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"The Legend of Captain Michael Grass"

The Logic of Elimination and Loyalist Myth-making in Upper Canada, 1783-84

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This article examines the founding myth for the community of Kingston, Ontario which holds that Associated Loyalist Michael Grass founded the city after he led eight companies of refugees from New York to Cataraqui (Kingston) in 1783-84. The legend is a "settler society fiction", an invented founding narrative that privileges Loyalist history at the expense of other communities including the Indigenous Mississauga. Comparing the legend and documents from Grass's lifetime, shows that the Indigenous presence at Cataraqui has been effectively eliminated. The legend justifies the dispossession of the local Mississauga, accounts for the sudden presence of White settlers on the north shore of Lake Ontario, and perpetuates a settler society fiction.

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This article examines the founding myth for the community of Kingston, Ontario which holds that Associated Loyalist Michael Grass founded the city after he led eight companies of refugees from New York to Cataraqui (Kingston) in 1783-84. The legend is a "settler society fiction", an invented founding narrative that privileges Loyalist history at the expense of other communities including the Indigenous Mississauga. Comparing the legend and documents from Grass's lifetime, shows that the Indigenous presence at Cataraqui has been effectively eliminated. The legend justifies the dispossession of the local Mississauga, accounts for the sudden presence of White settlers on the north shore of Lake Ontario, and perpetuates a settler society fiction.

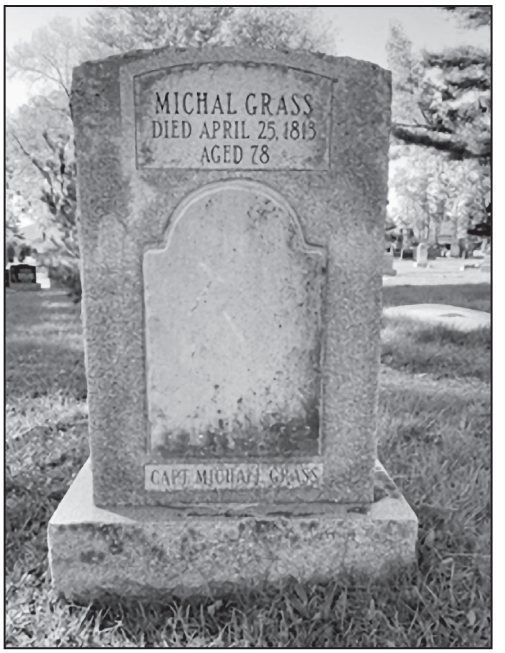
Résumé: *Dans cet article, nous examinerons le mythe fondateur de la communauté de Kingston, en Ontario, selon lequel le loyaliste Michael Grass (1735-1813) aurait fondé la ville après avoir conduit huit compagnies de réfugiés de New York à Cataraqui (Kingston) en 1783-84. Nous nous appuierons sur des documents d'archives réalisés du vivant de Grass pour montrer que cette légende est une "settler society fiction" inventée comme récit fondateur pour privilégier l'histoire des loyalistes aux dépens d'autres communautés, notamment les peuples autochtones Mississauga et Cataraqui, et pour expliquer la présence soudaine de colons blancs sur la rive nord du lac Ontario.*

Introduction

> "The primary motive for elimination is not race (or religion, ethnicity, grade of civilization, etc.) but access to territory. Territoriality is settler colonialism's specific, irreducible element."[1] (Patrick Wolfe)

On a sunny morning in May 2002, a group of volunteers gathered around the gravesite of a notable United Empire Loyalist named Michael Grass (1735-1813), located in Cataraqui Cemetery, Kingston, Ontario. Those who gathered were members of the Michael Grass Stone Committee, local history enthusiasts who raised funds for the restoration of Grass's deteriorating headstone. Affectionately referred to as "Captain Michael Grass" the gravesite marked the final resting place of the man often credited as the founder of Kingston. From 1783-84 Grass led eight Companies of Associated Loyalists from New York City to Cataraqui (Kingston) in the wake of the American Revolutionary War (1775-83) and has since

[1] Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8 (December 2006), 388.



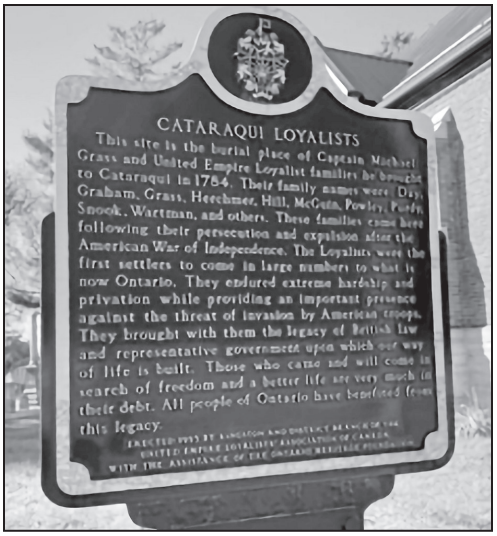
Figures 1 & 2: Michael Grass's Gravesite, 2021: Located in the Heritage Section of Cataraqui Cemetery, Kingston, Ontario, the gravesite features the original headstone remounted on a new granite block (left) as well as a bronze plaque mounted on the rear (right). Source: Photographs by the author.

been celebrated as the city's founder.[2] As seen in Figures 1 & 2, the committee attached a bronze plaque to the back of the headstone engraved with the following passage, "During the spring of 1784, Michael led fifty Loyalists families to Cataraqui establishing a permanent settlement from which has grown the City of Kingston."

In addition to the new bronze plaque, there are other monuments scattered throughout Cataraqui's commemorative colonial landscape which reinforce that claim. One was erected just yards from Grass's gravestone by the Kingston and District Branch of the United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada in 1993 with the assistance of the Ontario Heritage Foundation.[3] As seen in Figure 3, the seven-foot-high plaque states, "This is the

[2] The term "Associated Loyalist" was used by a number of military organisations during the American Revolution but came into prominence at the end of the conflict. Loyalists became associated as a means of organising the thousands of refugees pouring into cities like New York in seek of safety.

[3] The Kingston and District Branch of the United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada is a volunteer-run historical organisation dedicated to the preservation of Loyalist history. It is one of twenty-seven branches across Canada that preserves and promotes the Loyalist past. The Ontario Heritage Foundation has since been renamed the Ontario Heritage Trust (OHT) and is a non-profit agency of the Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Culture. Since 2005 the OHT has erected over 1,200 blue and gold plaques dedicated to regional cultural heritage across the province including the Ontario Street plaque erected in honour of Grass and the Loyalists.



