

Locating Loyalist Tradespeople & Occupations



How did loyalists of the American Revolution make a living before, during, and after the war?

☞ **Trades:** a skilled manual occupation, especially one requiring an apprenticeship or other training.

Most common loyalist trades: carpenter, cordwainer (shoemaker), tailor, mason, blacksmith, baker, shipwright, butcher, barber, weaver, tanner, and cooper.

☞ **Sea & Land:** connected occupations included mariner, fisherman, pilot, and farmer (also called husbandmen, yeomen).

☞ **Servant & Labourer** were the occupations of a large sector of late 19th century people.

☞ **Commerce:** encompassed merchants, tavern and innkeepers, traders, and more specialized trades such as tidewater (a customs officer who boarded ships to enforce the customs regulations).

☞ **Professions:** that often required specialized training such as lawyers, ministers, schoolmasters/ teachers and the field of medicine which included “Doctor of physic,” druggist, surgeon, and physician.

For the generation of young loyalist men who participated in the war but were not able to apprentice, their path to trades were often interrupted. Many loyalists, particularly after resettlement, relied on farming or fishing as well as a trade.

Women were found in trades and commercial spheres during the loyalist period, particular in tavern keeping, printing, mercantile operations, cloth and clothing productions, midwifery, and education.

Primary Sources

- Census and poll tax lists:** Early censuses and lists for taxation purposes in the British and American colonies sometimes list occupations. For example, the [Nova Scotia Census Returns, Assessment and Poll Tax Records 1767-1838](#) and see Library and Archives Canada, [Early census and related documents, 1640 to 1945](#).
- Loyalist claims** include paperwork as evidence to support their claims which can include lists of tools and equipment used in their trades.
 - Great Britain, Audit Office, Claims, American Loyalists: [Series I \(AO 12\)](#): 1776-1831 and [Series II \(AO 13\)](#): 1780-1835. *Note:* Loyalist Claims are also searchable through a subscription to *Ancestry*.
- Esther Clark Wright Index** for New Brunswick often includes occupations.
- Apprenticeship contracts** with youths can sometimes be found in deeds and probate records.
- Newspapers:** advertisements of services or trades were often placed in newspapers. Good sites to find loyalists in newspapers include [America's Historical Newspapers](#), the [New Brunswick Historical Newspapers Project](#), and [Nova Scotia Archives](#).
- County Court records** in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia can list early tavern keepers and teachers licenses.
- Probate records** can indicate inherited trades and businesses via what is passed to the next generation.
 - [Early New Brunswick Probate Records, 1785-1835](#) are indexed online by the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick.
 - [Deaths, Burials, and Probate of Nova Scotians, 1749-1799](#), From Primary Sources, 2 volumes
- Marriage records** sometimes include trades of grooms and can be found in county court, church, and legal records (e.g. [Marianne Grey Otty Database](#)). Marriages made before or during the war may be located in indexes from the American colonies.
- Book of Negroes:** a listing of Black Loyalists, both free and enslaved, in New York City in 1783 who intended to go to Nova Scotia (which included New Brunswick at that time) where trades were sometimes recorded. Searchable, digital copy available through the Nova Scotia Archives' [African Nova Scotians](#) webpage.

☐ **Muster rolls:** trades practiced in a military capacity can be included in muster rolls.

- [Great Britain. Army. Provincial Corps. Muster Rolls: 1777-1783](#) . Index and documents available [through Library and Archives Canada](#).

☐ **Ship lists:** applications for letters of marque include crew's occupation.

- [Letters of Marque : Declarations Against France, Spain, and the United Provinces \(HCA 26/33-59\) : 1777 - 1783](#). Great Britain. High Court of Admiralty.
- [Letters of Marque : Declarations Against America \(HCA 26/60-70 ; ADM7/317-318\) : 1777 - 1783](#). Great Britain. High Court of Admiralty (indexed).

