

WHERE HISTORIES MEET: INDIGENOUS AND SETTLER ENCOUNTERS IN THE TORONTO AREA

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Settlers on Indigenous Lands

My father used to say we had a very lax immigration policy back then.

—Sherry Lawson, Chippewas of Rama¹

Upper Canada's founders were hostile to American democratic ideals and wanted to create a new territory in the image of Britain and its institutions, including a landed aristocracy. In 1791, when Upper Canada was separated from Lower Canada (Quebec), John Graves Simcoe became the first lieutenant-governor. He and other colonial officials awarded large land grants to British settlers and military officers, some of whom became government officials, magistrates, and so on. But this attempt to create a British landed gentry in North America was unsuccessful.

For one thing, Britain was far away. Loyalists, on the other hand, were just across the border and in need of land. On February 7, 1792, Simcoe issued a proclamation inviting those in the newly declared United States of America who remained loyal to the British Crown to come to Upper Canada. American immigrants were welcomed because they already had experience in clearing and farming North American lands and could quickly move their families at their own expense rather than requiring a government subsidy for ship's passage from Britain. They were offered two hundred acres of virtually free land per family and lower taxes than in the United States. To obtain a land grant, a male settler swore an oath of allegiance to "the King in his Parliament" and paid minor fees. Within two years, he had to build a home, clear 10 metres of land across the front of the property for a road, and clear and fence 10 acres.²

From the beginning, the British government, loath to spend money on the colony's development, tried to make the colony self-financing. In the 1790s, trade remained minimal, and agriculture was mainly for subsistence rather than surplus. Officials resold lands acquired at below-market prices from the Mississaugas to build infrastructure.³

Settler Attitudes towards Indigenous Peoples

Early settlers from the Thirteen Colonies had various ideas about Indigenous peoples. They brought with them attitudes forged over almost two hundred years of uneasy coexistence and sometimes extremely violent conflicts over land—including King Philip’s War (1675–77)—which hardened anti-Indigenous prejudice. Immigrants from America and Europe arrived with preconceptions shaped by stories told by explorers and travellers about the supposed customs and nature of “Indians.” They presumed they were culturally and religiously superior in a “natural” hierarchy of societies and peoples. A common misbelief was that Indigenous peoples did not properly use their land so they had minimal rights to it. These attitudes led to friction. In 1797, Peter Russell issued a proclamation promising the “utmost severity” against anyone doing injury to the “fisheries and burial places” of the Mississaugas, a widespread problem.⁴

I kind of get the feeling that unless we were needed for something, we weren’t really liked. Unless we were needed for our trading or our goods or our knowledge, then we were just kind of another class of people who were off to the side and in the background and looked upon as lesser.

—Ben Cousineau, Chippewas of Rama First Nation⁵

Some negative attitudes changed through contact. Elizabeth Simcoe, disparaging of the first Mississaugas she met in Kingston in 1792, came to view them more positively.⁶ People who worked in the Indian Department (located at Niagara and then York) had greater familiarity with Indigenous cultures and languages than the new-comer population at large, even though it served Britain’s interests. At one point, before 1800, six of eighteen of the highest-ranking officials were married to Indigenous women, and another five were of partial Indigenous descent.⁷

In the nineteenth century, settler concepts of racial difference hardened into cruel stereotypes. These attitudes were not just mistaken beliefs based on observable differences, but useful concepts that encouraged and justified the takeover and exploitation of another people’s land for imperial and individual ends. Yet on the ground, and especially in the first years of European settlement, actual contact between Indigenous and settler peoples had a variety of outcomes. Indigenous peoples often extended hospitality to the newcomers and worked with them for mutual benefit. Some settlers—a minority—returned this hospitality.

I’ve been at some of their homes when their grandparents talk about people that I’ve heard of in our community from way back. “Yeah, my grandmother was friends with this person from Rama” or “My friend was friends with this person.” So there are always good exchanges. Because

they'll just tell you, like, "Oh, yeah, we've always thought the Indians are good people." They say things like that and you're, like, cool.

—Kory Snache, Chippewas of Rama⁸

Who Were the Settlers?