Figures 3 & 4: Plaques Dedicated to Michael Grass, 2021: The plaque next to Grass's gravesite at Cataraqui Cemetery (left) and the plaque located along Ontario Street in downtown Kingston (below). Source: Photographs by the author.

burial place of Captain Michael Grass and United Empire Loyalist families he brought to Cataraqui in 1784" before continuing, "Those who came and will come in search of freedom and a better life are very much in their debt." The memorial concludes, "All people of Ontario have benefitted from this legacy." But not *all* people of Ontario have benefitted from this legacy. Indigenous communities continue to be marginalised by the Anglo-Protestant majority.

Another monument was erected in 1993 and can be found along the Kingston waterfront on the south side of Ontario Street. As seen in Figure 4, the plaque recounts, "In June 1784 a party of Associated Loyalists from New York State under the command of Captain Michael Grass... established a camp here on Mississauga Point" and continues, "Grass later recalled: 'I led the loyal band, I pointed out to them the site of their future metropolis and gained for persecuted principles a sanctuary, for myself and followers a home.'" Together, the numerous memorials are physical testaments to the "Legend of Captain Michael Grass," a specific interpretation of the events and people that shaped the region between 1783 and 1784. This understanding places a heavy emphasis on the significance of the region's pioneer past.[4]

Monuments, however, seldom commemorate an objective past. As Canadian historian Norman Knowles writes, monuments celebrate "a version of the

[4] French historian Pierre Nora's concept of *Lieux de mémoire* (site of memory) argues that material or non-material entities become symbolic elements of memorial heritage within communities. In Kingston, the monuments dedicated to Grass and the Loyalists have become vested with historical significance in the collective memory of the community as notable cultural landmarks.

past that reflected the values, attitudes, and objectives of their promoters."[5] Applying his insights to the Cataraqui region, the monuments dedicated to Grass represent the values, attitudes, and objectives, of those who privilege the region's colonial past at the expense of other legacies. Furthermore, the handful of monuments are a prime example of what Ontario historian Cecilia Morgan has called "settler society fictions." According to Morgan, settler society fictions are particular narratives concerning the establishment of Upper Canada with the arrival of the United Empire Loyalists where the province's "pioneer past" prevails at the expense of the regions much longer history, especially that of Indigenous peoples.[6] In Kingston, the myth surrounding Grass served as an anchor point for the rootless community after being exiled from the American colonies in 1783-84. Loyalism and its principles would continue to evolve and eventually solidify into the bedrock of Upper Canadian communities; as historian Jerry Bannister points out, "the arrival of the Loyalists engendered a series of myths that continues to shape Canadian history."[7]

The greatly embellished "founding" moment for Kingston in 1784 also dovetails with the ground-breaking scholarship conducted by Australian historian Patrick Wolfe who first wrote about the immensely influential theory known as "the logic of elimination." Wolfe argues that elimination is the organizing principle of settler colonialism, which itself is an ongoing system of power perpetuating the repression of native peoples and strives for the liquidation of Indigenous societies, while seeking to establish colonial society on the expropriated land base.[8] Canadian historian Allan Greer furthered Wolfe's theory on elimination by arguing that it can be found within the tradition of treaty making in North America as Indigenous peoples surrendered vast tracts of land to the preeminent European power on the continent, Great Britain.[9] Treaties were an "instrument of unusually thoroughgoing dispossession"[10] which is made evident when examining the British acquisition of Cataraqui through the Crawford Purchase (1783-84). The purchase extinguished Indigenous title to the land and pushed the local Mississauga aside, making room for

[5] Norman Knowles, *Inventing the Loyalists: The Ontario Loyalist Tradition and the Creation of Usable Pasts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 115.

[6] Cecilia Morgan, *Creating Pasts: History, Memory, and Commemoration in Southern Ontario, 1860-1980* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 7.

[7] Jerry Bannister, "Canada as Counter-Revolution: The Loyalist Order Framework in Canadian History, 1750-1840," in *Liberalism and Hegemony: Debating the Canadian Liberal Revolution*, ed. Michel Ducharme and Jean-François Constant (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 103.

[8] Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event* (New York: Cassell, 1999), 27.

[9] Allan Greer, "Settler Colonialism and Empire in Early America," *William and Mary Quarterly* 76 (July 2019), 387.

[10] *Ibid*.

the Loyalists who then claimed ownership of the region.

Instead of acknowledging the dispossession of the Mississauga, the legend centres on Grass and the successful establishment of a Loyalist sanctuary on the periphery of the British empire. However, the legendary story is not just another benign Loyalist myth. It is a cultural relic of the province's pioneer past that accounts for the sudden presence of European settlers at Cataraqui, legitimises the dispossession of the Mississauga from the north shore of Lake Ontario, and perpetuates the settler society fiction of Grass's "founding" moment in 1784.

The Legend of Captain Michael Grass

Grass was born "Johann Michael Gress" to a German Lutheran family on 11 February 1735 in Roppenheim, Alsace, France.[11] A French subject by birth, Grass was better described as both linguistically and culturally German. On 22 September 1752 Grass emigrated to North America aboard the ship Halifax and arrived in Philadelphia.[12] Eight years later the young German immigrant married Anna Margaretha Schwartz in New York City on 20 July 1760 and took up the trade of harness and saddle maker.[13] By 1772 Grass had the means to purchase a 125-acre farm located along Bowmans Creek in Canajoharie, New York and relocated his family there. During the American Revolutionary War Grass fled the increasingly rebellious Canajoharie community for the safety of Loyalist-held New York City when his farm and possessions were confiscated by the Patriots.[14] He built a new home in the city and joined the Loyalist militia receiving a commission on 2 February 1780 as a First Lieutenant.[15] By the end of the war the Grass family was forced into exile and migrated to Sorel, Quebec, in the summer and fall of 1783 before continuing on to Cataraqui the following spring.

For the above reasons, Grass's exciting life has become the subject of myth for the Kingston community. But when it comes to his story one basic question rises above all others; "Was he in fact the man that the legend promotes?" To find the answer to this complex question, one must examine and scrutinize the archival materials on the Loyalist migration and

[11] Archives Départmentales Du Bas-Rhin, "Registers Paroissuaux et Documents d'état Civil," Paroisse Protestante (Avant 1793) 1688-1746. E 409/1. 101.

