

## CHAPTER ONE



# The Early Settlement of Cornwall, Ontario and Massena, New York, 1784–1834

The towns of Cornwall, Ontario and Massena, New York were established by pioneers on the U.S.–Canadian border at the end of the eighteenth century in a previously untamed wilderness. The northernmost part of New York State and the southern border of British North America were labeled the “Great Wilderness” by cartographers on maps drawn prior to 1772. The region was isolated from established commercial centers, inhabited by Indians and covered by dense forests. The area, therefore, was unattractive to many frontiersmen until after the American Revolution when the forced exile of British loyalists and the limited availability of fertile land in New England encouraged the settlement of this formerly desolate borderland. The founding fathers of Cornwall and Massena faced starvation and economic uncertainty during the first years of settlement due to their geographic isolation.

The permanent settlement of Cornwall, Ontario and Massena, New York, while twenty years apart, was demographically, socially, religiously, and politically similar. Early pioneers from New England and other former American colonies cooperatively built houses and churches and worshiped together at Sunday services. The rigors of frontier life, economic and social isolation, and an agrarian economy prevented the development of social differences among settlers and the ascension of elites to power. Regardless of the fact that they now lived on opposite sides of the border, the loyalists and Massena settlers still harbored comparable social and political goals and values. The founding fathers of both towns were collectively oriented, distrusted the state, and developed voluntaristic and egalitarian religious traditions. The border location of Cornwall and Massena forced residents to become self-sufficient, made them vulnerable to foreign invasion, and encouraged them to develop different social and political institutions from

those in the heartland regions. The settlement and early struggles of families in Cornwall were more similar to those of their neighbors in Massena than to residents in other areas of Canada.

## Cornwall

Cornwall, Ontario was settled in 1784 by United Empire Loyalists and their families as one of five new royal townships. During the Revolutionary War, many British sympathizers left homesteads in New York, Pennsylvania, and New England, joined royal regiments, and fought on behalf of King George III. Once the war was over, loyalists pressured British government officials for new land and financial compensation as repayment for their allegiance. For defense purposes British officials wanted some of these families settled close to the United States border. The male residents of the royal townships provided an experienced militia force in case American officials attempted to extend their property further northward in the future. Following the signing of the Treaty of Paris in November of 1783, Sir John Johnson, commander of the King's Royal Regiment, and several of his fellow military leaders traveled down the St. Lawrence River and negotiated land deals with the St. Regis Indians for property in a previously unsettled area of Upper Canada. Once the deal was signed and the necessary surveys conducted, experienced French-Canadian bateaux captains brought loyalists and their belongings to their new homes along the St. Lawrence. The first settlers arrived in Royal Township #2 in 1784.<sup>1</sup>

Cornwall's isolated location forced the loyalists to become self-sufficient and create a unique community based on environmental factors. Prior to Sir Johnson's agreement with the St. Regis, the area where Cornwall is situated was largely an untamed wilderness. The French had long occupied the eastern region of Canada ending at the present Ontario-Quebec border. Explorers and missionaries had journeyed further inland and some of the islands and rapids still bear the names of those pioneers.<sup>2</sup> In the past, central Canada was also considered as a location for a trading or military post by French government officials. But, according to a local reporter, it was "unlikely that more than half a dozen white men had ever gazed upon the place where the future Cornwall was situated."<sup>3</sup> When the former soldiers arrived to claim their new plots of land along the St. Lawrence River, no roads or means of communication existed to connect the area with major commercial centers like Montreal. Therefore, many of the township's early settlers relied on home production and the local exchange of foodstuffs for basic subsistence.

Royal Township #2 was the most popular settlement among loyalist soldiers because of its fertile agricultural land, favorable climate, and good timber.<sup>4</sup> The area was described by a geographer as 10,231 square miles of

forest and farmland laced with sparkling lakes and streams.<sup>5</sup> Cornwall's climate was also well suited for farming. The 163-day growing season and 70 degree average temperature were similar to the conditions the loyalists were accustomed to in New York and New England. The monthly rainfall of three inches was ample for most crops.

The indigenous fir trees and hardwoods were valuable resources for the early residents. Wood accumulated by settlers during land clearing was chopped and processed into potash or lye and sold for cash for use in soap and other products in Canada and overseas. Farmers simply designated burning areas on empty lots of land and sold the ashes to traveling dealers. Additionally, lumbering was a source of off-season employment for many farmers. There was a local and regional market for wood, as settlers were constantly arriving in the royal townships and constructing new homes and churches. Lumbering bees were also held by farmers to rid their land of unwanted trees. Several men gathered to cut down massive amounts of pine, maple, oak, and elm and drag the trunks and branches to a clearing to be burned.<sup>6</sup> While the arable land and timber were initially seen as assets to the loyalist soldiers, the physical isolation and frontier conditions they experienced fostered a unique community that often put them at odds with national officials. However, it was forced exile that initially brought the early settlers to Royal Township #2.

The original 516 settlers arrived in Royal Township #2 with minimal supplies and faced years of hard work and possible starvation. Upon their departure from military camps in Montreal, Pointe Claire, Saint Anne, and Lachine in the fall of 1784, loyalists were given a tent, one month's worth of food rations, clothes, and agricultural provisions by regiment commanders. They were promised one cow for every two families, an ax, and other necessary tools in the near future.<sup>7</sup> For the next three years, bateaux crews delivered rations to the township, after which residents were left to fend for themselves.<sup>8</sup> Military officials distributed small amounts of beef, pork, butter, and salt to the head of each household. The total allotment of each item was based on the number of family members.<sup>9</sup> Financially, most male settlers shared in the \$500,000 compensation package paid to former soldiers, while a minority of the officers were awarded a pension of half pay for life. In 1787 British government officials discontinued the food rations, financial compensation, and agricultural implements extended to the loyalist settlers. Most Cornwall residents were not self-sufficient in terms of food production and faced starvation. Additionally, merchants had not yet established stores and mills to sell or process goods that could not be produced by settlers at home.<sup>10</sup> Life for the founding fathers of Cornwall was primitive and unpredictable even though they owned large amounts of property.

