

**BRITISH NORTH AMERICANS (CANADIANS) IN THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR by Tom Brooks Camp Chase Gazette, June 1991**

Though British North Americans served in the Union and Confederate forces in considerable numbers, there is no general agreement among historians as to how many so served. In 1860 the combined populations of the six British North American colonies or provinces, was estimated at somewhat more than three million people. The 1860 United States census listed 249,970 British North Americans as residing in the 'great republic', the fourth largest foreign born ethnic group. Ninety per cent of these British North Americans dwelled in states that subsequently adhered to the Union. It was from these two groups, those living in the 'colonies' who crossed the border to enlist, and those already domiciled in the United States, that British North American recruits to Mr. Lincoln's army came. Four of these recruits attained the general's rank in the Union army; Henry Benham, Jacob Cox, John Farhnsworth and John McNeil. At least one British North American woman served in the ranks. Sarah Emma Edmonds, from New Brunswick, enlisted in the 2nd Michigan Infantry, under the alias 'Franklin Thompson.' Her true identity, and sex, did not become known to her comrades until the regimental reunion of 1884. Benjamin Apthorp Gould, in an 1869 study of some 230,267 Union enlistments, counted 19,985 British North Americans among them. Using calculated ratios, and applying said ratios to the entire body of Union enlistments, he arrived at a figure of 53,532 British North Americans in the Federal service. Gould's methodology has been criticized, however, his figure remains among the few with a basis in fact. Following the Civil War, but prior to Gould's study, the figure of 40,000 was popularized by Canada's first Prime Minister, Sir John A. McDonald. This figure appears to have been appropriated from a eulogy given by Abbe Hercule Beauday, in St. Constant, Quebec in February 1865. The source of this number has never been determined. During a public address in Detroit in 1865 the prominent Nova Scotian, Joseph Howe, used a figure of 50,000 when speaking of the British North American contribution to the Union victory. The source of this statistic remains a mystery. Howe's son Frederick was among those who answered the call. Frederick Howe was severely wounded while serving with Sheridan's cavalry. In 1875 a cursory analysis of 501,068 men examined by enrollment boards during the war found 21,645 British North Americans among them. In 1896, the US Record and Pension Office released the results of an incomplete study. Of the 343,754 drafted men, recruits and substitutes surveyed, 15,507 were found to be British North American by birth. J.K. Knowlton, late of the 189th New York Infantry and adjutant of G.A.R. Post 532 (Toronto) during an interview in 1914 quotes a figure of 64,000 in the Union forces, though how this number was arrived at is not known. Fred Landan, a well respected historian used an undocumented figure of 48,000 in an article written in 1920. William Fox, in his exhaustive study, 'Regimental Losses in the American Civil War 1861-1865',

uses an estimate of 50,000, a number no doubt influenced by Gould's work. British North American blacks volunteered for service in Northern units, but their total number is not known. Anderson Abbott, a graduate of the University of Toronto, was one of only eight black doctors in the Union Army. Forty Negroes from Elgin (Ontario) joined the first black regiment raised in Michigan, and seventy coloureds from Buxton (Ontario), among them 16 year old H.R. Williams, likewise crossed the border to enlist. Massachusetts coloured regiments were not without black British North American soldiers. Two white men from Wolverton (Ontario), Joseph Fitzgerald and Alonzo Wolverton, served as officers in the 9th U.S. Coloured (Heavy) artillery. Arthur Rankin, a politician from Windsor (Ontario), recruited 683 men into a cavalry regiment which crossed the border at Detroit in the autumn of 1861, and became the 1st Michigan Lancers. For diplomatic reasons, the unit was disbanded in March 1862, with most of the men dispersing to other Michigan regiments. At least sixteen of their number joined company 'K', 1st Michigan Sharpshooters, several went to the 16th Michigan Infantry. Joshua Aldrich joined the 8th Michigan Infantry, and Gersham Mattoon enlisted in company 'E', 6th Michigan Cavalry. Mattoon was wounded at Hagerstown, Maryland on July 9, 1863. American draft-dodgers began appearing in the 'colonies' soon after the passing of the first Federal draft law in August 1862. They were quickly followed by enterprising 'Yankees' who eagerly, and profitably, sought British North American recruits, and substitutes. Their illegal activity, referred to as 'crimping', was a constant irritation to the colonial authorities. Such was the enticement of the bounty that in Quebec it was deemed necessary to warn, from the sanctity of the pulpit, of the evils of enlisting in the Union Army. It is thought that no less than 10,000 Nova Scotians served in the war, among them Dr. Brown Gesner, surgeon to the 10th New York Infantry. Alexander Dechman and M.K. Simons, both Nova Scotians, served in the 19th Texas Cavalry. In August 1865, Jock Fleming of Halifax had a brief moment of glory as the pilot of the C.S.S. Tallahassee. His single exploit is still a matter of admiration amongst pilots in the Bedford Basin. The number of British North Americans in the Confederate ranks can only be remotely guessed. Prior to the war, Halifax born Thomas J. Devine was a district judge in Texas. He served as the Confederate commissioner to Mexico. John Orr served as the regimental adjutant for the 6th Louisiana infantry, while John Tolen and William St. Clair Smith enlisted as privates in company 'B' of that regiment. George Osborn Elms did likewise in company 'A' of the 28th Louisiana Infantry. E.A. McKenney joined company 'C', 6th Texas Cavalry, while George A. Ellsworth, a renowned telegrapher, served with General John Hunt Morgan. William Robinson, a West Point graduate, was colonel of the 2nd North Carolina Cavalry. Jonathan Ryan of Toronto was wounded at the battle of Corinth, while serving as an officer in the 2nd Arkansas Cavalry. In the spring of 1865, he was held incommunicado for several months by the government in Washington while persons unknown endeavored to implicate him in the 'Lincoln

