

Why Do The United Empire Loyalists Matter ?

By
Brian McConnell, UE *

As a member of the United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada you might think I would not have any difficulty answering the question: Why do the United Empire Loyalists matter? I believed I did not primarily for two reasons. First, on a personal level they matter to me since I enjoy learning about my roots as a descendant of a Loyalist soldier who served in Jessup's Rangers during the American Revolution.(1) Second, as a life - time student of history and resident of Canada I am interested in learning more about the role the United Empire Loyalists played in the country's development. Nonetheless, when I was asked this question a few years ago by a Newspaper Reporter it caused me to pause and I began to give it more consideration.

I recognized the genealogical and historical reasons are important, however comments I read made by John Eaman, a Past President of the United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada encouraged further thought.(2) Even though made almost 40 years ago his points are interesting for the issues they raise and are provided below:

***Excerpts From a Talk Given by the National President John Eaman to the
Halifax - Dartmouth Branch of the UELAC at a Special Meeting, Sept. 2, 1981 (3)***

"The Maritimes are the heart of Loyalists and in this area there would be many with a Loyalist background. At this time there are 25 Branches in Canada, and from the National best wishes are extended to this Branch....The topic of the evening is "The UEL of the Future".

As Churchill once said 'Let your traditions be a rudder, not an anchor'. In this manner look ahead to the future, but at the same time look back to the honoured past.

In the future we should consider: (1) unity; (2) loyalty; (3) membership; and (4) perpetuating the history of the Loyalists.

(1) We should strive to unite the Loyalist descendants...we should embrace practices with the widest appeal. The first Branch was formed in 1897 and the UEL of Canada in 1914. Since that times have changed. We should avoid practices which make us appear to be elitist...Canada as our fathers knew it has changed, as have the loyalty for the Union Jack...We should invite all those interested in our beliefs to join our organization immediately rather than force them to complete application forms... We should be telling our members to freely bring their friends so that we can all work together.



**John Eaman, Dominion President (1980-82)
United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada**

The ideal for the future should be 'one membership' per Branch, rather than the necessity for proof for all members....There should be less stress on the 'mark of honour' of being a UEL.

(2) Our main concern should be Loyalty to the Crown and to Canada, which will form the keystone both now and in the future.

(3) I believe in an 'open' membership. Lets invite people to come to meetings and enroll them....We should appeal to the youth, have youth oriented programs...

(4) What will be the Loyalist influence in the Future? We must stress loyalty to the Crown, and loyalty to Canadian unity. Our ancestors stressed the golden rule, and living united with one's neighbour....We should be proud of a multi-cultural society, since our Loyalist ancestors represented many various cultures. We therefore have a history of cultural tolerance. But we still continue to respect the Queen and keep the Queen as the head of state of Canada. She represents a symbol of unity for all Canadians, a symbol which should stand out against creeping republicanism.

We want to build a Canada in the spirit of our ancestors. We do not have self-doubts about our identity. We know where we came from. We know our roots. We have a knowledge and a pride from coast to coast.

Lets keep our Loyalist traditions alive."

In his comments President Eaman suggested genealogy was important however historical traditions should be kept. He suggests giving less attention to the 'mark of honour' which refers to the UE postnominal described in Lord Dorchester's Proclamation.(4) Rather he indicates it is important to remember the United Empire Loyalists for their history and their loyalty. He urges we remember this as we go forward.

Despite the urging of President Eaman the United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada has removed from its purposes and mission statement any reference to loyalty to the Crown. (5) When the Association was formed in 1914 the first of its five purposes noted it was formed:

" to unite together irrespective of creed or political party, the descendants of those families who, during the American revolutionary war of 1775 to 1783, sacrificed their homes in retaining their loyalty to the British Crown, and to perpetuate the spirit of loyalty to the Empire"

By 2002 any mention of loyalty had been removed although the Constitutional Monarchy was mentioned in a revised mission statement that in section six included:

“Defending and promoting the values and institutions fundamental to Canada's United Empire Loyalist, heritage and, in particular, the Constitutional Monarchy, the Commonwealth, Parliamentary Government, the Rule of Law, Human Rights and Unity.”

In 2015 this section was removed. Does loyalty have any place in the contemporary world of members of the Association? I asked some members how they would answer the Newspaper Reporter's question about why the United Empire Loyalists matter or how are they relevant today. Below are some of the answers I received:

(i) A native Nova Scotian mentioned *“Loyalists matter today because of the historical significance they have played in this province. Take for example of one person in Joseph Howe, a son of a Loyalist and how we celebrate him and much of the Black Loyalist history we have in this province.”*

(ii) From Ontario a members said *“The Loyalists, being of good stock, arrived in such large numbers compared to the existing population, created perhaps the majority of the citizenry in their areas of settlement, and accordingly, were responsible for the incubation and implementation of ideas, plans and improvements to the provinces that they occupied. This likely led to many Loyalists becoming political and finding themselves in the chairs of power with the ability to make changes as we enjoy today. Since the Loyalist arrived at such an early time in the Country's development, they found themselves in the "drivers' seat" of the protocols and politics of the Country.”*

(iii) Another Nova Scotia member said *“To me the Loyalists are the ones that came and settled the new world (Nova Scotia) some stayed, some left and went back to the States and the ones that stayed were still loyal to the crown and wanted to stay Neutral . It's our lineage & we should be proud of it.”*

(iv) One member from Western Canada noted *“The Loyalists themselves were a diverse group of men and women who left their property and in many cases family behind and brought to this new home commitment to parliamentary system of government and common law legal system. Since that time and continuing today descendants of Loyalists have built institutions, businesses and traditions that have become cornerstones of what we know value as Canadians.. ..I truly believe that Canada would not be what it is today if not for the contributions of the Loyalists and all of their descendants over 9 or 10 generations to this day. We need to remember our history!”*

In these comments can be noted a recognition of the importance of history. It is submitted you cannot remember the history of the United Empire Loyalists without remembering their loyalty. In this sense loyalty continues to play an important part in making them relevant today.

Notes:

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(1) McConnell, Brian, "Loyalist soldier in Jessup's Rangers" , published by UELAC and viewable at:
www.uelac.org/Loyalist-Info/extras/Humphrey-James/James-Humphrey-biography-by-Brian-McConnell.pdf

(2) Death Notice - John Eaman at:
<http://www.uelac.org/Loyalist-Trails/2004/Loyalist-Trails-2004.php?issue=200419>

(3) Eaman, John, Talk to Members of the Halifax - Dartmouth Branch of the United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada, Special Meeting, September 2, 1981, Halifax, NS

(4) Lord Dorchester's Proclamation at <http://www.uelac.org/PDF/ldp.pdf>

(5) McConnell, Brian, "Loyal Then, Loyal Now", published in Loyalist Trails, April 15, 2018 and viewable at <http://www.uelac.org/events/Loyal-Then-Loyal-Now-by-Brian-McConnell.pdf>