

WHAT CHALLENGES DID THE LOYALISTS FACE IN THEIR NEW LAND?

The thousands of Loyalists who arrived in the Maritimes and Québec brought with them hopes for a good life in British North America. Many families left behind thriving farms and became refugees, on the promise of freedom and new land. They soon found out that rebuilding their lives in British North America would bring unexpected challenges.

AN UNTAMED NEW LAND

The journey to British North America was long and difficult for many of the Loyalist refugees. Loyalist Sarah Frost left New York by ship for Nova Scotia in the spring of 1783. She and her family lived on the crowded ship for more than 30 days before finally reaching the banks of present-day New Brunswick. Her diary tells of an uncomfortable trip on an overcrowded ship where many people were ill. Upon landing in British North America, Frost set eyes on a rough and unsettled land. Read an excerpt from her diary in **Figure 4.12**. What is Frost's first impression of her new home?

Land had to be divided up into lots before it could be given to the arriving Loyalists. The British government sent out surveyors to divide up the land. **Figure 4.13** shows surveyors at work near the old Fort Frontenac. What do you think Loyalist settlers had to do to make a home out of this land?



FIGURE 4.13 This painting entitled *A View of the Ruins of the Fort at Cataraqui* by James Peachey in 1783 shows British cartographer (map-maker) Samuel Holland and his team surveying land. Their job was to divide the land into settler plots on the site of ruins of the old French Fort Frontenac. **Analyze:** Who do you think was not invited to settle in the site of the old Fort Frontenac?

“It is now afternoon and I have been on shore. It is I think the roughest land I ever saw. It beats ‘Shortrocks’ [in Stamford]. I think that is nothing to this; but this is to be our city they say.... We are to have our land sixty miles further up the river. We are all ordered to land tomorrow, and not a shelter to go under.”

— Sarah Frost, Loyalist

FIGURE 4.12 This diary entry was written in 1783 by Frost upon arriving in British North America. **Analyze:** How does Frost's experience compare with the way the Loyalist arrival was shown in **Figure 4.1**?



FIGURE 4.14 This image is an undated pen and ink drawing by C.W. Jefferys called *Loyalists Drawing Lots For Their Lands, 1784*. Jefferys did not live in this time period. He drew this scene of the 1784 lottery system showing settlers drawing a lot of land from a hat. **Analyze:** Based on this depiction, how do you think the Loyalists felt while waiting to randomly choose a lot of land?

WAITING TO OWN LAND

Once Loyalists had arrived, they could begin the process of acquiring land. Individual Loyalists or groups of Loyalists could petition, or request, one or more lots. They would often divide the land they acquired among themselves by lottery. Examine the land lottery shown in **Figure 4.14**. Do you think this was a fair or effective way to give out land?

Along with land, Loyalists were given some free supplies, such as farm tools, food, and clothing. As well, they did not have to pay taxes for a number of years. In exchange for all of this, the Loyalists needed to complete certain tasks or else they had to give the land back. This usually meant that they had to clear and farm a set amount of their land within a certain time period. However, many Loyalists did not receive land right away. Read the quote in **Figure 4.15** from Loyalist Mary Barbara Fisher, which describes her and her family's harsh living conditions. What other supplies could the British government have provided to help Loyalist refugees when arriving in British North America?

“We pitched our tents in the shelter of the woods and tried to cover them with spruce boughs. We used stones for fireplaces. Our tents had no floors but the ground ... how we lived through that winter, I barely know ...”

— Mary Barbara Fisher, Loyalist

FIGURE 4.15 Fisher recounts her family's arrival in October 1783. The account was found in a manuscript written by her granddaughter Georgianna in the 1880s or 1890s. **Analyze:** What does this tell you about the living conditions that many Loyalists had to endure as they waited for their land?



CLEARING LAND

Some of the land that you see around present-day Lake Ontario's north shore and the St. Lawrence River has been cleared for farmland, roads, and buildings. When the Loyalist settlers arrived in British North America, the land was very different. It was wild, with great forests often to the edge of the water. Look at **Figure 4.16**. The painting shows what part of the Thousand Islands looked like in 1796. The painter, Elizabeth Simcoe, was the wife of John Graves Simcoe, the first lieutenant-governor of what is southern Ontario today. How did she see her new land? Compare **Figure 4.16** with **Figure 4.17**, a present-day photo of part of the Thousand Islands. What has changed? What has stayed the same?

Once Loyalist settlers claimed their lots, trees needed to be cut down, tree roots removed, soil turned, and homes built. Doing these tasks with human strength alone was extremely difficult. There were no bulldozers or power tools to clear land and build homes quickly. It was crucial for settlers to have a warm shelter in order to survive their first winter. Some settlers did not survive the harsh conditions.

