

The American Revolution

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6. CANADA

A British North America Survives the American Revolution^a

In December, 1773, just a few months before the Quebec Act^b was passed, a strange event took place which was to have an unexpected effect in Canadian history. Three ships loaded with tea were lying in Boston harbour when a party dressed as Indians boarded them and threw the cargoes overboard. This was the famous Boston Tea Party, and it started a crisis which ended in the American Revolution and created the United States as an independent country. But if the American Revolution created the United States, it was scarcely less of a turning-point in Canadian history, for Quebec, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland refused to join the Revolution, and following it they received from the Thirteen Colonies a new migration of Loyalists who left most important effects in Canada's development.

The Causes of the American Revolution

What then were the causes of the American Revolution? It used to be argued that the Revolution was caused by the tyranny of the British government in the years following the Seven Years' War. This simple explanation is no longer acceptable. Historians

^aCompilers' Note.—From George W. Brown's *Building The Canadian Nation* (rev. ed.). Toronto: J.M. Dent & Sons (Canada) Limited. 1958. Pp. 184-93, 195-96, and 202-03. Reproduced with permission from J.M. Dent & Sons (Canada) Limited. The material is designed for the 10th year of a 12- or 13-year primary-secondary school cycle, but is used at other grade levels as well. (Original in English.)

^bCompilers' Note.—The Quebec Act of the British Parliament expanded the territory of Quebec to include the area between the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, most of which was claimed by several of the then English colonies along the Atlantic seaboard. (See p. 32 for accompanying map, "Province of Quebec, 1774.")

now recognize that the British colonies were the freest in the world, and that their people had rights and liberties, such as elected assemblies and trial by jury, which were enjoyed in no other empire. But if the British government was not guilty of tyranny, it was guilty, as we shall see, of a failure to understand the real difficulties of the situation. Unfortunately, the 1760's were a decade of weak and divided leadership in England, and the government showed a bungling stupidity which invited disaster no less surely than tyranny would have done.

In 1763, the Empire had just come through the most costly and dangerous struggle in its history, and in spite of victory there had been serious weaknesses. The laws of Parliament regulating trade had been broken in the colonies even by trading with the enemy, and the burden of defence had been very unequally shared: some colonies had given generous assistance, while in others the assemblies had done little if anything. To cure these defects it seemed reasonable, even to many people in the colonies, that some reorganization should take place. Unfortunately, however, the British government did not work out its plans carefully or make them clear to American leaders with the result that misunderstanding and resentment arose.

The government's first step was the Proclamation of 1763. Pontiac's rising had just swept over the West, and the plan of forbidding settlers to go beyond the Alleghanies [sic] seemed wise at the moment. Nevertheless, many important colonial landholders like George Washington were seriously disturbed by the Proclamation Line which hemmed the Thirteen Colonies in, and threatened to block their growth.

The British government followed the Proclamation by two other steps which brought a serious crisis. The first was the decision to enforce the laws of Parliament controlling the trade of the Empire, the Navigation Acts as they were called. Smuggling had been rampant, but to enforce the laws without giving the colonies more freedom in their trade would be a severe blow to their prosperity and was bound to



British Possessions in 1763



Proclamation of 1763



Province of Quebec, 1774



The Peace Treaty of 1783

Within twenty years, 1763-1783, there were crowded four boundary settlements which have an important place in Canadian history. The first and fourth were caused by wars, the Seven Years' War (Map 1) and the American Revolution (Map 4). The other two resulted from attempts made by the British government to solve the difficult problems of Canada and the control of the western country.

cause trouble. The second step was the proposal of a new plan for defence by which large garrisons would be stationed in America to control the Indians and the West. Britain was to pay two-thirds of the cost, the colonies only one-third. To raise the necessary money the famous Stamp Act of 1765 was passed, and by it for the first time a direct tax was levied on the colonies by Parliament. The Act brought a storm of argument and rioting. The colonists protested against the "rights of Englishmen" being taken from them, and raised the cry so familiar in English history, "No taxation without representation." Pitt, whose genius had saved the Empire in the Seven Years' War, warned Parliament in the most solemn terms against threatening the liberty of the colonies. "I rejoice," he declared, "that America has resisted." The British government bowed to the storm and the Stamp Act was repealed after a year, but it was followed by taxes on tea, glass, and painters' colours. These too aroused opposition and then like the Stamp Act were repealed in 1770, except for the tax on tea which was foolishly kept in order to show that Parliament had the right to levy such taxes. Thus the British government in its attempts to reorganize the Empire had succeeded by 1770 only in creating ill-will and a fear that colonial liberties and rights of self-government were in danger.

Two causes of the Revolution have been suggested—the difficulty of reorganizing a vast and complex empire after the Seven Years' War and the mistakes in judgment of the British government. A third must be added, the feelings of strength and sturdy independence which had resulted from over a century of growth. The Thirteen Colonies were no longer in their infancy. Their people numbered over two million and many of them had never seen England. The colonies were American in their spirit and in their ways of living. Moreover, the French menace was removed after 1763 and the colonies no longer felt dependent on England's aid. This did not mean that they wished for independence. The great majority of the colonists were loyal, even after the Stamp Act. They were proud of the Empire and its liberties but to destroy those liberties was to invite disaster. Edmund Burke, the great Member of Parliament, understood this, but few in England were willing to listen to him. "Slavery they can have anywhere. But freedom," he declared, "they can have from none but you. Deny them this freedom and you break that sole bond which must preserve the unity of the Empire."

