

# info

This Info has been produced by the Interpretation Unit of the Nova Scotia Museum History Section, with the assistance of Ruth Holmes Whitehead, Carmelita Robertson, Carolyn Smith, David States, Patrick Kakembo, Gloria Desmond, Scott Robson and Angela Melgaard.

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.

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LOYALISTS



BLACK  
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# THE BLACK LOYALISTS OF NOVA SCOTIA

## Part 2

### HEROES & HEROINES

A woman struggling to get herself and her elderly mother to freedom.  
A child trying to be brave, spurred on by the display of courage around him.  
A man who has never tasted freedom, valiantly battling for something that is his right.

Every individual who struggled for freedom—every Black Loyalist—is a hero. The people identified here are some of the many who looked despair and death in the face and kept on going. Their stories exist as bits and pieces of information handed down through families and in records such as land grants, deeds, census records, wills, church records, historical photographs, cemeteries and newspapers. Details are also found in archaeological data, obtained through field surveys and excavations.

## *Hagar and Benjamin Gero*

Hagar and Benjamin Gero, Tracadie, were the ancestors of a long line of Geros in many areas of Nova Scotia today. Hagar escaped at age 16 from Thomas Broughton, owner of Mulberry Plantation in South Carolina. It was 1779, the year of the first British land invasion of that colony. Hagar made it to New York, working in the Wagon-Master General's Department of the British Army; from there she came on the ship *Nisbet* to Port Mouton, Nova Scotia.

Benjamin Gero, age 25, was on the same ship. He had been owned by a poor French-Huguenot silk weaver, Peter Giraud (pronounced Gero), who had a shop on King Street in Charleston, South Carolina.



### GERO FARMLAND

This barn on the Gero farm in the Brownspriggs grant burned after this photo was taken in 1996. Photo by Ruth Holmes Whitehead, Nova Scotia Museum

After the 1784 fire at Port Mouton, Benjamin and Hagar moved to Chedabucto and received land in the 1787 Brownspriggs grant, where they farmed and raised their children.

### MULBERRY PLANTATION, BERKELEY COUNTY

This is where Hagar Gero was enslaved in South Carolina. Notice the African-style huts in front of the Big House. Did Hagar live in one of these? This oil painting on paper is by Thomas Coram. Gibbes Museum of Art/Carolina Art Association, Charleston, South Carolina. 68.18.01

## *Samuel Dismal*

Samuel Dismal, Tracadie, left his owner, John Dismal, of Somerset County, Virginia, in 1779. He came to Nova Scotia on board *Nisbet* in 1783. Having survived in Nova Scotia for four years with no firm roots, he settled at Tracadie in 1787. Samuel wed Suzan Richardson at Christ Church, Guysborough, on 4 November 1792. Their descendants would fight to retain the land on which the old family homestead stood. Today, the family name is written as Desmond.



**DISMAL/DESMOND AND GERO DESCENDANTS**

Rose Desmond, Ella Mae (Desmond) Sylvia, Clara Louise (Desmond) Reddick, and Elizabeth (Gero) Carvery are all descended from Black Loyalists. This photo was taken in New Glasgow, Nova Scotia, in the early 1940s.

Courtesy of Ella Reddick Carvery

*Dinah and Hannah Lining,*

Dinah and Hannah Lining, Tracadie, were slaves of the Lining family of Charleston, South Carolina. Hannah tried to run away when she was 14, but was recaptured. In 1780, when she was 34, the British Army crossed the



**CHRIST CHURCH AND CEMETERY, GUYSBOROUGH**  
Hannah and Dinah Lining were baptized and buried here.

Photo by Ruth Holmes Whitehead, Nova Scotia Museum



**LINING HOUSE, CHARLESTON**

Dinah and Hannah Lining were enslaved by Dr. John Lining until 1780. He and his wife Sarah Lining lived here at the corner of King and Broad Street, in Charleston, South Carolina. Almost 50 percent of enslaved Africans came through the port of Charleston, South Carolina. At the time of the American Revolution, Charleston had the largest Black population in the North American colonies.

Photo by Ruth Holmes Whitehead, Nova Scotia Museum.

lands of the Lining plantation on its way to besiege Charleston. Hannah, blind in one eye, not only helped her elderly mother, Dinah, escape safely with the army to New York, but worked to support her until they took the brig *Elijah* to Port Mouton in 1783.

