

“UE” and Me

By Brian Edward McConnell UE, B.A.(Hons.), LLB *



When I recently received in the mail from the Toronto Branch of the United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada the UE Pin I purchased and put in on my jacket it gave me a sense of pride and accomplishment. It reminded me of the challenges faced by my Loyalist ancestors when they were forced to leave their homes in New York State in the 1770s, to fight in the American Revolution, and subsequent resettlement north in present day Ontario. They and their descendants with others built a democracy in Canada that has become an inspiration to much of the world.

Putting on the Pin I also thought of the years of research that were inspired from family stories passed down about Loyalist relatives. My maternal great grandmother, Ellie Umphrey, pictured below, told her daughter, who passed on accounts to my mother, about the family having to flee New York State during the American Revolution. In the conflict, my 5th great grandfather, James Humphrey, joined Jessup's Rangers, a provincial unit of the British military. To confirm my Loyalist ancestry I searched countless records over many years to obtain the necessary proofs. (1)



Maternal Great Grandmother, Ellie Umphrey

The history of the letters UE as appear on my Pin have been traced to 1778 when at the suggestion of General Gage of the British Army, a society was formed in Boston, named the Loyalist Association. It had for its objective "The Unity of the Empire". From this organization had been derived the insignia, U.E.(2)

Lord Dorchester, the Governor of Quebec, in a meeting of Council held on Monday, November 9, 1789 brought up the authority for the use of the letters U.E. Order of Council No. 24 was passed to place an honour on those families that had remained loyal during the American Revolution. It approved the use of the letters U.E. by Loyalist families and including 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 a covering letter which Lord Dorchester sent with the Order to London, he explained: " Care had been taken to reward the spirit of loyalty and industry, to extend and transmit it to future generations."

Today use of the initials is not common place but is still used by some who have become aware of their Loyalist heritage and confirm their ancestral connection. Perhaps two of the most prominent Canadians to use it in recent times have been Rt. Hon. Ellen Louks Fairclough P.C., D.C. , F.C.A., L.L.D. F.R.C.G.S., D.H. U.E. (3) and The Honourable Peter Andrew Stewart Milliken, P.C, U.E, B.A., M.A, LL.B (4). Fairclough was a Chartered Accountant who served on the city council of Hamilton, Ontario for five years before being elected to the Canadian House of Commons from 1950 - 1963. She advocated women's rights including equal pay for equal work and while in government was chosen the first female member of the Cabinet.

Peter Milliken graduated from Queen's University, Dalhousie University, and Oxford before becoming a lawyer in Kingston, Ontario. He was elected Member of Parliament from Kingston and the Islands in 1985 and served until his retirement in 2011. In 2001 he was elected Speaker of the House of Commons and held that position until he retired in 2011. His Loyalists ancestors came from the Mohawk Valley of New York State. He is an Honorary President of the United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada. (5)

Recognition of Loyalist roots includes many things in addition to knowing the history of the UE initials. Several provinces and cities have designated a 'Loyalist Day' as recognition of the importance the more than 50,000 Loyalists who came to Canada as refugees played in the development of the country. (6) They were the first large influx of multi-ethnic immigrants. It is an opportunity for those of Loyalist heritage as well as other Canadians to take time to appreciate this past.

In some parts of Canada, the signage evidences the Loyalists History. In Nova Scotia, particularly in Digby and Shelburne, two Towns that were founded with the settlement of Loyalists, this can be seen.



Old Loyalist Cemetery on Warwick Street in Digby



Sign at Entrance to Shelburne founded in 1783 by United Empire Loyalists

Although I now wear my UE Pin with pride, there is no special place today according to the Canadian government for those who bear the UE designation. This is partly because during the past 100 years Canada has moved away from recognizing hereditary honours. In 1919, the House of Commons passed the so-called 'Nickle Resolution' which directed the practice of bestowing titles of honour by foreign governments on Canadians be discontinued. There was a brief revival of the foreign honours system during the administration of Prime Minister R. B. Bennet and several knighthoods and lesser distinctions were awarded in 1934-5. In 1968 the government published "regulations respecting the acceptance and wearing by Canadians of Commonwealth and foreign orders, decorations and medals", and in 1988 it adopted a resolution that declared the Canadian government would not approve an order or decoration that carries with it a title of honour or any implication of precedence or privilege..."(7)

A letter from an official with an office of the Canadian government that refers to the letters UE was posted on the internet group Rootsweb regarding the Subject: Post-Nominal Letters on September 17, 1999. (8) It which stated:

Dear Mr. Eamer:

Thank you for your email dated September 7, 1999, regarding post-nominal letters UE.

