

Mid eighteenth century Nova Scotia experienced a four-fold series of far-reaching demographic upheavals. First, in 1749, England dispatched an expedition that led to the founding of Halifax, followed in short order by “foreign Protestants”, who came from continental Europe to settle mainly in Lunenburg. Then starting in 1755, colonial authorities carried out a traumatic mass deportation of the colony’s Acadian population. Even as that “derangement” was playing out, the years 1759-60 saw commencement of a large-scale influx into Nova Scotia of settlers from neighbouring New England, people now referred to collectively as the “Planters”. Within a decade the Planters would be established as the dominant population group in mainland Nova Scotia.

The key factor prompting an exodus from the New England heartland of Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut was land hunger. As population grew and the colonial economy developed, the price of real estate soared, to the point where more and more people could not afford to obtain a farm of their own. The solution of migration to the frontier, where real estate was relatively cheap, remained inhibited through most of the 1750s, because of French, Acadian and First Nation resistance to encroachment on their terrain.

Then the course of war suddenly made available what had previously been out of reach. By 1759, with the Acadians mostly driven from their homeland, the French bastion at Louisbourg captured, and Mi’kmaq-Malecite military capacity in decay, Nova Scotia became a less dangerous place for Yankee settlers. Moreover, the authorities in Halifax, desperate to rebuild the colony’s population but lacking the funds needed to subsidize immigration from Europe, invited their neighbours to come north. Two proclamations, the first late in 1758 and the second early in 1759, offered generous packages of free real estate, some already cleared for farming, to all willing to put down roots in Nova Scotia. With property came political and civil rights. Settlers moving into the projected Township communities would acquire elected representation in the colony’s newly established House of Assembly and, for a time would have control over local affairs through “town meetings,” open to all male heads of household. As an added bonus, non-Anglicans would not be taxed to support the Church of England and there would be a ten-year holiday from property taxes. Those coming to Nova Scotia were supposed to arrange and pay for their own transportation and bear the costs of settlement but on occasion Halifax officials provided subsidies and relief supplies to facilitate Planter relocation.

