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It comes out of the research and exhibition project "Remembering Black Loyalists, Black Communities". The project recovered information relating to the Black Loyalist settlements of Birchtown, Shelburne County and the Tracadie area of Antigonish and Guysborough Counties. Research results have been given to the Black Loyalist Heritage Society, the Brownspriggs Historical Society, and the Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia.

This project was funded by Dept. of Canadian Heritage: Multiculturalism, the Nova Scotia Museum, and the NS Dept. of Education's Learning Resources & Technology.



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NOVA SCOTIA
MUSEUM
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NOVA SCOTIA
Tourism and Culture

BLACK
LOYALISTS



BLACK
COMMUNITIES

THE BLACK LOYALISTS OF NOVA SCOTIA

Part 1

Who were the Black Loyalists?

The Black Loyalists arrived in Nova Scotia between 1783 and 1785, as a result of the American Revolution. They were the largest group of people of African birth and of African descent to come to Nova Scotia at any one time.

In 1775, some people in the British North American colonies were arguing with the British government about how much control Great Britain should have over taxes and life in the colonies. The colonists wanted to influence decisions about laws and taxes but had no representation in the British parliament. They declared themselves independent of Britain when they weren't able to come to an agreement. The American Revolution, also called the American War of Independence, was the result.

People of African birth, who were brought forcibly to the colonies to provide slave labour, and their descendants, were caught in this war. In the late 1600s and 1700s, the British had established rice, indigo, and tobacco plantations in the southern part of North America. Plantation owners required lots of labourers to do field work and other jobs. To reduce costs, they used slaves. At first they enslaved the native Indians but then used mostly African slaves.



In the northern colonies, slaves worked as farm hands or at various jobs as domestic workers, or at semi-specialized trades such as lumbering, mining, road-making, black smithing, shoemaking, weaving and spinning.

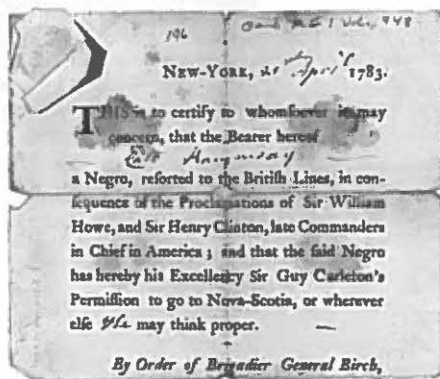
When Lord Dunmore, Royal Governor of Virginia, lost control of that colony to the rebels in the summer of 1775, the economy of Virginia was based on slave labor. Lord Dunmore issued a proclamation that slaves or indentured persons would be given their freedom if they took up arms with the British against the rebels. As a result, 2,000 slaves and indentured persons joined his forces. Later, other British supporters in the colonies issued similar proclamations.

A BRIEF OUTLINE OF AFRICAN NOVA SCOTIAN SETTLEMENT

- People of African descent have been living in Nova Scotia for almost 300 years.
- In Acadia, from the early to mid 1700s, there were more than 300 people of African descent in the French settlement at Louisbourg, Cape Breton.
- In Halifax in 1751, there were 15 Black people.
- Between 100 to 150 people of African descent were among the new settlers, now known as the Planters, who came from New England after the British gained control over Nova Scotia in 1763.
- Over 3,000 Black people came as part of the Loyalist migration between 1783 and 1785.
- In 1796, 350 people, known as the Maroons, were deported from Jamaica to Nova Scotia. In 1800 they were relocated to Sierra Leone.
- Some 2000 escaped slaves came from the United States during the War of 1812, under conditions similar to those of the Black Loyalists. They had thrown in their lot with the British between 1812 and 1816 and were offered freedom and land in Nova Scotia. They moved into the Halifax area to settle at Preston, Hammonds Plains, Beechville, Porter's Lake, and the Lucasville Road, as well as the Windsor area.
- In the early 1900s Black immigrants were actively recruited from Barbados, West Indies to work in Cape Breton for the Dominion Coal Company. This community survives to the present day in Whitney Pier, Glace Bay and New Waterford.
- People of African descent continue to immigrate to Nova Scotia today.

