

Seeking Safety in Canada

People have come from all over the world to live in Canada, settling on traditional Indigenous territory. Many simply came because they wanted to. Many came to escape discrimination, hunger, war or lawlessness. Canada offered a safe place to live. Of course, that doesn't mean that everyone who escaped here was welcomed, or that they were all treated as well as they should have been. But over the centuries our country has welcomed millions of new Canadians and offered them freedom, democracy and a new life. Here are the stories of just some of them.

Looking for Land

Thousands of people in the Scottish Highlands had lived for generations in small houses amid fields, often fiercely loyal to larger family groups known as clans. They never owned these farms — rich landlords did. In the late 1700s, those landlords decided they wanted sheep to graze on their farms. They kicked out the people who'd been living there in what's become known as the Highland Clearances. (It was also handy for Britain that rebellious clan members were among those put off the land.) From about 1770 to 1815, about 15,000 Scots came to Canada where they could farm and live in freedom. Most ended up in Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and Upper Canada (Ontario). Lord Selkirk also brought more than 800 Scots to the new Red River settlement in what is now Manitoba.



Public Domain, Library and Archives Canada

About four million Canadians are partly Scottish.



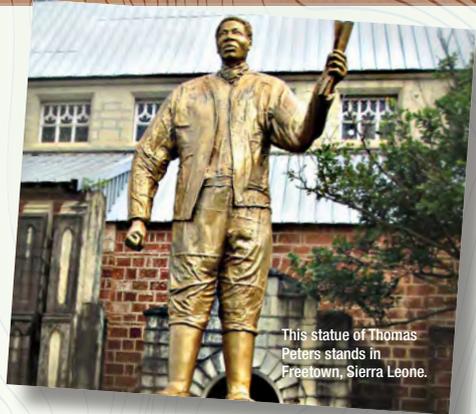
Allied with Britain

While people in what would become the United States fought the Revolutionary War against Great Britain, there were others who stayed true to Britain. They were known as United Empire Loyalists — Loyalists for short. Starting in 1775, as American anger against British rule grew, Loyalists had their land taken away and their lives threatened. Over the next 20 years or so, tens of thousands of them fled north to what are now Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec and Ontario. Many United Empire Loyalists who migrated to Canada brought Black enslaved people with them, which led to anti-Black racism. The arrival of so many new people in such a short time changed the future of the country, leading to the creation of Upper Canada in 1791.

Thayendanega, often known as Joseph Brant (shown above), supported Britain and even led his Haudenosaunee people to fight for it in the Revolutionary War. He left the U.S. and with hundreds of his people, settled around the Grand River in southwestern Ontario. Canada soon took large pieces of this land away and sold or leased it to non-Indigenous people.

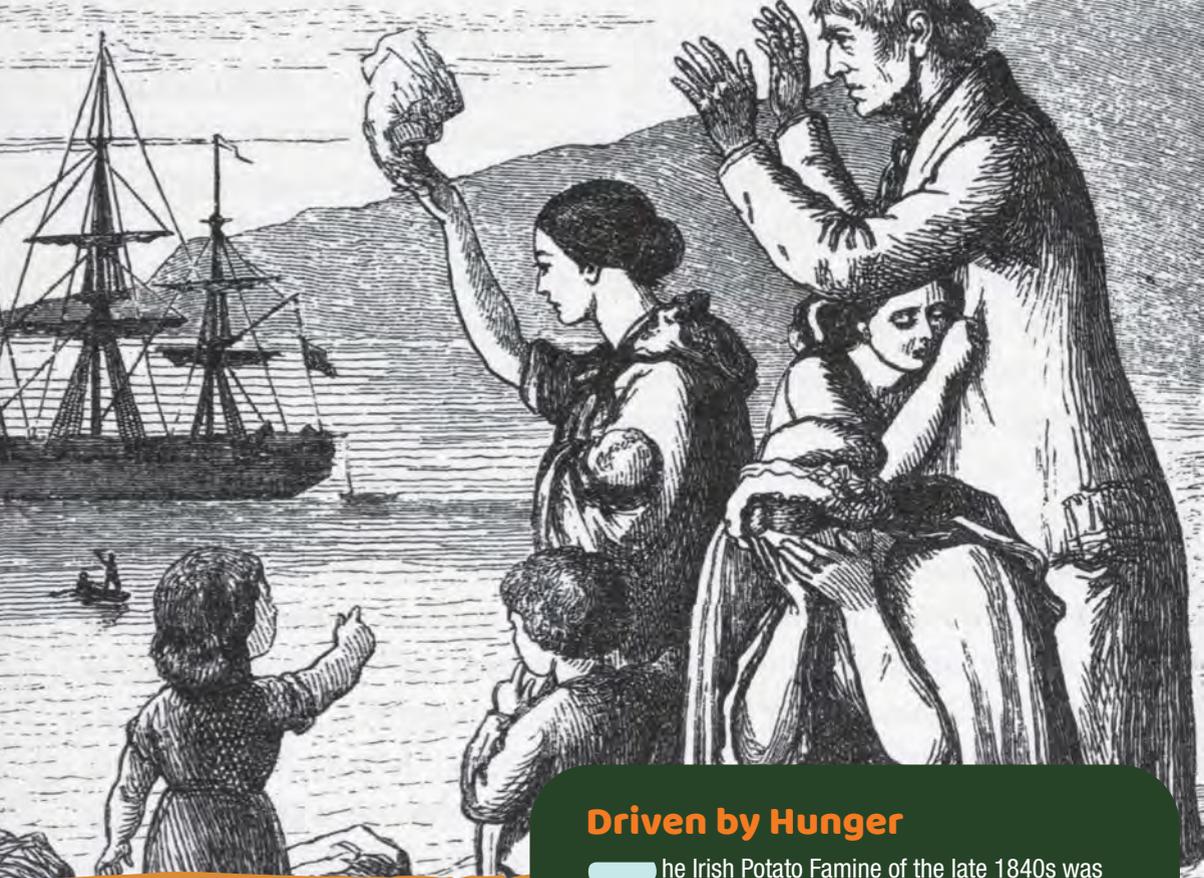
**“It is now
afternoon and
I have been
on shore. It
is I think the
roughest land
I ever saw.”**

