

No Fourteenth Colony:
Nova Scotia during the Era of the American Revolution

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Despite not joining the patriot side in the American Revolution, Nova Scotia saw great changes during and after the American Revolution. The most notable of these was the dramatic increase in population. This was mostly from loyalists who lived in America and fled to the new United States's northern neighbor. There are several historians who have written on this topic and other pressing questions of why a fourteenth colony never joined the Revolution. After the United States gained their independence, the government of Nova Scotia offered large land grants to loyalists trying to flee the newly independent America. The historians agree that there was much confusion that ensued after tens of thousands of loyalists moved there with the promise of substantial land grants after the war. Regardless of what one's role in society was, life in Nova Scotia during this time was far from easy.

Dana Brenner's article "The Fight for the Fourteenth Colony" argues that the American Revolution extended farther north than the wilderness of Massachusetts. He describes the efforts of the different Native American tribes who fought against the British in Nova Scotia with intentions to take it out of the British Empire. Not all of the tribes were willing to help revolt against the British Crown. The idea that both those in Nova Scotia who wanted to leave the British Empire and those who wanted to remain under the king was that "if the tribes couldn't be convinced to join the fight... then perhaps they could be persuaded to remain neutral."¹ The American patriots in 1775, expected that their Native allies, such as the Micmac and Maliseet, would fight the British in Nova Scotia keeping them too busy to move south to fight the Americans.² Shortly after the Declaration of Independence was signed, several Native American tribes also signed treaties with the new United States government to join the American War for

¹ Dana Brenner, "The Fight for the 14th Colony: At the Onset of the American Revolution the British and Americans Each Sought to Sway New England Settlers and First Nations Tribes in Nova Scotia," *Military History* 36, no. 5 (2020): 67.

² Brenner, "The Fight for the 14th Colony," 68.

Independence; many helping the colonists in the Revolution.³ These alliances cemented the relationships between the patriots and several Native American tribes.

Brenner also discusses the several attempts made by American patriots to get Nova Scotia to join the American Revolution. Many of these efforts were executed by New Englanders who relocated to Nova Scotia before the war started in an effort to make the region less francophone. Most of Nova Scotia's New Englander population moved there after many French Acadian residents were exiled from their homes to other British North American colonies. To fill the vacancy left by the Acadians in the 1750s, the British gave several land grants away to New Englanders. Thousands of New England farmers took this opportunity, making "Nova Scotia a literal outpost of New England."⁴ These relocated New Englanders often expressed patriotic sentiments during the American Revolution, including attempting to start rebellions in Nova Scotia. Despite the large New Englander population, George Rawlyk, author of *Revolution Rejected 1775-1776*, describes that even during the beginning of the war, there were also those criticizing the patriotic Nova Scotians. Lieutenant-Governor Mariot Arbuthnot, for example, stated that "the New England people [living in Nova Scotia] ... are bitter bad subjects."⁵ This criticism about the New Englanders of Nova Scotia, was published in the *Nova Scotia Gazette*, and showed the loyalist sentiment was present in Nova Scotia since before the mass exodus of loyalists flooded Nova Scotia. Overall, in this article, Brenner states that despite the many attempts from both American colonists and Native Americans, there was not enough support in Nova Scotia for the Revolution to spread into a fourteenth colony. Unlike in other colonies, during this time, there was only one newspaper active in Nova Scotia, the *Nova Scotia Gazette*.

³ Brenner, "The Fight for the 14th Colony," 70.

⁴ Wrong, *Canada and the American Revolution*, 411.

⁵ George A. Rawlyk, "Lieutenant-Governor Arbuthnot's Observations (1776)," in *Revolution Rejected 1775-1776*, (Scarborough, ON: Prentice-Hall, 1968):27.

