III  LOYALIST SETTLEMENT IN NOVA SCOTIA

HALIFAX

Based on an article by R.H. Blakeney

Halifax in 1777 as sketched by Richard Short of the Royal Navy, with St. Mathers' Meeting house on the left, The Governor's House, centre.

At the outbreak of the American Revolution in 1776, two-thirds of the people of Nova Scotia were of Yankee birth or parentage. Then Halifax became an armed camp; most of the British troops destined to fight in New England came here or to New York. When General Howe abandoned Boston in 1776 he sailed to Halifax with many of the King's supporters. They arrived in crowded ships "with health and strength almost exhausted." Profit-hungry local inhabitants charged the refugees six times the usual rent for "miserable lodgings" and double for food and clothing. By May many of them had sailed for England. Between 1772 and 1781 the population of Nova Scotia dropped from 19,000 to 12,000 but by 1784, after the continual arrival of the Loyalists, the population soared to 32,000.

Troops and Loyalists vied for proper food and accommodations. Landlords, brewers, and madames of the bawdy-houses filled their pockets while the ordinary townspeople had to compete for this expensive food and lodging. Halifax enthusiastically supported the British cause by equipping loyal privateers and the pro-American sentiments of pre-Loyalists soon changed when they learned that their friends and family located in such outports as Lunenburg, Annapolis, and Canso had been raided and completely sacked by Yankee privateers without regard to their connections. From 1778 to 1781, a brigade of Scottish troops, as well as many regiments of Hessians, were stationed in Halifax.

Arriving refugees lived in tents on Citadel Hill and Point Pleasant and in St. Paul’s and Mathers Churches. People were fed in the streets near Granville and Hollis and, as late as 1783, the bulk of 10,000 refugees endured the miseries and insanitary conditions of an over-crowded town. At night pressgangs roamed the streets with cudgels to persuade new recruits to join His Majesty’s Navy. Besides the fleets, armies, and civilians, hundreds of French and American prisoners were confined in jails and ships moored near the dockyard. Escapes were common; many a prisoner of war successfully fled the province to return quietly to his home in the Thirteen Colonies.

As the war dragged on, many of the Loyalists yearned to see their old homes but their hopes were dashed when the British surrendered at Yorktown in 1781. Many Loyalists went forth from Halifax to lands which had been set aside for them along the coast and in townships throughout Nova Scotia. They adapted themselves to the economy of the place—lumbering, shipbuilding, and fisheries. They lived off what capital they had or the compensation they received from the government. Their loyalty was not forgotten, for 4,000 Loyalists claims, amounting to £3,000,000, were paid.

Halifax also became the permanent residence of
Loyalists of the Maritimes

such Loyalists as Phillip Marchington, who escaped from New York with a large fortune. Establishing a successful mercantile business, he built a church on Argyle Street to air his own sermons, but eventually squabbles with his congregation forced him to close the church. Joseph Howe was the son of a Loyalist from Boston who printed the first issue of the Halifax Journal which served the city from 1781 to 1870.

After 1783 discharged military personnel drifted aimlessly after eight years of war. Government officials struggled with the settlement and support of thousands of Loyalist refugees and the city adjusted to conditions of peacetime marked by a stagnant economy and declining population.

SHELBURNE

Based on articles by Mary Archibald, Watson Kirkconnell, and Gerald A. MacAlpine, U.E.

Shelburne, originally known as Port Roseway, is located at the head of one of the finest natural harbours in the world near the south-west corner of Nova Scotia. In 1765, the area had been granted to Alexander McNutt who hoped to establish a model community there. His plan failed and the grant reverted to the Crown in 1783.

The Frith House, built in 1783

At the end of the American Revolution a group of Loyalists from New York formed the Port Roseway Associates with the intention of obtaining a grant in that area. Charles Morris, Surveyor-General for Nova Scotia, had recently appointed Benjamin Marston as Deputy Surveyor and had ordered him to meet the Loyalists at Port Roseway to lay out a township for them. Marston was a Loyalist and graduate of Harvard who had lost all his property during the Revolution and had fled to Halifax.

