**Remembering the Loyalists**

The Loyalists fled the new United States because they were loyal Englishmen, often of a better class, who had lost to American rebels, freedom-loving farmers who had taken up their rifles in the name of liberty.

That is the Myth! The reality was quite different. Very few of the Loyalists were English, let alone of a better class, let alone rich. When you glance at the signatures of the Declaration of Independence almost all the names are English, no hint of a large German and Dutch population, and little hint of the Scots or Irish, or the Indians or free Blacks. When you examine the lists of Loyalists, they consist almost entirely of these minorities. About 40% of the Loyalist refugees were German speaking, Palatine Germans. And the rest were Scottish highlanders, Irish, Dutch. There were probably more Aboriginal and Black Loyalists than there were English Loyalists. They were religiously diverse: a few Anglicans, but most were from Dissenting religions, Mennonites, Lutherans, Quakers, Baptists, Presbyterians. Words that have recently become popular could apply to these first settlers: diversity, pluralism, and multiculturalism.

John Ralston Saul states: “They fled not because they were Tories, but because they had been caught up in the meat grinder of Englishmen fighting each other. Minorities flee when majorities fall into conflict.”

When they arrived on the shores of the St. Lawrence River or the Niagara River they had very few possessions, and they had to clear the land of trees and struggle to grow crops. During the first few years many of them were on rations lists, receiving supplies from the British government. But in those early years of the 1780’s and 1790’s they demonstrated a resilience and a courage which we celebrate here today. They built houses, grist mills, villages, churches and the first stirrings of democracy occurred among the Loyalists as they formed village councils and land boards and began to complain about the heavy hand of the Lieutenant-Governor and later the notorious Family Compact.

John Ralston Saul reminds us in his recent book A Fair Country: Telling Truths about Canada that the basic values of egalitarianism and the importance of the tension between the individual and the group, and the importance of communication, negotiation and consensus was learned from the Loyalists’ relationship with Aboriginal people. Tomorrow is National Aboriginal Day in Canada, and many of our churches will have a “First Nations Day of Prayer.” So it is fitting that we recognize the important role that Aboriginal Loyalists like Joseph Brant and the Six Nations played. Our Loyalist ancestors and the Iroquois were equals, and in many cases intermarriage meant “marrying-up” for English settlers. A good example is Sir William Johnson, an Irish gentleman without money who made his way to America and became the Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the British in the 1760’s. His second wife was Molly Brant, the sister of the famous Joseph Brant. Molly was from Six Nations aristocracy, which gave her enormous influence, especially during the Seven Years’ War. From the fall of New France to the Declaration of Independence, Sir William Johnson was the most powerful non-Aboriginal man from the Mohawk Valley in the East to the Detroit river in the West. He died suddenly on the eve of the rebellion while speaking to thousands of First Nations leaders gathered at Johnson Hall. He was rallying them to support the crown. His widow, Molly Brant continued that work, as did his son by his first marriage, Sir John Johnson, and his son-in-law, Guy Johnson, and his brother-in-law, Joseph Brant. Eventually they would all retreat to Canada, Joseph Brant and the Six Nations would eventually settle along the Grand River; the Johnsons along the St. Lawrence River, and Molly Brant would settle eventually in the Kingston area. But first she moved her family of seven children—she and Sir William Johnson had eight children, but the oldest, Peter, was away at school. At the urging of Major John Butler, Molly took her seven children to Fort Niagara in the fall of 1777. There are two paintings of Fort Niagara by James Peachy which show that outside of the Fort, between the walls of the Fort and the Niagara River there were many buildings, warehouses and homes. Only the British lived inside the Fort, so Molly and her family probably lived in a cabin just outside the Fort. This was an incredibly difficult time for the Aboriginal population. The American forces had repeatedly destroyed their villages and their crops, and especially during the winters of 1777, 1778, 1779, thousands of Indians camped around Fort Niagara, as far as the eye could see. It was some time during the winter of 1778-1779 that a group of Indians brought my ancestor, the 12 year old Andrew Miller to Fort Niagara. The sutler of the Fort, the man in charge of the Indian Trade, John Burch, recognized Andrew and purchased him from the Indians in exchange for corn. Andrew was taken in to the Burch home just outside of the Fort, where no doubt, he played with the children of Molly Brant who were around the same age as Andrew. Andrew’s parents were Loyalist on their way to Canada when they were killed by an out of control roving band of Iroquois, which was not uncommon in those confusing days, and he was taken captive. No doubt as all the evidence suggests, he was treated very well while in captivity. But I often wonder what my ancestor learned from his experience in captivity. The only clue I have is that later when he took up the land he received from the British government as a Loyalist, the land was located at the end of an old Indian trail which led from Lake Erie, near Port Colbourne to the Niagara River at Miller’s Creek, five mile north of Fort Erie.

But in this I have no doubt. The survival of the Loyalists on the Canadian frontier was made possible and shaped by the interaction of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Loyalists, and we include all of them in our memorial today.