Extensive settlement of the Humber River / Black Creek watershed and area north and northwest of York did not occur until after the founding of York in 1793. The largest group of settlers were so-called late Loyalists who arrived from Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey before the War of 1812. Unlike the United Empire Loyalists who arrived during or just after the American Revolution, late Loyalists were motivated more by the possibility of acquiring land or escaping persecution for their pacifism than loyalty to the British Crown. Most were poor farm families with little education. Others were labourers or tradespeople. Many were recent immigrants to the United States.⁹

A minority of the Loyalists were from a more prosperous social class and had served as British officers. Some had fought alongside warriors such as Joseph Brant in the American Revolution, for example, in Butler's Rangers (led by John Butler, who later helped to negotiate the Johnson-Butler agreements of 1787–88). Many of these veterans would go on to serve in the Indian Department, which was staffed by military officials until 1830.

The colonial administration encouraged settlement along Yonge Street so farmers could help clear, maintain, and defend the vital transportation and military link. The Chippewas from Lakes Huron and Simcoe also used Yonge Street to travel to York to sell their wares or confer with colonial officials. They often camped on the lands of sympathetic settlers, such as the farm of Jacob Munshawa (Jr.) at the rise just south of Thornhill.¹⁰

Areas adjacent to Yonge Street and in the Don River watershed developed rapidly and supported several larger villages and other infrastructure (such as stagecoaches), while the area north of York between Yonge Street and the Humber remained largely agricultural. Smaller hamlets and villages served local needs. Yet only a part of Yonge Street had been provisionally surrendered through the 1787–88 agreement, and the northern boundary of ceded territory had yet to be established. Even after 1805, the status of lands north of what would become Newmarket to Lake Simcoe was still uncertain.

The settlers who took up farms in the area north of York were ethnically diverse, principally Palatine Germans but also other Americans, Quakers, French Royalists, British settlers, and Black immigrants from the American colonies. Several groups immigrated en masse and formed close-knit groups that could preserve their distinct identities more readily than they would have in the nascent United States.



Detail from “A Map of the Province of Upper Canada Describing All the New Settlements, Townships,” Sir David William Smyth, 1800. Note the “Old Indian Fields” south of Lake Simcoe, the unceded Mississauga territories to the west, the salmon fisheries at the mouths of the rivers, the lands granted to the French Royalists, and Six Nations lands along the Grand River | Courtesy of University of Toronto Libraries

The Palatine or Pennsylvania Germans

Palatine Germans (popularly referred to as Pennsylvania Germans or incorrectly as Pennsylvania Dutch) were the most numerous Loyalist group to settle north of York. The majority arrived between 1798 and 1805. Originally from the Rhine River region of Germany known as the Palatinate, they fled famine, war, and religious persecution beginning in 1709. Many went to England but were offered homes in Pennsylvania or along the Mohawk Valley in New York by Queen Anne, who reportedly sought permission for their settlement from the Mohawks Sachems visiting her in England.¹¹ Thousands of other Germans followed. Some of the Germans who came to Upper Canada, especially those who had lived in the colony of New York before the Revolutionary War, had lived close to the Haudenosaunee (especially the Mohawks and Oneidas) with permission from Haudenosaunee Clan Mothers. They “communicated, drank, worked, worshipped and traded together, negotiated over land use and borders, and conducted their diplomacy separate from the colonial governments.”¹²

The Palatine Germans in New York were attacked in November 1757 by a raiding party of about 200 Mississauga and Canadian Haudenosaunee warriors from Kahnawà:ke and 65 French troops and Canadian militiamen. The attackers burned the town of German Flatts, killed about 40 inhabitants, and took 150 captives, mainly women and children, back to New France. During the American Revolution, Joseph Brant led 150 Haudenosaunee warriors loyal to the British



William Berczy, self-portrait, 1783 | Courtesy of Royal Ontario Museum ©ROM, 989.282.1

Crown, and Captain William Caldwell commanded 300 Loyalists in an attack that destroyed the same town, then held by the American forces, although, in this instance, few Germans were killed. Despite these attacks, after the American Revolution, many of the Palatine Germans of the Mohawk Valley accompanied Brant and Loyalist Mohawks to Niagara. At the invitation of Brant, they settled mainly in the counties of Dundas and Grenville on the Haldimand Tract in Upper Canada, but another related group came to the area north of York.



