

Some Recent Books on Late 18th-Century Atlantic Canada

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[See table of contents](#)

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REVIEW ESSAYS/NOTES CRITIQUES

Some Recent Books on Late 18th-Century Atlantic Canada

WHEN I ARRIVED AT THE University of New Brunswick over a quarter of a century ago I immediately became part, in a rather junior capacity, of the ambitious, international Programme for Loyalist Studies and Publications. We sought to amass a bibliography of Loyalist sources in Britain, the United States, Canada and elsewhere, and to film them. We also hoped for symposia, publications and a general flowering of research. The Programme was far from a complete success (only one Canadian symposium, one semi-official publication apart from a bibliography) though the collection and filming of the Canadian material (and much more) has, at long last, been completed most ably by Kathryn Hilder of the Harriet Irving Library here in Fredericton. It is called the Loyalist Collection. When I consider the growing success of the Planters Studies Centre, I am filled with admiration and more than a twinge of envy for its accomplishments. In 1983 the Canadianists at Acadia University formed the "Planters Studies Committee" which led, in 1987, to the first Planters Studies Conference at Wolfville, the proceedings of which were published in 1988 with the title *They Planted Well*.¹ The Committee also planted well: a second conference in 1990, a third in 1993, and at least three significant publications including the first book under review, the proceedings of the second conference, *Making Adjustments: Change and Continuity in Planter Nova Scotia, 1759-1800* (Fredericton, Acadiensis Press, 1991), skilfully edited by Margaret Conrad, as she did the first.

The object seems to have been, in Graeme Wynn's words, "to bridge the historiographical canyon now separating 18th-century Acadian and 'Anglo-German' Nova Scotia from the later Loyalist period" (p. 63), and to add Planters to other major Canadian groups such as Acadians and Loyalists. The blurb on the back cover of *Making Adjustments* assures us that Planter descendants include "major educators, theologians, inventors...and at least two Canadian prime ministers", an encomium reminiscent of Loyalist tributes of yesteryear.

Who were the Planters and are they worthy of special attention? *Roughly* speaking, they were the pre-Loyalist settlers of the old province of Nova Scotia (Prince Edward Island does not seem to be included). I have no problem with their relatively small numbers, some 20,000 when the Loyalists arrived in 1783, an issue dealt with by John Reid in his essay, "Change and Continuity in Nova Scotia, 1758-1775". As someone else points out, the much studied colony, Plymouth, had less than 2,000 inhabitants in 1660. I italicize *roughly* because it is definition which raises questions. Elsewhere Conrad defines the Planters as the 8,000 New Englanders who came to Nova Scotia between 1759 and 1768. She admits that they did not particularly think of themselves as Planters! that it is uncertain whether to include merchants and officials in Halifax, that J.B. Brebner

1 Margaret Conrad, ed., *They Planted Well: New England Planters in Maritime Canada* (Fredericton, 1988).

never used the term.² (George Rawlyk claims the Ukrainians as Planters.) Granted the characterization pre-Loyalists is rather negative, but the trouble is that Planters does not seem to include all of them. With its strong 18th-century connotation with the Southern colonies and the West Indies, the contrived term rests uneasily with me, but what the heck, some of the contributors simply ignore it, and it serves as a spectacular rallying point for research. This period *is* worthy of special attention and benefits from all the exciting innovations which have appeared in the American colonial field during the last three decades. You can't have too much history any more than you can have too much money.

The second conference was clearly a huge success, part learned symposium, part Amway convention, with over 150 enthusiasts in attendance. There was a wide range of speakers: amateur and professional, archivist and archaeologist, agriculturist and musicologist, political scientist and civil servant, professors of English and History. Broad construction was the order of the day. Some of the best contributions have no particular focus on Planters, such as Julian Gwyn on "Economic Fluctuations in Wartime Nova Scotia, 1755-1815" and Carol Campbell, "A Scots-Irish Planation in Nova Scotia: Truro, 1760-1775". The time frame is also broad, as suggested by Brian C. Cuthbertson's useful "Planter Elections: The First One Hundred Years", though this statistical profile is of "constituencies which were unquestionably Planter in population" (p. 253), and by Bill Wicken, "Mi'kmaq Land in Southwestern Nova Scotia, 1771-1823".

