




CANADIAN ETHNOGRAPHY SERIES VOLUME 2

From American Slaves to Nova Scotian Subjects

THE CASE OF THE BLACK REFUGEES, 1813-1840

Series Editors:
Bryan D. Cummins
John L. Steckley



HARVEY AMANI WHITFIELD

WHITFIELD

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From American Slaves to Nova Scotian Subjects

PEARSON PRENTICE HALL



Robert J. Harding
Dalhousie
2005

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MCMASTER UNIVERSITY

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HUMBER COLLEGE

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Gorsebrook Research Institute

Saint Mary's University



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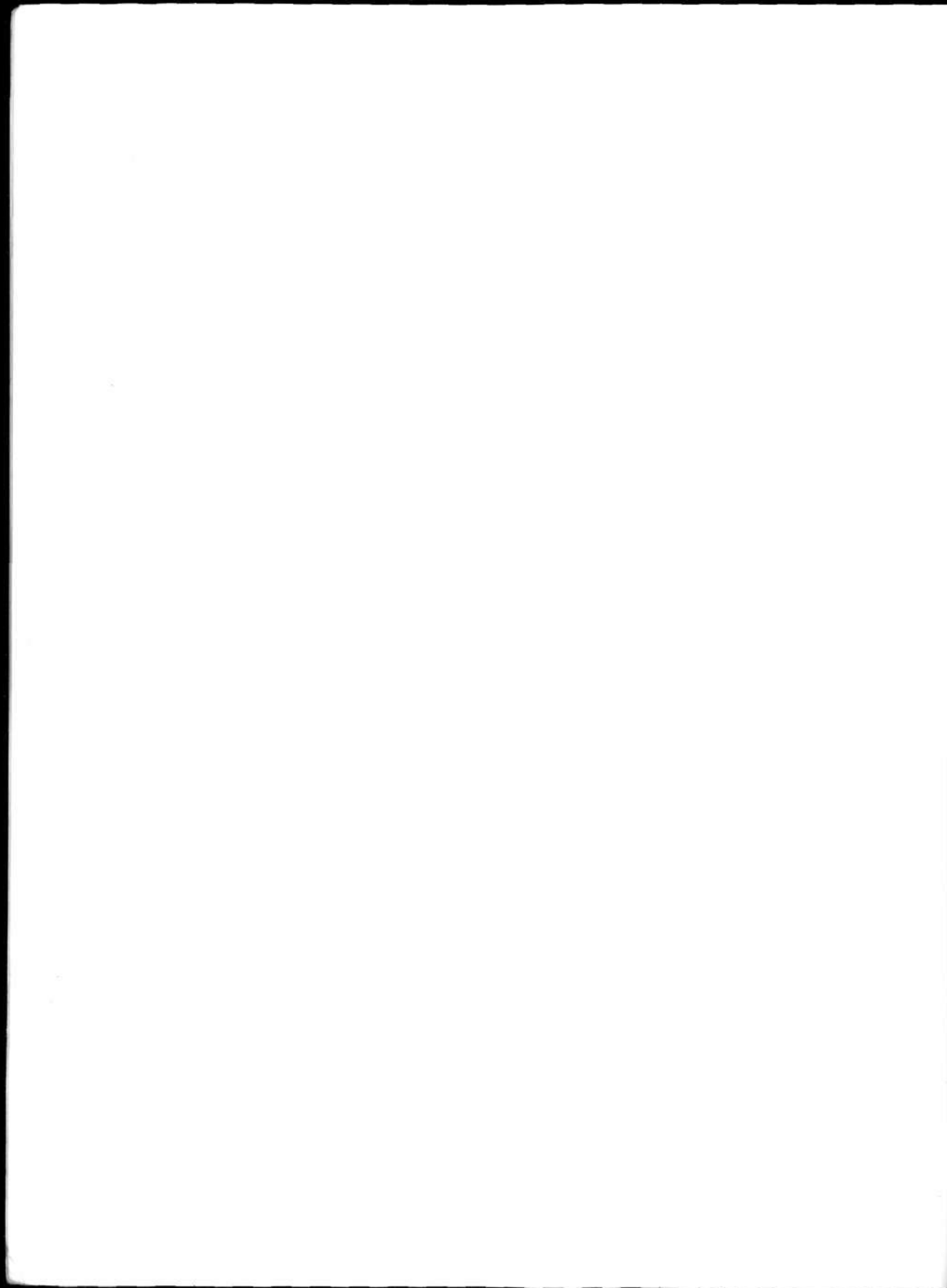
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Printed and bound in Canada.



To my family in America and Nova Scotia



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Preface

CANADIAN ETHNOGRAPHY SERIES

The Canadian Ethnography Series is intended to familiarize undergraduate students with the background and recent history of some of the diverse cultures that make up this country. While the series has as its primary audience students taking courses in anthropology, the monographs will be useful to students of Canadian studies, indigenous studies, sociology, and history.

The series of monographs will examine the distinct histories and contemporary experiences of some of the diverse cultures that make up Canada. The ethnographies will look at a variety of themes, such as indigenous rights, multiculturalism, and socioeconomic development. While some of the topics may resemble those covered by sociologists or historians, each book in our series will provide a firsthand, detailed description of a particular Canadian culture based on personal experience. It is our belief that good case studies are critical for a better understanding.

Through ethnographies, students get to know a people in greater depth. In order to enhance this experience, each of the ethnographies in our series will be supported with the use of some pedagogical features. Each book in the series will be short, less than 200 pages, and will include learning objectives, key terms with glossary, and content questions. The series is intended to be accessible to today's post-secondary students.

Acknowledgments

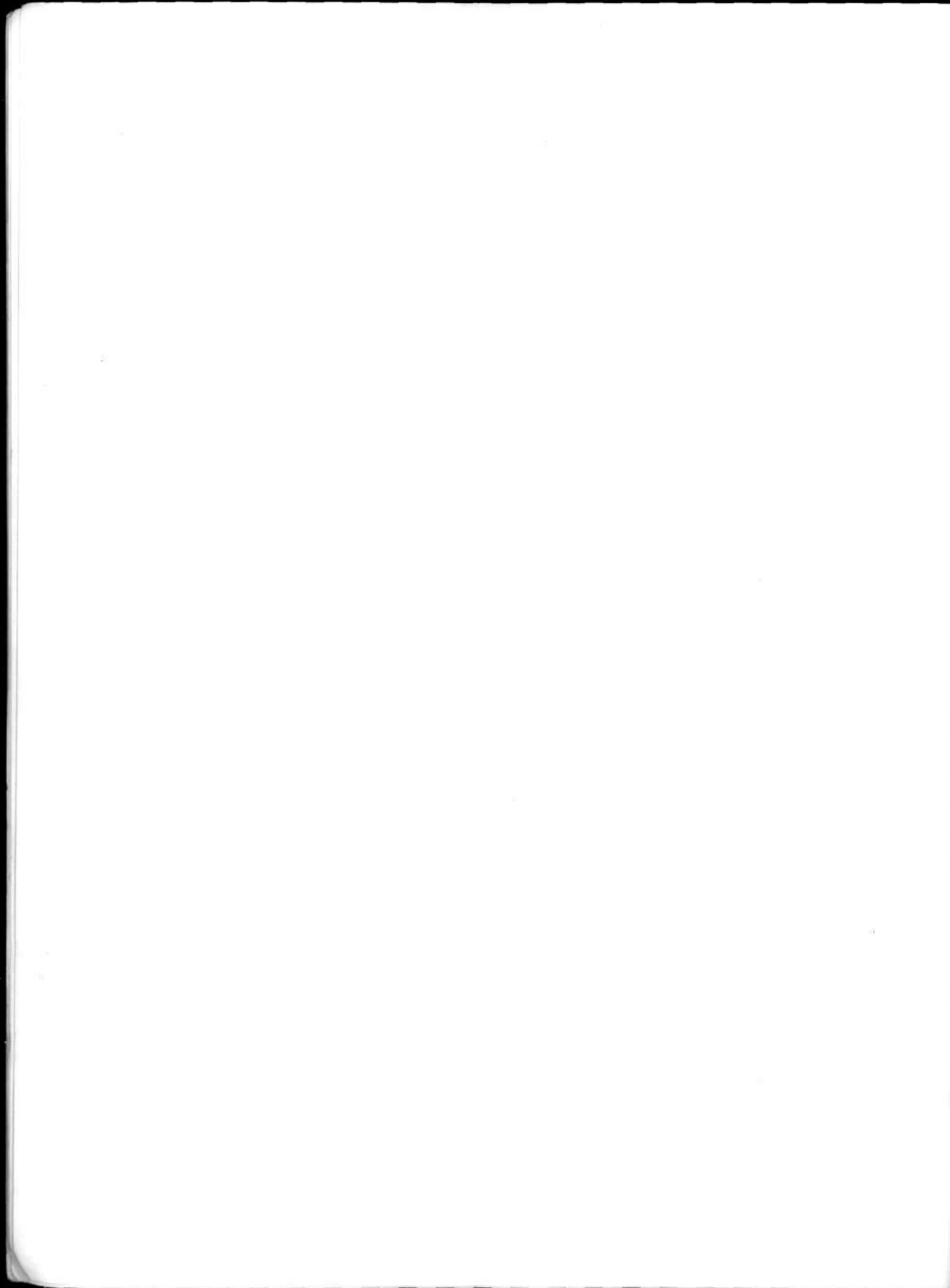
I am indebted to many people for helping me to complete this manuscript. In particular, Dr. David Sutherland, Dr. Judith Fingard, Dr. Michael Cross, and Dr. John O'Brien read through more drafts of this book than any rational person should. Professors James Walker and John Grant shared their vast knowledge of African North American history with me, while Dr. Philip Zachernuk and Dr. Jane Parpart offered continuous moral support. Lastly, I would like to thank the very small community of African Canadian historians.

The following institutions provided me with documentation and support that made this book possible: Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management, Pennsylvania Historical Society, Florida State University Library, Howard University Library, and the University of Toronto Library. The staff at the Nova Scotia Archives helped find documents that had not been requested for nearly a decade.

Finally, I want to express my profound love and appreciation for my family in the United States and my partner and her family here in Nova Scotia.

Although all of the preceding people helped in the creation of this book, any errors of fact or interpretation are my fault alone.

Harvey Amani Whitfield,
2003



Historical Context, Historiography, and Language

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, students should be able to:

1. Distinguish between the three major stages of black immigration into Nova Scotia.
2. Discuss the general trends in historical writing about the Black Refugees.
3. Understand the importance of the labels "Loyalist" and "Refugee."
4. Discuss the benefits and pitfalls of writing history through the active agents/passive victims model.

INTRODUCTION

People of African descent have been in Nova Scotia since the early seventeenth century. The first African Nova Scotians were mostly slaves. They laboured under the French in Île Royale (Cape Breton) and other parts of Nova Scotia. In the eighteenth century, planters from New England brought slaves to the colony. Yet the African Nova Scotian population remained relatively small until the American Revolutionary War, when white owners brought more slaves to the colony and when many recently freed blacks also arrived.¹

BLACK LOYALISTS

By 1784, 3500 **Black Loyalists** had immigrated to Nova Scotia, and, in addition, 1232 slaves were brought to the colony by their white Loyalist owners.

BOX 1.1

The Loyalists

The conclusion of the American war for independence forced the emigration of approximately 100 000 people who did not share the revolutionary zeal of their brethren. Nearly 35 000 of these Loyalists settled in British North America. The Loyalists, contrary to popular myth and historical misconception, consisted of various elements of American society. They were not necessarily devoted to the British Crown but simply believed that

revolution should not take the place of reasoned reform through the existing colonial system. The Loyalists and their offspring held important positions in the colonial governments of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and what would become Upper Canada in 1791. The Loyalist influx into British North America changed the population, character, and development of the geographic region that would, in 1867, become Canada.

Thus, Nova Scotia, while not dependent on slave labour, was in fact a “colonial slave society” (Cahill 1995:193). The Black Loyalists received small allocations of land in a number of widely separated locations, and some of them endured the first race riot in British North American history in 1784. They faced discrimination in terms of employment and an unfair judicial system. In search of better opportunities, nearly 1200 immigrated to the West African country of Sierra Leone in 1792–3 with the aid of British abolitionist John Clarkson.

This exodus had a negative impact on the Black Loyalists who remained in Nova Scotia. The community had lost “its teachers, preachers, and other leaders to Sierra Leone” (Walker 1973:672). However, the scattered remnants of the black community persisted and took advantage of employment opportunities in Halifax. By the early nineteenth century the Black Loyalists had made some economic and social progress through urban employment and increasingly integrated residential patterns. Yet this progress would be inhibited by the drastic upturn in European and African American immigration during the second decade of the nineteenth century.

THE JAMAICAN MAROONS

In 1796, 500 **Jamaican Maroons** were exiled to Nova Scotia because of their defiance of British policy. The local government attempted to introduce them to Christianity and other aspects of Western civilization. However, the Maroons refused to change their culture. They were also frustrated that Nova Scotia’s climate prevented them from growing familiar food crops such as bananas, yams, and cocoa. Moreover, the Maroons resented the colony’s attempt to use them as cheap labour. The Maroons quickly tired of Nova Scotia, and, in 1800, they also took advantage of the opportunity to immigrate to Sierra Leone.

The Black Loyalist and Jamaican Maroon episodes left a two-pronged legacy that the **War of 1812 blacks** inherited. First, conventional wisdom in the colony held that people of African descent were unable to survive in Nova Scotia. Second, the influx of black slaves along with the Loyalists informed racial attitudes in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The racial badge of slavery continued into the nineteenth century and reinforced a hierarchical society, which placed the black community on the lowest rung of the social ladder. Although slavery had practically ceased to exist in Nova Scotia before the British government made the institution illegal in 1833, slavery still shaped the opinions of the white population toward African American settlers during the post-War of 1812 period.

Scholars of early nineteenth century Nova Scotia have emphasized four important themes in order to understand the state of the colony. First, although there was *some* economic development in the timber industry after the Anglo-American conflict, Nova Scotia slipped into a period of economic inertia that contrasted sharply to the prosperous war economy of the previous years. Second, as the colony regressed into depression, European immigration increased. In other words, immigrants flooded into a colony that hardly offered enough work to support its established population. Third, charitable organizations and philanthropic individuals attempted to improve the lives of the poor, immigrants, Aboriginal people, and blacks. Fourth, in the 1820s and 1830s, Nova Scotians began to seek an extension of rights in religious and political spheres at the expense of the established hierarchy. Overall, Nova Scotia in the early nineteenth century functioned as a strategically important British colony but remained behind its New England neighbours in terms of population, education, and economic development. It was this situation that the War of 1812 African American immigrants encountered.²

BOX 1.2

War of 1812

The War of 1812 pitted Great Britain (including British North America) against the United States. America entered this war divided between expansionists who wanted conflict and those who utterly opposed the war. The anti-war sentiment prevailed in New England, where politicians and merchants refused to aid the government in the war effort. The War of 1812 consisted of two primary theatres of action: the western territory of North America (Upper Canada and New Orleans) and the Atlantic seaboard. In the west, the United States believed that Upper Canada presented an easy target for its military forces. The American forces did win some engagements, such as the Battle of the Thames, and were able to

briefly occupy and burn down the capital of Upper Canada (York). Nevertheless, the British forces ejected the Americans from Upper Canada. After the official end of the hostilities, the Americans decisively defeated the British at New Orleans. Along the Atlantic seaboard, the United States suffered serious setbacks as British naval forces (including privateers from Nova Scotia) disrupted trade. The landing of British forces on the American mainland also precipitated the desertion of nearly 3500 slaves from their owners. In 1814, the British attacked Washington, D.C., burned down numerous government buildings, and forced the abandonment of the capital by President James Madison and his staff. By the end of 1814, the British and

(continued on next page)

American governments were interested in ending the war. The British had been at war with Napoleon and hoped to enter into a period of peace and prosperity. The Americans also hoped for peace because they had suffered serious reverses in Washington and faced the threat of more British forces. Both com-

batants signed the Treaty of Ghent (the treaty ending the War of 1812) on December 24, 1814. This treaty recognized borders between British North America and the United States that had existed before the war. Continuing disputes between the two countries were to be taken up in the future.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

Historians have long recognized the dynamic nature of Nova Scotia's pre-Confederation history. For example, Victorian scholars focused on political institutions and mercantile development (Murdoch 1865–67; Campbell 1875). Yet the history of the **Maritime region** became peripheral to major developments in Canadian historical writing during the twentieth century (Berger 1976). In the late 1960s, scholars argued that regional history could offer perspectives on Canada that national studies had neglected (Careless 1969; Buckner 1971). This led to a flowering of historical studies about Canada's Maritime provinces. These historians focused on regional distinctiveness and dynamism through an examination of the Maritimes' political development, social institutions, economy, and geography (Fingard 1973, 1975). Yet not all scholars agree that the pre-Confederation era embodied economic progress. For example, Julian Gwyn argues that stagnation defined Nova Scotia's economy before 1870. Gwyn's position is worthy of consideration because it demonstrates the difficult economic conditions that immigrants to the region faced in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (1998).

In addition to debating the nature of the region's economic and social conditions, scholars have also examined cultural and **gender** history. These developments have resulted in a broader understanding of the contributions made to Maritime society by groups previously ignored.³ More recently, scholars have questioned the very notion and idea of region. They argue that geographic location is not enough to make a study regional. In other words, how regional is regional history (McKay 2000; Morton 2000)?

The history of the War of 1812 blacks is both North American and regional. Their experience with slavery and subsequent community development mirrors the experience of free blacks in nineteenth century Philadelphia, Boston, and other areas (Curry 1981; Horton and Horton 1979; Nash 1988). Similar to the African American population in Boston and Philadelphia, the War of 1812 blacks found employment in seafaring (Bolster 1997), created separate churches, and struggled to create an identity that acknowledged their experience in North America while memorializing their distant homeland in Africa (Bolster 1997; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Rael 2002).

In his seminal essay, "The Black Urban Experience in American History," Kenneth Kusmer outlined three factors that influenced African American life. First, there were external factors, such as racial restrictions and discrimination that limited the options for blacks in urban centres. Second, there were internal factors, such as the black community's responses to discrimination in the form of family networks and community institutions.

Third, there were structural factors, such as the place of African Americans within the wider society. The history of the War of 1812 blacks can be usefully developed within Kusmer's theoretical framework (1986).

Yet there are aspects of this study that are regional in nature. Kusmer's third factor allows for the importance of geographic location and how this affects the community under study. The War of 1812 African Americans' location within the British Empire made their experience different from their brethren in the United States. For example, they existed within a distinctive political economy and partially derived their identity from the British connection. Additionally, in contrast to the subjects of Kusmer's theoretical paradigm, the War of 1812 migrants were semi-rural people. They lived on farms approximately 15 kilometres from the urban centre of Halifax but still participated in city life. Also, their community did not have an educated elite similar to that of the African American communities in early nineteenth century Philadelphia or Boston. In short, we can understand the War of 1812 black experience in Nova Scotia as both regional and North American.

Within these wider developments of regional and international historiography, scholars have attempted to reconstruct the experience of African Nova Scotians. Scholarly attention has focused on black immigration to Nova Scotia during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The Black Loyalist and Jamaican Maroon episodes have been viewed more positively than those involving the War of 1812 African Americans. The Maroons and Loyalists were portrayed as brave agents who made their own history. Both groups had fought against racist regimes, had attempted to settle in Nova Scotia, and had abandoned the colony in protest against their treatment by the government and the local white population.

Of course, the majority of the Black Loyalists remained in Nova Scotia, but historians and other scholars have focused more on the exodus (Walker 1976a; Cheney-Coker 1990). George Elliott Clarke implores scholars to reconsider the image of the Black Loyalists who stayed in Nova Scotia, but the **historiography** has short-changed these people (1997).

The last major wave of black immigration to Nova Scotia, occurring during and after the War of 1812, appeared to tell a less glorious story. These immigrants supposedly showed less initiative in escaping slavery and largely failed to become successful settlers. More important, the War of 1812 blacks did not leave Nova Scotia. Seemingly, they did not have the courage to find more meaningful freedom elsewhere. In other words, they simply accepted their lowly position without fighting back. One historian described the differences between the three immigrations:

Unlike the Black [Loyalists] Pioneers who were proud in their sense of Loyalism, and the Maroons who were crude but vigorous in their military unity the [War of 1812] Negroes were a disorganized, pathetic, and intimidated body who seemed unable to recover from their previous condition of servitude. (Winks 1971:114).

Negative interpretations of the War of 1812 blacks began in the nineteenth century. Late Victorian historians argued that African Nova Scotians were lazy and burdensome to the colony's white population. They believed that people of African descent were inherently unable to contribute to Nova Scotia's society. For example, in 1893, Mary Jane Katzmann described the War of 1812 blacks as being unproductive settlers:

They were a wretched class of settlers. On plantations of their owners in Virginia and other Southern States, all their wants had been provided for, and consequently they were unacquainted with the thrift or the reward of labour. Freedom made them idle and miserable. The government

was obliged to allow them rations during the winter and otherwise to provide for their existence. For many years they experienced the wretchedness incidental to idleness and improvidence, and were a constant drain upon the benevolence of their white neighbours. (Katzmann 1893:187–8)

These racist attitudes, as expressed in the work of Katzmann and Sir Adams Archibald, might be understood as an elitist white backlash against a recent upsurge in black social activism (Archibald 1891). During the 1880s and 1890s, African Nova Scotians had protested against segregated schools and discriminatory hiring practices. Moreover, they had become more assertive and proud of their culture. Perhaps, in an effort to justify segregation and reinforce popular notions of black indolence, white historians wrote about African Nova Scotians in pejorative terms, paying little attention to their actual history. Twentieth-century historians often echoed these views.

In 1948, archivist C.B. Fergusson published *A Documentary Study of the Negroes in Nova Scotia*. This study was “prompted by recent enquiries as to the origin and status of the negro [sic] element...since the [War of 1812 blacks] were destined to become the progenitors of the majority of Negroes who are in Nova Scotia to-day. [sic]” (Harvey 1948: “Preface”). These enquiries were probably related to significant developments within the African Nova Scotian community. In the 1940s, the Nova Scotia Association for the Advancement of Coloured People formed, and Viola Desmond challenged segregation laws. Also, Carrie Best published *The Clarion*, which condemned Nova Scotia for its general acceptance of Jim Crowism.⁴

BOX 1.3

Jim Crow

In Canada, blacks were subjected to the uneven enforcement of de facto segregation, or Jim Crowism—the racial segregation of blacks and whites in public facilities and institutions. In the United States, segregation was written into southern state laws and customarily practised throughout other regions in the country. As James Walker has pointed out, Canadian forms of Jim Crow were

upheld more by attitude than law but could be reinforced through legal decisions. In Nova Scotia, blacks were routinely barred from cinemas, restaurants, swimming pools, and even burial grounds. Although lacking the legal framework that supported segregation, when blacks challenged these restrictions in court, such as in the Viola Desmond case, they usually lost.

In Nova Scotia, schools, housing, and social institutions remained segregated into the 1940s. At times, the white population resorted to violence in order to maintain segregation. For example, in 1937, local whites in Trenton stoned the house of a black man who had recently moved into the neighbourhood. Although the Royal Canadian Mounted Police forced the mob to scatter, hundreds returned the following night and demolished the home. Predictably, these vandals were not arrested (Winks 1971:419–20). These challenges to Jim Crow probably encouraged historians to study the roots of Nova Scotia’s black population.

In writing about the War of 1812 blacks, Fergusson wanted to portray Nova Scotia as a colony of freedom that held a special place in the history of “mankind’s advancement in human relations” (Fergusson 1948:1). Fergusson’s archival abilities allowed him to gather disparate documents into a cohesive study. In attempting to place Nova Scotia at the

vanguard of human rights, he focused on public and private assistance for the War of 1812 blacks. Indeed, these migrants were actually peripheral to his story of white benevolence. Fergusson believed that without white assistance the War of 1812 blacks "could not have survived" (Fergusson 1948:67). He also did not focus on white racism. In fact, Fergusson argued that no legal colour bar existed in Nova Scotia. Of course, close attention to racism would have created problems for his assertion that Nova Scotia was a land of progress and human rights. In short, the African American migrants were depicted as hapless wards who could be understood as a drain on the colonial treasury. Fergusson's work is important because it influenced the views of other historians (Fergusson 1948:1, 66).

Although writing 20 years later in the shadow of the American civil rights movement, Robin Winks reached similar conclusions about the War of 1812 blacks in his comprehensive study about the entire African Canadian experience from 1638 to 1970. As an American liberal imbued with ideas about the benefits of integration, Winks believed that these migrants were an example of the dangers of racial separation. The War of 1812 African Americans, he alleged, had failed to find respectable employment or create successful communities and had suffered from their "persistent lack of leaders" (Winks 1971:114). Drawing on the documentation provided by Fergusson, he traced the immigrants' failures to the "softening" slave system in Virginia, which had resulted in virtually "none" of the black immigrants being trained in "any particular skill" (Winks 1971:124). Winks, however, offered no footnote for such a sweeping interpretation. Seemingly, he took Stanley Elkins's argument that slavery made blacks indolent and unimaginative and applied it to the War of 1812 blacks.⁵ Going even further, he contended that the War of 1812 blacks were "[u]nderstandably unable to help themselves" (1971:125). Moreover, these immigrants believed that freedom "involved no responsibilities." Winks concluded that the War of 1812 migrants' experience was simply miserable (1971:124).

Later publications provided a revisionist understanding of the War of 1812 migrants. These historians were more critical of government inaction and shifted attention away from white philanthropy and toward the actions of the War of 1812 African Americans. For example, in his 1976 essay, James Walker, who specialized in the Black Loyalist experience, pointed out that the War of 1812 African Americans faced unfair government practices and racial hostility. These conditions encouraged the War of 1812 immigrants and their children to sacrifice economic development in favour of community survival. John Grant's 1990 study about the War of 1812 migrants criticized government policy and emphasized that at least some of them had become successful settlers (Walker 1976b; Grant 1990).

Historical scholarship about the War of 1812 blacks has not been monolithic or entirely negative. Yet these studies do have certain limitations. First, and most problematic, is the work of Fergusson and Winks, who portray the experience of the War of 1812 blacks as both bleak and static. Little effort is made to develop the theme of change over time. Second, the works do not examine, in detail, the diversity of actions and attitudes represented by the African American immigrants. Third, these studies are nearly 30 years old and thus do not incorporate recent developments in regional, national, and international historiography. This problem has been compounded by Robin Winks, who published a second edition of *The Blacks in Canada* in 1997, but chose not to revise his text. John Grant also decided to publish his work "as it was written twenty years ago" (1990:10). Fourth, little effort has been made, with the exception of James Walker's brief pamphlet (1985), to understand the War of 1812 migrants' contribution to Nova Scotia's black identity.

Accordingly, major questions remain to be explored about these immigrants before we can definitively understand their history.

It is tempting to write this textbook around the theme of **agency**—that is, the ability of marginal groups to influence their own destinies even in oppressive situations, especially in light of the influential work of Robin Winks. But the history of the War of 1812 blacks deserves a more open-ended analytical framework. The active-agents/not-passive-victims model that emphasises black unity reduces the complexity of African North American history by assuming, as Clarence Walker points out, that “oppression produced a class of people who were inevitably kind and generous to their peers” (Walker 1991:xvi). Indeed, a more critical approach that recognizes stories within black history that do not fit the African North American unity model is important. However, Walker’s argument is also problematic. Although white racism and similar economic conditions did not *always* create unity among blacks, many times these circumstances did create tightly knit communities.

In approaching the history of the War of 1812 blacks, it is essential to recognize examples of community development and black unity. Yet events and personalities that do not fit the model must not be swept under the rug and ignored. This work attempts to recognize complexity and context through the use of a rarely used archival source: the War of 1812 blacks’ petitions to the government. These were usually written verbatim by their white friends and offer historians an opportunity to counterbalance official government documents. Moreover, the petitions provide insight into these African Americans’ attitudes and actions. Also, this study reassesses the documentation that Fergusson examined and, by placing that evidence in a different framework, seeks to gain new insight into the long-term significance of the War of 1812 black presence in Nova Scotia.

Building on insights suggested by John Grant and James Walker, this study pursues the following questions about the War of 1812 migrants’ experience in Nova Scotia. Who were these migrants, and what experiences did they endure during slavery? How did this affect them once in Nova Scotia? How did the War of 1812 blacks understand freedom? What type of group identity did they develop from their diverse backgrounds? What type of work did they pursue? What type of material conditions confronted the War of 1812 blacks in Nova Scotia? How did family and community structure develop? What was the state of race relations in early nineteenth century Nova Scotia? In short, this work seeks to portray these immigrants as more than passive and undifferentiated farm labourers.

LABELS AND LANGUAGE

It is important to examine the genesis and development of the label used to identify the War of 1812 blacks. Historians have adopted the term *Refugee* to differentiate between the black influx during the War of 1812 and the earlier immigration of Black Loyalists in 1783.⁶ The word *Loyalist* carries a more positive connotation than does *Refugee*. The latter implies loss, passivity, and victimization, while *Loyalist* indicates activity, agency, and historical importance. It is hardly surprising that most historical monuments and web sites in Nova Scotia about the black population are dedicated to the Loyalists. However, the similarities between these two migrations are quite compelling. Both the Loyalists and the Refugees came north because of military proclamations offering freedom, both risked their lives in escaping from slavery, and both fought for the British during the wars.⁷ In obtaining their freedom, both Loyalists and Refugees declared their loyalty to the British Crown.

Both groups can be described as being Refugees and Loyalists, in that they were homeless because of the wars and faithful to the British Crown.⁸ Several questions emerge from the convention of designating the War of 1812 blacks as Refugees. Why has this label been accepted, and was it the only designation used by contemporaries to describe these African Americans? How did the Refugees refer to themselves in petitions and other documents? What terms have historians applied to them?⁹

One of the first pieces of correspondence about the Black Refugees, between Lieutenant-Governor John Sherbrooke and Colonial Secretary Lord Bathurst, referred to the Refugees simply as "Black People" (Sherbrooke to Bathurst, Oct 18, 1813, Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management [NSARM], 111:66-7). A year later, in 1814, they were described as "Black Refugees" (Sherbrooke to Cochrane, Oct. 5, 1814, NSARM, 111:101-3). This might have reflected their increasing numbers and the need to differentiate between the Refugees and other elements of the local black population. Several months later, in a letter to the House of Assembly, Sherbrooke designated the Refugees "people of colour" (Sherbrooke to House of Assembly, Feb. 24, 1815, NSARM, 288:101). The lieutenant-governor's changing labels for the Black Refugees reflected a general trend. His successor, Lord Dalhousie, usually characterized them as "Refugee Negroes," but in his diary they became "Chesapeake Blacks."¹⁰ Government officials and the local population labelled them interchangeably as "Black Refugees," "Negro Refugees," "People of Colour," and "Black People."¹¹ The Black Refugees described themselves in terms ranging from "Inhabitants of Colour" to "Refugees" in petitions to the government.¹² Often the petitioners specified their geographic location and referred to themselves as "People of Colour" at Preston or Hammonds Plains. In 1818, seaman John Carter, who had arrived in Halifax two years earlier, described himself as an "American" (*Acadian Recorder* Aug. 29, 1818, NSARM). It is understandable that Carter identified himself in this manner considering his brief stay in the colony. The labels used by the Black Refugees were situational: in other words, characterization differed with the particular circumstances of an individual or group. The terminology employed to describe the Refugees varies by historical document.

Most scholars have not been so flexible. Nearly every historian of the subject has employed the term *Refugee*. Alternatively, however, they use *Chesapeake Blacks* to indicate the origin of many of the Refugees. But this label is also problematic since substantial numbers of the Refugees were from Georgia (Bell 1987; Bullard 1983). The term *Refugee* need not be abandoned or quarantined with quotation marks or italics, but it can no longer be seen as the antithesis of the more heroic label, *Black Loyalist*. The word may be used to differentiate between the Refugees and the Loyalists, but we must recognize the similarities of the two influxes and abandon the notion popularized by Winks that one group exhibited pride, while the other one was devoid of nearly every asset—pride, skills, capital, and agency (Winks 1971:114).

This study is divided into seven chapters. Chapter two explores the Black Refugees' slave background. Attention is given to the skills and culture that they brought to Nova Scotia. The Refugees' escape from slavery is examined in an effort to underline the self-assertion they displayed in escaping from what South Carolinian John Calhoun called the "Peculiar Institution." Chapter three considers the colonial government's attitudes and policies toward the Black Refugees. It also explores how the Refugees shaped government policy by accepting certain initiatives while rejecting others. Chapter four reconstructs the

Black Refugees' work patterns so as to challenge the myth of Refugee indolence and lethargy. Chapter five examines the impact of sickness and poverty on the Refugees and how this created close-knit families and communities. Chapter six focuses on the development of community institutions, such as churches and schools, and assesses the Refugees' identity within the British North American context. Chapter seven considers the state of race relations in early nineteenth century Nova Scotia, delineates the colour line, and reviews the strategies employed by the Refugees to challenge racial restrictions. Chapter eight sums up this study's contribution to African Nova Scotian history and offers ideas about future areas of research.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Nova Scotia experienced three influxes of black immigration: the Loyalists, the Jamaican Maroons, and the Refugees. Significant numbers of the first two groups quickly tired of Nova Scotia and left the colony after short periods of settlement. The last group of migrants, the Black Refugees, remained in the colony and refused to immigrate to Africa or to the West Indies.

The Black Loyalists and the Jamaican Maroons have received fairly positive attention from professional historians and the general public. These groups have been portrayed as active agents who made their own history by fighting against racism and, in the case of the Maroons, by rejecting Anglo-American society. In contrast, well-known historian Robin Winks has portrayed the Black Refugees as hapless pawns of white philanthropy, unprepared for the responsibilities and obligations of freedom. Although other historians have questioned his interpretations, the story of the Refugees can be recast with an eye toward complexity and context.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Who were the Black Loyalists and Jamaican Maroons? How did their experiences in Nova Scotia affect the Black Refugees?
2. What were the general conditions of Nova Scotia during the early nineteenth century?
3. How was the experience of the Black Refugees similar to the history of free black communities in the northern United States? How did it differ?
4. According to the author, what are the problems with studies about the Black Refugees?

RECOMMENDED READING

General Overviews

Pachai, Bridglal. *Beneath the Clouds of the Promised Land: The Survival of Nova Scotia's Blacks Volume I, 1600-1800*. Halifax: Black Educators Association of Nova Scotia, 1987.

