

# To Halifax



## The Early Settlers Recruitment/Voyage/Arrival

Tom Tulloch

First some context as to why Halifax was established.



Britain and France had been in conflict for many years before Halifax was founded.

In 1745, during the War of Austrian Succession, British and New England colonial forces had captured Louisbourg, because of the threat it posed to the New England colonies and to British fishing interests in Newfoundland.

Three years later in 1748, at the end of the war, the Treaty of Aix-la-Chappelle saw Britain agree to hand back to France the fortress at Louisbourg, along with Ile Royale (Cape Breton) and Ile St Jean (Prince Edward Island).



The re-established French stronghold of Louisbourg on the Atlantic seaboard was therefore of great concern to both Britain and New England. And so, the next year, in 1749, Britain set out to establish a settlement that would strengthen her position in mainland Nova Scotia. Control of the mainland had been ceded by France to Britain back in 1713, and a new settlement would add to the British presence at Annapolis Royal and Canso which were already in place.

In the 1730s, British Captain Thomas Durell had authored a survey of the big harbour on the Eastern side of Nova Scotia known as Chebucto. Afterwards, in 1739 Captain Peter Warren had proposed it as a site for a British settlement because of its superb harbour. The potential of the location was therefore well known some years before the decision was made to create what would become Halifax.

So, on the 7<sup>th</sup> 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 the 25<sup>th</sup> - to solicit volunteers for the expedition.





## Composition of Settlers

2,547 embarked

about 1,200 in families (about 440 children)

about 650 single men

about 420 servants

435 heads of families ex-Royal Navy

137 heads of families ex-British Army

Bartelo	Duport	Hinshelwood	Martin	Wallis
Brown	Floyd	Ives	Newton	Warren
Bruce	Gibson	Joice	Nisbett	Watson
Campbell	Gilman	Kerr	Partridge	Wenman
Cannon	Grant	Lemon	Piers	White
Chambers	Gray	Lewis	Strasburger	Wood
Colly	Gunn	Little	Steele	
Drake	Hay	Lockman	Thompson	

The advertisement doesn't mention how many applicants the Board of Trade had hoped to attract, however a total of 2,547 persons embarked for the adventure. This comprised about 1,200 in families, about 650 single men, roughly 440 children, and about 420 servants.

Of the heads of families, 435 were recently released Royal Navy personnel, and 137 were recently retired from the British Army. A sample of the surnames from the passenger lists are shown here, many of which can still be found in the Halifax area.

38 passengers were identified as medical professionals, including 16 surgeons, 10 surgeons' mates, and an assortment of apothecaries, apothecaries' mates, chemists or druggists and midwives.

According to Thomas Raddall, 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 wilderness, attracted simply by the promise of free victuals." He indicates that the