FIGURE 4.17 This is a present-day photo of part of the Thousand Islands. **Analyze:** Why do you think the coastline has not been completely cleared?



FIGURE 4.16 Elizabeth Simcoe's watercolour painting *Thousand Islands* dated July 1796 shows a rugged coastline, thick with trees. **Analyze:** Look at the people in the foreground of the painting. What could they be doing?

BROKEN PROMISES

For most of the Loyalist refugees who survived the first few years in British North America, their hard work eventually paid off. Many present-day towns across southern Ontario, Québec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island can trace their roots back to the Loyalists. However, the promise of a better life did not come true for all the Loyalists who came to British North America.

LACK OF COMPENSATION

Whenever British subjects lost their property due to war, the British government would compensate, or pay back, a portion of their losses. Some of the Loyalists who left behind property in the Thirteen Colonies expected they would receive government money, in addition to free land, to help them start over. They petitioned the government for this compensation, but the money was slow to arrive. Some Loyalists, such as the Black Loyalists, never received any compensation. Read **Figure 4.18**, a quote from Sir Guy Carleton, the British commander-in-chief in British North America, whom you learned about in Chapter 3. Do you think that the British and American governments had a responsibility to pay back all the Loyalists for their losses?



“Ten years have elapsed since many [Loyalists] have been deprived of their fortunes, their helpless families reduced from independent affluence [wealth] to poverty and want. Some are now languishing [suffering] in British jails, unable to pay their debtors. Provision should now be made for payment of those whose claims have been settled and reported. It will not only relieve them of their distress but give credit to others whose claims remain to be considered and enable them all to provide for their wretched [unhappy] families and become again useful members of society.”

— Sir Guy Carleton, British commander-in-chief

FIGURE 4.18 This excerpt, written by Carleton, was part of a 1786 submission to the British House of Commons that supported paying Loyalist compensation claims. **Analyze:** What are the arguments that Carleton makes for compensating the Loyalists?

Now read **Figure 4.19**, a quote from Carleton about the Loyalist refugees. How does **Figure 4.19** support his views in **Figure 4.18**?



“Brave, unfortunate people, many of them of the very first families, reduced to a condition that makes one's heart bleed.”

— Sir Guy Carleton, British commander-in-chief

FIGURE 4.19 This undated quote by Carleton is in response to the state of Loyalist refugees. **Analyze:** Who do you think Carleton was referring to when he said “first families”?

What could be some reasons why Loyalist families were able to survive their first few years in British North America?

INTERPRET AND ANALYZE

Having a strong inquiry question and researching reliable information are only the first steps in conducting a historical investigation. Once you have your inquiry question and information, you need to analyze, or make sense of, your findings. Ask yourself what your information means. Think about how different pieces of information fit together. How do you think people would have thought, or felt, based on your evidence?

When you interpret and analyze information, you need to

- think about your evidence in different ways using the historical thinking concepts
- try to uncover new details and perspectives
- look for ways that different pieces fit together
- try to find patterns
- put the evidence you have found into your own words

CASE STUDY: THE DAILY LIVES OF BLACK LOYALISTS IN NOVA SCOTIA

The majority of Black Loyalists settled in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. However, many did not have the same support as white Loyalists. Along with the lack of compensation, the Black Loyalists received either poor quality land or no land at all. Consider this inquiry question as you interpret and analyze the information in this case study: Did Black Loyalists in Nova Scotia experience the better life they were promised by the British?

In 1773, a large group of Black Loyalists arrived in Nova Scotia. They settled in Birchtown, just outside Shelburne, Nova Scotia. With the arrival of so many Loyalists in the area, food and shelter quickly became scarce. The Black Loyalists were the last to get provisions, tools, and land, if they got them at all. Only one-third of the Black Loyalists ever received land. Those who did, found that the land was often unsuitable for farming. Often they were unable to wait for land and had to work as labourers or indentured servants.

Indentured service was a temporary form of slavery. People would sign away their freedom for a specific amount of time and receive a sum of money at the end of the term.

Racial tension between white and Black Loyalists increased as some white Loyalists arrived in British North America with enslaved people. Some free Black Loyalists were kidnapped and sold back into slavery. Black Loyalists also faced discrimination. They were not allowed to vote or allowed to have a jury trial. Their punishment for crimes was often whipping or being returned to slavery. There were even laws that prohibited them from dancing and having social gatherings.

Read Lieutenant William Dyott's description of the conditions in Birchtown in **Figure 4.20**.