William Berczy, *Thayendanege (Joseph Brant)*, c. 1807 | National Gallery of Canada, acc. no. 5777

In 1794, the Executive Council granted land developer and artist William Berczy and his partners a large land grant in Markham Township with a contract to finish building Yonge Street north from York to Lake Simcoe within one year. Sixty-four families of German settlers from



Nehkik, portrait of Samuel Peters Jarvis attributed to William Berczy, 1794 | Courtesy of Royal Ontario Museum, ©ROM, ROM2016_15391_11

New York and Pennsylvania established German Mills on a branch of the Don River two miles east of what would become Thornhill and is now part of Markham.¹³

Berczy's settlers cleared part of the townsite of York and 24 kilometres of Yonge Street (Eglinton

to Elgin Mills), but they weren't able to complete the road within the stipulated year. By the winter of 1795–96, about one-third of the Markham settlers had returned to Niagara, and Berczy's grant was revoked, although some settlers remained."¹⁴ William Berczy painted one of the most famous paintings of the Mohawk leader, likely in 1807, the year of Brant's death. As art historian Gloria Lesser comments: "It was in his capacity as a land developer that Berczy met Joseph Brant in 1794, and the union between them and John Graves Simcoe, the first Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada, consolidated their mutual political and financial prospects."¹⁵ Berczy is also credited with painting the portrait of two-year-old Samuel Peters Jarvis, son of the first provincial secretary and registrar, William Jarvis, who later became chief superintendent of the Indian Department. The child was given the name "Nehkik" (Otter) by the Mississaugas.

The Palatine Germans from Pennsylvania had originally been invited to Pennsylvania by William Penn, the famous Quaker and founder of the colony, an iconic "friend to the Indian" because of his conciliatory relationship with the Lenni Lenape, with whom he had concluded a peace treaty in 1682. But later Pennsylvanians abandoned Penn's progressive policies. In Pennsylvania and most other colonies, "unrelenting settlement expansion and violence became the norm" and so-called Indian wars erupted as the frontier moved westward.¹⁶

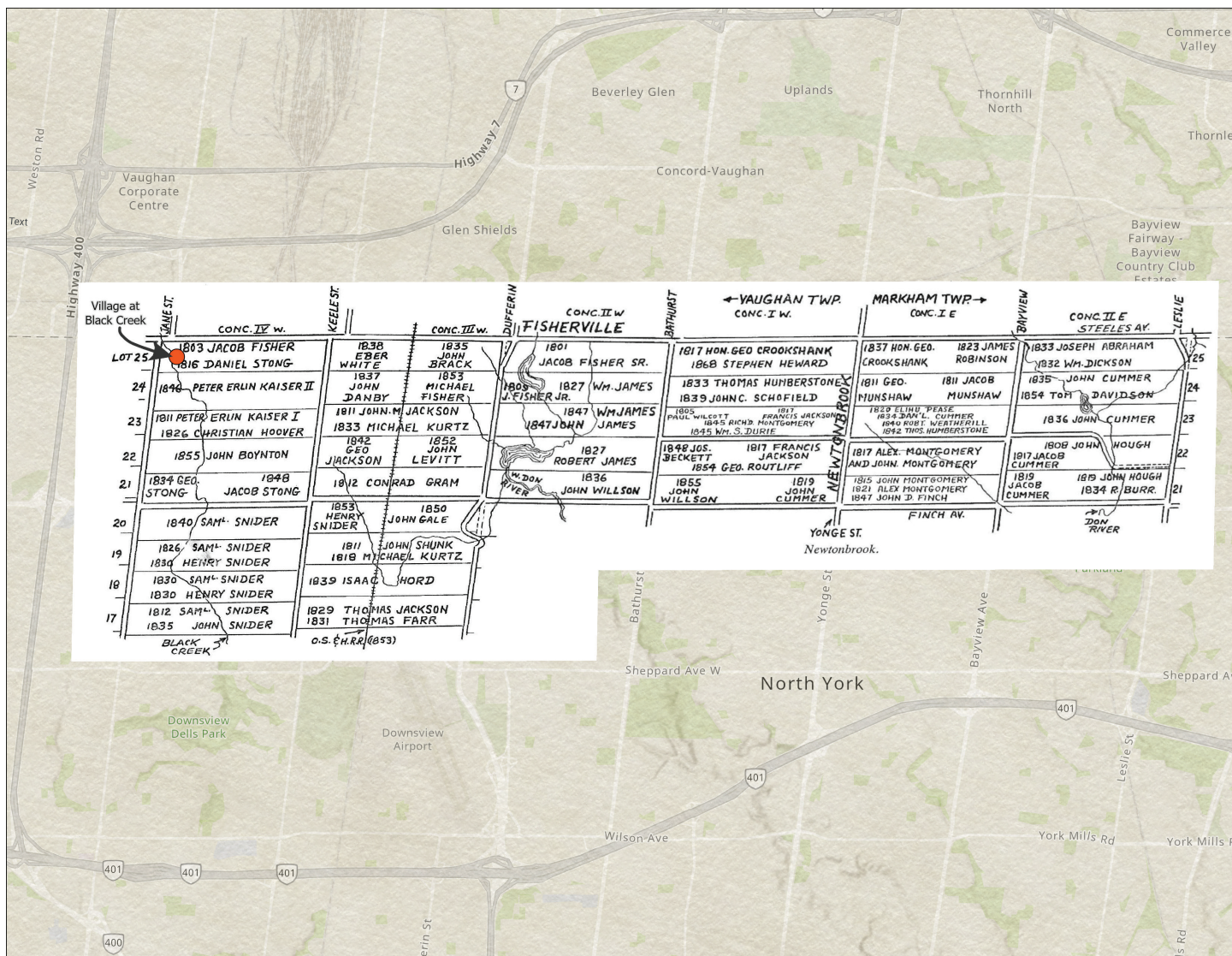
After 1800, a large number of Mennonite or Lutheran Germans from New York and Pennsylvania settled north of York. Many were related to

