

## The Ambivalent Loyalists

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France's involvement in North America. This is no mean achievement.

During the next few years there will, without question, be more books published about Louisbourg. And they, like the ones published in the early 1980s, will be of uneven quality and will owe a great deal to Parks Canada. Publishers, however, should be discouraged from trying to transform serviceable "historical reports" prepared for the Fortress of Louisbourg Historic Park into books which too often may be regarded as being of limited importance. Moore and Balcom have certainly pointed in the direction that future Louisbourg historiography should go. It should carefully avoid the two sieges and concentrate on larger issues which can be confidently located within the framework of 18th century North American scholarship.

G.A. RAWLYK

### The Ambivalent Loyalists

A CENTURY AGO, WHEN THE LOYALIST CENTENARY was being celebrated, the picture seemed reasonably clear. According to men like William Canniff and William Kirby, the Loyalists were a highly-principled and well-educated elite who chose to grapple with the hardships of a northern wilderness environment rather than submit to the tyranny of democratic republicanism. United by their ideology and their suffering, in this view, the Loyalists formed a close-knit community characterized by an unswerving fidelity to the British Empire and the "real liberty" of the British Constitution. In more recent years, scholars such as Esther Clark Wright and Neil MacKinnon have effectively challenged the comforting certainties of the traditional interpretation.<sup>1</sup> While the romantic 19th-century image is no longer accepted in its entirety, the heroic view has nevertheless refused to give up the ghost altogether. The result is a marked ambivalence in current Loyalist historiography. Along with sophisticated scholarly studies of the Loyalists' ideology, experiences and legacy, the current Bicentennial year has also produced books and articles written primarily to praise the Loyalists and honour their heritage.

The state of Loyalist studies before the Bicentennial is surveyed in Robert S. Allen's *Loyalist Literature: An Annotated Bibliographic Guide to the Writings on the Loyalists of the American Revolution* (Toronto and Charlottetown, Dundurn Press, 1982). The book is divided into four sections: general references, the American Revolution, the diaspora and the Loyalist legacy. Anyone moving into the field will find it a good starting point, although Allen's obvious sympathy for the Loyalists occasionally leads him into questionable judgements. It

<sup>1</sup> Esther Clark Wright, *The Loyalists of New Brunswick* (Fredericton, 1955); Neil MacKinnon, "The Loyalist Experience in Nova Scotia, 1783-1791", Ph.D. thesis, Queen's University, 1974.

is significant, for example, that he strongly attacks Bernard Bailyn's biography of Thomas Hutchinson for its supposedly "smug", "narrow" and "contrived" interpretation, but uses milder language to criticize the sometimes hagiographic and generally inferior work of W.O. Raymond (pp. 14-15, 43, 47, 49, 57). If Allen's pro-Loyalist leanings weaken the guide, his suggestions for further research strengthen it. He accurately points to the important lacunae in the secondary literature on Loyalism, especially in the case of the Loyalists outside the elite. As he writes of Nova Scotia, "an understanding and appreciation of the illiterate and hard-working majority await more probing archival and field research" (p. 51).

To facilitate this kind of research and, in the words of the foreword by Mary C. Gillis, to instill in the younger generation "an enthusiastic awareness and greater understanding of the Loyalist tradition", the Public Archives of Nova Scotia has published *The Loyalist Guide: Nova Scotian Loyalists and their Documents* (Halifax, Public Archives of Nova Scotia, 1984). A well-organized, clear and comprehensive work, this "annotated bibliographic guide to Loyalist sources" in the Archives' holdings from 1775 to 1830 should indeed stimulate further study of the Loyalists. However, the book reflects ambivalent purposes: a "greater understanding" is to be welcomed, but the desire to foster "enthusiastic awareness" slides easily into a glorified view of Loyalism. It is thus not surprising that Brian Cuthbertson, in his introduction to this volume, paints the Loyalists in glowing colours and asserts that Loyalist principles have made Canada a "political haven" in a troubled world.

The tension between the desire to celebrate and the need to understand the Loyalists runs through not only these bibliographic guides but also several recent publications on Loyalism, some of which were explicitly timed to commemorate the Bicentennial. One of these, Robert S. Allen, ed., *The Loyal Americans: The Military Role of the Loyalist Provincial Corps and Their Settlement in British North America, 1775-1784* (Ottawa, National Museums of Canada, 1983), is the product of a "special exhibition assembled and organized by the Canadian War Museum to commemorate the contribution of military Loyalists to Canada" (p. ix). It is essentially a catalogue of Loyalist military memorabilia, with everything from Jeremiah French's powder horn to Colonel Winckworth Tonge's Chinese porcelain. There are brief background essays by Loyalist scholars, including Ann Condon, Phyllis Blakeley, Wallace Brown, George Rawlyk and Robert Allen. In general, these essays are descriptive thumb-nail sketches which do not contribute significantly to our understanding of Loyalism.

