

The American Revolution



Part 1

The residents of the Thirteen Colonies, which were clustered on the east coast of what is now the United States, were all British subjects in 1776. The colonies had been left to mostly govern themselves. North America was a long way from Britain and there was much to keep that powerful nation occupied both at home and abroad. The colonists who lived south and east of France's possessions were never happy about having French Catholics so close by. In 1775, just a year before the American Revolution began, there were twenty British possessions in North America. Thirteen opted to fight for independence.

Many residents of the Thirteen Colonies felt that together they would be better off as a sovereign nation. In other words, they would no longer be under British control. Their grievances mainly about political representation and taxation.

In the mid-1700's the colonies along the east coast of what is now the U.S. were facing a population crisis. As the colonies became more prosperous, the number of people grew. Agriculture was the main business and it was doing well. This led to larger families. Fewer children died young, but as those children grew up, there was a surplus of young men with no land to farm.

The American colonies wanted the French out of North America. Most of the residents were Protestant and did not trust the Roman Catholic presence in New France. They pressured Britain to fight France and take their North American possessions. In the 1750's the French, with First Nations allies, had driven British settlers from the colonies out of the Ohio Valley. The vast area was excellent farm land and under French control. That would soon change.

Part 2

In the middle of the 18th century, the numbers of British colonists along the Atlantic coast had increased. There were two and a half million of them, and only sixty thousand French settlers. However, the French controlled a huge territory with excellent farming land. Most of the people who lived there were Native Americans. The British colonists wanted to expand west.

Skirmishes in the 1750's that began in the Ohio Valley area soon led to an all out war between the British and the French. The French built new forts to protect their western territory and expanded even farther into what is now western Canada. A small army from New England attacked and took Louisbourg, the French fort on Cape Breton Island (now part of Nova Scotia). When the Seven Years' War was over in 1763, all of France's important possessions in North America were lost, and Britain controlled the Ohio Valley.

The colonists along the Atlantic seaboard were hoping they could now expand into the rich farming land to the west. However, the British decided that the support they had been given by the First Nations people during the war had to be honoured. A rebellion, led by Ottawa Chief Pontiac (the Ottawa Indians lived along the Ohio River), resulted in the deaths of many recent British settlers. The British government laid down the law – the settlers had to go north to Nova Scotia or south to Florida. The colonists were angry. They wanted to go west.

When the British government began to exercise more control over its colonies and impose new taxes, the anger grew. Within a few years it led to a revolution and changed North America forever.

The Loyalists: During and After the Revolution

Part 1

The precise population of the Thirteen Colonies is not known, but during the Revolutionary War (1776–1783) it was somewhere between two and a half and three million people. Historians believe that between one-fifth and one-third of the population did not support the rebellion and another large segment didn't have strong feelings one way or the other.

The colonists who remained loyal to the British crown came from every one of the Thirteen Colonies. Some were wealthy but a lot of them were not.

Many were of British background themselves, but a large number of the Loyalists were of German origin. New York was the colony that had the most Loyalists. When it was clear the Revolution was not going their way, it was from the city of New York that many Loyalists left.

There were a number of colonists of African ancestry among the new settlers. Many settled in Nova Scotia.

It is estimated that about 100,000 Loyalists decided to leave the U.S. immediately. About forty thousand came to Canada. In the years that followed others moved north. They are sometimes called "Late Loyalists". Some came for political reasons and others came north to join relatives or buy land.

About forty thousand men, women, and children came to Canada. At the time, there were two colonies to settle in – Nova Scotia and Quebec. Loyalists were settled in three areas: along the north shore of the Bay of Fundy in Nova Scotia and along the St. Lawrence River west to Lake Ontario. A small number were settled in Quebec, in the Gaspé and the Eastern Townships.



Part 2

Besides the majority of Loyalists who were of European ancestry, there were also free Blacks and former slaves. Slaves had joined the British forces with the promise of their freedom. They were known as "Black Loyalists" and many of them moved to Nova Scotia. Some Loyalist slave owners took their slaves north to Canada.

There were First Nations people who remained loyal as well and actively helped the British against the rebels. Many of the members of the Iroquois Confederacy of New York state were resettled in British territory once the outcome of the war was decided. They were relocated to the area of what is now Brantford, Ontario. They are known as the Six Nations and before the war were a very powerful Native confederacy.

Many Loyalists travelled north from New York City on ships that took them to Nova Scotia. Others sailed on to Quebec where most were sent even farther west, to establish towns in Ontario like Belleville and Napanee. There were Loyalists who trekked north on foot, through New York State and Pennsylvania, making the long journey into southern Ontario.

In time the British compensated Loyalists for some of their losses suffered during the Revolution. Land grants were offered and Loyalists settled down to farm and raise families. The creation of the colonies of Upper Canada (now Ontario) and New Brunswick (now a Canadian province) were the result of Loyalist settlement in those areas. English-speaking Canada was shaped and influenced by the arrival of these former colonists who risked their lives and way of life by staying loyal to the British Crown.