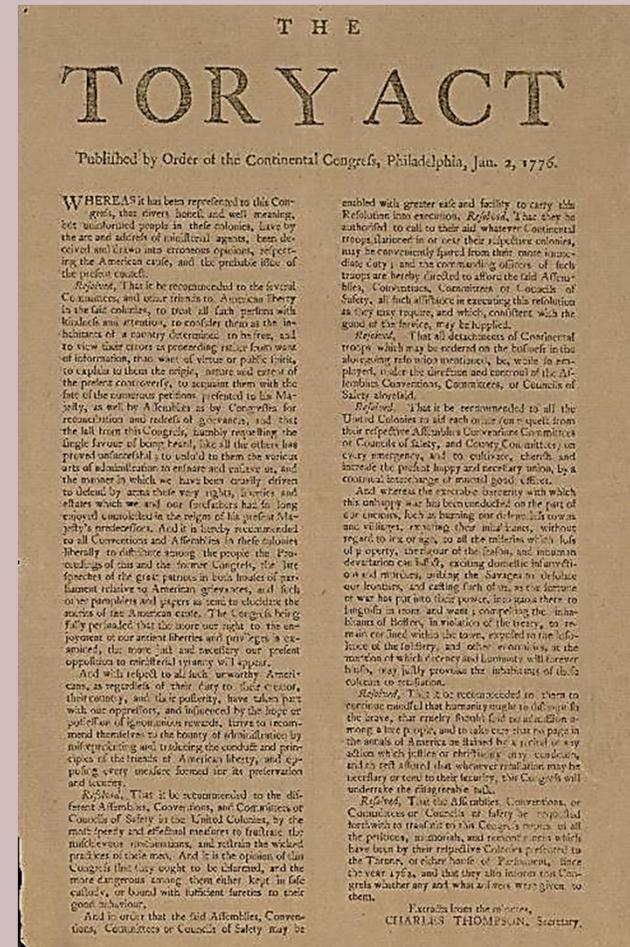
- April 19, 1775
- Outbreak of war forces colonists to adopt sides



Persecution

The Tory Act

- Second Continental Congress passed Tory Act in January 1776
- Offered guidance for managing Loyalists
- Empowered local committees to action



Test Laws

- Test laws passed by colonies requiring pledge to Patriot cause
 - Identify those against Patriot cause
 - Generally applied to adult males
- Harsh penalties for refusal
 - Imprisonment
 - Banishment
 - Loss of legal rights
 - Execution upon return to colony

Test Laws

- *The Loyalists in the American Revolution* by Claude Halstead Van Tyne
- Laws passed by all colonies included

APPENDIX B.
ANALYSIS OF THE TEST LAWS PASSED BY THE LEGISLATURES OF THE THIRTEEN COLONIES DURING THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR.

NEW HAMPSHIRE.
(Laws of New Hampshire in C. Tower Coll., pp. 63, 90.)

Date of Test Laws.	Affected Persons.	Penalty of Refusal.	Persons Executing the Laws.
Nov. 8, 1777.	Civil and Military officers, barristers and attorneys at law.	Suspended from office.	Commissioners.
March 14, 1778 (an addition to above act). (Time limit extended.) (Affirmation instead of oath allowed.)			Justices.

MASSACHUSETTS.
("Laws of Massachusetts, 1775-80," pp. 31, 159, 161, 168, 184.)

1776.	Every male person above 16.	Disarmed, unable to hold office, ministers and school masters lose salaries—also governors of Harvard College.	Committee of Corres., Safety, Justice of Peace, Sheriff.
Jan. (?), 1778.	Persons suspected of being inimical (except Mandamus Councillors who accepted office, and all who since April 19, 1775, have joined the enemy or enlisted men for, etc.).	Committed to gaol (costs to be paid out of the estate of person). Within 40 days sent to British territory. Death penalty if return.	Justice of Peace (upon representation made by member of Council, H. of R.). Civil or military officer, selectman, or member of any Committee of Corres. or any two substantial free-holders.

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Massachusetts



MASSACHUSETTS.

("Laws of Massachusetts, 1775-80," pp. 31, 159, 161, 168, 184.)