Kate Dunsmore, in her article “On the Edge of the American Revolution: The *Nova Scotia Gazette* in 1775,” describes the attitudes of Anthony Henry’s newspaper in colonial Halifax during the outbreak of the American Revolution. She focuses on one of the only newspapers in what is now Canada during the mid-1700s. The *Nova Scotia Gazette* did not openly support or condemn the American Revolution; it discussed the occurrences on both sides of the war.⁶ This was very different from what was happening in the thirteen colonies. There, loyalist printers in British-occupied cities were able to print their own opinion, but doing so elsewhere in the thirteen colonies was very difficult. Nevertheless, Henry’s unique position as the printer of the only newspaper in Nova Scotia gave him the ability to display achievements for both sides of the war with little repercussion from the public. This press freedom that was in Nova Scotia gave the colonists there an opportunity to make their own opinions about the war. This explains Brenner’s argument that some, but not all, Nova Scotians would have sympathies to the patriots fighting the British. Dunsmore also makes note that Henry had as an apprentice Isaiah Thomas who would later start the *Massachusetts Spy* newspaper, which was an avid supporter of the American Revolution.⁷ There was a stark difference between how Henry and his former apprentice treated matters of the American Revolution, while Henry remained relatively unbiased, Thomas openly and fervently advocated for the patriot cause. Henry’s *Nova Scotia Gazette* gave colonists living in Nova Scotia an impartial view of both sides of the American Revolution which was very uncommon for the time. As the American Revolution continued the *Nova Scotia Gazette*’s neutrality and abstinence from the war, helped the colony become a place of refuge for loyalists who retreated back into British-controlled territory. With the more

⁶ Kate Dunsmore, “On the Edge of the American Revolution: The *Nova Scotia Gazette* in 1775,” *American Journalism* 37, no. 4 (2020): 532.

⁷ Dunsmore, “On the Edge of the American Revolution,” 527.

unbiased nature of the press, the experiences of those living in Nova Scotia during and after the American Revolution differed from that of residents of other countries.

In *Canada and the American Revolution*, published in 1968, George Wrong writes about several different experiences of different groups who lived in Canada during that time from loyalists moving away from the Revolution, to the British Nova Scotian government who was trying to deal with the great number of refugees who moved there in such a short period of time. Although Nova Scotia became part of Canada in the nineteenth century, Wrong occasionally refers to Nova Scotia as being part of Canada at the time of the American Revolution. He analyzes why Nova Scotia never joined the American Revolution. He states that Nova Scotia had a large population from New England, and Nova Scotians, like their more rebellious colonial neighbors to the south, disliked the Stamp Act. Wrong also stated that the Nova Scotians respected John Adams “but for his relative Samuel, they had hard words.”⁸ They thought that Samuel Adams was too radical and did not have his priorities in the right order; one loyalist wrote that Samuel Adams was “a cheat, cunning, specious, sanctimonious, a vulgar man who appealed to the ignorant and... let his families suffer for the common necessities of life.”⁹ Samuel Adams’s personality drove some neutral individuals in Nova Scotia away from the patriot cause. The Nova Scotian loyalists had similar sentiments for John Hancock. Throughout his book, Wrong focuses on the refugees who moved to Nova Scotia after the Revolution and the creation of New Brunswick after western Nova Scotia gained a significant population of loyalists. Wrong’s book emphasizes the experiences of the average individual living within Nova Scotia at the time. There are several other historians who have written about the land

⁸ George M. Wrong, *Canada and the American Revolution* (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1968), 436.

⁹ Wrong, *Canada and the American Revolution*, 436.

dispersal in Nova Scotia after the American Revolution, Maya Jasonoff gives a more modern historical view of this event.

