

History of the Papers and the Project

The Papers

The British Headquarters Papers, New York 1774-1783 (the Carleton Papers) preserved in the Public Record Office of the United Kingdom, but available on microfilm at the National Archives of Canada, and many other institutions, hold records kept by successive Commanders-in-Chief of the British Army in North America during the American Revolution. In the 30,000 manuscript pages are the documented details of the services, sufferings and forced emigration of Loyalists of all classes who, because they had adhered to a lost cause, and were required to exist under laws of proscription, banishment and confiscation of property.. This particular collection was retained by Sir Guy Carleton, last British Commander-in-Chief in New York City, and entrusted to his private secretary in England, Maurice Morgann, who many years later passed them on to John Symmons. He donated them to the Royal Institution of Great Britain which called them the American Manuscripts. In 1929 this organization sold the lot as the Carleton or Dorchester Papers to an American. British opposition politicians and Lord Beaverbrook's newspapers called the sale a national disgrace. A.S.W. Rosenbach, the rare book dealer, acted for John D. Rockefeller. After being reorganized in the New York Public Library, the Papers were put in the Rockefeller museum at Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia. In 1957 President Eisenhower presented the collection to Her Majesty the Queen during her visit to the United States. The collection returned to England and is now preserved in the Public Record Office.

The Project

Taking this as its Bicentennial project in 1984, Sir Guy Carleton Branch of the United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada undertook to make an index to the Loyalists documented in this collection. Between 1984 and 1996 Sir Guy Carleton Branch employed research teams to create a selective index to the British Headquarters Papers as a computer database of 54,567 records. Researchers were employed with the assistance of a Bicentennial Grant, and contributions or grants from Employment Canada, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and the Canada Employment Job Creation Programme. They also received full co-operation of staff in the National Archives' Pre-Confederation Manuscripts, British Military Records, and Genealogy departments throughout the project.

About the Index

This index is an exceptional guide to information for anyone interested in people who were on Manhattan Island or the adjacent mainland areas dominated by the British during the American Revolution: loyalist soldiers and civilian refugees (white and black), and many British and German soldiers. It will be especially valuable for genealogists as well as historians, ethnographers and other specialists to help them research. A searcher proceeding to the actual microfilmed documents, located by using the index references, will frequently find more details about the ancestor. Specialists will be able to locate and manipulate data easily.

Genealogical Search

The index can be used to search for ancestors who passed through New York City during the Revolution; ancestors who fled or were evacuated; ancestors sent to Canada under specific orders; ancestors who were soldiers of a British Regiment demobilized in Canada; ancestors who were soldiers of a German regiment who settled in Canada, and "rebels" who: wrote letters to Headquarters, whose property was confiscated, or who were imprisoned in New York City.

Black History

This index is also invaluable for Black History because it contains many names of individuals, previously scattered throughout the documents: loyalist soldiers, and freed or enslaved civilian refugees. The index also includes the so-called "Carleton's Book of Negroes" which is a register of refugees of colour with references to 2,831 people many of whom went to Nova Scotia. There is extensive information about them such as their names, sex, health, distinguishing marks, status (free or slave), origins, names of their white associates, and the ships carrying them.

References for the Papers

Public Record Office (Kew) - CO 30/55 Carleton Papers (originals)

National Archives - PRO: CO 30/55, microfilm reels M.341-M.370.