[12] Ralph Beaver Strassburger, ed., *Pennsylvania German Pioneers, A Publication of the Original Lists of Arrivals in the Port of Philadelphia from 1727 to 1808* (Binghamton: Vail-Ballou Press, 1934), 436.

[13] New York Lutheran Parish Records, "Vital Records Index: Individual Records: Michael Grass, Anna Margaretha Schwartz." 20 July 1760.

[14] Larry Turner, *Voyage of a Different Kind: The Associated Loyalists of Kingston and Adolphustown* (Belleville: Mika Publishing, 1984), 36.

[15] The National Archives, Kew, "American Loyalists Claims Commission: Records 1777-1841," vol. 13, series II, T 79, 118.

test them against the details of the myth. The legend itself refers to the composite patchwork of stories about the Loyalist leader that were promoted by several different groups including his descendants, historians, and local historical organisations. To pin down what is meant by "The Legend of Captain Michael Grass" the following analysis explores the six most important sources that speak to his exploits in an effort to untangle the confusing mess. Careful attention has been given to the instances where two or more accounts disagree to draw attention to the incredibly subjective nature of the myth.

Two of the six accounts begin by stating that Grass emigrated from Germany to America at an unknown date—William Canniff's *History and the Settlement of Upper Canada* (1869) and *Pioneer Life on the Bay of Quinte* (1904). Three accounts, *Pioneer Life*, Richard A. Preston's *Kingston Before the War of 1812* (1959), and Larry Turner's *Voyage of a Different Kind* (1984), state that Grass served in the British forces during the Seven Years' War (1754-63).[16] *Voyage of a Different Kind* copies an earlier account recorded by the Reverend James Richard of Kingston who interviewed Grass's son John in the mid-nineteenth century. Five of the six accounts, including an article in the *Kingston Gazette* (1811) and Agnes Machar's *The Story of Old Kingston* (1908), state that Grass was captured by Indigenous warriors prior to or during the Seven Years' War and brought to Cataraqui where he was imprisoned.[17] In Canniff's *History and the Settlement*, based on an interview conducted with Grass's grandson Robert in the mid-nineteenth century, he was taken prisoner during the American Revolutionary War.[18]

All six versions, however, agree that Grass was a prisoner at Cataraqui at some point in his life. *History and the Settlement* and *Pioneer Life* both state that Michael escaped from captivity at Cataraqui and made his way south to the province of New York.[19] In *History and the Settlement*, it is alleged that he made two escape attempts from his captors which resulted in the death of a fellow prisoner along the way. Two of the six versions state that he was a saddle and harness maker by trade. Interestingly, *History and the Settlement* makes the claim that Grass was in Philadelphia whereas *Kingston Before the War* states that he was actually living in New York at this time. According to *The Story of Old*

[16] Unknown Author, *Pioneer Life on the Bay of Quinte, Including Genealogies of Old Families and Biographical Sketches of Representative Citizens* (Toronto: Ralph and Clark, 1904), 344. R.A. Preston, *Kingston Before the War of 1812: A Collection of Documents* (Toronto: The Publications of the Champlain Society, Ontario Series III, 1959), xlii. Larry Turner, *Voyage of a Different Kind: The Associated Loyalists of Kingston and Adolphustown* (Belleville: Mika Publishing, 1984), 37.

[17] Michael Grass, 'SEVEN and Twenty Years," *Kingston Gazette*, 10 December 1811. Agnes Machar, *The Story of Old Kingston* (Toronto: The Musson Book Co. Limited, 1908), 55.

[18] William Canniff, *History and the Settlement of Upper Canada, (Ontario) with Special Reference to the Bay of Quinté* (Toronto: Dudley & Burns, 1869), 650.

[19] Canniff, *History and the Settlement,* 650. *Pioneer Life*, 344.

Kingston and *Voyage of a Different Kind*, Grass lived in a farm about thirty miles above New York City at the start of the American Revolutionary War.[20]

Two of the accounts agree that Grass refused a captain's commission in the Patriot Army around 1775 and was forced to flee from his farm to the safety of New York City. *History and the Settlement* explicitly states that he did not serve in the British forces during the war, but the account in *Pioneer Life* claims he did.[21] Nearly all the versions, however, claim that the British commander in New York City, Sir Guy Carleton, was aware of Grass's time spent at Cataraqui and summoned him to ask if it was a suitable place to send the refugees. Both *The Story of Old Kingston* and *Voyage of a Different Kind* agree that Michael was then offered a commission to lead the Loyalists to Canada and gave him three days to weigh his options.[22]

Three of the six accounts state that the band of refugees were escorted by a British man-of-war from New York City to Sorel, Quebec in 1783. In *The Story of Old Kingston* the fleet consisted of seven vessels but in *Voyage of a Different Kind* there were apparently eight ships in all.[23] Both *History and the Settlement* and *The Story of Old Kingston* mention that the fleet encountered a severe gale which nearly destroyed the ships during the journey, but this detail is omitted from the other four accounts. All the narratives, except for the one found in *Kingston Gazette*, asserts that the Loyalists landed in Sorel and that the men of the party continued to Cataraqui and pitched their tents along the beautiful shoreline. In *History and the Settlement* and *Pioneer Life* Grass triumphantly drove a stake into the ground to mark his arrival, but this romantic moment is absent from the other renditions.[24]

Five of the stories maintain that Grass returned to Sorel during the winter of 1783-84 with his party of intrepid explorers before finishing their journey the following spring. *Kingston Before the War* is the only version that mentions a petition penned by Grass and addressed to Governor Haldimand that advocated for better shelter on behalf of the refugees.[25] The account in *Kingston Gazette* states that upon landing in the spring of 1784 there were no signs of life at Cataraqui, but the other five versions curiously fail to comment on the assertion.[26] Four of the six narratives claim that the governor paid a visit to the newly arrived Loyalists, but only *History and the Settlement* goes as far as to state that Grass was given preferential treatment by Haldimand

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[20] Agnes, *The Story*, 55. Turner, *Voyage of a Different Kind*, 37.
[21] Canniff, *History and the Settlement,* 650. *Pioneer Life*, 344.
[22] Agnes, *The Story*, 56. Turner, *Voyage of a Different Kind*, 43.
[23] *Ibid*. Turner, *Voyage of a Different Kind*, 54.
[24] Canniff, *History and the Settlement*, 422. *Pioneer Life*, 345.
[25] Preston, *Kingston Before the War*, xlvii-xlviii.
[26] Michael Grass, 'SEVEN and Twenty Years," *Kingston Gazette*, 10 December 1811.

when drawing his plot of land.[27]

In the end, all six versions draw the same conclusion, that Michael Grass was a significant figure in the Loyalist migration from New York City to Cataraqui in 1783-84 and should be credited as the founder of Kingston for leading the expedition. Take for example the closing line of the account found in *Pioneer Life*: "Truly it may be said that captain Michael Grass was the founder of Kingston; the first citizen in the Bay of Quinte."[28] Although the stories disagree on the minute details of the migration, they remain significant because they bestow the loyal German with heroic characteristics and christen him as the founder of Kingston. As such, Grass is part of a larger chapter of Upper Canadian history in which the bold Loyalist leaders ventured into the wilderness to lay the foundations of English-speaking Canada. Cataraqui however, was anything but uninhabited forest when the Loyalist families finally arrived in 1784.