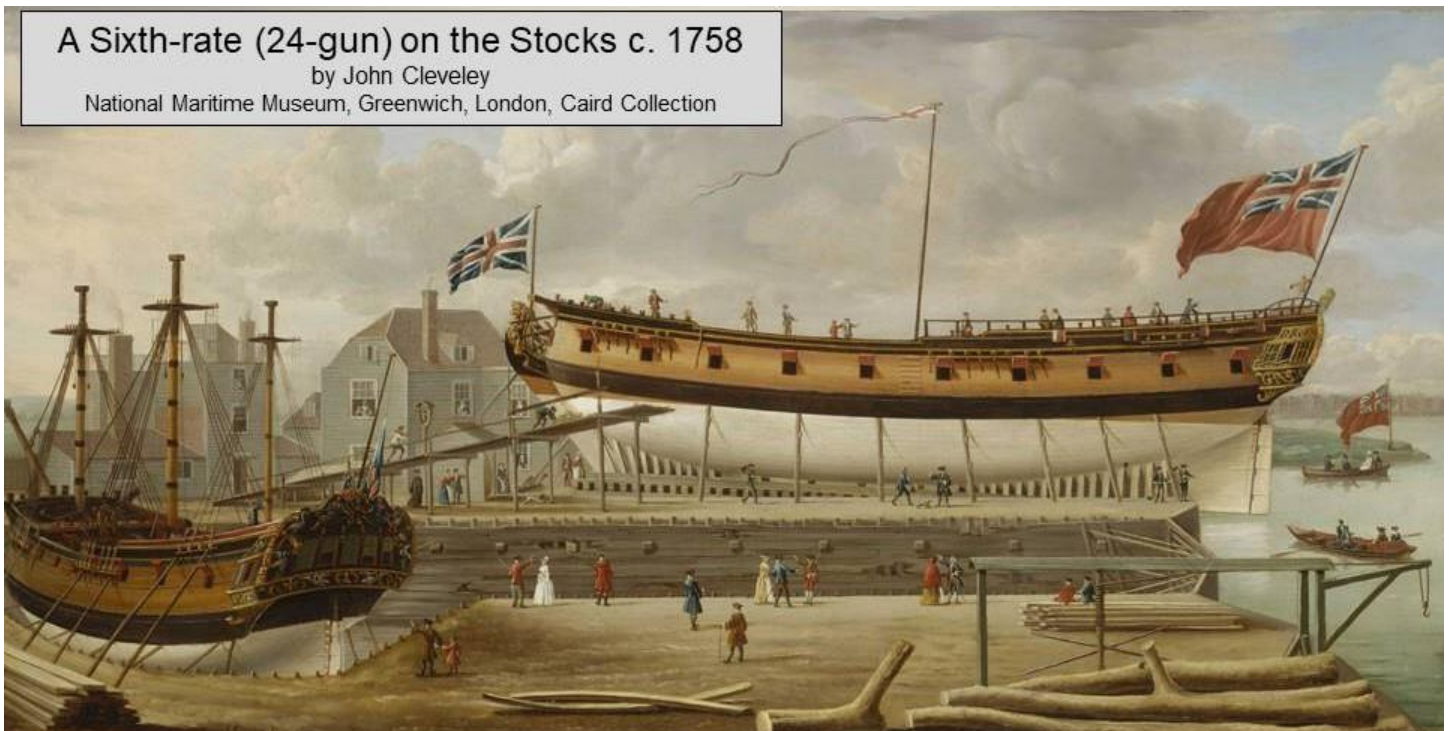


number taking up the offer outran all expectations, which meant additional transports had to be acquired, and more people crammed into each ship than originally planned. This explains the delay departing England of over 3 weeks beyond the planned date.

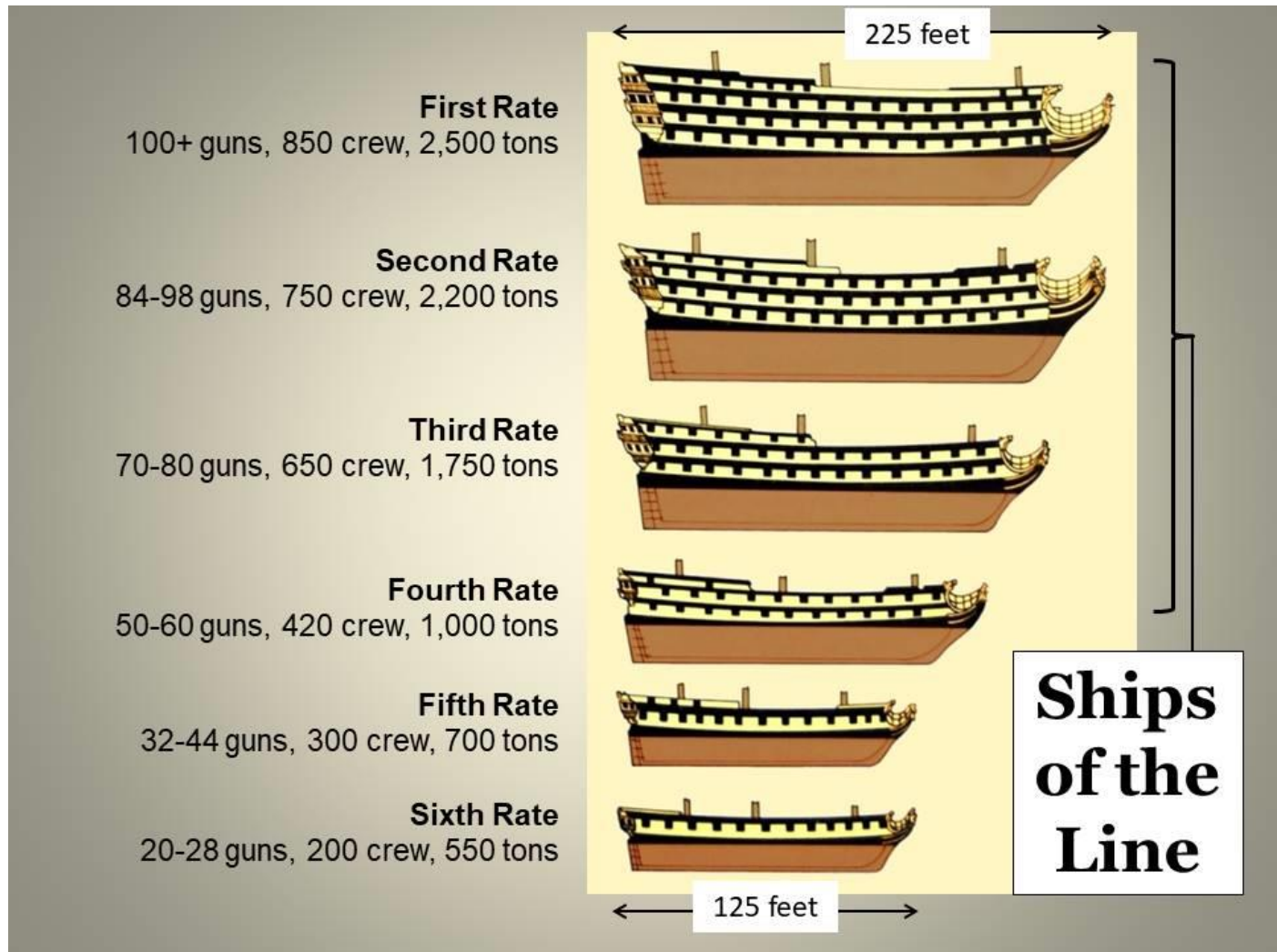


The scale of the uptake was perhaps not quite so surprising if we reflect on the social and living conditions of London at that time. The city's population in 1745 was 650,000, and a large percentage of them lived in cramped squalor, poverty and filth. Fire had regularly ravaged London for centuries, with the most recent one in 1748 having 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 would of its less fortunate would have been keen to escape.