Books of essays by various authors are notoriously difficult to review. One ploughs on, silently awarding grades, an A here, a B- there, jotting down comments: for example, "fun" — Gwendolyn Davies on "The Peregrinations of the Reverend John Secombe", "most useful" — Joan Dawson on "The Mapping of the Planter Settlements". The wildly differing subject matter always prompts the big question — what's it all about Alfie? or, as E. Jennifer Monaghan puts it — "the great 'so what' of historical enquiry" (p. 19). For me the question is sometimes easier to answer favourably, for example Monaghan's keynote musings on literary and gender issues in New England (which, at the very end, she ties in neatly with the Planters) or Donald Desserud's application of Bernard Bailyn and J.G.A. Pocock to "Nova Scotia and the American Revolution", sometimes harder, for example Deborah Trask on German gravestones or Marc C. Lavoie on "Archaeological Evidence of Planter Material Culture". Not that Trask's and Lavoie's articles are not scholarly and interesting. The fact is, of course, that one person's history is another's antiquarianism. All history is antiquarian.

The main impression left by *Making Adjustments* is of the vitality and range of the research interest in the region for this period, and the sensible refusal to take the Planter concept too seriously. The volume concludes with six commentaries on "Future Directions" which are essential reading for graduate students (and others) seeking research topics.

Vitality is also evidenced by the Planters Studies Centre's sponsorship of Judith A. Norton's computer assisted *Bibliography of Primary Sources*, to quote the

2 Conrad, ed., *They Planted Well*, pp. 10-11.

subtitle to her *New England Planters in the Maritime Provinces of Canada, 1759-1800* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1993), which will be a great help to future researchers. As compiler Norton notes, "The Planters left behind them vast quantities of paper" (p. xi) covering a wide spectrum: personal, government, legal, military, business and religious, most of which seems to be in the bibliography's more than 3,000 entries. Forty-nine repositories have been culled, ranging from the John Carter Brown Library and the Nantucket Historical Association in the United States to the New Brunswick Museum and the Annapolis Valley MacDonald Museum in Canada. Again nothing from Prince Edward Island. British repositories are not included because copies of the relevant material are listed from the National Archives in Ottawa and the Public Archives of Nova Scotia. The only major gap which occurs to me is the failure to include the Loyalist Collection at the University of New Brunswick. Among the 3,000 reels of microfilm and 700 microfiches of North American Colonial and early Canadian primary sources, there must be much material on Planters, even if defined in the strictest way.

Norton uses five categories of sources: Government Documents, Personal Papers, Business Records, Documents of a Society (including church records) and Newspapers. The general New Brunswick and Nova Scotia documents are listed first, followed alphabetically by county. The "New England Documents" (including New Jersey and New York!) are listed alphabetically by state. Five indexes make for easy use: Planter, Non-Planter, New England Town and Church Record, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick Place, Subject. The addresses, but not the telephone numbers (pity), of all the repositories are given. There is a nice map. Needless to say, if they can cough up \$125.00 plus GST all scholars in the field will want to own this indispensable tool. Finally, for those who understand these things, the bibliography is also available on software: "information on the CLARION Planter Archive System (PAST) is available from the Planter Studies Centre, Acadia University" (p. xiii).

I tried out the indexes in a number of ways and in two cases was less than satisfied. I checked "Loyalists", which has over 30 entries including Document 369, "Defence of Nova Scotia 1782", which boasts "applications from New York Loyalists". The next Document, 370, "Governor Wentworth Correspondence", including much on "the settlement of the Loyalists", is not in the index under Loyalists although it is much the more important of the two. (Of course, it is a good rule never to put complete trust in indexes.) On the positive side, I located several interesting items not found in the Palmer Bibliography of *Loyalist Source Material*.³ Another spot check yielded a puzzling result. Norton mentions finding "well over a hundred" personal letters, "mostly in repositories in New England" (p. xi), yet Letters (Personal) in the Subject Index lists fewer than 20 such American letters.

M.A. MacDonald, in *Rebels & Royalists: The Lives and Material Culture of New Brunswick's Early English-Speaking Settlers, 1758-1783* (Fredericton, New

3 Gregory Palmer, ed., *A Bibliography of Loyalist Source Material in the United States, Canada, and Great Britain* (Westport and London, 1982).

Ireland Press, 1990), prefers the Loyalist term "Early Comers" to Planters. Certainly many of the people she discusses were not Planters, including William Davidson, the Scot "who, in 1766, founded the first English-speaking settlement in northern New Brunswick" (p. 72) and William Trueman, a Yorkshireman, who arrived on the Chignecto isthmus in 1774.

