

***Nova Scotia's First Multi-Racial Refugees -  
The United Empire Loyalists***

By Brian McConnell UE\*

Located on the scenic waterfront in the Town of Digby, Nova Scotia is a Cairn dedicated to the 1200 United Empire Loyalists who landed near there in June, 1783. It was dedicated by John E. Shaffner, Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia.



**Loyalist Cairn in Digby, N.S.**

The Cairn reads:

LOYALIST PARK

NEAR THIS SITE IN JUNE 1783  
1200 UNITED EMPIRE LOYALIST SETTLERS  
LANDED UNDER THE PROTECTION OF  
REAR ADMIRAL ROBERT DIGBY

IN RECOGNITION OF THIS EVENT  
THIS PARK IS DESIGNATED AS LOYALIST PARK  
THE WALKWAY TO THE LEFT AS ADMIRAL'S WALK  
DEDICATED BY  
THE HONOURABLE JOHN E. SHAFFNER  
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR OF NOVA SCOTIA  
6 AUGUST 1983

During the years between 1775 and 1784 what is now Canada received approximately 50,000 refugees from the territory of the United States, with the majority as many as 35,000 coming to Nova Scotia ( which then included New Brunswick), with another 10,000 going to the old province of Quebec. It overwhelmed the old population and led the British government to create two new colonies of New Brunswick and Cape Breton Island, and eventually the Province of Upper Canada (Ontario).(1)

Who were these refugees and why did they come to Canada? This year marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Empire Loyalist Association of Canada. It was formed in 1914 and followed upon a provincial Loyalist organization which existed in Ontario.(2) Its Mission Statement adopted includes “...increasing public awareness of the Loyalist contributions to Canada...”

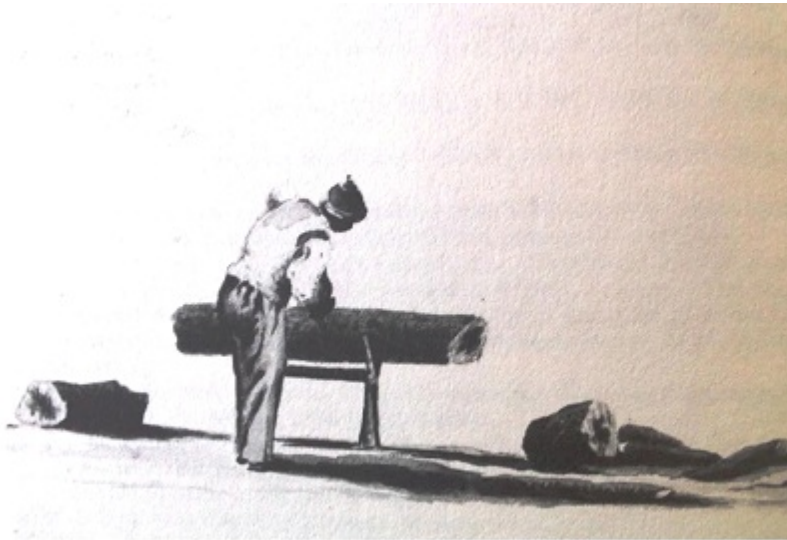
### **Mission Statement of the United Empire Loyalist Association of Canada**

*1. 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.*

There are currently 27 branches of the United Empire Loyalists Association in Canada, including the Nova Scotia branch. Branches range in size from less than 50 to several hundred. Membership is open to anyone who is interested in participating in its activities.

The Loyalists who arrived in Canada were refugees. Through the conflict which has become known as the American Revolution many had lost all or most of their personal possessions. Some called them British Tories. However, they came from many backgrounds including German, Dutch, Scottish, Irish, English, and religious minorities like the Quakers and Mennonites. As well there were native people like the Mohawks who went north to Canada and different racial groups like the approximately 3,000 Black Loyalists who came to Nova Scotia.(3) The Loyalists were Nova Scotia's first Multi- Racial refugees.