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NOTES

- 1 Winks 1971:25, 37–8, 41; Pachai 1987; Donovan 1995; Smith 1899; Cahill 1994; Cahill 1995.
- 2 Fergusson 1948; Sutherland 1994; Fingard 1973, 1994; Ommer 1994; Martell 1942; Power 1991; Cuthbertson 1994.
- 3 Guildford and Morton 1994; Sutherland 1996; Clarke 1994; Fingard 1992.
- 4 Backhouse 1994; Best 1977; Winks 1971:351, 382, 419, 458, 474, 512.
- 5 Elkins 1959. For critiques of Elkins, see Genovese 1967; Lane 1971; Blassingame 1972; Gutman 1976; Levine 1977.
- 6 Fergusson 1948; Winks 1971; Grant 1990; Walker 1976; Pachai 1987; Boyd 1976; Picart 1993.
- 7 Walker 1976a; Weiss 1998; Cassell 1972.
- 8 Recent scholarship has questioned the construction of Black Loyalist identity, see Cahill 1999. For a vigorous response, see Walker 1999.
- 9 American slaves that escaped to Upper and Lower Canada were referred to as *Fugitives* and *Refugees*.
- 10 Dalhousie to Bathurst, Dec. 2, 1816, NSARM, 112:1–6; Dalhousie to Bathurst, Aug. 14, 1817, NSARM, 112:32–5; entry for Sept. 28, 1817 in Whitelaw 1978:63.
- 11 Minutes of Council, Apr. 30, 1817, NSARM, 214: 1–2; Dalhousie to Bathurst, Dec. 29, 1816, NSARM, 111:6–9; Chamberlain to Morris, Jan. 4, 1816, NSARM, 419: doc. 46; Coleman to Sabatier, Mar. 23, 1815, NSARM, 21: doc. 84.
- 12 Preston School Petition, Nov. 11, 1820, NSARM, 420: doc. 22; Petition of Coloured People at Preston, Feb. 23, 1841, NSARM, Box—Crown Lands—Peninsula of Halifax, 1840–45.

chapter two

Refugee Origins and Escape

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, students should be able to:

1. Distinguish between slavery in the Lowcountry and the Chesapeake.
2. Understand the differences between task and gang labour.
3. Discuss the cultural differences between Chesapeake and Georgia Sea Island slaves.
4. Understand the skills and culture that the Black Refugees brought to Nova Scotia after the War of 1812.

INTRODUCTION

The culture that the Black Refugees came from was deeply embedded in American slavery. Therefore, it would seem logical to assume that the study of the Black Refugees must begin with an examination of their encounter with American slavery. Yet historians of Nova Scotia's Black Refugees have made little effort to understand the impact of slavery. They make passing remarks about the Black Refugees' origins, none of which are grounded in a serious examination of primary or secondary materials. Robin Winks and

C.B. Fergusson agree all too readily with Lord Dalhousie's infamous comment about the Refugees—that without “the dread of the lash, their idea of freedom is idleness and they are therefore quite incapable of industry” (Dalhousie to Bathurst, Dec. 29, 1816, NSARM, 111:6–9). Neither Winks nor Fergusson rigorously explores the slave experience of these African Americans. John Grant admits that slavery had an influence on the Refugees but states it is beyond the scope of his study to delve into the issue. Accordingly, the single most important aspect of the Black Refugees' experience prior to their arrival in Nova Scotia has been distorted or neglected (Fergusson 1948:67; Winks 1971:124; Grant 1990:118–20).

This experience varied by region, county, gender, work experience, and owner. As Ira Berlin notes, historians must understand the development of African American culture in its particular context and time period (1980). Thus, this chapter focuses on slavery during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The Black Refugees' encounters with slavery can be partially reconstructed through relevant secondary sources, diaries, shipping lists, claimant lists, plantation correspondence, and travel books. As the majority of Black Refugees were from two distinctive cultures of slavery—the **Chesapeake** and the **Georgia Sea Islands** (part of the **Lowcountry**)—this analysis addresses similarities and differences between the Chesapeake and the Lowcountry. Although a small number of Refugees were from Charleston and possibly coastal Georgia, the vast majority came from the Chesapeake and the Sea Islands (Ship record of the *Ceres*, NSARM, 419: docs., 58 and 59).

SOME SIMILARITIES IN THE REFUGEES' SLAVERY CULTURE

Although slavery developed along rather different lines in the Chesapeake and in the Lowcountry, there were some notable similarities. By the early nineteenth century, both regions were home to self-reproducing slave populations. African Americans constituted a significant percentage of the general population in the Chesapeake and vastly outnumbered whites in the Georgia Sea Islands. Possibly as a result of indigenous reproduction, masters displayed more concern for slave families than had earlier generations of slave owners. However, this did not prevent them from breaking slave families apart in order to adjust to the changing economy during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The labour of slaves increased markedly in both regions with the expansion of rice-growing in the Lowcountry and the development of mixed agricultural production in the Chesapeake. Yet slaves resisted changes to their work regime and won some concessions from their masters in both regions. The number of skilled slaves also increased during this period. Generally speaking, the social environment of slaves changed as many were moved from small or mid-sized plantations to larger ones. These similarities are, however, exceptions on a broader canvas of difference.

SOME DIFFERENCES IN THE REFUGEES' SLAVERY CULTURE

Interestingly, regional customs that benefited slaves in the Georgia Sea Islands were not practised in the Chesapeake, while Lowcountry slaves did not enjoy some of the more 'humane' aspects of Chesapeake slavery. Although Lowcountry slaves had a considerable degree of autonomy from their masters and from whites in general, the large size of plantations inhibited the emergence of mutual obligations between slave and master. Eugene Genovese contends that paternalism (patron-client relationships) encouraged kindness and

affection as well as hatred and cruelty (1972). The idea of paternalism partially rests on the notion that slave owners were pre-capitalist feudal landlords. Yet the expansion of rice cultivation in the Lowcountry and the intensification of workdays for Chesapeake slaves indicate that many slave owners were in tune with the capitalist economy. Moreover, they were quite willing to disregard the concerns of their slaves if it meant increasing profits.

BOX 2.1 Patron-Client Relationships

A patron-client relationship can be defined as a relationship that is mutually obligatory and involves as patron one who possesses resources such as wealth, social status, authority, or racial privilege; and it involves as client someone who benefits from the support or influence of the patron. The literature on these relationships extends chronologically from the days of the Roman Empire

to contemporary times in developing countries and geographically all over the world (Eisenstadt and Roniger 1984). For a discussion in a Canadian context, see Paine 1971. On the limits of patron-client relationships in the Sea Islands, see Dusiinberre 1996:429–36; Miller 1986:92; and Bell 1987:531–2. A more positive view of such relationships in the Sea Islands can be found in Smith 1985:208–9

Patron-client relationships could develop on a plantation if an owner had some interest in the welfare of his slaves, as did John Couper of St. Simon's Island (Kemble 1863:278). However, if slaves were exposed to an inhumane and cruel overseer, such as Roswell King, Sr. or his son (plantation managers in the Sea Islands), patron-client relationships became at best a remote ideal. Despite their assertions to the contrary, both Kings impregnated several slave women and employed the whip in a capricious manner. For example, in 1808 King, Sr. brutally whipped a young boy because he had stolen rice and had run off for two days.¹

Fanny Kemble, an author and a famous British actress of the time, was married to Pierce Butler II (Pierce Butler's grandson). She visited his Georgia plantations in 1838–9. This visit reinforced her anti-slavery sympathies. She spoke with many people who were alive during the Black Refugees' escape some 20 years earlier, including Roswell King, Sr. and his son; John Couper; and many slaves. In discussing the older King, Kemble stated that he was the "more cruel and unscrupulous one [in comparison to his son] as regards the slaves themselves, whatever he may have been in his dealings with the master Major Pierce Butler, [her husband's grandfather], I should think it would be difficult to find, even among the cruel and un-scrupulous [sic] class to which he belonged" (Kemble 1863:167). As for Roswell King, Jr., she wrote, "every account I receive from the negroes seems to me to indicate a merciless sternness of disposition that may be a virtue in a slave driver, but is hardly a Christian grace" (Kemble 1863:232).

Although Philip Morgan argues that the paternalist ideal was more widespread in the Chesapeake, owners constantly demonstrated a callous disregard for slave families through sales to the Piedmont or hiring of individual members of a slave family out to other plantations (Morgan 1998:257–61).² In fact, the number of planned slave conspiracies indicate that the patron-client ideal fell far short of its goals, even on the Chesapeake's smaller plantations.³

The smaller size of Chesapeake plantations also offered slaves less selection in terms of marriage partners. Thus, many found husbands or wives on different plantations (Kulikoff

1986, 358–71). In contrast, the large size of Sea Island estates allowed many slaves to find marriage partners on their own plantations. Not surprisingly, by the late eighteenth century most slave households in the Chesapeake were single-parent, while in the Lowcountry two-parent households predominated. Although Chesapeake slaves were more mobile than their counterparts in the Sea Islands and maintained family ties on other plantations, this mobility had its drawbacks: it allowed for fewer opportunities to create a stable family life.⁴

The most significant difference between slavery in the Chesapeake and slavery in the Georgia Sea Islands was the mode of labour. In the Georgia Sea Islands, plantation managers employed the **task system**, notable for its lack of white supervision and for the time it offered slaves to pursue their own interests. The task system required slaves to work intensively at a given assignment during the day. Completion of a task allowed slaves to use the rest of the day as they pleased. Most slaves spent this time cultivating their personal plots, hunting, fishing, or relaxing (King Jr. 1828:523–9; Hall 1829:229–30; Smith 1985:45–89; Morgan 1982, 1998).

Rice and cotton cultivation determined work culture in the Sea Islands. In terms of rice production, slaves were responsible for planting or weeding one-quarter of an acre per day. However, this amount increased at harvest to three-quarters of an acre. The cultivation of rice was a complicated process that included various tasks throughout the year. Before the planting season commenced, slaves constructed ditches and levees. In March, slaves cleared swamplands and planted seed rice. This process was extraordinarily difficult and required “gangs of slave laborers” (Smith 1985:46). After months of flooding and draining the fields, rice was harvested in late August or early September. All slaves on a given plantation were required to help with the harvest, but women were considered more adept at it. In the final months of the year, slaves threshed and prepared rice for market. In the Sea Islands, skilled slaves usually worked as ditchers or as machine operators in the production process (Smith 1985:45–63; Hall 1829:213–14; Morgan 1998:147–59).

The production of Sea Island cotton, while not as difficult as rice cultivation, also required arduous field labour. During the growing season, slaves cleared weeds and grass while thinning out the cotton plants. In the fall, women gathered and sorted the cotton by its quality. In observing cotton production on St. Simon’s Island, a British visitor stated that women performed “twice as much” cotton gathering as men (Hall 1829:230). After the cotton gin removed the seeds, slaves cleaned out seed fragments and packaged the cotton for shipment. Sea Island cotton production resulted in a decline in slave skills. This visitor estimated that of 57½ “taskable hands” on one Sea Island plantation, 44 were engaged in manual field labour, while the remaining ones were employed as cart drivers, nurses, cooks, carpenters, gardeners, and house servants. The most important skilled position acquired by slaves was the role of driver (Hall 1829:229–32; Morgan 1998:107).

Black drivers had an intricate understanding of rice and cotton production. Indeed, many owners deferred to their expertise. Drivers were responsible for nearly every aspect of production, ranging from assigning a task to deciding if it had been adequately completed. They set the pace of labour and were responsible for slave conduct. For the most part, drivers also doled out food and punishments. Their authority differed by plantation. Although some slave owners gave their drivers considerable control over plantation life and labour, Pierce Butler’s overseers kept their drivers on a tight leash. Black autonomy and authority in the Sea Islands were contingent on the wishes of an owner or overseer (King, Jr. 1828:524–5; Smith 1985:64–75; Morgan 1983:118–21).

Agrarian Background

In the Chesapeake, the development of grain production in response to falling tobacco prices during the European wars (1792–1815) required different methods of labour organization and production. Planters who remained in the Tidewater Region downsized their labour forces by selling surplus slaves (usually women and children) to the West or hiring them out to farms or cities. Although planters did not completely stop tobacco production, they moved to a more diversified economy that included corn and wheat crops. This required slaves to achieve specialization in a number of new and different tasks. For example, the new economy required a slave-force able to mill, store, transport, ship, and market wheat. As Ira Berlin notes, this created new plantation specialists, such as plowmen and dairymaids. Instead of engaging in the process of hoeing tobacco, slaves sowed grains, broke flax, pressed cider, plowed, harrowed, lumbered, fished, and shucked corn (Berlin 1998:265–70). In short, grain production entailed a switch from the hoe to the plow and an intensification of work patterns (Walsh 1989:401–6; Walsh 1993:197–8; Walsh and Carr 1988:175–6).

The development of a diversified agricultural economy led to new methods designed to extract as much work as possible from slaves. There was a movement among planters and farmers alike to rationalize production. This rationalization meant longer workdays and a more intensive work environment for slaves. George Washington summed up this new emphasis on longer working days:

[that]my people may be at their work as soon as it is light, work till it is dark, and be diligent while they are at it, can hardly be necessary; because the propriety of it must strike every Manager who attends to my interest, or regards his own character; and who, on reflecting, must be convinced that lost labour is never to be regained; the presumption being that every labourer (male or female) does as much in 24 hours as their strength without endangering the health, or constitution will allow of. (Fitzpatrick 1931, 30:175)

The new demands placed on labour were reflected in changes to slaves' work patterns. Before the switch from tobacco to grain, the winter months had been relatively relaxed. Slaves were then responsible for only a few tasks, such as clearing land and cutting firewood. However, the new economy required slaves to spend the winter plowing ground, threshing and cleaning grains from the previous harvest, cleaning meadows, sowing crops, fixing fences, and cutting timber for the burgeoning town markets. In the growing season, March to November, slaves were under intense pressure in terms of ground preparation, planting, harvesting, and seeding. As Lorena Walsh states, this work regimen left "no season of leisure except in the worst winter weather" (Walsh 1995:107, 106–9; 1989:405–6).

Slaves resisted the new pressures of work. They attempted to re-negotiate labour patterns by purposely slowing down production, destroying equipment, and refusing to work. Slaves were very hesitant to give up rights won with one overseer when a new one attempted to impose rigid controls. As one estate manager noted, "[t]he Negroes are very unwilling to give up the privileges they were allowed in Wingfield's time. Indeed they seem to be determined to Maintain them & because Smith [new plantation manager] has Endeavoured to keep them to there [sic] duty they have every plan they possibly could to get him turned off" (cited in Walsh 1995:110). On another plantation, an English visitor painted an interesting portrait of slave resistance:

Nothing can be conceived more inert than a slave; his unwilling labour is discovered in every step that he takes; he moves not if he can avoid it; if the eyes of the overseer be off him, he sleeps; the ox and the horse, driven by the slave, appear to sleep also; all is listless inactivity; all motion is evidently compulsory. (cited in Morgan 1998:191)

These examples notwithstanding, the majority of slaves were unable to slow down the pace of work or negotiate better working conditions. This resulted in especially harsh work conditions for slave women (Berlin 1998:268–9; Walsh 1995:105–12).

Female slaves suffered as a result of the switch from tobacco production to mixed agriculture. There had been less variation in labour between the sexes in tobacco cultivation because both male and female used the hoe. The new emphasis on grain production did not open up many skilled positions for women. A few were involved in spinning, cleaning, washing, or other domestic duties. However, most slave women did not participate in the domestic sphere of their mistresses. This task was reserved for poor, white labouring women. For the most part, African American women were confined to the most menial agricultural tasks. For example, female slaves “grubbed swamps and meadows, weeded corn and vegetables, hoed ground the plows could not adequately break up, erected fences, cleaned the stables, heaped the dung, spread the manure, harvested the corn, and at the end of the year, threshed and cleaned grain and husked the corn” (Walsh and Carr 1988:179). In addition to working in the fields, slave women were responsible for their own domestic duties (such as cooking and making clothes). As Lorena Walsh and Lois Carr note, female slaves suffered the double burden of gender and race and were associated with the most “monotonous” and “inglorious” agricultural labour (Walsh and Carr 1988:183, 179–83; Berlin 1998:270–1; Shammas 1985).

While slave men became more skilled in the Chesapeake during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, there is some scholarly disagreement over the proportion of slaves who were skilled. Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman, in a general treatment of skill level among American slaves, estimate that 27 percent were skilled (1974:38). Herbert Gutman places the number at 15 percent (1975:51). In a more recent study, Philip Morgan argues that, in 1810, 19 percent of Chesapeake slaves were skilled or semi-skilled (1998:217). Differences aside, it is clear that the vast majority of skilled slaves resided on larger plantations. For example, John Tayloe of Richmond County owned well over 300 slaves, and 34 percent were skilled or semi-skilled (Dunn 1977). The expansion of occupations requiring skill was usually limited to wealthy plantations and to male slaves.

The focus on grain cultivation and the concomitant growth of cities required slaves to obtain new skills. The specialization required by grain cultivation allowed many slaves to move into semi-skilled positions, such as plowing and carting. They also engaged in ditching, road construction, and brick-making. The rise of cities required a supply of skilled craftsmen, such as carpenters and sawyers, to meet the housing demands of an emerging urban population. Urban slaves also worked in shipyards and factories. Skilled slaves enjoyed considerable autonomy and quite often set their own pace of work (Berlin 1998:274–7; Walsh 1989:401; Dunn 1983:52–4; Walsh 1995:110–11).

Hiring out was one of the most important elements of Chesapeake slavery during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The switch from tobacco to mixed agricultural production left the region’s wealthier planters with “obsolete” labourers, primarily women and children (Dunn 1983:51). Slaves were generally hired out to whites who could not afford to purchase their own chattel. In fact, hiring made slavery more widespread as even tenant farmers could rent the services of a slave. Although hiring offered some slaves more autonomy and an opportunity to escape the isolation of plantations, it split up families and disrupted the continuity of slave life (Hughes 1978:260–86; Franklin and Schwenger 1999:4–6, 32–7).

In the Chesapeake, despite the difficulties caused by hiring, labouring conditions were relatively healthy. On the other hand, for the Sea Islanders, the cultivation of rice was dangerous and resulted in a high death rate. On a tour through the southern United States, British Army Officer Basil Hall described the devastating results of rice cultivation on slaves in the Lowcountry:

The cultivation of rice was described to me as by far the most unhealthy work in which slaves were employed; and, in spite of every care that they sank under it in great numbers. The causes of this dreadful mortality, are the constant moisture and heat of the atmosphere, together with the alternate floodings and dryings of the fields, on which the negroes [sic] are perpetually at work, often ankle-deep in mud, with their bare heads exposed to the fierce rays of the sun. At such seasons every white man leaves the spot, as a matter of course, and proceeds inland to the high grounds; or, if he can afford it, he travels northward to the springs of Saratoga or the Lakes of Canada. (Hall 1829:214)

There were many other differences—in terms of plantation life and the regional context—between slavery in the Sea Islands and slavery in the Chesapeake. Chesapeake slaves adopted Christianity and had more contact with the dominant Anglo-American culture than their counterparts in the Sea Islands. In the Chesapeake, some slaves were brought into the Baptist or Methodist faith during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Although Christianity had some influence in the Lowcountry, as some owners there believed in the importance of religious instruction as a means of control (Jones 1837), its impact on the Sea Islands is debatable. On Pierce Butler's plantation, slaves were not offered biblical instruction in any systematic way before the War of 1812. Yet they had other methods of worshipping God. In later years, the Black Refugees recounted the nature of their religious services. The secretary of Nova Scotia's African Baptist Association recorded these stories:

The close of the American war brought scores of coloured people: men, women and children, from the United States, and among them many Baptists, whom when enquired where they got their religion, would frankly tell you, in the forests, behind the stone walls, in the cane brakes, in the cotton fields, and in the rice swamps...some would keep [watch for] the approach of the driver whilst a company of penitents would go up yonder and pray. They had to make a two-fold prayer: one for the conversion of their own souls, and the other to keep their hands from shedding the blood of the cruel monsters that were placed in charge over them. (McKerrow 1976:11)

The isolation of the Sea Islands from the main currents of Anglo-American culture and the continuing infusion of Africans (South Carolinians and Georgians imported Africans throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries) encouraged the slave population to retain important aspects of West African cultures. The important role of Africanisms in Sea Island culture is evident in the Gullah language, in naming patterns,⁵ and in religious ceremonies, burials, animal stories, and dances, such as the Buzzard Lope and Ring Shout.

The slaves in this region "remained physically separated and psychologically estranged from the Anglo-American world and culturally closer to Africa than any other blacks on continental North America."⁶

The last major difference between the Sea Islands and the Tidewater Region could be found in the large free black population and the opportunity for escape and rebellion in the Chesapeake. On the eve of the War of 1812, there were over 60 000 free blacks in the Chesapeake. Slaves and free blacks maintained contact through familial relations, at African churches, and through the hiring of slaves to urban centres. This contact might

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| BOX 2.2 | The Gullah Language |
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Gullah began as a pidgin in West Africa, mixing together English and a broad variety of African languages. Pidgins are partial languages developed in situations in which peoples who do not share a common language need to talk to each other. With Africa's linguistic diversity (having over 1000 languages) and the social disruption of the slave trade, pidgins abounded in Africa, especially West Africa. In a process similar to the development of the English language, Gullah grew in complexity and vocabulary until it became the native tongue of thousands of people; it became a creole.

Lorenzo Turner, an African American linguist, changed how people think of

Gullah with his book, *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* (1949, 1973). Beginning in the early 1930s, when he went to live for several years with the people of the Sea Islands, he spent 15 years researching the language. Unlike white scholars, who essentially looked only to English as a source for Gullah, Turner pursued the West African linguistic input, mostly from Bantu languages. He discovered an African grammatical influence (e.g., adjectives following nouns) and thousands of African words in the language. This includes words such as *tote* ("to carry"), *goober* ("peanut"), and *okra* and *gumbo*, which have entered the English language.

have encouraged slaves to abscond from their masters. Ideas of freedom and liberty were also imbibed through knowledge of the American and San Domingo Revolutions. The violent overthrow of the French regime by the black population on this West Indian island frightened slaveholders throughout the United States. Taken together, this created a volatile atmosphere. For example, the Chesapeake had experienced two major slave conspiracies and numerous smaller ones during the first decade of the nineteenth century. One of these conspiracies, Gabriel's Rebellion, might have included thousands of slaves and free blacks. The leaders of this conspiracy borrowed ideas of liberty from the American Revolution to justify rebellion against the white population. The possibility of freedom was more immediate for slaves in the Chesapeake than for those in the Sea Islands.⁷

The rebellious nature of Chesapeake slaves was well known; in fact, Lowcountry masters feared the importation of these slaves because they were thought to encourage insurrection and other insubordinate activities. This is not to suggest that slaves in the Sea Islands were satisfied with their lot in life. They simply realized that their chances of escape or successful insurrection were minimal. Molly, an older slave on Pierce Butler's plantation in the late 1830s, explained to Fanny Kemble the difficulties of escaping: "[T]aint no use,—what use nigger run?—de swamp all around; dey get in dar, an' dey starve to def, or de snakes eat 'em up—massa's nigger, dey don't neber run away" (Kemble 1863:140). As Philip Morgan argues, the white population's ability to "mobilize forces of repression" and the slave population's ability to create a "meaningful" social environment accounts for the lack of large-scale slave conspiracies in the Lowcountry (1983:140).

Overall, slavery in both the Chesapeake and Lowcountry was a tangled layer of contradictions, contingencies, and complexities. For example, as access to slaves extended throughout the Chesapeake to different class levels and new geographic areas, the free black population exploded in Maryland, and manumissions became common (before they

were restricted in Virginia in 1806). On the other hand, slavery became more entrenched in the Lowcountry with the expansion of rice production, while at the same time slaves gained more autonomy within the system.

REFUGEE ESCAPE

The War of 1812 provided some American slaves with an opportunity to escape the shackles of the "Peculiar Institution." In a manner similar to African Americans' actions during events surrounding the Revolutionary War 30 years earlier, African Americans once again sought refuge behind British lines in hope of obtaining freedom. Although some runaways sought refuge from the British even earlier (*National Intelligencer* May 1, 1813), it was Vice Admiral Alexander Cochrane's well-circulated proclamation of April 1814, promising freedom and subsequent settlement in British North America or the West Indies, that occasioned the desertion of at least 3500 slaves from their masters during the War of 1812. Of that total, over 2000 had arrived on the shores of Nova Scotia by the end of 1818. Some 400 of these people went to New Brunswick. The remaining 1600 settled in Nova Scotia.⁸

The Black Refugees usually employed two avenues of escape. Many slaves left their owners under the cover of darkness and sought out the nearest British naval vessel. This entailed great risk in that capture usually resulted in extreme punishment or execution. As Frank Cassell points out, "in both 1813 and 1814 armed patrols of whites constantly scoured the coastal areas [in the Chesapeake region] shooting suspected escapees on sight" (Cassell 1972:147). Indeed, the *Richmond Enquirer* of October 8, 1813 reported that escaped slaves were often beaten or killed by local whites. Nevertheless, thousands of African Americans risked their lives in order to achieve freedom. In other areas slaves were more fortunate. The British Navy invaded and occupied the undefended Sea Islands, freeing slaves as they went. Two large-scale slave owners in the Georgia Sea Islands, James Hamilton and Pierce Butler, lost slaves in this manner, losing 238 and 139, respectively. However, some Sea Island slaves made dangerous trips of nearly 15 miles to reach British encampments on their own initiative. These slaves did not simply cling to the freedom of the British naval vessels; many returned home to help others escape.⁹

The British practice and later policy of encouraging American slaves to escape mixed humanitarian and military motivation. American historian Christopher George argues that this policy was motivated by relatively selfish reasons, an argument based on the fact that the British did not accept a group of slaves seeking their assistance during the retreat from Washington (1996:440).¹⁰ However, the reasoning behind British policy cannot be so easily defined. It is quite clear from letters to the Admiralty that the top commanders were very concerned with the performance and well-being of the Colonial Marines—a regiment of Black Refugees (Weiss 1998). In one letter, Admiral Cockburn stated that it "would be very sad indeed if they [the Black Refugees] fell again accidentally into the Hands of their old Masters" (Cockburn to Cochrane, May 9, 1814, Cochrane Papers, NSARM). More important, while the British might be accused of using American slaves in an opportunistic manner, it certainly was a reciprocal relationship, one that gave the British military advantages while the Refugees achieved freedom.

Admirals Cochrane and Cockburn instituted a policy that freed slaves once they stepped onto British vessels. Throughout the war, slave owners attempted to recover their human chattel, but the Royal Navy refused most requests. However, at the war's conclusion

Cochrane returned some slaves who had escaped after the Treaty of Ghent's ratification. This was not enough for some slave owners, who pursued their lost property all the way to Bermuda where many of the Black Refugees were awaiting transportation to Nova Scotia. A British official told them that he "would rather Bermuda and every man, woman and child in it were sunk under the sea than surrender one slave who had sought protection under the flag of England."¹¹

The British had recruited many Refugees to serve in the Colonial Marines because they were "more terrific to the Americans than any troops that could be brought forward" (cited in Cassell 1972:152). The Black Refugees participated in assaults on American encampments in the Chesapeake and Georgia. They also served as spies, messengers, and guides. For example, the horrified editors of the *Niles Weekly Register* reported on May 22, 1813 that recently escaped slaves had served as messengers for a British raiding party. A year later, Cockburn reported that "the Colonial Marines, who were for the *first* time employed in Arms against their old Masters on this occasion...behaved to the admiration of every Body" (Cockburn to Cochrane, June 25, 1814, Cochrane Papers). In another letter, Cockburn stated that the Colonial Marines were "indeed excellent men, and make the best skirmishers possible for the thick woods of this Country" (Cockburn to Cochrane, July 24). In 1815, the Colonial Marines played an important role in the invasion of Cumberland Island, the southernmost of the Georgia Sea Islands, helping to free hundreds of slaves (*Niles Weekly Register* Sept. 30, 1815; Bullard 1983:62-80). Although many slaves used the Royal Navy's invasion as an opportunity to escape, some rejected the British offer of freedom. John Couper's slave driver, Tom, remained loyal to his master and implored other slaves to remain on the plantation. Tom had been a slave in the British West Indies. He told Couper's other slaves that life on St. Simon's Island was much easier than anything the British could offer. He frightened slaves with stories of his harsh treatment by the British. Despite Tom's efforts, John Couper lost nearly 60 slaves to the British. Couper's escaped slaves made a choice, which most owners refused to believe (Bell 1987:172).

Instead, they claimed that the British had forced their slaves to run off. Slaves allegedly had been bombarded with British promises of an easy life in their colonies, complete with carriages, servants, and free food. According to George Baillie, a southern slave owner and merchant, the British told slaves that the Queen of England was black. These stories fit in with the contemporary white myth that African Americans were happy as slaves and could only be enticed away by elaborate lies about a wealthy future. Thus, Roswell King told Pierce Butler, "[d]o not think I shall be violent with your Negroes. They are more to be pitied than blamed. It is the British Policy (that God suffers to be a scourge and Curse on all Nations that know them) that is to blame" (King to Butler, Mar. 18, 1815, BPP, Historical Society of Pennsylvania [HSP]). However, in another letter, he blamed his "ungrateful Negroes," arguing that more "would have gone off if they had only a chance" (King to Butler, Feb. 26). Since slaves were supposed to be happy with their lot in life, it logically followed that the British had tricked them into running away. But in the Chesapeake region when slave owners were allowed to board British ships to persuade their slaves to return, they encountered defiance. In Georgia, where slave owners were permitted to implore hundreds of slaves to return, only 13 did so.¹²

We may never fully understand why the Black Refugees left their owners, but hopes for land and freedom seem to have prevailed. Charles Ball, a slave who later achieved freedom, accompanied his owner on an unsuccessful attempt to recover the runaways. In his

narrative Ball recalled the scene: "I was invited, and even urged to go with the others, who, I was told, were bound to the island of Trinidad, in the West Indies, where they would have lands given to them, and where they would be free" (1969:472). G.R. Gleig, a British officer, also recalled the Refugees' emphasis on becoming free: "During this day's march, we were joined by numbers of negro slaves, who implored us to take them with us, offering to serve either as soldiers or sailors, if we would but give them their liberty" (1821:144).¹³ The emphasis on freedom had also been the primary concern of the Black Loyalists during their escape from the United States over 30 years earlier.

Most Black Refugees were illiterate and thus have left few written documents about their escape. Therefore, historians' understanding of the motivation underlying their escape from slavery is limited. However, in the late nineteenth century, the Halifax *Morning Chronicle* recorded the story of John Shaw, a well-respected local black resident. A teenager when the War of 1812 broke out, Shaw had laboured in the tobacco fields of Little York, Virginia. One day, with the British warships only a few miles away, Shaw's master "offered to give any of his slaves a pass of freedom if they wished to have their liberty" (*Morning Chronicle* October 7, 1889, NSARM). Recognizing this offer as a mere trick, the slaves remained silent. In a few weeks, their master died, and the estate passed to his son. "The young man was a hard master, with a sharp tempered wife, and the slave driver they employed was a cruel, merciless man." Additionally, the slaves discovered they would be sold soon. These circumstances convinced Shaw and five others that the chains of slavery outweighed the dangers of escape. They absconded under the cover of darkness and took a canoe to the nearest British vessel.

This short story offers a few clues as to why slaves risked life and limb to attain liberty. The overriding concern of the Black Refugees was freedom. However, as John Shaw's narrative indicates, other factors played an important role in their decision to run off. Shaw and his compatriots mistrusted their owner and resented the introduction of a new slave driver. This "merciless man" probably introduced new work patterns and harsh plantation rules, which angered the slaves. The prospect of sale to the cotton states, which would have entailed the separation of families and friends, proved too much for these Refugees to endure.

The Black Refugees, then, left their plantations for various reasons. The exacting pace of labour that many Chesapeake slaves were forced to endure probably made the attraction of possible freedom outweigh the risk of getting caught. Also, as many families had been broken up through hiring and through sale to other plantations, freedom might have offered the opportunity for family reunification. In the Sea Islands, the lack of opportunity to escape vanished with the appearance of the British warships, and many probably saw this as a once in a lifetime opportunity. The Sea Island Refugees escaped in February right before the rice-growing season commenced. Thus, their exodus could also have been about the avoidance of harsh and dangerous labour.

It is difficult to know the exact number of Refugees who escaped from the Chesapeake and from the Georgia Sea Islands. Records are confusing and incomplete. Although we can check the lists of lost slaves from different states, we must remember that some Refugees went to the West Indies. Also, it is difficult to know the exact background of the slaves, for many probably changed their names once onboard a British vessel. In creating a general profile of the Refugees who escaped, emphasis has been placed on shipping records, slave claimant lists, and British government documents. A breakdown of male and female runaways from Bayly's List indicates that about 60 percent of runaways were male and 40 per-

cent were female (*British Government* 1827:67–106). The majority were in their twenties and thirties, with a significant minority over 40 years of age. If we add earlier escapees to Halifax to Bayly's List, the totals would be 963 men, 612 women, and 216 children (Slaves on Halifax List, claimants and state; List of Slaves allowed to Virginia, Maryland, etc. at Georgia average, NSARM, Misc., Blacks War of 1812).

It is also clear that the majority of Chesapeake Refugees were from Westmoreland and Northumberland counties in Virginia. The high percentage of women and children indicates that many slaves fled as a family unit or as a kinship group in the Sea Islands and Chesapeake (see Claims for Slaves in Virginia, NSARM, Misc., Blacks War of 1812; *British Government* 1827:104–7; Claims for Slaves in Virginia, NSARM, Misc., Blacks War of 1812).

In line with Philip Morgan's assertion that the majority of slave households in the Chesapeake were one-parent, my data indicate that 56 percent of married couples had lived on different plantations.

BOX 2.3 Families Separated and Reunited Once in Nova Scotia

Of 16 families listed, the following nine couples were separated during slavery:

Peter Dunkin and Adah
 William Wise and Hannah
 Charles Isaac and Petty Gray
 Basil Croud and Sall
 Henry Gross and Mary
 Willoughby Travers and Sukey
 John Collins and Clara
 James Bruce and Nelly
 Adam Green and Matilda

Source: List of slaves allowed to Virginia, Maryland, etc. at Georgia Average, NSARM, Misc., Blacks War of 1812.0

An examination of family structure suggests that over 30 percent of the adult population were married upon arrival in Nova Scotia. The importance of family in deciding to leave the United States can be gleaned from the comments of Roswell King. He angrily complained that while some Refugees left their wives and husbands, others "said they must follow their daughters and others their wives" (King to Butler, Feb. 14, 1815, BPP, HSP). Although black families were torn apart by hiring and sales, many slave owners had encouraged marriage and family ties in order to stabilize their workforces. This policy is reflected in the significant number of families among the Refugees (Gutman 1976; Norton, Berlin, and Gutman 1983:175–91).