The first fleet carrying about 400 families arrived on May 4, 1783 and after some early disagreements, the people were soon ashore clearing the town site and erecting tents and log huts for protection. In spite of their lack of experience, they built nearly 1,500 houses the following summer. A list of the disbanded Loyalist soldiers in the fall of 1783 shows that the majority were from the British Legion, the Duke of Cumberland’s Regiment, and the New Jersey Volunteers. Black regiments also came to Port Roseway but they settled by themselves across the bay in an area which they called Birchtown, named for Brigadier-General Samuel Birch who had befriended them in New York.

A church built by Loyalists

As the year progressed, hundreds more refugees and disbanded soldiers sought shelter in Port Roseway, swelling the population by the end of the year to between 9,000 and 10,000 persons. Before the last refugees had come, however, some of the early arrivals had left for other parts. This pattern underlines the problem created by dumping the remnants of New York’s loyal population on the township after the peace, thereby turning the community into a refugee camp. A great majority of the refugees remained only briefly before moving on to greener pastures because there were few good reasons to stay.

On July 22, 1783 Governor Parr, on his first visit to the community, named the town Shelburne in honour of William Petty Fitzmaurice, Earl of Shelburne who, during the peace negotiations, was Secretary of State for Home, Colonial, and Irish Affairs. Although Parr revered him, Lord Shelburne was not popular with many Loyalists because they blamed him for the terms of peace which granted...
Loyalists of the Maritimes

full independence to the United States.

In the summer of 1784, Marston was compelled to
leave town. There had been a certain amount of dis-
satisfaction with his conduct from the start. He had
been blamed for errors in running some of the survey
lines and had also been accused of favouritism in the
allocation of some lots. A riot broke out on July 16,
1784 when the disbanded soldiers drove the free
Blacks out of town and went searching for Marston.
He took refuge in the barracks across the harbour
from the town and sailed for Halifax the next day.
Parr, who laid the blame for problems at Shelburne
on Marston, was more than happy to have someone
to condemn for some things that were more his and
the government’s fault than Marston’s.

In 1785, five sawmills providing lumber for the
West Indies market were in operation. A whale
fishery had been started and 10 boats were ground
fishing. An energetic program of road building was
started that year in an effort to link the farms in
the surrounding area to the town. The township was
not yet self-sufficient, however, and King’s rations
were supplied until 1786.

The decline in population continued until it sta-
bilized around 300. There were various reasons for
Shelburne’s waning, but one of the most important
was the choice of an unsuitable site for the settle-
ment. Sour soil, spread thinly over granite and lit-
tered with glacial boulders, was ill-suited for farm-
ing. The marketable timber within reach of the
coast soon petered out and two of the three “instant
sawmills” soon ceased to operate owing to lack of
sawlogs. There was no habitable hinterland to be
served by the stores of Shelburne. Apart from fish-
ing, in which few of the settlers were experienced,
there was no lasting gainful occupation to maintain
even a village, let alone a city. The economic base of
the whole enterprise was almost non-existent.

The government at Halifax was indifferent to
the plight of Shelburne. In 1784 Halifax merchants
had tripled the price of their goods and then com-
plained to the government that Americans were
selling produce to the new settlers at lower prices.

A smallpox epidemic in 1788 and natural dis-
asters also contributed to the decline of the settle-
ment. In 1786, a hurricane from the Caribbean de-
omolished the warehouses and wharves along the
shore. There was a devastating drought in 1791, but
perhaps the greatest blow of all was a disastrous
forest fire in 1792. From the middle of June until a
substantial rain on the 9th of July, fires raged
through the tinder-dry woodlands in southern end of
the province. Approximately 50 houses were said to
have been burned, but a list of the poorest and most
distressed includes 84 names of settlers in the area
from Birchtown to Port Herbert. Birchtown was par-
ticularly hard hit with 17 families requiring aid.

The Shelburne “Fire Engine” was in
use as early as 1785. It is thought
to be one of the three oldest fire
engines in North America and is on
display at the Shelburne County
Museum.