The loyalists were awarded land through a lottery system. Each participant drew a number out of a box that corresponded to a similarly labeled

parcel of land. The size of the allotment was based on the military rank of the individual. Noncommissioned officers received 200 acres, while the highest-level field officers were awarded 5,000.<sup>11</sup> The acreage included one plot of land with river frontage for planting and water access and another further inland for housing. Some former officers who participated in the lottery never settled in the area and many of the acres remained uncultivated. According to Edgar McInnis, "Large tracts of land in the most desirable locations lay waste, and new settlers had either to pay excessive prices or locate in areas remote from markets and transportation."<sup>12</sup> These circumstances stunted the population growth of Cornwall, since no property was available for purchase by newcomers at a reasonable price. The ownership of more land by the former officers did not socially or economically separate them from the rest of the population.

While some officers, including Samuel Anderson and Major James Gray, received substantial amounts of waterfront property, this did not make these former regiment commanders wealthier than the rest of the early Cornwall residents. They were not able to hire other men initially to build their houses and continually tend their grain fields and vegetable gardens. The harsh conditions of frontier life, lack of appropriate tools, and the area's remote location prevented the immediate development of a wealthy landowning class. All residents depended upon the help of their neighbors to build shelter, plant crops, and share supplies during bad harvests.

The settler's primary task was preparing his land for the next year's harvest. Male pioneers cleared, seeded, and harvested their acreage and crops by hand with a ship ax, as no oxen, horses, or machinery were available. With these primitive implements, the process of clearing the land was slow and arduous, with most families managing to clear about two-thirds of an acre after six months of work.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, settlers augmented their food supply with the ample fish and game in the area. They also set up a bartering system to exchange goods and services. Although many were experienced frontiersmen, the hardships they faced in Upper Canada were often extreme and insurmountable due to the area's isolation.<sup>14</sup> As M. A. Garland and J. J. Talman noted, "Life in the bush had a tendency to demoralize the settlers. The task of clearing his land and providing the necessities of life was a hard and monotonous one."<sup>15</sup> Building temporary housing was also difficult in this isolated location.

For shelter, loyalists constructed wood huts with the assistance of neighbors. William Catermole wrote, "With respect to new settlers, they always find their neighbors ready to assist them in putting up their houses."<sup>16</sup> The typical pioneer erected a shanty by placing round logs on top of each other to a height of seven to eight feet with an elm bark roof. The walls were mortared with mud and small sticks. Builders cut two small openings into

opposite walls for a window and a door. Settlers used blankets or wooden boards for doors and cut squares of oil paper to serve as windows. The floor was comprised of split logs or dirt. The only piece of furniture most loyalists brought with them was a bed. Tradesmen crafted all the other furniture, including tables and chairs, after arrival. The most unique feature of the early log homes was the large fireplace used for heating and cooking. Some of these were big enough to accommodate 6-foot long logs.<sup>17</sup> According to William Catermole, these primitive dwellings cost male settlers a total of £10 to £12 to complete.<sup>18</sup> Women spent most of their time in these shanties performing their domestic duties.

Loyalist women had to be hardy, strong, and adaptable to the simple and primitive living conditions in the Royal Townships. They, along with their children, performed many tasks usually carried out by men in other communities during planting and harvesting, including thrashing wheat and cutting wood. Women's primary responsibilities were cooking, cleaning, and childrearing. A typical dinner cooked by pioneer women included pork, cornmeal porridge, vegetables, with a wild strawberry pie for dessert. In the autumn, women made candles to provide artificial light for family members to read by during the winter months. The candles came in two varieties. The first, molded, was formed by pouring melted tallow into tin frames. The other, wicked, was made by repeatedly dipping pieces of yarn tied to a long stick into hot vats of tallow. Female settlers also produced the family clothing and woolens. They often gathered in small groups and processed wool and flax into cloth and woolen material. While one woman spun the wool on a wheel into yarn, another would weave it into cloth on a handloom. Housewives or tailors then cut and sewed this material into a variety of garments, including shirts, pants, and skirts.<sup>19</sup>

Settlers also held many bees to husk corn, sew quilts, prepare apples for drying, and construct barns, mills, and churches.<sup>20</sup> In her book *Roughing It in the Bush*, Susanna Moodie observed that "people in the woods, have a craze for giving and going to bees and run to them with as much eagerness as a peasant runs to a race."<sup>21</sup> The logging bee was the most common event held by farmers who wanted to strip their land of unwanted trees. All men within a 20-mile radius were invited and most brought their axes and oxen. Once the men arrived, someone was placed in charge of supervising the work. Initially, several men cut down the timber and dragged the trunks and branches to a clearing where another group of men stacked them into piles. A third team was charged with burning the logs and scooping the ashes into bins for processing into potash. Once the work was finished, the party began. While the men drank whiskey and cider, the women served food and the young people danced and socialized. Bees often involved all ranks and nationalities of society. Thomas Need, a saw mill operator in Victoria County, described

the raising of his facility in 1834 in the following way: "They assembled in great force and all worked together in great harmony and good will not withstanding their different stations in life."<sup>22</sup> These gatherings exhibited the lack of aristocracy in the rural loyalist settlement along the St. Lawrence River and residents' disregard for individuals' former social standing or lineage.

In 1812 the majority of Cornwall's male inhabitants were self-sufficient out of necessity and still clearing land and plowing soil with primitive tools. The harshness and isolation of frontier living prevented the development of an aristocracy and, instead, united all members of the community in a struggle for survival. Early loyalists, regardless of the amount of land they owned, depended upon the help of their neighbors to clear land, build homes, and share supplies and food during times of poor harvests. According to Edwin Guillet, "The life of pioneer settlers in Canada was one of hardship, but the difficulty under which they lived was to some extent relieved by cooperation."<sup>23</sup> These circumstances were similar to those of their American neighbors in Massena at that time. As Gerald Craig indicated, "In many aspects, life of the Upper Canada farmer differed little from that of the farmers on many another North American frontier."<sup>24</sup> The War of 1812, however, disrupted town life for several years.

