

Cumberland Township: A Focal Point of Early Settlement on the Bay of Fundy¹

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It is the destiny of certain places to be ingathering and distributing centres for a time, and then, because of changes in means of transportation or because of the opening of new regions, to lose their local importance. During the eighteenth century, Philadelphia was the principal receiving and distributing centre of population for the Atlantic seaboard, and it was only slowly, and with much difficulty, that New York forged ahead to supremacy in the nineteenth century. For the Bay of Fundy region, Cumberland Township on Chignecto Isthmus was such a centre from 1750 to 1783 — the dates can be assigned quite definitely — and the story of how it became such a centre, of its functioning during the period of its supremacy, and of the way in which it lost its focal importance, is here set forth.

Port Royal-Annapolis had been the first Bay of Fundy centre. It was from Port Royal that the various French settlements around the Bay of Fundy and its inlets were established, including the one at the head of the middle passage which the French called Beaubassin, and the English Cumberland Basin. This settlement was begun by Jacques Bourgeois shortly after 1671,² and granted as the Seigneurie of Chignitou or Beaubassin to Michel le Neuf, Ecuyer, Sieur de la Vallière, on October 24, 1676.³ Thanks to Vallière's energy and the fertility of the marshlands, this was the most successful seigneurie in Acadie, and from 1738 to 1748 showed an annual increase of eleven per hundred inhabitants.⁴

The richness of the area was, however, only one factor in accounting for the stubbornness of the English attempt to capture the district, and of the French to retain it. The isthmus was a long used route of travel from the Gulf of St. Lawrence to the Bay of Fundy, familiar both to the Indians and the French. Furthermore, the area had a strategic value as offering the shortest possible front line for the opposing forces. In 1750, both sides moved to the isthmus — La Corne with the French forces, early in the year, to the hill of Beausejour, west of the Misseguash and Major Charles Lawrence, in September, to the ridge on the east — and both began

1 Reprinted with the permission of the University of Toronto Press from the *Canadian Historical Review*, 27 (1946), 27-32.

2 Rameau de Saint-Père, *Une Colonie féodale* (2 Vols., Paris, 1889), I, 168.

3 W.F. Ganong, "Historic Sites in New Brunswick," *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, 1899, Section II, 315.

4 Rameau, *Une Colonie féodale*, II, 77.

fortifications. With the capture of Fort Beausejour by the English in 1755, control of the region passed to the English, and when Louisbourg was taken in 1758, their possession was confirmed.

The captured fort was renamed Fort Cumberland; the other forts on the isthmus, the English Fort Lawrence and the fort on Baie Verte, called Gaspereau by the French and Monckton by the English after its surrender, were destroyed by order of the Council at Halifax.⁵ A considerable force was maintained at Fort Cumberland until 1768, when the soldiers were withdrawn from this and other forts in Nova Scotia to Halifax, and a small garrison thereafter.⁶ The existence of a large garrison at the fort from 1755 to 1768 meant that there were vessels plying to and from the region with troops destined for the garrison, with troops being relieved of duty, and with supplies. It meant also the existence of a commissariat for provisioning the garrison, and the appearance of the traditional camp followers, a sort of irregular commissariat, who supplied the soldiers with services and goods, not always of a desirable kind. The danger of raids by the French and Indians held back for three or four years any attempt at building or farming, except in the immediate vicinity of the fort. It may have been this danger, but it was probably the unaccustomedness and the menace of the tides which led to there being no desire on the part of the New Englanders who took part in the capture and the early garrisoning of the fort to take up land in the region.

The first manifestation of desire to settle is found in the grant of the Township of Cumberland, in 1759, to ninety-one individuals, with a supplementary grant the next year, in which nine other names were included. Two groups had joined in the application, one of persons connected with the fort but mostly with the commissariat, and a committee from Connecticut who came up to Nova Scotia in July, 1759.⁷ The two groups added the names, if not of their sisters, their cousins, and their aunts, at least of their brothers, their uncles, and their brothers-in-law. In addition, there were several names from Halifax, notably those of John Burbidge and William Best. (The Connecticut settlers were deflected to Cornwallis, for the most part, apparently by the deliberate purpose of the administration at Halifax to have settlers in a more accessible region.)⁸

Only about twenty percent of the one hundred persons named in the 1759-60 grants were at Cumberland long enough to have their names included in the second pair of grants, made in 1763 and 1764 — a few of the Connecticut settlers and a larger number of officers in the regular army or

5 J.C. Webster, *The Forts of Chignecto* (Saint John, 1930), 71.

6 *Ibid.*, 76.

