

Kelly Alexandra Bennett
2005 UELAC Loyalist Scholarship Award Recipient



The first UELAC Loyalist Scholarship was awarded in 2005 to Ms. Kelly Alexandra Bennett, a Master of Arts history student at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. Raised in Toronto and Montreal, Kelly is an 8th generation Loyalist descendant of the McLeod family of Murray River, Prince Edward Island. Kelly's Loyalist lineage is traced through her paternal grandmother Grace MacPhee Bennett.

Under the supervision of Dr. Jane Errington, Kelly's research explored the personal and political legacy of Loyalist refugee women. With a working title – "Becoming 'Daughters of the Empire': The Loyalist Refugee Women's Experience in Upper Canada, 1783 – 1812", Kelly examined personal diaries and private papers of some of Upper Canada's founding families and the few surviving Loyalist family records for evidence of women's political engagement and active participation in the ideological debates of the revolutionary era.

Following is the 2006 thesis abstract for - "Defending Home and Kingdom with 'Indomitable Pluck': The Experiences of Loyalist Refugee Women in Upper Canada, 1770 – 1791" by Kelly A. Bennett.

Living through the American Revolution was a formative experience for Loyalist women, as well as men. Contrary to Janice Potter-MacKinnon's claims in her landmark study While the Women Only Wept (1993), the personal narratives of many refugee women speak to the existence of a Loyalist refugee womanhood characterized by inner strength, determinations, grit, stamina and backbone. Based upon a close study of their private papers, public petitions, land grants, travel diaries, wills and other documentary evidence, it is clear that the first wave of women who followed the flag to western Quebec/Upper Canada during and immediately following the Revolutionary War were not fragile creatures who merely followed their husbands. They wholeheartedly supported the counter-revolutionary movement and actually showed determined loyalty to the Crown.

In exile, many Loyalist women were also unwilling and unable to forsake their Revolutionary experiences. While they may have adopted the formal language of humility, modesty and deference in their post-war Memorials, they continued to think of themselves as capable wives and mothers and as committed Tories and refused to relinquish all of their decision-making power, at least in the immediate aftermath of the war. As one Brockville woman suggested more than a century ago, the first generation of refugee women who came to Upper Canada displayed a fair measure of 'indomitable pluck', true loyalty, quiet strength, stoicism and passive resistance.

They also emerged out of the Revolutionary War and exile experience more determined, self-confident and strident in their opinions than ever before.

On completion of her Master's degree at Queen's University in June of 2006, Kelly continued her studies at the PhD level. Two copies of Ms. Bennett's MA thesis were presented to the UELAC library at 50 Baldwin Street in Toronto.