The editor, as might be expected, is firmly on the Loyalists' side. Allen never refers to the "American Revolution"; instead, he prefers to write about the "colonial rebellion". [One is reminded of William Cobbett in his Tory mood; he always referred to "the rebellion (for, I love to call things by their right names)"]

And Allen gravitates towards a heroic view of the Loyalists. "There were", he writes with Bernard Pothier, "close to forty thousand men, women, and children who had suffered hardship and humiliation, endured a long, bitter war, and undergone immense material sacrifices in their attempt to preserve and defend the unity of the empire" (p. x). While there is undoubtedly some truth in this statement, it cannot easily be reconciled with Rawlyk's view that "Few of these Loyalists [in Upper Canada] possessed even a rudimentary grasp of the ideological underpinnings of the American Revolution" (p. 100), or with Condon's contention that "a great host of people became Loyalists for reasons quite unrelated to British imperial policy or to the issue of American independence" (p. 3). And even Condon herself slips into a Canadian version of Whig history when she writes that the Loyalist elite understood "the need for a policy of tolerance towards religious dissenters and ethnic minorities, which laid the basis for Canada's distinctive social outlook" (p. 114). One would have to look long and hard to find such tolerance in Charles Inglis' attitude to Baptists and Methodists, William Smith Jr.'s policy towards French Canadians or John Saunders' approach to slavery. To argue that a distinctively Canadian tolerance can be traced to the experiences and values of the Loyalist elite is to exchange old myths for new.

Christopher Moore's *The Loyalists: Revolution, Exile, Settlement* (Toronto, Macmillan, 1984) concentrates on "the personal experiences of the Loyalists" (p. viii) rather than attempting to assess the long-range significance of Loyalism. Well-written and lavishly illustrated, Moore's book nevertheless suffers from serious shortcomings. Instead of incisive insights into personal experience, Moore generally describes the exploits of Loyalist individuals, and even then pays little attention to black Loyalists, Indian Loyalists, and illiterate white Loyalists. Anyone seeking a systematic analysis of Loyalist motivation or a discussion of the social composition of Loyalists will be disappointed. And it is surprising, given the commemorative nature of the book, that the question of the Loyalist legacy remains unexplored.

More seriously, *The Loyalists* is under-researched. While Moore's *Louisbourg Portraits* (1982) demonstrated an impressive knowledge and command of sources, *The Loyalists* fails to take into account some of the most recent research in the field, and is marred by loose generalizations. Ignoring the work of Janice Potter and Ann Condon, Moore repeats the old argument that the Loyalists were "out of touch" with their times, assumes that the Loyalists were outside an American consensus and implies that the outcome of the Revolution was inevitable. Unfamiliar with the work of David Bell, Moore underestimates the degree of confusion and discontent at Saint John, misunderstands the controversy over the Committee of Fifty-Five (which wanted land in peninsular Nova Scotia, not present-day New Brunswick) and takes a superficial view of the founding of New Brunswick. Failing to absorb the work of Neil MacKinnon, Moore does not probe the depth of conflict in Loyalist Shelburne,

and says little about the place of the Loyalists in the town and country split which characterized the development of Nova Scotia politics. Yet all these studies, in the form of books, articles or theses, were available before *The Loyalists* was written.<sup>3</sup> There is a very real need for a new synthesis of Loyalism, and there is obviously much to be learned from the personal experiences of Loyalists; this book, however, fails to live up to expectations. Unfortunately, *The Loyalists* displays the weaknesses of popular history as strikingly as *Louisbourg Portraits* displayed its strengths.

While Allen and Moore have produced general works on the Loyalists, other writers have favoured a biographical approach. Brian Cuthbertson's *The Loyalist Governor: Biography of Sir John Wentworth* (Halifax, Petheric Press, 1983) examines Wentworth's life from his governorship of colonial New Hampshire (1766-75) to his career as governor of Nova Scotia (1792-1808). In New Hampshire, Wentworth emerged as a prudent, pragmatic politician; like Edmund Burke in England, he tried to blur the "theoretical" issue of Britain's right to tax the colonies, and wanted to steer a course which would take the steam out of Patriot protests. His experience of revolution in New Hampshire left a deep and lasting impression. As governor of Nova Scotia, Wentworth interpreted any opposition to his policies as seditious. Thus when William Tonge played a leading role in challenging Wentworth's distribution of patronage, Wentworth responded by treating his opponent as a dangerous revolutionary. As Cuthbertson puts it, "Tonge had come to represent for Wentworth all the revolutionary influences that had destroyed the America he had known and loved; Tonge had to be destroyed before he worked his evil in Nova Scotia" (p. 124). With memories of New Hampshire never far below the surface, Cuthbertson argues, Wentworth was determined to maintain a tight grip on power in Nova Scotia. Given the importance of Wentworth's New Hampshire experiences, it is surprising that Cuthbertson skates lightly over this part of Wentworth's career. Indeed, this is a rather lopsided biography, with only one chapter on Wentworth's 46 years before moving to Nova Scotia. It is also surprising that Cuthbertson has ignored Paul Wendell Wilderson's important thesis on Wentworth's life between 1737 and 1775.<sup>4</sup> The connection between Wentworth's New Hampshire and Nova Scotia experiences should have been pursued in more depth.

Cuthbertson explores the personal as well as the political life of his subject.

3 Janice Potter, "The Lost Alternative: The Loyalists in the American Revolution", *Humanities Association Review*, 27 (2) (1976), pp. 89-103; Ann Condon, "Marching to a Different Drummer: The Political Philosophy of the American Loyalists", in Esmond Wright, ed., *Red, White and True Blue: The Loyalists in the American Revolution* (New York, 1976); David Bell, *Early Loyalist Saint John* (Fredericton, 1983); MacKinnon, "The Loyalist Experience in Nova Scotia". While Moore cites MacKinnon's thesis in his bibliography, he has not incorporated MacKinnon's analysis into the text.