The designation UE never has been part of the national honours system in Canada. As you are aware, the designation was proposed in late 1789 as a mark of honour by Lord Dorchester, then Governor-in-Chief of Quebec. It was proposed to be borne by Loyalists and their descendants. The use of the mark of honour was never made official by King George III, but the initial UE rapidly came to be used as an administrative convenience, to ensure that Loyalists and their descendants enjoyed certain privileges when receiving grants for Crown lands.

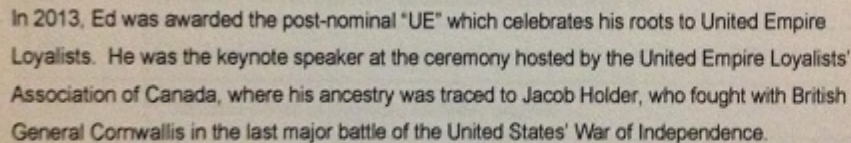
Had George III, or one of his successors, subsequently made the designation an official one, it would now contravene national honours policy, which does not provide for hereditary honours of this type. In these circumstances, the genealogical registries kept by the United Empire Loyalist Association of Canada and the procedures which support their creation and maintenance probably offers the best approach for preservation of the Loyalist heritage in a particular family. You may also wish to petition for a coat-or-arms, which, if granted, can include elements honouring a Loyalist heritage. You may forward your request at the following address:

*The Canadian Heraldic Authority
The Chancellery, Rideau Hall
1 Sussex Drive
Ottawa, Canada K1A 0A1*

Yours sincerely,

*Marie - Paule Thorn
Honours Information Officer*

Despite the position of the government of Canada the use of the letters UE is still found in present times as in the case of Ed Holder, Member of Parliament for London West in Ontario, from 2008 to the present. On his website it states that “In 2013 Ed was awarded the post-nominal “UE” which celebrates his roots to United Empire Loyalists. He was the keynote speaker at the ceremony hosted by the United Empire Loyalists’ Association of Canada, where his ancestry was traced to Jacob Holder, who fought with General Cornwallis in the last major battle of the United States War of Independence.” (9)



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Several Branches of the United Empire Loyalists’ Association of Canada make reference to the “UE” on their website. The Bay of Quinte one states: “Once you have joined the Bay of Quinte Branch as a member, you may wish to document your Loyalist connection and apply for your Certificate as a descendant of a United Empire Loyalist, and as a result the applicant may use the post-nominal letters “UE” after their name, an honour that dates back to Lorch Dorchester’s Order in Council in 1789, conferring recognition of the service of the Loyalists in their defence of “The Unity of the Empire.” (10) The Vancouver and Hamilton Branches also refer to the UE on their websites as does the Dominion Office of the United Empire Loyalists’ Association of Canada. It is further mentioned in educational material produced by the Dominion Office and attached as Appendix A.

The UE initials were begun by Lord Dorchester when he was Governor of Quebec in 1789 and it was instituted in the documents of the day. (11) He obviously believed at the time he had the power to do it and others did as well in carrying out his Order. It was referred to in documents concerning Land holdings as well as other correspondence related to the Loyalists. In this way it can be contrasted with more recent honours awarded by foreign governments. For me who enjoys and appreciates my Loyalist ancestry this is enough to wear with pride my UE Pin. Its’ acceptance of useage by Canadian leaders like Rt. Hon. Ellen Louks Fairclough, The Honourable Peter Andrew Stewart Milliken, and Ed Holder, M.P. gives me further satisfaction that I am not alone in this appreciation and recognition of Loyalist heritage.

