

V.—*The Loyalists in Prince Edward Island.*

By PROF. WILBUR H. SIEBERT and FLORENCE E. GILLIAM of Ohio State University.

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The general conditions which led to the influx of large numbers of Loyalists into Canada from the American colonies during the Revolution of 1776 and at its close are well known. They resolve themselves into the provisions of the anti-Loyalist legislation passed by the revolting States,¹ the threats and persecutions to which those people were subjected who supported the British cause by word or deed, the failure of the United States Government, or of the separate States, to accord any redress to the Loyalists for losses of property, and the grants of land in Canadian territory made by the British Government in an endeavour to repair the losses sustained by its distressed adherents from the States. In a general way these conditions may be held to account for the settlement of the Loyalists in numerous places in various parts of Canada from Detroit on the west to the Island of Cape Breton on the east.

When, however, we take up any given place of refuge, for the purpose of examining the history of its connection with the American Loyalists, we find at once that special causes must be reckoned with. Thus, there were considerations chiefly of a personal nature which induced many Loyalists to resort to London as the seat of government in far-away England; and other considerations more local in character which influenced numbers of "Tories" from Georgia and Florida to seek a congenial refuge under the British flag in some of the neighbouring West Indies.

It is our purpose in the present paper to examine the special causes and circumstances under which a considerable number of Loyalists settled in Prince Edward Island, and to set forth their subsequent history in that place.

Prince Edward Island lies in the Gulf of St. Lawrence adjacent to the northern shore of the peninsula of Nova Scotia. In 1767 the entire island, then known as the Island of St. John, was disposed of in various grants by the Crown, and was annexed to the provincial government of its neighbour on the south. In 1768 a large majority of the proprietors presented a petition to the king, praying that the island be erected into a separate government. The petition was granted, and Captain Walter

¹ See "Anti-Loyalist Legislation during the American Revolution," by Prof. J. W. Thompson in *Ill. Law Rev.*, Vol. III, Nos. 2 and 3.

Patterson, one of the island proprietors, was appointed governor. The existing name of the island led to much confusion and inconvenience. There was Cabot's Island of St. John off the west coast of Cape Breton, Gomez's Island of St. John which was Cape Breton itself, the river St. John, and other instances of the name. Governor Patterson complained of mails going astray, and asked to have the name changed. That of Prince Edward Island was therefore adopted.¹

The proprietors seemed to feel themselves under no obligation to pay their quit-rents and the island officials found it very difficult to keep the government machinery in motion. The governor became involved in a quarrel over the sale of lands, and felt it necessary to get the influence of such people as the Loyalists, who were now, at the evacuation of New York by the British troops, coming from that and other states to settle in Nova Scotia. The proprietors saw a chance to escape the payment of quit-rents on any land granted to Loyalists and found thus a special interest in their coming. Hence, in examining the causes for the settlement of the Loyalists in Prince Edward Island we must first consider the apparently liberal offer made by the proprietors of the island itself in 1783. This offer was set forth in a petition delivered to Lord North, declaring their desire to afford asylum to such distressed fellow-subjects as preferred a settlement on the island to one in Nova Scotia, and asking for such an abatement of quit-rent as would render the island an attractive place of settlement for American Loyalists. The petition asserted as its motive the wish to further the prosperity of the colony.²

This step naturally received encouragement from the British Government. Accordingly, the governor, by advice of the Council, issued a proclamation promising certain lands to those who should choose to become settlers in the same manner as in Quebec and Nova Scotia.³ And when this procedure did not prove entirely satisfactory, the Island legislature, in 1790, passed an act, which was approved by His Majesty the King of England in 1793, empowering the governor, lieutenant-governor, or other commander-in-chief for the time being, to give grants of such portions of the lands resigned by the proprietors as were then in possession of Loyalists and reduced soldiers.⁴ The governor

¹ Warburton, *Historical Sketch of Prince Edward Island*.

² The text of this paper is quoted in the Act of the Legislature of 1790. See *Revised Statutes of Prince Edward Island*, 30th George III, ch. 5.