4 Paul Wendell Wilderson, "Protagonist of Prudence: A Biography of John Wentworth, the King's Last Governor of New Hampshire", Ph.D. thesis, University of New Hampshire, 1977.

But the treatment of Wentworth's wilderness treks, his marriage and his social circle is disappointing; potentially fascinating material is presented in a dry, matter-of-fact manner. Moreover, some of Cuthbertson's comments appear rather insensitive. Although we are informed that the unfortunately-named Charles Mary was John's "only son" (p. 96), we also learn that the "Father of the Province" was father of at least two illegitimate sons; illegitimate children apparently do not count. Cuthbertson's comments about Prince Edward, who arrived in Nova Scotia in 1794, are equally troubling. Edward imposed brutal military discipline on his men, ordering sentences of up to 1,500 lashes for desertion; one-third of the patients in the army hospital at Halifax were recovering from severe floggings. In the face of this evidence, Cuthbertson simply observes that "The respect and affection shown Edward during his years in Nova Scotia would have been even warmer had it not been for his apparent inability to learn when to exercise some degree of compassion" (p. 73). One wonders how much affection emanated from the ranks of the army, as opposed to those who floated around the levees and balls of Halifax.

The comments about Prince Edward and about Wentworth's "only son" reflect a deeper problem with *The Loyalist Governor*; the book views Nova Scotia very much from the top down. Cuthbertson repeatedly asserts, but fails to demonstrate, that Wentworth made Nova Scotians "conscious of themselves as a distinct people" and nurtured a "new loyalty to Nova Scotia that transcended the anguish of the past" (p. 89). Exactly how Wentworth was able to do this is unclear. The "people of Nova Scotia" who apparently responded in this way are a vague abstraction who enter the narrative to approve and applaud the governor. We are told [twice] that they "all" took pride in Wentworth's Royal Nova Scotia Regiment, and that under his leadership they gained "the confidence to seize the opportunities" (p. 147) opened up by Nova Scotia's social and economic transformation. Adopting the view from Government House, Cuthbertson presents a simplified version of Nova Scotia society and makes excessive claims about Wentworth's influence. For all the descriptive material in the book, the author's central contention that Wentworth gave Nova Scotians a distinct sense of identity remains unsubstantiated.

If *The Loyalist Governor* reveals the shortcomings of history from the top down, Earle Thomas's *Greener Pastures: The Loyalist Experience of Benjamin Ingraham* (Belleville, Mika Publishing Company, 1983) displays the difficulties of history from the bottom up. *Greener Pastures* is, in Thomas' words, "a study of a common man in the American Revolution, as well as his life before and after it" (p. 7). It is also, surprisingly, the first book-length biography of a New Brunswick Loyalist. Thomas tells the story of Benjamin Ingraham's life from his days as a farmer in New Concord, New York, through his experiences in the King's American Regiment during the War of Independence, to his years as a pioneer and modestly successful yeoman farmer in New Brunswick. As Thomas acknowledges, sources on Ingraham are sparse. Faced with the limitations of

these sources — Ingraham's diary, for example, tells us little about his personality — Thomas adopts two approaches. First, he quotes extensively from his primary material, to the point where almost anything Ingraham happened to mention, no matter how trivial, is presented to the reader. Secondly, Thomas frequently compensates for lack of hard evidence by relying on his imagination. Used carefully, the technique of imaginative reconstruction can be illuminating, but Thomas treats his sources uncritically and goes far beyond the evidence. This is particularly apparent in the second chapter, when Thomas paints an idealized portrait of peace, comfort and domestic bliss in New Concord before the dark clouds of rebellion gathered on the horizon. At other times, dubious dialogue is introduced, as in this description of three Loyalists defending Ingraham's house against four "rebels":

Savage, Dorman, and Powers raised their muskets. 'I'd hate like hell to have to shoot a neighbour or a man I used to think was my friend', Savage said, 'but I swear by all that's holy I'll do it before I go with the likes of you. Now why don't you just go peacefully away and let us be'. The four men departed without further ado. 'You mark my words, Savage', John Salisbury called over his shoulder, 'I'll get you before the night is over'. (pp. 45-46)

Such an approach might be suitable for an adventure story; as history it is not acceptable. By the end of the book, Ingraham's personality remains something of a mystery. On the question of his motivation, Thomas persuasively emphasizes the importance of Ingraham's Anglicanism, but beyond this he implicitly explains Ingraham's Loyalism through relating it to wider Loyalist attitudes. The result is tautological; the general is used to illustrate the particular, and the particular then confirms the general. There is not enough evidence to provide insights into Ingraham's character, and there is little analysis of the events impinging upon him. Thus the reader is left with an idealistic, one-dimensional picture of Ingraham as a loyal, God-fearing, hard-working, good father and husband, a caricature of Loyalist wholesomeness.