“... walked through the woods about two miles from the barracks to a negro town called Birch Town. At the evacuation of New York there were a great number of these poor devils given lands and settled here—The place is beyond description wretched, situated on the coast in the middle of barren rocks, and partly surrounded by a thick impenetrable wood—Their huts miserable to guard against ... a Nova Scotia winter, and their existence almost depending on what they could lay up in summer. I think I never saw wretchedness and poverty so strongly perceptible in the garb and the countenance of the human species as in these miserable outcasts.”

— Lieutenant William Dyott,
British infantry officer

FIGURE 4.20 This excerpt is from Dyott's diary. It was written in October 1788. **Analyze:** What are the key points in this excerpt?



FIGURE 4.21 This watercolour of a Black woodcutter in Shelburne, Nova Scotia, was painted by Captain William Booth in 1788. It is one of the few images from the period showing Black Loyalists. **Analyze:** How would you interpret this watercolour with and without the other two sources?

“About this time the country was visited with a dreadful famine, which not only prevailed at Birchtown, but likewise at Chebucto, Annapolis, Digby, and other places. Many of the poor people were compelled to sell their best gowns for five pounds of flour, in order to support life. When they had parted with all their clothes, even to their blankets, several of them fell down dead in the streets, thro' hunger ... poverty and distress prevailed on every side; so that to my great grief I was obliged to leave Birchtown, because I could get no employment.”

— Boston King, Black Loyalist

FIGURE 4.22 This description of conditions in Birchtown during a 1787 famine was written by a Black Loyalist named Boston King. **Analyze:** How is King's description similar to or different from Dyott's diary in **Figure 4.20**?

Despite the harsh conditions, Birchtown became the largest Black settlement in North America. Black Loyalists who were skilled workers were able to find jobs as shoemakers, teachers, ministers, or woodcutters, as pictured in **Figure 4.21**. Some enslaved people escaped and found refuge in the free Black communities. **Figure 4.22** is a description of life in Birchtown, written by a Black Loyalist named Boston King. When you examine **Figure 4.22**, what new understanding do you have about the lives of Black Loyalists?

TRY IT

1. Consider the sources in this feature. What patterns emerge?
2. Compare the sources here with other sources in the chapter. How did the experiences of white Loyalists differ? Are they similar in any way? Consider what perspective each source represents. How do the sources help you to answer the inquiry question?