—
from the diary of Loyalist
Sarah Frost, who had just
seen what was to be her
family’s new home in New
Brunswick, 1783



This statue of Thomas Peters stands in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

Thomas Peters escaped enslavement to fight with the British in the Revolutionary War. He came to Nova Scotia in 1784, where he was put in charge of a group of Black Loyalists. They received just 80 days’ worth of food when white Loyalists got three years’ worth. The Black settlers never received the land they’d been promised. Peters gave up and led a group to settle in Sierra Leone in Africa in 1792.



Driven by Hunger

The Irish Potato Famine of the late 1840s was unimaginably brutal. People who depended on potatoes for nearly all of their food had nothing to eat when a disease hit the crop. Thousands died. Desperate for a life free of hunger, Irish people crowded onto ships for Canada. But they couldn't escape disease and thousands more died on board or after arriving here. Although they worked hard — Irish labourers built Ontario's 202-kilometre-long Rideau Canal — they were often looked down on and treated badly. Although many stayed and eventually found better lives, many others left for the U.S.

Many Irish children whose parents died on the way to Canada or were too poor to look after them were taken in by francophone families in Quebec. Their descendants often married francophones, meaning that today there are lots of French-speaking people with a last name like Nelligan or O'Neill. Irish names were also "francized," so that over time Sullivan became Sylvain and Carroll became Caron.



Public Domain, Library and Archives Canada



HARRIET TUBMAN

This brave woman escaped slavery herself and then returned to help other enslaved people out of the U.S. She earned the name Moses, because she brought so many to freedom in Canada. For several years, she lived in St. Catharines, Ont., near Niagara Falls, where she planned her missions.

Underground to Freedom

Canada finally got rid of slavery in 1834. By the early 1860s, there were about 40,000 Black people living in Canada. Many travelled here on their own, but a large number of freedom-seekers made it out of the United States with help from agents of the Underground Railroad. The Underground Railroad was a secret network of people, Black and white, who were against slavery. They offered safe places and help to escaping people trying to get to freedom in Canada.

The Underground Railroad, by Charles T. Webber, 1893.



Heartbreak and a New Home

Exhausted by disease and natural disasters, people from Iceland started coming to Canada. A group of 352 arrived in the village of Kinmount in central Ontario in 1874. The men were hired to build a railway, but the wood buildings the company gave them to live in were cold and overcrowded. Thirteen children died in just six weeks. In 1875 the newcomers gave up and went to Manitoba, where there was even a territory for a short time called New Iceland, which had its own laws. The main settlement is now the town of Gimli, where many people have Icelandic roots.



Flickr Commons, Library and Archives Canada

The Land Was Never Empty

Everywhere the Canadian government wanted people to settle was Indigenous land. Sometimes First Nations and Métis people had been forced off to create farms for the newcomers or to make room for the railway to take settlers west. Sometimes the land was covered by a treaty. Sometimes it wasn't, and the Indigenous people who lived there were still pushed out by new settlements. All of the territory we now call Canada still is the homeland of many First Peoples. Much of it, even where there are Canadian cities, has never been ceded (given up) by them.