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Oath of Allegiance

“ I _____, do swear (or affirm) that I renounce and refuse all allegiance to George the Third, King of Great Britain, his heirs and successors, and that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to the commonwealth of Pennsylvania as a free and independent state, and that I will not at any time do or cause to be done any matter or thing that will be prejudicial or injurious to the freedom and independence thereof, as declared by Congress;

Oath of Allegiance

...and also that I will discover and make known to some one justice of the peace of the said state all treasons and traitorous conspiracies which I now know or hereafter shall know to be formed against this or any of the United States of America...”

Passed June 13, 1777

Additional Laws

- Colonies passed additional laws restricting rights of Loyalists
 - Freedom of Speech
 - Removal from public office
 - Taxation
 - Loyalty to British Crown criminalized; Treason

Confiscation of Property

- Confiscation laws passed to criminalize opposition to Patriot cause
 - Varied in each colony
- Loyalist lands confiscated by colonial governments
- Lands were auctioned off and income given to colonial governments

Confiscation of Property

- *Boston Gazette*,
December 30, 1782
- Several properties sold by
The Committee for the
Sale of Absentee Estates
in the County of Suffolk

PUBLIC AUCTION

THE Committee for the Sale of Absentees Estates in the County of Suffolk, hereby give Notice; that there will be sold by

PUBLIC AUCTION;
At the the Bunch of Grapes Tavern, Cornhill-Street, on Tuesday 25th January next, at eleven o'Clock, A M.

A neat and commodious
Dwelling-House, in Purchase-Street, near Wheelwright's Wharf; late the Property of Robert Jarvis, an Absentee.

A L S O,
A House Lot, at the southerly Part of Boston, about 70 Feet by 80 at the Corner of Short-Street, fronting on Essex Street, or Auchmuty's Lane.

A L S O
A large Lot of Land, measuring 100 Feet, northerly on Blind Lane and Church Green near the New South Meeting House, 51 Feet southerly on Essex Street or Auchmuty's Lane, and about 290 Feet from one street to the other, suitable for two large House Lots, one to front in each Street.

A L S O,
A Brick Distill-House, *something out of Repair*, fronting on Essex-Street 50 Feet, with a very convenient Wharf, Flats, &c. late the Property of John Coffin, Distiller, an Absentee.

A L S O:
A Wharf and Flats, in the Street leading from Winnifinet to Charlestown-Ferry, late the Property of Thomas Hutchinson, Esq; Conspirator and Absentee.



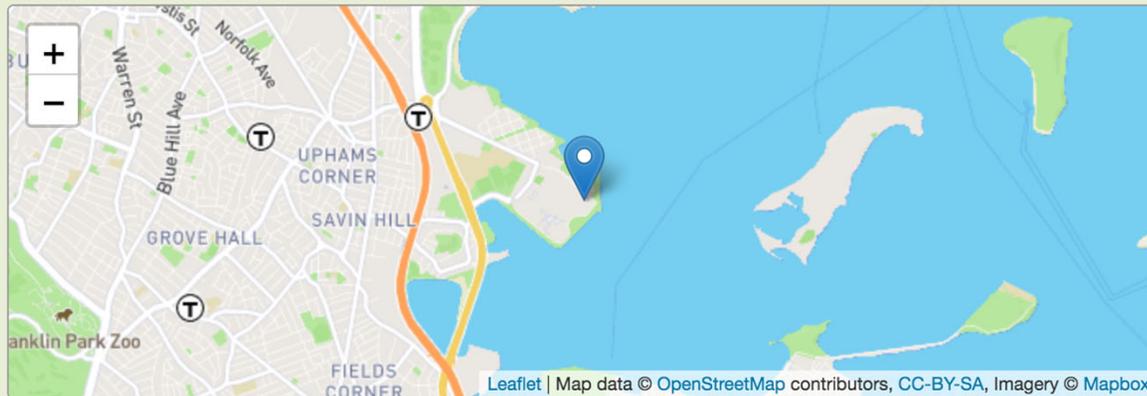
Search for people, places, events, and more

Search

Record of the Committee for the Sale of Estates of Absentees in Suffolk County, 1781-1785

Massachusetts General Court Committees for the Sale of Absentee Estates

Commonwealth of Massachusetts State Archives



Contact Information

View in Google Maps

Details

1 volume (partial doc. box)

In two subseries: (1) Journal; arranged chronologically (2) Ledger; arranged by estate, thereunder chronologically