³ The proclamation is quoted in the report of the Committee appointed in 1833 to investigate the complaints of the Loyalists. See *Journal of the House of Assembly of Prince Edward Island* for the year 1833.

⁴ See *Revised Statutes of Prince Edward Island*, 1790. 30th George III, ch. 5.

received royal instructions concerning the grants which embodied very liberal terms for the settlers.¹

Further than the encouragement thus offered, we have as an active cause of Loyalist settlement in Prince Edward Island, the collapse of Shelburne, "that great city that was to be," founded after the American war by refugees in Nova Scotia.² Many of the disappointed settlers of Shelburne saw the proclamation of the governor of the island, and went there in the hope of retrieving their fortunes.³ One of these, who arrived in 1784, afterwards informed a committee of the legislature that he had been induced to come by several proclamations posted about the streets of Shelburne offering lands to Loyalists on their arrival; and another tells of having been informed of the proclamation by an agent of Governor Patterson, who assured him that he could easily get land as a settler.

That these methods on the part of the authorities met with a measure of success is shown by some important records of the time. On June 12, 1784, a muster of Loyalists was taken on the island, which gives the number of men as two hundred and two, with enough women, children and servants or slaves to make a total of three hundred and eighty persons.⁴ During the summer and early autumn of the same year several groups of Loyalist families arrived from Shelburne: thus we find it noted that twenty-seven men, together with women and children, came in on July 26; twenty-six men, also with women and children, on September 13, fifty-five on September 19, and twelve on September 25.⁵ These figures give an aggregate of one hundred and twenty men alone (the figures for an accurate count of the women and children not being at hand), who are recorded as arriving from Shelburne during the interval of two months from July 26 to September 25, 1784.⁶ Counting in all the Loyalists who were duly reported in the records of the summer and fall of this year, 1784, we have a total say of six hundred, more or less, who had made their way to Prince Edward

¹ Quoted in the report of the committee appointed in 1833 to bring in a bill for the relief of the Loyalists. See *Journal of the House of Assembly of Prince Edward Island*, March, 1833.

² See Crosskill: *Prince Edward Island, the Garden Province of Canada*, p. 18.

³ Interviews appended to report of the committee to whom was referred the Loyalist Petition. See *Journal of the House of Assembly of Prince Edward Island* for the year 1833.

⁴ Brymner, *Report on Canadian Archives*, 1884, p. xli.

⁵ Letters and Records of C. Stewart. See *Muster Rolls of Loyalists and Soldiers*, 1784, Vol. 376.

⁶ Crosskill in his little handbook, *Prince Edward Island, the Garden Province of Canada* (1906), p. 18, has understated the number of arrivals from Shelburne, placing the figure at about one hundred.

Island. It is therefore clear (unless about two-thirds of these intending settlers departed during the year and a half between June, 1784, and January, 1786), that there is a large discrepancy in the statement of Governor Patterson, who is said by Warburton to have written to the Secretary of State, in January, 1786, that only about two hundred settlers had arrived and some families from Rhode Island, who expected others soon to come from the United States on account of heavy taxes and want of trade.¹

Doubtless, Governor Patterson and his colleagues were disappointed in the number of settlers which the offer of lands in their pleasant and fertile island secured; but it must be remembered that Prince Edward Island was competing for residents with the idyllic western portion of the Nova Scotian peninsula and with the rich and lovely valleys of the St. John and St. Lawrence rivers, localities in which thousands of Loyalists were finding homes. Under these circumstances one may reasonably say that the island fared well in the number of Loyalists who sought its shores. That a considerable exodus of these immigrants may have taken place is not improbable in view of the charlatany practised on them by both proprietors and officials when they presented their claims for homestead lands. The story of the many wrongs committed against the settlers will be narrated later on.

It may be asked from what States these Loyalists came. The majority of those whose origin is known came from New York. Occasional references indicate that some had formerly lived in Boston, Mass., Rhode Island and other parts of New England, while some came from remoter sections, for example, North and South Carolina.