7 A.W.H. Eaton, *The History of Kings County* (Salem, Mass., 1910), 64-5.

8 J.B. Brebner, *The Neutral Yankees of Nova Scotia* (New York, 1937), 60.

persons connected with supplying the garrison.⁹ There were nearly as many names on the 1763-4 lists as on the previous grants, for the original grantees added the names of members of their families;¹⁰ there were a few more members of the garrison,¹¹ new settlers from Massachusetts,¹² further arrivals resulting from the visit of the Connecticut committee,¹³ and a few immigrants from the British Isles.¹⁴

It was the policy of the Nova Scotia Council at that time to make grants of 100,000 acres as townships. Cumberland township included the Fort Cumberland and Fort Lawrence ridges, with the Missequash River between, and extended to the River Aulac, west of Fort Cumberland, to the river La Planche eastward, and north-east to Baie Verte. Since its bounds by no means included all the land dyked by Vallière's industrious settlers, two other townships were laid out and granted in 1763, Sackville, west of the Aulac, to include the great marsh of the Tantramar, and Amherst, east of the La Planche. The settlers for these districts were probably landed at Cumberland and distributed from there, and they were joined in their new homes by former Cumberland settlers. By 1770, when returns of the state of the townships were made, there were nine or ten

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- 9 The Connecticut settler, chiefly Norwich names, were Ayer, Burnham, Fales, Fitch, Fillmore, Hunt, and Merrill. The garrison and commissariat group included William and John Allan, Halifax merchants of Scottish origin, William Bearsto, probably of Boston, head carpenter, Captain Benoni Danks, Jotham and Samuel Gay, traders, John Huston and his protégé, Brook Watson, Richard Jones of the 47th Regiment (Westmorland County Memorial no. 171, Crown Land Office, Fredericton), Captain Sennacherib Martyn, Henry McDonald, Abiel Richardson (formerly Innholder of Cambridge, who was drowned in 1765 on the way to his fish curing establishment on P.E.I., *Boston Evening Post*, March 24, 1766), Engineer Winckworth Tonge, and Josuha Winslow, Chief Commissariat Officer.
- 10 Abiel Richardson, for instance, added the names of his two sons, Abiel Jr., and Godfrey, although they were only eleven and seven years old, and the name of his bother-in-law, Jesse Converse, who remained fifty years in the region.
- 11 Lieutenant Thomas Dixson or Dickson, William How, whose father had been slain by the Indians in 1750 (*Webster, Forts of Chignecto*, 32), Daniel Goodwin or Gooden (said to be a native of Plymouth, England, who had been in Captain Adam's company from Newburyport) and his brother Enoch, Alexander Mills, who had been taken prisoner with Dickson, Martin Beck ("Marin Peck, der King's Paker, tam you." He is supposed to have said, according to the Steeves family tradition), and Samuel Wethered of Boston, who was connected with the commissariat.
- 12 Moses Barnes of Swansea, John and Jesse Bent of Milton, the Eddys from Sharon, the Gardners from Salem, Joseph Morse from Dedham, Zebulon Roe, perhaps from Newburyport, Gamaliel Smethurst and Ebenezer Storer, Boston merchants, Nehemiah Ward of Attleborough.
- 13 Chappels of Lebanon, Simeon Chester of Groton, Amos Fuller of Lebanon, Nathaniel Sheldon?, Josiah and Thomas Throop of Lebanon.
- 14 Anthony Burke, Windsor Eager, of Dumfries, William Maxwell, William Milburn, Robert Whatley.