The War of 1812 was a culmination of post-revolutionary tensions between Britain and the United States. President James Madison feared Canada as a growing military threat. He also resented British interference with the American settlement of its newly acquired western land and its restriction of neutral trade by capturing American merchant ships. Governor General James Craig of Canada renewed military assistance to Native Americans in the Ohio River Valley, hoping that the Indians could defend their territory and continue to trade with the British. During the Napoleonic Wars, Britain began seizing American cargo ships, including the *Essex*, which were carrying sugar and molasses from the West Indies to France.<sup>25</sup> This new British naval blockade threatened the profits of American merchants and revived anti-British sentiments. Attacking Canada seemed the only way to end British interference. For nearly three decades, Cornwall residents had avoided becoming entangled in any national disputes. However, their border location and the military expertise of many male residents forced them into playing a central role in what many historians refer to as the second war for American independence.

While many loyalists exchanged their muskets for hoes for several years, they were never far from their military past. In 1787 British officials divided the territory of Upper Canada into counties for both electoral and military recruitment purposes. The leaders of each county organized their own militia, which were charged with local defense and the training of soldiers to serve in national units. Two former loyalist commanders, Captain Archibald Macdonnell and Major James Gray, assembled and led the Stormont

company. They recruited former regimental officers, including Jeremiah French and Joseph Anderson, to serve in their new units and promoted them to the next highest military rank.

In 1812 the Cornwall militiamen joined the national forces in defending the dominion's border against foreign invaders.<sup>26</sup> According to the *Old Boy's Reunion Brochure* in 1926, "Never forgetting their military experience, it needed but the declaration of war by the American Congress in 1812 to muster the pioneers and their sons round the old flag once more."<sup>27</sup> While the brunt of the war took place in the western part of Canada, near Chateaugay, guards manned several outposts above and below Cornwall protecting vulnerable land and water crossings. These troops were involved in several key battles, including the Battle of Crysler Farm. This victory prevented American soldiers from invading Montreal and maintained the national flow of munitions and food down the St. Lawrence River.<sup>28</sup>

Unlike Massena, whose residents who were not directly affected by the battles of the War of 1812, Cornwall served as a relay post for supplies, munitions, and troops, making it a prime target for American troops. Therefore, town residents were put on a constant state of alert. According to Lieutenant Colonel Ralph Bruyeres, who was sent to determine the vulnerability of the supply route between Prescott and Montreal in 1812, Cornwall was located in one of the hardest regions in Upper Canada to defend due to its close proximity to the American border.<sup>29</sup>

The invasion of the American troops eventually took place on November 11, 1813 at the commencement of the Battle of Crysler Farm. Three thousand five hundred ground troops under the command of Colonels Brown and Wilkinson descended the St. Lawrence on foot, accompanied by 300 others in boats. Brown's troops camped outside Cornwall from November 10 through 12, while Wilkinson's units marched on to Crysler Farm for a battle with British and militia troops. The British commanders claimed victory on November 12 with the loss of 93 Americans and another 237 wounded. When Brown's troops camping near Cornwall heard of the loss, they boarded their flotillas and headed for home. The victory at Crysler Farm prevented an occupation of Montreal and the possible destruction of Cornwall. After November 1813 no other attempt was made by American forces to invade Cornwall.<sup>30</sup>

The war's aftermath revealed that Cornwall was not as economically diversified as neighboring Kingston, where residents had begun developing transshipment and shipbuilding businesses and had constructed several small factories. While Cornwall's economy remained more agriculturally based, it still showed some signs of advancement. Farmers cleared larger amounts of land for pastures and partially converted their operations from wheat farming to dairying. Lumbering and potash production remained male inhabitants'



main sources of cash. Many families also moved out of log cabins into framed dwellings that cost between £1,000 and £2,500 depending on the style.<sup>31</sup> A traveler in 1832 reported seeing fewer log homes and more brick and frame structures in the St. Lawrence River settlements.<sup>32</sup> By 1845, Cornwall's population of more than 1,000 was housed in 321 framed, 45 brick, and 129 log homes.<sup>33</sup>

The original Cornwall settlers were predominantly regimental soldiers and their families who were compensated for their loyalty to the crown with substantial lots on the St. Lawrence River. While many were farmers in the old colonies, they reluctantly faced the overwhelming task of clearing vast, untamed forests. Many were no longer young and had already experienced frontier life in their former homes. Male inhabitants, regardless of the amount of land they owned, labored with primitive tools and faced starvation if their crops failed. Through cooperation, male settlers lessened some of the stresses associated with pioneer life in an isolated location. As David Rayside suggested, "The harshness of conditions in the countryside made social standing and size of land grant less significant."<sup>34</sup> Cornwall residents developed a unique community based on environmental factors and separation from their Canadian compatriots who populated the heartland. Therefore, the early lives of Cornwall residents paralleled the future development in New York more than those of other loyalist settlers in Upper Canada at the end of the eighteenth century. As Gerald Craig put it, "In many respects Upper Canada was an American community."<sup>35</sup> This extended even to religious practices.

During the first fifty years of settlement in Upper Canada, dedicated worshipers formed a broad spectrum of religious congregations whose governing bodies and services were greatly influenced by the congregational and democratic religious and political beliefs fostered in the former American colonies. According to S. D. Clark in *Church and Sect in Canada*, "The American connection was decisive in determining the form taken by religious organization in Canada during the early period of settlement."<sup>36</sup> Many worshipers saw religion as a stable institution and their faith as a way to deal with the harsh conditions and isolation of frontier living. Like the pioneers who settled the American West, the loyalists experienced starvation, financial uncertainty, and loneliness. They gained a new respect for individualism, self-sufficiency, and social equality. These values became a permanent aspect of Canadian religious ideology and were different than the basic Anglican teachings.