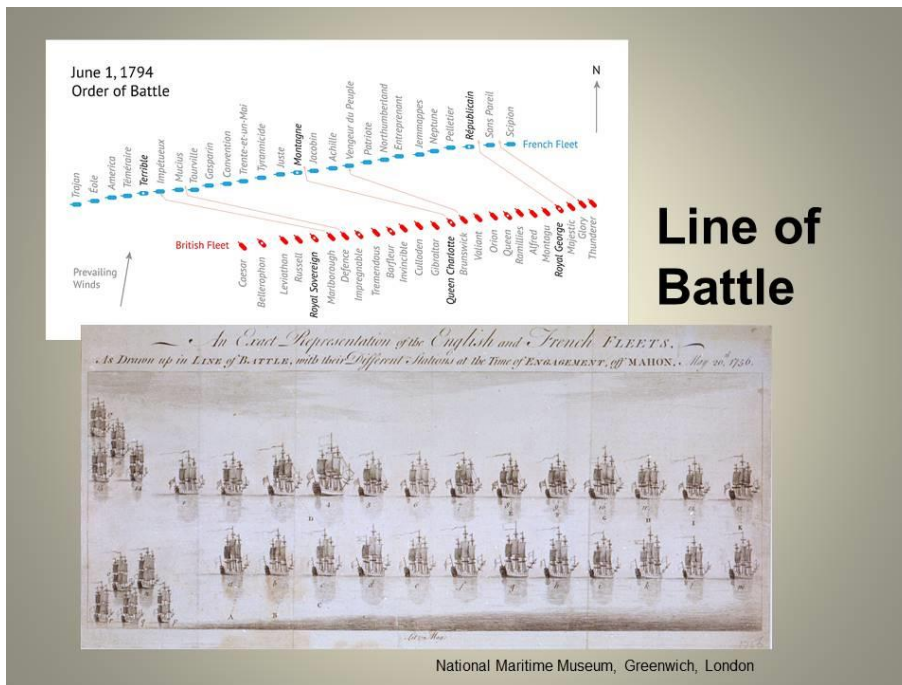


The leader of the expedition, Edward Cornwallis and his staff embarked in Her Majesty's Ship *Sphinx*. This was a relatively small warship, at the low end of the scale, a 6<sup>th</sup> rate vessel or frigate of 520 tons, carrying 24 x 9-pounder cannons. Much like the vessel shown in this slide. She was 114 feet long and 32 feet across the beam, and had a complement of about 160 officers and men.



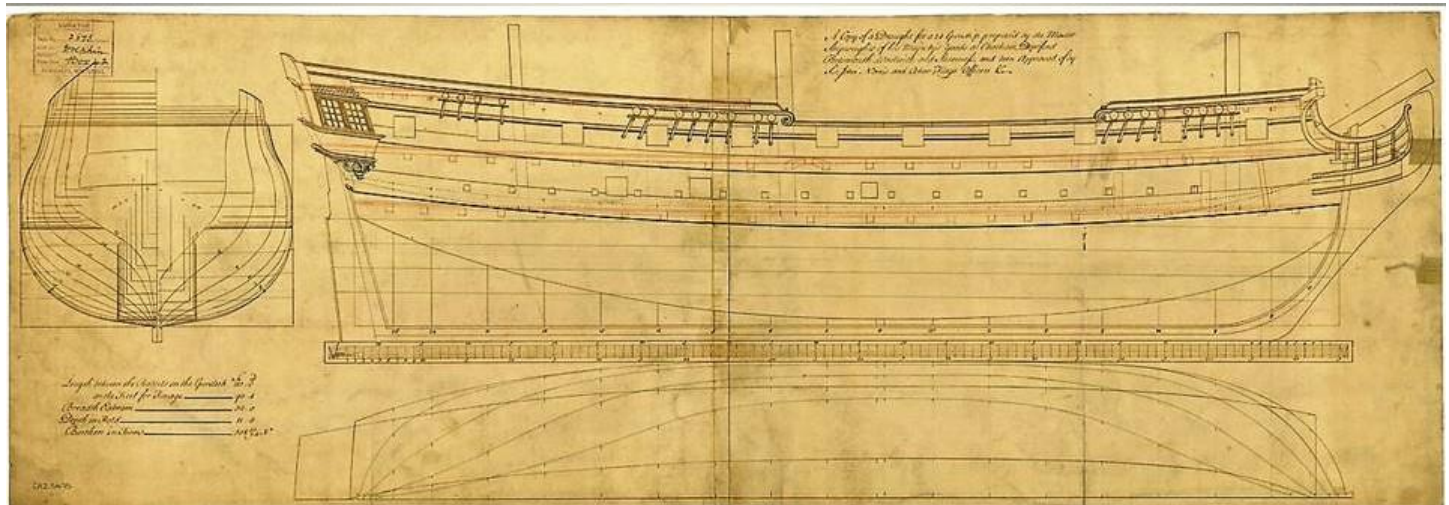
The rating of a warship refers to its relative size, and more specifically to the number of guns it carried. First, second, third, and sometimes fourth rate ships were considered powerful enough to fight in a line of battle, making them “ships of the line.” They would carry many guns capable of firing heavy projectiles – mainly 24 and 32 pound canons, but also shorter range carronades that could hurl a 68 pound canon ball.





