

**I**t is indeed an honour to be asked to address the subject “What is a Loyalist” at the fourteenth UEL Day Ceremony of Remembrance and Honour. Since Ontario’s UEL Day came into existence late in 1997 with the passage of Harry Danford’s Private Member Bill, the Hamilton Branch has continued to draw attention to the United Empire Loyalist heritage we enjoy. Indeed, this unique monument has witnessed many more gatherings than the recent 14 since it was first unveiled on 24 May 1929.

If asked to define “What is a Loyalist”, most of us would interpret the question as an opportunity to talk in generalities about United Empire Loyalists, recounting the travails of this early group of refugees arriving in a land of veritable virgin forest. Mention would be made of the fact that they were an ethnic mix fleeing urban regions such as Boston or Philadelphia or Charleston, or perhaps the more rural areas of the seaboard colonies, or even the wilderness west of the Appalachians and along the Mohawk River in Upper New York. While much is made of the variety of religions and languages among the early settlers, these United Empire Loyalist embodied the collection of European settlers in the 13 colonies, the First Nations Allies as well as the Blacks, both Free and enslaved. Perhaps the answer would also include reference to the refugee centres such as New York City, Sorel, and Montreal. No doubt mention would be made that the greater number settled initially in the Atlantic Region while approximately ten thousand created new homesteads in what was to become Lower and Upper Canada. While the result wasn’t exactly a definition, Stephen Davidson wrote an excellent article in 2008 for Loyalist Trails emphasizing the differences between the United Empire Loyalists who settled in the Maritimes and those who settled in Central Canada. It would be hard to simplify the characteristics of the United Empire Loyalists any further.

The dedication plaque for this monument has a simple explanation of “What is a Loyalist”

*This monument is dedicated to the memory of the United Empire Loyalists, who after the Declaration of Independence, came into British North America from the seceded American colonies and who, with faith and fortitude, and under great pioneering difficulties, largely laid the foundations of this Canadian nation as an integral part of the British Empire.*

*Neither confiscation of their property nor merciless persecution of their kinsmen in revolt, nor the galling chains of imprisonment could break their spirits or divorce them from a loyalty almost without parallel.*

In summary of the ideas expressed so far, the guidelines for proving United Empire Loyalists ancestry have three foci – 1. loyalty to the crown 2. residency in the American Colonies and 3. settled in present day Canada. However, beginning in the early seventies, UELAC formed a committee called *Nomenclature* that sought to establish more specific characteristics. That work continues to grapple with dates, residency and proof of loyalty.

Earlier this month, Todd Braisted, founder of the *On-Line Institute for Advanced Loyalist Studies* and one of our Honorary Vice Presidents, presented an interesting paper at a Humanities Conference at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton. He sought to clarify the number of soldiers whose names appear on the muster roles of both sides during the Revolution. It is possible that only a few of those soldiers may have been those who chose to fight for the crown when faced with imminent imprisonment or death. Is LOYALTY displayed by a point in time or by evidence of commitment? How do the members of the UELAC view their own loyalty to an organization created to honour these early Canadians? How is commitment different from loyalty?

The Mission Statement of UELAC calls members *To enrich the lives of Canadians through fostering public awareness of our national history, and, in particular, of the United Empire Loyalists and their contributions to Canada, while also celebrating their memory and perpetuating their heritage as an*

*integral part of the Canadian identity.* Indeed, it is the commitment of so many of our members that ensures the attainment of that mission.

At a time when we honour our ancestors, we also need to take time to honour those whose sense of loyalty is more than a passing reference to the benefits of living under a constitutional monarchy and the rule of law. We need to be reminded of those who have identified the burial sites of the United Empire Loyalists, restored the cemeteries of our ancestors or fought to protect the cemeteries from encroaching developers. We need to be reminded of our members who over the years, even decades, have dedicated their volunteer time to educating the branch, our youth and the community about the place of Loyalist heritage in Canada's history. We need to be reminded that UELAC has benefited from those whose leadership qualities continue like that Eveready bunny to keep our Branches, Regions and Association vibrant and growing.

As a Dominion President of UELAC, I had the opportunity to recognize both the service and commitment of many of our members:

*John Chard*, President UELAC 1996-1968 and responsible for the restoration of the Loyalist Gazette in 63 – still a delegate at the recent AGM

*Elizabeth Hancocks*, Dominion Genealogist now collectively for 24 years

*Doug Grant*, recipient of the UELAC Dorchester Award 2011, served as Dominion President 2004-2006 and continues to develop the Loyalist directory, edit the Loyalist Trails and Executive Notes and has also accepted the challenges of a third cycle as President of the Gov. Simcoe Branch. He has yet to retire from the real world.

*Todd Braisted* first spoke at conference in 1989. Operating from his position in New Jersey, his presence as a re-enactor and speaker still reflect the Loyalties of our ancestors.

At the Recent Show and Tell meeting, the commitment of two our members were implied. *Irene McCrimmon* contributed Branch leadership, established the UELAC Scholarship, developed Loyalist family histories for Grand River and Hamilton and recently was awarded a 35 year pin for volunteer service in Ontario.

The name of *David Faux* first appears in the Fall issue of 1978 LG as a speaker at the Gov. Simcoe Branch on pioneer families along the Grand River. His leadership in the development of family histories and preservation of burial grounds is well documented.

I can hardly leave this section without acknowledging *Gloria Oakes*, whose efforts as the Membership Chair for the Hamilton Branch for more than a decade would take no backseat to anyone.

I have mentioned these seven individuals only to illustrate or underline the two obvious qualities of loyalty - service and commitment - two qualities that are also noted in individual research on the United Empire Loyalists. The commitment and service of our ancestors brought them to our country. The commitment and service of our members continues to honour our ancestors and strengthen our mission.

What is a Loyalist then?

It is a person whose loyalty to a cause is clearly displayed through commitment and service.

As we remember and honour our ancestors, let all of us remember our need to commit and serve.

Fred H. Hayward