More Like This

Records, 1776-1778

Massachusetts General Court Committee of Sequestration

Commonwealth of Massachusetts State Archives

Ledger of estates of absentees, 1780-1795 (bulk 1781-1791)

Massachusetts Treasury Office

Commonwealth of Massachusetts State Archives

Auction records of absentee estates, 1777-1778

Massachusetts General Court Committee of Sequestration

Commonwealth of Massachusetts State Archives

Proceedings, 1774-1775

Massachusetts Provincial Congress

Commonwealth of Massachusetts State Archives

Indian conference files, 1692-1780

Massachusetts Office of the Secretary of State

New York

- Some of the most aggressive confiscation laws
- Forfeiture Act – October 22, 1779
- Included list of Loyalist New Yorkers

CHAP. 25.]

THIRD SESSION.

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CHAP. 25.

AN ACT, for the forfeiture and sale of the estates of persons who have adhered to the enemies of this State, and for declaring the sovereignty of the people of this State in respect to all property within the same.

PASSED the 22d of October, 1779.

WHEREAS during the present unjust and cruel war waged by the king of Great Britain against this State, and the other United States of America, divers persons holding or claiming property within this State have voluntarily been adherent to the said king his fleets and armies, enemies to this State and the said other United States, with intent to subvert the government and liberties of this State and the said other United States, and to bring the same in subjection to the crown of Great Britain by reason whereof the said persons have severally justly forfeited all right to the protection of this State and to the benefit of the laws under which said property is held or claimed

And whereas the public justice and safety of this State absolutely require that the most notorious offenders should be immediately hereby convicted and attainted of the offence aforesaid in order to work a forfeiture of their respective estates and vest the same in the people of this State. And whereas the Constitution of this State hath authorized the legislature to pass acts of attainder, for crimes committed before the termination of the present war.

I. Be it therefore enacted by the People of the State of New York represented in Senate and Assembly and it is hereby enacted by the authority of the same, That, John Murray earl of Dunmore formerly governor of the colony of New York, William Tryon Esquire late governor of the said colony, John Watts, Oliver DeLancey, Hugh Wallace, Henry White, John Harris Cruger, William Axtell and Roger Morris Esquires late members of the council of the said colony; George Duncan Ludlow and Thomas Jones, late justices of the supreme court of the said colony, John Tabor Kempe, late attorney general of the said colony, William Bayard Robert Bayard and James DeLancey now or late of the city of New York Esquires David Matthews, late mayor of the said city, James Jauncey, George Foliot, Thomas White, William McAdam, Isaac Low, Miles Sherbrooke, Alexander Wallace and John Wetherhead, now or late of the said city merchants, Charles Inglis of the said city, clerk and Margaret his wife; Sir John Johnson late of the county of Tryon, knight and baronet, Guy Johnson, Daniel Claus and John Butler now or late of the said county, Esquires and John Joost Herkemer, now or late of the said county yeoman, Frederick Philipse and James DeLancey now or late of the county of Westchester Esquires, Frederick Philipse (son of Frederick) now or late of the said county gentleman, David Colden Daniel Kissam the elder, and Gabriel Ludlow now or late of Queens county Esquires, Philip Skeene, now or late of the county of Charlotte Esquire; and Andrew P. Skeene son of the said Philip Skeene and late of Charlotte county Benjamin Seaman and Christopher Billop, now or late of the county of Richmond Esquires, Beverly Robinson, Beverly Robinson the younger and Malcom Morrison now or late of the county of Dutchess Esquires, John Kane now or late of the said county, gentleman, Abraham C. Cuyler now or late of the county of Albany Esquire, Robert Leake, Edward Jessup and Ebenezer Jessup now or late

Persons convicted of treason.

Life in the Colonies during the Revolution

Neighbor vs. Neighbor

- Many loyalists engaged in a struggle at home
 - Tried to retain property
 - Avoid persecution
 - Escape jail
- Pitted neighbors against one another

Violence

- Victims of violence and harassment
- Vigilante groups form
 - Especially true where loyalist and patriot populations were relatively even
 - New Jersey
- Destruction of property

Migration out of the Colonies

- Loyalists from New England begin to leave the colonies as early as 1774
- Some flee to Canada at outbreak of the American Revolution
 - New Yorkers

Migration within Colonies

- Moved to a different region within home colony
 - Some banished
- Migrated to another colony
 - Protection amongst more Loyalists
 - Opportunity to participate in war effort
 - Banded together to protect interests
 - Loyalist culture – plays, concerts, balls, etc.