Children of Hardship

Promised a better life, about 100,000 children were sent to Canada from Britain between 1869 and the late 1930s. They were known as Home Children because many came from orphanages, or “homes”. But many actually had parents who had left them on their own or didn’t have money to care for them. Churches and charities thought they were helping these children by taking them away and giving them a healthy new life on Canadian farms. Although that was true for some, too many others faced gruelling work, harsh treatment and bullying. Brothers and sisters were often separated.

Learn more about
Home Children in the
September 2016 *Kayak*



Home children
arriving in Saint
John, N.B., in 1920.



This giant Easter egg is decorated in the Ukrainian style called *pysanka*. It stands near Vegreville, Alta., to honour the Ukrainians who settled east of Edmonton.



Future Farmers

From the late 1890s to 1914, many families left the eastern European country of Ukraine because there were too many people and not enough good farmland. They found familiar landscapes in the Canadian prairies and settled near each other so they could keep their language and culture.



A Ukrainian immigrant family working on their farm near Pine River, Man., 1914.



Escaping War's Horror

Very few Jewish children in places like Germany and Poland escaped death at the hands of the Nazis in the Second World War. Those who survived often found their parents had been killed in Nazi death camps. Anti-Jewish feeling was strong in Canada, which meant we were slow to accept Jewish refugees. But by 1947, Canada had taken in 1,123 Jewish children orphaned by the war. Jewish Canadians found them homes and helped them build new lives. Most ended up in Montreal and Toronto.



Regina Bulwik couldn't find her parents after the war. She sailed with other Jewish war orphans to Canada in 1948, ending up in Vancouver at 15 years old. She married David Feldman, another survivor of the Holocaust. In the online exhibition *Open Hearts, Closed Doors* by the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre, she thanks Canada. "To this day I am grateful to the Jewish community for bringing me here and I thank Canada for allowing us in. My heart cries for all the people who have perished unnecessarily. I wish there would be some peace now everywhere in the world. Children should not have to suffer anywhere at any time."



Austrians help a Hungarian refugee to safety, 1956.

Leaving Communism for Canada

By the 1950s, life under communist rule in Hungary had become very hard. When the people rose up against the government in 1956, the army of the communist Soviet Union came in and crushed the rebellion. Over the next year, about 30,000 Hungarians — many young men but lots of families, too — fled for Canada.



Janos Maté was a boy when his family left Hungary and came to Canada as refugees in 1957. He remembers everyone being given a little box of Kellogg's Cornflakes. But the Hungarians had never had the cereal before and weren't impressed at first with the dry, crunchy flakes. Fifty years later, he told the story to staff at the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21. "To this day, many of those refugees, including me, still have an emotional attachment, a product loyalty, to Kellogg's Cornflakes, their first taste of Canadian culture."

Fleeing a Dictator

Soon after the South American country of Chile elected a leader in 1973 the U.S. didn't like, the country's army (with American support) drove him out of office. In his place they put a dictator who used the military to destroy opposition. Ordinary people who had supported the elected leader feared for their lives. The Canadian government didn't really want to bring any of them here at first. It had long preferred European migrants and was suspicious about the political beliefs of the Chilean refugees. But Canadian churches, universities and charities were horrified at the violence and murders and pushed the government to change its rules. The government eventually gave in and allowed about 7,000 Chileans into Canada.



Carmen Aguirre's parents were part of the resistance in Chile against military dictator Augusto Pinochet. They fled to Canada for safety and later went back to Chile. Aguirre now lives in Vancouver and is a well-known playwright, actor and author. Her book *Something Fierce: Memoirs of a Revolutionary Daughter* won CBC's Canada Reads contest in 2011.

"Work hard and be honest, and you'll make it." – Bahaduraji Sumar, who came to Canada from Uganda with his family in 1972

Driven from Africa

In 1972 the unpredictable and cruel dictator of Uganda suddenly decided that anyone who was not a citizen of the country and held a passport from Britain, India or Pakistan must leave the country within three months. Britain took many of the refugees but couldn't handle all of them and asked for help. By 1974, about 8,000 Ugandans, mostly people of Indian or Pakistani descent, were safe in Canada.



Since it became a country, Canada has picked and chosen who could come here. Our system for deciding who was a refugee, and which refugees could stay, goes back to at least 1922. Our refugee rules have changed many times since then. In 1991 Canada took in nearly 45,000 refugees. Changes to the rules since then have lowered that number.



An Earthquake's Fallout

The world was shocked into disbelief at the terrible aftermath of the earthquake that hit the Caribbean country of Haiti in January 2010. Canada sent help, but it soon became clear that many Haitians would have nowhere to live. Because Haiti is a French-speaking country, many people there have migrated from there to Quebec over the years. The province set up a special program that brought about 5,500 Haitian survivors of the earthquake to safety in Canada by 2015.



A group of Haitian-Canadian women in Montreal, 1992.

There are about 120,000 people with a Haitian background living in Quebec.