The first obstacle many Cornwall settlers faced was the lack of congregations to attend. While most were affiliated with the more structured faiths of Presbyterianism, Anglicanism, and Roman Catholicism, Cornwall families were left in charge of their own spiritual lives based on their isolated location. They were unsuccessful at recruiting full-time ministers and priests, as many members of the British clergy viewed Canada as an unsettled frontier and its



parishes as an undesirable assignment. Therefore, settlers started their own congregations and conducted their own services without the guidance of a minister. Lay readers not only presided over sporadic services, but also performed weddings and funerals. In *A Concise History of Christianity in Canada*, Terence Murphy indicated that “local initiatives of this kind were crucial to the early development of religious institutions.”<sup>37</sup>

The Presbyterians were the most prominent faith in the area from the early days of settlement and traditionally one of the most nationally organized religions. The Cornwall congregants constructed the town’s first public building on Pitt Street, which was also used as a barracks and courthouse. They were also initially put under the watchful eye of ordained minister, John Bethune, who also ministered to worshipers in the surrounding settlements. This was an attempt by British North American Presbyterian officials to establish a traditional church organization overseen by a system of courts, synods, and general assemblies. But frontier life altered the deference of local worshipers to the authority of church leaders as it had in the former American colonies. While Cornwall Presbyterians still accepted the Book of Common Prayer and stressed ceremony and Christian discipline, they were determined to retain their ability to excommunicate members and to ordain their own minister. Bethune remained the only Presbyterian clergyman in Upper Canada for several decades and preached to followers in Cornwall for twenty-eight years until his death in 1812.<sup>38</sup>

Cornwall Presbyterians illustrated their independence from national rulers by hiring Joseph Johnston in 1817 to succeed Bethune. He had no official religious training or standing in the Church of Scotland. However, following five years without a leader, members of the Cornwall congregation invited him to conduct services anyway. In 1818 Johnston took orders in the Presbyterian church over the objection of national church leaders.<sup>39</sup> Soon after his appointment, Johnston spearheaded a crusade to raise cash for the construction of a new white frame church to replace the original log building. He secured a large amount of financial support from Presbyterians in Cornwall, Montreal, and Quebec, and managed to erect the frame of the church. Church elders, who thought Johnston’s architectural design was too audacious, halted construction soon after its commencement. Having lost the confidence of his flock, Johnston accepted a post at the Presbyterian church in nearby Osnabruck in 1823.<sup>40</sup>

In 1827 the 113-member Cornwall congregation hired its first full-time minister, Hugh Urquhart, who created a permanent local governing body and educational system. This reflected a return of the congregation to a more traditional Presbyterian structure and the reestablishment of elite control over worshipers. In July 1827 eight elders—Archibald McLean, James Pringle, Adam and William Johnston, John Cline, Martin McMartin, John Clesley,

and James Craig—were elected and developed a Kirk Session to manage church affairs. Urquhart also organized a Sunday School to educate the young members of the congregation on the fundamentals of the faith, in the hopes of fostering lifelong church affiliation. The long-term mechanisms he established guaranteed the stability and expansion of the Presbyterian faith in the area.<sup>41</sup> Terence Murphy suggested, “In the 1830s, church leaders formed church committees and started church schools as a means of making religion an integral part of people’s lives.<sup>42</sup> By 1839 there were 961 Presbyterians worshipping at St. John’s.<sup>43</sup>

The original Catholics who settled in Cornwall also did not implement the traditional parish structure headed by a priest. Instead, based on their isolated location, Francis McCarthy, Daniel McGuire, John Luney, and Captain John MacDonnell adopted a congregational method of organization also known as trusteeism. According to Sidney Ahlstrom, prior to 1791 there were few Catholic priests in North America. Therefore, Catholics independently established and maintained their own parishes. He indicated, “In a time when funds were lacking and when episcopal authority was weak or non-existent, trusteeism was a way of providing a church for people who wanted one.”<sup>44</sup> Initially, Cornwall settlers traveled to St. Andrew’s to worship in a modest log chapel constructed by Captain John MacDonnell, one of the most devout Catholics in the settlements. In 1806 the twenty-three Cornwall Catholic families began holding services in the Cornwall courthouse or private residences. Two decades later, Cornwall Catholics led by Donald Macdonnell, the town’s longtime sheriff, and John Loney, financed the commencement of construction of St. Columban’s on Fourth and Pitt Street. The Cornwall congregation remained a mission church of St. Andrew’s until the completion of St. Columban’s in 1834. In 1835, only one year after St. Columban’s was dedicated, parish leaders recorded seventy-eight baptisms, eight marriages, and six burials. As local historian John Harkness noted, “St. Columban’s Parish had finally taken root in a community that had grown to over 1,000 citizens.<sup>45</sup>

Adherents to the Church of England or Anglicans were also among Cornwall’s founding fathers. Like their Presbyterian and Catholic counterparts, Anglicans periodically held services in the absence of an ordained minister. Initially, the Anglican bishops in Upper Canada lacked the number of clergy required to minister to the scattered population in the new settlements. Therefore, from 1784 to 1787, Anglican residents of Royal Township #2 were ministered to annually by Reverend John Stuart, the only Anglican clergyman west of Montreal. The approximately 100 Anglicans in Cornwall hired their first full-time minister, John Bryan, in 1787 and established the first weekly Anglican services in the royal townships. However, two years later he fled to the United States to avoid public censure. Cornwall residents later discovered that Bryan was an impostor who had forged his religious credentials.<sup>46</sup> Bryan’s

inadequacies support Terence Murphy's argument that prior to 1815 with the shortage of qualified clergy, British denominational leaders sent their problematic ministers to Canada.<sup>47</sup> From 1789 to 1801, the Anglicans were again without a leader, but continued to hold prayer meetings.<sup>48</sup>