The Black Refugees also possessed diverse skills and trades. In the Georgia Sea Islands, most slaves laboured in the rice or cotton fields. There were many artisans in this region, including blacksmiths, carpenters, and masons, but one of the most important skills learned in the Georgia Sea Islands—the cultivation of cotton and rice—would be of little

consequence in their new homeland. In the Chesapeake, the Refugees possessed diverse skills that were more transferable than those of their more southern brethren. One document, "Claims for Slaves in Virginia" (NSARM, Misc., Blacks War of 1812), lists over 150 people (out of a population of 2000) with occupations and allows us to have a glimpse of the Refugees' occupational diversity (see table 2.1).

| Female | | Male | |
|---------------|----|-------------------------|----|
| House Servant | 20 | Carpenter | 20 |
| Spinner | 16 | Field Slave | 16 |
| Cook | 5 | Sawyer | 16 |
| Weaver | 5 | House Servant | 14 |
| Field Slave | 3 | Blacksmith | 13 |
| Cook/Spinner | 2 | Ploughman | 7 |
| Servant | 2 | Hostler | 3 |
| Nurse | 1 | Woodcutter | 2 |
| Waiter | 1 | Cooper | 2 |
| | | Nurse | 2 |
| | | Tanner | 1 |
| | | Overseer | 1 |
| | | Smith | 1 |
| | | Sailor | 1 |
| | | Wheelwright | 1 |
| | | Sawyer/Cooper | 1 |
| | | Shoemaker/House Servant | 1 |
| | | Cook/Waiter | 1 |
| | | Mower/Sawyer | 1 |
| | | Shoemaker | 1 |
| | | Coach Driver | 1 |

Source: "Claims for Slaves in Virginia," NSARM, Misc., Blacks War of 1812.

In this listing, we find that the Black Refugees were highly skilled. In fact, the majority of women held skilled positions, such as house servant, spinner, or weaver. Although Walsh and Carr are correct in asserting that many women remained field slaves during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (1988), only 5 percent of Refugee females were listed as field slaves. The most common occupation for men was carpenter, which makes sense given the expansion in slave skill and the need for new housing in the emerging urban centres. Field slaves and sawyers were tied for the second most common occupations among men (Claims for Slaves in Virginia, NSARM, Misc., Blacks War of 1812).

The occupations of the Black Refugees are also found in records of ships entering Halifax in 1813. These documents list 74 people with occupations, and the following profile is taken from them (see table 2.2). Some 68 percent of these Refugees were listed as

TABLE 2.2 Occupations of Chesapeake Slaves Entering Nova Scotia

| | |
|-------------|----|
| Farmers | 25 |
| Laborers | 25 |
| Sawyers | 12 |
| Shoemakers | 3 |
| Servants | 3 |
| Washerwoman | 1 |
| Wheelwright | 1 |
| Fisherman | 1 |
| Hostler | 1 |
| Blacksmith | 1 |
| Carpenter | 1 |

Source: HMS *Rifleman*, HMS *Marlborough*, HMS *Junon*, HMS *Mariner*, HMS *Diomedé*, HMS *Diadem* September 1813, NSARM, 420: docs. 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8.

farmers or labourers. The remaining 32 percent were identified as holding more specialized occupations, such as sawyer, shoemaker, hostler, and blacksmith.¹⁴

Clearly, the Black Refugees were a diverse group. They were old and young, skilled and unskilled, male and female, single and married, with family and without. For example, Timothy Williams was over 80 years old when he arrived in Nova Scotia. At the other end of the spectrum, George Neale was only five years of age. One escapee, Sally, was blind and described by Nova Scotian officials as a true case of "charity."¹⁵ In contrast, government officers characterized Spencer Boyd as an excellent sawyer. Sea Island Refugee July Hamilton possessed a "Knowledge of medicine." Elizabeth Grant arrived in Nova Scotia as a single mother of five children.¹⁶ If the Refugees can be understood as monolithic in any terms, the desire for freedom comes to the forefront. As Herbert Aptheker stated, "The desire for freedom is the central theme, the motivating force, in the history of the American Negro people" (Aptheker 1940:5).

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The Sea Island Refugees carried their identities and expectations about labour to Nova Scotia. Indeed, they held onto localized or even plantation identities once in the colony. For example, the vast majority of John Couper's and Pierce Butler's former slaves (nearly 200) settled at Hammonds Plains. Captain Wiley's ex-slaves also settled together at Hammonds Plains on Middle Street. Presumably, they continued traditions that were peculiar to their plantation or to the Sea Islands more generally. These settlement patterns preserved customs, such as religious ideals, language, folk customs, music, cooking, and family kinship patterns, during their first years at Hammonds Plains. The Sea Islanders also brought an understanding of incentive-based economics to Nova Scotia. As slaves, they had enjoyed rewards for working hard, but industrious habits in Nova Scotia resulted in poverty for many Refugees. Thus, less fortunate Sea Islanders simply left the colony for Trinidad or other places. By 1835, many of the original settlers at Hammonds Plains had abandoned the settlement.

For their part, the Chesapeake Refugees brought their understanding of Christianity, localized customs, and notions about gender roles to Nova Scotia. Not surprisingly, when the Black Refugees developed separate African churches, the leaders of this movement were from the Chesapeake. The vast majority of Chesapeake Refugees settled together at Preston. This type of block settlement allowed them to continue customs and traditions that might have seemed quite foreign to the Sea Islanders. The Chesapeake Refugees also carried ideas about family and gender roles that were similar to general attitudes in North America. In petitions to the government, the male Refugees argued that they alone provided for their wives and children. Thus, as Carr and Walsh point out, these ex-slaves' attitudes about work and gender fell in line with their former owners' beliefs: the male head of the household needed to provide for his family (1988).

Although both groups brought their marketing skills to Nova Scotia, which would serve as the basis for their economic survival (see chapter four), the Chesapeake Refugees were better positioned to succeed in Nova Scotia for one major reason: they had an intimate understanding of Anglo-American culture that made the transition to freedom slightly less traumatic. On the other hand, the Sea Islanders were thrown into a situation that shattered the security of their relatively insulated black world.

Let us return to the oft-quoted words of Lord Dalhousie. Certainly, the Refugees hoped to escape "the dread of the lash" in order to work for themselves in Nova Scotia. However, it does not follow that their idea of freedom was "idleness" or that they were "quite incapable of industry" (Dalhousie to Bathurst, Dec. 29, 1816, NSARM). Sadly, Dalhousie's assumptions about the Refugees' work ethic, so similar to the attitudes of their former owners, were all too common in colonial Nova Scotia.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What were the differences between slavery in the Chesapeake and the Lowcountry (Georgia Sea Islands)?
2. What were some of the hallmarks of Georgia Sea Island culture?
3. Aside from their yearning for freedom, why did the Black Refugees risk their lives to escape slavery?
4. How did the Black Refugees escape from their owners in the Georgia Sea Islands and the Chesapeake?
5. Which group of Refugees was better prepared for the transition to Nova Scotia, and why?

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e) African Americans and the War of 1812

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NOTES

- 1 Roswell King to Pierce Butler, July 23, 1808, Butler Plantation Papers (BPP), Historical Society of Pennsylvania (hereafter HSP); also see King to Butler, Feb. 12 and 26, and Mar. 4, 1815, BPP, HSP. All papers from the Historical Society of Pennsylvania were accessed through the University of Toronto Library.
- 2 On the sale of Chesapeake slaves outside of the region, see Dunn 1983:59; Kulikoff 1983:145–9; Walsh 1989:405. On hiring out, see Hughes 1978:260–86; Franklin and Schweningen 1999:32–7.
- 3 On slave discontent, see Franklin and Schweningen 1999; Sidbury 1997; Egerton 1993; Carroll 1968:47–76.

- 4 The separation of husband and wife is demonstrated in: Slaves on Halifax list, claimants and state; List of slaves allowed to Virginia, Maryland, etc. at Georgia Average, NSARM, Misc., Blacks War of 1812. On the advantages of larger plantations in the Lowcountry in terms of marriage and household structure, see Morgan 1998:503, 507–10; Berlin, Gutman, and Norton 1983:178.
- 5 On African naming patterns in the Sea Islands, see A List of Negroes in possession of the British Forces in the State of Georgia, under the command of Rear Admiral Cockburn with the period of their being taken, and the period of their removal from Cumberland Island, or the Waters adjacent to the same, NSARM, Misc., War of 1812 Blacks.
- 6 Berlin 1980:54; Raboteau 1983:193–217; Morgan 1998:420–37; Sidbury 1997:35–8; Mathews 1965; Sobel 1979; Berlin 1998:272–3; King to Butler, Mar. 30 1804, BPP, HSP; Kemble 1863:220; Granger 1973; Bell 1987:126–54; Parrish 1992; Stucky 1987; Creel 1988.
- 7 Dunn 1983:50; Raboteau 1983:206–8; Berlin 1998:274–7; Sidbury 1997:48–9, 140; Egerton 1993; Walsh 1993:188–9; Walker 1973:1–26; Carroll 1968:47–76; James 1963.
- 8 Grant 1973:253–70; Cassell 1972:144–55; Fergusson 1948:10–13; Spray 1977:64–79; Stagg 1983. For the story of black Americans that fought in the War of 1812, see Altoff 1996.
- 9 Ball 1969:470–1; Shipping Log, *Regulus*, Feb. 19 and Mar. 7, 1815 in *Documents Furnished by the British Government Under The Third Article of the Convention of St. Petersburg, And Bayly's List of Slaves And Of Public And Private Property Remaining On Tangier Island And On Board H.B.M. Ships of War, After The Ratification Of The Treaty Of Ghent* (Washington: Gales & Seaton, 1827), p. 63 (hereafter *British Government* 1827); Bell 1987:172; King to Butler, Mar. 18, 1815, BPP, HSP.
- 10 For a good discussion of the politics of slavery during the Anglo-American conflict, see Mason 2002:665–96.
- 11 Cited in Bell 1987:180; Shipping Log, *Regulus*, Mar. 12, 1815 in *British Government* 1827:63; *Niles Weekly Register* Sept. 30, 1815.
- 12 Cassell 1974:155; Bell 1987:170–91; Bullard 1983:62–80; Ball 1969:472; *Niles Weekly Register* Sept. 30, 1815.
- 13 For the Refugees' emphasis on freedom and land, see Cochrane to Bathurst, 14 July 1814 in Cassell 1972:152.
- 14 HMS *Rifleman*, HMS *Marlborough*, HMS *Junon*, HMS *Mariner*, HMS *Diomedes*, and HMS *Diadem*, Sept. 1813, NSARM, 420: docs.1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8.
- 15 Names, Age, Description and present State of the Blacks, Melville Island, May 6, 1816, NSARM, 421: doc. 1; Names, Age, Diseases + present State of the Patients, Black Hospital Melville Island, NSARM, 421: doc. 2.
- 16 Black Refugees desirous of settling upon lands at Preston, 1815, 419: doc. 93.

chapter three

Government Policy and Black Consciousness

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, students should be able to:

1. Understand how the intellectual and political climate of early-nineteenth-century Great Britain influenced Nova Scotia's policy toward the Black Refugees.
2. Discuss the challenges facing Nova Scotia's government after the Refugees settled in the colony.
3. Discuss the different ways that the Black Refugees helped determine government policy.
4. Discuss the importance of the Refugees' refusal to leave Nova Scotia.

INTRODUCTION

The first generation of Black Refugees struggled to carve out a position in the rapidly changing landscape of Nova Scotia between 1813 and 1832. Poor health, inadequate housing, crop failures, and unemployment largely defined these years. The Refugees also faced major obstacles rooted in race, class, and a dislocated post-war economy. Indecisive government officials exacerbated many of these difficulties. Understandably,

historians such as Robin Winks and C.B. Fergusson have focused on government policy, — because it is more accessible, without closely examining the Refugees' responses to it. Yet it can be shown that complex negotiations took place between the settlers and the Crown, which allow us to understand the Refugees' individual and collective aspirations. The first generation of Black Refugees created, and in some cases re-created, communities that can — not be understood by focusing exclusively on the actions of the colonial government. The Refugees' responses to government policy entailed defining the rights and expectations of freedom. In order to understand government policy, it is important to outline briefly the intellectual and political climate of early-nineteenth-century Britain and its empire.¹

British intellectuals and policy-makers developed ideas about the natural inequality of men that influenced Nova Scotia's policies toward the Black Refugees. These thinkers, such as Edmund Burke, believed that class distinctions were necessary for peace, order, and good government.

BOX 3.1 | **Edmund Burke**

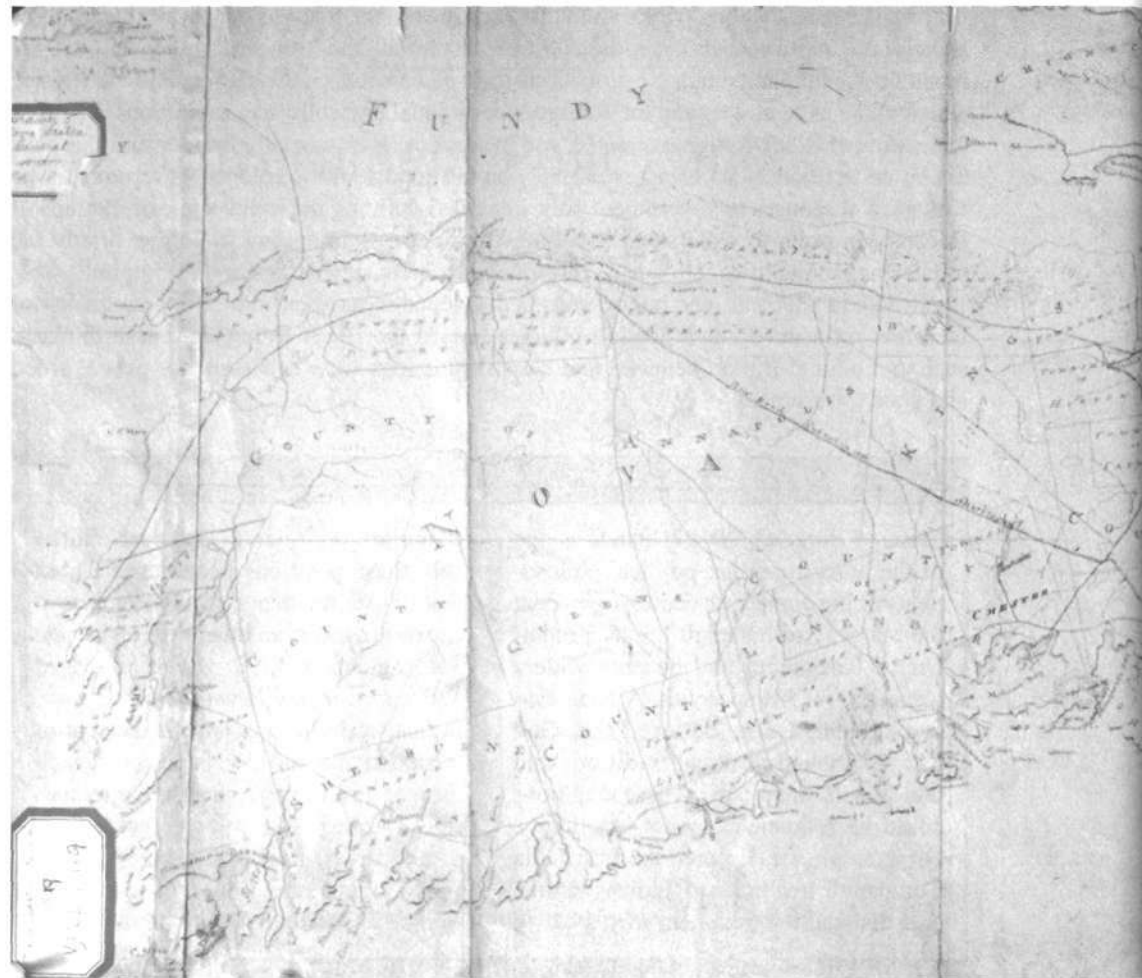
Edmund Burke (1729–97) stands as one of the most important political philosophers of the eighteenth century. He spent the majority of his adult life as a member of Parliament and became widely respected for his speeches. A conservative thinker, Burke believed that God had sanctioned political traditions and that people must obey. These traditions could be reformed but not drastically. For example, he deplored the East India Company's treatment of Indians. Burke also disliked the treatment meted out to

Catholics in Ireland. However, Burke held these positions because he feared that these incidents would lead to a backlash against an otherwise legitimate government. In 1790, Burke published *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. In this work, he rejected the concept of natural rights and defended the French form of government (an absolute monarchy). Despite the seeming contradictions in his career, Burke held conservative views about the place of men and women in society.

Supposedly, the poor and rich were linked in an unequal relationship, which God sanctioned and men must obey:

It is a partnership in all science, a partnership in all art, a partnership in every virtue, and in all perfection. As the ends of such a partnership cannot be obtained in many generations, it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but also between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born. Each contract of each particular state is but a clause in the great primaevael contract of eternal society, linking the lower with the higher natures, connecting the visible and invisible world, according to a fixed compact sanctioned by the inviolable oath which holds all physical and all moral natures, each in their appointed place. (cited in Dickinson 1977:295)

According to this view of society, government could do little to assist the poor without endangering the more fortunate. Any attempt to remedy the plight of the poor disregarded the laws of nature and of liberty itself. The British establishment regarded challenges to the status quo as direct assaults on the natural order of society. Thus, movements (the French



Map of Nova Scotia in the early nineteenth century.

Revolution in particular) that advocated an expansion of rights to certain classes within a given society were considered dangerous. Of course, the British campaign to end slavery seems to contradict the prevalent policies of this immensely conservative period. Yet the end of the slave trade in 1807 hinged more on economic improvement—through the ideology of free labour—for the empire and had less to do with extending genuine rights to newly freed slaves. Recalling the end of slavery, Lord Palmerston commented that these treaties had been partially made “for the encouragement of commerce” (cited in Walvin 1993:309).² The most telling failure of British abolitionism was the neglect and indifference that freed slaves experienced throughout the New World, from the West Indies to Nova Scotia. In short, despite the humanitarian impulse of the abolitionist movement, conservative ideology that argued for class distinctions, racial hierarchies, and obedience to authority remained sacrosanct (Dickinson 1977; Harrison 1965:90–177; Philip 1991; Allen 1994).



Source: NSARM.

The colonial elite in Nova Scotia remained wedded to these principles during the Black Refugees' first years of settlement. As nineteenth century notables imbued with ideas about the natural order of society, Sir John Sherbrooke and Lord Dalhousie (lieutenant-governors between 1811 and 1820) saw the Black Refugees as being preordained a servant class. However, the timing of the Refugees' settlement presented numerous problems for the colonial government. Local officials struggled to define the Black Refugees' place in society, because there were few labouring jobs available following the War of 1812. Thus, their belief that the Refugees must remain a perpetual labouring class clashed with the reality of unemployment.

Indecision, uncertainty, and ambiguity marked Nova Scotia's policy toward the Black Refugees. These problems emanated from the Crown's unilateral decision to send the Refugees to Nova Scotia. In other words, the Refugees were thrust upon Nova Scotia

without its consent, an initiative that became a chronic source of complaint in the House of Assembly and with the local population (Journal of the House of Assembly, April 1, 1815, NSARM, 305: doc. 3; *Acadian Recorder* Dec. 23, 1815, NSARM). Periodically throughout the next 20 years, the colonial government attempted to send the Refugees back to the United States or to Trinidad, while at the same time placing them on sterile land in Nova Scotia and creating a cheap labour pool. The tension caused by accepting the Refugees as viable settlers on the one hand and viewing them as sojourners on the other contributed to indecisive government policies.³

EARLY GOVERNMENT POLICY: LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR SHERBROOKE

The Black Refugees arrived in Nova Scotia in increasing numbers between 1813 and 1816. The government soon realized that the trickle of ex-slaves promised to become a flood of poverty-stricken people in desperate need of food, clothing, shelter, and medicine. Yet, as Robin Winks notes, the colonial government continued (with the exception of its flawed land settlement project) to apply short-sighted solutions to problems that demanded a carefully crafted and skilfully executed development program (1971:120).⁴

In the autumn of 1813, the first Black Refugees arrived in Nova Scotia. However, Lieutenant-Governor John Sherbrooke failed to institute Lord Castlereagh's Order-in-Council about providing for slaves captured during war. Castlereagh had written to Sherbrooke's predecessor, Sir George Prevost, in 1808:

So Soon as any Slaves shall be committed to his charge by any Decree of the Vice Admiralty Court, the Chief Officer of the Customs is to take measures immediately for receiving & providing for them, I am therefore to signify to you His Majesty's pleasure that you do adjust with the said Chief Officer, the expense per head per diem, at which such Slaves are to be maintained and what allowance should be made for necessaries and Cloathing [sic], and Contingencies for each until they shall be enlisted, or apprenticed, and the amount, of the expenses attending this measure. (Castlereagh to Prevost, April 10, 1808, NSARM, 420: doc. 9)

Instead, Sherbrooke sent sick Refugees to the Halifax Poor House while encouraging those in better health to enter the colony's interior in search of employment. Sherbrooke's policy derived from his belief that the newcomers could "maintain themselves comfortably by their labour" thanks to the bustling wartime economy and the prevailing shortage of labour (Sherbrooke to Bathurst, Oct. 18, 1813, NSARM, 111:66-7). But this relatively positive circumstance lasted for less than a year; until a peacetime recession set in. Sherbrooke's plan to provide for unhealthy Refugees was even less successful. Although the Halifax Poor House provided basic necessities, such as food and shelter, its facilities were grim. One woman suffering from starvation at a farm on the outskirts of Halifax preferred to die there rather than return to the Poor House, where she said she would be "devoured by vermin" (Rufus Fairbanks's letter, Mar. 8, 1815, NSARM, 305: doc. 22).

Sherbrooke's policies of selective provisioning and employment in the interior soon became inadequate as the number of Refugees dramatically increased. In the summer and fall months of 1814, as a result of Admiral Cochrane's proclamation, hundreds of Black Refugees began arriving in Nova Scotia. In October 1814, Cochrane warned Sherbrooke that the Refugees were in "great distress"—that is, desperate for food, clothing, shelter, and medical attention (Cochrane to Sherbrooke, Oct. 5, 1814, NSARM, 420: doc. 110).

However, the colonial government did not immediately revamp its policy to deal with the increased number of Refugees. Finally, in April 1815 Sherbrooke enforced Lord Castlereagh's Order-in-Council, which placed the Refugees under the supervision of the collector of customs at Melville Island on the west side of the Northwest Arm, which is a peninsula in the Halifax area that points to Melville Island (Cochrane to Sherbrooke, Mar. 25, 1815, Colonial Office 217/96, NSARM).

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| BOX 3.2 | Melville Island |
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Melville Island is located on the Northwest Arm in Halifax. It served primarily as a prison for French and American soldiers during the early nineteenth century. The public remembers Melville Island for its role in military matters. Little attention is paid to its use as a home to the Black Refugees. It should be remembered, however, that

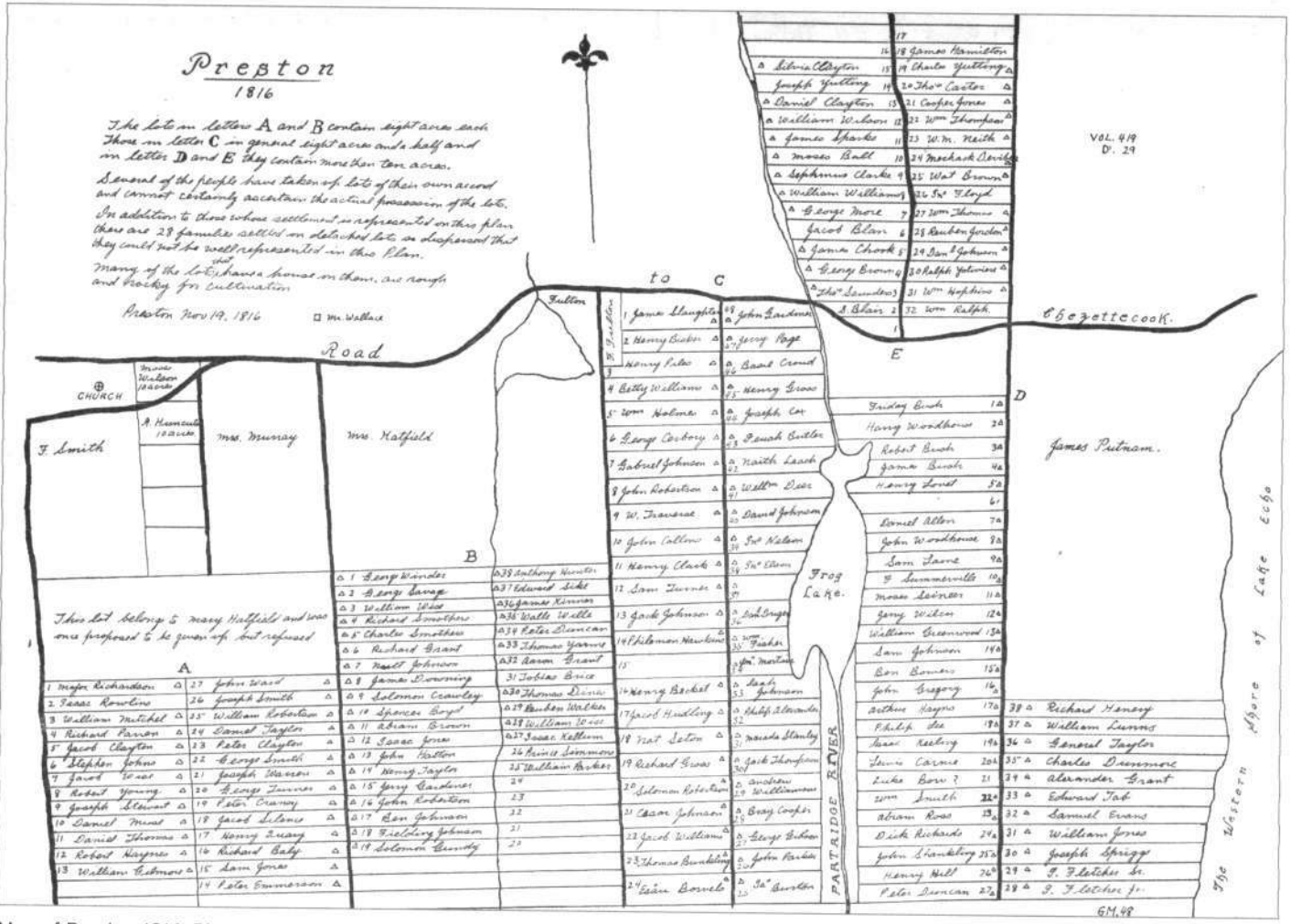
Black Refugees were born there, lived there, and died there. Melville Island will always be remembered for its military role, but it was also the starting point of freedom for African Americans who immigrated to Nova Scotia during the War of 1812 (Melville Island Records, NSARM, 420).

Melville Island had been used as a prison during the Napoleonic Wars and the War of 1812, but in 1815 it served as a quarantine centre for the flood of Refugees, while the government decided what to do with them. From April 27 to July 26, 1815, Melville Island received over 700 Refugees, who were given basic medical attention. Upon arriving in Nova Scotia, many of them were suffering from a variety of ailments, including dysentery, ulcers, and frozen limbs, which together contributed to the deaths of over 70 people. The Melville Island establishment also provided the Refugees with food rations that included beef, Indian meal (made from corn), potatoes, pork, molasses, coffee, and spruce beer. This facility remained open until the summer of 1816, serving as a hospital and a poor house. Although as a short-term shelter Melville Island was a relatively successful endeavour, the government needed a more permanent solution to the Refugee situation.

In the summer of 1815, Lord Bathurst wrote to Sherbrooke and suggested that the Refugees receive small farms to provide for their subsistence:

The advantage which might result from giving to those persons who are mostly accustomed to Agricultural labour, small Grants of Land by the cultivation of which they might in a short time be enabled to provide for their own Subsistence and to promote the general Prosperity of the Province in which they might be settled. (Bathurst to Sherbrooke, June 13, 1815, NSARM, 63: doc. 12)

Throughout the winter and into the following spring, the Refugees were moved to settlements at Preston (924 Refugees), Hammonds Plains (504 Refugees), Halifax (115 Refugees), and numerous smaller clusters. In some ways, the settlement plan mirrored the treatment of other immigrants, in that the Refugees were given land and rations. However, black settlers, regardless of the size of their families or their military service, were given only ten-acre lots. In contrast, European immigrants regularly received over 100 acres and sometimes more, depending on the size of their families and previous service to the British



Source: NSARM.

Map of Preston 1816. Please note the small size of the Refugees' farms in comparison to their white neighbours.

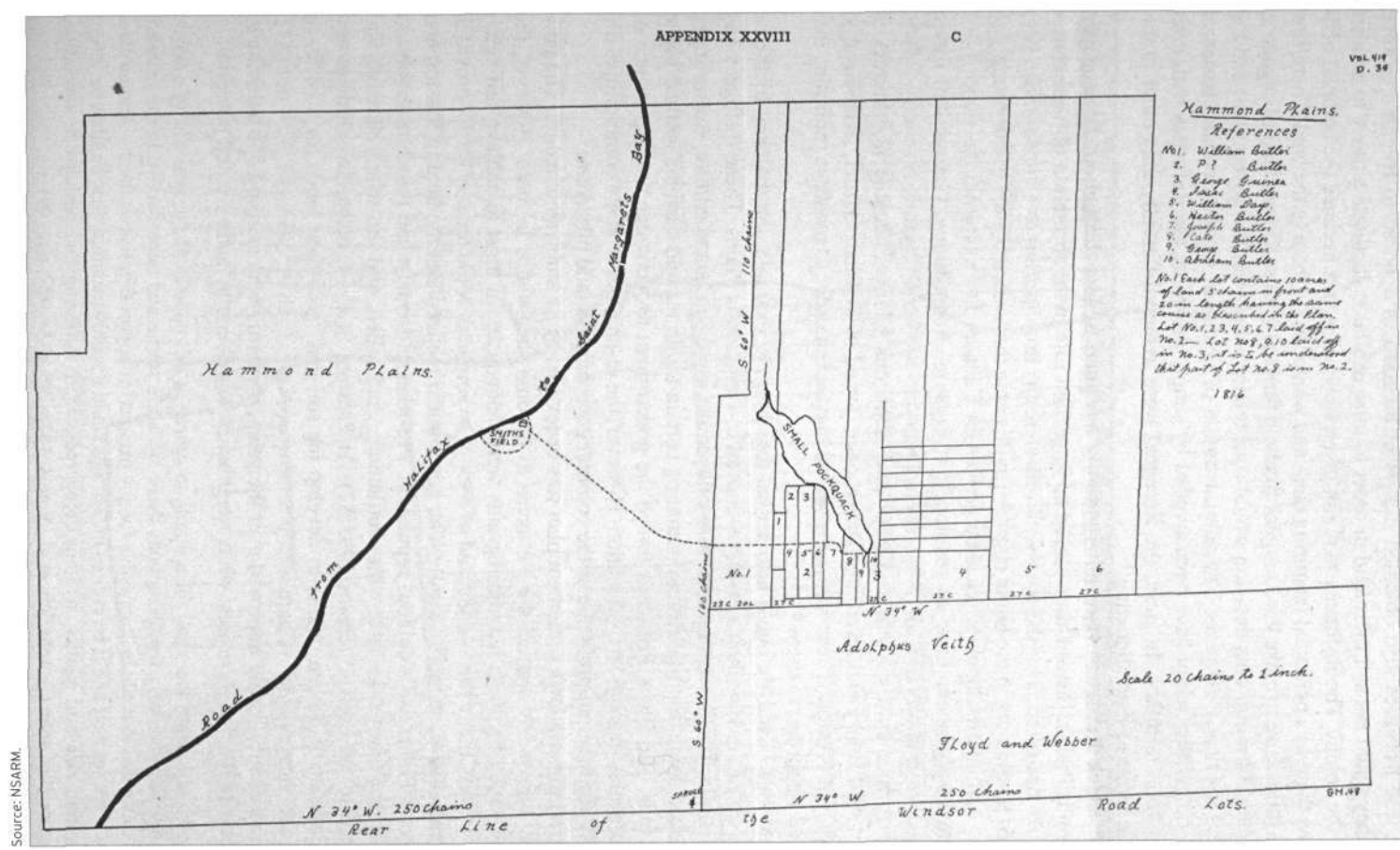
Crown. The Refugees also obtained **tickets of location** as opposed to **freehold grants**. Thus, they could not sell their land in order to raise capital to facilitate a move to another part of the colony. The Refugees were not given freehold grants because the colonial officials saw them as a perpetual labouring class and wanted to tie them to the land. Therefore, it made little sense to make the Refugees freehold farmers with sufficient land to engage in commercial farming. This decision would sour relations between the government and the Refugees for nearly 30 years. The administration of tickets of location created issues of access to land that might have been avoided by simply providing the Refugees with their titles to good farmland. In short, the Refugees were treated differently than other immigrants in terms of land allocation.⁵

The Black Refugees were not randomly assigned to lots throughout Preston and Hammonds Plains. Instead, they played an important role in the formation of these settlements. As has often been the case with other groups immigrating to Canada, those who had been neighbours in the home country (in this case the United States) usually sought to become neighbours again when they arrived in Canada. For example, the majority of Chesapeake Refugees took up residence at Preston. Accordingly, George and Levin Winder, former slaves of a Mr. Wise, settled near one another at Preston. Similarly, Edwin Nelm's former slaves, George Turner and Septimus Clarke, became neighbours at Preston. And Henry and Jeremiah Garner, once owned by William Garner, lived close to each other at Preston. These Refugees settled together in order to preserve traditions that remained important to them.⁶

Many Sea Island Refugees also settled together. For example, the majority of Pierce Butler's and John Hamilton's ex-slaves moved to Hammonds Plains. These Refugees had shared similar labour requirements and enjoyed the same Sea Island culture. Accordingly, they placed some importance on continuing certain traditions and customs learned in the Sea Islands. The Black Refugees forced the government to recognize the importance of slave identities through land allocation. However, the re-creation of some communities did not solve the inherent problems of the colonial government's land procedure.⁷

The administration's settlement plan was bedevilled by its ambivalent nature. The government supposedly wanted the Refugees to become subsistence farmers. However, the farms reserved for these new immigrants were inadequate for most to achieve self-sufficiency. Indeed, many farms consisted of rock or swampland, while the rest hardly provided enough acreage to support a family. The government realized that the land in Preston and Hammonds Plains had a dubious reputation. Previous settlements had failed miserably. At Hammonds Plains, "the first white settlement...had failed, and the whole acreage had escheated to the crown" (Evans 1993:57). At Preston, in 1784, disbanded soldiers and other Loyalists had been unable to develop the soil and "sold their lands for a trifle, or abandoned them unsold" (Chamberlain to Morris, Nov. 11, 1814, NSARM, 419: doc. 41). The land's quality hardly improved over the years, no matter who attempted to cultivate it. In the late 1830s, the Refugees' white neighbours described the land's limited potential:

That these lots are too small for a family to subsist in this country, if the land was of a fertile quality, but with very few exceptions these lands are sterile and unproductive in the extraim; insomuch that it would be impossible for any persons to support families on them—And no class of settlers, let their habits be ever so industrious could possibly maintain their families on lots of the same size and quality, without being reduced to suffering and perhaps to starvation. (Memorial of John Chamberlain et al., June 8, 1838, NSARM, 422: doc. 49)



Source: NSARM.