Naval tactics in the age of sail involved the two sides each forming their ships into a line, one behind the other, to be able to fire broadsides into each other until one side came away victorious. Fifth and sixth rate ships were too small to fight in the line, and would generally be stationed separately with other duties such as scouting or message carrying, or operate independently.

*Sphinx* was one of these.



### Royal Navy Sixth-rate Establishment Design 1745

National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, Caird Collection

displacement 520 tons, length 114 feet, beam 32 feet  
24 guns (22 x 9-pounders + 2 x 3-pounders)

She had been built at Rotherhithe, on the River Thames in December 1748, and based on the Royal Navy's standardized design for 6<sup>th</sup> rate warships that came out in 1745. This slide from the Maritime Museum in Greenwich shows the plan for these ships.

The settlers made the voyage from England embarked in 13 transport ships that were hired by the British Government for that purpose.

Vessel	Tons	Passengers
Charlton	395	213
Cannon	342	190
Winchelsea	559	303
Wilmington	631	340
Merry Jacks	378	230
Alexander	320	172
Beaufort	541	287
Rockhampton (or Roehampton)	232	77
Everly	351	186
London	550	315
Brotherhood		27
Baltimore	411	226
Fair Lady		10
	<b>Total</b>	<b>2,576</b>

From Thomas H. Raddall, "Halifax, Warden of the North"

## Transport Ships

Initial Convoy - 1749



British Naval Transport Ship c. 1759

by Charles Brooking

National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, Caird Collection

These were assorted sized vessels – ranging from around 200 tons up to about 630 tons. Crews were small – generally 5 men and a boy for every 100 tons – compared to warships which carried around 35 men for every 100 tons.

But warships had to be able to carry out complex manoeuvres under sail, while being able to man all the guns at the same time – a very labour intensive operation. A merchant transport on the other hand was mainly concerned about getting from A to B in an economical fashion.



The vessels were very small by today's standards. To help visualize this, here are two comparisons: one to a frigate of the Royal Canadian Navy that you see here in the harbour today - less than a tenth the displacement, but carrying a similar number of people; and a second comparison to another vessel we see here in Halifax on a regular basis – the Cunard liner Queen Mary II, which can carry about the same number of passengers at one time as the entire fleet that arrived in 1749.



#### Transport Ship

Length 90 feet

Beam 24 feet

Displacement 220 tons

Passengers 230



#### Halifax-class frigate

Length 440 feet

Beam 54 feet

Displacement 4,770 tons

Crew 225



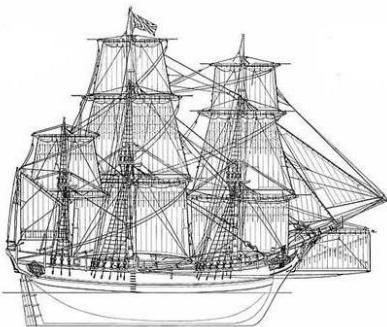
#### RMS Queen Mary 2

Length 1,132 feet

Beam 135 feet

Displacement 79,287 tons

Passengers and Crew 3,948



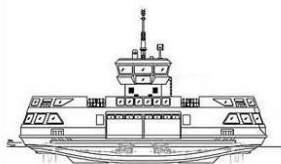
#### Transport Ship

Length 90 feet

Beam 24 feet

Displacement 220 tons

10-12 crew/ 230 passengers



#### Halifax-Dartmouth Ferry

Length 79 feet

Beam 31 feet

Displacement 260 tons

5 crew/ 390 passengers

One more comparison – here beside one of the ferries that today runs between Halifax and Dartmouth. Eleven feet shorter but seven feet broader than our transport example, and designed to carry 390 passengers rather than 230, however the journey is measured in minutes rather than weeks or months...

Merchant ships of the period tended to be rather square in shape, both athwart ships or in cross section, as well as fore and aft, with bluff bows, giving the greatest possible internal capacity for its length. They would be either two-masted brigs or larger three-masted barques, both of which