When fire destroyed the town a year later, they moved to Guysborough. On 30 July 1786, Hannah and Dinah were baptized at Christ Church, along with James Lennox, whom Hannah later married. James Lennox's name shows on the Tracadie land grant, but he died just prior to the grant being issued. Hannah, as his widow, took up the land, and remarried. Her husband appears in one document as Samuel Aitkens and in another as Samuel Hawkins. Throughout difficult times, Hannah took care of her mother, who lived to be 89. Hannah died at age 80 and is buried near Dinah.

*Thomas Richardson,*

Thomas Richardson, Tracadie, sailed on the ship *Nisbet* in November 1783, when he was 32, to make a good life for himself in Nova Scotia. He had escaped in 1777, early in the war, from Edward Dawson of Aarons County, Maryland. Ten years later, he was one of the grantees at Tracadie. A man of character, he served as a town officer there in 1794-1795, keeping order as a constable. He owned more land than his initial Brownspriggs grant, and was living on his own property around Little Tracadie in 1799. His will and inventory tell us what his life was like.

Richardson owned livestock, a musket, an umbrella, furniture, tools, and a spinning wheel. He left all his farmland and buildings to his wife, Anne, so she could support their young children. To his older daughter Anne, he gave a cow and its offspring. He left his stepdaughter a shilling. Thomas Richardson undoubtedly worked long hours but still had time to celebrate life through his religion. So deep was his spiritual belief that in his will he left a sum of money to the parish priest to pray for his soul. Although the Richardson surname is not common in the Tracadie area today, he had many descendants through his daughter Anne.

*Margaret and Stephen Blucke,*

Birchtown, are intriguing individuals. Margaret was born in New York, where most of her family were free and well-off. She bought her own freedom at age 14, and then the freedom of a younger girl, Isabella Gibbons. A letter written by Margaret indicates that she was well educated and religious. At age 40, in 1783, she left New York on

*L'Abondance* with her 31-year-old husband, Stephen, born free in Barbados, and the 20-year-old Isabella. Stephen Blucke had taken over command of a much-feared military unit in New Jersey after the previous

night he just disappeared. Some believed he was killed by wild animals because they found his torn clothes on Pell Road. But his end remains a mystery.

### *Mary Postell*

Mary Postell, Birchtown, was the slave of a wealthy South Carolina planter when the war began. She managed to get herself and her children away from him, and they claimed freedom behind the British lines. Her certificate of freedom was taken from her, however, by a White person who pretended he wanted to see her papers. When Charleston surrendered to the Americans, Mary went to St. Augustine, Florida, with her husband and family, as servants to Jesse Gray. There, Gray claimed she was legally his slave, and sold her to his brother Samuel.

Samuel and Jesse Gray emigrated to Nova Scotia, taking Mary and her daughters along. At some point, Samuel sold Mary back to Jesse. She became very afraid that Jesse Gray would sell her away from her children. One night, she escaped with them from his house. Gray went to court to prove he owned her; then, to punish her, he took her down the coast to Argyle, where he sold her to William Maugham for one hundred bushels of potatoes.

Ignoring Mary's desperation and heartbreak, he sold her daughter Flora to John Henderson, keeping another daughter, Nell, as his own property. Such was the terrible reality of slavery in Nova Scotia.

### *Jupiter and Venus Farmer*

Jupiter and Venus Farmer, Birchtown, are the ancestors of many Black Nova Scotians. Although neither appears in the *Book of Negroes* with the surname Farmer, there is a man entered as Jupiter (no last name recorded), a "stout fellow," age 35, who worked with the Wagon-Master General's Department of the British Army. The former

#### ARTIFACTS FROM THE ACKER SITE

This punch bowl, tea bowl, and saucer were among 13,840 archaeological artifacts found during the excavation at the site that likely was the home of Margaret and Stephen Blucke.

Photo by Richard Plander, Learning Resources & Technology for the Nova Scotia Museum



#### MILITARY UNIFORM BUTTONS

These buttons are from British regiments. Three cannons on a button indicate the British Royal Artillery. These buttons were excavated at the Acker site, Birchtown. How did they get there? Two possibilities: they were available to the Black Loyalists as surplus, or the person who lived in the house played a military role in the American Revolutionary War.

Photo by Richard Plander, Learning Resources and Technology, Nova Scotia Museum.