Map of Hammonds Plains 1816. Please note the small size of the Refugees' farms in comparison to their white neighbours'.

The Refugees responded to the government's policy by insisting that they needed better land. In petitions to the Crown, the Refugees argued that prosperity remained impossible and survival tenuous. In 1821, Levin Winder's description of the land at Preston was representative of prevalent attitudes among the Refugees:

[O]wing to its limited [sic] size and Sterile quality [sic] he—cannot make a living for himself and family—That since his settlement thereon he has used his utmost endeavours to cultivate it in such a manner as that he might keep himself and family from Want which he finds he cannot do. (Levin Winder 1821, Land Papers, NSARM, RG 20 A)

The Black Refugees' response to government land policies remained negative. They hoped to improve their fate by acquiring more land, but the soil's limited prospects made this endeavour largely futile.

BOX 3.3

Internal Colonialism: Similarities Between Government Treatment of Black Refugees and Natives in the Prairies

There is a significant similarity between how the British government treated the Black Refugees and how the Canadian government dealt with Aboriginal people in the Prairies in the latter half of the same century. Both governments practised an internal colonialism that restricted movement, created second-class land ownership, and provided insufficient farming assistance. In the case of the Aboriginal people of the Prairies, they lived on reserves. If they wanted to leave the reserve to travel any-

where, they required a pass, which would be issued by the local "Indian Agent" (a non-Aboriginal federal official). The Metis of the Prairies were issued scrip by the Manitoba Act of 1870, which in theory recognized their rights to land, but in actuality provided them with little land. Finally, the treaties that the Aboriginal people of the Prairies signed included promises of farming assistance. The amount of help actually given was as minimal as what was given to the Black Refugees.

For the historian, the land settlement program raises important questions. How could the Refugees provide for themselves if the land they were assigned did not even produce the most basic level of subsistence? Why did the government place them on such poor land? If disbanded soldiers and experienced farmers failed to produce anything of value at Preston and Hammonds Plains, why did the government believe that a group of impoverished ex-slaves might do any better?

The search for answers to these questions requires us to consider the possibility that the government placed the Black Refugees on sterile land in order to use them as a cheap labour supply for local farmers. Additionally, from the government's perspective, settlement in Preston and Hammonds Plains removed the Refugees from the social integration that mass settlement in Halifax might have provided. The local government land agent, Theophilus Chamberlain, had encouraged their settlement in Preston because they would "serve to improve the Place in general, and afford assistance to us towards repairing the Roads, but likewise furnish us with Laborers of whom we stand in too much need to make tolerable progress on our own improvements" (Chamberlain to Morris, Nov. 11, 1815,

Dalhousie eventually came to believe that the Black Refugees were incapable of surviving in Nova Scotia. Thus, he contemplated a number of different schemes to remove them from the colony. As a rationalization for deportation, Dalhousie reasoned incorrectly that most Refugees had been taken from the United States against their will. Thus he encouraged the Crown to “procure a pardon from the government of the United States, [as] it would be most desirable to restore them to their masters in America or send them to Sierra Leone. Either of these places I believe would be agreeable to the greater part of them” (Dalhousie, Dec. 29, 1816:6–9).

BOX 3.4 **Sierra Leone**

Sierra Leone is located in West Africa. Its indigenous people traded with Europeans as early as the fifteenth century. It became one of the first British colonies in 1808. Sierra Leone is best known for its history as the home of former slaves who returned to Africa from North America and the West Indies. During the late eighteenth century, beginning in 1787, the British government resettled people of African descent in Freetown. Removed from their indigenous African experience by slavery, these returnees, such as the Black Loyalists and Jamaican Maroons, embraced British ideals and an eclectic mix of African cultures. The settlement developed into a bustling society that served as an important base for the

Royal Navy’s anti-slavery operations after 1808. In the 1820s, Fourah Bay College was founded and attracted students from throughout the British Empire. Despite these positive developments, Freetown remained a site of conflict because the returnees, or *Krio* as they came to be called, were not interested in mixing with the indigenous people of Sierra Leone. Indeed, indigenous peoples launched several revolts against the British and the *Krio*. Sierra Leone is important to the history of North America because it always held out the possibility of return to Africa for former slaves. Ironically, it also held out hope to whites in Nova Scotia and other British colonies that blacks would not stay in the New World.

When Nova Scotian officials attempted to persuade the Refugees of the advantages of returning to the United States, they encountered defiance. Eventually, Lord Dalhousie realized that “none of them are inclined to return to their Masters, or to America” (Dalhousie, May 16, 1817:23–6). The Black Refugees were not interested in departing for the United States, especially if it meant a possible return to slavery. The Refugees quite clearly connected America with slavery and the British Crown with liberty. One Refugee, when questioned by a traveller if he would return to the United States, given the difficulties he had experienced in Nova Scotia, simply replied “oh no—that never do [sic]” (Moorsom 1830:126). In the summer of 1815, local blacks in Halifax supposedly had expressed interest in returning to Africa.⁹ However, it is doubtful the Refugees were involved in this endeavour because many had yet to arrive in Halifax or leave Melville Island. Also, subsequent refusals to leave the colony make it unlikely that the Refugees would approve of migrating to Africa right after they had landed in Nova Scotia. Nevertheless, some

Refugees suggested that they might entertain the prospect of departing for Trinidad and Tobago. Thus, Dalhousie immediately arranged to send them to the West Indies. However, the Nova Scotian government initially lacked the funds to send the Refugees to these distant islands (Dalhousie, May 16, 1817:23–6).

In 1820, however, the Refugees were offered conveyance to and settlement in Trinidad. The Lord Commissioners of His Majesty's Treasury paid for the expedition. The Refugees were also promised land and rations. In 1821, Trinidad was a colony of Great Britain that relied on slave labour. Yet it also had a growing population of free blacks. The Halifax government hoped that the Refugees would happily join kinfolk and friends in Trinidad. During the War of 1812, some of the Black Refugees had been temporarily held in the West Indies before obtaining transportation to Halifax. Undoubtedly, some neighbours and families were split up because certain individuals preferred at the time to live in the West Indies, while others thought Nova Scotia presented a better option. Those Refugees who remained in Trinidad after the War of 1812 had developed a successful settlement at Naparima. Thus, the colonial government's offer had some appeal. However, Halifax officials did not give sufficient weight to the Refugees' attachment to their new land or to their fear of re-enslavement (Fergusson 1948:35; Grant 1972:289–92; Weiss 1995).

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| BOX 3.5 | Trinidad |
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Trinidad is an island located off the coast of Venezuela. Spain colonized Trinidad in 1532. However, the island remained lightly populated as warfare, disease, forced labour, and murder drastically reduced the population of the Aboriginal people. Moreover, Spain did not provide many colonists. In 1797, the British captured the island, and five years later it became an official colony. Trinidad remained economically underdeveloped and politically divided between British planters and the government during the early nineteenth century. The planters wanted to import more African slaves in

order to produce sugar, while the government hoped to introduce crop diversification by settling free blacks (after failing to attract European and Asian labour) in the colony who would serve as an independent farming class. The War of 1812 provided the government with an opportunity to settle free blacks in Trinidad. These settlers did quite well, and as a result Trinidad's government encouraged free blacks in North America to immigrate to the island throughout the 1820s and 1830s. Despite the increasing number of free blacks, slavery remained legal in the colony until 1834.

In the end, only 95 Black Refugees migrated to Trinidad, in January 1821. These 95 migrants consisted of 81 adults and 14 children (Kempt to Harrison, Jan. 20, 1821, NSARM, 113: doc. 35). In other words, less than 6 percent of the Refugee population left Nova Scotia. Yet the emigration to Trinidad poses important questions for the historian. Who left and why? Moreover, and most important, why did so many remain in Nova Scotia?

Identifying those Refugees who migrated to Trinidad is very difficult, and historians disagree as to the composition of the group.¹⁰ James Walker argues that the 95 emigrants were "all from Hammond's Plains" (1976a:394). Robin Winks maintains that "nearly all

were from Beech Hill [a small black settlement 11 kilometres from Halifax]" (1971:123). C.B. Fergusson and John Grant state that 34 families from Preston, Hammonds Plains, and Beech Hill expressed interest in removal to Trinidad (Fergusson 1948:35; Grant 1972:289). This diversity of opinion derives from the inadequate and contradictory documentation that exists about the migration to Trinidad. A census return made at Hammonds Plains in 1820 lists 70 individuals "desirous of going to Trinidad" (Return of the Black American Refugees residing at Hammonds Plains, NSARM, 422: doc. 19). Another source entitled, "Those who wish to go to Trinidad," identifies 81 individuals as being interested in removing to Trinidad. They were from Hammonds Plains (51), Preston (23), Beech Hill (4), and Refugee Hill (3) (NSARM, 422: doc. 20).

What accounts for these differences? There are two possibilities. First, some families and individuals might have made last-minute decisions to leave or to stay. Second, the migrants were under- or over-counted. Some evidence is available that supports the first scenario. Thomas Dines's large family signed up to immigrate to Trinidad, but his heirs were granted land in Preston in 1842.¹¹ This suggests that he changed his mind and remained in Nova Scotia. Hammonds Plains farmer Nassau Jackson expressed interest in moving to Trinidad in 1820. But Jackson and his family also remained in Nova Scotia.¹² Despite the gaps in documentation and interpretation, the question "who left and why?" can be partially answered.

In order to understand some general trends among the Trinidad emigrants, the document entitled "Those who wish to go to Trinidad" offers the best data. Some 63 percent of these Refugees were from Hammonds Plains; 37 percent had lived at Preston, Beech Hill, and Refugee Hill. The majority were married, but 56 percent did not have any children. Nearly 40 percent were single with no family attachments. Overall, most of the emigrants were relatively youthful and without large families and, as such, had a lower level of attachment to Nova Scotia than older Refugees at Preston (NSARM, 422: doc. 20).

These Refugees probably left for numerous reasons. They had endured crop shortages, failed farming, and unemployment. Moreover, government rations had ceased. They may have thought Trinidad presented a possible solution to their problems. On the other hand, slavery still existed in Trinidad in 1821. Refugee migrants probably recognized the danger of travelling to an island where an unscrupulous official could sell them into slavery, but these people were willing to risk re-enslavement in hope of finding a more prosperous freedom.

We know that, once in Trinidad, these Refugees settled among their brethren at Naparima. The 1821 emigrants did not require assistance after their first 18 months on the island. They contributed to the local Refugee settlement, which in 1825 produced 2000 barrels of corn and over 400 barrels of rice (Laurence 1963:31-2). They raised and sold poultry, pigs, and other provisions. By the 1830s, the more prosperous Refugees moved to other "cultivated districts." There, they owned small farms and produced numerous goods for the local market (Fergusson 1948:37). Clearly, the economic success of those who went to Trinidad challenges the myth of Refugee indolence. The Trinidad emigrants of 1821 took a calculated risk that soon gave them greater economic success than their more cautious friends in Nova Scotia.

Despite the adversity they encountered in Nova Scotia, 94 percent of the Black Refugees refused to immigrate to the Caribbean. Some had established friendships, built

houses, cleared land, and found employment in Nova Scotia. Moreover, they realized that sailing down the American coast exposed them to possible capture and subsequent enslavement. Also, the Refugees, like most African Americans, were aware of the horror stories of slavery in the West Indies. Although many Refugees expressed initial interest in the possibility of moving to Trinidad, their religious leadership rejected any possibility of removal. Lieutenant-Governor James Kempt subsequently recorded his interpretation of their reasons for staying in Nova Scotia:

At first a considerable number expressed their desire of going thither; but, when the time for their departure approached many who had given their names as being so disposed withdrew them in consequence of their having been made to believe by fanatical preachers interested in keeping them in the province that it would not be intended to send them to Trinidad, but to sell them to their former Masters in the United States. (Kempt to Horton, May 4, 1825, Colonial Office 217/144, NSARM)

The Refugees' crucial, and cautious, decision to remain in Nova Scotia (as opposed to the Black Loyalists' and Maroons' more daring decision to opt for exodus to Sierra Leone) created the foundation of a new black consciousness. This new consciousness subordinated the Refugees' links with black America in favour of forging a new identity within Nova Scotia. In other words, the community defined itself as a distinct group of African North Americans.

The Refugees' refusal to immigrate to Trinidad did not dissuade local whites from continuing to encourage their removal to a warmer climate. Edmund Ward, editor of the *Halifax Free Press*, recommended that the Refugees "should be sent to a climate, more congenial to their constitutions than that of Nova Scotia, where the produce of the earth can be obtained with little exertion" (*Free Press* Feb. 8, 1825, NSARM). Not surprisingly, the government attempted to encourage the removal of the Refugees, periodically, for many years, but these offers were rejected. The emerging leadership of the Black Refugees in Nova Scotia created a community that valued safety and caution over the risky ideas of their brethren who went to Trinidad.¹³

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Government practice involved a constant negotiation between the Refugees and the colonial administration. In the Refugees' reactions to government policy, we see their understanding and definition of freedom. This definition of freedom was rooted in a desire to control their own lives, obtain land, and decide settlement patterns. However, the Refugees could not overcome the administration's unwillingness to fashion a consistent development program. Instead, the regime focused on a program of marginalization blended with efforts at mass removal. Then, in the period from 1821 to 1840 policy shifted from pessimistic manipulation to neglect. Aside from granting land to some Refugees while attempting to secure the departure of others from the colony, the colonial government dealt with them only when starvation or sickness threatened their survival. In the final analysis, the Nova Scotian administration essentially failed to meet the challenges posed by the mass immigration of the Black Refugees.¹⁴

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What problems did the influx of Black Refugees cause for the Nova Scotian government?
2. How did the Refugees reject government initiatives?
3. What were the problems with the government's land settlement policy?
4. Why did the majority of Refugees reject the government's offer of removal to Trinidad?
5. Why does the author consider the Refugees' refusal to migrate to Trinidad a crucial point in their history?

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NOTES

- 1 Fergusson 1948:1–67; Winks 1971:114–41.
- 2 Some historians have placed British abolitionism within a framework that sees this event as heavily influenced by both economic and moral reasons. See Davis 1984 and Turley 1991.
- 3 Bathurst to Sherbrooke, Nov. 10, 1815, NSARM, 63: doc. 121; Minutes of Council, Apr. 30, 1817, NSARM, 214 1/2; Kempt to Harrison, Jan. 21, 1821, NSARM, 113: doc. 35.
- 4 Cochrane to Sherbrooke, Oct. 5, 1814, NSARM, 420: doc. 110; Sherbrooke to Cochrane, Oct. 5, 1814, NSARM, 111:101–3; Sherbrooke to House of Assembly, Feb. 24, 1815, NSARM, 288: doc. 101.
- 5 Morris to Sherbrooke, Sept. 6, 1815, NSARM, 420: doc. 76; NSARM, 419: docs. 39–42. On the land allocated to other immigrants, see *Free Press*, July 22, 1817, NSARM; also see Martell 1942:7–33.
- 6 Report of Lands Cleared by the People of Colour in Preston, May 9, 1816, NSARM, 421: doc. 3; Report of the Inspection of Preston Lots, August 1818, NSARM, 419: doc. 90; Slaves on Halifax List, claimants and state; List of Slaves allowed to Virginia, Maryland, etc. at Georgia average, NSARM, Misc., Blacks War of 1812.
- 7 Return of the Black American Refugees residing at Hammonds Plains, NSARM, 422: doc. 19; License of Occupation at Hammonds Plains, 1818, NSARM, 419: doc. 119.
- 8 His Majesty's Council to Dalhousie, Nov. 29, 1816, NSARM, 421: doc. 37. See also Dalhousie to His Majesty's Council, Nov 15, 1816, NSARM, 421: doc. 36.
- 9 *Acadian Recorder*, July 22, 1815, NSARM; *Halifax Journal*, July 24, 1815, NSARM; Fingard 1973:137.
- 10 In his book, Weiss proposes a list of the possible Trinidad emigrants, but it is based on the 1823 census. Thus, again, we can only begin to piece together the exact identity of the 95.
- 11 Land Grant for the People at Preston, May 23, 1842, NSARM, Land Grants.
- 12 Return of the Black American Refugees residing at Hammond's Plains, NSARM, 422: doc. 19; Gray to James, May 11, 1836, NSARM, 9: doc. 58.

- 13 Kempt to Harrison, April 17, 1821, NSARM, 113: doc. 35; Kempt to George, Jan. 20, 1821, NSARM, 113: doc. 38; Grant 1990:98; Fergusson 1948:36-7.
- 14 Reports on Hammond's Plains, January 16, 1827, NSARM, 422: doc. 35-7. There is a major decrease in government documentation about the Refugees during the 1820s as opposed to their first years of settlement.

chapter four

Land and Labour

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, students should be able to:

1. Understand the difficulties of finding employment in early-nineteenth-century Nova Scotia.
2. Outline the similarities between the struggles of the Black Refugees and other immigrants to Nova Scotia.
3. Outline the numerous strategies employed by the Refugees in their attempt to find work.
4. Understand the importance of petitions and the farmer's market for Refugee survival.

INTRODUCTION

The Black Refugees endured numerous crop failures, devastating food shortages, the enmity of some neighbours, and unemployment. At various times, the government and private charities supported the Refugees when starvation threatened to wipe them out. Thus historians, such as Robin Winks and C.B. Fergusson, have focused on the failure

of the Refugees to garner steady employment. They inaccurately depict the Refugees as a group satisfied to live off white philanthropy and unable to improve or even uninterested in improving their situation through industry (Fergusson 1948:66–7; Winks 1971:114–41). John Grant and James Walker, however, present a more sympathetic portrayal of Refugee work patterns (Grant 1990:103–20; Walker 1976b). But the Refugees' work patterns can still benefit from a rigorous investigation as Winks is still considered the authority on African Canadian history.

Winks believed that the Refugees thought liberty meant the right to be idle because “so recently escaped from slavery, they at first assumed that freedom involved no responsibilities” (Winks 1971:125). This might have been true of a few Refugees. However, even these Refugees' perceived laziness might have largely resulted from the colony's pathetic employment opportunities and the rocky land the Refugees were forced to farm.

The Refugees' understanding of freedom rested partially on the idea of payment for work. The clearest expression of how the Refugees defined freedom can be found in a conversation between British traveller Captain William Moorsom, who held negative opinions about the Black Refugees, and a male Hammonds Plains Refugee in the 1820s. When asked why he did not return to the United States, given the difficult conditions of Nova Scotia, the Refugee replied “Cause, what I work for here, I gets.” Moorsom added, “This is not the idea of one, but of the many” (Moorsom 1830:126). These feelings were not exclusive to male Refugees. In the 1850s, New Yorker Frederic Cozzens visited Preston. A humorist and wine merchant, Cozzens was stuck in the colony because his boat to Bermuda had been cancelled. Imbued with the belief that African Americans were happier as slaves, he interrogated Mrs. Dair, formerly of Maryland. Cozzens's conversation with the “old tidy wench” is revealing (Cozzens 1859:64):

‘But which place do you like best?’ ‘I like Nova Scotia best.’ ‘But why’ said I, ‘do you prefer Nova Scotia to Maryland? Here you have to work so much harder, to suffer so much from the cold and the rheumatism and get so little for it.’ ‘Oh!’ replied Mrs. Deer, ‘de difference is, dat when I work here, I work for myself, and when I was working at home, I was working for other people.’ (Cozzens 1859:65–6)

CONTEXT AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

The Refugees' farming problems must be understood within a wider framework of immigrant difficulty in British North America. It would seem particularly appropriate to compare the Refugees' experience to the later arriving **American Fugitives** in Upper Canada (now Ontario).¹ Yet this comparison is problematic. It is primarily based on the dubious concept of racial similarity. Aside from this, the differences between the Refugees and the Fugitives are numerous.

Some of the American Fugitives' urban backgrounds differed greatly from the Refugees' backgrounds, which were primarily rural or semi-rural. The American Fugitives also included free blacks attempting to escape from the Black Codes—which were laws enacted by individual states that regulated the conditions of black slaves and restricted the rights of free slaves—and, after 1850, from the Fugitive Slave Act. Thousands of African Americans escaped via the **Underground Railroad** (a set of safe houses that stretched from the southern United States to Canada) during the 1850s and settled in Upper Canada. Also, the settlements in Upper Canada were led by outstanding personalities, such as Mary Shadd and Samuel Ringgold Ward. This is not to argue that the leadership in Upper Canada

BOX 4.1

American Fugitive Settlements in Upper Canada

The American Fugitives settled in different places throughout Upper Canada in the 1830s. Some preferred to live in black settlements, such as Wilberforce, Buxton, and Dawn. Each of these settlements faced difficulties typical to recent immigrants to British North America in the mid-nineteenth century. But these settlers also faced the additional variable of racism. Nevertheless, the local economy offered many opportunities for the recent immigrants, which led one American Fugitive to claim that Canada West "is the best poor man's country that I know of." Thus, many were able to find decent wages, and some even saved enough money to buy the land that they farmed. In this sense, the American Fugitives enjoyed advantages that the Black Refugees did not have. Similar to the Refugees and other free black communities, the population of African descent in the settlements also established separate

churches. It would be a mistake, however, to only understand the history of the American Fugitives in terms of the separate black settlements. Indeed, some settled in Toronto, Hamilton, and rural areas that were populated mainly by people of European descent. The black population's fortunes were intimately tied to events in the United States. For example, the settlements increased in numbers after the passage of the American Fugitive Slave Act in 1850. Also, the conclusion of the American Civil War encouraged some Fugitives (there is considerable debate as to the actual numbers) to return to their friends and family members in the United States. The separate black settlements suffered some depopulation after the American Civil War, but some Fugitives remained in Upper Canada and either continued farming or attempted to find other work in Toronto or other urban centres (Walker 1980:47–62).

was united, but it provided an important foundation that attracted donors and other aid to the Fugitive communities. Although the Fugitives did not receive grants of land like the Black Refugees, Upper Canada's economy offered many more opportunities for the Fugitives to gain a decent livelihood than Nova Scotia's. Clearly, the American Fugitives and the Black Refugees were two distinct groups that should be understood in their respective contexts (Law 1977; Rhodes 1998; Walker 1980:47–62; Wayne 1995).

COMPARISON WITH OTHER MARITIME SETTLERS

The Maritime region provides better material for comparison. Early historians believed that the frontier conditions of eastern Canada created subsistence farmers who enjoyed a "rough equality" (Bittermann 1988:33). In contrast, Rusty Bittermann argues that farm settlement was "a differentiating process" among the Scottish settlers at Middle River in Cape Breton (Bittermann 1988:34). Unequal land distribution created a segmented society in which farmers with capital benefited at the expense of the poorer **Backland settlers**. These settlers faced conditions that mirrored the Refugees' experience:

Many of them, either because they had settled on Indian lands or because they lacked the means to pay for Crown lands, held their lands as squatters rather than as owner occupiers... Because the Backlanders were confined to marginal agricultural lands, they also lost control over much of

their labour power. The more marginal the land, the greater the capital and labour inputs necessary to wrest a living from the soil. Lacking the means of subsistence, the labour of Backlanders had, of necessity, to be directed off the farm in order to make ends meet. (Bittermann 1988:34)

The prosperous farmers at Middle River had little regard or concern for their poorer neighbours (Bittermann 1988:47–50). In contrast, the poverty-stricken Refugees usually relied on the farm production of their more fortunate brethren. However, the similarities between Backland farming and the agricultural situation at Preston and Hammonds Plains are striking. First, both groups of settlers were subsistence farmers who rarely produced enough foodstuffs to move into commercial agriculture. Second, they had to perform menial labour in order to survive. Third, the majority of Refugees and Backlanders lived in poor housing and at times were reduced to eating only potatoes (Hornsby 1992:71–9). Clearly, poor farmers who immigrated to Nova Scotia, regardless of racial identity, endured difficult conditions.

The Refugees' experience fits into a general pattern of immigrant struggles in Nova Scotia after the War of 1812. For example, disbanded soldiers settled three hamlets in the western interior of the colony—Wellington, Dalhousie, and Sherbrooke—on the “projected” road from Halifax to Annapolis. These communities supposedly received “every possible assistance” (Martell 1942:17–18). Yet faced with strictly seasonal labour and other difficulties the settlers abandoned their farms, having made little or no improvements (Martell 1938:75–106). Seemingly, Preston and Hammonds Plains fared better than these soldier settlements. The Refugees at least cleared land, built roads, and did not completely abandon their farms.

BEGINNINGS OF PRESTON AND HAMMONDS PLAINS

By December 1816, 924 Refugees had settled at Preston, about 15 kilometres east of Halifax (Return of Negroes by Richard Inglis, Dec. 30, 1816, NSARM). A spirit of optimism accompanied the initial settlement activity. Charles Morris, the surveyor general, developed an ambitious plan for the Refugees. He confidently wrote to Lieutenant-Governor John Sherbrooke in September 1815 that “the situation has many advantages peculiarly favorable to those poor people, and if no improper means are resorted to, to discourage the attempt they will I am confident with a little assistance be able to support themselves” (Morris to Sherbrooke, Sept. 6, 1815, NSARM, 420: doc. 76). Morris believed that Preston's location offered the Refugees an excellent opportunity to access the urban market.

They were expected to raise vegetables, poultry, and other items for sale in Halifax. Morris also encouraged the Refugees to supply “this Market, with, laths, shingles, hoop poles, Brooms, axe-helves, oar Rafters, Scantling, [and] Clapboards.” Optimistically, Morris stated that the new immigrants could sustain themselves simply by selling berries to people in Halifax if all else failed. The government also provided the Refugees with “a few implements of husbandry” in order to facilitate the construction of cabins (Morris to Sherbrooke).

High hopes also accompanied the initial settlement at Hammonds Plains. In November 1815, Sherbrooke informed Lord Bathurst that “another situation has been discovered well suited for the Negroes...at Hammonds Plains about twenty miles from Halifax” (Sherbrooke to Bathurst, Nov. 21, 1815, Colonial Office 217/96, NSARM). In fact, the Refugee settlement was located about 20 kilometres northwest of Halifax. As of December 1816, 504 Refugees had moved to Hammonds Plains (Martell 1942:37). This settlement offered the Refugees access to the main road between Halifax and St. Margaret's Bay.

According to local historian Dorothy Evans, the settlement's advantages included lumbering opportunities and its short distance to salt water. However, she carefully notes that "little of the soil in Hammonds Plains was suitable for farming" (Evans 1993:56).

The Black Refugees were anxious to take possession of their farms. At Hammonds Plains, the Refugees were said to be "much pleased" with the land and its potential (Sherbrooke to Bathurst, Nov. 21, 1815). Immediately, they began clearing timber and building houses in anticipation of the "severe" winter. After visiting Preston briefly, the Refugees were "well pleased and satisfied with its quality and situation." They were "desirous to become immediate Settlers [sic] & to clear part of their Lots & to build Huts for their families to shelter them from the inclemency of the approaching Winter" (Morris to Sherbrooke, Sept. 6, 1815).

The Refugees were excited about the opportunity to occupy their own land. Emerging from slavery, where many had tilled the soil for others, they relished the chance to create successful farms and viable communities. Yet they remained cautious. The frontier-like condition of Hammonds Plains and Preston concerned Sherbrooke and the Refugees alike:

The barren appearance of this country before it is cleared operates with other causes against the immediate execution of it [the success of the settlements], as the negro [sic] on the first arrival seem to dread so arduous an undertaking as the tilling of ground of this description appears to be. (Sherbrooke to Bathurst, July 20, 1815, Colonial Office, 217/96, NSARM)

WORK PATTERNS: PROBLEMS AND RESPONSES

The Black Refugees' work patterns were bedevilled by two major problems. First, the contracting post-war economy and an increase in European immigration left few jobs for the Refugees. In the autumn of 1814, "there was no longer any demand for Negro labour" (Martell 1942:16). Several months later the situation had not improved. One contemporary observer, store owner and Quaker Seth Coleman, noted a "disposition in [the Refugees] to labour, and to help themselves, but the fact is they have nothing to do" (Coleman to Sabatier, March 23, 1815, NSARM, 21: doc. 84). Employment remained seasonal even during periods of economic prosperity. In other words, the Refugees had difficulty finding work during the long winters. Second, the Refugees faced discriminatory hiring practices. In 1838, the Preston Refugees' white neighbours recorded the following:

[D]uring the winter parts of the year which generally extends from the Middle of November to the Middle of April, no employment as labourers can be depended on. And it is well known that there are numbers of the white labouring people, who are engaged in the fisheries during the summer who spread themselves throughout the country and labour the whole winter for no other compensation than their food. Besides this persons very generally prefer White labouring people to the Blacks by which these unfortunate people have not an equal chance of obtaining their share of even the little labour that is wanted. (Memorial of John Chamberlain et al., June 18, 1838, Reside in the neighbourhood of the people of colour settled in Preston, NSARM, 422: doc. 49)

Although some Black Refugees found various types of employment, the majority of men remained unemployed. Coleman reported in 1815 that the few who found work usually cut wood or made brooms (Coleman to Sabatier, March 23, 1815, NSARM). Some Refugees searched for menial jobs in Halifax but without much success. Coleman wrote that only four men with families had found employment. Jobless male Refugees remained at home "taking care of the Family." Accordingly, often the principal breadwinners of the

early Black Refugee household were women. They washed clothes for their white neighbours and performed other domestic tasks. However, the income from such work struck Coleman as being "scanty" (March 23, 1815).

The problems associated with finding employment made successful farming imperative. Sadly, farming proved equally difficult for the Refugees. At Preston, the land's sterility meant that the small size of the farms allocated for each family remained inadequate for subsistence production.²

BOX 4.2 Sample Refugee Petition for Land

The Memorial of Bray Cooper a man of Colour Humbly Sheweth

That your Memorialist Emigrated into this province from the United States early in the late American War, and settled with his family on a small lot in Preston which he now finds is not of sufficient extent to keep himself and his sons employed. That he is forty years old, has one Son Austin Cooper twenty years old, another Isaac Cooper Seventeen years old and two other small children. That he has no other prospect of a living for himself or them but by the calling of husbandman. That his not directly nor indirectly bargained for the sale of whatever land your Excellency may think proper to grant him but intends, with his sons immediately to go to work on the same and depends thereon for a living. Whereupon he humbly prays that your Excellency will take his case into your wise consideration and grant him one hundred acres for himself and fifty for each of his sons Austin and Isaac.

And as in duty bound Memorialist will ever pray

Bray Cooper,
his mark Preston 21st March 1820

The above subscriber Bray Cooper has made the oath before me that the facts stated herein are true

T. Chamberlain,
signed

This is to certify that we the Subscribers are acquainted with the Memorialist Bray Cooper and know him to be a hard working industrious sober decent man, and it is our opinion that he will make a good settler...it is our further opinion that his present lot is not large enough to employ him and his sons

T. Chamberlain,
signed

John Chamberlain,
signed

Robert Tremain,
signed.

The Hammonds Plains Refugees expressed frustration about the “small dimensions” of their lots (William Days 1823; Andrew Smith 1829, NSARM, Land Papers, RG 20 A). In both settlements the farms simply could not produce enough vegetables to prevent community-wide food shortages. Also, the lots did not provide enough trees for the Refugees to engage substantially in the production of shingles, charcoal, or staves.³ In addition, timber remained scarce for the crucial purpose of heating the Refugees’ homes. For example, Hammonds Plains resident Charles Arnold stated that he needed more land for “the purpose of furnishing...a sufficient quantity of Fire Wood” (1820, Land Papers). The severity and length of the winter season worsened these problems. During the winter and early spring, the Refugees usually ran out of food. As a result, in 1816, 1819, 1821, 1824, 1825, 1827, 1830, and 1831 government officials or local whites provided the Refugees with assistance.⁴

Despite the Refugees’ efforts, their farming difficulties annoyed and angered the local white population. Many assumed that the Refugees’ failure to purchase livestock or their reliance on potato production signified an inherent disposition to laziness and stupidity. In early 1841, a correspondent for the Halifax *Morning Post* interviewed a young son of a Refugee, who was probably around 19 years old. The conversation reveals what the Refugees attempted to grow, the difficulties encountered during the different seasons, and why they pursued certain agricultural practices:

‘I only want to ask you what you do in the summer. Why don’t you provide then for the winter?’

‘Why, massa, in the summer I plant potatoes, plant cabbage, peas, beans, turnips, and in the fall we chop down the ground (meaning the trees of the ground) to clear it for planting.’

‘How much have you cleared?’

‘Can’t say gentleman,’ (getting up to go).

‘Stop, stop, I’ll give you some money to get what you want. Can’t you say how much you have cleared?’

‘S’pose I’ve got better nor [near?] twenty acres cleared, massa.’

‘Why don’t the potatoes, and what else you raise in the summer, last you the winter?’

‘I have some potatoes now, massa.’

‘Nothing else?’

‘No, massa.’

‘What do you do with your turnips and beans?’

‘Use them ourselves, my gentleman.’

‘Don’t you raise any cattle?’

‘No, Sir.’

‘Why?’

‘Massa, no able to get them, sir.’

‘Could you not get a sheep, or bargain with your richer neighbours for a calf to raise, and in that way in time get a small stock of cattle?’

‘No, massa.’

‘Why?’

‘Why, massa, you see we hav’nt the little coppers. We have to work very hard, too, massa.’

‘And can’t you raise more than enough turnips or potatoes for more than you want yourselves, to buy a sheep?’

‘Why, massa, very hard to raise what we do; the rocks so many, and it takes so long to clear a very little piece of land.’