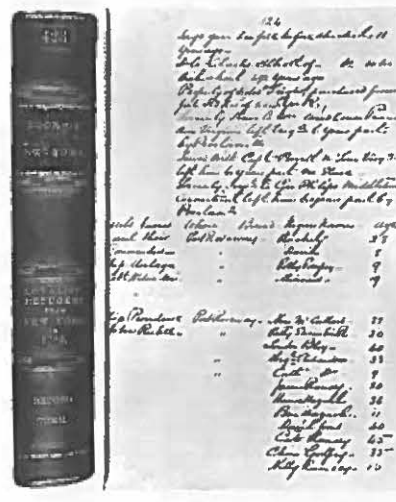
Then the British Commander-in-Chief at New York, Sir Henry Clinton, issued the Philipsburg proclamation when the British realized they were losing the war. It stated that any Negro to desert the rebel cause would receive full protection, freedom, and land. It is estimated that many thousands of people of African descent joined the British and became British supporters.

When the Americans won the war and the Treaty of Paris was signed in 1783, British forces and their supporters had to leave the new United States. They gathered at New York, waiting to be evacuated. In the meantime, the Americans wanted their lost property returned. Sir Guy Carleton, the new British Commander-in-Chief, refused General George Washington's demand for the return of those slaves who had joined the British before November 30, 1782. The two men agreed that the Americans would receive money instead.



CERTIFICATE OF FREEDOM
This certificate of freedom, issued in New York City to Cato Ramsay, is one of the few to survive.
Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management

The British-American Commission identified the Black people in New York who had joined the British before the surrender, and issued "certificates of freedom" signed by General Birch or General Musgrave. Those who chose to emigrate were evacuated by ship. To make sure no one attempted to leave who did not have a certificate of freedom, the name of any Black person on board a vessel, whether slave, indentured servant, or free, was recorded, along



THE BOOK OF NEGROES
This book is a handwritten list of Black passengers leaving New York on British ships in 1783. It gives a name, age, physical description, and status (slave or free) for each passenger, and often an owner's name and place of residence. Three copies of the *Book of Negroes* exist: one in England, at the British Records Office, Kew; one in the United States, at the National Archives, Washington; and one in Canada, at the Nova Scotia Archives, Halifax. Knowledge of the Black Loyalists begins with this list, made by British and American inspectors.
Photo by Learning Resources & Technology, Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management

with the details of enslavement, escape, and military service, in a document called the *Book of Negroes*.

Between April and November, 1783, 114 ships were inspected in New York harbour. An unknown number of ships left New York and other ports before and after these dates. Over 3,000 Black Loyalists were enrolled in the *Book of Negroes*, but perhaps as many as 5,000 Black people left New York for Nova Scotia, the West Indies, Quebec, England, Germany, and Belgium.

Black Loyalist Communities in Nova Scotia

When about 40,000 newcomers, today referred to as United Empire Loyalists, arrived in the British colony of Nova Scotia between 1776 and 1785, the population tripled. There were about 3,500 Black Loyalists in this group. They included newly freed slaves, those who

had bought their freedom, and those born free, as well as indentured servants and slaves to White Loyalists and disbanded soldiers.

The Black Loyalists were landed at Port Roseway (now Shelburne), Birchtown, Port Mouton, Annapolis Royal, Fort Cumberland, Halifax, and Saint John. New Brunswick, until that time a part of Nova Scotia, was created in 1784 as a new province, to distribute the administrative burden of dealing with so many new arrivals.

Black Loyalist settlements in Nova Scotia were established in Annapolis Royal and in the areas of Cornwallis/Horton, Weymouth, Digby, Windsor, Preston, Sydney, Fort Cumberland, Parrsboro, Halifax, as well as Shelburne, Birchtown, and Port Mouton. In New Brunswick, Black Loyalists were settled in Saint John and along the Saint John River.



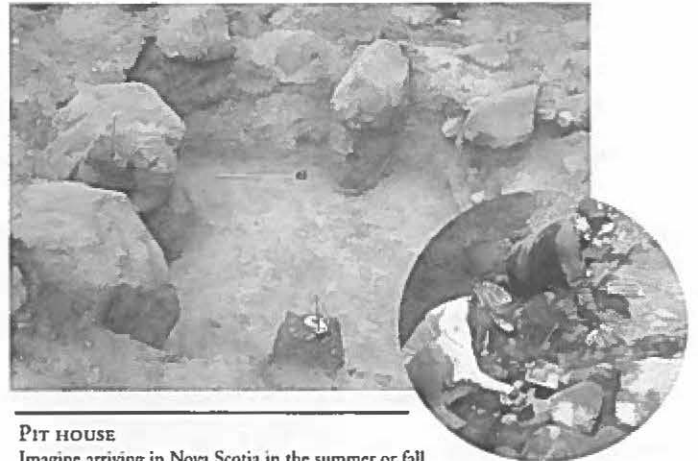
THE BROWNSPRIGGS LAND GRANT
This surveyor's drawing shows the 3,000-acre Brownspriggs grant at Tracadie, given to 74 Black Loyalists in 1787.
Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management