Cataraqui Before the Associated Loyalists, 1650-1760

At the heart of the myth is the assumption that Grass and his companies founded the *first* human settlement in the area and that the region was an untouched wilderness on the periphery of the British empire. This assumption fails to acknowledge the fact that numerous small communities called Cataraqui home prior to the Loyalists, including the Indigenous Mississauga who occupied the land for nearly one-hundred years before the Loyalists arrived.[29] Between 1650 and 1783, the region was home to the Haudenosaunee, Mississauga, and even a small community of French fur traders and soldiers.

Indigenous peoples occupied the north shore of Lake Ontario from time immemorial up to the 1780s.[30] During the seventeenth century, the Iroquois Wars (1603-1701) pitted the Wendat, Mississauga, and a coalition of Great Lakes peoples against their traditional enemies, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. The Haudenosaunee established seven settlements on the north shore of Lake Ontario between 1665-1670 and used the eastern end of the lake as a hunting ground from which they frequently visited Cataraqui.[31] By 1690 the Wendat, Mississauga, and other Great Lakes nations, such as the Odawa, Ojibwe, and Tionontati managed to push the Haudenosaunee back across the lake and disrupted their pattern of settlement on the north shore.

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[27] Canniff, *History and the Settlement*, 651.

[28] *Pioneer Life*, 346.

[29] Donald B. Smith, "The Dispossession of the Mississauga Indians: A Missing Chapter in the Early History of Upper Canada," in *Historical Essays on Upper Canada: New Perspectives,* edited by J.K. Johnson and Bruce G. Wilson (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1989), 23.

[30] Peter S. Schmalz, *The Ojibwa of Southern Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 18.

[31] *Ibid*.

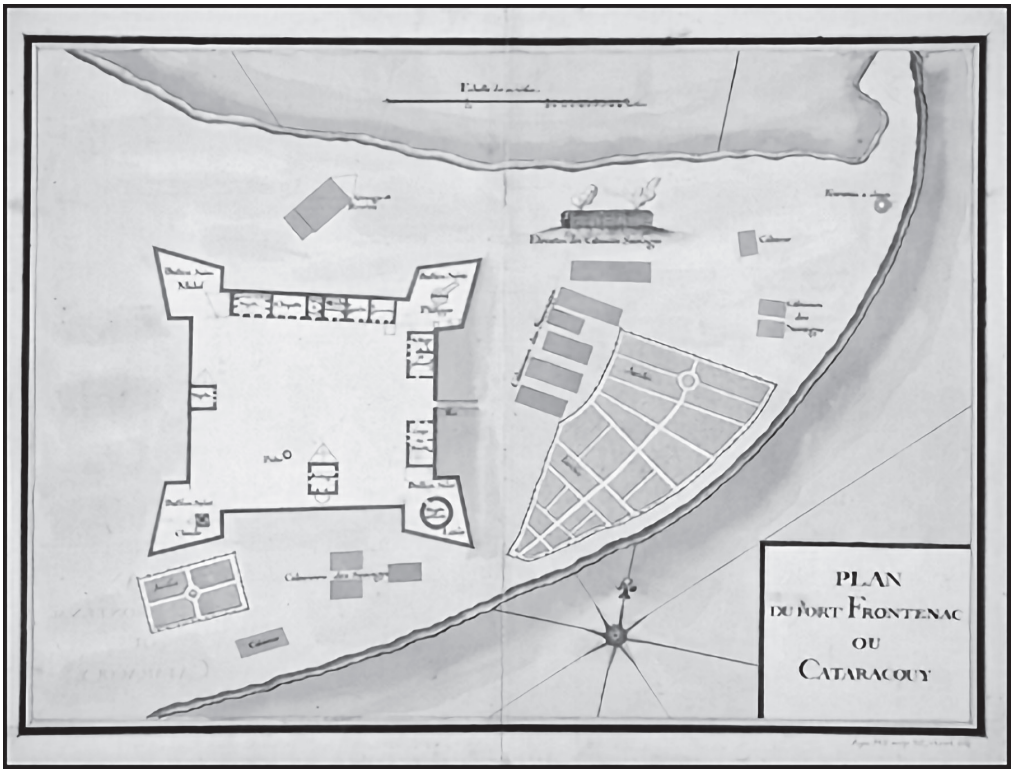


Figure 5: "Plan du Fort Frontenac ou Cataracouy" (c.1720) by Gaspard-Joseph Chaussegros de Léry, depicting the French settlement and gardens along with fourteen 'Cabannes de Sauvages," or dwellings belonging to the Indigenous peoples. Source: Edward E. Ayer Collection, Newberry Library Collection.

When the Iroquois Wars ended in 1701 with the signing of the Great Peace of Montreal the Mississauga had replaced the Haudenosaunee at Cataraqui and constructed a permanent settlement.[32] The Mississauga village located at Cataraqui bore all the vestiges of human habitation long before the Loyalists arrived eighty years later.

The French were another distinct group that occupied the Cataraqui region during the 1670s. Under the leadership of the Louis de Buade de Frontenac, the governor-general of New France, the French established an outpost at Cataraqui that would be known as "Fort Frontenac" for commercial and military purposes in 1673.[33] Allan Greer has argued that the establishment of commercial outposts in Canada during the seventeenth century does not constitute as settler colonialism because the local

[32] Leroy V. Eid, "The Ojibwa-Iroquois Wars: The War the Five Nations Did Not Win," *Ethnohistory* 26 (1979), 306.

[33] W.J. Eccles, *The French in North America: 1500-1783* (Markham: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1998), 95.

Indigenous peoples still managed to retain dominance over the region.[34] Fort Frontenac experienced a brief period of abandonment from 1689-95 after the Haudenosaunee besieged the outpost but it was reoccupied shortly thereafter by the French. As seen in Figure 5, the French fort was surrounded by *cabannes sauvages*, longhouses belonging to the small group of Haudenosaunee living outside Fort Frontenac which gave them access to shared hunting grounds.

