

Loyal Then - Loyal Now

*By Brian McConnell, UE **

In October, 2014 I completed an article entitled “UE and Me” which described some of the history and background surrounding the use of the postnominal letters UE by descendants of United Empire Loyalists. (1) My conclusion was that the history of the letters UE was one aspect of my Loyalist Heritage and to be appreciated in that context.



United Empire Loyalists' Association Plate with reference to U.E.

Persons who were interested in my article might be further interested to know that an attempt was made in Ontario in 1897 to have the recognition which was granted by Lord Dorchester in 1789 more formalized and how the purpose and mission of the United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada has evolved over time.

Lord Dorchester, while acting as Governor of Quebec, on November 9, 1789 in the Council Chambers in Quebec approved a resolution which was forwarded to Britain that indicated he desired to put a mark of honour upon the families who had adhered to the Unity of the Empire, and joined the Royal Standard in America before the Treaty of Separation in the year 1783. (2) Accompanying the resolution to London to be presented to the King, was attached a form of militia roll for the western districts to discriminate the families before mentioned which included the following:

"N.B. Those Loyalists who have adhered to the unity of the Empire, and joined the Royal Standard before the Treaty of Separation in the year 1783, and all their children and their descendants by either sex, are to be distinguished by the following capitals, affixed to their names: U.E. alluding to their great principle the unity of the Empire."

In 1897, The United Empire Loyalist Association of Ontario, predecessor to the United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada, was led by George Sterling Ryerson, "physician, teacher, militia and army officer, politician, author, and businessman". (3) As President he decided to secure official authorization for a special badge and insignia.

"In 1897 the Association sent a petition to the Queen requesting royal sanction. Pointing out that 'it was the intention of Her Majesty's Royal Predecessor, George III, that the Petitioners Ancestors and their descendants should be accorded a special mark of honour of a permanent and enduring character whereby they should at all times be distinguished from other settlers in Canada,' the association suggested that the queen's jubilee 'should be the occasion of the more complete carrying out of His late Majesty's intention and be marked by the conferring upon the Petitioners and those whom they represent a further and more enduring mark of honour.'" (4)

Ryerson travelled to England and attempted to meet with the British Prime Minister. He was unsuccessful in seeing him but did meet with his under- secretary who indicated he had never heard of the Loyalists and could not see any reason why the state should acknowledge their existence. Further to this the Colonial Office contacted the Governor General of Canada, Lord Aberdeen, to determine the position of Canadian Prime Minister Wilfred Laurier.

Apparently sensitive to anti-imperialist sentiment in his native province of Quebec, Laurier advised any action on the matter would have to wait until a 'more propitious season.' The colonial secretary, Lewis Harcourt, informed Ryerson that to revive a colonial order - in - council that had been dormant for more than a century would be 'impolitic'.

It was made clear to Ryerson that the British Colonial Office would not authorize the Association's badge without prior approval of the Canadian government. Nonetheless, he was not dismayed in his support for the Loyalist heritage and continued to be active. Letters Patent incorporating the United Empire Loyalists' Association of Ontario were granted by the Province of Ontario on December 1, 1897. Ryerson was the first President of the Association. He is also known as the founder of the Canadian branch of the Red Cross. (5)

Over the years as there have been political changes the United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada has evolved as can be seen by changes in the purposes of the Association. Describing what is important to recognizing the Loyalist heritage has changed. The concept of Unity of The Empire which the letters U.E. referred to and associated loyalty to the Crown was included in the language of the Association when it was founded.

The United Empire Loyalists of Ontario became incorporated on May 27, 1914 in a statute of the Dominion of Canada and changed its' name to "The United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada". (6) Its' connection to the former British Empire was well noted as its' first purpose included "to perpetuate this spirit of loyalty to the Empire".

There were five purposes being:

(a) to united 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;

(b) to preserve the history and traditions of that important epoch in Canadian history by rescuing from oblivion the history and traditions of the loyalist families before it is too late;

(c) to collect together in a suitable place the portraits, documents, books, weapons, flags, monuments, memorials, and all other articles relating to the United Empire Loyalists which are now scattered throughout Canada and elsewhere;

(d) to publish an historical and genealogical journal or annual transactions;

(e) to erect, construct, and repair buildings, monuments, memorials, and also to purchase real estate and other things that may be considered desirable to perpetuate the memory of the United Empire Loyalists.