Some of these weaknesses reappear in Phyllis Blakeley and John Grant, eds., *Eleven Exiles: Accounts of Loyalists of the American Revolution* (Toronto and Charlottetown, Dundurn Press, 1982), which chronicles the careers of 11 (mainly "upper-class") Loyalists who came to British North America. John Grant has written a concise introduction to the volume, and Phyllis Blakeley's articles on Boston King and Francis Green are useful. The other contributions range from mediocre to poor. Almost all of them follow the same approach: they begin by describing a dramatic event in the life of the Loyalist under consideration, usually connected with his or her flight from the Revolution; they move through a chronological account of the subject's activities; and they conclude with some general comment about the individual's important contribution to British North

America. Within this hackneyed framework, there are a number of common factors: a descriptive rather than an analytical approach, little discussion on Loyalist motivation or ideology, and a partisan view of the American Revolution. There are so many hostile references to the Patriot "mob" that one begins to question whether George Rudé actually existed.<sup>5</sup> The article titles sometimes set the tone: Mary Archibald describes John Johnson as the "Knight of the Revolution", and Helen Robinson calls Molly Brant a "Mohawk Heroine". When the Mohawks' morale was low, Robinson writes, Molly Brant was able to lift their spirits: "Dejected shoulders lifted as she spoke, eyes glimmered with new hope, there was a certain eagerness in their movements as each family set about building a temporary shelter" (pp. 123-124). This kind of writing is clearly the product of an over-active imagination rather than historical research. Most of these essays add little to our knowledge of Loyalism; at least some of them, however, reveal that images of romance and heroism still pervade Loyalist historiography.

In striking contrast to the books which seek to foster a sense of pride in the Loyalist heritage, other recent publications have cut through the mythology to provide stimulating interpretations of Loyalism and its broader significance. The complex question of Loyalist ideology is discussed in Janice Potter *The Liberty We Seek: Loyalist Ideology in Colonial New York and Massachusetts* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, Harvard University Press, 1983). Through her study of Loyalist publications in New York and Massachusetts, Potter attempts "to fill the need for a clear statement of Loyalist ideas" as they emerged before and during the American Revolution. Even though the Loyalist Anglican clergymen of New York and the royal officeholders of Massachusetts had separate and distinct experiences, argues Potter, they nevertheless shared a common outlook. On fundamental questions such as the nature of the Empire and the character of American society the Loyalists were deeply divided from the Patriots. Potter shows that for the Loyalist elite, the greatest threat to liberty came from excessive democracy within America rather than British power from without. In much the same way that the Patriots believed they were confronted with a ministerial conspiracy to enslave them, the Loyalists believed that the Patriots were conspiring against law and order to sever the British connection. According to this conspiracy theory, Patriot leaders, motivated by envy, ambition or malice, fomented or manipulated popular discontent to further their own ends. With the breakdown of constituted authority, "democratic tyranny" prevailed. In Loyalist eyes, this meant that the local bully-boys, in the form of

5 For some examples of Rudé's pioneering work on the pre-industrial crowd, see his *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1959) and *Paris and London in the 18th Century* (London, 1970). Rudé offers some interesting comments about the American "mob" in his review of Pauline Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765-1776*, *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd. series, XXX (1973), pp. 152-154.



committees and congresses, were taking over. The Loyalists complained bitterly of intimidation, arguing that their freedom of expression was being suppressed in the name of freedom.

To counter such developments, the Loyalist elite wanted to strengthen the mechanisms of social control. They believed that the family should exert more discipline, that the church should define and promote public morality, and that the government should control the inevitable but increasingly dangerous factionalism of political life. While this viewpoint was expressed with heightened urgency during the critical years of 1774-76, Potter traces such attitudes back to their colonial and British origins. The Anglican episcopal debate in New York and the controversy over the Bernard and Hutchinson administrations in Massachusetts, she argues, saw the emergence of what would become the characteristic Loyalist position. Going back still further, Potter establishes the trans-Atlantic dimensions of Loyalist ideology. Finding striking parallels between the Court and Country debates of mid-18th century England and the Loyalist-Patriot split in the colonies, Potter examines conservative interpretations of Locke, the influence of Bolingbroke and above all the impact of Blackstone on the development of Loyalist thought. In this sense, Loyalist arguments can be seen as a regional variant of a broader ideological outlook.

From this background, Potter focuses on the Loyalist position during the First Continental Congress. For the Loyalists, she argues, independence was unnatural (since it would plunge the Empire into fratricidal war) — unjustifiable (since Britain's policies were not perceived as a conspiracy against liberty) and impractical (since America was too weak and divided to confront the most powerful nation in the world). Instead of embarking on such a disastrous course, they favoured reconciliation within the framework of parliamentary sovereignty. In responding to the pressure of events, articulate Loyalist spokesmen hammered out their own alternative to independence: they wanted, in Potter's words, "a reformed British Empire and revitalized colonial institutions" (p. 154). Far from being apologists for the *status quo*, they not only attacked the Patriots but also criticized what they perceived as the ignorance and vacillation of British policies. Believing in a prosperous, dynamic and enlightened Anglo-American empire, in which America might eventually become the senior partner, they sought to find new avenues of Anglo-American communication and cooperation. Joseph Galloway, for example, wanted a trans-Atlantic federal union, in which America would have its own "inferior and distinct Branch of the British legislature united and incorporated with it" (quoted on p. 167). In addition, the Loyalists wanted to strengthen the power of the governors, upper houses and judiciaries in the colonies to counteract the slide towards excessive democracy. Only through such means, it was believed, could the integrity of the Empire and true British liberty be preserved in North America.