Protection

- British Government assumed duty of protecting some Loyalists
- Some Loyalists settle near British executive headquarters
 - New York City



British Army

- Many Loyalists joined the British Army
- Loyalist regiments formed
 - Most known as Provincials
- Various regiments raised by individuals
 - Butler's Rangers



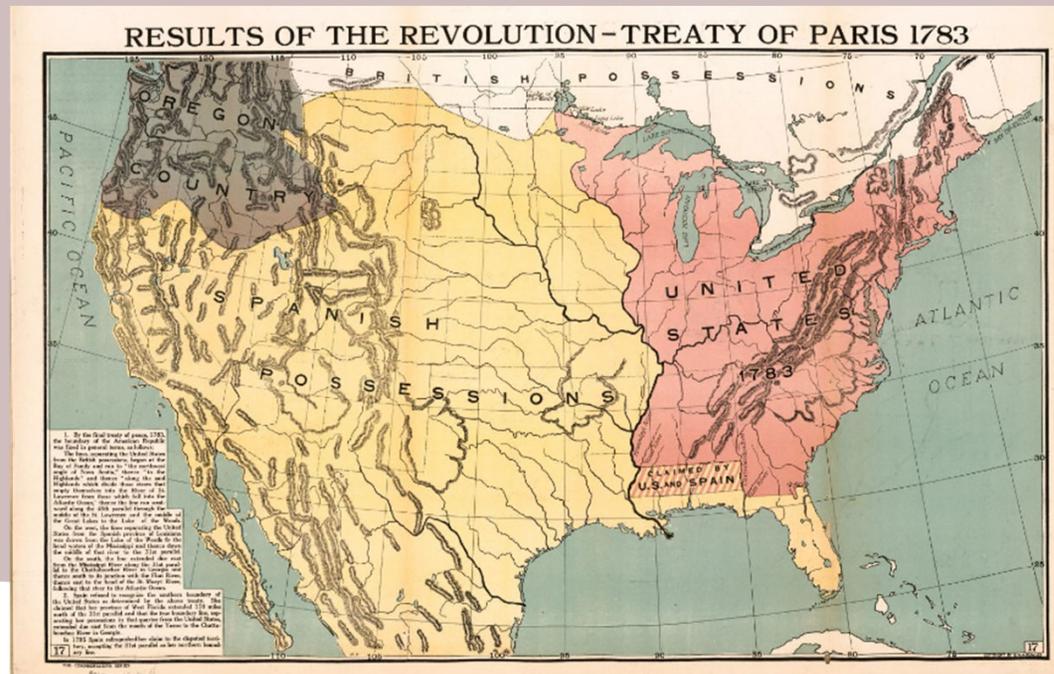
Firsthand accounts

- Robert S. Allen, *An Annotated Bibliographic Guide to the Writings on the Loyalists of the American Revolution*, (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1982)
- William Matthews, *American Diaries in Manuscript, 1580-1954*, (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1974)
- William Matthews, *American Diaries: An Annotated Bibliography of American Diaries Prior to the Year 1861*, (Boston: J.S. Canner, 1959)

After the Revolution

Peace

- Preliminary treaty of peace signed in November 1782
- Termination of fighting on April 19, 1783
- Treaty of Paris signed in September 1783



Evacuation

- Sir Guy Carleton installed as commander-in-chief of North America in 1782
- Ordered evacuation of all British troops in the southern colonies
 - Left southern Loyalists vulnerable
- Many flee to the Bahamas, Jamaica, and greater Caribbean
- Others flee to the north

Evacuation

- Largest population in New York City
- Loyalists worked to sell property and businesses before evacuation
- Transportation organized by Sir Guy Carleton
 - First ship leaves in April of 1783 for Nova Scotia
 - Ensuing ships bring about 32,000 Loyalists to Nova Scotia in summer of 1783
- Others flee to Britain

Why did they leave?

