

Review Articles

The “Good Americans” Two Hundred Years Later

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Victorious in Defeat: The Loyalists in Canada. WALLACE BROWN and HERWARD SENIOR. Toronto: Methuen Publications, 1984. x, 230 p. ISBN 0-458-96850-1.

The Loyalists: Revolution, Exile, Settlement. CHRISTOPHER MOORE. Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1984. 218 p. ISBN 0-7715-9781-9.

*I never had an idea of subduing the Americans;
I meant to assist the good Americans subdue the bad.*

General James Robertson

The bicentennial of the migration to British North America of those who remained loyal to the British Crown during the American Revolution has brought forth a spate of publications from coffee-table volumes to colouring books, a host of exhibitions at museums and galleries, dozens of conference papers, and even enactments of Loyalist encampments and Revolutionary War battles, but, unfortunately, not much re-evaluation of the Loyalists. To obtain some perspective on the two important books reviewed here Loyalist historiography needs to be briefly reviewed.

It has happened twice that initiation of the study of the Loyalist migration has come from the United States where the Loyalists were losers, not founders. How is it that Canadians lost track of a portion of their founding fathers and mothers? To give an historiographical answer, Canadians missed years of collecting and reprinting of the original documents of settlement — the town, land grant, and parish records that the Americans gathered together usually through the efforts of local historical societies. When Egerton Ryerson rediscovered the Loyalists, he relied on such work by the American, Lorenzo Sabine. Other American historians who wrote about the Loyalists in the late nineteenth century include James De Peyser, A.C. Flick, Claude Van Tyne, James Stark, and Moses Coit Tyler. Ryerson's *The Loyalists of America and their Times* (1880) was an early manifestation of the Canadian interest in the Loyalists which peaked in the Loyalist centennial celebrations of 1884. Carl Berger in *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism 1867-1914* (1970) has shown how the popularization of the Loyalist tradition prefigured the rise of the imperial federation movement in the 1880s and contributed key elements to English-speaking Canada's emerging identity, but this does not add to our knowledge of the Loyalists themselves.

Students of the Loyalists can be grateful to archives at the turn of the century for making documents available: the Public Archives of Canada for the Haldimand calendar, Nova Scotia and Quebec for reprints, and the Ontario Archives for the monumental volumes of the Loyalist claims before the British commissioners. The first onslaught by historians was often by amateurs, such as William F. Riddell on legal records and Ernest Cruikshank on the Haldimand Papers of the Revolution and immediate postwar era and the records of the War of 1812.

Have we advanced since then? A.L. Burt's *The Old Province of Quebec* (1933) is a classic, by an American. Gerald Craig's *Upper Canada: The Formative Years 1784-1841* (1959) was an admirable plateau in the McClelland and Stewart's Canadian Centenary Series. The Champlain Society, dedicated to scholarly publication of documents, produced in twenty years five works related to Loyalists: J.J. Talman's *Loyalist Narratives from Upper Canada* (1946), *The Diary of Simeon Perkins* with three different editors (H.A. Innis, D.C. Harvey, and Charles Fergusson) in five volumes (1948-1978), R.A. Preston's *Kingston before the War of 1812* (1959), Charles Johnston's *The Valley of the Six Nations* (1964), and *The Diary of William Smith* edited by Leslie Upton (1963-1965). Esther Clark Wright's painstaking study, *The Loyalists of New Brunswick* (Windsor, NS, 1955), William Nelson's analysis *The American Tory* (1961), and Wallace Brown's quantitative study, *The King's Friends* (1964) were significant contributions. Brown, Wright, and Nelson defined clearly who the Loyalists were: diverse in nationality, class, occupation, and education, concentrated in certain segments of society but not overwhelmingly of the elite. But there hung still around the Loyalists the aura of losers, of self-deception, of lack of initiative.