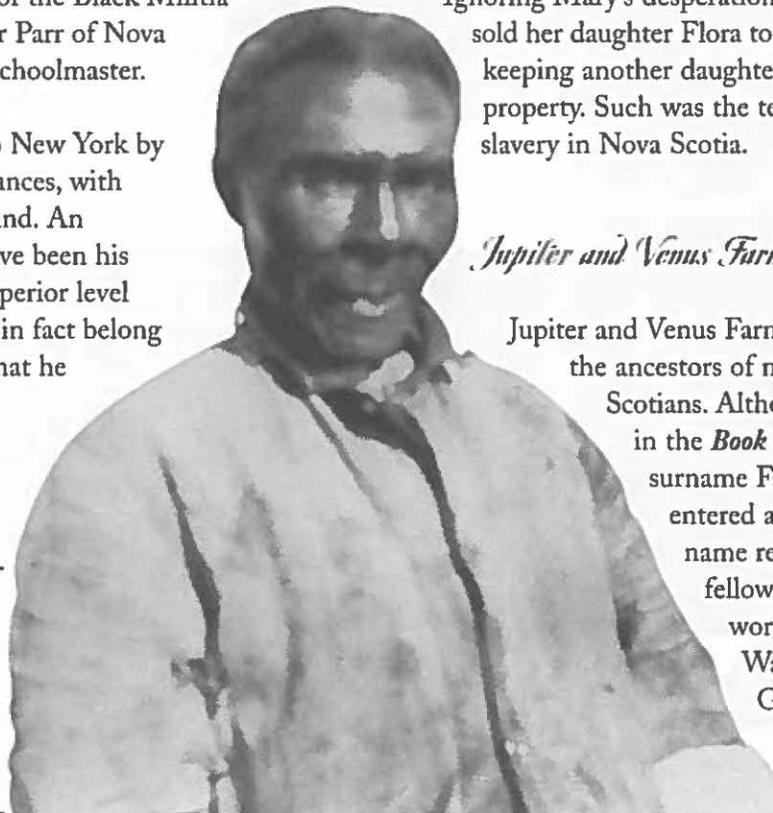


commander, Colonel Tye (a runaway slave), died from wounds in 1780. In September 1784, Blucke was commissioned lieutenant-colonel of the Black Militia in Shelburne District by Governor Parr of Nova Scotia. He also became the local schoolmaster.

Margaret left him and returned to New York by 1789. Stephen had a daughter, Frances, with Isabella Gibbons, who stayed behind. An archaeological dig at what may have been his "spacious house" has revealed a superior level of furnishings. If these things did in fact belong to Stephen Blucke, they suggest that he liked the good life. His fortune probably dwindled when most of his students left Nova Scotia to relocate in Sierra Leone. One

**JOHN FARMER IN THE 1920s, BIRCHTOWN**  
Nova Scotian writer Clara Dennis interviewed John Farmer in the 1920s, when he was an old man. His grandparents had been slaves: Jupiter, in Brunswick, New Jersey; Venus, in Charleston. He showed Dennis the remains of pit houses near Birchtown, and told her how Venus, a "smart woman," helped support their many children by her knitting.

Photo by Clara Dennis. Nova Scotia Archives & Records Management, Acc. 1983-468 #33 (1923-1940) N-8877



owner of this Jupiter is entered as Joseph Harmer. Jupiter likely took this name as his own surname. Perhaps Harmer became Farmer over time, in the same way that Wingood became Ringwood, or Dismal became Desmond.

A woman named only Venus in the *Book of Negroes* was described as slender, age 28. She had come to Shelburne on the ship *Ann & Elizabeth* in 1783 after escaping from William Smith of Charleston, South Carolina. In Shelburne, Venus was indentured to Edward Hannah, and probably lived in the Hannah household. Indenture was similar to slavery, but for a specific number of years. With no say in the matter, an indentured servant could be sold by one master to another.

