OGS SEMINAR '86
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In the Footsteps of the Habitants
French-Canadian and Acadian Loyalists

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Introduction: What is a Loyalist?
The classic image of a loyalist is someone who fled one of the thirteen colonies and moved to Canada to avoid political persecution. They supported the cause of the Crown during the American Revolution and were predominately of English origin. Although it is acknowledged that some Scottish, Irish, Dutch, Huguenot, and German loyalists also existed, the emphasis is on the English. The descendants of these loyalists are all eligible to be members of the United Empire Loyalists’ Association of Canada. According to the UEL’s Request for Membership Application Form a loyalist was: “...a resident in one of the thirteen Colonies before the Revolutionary War of 1775-83. He or she remained loyal to the Crown, moving to and settling in, the area now called Canada.”

Recent publications have broadened this narrow image of loyalist ancestry. Parks Canada published a pamphlet entitled “The Loyalists,” which acknowledges that some loyalists were “former Black slaves” and Iroquois Indians.1 Joan Magee’s Loyalist Mosaic: A Multi-ethnic Heritage also includes a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds.2 Despite these belated recognitions of other ethnic loyalists, the contributions of French-Canadian and Acadian loyalists are still relatively ignored.

French-Canadian and Acadian Loyalists
Most French-Canadians and Acadians remained neutral during the American Revolutionary War. They were happy to stand back and watch what was essentially a fight between Englishmen. However, some of the French-Canadians became active on either the British or the American side. As for the Acadians, they were more likely to join the rebels, but a few will be found among the ranks of the loyalists.

1 Parks Canada. The Loyalists (Pamphlet published by the authority of the Minister of the Environment, Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services, 1983).

If we modify the concept of loyalist to include all those people who risked their lives and happiness for the Crown, then the French-Canadian and Acadian supporters of the British would qualify. In fact, there are several striking parallels between the experiences of the French and English loyalists.¹

The French loyalists not only fought for the Crown, but they also took a great risk in doing so. Like the English loyalists, who were fighting to preserve their own principals, the French loyalists were joining the struggle in the hopes that the British authorities would persist in maintaining their alien way of life. Although the British had protected their religious and civil rights since the 1763 conquest, there were no guarantees that they would continue to honour the rights of the French-Canadians. After all, the 1755 expulsion of the Acadians was still fresh in the minds of the French. In a sense, the French loyalists were gambling on the kindness of the British Empire (a wager that the Irish and Scots had lost more than once).

Another important similarity with the English loyalists is that for the French loyalists the Revolution became a Civil War. Since their cousins and brothers might be fighting with the rebels, there was always the danger of having to kill a kinsman. When confronted with Canadians on the American side, these loyalists occasionally refused to fight. Furthermore, France’s entry into the war on the side of the Americans caused some consternation for the French-Canadian people. Nevertheless, their allegiance to the British was not shaken. Enough of the people felt that the French monarchy had abandoned them at the 1763 peace table or that the French would not come to their rescue if they joined the rebellion against the British.

Lastly, a few of the French loyalists, like their English counterparts, fled their homeland after the war. In the Detroit area, some of the French loyalists crossed the river to settle in Ontario. Others, with some geographic confusion, fled to Frenchtown (Monroe, Michigan) to escape the Yankees.

The main difference between the English and French loyalists was that these Canadians had a healthy disrespect of the Americans — especially their land hunger and hatred of Catholicism.

I believe that it is important to now acknowledge and accept the idea that significant numbers of French-Canadians and a few Acadians were loyal to the Crown during the American Revolution. Moreover, the French loyalists demonstrated their loyalty to the Crown long after the war. They helped to keep the Northwest Territory in English hands until 1796. And, they stepped forward in even greater numbers during the Second War of American Independence — the War of 1812.

My Canadian friends often remind me that their land is composed of two founding “races” but is still one single nation. Yet one only has to casually search the history bookshelf to find that there is very little written on the common history of these two races. Few scholarly works cover in detail the period of French and English Canadian cooperation in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. A sociological study of Canadian history textbooks published in the United States ended abruptly in 1763 with the French and Indian War, thus ending any attempt to comprehend the full story of the French-Canadian and Acadian loyalists.

¹Throughout this paper the term “French loyalist” will be used to refer to “French-Canadian and Acadian loyalist” who served the British Crown during the American Revolution.

Seminar Annual '86

50

French-Canadian and Acadian


those people who were French-Canadian. In fact, there are those who have been French and English respectively.

