

Finding Loyalists in Canadian and Other British Empire Records

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Loyalists to Canada

Passenger Lists

- During the evacuation from New York, nine transport ships left on October 19, 1782, and arrived at Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia a few days later.
- The “Spring Fleet” launched on April 11, 1783; ships continued to travel throughout the spring and autumn, arriving as late as January 15, 1784.
- United Empire Loyalist Association of Canada (UELAC) Loyalist Ships Database - <https://uelac.ca/loyalist-ships>
 - Some of the passenger lists referenced have more detail than others: Some include little more than a name and whether a woman or child; Others may be more detailed (ex. Book of Negroes in the Carleton Papers)

Land Grants

- Petitions were submitted that stated whether the Loyalist was a soldier or supported the British in some other way.
- Petitions could be submitted by the children of the Loyalist.
- If petition was approved, the claimant was provided with a ticket with the township and lot # of the land they were awarded.
- Land grant petitions for Lower Canada (Quebec) and Upper Canada (Ontario) can be found on the Library and Archives Canada website.
- Land records for New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island are held at the provincial level:
 - New Brunswick - <https://archives.gnb.ca/Archives/?culture=en-CA>
 - Land Petitions: Original Series, 1783-1918
 - New Brunswick Land Grants, 1784-1997
 - Nova Scotia
 - Nova Scotia Land Papers 1765-1800 - <https://archives.novascotia.ca/land-papers/>
 - Prince Edward Island
 - Master Name Index - <https://peigs.ca/search-master-name-index/>
- Also check FamilySearch.org (see “Online Collections” below for links)

Black Loyalists

- Dunmore Proclamation decreed that any enslaved person who joined the British to fight against the American rebels would be freed from slavery.
- Thousands joined British forces and were separated into military units; often served as scouts, raiders, and military engineers; sometimes they did engage in

direct combat.

- Following the end of the Revolutionary War, General George Washington demanded the return of all American property, including the enslaved.
- Thousands of enslaved persons were relocated; Sir Guy Carleton oversaw the evacuation of Black Loyalists to other British territories, including Jamaica, London, and Nova Scotia
- Major settlements included:
 - Birchtown (near Shelburne)
 - Brindley (near Digby)
 - Negro Line (now Southville, Digby County)
 - Old Tracadie Road (Guysborough County)
 - Preston
- Due to poor economic, social, and political conditions, thousands of Black Loyalists left Nova Scotia on ships headed to Sierra Leone to settle in the colony known as Freetown
- Approximately 50 families remained in Halifax and other cities in Nova Scotia

Loyalists to Great Britain

- There is no estimate for the total number of Loyalists that fled to Great Britain, however, many went to Canada first, and then returned to England later to file for claims for compensation.
- Pensions were paid out by the Treasury before the American Loyalist Commission was formed; the pension and allowance payments to American Loyalists and other refugees (which incl. women and children) are held at the National Archives in Kew, England under AO 3/276 – <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C2573124>.
- Many Loyalists that returned fought for compensation for losses in the American colonies (record set AO 12 and 13); the American Loyalist Claims database on Ancestry.com has the digitized records from these series (see Class 2 for more information on these records)
- Military officers (and their surviving widows and family members) filed for pensions and other benefits; record set WO 42 includes the personnel records of the military officers and contains details such as vital records, probate records, and other papers (digitised on Ancestry.com)
- Military pension records include the Royal Hospital Chelsea (WO 97 and 120 series); the Royal Hospital Chelsea was the administrative office for the British Army (digitized on Ancestry.com)
- Look for probate records in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury and York, and the Episcopal Consistory Court in London for Loyalists who returned to England or died overseas.

Loyalists of the Caribbean

- According to a report presented to the Bahamas House of Assembly in 1789, 1,200 Whites and 3,600 Blacks arrived between 1784 and 1785 [the enslaved were listed as "servants" to avoid possible claims issues with the United States]
- Most Loyalists who went to Jamaica came from Georgia, North and South Carolina, and Virginia; there were 3,000 Loyalists who took 8,000 enslaved persons to Jamaica.
- Research land, probate, and church records in these areas; some records may be offline and held in the country's archives.

Resources: Online Collections & Databases

FamilySearch.org

- Bahamas Land and Property Records, 1788-1955 - <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/228489>
- British Military Records "C" Series, 1757-1899, Location at the National Archives of Canada - <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/397529>
- Church of England, Diocese of Jamaica, Parish Register Transcripts, 1664-1880 - <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/255086>
- Lower Canada Land Petitions and Related Records, 1637-1842 - <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/500672>
- Upper Canada Petitions for Land Grants and Leases, 1791-1867 - <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/2186363>

Library and Archives of Canada Databases:

- Black Loyalist Refugees, 1782-1807 – Port Roseway Associates - <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/loyalists/loyalist-port-roseway/Pages/port-roseway-associates-loyalists.aspx>
- British Military and Naval Records - <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/mass-digitized-archives/british-military-naval-records-index>
- Carleton Papers – Book of Negroes, 1783 - <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/loyalists/book-of-negroes/Pages/search.aspx>
- Land Petitions of Lower Canada - <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/land/land-petitions-lower-canada-1764-1841>
- Land Petitions of Upper Canada - <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/land/land-petitions-upper-canada-1763-1865>

Ancestry.com Databases (\$):

- England & Wales, Prerogative Court of Canterbury Wills, 1384-1858 - <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/5111>
- London, England, Wills and Probate, 1507-1858 -

<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1704>

- UK, American Loyalist Claims, 1776-1835 - <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/3712>
- UK, Pension Applications for Widows and Family of Military Officers, 1776-1881 - <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/3353/>
- UK, Royal Hospital, Chelsea: Regimental Registers of Pensioners, 1713-1882 - <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/3255>

Resources: Websites

- American Ancestors – <https://www.americanancestors.org>
- Ancestry – www.ancestry.com
- Black Loyalist Heritage Society - <https://blackloyalist.com/cdc/>
- FamilySearch – www.familysearch.org
- Jamaican Family Search - <http://www.jamaicanfamilysearch.com/>
- Library and Archives Canada - <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/Pages/home.aspx>
- Loyalist Collection at the University of New Brunswick - <https://loyalist.lib.unb.ca/>
- Nova Scotia Archives - <https://archives.novascotia.ca/>
- Provincial Archives of New Brunswick - <https://archives.gnb.ca/Archives/?culture=en-CA>
- Public Archives and Records Office (Prince Edward Island) - <https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/service/search-public-archives-material-online>
- United Empire Loyalists Association of Canada - <https://uelac.ca/>
- University of Illinois Chicago – Sierra Leone Collection - https://collections.carli.illinois.edu/digital/collection/uic_sierra



Resources: Published Sources

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- Keith E. Fitzgerald, *Loyalist Lists: Over 2000 Loyalist Names and Families from the Haldimand Papers* (Toronto, Ontario: Ontario Genealogical Society, 1984).
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- Paul J. Bunnell, *Research Guide to Loyalist Ancestors: A Directory to Archives, Manuscripts, and Published Sources* (Bowie, Maryland: Heritage Books, 1990).
- Robert S. Allen, *The Loyal Americans: The Military Role of the Loyalist Provincial Corps and Their Settlement in British North America, 1775-1784* (Ottawa, Ontario: National Museums of Canada, 1983).
- Ruth Holmes Whitehead, *Black Loyalists: Southern Settlers of Nova Scotia's First Free Black Communities* (Halifax, Nova Scotia: Nimbus Publishing, 2013).