Besides the loss of houses, outbuildings, and
crops, the forest which had provided one of the few
industries to the community had been destroyed.
Most of the roads extending from the town had been
rendered impassable because their bridges were
burned.

There were however, some hardy pioneers who
decided that Shelburne was a good place to live and
these became permanent settlers. They were a mix-
ture of true Loyalists, disbanded soldiers, and those
who preferred the British form of government.
Many Loyalist surnames are still represented in
modern Shelburne and the surrounding area, and
such Loyalist homes as the Ross-Thomson house
built about 1785 have been restored and renovated.
Loyalists of the Maritimes

Digby

Based on the MA Thesis of Taunya Dawson,

"The Church of England's role in settling the Loyalists in the Town of Digby, 1783-1810" Acadia University, 1991

Digby was a Loyalist settlement in Nova Scotia, second only in size to Shelburne (Port Roseway). Its location, directly across the Bay of Fundy from Saint John, near the entrance to the Annapolis Basin on a body of water known as the Digby Gut, was a major attraction for Amos Botsford, agent for the New York Refugee Association in 1782. He had been dispatched to find a suitable location for a sizeable group of Loyalists who expected to be refugees at the end of the war. The area had been named Conway Township when the first white settlers moved into the area from Annapolis in the 1760's.

On April 27, 1783, 44 ships departed for Nova Scotia from Long Island with close to 6,000 Loyalists, most of whom went to Port Roseway because Botsford had not yet been able to decide definitely whether to send his people to Saint John or to the Annapolis Basin. By May 2 another convoy of nine ships left for Saint John, Annapolis, and Digby with 2,434 Loyalists, 1,000 of whom would go to Digby. Another group, including 51 heads of families, arrived on October 18. Some of them stayed on the ship until spring while others camped on shore.

Botsford obtained 65,000 acres in Conway Township for 301 settlers on February 20, 1784 and secured land for a town plot. The town, named Digby after the admiral responsible for the Loyalists' transportation to Nova Scotia, was designed on a grid but had more character than most towns, owing to its location on a peninsula. Land was reserved for a glebe (clergy reserve) and school in the town.

After taking the Oath of Allegiance, Loyalists were able to purchase a town lot. These had to be purchased because they were considered to have been "improved". Grants in the township were free, with the size depending on the military rank of the head of the household and 50 additional acres for each family member and servant. The average size of the rural lots was 200 acres.

Of those Loyalists who could be traced, originally 50% were from New York, 20% New Jersey, with representation from New Hampshire, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Massachusetts, Georgia, and the Carolinas. The regiments represented were: The New Jersey Volunteers, The Royal Garrison Battalion, and The Loyal American Battalion. Black Pioneers, including Thomas Peters who settled near Annapolis, and Joseph Leonard, along with 200 Black veterans settled in Brindley Town, now Acaciaville, were shortchanged with land and rations in the same way as Blacks who settled elsewhere.

Digby prospered from the West Indian trade with merchants exporting cod, timber, beer, dairy and farm produce, and especially herring. Enough herring was caught to provide employment for 400 workers. Many occupations were associated with the sea. Daniel and James Leonard were sail makers. In 1785 Digby was designated a Port Town and Captain James Baseley was appointed Harbour Master. A post office opened in the home of Andrew Snodgrass, in 1784 and daily ferry service to Saint John began in that same year.

Loyalists were occupied in various businesses. Henry Rutherford and George Nash operated a general store. James Reid and Robert Ray were hotel keepers, and Fleming Pinkston was one of the town physicians. Loyalists also held public offices. Isaac Bonnell was the first Justice of the Peace and was later appointed Puisne Judge of the Inferior Court of Common Pleas. Andrew Kysh was another Justice of the Peace. James Wilmot was Collector of Duties for the port and Deputy Registrar of Deeds and Conveyances.

Reverend Jacob Bailey, rector at Annapolis Royal, visited Digby often and assisted in the establishment of the parish which the Loyalists named "Trinity" after the one that many of them had been forced to leave in New York. Anglicans did not constitute the majority of the population, however, and both Presbyterians and Methodists were active in the community. The Methodists, in particular, appealed to the Black population and the efforts of Methodist missionaries were met with enthusiasm in that community.