Cumberland families at Sackville, and four at Amherst.¹⁵

Nor was it only to the adjacent townships that Cumberland distributed population: after the setting up in 1765 of the townships of Hopewell, Hillsborough, and Monckton on Shepody Bay and the Petitcodiac River, Cumberland passed along settlers to all three, in some cases its own, in some cases Horton and Cornwallis settlers who paused briefly at Cumberland and then moved on.¹⁶

The censuses of 1767 and 1770 show a decline in the population of Cumberland from 334 to 322, but the 1770 returns are admittedly incomplete and may have still other omissions. The shifts to Sackville and Amherst probably occurred before 1767, when enthusiasm for the new grants was high. The lists for 1770 show that nearly half of the 1763-4 grantees were still at Cumberland, and that members of their households had set up households of their own. There were not many newcomers; two Rhode Island families, an army officer, four or five old country men who may have been soldiers, and three or four families who may have been among the dissatisfied tenants who disappeared from Hopewell and Monckton.¹⁷

Unfortunately, there are no later returns similar to those of 1770, with names of the householders and the numbers in the household. For the next phase in the history of Cumberland Township — the coming of the Yorkshire immigrants in the years before the war, 1772 to 1774 — it has been necessary to piece together the evidence from family histories,¹⁸ from deeds, and from *Memorials* in the Crown Land Office, Fredericton. At least fourteen families came to the area, some directly, some after a brief sojourn elsewhere, those of the name of Atkinson, Carter, Chapman, Dobson, Harper, Keillor, Lowerison, Scurr, Siddall, Trenholm, Trueman, Wells, Wood. At the same time, the Copps and perhaps other families moved over from Horton. With these additions, Cumberland Township must have seemed well on the way to success, with an assured future; but already the storm was gathering which was, in the end, to wreck Cumberland's chances of remaining the principal port of the Bay of Fundy.

15 1934 Report, Public Archives of Nova Scotia (Halifax, 1935), 27, 33, 34, 47, 48.

16 The Copps, for instance. See Samuel Copp Worthen's articles in *New York Genealogical and Biographical Report*, LXII, 350, and LXVIII, 34. For other instances, see E. C. Wright, *The Petitcodiac* (Sackville, N.B., 1945), passim.

17 The R.I. families were Hicks and Brownell, the officer, Edward Barron. John Ackley or Eckley, reported to be from Pennsylvania (*Maine Historical Magazine*, IX, 1894-5, 64-5), William Resty and wife listed as "Germans and other foreigners," John Leckhart, may have come from either Hopewell or Monckton.

18 Howard Truman, *The Isthmus of Chignecto* (Toronto, 1902), is particularly helpful, although the statements need checking occasionally.

The first events in the Revolutionary War, the so-called Eddy Rebellion, which culminated in the attack on Fort Cumberland, and the harrying of the settlements by American privateers, seemed to accentuate the importance of Cumberland. The Royal Fencible Americans were sent to hold the fort and to man outposts, and settlers from the outlying districts¹⁹ moved to Cumberland within the protection of the fort. To balance this gain, however, there was a loss of population with the removal of some fourteen or fifteen Cumberland residents who found it expedient to withdraw after the unsuccessful attempt on Fort Cumberland.²⁰