(*Morning Post*, January 16, 1841, NSARM)

BOX 4.3 Caution Concerning Contemporary Journalists as Sources

Although contemporary newspapers are an important source for historians and other scholars, it is important to ask why certain articles were written, who the intended audience was, and why certain language was employed by the writer or editors. For example, the quotation from

the *Morning Post* is interesting because of the journalist's portrayal of the Refugee's language. If the Refugee were around 20 years of age as the paper claimed, he would have been born in Nova Scotia. Thus, is it quite curious that he referred to the journalist as "massa."

The Refugees responded to these difficult farming conditions in two major ways, with varying degrees of success. One segment of the population abandoned the settlements. Thus, the population at Hammonds Plains decreased from 504 in 1816 to 196 in 1838 (Fergusson 1948:54). There, the Refugees were situated on three separate roads: Old Road, Annapolis Road, and Middle Street. The majority lived on Middle Street, while a small group settled at Old Road (Return of the Black American Refugees residing at Hammond Plains 1820, NSARM, 422: doc. 19). In 1835, government official Joseph Thomas surveyed 83 lots (Report on Lots at Hammonds Plains, June 17, 1835, NSARM, Halifax County Land Grants, 1787–1835: doc. 185). He carefully noted the original occupant's names and whether the household had been abandoned. Nearly 65 percent of the original occupants had abandoned their farms by 1835. It should be noted that this seemingly high rate of out-migration must be understood in light of the fact that some of the Refugees probably died during the scarlet fever epidemic of 1826–7 or other illnesses (see chapter 5).

Preston's population declined from 924 in 1816 to 525 in 1838 (Fergusson 1948:51). In 1818, Preston was divided into 10 sections: letters A through K. (There was no section J.) Divisions A through E had 25 or more families each. The other sections held 10 families or less (Report on the Inspection of Preston Lots, Aug. 1818, NSARM, 419: doc. 90). Each division, except one, had sustained significant desertions by 1842: section A, 52 percent; section B, 48 percent; section C, 52 percent; section D, 42 percent; section E, 25 percent; section F, 40 percent; section G, 67 percent; section H, 80 percent; section I, 40 percent; and section K, 0 percent (Land Grant for People of Colour at Preston, May 23, 1842, NSARM, Land Grants). The Refugees in section K probably comprised a portion of the poor, with three out of the five household heads described as doing nothing in 1816, while there is no information about the other two household heads. In total, 43 percent of the households in 1818 had deserted Preston by 1842.

A total of 191 families were identified, and 83 had left before 1842. These statistics do not include the 19 Refugee families that petitioned for land and settled elsewhere. It is difficult to determine how many of these people died as opposed to how many abandoned the settlement. Many of these Refugees probably deserted the settlement because their wives and children were not granted land in 1842. The descendants or relatives of other Refugees, who remained at Preston but died before 1842, were granted land. Thus, the rate of desertion, even if we allow for deaths, remained quite significant.

The Refugees who remained in the settlements were divided into two distinct elements. The majority supplemented farming with menial wage labour and remained partially dependent upon the charity of their more successful neighbours. A minority, constituting

an emerging leadership, engaged in relatively successful farming and regularly petitioned the government for additional land. Overall then, the Refugees who settled at Preston and Hammonds Plains followed one of three strategies: they left, they remained but suffered in poverty, or they persisted and gained a foothold in the realm of commercial farming.

IN SEARCH OF EMPLOYMENT AND LAND

The Refugees who abandoned Preston and Hammonds Plains must also be divided into two groups. Some moved into Halifax, Dartmouth, or other areas in search of wage labour. Another segment did not give up on agriculture. They petitioned the government for land — outside of the original settlements, or they moved into other farming districts.

A few trends can be discerned through a careful study of the Refugees who moved. First, the majority gave up on Preston and Hammonds Plains within 10 years of settlement. Indeed, 70 percent had abandoned their farms by 1827 (1827 Census, Nova Scotia, NSARM). Second, the Preston Refugees were relatively mobile because they had fewer family members to support. An examination of the 11 migrant households that I could identify with certainty indicates that only one had multiple children (Report of People off [sic] Colour at and about Preston, NSARM, Halifax Land Grants 1787–1835: doc. 169). At Hammonds Plains, for which there are better records, 14 out of 29 migrant households that I could identify had only one child. The other 15 households consisted of a wife and two or more children. However, 72 percent of these families did not exceed more than two children (Report of Lots at Hammonds Plains, June 17, 1835, NSARM). Third, neighbours seem to have abandoned their farms collectively. For example, Friday Bush, Henry Woodhouse, Robert Bishop, James Bush, and Henry Lovett lived next to each other in 1818. By 1827, all had abandoned Preston (Report of Preston Lots, Aug. 1818, NSARM, 419: doc. 90; 1827 Census, Nova Scotia). Jacob Williams, Thomas Bingley, and Esau Bowers early on lived next to each other in section C. By 1827, these Refugees had also deserted their farms (1827 Census). At Hammonds Plains, neighbours usually abandoned farms in large groups as well. For example, Nearo March, March Movil, John Thomas, Robert Nory, George Coppy, Naseus Lampeat, and Leonard Cooper all settled together on Lots 42 through 48. By 1827, they had abandoned Hammonds Plains (Report of Lots at Hammond Plains, June 17, 1835).

Some Black Refugees gave up on farming because the first years of settlement had been riddled with crop failures. In 1815 and 1816, crops were destroyed by heavy frost. During these years, cold weather continued well into June, making agricultural production nearly impossible. In 1817, rodents devoured seed grain and potato seed, which destroyed the Refugees' main staples. Even if the weather did not destroy crops, the Refugees persistently had difficulty finding employment to supplement their meagre farming produce. In 1828, the government reported that the Hammonds Plains Refugees could not find — employment in their district (Minutes of Council, April 7, 1828, NSARM). In Halifax, the — Refugees could obtain jobs in domestic service, dockyard employment, ship work, and — various other types of wage labour. Additionally, by the 1830s urban institutions, such as the African Church and the **African Friendly Society**, had developed, which encouraged Refugees to visit Halifax more often.

The Refugees entering Halifax had access to a racially segmented job market. The pre-Refugee blacks had established themselves as good urban labourers, shiphands, and domestic servants. In 1812, an unknown author recorded some impressions of that black community:

Black people are good house servants, and make very good common Hands on board vessels; they make but indifferent Country Laborers—and never become the Masters of others—they are quick and inventive in the small way never in the great—traitable [sic], cheerful, and good tempered, of much value in the towns, very little in the country;—sober, honest, industrious, but not often laborious—love their own society and are very talkative. (cited in Grant 1990:103)

These words could also have described the Refugees' employment in Halifax. The vast majority of Refugee migrants to Halifax, like their urban counterparts in the United States, were employed as domestic servants, urban labourers, chimney sweeps, washerwomen, and shiphands. Although racially segmented employment had its drawbacks, it was very important, and the Refugees found work based on the notion that blacks were suited for certain occupations.⁵

Most Refugees found employment as wage labourers in public works, such as road construction or dock work. For example, by 1827 John Floyd and Nim Carter had moved to Dartmouth from Preston and found work as labourers (1827 Census, Nova Scotia). As of 1838, George Winder and Samuel Turner had given up on farming and taken up wage labour in Halifax (1838 Census, Nova Scotia, NSARM). Other Refugees worked as domestic servants (*Acadian Recorder* Jan. 4, 1817, NSARM). For example, Samuel Turner employed one-time Preston resident William Wiley as a servant. Wiley also worked in the fisheries (*Novascotian* Nov. 23, 1826, NSARM). Benjamin Roberts, a native of St. Mary's county, Maryland, had been "in the service" of Chief Justice Blowers before obtaining land on the Northwest Arm (Report to H. H. Cogswell, May 15, 1816, NSARM, 419: doc. 34). E.T. Coke, who toured through Nova Scotia in the early 1830s, remarked that the Hammonds Plains Refugees were "good servants" (Coke 1833:415–16). Nevertheless, many Refugees remained subject to frequent periods of unemployment.

Within the urban black community, an emerging artisan class held specialized occupations, such as carpenter, cooper, shoemaker, barber, dyer, butcher, and truck man (1838 Census, Nova Scotia). These artisans enjoyed steady employment and distinguished themselves from the black labouring class by their ability to provide what white society deemed important and respectable services. For example, Jacob Ford left Preston for Halifax and worked as a mason (1838 Census). Originally settled at Hammonds Plains, Scipio Cooper moved to Halifax and found employment as a truck man. Cooper seems to have had a relatively successful business. In December 1830, Cooper was convicted of assaulting William Jackson. In contrast to the majority of blacks who were unable to pay fines and therefore spent time in jail, Cooper paid the court forty shillings and was released (Minutes of the Court of Quarter Sessions, 1827–1839, Dec. 11, 1830, NSARM). In 1832, according to the *Novascotian*, one or two constables were black men (June 27, 1832, NSARM). In Dartmouth, Dean Atkins had served James Creighton, a farmer, for "seven years as an apprentice from his first arrival in this Province [1814] and...has behaved himself during that period with honesty and sobriety" (Dean Atkins and William Wise, 1821, Land Papers, NSARM).

The work of two Refugees deserves closer attention. One of the most successful Refugees in Halifax, a man named Mr. Campbell, owned a livery stable. His livestock holdings were comparable to the lieutenant-governor's (Grant 1990:109). Campbell's prosperity shocked visitors to the colony. He was probably the wealthiest black in the colony during the early nineteenth century. William Moorsom, who rarely had anything positive to write about the Refugees, was impressed with Campbell:

↑ OPPORTUNITY } AGENCY!
IN HFX! }

No mean personage is Mr. Campbell, when an invite to some universal party, on a rainy eve, renders his huge mourning coach the object of at least half-a dozen separate engagements. (Moorsom 1830:131)

Constable Hawkins, a Chesapeake Refugee, probably held the most intriguing occupation, at least from a psychological perspective. Before moving to Halifax, Philliman Hawkins had lived at Preston. There, he cleared half an acre of land and built a hut (Report of Lands Cleared by People of Colour in Preston, May 9, 1816, NSARM, 421: doc. 3). Hawkins was probably middle-aged in 1815 (Black Refugees desirous of settling upon lands at Preston, NSARM, 419: doc. 90, which lists him as 50 years old). Once in Halifax, he worked as an officer at the city workhouse, where his duties included escorting prisoners down George Street to the Office of Examination (Akins 1973:207). A local celebrity of sorts, "mob[s] of boys" accompanied Hawkins during these walks. He also whipped white inmates at the county workhouse.

The Refugees were also employed as merchant mariners—that is, they performed numerous tasks on ships. They excelled in this profession. Seafaring offered the Refugees an opportunity to gain employment in an occupation that some had become familiar with during slavery. In 1817, Brister Webb abandoned farming at Hammonds Plains. His friend and neighbour Andrew Smith told the government that Webb had moved to Halifax. There, Webb found employment as a seaman, an occupation "he had always been used to" (1829, Land Papers). Of course, not all blacks enjoyed their service in this profession. In the summer of 1815, "a black young Man" named William absconded from the schooner *Princess*. The Captain placed an ad in the *Acadian Recorder* accusing William of stealing clothing and several other articles (July 22, 1815, NSARM). It is difficult to know whether William was a Refugee who wished to escape his service to search for his family or to avoid an arduous sea voyage. Nevertheless, by 1840 the Refugees had earned a solid reputation for their abilities as seamen. According to the Reverend Robert Willis, Rector of St. Paul's Church, "their aptitude for the service of merchant-sailors can be attested [to] by the mercantile community of Halifax" (The Petition of the Reverend Robert Willis...on behalf of the Coloured People of Halifax, Jan. 27, 1840, NSARM, 296: doc. 48).

A few Refugees chose to leave Halifax County and follow the colony's major road to Hants County in search of wage labour. Originally settled at Preston, Joseph Cooper had only cleared a quarter of an acre during his first months of settlement (Report of Lands Cleared by People of Colour in Preston, May 9, 1816, NSARM). It was reported in the 1827 census that he had found work as a labourer in Windsor, Hants County. Henry Quarey also settled at Preston. He was less successful at farming than most Refugees. He cut down "[a] few trees," but failed to erect a hut (Report of Lands). By 1827, Quarey had moved to Windsor and found employment as a labourer.

These two Refugees' decisions to remove to Hants County is important. In contrast to the contemporary image and later stereotype that the Refugees simply gave up and lived off government rations, these Refugees were willing to travel a fair distance to maintain themselves and their families. Also, it speaks to the diversity of responses the Refugees employed to negotiate a treacherous job market. Moreover, Cooper and Quarey's lack of farming success indicates another problem with relations between the government and the Refugees. Although most Refugees did some type of agricultural work during slavery, some had been employed as house servants or other non-agricultural work. Whatever the case may have been, the government's land settlement policy hardly took into account the wide range of

experiences that the Refugees had endured during slavery. Some Refugees simply were not cut out for the arduous frontier farming that the Nova Scotian wilderness required.

Other Refugees were not interested in pursuing urban wage labour. They hoped to continue farming in areas near the original settlement. Between 1820 and 1826, 19 Refugees petitioned the government for larger land allocations in more fertile areas.

X |

| BOX 4.4 | Refugees Petitioning for Larger Land Allocations in More Fertile Areas, 1820-6 | | |
|---|--|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Siding with Walker over Cahill here! | <i>Jacob Allen,</i> | <i>William Kellum,</i> | <i>William Raph,</i> |
| | <i>Spencer Boyd,</i> | <i>Naith Leach,</i> | <i>Joseph Smith,</i> |
| | <i>Henry Broad,</i> | <i>Henry Lee, Sr.,</i> | <i>Winslow Sparkes,</i> |
| | <i>William Bunday,</i> | <i>Henry Lee, Jr.,</i> | <i>Charles Stewart, and</i> |
| | <i>James Downing,</i> | <i>David Page,</i> | <i>William Wise.</i> |
| | <i>Ben Johnson,</i> | <i>Jeremiah Page,</i> | |
| | <i>Naith Johnson,</i> | <i>Zachariah Randal,</i> | Source: Land Papers, NSARM, RG 20 A. |

In these petitions, the Refugees maintained a tone of respectability. The petitioners usually asserted that they had “made every endeavour” to improve the land and remained determined to continue as farmers. Jacob Allen stated that he was “acquainted with the calling of husbandry and [had] no other prospect of maintaining [his family] but by following the same” (Jeremiah Gardner and Jacob Allen, 1822, Land Papers, NSARM). Spencer Boyd, a “most excellent Man & a good sawyer,” also believed that he had “no other means of providing for [his family] but by following the calling of husbandry.”⁶ Some petitioners, such as David Page, were “willing to go any distance into the woods” in order to “obtain a piece of land” (1825, Land Papers, NSARM). However, most petitioners settled on the “new” road toward Musquodoboit or north of the original Preston settlement.

| BOX 4.5 | Petitioners Settled on the “New” Road Toward Musquodoboit or North of the Original Preston Settlement | | |
|---------|---|------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| | <i>Jacob Allen,</i> | <i>Naith Leach,</i> | <i>Joseph Smith,</i> |
| | <i>Spencer Boyd,</i> | <i>Henry Lee, Sr.,</i> | <i>Winslow Sparkes, and</i> |
| | <i>Henry Broad,</i> | <i>Henry Lee, Jr.,</i> | <i>William Wise.</i> |
| | <i>William Bunday,</i> | <i>David Page,</i> | |
| | <i>Jeremiah Gardner,</i> | <i>Zach Randal,</i> | Source: Land Papers, NSARM, RG 20 A. |

These land petitioners had larger families than the Refugees who went to urban areas and were, therefore, less mobile. For example, William Raph had a wife and four children (1824, Land Papers). Charles Stewart had a wife and six children (1823, Land Papers). Henry Hill was married and the father of eight children (1824, Land Papers).

Interestingly, some Petitioners applied for land with other families. For example, Henry Lee, Sr., Henry Lee, Jr., Winslow Sparkes, and William Bunday collectively applied for land north of Preston (1820, Land Papers). Naith Johnson and James Downing, both married with three children each, hoped to settle together and “make a crop [during] the incomeing season” (1820, Land Papers). Collective farming lessened chores and increased the possibility of raising substantial crops. Also, these Refugees probably shared food.

One Refugee, Henry Piles, moved out of Preston and continued farming in Hammonds Plains. Bypassing the path of petitioning, he simply packed his belongings and abandoned Preston. His desertion of Preston was not the result of failed farming. In fact, Piles had cleared one acre and built a hut after a few months of settlement (Report of Lands Cleared by People of Colour in Preston, May 9, 1816, NSARM). Yet Piles saw better opportunities elsewhere. A scarlet fever epidemic had left many lots empty in Hammonds Plains; thus, Piles moved on to increase his land holdings sometime after 1827. By 1835, Piles owned two lots, one of which he occupied (Report of Lots at Hammonds Plains, June 17, 1835, NSARM).

In Hammonds Plains, many Black Refugees were equally interested in continuing as farmers. There were two distinctive traits about the Hammonds Plains Refugees’ petitions. First, they placed great importance on collective or cooperative farming. Second, these Refugees wanted land in or near the original settlement. Between 1819 and 1829, 41 Refugees petitioned for land at Hammonds Plains.⁷ In 1819, Dominic De Broker and 35 others collectively petitioned the government for more land. They had built houses and improved land relinquished by earlier white settlers (Fergusson 1948:51–2).⁸ This type of large-scale collective petitioning was absent at Preston. Possibly, De Broker and his fellow petitioners planned to divide the land evenly between each household. Yet it is also plausible that they planned to cultivate this land cooperatively.

The Hammonds Plains Refugees rarely complained about the quality of land. They were not willing to move far away from the original settlement. The majority hoped to settle on abandoned lots within the “Colored peoples settlement” (William Days, 1823, Land Papers, NSARM). For example, Robin Cunard hoped to “occupy Lot No. 1 abandoned by William Butler who lately went to Trinidad” (1821, Land Papers). In 1827, James Watson sought the land of Lenin Cooper, who had died during that year’s scarlet fever epidemic (1827, Land Papers). Andrew Smith had cultivated the abandoned lot of his neighbour for 12 years, and in 1829 formally applied for a ticket of occupation (1829, Land Papers). The Hammonds Plains Refugees wanted to increase their landholding in the settlement because of its location. Unlike Preston, which had few redeeming qualities in terms of its location, Hammonds Plains offered the Refugees access to lumbering opportunities that could supplement farming.

FARM PRODUCTION AT PRESTON AND HAMMONDS PLAINS

The majority of Refugees and their descendants remained in Preston. Despite the contemporary image of the Refugees as indolent failures, the early years at Preston were promising. In the late spring of 1816, government officials visited the Preston Refugees. Their report of the Black Refugees’ progress reveals a wide range of attitudes toward work. Some Refugees, such as James Patterson and Jerred Thomas, were described as “doing nothing.” Conversely, Richard Smothers, Friday Bush, and Joe Sprigs were listed as “industrious” men (Report of Lands Cleared by People of Colour in Preston, May 9, 1816, NSARM).

What accounts for the difference in work attitudes? Possibly, some Refugees were simply better at agricultural labour. The Refugees described as idle might have had no interest in farming, or maybe their understanding of freedom meant the right to do nothing. The vast majority of Refugees, however, were engaged in clearing land and building houses (Report of Lands Cleared). A statistical analysis of the Refugees' land-clearing reveals that at this early stage of settlement only 6 percent had made few or no improvements. Some 74 percent had cleared at least half an acre or more, while approximately 20 percent cleared a quarter of an acre (Report of Lands Cleared). Clearly, initial work patterns indicate a general willingness to become viable settlers, rather than idle wards of the government.

Visitors to Preston were impressed by the amount of work undertaken by the Refugees. In 1817, a Council Report stated that the Refugees had "in many instances made great improvements" on the land (Report of Council Committee on lands relinquished for the accommodation of People of Colour settled in Preston, Dec. 11, 1817, NSARM, 419: doc. 102). They were also engaged in clearing and constructing roads (Dalhousie diary entries, Apr. 23 and Sept. 28, 1817, in Whitelaw 1978:32, 63). The Refugees had planted "upwards of 1500 bushels" of potatoes and attempted to access the local fishery. Lord Dalhousie was surprised at their work ethic: "I find almost every man had one or more Acres cleared and ready for seed [and] working with an industry that astonished me." Sadly, this "industry" could not stave off continual crop shortages (Dalhousie to Bathurst, Aug. 14, 1817, NSARM, 112:32-5). Yet the Refugees played an important role in the crop production of the Preston Township.

In 1828, the community's residents, black and white, had produced 56 bushels of wheat, 921 bushels of grains, 11 320 bushels of potatoes, and 507 tons of hay. The Preston community also owned 13 horses, 289 cattle, 113 sheep, and 221 swine (Trider 2001, 2:191). Of course, whites produced some of these crops. However, the Refugees made up at least 70 percent of Preston's population in 1828. Thus, they played an essential role in grain, potato, and hay production. Also, they owned some of the horses, cows, and swine.

Unfortunately, it is very difficult to present a comprehensive picture of farming practices at Hammonds Plains. Government officials spent more time observing and chronicling the Refugees' activities at Preston. Perhaps the lack of documentation indicates that the Hammonds Plains Refugees were less of a problem for the colony. The variety of work ethics and work patterns can only be pieced together through very fragmentary evidence. In 1826, the Hammonds Plains Refugees petitioned the government for help in constructing a church. In this petition, the Refugees stated that "a great deal of improvements" had been made on the land (The petition of the undersigned Coloured People residing at Hammonds Plains, Aug. 18, 1826, NSARM, 422: doc. 33). They were "mostly able to support their families by their own industry." According to the 1827 census, the Hammonds Plains Refugees had 465 acres under cultivation, owned 35 horses, 30 cows, and 26 swine (1827 Census, Nova Scotia). However, the 1826-7 scarlet fever epidemic coupled with numerous crop failures during the next five years destroyed this early success and progress (Baxter to Kempt, Jan. 15, 1827, NSARM, 422: doc. 35). By 1834, one observer noted that the Hammonds Plains Refugees were "indifferent to nearly everything [and] must perish if the greater proportion of the people are not soon removed" (Black Refugees of Nova Scotia, Letter, July 28, 1834, Reports of the Associates of the Late Dr. Bray).

Clearly, the majority of Refugees at Hammonds Plains were extremely poor. The reason for this was the small size of their lots, numerous crop failures in the 1830s, and the preva-

lence of sickness. This led to an overwhelming feeling of despair. In 1835, they were granted ownership of 82 lots. However, 44 percent of these farms were unoccupied (Report of Lots at Hammonds Plains, June 17, 1835, NSARM). Although land holding remained an important community ideal, many had to find work elsewhere. Fifty-six percent of the land grantees remained at Hammonds Plains, but conditions deteriorated to the point of starvation for most of these Refugees. In 1837, Robert Thomson recorded the dreary situation:

[T]here are fifty-nine familys [sic] living in the most abject state of poverty and wrathedness [sic] perishing both for Food and Clothing and owing in a grate [sic] measure to the failure of the last years crop and the Severity of the present winter they have been forced to eat up all that little portion of seed they had laid up to plant in the Spring, thus are they destitute of everything that can afford the least comfort. Some of them have prepared some good ground to plant in the Spring if they can get Seed—but this they are unable to do of themselves. (Thomson to Campbell, March 24, 1837, NSARM, 422: doc. 44)

The work patterns of the Hammonds Plains Refugees' were constantly interrupted by unavoidable circumstances. By 1826, many had improved the land and provided for themselves. However, the 1826–7 scarlet fever epidemic coupled with crop failures and rural unemployment in the late 1820s destroyed the gains of the promising first years of settlement. In the 1830s, as the Hammonds Plains Refugees applied for more land and were granted farms, mass crop failures offset these positive developments. By 1838, the population dipped below 200.

SUPPLEMENTAL INCOME

The majority of Refugees at Hammonds Plains and Preston needed to find additional work away from their farms. As early as 1816, many Refugees went to Halifax in search of employment. In 1837, one government official stated that “[t]heir proximity to the Town of Halifax induces many to visit it twice a week in Summer, and as often as they can in Winter” (Desbrisay and Lowe, March 9, 1837, *Journal of the House of Assembly*, No. 44, Appendix 9, NSARM). Some Refugees probably maintained two residences, one in the city (i.e., boarding or renting out) and another at the settlements. For example, Jacob Ford, Isaac Rawlins, and Samuel Turner worked in the Halifax/Dartmouth area during the 1820s and 1830s (1827 and 1838 Census, Nova Scotia).⁹ Yet all were given title to their farms in Preston (Land Grant for the People of Colour at Preston, May 23, 1842, NSARM). Scipio Cooper worked in Halifax during the 1830s. As of 1835, he owned two farms at Hammonds Plains, where he had originally settled 20 years earlier. Quite possibly, many Refugees worked in Halifax during the winter and returned to farming in the spring. Their frequent trips to Halifax were an effort to sell produce at the local farmer’s market.

Most farmers within travelling distance of Halifax relied on the city market to dispose of their produce. In 1815, Charles Morris prophetically argued that the Refugees’ economic success would hinge on their ability to provide Halifax with agricultural produce (Morris to Sherbrooke, Sept. 6, 1815). The Morris plan proved beneficial because the Black Refugees had extensive experience in carrying produce to local markets during slavery. In the Georgia Sea Islands, the Butler family’s slaves and their descendants brought various vegetables and produce to the local town market at Darien (Bell 1987:151). Although men were involved in marketing, women dominated the trade in Savannah and other towns. One Darien resident recalled that “an old Butler Island woman

named Aunt Jerusalem used to sell me figs and blackberries, early English peas and chickens" (Bell 1987:134). As observance of the Sabbath became more prominent in Georgia during the early nineteenth century, slaves simply combined "spiritual and material needs on their weekly visits to Savannah" (Wood 1995:92). Chesapeake slaves were no less adept at market trading:

By the early nineteenth century the slave presence in the urban markets of the Chesapeake region seems to have been readily accepted. A visitor to Alexandria [Virginia] in 1805 observed how, on market days, many black slaves 'come out of the country with fruit, vegetables, etc. and some, even girls of 10 or 12 years of age, are seen walking the streets with baskets on their heads without any clothing'..In June 1807, a visitor to Washington D.C., observed how the wild strawberries, which grew with abandon in the neighboring countryside, were 'brought every Morning to market in profusion by Negroes.' (Morgan 1998:372-3)

The Refugees had ample experience in the realm of marketing produce. Techniques learned during slavery were applied in Halifax.

The Halifax market was located on present-day George Street at the corner of Bedford Row. In 1799, the legislature provided funding for the erection of a new market house. Farmers used this structure to sell meat and poultry on Wednesdays and Saturdays. But they had no "convenient place for the sale of vegetables" (Kilcup 1998:17). Thus, farmers sold their produce in an area referred to as the "Green Market" (Eaton 1915:835). Historian Arthur Eaton wrote in 1915 that the market consisted of "Chezzercookers [Acadians] and Negroes" who sold various fruits, vegetables, flowers, and poultry. These hawkers were arranged "along the sidewalks [and] unobtrusively offer[ed] their goods for sale" (Eaton, 835). Black Refugee marketers were an integral part of urban life and provided their families with an important source of income.

Nova Scotia offered a wide assortment of wild fruits, including gooseberries, cranberries, chokecherries, strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, and blackberries. The selling of berries and fruits became an important source of income for the Refugees. A letter writer to the *Acadian Recorder* stated that "hundreds of them have no other way of procuring a living but by picking and selling wild berries" (*Acadian Recorder*, Feb. 21, 1824, NSARM). According to traveller Campbell Hardy, the Hammonds Plains Refugees had "quite a small trade of their own with the Haligonians, whom they supply with hundreds of bushels of blueberries, for preserving purposes" (Hardy 1855, 2:22). Frederic Cozzens declared that "as every race has a separate vocation here, only of the negroes [sic] can you purchase berries" (cited in Whitelaw 1986:27).

Farmers desperately needed the income that market vending provided. Winter weather did not prevent local producers from making the lengthy trip to Halifax. In the 1820s, Thomas Haliburton reported that agriculturists "drew upon their sleds their wood and poles from the forest and carry their produce to market" (Haliburton 1823:22). The Hammonds Plains Refugees participated in the general influx of farmers to the city market. They endured late night walks in order to be present at the commencement of trading:

In summer, large parties of negroes [sic] may be seen entering the town by seven in the morning, having walked all that distance, to sell the wild fruits they gather in the woods, and to procure their supplies. In winter too, they are seen bringing in a few shingles or brooms, and with the exception of some of the young women, always clothed in rags, exhibiting the picture of wretchedness. (Moorsom 1830:126)

As ferry service across the harbour remained tenuous until 1816, the Preston Refugees were compelled to walk around the Bedford Basin or take the risky sea voyage in open boats (Katzmann 1893:46; Payzant and Payzant 1979).¹⁰ Increasing farm production encouraged the government and local businessmen to develop a more reliable ferry service between Halifax and Dartmouth. Before 1825, Joseph Findlay ran four boats during busy times. These boats usually carried between 15 and 30 passengers along with their produce to Halifax (Katzmann 1893:46–7). Supposedly, “coloured” persons were charged much less for conveyance across the harbour (Katzmann:48). The Preston Refugees “were accustomed to troop into town, across the Dartmouth Ferry, their rude wagons laden with farm produce” (Eaton 1915:835). In other words, they had to travel overland to reach the ferry terminal. This was no easy task. The Refugees were forced to embark on rocky dirt paths that can hardly be described as roads. Beamish Murdoch defended the Refugees from their detractors by encouraging people to view “the roads they have to travel,” in order to better understand their difficulties (*Morning Post*, Oct. 29, 1840, NSARM). Nevertheless, large groups of Refugees made the lengthy trip to the city market over these paths:

Passing over in the Steam-boat one fine morning of late, our attention was forcibly attracted by the crowd of sable gentlemen and ladies, laden with brooms, charcoal, tabs, and trout, that were coming over the ferry, and as we wandered up the lake side, we could trace a line of them “long drawn out,” and extending for half a mile. (*Novascotian*, June 27, 1832, NSARM)



Source: NSARM.

Black family bringing supplies to the market. Many black families travelled long distances to sell their produce at the Saturday market.

Although some male Refugees worked at the market, women controlled the sale of farm produce. This particular aspect of market life had its roots in West Africa, where women dominated trade and produce (Clarke 1994; Ekechi and Midama 1995). The women sold nearly everything, ranging from flowers to shingles. However, they were particularly aggressive in selling berries. This entrepreneurial spirit caught the eye of a young Joseph Howe. In the late 1820s, he noted that Refugee women were “pouring strawberries down the throats of the citizens” (Parks 1973:55). However, the market was more than a simple economic endeavour. Refugee women used the opportunity to socialize with each other and converse with their white benefactors. They also obtained Indian white meal, a favourite food of the Refugee communities, and made sure to have “their pipes filled.” Late Victorian historian Mary Jane Katzmann described the Refugees’ seasonal market activities:

The women in summer gather the wild fruits and flowers of the woods, and bring them to market. The sight there, so familiar, is always amusing. They are seen squatting round the open space allotted to their use in the Halifax green market, with their miscellaneous gatherings for sale, chattering like monkeys, and like them enjoying the warmth and pleasantness of summer. Brooms, baskets, tubs, clothes-props, pea-sticks, hop- and bean-poles, rustic seats, and flower boxes, make up part of their various stores. Great baskets of mayflowers and mosses are brought in during early spring. Some of their bouquets are arranged with a good deal of taste. From the middle of May until late in autumn, ferns of every kind are carried on their heads from door to door, while others of these plants fill barrows in the market, or else stand in boxes made of the birch- and fir-trees, greening the sidewalks about. In early winter, the spruce and hemlock trees



Black women selling flowers at the market. This picture was drawn in the early 1870s. The picture clearly indicates that many of the women at the market were older and probably Refugees or of Refugee descent.

are laid under contribution. Wreathes and branches, Christmas trees, long leaves, sumach berries, —in short anything that can be made available for sale, is brought to market by these ventures; for such articles cost nothing to produce, only requiring the labour of gathering and carriage. All of them have special patrons and friends upon whom they can depend in times of want and trouble. (Lawson 1893:188–9)

Many contemporary observers ('Z' in *Acadian Recorder*, Feb. 21, 1824, NSARM; Moorsom 1830:125–31; Cozzens 1859:41) and later historians found the Refugees' berry-gathering a sign of indolence or failure to engage in the colony's "staple trades" (Winks 1971:140). In actuality, the Refugees' continuing reliance on the market was based on their familiarity with similar markets as slaves.

The country districts also offered the Refugees an opportunity to supplement their farming produce. At Preston, men usually cut wood and performed other menial tasks (Coleman to Truman, March 5, 1815, NSARM, 420: doc. 132). They also marketed "charcoal, staves, and shingles and such other lumber" (Memorial of John Chamberlain et al, June 18, 1838). At Hammonds Plains, Deal Wiley engaged in barrel-making to support his farming endeavours (Evans 1993:63). His son or grandson, also named Deal, opened his own mill after purchasing a barrel-making machine in 1888. At Preston, women were "generally good spinners," and engaged in the production of cloth under the direction of well-known local weaver William McLaughlin throughout the 1820s and 1830s (*Novascotian*, June 28, 1827, NSARM; Memorial of William McLaughlin, Feb. 14, 1836, NSARM, 52: doc. 95). Women at Hammonds Plains worked as domestic servants and made brooms (*Novascotian*, Feb. 22, 1834, NSARM; Coke 1833:415–16). In times of difficulty, local philanthropic organizations, such as the Ladies' Bazaar, furnished "the means of employment" for the Refugees when "their ordinary occupations fail" (*Acadian Recorder*, July 3, 1830, NSARM).

Two Preston Refugees attempted to supplement farm production with ventures in the hotel business. During the 1820s, George Winder allowed his home to be used as a rest stop for weary travellers. However, this dwelling was too small to comfortably accommodate their needs. Thus, Winder petitioned the government for money to "enlarge his house and build a small stable for the use of travellers [sic] and their cattle" (The Memorial of George Winder 1829, NSARM, 57: doc. 82). This plan did not come to fruition. As of 1838, Winder had abandoned his house and turned to urban labour (1838 Census, Nova Scotia).

William Dair (also spelled "Dare," "Dear," and "Deer") owned and operated the Stag Hotel. Popularly known as "Dear's Hotel," this inn remained extremely popular throughout the nineteenth century. Dair used an amusing advertisement to attract customers:

*The 'Stag Hotel' is kept by William Dear;
Outside, the House looks somewhat queer;
Only Look-in, and there's no fear;
But you'll find Inside, the best of Cheer;
Brandy, Whiskey, Hop, Spruce, Ginger Beer;
Clean Beds, and food for Horses here;
Round about, both far and near;
Are Streams for Trout and Woods for Deer;
To suit the Public taste, 'tis clear;
Bill Dear will Labour, so will his dearest dear.*

(cited in Grant 1990:106)



Source: NSARM.