Although Potter's analysis of Loyalist thought is not strikingly original, she

does succeed admirably in outlining the broad elements of the "articulate" Loyalist case against the Revolution. The greatest strength of her book is the way in which she links Loyalist ideology to wider changes in American society. Above all, she shows that Loyalist ideas were highly relevant to the colonial situation. As she puts it, the Loyalists' "perception that ambition and self-interested behaviour were becoming more common and accepted was accurate" (p. 51). The Great Awakening had shaken religious cohesion, the family was losing its effectiveness as a "stabilizing social institution" (p. 53) and colonial governments were beset by factionalism. In this context, Loyalist arguments about social fragmentation and political instability struck a responsive chord. The defeat of the Loyalists, Potter contends, can be explained more in terms of their inability to influence British policies and of their organizational weakness rather than the "irrelevance" of their ideas.<sup>6</sup> After this book, the notion that the Loyalists were out of touch with American realities should be completely laid to rest.

Nevertheless, Potter's work is not without its problems. In trying to do for the Loyalists what Bernard Bailyn's *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (1967) attempted for the Patriots, Potter has run into some of the same conceptual difficulties facing Bailyn. With Potter, as with Bailyn, it is not clear to what extent the notions of the elite trickled down to the rank and file. Potter cautiously argues that "the Loyalist message influenced at least some rank-and-file Americans" (p. 10). But how many? How influential was it at the grassroots level? Did the interaction between Loyalist ideology and social change produce widespread popular acceptance of the elite's views? It is by no means clear that "ordinary" Loyalists were as deferential as Potter suggests. Potter's analysis should stimulate more research on this difficult question.

A second problem lies in Potter's tendency to sharpen differences in attitude between Loyalists and Patriots. It may be true that the Loyalists' view of man was more historical than that of the Patriots, and that for the Loyalists, history taught that men were unequal and imperfect. It may also be true that the Loyalists generally placed more emphasis on man's vulnerability to passion. But it must be remembered that leading patriots such as John Adams and Alexander Hamilton also stressed the "historical" nature of society and were very much aware of the dangers of passion.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, many of the socially conservative at-

6 Potter suggests a third reason for the Loyalists' weakness: the contradiction between their elitism and the need to mobilize popular support against the Revolution (pp. 149-151). Yet too much can be made of this. Political elitism did not stop the Federalists in the 1790s from appealing vigorously to public opinion, nor did it stop the Reeves Association in Britain from using pamphlets, broadsheets, public assemblies, petitions and rituals to gather popular support against the French Revolution and its domestic sympathizers.

7 It should be noted that Potter's statement that Thomas Paine "exalted" passion (p. 41) is erroneous. In fact, Paine strove consciously and deliberately to strike the right balance between "reason" and "passion", with passion in a subordinate position. See, for example, Paine, "Letter

itudes ascribed to the Loyalists would surface in full force among the Federalists during the 1790s. It is significant, in this context, that there was a remarkable degree of common ground between the High Federalists of 1797-99 and the Loyalist elite in British North America.

Potter, however, is more interested in viewing Loyalists and Patriots in separate compartments. In her words, "just as it is possible for historians to write confidently about Patriot ideology despite the obvious differences among John Adams, Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson, it is feasible to do the same with Loyalist spokesmen" (p. 39). But in the same way that Bailyn's approach tends to obscure those "obvious differences", Potter underplays the tensions within Loyalism. In arguing that the Loyalist elite held conservative social assumptions and desired reconciliation with Britain, Potter is blurring processes which were not always synonymous. Take, for example, the careers of two different men with the same name: William Smith. William Smith Jr., the New York lawyer who wound up as Chief Justice of Quebec, was a Whig during the 1760s and early 1770s, and did not share many of the views of Potter's Loyalists. But he did draw the line at independence; when it came to the crunch, his desire for reconciliation prevented his Whiggism from developing into Patriotism. Contrast his career with that of William Smith, Provost of the College of Philadelphia. In 1776, in a blistering reply to Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, Provost Smith employed arguments which placed him neatly in Potter's category of Loyalists. Yet this Smith eventually and reluctantly came to the conclusion that reconciliation was impossible, supported independence, and later in life tried to suppress his anti-Paine writings. The Provost became a Patriot despite his social conservatism. For both men, it was the question of reconciliation, rather than social conservatism, which proved decisive. Potter realizes that the issue of reconciliation was the key dividing line between Patriots and Loyalists, but does not explore the myriad of different Loyalist viewpoints contained within that line. To be socially conservative was not necessarily to be Loyalist, and to be Loyalist was not necessarily to be socially conservative. In trying to present a coherent picture of Loyalist thought, Potter does not fully bring out the ambivalence and ambiguities within Loyalism.

The differences within Loyalism became particularly visible in the new communities established by the Loyalist exiles in British North America. Surprisingly, a comprehensive overview of this phenomenon has yet to be written. But in David G. Bell's *Early Loyalist Saint John: The Origin of New Brunswick Politics, 1783-1786* (Fredericton, New Ireland Press, 1983), we have a thoroughly researched analysis of the experiences of one group of Loyalists immediately after the Revolution. After examining the situational pressures which forced so many Loyalists into exile, and after providing a sensitive statistical profile of the exodus to the St. John River Valley, Bell discusses the deep ten-

to the Abbé Raynal" in Philip S. Foner, ed., *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine* (New York, 1945), II, p. 214.

sions which characterized the settlement of Saint John. When they arrived, these "angry, dispirited and and vulnerable" refugees encountered chaotic conditions. With lack of coordination among the military, the Nova Scotia government and the Agents and Directors who helped organize the exodus, preparations for settlement in 1783 and 1784 were hopelessly inadequate. Overcrowding, shortages of water and fuel, primitive shelter, and above all the nondistribution and maldistribution of land, produced intense frustration and bitterness. "Far from being united by common 'Loyalist' beliefs and shared experience", writes Bell, "the exile community was deeply and bitterly divided. The political climate of early Saint John assumed an aspect so grave that many likened it to the mood of the old colonies on the eve of the Revolution" (p. 62).