or knew one another. In the first generation, they tended to marry within their own community. By 1805, approximately four thousand Pennsylvania Germans had arrived in Markham, Vaughan, York, Pickering, Scarborough, and Whitchurch townships in York County and townships in Waterloo County that had been created from Block Two of the Haldimand Tract.¹⁷

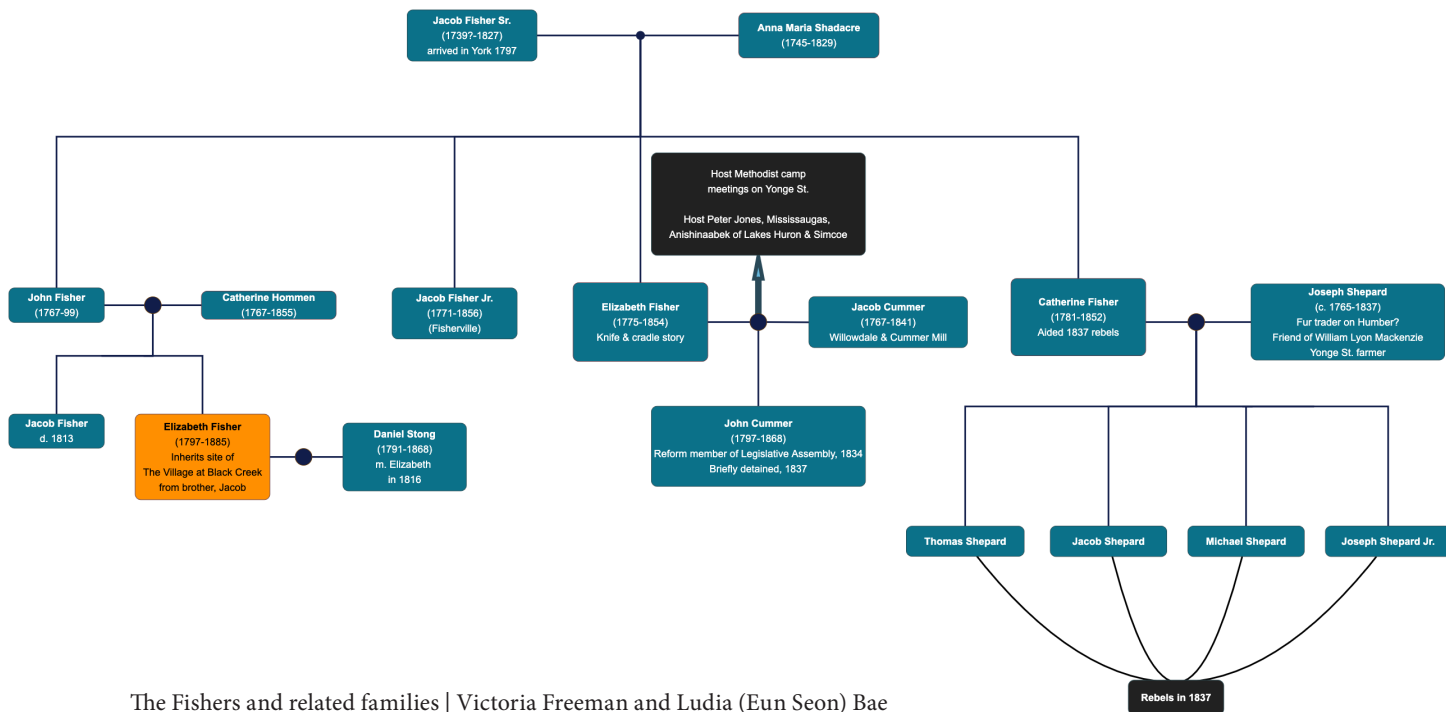
The Fisher, Stong, and Kaiser Families

The Fisher, Stong and Kaiser families who established farms on lands that would become The Village at Black Creek were of German origin from Pennsylvania. Elizabeth (Fisher) Stong inherited a 200-acre lot when her brother Jacob Fisher died of camp fever during the War of 1812. Daniel Stong and Elizabeth (Fisher) Stong married in 1816 and began clearing land and building their first home. To the south, the Kaiser family settlement, called Kaiserville, eventually included a blacksmith shop, carpenter shop, wagonmaker's shop, a store, a sawmill built by John Dalziel, and an ashery.¹⁸

Jacob Fisher Jr., Elizabeth's uncle, acquired significant land holdings in York and founded the village of Fisherville.¹⁹ The nearby village of Newtonbrook, along Yonge Street between Finch and Steeles, was framed by the Fisher family mills on the west branch of the Don to the west and the Cummer Mills on the East Don River to the east. Both mills were owned by families related to Daniel and Elizabeth (Fisher) Stong. Jacob Cummer; his wife, Elizabeth (Fisher) Cummer; and their three children had travelled from



Early settlers near The Village at Black Creek



The Fishers and related families | Victoria Freeman and Ludia (Eun Seon) Bae



Daniel and Elizabeth Stong's first house, 1816. The Stong house is the oldest building at The Village at Black Creek | Courtesy Toronto and Region Conservation Authority