SURVEY OF BIRCHTOWN
This surveyor's drawing shows several Black Loyalist names. It was discovered in a wall of a house in Shelburne County in 1998. This drawing and a ledger kept by merchant Stephen Skinner are the earliest evidence that Black Loyalists owned land in the present-day Birchtown.
Private Collection. Photo by Learning Resources & Technology for the Nova Scotia Museum

About 1,500 Black Loyalists settled in Shelburne County, Nova Scotia. Most indentured servants and slaves settled in the town of Shelburne. Free Blacks settled nearby on the northwest harbour in an area named Birchtown, after the man who had signed the certificates of freedom. Here, under the leadership of Colonel Stephen Blucke, 1,200 Black Loyalists formed the largest Black township of the time in British North America. Blucke was leader of a militia group, the Black Pioneers, organized to clear and construct the town of Shelburne and to settle the Black Loyalists in Birchtown.

Port Mouton, renamed Guysborough in honour of Sir Guy Carleton, was home to 558 Black Loyalist settlers until a fire ripped through the town and destroyed everything. The people were removed by the government in June of 1784 to Chedabucto Bay, in north-eastern Nova Scotia where they created the township of Guysborough, named after their original settlement.



PIT HOUSE

Imagine arriving in Nova Scotia in the summer or fall of 1783. You need a roof over your head, but lumber is in short supply. Or you don't have time before winter comes to build a house. So you dig a hole in the ground and make a roof of tree trunks and canvas over the hole. The British Army often lived this way while on the march, and Black soldiers and engineers had built hundreds of them during the war. This pit house (AKDi-12) was excavated by St. Mary's University Field School archaeologists in 1994.
Nova Scotia Museum. Photo by Laird Niven.

A Difficult Life for Black Loyalists

Resettlement was hard for White Loyalists, but it was worse for Black Loyalists. Nova Scotia, under the direction of Governor Parr, was not prepared for the arrival of so many people. Many arrived late in the fall and had no opportunity to clear land, build a home, or plant crops. Many spent the winter in tents and makeshift huts in the thick woods. Others built pit homes.

The British had promised free land and rations for three years to the Black Loyalists. A family was supposed to receive 100 acres for each family head and 50 acres for each person in the household (wife, son, daughter or servant). Each military officer was to receive 1000 acres; a private was to receive 100 acres. But it never happened that way. Out of 649 Black men, only 187 received land. Those who served in the Black Pioneer militia companies received very little land and in many cases none at all. The exception was Colonel Stephen Blucke who received 200 acres of land at Birchtown, but had to wait four years to get it.

The Black Loyalists who moved to Chedabucto from Port Mouton got fed up with being landless. In 1787, their representative, Thomas Brownspriggs, presented a petition to the government signed by seventy-four people requesting land. By September of that year, 74 Black Loyalist families were granted 3000 acres in Tracadie, around the mouth of Tracadie Harbour, in what was then called Sydney County but is now Guysborough and Antigonish Counties.

Most Black Loyalists couldn't make a living from farming because either they had no land, or their land was unsuitable for growing crops. Black Loyalists with skills as blacksmiths, bakers, shoemakers, carpenters, teachers, ministers, coopers, boatbuilders, laundresses, seamstresses, tailors, military persons, midwives, domestics, cooks, waiters, sailors, a doctor, pilots of boats, and navigators were in a better position to make some kind of a living.