As Bell points out, the roots of these tensions can be traced to earlier events at New York. While the Loyalists were preparing to leave, 55 leading figures attempted to regain their former social status by petitioning for large land grants in Nova Scotia. In the "surge of indignation" (p. 65) which followed this action, men like Elias Hardy and Tertullus Dickinson emerged as leading spokesmen for discontented Loyalists. The same men played a prominent role in organizing the opposition movement which developed in Saint John. With the Agents and Directors attempting to acquire the most attractive lots, with persistent delays in getting people to their land, and with fears bubbling to the surface that ordinary Loyalists would be reduced to tenants (or "slaves") of a few large landowners in a kind of "feudal revival", something approaching a "spirit of insubordination" (p. 69) arose in the town.<sup>8</sup> To protect their position and to restore order, the Agents and Directors clamped down on the protest movement and branded the opposition as seditious. After only a few months in Saint John, the local elite was arguing that their Loyalist opponents were actually disloyal — a truly remarkable development.

In the light of these events, Bell considers two broad themes. First, he probes the relationship between the troubles at Saint John and the establishment of New Brunswick as a separate colony. While he demonstrates that there was in fact no causal connection between the two, he nevertheless shows that both opponents and supporters of partition attempted to turn events at Saint John to their own advantage. Governor Parr of Nova Scotia did not want his area of jurisdiction to be cut in half, and was well aware that the campaign to establish New Brunswick involved using unrest at Saint John as a pretext for partition. Understandably, Parr tried to discredit the partition movement by blaming the troubles at Saint John on the local elite. At the same time, London-based Loyalists pressing for partition attempted to blame the discontents on Hardy's "factionalism" and Parr's administration, and encouraged the Agents and Directors to petition for a separate colony. As it turned out, these petitions ar-

8 These fears can be examined in connection with John Murrin's fascinating thesis that colonial America was experiencing a "feudal revival" which was reversed by the Revolution. See John M. Murrin, "Review Essay", *History and Theory* 2 (1972), pp. 225-275.

rived in London too late to have any effect; partition had already gone through.

Bell argues that the real beneficiaries of partition were the Loyalists who had done their politicking in London. For these Loyalists, men such as Jonathan Odell and Jonathan Bliss, New Brunswick would serve a dual purpose. It would enable them to become big fish in a small pond; they were quite open about this, and were duly rewarded with senior appointments. And it would give them a "heaven-sent opportunity to vindicate those principles of empire and authority for which they had been martyrs in the Revolution....Creation of the Loyalist province represented their chance to prove to the world — and to prove to themselves — that a British colony ordered on firm, hierarchical, erastian principles would flourish and become the envy of its republican neighbours. If the New Brunswick experiment succeeded it would be their vindication before all generations. If it failed it would mean they had fought the Revolution in vain" (p. 97).

This brings us to Bell's second and major theme: the nature and significance of the political divisions within Saint John in 1785 and 1786. Determined to mould New Brunswick in their own image, the elite effectively stamped out the opposition party, known as the Lower Covers, after the 1785 election. Although the Lower Covers actually won the election, the elite overturned the results, suppressed the protests which followed, laid charges of sedition against the *Saint John Gazette* and, in what Bell calls "the most repressive piece of legislation ever enacted in New Brunswick" (p. 114), even banned public petitioning. In explaining these events, Bell agrees with W.S. MacNutt's emphasis on the importance of class, sectional and geographical divisions, but goes beyond MacNutt to stress the psychological dimensions of the conflict.<sup>9</sup> The rank-and-file, argues Bell, were haunted by a fear of betrayal; they felt let down by Britain, they felt vulnerable, and they were in no mood to give the elite the benefit of the doubt. The elite, in contrast, viewed any and every challenge to their position as a threat to the establishment of what was intended to be the most "Gentlemanlike" colony on earth. As Bell puts it, the New Brunswick elite sought to achieve "psychological redemption through creation of a model Loyalist colony. Any deviation from that model was to be resisted to the uttermost" (p. 134).

Bell's interpretation is sophisticated and compelling; the sheer depth of bitterness in Saint John becomes much more intelligible in the light of his analysis. He also lends support to Esther Clark Wright's contention that the political apathy which apparently characterized New Brunswick during the early 19th-century had its roots in the events of the 1780s. By suppressing dissent, Bell maintains, the elite pushed many of its opponents out of the colony, and ensured the passivity of those who remained. The triumph of the elite was confirmed during the following decade, when James Glenie's opposition was similarly branded

9 W.S. MacNutt, *New Brunswick: A History, 1784-1867* (Toronto, 1963), p. 61.

with disloyalty and driven to defeat. The "Loyalty Cry" which would be heard so frequently in Canadian politics first appeared in Saint John in 1785. And it was first used by Loyalists against Loyalists. In linking the ascendancy of the Saint John elite to 19th-century New Brunswick politics, Bell has added an important Maritime dimension to the broader question of the Loyalist impact on British North America.