Cradle said to have been gifted to Elizabeth Cummer by an Anishinaabe man from Lake Simcoe. Some Cummer descendants question this provenance, given the cradle's Pennsylvania German design. Would an Anishinaabe man have made a cradle of this type? Did he receive it in trade from German immigrants? Or did the story become attached to it at a later date? | Photo courtesy of Sarah J. McCabe

Pennsylvania to York County with Elizabeth's father, Jacob Fisher Sr., and her brother John Fisher (Elizabeth's father) in 1797.

Although Elizabeth and Daniel Stong's personal experience with Indigenous peoples is unknown, Elizabeth's aunt, Elizabeth Cummer, related a story about her encounter with an Anishinaabe man from the Lake Simcoe area:

During these early days, it is said that Elizabeth Cummer was at work in the kitchen in the pioneer dwelling, when an Indian came to the door and manifested

his admiration for an ordinary kitchen knife which was on the table. Fearing him and anxious to have him leave, Mrs. Cummer gave him the knife and thought nothing more of him. Later, this Indian came back, making a journey from Lake Simcoe, and bringing as a gift for her a cradle which the Indian had fashioned in honor of her infant son John, for he heard that he was the first white child born in the wilderness north of Toronto.²⁰

In *Pioneering in North York*, Patricia Hart comments on this incident as reflecting an Indigenous ethic of reciprocity: "It was an Indian custom to return gift for gift."²¹ As Catherine Sims notes, "Ojibwa oral tradition as well as documentary sources confirm that to the Ojibwa people, giving gifts was the most important means through which humans could communicate with the spirits and with each other." Thus, the gift of the cradle was more than a gesture of hospitality: "In Ojibwa culture, presents conferred responsibilities on the receiver."²² Reciprocal gift giving created and affirmed an ongoing relationship for mutual benefit. Gifts communicated peaceful intent and one's regard and respect for the other; they acknowledged interconnection and accepted responsibility to maintain the relationship.