## Vessel Types

Mainly Square Rigged

Combined Square and Fore-and-Aft Rigged

Three Masts



Barque



Barquentine

Two Masts



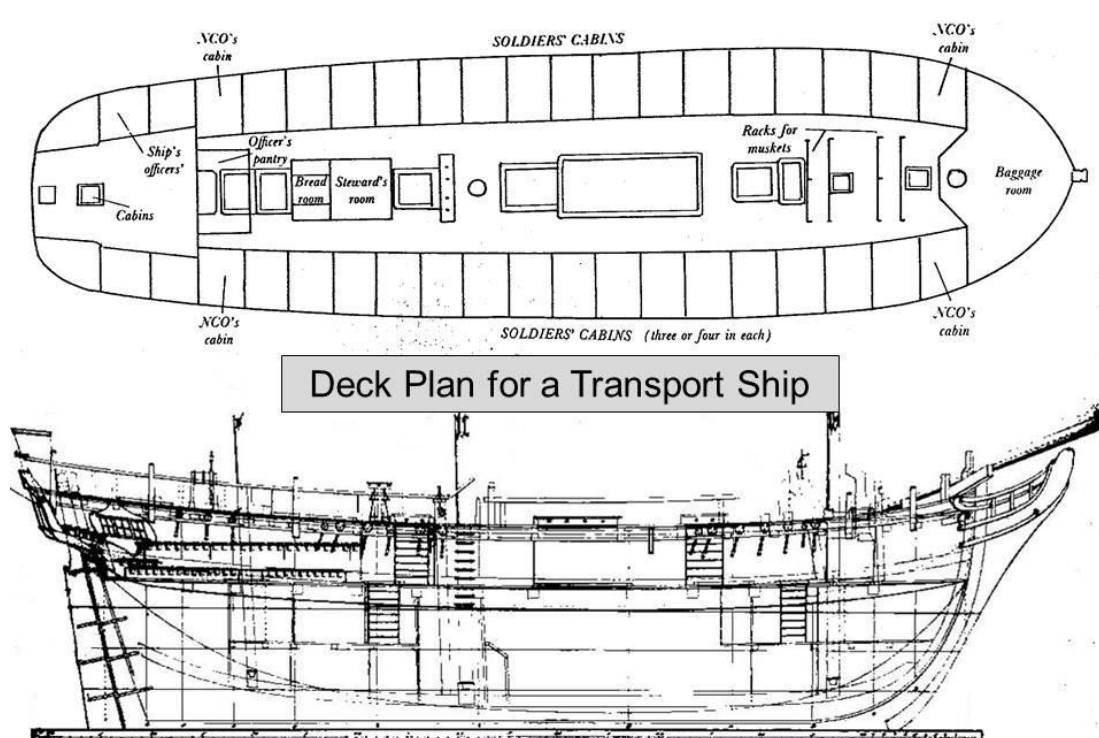
Brig



Brigantine

were square rigged vessels, meaning the main driving sails are suspended from horizontal yards that lie square to the mast. If they also carried triangular sails (called fore and aft rig) they would be referred to as brigantines or barquentines. The transports were likely a mixture of mainly these four types of vessel.

Conditions on board would have been cramped. The standard measure was roughly 1 adult passenger for every 2 tons of ship, with children under 14 considered as half an adult for space, and children under 4 years old expected to occupy the same space as their parents. This bears out in the numbers of passengers embarked in the various ships of Cornwallis' convoy, with an adult passenger having a space about 10 or 11 square feet, and a family of four having an area about 6 feet by 6 feet, or 36 square feet.





## Board of Trade Guidelines for Provisions During Voyages

Per Adult per Week:

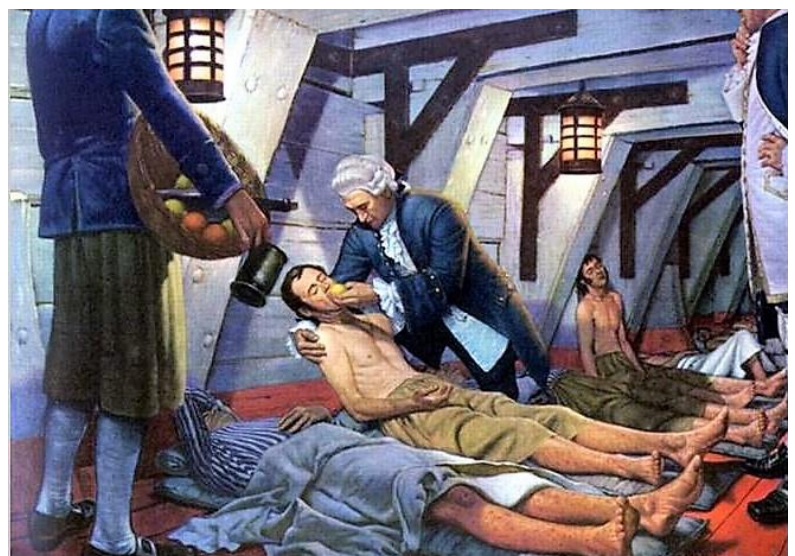
- 7 pounds biscuit (hardtack)
- 2 pounds salt beef
- 2 pounds salt pork
- 2 pounds flour
- 1 quart peas
- 1½ quart oatmeal
- 6 ounces butter
- ¾ pound cheese
- 7 gallons of beer (or in lieu 3½ pints of brandy to mix with water to make it less noxious)

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 were not implemented until decades later that century, it's remarkable that there was only one death reported across the entire convoy during the crossing – that of a small child.

Consider that just 4 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.

Scurvy is a disease brought on by a severe deficiency of vitamin C, which is normally found in fruits and green vegetables. For a diet that includes no vitamin C at all, the onset of symptoms is about 5 weeks – and any embarked fruit and vegetables would not normally last beyond a week at best, so scurvy would start to rear its head by about the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> week into a voyage.