The next impetus for Loyalist studies in the 1970s came from American interest and scholarship sparked by the bicentennial of the Declaration of Independence. Mary Beth Norton's extensive archival research on the Loyalist claims for reparations from the British government produced *The British Americans: Loyalist Exiles in England 1774-1789* (1972), an analysis of Loyalist characteristics and thought. Bernard Bailyn's biography, *The Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson* (1974) was a sympathetic approach by a major American historian to one of the first Loyalist refugees, the Massachusetts governor who was driven from his post. Carol Berkin wrote the biography of Jonathan Sewell, *Jonathan Sewell: Odyssey of an American Loyalist* (1974), who settled in the Maritimes and whose son became Chief Justice of Quebec. In 1973 Robert McCluer Calhoon produced *The Loyalists in Revolutionary America 1760-1781* which examined the pamphlets and political writings of articulate Loyalists. In these studies, a new evaluation of the Loyalists becomes apparent. They appear as articulate writers and thinkers who sought political alternatives to separation. They were not bigots. Nor was Loyalist conservatism out of touch with post-revolutionary American society in its early days.

It is impossible to do justice to, or even to list, all the writings (not to mention research) on the Loyalists. Robert S. Allen's *Loyalist Literature: An Annotated Bibliographic Guide* (1982) can provide a good overview. The Loyalist Studies Project of the University of New Brunswick launched an ambitious programme of research and publication involving American, British, and Canadian scholars and archives but unfortunately the programme could not live up to its potential. British historians Esmond Wright and Howard Temperley have recently written on the Loyalists. Among Canadian historians, Janice Potter's *The Liberty We Seek: Loyalist Ideology in Colonial New York and Massachusetts* (1982), based on her doctoral thesis at Queen's University, is a scholarly

examination of political thought expressed in the newspapers. Published and soon to be published work on the Maritimes by Neil MacKinnon and David G. Bell join specialized studies such as James Walker's *The Black Loyalists* (1976) and Judith Fingard's *The Anglican Design in Nova Scotia 1783-1816* (1972). Where are the central Canadian historians?

The 1950s have been considered Canadian history's golden age of biography. But the late Leslie Upton's *The Loyal Whig: William Smith of New York and Quebec* (1969) is of high calibre. More recent Loyalist biographies are Brian Cuthbertson's *The Loyalist Governor: Biography of Sir John Wentworth* (1983) and Earle Thomas's *Greener Pastures: The Loyalist Experiences of Benjamin Ingraham* (1983) (a Ph.D. thesis from Concordia). The field is wide open. Richard Cartwright of Kingston is well served in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, but surely he is worth a full biography.

Books have been produced at all levels. The Ontario celebration, stretched to claim a dubious provincial bicentennial, has brought forth two large volumes of the coffee-table variety: *The Shaping of Ontario from Exploration to Confederation*, compiled by editors Nick and Helma Mika (1985) and the publication by the United Empire Loyalist Association, *Loyal She Remains: A Pictorial History of Ontario* (1984). Both books are a pastiche of articles of varying quality by a wide range of contributors on topics which include the Loyalists.

On the Canadian scene, the work of Dundurn Press must be mentioned. As a small publishing house based in Toronto and Charlottetown, it has done yeoman service in producing Loyalist studies. Notable are *As She Began: An Illustrated Introduction to Loyalist Ontario* (1981), a short basic volume of new scholarship by Bruce Wilson that should be in every school and public library; and Mary Beacock Fryer's works on the Provincial Corps of the British Army, especially *King's Men: The Soldier Founders of Ontario* (1980). Covering more than the Ontario scene are the short biographies of Loyalists in *Eleven Exiles*, edited by Phyllis Blakely and John N. Grant (1982), and Joan Magee's *Loyalist Mosaic: A Multi Ethnic Heritage* (1984) which has the added dimension of illustrating the diversity of the Loyalist heritage.

As well as the printed word, the artifacts of the Loyalists have also been on display. Anyone who has seen the catalogue of selected pieces from the New Brunswick Museum entitled *The Loyalists* (1975) will understand the richness of the Maritime heritage. That catalogue was prepared for the American bicentennial. The travelling exhibition prepared by the Canadian War Museum in 1983 in collaboration with the New Brunswick Museum entitled *The Loyal Americans: The Military Role of the Loyalist Provincial Corps and their Settlement in British North America 1775-1784* was broader than its title suggests. Portraits, diaries and household items as well as military ones were on display and the catalogue, edited by Robert S. Allen, contained excellent articles on the period and on the military settlements. In 1984 the Royal Ontario Museum mounted an exhibition with the title *Georgian Canada, Conflict and Culture 1745-1820*. In an attempt to produce a broad sweep from the death of Wolfe to the War of 1812, fine paintings, furniture, and silver were brought from collections in Britain and the United States. Although the exhibition was visually delightful, the emphasis on the objects of art obscured the history.