A wide variety of social condition was shown by the new settlers. Disbanded officers and men from Loyalist regiments, such as Butler's Rangers and the King's Rangers were to be found among the population. Sabine, in his *American Loyalists*, gives sketches of some of these, among them several who were connected with the King's Rangers, and who after settling appear to have written others inviting them to follow.² The civilians were represented by men of former wealth and rank, as also by farmers and artisans of the middle class. We hear of persons of both high and low degree among the recent settlers who, like the Loyalists of all other localities, had gone through the most trying vicissitudes on account of their devotion to the Crown, some of them members of the wealthy class of New York who became involved by giving aid to British troops, and again a New York gun-smith who relates the danger he encountered in supplying arms to the British, and

¹ Warburton, *Prince Edward Island, an Historical Sketch*, p. 30.

² Pp. 243, 359, 439, 572, 625, 646.

adds that he acted as one of their army guides during most of the war but got nothing for it.

In general it may be said of these new members of the island community that they were capable and industrious people, recognized as valuable settlers, and became the founders of thrifty, prosperous and continuing families. The provincial librarian, Mr. W. H. Crosskill, writing in 1906, says in this connection:¹ "Many well known families of to-day, thrifty and prosperous citizens of such fine farming districts as Bedeque, Pownal, Vernon River, etc., are descendants of those who in 1783 preferred George of England to his namesake² Washington."

The settlements of the Loyalists were established for the most part on the south shore of the island. The lands assigned to them were in various townships, notably, Nos. 16, 17, 19, 26, 32, 50 and 56. Most of the people from Shelburne got settled, after much difficulty, at Bedeque Harbor. The obtaining of the grants was a very slow process; and in order to supply their necessities in the meantime the British Government issued provisions to them, at first for one month, but afterwards during the second month also. Many of the Rhode Island immigrants were, according to a writer of 1821-22, located in King's County.³ Stuart, in his *Account of Prince Edward Island* speaks of the success of the Loyalist settlers in township No. 26 as proof of "what might have been expected from that description of people, had any considerable number of them been brought to the Island instead of being encouraged and in some measure compelled by the overbearing influence of a few individuals to settle themselves on the barren, foggy shores of the southern coast of Nova Scotia."⁴

By far the greater part of Loyalist history in the island must, of necessity, be taken up with the wrongs and persecutions inflicted on the Loyalist settlers. It is not putting the matter too strongly to say that the proprietors participated in a general defalcation when the settlers began appearing in response to the offers first set forth in the proprietary petition to Lord North. Even Edmund Fanning, when lieutenant governor was implicated, as one of the proprietors, in the trouble which arose over township No. 50.⁵ The Loyalist settlers in this township,

¹ *Prince Edward Island, the Garden of Province of Canada*, p. 18.

² Letter of C. Stewart, appointed to muster disbanded troops and Loyalists, dated St. John's Island, 9th August, 1784. See *Muster Rolls of Loyalists and Soldiers*, 1784, Vol. 376.

³ Warburton, *Prince Edward Island, an Historical Sketch*, p. 30.

⁴ John Stewart, *Account of Prince Edward Island in the Gulf of St. Lawrence*, pp. 207-217. See also Interviews appended to reports of committees in the *Journals of the House of Assembly of Prince Edward Island*.

⁵ See *Journal of the House of Assembly of Prince Edward Island* for year 1833—report of the committee to whom was referred the Petition of American Loyalists in 1832.