Stag Inn, William Dair's famous hotel in Preston.

This popular inn accommodated many of the province's elite, including Joseph Howe. However, some visitors held Dair's hotel in very low regard. Frederic Cozzens described it as a "weather-beaten shanty of boards" that nonetheless seemed like a castle "compared with the wretched redoubts of poverty surrounding it" (Cozzens 1859:43). Nevertheless, Dair and his wife did quite well as innkeepers. Recalling the hotel's success, the *Morning Chronicle* reported in 1909 that "a trip in that section of the county would not be complete without a stop being made at this favourite hostelry" (June 7, 1909, NSARM).

WOMEN'S ECONOMY AND GENDER ROLES

The Refugees' petitions to the government exhibit contemporary ideals about the **gender roles** of men and women. The men portrayed themselves as the sole breadwinners in the family. Zachariah Randal and Anse Moaten found it nearly impossible to keep "themselves and [their] families from suffering" (1825, Land Papers, NSARM). Jeremiah Gardner stated that his large family was "depending upon him for support" (1822, Land Papers). Daniel Clayton could not "with all his endeavours keep his family from suffering" (1823, Land Papers). Suther Blair claimed that his wife and six children were "depending on him for support" (1824, Land Papers). In contrast, Thomas Saunders described his entire family "as labouring People." He added that his wife and six children would "assist him in his improvements" (1823, Land Papers). In other words, Saunders recognized the importance of his wife's agricultural work. In the Refugees' petitions, women seemed to have occupied a separate sphere outside the realm of family income.

However, this image might have been a rhetorical device to elicit sympathy from the government. In reality, most Refugee women worked and provided their families with important income from market trading, washing, farming, domestic service, and the clothing industry. Elizabeth Grant, an "honest and industrious Woman," maintained her own farm and raised six children alone (1823, Land Papers). In 1823, she petitioned the government for more land. Grant declared that she had "no other expectation of maintaining herself or family but by the calling of husbandry." Hammonds Plains resident Widow Gingham ably provided for her children. She maintained one of only 11 households at Hammonds Plains (there were 66 households in total) that did not require government assistance in 1836 (Gray to James, May 11, 1836, NSARM, 9: doc. 58). These women remained the sole breadwinners for their families. If other Refugee women did not participate in farming, their opinions still held influence within the communities. For example, when the government renewed its offer to pay for the Refugees' removal to Trinidad in the mid-1830s, a few men were interested. However, the offer was refused because the women would not leave (Desbrisay and Lowe to George, March 9, 1837, NSARM, 422: doc. 43).

It is more difficult to discern how Refugee women perceived gender roles. For example, how had gender roles and expectations changed during the transition from slavery to freedom? In 1856, Frederic Cozzens questioned Mrs. Dair, a relatively privileged ex-slave, about her life in Maryland. Mrs. Dair's response is revealing in terms of gender roles. She told Cozzens that "[w]hy, I never had no such work to do at home as I have to do here, grubbin' up old stumps and stones; dem isn't women's work. When I was at home, I had only to wait on Misses, and work was light and easy" (Cozzens 1859:64-5). Of course, her views cannot be taken as representative of most Refugee women. Certainly, many women from the Sea Islands and the Chesapeake had plenty of experience with breaking ground or planting rice. Gender roles and perceptions remain difficult to examine due to a lack of source material.

BOX 4.6

Two Sources on Nineteenth Century African Nova Scotian Women

Hamilton, Sylvia. "Naming Names, Naming Ourselves: A Survey of Early Black Women in Nova Scotia." In *We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up: Essays in African Canadian Women's History*. Edited by Peggy Bristow, et al. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994.

Morton, Suzanne. "Separate Spheres in a Separate World: African Nova-Scotian Women in Late-19th-Century Halifax County." In *Separate Spheres: Women's Worlds in the 19th-Century Maritimes*. Edited by Janet Guildford and Suzanne Morton. Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1994.

SUCCESSFUL FARMERS

Although collectively the Preston Refugees were very poor, a few families did quite well. These successful farmers produced substantial quantities of food and rarely suffered like their brethren. This differentiation in agricultural production was noticed as early as 1816. Lord Dalhousie maintained that approximately one-third of the Refugees were industrious

and deserving of assistance and encouragement (Dalhousie to Bathurst, Dec. 29, 1816, NSARM, 112:6-9). In 1821, Captain Scott depicted Preston as a two-tiered community in which the poor depended on the more successful:

These unfortunate people with some exceptions appear to be unable to take care of themselves... Many of them are industrious and have raised a considerable quantity of Potatoes last summer, but the more helpless have fed upon them during the Winter, so that they have all for some time been upon an equality in wretchedness. (Scott to Kempt, March 19, 1821, NSARM, 422.; doc. 28)

Thomas Desbrisay and Edward Lowe made similar observations about Preston 16 years after Scott's visit. "[S]ome few indeed, say about six or seven families, have kept themselves very comfortable, and every season make good Crops, but the number of distressed beings who surround them are continually begging of their substance, which is a very serious drawback to their industry" (Desbrisay and Lowe, March 9, 1837).

Although historians know that some Preston Refugees were relatively prosperous, their names have not been recorded. In determining the identity of those at the top of the farming hierarchy, caution must prevail. One place to begin is with the petitioners. For the most part they were industrious agriculturists. Thus, their push for more land makes sense. For example, William Raph had cleared one acre of land and constructed a house by 1816 (Report of Lands Cleared by People of Colour in Preston, May 9, 1816, NSARM). He petitioned the government for more land in 1824 (1824, Land Papers). Richard Smothers had cleared two acres of land by May 1816 (Report of Lands Cleared by People of Colour in Preston, May 9, 1816). By the summer of 1818, he had constructed a double house, and the following year he successfully petitioned for 130 acres of land (Report of the Inspection of Preston Lots, Aug. 1818; Richard Smothers, 1819, Land Papers). In 1819, Septimus Clarke had produced over 120 bushels of potatoes and other vegetables. He had also cleared his entire lot of trees and thus requested an additional 250 acres of land (1819, Land Papers). In 1820, Suther Blair had six acres under cultivation. He also purchased one cow (1820, Land Papers).

However, some of the petitioners may not have been very successful farmers. For example, in 1816 John Statton had failed either to construct a home or clear any acreage, but he successfully petitioned the government for land in the 1820s (Report of Lands Cleared by People of Colour in Preston, May 9, 1816; 1824, Land Papers). Possibly, Statton became a better farmer over time, or maybe he was sick during the first months of settlement. These gaps in the historical documentation make it difficult at times to really dig into an individual's life.

Some prosperous farmers did not petition for land but rather occupied abandoned lots and made improvements. They were usually granted multiple farms by the government for their hard work. For example, in 1842 the government granted James Slaughter eight lots that he had improved (Land Grant for the People of Colour at Preston, May 23, 1842). William Robertson had cleared half an acre and built a house by the spring of 1816 (Report of Lands Cleared by People of Colour in Preston, May 9, 1816). Over the next 20 years, Robertson bettered the deserted lots of his brethren. In 1842, the government granted him five lots (Land Grant for the People of Colour at Preston, May 23, 1842). A few Refugees not given land in the original settlement subsequently moved into Preston. For example, Armiston Currie and General Saunders probably moved to the settlement in the 1820s and settled on abandoned farms. Both were given title to multiple farms in 1842 (Land Grant, May 23, 1842). These Refugees might have been the successful settlers that observers noted in their visits to Preston. The exact identity of these farmers remains elusive, but clearly some Refugees moved beyond subsistence farming.

A successful core of farmers also emerged at Hammonds Plains. These Refugees distinguished themselves from the rest of the community by their willingness to continue as farmers. More important, some did not require government assistance and attempted to increase their land holdings. In 1820, Charles Arnold had cultivated five acres and petitioned the government for more land (1820, Land Papers). By the 1830s, some Refugees had garnered enough expendable income from farming and other activities to purchase more land. In 1834, 30 Hammonds Plains Refugees paid “[s]ixty pounds Nova Scotia currency” for 600 acres of land.

| BOX 4.7 1834 Refugee List | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>Patrick Bailey,</i> | <i>Cuffee Gray,</i> | <i>William Marshman, Jr.,</i> |
| <i>Newman Brackenbury,</i> | <i>Lawrence Hamilton,</i> | <i>Israel Mott,</i> |
| <i>Sampson Brown,</i> | <i>S. Hamilton,</i> | <i>Edward Price,</i> |
| <i>Thomas Bunt,</i> | <i>Jack Harris,</i> | <i>Abraham Smith,</i> |
| <i>July Cooper,</i> | <i>Joseph Holmes,</i> | <i>Andrew Smith,</i> |
| <i>Frederick Davis,</i> | <i>Charles Jackson,</i> | <i>Lewis Steuben,</i> |
| <i>Reuban Davis,</i> | <i>Joseph James,</i> | <i>William Marshman, and</i> |
| <i>William Days,</i> | <i>Peter Jenkins,</i> | <i>Deal Wiley.</i> |
| <i>James Ellison,</i> | <i>Hector Johnson,</i> | |
| <i>Alexander Emerson,</i> | <i>Cato Manigo,</i> | |
| <i>Joseph Graham,</i> | <i>Gabriel Manigo,</i> | |

Source: Land Grant of Oct. 20, 1834, NSARM, 419:doc.120.

They were “granted” the land “as tenants in common” and were required to pay “one Peppercorn” every March (Land Grant, NSARM). Two years later, the Reverend Archibald Gray visited the Hammonds Plains Refugees. He reported that only 11 households (17 percent) were able to survive without government rations.

| BOX 4.8 1836 Refugees Able to Survive Without Rations | | |
|---|------------------------|---------------------------|
| <i>Sampson Brown,</i> | <i>Cuffee Gray,</i> | <i>Hector Johnson,</i> |
| <i>William Days,</i> | <i>John Hamilton,</i> | <i>Abraham Smith, and</i> |
| <i>Charles Dickson,</i> | <i>Larry Hamilton,</i> | <i>Andrew Smith.</i> |
| <i>Widow Gingham,</i> | <i>Shad Hamilton,</i> | |

Source: Gray to James, May 11, 1836.

These Refugees were usually granted ownership of multiple lots in 1835. Thus, they also cultivated the abandoned lots of neighbours or relatives (Report of Lots in Hammond’s Plains, June 17, 1835, NSARM, Halifax County Land Grants—1787–1835, doc. 185).

TIED TO THE LAND

Why did most Refugees and their descendants remain in Preston? Primarily, they stayed because of the government's refusal to offer freehold grants. The Refugees were unwilling to give up their farms without compensation. After visiting the Preston Refugees in 1836, E.H. Lowe reported:

They seem to have some attachment to the soil they have cultivated, poor and barren as it is, and, I think, feel some jealousy lest such as remain should possess the improvements of all that might leave. One man did express some willingness to move, but expected in such case to be paid at a valuation for the Land he occupies. It was readily acknowledged by them that too many are settled together, that the land is worn out, bare of fuel, and cannot maintain such a number, particularly in a District where labor is not to be obtained to assist their support, and they all seem ready and willing to remove to any other part of this province, where the land is more fertile and a larger portion can be given to them. (Letter of E.H. Lowe, Jun. 7, 1836, *Journal of the House of Assembly*, 1837, NSARM)

In March and June of 1837, government officials made lists of the Refugees willing to move into other areas. Seventeen Refugees were on the March list and another 36 on the June document. Some of the signers were members of the second generation, such as Reuban Clarke or George Neal. Strikingly, Refugees who had petitioned for land and increased their holdings around Preston were willing to move elsewhere. Successful farmers and community leaders, such as Septimus Clarke, Winslow Sparkes, Levin Winder, Joseph Smith, and Spencer Boyd all affixed their names to these lists.¹¹

— The Refugees would only move in a large group. Lieutenant-Governor Colin Campbell
— disdainfully noted that “Here, they are determined to remain: nor will they consent as I have proposed to be distributed in detachments, in different parts of the Province” (Campbell to Glenelg, Aug. 25, 1837, NSARM, 115:56–7). In other words, they had created community ties that they hoped to continue in a new farming district. The Refugees’ demand to move in large groups illustrates their fear of being dispersed among the colony’s white inhabitants. The government had hoped to settle some Refugees in Pictou, but surveyor John Spry Morris noted that they “would be received with no friendly feeling by the white population” (Morris to George, Aug. 1, 1837, *Journal of the House of Assembly*, 1838, NSARM).

In 1837, Campbell explained the situation to the Colonial Secretary Lord Glenelg. He argued that the Refugees “never could prosper here” because “the lots on which they were placed being of very small dimensions, and miserably sterile” (Campbell to Glenelg, Aug. 25, 1837, NSARM). Campbell asked the Crown to provide money for the Refugees’ removal to another part of the colony. He believed that the local government would never countenance the expense as they still resented the Refugees’ introduction into Nova Scotia. Campbell hoped that “fruitful Soil would stimulate them to those industrious habits which have been discouraged by the unproductive nature of the land on which they are now settled” (Campbell to Glenelg).

The penny-pinching Crown refused this request. Lord Glenelg believed that the Refugees’ failure to develop successful farms resulted from their supposed laziness:

If the want & privations from which they have so long suffered have not furnished sufficient inducement to active and industrious habits, I should fear that the mere occupation of rich Land would fail that effect. The proposed scheme appears to me directly calculated to cherish the mis-

taken & mischievous notion, that if they are to subsist at all, it must be as proprietors of Land and not as Laborers for hire. (Glenelg to Campbell, Oct. 25, 1837, NSARM, 422: doc. 50)

He also worried such an action would set an "inconvenient" precedent of granting lands to "a class of Settlers in some of the British Colonies whose improvidence has reduced them to great poverty and distress" (Glenelg to Campbell, NSARM). Ignoring the reports of those closely associated with the Refugees, Glenelg stubbornly clung to ideas about blacks' supposed "improvidence" in order to justify his inaction. Most government officials in Nova Scotia had realized the reality of the Refugees' situation. However, the Crown refused to consider them as anything but perpetual paupers.

The Refugees were unhappy about this turn of events. In the next four years, they petitioned the colonial government twice for land grants to replace the tickets of location. The first petition stated that "many of your Memorialists are put to great loss and inconvenience, by not having their grant" (The Memorial of the People of Colour [sic] Settled in Preston, [1838?], NSARM, 422: doc. 46). Sixty-four Refugees marked this petition. They realized that obtaining land grants increased the chance of earning some compensation for their improvements.

The 1841 petition merits closer attention. Written with a tone of increased urgency, the Refugees candidly explained the problems of farming and their hopes for the future. More important, this petition highlights the Refugees' attitudes about government policy, land settlement, and the impact of slavery:

Petitioners are Refugees, brought from the Plantations of the southern States, during the American War or their decendants [sic], being placed by Government upon ten acre lots, of poor land, many of them including swamps and likewise entirely barren & unproductive, and none of them sufficient to yield subsistence for a family however skillfull [sic] and industrious, they have dragged on a miserable existence but few, if any of them, rising above the level of hopeless poverty. But few white men in this country seldom make a living upon ten acres of good land, and Petitioners believe that any number of them similarly placed to themselves in a strange country, and beneath a rigorous climate, after being recently relieved from the associations and pressure of slavery and the heat of a southern sun, would have for many years presented the same spectacle that the coloured people of Preston have exhibited. (Petition of Colored People at Preston, 1841, NSARM, RG 20 C, 31: doc. 124)

This petition is very important because the Refugees themselves might have written it. The authors were probably William Dair and Sampson Carter. One hundred and five Refugees marked the petition.

The community remained divided between those willing to remain and others intent on leaving. Yet they all wanted land grants. The petitioners "humbly" prayed that the Lieutenant-Governor might "allow grants to pass confirming our titles to the lands we occupy, that those of us who wish to sell and remove to better locations or follow other employments may dispose of our lands and improvements to those who remain" (Petition of Colored People at Preston). The Refugees were painfully aware of the disadvantages associated with tickets of location as opposed to freehold grants. "At present, holding under Tickets of location, we cannot sell to advantage, we are tied to the land without being able to live upon it." (Petition Of Colored People at Preston). Finally, in 1842, the Crown granted the Refugees and their descendants the land at Preston (Land Grant for the People of Colour at Preston, May 23, 1842).

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This analysis of the Refugees' labour and work patterns indicates that settlement in Nova Scotia elicited a variety of responses. A few Refugees did nothing. Possibly, years of observing lazy overseers or masters convinced them that freedom meant the right to be idle. This was not the case for the majority of Refugees. As government reports indicate, the first years were promising, but massive crop failures and poor weather destroyed this early progress. Yet the Refugees did not simply become wards of the government. Many moved to Halifax or other areas in search of wage labour to make ends meet. Others continued as farmers and attempted to increase landholding through petitions to the government. A few were able to become successful farmers through their own industry and, one suspects, a bit of luck. Despite overwhelming odds that restricted their opportunity to earn a respectable livelihood, the Refugees were able to gain a foothold in the colony's urban and rural economy. In the end, their tenuous experience mirrored the difficulties experienced by other poor immigrants in Nova Scotia.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What strategies did the Refugees employ to survive in Nova Scotia?
2. Why did the majority of Preston Refugees remain in the settlement despite its poor prospects for agricultural production?
3. What role did the farmer's market play in the lives of the Refugees?
4. How did the idea of work influence the Refugees' understanding of freedom? How did the lack of employment in Nova Scotia limit the Refugees' understanding of freedom?
5. Why were women able to find steadier employment than men?

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NOTES

- 1 Important primary documents concerning the American Fugitives in Upper Canada include: Benjamin Drew, *A North-Side View of Slavery: The Refugee; or The Narrative of Fugitive Slaves in Canada Related by Themselves with an Account of the History and Condition of the Colored Population*. New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968; Samuel Ringgold Ward, *Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro: His Anti-Slavery Labours in the United States, Canada, and England*. London: J. Snow, 1855; C. Peter Ripley, ed. *The Black Abolitionist Papers, Canada 1830-1865*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986, Volume 2.
- 2 On the small size and sterility of the Refugees' farms, see the following petitions: Bray Cooper 1820; Benjamin Johnson 1821; Dean Atkins and William Wise 1821; Levin Winder 1821; Jacob Allen and Jeremiah Gardner 1822; Daniel Clayton 1823; Thomas Saunders 1823; Henry Hill 1824; Charles Stewart 1825, Land Papers, NSARM, RG 20 A. See Also Petition of the Colored People at Preston, 1841, NSARM, RG 20 Series C, 31; doc. 124.

- 3 On the shortage of timber, see the petitions of Septimus Clarke 1819; James Downing and Naith Johnson 1822; Bazil Crowd 1823; Spencer Boyd 1825, Land Papers.
- 4 Dalhousie to Bathurst, Dec. 29, 1816 and Jun. 10, 1819, NSARM, 112:6-9 and 78-9; *Journal of the House of Assembly*, Apr. 8 and 13, 1819 and Mar. 15, 1821, NSARM; The Memorial of Certain Inhabitants of the town of Halifax on behalf of the poor Black Settlers at Hammonds Plains and Preston, Mar. 6, 1824, NSARM, 80: doc. 32; We the undersigned Inhabitants of Halifax humbly beg leave to call the attention of Your Honorable House to the deplorable state of the Black settlers at Hammonds Plains and Preston, Mar. 12, 1825, NSARM, 80: doc. 35; *Free Press*, Feb. 1, 1825 and Jan. 23, 1827 and *Acadian Recorder*, Jul. 3, 1830 and Jan. 22, 1831, both NSARM.
- 5 On African American employment, see Berlin 1998:245-8; Levesque 1994:115-23; Nash 1988:144-54; Curry 1981; Litwack 1961; Bolster 1997; Horton 1993; Gilje and Rock 1994.
- 6 Black Refugees desirous of settling upon lands in Preston, 1815, NSARM, 419: doc. 93; Spencer Boyd, 1825, Land Papers.
- 7 Dominic De Broker and 35 others 1819; Charles Arnold 1820; Robin Cunard 1821; William Days 1823; James Watson 1827; Andrew Smith 1829, Land Papers, NSARM, RG 20 A.
- 8 Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management has lost Dominic De Broker's petition, so we do not know the identity of the other 35 petitioners.
- 9 The Refugees were migrating between Halifax and Preston; thus, the census takers might have undercounted the number of Refugees residing in Halifax.
- 10 The authors of the latter book maintain that service was certainly regular as early as 1786. However, Lawson argues that it was hardly regular before 1816.
- 11 Those that embrace the opportunity of going into the Country, March 26, 1837, NSARM, 422: doc. 47; Howe to George, June, 12, 1837, NSARM, 422: doc. 48.

chapter five

Material Conditions and Family Structure

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, students should be able to:

1. Describe the similarities between the Refugees' material conditions and those of European immigrants to Atlantic Canada.
2. Describe the Refugees' housing, clothing, and diet.
3. Explain the impact of sickness and disease on the Refugees' experience in Nova Scotia.
4. Describe the general makeup of the Refugees' family structure.

INTRODUCTION

Immigrants to the Maritime region after the War of 1812 faced difficult circumstances. Many new settlers attempting to escape the dreadful conditions of Ireland and Scotland hoped to become independent farmers. However, the immigrants' poverty and the region's sterile land made this aspiration difficult to achieve. Thus, older historical accounts argue that most farming remained at a subsistence level (Lower 1977:193-4). More recent studies maintain that settlement patterns and agricultural production

depended heavily on one's access to capital (Bittermann 1988:33–55; Acheson 1993:5–26; Hornsby 1992:72–4).

New Nova Scotia settlers who did not bring with them sufficient resources suffered tremendously. Ex-soldiers, Backland immigrants, Scottish settlers in Pictou, and the Black Refugees endured food shortages and poor housing. For example, recent arrivals in Pictou were reduced to starvation during the spring of 1816 (Martell 1942:18). One year later, Lord Dalhousie reported that a settlement of “disbanded soldiers” was in danger of starvation, and “if rations [were] stopt they must quit” (Dalhousie to Bathurst, Aug. 14, 1817, NSARM, 112:32–5). In 1829, a group of poor immigrants from Scotland attempted to establish a settlement near Bras D’Or Lake. Four years later, they were “poor and indigent without means of subsistence” (Hornsby 1992:74). Difficulty in clearing frontier land remained a problem for immigrants across British North America—for example, the Irish tenant farmers on Amherst Island, near Kingston, Ontario (Wilson 1994). Generally speaking, most recent immigrants found it nearly impossible to “farm wilderness land without capital” (MacNutt 1965:157). The Black Refugees’ Nova Scotia experience was similar to the trials faced by other indigent immigrants.

The Refugees’ material conditions and family structure can be understood through the themes of isolation and poverty. These themes had both positive and negative effects on the Refugee communities. Hammonds Plains and Preston were on the fringes of colonial society. The Refugees rarely received adequate medical attention because sickness probably precluded them from seeking it in Halifax. Nevertheless, the Refugees’ isolation made them less susceptible to the unhealthy sanitary conditions that plagued the urban poor. Thus, they did not suffer from the 1834 cholera epidemic that took the lives of nearly 300 people.

Still, poor housing and inadequate clothing were realities of the Refugees’ everyday lives. Certainly, poverty made survival the first priority of every community member. Yet these shared problems fostered self-reliance and mutual support as reflected in the Refugees’ housing, clothing, diet, health, and family structure.

BOX 5.1**Cholera**

Halifax’s position as an important port in the British Empire made it particularly vulnerable to outbreaks of disease. There were several outbreaks of cholera on ships carrying recent immigrants to Nova Scotia. Cholera is a gastrointestinal disease that causes people to suffer from vomiting and diarrhea. In 1834, nearly 300 people died in an outbreak that lasted

six weeks. However, the high death rate encouraged local officials in Nova Scotia to open health boards. It is important to remember that people were extremely prone to disease in the early nineteenth century. Doctors were available, but they were limited in what they could do in terms of medicine. Usually, the only way to control disease was through quarantine.

REFUGEE HOUSING: CONFLICTING OBSERVATIONS

Scholars are presented with conflicting observations about the Refugees’ housing. One early visitor to Preston reported that they had erected “decent [and] comfortable houses” (Report on Preston, [undated], NSARM 419: doc. 81).¹ Another observer, Captain Scott,

stated in 1821 that "their Huts are of poor contrivance generally without cellars or if they are provided with that convenience are so badly constructed as to occasion the loss of their Potatoes the first severe frost" (Scott to Kempt, Mar. 19, 1821, NSARM, 422: doc. 28). In 1827, Dr. John Carter visited the Hammonds Plains Refugees. He reported that their houses were "with two exceptions warm" (Carter to Baxter, Jan. 16, 1827, NSARM, 422: doc. 37). Carter said they also enjoyed the comfort of beds made of "dry hay," but some Refugees did not have blankets.

How can historians account for such differing interpretations of the Refugees' housing? Captain Scott's visit to Preston occurred during a period of extreme deprivation. Houses or huts that might have been in good condition in 1817 probably had deteriorated significantly by 1821. The difference in description might also reflect observers' personal opinions about the Refugees. Also, the Refugees lived in various types of housing (Report of Lands Cleared by People of Colour in Preston, May 9, 1816, NSARM, 421: doc. 3). Out of 127 families, 85 were reported as living in huts, 34 in houses, four in snug houses, and only four in good houses (Report of Lands Cleared). Thus, some visitors to Preston might have only observed certain sections, where housing could have been either very poor or relatively sturdy. Since Dr. Carter visited fewer than 20 households, it is difficult to know whether these dwellings were exceptional or typical of the community (Carter to Baxter, Jan. 16, 1827).

The heterogeneity of house construction probably reflected each family's varying ability to garner the necessary materials and supplies to build a dwelling. As of 1816, the vast majority of Refugees had constructed huts that provided little shelter from the winter weather. These huts were made of dubious building materials. The Refugees were not aware that floors and cellars were necessary in such a rigorous climate. Dr. Samuel Head provided the most in-depth description of the Refugees' housing during their first year of settlement:

I must beg leave to observe that from those new settlers not being accustomed to a climate so severe as this, & the dwellings (altho [sic] being better than could have been expected for the short time since their erection) yet being made of green materials, & neither proof against the wet or cold, & having no cellars under them & some even no floors. (Head to Morris, 1816, NSARM, 419: doc. 47)

As we have seen, eight families had constructed "good" or "snug" houses. These dwellings probably had sturdy frameworks, floors, and cellars. In general, however, the Refugees' huts provided only basic shelter. One overarching problem created by this type of flimsy housing was that the Refugees could not store food during the lengthy winter.

European immigrants to Atlantic Canada had similar difficulties in constructing sturdy housing, especially when they brought little or no capital (Martell 1938:75-106; 1942:7-33). For example, the Backland settlers in Cape Breton lived in housing that was roughly comparable to the Refugees' dwellings. The majority of these poor immigrants lived in shanties that were "small and spartan" (Hornsby 1992:74). Their dwellings generally had dirt floors and patched roofs while holes in the house were covered by dry moss. In Newfoundland, initial housing among indigent Irish immigrants followed this pattern. Most dwellings consisted of a clay floor and "sod walls without windows" (Mannion 1974:143). The Black Refugees, Cape Breton Backland settlers, and Irish immigrants constructed and lived in similar dwellings because of a blend of inexperience and poverty.

By the 1850s, the Refugees' housing had improved slightly. However, New Yorker Frederic Cozzens stated that their homes were nothing more than "scare-crow edifices." In fact, the most impressive abode at Preston struck him as a "shanty":

All forlorn, all patched with mud, all perched on barren knolls, or gigantic bars of granite, high up, like ragged redoubts of poverty, armed at every window with a formidable artillery of old hats, rolls of rags, quilts, carpets, and indescribable bundles, or barricaded with boards to keep out the air and sunshine. (Cozzens 1859:41)

Housing remained primitive for three reasons. First, during the initial years of settlement, the Refugees constructed houses or huts similar to those that they had been familiar with during slavery. Ira Berlin's description of slave housing in the Chesapeake echoes the Refugees' housing problems in early-nineteenth-century Nova Scotia. "[T]he quarter was little more than a ramshackle collection of huts and outbuildings. Surrounded by equally disorderly gardens, animal pens, and scrawny barnyard fowl, this farrago [confused collection] of small dwellings—each rarely more than a single spartan room with an earthen floor" (Berlin 1998:133). Second, the government's land policy discouraged the Refugees from investing prior to becoming freeholders. Those Refugees who had any means probably hesitated to build sturdy structures that could be passed onto children because if they moved someone else would occupy their improvements. Third, most Refugees simply did not possess the disposable income necessary to construct anything more than "scare-crow edifices."

REFUGEE CLOTHING: INADEQUATE

The literally chilling effects of the Refugees' housing problems were exacerbated by the fact that the Refugees rarely had sufficient clothing. In 1815 Rufus Fairbanks, a wealthy landowner, remarked that they had "scarcely a Dud to cover them by Day or Night" (Fairbanks' Letter, March 8, 1815, NSARM, 305: doc. 22). The following year, Charles Morris reported that the Refugees were "exposed to the severity of the Weather and in want of cloathing [sic]" (Morris' Report, 1816, NSARM, 421: doc. 22). Another observer found some families "almost naked" (Report on Preston, [undated]). The Refugees simply did not have the means to buy or produce clothing that might have withstood the climate. Additionally, they needed more clothing than the government or **benevolent societies** could provide. In a document entitled, "We the undersigned Inhabitants humbly beg leave to call the attention of your Honourable House to the deplorable state of the Black Settlers at Hammonds Plains and Preston," the petitioners wrote the following:

Much has been done by a number of Charitable individuals in both money and clothing as well as by a Society of Females who have during the Winter devoted one day in each week to making up garments of various Kinds (principally for the Women and Children) and which have been gratuitously distributed among them, but the task of the distributing Committee was most arduous. Want stared them in the face at every step, insomuch that those small supplies appeared as nothing. (March 12, 1825, NSARM, 80: doc. 35)

These petitioners found some of the Refugees' children in "a perfect state of nudity." Two years later, in 1827, one visitor to Hammonds Plains commented that the Refugees' lack of clothing was "distressing." In fact, some "scarcely [had] a covering of rags for their bodies" (Report on Hammond Plains, Jan. 15, 1827, NSARM, 422: doc. 35). Yet these Refugees were in better shape than one family whose condition he found "appalling." The mother "was scarcely covered," while her children were "as naked as when they were born." The father sat so close to the fire that his body was scorched with only "a ragged jacket thrown over his naked back" (Report on Hammond Plains).

In 1825, two separate thefts underscore the Refugees' desperate shortage of clothing. On the night of January 17, 1825, Aaron Butler, a sawyer originally from the Chesapeake, supposedly stole numerous clothing articles, including stockings and a coat, from Muirhead & Roasts in Halifax (*Novascotian* April 13, 1825, NSARM). A few days later, a magistrate searched Butler's cellar apartment and discovered the missing articles. The magistrate found Butler and his roommate, Lewis Patterson, wearing the recently stolen stockings. The Supreme Court convicted Butler of larceny and discharged Patterson.

Several months later, John Anderson, "a coloured lad," stole a hat, shoes, and other items from his former employer, Jon Tremain (*Novascotian* June 15, 1825, NSARM). The police arrested Anderson, who had some of the "identical articles of wearing apparel upon him." The desperate straits in which he lived are reflected in the fact that Anderson had exchanged the other clothing items for food. Unsympathetically, the magistrates were convinced that Anderson preferred "to live by stealing than honest labour...[and] very properly ordered him to the gaol" (*Novascotian* June 15, 1825). Clearly, some Refugees' lack of clothing provided an impetus for them to acquire clothing through extra-legal methods. However, it should be noted that there were only a few convictions for larceny.²

The Refugees' clothing situation did improve slowly, although from the time of settlement until the late 1820s clothing remained ragged and inadequate. These problems are reflected in the numerous petitions of concerned citizens on behalf of the Refugees. Interestingly, there is less documentation about the Refugees' clothing woes in the 1830s. Perhaps, they had collected enough clothing articles—women were working in the clothing industry by the 1830s—to prevent frozen limbs and to provide for their children. The Refugees probably learned to substitute various items for clothing. Fredric Cozzens's description of their old hats, quilts, and "indescribable bundles" may be interpreted as reflecting an attempt by the Refugees to retain older apparel in preparation for the winter (Cozzens 1859:41).

REFUGEE FOOD: INADEQUATE

As for food, the Refugees' diet remained inadequate throughout their first 25 years in Nova Scotia. Food shortages and starvation were commonplace. Local inhabitants such as Seth Coleman were shocked at the Preston Refugees' plight in 1815. He found "many of them Subsisting on what we should think literally [sic] nothing" (Coleman to Sabatier, March 23, 1815, NSARM, 21: doc. 84). Although the government attempted to rectify this situation by rationing out fish, meat, pork, and rice, Dr. Samuel Head remarked that their diet remained "dry & salt" (Head to Morris, 1816). Even when the Refugees produced enough food to avoid starvation, their diets remained unvaried and dependent upon one item of food. For example, in the late 1820s Dr. John Carter stated that the Hammonds Plains Refugees' "general food was potatoes, seemingly of good quality with some in sufficient quantity, but with many in a scanty portion" (Carter to Baxter, Jan. 16, 1827). Indeed, for many Refugees food remained a scarce commodity.

It is difficult to determine the Refugees' daily diet. However, they clearly preferred Indian meal (cornmeal), molasses, various types of meat, and fish. In 1815, Seth Coleman reported that "there appears nothing so satisfactory to them [the Preston Refugees] that I have ever given out as Indian meal [and] molasses it seems to please them when I name it" (Coleman to Sabatier, March 23, 1815). The Refugees' known preference for Indian meal led the local authorities falsely to charge Hammonds Plains residents Scipio Cooper and

Charles Jackson with stealing 400 pounds of it in the winter of 1817 (Scipio Cooper and Charles Jackson, March 4, 1817, Grand Jury Room Book, 1811–28, NSARM). The charge did not stick. Both men were exonerated.³ Ten years later at Hammonds Plains, a government official noted that “Indian Meal [and] molasses” were “the luxuries most desired by these poor people.” He also stated that the Refugees wanted the extremely unhealthy “Salt Fish” (Report on Hammonds Plains, Jan. 15, 1827). Because the Refugees sold berries at the market, strawberries, blueberries and cranberries also served as an important addition to their diet. Frederic Cozzens’s Nova Scotian companion remarked unsympathetically that the Refugees, “a miserable set of devils,” made money during the strawberry season and “while it lasts are fat and saucy enough” (Cozzens 1859:41). Undoubtedly, the Refugees also supplemented their diet through fishing and hunting. Thus, they probably consumed trout, rabbit, quail, and possibly deer. The Refugees’ main diet, when crop failures did not ravage the communities, probably consisted of potatoes, fish, berries, eggs, and Indian meal.