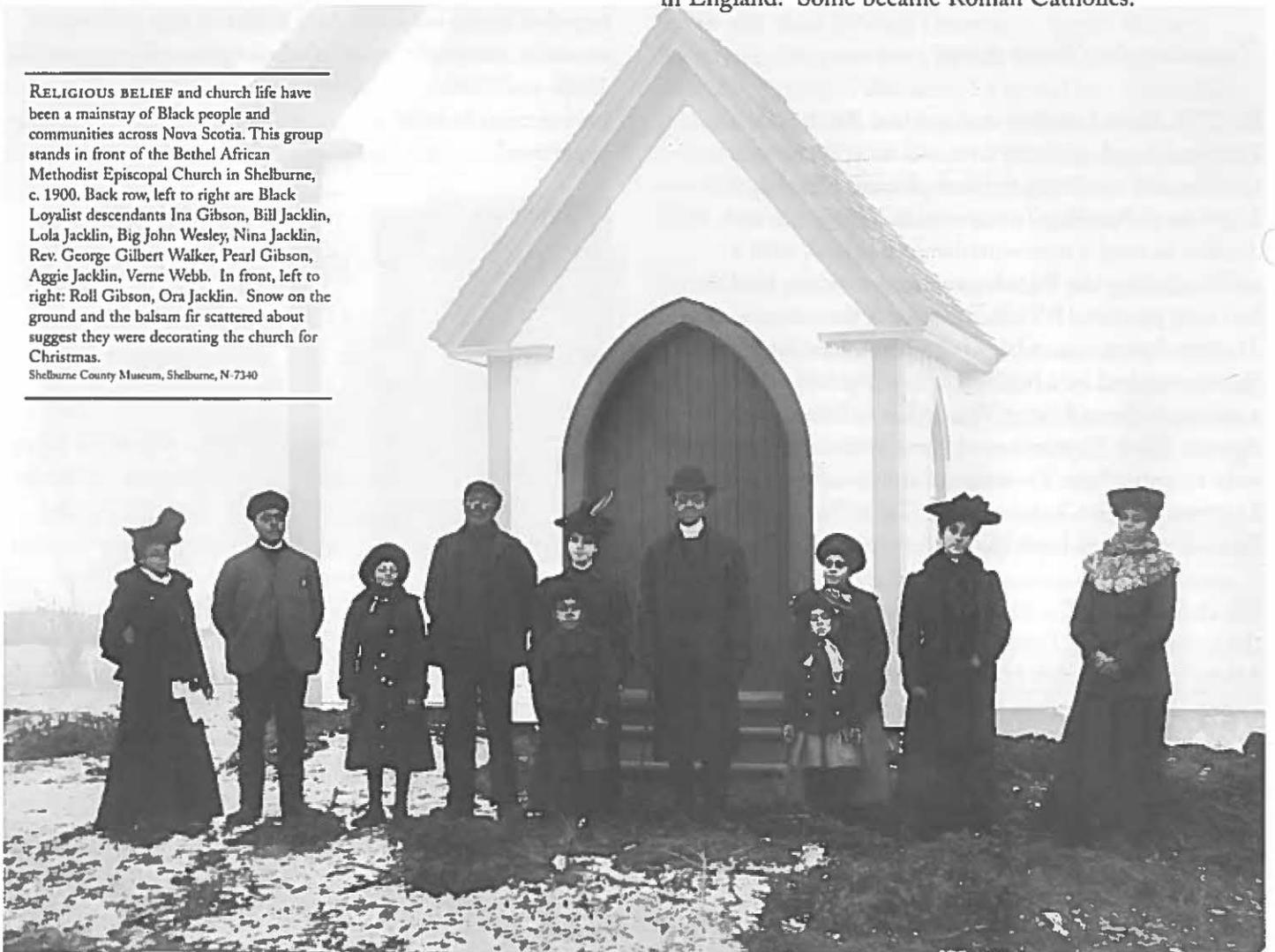
### *Finding a Way*

Many Black people in North America in the 1700s had actually been born in Africa. They still spoke their mother languages and remembered some of the practices and beliefs from their previous lives. While enslaved, many were not allowed to practice any form of religion, including Christianity. However, people met in secrecy and developed their own religious practices and rituals, which combined African and Christian beliefs.

Many Black Loyalists followed the Baptist faith under the direction of David George, the first Black Baptist minister in Nova Scotia. Others followed the Methodist faith under the direction of John Marrant, Boston King, and Moses Wilkinson. Some, such as Stephen Blucke and Thomas Brownspriggs, were Anglican, the state church in England. Some became Roman Catholics.

RELIGIOUS BELIEF and church life have been a mainstay of Black people and communities across Nova Scotia. This group stands in front of the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Shelburne, c. 1900. Back row, left to right are Black Loyalist descendants Ina Gibson, Bill Jacklin, Lola Jacklin, Big John Wesley, Nina Jacklin, Rev. George Gilbert Walker, Pearl Gibson, Aggie Jacklin, Verne Webb. In front, left to right: Roll Gibson, Ora Jacklin. Snow on the ground and the balsam fir scattered about suggest they were decorating the church for Christmas.

Shelburne County Museum, Shelburne, N-7340



Having been denied open and formal religion in slavery, Black Loyalists in Nova Scotia used the church as a source of security, a social gathering place, an educational institution, and a place for political discussions. The church provided a spiritual and emotional release for these settlers who were in a trying situation. They continued to express their yearning and hope for real freedom and equality through spiritual songs.

### *The Continuing Struggle*

Nova Scotian Black Loyalists and their descendants have faced a continuing struggle. Equality is still not a given for African Nova Scotians. The struggle for employment and access to education and human rights continues today.

