

Searching Loyalist Claims on Ancestry.ca and Elsewhere

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Ancestry.ca has in its reference works "UK, American Loyalist Claims 1776-1835" (<http://search.ancestry.ca/search/db.aspx?dbid=3712>) which are micro-film copies of American Loyalist Claims, 1776–1835. AO 12–13 in the National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew, Surrey, England. (A subscription to Ancestry is needed to access this document and the one mentioned below). AO 12 consists of 146 files organized by colony/state containing the evidence heard and other files containing the determination by the Loyalist Commissioners of each claim also organized by colony/state. AO 13 consists of 140 files organized again by colony/state also including New Brunswick (943 pages in two files) and Nova Scotia (1759 pages in 3 files) containing new claims and other claims. The files have not been indexed by Ancestry so you cannot use the search engine to locate where a particular person's claim might be found within these files. Most of the files are done in alphabetical order and some have an alphabetical list of claims at the beginning. Some claims may be found in the state from which the claimant originated and others in the colony to which they fled. Within each file you can select the page number you wish to see which helps narrow down the names by alphabetic order much more quickly than proceeding page by page through documents often numbering more than 500 pages each.

Ancestry.ca also has in its reference works "American (Loyalist) Migrations 1765-1799" (<http://search.ancestry.ca/search/db.aspx?dbid=49027>) by Peter Wilson Coldham, (Original data: "Coldham, Peter Wilson. American Migrations 1765-1799: The lives, times, and families of colonial Americans who remained loyal to the British Crown before, during and after the Revolutionary War, as related in their own words and through their correspondence. Baltimore, MD, USA: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2000".), which has abstracts of all 5,800 individual claims--the entire contents of the papers of the Loyalist Claims Commission that form record classes AO 12 and AO 13 at the U.K. Public Record Office. This book has been indexed and can be searched. Each abstract provides details of where the actual memorial, evidence heard and determination can be found in the AO 12 and 13 series. For example, I have found from the abstract for my Loyalist ancestor Daniel Smith of New Milford Connecticut, who arrived in Saint John on the "Union" at the head of the Spring Fleet in 1783, that his claim is recorded in AO 12 file 1 pages 333-341, AO 12 file 57 page 50, AO 12 file 109 page 278 and AO 13 file 76 pages 472-482. In examining these files, I found that AO 12 file 1 pages 333-341 ("Evidence, Connecticut, 1786-1787") contains Smith's undated memorial, an inventory of losses submitted by him totalling £1247, which mentions but does not value a tract of land on the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania; and the evidence heard by the Loyalist Commissioners in Saint John on 17 February 1787. AO 12 file 57 page 50 ("Decisions, Connecticut, 1786-1788"), dated 28 February 1787 contains the determination by the Loyalist Commissioner that Smith was "a Loyalist who bore arms" and that his total claim for £1000 in losses was approved in part (£487). Claims for 96 acres in Kent, Litchfield County and for land on the Susquehanna River were disallowed "for want of title and want of proof of title". AO 12 file 109 page 278 ("Reports and Statements, 1784-1789") is a table of claims heard in New Brunswick which lists the names of the claimants: for Daniel Smith: the amount of their losses (£1000), the sum originally allowed (£487), the sum allowed on revision (£487), the percentage to be deducted by Act of Parliament (0), the Total Sum Payable under Act of Parliament (£487), the Sum already received (£194/16), the Balance after such receipt (£292/01), deductions on account of pension (0), and Final Balance (£292/1). AO 13 file 76 pages 472-482 ("New Claims: Connecticut") contains Daniel Smith's

New Claim as No 1541 dated 27 April 1786 with his memorial, dated 9 March 1786, a statement of losses which totals £1247, a sworn oath dated 19 April 1786, copies of the documents he submitted to support his claim, but not the record of his hearing nor the testimony of his witnesses, and on page 482 a “schedule of the real and personal estate to be the property of Daniel Smith late of New Milford in Connecticut and confiscated by that state” which totals £1790 and which evaluates his property in New Milford at £988, 90 acres in Kent at £270, another 48 acres in Kent at £144 and 2000 acres in Susquehanna at £200. This schedule appears to have been prepared by the state authorities in Connecticut and is £550 higher than Smith’s claim to the Commissioners for £1247. How the Commissioners lowered it to £1000 is not known.