being unable to obtain their grants, resolved to send a remonstrance to the British Government and chose as their representative one of their number who had been known to Lord Cornwallis in the war, hoping thus to obtain redress. This agent was preparing to leave for England, and had made known his intention to Lieutenant-Governor Fanning and the other officers of the provincial government. The effect secured was as prompt as it was significant; within a week afterwards nearly all the Loyalists who had claims in the specified township obtained their grants. It is worth remarking that the Lieutenant-Governor was himself an extensive proprietor in the township in question. In many other cases, however, the difficulty was not so easily arranged; grants were promised, and then refused; Loyalists were allowed to take up their residence on certain lands, being assured that their titles were secure, and after clearing the lands, erecting buildings, planting orchards, and making other improvements, were told that their titles lacked validity, and were forced to move;¹ and many onerous conditions were attached to the holding of the granted lands. In the legislative investigations which were subsequently made, considerable evidence was adduced to prove that the governors themselves had acted in bad faith in the carrying out of the offers made. A soldier who had seen service both in New York and Cape Breton, on presenting letters of recommendation for land to Governor Fanning, was told—according to his account—that the whole island was soon to become King's land, that the only Crown land at present was in the middle of the forest, and he was advised to wait, with the result that he never got the land. Another, a disbanded seaman, let slip the grant which he might have obtained in Halifax in order to come to the island, and though he repeatedly endeavoured to get a grant from the governor, he was always met with some excuse and remained landless. The royal instructions concerning the grants embodied very liberal terms.² But, in disobedience to express provisions therein, time limits were set, quit-rents were demanded, and certain improvements were made conditions of holding. Inducements that were held out by the governors led a number of Loyalists to come to the island who never received any fulfilment of these promises. Written deeds were withheld, and the location of the Loyalists changed quite arbitrarily from one place to another. The minutes of Council which contained many of the Loyalist locations, were not entered in the regular Council Book; and the rough minutes when discovered, bore evidences in erasures and different inks of having

¹ See *Journal of the House of Assembly* for 1833—testimony of witnesses appended to the report of the committee to confirm the titles of the Loyalists.

² Quoted in report referred to in note 1.

been tampered with.¹ Moreover, we find Governor Patterson taking advantage of the dependent condition of the Loyalists to secure for himself a party in the House of Assembly. These new settlers were dependent on him for the government donations which made the establishment of their settlements possible; in him also was vested the power of locating them on the lands they were to receive—hence they were ready to support any measure in which he was interested. Fanning, Patterson's successor, later excused himself for withholding a grant on the ground that all the land had been granted by his predecessor.

If Loyalist history in the island is full of wrongs and persecutions, it is also marked by attempts at Loyalist redress renewed from time to time. As early as 1790 the island legislature passed an act empowering the governor to give grants to Loyalists who had not yet received them from the proprietors.² The need of this act, as avowed, lay in the fact that the proprietors had failed to fulfil their part of the agreement, and many of the Loyalists had therefore remained unsupplied with lands. This measure was "allowed" by the King in 1793. But its provisions did not redress all grievances, and after the lapse of forty years a petition of the Loyalists led to further action in the matter. A committee of investigation was appointed in the House of Assembly, and made a report containing a review of the Loyalist movement in which the gross injustice of their treatment was shown. A bill to confirm their titles was recommended and evidence was presented in the form of interviews with witnesses.³ The committee appointed to prepare a bill for the relief of the Loyalists also made an extended report.⁴ This report quoted the royal instructions of 1783, pointed out the failure on the part of the proprietors and governors to regard them, and exposed the suppression of Loyalist applications in the Council Minutes. Appended to this report there was likewise a set of interviews with witnesses.

This measure seems to have fallen through, for in 1839 another bill for relief was reported. It did not, however, meet the approval of the Colonial Secretary in England, although his objections were replied to by the committee to whom his despatch had been referred. Another bill passed the House in 1840, but was rejected by the Legislative Council. In the same year the Loyalists sent an address to the Governor General of Canada; and in 1841 a bill for relief was again passed in the

¹ These Minutes were originally thought to have been lost, but investigation revealed that they had been preserved on loose papers.

² *Revised Statutes of Prince Edward Island*, 1790, 30th Geo. III, ch. 5.

³ *Journal of the House of Assembly of Prince Edward Island* for the year 1833.

⁴ *Journal of the House of Assembly of Prince Edward Island*, Thursday, March 28, 1833.