The stated purposes of the United Empire Loyalists Association of Canada have gone through a number of changes. By 2002, with the passing of the British Empire and its replacement by the Commonwealth the reference to ‘loyalty to the Empire’ was removed. (7) The sixth item in the mission statement included “defending and promoting... the Constitutional Monarchy, the Commonwealth...” The entire mission statement was:

“To preserve, promote and celebrate the history and traditions of the Loyalist epoch in Canadian history by:

1) Uniting in a Canadian association the descendants of those families who, during the American Revolutionary War, sacrificed all to retain their loyalty to the British crown.

2) Collecting and cataloguing portraits, documents, books, weapons, flags, clothing and other artifacts relating to the United Empire Loyalists.

3) Publishing an historical and family research journal, books and newsletters as well as educational resource materials and encouraging scholarship and publication about Loyalist history and demography.

4) Erecting, constructing and repairing buildings, monuments and memorials in Canada to perpetuate the memory of the United Empire Loyalists.

5) Increasing public awareness of the Loyalist contributions to Canada and preserving, defending, and promoting Loyalist heritage within Canadian society, by developing and participating in projects and activities which honour and celebrate the memory of the United Empire Loyalists.

6) 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.”

The most dramatic change in the purpose of the United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada appeared in 2015 with the removal of support and promotion of the Constitutional Monarchy and Commonwealth. (8) The current mission statement adopted also now includes new wording that specifically includes support for collecting genealogical data in Item 2 and in Item 4 provides for encouraging research through scholarship support. It reads:

“Our Mission is to preserve, promote and celebrate the history and traditions of the United Empire Loyalists.

We will accomplish our Mission by:

1) Uniting, in a Canadian-based association, descendants of families who remained loyal to the British crown during the American Revolutionary War, as well as persons interested in the Loyalist era and early Canadian history.

2) Supporting the collection and cataloguing of documents, books, artefacts, memorabilia and genealogical data relating to the United Empire Loyalists.

3) Facilitating and publishing research related to the United Empire Loyalists in the form of historical and family research journals, books, newsletters and digital media.

4) Providing Loyalist education resource materials and encouraging research through scholarship support.

5) Assisting in the construction and preservation of Loyalist monuments and memorials in Canada.

6) Participating in projects and activities which honour and celebrate the legacy of the United Empire Loyalists.”

The recognition of the importance of genealogical data also is reflective of another change which occurred. Originally to become a member of the Association required simply a form signed by two existing members who vouched for you as a descendant of a United Empire Loyalist. However, now and for many years Branches of the Association have genealogists who review detailed forms and there are Dominion Genealogists who review applications.

The plate pictured below shows the badge of the United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada. It proclaims enduring loyalty to the Crown with the words "Loyal Then - Loyal Now". The badge consists of a wreath made up of red maple leaves and oak leaves and acorns. The maple leaves represent Canada while the oak leaves and acorns are a long held symbol of loyalty and fidelity to the monarchy. In the centre is the Cypher G III R, signifying Georgius Tertius Rex, the sovereign to whom the Loyalists gave their devotion and their service. It along with the Coat of Arms were approved at a time when the stated purpose of the Association included loyalty to the Empire as described in an article in 1972 by Conrad Swan, York Herald of Arms-in-Ordinary to Her Majesty The Queen and Honorary Vice-President, UELAC. (9)



Notes:

* This article was completed on April 7, 2018 by Brian McConnell, UE. He is a Trustee of the United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada and President of the Nova Scotia Branch.

(1) "UE and Me" published in Loyalists Trails, October, 2014 newsletter of the United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada

<http://www.uelac.org/events/UE-and-me-by-Brian-McConnell.pdf>

(2) Library and Archives Canada RG1 L1 Vol. 18, p. 110

(3) Peter E. Paul Dembski, "RYERSON, GEORGE ANSEL STERLING," in Dictionary of Canadian Biography, vol. 15, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003, accessed April 7, 2018, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/ryerson_george_ansel_sterling_15E.html.

(4) Norman Knowles, "Inventing the Loyalists - The Ontario Loyalist Tradition & the Creation of Usable Pasts", University of Toronto Press, 1997, page 153.

(5) "Loyally Yours - 100 Years of the UELAC", compiled by Frederick H. Hayward and printed by GlobalGenealogy.com Inc., 2014

(6) "The Law Times", Vol. 138, March 13, 1915, p. 443

(7) Mission Statement of United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada adopted at the Annual General Meeting June 8, 2002. <http://www.uelac.org/mission.php>

(8) Mission Statement of United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada adopted at the Annual General Meeting May 30, 2015. <http://www.uelac.org/mission.php>

(9) "The Armorial Bearings Of The United Empire Loyalists' Association Of Canada" by Conrad Swan, Loyalist Gazette, Vol. X, No. 2, Autumn, 1972

<http://www.uelac.org/UELAC-history/Armorial-Bearings-Gazette-1972.pdf>