The Reverend John Strachan was the preacher who revived the Cornwall Anglican congregation and built it into a stable institution. Upon his arrival in the township in 1803, he found the church building in shambles and many parishioners attending services of other denominations.<sup>49</sup> Other Canadian ministers had complained that their parishioners infrequently attended services, were not captive audiences, and had little respect for the Sabbath.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, Strachan's primary tasks were to raise funds for a new church, to reclaim the allegiance of many of the departed faithful, and to create a permanent church administration. He solicited £633 in private donations, government funds, and pew rents for the construction of a framed church. In 1806 builders completed the new Trinity Church, and male parishioners elected their first vestry composed of Joseph and Samuel Anderson and Jeremiah French to oversee church business. Six years later Strachan left the 850 members of the parish under the successive guidance of William Baldwyn, Salter Mountain, and George Archbold. In the next several decades, parish leaders created a Sunday School, enlarged the vestry, and established a church-sponsored school. Therefore, Strachan's administrative, spiritual, and educational practices were continued and improved by his successors. By 1839, with 891 members, the Anglicans were challenging the Presbyterians and Catholics for majority status among Cornwall worshipers and were soon joined by the Methodists.<sup>51</sup>

Methodism appealed to many Cornwall residents based on its simple doctrines and organization and its evangelical traveling preachers. John Wesley, the faith's creator, stressed the role of the individual in seeking salvation and preached that perfection was available to those who desired it with the aid of the Holy Spirit. While a superintendent oversaw and defined the circuits that traveling preachers serviced, it was the weekly class meetings that were the foundation of Methodism. Occasional camp meetings, held by two or more ministers, also served as a source of group consciousness based on shared spiritual values. These planned gatherings made settlers feel less isolated and part of a community. The sermons ministers preached spoke of attributes that were central to settlers' lives including self-sufficiency, social equality, and individualism. The conversion experience itself provided worshipers with a release from the anxiety and frustration associated with frontier life.<sup>52</sup> The social and emotional content of Methodism adapted well to frontier life.

From 1784 to 1790 Cornwall Methodists independently sustained their faith. Samuel Empury organized prayer meetings at his home and scheduled periodic services with traveling ministers. The weekly gatherings strengthened

the faith of attendees through prayer, joint study, and testimony. In 1790 Reverend William Losee from the New York Methodist Association assessed the number of Methodists in Canada and outlined two preaching circuits for ministers. The first extended to the west of Montreal and covered Prince Edward Island, while the other encompassed the eastern portion of Upper Canada and ended at Cornwall. American itinerant preachers visited Cornwall Methodists sporadically until the War of 1812, when their border crossings were restricted by national officials. On Christmas Day 1817, Reverend Henry Pope, a representative from the Methodist Church of the United States, arrived in Cornwall and reopened the old circuits abandoned during the war. Six years later, a camp meeting organized by Reverend William H. William resulted in many converts. Subsequently, Cornwall Methodists took steps to establish a permanent congregation. Local worshipers instituted a fund drive to raise cash for the construction of a church, while church leaders formed a search committee charged with recruiting a permanent minister. In 1839, there were 160 registered Cornwall Methodists.<sup>53</sup>

While the majority of Cornwall residents belonged to three religions that were traditionally hierarchically structured and administered—Catholicism, Anglicanism, and Protestantism—their isolated location and experiences in the former American colonies encouraged them to establish congregational organizations. In the absence of ministers, Cornwall residents took charge of their spiritual lives. They were successful at independently conducting meetings and saw no need to relinquish any control over church affairs to preachers or vestry members once they were hired or elected. Methodist ministers also built a strong congregation in Cornwall, as their style and beliefs complemented frontier living. The itinerant preachers' message of social equality raised the self-confidence of members of the lower classes and fueled their desire to overthrow the traditional social and political authority of the elite. The congregational method of governing churches had also strengthened the common citizens' willingness to criticize political officials and the government structure. In Cornwall, men led by Patrick McNiff challenged the authority of the former regimental commanders and created a contentious political atmosphere. As Sydney Ahlstrom stated, "A new epoch in the history of religious freedom had opened a new realm of political participation."<sup>54</sup>

The attempt to establish an organized governing structure in Cornwall exposed the differing political beliefs of the former military commanders and common citizens. Many Cornwall settlers cherished the participatory form of government they had established in the former colonies and wanted the same mechanisms developed in Upper Canada.<sup>55</sup> However, the former regimental commanders wanted to maintain their arbitrary rule. Beginning in 1784, Cornwall was ruled like a regimental camp. Former military leaders, including Sir John Johnson, Major John Gray, and Captain Alexander Macdonnell,

supervised the allotment of land, settled grievances and disputes, and distributed government-sanctioned supplies. These revolutionary heroes also served as magistrates in the early court sessions. However, many of the loyalists resented the power assumed by former military leaders whose homes they had helped build and whose land they had cleared. As they were equal economically, they felt they should be on the same footing in the political arena. According to political historian Edgar McInnis, this distrust of military leaders and a desire of settlers with an American background for a system of representative government caused this informal governing system based on deference to fail.<sup>56</sup> Common citizens and regimental soldiers also clashed over the establishment of a permanent town government.

National government officials, Sir Guy Carleton, the head of the Canadian government and Stephen DeLancy, the inspector of the loyalists, first attempted to formalize the structure of town governments by ordering settlers of the royal townships to hold town meetings in 1787. The two leaders sent a letter describing the proper procedure for executing a town meeting and the election of town representatives. In Cornwall a conflict arose between former military leaders, including Captain Samuel Anderson and local activists led by Patrick McNiff, over who should conduct the meetings and be eligible for election as town delegates. Both Anderson and McNiff supporters campaigned for their candidates and distributed outlines of the inaugural meeting's agenda. When the gathering was held on July 12, 1787, Samuel Anderson, the current town magistrate, presided over the proceedings. Anderson and his counterparts hoped that the election of officials would take place without incident. However, McNiff and his supporters stood up and began to shout about the dictatorial power of the military leaders, calling for their removal and murder. Anderson and his fellow officers left in response to this verbal abuse. The citizens who remained at the meeting elected ten representatives, including McNiff, William Impey, Jonas Wood, and Donald McDonnal. After the votes were cast, the meeting was adjourned, and McNiff sent a list of the new officials to Sir Carleton.<sup>57</sup> However, Anderson and the other regiment commanders challenged the election results in a letter sent to Sir Carleton and De Lancy. In response to the controversy, Sir Carleton set aside the idea of locally appointed officials administering town affairs and instead created a regional and national political structure that controlled town affairs from above.<sup>58</sup>

In 1788 Sir Carleton established a provincial government headed by a lieutenant governor and supported by a popularly elected legislative assembly and a parliamentary appointed council. The main goal of the new provincial government created by Lord Dorchester was to keep popular movements and protests like those staged by McNiff in check by strengthening the authority of the government. During the nineteenth century, these officials collectively authored and implemented all provincial public policy.<sup>59</sup> The fundamental

element of the new governmental system was the Court of General Quarter Sessions. Members were charged with managing the legal and financial affairs of four newly designated districts in western Quebec.