assassination conspiracy'. To quote one noted authority, Ella Lonn: 'The claim has been made by Canadians (to D.W. Pipes of the Washington (La.) Artillery) that they had 40,000 in the confederate ranks (an obvious confusion with McDonald's 40,000 in the Union ranks). In the opinion of the writer (Ella Lonn) that is probably a gross exaggeration, but that there were some thousands she will readily concede.' According to Lonn, "It was rare in the Mississippi companies not to find at least one Irishman or Canadian." British North Americans rode with Scott's Louisiana Cavalry, with Morgan, with Mosby, and with Forrest. In Kincardine (Ontario) stands a monument to Dr. Solomon Secord, surgeon to the 20th Georgia infantry. He was captured at Gettysburg. The Secord name, of War of 1812 fame, is surely one of the most recognizable of 'Canadian' names. It may never be known how many British North Americans died in the war. If an average mortality rate is assumed, then something in the neighborhood of 5,000 British North Americans lie beneath Southern soil. Joseph-Caleb Paradise was killed leading a charge at the battle of Rappahannock Station. He was only twenty-one years old. Eighteen year old Dennis Buckley of Company 'G', 136th New York Infantry, earned a posthumous Congressional Medal of Honor at Peach Tree Creek, Georgia on July 20, 1865, for capturing the flag of the 31st Mississippi Infantry. Major McVicker, from Kingston (Ontario) was killed at Malvern Hill on the first of July 1862. J. Johnson, a teamster, died at Andersonville (prison) on March 1, 1865. He is buried in grave number 12714. James Morton, age 28, enlisted in company 'F', 119th New York Infantry on August 13, 1862. He lost his life during the Chancellorsville debacle on May 2, 1863. James Lundy, of Company 'C', 179th New York infantry, died September 10, 1865 of disease contracted in the trenches before Petersburg. His body was brought home to the village of Sharon (Ontario) and laid to rest. On the Confederate side, Pierre Leclair was killed at the 'Mule Shoe' salient on May 12, 1864 (battle of Spotsylvania). I sought his grave in the Confederate cemetery at Spotsylvania, but no grave was found. In August, 1988, in a program aired by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, an unsubstantiated figure of 12,000 deaths was claimed for British North Americans. Others have used numbers as high as 18,000 fatalities. There is no reason to believe that the British North American death rate was any higher than that of other nationalities. Roughly ten percent of all Northern soldiers died during the war. Twenty-nine British North Americans were awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for gallantry during the Civil War, including four on a single day at Fort Morgan, Alabama, August 5, 1864. The U.S. Pension rolls of January 1, 1883 list 670 persons in the Dominion of Canada as receiving Civil War disability pensions. Not all British North Americans returned home at the cessation of hostilities. William Winer Cooke, from Hamilton (Ontario) and late of the 24th New York Cavalry, joined the 7th U.S. Cavalry and died with Custer at the Little Big Horn. William Box, from Streetsville (Ontario), late of the 108th New York Infantry, was killed fighting Indians in South Dakota. Many veterans, including Sarah Emma

Edmonds, resumed or took-up, residence in the United States. Jacob Cox, Montreal born of American parents, became governor of Ohio. Richard Surby, who enlisted in Company 'A', 7th Illinois Cavalry on August 10, 1861, wrote a book on Grierson's raid through Mississippi. Calixa Lavallee, who served as a musician in the 4th Rhode Island Infantry, married an American woman. John McDonald, late of the 7th New Jersey Infantry, from St. Catharines (Ontario) did come home to defend Canada from the Fenians. Except when it was politically expedient, the Dominion of Canada ignored her sons in 'Blue and Gray' for the colour of our tunics has always been 'red'.

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Note: Tom is from Gravenhurst Ontario, Canada and a member of the 10th Louisiana Infantry Regiment