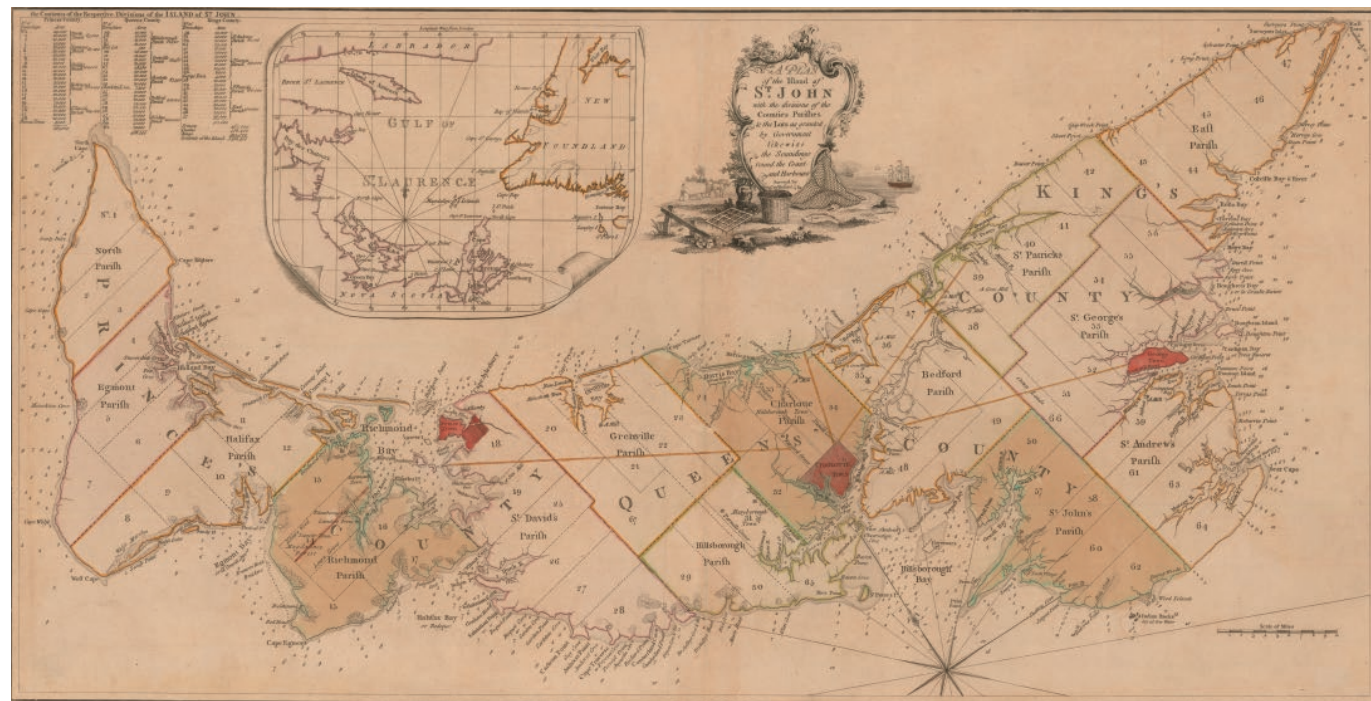


FIGURE 4.23 Samuel Holland created the first map of P.E.I. to help the British government divide the land into lots for settlement following the expulsion of the Acadians. **Analyze:** Where do you think the most desirable plots of land were?

ABSENTEE LANDLORDS

In 1764, Samuel Holland began mapping out Île Saint Jean (Île means “island”), which we now call Prince Edward Island (P.E.I.). His purpose was to divide the island, which included former Acadian land after the Acadian Expulsion, into large lots for new settlements. You can see Holland’s finished work in **Figure 4.23**. The government gave the plots of land to 17 friends of the British Crown, who were required to settle the island in exchange for land ownership. Many landowners lived in Britain, and a few were women who inherited the land from their families. One such landowner was Anne Saunders, Lady Melville. Saunders inherited two lots of land from her father since she did not have any brothers. She never visited P.E.I. while she owned land there. Instead, she used a land agent in P.E.I. to manage her lots for her.

Many of the overseas landowners managed their land badly, often leaving much of the land untouched throughout the 1770s. This created a legacy of “absentee landlords.” Why do you think so much of this land belonging to absentee landlords stayed undeveloped for so long?

As the Loyalists’ demand for land continued to increase, the landlords agreed, in 1783, to give up about 109 000 acres. This is about the size of present-day Kingston, Ontario. The Loyalists were told that they would be allowed to keep the land if they did the hard work of clearing it and building roads. Although Loyalist settlers did their part and worked the land, many landowners never intended to keep their promise to hand over ownership. The settlers in P.E.I. continued to fight the government over the land issue for more than 100 years, finally resolving it with a bill named *The Land Purchase Act, 1875*.

What might be the consequences of landowners living in Britain rather than in P.E.I.?

THE FALL OF SHELBURNE

Shelburne, Nova Scotia, was a small port settlement isolated from other parts of Nova Scotia. It was a quiet place with a small population. Everything changed when masses of Loyalist refugees began arriving on Shelburne’s shores. By December 1784, Shelburne’s population had increased drastically to more than 10 000 inhabitants. It became the largest city in the British colonies and the fourth largest in North America after New York, Philadelphia, and Boston. However, despite arriving in a location with a large supply of unsettled land, hundreds of Loyalist families still found themselves without land. The British government had claimed large tracts of land in Shelburne for the King, as well as for naval and military purposes. These kinds of restrictions caused a land shortage and slowed down the land grant process. Loyalists without land were left frustrated and homeless, with no way to support themselves. They were dependent on government aid in the form of food and shelter. In 1787, the British government stopped all aid to the Shelburne Loyalists. People then began leaving for better opportunities elsewhere. By 1791, two-thirds of Shelburne’s population had left. Despite this, Loyalists still left their mark on Shelburne. In present-day Shelburne, there are many heritage buildings in the town that date back to the Loyalist migration. **Figure 4.24** is an image of Cooper’s Inn, built in 1784 and protected today as a heritage property. Why do you think Shelburne preserves buildings from the Loyalist era?



FIGURE 4.24 Cooper’s Inn is one of several historic buildings in Shelburne that date back to the Loyalist migration. **Analyze:** Why is it important to protect historical buildings?

CHECK-IN

- GATHER AND ORGANIZE** What other types of evidence might help you understand more about the challenges that the Loyalists faced?
- FORMULATE QUESTIONS** Create an inquiry question that will help you investigate the similarities and differences between the various Loyalist groups. For example, you can compare different groups’ reasons for staying loyal to Britain.
- CONTINUITY AND CHANGE** For which Loyalist immigrants did life get better, stay the same, or get worse after the American Revolution?
- COMMUNICATE** Imagine you are an Acadian farmer watching the British government claim your land on Île Saint Jean. Write a diary entry expressing your feelings and concerns about how your old home is being taken away from you.