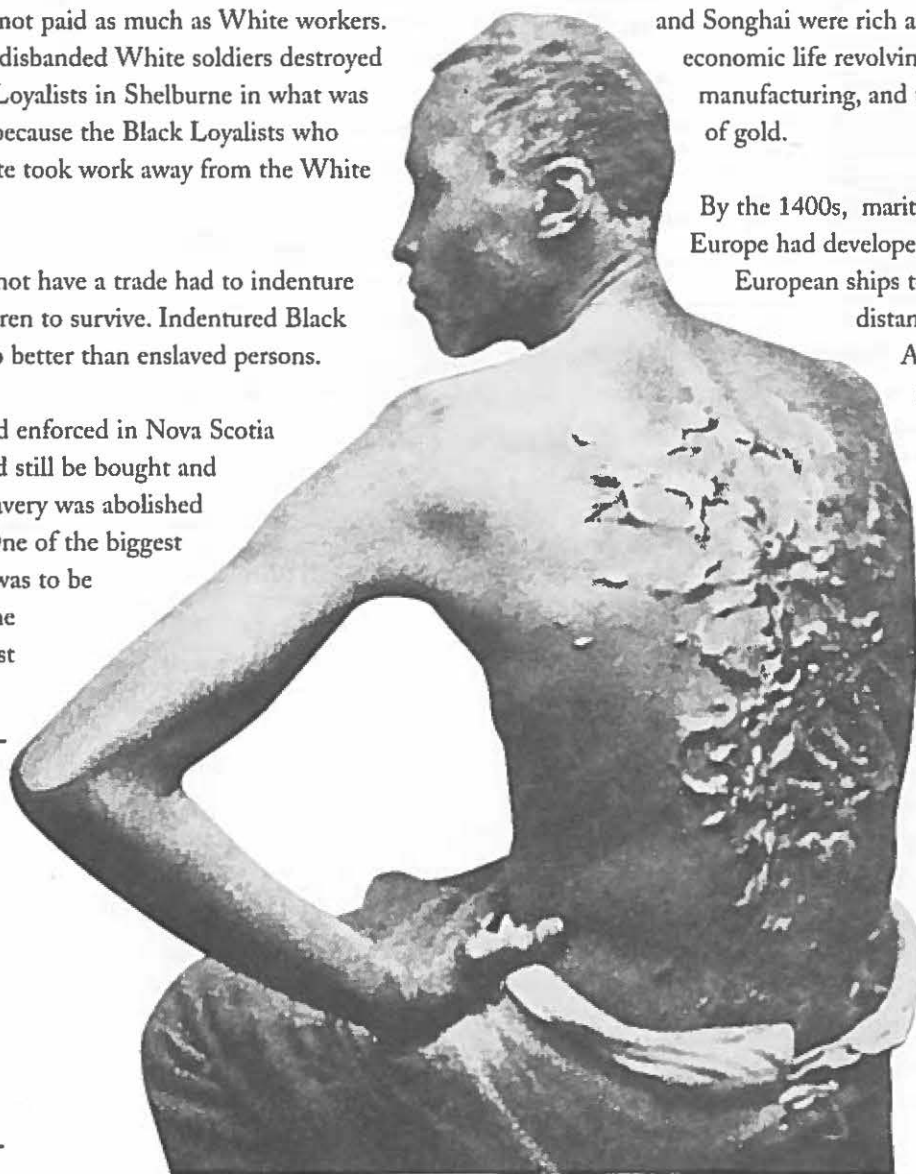
But Black workers were not paid as much as White workers. In July 1784, a group of disbanded White soldiers destroyed 20 houses of free Black Loyalists in Shelburne in what was Canada's first race riot, because the Black Loyalists who worked for a cheaper rate took work away from the White settlers.

Many of those who did not have a trade had to indenture themselves or their children to survive. Indentured Black Loyalists were treated no better than enslaved persons.

Slavery was still legal and enforced in Nova Scotia at this time. People could still be bought and sold until 1834, when slavery was abolished in the British Empire. One of the biggest fears of Black Loyalists was to be kidnapped and sold in the United States or the West Indies by slave traders,

**SCARRED BACK OF GORDON,
AN AMERICAN SLAVE, c1863,
LOUISIANA**

This man bears the scars of flogging. John Farmer of Birchtown, Nova Scotia, told Clara Dennis in the 1920s, "Slaves were used hard...If anything went wrong they were tied up and lashed, then their backs were bathed in pickle. Grandfather had it done to him in slavery". John was a descendant of Nova Scotian Black Loyalists, Jupiter and Venus Famer.
Copyright CORBIS, New York



who sometimes sailed along the coast of Nova Scotia. At the same time, since Nova Scotia did not have a climate to support the plantation system, many White Loyalists abandoned their slaves because they could not afford to feed them.

Poverty, epidemics and suffering were widespread among the Black Loyalists. Harsh winters, sickness, and lack of healthy food killed many. Accounts written by Black Loyalists and others at this time tell how terribly difficult it was for these new Nova Scotians.

Slavery in the Black Loyalists' Story

The original homeland of most Nova Scotian peoples of African descent is West Africa. The area has a varied heritage going back thousands of years. From about 500 until the 1600s, the three West African kingdoms of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai were rich and powerful, their economic life revolving around agriculture, manufacturing, and the international trade of gold.

By the 1400s, maritime technology in Europe had developed enough for European ships to navigate to more distant places, including

Africa. European merchants had new markets for goods. They also had new sources of goods to sell in Europe and the Americas.

European countries began to establish colonies in the Americas in the 1600s and 1700s. When the British established rice, indigo, and tobacco plantations in the southern part of North America, plantation owners

needed lots of workers. First they used native Indians as slave labour but then they mostly used African slaves because the Africans were able to withstand the heat and malaria.