House and rejected by the Council. A committee, also appointed in 1841, to deal with the question of Loyalist relief, gathered together all these bills with the reasons given for their rejection. They showed that the objections of the Colonial Minister, which had not been completely refuted in the report of 1840, were removed by the omission from the bill of 1840 of the objectionable parts of the bill of 1839; that the bill of 1840 did not in fact infringe the rights of either the proprietors or the Crown. They reviewed the reasons given by the Legislative Council for rejecting the bills, namely, that it was similar to that of 1839, and that it amounted to an assumption by the Legislature of the right to dispose of the waste lands of the Crown, and showed that both statements were unfounded. They called attention to the fact that the "anxious desire" professed by the Legislative Council to afford relief to the Loyalists did not facilitate the comprehension by that body of what was the evident intention and meaning of the bill of 1840. They made it clear also that through the objections raised in various quarters on the part of the Crown, governors, and Legislative Councils, all bills for Loyalist relief for forty years had been prevented; and they urged the House not to relinquish a cause which after mature consideration it had declared to be well founded, but that it publish the list of Loyalist claimants along with extracts from certain letters of Lord Liverpool and William Faulkner, and appoint a committee at the next session to investigate how many claimants had been satisfied to the end of securing redress for those who had not.¹

What was the outcome of this agitation we are unable to say, for the records at our disposal are incomplete; but it should be noted that as late as 1860 a Land Commission was appointed which again reported that the Loyalists had claims on the local government, and recommended that free grants be made to such as could prove that their fathers had been attracted to the island under promises which had never been fulfilled. Thus we see that for three-quarters of a century after the settlement of the Loyalists in Prince Edward Island, their grievances had been periodically urged with vigour and had proved to be an abundant source of agitation and concern to the island authorities.

Concerning the real significance of the Loyalist settlement in Prince Edward Island, it is not easy to generalize. It seems probable that at the end of the year 1784 the American refugees formed from a fifth to a sixth part of the island population, which some fifteen years later amounted only to 4,372. As their habitations were fixed mostly in the southern part of the island, that section, which already had the

¹ Report quoted entire in the *Journal of the House of Assembly of Prince Edward Island*, April 20, 1841.

advantage of proximity to Nova Scotia, received an additional stimulus, and benefited agriculturally, commercially and in other respects. The presence of the Loyalists also made itself felt politically. Governor Patterson was not averse to bidding for the votes of Loyalists and their friends in the lower house of the provincial legislature when some favourite measure was up for enactment. These people were naturally conscious of their obligations to the executive, and were likely to vote as he desired. However, the political influence of this class of settlers seems to have been incidental to the exigencies of the situation.¹ Otherwise, it manifested chiefly, if not altogether, in the recurring attempts to right the wrongs of the Loyalists themselves. As the Loyalist strength, however, was entirely confined to the House of Assembly, remedial legislation could not be secured. The adverse power of the proprietors found its chief defence in the Legislative Council; the proprietors well knew that their titles to disputed lands were only safe while they were in control of that body. As the governors, Patterson and Fanning, were themselves proprietors, they did not escape being charged with sharp practice towards the refugee claimants, although the latter was himself a North Carolina Loyalist. In this connection it may be noted that one of the early chief justices of the island was the son of a Loyalist from Connecticut, Munson Jarvis.²

We have some slight indications of the religious adherence of the new settlers. The great majority of them were undoubtedly Episcopalians. But when in 1792 a Methodist revival was held in the island, Nathaniel Wright and his family became converts. They were of the number of Loyalists who had scattered from Shelburne. They remained zealous followers of Methodism, and not only assisted in bringing another minister to the island in 1794, but were active in keeping alive Methodist teachings in the colony. It is probable that Nathaniel Wright who lived at Bedeque—the place of settlement chosen by many of the Loyalists—had associated with him a considerable number of his fellow refugees in the Methodist community which grew up there.

¹ Stewart, *Account of Prince Edward Island*, pp. 192-4.

² Sabine, *The American Loyalists*, p. 384.