MacDonald participated in the First Planters Conference and published in its proceedings, but her book has no direct connection with the Planters Studies Centre. Nevertheless, it is a welcome addition to Planter Studies as most of the artifacts discussed were owned either by New Englanders or Yorkshire immigrants. It is also a sort of welcome addendum to Norton's bibliography because it arose out of a New Brunswick Museum project "to find and authenticate any two- and three-dimensional objects once owned by the pre-Loyalist English-speaking settlers of the region that became New Brunswick" (p. vii). The result, she tells us, is, despite the ravages of "antique pickers", "unexpectedly rich", ranging "from personal military items — a sword, drum, a powder horn through housewares, furniture, and portraits; even an entire house, with much of its original hardware" (pp. 11, vii). Unfortunately, these items are not catalogued or listed, but there are 37 fine illustrations (which seems to be most of them) of such items as plans, maps, pottery, furniture, weapons, clothing (a lone waistcoat), tools, clocks, paintings. There is also a good bibliography.

There are really two books here, lying side by side. The first is a useful summary of the history of pre-Loyalist New Brunswick, 1758-1783, although the author sometimes over-reaches herself and the information is not always particularly linked to material culture. The second, and much more important, is the description of the artifacts. As with most material history, the difficulty is going beyond description to meaning. "What do these artifacts say about the original owners and their world?" (p. 110). The answers are less than inspiring: "The Steeves Bible speaks to the religious faith characteristic of these Protestant pioneers"; The Trueman spoon mould speaks to domestic self-sufficiency"; "the clean, classical lines of the...Chapman door hardware represents the good taste of the times" (pp. 110-11). To be fair, I doubt that much more than this sort of thing can be addressed. The only really useful bit of mainstream historical knowledge — "a competent carpenter earned about a pound a week" (p. 111) — comes from the Chapman notebook which, in my opinion, is not an artifact.

Meanwhile, despite the long since demise of the official programme, Loyalist studies flourish by necessity. Loyalists were a major factor in the American Revolution and they impinge, to a greater or lesser degree, on all of Canadian history from the late 18th-century until the War of 1812, and in some ways down to the present. These truisms are borne out by the next three books under review: James S. Leamon's history of Maine during the American Revolution, Janice Potter-MacKinnon's account of some Loyalist women and Theodore C. Holmes' investigation of the Quaker and Baptist Loyalist settlement at Passamaquoddy Bay, New Brunswick.

The War for American Independence in Maine, the subtitle of Leamon's *Revolution Down East* (Amherst, The University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), is misleading because, although the war is indeed well covered, the book deals with

the whole revolutionary history of Maine from the Stamp Act to the ratification of the federal constitution in 1788. Given the power of the professional American historical machine, it is astonishing that this is the first "general history of the Revolution in Maine" (p. xiv). Leamon explains that, ever since it achieved statehood in 1820, "Maine has remained a colony to Massachusetts historiographically much as it was politically and economically" (p. xiii). An excellent opening chapter, which describes the three poverty-stricken frontier counties (York, Cumberland, Lincoln) on the eve of the Revolution, makes it clear that, although the District had been part of Massachusetts since 1690, Maine was always a distinct entity. Leamon's synthesis of his own research and the existing historical literature triumphantly fills the historiographical gap. The book is sober: "Despite the spread of revolutionary enthusiasm, Maine's traditional leaders maintained control of an essentially conservative revolution with remarkable success" (p. xv); and the American tendency to Fourth of July sermons is mercifully confined to the last two paragraphs. The book is clear, well-written, well-organized, occasionally revisionist, with excellent maps and illustrations. My only regret is that the suggestive parallels between Maine and the lower South (and other border areas) hinted at in the preface are not sufficiently spelled out in the subsequent text. A learned article is in order.

Specialists will find little to surprise them regarding the Loyalists. Chapter Five, "A Divided People", is a good summary, drawing particularly on unpublished Ph.D. dissertations on Maine Loyalists by Richard I. Hunt Jr., Robert Sloan and Edward Cass. On the vexed questions of numbers and motivations Leamon practically throws in the towel, agreeing with the useful, venerable generalizations of Paul H. Smith and William H. Nelson, respectively. The British occupation of Bagaduce (Castine) in 1779 provided a rallying point for Maine Loyalists and encouraged bitter civil war, while generally the destruction of commerce, food shortages, rebel recruitment and taxation severely tested all Mainers who, like Americans "in other border regions, were left to survive largely by their own devices" (p. 135).