But what historians and the masses forget, the genealogists uncover. The English and French Canadians fought side by side in the American Revolution and the War of 1812. Furthermore, they worked closely together in the fur trade. Popular histories may neglect these facts, but they can not be hidden from genealogical research. This is why I find the topic of French loyalist research so interesting. It is a means of recovering a forgotten heritage and of demonstrating common ties between the English and French Canadians. For the descendants of French loyalists who no longer speak French, this period of history can be especially rewarding since many of the documents will be in English. Furthermore, the United Empire Loyalists Association now accept members who can prove descent from French loyalists. I was able to join the United Empire Loyalists through my descent from Jean-Baptiste Cadotte, an interpreter in the Indian Department at Fort Michilimackinac and Sault-Ste-Marie.

This speech is only a reconnaissance of this topic since I am just learning about the area myself and very little work has been done in the field. The topics to be covered include: (1) a brief discussion of the war and how it affected French loyalists; (2) the military units involved in the American Revolutionary War containing French loyalists; (3) genealogical sources for uncovering French loyalist ancestors; and lastly (4) helpful tips on learning as much as possible about a French loyalist ancestor.

Brief History from the Canadian Perspective

For Canada the American Revolution was a two-front war. The first front was eastern Canada and involved Quebec and the Maritimes. The second front was western Canada and involved Ontario and what would become the American Northwest Territory.

The invasion of Canada, 1775-76, including the siege of Quebec city, was the most important campaign involving the French loyalists. The French militia proved to be a valuable factor in the defense of Quebec. Of the ten militia companies serving at Quebec, nine were French-Canadian. In Bourgoyne's campaign of 1777 the French militia was also involved. They were used mostly to transport supplies. Like the American militia, many of them refused to go beyond their province, in this case Lake Champlain. After 1778 there was little action on the eastern front.5

In western Canada the British organized raids out of Forts Niagara and Frontenac (Kingston) against New York and Pennslyvania in 1777, 1778, 1780, and 1781. The British also sponsored raids in Illinois, Kentucky, and

history textbooks published from 1850 to 1968 showed that there was a vast difference in the way English and French books interpret history.4 For French-Canadians their history — which they are so proud of remembering — ends abruptly in 1763, which is consequently the same year in which English-Canadian history starts.


French-Canadian and Acadian Loyalists
Ohio countries. The French loyalists and the Indian allies of the British were the main members of these raiding parties. The French loyalists also served the interests of the Crown fighting against the incursion of General George Rogers Clark at Vincennes in 1778 and 1779.

In the west the Detroit militia was particularly active. The Detroit militia was predominantly French-Canadian. A 1778 list of militia officers show that out of thirteen named, ten were French. In 1782 five of the six companies were French with their captains bearing the surnames of Maisonneuve, Montforton, Campeau, Moran, and Gamelin.

The year 1778 was a busy one for the French militia of Detroit. Members of the militia attacked Boonesborough in 1778. And that same year, members of the Detroit militia accompanied the Indian war party which captured Daniel Boone and brought him to Detroit. A militia detachment from Detroit was involved in the British capture of Vincennes in 1778. However, the following year the British Lieutenant Governor of Detroit, Henry Hamilton, blamed the French militia for the subsequent loss of Vincennes. He claimed that they were reluctant to fight their kinsmen serving with the forces under Clark's command. In 1780 the Detroit militia, a few British regulars, and over 500 Indians invaded Kentucky. They captured two towns and took 350 prisoners. Lastly, the French loyalist militia of Detroit participated in the battle of Blue Licks against Daniel Boone and his Kentuckians in 1782.

Considering that they were not only militia volunteers, the Detroit French militia took an active role in defending the fur trade and coincidentally the interests of the British empire. It is an excellent example of the contribution of French loyalists. Other than the capture of Vincennes, the French and Indians were able to maintain the British dominance in the West. It was only at the peace table that the British lost the Northwest to the Americans.

The French loyalists were not as eager to defeat the Americans as they were to defend Canada and their way of life. Nor did they cherish the idea of fighting their cousins who had joined the rebels. Nevertheless, significant numbers of them decided to fight for the British and even more did so during the War of 1812. When it is considered that they were a conquered people it is rather amazing that so many of them stepped forward to protect their own conquerors. They did not do it out of loyalty to King George III, but in hopes that their actions would preserve their culture and protect the all important fur trade.