By 1786, a small town existed in Conway Township but its growth did not fulfill its potential. Botsford's indecisiveness about the site caused considerable confusion and many Loyalists decided to follow the Port Roseway Associates to what became Shelburne. There, Loyalists did not have to pay for their town lots. Botsford was not meticulous about legalities and records and legal titles to land were questionable. Poor distribution of food and supplies also hindered successful settlement. Nor did Digby have a wealthy agricultural hinterland. Many of the town's first settlers stayed for only a short time and then moved on to seek their fortunes elsewhere.
One of the largest concentrations of Loyalists was at East Country Harbour in Nova Scotia's beautiful County of Guysborough. The Loyalists came from Halifax to a place now known as Country Harbour Mines at the upper end of Country Harbour. They arrived late in the year and endured a horrible first winter in primitive log cabins improperly roofed. Many died from exposure and sickness.

Some 150 Blacks came with them and it must be concluded that although some were slaves, many more were not, and had served as bondsmen, servants, and pioneers in both the British Army and Loyalist Provincial Corps. The lot of the Black Loyalist was a hard one. Compared to the 150 acre land grants of whites, the Black's grant of one acre for services rendered to Crown and Country was a poor reward for seeing service in very arduous times.

Black provincial units which did not participate directly were recruited for garrison and other duties in North America. These were: the Jamaica Rangers, all Blacks but including independent companies which were partly black and partly white, and the Jamaica Volunteers made up of mixed races. Another black unit, the Negro Horse, was raised in New York in 1782 and performed provost duty picking up deserters. They also fought at Dorchester in what is now New York County.

The Loyalists at East Country Harbour were initially under the jurisdiction of a Georgian officer, Major James Wright. They were principally from three regiments: the Royal North Carolina Regiment, the King's (Carolina) Rangers, and the South Carolina Royalists. All of them had experienced heavy fighting in Southern campaigns. The Royal North Carolina Regiment had absorbed a militia unit, the North Carolina Highlanders, composed of Scots who had seen action at Moore's Creek Bridge. Some extant Scottish names in Guysborough County today are those of people descended from Loyalist Scotsmen.
JOHN PARR (1725-1791)
GOVERNOR (LATER LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR) OF NOVA SCOTIA

John Parr was born in Dublin in 1725 and spent most of his adult life in the British Army. He married Sara Walmsley in 1761 and they had three sons and two daughters.

Parr was appointed mayor of the Tower of London in 1778. In 1782 he received what he thought would be a comfortable, easy appointment as Governor of Nova Scotia. He did not anticipate serious problems with the Loyalist migration, although he had qualms about the lack of building materials, firewood, and military protection in the colony. He soon found himself caught between the demands of the Loyalists and the British government's slowness to act when the steady stream of refugees began in 1783.

The pre-Loyalist settlers had, understandably, taken up the best lands and absentee landholders held other large tracts. Digby, Shelburne, and Guysborough were the major areas remaining open to Loyalist settlement. Parr was often obliged to take action without instructions from London. He wrote, "Government has not yet honoured me with their commands relative to this vast Emigration. I have hitherto acted in the dark to the best of my abilities."

His initial duties were to supervise the surveying of lots and provision of some kind of shelter before the coming of winter. Supplies were inadequate and the weather that autumn was particularly unpleasant. In February he wrote of the ingratitude of the Loyalists despite the boards he had acquired for them "without having yet had sufficient Authority from home, and without which many would have inevitably perished." In spite of these difficulties most of the Loyalists managed to get under cover before winter which, fortunately, turned out to be relatively mild. The British also extended provisions to the Loyalists until 1786, if necessary.

By 1785, the initial rush was over, although some groups were still trickling into the colony. Soon the Loyalists began to accuse Parr of incompetence and of favouring the old colonists and the "Halifax Faction" because he did not invite the newcomers into his government circle. They also tended to blame Britain for what they considered a bad peace settlement.