Leamon provides an interesting account of privateering raids on the coast of Nova Scotia during the early years of the war, but his handling of the eventual settlement of Maine Loyalists in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick is perfunctory. There is no mention of Loyalist activity on Passamaquoddy Bay, but, to be fair, those refugees were not from Maine. For this we turn to Theodore C. Holmes, whose impressive digging in the sources has produced *Loyalists to Canada: The 1783 Settlement of Quakers and Others at Passamaquoddy* (Camden, Maine, Picton Press, 1992) which means chiefly Beaver Harbour, St. Andrews, the Digdegwash River, Point Matoon (St. Stephen) and Cape Anne at the head of Oak Bay on the St. Croix River. Despite an opening chapter on the Quaker Loyalist settlement at Pennfield (destroyed by fire in 1790) and an Appendix which traces the general history of the Quakers, with emphasis on the American Revolution, this is primarily a welcome reference book complete with full footnotes, bibliography and an Every Name Index, but no Subject Index. Its heart is a few hundred (my guess) brief biographies of Passamaquoddy Bay settlers (Quakers, Baptists and many others) plus useful lists and materials including the muster roll of the *Camel*

(courtesy of that great Public Record Office sleuth, David Bell), which arrived at Beaver Harbour from New York City on 17 September 1783, and some Pennfield parish records from the 1820s (the book's chronology is wider than might be supposed from its title).

The Loyalists have always had a special attraction for genealogists and dedicated amateur and semi-amateur historians, some of whom are themselves descendants of Loyalists. Such a one is Theodore C. Holmes. Like many books of its type, *Loyalists to Canada* has a slightly undigested air, but when the history of the Loyalist Quakers in New Brunswick comes to be written it will be an indispensable aid. (Quakers are also found in the Conrad collection. Allen B. Robertson asks what are the "Quaker Contributions to Planter Nova Scotia"? Despite a gallant, scholarly effort, the answer seems to be not much.)

The Picton Press of Camden, Maine, has managed to misspell Roosevelt on the blurb of the Holmes book. A greater slip 'twixt cup and lip occurred in the production of Janice Potter-MacKinnon's *While The Women Only Wept*. The actual subtitle is *Loyalist Refugee Women* (Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993) but the dust-jacket substitutes the much more, if far from completely, accurate *Loyalist Refugee Women in Eastern Ontario*. (I should talk! I confidently thought I'd written a book with Hereward Senior entitled *Victorious in Defeat: The American Loyalists in British North America* only to receive a tome, without the intervention of galley proofs, subtitled *The American Loyalists in Exile*.) The group studied (the women are inevitably joined by men and children) consists of those Loyalists who eventually settled in what is now the Kingston region of Ontario. Only the last of the book's five chapters deals (briefly, because of the scarcity of records) with life on Lake Ontario. In fact, the book is primarily a study of the Loyalists before they got to Cataraqui: at home in northern New York, including a detailed, partly statistical analysis; experiences during the Revolutionary War; exile in New York City and in various Quebec camps. A great strength is the description of camp life at Machiche; another is the account of Mohawk women.

The main title is drawn from an 1894 poem by William Kirby espousing the traditional view that while the men, "the salt and savor of the land", played out their God-given roles, "the women only wept". There is much truth in this and Potter-MacKinnon somewhat marring her argument by harping on the fact that this was indeed a time of patriarchy and paternalism, male elitism and hierarchy. However, having been put, unasked by the males, on the Loyalist side, the war proved liberating for many females. With the men gone they could do more than merely weep: they were forced "to act in ways inconsistent with their status within patriarchal households" and even enter "the traditionally male-dominated world of politics and warfare" (p. 44). They took unaccustomed decisions, ran the family farm or business. Once they reached the British lines normality returned, and in eastern Ontario women were again fully in the thrall of a paternalistic society where, having suffered more, they enjoyed none of the gains of their rebel sisters in the Young Republic. Worse, their story and contributions "were minimized and distorted" (p. xiii).

Potter-MacKinnon has written a sprightly, spirited book which comfortably joins the works of such luminaries as Mary Beth Norton, Linda Kerber and others.⁴ The research is excellent, including effective use of M.A. theses and some papers in private hands. At the same time, this book suffers from a certain shrillness, repetition and occasional lack of focus. I think the author sometimes overstates her case and takes the formal language of petitions too seriously.

The year 1990 witnessed the publication of two books on the Canadian militia: David Facey-Crowther, *The New Brunswick Militia, 1787-1867* (Fredericton, New Ireland Press, 1990) and David Webber, *A Thousand Young Men: The Colonial Volunteer Militia of Prince Edward Island, 1775-1874* (Prince Edward Island, P.E.I. Museum and Heritage Foundation, 1990). They remain the only two books on the subject, though there are a number of learned articles — see the bibliographies in each book.

