

Canadian History

The United States started with thirteen colonies along the Atlantic. The British had some other colonies in the Caribbean, and some more further north.

These frozen possessions were Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, Lower Canada, and Upper Canada. They did not rebel because they were so distant from the more southerly colonies. They were also very thinly populated and had hardly developed politically at that time.

All you Americans should have heard of the hated Red Coats of the Revolutionary War. Over in Canada, we still have volunteers wearing historic red uniforms in a historic replica fortress. But they will not come back to inflict you with "taxation without representation", so you can put all your guns away now. We are friends and are related by blood.

It is little known that a large part of the early settlers of the 13 Colonies were not there by choice. They were malcontents or trouble makers that the British wanted out of the way. In that early time, Australia had not yet been considered as a human dumping ground. Some were enlisted as white slaves for a few years. Others were just let off the ships to either starve or survive in the wilderness. The British didn't care which. Decades of intermittent neglect and abuse set up long standing grudges against the British.

However much the same was happening at home in England. Abuse, exploitation and murder were commonplace. Peasants had no rights, except to flee to the Continent if they could.

The British were very brutish in those days. Instead of police, they had busy hangmen to entertain the leering populace. Many heads were hacked off to be impaled on pikes as a warning to all. It was cheaper that way. This was necessary because they had not yet been able to establish prosperity or taxation. Governments were broke and graft was rife.

"England of the 1700's was a putrid place that was oppressed under the brutal heel of cheap Gin and cruel tyranny. This disgusting environment made John Wesley want much more than his father's venerable Church of England could provide. He searched for Holiness even before he was saved! He was a brilliant scholar at Oxford that studied all the lives of the Saints throughout history to look for clues of true holiness -without knowing you had to enjoy an explicit experience of salvation first."

Three-quarters of all children died before age five. While irreversible disease accounted for a large percentage of the fatalities, the most callous neglect, not to say wilful cruelty, accounted for the rest. Among the poorest people, and amidst the human impoverishment which accompanies material deprivation, the child mortality rate was almost one hundred percent.1 Mr. Hanway, a governor of the Foundling Hospital (established in 1739, one year after Wesley's conversion) commented on this aspect of English social life. "The pagan Chinese may legally drown female children; but an English Churchwarden, or 'Father of the Poor' . . . may suffer children to be starved to death or poisoned with noxious air."2 Scores of thousands of children were entrusted to nurses who pocketed the paltry sum given them for "caring", permitting starvation to overtake the child who was too expensive to feed. And since remains were too expensive to inter, infant corpses were routinely thrown onto manure piles. At birth the very poorest children were commonly abandoned in the street to perish. Frequently destitute parents blinded, maimed or deformed their child in hope of teasing out a few more pennies when the child was sent forth to beg. "Saddling the spit" was the highlight of parish entertainment; parish officers commandeered the monies paid to the parish to care for resourceless children and treated themselves to a large-scale drunk. The children, as many as five hundred at a time, were simply forsaken.

In 1684 Britain distilled 527,000 gallons of spirits. By 1750 the flow reached eleven million. (For a total population of only five million people!) Of the two thousand houses in St. Giles, London, 506 were gin shops. The record of proceedings from the Old Bailey, England's principal criminal court, informs us of the tragedy of Judith Dufour. She had removed her young child from the workhouse, strangled her, thrown the body into a ditch, sold the child's clothing for one shilling and four pence, and finally spent the money on gin, which she then shared with another woman who had collaborated in the murder. The sign in gin shop windows read:

Drunk: one shilling

Dead Drunk: two shillings

Free straw

Some shops advertised "clean straw," a concession to a better class of patron who preferred not to sleep in someone else's vomit.

Parliament often foreshortened its debates "because the honourable members were too drunk to continue the affairs of state" 3 Couples aimed at solemnizing their marriages in the morning; by evening solemnity had given way to sottishness.

Gambling was equally addictive. The well-to-do forfeited huge sums at the roll of dice, up to twenty-thousand pounds. The poor lost their money piecemeal yet lost it as surely to the government lotteries whose seduction they found irresistible. (Westminster Bridge and the British Museum were built largely by funds naively offered up by the poorest classes.) The degeneration which accompanied all of this need not be detailed. Its depth and scope are sufficiently attested in one advertisement for entertainment, "Champagne, Dice, Music, or your Neighbour's Spouse."⁴

We Canadians certainly had to contend with these same loutish British nobles to obtain our independence, but all out war was avoided, because after your war with them, the British became slightly more reasonable. But only slightly.

Tom Plumb