

## **MAPPING AND CIVIL SERVICE: SAMUEL GASKIN'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO NOVA SCOTIA GEOLOGY, 1950-1977**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Tracing the historical contributions of African Nova Scotians to geoscience provides an opportunity to reflect on their personal challenges, determination, and achievements. Samuel Gaskin worked in the mapping unit of the Nova Scotia Department of Mines (now Department of Natural Resources) from 1950 to 1977 and was (perhaps) the first African Nova Scotian to work in the provincial geoscience department. Due to the impact of the maps he contributed to, Samuel's knowledge and technical expertise in mapping provided a foundational contribution that positively impacted Nova Scotians through advances in geoscience but also resulted in the production of maps used for tourism and natural sciences.

### **EARLY YEARS**

Samuel's father and mother immigrated from Barbados to Nova Scotia in 1903/1904. This was a period of increased immigration from Barbados to Nova Scotia, with many immigrants settling in Cape Breton after gaining work at the Dominion Iron and Steel Company (Bonner 2017). However, Abraham Gaskin (1881-1951) worked as a carpenter in Halifax in 1907,<sup>3</sup> and later owned a shop on Brunswick Street with his second wife Lillian in the mid-1920s when Samuel (b. 1926) and his brother Kenneth Gaskin (1922-1967) were born.

The Gaskin name in Halifax during the early 1920's was also associated with "Gaskin's Menthol Liniment" (Fig 1), but this was

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<sup>3</sup> McAlpine's City Directory 1907-08 p. 145. Gasken (sic) Abraham, carpenter, 203 Grafton, h 205 do. [archives.novascotia.ca/directory/page/?Place=&Letter=&Page=145](https://archives.novascotia.ca/directory/page/?Place=&Letter=&Page=145).

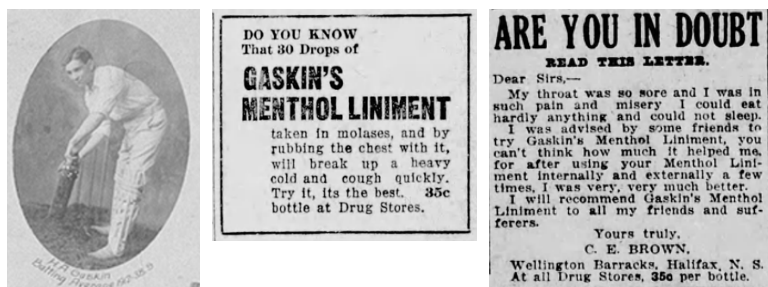


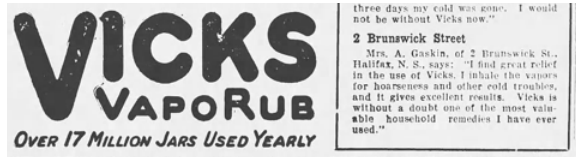
Fig 1 Hugh Gaskin, a member of the Sydney Cricket team during the 1912-13 season, (Beaton Institute/Cape Breton University) and Gaskin's Menthol Liniment ads in *The Evening Mail* (Halifax) on Dec 30, 1920 (centre) and Feb 17, 1921 (right).

produced by Philip Gaskin and his brother Hugh, pharmacists who were also prominent cricket players in Nova Scotia during the time (Reid 2020). Shortly after Philip left Nova Scotia in August of 1923, an advertisement for a competing brand, Vicks VapoRub (Fig 2), featured a testimonial from “Mrs. A. Gaskin of 2 Brunswick St. Halifax, N.S. says: *I find great relief in the use of Vicks. I inhale the vapors for hoarseness and other cold troubles and it gives excellent results. Vicks is the most valuable household remedy I have ever used.*” Dec. 23, 1923. This testimonial from Lillian Gaskin, Samuel’s mother, was likely incorporated in the Vicks VapoRub print ads due to the similarity in her name with the competing brand.

Abraham had a previous marriage and a family with Miriam (Jones). Abraham and Miriam were married in 1906 and their first son Marcus was born the year later. There were other children although several died at a young age. The family would have also experienced the Halifax Explosion of 1917. Miriam died in January of 1919, perhaps, given the date from the Spanish Flu. The 1921 Census shows Abraham and Marcus were living at 2 Brunswick Street, the same year that Abraham married Lillian (Rawlins). Marcus graduated from Grade 10 in 1928 and participated in an exhibition of carpentry work that he did while at St. Patrick’s School.<sup>4</sup>

Abraham and Lilian had a shop at 746 Brunswick Street in 1925. In March of that year, two young boys who burgled their shop were

<sup>4</sup> June 16, 1927 *The Evening Mail* (Halifax), pg. 20, “Display of Work By Boys Won Praise”. August 9, 1928, *The Evening Mail* (Halifax), p. 18, “Showing of Student’s is Excellent”.