Until the 1830s members of the Quarter Session, who met biannually in each district, had jurisdiction over all criminal matters and town administrative duties and were presided over by six magistrates. Session officials also approved funds for road construction, collected taxes, and appointed various town officials and committees to perform certain daily municipal duties or complete special projects. Typical criminal cases handled by the sessions were petit larceny and the selling of spirits, which carried a light sentence of several lashings or a small monetary fine. While the names of many of the magistrates were recorded, transcripts describing the specific actions of the early sessions do not exist.<sup>60</sup>

The democratic political beliefs held by many Cornwall residents were different from those cherished by the settlers of Alexandria, Ontario, who were governed by a ruling aristocracy composed of former military officers and clerics. David Rayside noted that residents in Alexandria realized that the only way that their community would survive was if the majority of male settlers relinquished their political power to these upper-class men.<sup>61</sup> The initial protests of Patrick McNiff illustrated the support of the majority of Cornwall male citizens for the development of a participatory and egalitarian political system. The loyalists wanted a local government administered by elected officials who were responsible for completing municipal infrastructure projects and mediating financial disputes. Therefore, the attempt by British officials and Church of England leaders to stop American ideals from surfacing in the political arena initially failed.<sup>62</sup> In reality according to Gerald Craig, "The province is still overwhelmingly American in origin. The tone of communities is as republican and Yankee as across the river."<sup>63</sup> The town's geographic isolation and financial hardship affected Cornwall inhabitants regardless of their lineage or previous military rank and made the values of the early loyalists more similar to those of their neighbors in Massena.

## Massena

New York State officials encouraged the settlement of Massena, New York following the American Revolution to prevent the British from expanding their present territory. The region was first discovered by Jacques Cartier on his exploration of northern waterways in 1536. Following the Revolutionary War, New York State officials purchased land in the last unsettled part of the state from the Seven Nations of Canada.<sup>64</sup> The New York State legislature subsequently offered land grants to revolutionary soldiers and sold the remaining acreage at public auction. Alexander Macomb, a land speculator and

adventurer, purchased 3,670,715 acres in 1787, including the present location of Massena, and divided the property into ten townships. Macomb had his land surveyed and sold plots to the highest bidder.<sup>65</sup>

The first permanent Massena settlers were predominantly young men and their families from nearby Vermont and New England searching for available land on the newly opened frontier. As Leonard Prince indicated, "Word of cheap land along the northern border of New York State filtered into New England. Young men were eager to move westward and northward or wherever they could secure cheap land."<sup>66</sup> Most of the area was covered by dense forest, occupied by roaming Indians, and characterized by explorers as having a rugged and severe landscape.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, during the first decades of settlement, life was filled with hardship and disease and conflicts with the Indians over property boundaries. These unpleasant conditions killed off entire families and influenced others to leave the region.<sup>68</sup> However, the land disputes were eventually resolved through treaties between the St. Regis Indians and the state government. Remaining settlers achieved self-sufficiency and developed social and political institutions among a widespread and often transient population.

Massena lies on the far or distant periphery of New York State. Originally comprising 30,671 acres, Massena was the last unsettled part of the state at the end of eighteenth century. The only access to the region was via poorly marked trails. Therefore, the original settlers arrived with all their personal belongings and necessary supplies, as they anticipated never returning to their old homesteads. The waterways became the main local and international transportation routes traveled by passenger boat and barge captains. Settlers also constructed mills to produce building materials and grind wheat and corn into meal and flour. Therefore, Massena was characterized by long-time local residents as a self-reliant small town with a shifting population. It was initially the fertile land, potential waterpower, and accessible timber that made Massena an attractive area for settlement.

Geologists considered Massena's climate and soil as being favorable for certain types of crop cultivation. The 150-day growing season was similar to the average in the central part of the state. The annual rainfall of 29.1 inches provided an ample water supply for most crops, while the nearby rivers provided alternative irrigation during times of drought.<sup>69</sup> Most soil in Massena was clay loam, which was rich in nutrients and could support a variety of vegetation. The most fertile land was along the riverbanks where the recession of water had left abundant mineral deposits. Until the 1820s, wheat was the staple crop harvested to feed livestock, including sheep and poultry, while potatoes and corn were planted for human consumption. However, the clearing of land by male settlers exposed fertile soil for growing hay for dairy cattle.



Many of the early settlers were also lumbermen. The dense forests of pine that originally surrounded the town were excellent sources of shipbuilding timber. Manufacturers in Montreal, a nearby shipbuilding center, provided a ready market for the processed wood. Spars ranging from 80 to 110 feet were floated down the river to other areas of Quebec for use in furniture manufacturing. In 1810 it was estimated that \$60,000 worth of timber was rafted to Canadian cities annually by local lumbermen.<sup>70</sup> Locally, the founding fathers used the wood to build log cabins and construct churches and bridges. The lumbering business ebbed with the progress of settlement around 1828. Many residents turned to farming or business ownership as a way to earn a living. While the land along the St. Lawrence River was well-suited for farming, it was the swift current of the area's waterways and timber that attracted the initial pioneers.