Remarkably, the cradle said to have been gifted to Elizabeth still exists and remains in the Cummer family—it was exhibited in 2015 at the North York Historical Society. The cradle is of typical Pennsylvania German design, so the Indigenous man either traded for the cradle or made it himself.

The Society of Friends / Quakers and Children of Peace

In 1800, Timothy Rogers obtained an 8,000-acre land grant for a Quaker settlement in York County (King and Whitchurch Townships), and he led the first group of Quaker families from Vermont and Pennsylvania the following year. More Quakers followed.²³ In 1801, Quaker Joseph Hill built a mill at the site of the town of Newmarket; he dammed the East Holland River to create a millpond (now Fairy Lake). The first Quaker meeting house, the oldest religious building erected north of Toronto, was built in Newmarket in 1807; the second, dating from 1810–12, still stands. A splinter group led by David Willson, the Children of Peace, built the Sharon Temple. Soon, according to local historian Ethel Wilson Trehwella, “all along Yonge Street, from Aurora to Holland Landing, also the northwestern part of Whitchurch Township and the southwestern part of East Gwillimbury Township were almost entirely settled by pioneer Quakers.”²⁴ The Quakers helped clear and build much of the northern part of Yonge Street.

The Quakers of Pennsylvania had a long (and somewhat mythologized) history of amicable relations with Indigenous peoples, going back to Pennsylvania’s founder, William Penn. According to historian Alan Taylor, one of the reasons the Quakers were attracted to Upper Canada rather than the Ohio Valley, another destination for settlement, was “because the British kept the peace by treating the Indians more generously than did the Americans.”²⁵ The British, for their part, welcomed the Quakers as exemplary and

peaceable farmers. To encourage their move to Upper Canada, Simcoe made it known that they would be welcome and enacted militia laws that exempted pacifist groups such as the Quakers, Mennonites, and Tunkers (later Brethren in Christ) from militia service upon the payment of a small fee. A further reason the Quakers, Mennonites, and Tunkers preferred Upper Canada to the United States was because of British policies that safeguarded their distinct identities.²⁶

The Quakers on north Yonge Street had considerable contact with Indigenous peoples because of their proximity to the Holland River, a key transportation route.

That community of what is now Georgina Island resided all around Holland Landing. The mouth of Cook’s Bay. Because that area was a huge staging ground for wild rice, waterfowl, and the rivers were used for harvesting.

—Kory Snache, Chippewas of Rama²⁷

French Royalists

In 1798, Augustus Jones laid out lots along Yonge Street for forty French Royalists who had gone into exile after the French Revolution. These émigrés, who with their families made up a group of about 170 settlers led by Count Joseph de Puisaye, settled in Uxbridge, Gwillimbury, and Whitchurch Townships in York County. Fearing an Indigenous attack from the north, Peter Russell suggested that de Puisaye’s men be provided



Unknown artist, *Laurent Quetton St. George*, 1815
 | Courtesy of Toronto Public Library, Canadian
 Documentary Art Collection, V 3-46c

weapons to form a local defence force: “Their numbers may moreover contribute to fill up an uninhabited space, thro’ which an Indian Enemy may at present advance to the Destruction of this Town before we can possibly receive sufficient warning of their approach.”²⁸ Although twenty-two 200-acre lots were granted for what became known as the Windham settlement, the French

aristocrats made poor farmers. By 1800, most had left. Those who remained did not receive patents to their lands until 1806, and by 1807–1808, most of the remainder had sold and moved away.

One of de Puisaye’s settlers, Laurent Quetton St. George, arrived at the Windham Settlement in early 1799 and for the next few years engaged in the fur trade before moving to Niagara and York. Known as Wau-be-wayquon (White Hat) to the Anishinaabek, he set up a store in York and trading posts near the Narrows and at Amherstburg across from Detroit. He learned at least rudimentary Anishinaabemowin, and his Anishinaabemowin vocabulary list is preserved at the Toronto Reference Library. St. George Subway Station is named after him.