The Loyalist legacy is considered from a very different but equally stimulating perspective in Dennis Duffy's *Gardens, Covenants, Exiles: Loyalism in the Literature of Upper Canada/Ontario* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1982). Rather than focusing on political matters, Duffy attempts to assess the influence of Loyalism on present-day Ontario's literary culture. Such a task is, as Duffy realizes, fraught with conceptual problems: it is difficult to trace "influences", and there is a danger of adopting a linear interpretation of cultural development. Nevertheless, Duffy feels that the effort is worth making, and concludes that Loyalist preoccupations have indeed endured in Ontario's literature. "The upshot of the study", he writes, "is a sense that in some way the culture of Upper Canada/Ontario remains continuous. Ontario's ancestors remain buried but not dead beneath the steel-and-glass facade of the Province of Opportunity. Their message — of covenant, of fall, of paradise lost and regained and lost again — far from reassuring, far from digestible to many, continues to be spoken, even to the unhearing" (p. 12).

After a faltering beginning on the historical background of Loyalist experiences, Duffy examines the transmission and transmutation of Loyalist values, attitudes and myths through the work of such writers as William Kirby, John Richardson, Charles Mair, Mazo de la Roche and Al Purdy. Loyalism for Kirby — as for so many 19th-century figures — glissades into the principle of Loyalty; the covenant between colonists and the mother country must be preserved through unity and, above all, sacrifice. Kirby's Upper Canada thus becomes both "garden and garrison" (p. 29). More controversially, Duffy also places John Richardson's work within the context of Loyalist culture. This "Loyalist in Disguise" (p. 44) is portrayed as expressing the deep-seated fear of violence, lawlessness and disorder which lay behind the Loyalist emphasis on peace, law and order. This fear, Duffy argues, was particularly acute in a society which emerged from and was sustained by the threat of war; violence was never far below the surface, and had to be harnessed and controlled. Richardson's writings, from this perspective, "preach from the house-tops the fears and obsessions others muttered beneath their blankets" (p. 46). The argument is neat — perhaps a little too neat — and must inevitably remain speculative; the undercurrent of violence is impossible to measure, and we cannot know what was muttered beneath the blankets.

Other fears developed later in the century. Duffy detects in Charles Mair's *Tecumseh* (1886) the underlying anxiety that imperial commitment to the covenant was fading, and he finds in Mair's other writings the sense that not only the

covenant but also the Loyalist garden itself was threatened. If Britain might undermine the covenant on the one hand, the "liberal and materialist culture" (p. 66) of late 19th-century Ontario could destroy the garden on the other. Indeed, the growing discrepancy between the garden and the modern world, between the Loyalist image of "an agrarian, deferential and devout polity" (p. 75) and the pragmatic, liberal-capitalist realities of modernizing Ontario, forms a major theme of Duffy's work. He argues that this discrepancy contributed to the strains and inconsistencies of Wilfred Campbell's *A Beautiful Rebel* (1909), and shows how in Mazo de la Roche's Jalna stories the Loyalist garden becomes a sentimentalized, nostalgic haven against the intrusions of modernity. And in a perceptive discussion of the reification of Loyalism, Duffy examines the way in which the old heroic view of Loyalism gave way to a more pragmatic, "useable" approach in keeping with modern preoccupations:

The attempt to create a heroic past for a pragmatic present succeeded only in underlining the distance between the two. That gap grew too large to ignore. The question it posed was a vexing one: how can a culture retain a heritage when the romantic, heroic, and idealistic speech that grants it significance has grown obsolete in public discourse? The answer lay in putting an emphasis on the hardship and struggle of pioneer life alongside a preoccupation with the technics employed by the pioneers. As realism came to overpower romance in historical fiction, textbooks and popular fiction began to reflect what I call an Upper Canada Village approach to the Loyalist past. (p. 98)

The romantic, heroic approach having become anachronistic and embarrassing (although, as we have seen, still alive and kicking), the Loyalist-as-Pioneer could combine a different brand of heroism with a "de-moralized" and homogeneous view of Loyalist experience. And at still another level, Duffy argues that contemporary writers like George Grant and Scott Symons, who react against what they perceive as the homogeneity and aridity of modern technological society, draw on Loyalist history and myth to express their own inner exile, their own sense of loss.

Duffy's analysis is challenging and controversial. Although the application of sophisticated literary criticism to manifestly unsophisticated 19th-century literature is incongruous, and although one detects an *a priori* approach to the material, Duffy has demonstrated that Loyalism represents one important strand in Ontario's literature. But the nature and extent of Loyalist influence, through literature, on Ontario's culture is another matter. This is not because most of the books being analyzed are bad; bad literature can provide many insights into cultural values — if that literature is widely read. However, most of the authors whom Duffy discusses were marginal figures who failed to grip and engage a general audience. The "unhearing" prevail, and the Loyalist tradition

has either been sanitized or seized upon by a minority of unrepresentative intellectuals crying into their technological, homogenized wilderness. For many Ontarians, Duffy's voices of the "ancestral present" probably appear as part of a tormented Laputa of the mind floating high above the CN tower. Under these circumstances, there is only a very limited sense in which Ontario's culture can be said to have kept faith with its Loyalist origins.