The French settlement at Cataraqui sprawled well beyond Fort Frontenac's walls, including the seigneurie of Madeleine de Roybon D'Allonne (1646-1718), a minor French noble women who established a farm roughly sixteen kilometres west of the fort.[35] D'Allonne ran her seigneurie from 1681-87 until she was captured by a Haudenosaunee raiding party and brought to Onondaga.[36] D'Allonne is significant because her seigneurie demonstrates that the French presence at Cataraqui was comprised of more than just a remote outpost, and was in fact a precursor to the later wave of European settlement that griped the region in the 1780s. The Haudenosaunee, Mississauga, and French all decided that Cataraqui was a suitable place to live, the Loyalists were simply the latest group to come to the same conclusion.

The British Presence at Cataraqui, 1760-83

To attract Loyalists for his expedition, Michael Grass placed an advertisement in the prominent New York City newspaper *Royal American Gazette* on 26 May 1783. The advertisement confirmed his wish to, "form a settlement on Fort Frontenac, at the mouth of lake Ontario & head of the River St. Lawrence."[37] According to the advertisement, the ruins of the old French fort were "The only eligible place left by the late treaty for the King's subjects, to carry on the Indian & fur trade."[38] What is significant about his statement is that the advertisement explicitly acknowledged that Indigenous peoples already lived in the Cataraqui region. This is ironic because Grass would later assert that little sign of "human habitation could be found in the whole extent of the Bay of Quinte!"[39] Evidently, Cataraqui continued to be an important place of settlement for the Mississauga even after the French had moved on from the region, which complicates the legends characterisation of the land as abandoned.

As Grass made ready to depart New York City, a significant development concerning Cataraqui was underway in Canada. Governor Haldimand, from his

[34] Greer, "Settler Colonialism and Empire in Early America," 383.

[35] Céline Dupré, "Roybon D'Allone, Madeleine de," in *Dictionary Canadian Biography,* vol 2, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003.

[36] *Ibid*.

[37] Michael Grass, "Those Loyalists," *Royal American Gazette*, 26 May 1783.

[38] *Ibid*.

[39] Michael Grass, "SEVEN and Twenty Years," *Kingston Gazette*, 10 December 1811.

office in Quebec City, had independently decided that the area was a satisfactory location for the resettlement of refugee Loyalists and was making arrangements for their reception. Contrary to the legend, Cataraqui was no mystery to the British authorities in 1783. During the Seven Years' War, British Lieutenant-Colonel John Bradstreet launched an attack on Fort Frontenac with upwards of 3,000 troops in August 1758.[40] French commander Pierre-Jacques Payen de Noyan et de Chavoy surrendered the fort after only two days of bombardment. The surrender marked the end of the French control at Cataraqui but launched a new phase of occupation by their imperial rivals. The British garrisoned the site in 1759 but abandoned the ruins after the Conquest of New France in 1760. An expedition led by Major Robert Rogers of the Queen's Rangers was sent back later that year and confirmed that there was a small community of "visiting Indian hunters" living at Cataraqui.[41] Between 1760 and 1777, after the French were expelled but before the British returned in force, evidence shows that the region was frequently occupied by Indigenous peoples and European traders. According to R.A. Preston, "A few traders, most notably a French Canadian named Dumoulin, went specifically to 'Cataraqui' and parts of Lake Ontario" revealing that some level of continuous occupation there.[42]

The American Revolutionary War brought Cataraqui back into the forefront of British imperial plans in North America in 1777 when Haldimand ordered the construction of a defensive fort on nearby Carleton Island.[43] Fort Haldimand, as it was named, was a hub of British military activity during the war but was soon made obsolete because of a strategic oversight by colonial administrators in Europe. As the highest-ranking British authority in Canada, Governor Haldimand learned of the preliminary terms of the Peace of Paris which ended the Revolutionary War by 1779, before the exact conditions of the treaty were finalised.[44] One of those conditions was the creation of a border between Canada and the American colonies. The new border traced the contours of the St. Lawrence and mistakenly placed Carleton Island and Fort Haldimand within the newly defined American territory. As a result, the governor decided to pull the British defensive line back to the ruins of Fort Frontenac at Cataraqui.

Haldimand initiated his plan in writing to Surveyor General Samuel Holland (1728-1801) on 26 May 1783 by instructing him "to proceed to Cataraqui, where you will minutely examine into the Situation... considering the fa-

[40] Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766* (New York: Vintage, 2001), 397.

[41] Preston, *Kingston Before the War*, xxxvii.

[42] *Ibid*.

[43] *Ibid*.

[44] Jean N. McIlwraith, *Sir Frederick Haldimand* (Toronto: Morgan & Co. Limited, 1904), 124.

Figure 6: "A Southeast View of Cataraqui on Lake Ontario, August 1783" Watercolour by James Peachey. Peachey depicts the growing settlement a year prior to the arrival of the Loyalists. Note the prominent Indigenous presence in the foreground of the work. Source: Library and Archives Canada/c001511k).

cility of establishing Settlement there."[45] Holland found Fort Frontenac in an acceptable condition, which then prompted the governor to order the British troops garrisoned at Fort Oswego on the southern shore of Lake Ontario to Cataraqui. According to Jane Errington, the arrival of British regulars to the frontier ahead of the Loyalists "provided protection, enabling Upper Canadians to build their homes and businesses secure from the terrors of the wilderness."[46] By ordering the 400-man garrison to depart Oswego for Cataraqui, Haldimand was paving the way for the construction of the settlement and ensured that the most difficult tasks would fall to the military authorities, not the incoming civilian population.

The Fort Oswego garrisons arrived under the command of Major John Ross (1744-1809), the top-ranking British soldier on the ground, who was immediately met by the workmen sent from Carleton Island.[47] Together, over 400 men began trans-

[45] Library and Archives Canada (hereafter cited as LAC) Haldimand Papers, Mss B 124, 88-89, Frederick Haldimand to Samuel Holland, 26 May 1783.

[46] Jane Errington, *The Lion, the Eagle, and Upper Canada: A Developing Colonial Ideology* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012), 15.