French Loyalist Military Units

Unlike the Voltigeur Corps in the War of 1812, during the Revolutionary War there were no distinct regular French loyalists units. The French loyalists served in either their local militia or with the Indian Department.

In the east the typical French military unit was the parish militia

Seminar Annual '86
The British appointed the officers for these units. They typically chose seigneurs or other members of the French elite. All men from the ages of 16 to 60 were obligated to serve in the militia. However, not all of them would have seen any combat action. Many only transported supplies or worked on fortifications. Nevertheless, a few would volunteer for particularly dangerous raids and most of the members of the Quebec City militia were needed to actively defend its walls.

The militia structure not only served the needs of the British, but also those of the invading Americans. The militia companies near Montreal were more likely to fight for the Americans or remain neutral. Those near Trois-Rivières were more divided in their loyalty. And those near Quebec were the least likely to join the rebels.

The other important service unit for the French loyalists was the paramilitary Indian Department which coordinated the tribal allies out of the posts at Detroit, Niagara, and Michilimackinac. The British Indian Department was formed in 1755 and disbanded in 1830. The agents of the Indian Department were assigned several difficult tasks: (1) keeping the Indians on the side of the British; (2) organizing and leading Indian raids against the Americans; (3) preserving peace among the feuding Indian tribes; and (4) maintaining the fur trade. An agent of the Indian Department might act as an interpreter, distribute gifts to the Indians, be an artificer repairing weapons, or serve as a lieutenant leading Indians on raids. These agents played a crucial role in the western sector of the war. Moreover, they helped to conserve British hegemony in the region until 1796.

Detroit again provides an excellent example of how the French loyalists contributed, in this case, through the Indian Department, to the defense of the West. In 1783 the Indian Department at Detroit consisted of 68 officers, interpreters, and craftsmen, of which 42 were French. Although a handful of regular militia members would volunteer to join Indian raids, the officers and interpreters of the Indian Department at Detroit always accompanied their friends and allies on the war path.

Like Detroit, most Indian Department employees at Fort Michilimackinac were French. An example of a French loyalist operating out of Michilimackinac is my ancestor, Jean-Baptiste Cadotte. He served the interests of King George III, but in service to the Crown during Pontiac's Uprising in 1763 and became an interpreter in the Indian Department. In 1779 he went on a dangerous mission to the land of the Sioux to ask their assistance in an attack on Spanish St. Louis. This took some bravery considering that his wife was an Ojibway, the traditional enemy of the Sioux. His métis sons followed in his footsteps and also served in the Indian Department during the War of 1812.

In summary, there were no regular French units like the English company. The British appointed the officers for these units. They typically chose seigneurs or other members of the French elite. All men from the ages of 16 to 60 were obligated to serve in the militia. However, not all of them would have seen any combat action. Many only transported supplies or worked on fortifications. Nevertheless, a few would volunteer for particularly dangerous raids and most of the members of the Quebec City militia were needed to actively defend its walls.

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In summary, there were no regular French units like the English
loyalist Butler’s Rangers. The French loyalists served either in the militia, with the Indian Department, or were attached to regular units as scouts or voyageurs. Because they did not serve in regular units it is more difficult to find information about French loyalist ancestors. However, it is not impossible.

**Genealogical Sources for Tracing French Loyalists**

There are few works devoted exclusively or even partially to French loyalists. In general, the standard United Empire Loyalist oriented publications will be of little help. Instead, the French loyalist researcher must depend on a wide variety of historical works and original documents.

**American Revolutionaries**

The French loyalist researcher must be prepared to search in some contradictory places. An example of a strange place to find information is a series of articles devoted to the rebels. De Marce’s work is of great importance because it has turned the attention of many French-Canadian and Acadian researchers towards the American Revolution and its impact on Canada. She has done a thorough job of documenting Canadian (both English and French) participants in the American Revolution who fought on the side of the rebels. The very last issue of this series is devoted to loyalists. It is an excellent bibliographic source in combination with her “Analysis of Sources” in the second issue. Nevertheless, the whole series accentuates the struggle in the East and virtually ignores the Indian Department.