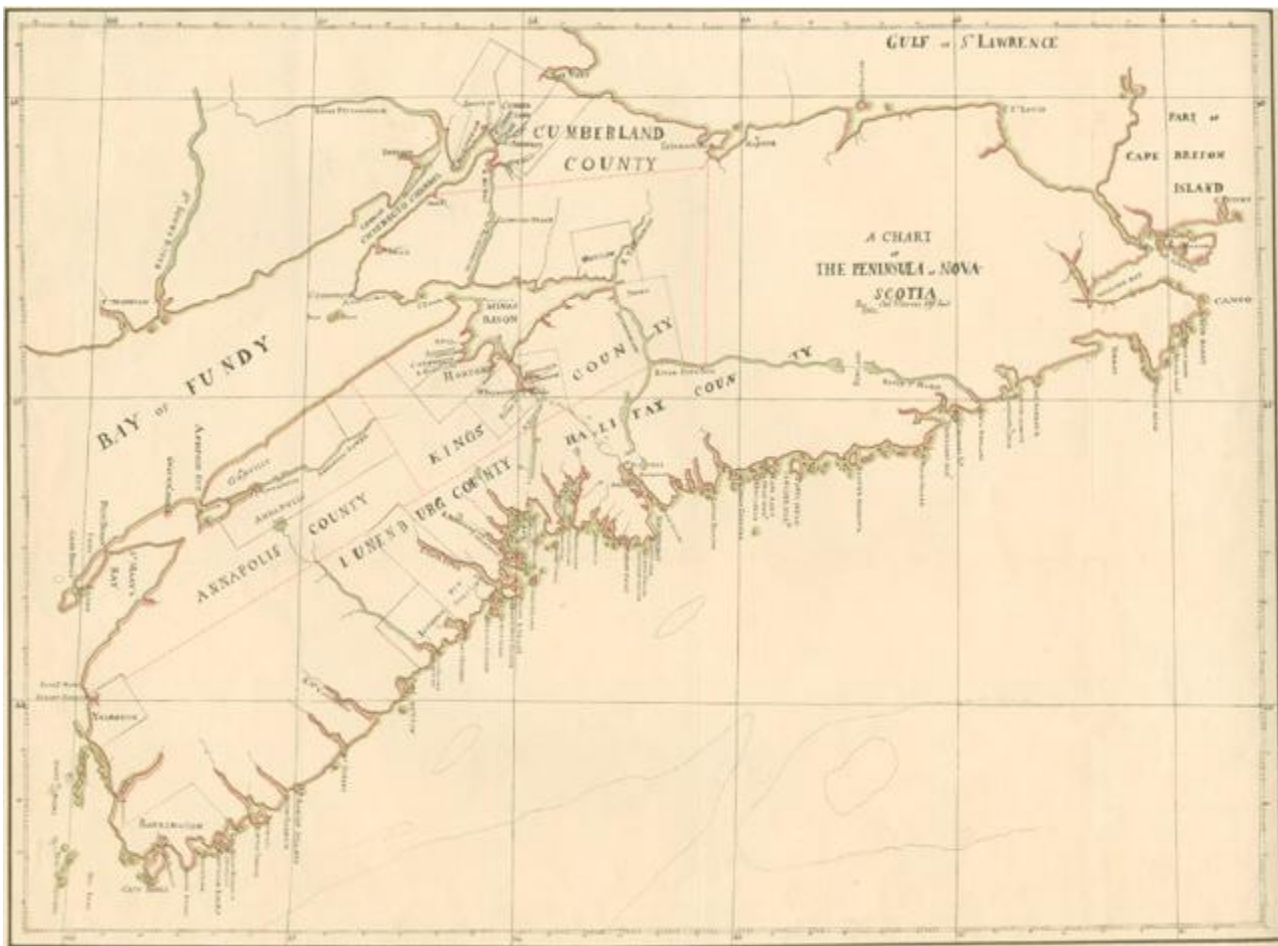
Those contemplating a move out of central New England could go to places other than Nova Scotia. Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont attracted the bulk of those on the move but approximately 7,000 migrated further north, starting in mid to late 1759. First to arrive were several agents, often military veterans who had served in Nova Scotia during wartime. They represented several groups of would-be settlers and had been sent to see what kind of bargain could be negotiated with government, particularly over the quantity and quality of real estate that was available for occupation. Welcomed by Lieutenant Governor Lawrence and his Council associates, these visitors were given tours, ranging from south shore locations adjacent to rich fishing grounds, to empty Acadian farmlands along the inner reaches of the Bay of Fundy. Favourably impressed with what they encountered, most of the agents agreed to bring their associates to Nova Scotia and in turn the authorities, led by Surveyor-General Charles Morris, laid out several 100,000 acre Townships, ranging from Chester, on the South Shore, to Sackville (now in New Brunswick), at the head of the Bay of Fundy.

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INTO NOVA SCOTIA, 1759-60

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Settlement did not begin immediately. Storm surges in the autumn of 1759 wreaked havoc with much of the Fundy dyking system and that, combined with the presence of armed Acadian and First Nation resistance fighters, forced delays in the arrival of aspiring Yankee settlers. But by the summer of 1760, with dyke repair under way (using conscripted labour provided by soldiers and Acadian prisoners) and peace coming in the wake of the capitulation of New France, the first wave of Planters began to occupy Nova Scotia's frontier.

Details about the settlement process are scarce. One stand-out event was the arrival at Minas Basin in June 1760 of a twenty-two vessel flotilla carrying approximately one thousand men, women and children. Most Planters, however, sailed north in single or paired vessels that anchored at multiple landing places around the coast. The main Planter influx took place between 1760 and 1763, although late-comers were still arriving through the following five years. Not everyone who came stayed but by 1768 approximately 7,000 had taken up residence in the colony, with the main concentrations of people in what is now Nova Scotia being found near present-day Annapolis Royal, Amherst, Barrington, Liverpool, Windsor, Wolfville and Yarmouth.