Parr, for his part, tried to distinguish between the solid Loyalists who wanted to settle and get on with their lives and the trouble-making whiners. He wrote that he had found "some honest men" among the Loyalists and he "stood in great need of them."

Unappreciated by both Loyalists and the British government, he found his administration reduced when New Brunswick and Cape Breton Island became separate colonies in 1784, and his appointment was reduced to Lieutenant-Governor under Governor Sir Guy Carleton in 1786. He remained in Nova Scotia until his death in 1791.

JOHN WENTWORTH (1737-1820)
2ND LT. GOVERNOR OF NOVA SCOTIA

This former Governor of New Hampshire remained loyal to the Crown and had to flee his home in the early 1770's. He went to Boston, then to Halifax before spending 5 years in London. He returned to Halifax where he succeeded John Parr as Lt. Governor in 1792, and he remained in office until 1808.

"He was a well-behaved governor, a kind, charming, earthy little man, devoted to the services of his monarch and hospitable to citizen and stranger alike."

J. Fingard
Flora MacDonald (1722-1790)

Flora was born on one of the Outer Hebrides islands off the west coast of Scotland. Her father died when she was two years old. When her mother remarried the family moved to the Isle of Skye. Her father, her mother, her step-father, and her husband were all named Macdonald.

In 1746 there was great turmoil in Scotland when Charles Stewart, Pretender to the throne of Britain returned to Scotland to overthrow the Hanoverian King George II. Bonnie Prince Charlie, as he was known by his supporters, was soundly defeated at Culloden Moor and was forced to flee for his life. Flora helped him escape by disguising him as her maid. Together with two other servants, they arrived safely at Skye from where he departed for France and final exile. Flora was found out and imprisoned for some time at Edinburgh until she was released in London.

In 1750 she married Allan Macdonald who had served in the army that had defeated Prince Charles at Culloden. They had seven children, five sons and two daughters.

The 20 years after the battle of Culloden were very difficult for the Highlanders since King George attempted to subdue them by destroying the clan system and the economy suffered as a consequence. From 1754 to 1776 it is estimated that 23,000 Highlanders left Scotland. The Macdonald family were among them. In 1774 they joined a group of their countrymen in North Carolina.

In 1775, Allan once again decided to support his king, this time George III, when hostilities broke out in the Thirteen Colonies. He was commissioned as captain in the 2nd Battalion, Royal Highland Emigrants, later known as the 84th Regiment, eventually being appointed brigadier-general. For some time he travelled about North Carolina recruiting troops for the Loyalist cause. Flora accompanied him on his many campaigns through the South until in 1776, he and his son were captured by rebel forces.

Flora had been responsible for many of the Highlanders rallying to the King’s standard and had spoken out strongly at many of the enlistment meetings. She refused to sign an oath supporting the American Congress and consequently the plantation and all of their possessions were seized. With her daughter and grandchildren Flora went by sea, first to New York, and then to Halifax where she was reunited with Allan who had been part of a prisoner exchange in 1777. For the next year and a half they lived at Windsor, a settlement near Halifax. After that, Flora, her daughter, and grandchildren returned to Scotland. At the end of the war Allan decided to return to Scotland as well, even though as a Loyalist officer he was entitled to a grant of several thousand acres in Nova Scotia.

Although best known as the woman who helped Bonnie Prince Charlie escape from his enemies, Flora Macdonald also deserves credit because her husband and four sons, two of whom died at sea, were commissioned officers in the Loyalist forces during the American Revolution.
Henry Magee (c. 1741-1806)

Henry Magee was born in County Armagh, Ireland to a Scotch-Irish family. Shortly before leaving Ireland he met John Wesley and converted to Methodism. He emigrated to America with his wife and six-year-old son in 1773. They landed in Philadelphia and immediately set off for Cumberland County. He began working in his chosen trade as a miller in the Perth Valley where, unfortunately for him, the majority of the population were rebels. He was repeatedly pressured to join the rebels but he resisted until he was arrested and accused of treason. The charge was dismissed on a technicality but Henry nevertheless fled to the mountains leaving the considerable property which he had acquired, and his wife and family which by then consisted of two sons. In 1777 he became a recruiter for Butler’s Rangers. In 1778 he made his way to Philadelphia and joined the British army, eventually being stationed in Nova Scotia.