Analysis of Sources, 6:3 (August 1980): 148-157,
Abblaré-Bombardier, 6:4 (November 1980): 218-227,
Bomier-Chartier, 7:1 (February 1981): 48-55,
Chartier-Crosby, 7:2 (May 1981): 102-107,
Clement-Doane, 7:3 (August 1981): 138-144,
Doane-Fissette, 7:4 (November 1981): 203-209,
Gill-Killan, 8:2 (May 1982): 96-104,
Kiley-Lesperance, 8:3 (August 1982): 149-153 and 157-164,
Lesperance-Lortie, 8:4 (November 1982): 207-210,
Lostelton-McCarty, 9:1 (February 1983): 52-55 and 51,
Morancy-Perley, 9:3 (August 1983): 163-171,
Perley-Rider, 9:4 (November 1983): 216-223,
Ridgeway-Ryder, 10:1 (February 1984): 25-28,
Sadot-Zacharie, 10:3 (August 1984): 137-152,

**Archival Sources**

Archival sources are important because of the lack of publications dealing with French loyalists. However, a list of Indian Department items of value can still be found among archived documents.


Cruikshank’s inventory is part of the Public Archives of Canada, and items of value can still be found in a series of military records dealing with the Indian Department.


Swiss-born General Fred during the American Revolution often mentioned important papers dealing with communications between various British military records. The following index to the Canadian Historical Collection. The collection of these documents is more likely to contain information than the regular militia rank and file.


The inventories listed here are: (1) Haldimand papers; (2) fur trade records; (3) naval records, and (4) Canadian French relating to the military.

**French-Canadian and Acadian Manuscripts.**

Seminar Annual ’86 54
French-Canadian and Acadian Loyalists


Cruikshank's inventory is now an outdated guide to the military records in the Public Archives of Canada. Although it ignores French loyalists, a few items of value can still be discovered in it. It inventories the crucial "C" series of military records dealing with the 1780s, 1790s, and the War of 1812.


Swiss-born General Frederick Haldimand was the Governor of Canada during the American Revolution. The Haldimand papers contain communications between various British commanders and the governor. These communications often mention officers but rarely soldiers. Many of the most important papers dealing with the Detroit were republished in the Michigan Historical Collection. The Public Archives of Canada has the complete collection of these documents.

Public Archives of Canada, Manuscript Division. "Index to the British Military Records." R.G. 8, formally the "C" series now called "I" series, available on microfilm from the Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa.

This index to the "C" series (now referred to as the "I" series) can be borrowed through interlibrary loan from the Public Archives of Canada. It is well worth a check. However, it only covers the last few years of the war and is more likely to contain information about officers and agents rather than the regular militia rank and file.


Preliminary Inventory, Record Group 9, Department of Militia and Defence, 1776-1922. Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, 1957.

Preliminary Inventory, Record Group 10, Indian Affairs. Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, 1951.

The inventories listed here are for manuscript and record collections in the Public Archives of Canada. Some of the key items to look through are: (1) the Haldimand papers; (2) fur trade and Indian records; (3) British military and naval records, and (4) Canadian militia records (including several pieces in French relating to the militia in the Revolutionary War and in the War of French-Canadian and Acadian Loyalists
1812). The guide to Indian Affairs contains a directory of “Who was Who and When” in the Indian Department in an appendix.

Quebec Militia Officers

Most of the articles and books in this section list militia officers serving in particular parishes during the American Revolution and also the French regime. Three of them are of particular interest.


Fauteux published the journal of the commissioners François Baby, Gabriel Tachereau, and Jenkins Williams. They toured the Quebec and Trois-Rivières areas in the summer of 1776. Their job was to find the rebel militia officers and replace them with officers loyal to the Crown. For each parish they visited they list the rebel officers and then their loyalist replacements. A similar commission for Montreal, composed of St-George Dupré, Pierre Panet, and Edward William Gray, also existed but their records did not survive.10

The second item of interest is the only list I have found of both militia officers and soldiers. Wurtelle covers the French loyalist companies which served during the siege of Quebec. The appendix contains a thorough list of the men who lived on.

The third work is by Fryer. It is not a history of Pontiac’s Uprising. If an attempt is made to use it as a reference, the mistake of ignoring it. The catalogue of the papers of Sir William Johnson is a source for tracking ancestry. It is not a history of Pontiac’s Uprising. If an attempt is made to use it as a reference, the mistake of ignoring it. The catalogue of the papers of Sir William Johnson is a source for tracking ancestry.

British Indian Department

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A rare Acadian example of loyalty is found in these journals. In the town Beaucour, one set of Acadian militia officers from La Salle-Paul who had served with the Americans were replaced by another set of Acadians expected to be more loyal. The surnames include: Le Prince, Cormier, Bourque, Bergeron, Leblanc, Doucet, and Hébert. Both sets of officers were interrelated. Fauteux, *Journal* pp. 499-501.