[Picture] *The Boston Tea Party.*

In the years following the Stamp Act a small minority of radicals began to work for independence. They watched for every opportunity of stirring up trouble, and their great chance came in 1773. In that year the British government gave the East India Company a monopoly of exporting tea to America. Tea, because it had been taxed, was a delicate subject in the Colonies and this action was widely resented, especially by the Colonial merchants, many of whom now lost their trade in tea. The radicals immediately seized the opportunity of making a crisis, and in Boston it was this group who staged the Boston Tea Party.

The Boston Tea Party was a lawless act, but now, if ever, was the time for a careful and wise policy. Instead, the British government closed Boston harbour until the tea should be paid for, and took other repressive measures.¹ A flame of opposition spread from one end of the Thirteen Colonies to the other. Men were already arming, and early in 1775 the first shots were fired at Lexington and Concord near Boston when a force of British redcoats, sent to look for hidden arms, was attacked. Soon General Gage and his British army were hemmed in at Boston, and in June a battle in which Gage was defeated was fought at Bunker Hill. Even yet there was time for compromise, but tempers were hot and neither side would go far enough to win a peaceful settlement. A Continental Congress with representatives from all the colonies had already been called together at Philadelphia, and during the autumn and winter of 1775-76 extreme opinions rapidly gained ground in it. Finally, on July 4, 1776, the Declaration of Independence was issued. The breach was complete.

Quebec, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland Refuse To Join the Revolution

Nowhere was the Revolution watched more anxiously than in the provinces north of the Thirteen Colonies. Would they join in it or would they remain loyal to the Empire? Newfoundland was the furthest

¹These acts were called in the Thirteen Colonies the "Intolerable Acts." The Quebec Act, being passed at the same time, thus got into bad company and was denounced as violently as the rest.

away, and its people had always been attached to Britain. They had no love for the New England fishermen who came to their shores, and in 1776 when Quebec was invaded it was the timely arrival of a corps of Newfoundland volunteers that helped to save the day.

In Nova Scotia the situation was very different. Here a large majority of the settlers were from New England, and naturally many of them sympathized with the Revolution. The feeling was, however, never strong enough to cause an open outbreak. The settlements were scattered, and most of the people probably wished to be left alone, like those of Yarmouth who made the following statement: "We do all of us profess to be true Friends and Loyal Subjects to George our King. We were almost all of us born in New England, we have Fathers, Brothers and Sisters in that Country. Divided between natural affection to our nearest relations, and good Faith and Friendship to our King and Country, we want to know, if it may be permitted at this time to live in a peaceable state, as we look on that to be the only situation in which we with our wives and children, can be in any tolerable degree safe." In Halifax feeling was overwhelmingly against the Revolution. Halifax was a naval and military base, and it prospered by the money which the British government spent there. The merchants felt they would be injured, not benefited, if their trade with Britain was broken off.

Britain and the British West Indies were by far their greatest markets. Moreover, the rebelling colonies could not send an army to Nova Scotia. The British navy controlled the sea; and although American privateers made some surprise attacks along the coast, the Thirteen Colonies lacked a navy and had neither men nor arms to spare. A number of reasons combined therefore to keep Nova Scotia from joining the Revolution.

In the province of Quebec there was still another situation. The leaders in the Thirteen Colonies feared an attack from Quebec. They were, therefore, most anxious to win it over as the fourteenth colony, and there seemed to be a good chance of their doing so.

Governor Carleton had only about 800 regular troops scattered in small garrisons from Quebec to Michilimackinac. Moreover, his support in the colony was very uncertain. The merchants were displeased by the Quebec Act except for the clause which had extended the boundary, and the habitants^c were very doubtful. In the spring of 1775, immediately after

the skirmishes at Lexington and Concord, a small group of Americans took Ticonderoga which was garrisoned by only a few sleepy British soldiers. The Lake Champlain route was thus left unguarded, and soon an American army was moving on Montreal. Carleton rushed up from Quebec but saw that Montreal was too weak to be defended, and only escaped being captured himself by going down the St. Lawrence again in a rowboat with muffled oars. By the autumn of 1775 only Quebec itself was left to offer resistance to the American invaders.