[47] Preston, *Kingston Before the War*, xl-xli.

porting provisions including entire houses from Fort Haldimand across the river to the mainland. Haldimand also instructed Major Ross to oversee the construction of both a sawmill and a gristmill at Cataraqui to ensure that the Loyalists had a ready supply of construction materials and flour when they arrived the following spring.[48] Ross and his troops presided over Cataraqui for an entire year prior to the Loyalists arrival. Commenting on this time period, R.A. Preston claims that, "He remained to become, in a much more real sense than Michael Grass who is sometimes given the credit, the founder of the settlement which was to be the future Kingston."[49] By August of 1783, a full eight months before Grass arrived, Haldimand's agents finished laying the foundation for the settlement at Cataraqui.

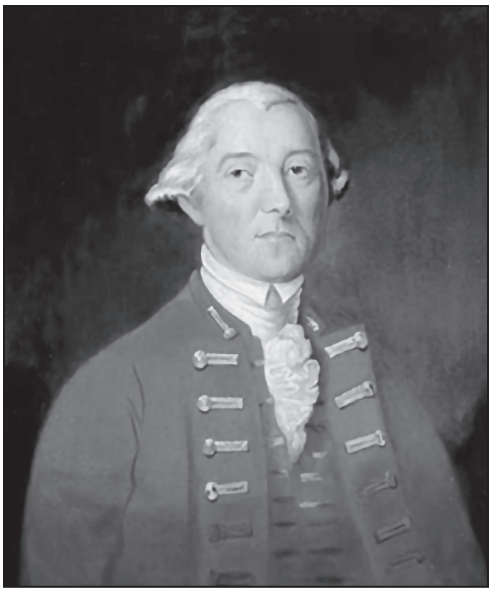
There is proof of a sizable community already established at Cataraqui by August of 1783 in the form of a watercolour painting by an eyewitness named James Peachey. Seen in Figure 6, the west bank of the Cataraqui river was already home to a community of British soldiers and camp followers with several buildings, a sawmill, a gristmill, and a bustling wharf. The small village had also attracted the interest of a number of merchants who followed the British garrisons from Fort Oswego and Fort Haldimand to Cataraqui.[50] According to R.A. Preston these men, "were the first British residents of the future town of Kingston."[51] The arrival of a sizable garrison and merchants, and the construction of mills, and a rudimentary harbour, raises the question: "What exactly was left for Michael Grass and the Loyalists to 'found' when they arrived at the settlement the following year?" All the necessities that ensured the survival of the community in the first crucial years were initiated by the British authorities. It was not Grass who was the architect of the settlement, but Haldimand and his subordinates.

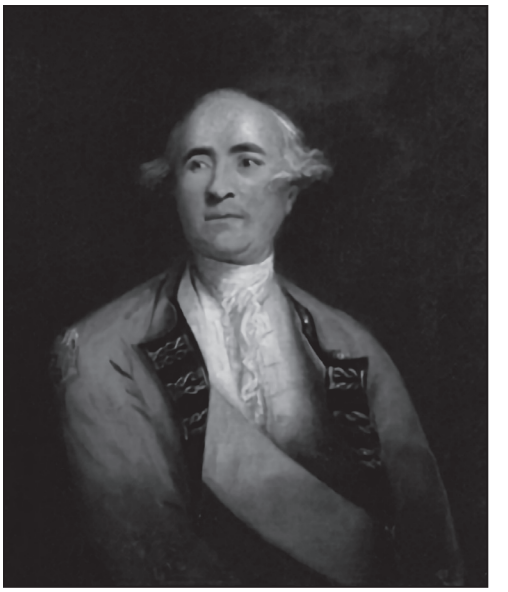
"He Assumes to Himself the Title of Proprietor": Grass's Landfall, 1783

The fact that Grass led the eight companies of refugees has often been conflated with the idea that he was the principal decision-maker at Cataraqui and somehow the grand architect of the settlement project. However, by examining the large collection of correspondence created by the colonial authorities at the time, it becomes evident that he was not the principal actor on the scene and played a far more limited role in establishing the community.

From his office in New York City, Sir Guy Carleton (Figure 7) wrote two letters to Haldimand (Figure 8) on 4 and 5 June 1783 in which he informed his northern counterpart that ships transporting Loyalists were bound for Canada led by "cap-

[48] *Ibid*.
[49] *Ibid*., xliii.
[50] *Ibid*, xlv-xlvi.
[51] *Ibid*.





Figures 7 & 8: (Left) Portrait of Sir Guy Carleton by unknown artist, oil on canvas, c. 1750. Carleton was the Commander-In-Chief of British forces in North America during the Loyalist migration. Source: National Archives of Canada. (Right) Portrait of Sir Frederick Haldimand by Sir Joshua Reynolds, oil on canvas c. 1778. Haldimand was the Governor General of Canada and Carleton's northern counterpart during the Loyalist migration. Source: National Portrait Gallery.

tains" who were appointed from the pool of refugees stranded in the city. The nature of the captains' "Temporary Commissions" were outlined in Carleton's letter.[52] Grass's commission, which later became a large part of his public identity, was only meant to exist for a limited time period and was not intended to be a permanent military distinction. Despite this, the self-identifying "captain" insisted on presenting himself in as such up until the time of his death in 1813.

Haldimand responded on 7 July 1783 informing Carleton that he had, "long since taken every preparatory Step in my power to afford those of them [the Loyalists] within my knowledge every Succour this Province, as an Asylum, can produce."[53] Haldimand already planned on moving some of the refugees to Cataraqui specifically, and the reconnaissance missions conducted on his behalf throughout the summer of 1783 are evidence of his intention. Between July and September 1783 Haldimand reached two noteworthy milestones in the settlement of Cataraqui. First, he ordered the British soldiers and workmen stationed at Carleton Island to the ruins of Fort Frontenac.[54]

[52] LAC, Haldimand Papers, Mss B 148, 148, Guy Carleton to Frederick Haldimand, 5 June 1783.

[53] LAC, Haldimand Papers, Mss B 148, 161-162, Frederick Haldimand to Guy Carleton, 7 July 1783.

[54] Preston, *Kingston Before the War*, xliii.

Second, he sent Deputy Surveyor John Collins to the old French fort to begin the task of partitioning the land into townships.[55] These key developments were planned and executed by the governor in preparation for the arrival of the Loyalists led by Grass. By the time the entire rag-tag band made landfall in the spring 1784, all the planning and most of the construction had already been completed.