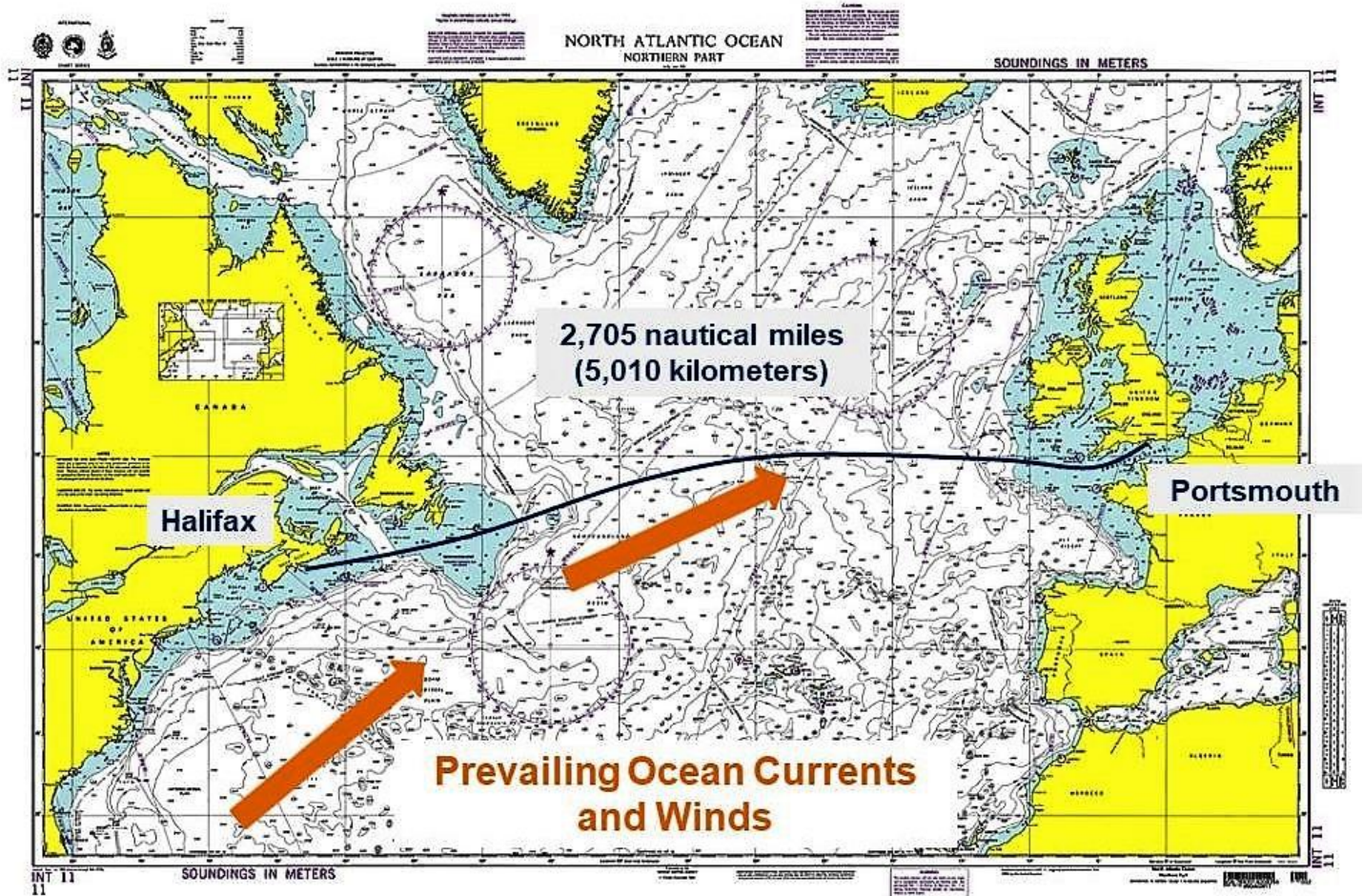


James Lind administering lemons as a prevention for scurvy  
Image from *A History of Medicine in Pictures* published by Parke, Davis & Co 1960. Artist: Robert A. Thom



Typhus is an infectious bacterial disease that becomes epidemic when poor sanitary conditions and crowding exists – such as in a tightly packed warship or transport vessel.

The convoy carrying the settlers from England fortunately arrived after just a month and a half at sea, having experienced good weather during the crossing. Had they been delayed by a number of weeks or even a month however, they would have likely suffered numerous casualties.



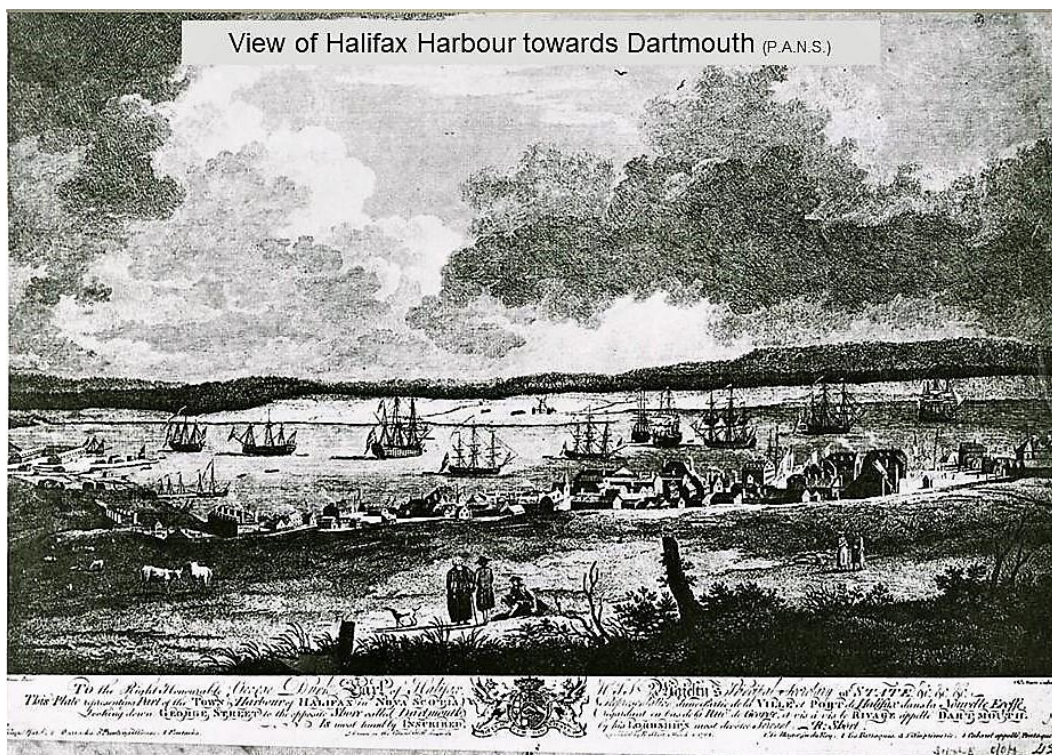
There were also a number of precautions taken to improve conditions on board, regardless of how cramped they were. The number of surgeons and surgeons mates embarked would have meant there were about 2 for every vessel (although surgeons of the period were primarily skilled in amputations and bleeding, and not much else). Plenty of medical supplies and surgical instruments were embarked, and *Roehampton* was designated as a hospital ship.