As Facey-Crowther reminds us, “the obligation of the adult male to participate in the defence of his homeland goes back” (p. 1) to the Anglo-Saxon *fyrd* which became the militia, in the modern sense, under Queen Elizabeth I. The institution was transferred to the American colonies and proved its worth for both sides during the Revolutionary War (James Leamon, however, does not find the Maine militia to have been very effective). Nevertheless, the Loyalists brought with them a “much stronger and more persistent...attitude...that a well trained militia was a necessity only in time of emergency and could be ignored in time of peace” (p. 3). Prince Edward Island’s militia dates from 1776, although, like New Brunswick’s (which dates from 1787), it was never involved in any actual hostilities.

Both historians are obliged by the records to focus on the official government and political aspects of the militia. As Facey-Crowther laments, “the records of activity at the battalion, or even county level, are extremely sparse, making it virtually impossible to use them to reconstruct what was happening at the unit level” (p. vii). Facey-Crowther’s two main themes are also taken up by Webber: first the militia “set against the backdrop of provincial politics and imperial defence concerns”, second, “conflicting notions over colonial defence”, namely local opposition to the imperial desire for the province “to take on a large share of the responsibility for local defence” (p. xi). Although there are many local differences (e.g., nothing like the Island’s land tenure problems in New Brunswick), not surprisingly the two books have many more similarities: the importance of the various lieutenant-governors and adjutant-generals; the same international backdrop — the American Revolution, the French Wars, the War of 1812, the rebellions of 1837, Napoleon III, the American Civil War, the Fenian movement. The chequered story of both militias is quite similar. By 1867, just as they disappeared, both, based on the volunteer system, were in excellent shape, particularly New Brunswick’s, where Lieutenant-Governor Arthur Hamilton Gordon, building on the efforts of his predecessor, John Henry Manners-Sutton, left

4 See, for example, Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Boston, 1980); Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill, 1980).

"a militia system that, with Confederation, was considered to be the best in the country" (p. 135).

The main difference between these two books reflects the differences between their authors. Facey-Crowther, the academic historian, serves up a dish of mainstream research; Webber's "heritage" career leads him to spend more time on uniforms and weapons and to be more generous with illustrations — maps, drawings, old photographs, plus eleven of his own handsome colour plates (the book's Cinemascope shape facilitates the horizontal depiction of rifles and muskets). However, Webber does not neglect orthodox research any more than Facey-Crowther neglects illustrations. It is difficult to believe, short of the discovery of new sources, that much more can be said of the New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island militias. Both books will serve partly as reference works: for example, Facey-Crowther has an appendix which lists the New Brunswick militia units with brief histories, commanding officers and uniform descriptions; Webber has five useful appendices including the Militia Act of 1780. Both books are required reading for historians of the colonial period and both will be prized by military history buffs.

Facey-Crowther's and McDonald's books are both published by the New Ireland Press and both are first-rate productions. It is, perhaps, fitting to pay tribute here to Rick Cummings who runs the press virtually single handedly, on a part time basis, here in Fredericton. Cummings' contribution to local history for the past dozen years and more is strikingly evidenced by his distinguished list of publications to which the above two are worthy additions.

E. Jennifer Monaghan's piece in *Making Adjustments* inaugurated the "Esther Clark Wright Lecture Series on Eighteenth-Century North Atlantic Culture and Society", a mammoth expansion of Planter Studies which will allow future conference organizers to cast a very wide net. Wright's accolade is most appropriate and I would like to propose another person overdue for recognition: William Odber Raymond (1853-1923). The two share some characteristics — a mix of professional and amateur, a passion for New Brunswick history, a lack of honour in their own country (George Rawlyk's perhaps obsolete description of Wright). Both wrote on both Planters and Loyalists, both were historical pioneers. M.A. MacDonald reminds us that it was Raymond who rescued the letters of James Simonds from "a pile of rubbish" (p. 26). Perhaps the Loyalist Collection should be renamed the Raymond Collection?⁵

WALLACE BROWN

5 Among many publications the following stand out. W.O. Raymond, ed., *Winslow Papers* (St. John, N.B., 1901, rep. Boston 1972); *The River St. John* (Saint John, 1910; ed. J.C. Webster, Sackville, N.B., 1943); ed., *Kingston and the Loyalists of the Spring Fleet of A.D. 1783 with Reminiscences of Early Days in Connecticut: A Narrative by Walter Bates, Esq., To which is appended a Diary written by Sarah Frost on her Voyage to St. John, N.B., with the Loyalists of 1783* (Saint John, 1889).