- Lost property, fear of violence or retribution
- Exiled or banished from home colony
- British government offered reimbursement for property losses
- Opportunity to resettle while still a subject of British Crown; transportation provided
- Land grants

Resettlement

- Loyalist agents work to identify possible settlements
- Governor John Parr organizes care and settlement of Loyalist refugees in Nova Scotia
- Reacquires private lands by escheat or reversion of property to the state
 - Frees land for Loyalists
- Timber, tools, rations, and materials acquired to support refugees

Resettlement

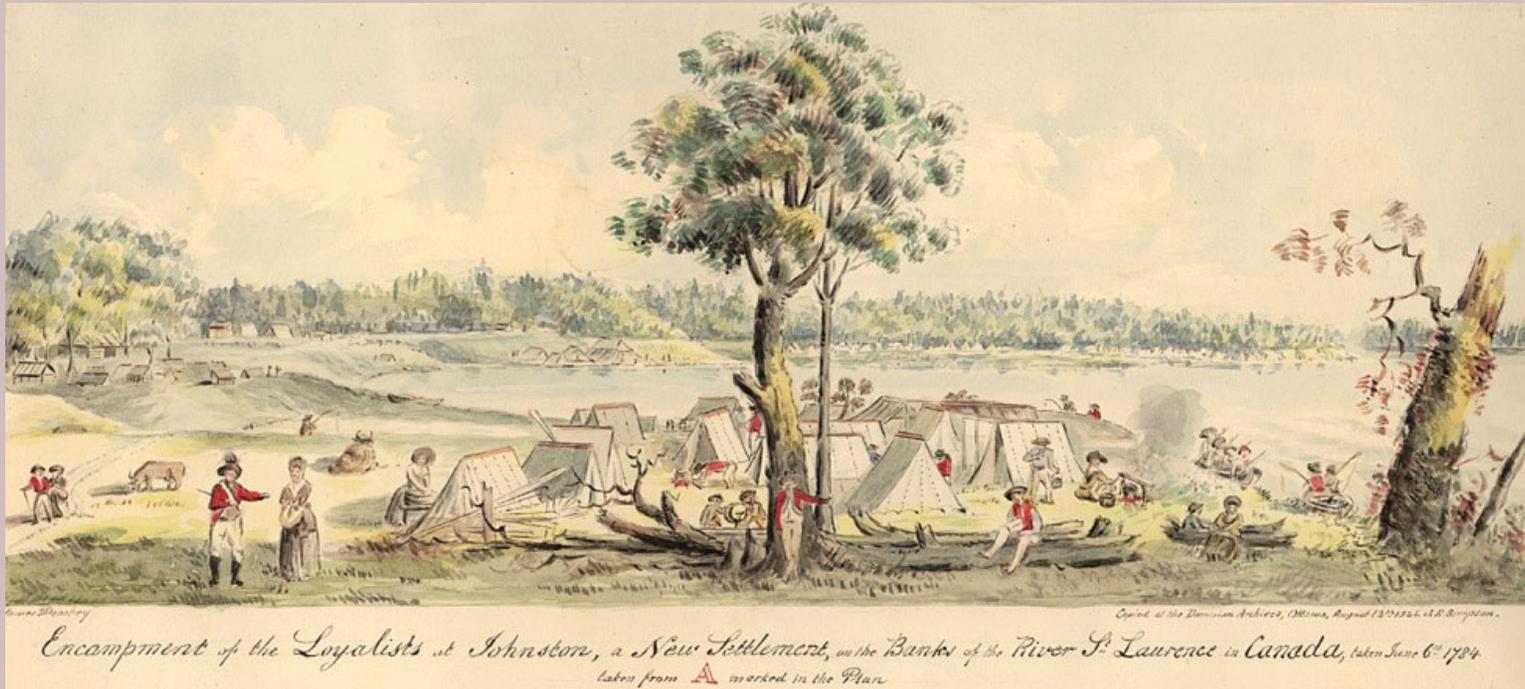
- Surveyor General Charles Morris tasked with laying out townships
 - Hires Boston Loyalist Benjamin Marston as Chief Surveyor
- Engineers, clerks, and surveyors work to prepare new communities
- Loyalists lodge in makeshift shelters
- Port Roseway, later Shelburne, becomes first planned community

Resettlement

- British Crown implemented similar planned communities in other provinces
 - New Brunswick (part of Nova Scotia until 1784)
 - Ontario
 - Quebec
 - Prince Edward Island
- Veterans of Loyalist regiments often settled together in planned communities and districts