**Fig 2** Vicks VapoRub ad in *The Evening Mail* Dec. 23, 1923 - featuring testimonial from Mrs. A. (Abraham) Gaskin, who was Lillian Gaskin, mother of Kenneth and Samuel Gaskin.

charged and convicted. A newspaper article describes stolen goods from the shop that included “women’s wearing apparel, soap, tobacco, stationary, handkerchiefs, etc.”<sup>5</sup> A shop in Halifax run by a Black family was not likely common in 1925, and the Gaskin children’s early years were likely surrounded by the activities associated with the business.

In the 1931 Census the Gaskin family was located at 2 Brunswick Street. Abraham is listed as owning the dwelling valued at \$3000, occupation of “Peddler notions” and the religion of the family is listed as Plymouth Brethren. The family members names and ages include:

Abraham	54	Kenneth	8
Lilian	44	Samuel	5
Marcus	24	Phyllis Grena	2

Samuel’s older brother Kenneth attended Bloomfield High School in 1939 (Fig 3). Later, when this school merged with another, Kenneth became a member of the first graduating class of the new Queen Elizabeth High School in 1943 (Fig 4). Samuel likely finished high school several years after his older brother Kenneth, perhaps in graduating in 1945. Although some of Kenneth’s records known, those of Samuel remain to be located.

The Gaskin children’s education experience is significant for the challenges that African Nova Scotian’s faced at this time. Their success in public school seems likely to have contributed to public service becoming a prominent aspect of Gaskin family life. In later years, Kenneth worked as a secretary and clerk, and was an active member (Recording Secretary, Army) of the Nova Scotia Civil Service Association (now NSGEU) when he died in 1967. Samuel’s public service would be with the Canadian military.

<sup>5</sup> March 26, 1925, *The Evening Mail* (Halifax), p. 9 “Industrial Home Boys Arrested”. April 9, 1925, *The Evening Mail* (Halifax) p. 18. “Youths Sentenced to City Prison”.



**Fig 3** Bloomfield School 1939-40, Kenneth Gaskin, back row fourth from right.



**Fig 4** First Graduating Class of the new Queen Elizabeth High School, 1943. Halifax Regional Municipality Archives. Kenneth Gaskin, backrow second from left.

## SAMUEL IN THE CORPS

Samuel was recruited into the Canadian Intelligence Corps (CIC) of the No. 3 Intelligence Company, Halifax (Skaarup, 2024), and was among the earliest recruits, joining in 1951 and serving until at least 1968 (Fig 5). Early in his tenure at the CIC, Samuel established expertise in aerial photography and mapping and was a member of a team that won three trophies for intelligence competitions held at Camp Borden (Fig 6).



**Fig 5** Members of the No. 3 (C) Intelligence Company (Halifax) at Camp Borden, Ontario, summer of 1966. Kneeling (L-R): WO1 Samuel (Sammy) Gaskin, Sgt. Alfred E. (Al) Brown, Maj. William (Bill) Landry Sgt. Edward (Ed) D. Kirby, Lt. Sherman R. Veinotte, Lt. L.A. (Al) McAulay. Standing (L-R): Ken Lord, Claude Laroux, James (Jim) McNutt, David (Dave) Bryson, Neil Walsh, Ken Smith.



**Fig 6** WO1 Samuel Gaskin, Lt. Sherman Veinotte, and Sgt. Alfred Brown, with the first awarding of the Canadian Military Intelligence Association trophy for aerial photography interpretation in 1964. The award was an original wooden Thunderbird carving by well-known West Coast Kwakwaka'wakw artist Henry Hunt (1923-1985).



**Fig 7** Detail of Plate XV from the report “Preparation of Maps and Plans from Aerial Photographs”, 1950. Eva Duncan in front and Samuel Gaskin seated in the back.

