

THE FOUNDING OF KINGSTON, ONTARIO

by Larry Turner

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One of the significant gaps in understanding Loyalist re-settlement at Cataraqui in 1784 has been the confusion surrounding the role and importance of the Associated Loyalists in the genesis of that settlement. The Associated Loyalists of Kingston and Adolphustown are just beginning to emerge from underneath a veil of historical obscurity. Their evacuation and migration, presence and persistence reveal a remarkable process by which the small but significant contingent of Associated Loyalists were able to help shape the destiny and pattern of Loyalist settlement in Upper Canada.

When the American Revolutionary War shuddered to an end, thousands of Loyalist refugees were crammed behind British lines in New York City. Faced with the monumental task of evacuating a British stronghold in the heart of a new Republic, Sir Guy Carleton allowed civilians and unattached soldiers to create and join companies of militia called the Associated Loyalists to facilitate their abrupt departure. While most of the Associated Loyalists were drawn to maritime re-settlement in Nova Scotia, a small but significant faction hailed a new course: that of inland migration to the headwaters of the St. Lawrence River.

Under the innovative and daring leadership of Michael Grass, Sir Guy Carleton was convinced in May of 1783 to allow for a group of Loyalists to sail for Quebec in pursuit of settling near the ruins of old Fort Frontenac on Lake Ontario. Shunning the mass migration to Nova Scotia and abandoning his intention to settle at Port Roseway (Shelburne), Grass embarked on a scheme to settle “the only eligible place left by the late Treaty for the King's subjects (Treaty of Paris) to carry on in the Indian and fur trade” and wrote that “we can only say that we cannot think of going to any other place in the Universe for the many Benefits that will flow from that settlement to the Settlers.”

There has long been a legend that as a former prisoner at Fort Frontenac during the Seven Years War, Grass was approached to head an expedition to Cataraqui but the evidence clearly showed Grass' initiative from New York and Carleton's benevolent support. Granted a Captain's Commission in Company number two, Grass was also recognized as the overall leader of all the other Captains of Associated Loyalists leaving New York in the convoy going to Quebec except for Company number one under Alexander White who would settle at Sorel.

In early July, 1783, Captains of Associated Loyalists White, Grass, Thomas D'Arcy, Daniel McGuin, John Everitt, Peter Ruttan, Abraham Maybee and James Gale embarked Staten Island with their diverse refugees in their respective transports named the **Blacket**, **Camel**, **Mary**, **Elizabeth**, **Union**, **Hope**, **Baker & Atlee**, and **Stafford**. The first transport arrived at Quebec City, 12 August, 1783, with the last limping in by 29 August. In early September, a final contingent of Associated Loyalists evacuated from New York City under Peter Van Alstine embarked for Quebec on the **Three Sisters** and **Grace** transports.

Except for a small private boat, the Companies under Alexander White, Michael Grass and Peter Van Alstine were the only refugees from the evacuation to undertake a voyage up the St. Lawrence to Quebec. Their abrupt arrival complicated the problems facing the Governor of Quebec, Sir Frederick Haldimand, in trying to find appropriate areas to settle members of the Provincial Corps and their families and the Un-incorporated Loyalists who were already residing temporarily in Quebec. Biased against settling Loyalists on Indian land in the western territory of the Province and against their settling too close to their former enemies or French communities on the St. Lawrence, Haldimand hoped that many would choose locations on the Bay of

Chaleur, Cape Breton or Nova Scotia where the commercial contact on the Atlantic shore would enhance their stability.

Despite the limitations, Haldimand was considering a number of areas for potential settlement in May of 1783, he ordered a new post to be built at Cataraqui. However, it was the arrival of Michael Grass and the Associated Loyalists in Quebec that helped push Haldimand toward accepting interior settlement to the west. Soon after Grass' arrival at wintering quarters in Sorel, Haldimand wrote to London that he was "making preparations agreeable to their request for a settlement of Royalists near Cataraqui" and later in September commented that Grass and his people "will persist in their desire of settling there". Grass and a number of his party were dispatched to Cataraqui to help in fall preparations for spring arrival and in spite of winter quarrels with Haldimand and Van Alstine back at Sorel, it was his persistence that helped Haldimand to isolate Cataraqui for Loyalist settlement. Haldimand had received favourable reports of the area from surveyors but none of the other Loyalist leaders present at Quebec had shown any particular interest in Cataraqui. Thus two different paths of initiative, that of Michael Grass seeking an alternative and Sir Frederick Haldimand seeking an acceptable region for settlement, came together in the creation of Cataraqui and ultimately the founding of Kingston. There would be other founders of the City of Kingston, but the genesis to settle around Fort Frontenac would rise from the enthusiasm of Michael Grass awaiting evacuation and exile in New York City and Sir Frederick Haldimand waiting for the match to strike the flint of settling the western wilderness above the headwaters of the St. Lawrence. We are reminded of Grass' unique role in a letter he wrote to the *Kingston Gazette* in 1811:

Seven and twenty years ago, scarce the vestige of a human habitation could be found in the whole extent of the Bay of Quinta! --Not a settler had dared to penetrate the vast forests that skirted its shores --Even on this spot, now governed with stately edifices, were to be seen only the bark-thatched wigwam of the savage, or the newly erected tent of the hardy loyalist...--for strong in my attachment to my sovereign, and high in the confidence of my fellow subjects, I led the loyal band, I pointed out to them the scite [sic] of their future metropolis, and gained for persecuted principles a sanctuary for myself and followers a home.

Note: The Associated Loyalists of Kingston and Adolphustown were unique in a number of ways: their special voyage from New York City to Quebec; their diverse origins from more established and settled portions of southern New York and New Jersey and, especially for the people under Peter Van Alstine, the predominance of their Dutch ethnicity. However, another significant factor was their considerable loss of numbers during migration from New York City to Lake Ontario in 1783 and 1784. From an estimated 1500 persons in New York to little more than 300 at Cataraqui, the Companies of Associated Loyalists lost adherents just before departure at New York, again at Quebec and also at Sorel.

The considerable loss of numbers reflects the trials and tribulations of exile and migration. Some panic stricken refugees would have sought last minute alternatives, some would have been attracted to towns like Quebec and Montreal where employment may have been available, and some would have given up hope, and returned to their homes or move on to new frontiers. Nevertheless, a little more than one hundred heads of families or adult males. of the Associated Loyalists settled in Cataraqui or Adolphustown.

Larry Turner was educated at Trent and Queen's Universities, and at the time of his death in 1996 was a freelance historian doing contract research through his company, Petherwin Heritage.

*His book, **Voyage of a Different Kind: The Associated Loyalists of Kingston and Adolphustown** was published by Mika Publishing Co., ISBN 0-919303-81-1. Illus., index, Loyalist lists, biblio., 180 pp., hardcover, price \$25.00.*

*Other publications by Mr. Turner include books on the Rideau Canal, Merrickville and Perth which are available at most bookstores, and **Ernestown Township** from the Ernestown Township Municipal office in Odessa, ON [2008 note: now Loyalist Township].*