- The lack of clothing and scarcity of food were intertwined problems, as noted by the white petitioners of Halifax in 1825:

The greater part of [Refugees at Preston and Hammonds Plains] are almost destitute of both food and clothing their only Stock of provisions, with very few exceptions, consisting of a scanty allowance of potatoes which must soon be exhausted and the Clothing of a whole Family being scarcely sufficient to protect one of its inmates from the inclemency of the Weather. We, the undersigned...(NSARM, March 12, 1825)

The situation remained desperate for some Refugees. Suffering continued periodically throughout the next 10 years. For example, in 1832 the Hammonds Plains Refugees suffered the loss of an entire crop. They feared that the community might “die” of starvation. Thus, they petitioned the government for relief (The Petition of the Black Settlers at Hammond Plains, 1832, NSARM, 422: doc. 42). One year later, government officials stated that only 10 bushels of potatoes remained for the entire settlement at Preston (Desbrisay and Lowe, 1833, NSARM, 311: doc. 90). Officials provided rations for 858 Preston Refugees. In that year, food shortages reached all levels of the community. Even generally successful farmers, such as Septimus Clarke, William Dair, Spencer Boyd, and Joseph Smith, were reduced to accepting food from the government.⁴

- Some Refugees turned to crime to feed their families. In the summer of 1817, after two years of crop failures and food shortages, Moses Wilson stole four quarters of meat (*Acadian Recorder*, Nov. 7, 1818, NSARM). The authorities arrested Wilson, charged him with grand larceny, and then sentenced him to six months’ hard labour. Wilson needed to provide not only for himself, but also for his wife and five children (Black Refugees desirous of settling upon lands at Preston, NSARM, 419: doc. 93). The evidence available suggests that Wilson had been a relatively industrious farmer before his illegal transgression. He had spent the previous year clearing half an acre and building a hut on his farm in Preston (Report of Lands Cleared by People of Colour in Preston, May 9, 1816). Significantly, the colonial authorities discovered the missing meat at Wilson’s home, which suggests that he had stolen it to provide food for his family.

EVERYDAY SICKNESSES

The Black Refugees’ material conditions resulted in a community prone to illnesses. They suffered from numerous ailments during their first years of settlement. These illnesses can

be divided usefully into two types: everyday sicknesses and serious diseases. The Melville Island Medical Reports of May 1816 provide a sketch of the day-to-day illnesses that the Refugees experienced.

Melville Island served as the Black Refugees' hospital during their first years of settlement. In May 1816, Hospital Assistant Robert Leslie recorded the names and illnesses of 10 people, consisting of seven men and three women (Names, Ages, Diseases + Present State of the Patients, Black Hospital Melville Island, NSARM, 421: doc. 2). Their ages ranged from 21 to 54, but 80 percent were over 30 years old. These Refugees suffered from ulcers (a break in the skin that causes the loss of surface skin tissue), fevers, dysentery, and chronic rheumatism. Five patients had been at the hospital for over 100 days. One woman, Fanny Lee, remained at Melville for 378 days. She had "not the entire use of her left foot, having lost the Toes" (Names, Ages, Diseases). Twenty-one-year-old James Thomas had his toes amputated and suffered from an ulcer on his right foot, and Thomas Farmer had lost "the use of his lower extremities from Disease of the spine" and was "bed ridden" (Names, Age, Description and Present State of the Blacks, Melville Island, May 6, 1816, NSARM, 421: doc. 1). A recent arrival at the hospital, Mary Christopher, suffered from dysentery, a disorder marked by diarrhea, with blood and mucus in the feces. She told Leslie that "many more [at Hammonds Plains] are labouring under the same complaint" (Names, Age, Description).

By June 1816 when the Melville Island hospital closed, the majority of Black Refugees had settled at Preston, Hammonds Plains, and other outlying areas. Unfortunately, dysentery, frozen limbs, and ulcers continued to plague the Refugees. Some probably attempted to remedy everyday sickness with rest or prayer while others sought basic medical treatment in Halifax at the Poor House. The Refugees' poverty and distance from Halifax probably made professional medical treatment a last resort.

Aside from the Melville Island records, other documents reveal that the Refugees were generally in very poor health. Rufus Fairbanks, a well-to-do landowner, noted that they were so "sick and ematiated [sic]...they could scarcely stand on their feet" (Fairbanks's Letter, March 8, 1815). Sickness and ill-health lingered in the community because the Refugees had "nothing better than salt provision to restore them" (Coleman Letter, April 16, 1816, NSARM, 419: doc. 76). In 1816, a visiting physician, Dr. Head, argued that the problems of housing, clothing, and food shortages made the Refugees susceptible "to the acute diseases of the country" (Head to Morris, 1816). He found three women on the verge of death and numerous others "complaining" of various ailments. Clearly, the Refugees' poverty contributed to continuing sickness in the community.

SERIOUS DISEASES

Periodically, the Refugees were afflicted with very serious diseases. In 1814, newly arrived Refugees suffered from smallpox. Seth Coleman and other government officials contained the disease by vaccinating 40 Refugees per day, but many died despite their efforts.⁵

Although the smallpox epidemic had been contained, as of early 1815 Coleman reported that between 12 to 14 Refugees remained in poor health (Coleman to Sabatier, March 23, 1815). The Refugees' squalid living conditions made the outbreak of smallpox almost inevitable. Additionally, medical provisions and better health planning might have prevented the outbreak.

BOX 5.2 Smallpox

Smallpox is a virus that causes skin pustules and scarring. The number of Black Refugees that died from smallpox probably exceeded the number given by Seth Coleman (fewer than 10) because some Refugees had been sent to the Poor House and had died there of the disease.

A physician at Melville Island, Dr. Almon, reported to a local paper nearly 20 years after the incident that between 40 and 50 Refugees had been “taken down” by the disease. Whether “taken down” means death is unknown.

Source: *Weekly Mirror*, Oct. 16, 1835.

- The smallpox outbreak is an important aspect of the medical history of the Refugees. It occurred when they were not isolated at Hammonds Plains or Preston. Instead, the Refugees lived in makeshift quarters throughout Halifax, Dartmouth, and Melville Island.
- Thus, the smallpox outbreak travelled quickly throughout the urban community. Close
 - contact and unsanitary living conditions fostered its spread to the black, white, and native population. Indeed, government officials contained the disease by vaccinating 79 whites, 59 “Indians” (i.e., Mi’kmaq), and 285 blacks (Coleman to Sabatier, Feb. 6, 1815). If the epidemic had occurred at Hammonds Plains or Preston the Refugees would not have received immediate medical attention, and the death toll would have been much higher. On the other hand, since smallpox broke out in the city, had the Refugees been at the settlements they may have never contracted it.

BOX 5.3 Scarlet Fever

Scarlet fever is a contagious febrile disease characterized by inflammation of the nose, mouth, and throat and by a red rash. Today we can treat this disease relatively easily, but in the early nineteenth century it could devastate communities. The outbreak at Hammonds Plains in 1826–7 is instructive. Although some sources put the number of deaths at

under 25, the number might have been much higher. Some probably died after the government reports were made. Dorothy Evans argues (citing a letter written in May 1827 but not published in the *Christian Messenger* until 1861) that the total number of deaths might have exceeded 40 persons (Evans 1993:62).

In the late 1820s, a scarlet fever epidemic ravaged Hammonds Plains (Reports on Hammonds Plains, Jan. 1827, NSARM, 422: docs. 35–8). At least 21 Refugees died between October 1826 and January 1827. The effects of this disease lingered because the Refugees lacked “Clothing, Bedding, nourishment, and Medicine” (Report on Hammonds Plains, Jan. 15, 1827). The horrors of this epidemic were recorded by visiting government officials. One man’s legs were so diseased that the “flesh [was] dripping away from the bones.” After visiting Hammonds Plains, Dr. Carter wondered “how some of these people could have struggled to exist under these circumstances” (Carter to Baxter, Jan. 16, 1827). The school register of Hammonds Plains in 1828 reveals the devastating

impact of the disease on the community. At least 12 children had lost parents during the epidemic (Half Yearly Return of the School at Hammonds Plains, Negro District, Nov. 1828, NSARM: 23).

The Refugees suffered from scarlet fever because they did not receive adequate medical advice. Although the disease broke out in October, the government did not send appropriate medical personnel to Hammonds Plains until mid-January. Of course, medical professionals probably could not have done much for the Refugees other than putting the afflicted in isolation. But this might have saved lives. Certainly, the distance of Hammonds Plains from Halifax contributed to government inaction. In this case, the Refugees' isolation from medical facilities allowed the disease to spread and seriously harm the community. But eight years later, this same isolation protected the Refugees from the devastating cholera epidemic of 1834.

The Refugees' medical problems must be understood within the context of the general health issues associated with immigration to Nova Scotia in the early nineteenth century. As archivist J.S. Martell noted, Nova Scotia was ill-prepared to handle the influx of European and non-European immigration in terms of making provisions to deal with sickly new settlers. European immigrants suffered from typhus, dysentery, and smallpox. Sadly, the colonial government did not have the resources to provide the food, shelter, or medical treatment that might have lessened the suffering of the new settlers, whether they were from the Chesapeake or from Scotland. As Nova Scotia's medical professionals acquired more knowledge about diseases, the colony's public health-care system improved. For example, in the wake of the 1834 cholera epidemic boards of health were created to better deal with medical problems (Pryke 1988:39-61). However, during the immediate post-war period health care remained sporadic and ineffective, especially for recent immigrants (Martell 1942:12, 15).

The Refugees' inadequate housing, insufficient clothing, lack of food, and sickness were the hallmarks of a poverty-stricken society. The Refugees' geographic isolation made access to relief and urban charities difficult. Yet in the face of such harsh realities, this shared experience of poverty and isolation created a tightly knit society. The Refugees shared scarce resources such as food, firewood, and clothing. The community could not have survived without a degree of the mutual assistance and support that was fostered in part by poverty and isolation.

FAMILY STRUCTURE

The Refugees responded to the adversity of difficult material conditions and sickness by creating strong family bonds, which in turn became a basis for community bonds. Our discussion of Refugee family life can be developed usefully within the context of Daniel Patrick Moynihan's provocative comments about the destruction of black families. Hoping to explain the disgraceful state of American ghettos, Moynihan wrote a report for the United States government underlining the problems facing African American families in the late twentieth century. He believed that slavery had created the fatherless household (Rainwater and Vancey 1967). In the years after slavery, blacks in America had supposedly made little progress toward the "ideal" two-parent, middle-class household.

Herbert Gutman's monumental work, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925*, proved that Moynihan had read history backwards. Assuming that problems of

late twentieth century American ghettos were rooted in slavery's destruction of the black family, Moynihan had failed to do the historical research necessary to prove his thesis. Gutman's study indicated that "large numbers of slave couples lived in long marriages, and most slaves lived in double-headed households" (Gutman 1976:xxii). Indeed, black families had formed important bonds in slavery and continued them in freedom.

The Refugees are an interesting case study about the formation and maintenance of the African North American family following slavery. Although documentation about the Refugees' family patterns is scarce, it is possible to outline the general contours of household structure. The most noteworthy aspect of Refugee family life was its stability, despite material conditions that probably led to high infant mortality and spousal death. Indeed, the Refugees' household structure indicates a determination to make stable family life one of the most important aspects of their definition of freedom.

The typical Refugee household cannot be described as fatherless. In fact, the vast majority of households tended to consist of two parents and multiple children. Of more than 50 households at Preston in 1815, only one did not have two resident parents (Report of People Off [sic] Colour, at and about Preston, Sept. 30, 1815, NSARM; Halifax Country Land Grants 1787-1835, doc. 169). The lone single parent, Elizabeth (Betsey) Gross, might have been widowed before arriving in Halifax. The Preston Refugees' family stability is demonstrated by the fact that many heads of households named their children after themselves. For example, Moses Johnston left property to his son, also named Moses. Joseph Cox and William Holmes both left property to Joseph and William, who were named after their fathers. Daniel Clayton left his farm to his son and grandson, both named Daniel. Henry Hill, Jr. inherited property from his father, Henry Hill, Sr.⁶

The Hammonds Plains Refugees also enjoyed stable family structure. In 1820, four years after arriving in Nova Scotia, 83 out of 89 households, or 93 percent, were two-parent (Return of the Black American Refugees residing at Hammonds Plains, 1820, NSARM, 422: doc. 19). Sixteen years later, death had taken its toll on family structure as the percentage of two-parent households had dropped to 80 percent (i.e., 53 out of 66) (Gray to James, May 11, 1836, NSARM, 9,: doc. 58). Women headed 12 out of 66 Hammonds Plains' households, or 18 percent, in 1836 (Gray to James). It is noteworthy that the vast majority of these women were widows. For example, Mrs. Jerry had to raise 11 children after the death of her husband, while Widow Brown needed to provide for six children (Gray to James).

The households of the Hammonds Plains Refugees in 1820 compare favourably with the white and free black population of Philadelphia in the same year. At Hammonds Plains, only 7 percent of households were female-headed in 1820. In Philadelphia during the same year, women headed 18.1 percent of white households and 20.5 percent of black households. By the 1830s, women headed 18 percent of households at Hammonds Plains. In comparison, Philadelphia women headed 24 percent of free black families and 18.7 percent of white households in 1830.⁷

Some Refugee households included extended kinship connections. The **extended household** had been an important aspect of slave families (Gutman 1976:101-229).⁸ In Nova Scotia this tradition continued as grandparents looked after children while mothers and fathers searched for employment. Jeremiah Gardner's household consisted of a wife, four children, and "aged" parents. Jacob Allen was married and lived with his mother-in-law and an apprentice (Jacob Allen and Jeremiah Gardner, 1822, Land Papers). Nora and

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Dolly Mathews, possibly sisters, lived together and raised two children (Return of the Black American Refugees Residing at Hammonds Plains, 1820). Arthur Bradley and Kelly Weaver adopted George Neal in 1816 (Names, Age, Description and present State of the Blacks, Melville Island, May 6, 1816). John Hamilton adopted the daughter of his friend, Cato Lee, who had died during the scarlet fever epidemic.⁹ The Refugees' family sizes and composition varied, but most households were two-parent with multiple children.

An examination of church records and marriage bonds indicates that the Refugees preferred partners within their community. Their geographic isolation from other elements of the black population and the Refugees' shared community experience of poverty, poor housing, lack of clothing, and farming difficulties probably made marriage within the community more appealing. The lack of Refugee surnames in church records and marriage lists suggests that Refugee unions were conducted by local preachers at Hammonds Plains and Preston rather than by ministers in Halifax.¹⁰

It is difficult to discern the dynamics of marriages in the past. And it is unwise to generalize from dysfunctional cases that "make the news." However, the death of Preston resident Charles Dunmore provides an opportunity to examine internal struggles within one marriage. In September 1830, Dunmore died after a relatively short and suspicious illness. Dunmore's wife quickly arranged for her husband's burial. Suspicions and rumours arose in the community, as Bennett Fletcher and Dunmore had quarrelled because of "the improper conduct of his wife and Fletcher." The local constables were soon called into investigate the situation and found Fletcher in the company of Mrs. Dunmore. They charged Fletcher and Mrs. Dunmore with poisoning Charles Dunmore. However, the court acquitted the pair because of a lack of evidence. Although the court remained doubtful of their innocence, "it appeared not impossible that the deceased might have taken the fatal drug intentionally to rid himself of a miserable existence" (*Acadian Recorder*, Oct. 30, 1830, NSARM). The Dunmore-Fletcher affair garnered local newspapers' attention because most Refugees maintained stable family relations. This episode, while interesting, was probably quite atypical.

As the early deaths of husbands or wives remained common among the Refugee communities, some remarried to fill the voids left in their lives. For example, James Slaughter, a prosperous farmer and community activist, had been married when he arrived in Halifax.¹¹ His first wife died sometime between 1815 and 1839. Slaughter married another Refugee by the name of Gracy Winder in 1840 (Trider 2001, 2:424).¹² Widower William Kellum, who had successfully petitioned the government for 100 acres during the 1820s, married non-Refugee Louisa Forrester in 1842 (Trider 2001, 2:426; William Kellum, 1826, Land Papers).¹³

It is worth noting that some of the Refugees found marriage partners in the white community. In 1839 William Smith, a "man of colour," married a white spinster by the name of Harriette Beoad (Trider 2001, 2:424). Four years later, James Bell, a white man, married Sarah Carter, a Refugee (Trider; School Petition, Nov. 11, 1820, NSARM, 422: doc. 20). As the Refugees became more established settlers, marriage options might have expanded beyond the confines of racial identity. However, an examination of the index of marriage bonds in Nova Scotia suggests that interracial unions remained quite rare (Index of Marriage Bonds 1760-1850, Government Archives, Series 1253, NSARM).

Although Nova Scotia's legal structure did not forbid interracial marriages, custom might have made interracial unions tenuous and difficult. Certainly, the Black Refugees

lived in a hostile racial environment, and intermarriage could have made a bad situation even worse. The Refugees might have agreed with their brethren to the south that fear of intermarriage provided pro-slavery advocates with a convenient excuse not to free the slaves.

In the northern United States, certainly, there were examples of interracial marriage, but free blacks discouraged these types of unions because it endangered the anti-slavery movement. James Horton accurately depicts prevailing attitudes in the antebellum period (the years preceding the American Civil War of 1861 to 1865):

In the south racial mixture was understood to be almost exclusively the prerogative of wealthy and powerful white men, but in the North, where free black men were uncontrolled by the 'civilizing' influence of slavery, the prospect of 'race mixing' was more frightening. African Americans understood well the issue's explosive potential. Anti-abolitionist forces used it to discredit the antislavery movement among many in the North by claiming that miscegenation was the natural outcome of abolition. Many blacks reacted by arguing that there was little interest in their communities in marrying outside the race. There was substantial ambivalence and little active black protest against anti-intermarriage laws in many northern states. (Horton 1993:143)

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Isolation and poverty defined the Refugees' material conditions and family structure. Their isolation placed them on the fringes of society at a great distance from medical care and poor relief. Yet their isolation also protected the Refugees from the dangers of living in the city, such as poor sanitary conditions and the hostility of the local white population. Poverty determined the Refugees' spartan housing, inadequate diet, and lack of clothing. Interestingly, this shared material experience of poverty resulted in a tightly knit society that enjoyed family continuity and social stability. The small number of marriages between the Refugees and other elements of the black population suggests the continuing importance of a distinct Refugee identity. In short, isolation and poverty encouraged self-reliance and mutual support among the Black Refugees.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How did the twin themes of poverty and isolation affect the Black Refugees' material conditions?
2. Why did some Refugees turn to extra-legal methods for clothing and food?
3. Explain how disease and sickness affected the Refugees.
4. Discuss the Black Refugees' family structure.

RECOMMENDED READING

European Immigration and Settlement in British North America

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The African North American Family

- Frazier, E. Franklin. *The Negro Family in the United States*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966.
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- Mitchell, Joanne. *The Black Extended Family*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.
- Rainwater, Lee and William Yancey, eds. *The Politics of Controversy: A Transaction Social Science and Public Policy Report*. Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1967.

NOTES

- 1 Based on the document's reference to rodents, this report was probably written in 1817.
- 2 The cases include: King versus Isaac Grant, Sr. and Isaac Grant, Jr. (Dec. 10, 1814, Minutes of the Quarter Sessions for Halifax County September 1813 to April 1818); King versus Thomas Binkley and Anne Binkley (Dec. 8, 1820, Minutes of the Court of Quarter Sessions, December 1814 to December 1826); King versus Sampson Carter (Dec. 13, 1825, Minutes of the Court of Quarter Sessions, 1825-7), NSARM.
- 3 Scipio Cooper and Charles Jackson, March 10, 1817, Minutes of the Court of Quarter Sessions, December 1814 to December 1826.
- 4 Return of the Distribution of Twenty-Five Pounds granted by the Honorable House of Assembly for relief of Poor Coloured People at Preston, 1833, NSARM, 9: doc. 56.
- 5 Coleman to Sabatier, Feb. 6, 1815, NSARM, 305: doc. 5; Fergusson 1948:15-17; Grant 1990:51-2.
- 6 Land Grant for the People of Colour at Preston, May 23, 1842, NSARM, Land Papers, RG 20 C. On the importance of naming patterns, see Gutman 1976:93-9.
- 7 Nash 1988:162; Return of the Black American Refugees residing at Hammonds Plains, 1820, NSARM, 422: doc. 19; Gray to James, May 11, 1836, NSARM, 9: doc. 58.
- 8 On the extended black family, see Martin and Mitchell 1978.
- 9 Half yearly Return of the School at Hammonds Plains, Negro District, November 1828, NSARM, 23; Return of the School Kept at Hammonds Plains, 1 July 1833, NSARM, 23.
- 10 St. Paul's Anglican Church Marriages (1816-77); Christ Church Dartmouth Marriages (1793-1843), NSARM.

- 11 Report of People off [sic] Colour at, and about Preston, Sept. 30, 1815, NSARM—Box—Halifax County Land Grants 1787–1835, doc. 169.
- 12 The government granted Slaughter eight lots in 1842. He was the elder at the ABA-Preston in 1854.
- 13 At this time, Kellum was married and had two children.

chapter six

Refugee Society

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, students should be able to:

1. Describe the importance of churches to the cultural, social, and political structure of the Black Refugees.
2. Understand the role of the Black Refugees' leadership.
3. Identify and discuss the career of Richard Preston.
4. Describe the importance of baptisms to the Refugees.

INTRODUCTION

The Black Refugees forged a community from almost nothing. It would be easy to describe this process in simple terms of black unity in the face of white hostility. To be sure, this is part of the story. The Refugees established separate churches and developed community bonds through shared experience, which did not exist when they first set foot on the shores of Nova Scotia. Yet there were other aspects of Refugee society that do not fit neatly into the unity model. Indeed, some Refugees engaged in social activities that were outside the watchful eye of the church. It is important to recognize that

Refugee society was layered, similar to all communities regardless of ethnic or racial makeup, and included elements that were not interested in respectable pursuits, such as attending church or attending benevolent society meetings. Yet by 1840 the community, despite its divisions, had developed an indigenous leadership, had created churches, and had mastered the rudiments of literacy. More important, the Refugees forged a new identity that highlighted their status as citizens of Nova Scotia and subjects of the British Crown. This chapter examines the Refugees' leadership, community institutions, and identity, while highlighting the diversity of Refugee society in the early nineteenth century.

INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP

Many free black communities in North America during the early nineteenth century were composed of recent migrants from the South. Black churches served as "instruments for developing community consciousness and for strengthening community bonds" among new settlers (Curry 1981:194). Free African Americans, like their counterparts in Nova Scotia, attended white churches before the development of separate institutions. Indeed, eminent American historian Leonard Curry argues that black religious leaders did not "rush to sever" ties with white preachers or churches because they were aware of the difficulties involved in maintaining their own churches (Curry 1981:194-5). Yet increasing racial tension and the growth of African American communities convinced the black clergy that separate institutions were viable, if not necessary. By the 1830s, African Baptist churches in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Buffalo had taken root and provided the local black communities with leadership and social guidance.¹

A similar pattern occurred among the Black Refugees in Nova Scotia. In developing indigenous leadership, the Refugees had to overcome an early dependence on white preachers. This is not to argue that Hammonds Plains and Preston were devoid of indigenous leadership before the advent of the African Baptist churches in 1832. Nevertheless, the importance of white preachers, such as John Burton, must be recognized. Burton provided important services to the Black Refugees during their first years in Nova Scotia. The Refugees' initial years of settlement were a tremendous struggle to feed families, make crops, and simply survive. As the War of 1812 blacks were from different backgrounds, community spirit probably took some time to develop. Once the majority of Refugees had forged an identity through mutual experience, they replaced John Burton with an indigenous black clergy.

Although the Refugees formed internally diverse communities, historians have mistakenly blurred these different lives into one stereotype: that the Refugees were all equally poor and dysfunctional. For example, Robin Winks argues that they could not create a vigorous community due to "their persistent lack of leaders" (Winks 1971:114). John Grant is more careful. He notes that "there was often a distinction between black leaders as recognized by blacks and black leaders as recognized by white society" (Grant 1990:116). However, he retreats onto familiar but unexamined ground by declaring that the lack of education resulted in "so few recognized leaders"—except, of course, for Richard Preston (Grant 1990:115; Boyd 1985, 8:968-70).

The leadership at the black settlements played an important role in work patterns, community decisions, religious gatherings, and political institutions. In 1836, the Reverend Archibald Gray acknowledged the leadership's role in rejecting the government's offer to pay for the Refugees' removal to Trinidad:

[S]everal of their number have great influence among them, and being able to provide for their own subsistence do not wish to leave the Province, and the rest, poor and miserable though they be, are unwilling to leave without them. (Gray to James, May 11, 1836, *Journal of the House of Assembly* 1837, NSARM)

Jane Pease and William Pease (1974:288–90) assert that during the mid-nineteenth century the African American middle and upper class pursued certain goals that were not always in the interest of the people they proclaimed to lead. This might have been the case for the Refugees. Certainly, a degree of paternalism existed within the Black Refugee community. However, can we really say that the community's poor wanted to leave the colony but were overruled by the elite? Were the leaders really more concerned about maintaining their improvements or were they actually shrouding self-interest in the cloak of group security?

In the case of the Refugees, I am not convinced that the goals of the leadership were at odds with the wishes of the community. It is possible that the leadership at Hammonds Plains and Preston consisted of **ethnic bosses** who controlled and exploited the communities. However, the relationship between the leadership and the community cannot be depicted simply in terms of exploitation. In his article, "Patronage and Corruption in Hierarchies," Albert Breton argues that **hierarchies** within communities are not necessarily exploitative. In fact, hierarchies can be understood as "exchange networks based on trust" (Breton 1987:31). If the Refugee leadership wielded significant power, the majority of the population probably would receive something in return. This could have been food, shelter, or religious guidance. In rejecting the proposed emigration to Trinidad or in creating community structures, the Refugee leadership might have simply reflected the majority's wishes. The members of the elite probably expressed the community's interests, while at the same time enhancing their own power.

REFUGEE RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

The Black Refugees placed great importance on religion. Christianity allowed the Refugees to make sense of their lives. Early religious gatherings in Preston and Hammonds Plains served as the foundation for Refugee consciousness and community. In the eyes of the white majority, the Refugees forged a peculiar understanding of God. For the Black Refugees, spiritual gatherings and church meeting houses were not simply religious in nature. As Eric Lincoln argues, these churches represented "the organizing principle around which life was structured. His church was his school, his forum, his political arena, his social club, his art gallery, and his conservatory of music. It was lyceum and gymnasium as well as sanctum sanctorum" (Barrett 1974:viii).² Indeed, African Nova Scotians' benevolent and improvement associations, such as the African Abolition Society and the African Friendly Society, were grounded in the African churches of Nova Scotia. Religious gatherings underpinned the social, political, and moral interests of the Black Refugee communities. These gatherings provided a sanctuary where the Refugees could voice common concerns and issues (Boyd 1976:i–xxv).

By the 1830s, the Black Refugees were predominantly Baptists. However, at what point they became Baptists is far more difficult to discern. Certainly, some of the Refugees carried the Baptist faith with them from the United States. In the 1820s, British traveller William Moorsom visited Preston before the advent of the African Baptist churches. Thus, his observations provide a window into the nature of early religious gatherings at the settlement:

Most of these negroes [sic] are Protestant sectarians; but their ideas upon religious subjects are more limited than those of any other class in the province, not excepting the Indians...In the Preston village is a facetious worthy, of sable hue, who styles himself the Reverend, and is in the habit of holding forth to a weekly congregation. A clerical friend of mine, a true Episcopalian, fraught with all the classic dignity of Oxford, was reclining one Saturday afternoon in that grotto of inspiration—his composing chair, when the street-door opened, and a formidable tap at the entrance of his sanctum interrupted a most poetic train of sermonizing imagery. 'Come in.' The Reverend Quaco B. made his appearance. The divine opened his eyes. As if uncertain of the nature of his sable visitor. 'Do you want to speak to me?'—'Oh! Not in partic'lar Sir—I only thought, as I was passing by, I'd call in to see a *Brother Minister*.'—I believe this 'Minister' takes the tenets of the Baptists as his model; but although his eloquence has raised him high in the estimation of his congregation, those who have been present report his sermons to be complete 'Greek' to a white man. (Moorsom 1830:126–7)³

Two important elements emerge from Moorsom's observations. First, religious gatherings were held regularly. Second, in line with most African North American communities, the preacher held an important place in Preston society.

Reverend John Burton: White Baptist Minister

Prior to the development of the African Baptist churches, many Refugees found spiritual guidance through the informal gatherings described by Moorsom or at the Reverend John Burton's Baptist Church. Born in England, Burton immigrated to Halifax "as an Episcopalian missionary" in 1792 (McKerrow 1976:9). After undergoing a religious transformation in the United States, Burton returned to Nova Scotia. In 1795, he established a Baptist church in Halifax and 25 years later one at Hammonds Plains (Oliver 1977:21; Clayton 1984:11–12). Burton welcomed the Black Refugees into his churches. His influence extended throughout the Black Refugee settlements. As Peter McKerrow noted, "[The Refugees] were spiritually cared for by this servant of God...Father Burton preached, baptized, married, and buried his flock, as he called them" (McKerrow 1976:10).

Burton's role within the Refugee communities went beyond religious instruction. According to the *Christian Visitor*, Burton exercised judicial authority over the Refugees. In fact, lieutenant-governors and local justices "acquiesced in Mr. Burton's decisions, and let him deal as he thought properly with this class of her Majesty's subjects" (cited in Boyd 1976:10). Burton's fervent religious beliefs melded well with the new settlers. Although not an especially dynamic speaker or well-read theologian, Burton possessed traits that the Refugees certainly admired, such as "an all-pervading piety" (Clayton 1984:12). By 1826, the Hammonds Plains Refugees wanted their own church, and Burton supported this aspiration (The petition of the undersigned coloured people, residing at Hammonds Plains, Aug. 18, 1826, NSARM, 422: doc. 33). During the scarlet fever epidemic, he petitioned the government to provide assistance to the Refugees (John Burton 1827, Hammonds Plains, NSARM, 443: doc. 65). Burton's role within the Black Refugees' communities diminished after the establishment of the African Baptist churches in 1832. He died six years later.

Churches of Their Own

Eventually the Refugees, or more accurately the communities' indigenous religious leadership, wanted their own churches. Frank Boyd's meticulously edited work allows scholars to

understand that this signified an important transition from dependency on whites to self-determination through the establishment of the African Baptist churches (Boyd 1976). Yet self-determination had its limitations. For example, white evangelical Christians played a role in the development of separate churches. In 1827, Dartmouth farmer Henry Keeler gave land to three Black Refugees (Jacob Allen, James Slaughter, and Richard Preston) in order to build a church upon “the principles of the Baptist Faith” for “people of color” (Trider 2001, 2:185; 1827 Census, Nova Scotia, NSARM).

In conjunction with aid from white evangelicals, the Refugee religious elite also harnessed genuine feelings of enthusiastic Christianity that pervaded many aspects of the Refugees’ existence. For example, at the height of the 1827 scarlet fever epidemic, Anglican Archdeacon Willis visited Hammonds Plains. He stated that these Refugees were “bearing their distress without murmuring. Many of them exhibit Christian Resignation, and were very grateful for his praying with them, when they manifested a fervent piety” (Report on Hammonds Plains, Jan. 15, 1827, NSARM, 422: doc. 35). The role of religious devotion cannot be overstated. Yet it must not be used to paint the Refugees as stuck in timeless religious isolation. Rather, Christianity helped the Refugees make sense of their world. Community activist and historian Pearleen Oliver captures their religious orientation:

Great as was the suffering in those days it could not stifle their prayers. They prayed through the Small Pox scourge and the Great Fever plague. They sang Spirituals as they cleared their plots, often on empty stomachs. God heard their prayers and their Spiritual songs and increased their Faith. Their wants were few. They had their Freedom and they had their God. It is wonderful to behold how God led these people through these weary years to 1832 when Richard Preston was chosen to be their first leader. (Oliver 1977:23)

BOX 6.1 Pearleen Oliver

Pearleen Oliver was one of the most important black activists in twentieth century Nova Scotia. The wife of Reverend William P. Oliver, her career is sometimes overlooked. A devoted member of the African Baptist Church, Oliver has authored several short books about the African Nova Scotian Baptist experience. Her *A Brief History of the Coloured Baptists of Nova Scotia, 1782–1953* is an excellent starting point

for those interested in black religious development in the Maritime provinces. She served as the first female moderator of the African Baptist Association. Dr. Oliver has also received the degree of doctor of humane letters from Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax. Her contributions to the betterment of black society have been recognized by local, national, and international organizations.

Richard Preston: Black Baptist Minister

Born in the early 1790s, Richard Preston spent his childhood and early adulthood as a slave in Virginia. During the War of 1812 his mother escaped with other slaves to Nova Scotia. Preston remained behind but in 1816 purchased his freedom. Hoping to reunite with his mother, Preston travelled to British North America. After searching through the various

colonies, Preston found his mother in Nova Scotia. Preston soon became an important figure in the community. His outstanding rhetorical skills and religious devotion earned Preston the admiration of the Refugee community. During the 1820s, he held revivalist meetings throughout Nova Scotia and acquired the undying support of the black communities at Halifax, Dartmouth, Hammonds Plains, Preston, and Beech Hill (McKerrow 1976:11–17; *Novascotian*, June 27, 1832, NSARM; Boyd 1985, 8:968–70).

In 1831, at the insistence of his flock, Preston travelled to England in hopes of being ordained and obtaining money for the construction of a chapel. The West London Association of Baptist Ministers ordained Preston in May of 1832. Preston made such an impression on his English hosts that he garnered enough money overseas to enable the black community to build the Cornwallis Street African Baptist Church in Halifax. Preston's speaking ability also garnered positive comment from the *Brighton Herald*: "His manner of delivery is exceedingly pleasing and in his dissertation he evinces clearness and perspicuity [sic]."⁴

Upon his return to Nova Scotia, Preston took up his position as the pastor of the African Baptist Church in Halifax. He also travelled to Preston, Hammonds Plains, and other areas to conduct weddings, baptisms, and funerals. Preston remained the dominating personality of the African Baptist flock until his death in 1861 (McKerrow 1976:11–17).