**SLAVE SALE AD,
SOUTH CAROLINA**

Millions of Black people were taken from Africa, to be sold in Europe and the New World. The British entered the West African slave trade in the 1500s, and brought most of the future Black Loyalists or their ancestors to North America. Almost 50 per cent of these people came through a single port: Charleston, South Carolina. At the time of the American Revolution, Charleston had the largest Black population in the North American colonies.

Photo by Terry Richardson, Charleston Library Society, Charleston, South Carolina.



In the Americas and the Caribbean, the Africans were sold for cash. This money purchased sugar, rum, spices, cotton, tobacco, coffee, rice, indigo, and molasses for sale in Europe. The trans-Atlantic trade between Africa, the Americas, and Europe, known as the Triangular Trade, created immense wealth for European nations.

It is estimated that more than 10 million people were brought across the Atlantic Ocean to North America during the three hundred years of active slave trading. It was a cruel commerce in human lives, carried on by both Blacks and Whites, with no regard for anything except profit and power.

The British colonies of the 1700s passed laws to control slaves. A slave was not free to marry, vote, move about freely, or meet with friends. A slave legally could be whipped, starved, tortured, mutilated, or branded. A slave could be forced to have children or to work eighteen hours a day. A slave could be abused or murdered or sold at any time. A slave was regarded as a piece of property. Slavery is a denial of basic human rights. In spite of the strict laws and punishments, slaves did rebel against this treatment. From the 1500s to the 1800s, there were more than 250 known slave revolts.

England made the slave trade illegal in 1807, but did not outlaw slavery itself until 1834. In the United States, the institution of slavery and the selling of slaves continued until 1863. To protect the price of their domestic slaves, in 1808 the United States made it illegal to import slaves from Africa.



**RUNAWAY SLAVE AD,
NOVA SCOTIA**

Slavery was not abolished in Nova Scotia or in the rest of the British Empire until 1834. Some Blacks who came to Nova Scotia as slaves in 1783 managed to run away and join the larger population of free Black Loyalists.

Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management

In the 1700s, quite a few European countries, including Great Britain, had slave-trading companies on the west coast of Africa, in the present-day countries of Gambia, Senegal, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo, Dahomey, and Nigeria. These companies built fortified towns, with full-time European and African staff who maintained diplomatic relations with African kings and chiefs, and traded textiles, weapons, ceramics, liquor, and raw iron in exchange for slaves.

Men, women and children were captured inland and brought to the coast by African dealers, then sold and held in the European "slave factories" where they might wait weeks for a slave ship to transport them across the ocean. They might spend more months in the hold of a vessel, waiting for a full cargo of slaves. Some would die crossing the Atlantic Ocean, from dehydration caused by heat, lack of water and severe diarrhoea - the result of unhealthy crowded conditions.

BRITISH SHIPS LEAVING NEW YORK HARBOR

More than 114 ships transported White and Black Loyalists to Nova Scotia in 1785, many making two or more trips. This wood engraving was done c. 1884 by Howard Pyle (1853-1911).

National Archives of Canada, Ottawa, accession no. 1990-553-656

For more about the Black Loyalists in Nova Scotia, see **Part 2**.

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*Available to Nova Scotian teachers at Department of Education Book Bureau

Videos

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<http://lrt.ednet.ns.ca>
- "Digging for Slaves." 50 min. 1989. International Tele-Film Ltd. 22388 [VHS loan]
- "Escape to Nova Scotia." 58:51 min. 1998. Learning Resources and Technology, Nova Scotia Department of Education. V 2170 [Video dubbing]
- "Hymn to Freedom" Series. 230 min. 1994. International Tele-Film Ltd. [Video dubbing]
- Includes "Nova Scotia: Against the Tides" 57:30 min. 1994. V 1643 [Video dubbing]
- Loyalties*. 56:50 min. 1998. Ziji Productions and the National Film Board of Canada. (Available from www.nfb.ca)
- Lucy's Bet: Black Loyalists in Nova Scotia*. 33:37 min. 1991. Learning Resources and Technology, Nova Scotia Department of Education. V 1144 [Video dubbing] Teacher's guide included.

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- The Black Loyalist Heritage Society -History
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- The On-Line Institute for Advanced Loyalist Studies:Black Loyalists index page
<http://www.royalprovincial.com/military/black/black.htm>
- The On-Line Institute for Advanced Loyalist Studies:Black Loyalists - David George
<http://www.royalprovincial.com/military/black/blkgeo.htm>
- Nova Scotia Museum Black Loyalists
<http://museum.gov.ns.ca/BlackLoyalists>
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<http://www.nsarm.ednet.ns.ca>