The two books to be reviewed here, Wallace Brown and Hereward Senior's *Victorious in Defeat: The Loyalists in Canada* and Christopher Moore's *The Loyalists, Revolution,*

Exile, Settlement are the most substantial publications of the Loyalist year of 1984. *Victorious in Defeat* attempts to fill a long recognized need for an overall history of the Loyalists which links their experiences in the Maritimes, Quebec, and Upper Canada. The coverage of the three areas is uneven, Upper Canada faring least well, probably because it is not the principal research area of either author. The authors' approach is more thematic than Christopher Moore's, and they spend little time on the events of the American Revolution, save as a staging for Loyalist departures. Very welcome chapters on black and Indian Loyalists were included.

Most detail is given for the Maritimes where there were four areas of settlement: Nova Scotia, based on a royal colony which in turn spawned the new province of New Brunswick in 1784, and the smaller settlements of Cape Breton and Prince Edward Island (Isle St. Jean). Curiously, in the Maritimes where the Loyalist heritage did not create a myth of social and cultural elitism, the Loyalist migrations were drawn more from the official and professional classes. Since Halifax was already established as an administrative capital and garrison, Loyalists settled around the port of Shelburne, the sudden influx creating a classic real estate boom and bust cycle as the port with no hinterland failed to thrive. The integration of the Loyalists with an established community produced considerable strain and disillusionment among some groups, especially the black Loyalists. New Brunswick, established to anchor the Maritime area against the American colonies, had a more tranquil beginning, although sectional jealousies and mercantile conflicts in the settlement arose. In Prince Edward Island, the small number of Loyalists made no impact on the feudal landholding system already established by absentee English landlords. Cape Breton drew some dissident Loyalists from Quebec and early established its Gaelic character.

The Maritimes were easily reached by sea by Loyalists fleeing the American colonies, even those in transit to Britain. Quebec, especially around Montreal and Lachine, drew those Loyalists on the arduous trek overland and those of the Provincial Corps of the British Army. After Burgoyne's defeat by the Americans at Saratoga in 1777, it must have become obvious to the Loyalists that their sojourn in Quebec would be long. Quebec was an established society with French laws and landholding, but with an English-speaking mercantile community. However, as the Loyalists began to look west to the interior for areas of settlement, they found their interests did not fit with those of the Scots and English fur traders. Quebec was a bridge between the new settlements, and its established society offered advancement to Loyalists such as the Stuarts from Upper Canada and the Sewells from Halifax.

The Niagara area and the old French post at Detroit were already well settled before the main Loyalist migration to Upper Canada in 1784. But of all the three major North American areas of migration, Upper Canada was truly a Loyalist creation, although the influx of American settlement in the 1790s nearly swamped the Loyalist element. In the new settlement of Upper Canada, landholding and trade patterns (excluding fur trade) had to be worked out, and some of the elements of Lieutenant Governor Simcoe's "image and transcript" of English society he sought to create were resisted by the North American-born such as Richard Cartwright.

The story of the black Loyalists, especially in their major settlements in Nova Scotia, is a bitter one but needs to be told. Perhaps it was impossible to transform the outlook of the Loyalists, coming as they did from a slaveholding society, but discrimination against the blacks in land grants and employment led to the blacks' further migration to Sierra Leone.

The story of the Loyalist Indians, chiefly Iroquois of New York, is part of a broader picture of the annihilation of Indian power in North America. The Iroquois had an eloquent and powerful leader in Joseph Brant but he sought the route of assimilation to white society.

The title *Victorious in Defeat* is a quotation from a poem by William Kirby, poet of the Loyalists (although born in Britain). The authors state, and continually reiterate, the point that Loyalists were not losers; they represented a viable political and social point of view that they went on to plant in a new country. This is an important emphasis but its repetition almost reaches the point where one feels the authors are trying to convince themselves. It might have been useful to point out that conservatism did not die out in the United States because of the revolution but survived to rise in the Federalist outlook which had many affinities with the Canadian.

