

London Gazette No. 8834
(March 21 to March 25, 1749), N.S. Archives.

On the 7th of March 1749, the British Lord Commissioners for Trade and Plantations presented a proposal to King George II to establish “a civil government in the province of Nova Scotia.” This proposal was reported in The London Gazette later that month - on March 25th - to solicit volunteers for the expedition.

The target audience for the advertisement was two principal groups: officers and private men recently retired from the British Army and Royal Navy; and skilled tradesmen, specifically carpenters, shipwrights, smiths, masons, joiners, brick makers and bricklayers and so on to construct the settlement. Also needed were surgeons. Terms of the offer included a land grant with no rent or taxes for 10 years; additional acres would be granted for each additional family member. Volunteers would be provided with provisions for 12 months; tools and materials for clearing and cultivating the land, building houses and fishing; and arms and ammunition for defence.

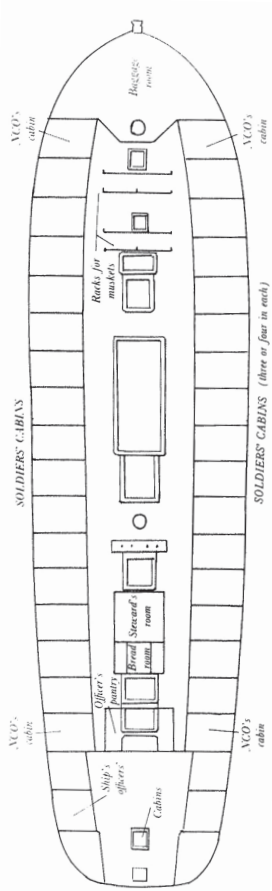
A total of 2,547 persons embarked for the adventure, comprising about 1,200 in families, 650 single men, 440 children, and 420 servants. Of the heads of families, 435 were recently released Royal Navy personnel, and 137 were recently retired from the British Army. Thirty-eight passengers identified as medical professionals, including 16 surgeons, 10 surgeons’ mates, and an assortment of apothecaries, apothecaries’ mates, chemists or druggists and midwives.

As Thomas Raddall writes in *Halifax, Warden of the North*, the bulk of the civilian settlers who responded to the advertisement were London’s poor, with virtually none from rural England. He describes them as “a rabble of cockneys wholly unfit for a life in the American

During the first half of the 18th century Britain sought a way to counter the influence of the French Fortress Louisburg on Ile Royale (today’s Cape Breton Island). British surveys of mainland Nova Scotia showed the existence of a superb great harbour on the east coast known to the Mi’kmaq as K’jipuktuk (anglicized as Chebucto). Therefore in 1749 Britain set out to establish a strategic base at what would become Halifax.

wilderness, attracted simply by the promise of free victuals.” The number taking up the offer outran all expectations, requiring additional transports and cramming more people into each ship than originally planned.

The scale of the uptake was perhaps not so surprising if the social and living conditions of London at that time are considered. London’s population in 1745 was 650,000, a large percentage of whom lived in cramped squalor, poverty and filth. Fire had regularly ravaged the city, most recently in 1748 that destroyed 100 homes and caused over a million pounds damage. This was the London depicted in William Hogarth’s famous paintings such as Gin Lane and The Harlot’s Progress – a London that many of its less fortunate would have been keen to escape.



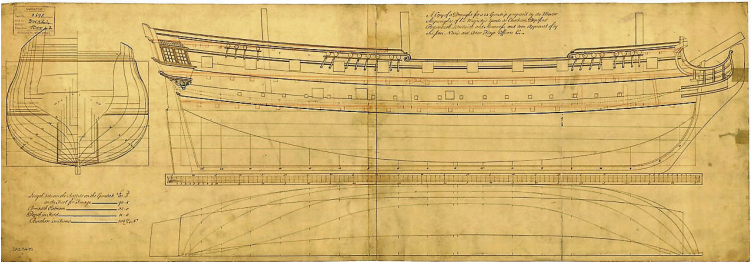
The leader of the expedition, Colonel Edward Cornwallis and his staff embarked in His Majesty’s Ship *Sphinx*, a small 6th rate 24-gun frigate of 520 tons, 114 feet long, with a complement of about 160 officers and men. The settlers embarked in 13 Government-hired transport ships of various sizes from 200 to 630 tons. Crews were small – generally 5 men and a boy for every 100 tons. They sailed from Portsmouth on the south coast of England on the 15th of May, 1749.