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served during the siege of Quebec, 1775-76. Although it is not indexed, the appendix contains a thorough list of the militia by companies and the streets the men lived on.

The third work is by Roy. It does not refer to any individuals directly, rather, it refers to a set of letters and documents. Nevertheless, it is a valuable source for tracking ancestors who may have served the British during Pontiac’s Uprising. If an ancestor was loyal in 1763-64, then he may have remained loyal during the American Revolutionary War.

**British Indian Department**

The Indian Department is a neglected area in the field of Revolutionary War studies. However, genealogical researchers should not make the mistake of ignoring it. The family historian may find that an ancestor served as a lieutenant or interpreter. Just a cursory search uncovers the following surnames: Langlade, Cadotte, Blondeau, Rocque, and Gautier at Michilimackinac and Baby, Réaume, Chesne, DeQuinder, Chabert, Joncaire, LaBute, Bondy, Drouillard, Beaubien, Duplessis and Gamelin at Detroit.

The works cited in this section are basically historical and not genealogical. Nevertheless, they still provide important clues and background information.


This is a history of the Indian Department that contains in Appendix D an annotated list of “Indian Leaders and Notables of the British Indian Department.” Not one of the twenty-six vignettes deal with French loyalists. Allen remarks in the text that French loyalists would accompany the Indians on raids, but he neglects to mention any names nor does he try to explain the contributions of French loyalists within the Indian Department. Despite these flaws it is the basic guide to the Indian Department’s long history.


This is another history that covers in part the activities of French loyalist employees of the Indian Department at Fort Michilimackinac. It is well indexed and documented. An excellent place to begin a search in that area.


Fryer’s work is concerned with English loyalists. However, she does mention the Indian Department throughout the book and has a small section devoted to it. It is well documented and may provide you with some valuable leads.


**French-Canadian and Acadian Loyalists**
Sir William Johnson was the founder of the Indian Department and its first superintendent. This collection is well indexed and contains many references to French-Canadians serving the interests of the Crown prior to the American Revolution.

**Conclusion**

Much of what I said in my paper on French-Canadian military records (also in *Seminar Annual ’86*) also applies to the case of French loyalist records. These records are seldom of genealogical value. Instead of solving genealogical problems, these records are usually uncovered in the normal process of genealogical research. As in any research dealing with military ancestors, there will usually be more accessible data available for officers than for common soldiers.

When the researcher finds a French loyalist soldier, it is necessary to follow the activities of that ancestor’s unit and the career of his officer or superiors. This approach assumes that the ancestor stayed with his company. Nevertheless, it is a method that can lead to further clues about a loyalist ancestor.

The French loyalist researcher must develop an understanding of the historical background because of the lack of published guides and compilations. Furthermore, the French loyalist researcher must be willing to rely on archival materials for clues and proofs. For example, the notarial papers of Quebec often contain information pointing to the military roles of the people involved in employment contracts, land sales, or marriage contracts. The notarial papers can be a valuable source of information and they should not be neglected.

Genealogical research that uncovers French-Canadians and Acadians serving the Crown not only broadens the image of loyalists, but also serves to build a common Canadian history. If indeed two founding “races” built Canada as a nation, then tracing the role of English and French Canadian ancestors who worked together to maintain their ties to Britain and to protect their lifestyle is a valuable and commendable activity.

**Appendix — War of 1812**

The French-Canadians and Acadians fought in even larger numbers for the Crown during the War of 1812. In this appendix I have stretched the definition of a loyalist to include someone supporting the Crown during the War of 1812. Included in this appendix are a few works that point to French ancestors who served the Crown from 1812 to 1814. The emphasis is on units serving in Quebec. However, it should be recalled that the Indian Department was crucial to the war effort and there were units organized on the frontier, for example, the Michigan Fencibles.1

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French-Canadian and Acadian Loyalists


Guitard is superb. He gives a social history of the French-Canadian militia units that fought in the Battle of the Chateauguay River. He includes a network diagram showing how all the top officers were interrelated. Although he tends to concentrate on the Voltigeurs (an elite unit), he also goes into some detail on the differences between the select embodied militia and the sedentary militia. In the appendices he lists all the names of the known soldiers and officers who fought in this engagement. This is a pleasure to read.


This work lists the names of men serving in the Voltigeur Corps from the Montreal area.


Finally, Jonassen presents a brief history of the war, lists some genealogical sources, and provides a disorganized but valuable index of the surviving veterans who claimed a gratuity in 1875.