In the meantime, his wife and sons were evicted from their home and set out on foot for New York, a Loyalist stronghold. Mrs. Magee worked as a seamstress for British officers’ wives until the end of the war.

In November, 1783 the family left for Halifax aboard a British man-of-war. When they landed, someone recognized her and told her that Henry was working on “Martock”, John Butler’s estate on the Minas Basin near Windsor where leading officials from Halifax had received large grants after 1757.

When the family was reunited, they moved down the valley to Wilmot where Henry received a grant of 500 acres in 1786. Within two years, he had built a gristmill and general store on the Kentville Brook where the town of Kentville developed. In 1799 he bought 600 acres near Aylesford. There his oldest son, John, built a house that is still standing.

This fine location had first been settled by New England planters in the 1760’s and was growing rapidly thanks to Loyalist settlers. The store was the first in the area and drew customers from miles around. Accounts show an annual income averaging £2000.

Bishop Charles Inglis and his son, Rev. John, Brigadier-General Morden (storekeeper of Ordnance at Halifax) and Colonel James Kerr of Parrsborough, gentlemen, artisans, farmers, Indians, and slaves, all dealt with Henry Magee Sr., in his capacity as merchant, banker, pawnbroker and general factotum for the district.

Henry Magee died in 1806 and was buried in the Oak Grove Cemetery in Kentville. Mrs. Magee moved to live with her son, John, in Aylesford Township were she died in 1813. She was buried in an unmarked grave in the churchyard of St. Mary’s Anglican Church in Auburn.

*This is not the John Butler of Niagara but someone of the same name who had arrived in Halifax after 1749 and settled outside Windsor on the road to Chester.

*Associated Loyalists were basically civilian refugees who enlisted in military companies and were provided for until they settled. The leader of each group was given a military rank and the group lived under military discipline.
The Treaty of Utrecht allowed the French to retain Île Royale and it was there that they built the fortress of Louisbourg. It also became a haven for Acadians after the British deportation in 1755. When the British captured Louisbourg in 1758, they totally destroyed the fort. Although they received the island through the terms of the Treaty of Paris in 1763, they paid little attention to it beyond having an official survey conducted by Captain Samuel Holland between 1765 and 1767. He identified the coal deposits which were to be of value later.

The last troops left the island in 1768. The population then consisted of approximately 300 Acadians on Isle Madame, and about 400 Newfoundlanders, Irish, and "American" fishermen.

Interest in the Island grew in 1784 when Abraham Cuyler, a former mayor of Albany, New York, informed the British authorities that he had 3,100 Loyalists then living in Quebec, who would be pleased to settle on Cape Breton Island, as the British called it. In anticipation of this influx, the British separated Cape Breton Island from Nova Scotia at the same time as they created the separate colony of New Brunswick. Major Joseph Frederic Wallet Des Barres, an engineer of French/Swiss descent who had migrated to England as a young man and had spent 20 years surveying northeastern North America, was appointed Lieutenant-Governor of the colony, partly because his compensation for service as a surveyor had been woefully inadequate.

In the autumn of 1784, Cuyler found 140 "Associated Loyalists" in Quebec who were willing to go to Cape Breton. They used three ships to make the move. Two shiploads landed at St. Peter's where one stayed and the other went on to the Baddeck River the next spring. The third went to Louisbourg. Jonathan Jones of the King's Rangers of New York was named magistrate for Baddeck and granted 200 acres. John Leaver and the sons of Hezekiah Ingraham also settled at Baddeck. John D. Meloney of Long Island was the head of the first family at Sydney, the town which grew near the ruins of Louisbourg. In February, 1785 Des Barres brought settlers from England to Spanish Bay (now Sydney Harbour) and in the Summer of 1785, six companies of the 33rd Regiment arrived. Some families, e.g., Henry Lewis from Virginia and William Watson from New York, left Sydney and settled on farms which had been held by Acadians. William Hood and his family settled at Bras d'Or, while Heze-kiah Ingraham who had come from Hartford Connecticut in 1783 settled at Margaree Harbour along with James Ross and Ira Hart. A group of Loyalists from New York who had arrived at Shelburne with the Spring Fleet of 1783 and had become disillusioned with life there arrived at Upper North Sydney in 1788. Among them was Peter Sparling's family.