The whole question of the Loyalist legacy demands further investigation. And if we shift our focus from the literary to the economic and social aspects of that legacy, it quickly becomes apparent that many fundamental issues have yet to be tackled. As Donald Akenson has noted in his recent study of the Irish in Ontario, "it might be well for historians of loyalist Upper Canada to put aside for a time their more sophisticated studies and answer the humbler questions: how large was the Upper Canadian population; how was it geographically distributed; and what was its composition in terms of ethnicity, national origin, and socio-economic background?"<sup>10</sup> In his own work on Leeds and Lansdowne Township, Akenson has concluded that there was virtually nothing to distinguish Loyalists from later American settlers as far as economic and cultural behaviour were concerned. If this is the case, and if Akenson's findings hold true for other areas, older notions about grassroots commitment to Loyalist concepts of "deference" and "order" must be revised.

Other lines of enquiry need pursuing. One would like to know more about those Loyalists who returned to the United States, disenchanted with places like Shelburne and Saint John. How many left British North America? How were they received when they returned home? One would also like to know more about the relationship between Loyalists and Federalists during the French Revolution and the Napoleonic era. George Rawlyk's discussion of the "Federalist-Loyalist alliance" in New Brunswick points the way to further research, although subsequent historians may well challenge his interpretive framework.<sup>11</sup> There is much work which needs to be done in areas such as the demographic background of the Loyalists, the experience of the Loyalist rank-and-file, and Loyalist women. On a more general level, a scholarly overview of the Loyalists in the Maritimes has yet to be written.<sup>12</sup> As this work proceeds, the

10 Donald Akenson, *The Irish in Ontario: A Study in Rural History* (Kingston and Montreal, 1984), p. 112n.

11 George Rawlyk, "The Federalist-Loyalist Alliance in New Brunswick, 1784-1815", *Humanities Association Review*, 27 (2) (1976), pp. 142-160. Influenced by G.P. Murdock's view that neighbouring societies tend to borrow cultural elements from one another, Rawlyk argues that the New Brunswick elite "borrowed" much of their ideology from New England Federalists. Yet it may also be argued that "articulate" New Brunswick Loyalists and New England Federalists shared a common Anglo-American conservative ideological heritage.

12 This point is made in William G. Godfrey, "'A New Golden Age': Recent Historical Writing on the Maritimes", *Queen's Quarterly*, 91 (2) (1984), p. 357. But with David Bell's study of Saint John, Neil MacKinnon's thesis on Nova Scotia Loyalists, and Marion Robertson, *King's Bounty: A History of Early Shelburne* (Halifax, 1983), the foundations for a monograph on Maritime Loyalism are clearly being laid.



Loyalists must be rescued from their admirers, and studied on their own terms. If Loyalist historiography has been torn between adulation and analysis, the actual Loyalist experience itself appears ambivalent, with important differences among Loyalists in class, ethnicity, regional background, experience and ideology. It would be a mistake to stand the 19th-century image on its head and see only fragmentation where earlier scholars saw unity. But it is essential to come to grips with the tensions within Loyalism before a new synthesis can be reached. When that happens, there will indeed be cause for celebration.

DAVID A. WILSON

### Rebels and Prisoners: The Canadian Insurrections of 1837-38

IT IS STRIKING TO NOTE how little our understanding of the rebellions of 1837-38 has advanced in the century and a half that has elapsed since Papineau, Mackenzie, Head, Durham and other participants penned their self-justifying accounts. Much of the historical literature is quite blatantly partisan and, in many cases, the conflict is presented in almost exactly the terms in which contemporaries conceived it. At the risk of oversimplification, one might speak of a "pro-rebel" historiographic tradition which, in its English-Canadian variant, sees the rebellion as part of a struggle against an office-holding clique and in favour of constitutional change.<sup>1</sup> A French-Canadian version of this approach portrays the *patriotes* as defenders of the nation.<sup>2</sup> Always the shadow of crushing defeat looms over the discussion, and pro-rebel historians, following the line established by many chastened insurgents after 1838, tend to play down the republican and genuinely revolutionary thrust of the rising. Opposing this camp is a more conservative, "anti-rebel" school which, like contemporary Tories, sees the rebellion as stemming from the criminal demagoguery of a few agitators and the foolishness of their followers.<sup>3</sup> Adopting the economic and

1 See, for example, Edwin C. Guillet, *The Lives and Times of the Patriots* (Toronto, 1938). Traces of this traditional liberal interpretation can still be found in recent works such as Michael Cross, "1837: The Necessary Failure", in M.S. Cross and G.S. Kealey, eds., *Pre-Confederation Canada, 1760-1849, Readings in Canadian Social History*, vol. 2 (Toronto, 1982), pp. 141-58, where the rebellions are seen making a contribution toward "political progress" and responsible government. Outside the academic establishment, there have been "radical" accounts, commemorating the insurgents as revolutionary heroes, but these works have generally been unsuccessful, both as history and as propaganda. See, for example, Greg Keilty, ed., *1837: Revolution in the Canadas* (Toronto, 1974), which attempts to portray W.L. Mackenzie as a stout opponent of American imperialism. Stanley Ryerson's work is an exception to the general pattern of low quality left-wing scholarship on 1837 (see footnote 7 below).

2 See, for example, Gérard Filteau, *Histoire des patriotes*, 3 tomes, (Montréal, 1938-42).

3 "Condamnable dans son principe et déplorable dans ses inévitables résultats", 1837 was, for