Maya Jasonoff in her article “The Other Side of the Revolution” describes the overall experiences of loyalists during the American Revolution and in its immediate aftermath. Many such loyalists moved out of the new United States and into other British colonies, primarily Canada and Nova Scotia, but going anywhere in the British Empire. She focuses on the world scale of the American Revolution, particularly that of the loyalists who were displaced in the Revolution’s wake. Jasonoff describes the chaos within the leadership of Nova Scotia to find accommodations for the loyalists who moved north to flee the United States, including the difficult land grants. While Walker writes about the differences between the white and black loyalists in Nova Scotia, Jasonoff mentions that many black loyalists moved to Sierra Leone in Africa or some even to Australia. Jasonoff mentions that the surveyor general of Nova Scotia, while working to measure and designate such land grants, found his work unbearably grueling.¹⁰ His grueling work was due to the nearly thirty thousand loyalists who flooded Nova Scotia and requested land grants upon arrival. Jasonoff also tells the stories of actual families that moved to Nova Scotia, one is the story of the family of Rev. Jacob Bailey who were “relieved to reach a land where they saw ‘the Britanic colours flying.’”¹¹ They had been travelling for two weeks to touch British soil again. Jasonoff also tells the story of Elizabeth Johnston who moved to three different British holdings on both sides of the Atlantic before settling in Nova Scotia.¹² Moving among British colonies was not uncommon for loyalist refugees to do. While moving throughout the global British Empire, it was also common for these refugees to lose most of their

¹⁰ Maya Jasonoff, “The Other Side of the Revolution: Loyalists in the British Empire,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 65, no. 2 (April 2008): 214.

¹¹ Jasonoff, “The Other Side of the Revolution,” 205.

¹² Jasonoff, “The Other Side of the Revolution,” 227.

possessions. Throughout her article, Jasonoff illustrates the difficulties that both residents of Nova Scotia and loyalist refugees who fled there had to face directly after the American Revolution. James Walker also discussed the Nova Scotian land dispersal, but through the lens of how the black loyalists were often worse than white loyalists seeking the same refuge in Nova Scotia.

The Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone, 1783-1870 by James Walker contains a chapter entitled “Land and Settlement in Nova Scotia: The Establishment of a Free Black Community, 1783–91.” In this chapter, Walker describes the experiences of black loyalists who were freed by Lord Dunmore’s Proclamation and emigrated to Nova Scotia after the American Revolution ended. The British guaranteed land in Nova Scotia to loyalists who fled the thirteen colonies in revolt. Walker states that there was disparity between the size and location of the land grants that white loyalists were receiving and that of the black loyalists. In the years following the war, Nova Scotia Governor John Parr estimated that the colony saw a population increase of around thirty thousand loyalists fleeing the United States.¹³ Despite all this confusion, Walker mentions that the black loyalists still received fewer acres than their white counterparts. He examines a town settled primarily by black loyalists called Birchtown and several white land grants near Birchtown. He mentions that the latter received land grants, on average, twice as large as those granted to blacks in that same area.¹⁴ Walker argues that this was not a solitary incident in one area of Nova Scotia, but events as this occurred throughout Britain’s remaining colony on the Atlantic coast. The freed African slaves

¹³ James W. Walker, “Land Settlement in Nova Scotia: The Establishment of a Free Black Community,” in *The Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone, 1783-1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992): 18.

¹⁴ Walker, “Land Settlement in Nova Scotia,” 23.

who sought to remain within the British Empire were unfortunately not able to escape the societal prejudices against them.

Even though these five historians are all writing about similar topics, they all have their own perspective and focus on it. Brenner gives an analysis of why he believes Nova Scotia never saw it fit to leave the British Empire and join the American Revolution. He argues that after two failed attempts at securing a patriot foothold in Nova Scotia, that General Washington would not allow another.¹⁵ Dunsmore explains that there was more print freedom in Nova Scotia than in the rebelling colonies, which might have been a crucial factor in why they never joined the war. Wrong gives good detail about both the sentiments of Nova Scotians during the war being relatively open to the idea of independence, and that of the loyalists who moved there afterwards, who thought that “in 1784... Halifax has already surpassed Boston in elegance.”¹⁶ Jasonoff also has an important perspective of the accommodations that were needed to be made for the dramatic influx of people living in Nova Scotia directly after the American Revolution ended. Walker also gives a perspective of the land grants given by the Nova Scotian government in relation to disparities between the white and black loyalists, and how the black loyalists who were promised land there were treated less favorably than their white counterparts were. From reading all of these sources, one can see a single common theme that connects all of these historians. They all agree that life in Nova Scotia during and after the American Revolution was anything but easy. Nova Scotia living at this time was very difficult for its residents, refugees, and politicians all faced difficult challenges. The residents were faced with the decision of what should they do as their neighbors to the south were fighting for independence; the refugees had to leave their homes and most of their belongings because their homeland was becoming

¹⁵ Brenner, “The Fight for the 14th Colony,” 71.