Cape Breton did not have an elected assembly but rather was ruled by the Lieutenant Governor and his Executive Council made up of Loyalists and English. Almost from the beginning there was dissen-sion among the Loyalists, the military, the English, and members of the council. For example, problems about the distribution of food to Loyalists being carried out by the military rather than the Lieutenant-Governor became so heated that Des Barres was removed from office. David Mathews, former mayor of New York City, led one faction that was opposed by The Rev. Ranna Cossit, the minister of St. George Anglican Church, organized as the garrison church for the troops stationed in Sydney.

Other Loyalists who developed the economy on Cape Breton were William Brown who came from New Jersey and operated a retail business along with his sons, and Samuel Plant from New York City who opened North Sydney's first general store. Other Loyalists went to sea to fish and trade. Some Blacks came as slaves, married, and were eventually buried in the cemetery at St. George Church.

Despite a sizeable migration of Scots beginning around 1800, the population grew slowly and remained isolated in the remote glens in the interior of the Island, quite unaware of the administrative chaos at Sydney. Matters came to a head in 1819 when judgment concerning a court case regarding the charging of a duty on imported rum implied that all government on the island since 1784 had been irregular, if not illegal, because of the absence of an elected assembly. Rather than grant an assembly, the British government decided to re-annex Cape Breton to Nova Scotia. The change took effect in 1821 without a great outcry from the islanders. Part of the reason for the minimal opposition may have been the prosperity which followed the acquisition of the Duke of York's mineral rights by the General Mining Association of London. Markets were found for coal in the United States, and Sydney became a coaling station of considerable importance for the new steamships which crossed the Atlantic.
THE REVEREND RANNA COSSIT

The Rev. Mr. Cossit’s grandfather, René, had come from Paris to Trois Rivières which he left in 1712 to move to Connecticut where he converted to the Anglican church. Born in 1744, Ranna grew up in Connecticut and studied in Rhode Island and England where he was ordained in the Church of England in 1773. He went to serve in New Hampshire with the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel and there married Thankfull Brooks in 1774. New Hampshire was controlled by rebels who arrested him in December 1774 and brought him before the Committee of Safety because he refused to support the revolution and continued to pray for the King during services. After 1775 his congregation dwindled but his family grew to 3 sons and 3 daughters. In all, Thankfull was to bear 13 children, of whom 10 survived, before dying in childbirth at Sydney in 1802 at the age of 46.

The church offered Cossit a post at Cape Breton, promising him a house, a church, a school, land, and financial help in 1785. Although the promises were slow in being fulfilled, Cossit brought his family to Sydney in 1789 and held his first service at Christmas of that year.

Cossit quickly became embroiled in the island’s political controversies. For example, he soon allied himself with James Miller, a mineralogist sent to investigate conditions at the coal mines leased by Loyalists John Tremaine and Richard Stout. Miller condemned their methods, especially because of what he considered to be overuse of rum as payment to miners. He wanted the mines, which supplied coal to Halifax, to be owned publicly and payments of wages made in cash. Stout was one of the island principal merchants along with Bartholomew Musgrave and Jeremiah Allan, Loyalists who began shipbuilding at North Sydney. David Mathews, the Attorney General, was deeply in debt to Stout, and also did not attend church, both reasons why Cossit opposed him. To further complicate matters, Cossit, who believed in the established Church of England on the Island, was a member of the Executive Council. By 1800, he had run afoul of the current Lieutenant-Governor who appealed to Bishop Inglis to remove Cossit from his parish. Cossit resisted until 1805 when Inglis arrived in person and persuaded him to go to Yarmouth where he died in 1815. The Cossit house on Charlotte Street is the oldest standing house in Sydney and is open to the public.