### *Departure for Sierra Leone*

By 1791, Black Loyalists realized that the dream of a Promised Land, with freedom and security for their families, was not being fulfilled. Some of the Black Loyalists of Brindley Town, outside Digby, met and decided to send a representative to England, with a petition asking the British government for the land they had been promised. While in England, their representative, Thomas Peters, a member of the Black Pioneers corps, was approached by a business group that had established a colony in Sierra Leone, West Africa. Peters was told that the Black Loyalists would receive free land if they were to settle there. He returned to Nova Scotia with Lieutenant John Clarkson of the Royal Navy, to convince Black Loyalists to leave Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.

On 15 January 1792, about 1296 Black Loyalists, including the notable leaders David George, Boston King, and Moses Wilkinson, left Halifax in fifteen ships, for Sierra Leone. This was slightly less than one third of the number of Black Loyalists who had arrived in Nova Scotia in 1783. It seems that neither John Clarkson nor Thomas Peters recruited in northeastern Nova Scotia, so none of the Black Loyalists from that area went to Sierra Leone.



**AN EARLY HOUSE SITE IN THE BROWNSPRIGGS GRANT, TRACADIE**  
Although the pearlware plate rims found at this site suggest it was occupied by the family of one of the original grantees, more research is required before anyone can say which family lived here.  
Photo by Stephen Powell, Nova Scotia Museum.

### *Recovering the History*

Many people, including descendants of these early settlers, do not know the origins of Black Loyalist communities and families in Nova Scotia. Although some people recorded family events in their Bibles or kept community accounts, the origins were largely forgotten throughout the 1800s and 1900s. As one descendant put it, "We didn't have time to look for our history; we were too busy trying to survive."



**AN EARLY HOUSE SITE AT BIRCHTOWN**  
The 1998 archaeological excavation at this early Black Loyalist house site (AkDi-23) yielded many more objects in a greater variety than expected. This artifact collection suggests that the occupants were better off materially than many other Loyalists.  
Photo by Richard Plander, Learning Resources and Technology, for the Nova Scotia Museum.

Interest in Black history in Nova Scotia increased in the 1970s. In 1983, with the marking of the 200th anniversary of the Loyalist arrival in Nova Scotia, Black

Nova Scotians made public claim to their part in the early settlement of the province. Now the story of the Black Loyalists is being recovered through the work of the Black Loyalist Heritage Society, the Brownspriggs Historical Society, and the Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia, among others, as people gather information from oral histories, land grant records, deeds, census records, wills, church records and archaeological data.



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#### THE PROJECT ADVISORY GROUP

Museum staff valued the perspective and collaboration of community representatives during this project. Here are some of the members of the Advisory Group and Nova Scotia Museum History Section staff at their first meeting in February 1998.

Front row L-R: Sharon Clyke-Oliver, Gilbert Daye, Deborah Scott, Carmelita Robertson, Pat Skinner. Back row: David Christianson, Richard Gallion, David States, Sheila Stevenson, Gloria Desmond, Robert Upshaw, Ruth Whitehead, Kevin Thomas. Missing are Henry Bishop and Judith Shiers Milne. Marjorie Turner Bailey and Patrick Kakembo joined the group later, replacing Sharon Clyke-Oliver and Robbie Upshaw. Photo by Roger Lloyd, Learning Resources & Technology for the Nova Scotia Museum

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As part of the research carried out by the Nova Scotia Museum in 1998, during the project "Remembering Black Loyalists, Black Communities", archaeologists located sites, associated with early Black Loyalist settlers, within the original 1787 Brownspriggs Grant area in what are now Antigonish and Guysborough Counties.

Also in 1998, archaeologists carried out a detailed excavation in search of Stephen Blucke's house in Birchtown. The archaeologists "revealed the cellar of a relatively substantial building that appears to have been abandoned by the end of the eighteenth century. The artifacts recovered were exceptional for what we know of the Black Loyalist period in Birchtown, not only because of their quantity but their quality as well." (Niven, 2000, 11)

This work, coupled with that of historians, archaeologists, and ethnologists across North America, is helping us to understand this incredible part of our history.



#### ROSE FORTUNE

Making a living was a challenge for the Black Loyalists. Rose Fortune operated her own business transporting goods for people in Annapolis Royal. Although her birth date is unknown, she was buried from St. Luke's Church on 20 February, 1864, when she was about 90 years of age. That means she was born during the American Revolutionary War period, and may have come to Nova Scotia as a child. This watercolour is by an unknown artist. Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management. 1979.147.56