¹⁶ Wrong, *Canada and the American Revolution*, 424.

unrecognizable; and the politicians had to deal with the dramatic influx of people who flooded their shores after the Revolution ended with the birth of a new republic.

There are several sources written on Nova Scotia at this time. There is a resolution written by residents of a small town of New Englanders in Nova Scotia asking to join the colony of Massachusetts Bay. There is also an anonymous letter written by a resident of Nova Scotia to General Washington asking for military support, which gives important details about the state of Nova Scotia at the time. Not all Nova Scotians wanted to join the American Revolution, as there are also a few petitions written by some New Englanders living in Nova Scotia asking that Nova Scotia remain entirely neutral during the Revolution. There is a section of a book written by a British politician who suggests that industry be intentionally withheld from Nova Scotia to prevent another colony from slipping into rebellion. There is also a book that responded to a pamphlet written criticizing Nova Scotia's Governor Parr on the poorly executed land dispersal grants given to loyalists who moved to Nova Scotia after the American Revolution.

There was a small group of Nova Scotian residents who wanted their settlements to join the colony of Massachusetts. They were willing to join the American Revolution to fight for their liberties against the British. This shows how important it was for such Nova Scotians to have the same liberties for which the American patriots were fighting. The community of Maudersville, in present-day New Brunswick, in 1775, wrote a resolution stating: "That it is in our Minds and Desire to submit ourselves to the government of Massachusetts Bay and that we are Ready... to Share with them... the present Struggle for Liberty."¹⁷ The residents of Maudersville had so much sympathy for the American patriots, that they were willing to join the colony of Massachusetts Bay before the Declaration of Independence was even signed.

¹⁷ George A. Rawlyk, "Resolutions of the Inhabitants of the Maudersville Area (1776)," in *Revolution Rejected 1775-1776*, (Scarborough, ON: Prentice-Hall, 1968): 24.

Evidently, Maugerville, never officially became a part of Massachusetts, but the town did, as George Rawlyk mentions, send twenty-seven men to join Johnathan Eddy's unsuccessful campaign to make the British relinquish control of the strategic Nova Scotian Fort Cumberland, located at the back of the Bay of Fundy just west of the modern border between Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. The patriotic residents of Maugerville shared the same desires for liberty that their fellow colonists in the thirteen colonies wanted.

There was one unnamed Nova Scotia resident presumably of New England origin, who even wrote a letter to General Washington about the prospects of Nova Scotia joining the American Revolution. The author wrote that in Nova Scotia, "a spirit of sympathy, I presume, for our brethren on the Continent, reigns in the breasts of the generality of the inhabitants."¹⁸ He stated that the colonists in Nova Scotia sympathized with the patriots fighting for their liberties. He wanted the colonies to assist Nova Scotians in gaining independence from the British. This letter asked Washington for military aid to Nova Scotia mentioning that the British have stationed "about two hundred regular troops in *Halifax*, including a number of raw recruits from *Newfoundland* and other places."¹⁹ He mentioned the number of troops in Halifax so that if Washington were to send aid, he would know what they should expect.

The author of this letter to Washington also recalls conversations with some Acadians who were "wholly inclined to the cause of *America*."²⁰ This is an interesting comment as it shows that Nova Scotian sympathies for the colonists were not only from the New Englanders who lived there, the French Acadians were also tired of British rule. This author also explains why the Nova Scotians did not just revolt on their own; "our remoteness from other Colonies,

¹⁸ George A. Rawlyk, "Anonymous Letter to General Washington (1776)," in *Revolution Rejected 1775-1776*, (Scarborough, ON: Prentice-Hall, 1968): 19-20.

