

# Was Canada a Land of Promise for Loyalist refugees?

By Kenneth Pearson

A mammoth exhibition on the scale of their Tutankhamun and Chinese exhibitions is being prepared by *The Sunday Times* and *Times* to celebrate the bicentenary of the American War of Independence in 1776. Called simply "1776," it will open on April 15, 1976, at the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich. Kenneth Pearson, assistant editor of *The Sunday Times* and director of the exhibition, has been researching and collecting material for it through the United States, Britain, France and Canada — the "land of promise" to which many thousands of Loyalists fled after the revolution. Here he describes the Canadian end of his researches and asks, how did the war and its outcome affect Canada?

The first time I visited Quebec I thought Montcalm had won. Cherchez le Wolfe, I cried, striking simultaneous blows for bilingualism and British pride. We found him: four feet of folk art carving looking down on the library of the Literary and Historical Society of Quebec, commissioned two hundred years ago by an Englishman who missed him even then.

We were in search of '1776,' a vintage year, when a luckier Benedict Arnold might have captured Canada for those rebels further south, and now the title of



the exhibition I am directing in London next year. But why should we British be bothering with the American bicentennial of their Independence and our defeat? A right to reply, might be one answer. No doubt the United States will stun itself with its own trumpeting side of the story. We thought we ought to bang the drum for ours.

And it occurred to me early on in our deliberations: was not the end of that war the birth of *two* nations, not just one? Had not those thousands of Loyalists who headed north to Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Ontario fundamentally changed the aspect of Canada? Long-neglected by American historians, should not those sad refugees have a chance to speak? Canada: a Land of Promise? What did happen?

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*Chief Joseph Brant, the Iroquois warrior (left), a Romney portrait lent by the National Gallery of Canada.*

*Below: Refugees from the American Civil War camping on the banks of the St. Lawrence River: detail from a watercolour by James Peachey, on loan from the Winkworth Collection.*