Amable Foucher was the first individual to reside in the previously unsettled region of New York State, now known as Massena. In 1792 the French-Canadian entrepreneur left his hometown of Old Chateaugay near Montreal and traveled across the U.S.–Canadian border in search of a location for a sawmill. He leased land from the St. Regis Indians for \$200 per year and built a dam and a sawmill on the Grasse River, where he processed lumber for shipbuilding. Foucher recruited workers and their families from Canada, including Francois Boutte, Jean Deloge, and Joseph Dubois, whom he housed in a log cabin settlement bordering the mill.<sup>71</sup> For almost a decade, Foucher's cluster of cabins and a mill were the only settlement and manufacturing operation in the area. Foucher operated his mill until 1808 when New York State officials bought the property and, in turn, sold it to Lemuel Haskell.<sup>72</sup> Haskell was among the many migrants who came to Massena in search of cheap land. He was joined by one of Foucher's workers, Antoine Lamping, who was one of the few lumbermen to make the transition from transient worker to permanent resident and was involved in gaining a town charter.

The official founding of Massena, New York was related to the establishment of St. Lawrence County in 1802.<sup>73</sup> Residents of the original ten townships wanted a county seat closer than Plattsburgh in Clinton County to conduct legal and financial transactions.<sup>74</sup> With more than 100 miles of rough trails and dense forest between some of the townships and the original administrative center, male residents found it difficult to pay taxes and attend court sessions. Therefore, in 1802, 156 men including Anthony Lamping, Amos Lay, and William Polley, signed a legislative petition requesting that a county be organized by New York State lawmakers along the St. Lawrence River.<sup>75</sup> On March 3, 1802, the New York State Legislature designated St. Lawrence County as the state's thirty-first county. The initial structure of the county consisted of four townships: Lisbon, Oswegatchie, Madrid, the new town of Massena, and a county seat located in nearby Ogdensburg.<sup>76</sup> Massena's iso-

lated location forced each family to build its own house and raise all necessary food for people and livestock. Similar to their Cornwall counterparts, Massena pioneers' selection of land, development of homesteads, and initial crop selection followed a standard pattern referred to by agricultural historians Percy Bidwell and John Falconer as the "Yankee system."<sup>77</sup>

Daniel Robinson from Shrewsbury, Vermont was the most well-known example of an early Massena settler. In the fall of 1802, Robinson, in his early twenties, visited several areas in northern New York and Canada searching for a location for his new family farm. Before being directed to the fertile land in Massena by the St. Regis Indians, he visited Ogdensburg, New York and Cornwall, Ontario and found nothing suitable. When Robinson arrived in Massena, he selected a plot on the Grasse River and camped there for several days before returning to Vermont. He then journeyed to Utica to legalize his purchase of 1,400 acres at \$3.00 an acre.<sup>78</sup>

In March 1803 Robinson returned to his newly acquired property with two men and two oxen, and cleared four acres of land by cutting down trees and burning the logs and the underbrush. Next, he planted corn and wheat for the year's harvest, constructed a log cabin, and erected fences around his property to keep out Indians and wild animals.<sup>79</sup> Robinson's first year progress of deforesting four acres was more than the national pioneer average of one to three acres per year. According to agricultural experts, it usually took a farmer four to five years to reach a level where he had cleared enough land to harvest adequate food and build appropriate shelter for his family.<sup>80</sup> In February 1804 Robinson traveled to Vermont and married 16-year-old Esther Kilbourne, whom he brought to his new home in Massena, along with his sister and brother-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Elisha Denison, who had purchased a plot a mile away.<sup>81</sup>

The initial housing Massena's male settlers constructed was very primitive and offered little privacy to family members. Most log huts consisted of a single room, where family members ate and slept and where livestock was often sheltered in the winter. A first-hand description of a couple's first house in the nearby town of Hopkinton indicated, "The house consisted of one room in which they all slept and did all the work. Every night they led the cow in and tied her in the corner."<sup>82</sup> Men collectively constructed these shanties with wooden poles held together by notches on each end. They filled the gaps between the logs with clay, mud, and straw. The roof was composed of bark and split boards. Families heated their houses with a primitive fireplace comprised of a stack of stones piled in a circle in the center of the floor. Most log huts also had at least one window and a door cut in the wall. Wives often covered the former with a wooden shingle or piece of oil paper to keep the draft out. Men blocked the latter with heavy wooden doors fastened from inside with a metal bar at night. Storage areas were also built to hold grain and vegetables during the winter months, as

most of the cabins were assembled without cellars.<sup>83</sup> According to a traveler in the late eighteenth century, "In such dark, dirty, and dismal habitations, the pioneer family lived for at least 10 to 15 years and often longer."<sup>84</sup>

In their first spring in Massena, the male settlers, similar to Cornwall loyalists twenty years earlier, cleared and plowed more fields for crop cultivation and deforested other areas to serve as pastures for horses, cows, and sheep. According to Bidwell and Falconer, "The early farm equipment was awkward, heavy, and poorly designed, which made land clearing and crop cultivation hard and tedious."<sup>85</sup> Franklin Benjamin Hough described one settler's efforts to clear his land. "In 1800 Daniel Harrington having commenced a small improvement the fall before, which consisted of a slight clearing on the bank of the river, where he sowed less than an acre of land to wheat; and having no team to assist him, he harrowed the grain with a hand rake."<sup>86</sup> Men also slaughtered livestock, which provided a major part of their diet, and supplied ingredients for medicinal, household, and building products. The settlers made calves' foot jelly for the treatment of ulcers and other skin irritations, tanned hides for boots and door hinges, processed tallow for candles, and stuffed pillows and bedding with goose feathers. As most Massena farmers had no steady income, local residents set up a bartering system with neighbors and Cornwall residents to exchange labor and goods. In return for assisting a neighbor in harvesting crops or building a new barn, local residents received a piece of livestock or assistance during the next year's haying season.