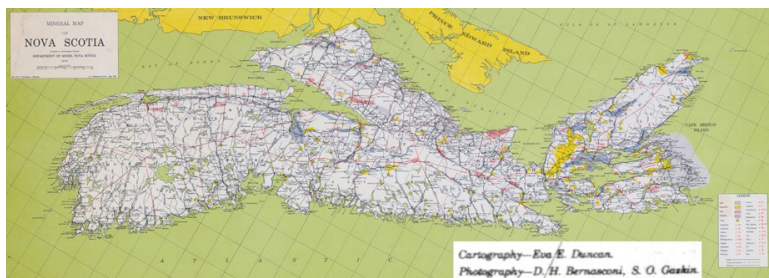
## **SAMUEL GASKIN JOINS DEPT OF MINES**

In 1950, Samuel Gaskin was hired along with Miss Eva Duncan as “draftsman for map compilation” in the Department of Mines (Nova Scotia 1951). That same year the Department published a report titled “Preparation of Maps and Plans from Aerial Photographs” (Nova Scotia 1950). The report includes several photographs documenting the team’s work and equipment, including one photograph that shows Samuel Gaskin and Eva Duncan at the mapping desks (Fig 7). The Department had initiated a new project to produce an updated map of Nova Scotia for registration of mineral rights. The Deputy Minister, J. P. Messervey, published a report of progress on “Maps of Nova Scotia” (Nova Scotia 1953, p. 73-79).

The knowledge that Samuel brought from the Intelligence Corps would likely have been of great value in these projects. The earliest map in which Samuel was a cited contributor is the Minerals of Nova Scotia Map of 1957 (Fig 8).

A departmental photo from the 1960s shows Samuel with colleagues in the mapping group (Fig 9), including Don Bernasconi, Director of the Cartographic Section. Departmental Reports do not seem to mention his work or contributions directly, although Samuel’s





**Fig 8** Mineral Map of Nova Scotia (Duncan 1956).



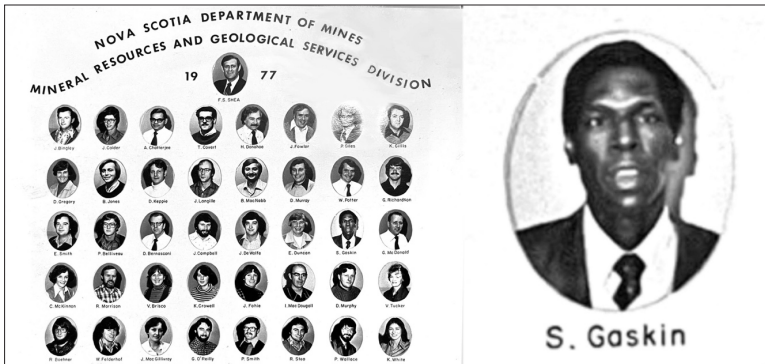
**Fig 9** Samuel Gaskin with colleagues in the mapping section, including (L-R) Eva Duncan, J. Campbell, and Don Bernasconi.

salary is listed in the Public Accounts documents for “Drafting – Making Maps” as \$4500 in 1966 and \$10,390 in 1977.

According to memories of retired members who worked with him (Fig 10), Samuel left the department soon after 1977, and died shortly thereafter, the exact date and cause of his death remains unknown. It seems Samuel and his siblings did not have any children so if he had kept any photographs or journals they are now unknown.

## CONCLUSION

The research behind this report started after seeing the photograph of S. Gaskin among the Departmental Portraits of 1977. Having uncovered this important story, we wanted to share information about



**Fig 10** Members of the Nova Scotia Department of Mines, Mineral Resources and Geological Services Division, 1977.

the man behind the portrait. With over 27 years of service to Nova Scotia geoscience, Samuel Gaskin had a tremendous impact on Nova Scotians through his service to map making in the Department of Mines. His expertise of aerial photography and mapping were used to produce maps of Nova Scotia used by industry and citizens, and for tourism. These included maps used to document the geology of Nova Scotia in the 1960-70s, a post-war era of rapid expansion of geoscience knowledge.

The education success and later public service of Samuel Gaskin and his brother Kenneth was influenced by the social position obtained by their parents. The neighbourhoods of #2 Brunswick Street (1921) and #750 Brunswick Street (1925) were two locations the Gaskin family lived and later had a store. Uncovering the history of Brunswick Street buildings and businesses in 1920-1930s is challenging due to several changes to civic numbers in 1950s. However, additional information about the Gaskin's early life might be uncovered in future research related to these neighbourhoods.

As Bajan immigrants to Nova Scotia in the early 1900s, the Gaskin family faced many obstacles yet made significant contributions to the province through the public service. Samuel Gaskin faced limited opportunities in education but overcame adversity through applying knowledge gained in the military service to improving maps used across Nova Scotia. Samuel's contributions impacted everyone who lived and visited Nova Scotia by making maps of the province more accurate and useful.



Note: In February 2025, the Atlantic Geoscience Society financially supported the printing of a commemorative poster based on this article. The posters were displayed at Acadia University to celebrate African Heritage Month and then made available to the Black Cultural Centre of Nova Scotia for educational programs.

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