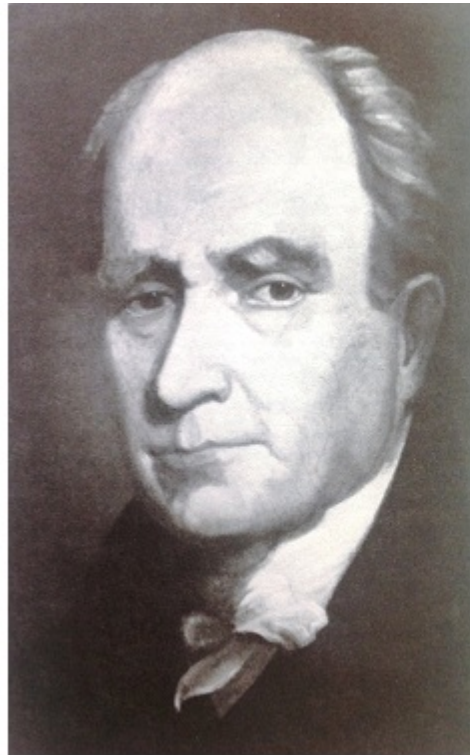


Painting of a Black Loyalist in Shelburne, N.S. (4)

It has been written about the Loyalists that up to July 4, 1776 and the Declaration of Independence the Loyalists:

**“were every bit as American as their Whig( later known as Patriot) brethren. They feared social change and any increase in the power of the democratic element in society, but one looks in vain for Loyalists who were opposed to Liberty or the rights of Englishmen...The quarrel was over the mode of opposition; the Loyalists would not admit violence and believed the future of their country would be ruined by revolution and independence. It was not a case of colonial rights or ‘passive obedience’ but rather whether the colonies’ future well-being could be best assured within the empire or without. The Loyalists had a fundamental trust in Britain, the Whigs (later called Patriots) a fundamental distrust.”(5)**

A majority of the Loyalists were farmers or landowners and therefore rural residents like James Moody from New Jersey who served with a Loyalist militia during the conflict and later settled in Weymouth, Nova Scotia, engaged in shipbuilding, and was elected and served 12 years in the Nova Scotia House of Assembly.(6) There were also artisans, merchants, servants, shopkeepers, innkeepers, printers, like John Howe, father of Nova Scotia's 1<sup>st</sup> Premier Joseph Howe, who sailed from Boston to Halifax in 1776, labourers, seamen, lawyers, teachers, doctors, clergymen, and office holders like Abraham Cuyler, the former Mayor of Albany, New York who helped lead a group to Sydney, Cape Breton in 1784.(7)



**Loyalist John Howe, father of Nova Scotia Premier Joseph Howe(8)**

The Loyalists came from all places in the colonies. The greatest numbers were from New York, followed by South Carolina, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Connecticut, Virginia, Georgia, Maryland, Rhode Island, and Delaware. The majority moved northward to Nova Scotia and Canada, however some fled to England, Bermuda, and the West Indies.

NOTES:

\* This article was prepared by Brian McConnell UE on August 2, 2014. To contact him email: [brianm564@gmail.com](mailto:brianm564@gmail.com)

(1) See “The Loyalists - Revolution, Exile, Settlement”, by Christopher Moore, Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2011, and “The Good Americans: The Loyalists in the American Revolution” by Wallace Brown, New York, Morrow, 1969;

(2) See website of United Empire Loyalists’ Association of Canada at: <http://www.uelac.org>

(3) See “The Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone 1783 - 1870”, by James W. St. G Walker, New York: Africana Publishing, 1976;

(4) See “King’s Bounty: A History of Early Shelburne, Nova Scotia”, by Marion Robertson, Nova Scotia Museum, 1978;

(5) See “ The King’s Friends: The Composition and Motives of American Loyalist Claimants”. by Wallace Brown, Providence, Rhode Island: Brown University Press, 1965;

(6) See “So Obstinate Loyal, James Moody 1744 - 1809” by Susan Burgess Shenstone, McGill - Queen’s University Press, 2000;

(7) See “ Eleven Exiles, Accounts of Loyalists in the American Revolution”, edited by Phyllis R. Blackely and John N. Grant, Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1982;

(8) See “The Speeches and Public Letters of Joseph Howe”, vol I, Halifax: Chronicle, 1909