¹⁹ Rawlyk, "Anonymous Letter," 22-23.

²⁰ Rawlyk, "Anonymous Letter," 22.

and our form of Government, joined with the indigent circumstances of the inhabitants, render it [rebellion] in a manner impossible.”²¹ It was not only Nova Scotia’s distance that made revolution unlikely, but they had a strict form of government and a poor population that could not afford it. The Nova Scotians also sent “an Address, Remonstrance, and Petition... to the Governour,” to repeal undesired acts and establish a new government in the House of Assembly.²² These were all ignored giving the author and other Nova Scotians no other choice that to reach out to the leader of the Continental Army. While George Washington never did send any troops to Nova Scotia, this letter shows that the misgivings that sparked the American Revolution spread northwards into Nova Scotia.

This liberty-seeking desire was not shared by all New Englanders living in Nova Scotia. Some such residents of Nova Scotia did not want to join the American Revolution in support of either side. This contention must have been difficult for those living in Nova Scotia, with some groups wanting to join Massachusetts and the Revolution, and others wanting simply to stay out of conflict. While some New Englanders in Nova Scotians wanted to get their adopted home to leave the British Empire, there were some neutral New Englanders feared a Nova Scotian entrance into the Revolution would only cause them to fight against their families and friends. They wrote multiple petitions to their British political leaders, asking that they not be required to fight against their former neighbors and extended families who were fighting as patriots. They asked that they “may be permitted at this time to live in a peaceable State.”²³ They were not voicing their opinions about which side was in the right, they were simply asking that they be allowed to continue to live their lives in British Nova Scotia. The petitioning colonists also

²¹ Rawlyk, “Anonymous Letter,” 20.

²² Rawlyk, “Anonymous Letter,” 21.

²³ George A. Rawlyk, “Petitions of New Englanders in Nova Scotia (1775),” in *Revolution Rejected 1775-1776*, (Scarborough, ON: Prentice-Hall, 1968): 28.

wrote that “it must be the greatest piece of cruelty and imposition for them [New Englanders in Nova Scotia] to be subjected to march into different parts in Arms against their friends and relations.”²⁴ The greatest fear of these New Englanders is that they may be forced to take arms against their kinsmen still living in New England. This shows that despite having a large population of native New Englanders who shared sympathies with the rebelling colonists, New Englanders who had migrated to Nova Scotia were often unwilling to go to war for either side, which made it more difficult for that first group of New Englanders to get Nova Scotia to join the Revolution.

In the wake of the American Revolution, there was a push to increase the settlement of Nova Scotia to rebuild the industry that Great Britain lost in North America with the birth of the United States. Richard Champion, who served as the British deputy postmaster general towards the end of the American Revolution, wrote a book regarding how the relations among Great Britain, other colonies in British North America, and the new United States would be once the fighting ended and the United States secured its independence. One section of this book shows what the British perspective of Nova Scotia was in the years following the Revolution. He argued that the contemporary movement to build viable settlements in Nova Scotia (presumably as a result of the influx of loyalist immigrants) will only lead to failure. He states: “Such a measure can never be for productive purposes to ourselves; for when... the inhabitants are strong enough to govern themselves, they will no longer be our subjects; and as the value of the country can never be an inducement to us to run into another American war.”²⁵ He wanted the contemporary reader to understand that if Nova Scotia gets too much funding for its

²⁴ Rawlyk, “Petitions of New Englanders,” 28.

²⁵ Richard Champion, *Considerations on the present situation of Great Britain and the United States of America, with a view to their future commercial connexions*, London: printed for John Stockdale, opposite the Burlington-House, Piccadilly, 1784, 126-127.

development, then it would be more likely to vie for its own independence in a similar method as the thirteen colonies had just a few years prior which resulted in a long and costly war. He was advocating against any of the British overseas colonies, including Nova Scotia, from becoming too wealthy or self-sufficient.

