

UNITED LOYALIST DAY - UELAC PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS
HAMILTON ONTARIO

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“Just imagine that you are awakened tonight by someone in your family who says to you, ‘Put the things you treasure most in one small bag that you can carry. And be ready in a few minutes. We have to leave our home and we will have to make it to the nearest border.’ What mountains would you need to cross? How would you feel? How would you manage?”

These words spoken by Mary Ann Schwalbe, Founding Director of the Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children, established in 1989, could very well be describing the experience of many of our Loyalist ancestors.

Perhaps the image of Loyalists as refugees does not attract the same attention as that of ‘conquering heroes’. The reality of 70,000 Loyalists leaving the thirteen newly independent states, with considerable loss to property and family is difficult to celebrate. And what future did they face? After the weariness, the sickness, and the pain came the moment to re-build and acknowledge the possibility of a promising future in a new land.

The grandmother of Sir Leonard Tilley, one of the fathers of Confederation, expressed what many Loyalists felt when she wrote: “I climbed to the top of Chipman's Hill (Saint John) and watched the sails in the distance, and such a feeling of loneliness came over me that though I had not shed a tear through all the war, I sat down on the damp moss with my baby on my lap and cried bitterly.”

We know the outcome of their struggle. It is a success story and one worth celebrating. The motto of the province of New Brunswick speaks to their endurance - Hope was restored. What provisions were they given to start their new life?

The following list of materials required by the Loyalists was prepared in January, 1785: nails, hammers, gimlets, planes, chisels, gouges, hinges, iron-rimmed locks, padlocks, handsaws, crosscut saws, broad axes, adzes, rub stones, whipsaws, window glass, carpenter tools, blacksmith tools, carpenter squares and compasses, hoes, spades, pickaxes, plough shares, and twine.

We read that Loyalists also received food and settlement assistance including the following provisions given to each male inhabitant 14 years of age or older: leather for horse collars, two spades, 3 iron wedges, 3 hoes, 3 chisels, 1 gauge, one hand saw and file, one nail hammer, one drawing knife, 2 scythes, 1 sickle and 1 broad axe. Each man and boy also received a coat, waistcoat, breeches, hat, shirt, blanket, shoe soles, leggings and stockings. Each woman and girl over six was allowed two yards of woollen cloth, four yards of linen, stockings, a blanket and shoe soles. Each child under ten was to receive one yard of woollen cloth, two yards of linen, stockings and shoe soles. Two children shared a blanket. For travel, every five persons were allotted a tent and a cooking kettle.

Many of the Loyalists did not live through the first winter; many left with the relief fleets when they set sail next spring. In the very early days much of what our ancestors learned about their new land came from their relationship with the aboriginal people. They shared their knowledge of farming, hunting and trapping, exploration, food preparation and the use of natural remedies for medicinal purposes.

Could we make a life with such simple resources? Perhaps, if we had to. The loss of electricity through a power shutdown in the grid immediately throws us back into an environment of utter dependence on our instincts and natural abilities. We may do well to remember where we came from. Today we stand here as champions of the contribution of the United Empire Loyalists to the development of Canada.

This monument where we gather stands as an enduring reminder of the hardship and hope that define the history of the United Empire Loyalists. At its unveiling in May of 1929 it was applauded as "a wonderful work of sculptural art, symbolic of hope, faith and determination...a perpetual reminder of devotion to principle, valour and the quality of overcoming the most difficult circumstances." Included in the mission of the United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada is support for the erecting, constructing and repairing of buildings, monuments and memorials in Canada that perpetuate the memory of the United Empire Loyalists. Monuments and memorials provide a setting where ceremony can take place. As author Carol Shields wrote, "Ceremony is society's cement".

Today as we meet to commemorate Loyalist Day in Ontario we are cementing the continued significance of the United Empire Loyalist history. We have a unique and important place in Canadian history and it is our responsibility to ensure that it is not forgotten.

Today we stand on the threshold of possibility. Within a few short months we will be marking the 100-year anniversary of our organization. One hundred years ago a decision was made to create a national organization that would honour the history of the Loyalists. The United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada came into being with a Federal Charter, passed by Parliament, on May 27, 1914. As members of the United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada, we are the guardians of that vision. We cannot rely on someone else to tell our story.

And that is why commemoration services such as this one today celebrating Ontario's sixteenth annual United Empire Loyalist Day are important. With the constant stress and demanding pace of everyday life it is good to step apart and pause to remember what brought us here. We have much to be thankful for.

I am so proud to call Canada my home and I am able to say that because like many of you, I have an ancestor who chose to remain loyal to the British Crown when the first rumblings of Revolution were felt in the thirteen colonies.

Today we celebrate June 19, Loyalist Day, first recognized in 1997 by a Legislative Assembly of Ontario bill giving us the opportunity to reflect on the sacrifices and the achievements of our Loyalist ancestors. And after the reflection let us take their story and their spirit into the community. Just as we have inherited the history of our ancestors, we are creating the heritage of those who will come after us. Today we raise the flag and our voices to proclaim "Loyal She Began, Loyal She Remains".

Bonnie L. Schepers UE
President UELAC

Sources Used:
Ann Mackenzie M.A. - "A Short History of the United Empire Loyalists",
Janice Potter-MacKinnon - "While The Women Only Wept",
With reference to other UEL education materials.