Glossary of Common Trades

armourer - A maker or repairer of weapons or armour.

blockmaker - Specialized in maker of pulley blocks for ships.

brazier - An artisan who worked in brass.

carman - A man who drives a cart.

clothier - Related to cloth trade: maker, dealer, seller of men's clothes.

cooper - A craftsman who makes and repairs wooden vessels formed of staves and hoops, such as casks, buckets, and tubs.

cordwainer - A worker in cordwain or cordovan leather; a shoemaker who works in new leather.

currier - One whose trade is the dressing and colouring of leather after it is tanned.

cutler - One who makes, deals in, or repairs knives and similar cutting utensils.

esquire - A man belonging to the landed gentry.

freeman - A man who is personally free or who possesses the freedom of a city, borough, company, guild, etc.

glazier - Glass maker or glass worker.

gunsmith - Manufactures, repairs, maintains, or sells guns.

housewright - A builder of houses, especially those constructed largely of timber; a house carpenter.

joiner - A craftsman whose occupation it is to construct things by joining pieces of wood; a worker in wood who does lighter and more ornamental work than that of a carpenter, as the construction of the furniture and fittings of a house, ship, etc.

mariner - A person who navigates or assists in navigating a ship; a sailor. Anyone who works on a ship.

mason - A worker or builder in stone.

master - A ship's master, also known as the captain, is a licensed mariner who has complete responsibility for a ship, its crew, cargo, and passengers.

millwright - A person who designs or sets up mills or mill machinery; a person who maintains and repairs machinery in a mill or factory.

pilot - A person who steers or directs the course of a ship; a helmsman or navigator; specifically a qualified coastal navigator taken on board temporarily to steer a ship into or out of a port, through a channel, etc.

plumber - A person who deals or works with lead.

rigger - A person who sets up and attends to the rigging of ships.

saddler - A person who makes or deals in saddles or saddlery.

sawyer - Cuts wood.

soapboiler - One who boils (the ingredients of) soap; a soap-maker, soap-manufacturer.

stationer - A person who sells books; a bookseller; occasionally also: a printer, a bookbinder.

surgeon - One who practises the art of healing by manual operation; a practitioner who treats wounds, fractures, deformities, or disorders by surgical means. In early use often more widely, a doctor.

surgeon's mate - A medical officer in the army or navy (on board ship known as the "ship's doctor").

tallow chandler - One whose trade is to make or sell tallow (animal fat) candles or dealer in supplies and equipment for ships or general household goods

tanner - Cures animal hides.

tidesman, tidewater - A customs officer who awaited the arrival of ships (formerly coming in with the tide) and boarded them to prevent evasion of the custom-house regulation.

tinman - A man who works in or with tin; a tinsmith; a dealer in tin-ware.

tobacconist - A seller of or dealer in tobacco; also, a manufacturer of tobacco.

turner - A person who turns and shapes wood, metal, bone, etc., on a lathe. Also could refer to a potter.

victualler - A purveyor of victuals or provisions; specifically one who makes a business of providing food and drink for payment; a keeper of an eating-house, inn, or tavern; a licensed victualler.

vintner - Wine merchant.

waggoner - One who has charge of a wagon as driver.

wheelwright - makes wheels for vehicles.

whitesmith - A person who makes articles from tin-plated iron or from tin or other white metal. Also: a person who makes iron tools with a sharp edge, or other iron articles with a polished surface.

yeoman - A freeholder or a person holding a small, landed estate, especially one who cultivates his own land.

Primary Source Examples from The Loyalist Collection

- Large, personal records from the period often mention interactions with people in trades and business such as John Saunders Papers; [Winslow Papers](#); and [Gideon White Family Collection](#).
- Bedell, William J. [Letter book : 25 January 1837 - 21 August 1838](#). Records related to lumbering and shipbuilding, New Brunswick.
- Denison, John. [Papers : 1792-1879](#). Brewery records, Kingston, Upper Canada.
- DeWolf, Edward. [Ledgers : 1773-1788, 1794-1797, 1802](#). Merchant records, Horton Landing, Nova Scotia.
- Magee, Henry. [Business Records : 1788-1806](#). General merchant records, Kentville, Nova Scotia.
- Mount Allison University (Sackville, NB). [Archives. Collection: 1762-1834](#). Anonymous Account Book of a merchant in the Sackville area, 1809-1820.
- Servos, Daniel. [Records: 1779-1826](#). Mill account book, Niagara, Upper Canada.

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Whitfield, Harvey Amani. [Biographical Dictionary of Enslaved Black People in the Maritimes](#). UNB eBook & HIL-MICGDL HT1052 .M37 W45 2022

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