NOTES

* This article was completed on October 25, 2014. Brian Edward McConnell was born in Ottawa, Ontario, graduated from Queen's University in Kingston with a Honours Major in History, and in Law from Dalhousie University in Halifax. His Loyalist ancestry has been traced to James Humphrey, who served with the Jessup's Rangers during the American Revolution. To contact him please email: brianm564@gmail.com

(1) See Article "James Humphrey - Loyalist soldier in Jessup's Rangers" at <http://brian.mcconnell.tripod.com/JH.pdf>

(2) See Article "Data Relating to the Formation of the United Empire Loyalists' of Canada" in Manitoba Loyalist Lines Newsletter, June 2010

(3) See "Celebrating Women's Achievements - The Rt. Hon. Ellen Louks Fairclough", Library and Archives Canada at <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/women/030001-1316-e.html>

(4) See "The Honourable Peter Andrew Stewart Milliken" at <http://equitassociety.ca/advisory-council>

(5) See "United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada - National Honorary Officers" at <http://www.uelac.org/Honours-Recognition/Honours-Recognition.php>

(6) For example see: "United Empire Loyalists' Day Act, 1997 (Ontario) at http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/statutes/english/elaws_statutes_97u42_e.htm

Also for Saint John, New Brunswick see: <http://www.uelac.org/UELAC-history/Loyalist-Day-New-Brunswick.php>

Loyalist Day is also officially celebrated in Saskatchewan, British Columbia, and Manitoba. In Nova Scotia during Founders Day celebrations the role of the Loyalists is recognized in Shelburne and Digby.

In "The Loyalists - Revolution, Exile, Settlement" by Christopher Moore, Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, Inc., 1984, p. 9, the author notes "The war that created the United States drove at least fifty thousand colonial Americans into exile for the sake of their beliefs. Most of the refugees came to Canada."

(7) Nickle Resolution, The Canadian Encyclopedia at <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/nickle-resolution/>

(8) See: Rootsweb: United Empire Loyalist - L - Archives, May 14, 2001 at <http://archiver.rootsweb.ancestry.com/th/read/UNITED-EMPIRE-LOYALIST/2001-05/0989875861>

(9) Ed Holder, MP, Biography at <http://www.edholdermp.ca/bio/index-fullbio.htm>

(10) See “Bay of Quinte Branch, UELAC - Obtaining UEL Certificates” at <http://uel.ca/united-empire-loyalists/obtaining-uel-certificates/>

Also see “The United Empire Loyalists’ Association of Canada Vancouver Branch - “UE - The Mark of Honour” at <http://www.uelac.org/Vancouver/markofhonour.php>

In the UELAC - Handbook for Branch Education Committees page 2009 - 8 entitled “Mark of Honour” states that “Today, if one can prove that he or she is a descendant of one of those First Loyalists, he or she can use those initials (UE) after their name. This is Canada’s only hereditary title.”

(11) For further information on Lord Dorchester’s Resolution see “United Empire Loyalists - A Guide to Tracing Loyalist Ancestors in Upper Canada” by Brenda Dougall Merriman, Global Heritage Press, 2006

APPENDIX A

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MARK OF HONOUR

Based on material from Loyalist Lineages, Toronto Branch – UELAC

After the United Empire Loyalists settled on their new lands, Lord Dorchester, Governor-In-Chief of British North America decided to honour those who had lost virtually everything they owned.

On November 9, 1789, in Council at Quebec City, he gave particular recognition to the "First Loyalists" by differentiating them from other Loyalist and settlers as defined below:

U.E.

Late Loyalists – Those who came later, attracted by cheap land rather than for reasons of loyalty.

Treasury Loyalist – Those sponsored by the British Treasury Board in the 1790s after they left the colonies.

Simcoe Loyalists – Those who came to Upper Canada when Lt. Gov. Simcoe opened lands for development.

Associated Loyalist/Incorporated Loyalists – Mostly civilian Loyalists who formed themselves into groups to journey to Canada and settle there after the American Revolution.

Regular British and German soldiers who were considered to be "Military Claimants."

The Dorchester Resolution approved by Council:

1. Defined the U.E. Loyalists as those "who had adhered to the Unity of Empire and joined the Royal Standard in America (publicly showed support for the British) before the Treaty of Separation in the year 1783.
2. "put a Mark of Honour upon the Families" of the U.E. Loyalists.
3. Approved the granting by the Land Boards of 200 acres of land to the sons and daughters of the U.E. Loyalists.

Accompanying the resolution to be laid before King George III in London was the following:

"N.B. Those Loyalists who have adhered to the Unity of the Empire, and joined the Royal Standard (in America) 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 the names:

U.E.

Alluding to their great principal "The Unity of the Empire."

In the covering letter, Lord Dorchester explained: "Care has been taken to reward the spirit of loyalty and industry, to extend and transmit it to future generations." Today, if one can prove that he or she is a descendant of one of those First Loyalists, he or she can use those initials after their name. This is Canada's only hereditary title.