Other Europeans had arrived at Cataraqui between August and September 1783 which alarmed the local Mississauga who still laid claim to the region and adamantly objected to the increased presence of settlers in their ancestral territory. By October, the British could no longer ignore the Mississauga's concerns and tried to reach a peaceful agreement by sending Captain W.R. Crawford to negotiate an agreement.[56] Crawford drafted a treaty with Chief Mynass of the Mississauga that ceded land from modern-day Brockville, Ontario, in the east all the way to the Bay of Quinte in the west for a trivial number of annual gifts. By agreeing to the purchase, Chief Mynass and the Mississauga initially believed that they had made a series of useful land rental agreements. The British, however, interpreted the purchase as the extinguishing of the Mississauga's rightful title to the land.[57] Thirty-six years after the Crawford Purchase was finalised, another Mississauga chief reflected on the disastrous effects the treaty had on his people, "We protected you [the British] till you became a mighty tree that spread throughout our hunting land. With its branches you now lash us."[58]

While Major Ross's troops constructed the barracks and mills, Deputy Surveyor John Collins led a small party of land speculators accompanied by "Mr. Grass Capt. Of one of the Companies of Militia" to finalize partitioning the land.[59] Haldimand was careful to refer to Michael as "Mr. Grass" which reiterated the temporary nature of his captain's commission to the other members of the expedition. It is significant to note that when the governor sent the small contingent to Cataraqui he had not yet secured permission to do so from his superiors in Great Britain. On 27 August 1783, he wrote to Home Secretary Lord North (1732-92) requesting permission to resettle the Loyalist refugees in Canada. He informed North, "I am making preparations agreeable to their request or a settlement of Royalists near Cataraqui."[60] Unfortunately for Haldimand,

[55] Reimer, "British-Canada's Land Purchases," 40.

[56] *Ibid*.

[57] Smith, "The Dispossession of the Mississauga Indians," 32. There was no written deed created for the Crawford Purchase 1783-84, and the exact terms and conditions of the agreement were extremely ambiguous by design.

[58] *Ibid*, 43.

[59] LAC, Haldimand Papers, Mss B 124, 91-94, Frederick Haldimand to John Collins, 11 September 1783.

[60] LAC, Haldimand Papers, Mss B 56, 132, Frederick Haldimand to Frederick North, 27 August 1783.

his letter never reached North's desk and he received no further instructions.

On 6 November 1783, Haldimand wrote another letter to North accepting full responsibility for his decision to expand the British settlement at Cataraqui. "My Lord," he began, "I have to express the great regret which I feel at not having received Dispatches from England."[61] His letter expressed the urgency of his situation and explained that the decision to settle refugees at Cataraqui was made with the intention of relieving the government from the mounting financial burden of housing them. Haldimand stated that, "in order to exempt the Government from these Expenses, I lose no time in preparing a Settlement for them at or near Cataraqui."[62] Haldimand was acting without direction from his superiors and had to strike a fine balance between the needs of the Loyalists the already strained financial resources of the small colony.

"How Much Mistaken He Was": Grass Assumes Proprietorship of Cataraqui, 1784

As fall turned to winter, the Loyalists led by Grass were still living in crudely erected log huts in Sorel, Quebec and were in desperate need of provisions. Considering the bleak position of his followers, Grass took it upon himself to write to the governor on 18 January 1784, requesting immediate assistance. He asked that the refugees be treated generously like the Loyalists who had chosen to settle in Nova Scotia and sent an extensive list of demands to Haldimand. The list included enough building materials for each Loyalist family to construct a new home, as well as generous amount of guns, ammunition, and axes for their defense.[63] The boldest demand in Grass's petition, however, was the insistence for "a Form of Government as nearly similar to that which they [the refugees] Enjoyed in the Province of New York in the year 1763."[64] Grass was referring to a time when the New York communities enjoyed a great deal of independence from government officials, a scenario that was unlikely to be repeated in Canada after the Revolutionary War. Haldimand had already arranged for considerable resources to be allocated to the refugees, and the additional demand for representational government only weakened the relationship between Grass and the authorities.

Haldimand promptly responded to Grass through the Inspector of the Loyalists, Stephen De Lancey, who was stationed at Sorel. De Lancey was informed "that the substance of their [the Loyal-

[61] LAC, Haldimand Papers, Q 23, 5, Frederick Haldimand to Frederick North, 6 November 1783.

[62] E.A. Cruikshank, *The Settlement of the United Empire Loyalists on the Upper St. Lawrence and Bay of Quinte in 1784: A Document Record* (Toronto: Ontario Historical Society, 1934), 23.

[63] LAC, Haldimand Papers, Mss B 165, 143, "The Petition of His Majesty's Faithful Emigrated Under the Conduct of Captain Michael Grass from new York to this Place," January 1784.

[64] Turner, *Voyage of a Different Kind*, 124. As an associated Loyalist, it is surprising that one of the

ists'] request is so different from the Instructions which His excellency had received from the King... that He cannot think to comply with it."[65] The letter also mentioned that the demand for materials on such a large scale as proposed by Grass was "utterly impossible."[66] Haldimand informed the anxious Loyalist leader that absolutely no change would be made to the form of government in the province without an Act of Legislature, which would not be forthcoming. De Lancey was also instructed to deliver a personal message to Grass. He told Michael that "If His Excellency's endeavours for the happy settlement of the Loyalists in this Province... do not suit the views of Mr. Grass... a passage will be provided for them to Nova Scotia, as early as the season will permit."[67]

The growing tensions between Michael and the authorities did not end with the rejection of his petition. In April 1784 a disagreement arose between Grass and a fellow Loyalist captain by the name of Peter Van Alstine (1743-1811). Van Alstine was a well-respected British major during the Revolutionary War and had followed Grass's party to Sorel with his own company of Loyalists. Jane Errington has argued that Loyalists traveling to Upper Canada were not as united in their cause as scholars once imagined and the dispute that arose between the two men illustrates this.[68] Grass felt as if Van Alstine, a younger man of a higher rank, was usurping his power and launched a formal complaint against him.

The complaint was addressed by Haldimand's subordinate Major Mathews on 15 April 1784. Mathews stated that the accusation was of a "very extraordinary Nature" due to Van Alstine's "General good character."[69] The most important element of Mathews' letter, however, was the insult that Grass had delivered to the colonial authorities by having casually presented himself as the proprietor of the land at Cataraqui while denouncing Van Alstine. Mathews stated: "His Excellency is much displeased with the last part of Mr. Grass's Letter, where he assumes to himself & party the Title of *proprietors* of the Land in Question, and says they first found out and planned the settlement."[70] Haldimand was sending Grass a strong message; that he was forbidden from presenting himself as the proprietor and thoroughly denied him the title of 'founder'. Grass's sentiments, he wrote, were "as expressive of Ignorance

primary demands made by Grass was for the establishment of representational government after having just lost his home and property for upholding the principles and traditions of the British monarchy.