Brown and Senior attempt to draw on new work, especially in the section on the Maritimes where they give credit to Neil Mackinnon for his work on Nova Scotia. Senior's contribution on Quebec fills the gap between Hilda Neatby's *Quebec: The Revolutionary Age, 1760-1791* (1966) and Helen Manning's *The Revolt of French Canada, 1800-1835* (1962). Brown does not cite his earlier book, *The King's Friends: Composition and Motives of the American Loyalist Claimants* (1965), which is an admirable analysis of the group, but then he has changed his mind since his previous conclusion that Loyalists as a group were passive, paralysed, and outclassed and had been treated as one of "history's complete losers" (Brown, *The Good Americans: The Loyalists in the American Revolution*, (p. 222.)

The sections on Upper Canada are brief, although there are bright spots such as the description of early Loyalist discontent with land grants and administration drawn from Elinor Senior's book on Cornwall. Incredibly the authors do not include in their bibliography Gerald Craig's *Upper Canada: The Formative Years 1784-1841* (1959) which is still the best general account. And naturally one can take exception to some of their viewpoints. The Church of England is frequently dismissed as a "school of manners." Joseph Brant is twice credited with translating the Anglican Book of Common Prayer and St. Mark's Gospel into Mohawk. Had the authors read their sources more closely they would have seen that Brant was taught by and worked on the translations with the Loyalist Anglican missionary to the Mohawks, the Reverend John Stuart. The role of the Anglican Church as a missionary church should not be undervalued.

It is sometimes hard to judge for what audience this book is written. The use of contemporary examples and names such as René Levesque and "twentieth century Okies" are a little jarring even if they are meant to assure casual readers they will not be overwhelmed by the eighteenth century. Illustrations are few and not well identified. There are many useful quotations but no footnotes and locating the sources can be a puzzle. Technical descriptions of such activities as surveying and clearing the land will certainly be useful in teaching. Again it may be said that the bridge Brown and Senior's book provides between the three areas of British North America in Loyalist times is a very welcome contribution.

Christopher Moore's first book, *Louisbourg Portraits* (1982), was greeted with great acclaim. He succeeded in a social history with a new technique of weaving together a general outline of history with case studies from official records. He did this with such balance that the outline and background of history seemed meaningful because of its

application to a single person or group and yet the case study fit into the background and was not an unrelated antiquarian incident. Moore has not achieved the same beautiful balance in his second book, *The Loyalists, Revolution, Exile, Settlement*. It is unlikely that his mastery of the technique has deserted him, but his current book is disjointed and the vignettes lack depth. The book was produced in time for the celebration of the Loyalist bicentennial in Ontario. One cannot help but think that if the book had been worked over longer, it would have gained in depth. Moore has been a researcher with Parks Canada and trained in painstaking research. It takes time to absorb and understand the records of a period; even with Moore's talent, the process cannot be hurried.

The book is a chronological account of events highlighted by the experiences of about a dozen individuals. The biographies of some of these individuals are woven into the chronological account in several places. Three examples are the stories of Alexander MacDonald, Nicholas Cresswell, and Moses Kirkland. Alexander MacDonald was a Highland soldier who married into the wealthy Livingston family in the colony of New York, but found he could not cast off his military allegiance to Britain. He rejoined the British Army with the Royal Highland Emigrants and spent much of the war in Nova Scotia; after the death of his wife he returned to Britain. Nicholas Cresswell was a young English gentleman who attempted a career as a Virginia tobacco merchant but remained an outsider to colonial society. His lack of success and the war sent him back to England. In turn a plantation owner, Indian agent, and courier, Moses Kirkland came from South Carolina, an area of British support but internal dissent. His wealth represented not the coast area but the frontier country and eventually he moved to Jamaica in 1782. While Moore does not draw this conclusion, these three illustrate Loyalist types as outlined by William Nelson in *The American Tory*: the newly arrived, the frontier dwellers, and the ethnic groups.

