

Hardy hands new history



Nationview Public students lived the life of 18th Century Loyalists at Upper Canada Village last week.

sawing is hard work for Amanda Lafaver and Jana Fawcett;

students help build a log hut after Donnie Johnson and Jeremie Bailey cut a notch into the log;

In the 1790s the British Army provided the same ingredients to United Empire Loyalists who emigrated to Canada from the United States. They came to avoid persecution for their allegiance to the King of England after the U.S. declared independence.

The Grade 7 and 8 students from Nationview became these early settlers for a day as part of the park's "Loyalists...The First Year" educational program. The program, which began in 1984, gives students from Grades 5 to 8 a chance to experience the life of the Loyalists who came to Eastern Ontario.

Equipped with reproductions of the few meagre tools and equipment supplied to the newly emigrated Loyalists, the students had to pitch a tent, cook a meal and begin cultivating the land.

This year, as a tribute to Canada's 125th birthday, students participating in the program will also help build, roof and furnish a 12-by-14 foot log hut. The building will be typical of first dwellings built by the Loyalists. Approximately 21 different school groups will work on the hut over the program's four-week run, which finishes May 16.

"It's (made of) round logs with the simplest corner notching," said McManus. "I think we'll manage to get part of the roof on by the time the program's over."

It is the first time Nationview students have participated in the Loyalist program but principal Jim Shaw said it's an experience worth repeating.

"I think it's wonderful. It brings history alive for the kids. Everyone takes too much for granted today," said Shaw. "It certainly gives them a lot better understanding of some of the hardships the Loyalists endured just to survive."

But the brief brush with the rugged life appealed to student Tammy Baldwin, 13.

"I wouldn't mind living out here. You get to cook on an open fire... make what you eat and you get to fish," said Baldwin.

The experience may have been fun for a day

The Loyalists survived on the army's rations until their farms were under way since there were very few large animals or guns to use for hunting. Guns were given out sparingly so hunting would not divert the men from their farming responsibilities.

However the sight of the food did not bring many rave reviews from children of the 20th Century.

"It looks like glue."

"These dumplings don't look too good."

"Maybe I'll try it, but I won't eat it."

However not every student minded the meagre fare of the Loyalists.

"Actually it's good in a way," said David Sargent, 12, after finishing off a plateful.

"I'm going back for seconds."



bent over a fire pit, Mike Flowers and Matthew Sumegi try lighting a fire with flint and steel.



Mike Shields and Tracy Lewis try on the typical fashions of the 1790s;

Students quickly discovered that simple chores of today were a much bigger production in the 18th Century. Lighting a fire with only a piece of flint and steel requires considerably more effort than striking a match, but it is possible, said John McManus, a park employee with the program.

"We always get some done with the flint and steel. We didn't get them all done," he said.