The abstract in Coldham’s book for my Loyalist ancestor Peter John shows that his claim, Number 357, dated 7 April 1786, is found in AO 13 file 25 pages 214-216 (“New Claims Including Re Sloop "James", Nova Scotia “). His claim was listed as “rejected” on 17 April 1786 on the cover page of his claim, not in a separate document. Unlike Daniel Smith, Peter John does not appear to have submitted any supporting documents with his claim nor had any witnesses to support it. It appears the claim was rejected without hearing any evidence. But he was granted two tracts of land in the 1801 Botsford Grant to Loyalists on the Sissiboo River in Digby County, Nova Scotia.

Without Coldham’s work you have to manually search through all of the files in AO 12 and AO 13 to find these documents.

There is no reference in Coldham’s work to another proven Loyalist ancestor James Cosman, who settled in Sissiboo (now Weymouth), N.S. and married Peter John’s daughter Catherine. Presumably that means that James Cosman did not submit a claim for losses to the Loyalist Commissioners. He was young and single during the American Revolution, so he probably could not justify a claim for losses. My research on him uncovered a reference to a memorial submitted by James Cosman which says ““James was a Sergeant in Capt. Preston's Company of Guides and Pioneers during the late American War and at the battle of Germantown, outside Philadelphia in 1777, lost his pocketbook which contained a certificate from General Sir William Howe saying that he was entitled to 200 acres of land. - Memorial of James Cosman”. From work compiled by Richard E. Cosman (deceased), SSF, HQ&SIGS, SPTP, CFB Petawawa, P, ON K8H 2X3” and Kaye (Cosman) Nath (deceased). That memorial, which I have not been able to locate, was probably a land petition in Digby County rather than a claim to the Loyalist Commissioners and may be somewhere in the Provincial Archives of Nova Scotia. James Cosman did receive 500 acres of land in the unallocated portion of the 1801 Botsford Grant to Loyalists in Digby County, N.S., but was already settled on part of the 200 acre grant that his brother John Cosman had received in 1784.

There is also no reference in Coldham’s work to another proven Loyalist ancestor, Issachar Currier, who came to Upper Gagetown, N.B. in either late 1783 or early 1784. He submitted a petition for land in Upper Gagetown in July 1785 which was granted. He later received two grants in 1799 at Kingsclear, N.B.

Another source for claims submitted by Loyalists to the Loyalist Commissioners can be found in “The Second Report of The Bureau of Archives for the Province of Ontario, 1904. Subtitle: United Empire Loyalists, Enquiry into the Losses and Services in Consequence of Their Loyalty, Evidence in the Canadian Claims”. The report was contained in Volume 1 of Wallace Hales’s “Fort Havoc” CD-ROM series which was acquired by the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick (PANB). Much of that CD-ROM is on the PANB

web-site, but not the Second Report, which can be purchased from GlobalGenealogy.com or viewed at a Family History Library. The Report does not contain all of the claims in AO 12 and AO 13. The claim of Peter John is not listed. Nor does the Report contain either Daniel Smith's Memorial with statement of losses, nor the determination of the Commissioners for his claim, just the evidence heard by them.

Given that the total number of claims submitted to the Loyalist Commissioners was 5,800, it is clear that the vast majority of Loyalist who came to what is now Canada did not file claims with the Loyalist Commissioners.

Land petitions and land grants made by and to Loyalists are also another primary source of information. The Provincial Archives of New Brunswick has an excellent database which helps identify the petition or grant and can then provide a photocopy of the original for a fee. Ancestry.ca has a data-base "Nova Scotia, Canada, Land Petitions, 1765-1800" (<http://search.ancestry.ca/search/db.aspx?dbid=5083>) which also contains records for early New Brunswick as well. The Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources has a Crown Land Index Maps which is a series of 140 maps showing the location of crown land grants in Nova Scotia, the majority of which were issued between 1750 and 1850. You may view or download the maps at <http://www.novascotia.ca/natr/land/grantmap.asp> At one time the New Brunswick Department of Natural Resources offered a CD-ROM containing maps of all the land grants in New Brunswick, but I could not find any reference to it on its web-site.