While the men were responsible for crop cultivation, construction of buildings, and managing financial matters, Massena women were in charge of the upkeep of the log cabins. According to Phoebe Orvis, a longtime resident of Hopkinton, her main domestic duties included childcare, cleaning, cooking, sewing, and washing and ironing the family's clothing.<sup>87</sup> Orvis also described in her diary how women gathered in small groups to weave flax into linen. The cloth was then sewn into garments for all members of the family. Sheep's wool was also carded, washed, and spun into yarn for sweaters and blankets. Female settlers produced all of their families' clothing and bedding. Bidwell and Falconer noted, "From his head to his feet, the farmer stood in vestment produced on his own farm."<sup>88</sup> However, a female inhabitant's most important daily duty was the preparation and presentation of the evening family meal. A common dinner consisted of hot or cold bean porridge, a bowl of vegetables, and some brown bread. The evening meal was the one time of the day when family members gathered around the table to eat and pray. Socially, women also organized and supplied food for various community gatherings. As Eleanor Dumas summed up, "Parties and dancing went hand and hand with barn raising, housewarmings and the long winter evenings when families could get together."<sup>89</sup> Massena settlers lived undisturbed in their isolated location for almost a decade.

Upon the outbreak of the War of 1812, Massena residents realized that their geographical location did not entirely isolate them from national conflicts. Regardless of their decade-long peaceful coexistence, many residents, including Robinson, feared raids or attacks by Indians or the British. Massena and the U.S.–Canadian border were guarded by 250 militiamen. However, town life was never really altered by the border conflict since no battle ever took place near Massena. The only local incident was the burning of the troops' barracks in September 1813 by a unit of 300 Canadian militiamen under the command of Major Joseph Anderson, who were stationed across the St. Lawrence River in Cornwall. As proof of their accomplishment, the militia commanders took several prisoners back with them to Cornwall and sank numerous boats anchored on the river. However, the American soldiers were released within a few days and no other invasion occurred.<sup>90</sup> While the War of 1812 had few ill-effects on Massena, its border location, like Cornwall's, made it susceptible to foreign invasion.

After the war, Massena residents moved out of log cabins and into framed homes. The new houses were grander than the first, with more rooms, elaborate entrances, and landscaped grounds often adorned with peacocks. In 1816 Montreal bricklayers built the first brick house in the area for Daniel Robinson with imported materials from Vermont. Many of Robinson's neighbors also constructed new homes out of more durable material.<sup>91</sup> From 1825 to 1833 Captain John Haskell, Benjamin Phillips, and John Belfield Andrews each built stone houses on Andrews, Phillips, and Tamarack Streets. Day laborers under the supervision of a foreman completed these homes in two years. Workmen chiseled the 10-inch-thick stone for the exterior walls from the bed of the Grasse River and dragged the slabs to each site with oxen. They then mortared the 30-inch walls with lime cured on-site in kilns. The houses also had wooden porches, cellars, four fireplaces, and 9-foot ceilings. A heavy front door opened into a central hallway with a large staircase.<sup>92</sup>

During the first decade of Massena, the life of early settlers was akin to that of Cornwall residents two decades earlier because of their isolated location. Men and women became self-sufficient, raised children, and built a small community based on mutual values and beliefs. Citizens cooperatively built homes, cleared land, and harvested crops. All male settlers faced the same struggles related to farming and crop cultivation in a previously unpopulated area, regardless of the amount of land they owned. As Franklin Benjamin Hough concluded, "If anyone needed a helping hand, his desire need but be announced to be heeded."<sup>93</sup> Massena settlers also initially established religious congregations as a means of creating shared spiritual experiences among a scattered population. Settlers brought with them religious beliefs and ideas about government that reflected their New England heritage and, therefore, created institutions that embodied these common values. Besides praying daily for good

harvests and health, the male residents saw religion as a way to instill moral behavior in their children and control the actions of their fellow citizens.

The religious experience of Massena residents mirrored that of their Cornwall neighbors as they too organized congregational and voluntary associations. Their shared heritage and isolated locations challenged individuals on both sides of the border who wanted to practice their faith to independently conduct meetings and to develop spiritual organizations in the absence of traditional clergy. Between 1800 and 1840 Massena settlers met weekly for prayer services and were visited periodically by traveling preachers. These loosely organized congregations were the town's central social and cultural organizations. As Sydney Ahlstrom indicated, "To a lonely, scattered people, they brought vital fellowship of an intimate personal concern."<sup>94</sup> While loyalists created Presbyterian, Church of England, and Catholic congregations, the founding fathers of Massena adhered to the more sectarian and evangelical faiths of Congregationalism and Methodism. However, regardless of their denominational differences, religious worshipers on both sides of the border remained in charge of their own spiritual lives and the administration of their churches.

The Congregational Church was considered by historians as the first denomination formed in Massena and exemplified the establishment of a church based on the New England Puritan model.<sup>95</sup> Congregationalism was a mutation of the fundamental beliefs and practices of Puritanism. When the Puritan movement died, the evangelicalistic spirit within it was reborn in Congregationalism. The church had gained members after the American Revolution because of the appeal of its system of self-government to citizens who had just fought for political independence. The Congregationalists formed churches whose members determined who were saints, who should be disciplined, and who should be ordained as ministers. They suggested that the inhabitants of new settlements follow a typical pattern of development. Initially pioneers should form a church comprised of the town's visible saints. These men and women then added to their congregations by interviewing those who could give credible accounts of their conversion experience. Once a significant number of worshipers had been identified and a church organized, funds were raised to erect a meetinghouse. This building often then served as a location for the town's other civic and political gatherings.

Congregational missionaries from Vermont and Massachusetts accompanied settlers to their new homesteads in Massena and assisted them in establishing proper worshiping and living habits. Early congregation members were described by a church historian in a 1946 brochure as "resourceful, accustomed to hardship, generally God-fearing, and outspoken."<sup>96</sup> The original church pledge required the male head of a household to read the scriptures daily with his family, pray every morning and evening, and never allow dancing, excessive drinking, or gambling to occur in his presence.<sup>97</sup> As historian Mary Ryan indicated, it was "the duty of parents to educate and sanc-