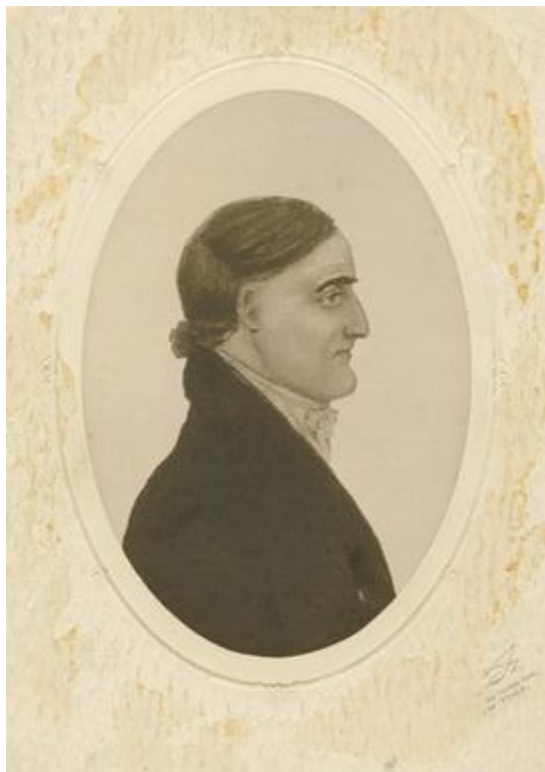


This "Chart of the Peninsula of Nova Scotia" was drawn in 1761 by Charles Morris, then the colony's Surveyor General. It shows the various Townships he surveyed for occupation by the incoming Planters. Some locations, such as New Dublin, were ignored by the new settlers. NSARM Map Collection: 202-1761 Nova Scotia.

Most immigrants arrived as members of family units, consisting of parents and children, while some brought more distant relations, along with neighbours they had known back in New England. None of the newcomers were what could be called “rich” but a few had the means to bring with them black slaves. All were Protestants (mostly adherents of the Congregational church) and, with the exception of a small Ulster Irish component, all derived from English ethnic stock and had been born in North America. These common denominators helped forge a cohesive sense of identity among the newcomers, especially as intermarriage created extended family bonds among the pioneers.

The Planters faced numerous challenges on Nova Scotia’s frontier. Even those who entered onto lands formerly occupied by Acadians encountered major hardship. The buildings, roads, bridges, schools and churches that they had known back home had to be recreated in what was still largely a wilderness. Those locating along the Fundy marshes had to master the techniques of building and maintaining the dykes that held back the sea. Fortunately, community decision making about issues ranging from the allocation of real estate to the selection of local officials, eased the process of adaptation. Equally important was settler ability to recruit capital and negotiate credit, mainly from family and friends back in New England. Nevertheless, it would be the 1770s before Planter Nova Scotians achieved a degree of economic self-sufficiency, along with a political voice strong enough to challenge the Halifax establishment for control of government in Nova Scotia.

Then, just as the Planters began to assert themselves, they became caught up in the great disruption of the American Revolution, which tested their allegiance. Would they identify with the revolutionary zeal of their old homeland in New England or see themselves as a continuing part of the British Empire? Opinions were divided and many insisted that all they wanted was to be left alone as “neutral Yankees.” Simeon Perkins of Liverpool typified the many Planters who employed a combination of “prudence and diplomacy” to survive the war and become permanent residents of Nova Scotia, in the process becoming more “bluenoses” than Yankees.



Simeon Perkins (1734/35 - 1812) moved from Connecticut to the new settlement at Liverpool in 1762. A merchant, shipowner, militia captain, and member of the local House of Assembly, Perkins is now best remembered for the extensive diary he kept detailing life in late 18th century Nova Scotia.

NSARM Photograph Collection: People, Perkins, Simeon