[65] LAC, Haldimand Papers, Mss B 63, 109-110, Robert Mathews to Stephen De Lancey, 2 March 1784.

[66] *Ibid*.

[67] *Ibid*.

[68] Errington, *The Lion, the Eagle, and Upper Canada*, 4-5.

[69] LAC, Haldimand Papers, Mss B 63, 212, Robert Mathews to Stephen De Lancey, 15 April 1784.

[70] LAC, Haldimand Papers, Mss B 63, 212-213, Robert Mathews to Stephen De Lancey, 15 April 1784.

as presumptions."[71] The tense letter continues: "it is well known that that part of the neighbouring County was intended and in forwardness for the reception of the loyalists" referring to the governors actions in the spring of 1783 to purchase the land, relocate the garrisons, and construct the buildings at Cataraqui.[72] Mathews' letter ended sharply by stating, "Mr. Grass should therefore think himself very well off... if he expects anything beyond that he will be disappointed."[73]

Mathews also saw fit to write directly to Grass on 15 April 1784. This letter was intended to, "set you [Michael] Right upon another part of your letter wherein you have assumed to yourself & followers the Title of *Proprietors* of the Land in Question."[74] He accused Grass of "having conceived an idea of *Right* or *Property*" concerning the growing settlement and concluded that the idea was as "fallacious as presumptuous."[75] Mathews could not have been more explicit; Grass was absolutely forbidden from taking credit for the settlement and was told to refrain from presenting himself as the founder.

Another British officer decided to weigh in on the situation at precisely this moment. In a letter dated 19 April 1784, another of Haldimand's agents in Canada by the name of Captain Barnes informed Mathews that he "explained to Mr. Grass how much mistaken he was in supposing himself the first person who found out Cataraqui as a settlement."[76] It was Barnes's pointed remark that later forced Grass to somewhat qualify his initial claims by adding that he only meant that he was the first *Loyalist* to have pointed to Cataraqui as a suitable place to settle, and that he did not mean to insult His Excellency by doing so. Based on an analysis of the correspondence between the British authorities already in Canada and the newly arrived Loyalists, it must be concluded that Grass did not play nearly as large of a role in the establishment of the settlement as promoted by the legend.

Conclusion

The archival evidence shows that Grass was not the man the legend depicts. With all the pushback from the colonial authorities, it is unsurprising that the first person to have promoted this account was Grass himself. On 10 December 1811, he wrote a letter to the printer of the *Kingston Gazette* in which he declared, "I led the loyal band, I pointed out to them the site of their future metropolis."[77] With his public im-

[71] *Ibid*.

[72] LAC, Haldimand Papers, Mss B 63, 212-213, Robert Mathews to Stephen De Lancey, 15 April 1784.

[73] *Ibid*.

[74] LAC, Haldimand Papers, Mss B 63, 219-220, Robert Mathews to Michael Grass, 15 April 1784.

[75] *Ibid*.

[76] LAC, Haldimand Papers, Mss B 148, 158, John Barnes to Robert Mathews, 19 April 1784.

[77] Michael Grass, "For the *Kingston Gazette*," *Kingston Gazette*, December 10, 1811.

age in mind, Grass argued that he was the founder of the community at a time when the colonial authorities of 1783-84 had either moved on to other positions within the empire or had passed away and were thus unable to contest his version of the past. As the settler society planted at Cataraqui continued to grow, the community romanticised the Loyalist migration and retrospectively christened Grass the sole hero of that chapter of Upper Canadian history.

However, the legend conceals an embarrassing legacy. By fixating on Grass as a hero of the migration, the community was able to overlook the displacement of the Indigenous population and spin what should have been an upsetting story of Indigenous displacement into a narrative of British triumph in North America. The result was not only the physical dispossession of the Mississauga, but also their complete removal from any memory of the "founding" of the settlement in 1784. By taking stock in the mythologization of Grass and his exploits, the community legitimised settler colonialism in Upper Canada.

The legend was able to overlook the rather limited role Grass played by embellishing his influence and simultaneously downplaying that of others. A key component to the legend is the presentation of Cataraqui as a barren and uninhabited wilderness ripe for settlement. It fails to acknowledge that there were numerous small communities there predating the arrival of the eight companies in 1784. There was a sustained presence in the region as the Haudenosaunee, Mississauga, French, and British, all spent a considerable time occupying the strategically significant headwaters of the St. Lawrence River. Thus, Michael Grass was not the first person to have founded a settlement at Cataraqui, nor was he even the first European to do so. A year before Grass arrived, British agents had already begun preparing the region for the refugees by erecting barracks, constructing houses, providing mills, and attracting merchants, and by rebuilding the old French fortifications. By the time the Loyalists families made landfall, the region already possessed the highly visible features of a typical European settlement in North America. The footprint of the settlement was laid down by Haldimand well in advance of Grass's party and there was little left for the Loyalists to decide upon when they arrived. When Grass did attempt to take control of the situation the British authorities actively prevented him from doing so and stopped him from exerting any real influence on the development of the settlement. This resulted in his diminished ability to shape the community in his own vision.

The most persuasive pieces of evidence supporting this claim are the numerous letters from the period in which the colonial authorities absolutely forbade Grass from presenting himself as the proprietor. On several occasions Haldimand and his subordinates thoroughly and swiftly refuted Grass's tendency to claim the idea as his own. It was the colonial authorities who were *actually* making the decisions at Cataraqui,

not the newly arrived refugees.

Despite the wealth of evidence that points to Grass's limited involvement in the founding of the settlement, he continues to be affectionately remembered as the principal actor at Cataraqui in 1784. This willful misunderstanding persists today because of the numerous commemorative plaques and monuments throughout Kingston's colonial landscape that ensure the survival of the legend. It also persists because the community chooses to privilege the Loyalist past at Cataraqui at the expense of other cultures and peoples that called the region home. The legend of Captain Michael Grass is enmeshed within a larger project of constructing colonial pasts within Upper Canada and celebrating the imperial expansion of the British Empire throughout the Great Lakes region in the 1780s. The resettlement of the Loyalists at Cataraqui by the colonial authorities was one method of removing the local Indigenous population from their territory, while also consolidating British control over the periphery of its empire. The result was not only their removal from the physical space at Cataraqui in 1784, but also their removal from any recollection of the famous "founding moment" that is attributed to Grass.