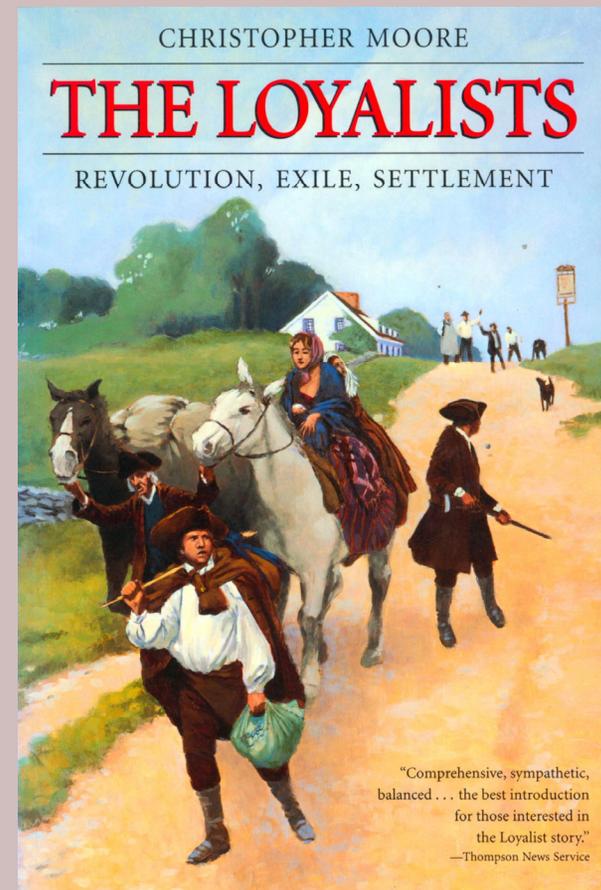
Exile

- Estimated that 60,000 loyalists left the colonies



Further Reading

- Christopher Moore, *The Loyalists: Revolution, Exile, and Settlement*, (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1984)



QUESTIONS?

How to identify Loyalists in your Family Tree

Location

- **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?

Learn about Residence

- Always learn about community in which your ancestor lived
 - Community **AND** Colony
- What was the political climate?
- Was it predominantly Patriot? Loyalist?

Important Questions

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

Best Sources

- Published town and county histories
- Newspapers
- Diaries
- Loyalist Claims
- Loyalist Confiscations

Loyalist Population Rankings

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

Loyalist Strongholds

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

Timing

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

Where in Canada?

Nova Scotia

- Shelburne
- Halifax
- Guysborough
- Digby

New Brunswick

- Fredericton
- Saint John
- Saint John River Valley

Where in Canada?

Ontario

- Bay of Quinte
- Prince Edward Co.
- Kingston
- Cornwall
- York (Toronto)

Quebec

- Eastern Townships

Prince Edward Island

Beware!

- Not all Americans who settled in what is now Canada in the late 18th century were Loyalists
 - Economic opportunity
 - Available lands
 - Arrived from UK, Ireland, and Europe
 - New England Planters

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!

Conclusion

- Loyalists were a diverse group
 - Lived in cities and rural regions of all 13 colonies
 - Different economic classes and backgrounds
 - Immigrants
 - People of color
 - Native Peoples
- Reasons for loyalty diverse and complex
- Faced persecution, violence, and exile

QUESTIONS?

Schedule a consultation
consultations@nehgs.org

Hire Research Services
research@nehgs.org

Search

Events

Membership

Give

Publications

Expert Help

Tools

Signature Projects

Centers & Initiatives

Home | Researching Loyalist Ancestors 2022

Researching Loyalist Ancestors 2022

Thank you for registering for the online course, *Researching Loyalist Ancestors!*

Not all our early American ancestors were patriots fighting for independence. Approximately one third of the population in the American colonies at the time were loyal to the Crown, with tens of thousands leaving their homes and taking up residence in Canada's eastern provinces or England. You can piece together your ancestor's movements and motivations using several resources. This three-week course will provide you with the historical context, records, and research strategies for identifying and learning more about your loyalist ancestors.

This course includes three 90-minute classes; exclusive access to handouts and recordings of each presentation; and in-depth q&a sessions with the instructor.

JOIN LINK

Join Zoom Webinar: <https://zoom.us/j/92263293040>

If you are unable to attend the live broadcasts you will be able to watch a recording of the session on this webpage. You won't miss any of the content participating this way.

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