Conditions on board were cramped. The standard measure was roughly 1 adult passenger for every 2 tons of ship, with children under 14 years considered as half an adult for space, and children under 4 years old expected to occupy the same space as their parents. A single adult passenger would have had a space about 10 square feet, and a family of four an area about 6 feet by 6 feet, or 36 square feet.

Provisions for the voyage consisted of salt beef, salt pork and dried cod, hard tack or biscuit, flour, dried peas, oatmeal, cheese and butter. Water was generally foul, and mixed with beer or brandy to make it palatable.

Given that the measures for preventing scurvy at sea (which resulted from a vitamin C deficiency) were not implemented until decades later, there was remarkably only one death reported during the crossing – that of a small child. Consider that just three years previously, in 1746, France had sent a huge fleet consisting of 64 ships and over 11,000 men to Nova Scotia to attempt to recapture Louisburg and mainland Nova Scotia. That expedition, under the Duc d’Anville, encountered heavy weather enroute that dragged out the Atlantic crossing to over 3 months. Scurvy and typhus ravaged the fleet, and nearly 2½ thousand died either during the voyage or shortly after arriving – nearly a quarter of the total embarked. The waiting Mi’kmaq were also seriously affected by the contagion.

The convoy carrying the settlers fortunately arrived after just a month and a half at sea, having had good weather for the crossing. Had they been delayed by even a few weeks however, they would have likely suffered numerous casualties. Precautions were taken to improve conditions on board, the most important of which was the fitting of ventilators operated by bellows in all the ships. This circulated fresh air through the ships’ interiors, resulting in a much healthier atmosphere and reducing the likelihood of disease such as typhus (an infectious bacterial disease that becomes epidemic when poor sanitary conditions or crowding exists) spreading amongst the tightly packed passengers.



Drawing of the Royal Navy 1745 Establishment Design for sixth-rate ships, on which HMS *Sphinx* was based. UK National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.

Sphinx, having sailed in advance of the transports, arrived off Chebucto on 14 June – a journey of 4½ weeks. The transports began to arrive 5 days later and by the 1st of July all were safely anchored in the harbour. The western side of the main harbour was selected as the location of the settlement. It offered the security of being on a peninsula, easier to defend against potential attacks from Indigenous forces, known to be allied with France. The hill also offered shelter from northwest winds in winter, there was a protected anchorage north of Georges Island, and good landing places along the shore.

TO HALIFAX

THE ARRIVAL OF THE BRITISH



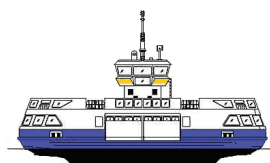
Additional waves of British and European settlers would continue to arrive in Halifax in the years following the city's founding, and many would come from the New England colonies. Halifax would soon serve as the springboard for the British campaign to recapture Louisburg in 1758 and to oust France from her other North American strongholds at Quebec and Montreal in the upcoming Seven Years War. Intended initially as a strategic foothold to strengthen Britain's presence in Nova Scotia, Halifax would evolve after the American Revolution into Britain's principal North American naval and military base, a role it would fulfil for the next century and a half.

VESSEL COMPARISON



TRANSPORT SHIP

Length 90 feet
Beam 24 feet
Displacement 220 tons
12 crew/ 230 passengers



HALIFAX-DARTMOUTH FERRY

Length 79 feet
Beam 31 feet
Displacement 260 tons
5 crew/ 390 passengers

Governor Cornwallis established his headquarters afloat in the transport *Beaufort*, which also served as the meeting place for the Nova Scotia Governing Council, the predecessor to the General Assembly of Nova Scotia. The passengers from five of the transports were landed to Georges Island where they would be safe from attack, while those ships sailed to collect additional British troops from Louisburg. By the end of July soldiers from Hopson's 29th and Warburton's 45th regiments reinforced those of the 40th Regiment that had earlier arrived from Annapolis Royal. Most of the other settlers continued to live on board the transports at anchor for 6 to 8 weeks after they arrived. Half would still be living on board and many would be in tents ashore over the coming winter, a harsh one during which hundreds would die from a typhus epidemic.



A Naval Snow (similar to a brig) – oil painting by Charles Brooking, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, Caird Collection.



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TO HALIFAX The Arrival of the British, authored by Tom Tulloch, MSM, CD, MDS(RMC), BA(Dal), Capt RCN (ret'd) as one of a series of general interest folders

on the early settlement and defence of Halifax by the Halifax Military Heritage Preservation Society.