[Picture] *Governor Carleton reviewing his troops in the Place d'Armes at Montreal in 1775.*

Their task was, however, not easy, and they did not get the help which they expected in the colony. The merchants, even though they disliked the Quebec Act, did not want to throw away their market for furs in England, and the habitants, while they disappointed Carleton, did not rush to support the invaders. Bishop Briand staunchly supported Carleton. "The singular kindness," he told his fellow French Canadians, "and the gentleness with which we have been governed on the part of His Most Gracious Majesty King George III; the recent favours which he has bestowed upon us in permitting us the usage of our laws, the free exercise of our religion, and allowing us to participate in all the privileges and advantages of British subjects, are sufficient without doubt to arouse your zeal to support the crown of Great Britain." The Americans also hurt their cause by offering paper money, which the French Canadians believed worthless, or by seizing supplies without paying for them at all. The small American army which, after taking Montreal, marched on Quebec in the autumn of 1775 was therefore in a most difficult situation, even though Carleton's garrison was desperately weak. On the night of December 31 in a blinding snow storm the Americans made their one hard assault. When this failed, it is a wonder that the siege continued. Short of supplies and with smallpox raging in their ranks, the invaders under General Arnold hung on till spring. When a British fleet sailed up the river in May, they could do nothing but retreat.

^cCompilers' Note.—The term "habitants" refers to the French agricultural settlers in Quebec.

[Picture] *General Arnold's Headquarters, 1775-76.*

No other invasion was attempted by the Americans. In 1777 the British took the offensive. An army under General Burgoyne was sent from Quebec by the Lake Champlain route. Another British army was to move north from New York, but when it failed to do so, Burgoyne was forced to surrender at Saratoga. Saratoga was a turning-point in the Revolution. It encouraged France to declare war on Britain, and so brought Americans help when they most needed it. But by this time the chance of winning Quebec had passed.

So the failure of the American invasion, British sea power, Carleton's leadership, the attitude of the merchants and French Canadians, all played a part in keeping Quebec from becoming the fourteenth colony. Most important of all was the fact that Quebec's interests were really different from those of the Thirteen Colonies. Her French-Canadian people did not want to merge with the English-speaking colonies. The centre of their life was the St. Lawrence as it had always been, and through the St. Lawrence Quebec's trade and defence were tied to Britain much more than to her neighbors on the Atlantic coast.

The End of the Revolution and the Making of Peace

In 1781 the defeat of the British army at Yorktown ended the campaigns of the Revolution. By this time Britain had almost every country in Europe against her, and only the navy's command of the sea prevented complete disaster. The news of Yorktown brought also a change in the British government. The friends of the Thirteen Colonies gained control and insisted on peace. The result was the Treaty of Versailles of 1783 which recognized the new United States of America, gave it the western country from the Alleghanies [sic] to the Mississippi, and drew the boundary line from the Atlantic coast to Lake of the Woods, which has remained with few changes to the present day. To some these boundaries seemed needlessly generous. The French government was astonished, and not very well pleased that the United States received so much, but the British government was determined that friendship and good-will should be restored. It was no fault of the Treaty that these generous intentions were later often forgotten.

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The Loyalists Seek New Homes

One of the greatest effects of the American Revolution on Canada has not been mentioned. This is the Loyalist migration which brought many thousands of new settlers from the United States to provinces still remaining under the British flag. In the Thirteen Colonies the Revolution had really been a civil war in which the whole population was torn with conflicting loyalties. John Adams, one of the American leaders, later said that in 1776 probably not more than one-third of the people favoured war against England, that another third opposed it, and that the remainder were uncertain. With opinion so divided, the harshest measures were used against those who remained loyal to Britain. Thousands, especially in New England, New York, and Pennsylvania were persecuted and stripped of their property. No less than eighty to one hundred thousand fled, or were driven and exiled from their homes. They were scattered on both sides of the Atlantic in many places, but mostly in the British Isles, the British West Indies, Nova Scotia, and the Province of Quebec. The Loyalists who settled in Nova Scotia and Quebec came mostly from the northern colonies—from Boston where the Revolution began, from New York which was held throughout the war by the British army, and from Pennsylvania where Loyalist sentiment was strong and widespread. Such a migration of thousands of new settlers was foreseen by no one at the beginning of the Revolution. It is not too much to say that it changed the course of Canadian history.

[Picture] *United Empire Loyalists. Landing on the site of Saint John, N.B., May, 1783, the first party of settlers faces new life in the wilderness of rocks and trees.*

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The Loyalist Influence

For many reasons, the coming of the Loyalists was an event of great significance in the history of British North America. Merely by adding to the population it caused changes all the way from Halifax to Niagara. New settlements sprang quickly into existence, not least among them the strong settlements west of Montreal on lands which had never previously been

occupied except by Indians. Two new provinces were created, and after 1791 there were four elected assemblies where before there had been only one. But the effect of the Loyalist immigration went far beyond these things which can easily be measured. The Loyalists brought with them qualities and ideas which were toughened by hard experience. No country could have asked for pioneers more likely to succeed. They had a strong loyalty to the British flag, and at the same time a determination to enjoy the liberties and rights of self-government to which they had been accustomed. The variety of people among them is one of the things which interests us most — English, Scottish, Irish, and German families, representing districts in the Thirteen Colonies all the way from New England to western Pennsylvania. Most of

them were humble and obscure people, many were from well educated and prominent families. Among them were soldiers and army officers, who brought a sense of discipline and organization. Others were men and women of force and experience whose influence could be seen everywhere in the life of their pioneer communities. Many of their descendants have shown the same high qualities of leadership, and it is no wonder that the Loyalist tradition has left in Canada an indelible impression.

[Picture] *Postage stamp issued to mark the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the coming of the Loyalists.*

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