

Catherine (Katie) Cottreau-Robins
2008 UELAC Loyalist Scholarship Award Recipient



The 2008 UELAC Loyalist Scholarship was awarded to Catherine Cottreau-Robins, a PhD candidate in the Interdisciplinary PhD program at Dalhousie University, Halifax, NS. In the late 1980s Catherine participated in an archaeological field school at Monticello, the home of Thomas Jefferson, in rural Virginia. It was there that her interest in the archaeology of slavery began.

In 2002, Ms. Cottreau-Robins earned a Master of Environmental Design Studies through the Department of Architecture at Dalhousie University. She worked as an archaeologist in Nova Scotia for several years and in 2008 accepted the position of Curator of Archaeology for the Nova Scotia Museum. As curator, Catherine works to steward an archaeological collection consisting of nearly half a million artifacts and representing every historic cultural group and time period in the province.

Fulfilling a research mandate at the Nova Scotia Museum, Catherine graduated from Dalhousie's interdisciplinary PhD program in October 2012. Dr. Cottreau-Robins works regularly with students at the undergraduate and graduate level and recently joined Saint Mary's Anthropology Department as an Adjunct Professor.

As provincial archaeologist, Dr. Cottreau-Robins has the opportunity to link to a wide range of heritage-related initiatives. Currently, she is part of the Editorial Board of MUSE, Canada's national museum magazine and in 2014 participated as Session Chair at the 20th annual conference of the OMOHUNDRO Institute of Early American History and Culture, 'The Consequences of War' held in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Dr. Cottreau-Robins' session titled – 'Loyalist Identity Formation and Order in the Crucible of Rebellion and War' included a presentation by another UELAC scholar (2012) Christopher Minty, University of Stirling.

For her dissertation project, Catherine drew from three disciplines to help explore the master-slave relationship among the Loyalists during the last quarter of the eighteenth century in Nova Scotia. The methodologies used to accomplish this included archaeological excavation, historical research and the description and comparison of physical landscapes in Nova Scotia and Massachusetts. Grounding these three streams of research is a case study: the home of the prominent Loyalist, Brigadier General Timothy Ruggles, of Hardwick, Massachusetts, who established a cider-producing farmstead in rural Nova Scotia with the help of family, hired hands and slaves.

Following is the thesis abstract for – "A Loyalist Plantation in Nova Scotia, 1784-1800" by Catherine Cottreau-Robins.

Abstract

The dissertation employs an interdisciplinary methodology that integrates research from Atlantic world history, historical archaeology and cultural geography. The resulting insights are key to supporting the central arguments and conclusions.

At the close of the American Revolution thousands of American Loyalists were forced into exile and made their way to British colonies beyond the United States. Most of the Loyalists landed in British North America, particularly the Maritimes. Along with the trauma and losses of the conflict, the Loyalists brought with them a way of doing things, an intense political history, and ideas concerning the imperial structure that framed their everyday lives.

This dissertation is a study of the Loyalists. Specifically, it explores a prominent Loyalist and his journey from Massachusetts to Nova Scotia along with family members, servants, and labourers, including enslaved persons. A central objective of the dissertation is to illuminate the story of the enslaved and magnify their place in Nova Scotia's eighteenth century colonial history narrative. The objective is addressed by adapting a holistic perspective that considers a single geography – the plantation. The holistic perspective, developed through an interdisciplinary methodology, explores the people, places and culture that formed the Loyalist plantation and were informed by it. The picture that emerges is one that puts into place the structure and organization of a Loyalist plantation in the late eighteenth century.

This dissertation argues that an interdisciplinary approach is fundamental when exploring the subject of the plantation and its inhabitants in Nova Scotia. Through study of the slaveholder and the comparison of his plantation spaces, the dissertation argues for Loyalist continuity. Such continuity confirmed a slaveholding culture during the mass migration. Finally, this dissertation argues that the Loyalist period can be described as Nova Scotia's Age of Slavery. The Loyalist migration represents an unprecedented arrival of enslaved persons to the province. Furthermore, the Loyalist migration represents the unprecedented arrival of a political and ideological framework that carried within it perceptions of race and seeds of discrimination that took root.

Contributors: Dr. James Morrison (external-examiner); Dr. Stephen Davis, Dr. Sarah Bonnemaïson, Professor Christine Macy (thesis-reader); Dr. Jerry Bannister (thesis-supervisor).

The dissertation is available free to download at Dalhousie University's [Faculty of Graduate Studies Online Theses](#).