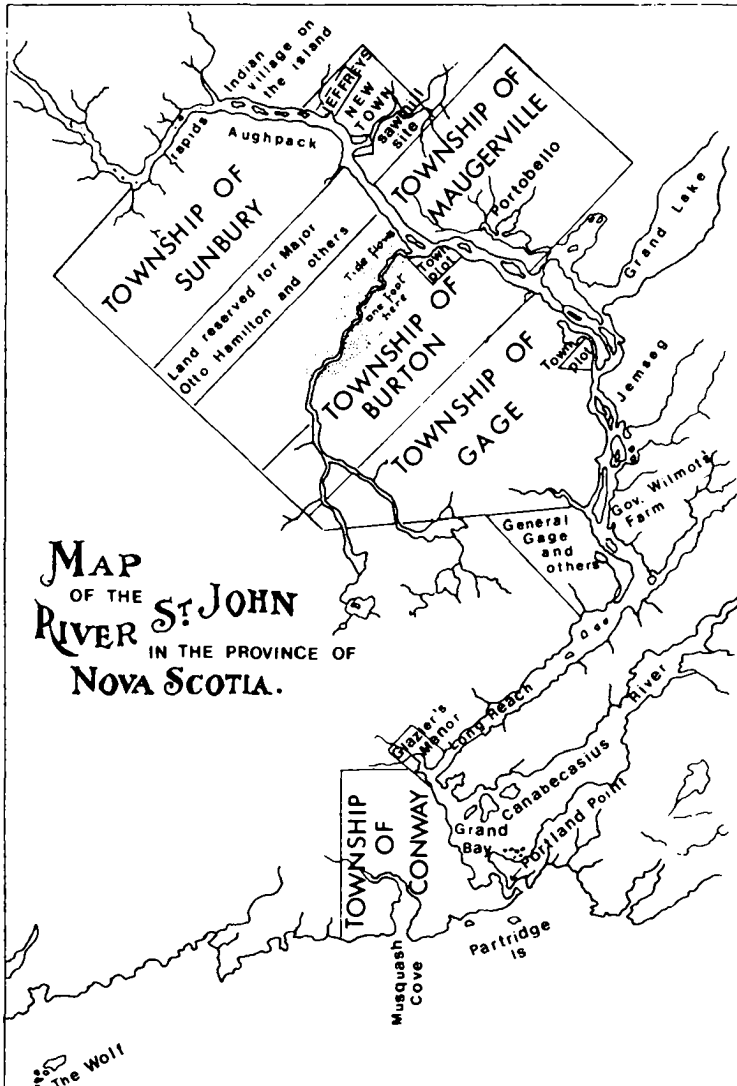
This outward movement, which probably would have occurred over a term of years but was hastened by the rebellion, was not the death blow to Cumberland Township: that came with the founding of Saint John and the division of Nova Scotia into two provinces. Had a larger body of Loyalists been sent to Cumberland, that district might have remained as the principal distributing centre on the Bay of Fundy, and might eventually have been selected as the capital of a single province, since its accessibility by water from the peninsular portion (the present Nova Scotia), the mainland portion (the present New Brunswick), and the island portions (Prince Edward Island and Cape Breton) would have been an irresistible argument in favour of such a choice, sufficient even to overcome the jealousy with which Halifax guarded its prerogatives. As it was, only one body of Loyalists, the Westchester Loyalists,²¹ was sent to Cumberland for distribution; the main body went to the mouth of the St. John River, where they found a hinterland, up the St. John River and its tributaries, of

19 The Lowerisons, Deslesderniers, and perhaps others moved from Hillsborough at this time. See Wright, *The Petitcodiac*, 50.

20 Jonathan Eddy listed the refugees (*Maine Historical Magazine*, IX, 1894-5, 64-5), who included the following from Cumberland, John Allan, Elijah Ayer, Obadiah Ayer, Anthony Burke, Simeon Chester, Parker Clarke, (Edward Cole?), Daniel Earl, John Eckley, Jonathan Eddy (Atwood Fales, who had moved to Amherst), Ebenezer Gardner, William How, William Maxwell, Nathaniel Reynolds, Zebulon Roe, Josiah Throop. These were given grants in Maine, and also in Ohio. See C.M. Layton, "Canadian Refugee Lands in Ohio," *Canadian Historical Review*, XXIV, December, 1943, 380. (Why *Canadian* Refugee Lands? The names given are nearly all traceable to Nova Scotia townships, to which the term Canada did not apply in the eighteenth century. Did any of them settle on the Ohio lands? Most of them can be traced in Maine, but a few returned to Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.)

21 The Westchester Loyalists were a more or less organized group who operated in the area between the British and American armies and were largely concerned with getting supplies for the army in New York. They were called "cattle rustlers" by the Americans, who had a similar body. It was the proud boast of the Westchester Loyalists that they always took enough prisoners to be able to redeem their own men and to have some left over for bargaining purposes. They received grants at Ramsheg (Wallace) and Cobequid, but a few remained at Cumberland — Edgett, Hewson, Knapp, Palmer, Pugsley, Purdy, Teed — and spread westward rather than eastward as designated.

unexpected value and accessibility. The St. John River Loyalists insisted on the division of the province, which not only split Cumberland Township in two, but also cut in half the Bay of Fundy empire. Cumberland might have prevailed against Halifax only; against the two way pull, of Halifax and Saint John, it was helpless. After 1783, the area which had been the township (the larger half, west of Missequash, went to New Brunswick, the smaller went to Nova Scotia) received rather less incoming population than most areas in the two provinces, and distributed only the usual quota which went out from all such regions in the era of large families.



adapted from W O Raymond