The most important innovation however was the fitting of ventilators, operated by bellows, in all the ships. This circulated fresh air through the interiors of the ships,



resulting in a much healthier atmosphere and reducing the likelihood of disease spreading amongst the tightly packed passengers.

Also in the passengers favour was the shortness of the crossing – just 5 weeks – which didn't give enough time for scurvy to develop from lack of fruits and green vegetables.



*Sphinx*, having sailed in advance of the transports, arrived off the coast of Nova Scotia on 14 June – a journey of 4½ weeks. Given that no-one on board had any local knowledge of the approaches to Halifax Harbour, where the main channel or the shoals and shallows lay, they hailed a passing New England schooner a few days

later, with two pilots embarked, who were able to guide *Sphinx* safely into the harbour.

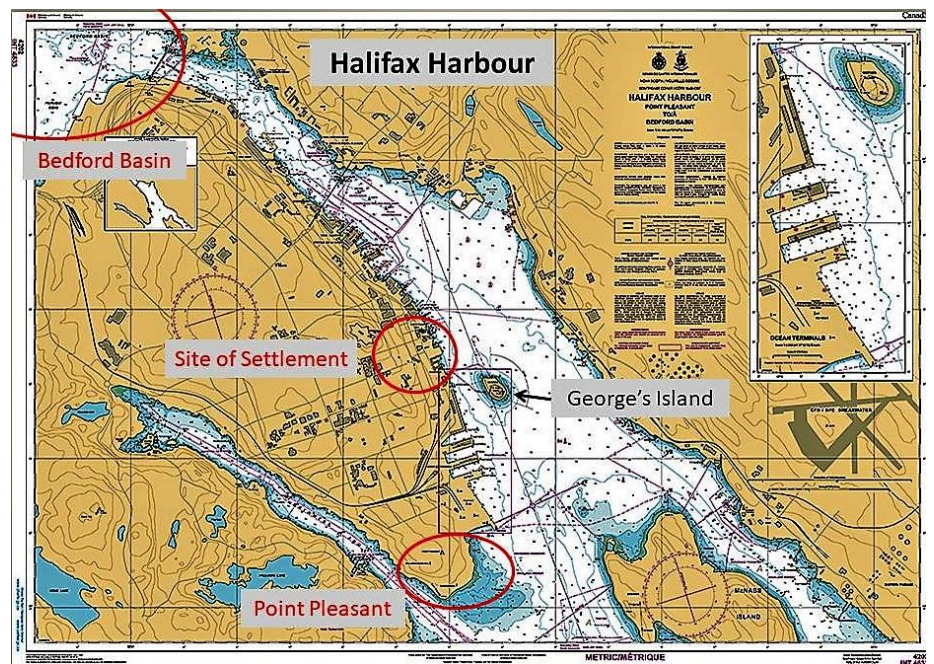
Of note is that at about the same time the French fleet that was sent to re-establish Fortress Louisbourg was just arriving off Ile Royale or Cape Breton Island with 2,000 settlers and troops. The British commander there, Colonel Hopson was preparing to oversee the handover to the French and the relocation of its British garrison to Halifax or New England. The French vessels sailed into Louisbourg Harbour on the 30<sup>th</sup> of June, just over a week after Cornwallis' arrival in Halifax.

Given the size of the harbour, there were a number of possibilities for where to locate the settlement. The shore of Bedford Basin was considered but ruled out as being difficult to defend from native attack, being too far from the open sea for fishermen to be able to operate, and being susceptible to having the narrows captured by an enemy and cutting off water access.

Point Pleasant too was examined as a possibility – it was relatively easily defended and close to sea – however it was abandoned as it was too exposed to South-East gales from the ocean, and the shallows extending over 700 yards off the Point made it impossible to anchor even small vessels there.

The Eastern side of the peninsula on the main part of the inner harbour was eventually selected. It offered the security of being on the peninsula, with the nearby Citadel Hill and Georges Island providing natural defensive positions. The hill also offered shelter from North-West winds in winter, there was a good protected anchorage north of Georges Island, and good landing places along the shore.

The transports started arriving 5 days after Cornwallis' arrival, and by July 1<sup>st</sup> all were safely anchored in the harbour. The crossing had taken a maximum of 46 days. Cornwallis set up 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 table from the *Beaufort* around which these early meetings were held can still be seen today at Province House, which stands on the site of Governor Cornwallis' residence.