Interesting as the personal sketches are, they lack depth. Mary Beacock Fryer in a chapter in *Eleven Exiles* sketched a better portrait of Sarah Sherwood of Upper Canada, wife of Justus Sherwood, Loyalist officer and British spy, using only official sources: letters, ship returns, and medical reports. This was no mean achievement considering the "silence" of women in official records and the lack of Sarah Sherwood's correspondence.

About half of the book deals with the background to and events of the American War of Independence. It is a fine account and certainly provides a useful perspective on the Loyalists' experience. While Moore sketches the story of the Scots officer Alexander MacDonald and his commanding officer Allan Maclean, a former Jacobite, we do not learn what the Provincial Corps' military experience was. Nor does Moore seem to have used the work of military historian John Shy, whose *A People Numerous and Armed: Reflections on the Military Struggle for American Independence* (1976) identifies in personal terms the American troops.

After the chapters on exile, Moore moves on to look at the settlement of three regions: the New Brunswick of the aristocrat Edward Winslow; the Nova Scotia of Gideon White, Shelburne merchant; and the Upper Canada of farmer Samuel Farrington of Ernestown. All three were winners who accommodated to the new British North America. Some Loyalists, such as Samuel Curwen who returned to Salem, Massachusetts, were not.

Moore concludes that the Loyalists did not make the Second Empire but that they needed the Empire — a new symbiotic relationship in terms of trade and migration grew up that happily would find less rigidity in Whitehall.

Moore's bibliography is impressive, but less so is his short list of archival sources. Albeit, the Audit Office claims are a voluminous source and provided short poignant quotations from Loyalist claimants that are used to good effect in the margins. Moore has developed an unusual system of footnoting which gives a list of individuals quoted in the text for each chapter, but the source is not always paged. The illustrations are well chosen but unfortunately often so small in reproduction that much important detail is lost.

Christopher Moore's next book will be eagerly anticipated because he has very obvious talent for writing Canadian history. Let us just hope it is allowed to mature in the cask a little longer to become vintage Moore.

Substantial though they are, the two books reviewed here do not match in stature American work on the Loyalists. Brown and Senior's work gives a broad picture and useful comparisons; Moore's technique illuminates the story of the Loyalists with human qualities but there is very little new in either. It is unfair to blame authors for what they did not set out to do, but it is valid to ask what knowledge has been gained about the "Good Americans."

National consciousness of these early migrants has surely been raised, however temporarily. Some good general and local studies have been produced that should penetrate the school system and correct old errors. But where is the cutting edge of scholarship or the effort to make sources for scholarship available? Archivists should ask that question. True, the Archives of Ontario republished the Loyalist claims, and the Public Archives of Nova Scotia has brought out *The Loyalist Guide: Nova Scotia Loyalists and Their Documents* (1983), compiled by Jean Peterson. But are the Haldimand Papers any more accessible (oh for a published index!) or the British Headquarters Papers? Why are the political writings of Loyalists not readily available? Christopher Moore laments in his preface that the "pioneers did not enjoy the luxury of documenting themselves extensively and so in places the historical record has been thin." That is true to a point but the pioneers did document their lives in petitions, militia muster lists, nominal census returns, wills, court cases, estate inventories, account books, assessment rolls, parish registers, and cemetery inscriptions. The record is there.

Where might Loyalist studies go from here? Brown and Senior have drawn together the Loyalist experiences in Upper Canada, Quebec, and the Maritimes. Brown has also written an article on the Loyalist migration to the West Indies in Esmond Wright's *Red, White and True Blue* (1977). With Norton's work on Loyalist experience in England, can a general picture of refugee responses be drawn? Or should the focus be on specialized studies? The history of native groups and the Indian Department or the blacks in Upper Canada come to mind. Though not confined to Loyalists, J.J. Bumsted's work on the Scottish influence and George Rawlyk's on religious revival in the Maritimes throw light on ethnic and religious groups and could be models for other studies. Military history has been receiving attention; incisive biographies are needed, both full length or fleshing out an account as Christopher Moore can do so well. The importance of ritual to the lives of white and Iroquois Loyalists and its enduring importance in the emerging Canadian society and character might be investigated.

No one could claim the Loyalists are the sole founders of Canada any more than the Massachusetts Bay Colonists represent all Americans, but they were essential to the development of the nation and must not be overlooked.