

## United Empire Loyalist Day 2010 Address

By Nathan Tidridge – June 19 2010

I have only been a teacher of history for a short time, but over the past years I have developed an appreciation – a passion – for Canadian and local history. Written out of the curriculum during the Mike Harris years, local history (the histories of our communities and province) are no longer talked about in classrooms unless by the personal choice of the instructors. This is a tragic development because making personal connections for our students is the key to effectively teaching Canadian history. The great Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor speaks of touch-points when he describes the importance of identity. Touch points. Those individual moments that highlight for a student a past in a way that makes it tangible for them. Events that personally connect us to the foundations of Canada – events they can hang on to and say “This is who we are.”

Loyalist Day is one of these touch points where we can stop and stand here, reflecting on what the loyalist ancestors did for this country. This day re-injects our collective memory with the stories of a people that changed this region into the Ontario we now recognize – as our provincial motto attests “Loyal she began, loyal she remains.” By crossing into British North America, loyalists ensured a way of life was preserved that included the development of a uniquely Canadian constitutional monarchy.

As a teacher, what can I do to keep these events fresh in the minds of those born in an age where e-mail is as common place using a telephone? We live amongst the most connected generation in human history – in a heartbeat we can send a message to friends, family and the prime minister of Canada from our cell phone, and yet we are part of a generation becoming more disconnected from our history and local communities.

My home is Flamborough, a community that was dramatically shaped by the Loyalist settlers and their descendants. We are surrounded by their names and memorials to their industry and perseverance: Dundas Street, the mills of Greensville, Greensville itself, Carlisle, Cootes Paradise, Joseph Brant, Sophia Pooley, Sir Allan McNab. I have found that once my students feel a connection to these places, they start to engage themselves in the larger story of Ontario and Canada. However, it is an uphill battle.

The only time that Loyalists themselves are mentioned in high school is within the Canadian History, Identity and Culture course which is an elective Grade 12 academic course – of a population of around 1400 students, only 60 a year will choose to enrol.

I also have a real interest in how government is taught in this country, particularly when it concerns our constitutional monarchy (an institution that was entrenched with the arrival of loyalist ancestors). Queen Elizabeth II, as a descendant of His Majesty King George III, holds the title “Queen of Canada” – she has since 1953. For six years I have taught the Civics course at Waterdown District High School, and throughout this time have discovered some very frightening facts that I would like to pass on to you:

- Civics (CHV20) is taught to Ontario students in Grade 10
- Civics is ½ credit, “open level” course, meaning that students of various academic abilities are all placed into the same class.
- Textbooks are written by private companies and sent to Department Heads across the province (typically Civics is taught with the History Department, but I have heard it has

- been administered by Business Departments as well). It is up to the various departments to decide on the textbooks they want to use.
- The textbooks are uniformly inaccurate. Concerning the Crown, the available textbooks are completely destructive. Combating the lack of real information concerning our form of government, my colleagues and I at Waterdown District High School wrote our own, online textbook ([www.waterdowncivics.org](http://www.waterdowncivics.org)) – schools across Hamilton are now opting to use our textbook rather than the ones promoted by Nelson and McGraw-Hill!
  - There is no mention of the Crown in the CHC2D (Grade 10 Canadian History – the only mandatory history course in Ontario) curriculum or textbooks.
  - Searching the curriculum documents for Civics, when I type in the keywords “Monarchy,” “Queen,” “Governor General,” “Lieutenant Governor,” “prime minister” or “British North America Act” the search engine produces NO results – they cannot be found within the text.
  - The Ontario Curriculum defines Parliament as “*An elected assembly responsible for passing legislation and granting the right to levy taxes. In Canada, the federal legislature consists of the sovereign’s representative, the Senate, and the House of Commons.*”

Not only is the Curriculum’s definition of Parliament wrong, it actually undermines the very idea of responsible government in Canada. It emphasizes an American expression of democracy – something that the Loyalists felt so passionately against that they got up and left the Thirteen Colonies for lands to the north. With this in mind, it should not surprise us that the following statistics were reported by the Historica-Dominion Institute in 2008:

- **51% of Canadians believe that the Prime Minister is directly elected by the people.** This can be seen as evidence of the influence of the American media concerning the need to have a direct mandate by the people in order to be democratic – an idea that does not work in our system of government which believes in responsible government and maintaining confidence in the House of Commons.
- **42% believe that the prime minister of Canada is our Head of State, while 33% think the Governor General serves in this role. Only 24% correctly identified The Queen as our Head of State,** highlighting a crisis in how politically savvy our society is.

A classic example of misunderstanding was highlighted during the political events of December 2008 when the Governor General (as the personal representative of our Sovereign) prorogued parliament on the recommendation of her prime minister. Newspapers and other media plastered the country with headlines reading “crisis” and “coup” – a complete misunderstanding of how our system operates. In fact, our constitutional monarchy was doing exactly what it was designed to do – it was also being fully democratic.

In two weeks Her Majesty is touring Canada for the 22<sup>nd</sup> time – reaffirming a connection that thousands of Loyalists believed in so much that they fled the American Republic so many years ago. Their migration also helped build the foundations of our present constitutional monarchy – an institution that needs to be taught more effectively to Canadians. Two weeks ago the Institution of Intergovernmental Relations at Queen's University hosted a policy conference entitled *The Crown in Canadian Governance*. One of the concerns expressed by the people gathered there was that there currently exists a vacuum in the public consciousness when we consider the Crown (our fundamental institution that is at the very heart of our political and legal institutions – the “ultimate touch point” as it were).

We need to educate people about our touch points – filling the voids in our local, provincial and national histories. Our curriculums need to be revisited, and groups such as the Hamilton Branch of the United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada applauded for their many efforts in bringing history to life (Specifically, we need to encourage projects such yours that place plaques at known Loyalist cemeteries across the city).

To forget the past, we destabilize our present – this can have devastating results when we look at such venerable institutions as the Canadian Parliament.

We stand here at the Loyalist Monument in Hamilton, looking out to the rest of our great country. This is one of those times where we pause, reflect and head off with purpose and focus.

Let's go.



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*Nathan was the recipient of the 2009 Premier's Award for Excellence in Teaching.*

*Outside of teaching, Nathan is especially interested in Canadian Constitutional Monarchy, local history and Canadian identity. The Monarchist League of Canada has had his attention for the past 15 years. In this time, he has published with the League and managed their educational program.*

*Nathan is also working on a book for publishing in 2011 regarding the Canadian Constitutional Monarchy.*

*Pat Blackburn UE,  
Hamilton Branch.  
Photo – Ray Cummins*