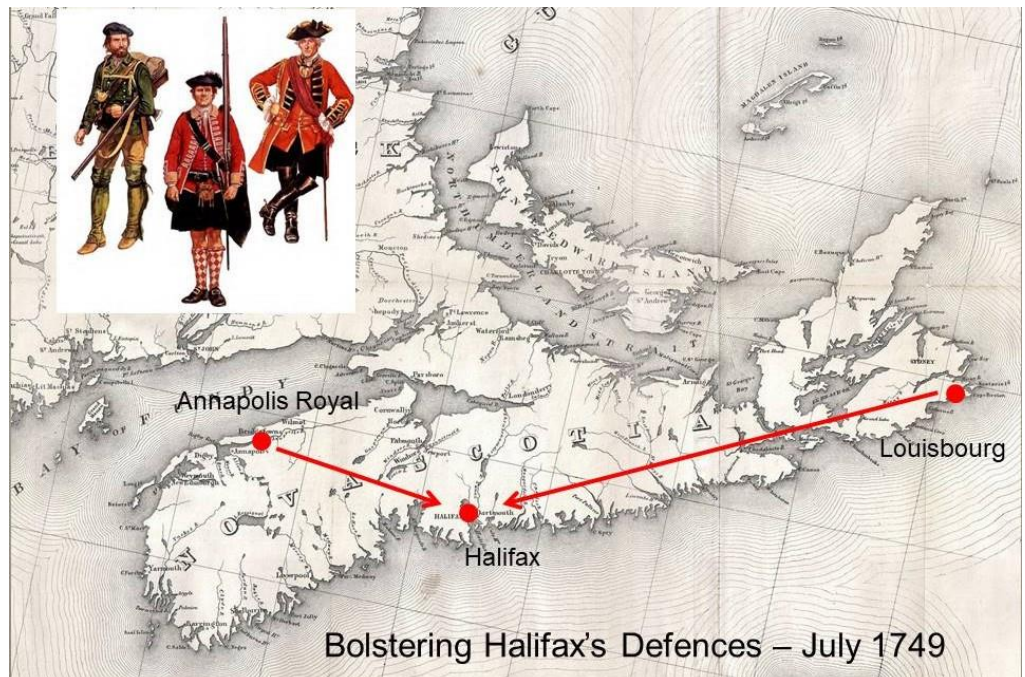


### Table from the Transport Ship *Beaufort*

Today in the Red Chamber at Province House, Halifax

First Meeting of Governing Council of Nova Scotia was held on board *Beaufort* at anchor in Halifax Harbour  
14 July 1749

Concerned about the possibility of coming under attack by native and Acadian forces, Cornwallis landed the passengers from at least 5 of the ships to Georges Island where they would be secure. These ships then sailed to Louisbourg to collect British troops from Hopson's 29<sup>th</sup> and Warburton's 45<sup>th</sup> regiments, to bring them to Halifax. They would arrive by July the 25<sup>th</sup>, bolstering the defences that had seen the arrival, two weeks earlier, of a company of soldiers of the 40<sup>th</sup> Regiment from Annapolis Royal, to add to the small number of troops that Cornwallis brought with him.



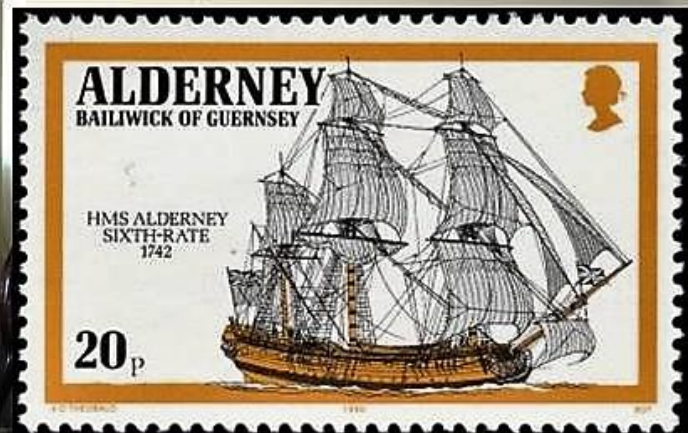
Bolstering Halifax's Defences – July 1749



Most of the other settlers, who had not been landed to George's Island, continued to live on board the transports at anchor for 6 to 8 weeks after they arrived, into August. Half would still be living on board over the coming winter months, a harsh one during which hundreds in the new settlement would die from a typhus epidemic.

Arrival	Vessel	Tons	Passengers
Fall 1749			
	<i>Sarah</i>	342	190
	<i>Union</i>	559	303
1750			
	<i>Alderney</i>	504	353
	<i>Ann</i>	220	305
	<i>Nancy</i>	130	150

## Subsequent Arrivals 1749/1750



It's beyond the scope and time available here to delve any deeper than a brief mention, into the subsequent waves of British and European settlers that would come to Halifax in the years following its founding.

The transports *Sarah* and *Union* brought more settlers from England in the fall of 1749, and the following year would see the first Dartmouth settlers arrive in the vessels *Alderney*, *Ann* and *Nancy*. This group would include the first German and Swiss Protestant settlers, fleeing French oppression and the ravages of war that had left their



homelands devastated. And of course 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 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.