The Queen’s Rangers

Many original lot owners in the area north of Toronto were former soldiers of the Queen’s Rangers, who like the French Royalists, were given land in the 1790s to defend York from potential Indigenous or American attacks from the north. They were also given a substantial block of land in Etobicoke to defend York’s western flank.

Most members were veterans of the American War of Independence from New York and Pennsylvania. They accompanied Simcoe on his first visit to York in 1792. The following year, about one hundred sailed to York, cleared ground on the waterfront, and constructed the blockhouse, storehouses, barracks, and palisade of Fort York, where they were stationed. They also began constructing Yonge Street, originally

intended for defensive purposes. By early 1796, the road extended to Holland Landing. Most of the Rangers sold their lands to the Pennsylvania Germans.

Early British Settlers

Some British settlers came directly from Britain. Others immigrated to the American colonies before the Revolution and made their way north as United Empire Loyalists. They were still perceived as British, as opposed to American-born Loyalists, whose families had lived in the American colonies for longer periods. They received more extensive land grants, according to their rank, and joined a relatively small number of British families to form a new colonial elite in York. Some of these families acquired multiple land holdings, including north of Toronto.

Early administrative positions were often filled by British officials. Some returned to Britain after a few years while others remained in the colony, including British military officers, most of whom had fought in the War of Independence. The number of British settlers would increase significantly after the War of 1812.

Early Black Settlers

During the American Revolution, British officers encouraged freed slaves to join Loyalist forces. An unknown number of Black soldiers, including Richard Pierpoint, fought for Butler's Rangers alongside Mohawks and other members of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy.²⁹

TO BE SOLD,
A BLACK WOMAN, named
PEGGY, aged about forty years ; and a
Black boy her son, named JUPITER, aged
about fifteen years, both of them the property of the
Subscriber.
The Woman is a tolerable Cook and washer woman
and perfectly understands making Soap and Candles.
The Boy is tall and strong of his age, and has been
employed in Country business, but brought up principally
as a House Servant—They are each of them
Servants for life. The Price for the Woman is one
hundred and fifty Dollars—for the Boy two hundred
Dollars, payable in three years with Interest from the
day of Sale and to be properly secured by Bond &c. —
But one fourth less will be taken in ready Money.
PETER RUSSELL.
York, Feb. 10th 1806.

1806 advertisement for the sale of Peggy Pompadour, an enslaved woman owned by Upper Canada administrator Peter Russell, *Upper Canada Gazette*, February 22, 1806 | Archives of Ontario

After the war, some Black Loyalist veterans, including Pierpoint, sought refuge in Canada and were offered land grants on the Niagara Peninsula. However, other free Black people and some who had escaped from enslavement to fight for the British came to York. At the same time, many well-to-do white Loyalists brought their enslaved African “servants” with them to Canada. For example, Sir John Johnson, superintendent-general and inspector general of Indian Affairs from 1782 until 1830 and negotiator of the 1787 Toronto Purchase, brought fourteen enslaved people to Lower Canada.³⁰ While a 1790 act passed by the British government assured British immigrants to Canada that their slaves would remain their

property, in 1793, Lieutenant-Governor Simcoe passed a law banning the importation of enslaved people and decreed that all enslaved children born in Upper Canada after 1793 would be free at the age of twenty-five.

In 1799, out of a total non-Indigenous population of two hundred, about fifteen people of African heritage lived in York and another ten east of the Don River. Six of the fifteen were “owned” by William Jarvis and five by Peter Russell.³¹ Thus, many of those who interacted with Indigenous peoples were also shaped by the general cultural acceptance of hierarchies of rights, privileges, and freedoms.

So early interactions with settlers, I would say, from what I’ve heard, is half good, half bad. I’ve heard of our people going and stealing from settler cabins and stuff when they just hacked them out of the woods and threw up, like, a cedar cabin. I’ve heard of stories of our people going at night and robbing . . . but then having to return items because they would get caught, and their Chief says, “Take that back. We want to keep peace between our people.” Don’t infringe upon them. Let them do what they’re doing and they’ll let us do what we’re doing, kind of thing. Keep relations peaceful. I’ve heard of that happening.

—Kory Snache, Chippewas of Rama³²