Champion did view Nova Scotia as economically valuable to the British Empire and explained that Nova Scotia was intended to “become the granary of the West Indies.”²⁶ This would mean that Nova Scotia’s purpose within the British Empire would be to produce grain and other crops for the British colonies in the Caribbean, which were usually used as slave depots. Champion believed that while there was hope for Nova Scotia to become more fruitful, he warned against the granting of too much industry and productivity to the colony or else it would be wanting of independence, for “No country will voluntarily become subject to another, when they have the strength to become their own masters.”²⁷ He wanted Nova Scotia to remain fully dependent on British rule because he was fearful of another revolution taking place in British North America. This shows that even though the British wanted to make their colonies, including Nova Scotia, more dependent on their rule. This means intentionally stunting the economy, making it difficult for Nova Scotians to continue to develop their land and industry.

After the American Revolution, an anonymous author released a pamphlet stating that Governor Parr did not execute the dispersal of land grants properly. In 1784, a response in support of Governor Parr was published, giving a contemporary explanation to the dispersal of land grants to loyalists during and after the American Revolution. The anonymous author wrote that fifty-five individuals were dissatisfied with the plots of land that they received from Governor Parr. This response shows both how difficult it was for the loyalist refugees to get the

²⁶ Champion, *Considerations on the present situation*, 127.

²⁷ Champion, *Considerations on the present situation*, 127.

land grants that they were promised and the political leaders of Nova Scotia to keep their promises about the land grants as tens of thousands of refugees relocated there within a few years. This author also includes several relevant letters to the governor from said loyalists and responses from representatives of Governor Parr to the claims of those individuals that the governor backed down on his promise to secure five-thousand acres of Nova Scotia land for each of them, for the British king forbade land grants of over one-thousand acres to any one individual.²⁸ These loyalists argued that they submitted their claims before that edict meaning that they were exempt from it.²⁹ The author also mentioned that he does not believe these fifty-five loyalists actually wrote the pamphlet to which he is responding, but believes the unnamed “Vindicator” who is mentioned as the author of it not to be related to them directly. After refuting the claims by the “Vindicator,” the author explained that Governor Parr is not faultless in the dispersal of the land grants to the loyalists. He then quoted from several complaint letters to the governor about the land grants. These complaints were made against Governor Parr before the “Vindicator’s” pamphlet was written. While individuals were waiting for their land grants, they were often left unable to provide food or shelter for themselves or their families, and work was also difficult to find. Such difficulty often led to disappointment as the land grants were not in a favorable location or it did not have the desired acreage.

Nova Scotia had several opportunities to join the thirteen colonies and rebel against Great Britain, but never had as widespread support as was present in the other colonies, this lack of support might have been that a majority of the British population in Nova Scotia was of New England origin and wanted but felt that they might not be able to gather enough support in the

²⁸ Anonymous (A Consistent Loyalist), *Remarks on a late pamphlet, entitled, A vindication of Governor Parr, and his council, &c.*, London: printed for J. Stockdale, opposite the Burlington-House, Piccadilly, 1784, 25.

²⁹ Anonymous, *Remarks on a late pamphlet*, 32.

vast wilderness of Nova Scotia. Also, unlike in the other American colonies, print in Nova Scotia was rather unbiased, meaning that for those who received their information from newspapers or from friends who would, there was not a one-sided story on the Revolution as there was in the more southern British colonies. There was also a lot of contention about the dispersal of land granted to the loyalists after the American Revolution. There was also push from elite in England to take caution when inventing in overseas colonies such as Nova Scotia. People were slandering the governor of Nova Scotia because of the delay and him appearing to double-back on his own word. This can be applied to the establishment of new towns to accommodate for the tens of thousands of loyalists who fled there after the Revolution. Nova Scotia's relative neutrality during the American Revolution, asked for by some of the New Englanders who lived there, ended up making Nova Scotia into a loyalist haven as the war progressed and looked less favorably for the British. It is also likely that the loyalists were encouraged to move to Nova Scotia not only because it was conveniently close to the new United States, but also because their loyalist voices would drown out the independence-seeking New Englanders already established in Nova Scotia, making a future revolution less likely.

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