Preston's decision to build the mother church in Halifax leads to some interesting questions. For example, why was the main church not built at one of the rural settlements? Indeed, the majority of the black population in the Halifax region resided outside of the metropolis. Perhaps Halifax represented a neutral site as opposed to Preston or Hammonds Plains. In other words, Richard Preston did not want to be viewed as favouring one settlement over the other. But his decision to build the church in Halifax probably went beyond geographic scruples. Preston might have hoped to unite the disparate elements of the black population in Halifax through the construction and development of the African church. How effective this turned out to be is up for debate. Although some Refugees travelled to the Halifax church, many residents of Preston and Hammonds Plains remained at the settlements for Sunday service. Perhaps Preston believed that the future of African Nova Scotians was in the city and hoped people would leave the rural settlements. Yet the black population in the Halifax region remained mostly rural until mid-century.

Experiencing God remained the single most important idea underpinning Refugee religious consciousness. Richard Preston remarked that "Holy Fire and the Grace of God" qualified one to be a preacher (McKerrow 1976:17). However, since he opted to spread the gospel throughout the colony, he left each local church under the control of its elders. According to McKerrow, at Preston Thomas Saunders and Charles Roan conducted services in Richard Preston's absence. They were "entirely unlearned...[t]heir addresses...were purely from experience. [T]hey would often give quotations from Scripture to bear out their points, and the great wonder was how it was done without inspiration" (McKerrow:58). Hammonds Plains also enjoyed the services of local "Exhorters" (Clayton 1984:48–9). These men held an important position in society and in the church. Although unable to conduct weddings or baptisms, they preached the gospel and held funeral services. In other words, they filled the day-to-day needs of the congregation because Richard Preston would have only been at Hammonds Plains sporadically.⁵

BOX 6.2 Roan and Saunders

Charles Roan (also spelled Rowan) remained an important figure in the Refugee community for over 25 years. He served as the president of the African Abolition Society during the late 1840s and early 1850s. He also served as the vice-president of the African Friendly Society during the same period. Roan was also the licentiate at the Dartmouth branch of the African Baptist Association

for many years. Thomas Saunders settled at Preston in 1816. He petitioned the government for a school in 1820. Three years later, he petitioned the government for land. Both of these men were important personalities in the Black Refugee community. Clearly, they played an essential role in the religious and secular organizations of the community.

African Baptist Religious Culture

Baptisms remained one of the most important aspects of the Refugees' religious consciousness. In Hammonds Plains, the services were usually reserved for the summer, but the community's oral tradition insists that many "were baptized in the dead of winter; the ice being cut so the lake could be used" (Clayton 1984:34). The minister would hold revival meetings for one or two weeks prior to the event. The candidates for baptism visited their neighbours in an effort to explain their newly discovered faith. Once these preliminary activities were completed, nominees could be baptized. Adorned in white robes, candidates were led by the deacons and minister to Rodger's Rock at Taylor Lake. At this point, the actual baptism took place:

Great Songs of the gospel rang through the air including two familiar songs, 'When John grew a man Baptizing began, sing Hallelu, Hallelu—sing Hallelujah,' and 'Hallelujah, 'Tis Done, I believe in the Son, I am saved by the blood of the Crucified One,' was always sung as the candidate came out of the water. It was always noted as to whether or not the minister 'buried' the candidate deeply enough, and 'how the candidate took the water.' (Clayton 1984:34)

Baptisms and other ceremonies were explicitly religious. Yet the Refugees also used these festivities to interact socially with relatives or friends who lived in Halifax or more distant locations. At these religious gatherings, they danced, feasted, conversed, sang, and generally enjoyed themselves. In the late nineteenth century, Mary Jane Katzmann described the wide-ranging activities that surrounded baptisms at Preston:

A "baptizing" as they term it, [was] the gala event of the summer...by the side of some lake or river, hundreds of gaily dressed colored brethren and sisters collect. Numerous visitors of their own race, from Halifax and Dartmouth, lend eclat to the scene. From five to fifty candidates, according to the fervour of the revival season, dressed in white with napkins round their heads and otherwise properly vested, are plunged under the water and thenceforth are received into the fellowship...Afterwards, prayers and addresses are made, and when these are over, the visitors are feasted at the houses of their neighbors and friends, and the day [was] made one of general rejoicing and festivity. (Katzmann 1893:190-1)

Culture
+
Religion!

The Black Refugees forged a religious culture that expressed their lives and experience in Nova Scotia through folk songs:

*Oh, we are of that class who toil and trust;
Others, may, too, but the toiler must;
God has not gone to some distant star,
He's in the fields where the toilers are.*

(McKerrow 1976:11)

Overall, the Black Refugees refused to compromise their understanding of God by attempting to fit it into established ideas about Christianity.

Anglican Reaction

- Denominational Tensions*
- For the established Anglican Church of Nova Scotia, the Black Refugees were almost the equivalent of pagans. In 1818, Anglican cleric John Inglis unsuccessfully attempted to impose his beliefs on the Preston Refugees. He stated that they were “rigid Baptists” and “will not come to church.”⁶ By 1820, Inglis concluded that the Preston Refugees were “hopeless” (Inglis to Wix, July 21, 1820, NSARM). Yet the Refugees were part of a broader evangelical challenge to the Anglican Church that swept across the colony in the 1820s and 1830s. Although the Refugees’ religious institutions developed separately,
 - evangelical Christians were more interested in the fate of the local black population than were members of the established (i.e., Anglican) Church. Overall, evangelical Christianity allowed the Refugees to come to terms with racism, seasonal employment, and failed farming.
 - Anglican observers were outraged that the Refugees insisted on their own version of
 - evangelical Christianity. In the mid-1820s, William Nisbett, the Anglican catechist in Preston, recoiled from the Preston Refugees’ religious ceremonies (Nisbett’s Report, Dec. 31, 1826, *Journal of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel*). He argued that they were given to “monstrous absurdities,” which replaced a true understanding of Christianity (Nisbett’s Report). The Refugees’ emphasis on “experiencing God” struck Nisbett as being superstitious and insane. For example, in what was either a religious vision or a dream, one Refugee related the story of stabbing a person on a cross, which drew blood and water (Nisbett’s Report). For the Refugees, a blood vision/dream meant an intimate understanding of and relationship with Christ. In contrast, Nisbett interpreted such religious stories as the height of “moral degradation.”

REFUGEE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

- The Refugees also attempted to create educational institutions. Schools were not simply an imposition of the local white population. In 1820, the Preston Refugees requested that the government provide them with a schoolmaster because they were too poor to afford one. Written by the proposed schoolmaster, James Bell, 31 Refugees affixed their names to the petition. This school petition demonstrates the important notion of self-improvement among the community’s population (School Petition, Nov 11, 1820, NSARM, 422: doc. 22). Yet the Refugees continued for the most part to rely on white teachers. This is hardly surprising given the fact that there were no institutions formed to train black educators. In

contrast to their religious leadership and institutions, the Refugees were not able to create partially self-sustaining educational institutions.

Benevolent societies and the government also attempted to foster education among the Black Refugees. In 1816, the Arms Fund provided money for the construction of schools at Hammonds Plains and Preston (Fergusson 1948:60). In 1818, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel provided money for a schoolmaster at Preston. During the same year, when the Reverend John Inglis visited the settlement he found an "unfortunate Black man who has lost both of his feet and teaches between 30 and 40 black children in one part of the settlement." An elderly Englishman, Mr. Fletcher, also instructed the Preston Refugees.⁷ The following summer, Inglis noted that attendance at the school had increased under the diligent instruction of Fletcher.⁸ In 1825, land surveyor John Chamberlain opened a Sunday school in Preston that was attended by 80 children (black and white) and their parents (Fergusson 1948:61). Although the Refugees rarely paid for the teachers, at Hammonds Plains parents supplied the local schoolmaster's house with firewood in exchange for his services (Hammonds Plains School Return, June 1, 1840, NSARM, 25). These early schools had some success. However, Inglis believed that the Refugees' "religious prejudices and uncertain and irregular attendance" made educational progress difficult (Inglis to Wix, Jan. 10, 1823, NSARM). In early 1823, Inglis "advised" Fletcher to foster educational interest among the more "respectable Black men" at Hammonds Plains so that they might encourage other Refugees to send their children to school (Inglis to Wix). This plan worked quite well. By 1835, Inglis (now bishop of Nova Scotia) reported that an observer "found young persons in many of their huts who could read a chapter in the Bible, write properly, and seemed to have an intelligent acquaintance with what they read and with their catechism" (Inglis to Wix, Feb. 21, 1835). In 1840, 37 children regularly attended school and had made some progress in reading and writing. Interestingly, adults also hoped to gain literacy. The school instructor reported that many parents attended Sunday school and were "now reading in the testament" (Hammonds Plains School Return, June 1, 1840, NSARM).

At Preston similar advances were made in education. In 1829, the Reverend Edward Wix visited the local school and reported that the children were engaged in reading St. John's Gospel.⁹ The Refugees' children were learning to read and spell by repeating after the teacher. Some were writing "monosyllable words" (Hammonds Plains School Return). Approximately 100 students (black and white children were separated) were registered at the school. Wix believed that "the school is as admirably conducted as any National school on this side of the Atlantic" (Hammonds Plains School Return). Despite these achievements, education remained elusive for the Refugees. Wix complained about their "irregularity of attendance" and "constitutional in punctuality."

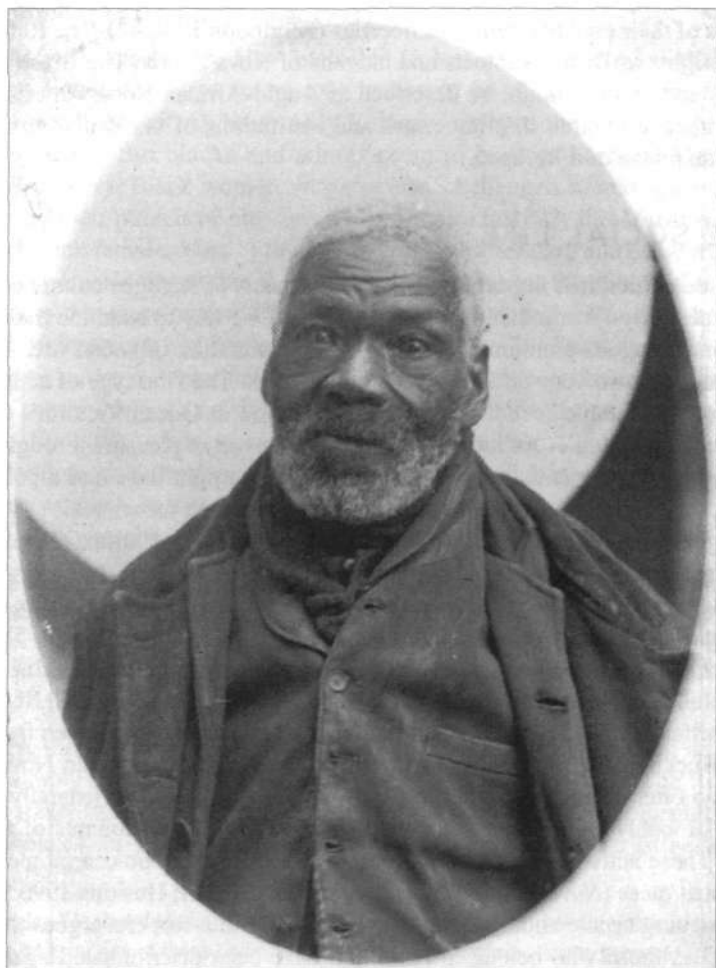
John Grant argues that the Refugees' failure to grasp the rudiments of education rested on their parents' inability to grasp its importance. Although this might have been part of the problem, the Refugees' educational petitions defy this interpretation. Also, schools in the black settlements were hardly everyday operations. Schools struggled to remain open because the Refugees and their benevolent friends could not easily find teachers, much less provide them with a decent salary.¹⁰ The Refugees did not lack the capacity for or commitment to education, but rather their poverty and their need for farm labourers probably lessened the importance of education. In other words, making a good crop outweighed learning the alphabet. Overall, black education faced the disadvantages of sporadic schooling and irregular attendance.

REFUGEE IDENTITY

- In 1992, Linda Colley published her seminal work, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837*.
- She argued that Britain's identity was created through patriotic language and the identification of others, such as the French and people of colour. In other words, Britons were exactly what these other groups were not: civilized, free, and Protestant. As Britain continued to forge its identity in the nineteenth century, the colonies also attempted to define themselves. Nova Scotia's mainstream white identity was contrasted with America's identity. Nova Scotians were not republicans, slaveholders (generally speaking), or ruled by the mob—traits that were ascribed to American political culture. The Black Refugees participated in this identity, in that they were conscious of their status as Nova Scotians, but they were also black. Thus, part of their developing identity had separatist sentiments based on racial designation. In a sense, the Refugees were both part of this general development of identity in the British world, but also somewhat apart from it (Colley 1992).
- Historians agree that the African Nova Scotian community developed a separate identity from mainstream colonial society during the nineteenth century. Robin Winks characteristically blames the Refugees for developing segregated communities (Winks 1971:140). James Walker, more insightfully, argues that black identity might be understood as a localized and communal response to white racism. In his opinion, the Refugees sacrificed economic improvement for physical safety and cultural maintenance (Walker 1976:230–7). But Walker carefully notes that localized identity did not inhibit loyal feelings to the British Crown (Walker 1985a:19). Frank Boyd argues that, through the African Baptist movement, the black community developed “separate” institutions (Boyd 1976:iii–vii). These scholars are correct in outlining and arguing for the development of a separate identity. But this separate identity must be divided into Refugee and Loyalist groups. In other words, there were at least two black identities. The question of when these two identities became one is well beyond the confines of this work and needs to be given sustained investigation by scholars. In this section, we will examine the development of the Refugee identity by pursuing the following questions. What elements of the Refugees' experience coalesced into making up their consciousness and identity? How did this identity develop over time? What divisions appeared in the Refugee identity?
- In the beginning, self-awareness hinged more on the Refugees' experience with slavery than on any localized racial identity. In their petitions, the Refugees referred to their American heritage, commenting that they “were men of colour who emigrated into this Province in the late American War.”¹¹ Clearly, they recognized what anti-colonialist intellectual Frantz Fanon called the “Fact of Blackness” (Fanon 1995:323–36). However, they also distinguished themselves from other segments of the colony's black population by asserting their origins and experience during the War of 1812. As the years passed, an internal identity certainly developed that focused on the Refugees' loyalty to Britain, racial consciousness, and their experience in Nova Scotia (African Baptist Association Minutes, 1855, Acadia University).
- In petitions to the government, the Refugees also asserted their loyalty to the British Crown. For example, James Barron stated that he “was born in the United States of America...one of those who took refuge under the British Flag in the year [1815] and is firmly attached to the British government” (James Barron, 1818, Land Papers, NSARM). They also participated in activities that demonstrated their loyalty to Queen and Empire, such as coronations. By the 1840s, as the Refugees became more involved in the increas-

ingly acrimonious political battle between Tories and Reformers, Richard Preston reminded black voters that they should support the entrenched Tory government so long as it did not “depart from its duty to England...” because that “great country has relieved us from American Bondage” (cited in Cuthbertson 1994:87). One of the most important aspects of the Refugee identity remained tied to the British connection well beyond mid-century.

In addition to their identification with the British Crown, the Refugees also engaged with intellectual W.E.B. Du Bois’s claim that African Americans had competing internal interests within their souls—that is, “American-ness” and “Negro-ness”—which threatened to tear their soul asunder (1970:3, orig. 1903). Recent studies in the United States have emphasized northern blacks’ attempts to define themselves as African and American



Source: NSARM.

Gabriel Hall. Possibly the only photograph taken of a Refugee. Gabriel Hall arrived in Nova Scotia from the Chesapeake as a teenager during the War of 1812. He worked as a farmer and petitioned the government for more land in the 1820s. In this picture, Hall was well over 90 years old.

in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century (Winch 2002; Rael 2002). The Refugees engaged in a similar struggle. Yet their identity reached beyond W.E.B. Du Bois's assertion about African Americans' "two-ness" and "double-consciousness." Indeed, disparate elements informed the Refugee identity. For example, they were Americans, Africans, Nova Scotians, farmers, British subjects, immigrants, labourers, ex-slaves, and Baptists. Certainly, these numerous elements played a role in their internal consciousness and outward attitudes that cannot be summed up separately. The Refugee identity was multiple and layered. They were Americans who memorialized their distant homeland in Africa, as illustrated by the names of their community institutions, such as the African Baptist Church and the African Friendly Society. Yet they became Nova Scotians by virtue of their experience with the climate, seasonal employment, and farming difficulties. Moreover, in the 1830s, the Refugees again refused to migrate to Trinidad because they valued and feared the loss of their civil and religious liberties (Fergusson 1948:46). The Refugees recognized their rights as British subjects and citizens of Nova Scotia. The Black Refugees' consciousness and identity might be described as Anglo-African North American, which was firmly embedded within the framework and institutions of the British Empire. (See photo 6.1 for an image of a Refugee.)

REFUGEE SOCIAL LIFE

As we discussed earlier, it is important to examine aspects of Refugee culture and society that do not necessarily fit into the ideal of black unity. One way to examine these less tidy elements in the Refugee community is through an examination of social life. This social life was divided into two very different types of activities. The first type of activities consisted of more "respectable" events, such as participation in Queen Victoria's coronation parade. The second type of event revolved around the pursuit of pleasure through drinking, dancing, and other enjoyments. Yet drinking and dancing might have had a political purpose—that is, the challenging of public spaces usually reserved for whites.

— The Refugees' social life usually revolved around activities in Halifax. Clearly, visiting the regional metropolis remained very important to the Refugees. In early 1815, one observer noted that the Refugees used Sundays to visit their brethren in Halifax or the surrounding areas (Coleman to Sabatier, February 6, 1815, NSARM, 305: doc. 5). In 1816, some Refugees were commonly found in Halifax seeking "pleasure" (His Majesty's Council to Dalhousie, November 29, 1816, NSARM, 421: doc. 37). James S. Buckingham, a visitor to Halifax in the 1840s, remarked that blacks and natives were "seen frequently in the streets" (Buckingham 1843:344). Another traveller noted that African Nova Scotians were found too often "hanging about the towns" (Johnston 1851:7). Generally speaking, the Refugees probably enjoyed activities that appealed to most inhabitants of the greater Halifax area. These activities included ox roasts, horse races, public ceremonies, taverns, soirees, and boat races (*Novascotian* August 24, 1826, NSARM; Huskins 1996:9–36).

— In her intriguing article about race and tavern space, Julia Roberts argues that "racialized others" (i.e., those who belong to races that have been discriminated against by the dominant majority) challenged "whites' dominance of public space" (Roberts 2002:22). In Halifax, blacks also challenged whites' dominance of public space through a variety of social activities, ranging from coronations to public picnics. In 1838, at the celebrations for Queen Victoria's coronation, the black community participated in the procession honouring the new monarch. The black marchers, organized by the African Friendly Society, carried a

pink banner that read "Victoria and Freedom" (*Novascotian* July 5, 1838, NSARM). The *Acadian Recorder* recognized that "the African Society, [have] claimed the right, which the Committee willingly conceded, of joining their fellow citizens in celebrating the coronation of a Sovereign" (*Acadian Recorder* July 2, 1838, NSARM). The *Novascotian* reported that they were "respectable and orderly, and exhibited an interesting specimen of the good feeling which should animate all classes" (*Novascotian*, July 5, 1838, NSARM). In 1850, one visitor found African Nova Scotians enjoying a public festivity with various other ethnic groups. He painted an amusing portrait of Nova Scotian social life at mid-century:

On the field upon M'Nab's Island, where the people were assembled, were music and dancing parties in different places; swings and refreshment stalls, whites of all grades, and darkies of different shades; but I saw neither intoxication nor disorder, nor rudeness, nor incivility anywhere. (Buckingham 1843:7)

The Black Refugees were also interested in less respectable pursuits. For example, Joseph Ford owned a "house notoriously known to be of ill fame" (*Acadian Recorder*, October 31, 1818, NSARM). How many Refugees enjoyed the pleasures of this house is difficult to assess. But blacks and whites seem to have gathered at Mr. Ford's home (*Acadian Recorder*). Black women, in particular, challenged sacred spaces of the white community in their pursuit of pleasure. For example, in 1843, the *Morning Herald* complained that black females were "prowling" the streets after dark and behaving in an unruly way (*Morning Herald* September 8, 1843). In hanging about the streets, these women had entered spaces that were reserved for men. They had stepped beyond the boundaries that respectable Haligonians had set for blacks and women. Two years later, an officer at the local garrison wrote a degrading piece about one black neighbourhood in Halifax. He stated that nearly every home doubled as a grog house or tavern. The majority of men engaged in fisticuffs, while women were involved in "something worse" (*Sun* May 7, 1845). Of course, this gentleman must have forgotten that his comrades were probably among these women's best customers. The garrison officer described the social escapades of the community as observed by one of his friends:

[T]he sounds of three or four fiddles from different huts, plainly intimated the nature of the amusements within; and as he passed the doors, the excited tones, the violent and coarse expressions, the shouts of the men, and the shriller shrieks of the women, the stamping of feet upon the floor, and numberless other discordant noises, warned him that the drunken orgies were at their full height. (*Sun*)

At times, the pursuit of pleasure had little to do with the challenging of public space. Instead, it simply revolved around drinking and having a good time. The Refugees could not always travel to Halifax during the weekends. Thus, some held informal gatherings at local farmhouses. In 1825, "A Haligonian" recorded one of these gatherings—another interracial affair:

Last Sunday I took a walk in the suburbs of the town in company with a companion, and we happened to pass by one of these hotbeds of vice and crime, when a scene presented itself, which was fit to shock every feeling of decency. In the barn there was a black man playing a reel tune upon a fife, to which four or five apprentice boys, with some ladies of the town were exhibiting attitudes upon the floor; at the door a knot of blackguard boys were collected, in the midst of whom two were fighting away, and swearing most manfully; and in a field at a little distance off were a number of labourers pitching quoits and near them a table upon which the *rum bottle*, with its accompaniments of pitcher and glasses, was duly set out. (*Novascotian* April 20, 1825, NSARM)

Gender
Activity!

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The Black Refugees' social life and pursuit of pleasure tells us a few important things about black society. First, far from being homogenous, the Refugee community in the early nineteenth century was internally divided. The upwardly mobile, such as the artisans and the religious leaders, attempted to achieve respectability through participation in activities such as Queen Victoria's coronation parade. How important these types of events were to the majority of blacks is questionable at best. Undoubtedly, the poorer classes' drinking and dancing probably horrified the respectable elements of the black community. Perhaps their behaviour served as an impediment to the middle class's gaining of acceptance within the wider community. Activities such as a trip to Mr. Ford's house or parties like the one described by the garrison officer probably disgusted the more "respectable" elements of the black community. However, for some blacks these events broke the monotony of everyday life. As Jane Pease and William Pease noted many years ago, the black bourgeoisie's attempts at middle class respectability usually resulted in a leadership that pursued goals that were of little concern to most blacks in their given communities (Pease and Pease 1974:288-90; Fingard 1992:169-95).

Overall, the Black Refugees built community institutions and community spirit. This required the development of a distinct identity within the framework of Nova Scotia. In some ways, the Refugees were quite successful in this endeavour. For example, they established an indigenous religious leadership and African Baptist churches. Yet dependency in terms of education continued throughout the Refugees' first 25 years in the colony. In general, however, the Refugees built communities from nothing, established religious institutions, and mastered the rudiments of education. Certainly, this was an arduous journey with numerous difficulties, but the Refugees persevered and made a place for themselves in nineteenth century Nova Scotian society.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why did the Black Refugees decide to form separate institutions?
2. Discuss how the development of separate institutions impacted the lives of the Black Refugees.
3. Discuss the different elements within Black Refugee society.
4. Why is it important to recognize unity and division within Refugee society?
5. How separate were the Black Refugees' supposedly separate institutions?

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NOTES

- 1 Curry 1981:174-95; Nash 1988:259-67; Levesque 1975:491-525; Lapsansky 1980:54-78; Horton 1993:34-5.
- 2 Also see Raboteau 1983:193-217; Mathews 1965; Sobel 1979.
- 3 One wonders who this "sable" Reverend was. I doubt it was Richard Preston, as he was very light skinned.
- 4 Extract from the *Brighton Herald* in the *Novascotian*, Jun. 27, 1832, NSARM; McKerrow 1976:12-17.

- 5 On the role of Black Fathers and the Black church more generally, see Woodson 1921; Frazier 1963; Hamilton 1972; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990.
- 6 Inglis to Wix, July 20, 1818, Bray's Associates: Canadian Papers 1784–1836, copies, Judith Fingard Papers.
- 7 Inglis to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, Nov. 10, 1818, Inglis Journals, NSARM.
- 8 Inglis to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, July 1, 1819, Inglis Journals, NSARM.
- 9 Wix to Secretary of Associates of the Late Dr. Bray, Oct. 5, 1829, Bray's Associates: Canadian Papers 1784–1836, copies, Judith Fingard Papers.
- 10 Inglis to Wix, July 20, 1818, July 21, 1821, Dec. 16, 1830, Bray's Associates: Canadian Papers 1784–1836, copies, Judith Fingard Papers. For a discussion of the problems faced by black schools in Ontario and Nova Scotia, see Winks 1969:164–91.
- 11 Zachariah Randal and Anse Moaten 1825, Land Papers. Also see the following petitions: William Wise 1825, William Deer and others 1824, Samuel Evens 1823, David Page 1825, Land Papers, NSARM.

chapter seven

Racial Attitudes and Race Relations

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, students should be able to:

1. Understand the similarities and differences between racial attitudes in the northern United States and Nova Scotia.
2. Describe the popular image of the Black Refugees.
3. Discuss how racial attitudes informed many people's opinions about the Black Refugees' preparedness for freedom.
4. Understand how the popular image of the Refugees helped to define white Nova Scotian identity.

INTRODUCTION

In the early nineteenth century, white society in Nova Scotia remained divided by class, religion, and ethnicity. For example, religious minorities, immigrants, and the poor faced discrimination, disdain, and suspicion. Given the cleavages within white society, it is possible that the Black Refugees were not always ostracized solely on the basis of

race. However, **race** was an additional variable that makes their story (like that of the Aboriginal people in the area) especially intriguing and worthy of study.

The concept of race and how to understand it has become the focus of a lively debate. The use of race as a social construct has gained both advocates and critics within the academy. (See recommended reading at the end of the chapter.) It is important to acknowledge that race is a social construction, as opposed to a biological fact. However, this hardly explains how race and racial ideas were used to define, categorize, and understand social relationships. As Ira Berlin notes, race is also a historical construction. In other words, the meaning of race must be situated within a particular time, place, and social dynamic (Berlin 1998:1; Fredrickson 1997:77–97). Thus, this analysis attempts to examine how notions of race informed popular ideas about Nova Scotia's Black Refugees and how this in turn affected relations between the colony's black and white populations between 1813 and 1840.

BOX 7.1 Race as a Social Construct

The following is a typical presentation of the notion of race as a social construct:

“[H]uman interaction rather than natural differentiation must be seen as the source and continued basis for racial categorization...Racial formation includes both the rise of racial groups and their constant reification in social thought. I...use the term ‘racial fabrication’ in order to highlight four important facets of the social construction of race. First, humans rather than abstract social forces produce races.

Second, as human constructs, races constitute an integral part of a whole social fabric that includes gender and class relations. Third, the meaning-systems surrounding race change quickly rather than slowly. Finally, races are constructed relationally, against one another, rather than in isolation.” (Lopez 1994:196)

Source: Ian Lopez, “The Social Construction of Race: Some Observations on Illusions, Fabrication and Choice” in *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review* 29 (1), Winter.

White racial attitudes in North America typically depicted blacks “as a permanently alien and unassimilable element of the population” (Fredrickson 1971:1). Borrowing from the writings of Thomas Jefferson, many legislators and common people alike believed that it was impossible to incorporate “the blacks into the state” (Thomas Jefferson, “Notes on Virginia,” in Rose 1976). These ideas were environmentalist in that African North Americans’ behaviour and psychology were explained through their position in society as opposed to any innate racial inferiority. Winthrop Jordan argues that environmentalist reasoning lost its position to racial ideology before the War of 1812 (Jordan 1968:482–541). In contrast, George Fredrickson argues that these ideas were not challenged until the development of “respectable” ethnological studies in the 1830s and 1840s (Fredrickson 1971:2). In the case of Nova Scotia, racial doctrines crossed the boundaries between environmental reasoning and ideologies that made explicit reference to the Refugees’ inherent racial characteristics.

THE AMERICAN BACKGROUND

In the northern states, free blacks were seen as a degraded class that undermined the very structures of society. In New Jersey, an abolitionist group described liberated blacks as

idle, drunk, and prone to dishonesty (Fredrickson:4). A Philadelphia abolitionist, Thomas Branagen, argued on behalf of his fellow whites “[h]ow it must dampen their spirits, when they come and have to associate with negroes [sic]...and what is much worse, be thrown out of work and precluded from getting employ to keep vacancies for blacks” (cited in Nash 1988:179).¹ In 1808, the New York Manumission Society stated that the free black population exhibited “looseness of manners & depravity of conduct.” Taken together, in the American imagination free blacks were portrayed as a menace to society (Fredrickson 1971:4).

In the early nineteenth century, there seemed to be a growing belief that free blacks were incapable of making any sort of positive contribution to society. Thus, the possibility of removing them from North America gained popular support. The idea that free blacks should be colonized in Africa gained its greatest support from the American Colonization Society (ACS), founded in late 1816 with Bushrod Washington as president. This organization insisted that the introduction of free blacks into any white community contributed to the depravity of the existing underclass. In other words, the prospect of free blacks roaming around the United States fuelled a general fear about the poorer classes. The ACS believed that blacks and whites could never coexist in a bi-racial democracy. One of the organization’s more prominent members, Senator Henry Clay, stated that free African Americans represented “a dangerous and useless part of the community” (cited in Nash 1988:238). Thus, the ACS hoped to send all free blacks to Liberia or anywhere else so as to relieve the white population of the burden supposedly associated with large numbers of free African Americans.

The ACS failed to gain the support of most black Americans. They did not want to be separated from their brethren who still suffered in bondage. The colonization scheme, in their opinion, was calculated to secure the property of the slaveholding classes. In Philadelphia, the black community refused to believe “that whites wished to do ‘a great good’ for a people they hated” (Nash 1988:238). Most African Americans agreed with abolitionist and activist Martin Delany’s characterization of the ACS as “one of the Negro’s worst enemies” (cited in Franklin and Moss 1994:169).²

RACIAL ATTITUDES IN NOVA SCOTIA

White Nova Scotians’ views of the Black Refugees mirrored white Americans’ views of free African Americans in the northern United States during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In 1815, before large numbers of the Refugees arrived, the Nova Scotian House of Assembly stated its opposition to an increasing non-white presence:

The proportion of Africans already in this country is productive to a great many inconveniences; and that the introduction of more must tend to the discouragement of white laborers and servants, as well to the establishment of a separate and marked class of people, unfitted by nature to this climate, or an association with the rest of His Majesty’s Colonists. (*Journal of the House of Assembly*, April 1, 1815, NSARM, 305: doc. 3)

The Assembly believed that innate black racial inferiority made **assimilation** unthinkable. Ironically, members of the Assembly feared that the white working class would be discouraged by black competition. The Assembly members also argued that the Black Refugees were “burthensome” to the colony’s population (*Journal of the House of Assembly*). These views formed the basis of prevailing racial doctrine in early nineteenth-

century Nova Scotia. Conventional opinion held that blacks did not belong in the colony and needed to be removed at the earliest convenience. However, this conclusion needed some justification, which came in the form of accounts describing the Black Refugees as indolent, depraved, unprepared for freedom, and prone to criminality. This multifaceted image was used to buttress the theory that blacks were "unfitted" for settlement in Nova Scotia.³

In the eyes of many Nova Scotians, the Black Refugees personified depravity, dependency, and idleness. The belief that the Refugees were lazy reached into the highest echelons of the colonial government. Lord Dalhousie believed that the Refugees were inherently incapable of labour, as he wrote to Lord Bathurst in 1816:

Permit me to state plainly to Your Lordship that little hope can be entertained of settling these people so as to provide for their families and wants—they must be supported for many years—Slaves by habit & education, no longer working under the dread of the lash, their idea of freedom is idleness and they are therefore quite incapable of industry. (Dalhousie to Bathurst, Dec. 29, 1816, NSARM, 112:6–9).

These official views found widespread support in the local population. In a letter to the *Acadian Recorder*, "W.W." stated in 1815 that "[o]ur poorhouses and prisons were soon filled with them, because they were too lazy to work, and to steal was easier than to labour" (*Acadian Recorder* Dec. 23, 1815, NSARM). Another letter writer, "A Resident Mechanic," complained in 1817 that the Black Refugees lived in palaces and lazily existed in the sunshine (*Acadian Recorder* July 26, 1817, NSARM).

This image had little basis in reality given that the majority of Black Refugees lived in huts with no cellars. Moreover, reports to the government challenged the popular perception of the Refugees as being lazy. For example, in 1816, John Poule of Beaverbank reported that the Refugees had "made several improvements on said land, have erected a very comfortable house, [and] cleared several acres of land now in Cultivation."⁴ Another local official stated that "[m]any of them are industrious."⁵ However, these positive reports did little to change the popular image that the Refugees were idle and prone to criminality. Poule's report and others like it never made it into any newspapers. Thus, the idea persisted that the Refugees were lazy.⁶

Black women were considered more depraved than their male counterparts. (For an analysis of a similar image of women of colour see Brand 1987 and 1988.) They struck some observers as poor imitations of white femininity. Supposedly, these black women attempted to hide their corrupted nature beneath the garments of respectability:

The females clad like the wives and daughters of your Lairds, but frequently gazing at, will (like Capt. Hay's man in the Sun) betray the skelton [sic]; what now appears to you so gay and gaudy, you will soon discover to be penitentiary [sic] dresses evincing the depravity of the wearers. (*Acadian Recorder* Dec. 23, 1815, NSARM)

This quotation is indicative of the prevalent attitude in mainstream society that the Refugees were not welcome. Their ostentatious dressing habits were not signs of refinement but, rather, indications of mimicry and debasement. No matter how they behaved, black women were thought to be incapable of hiding their true nature. Even letter writers who challenged racist views about the Refugees, such as "Englishman," lamented the "depravity of those black females, which unhappily is too often witnessed in our streets" (*Acadian Recorder* Dec. 30, 1815, NSARM). In the white Nova Scotian imagination, black women were a degraded and disgusting element of the population.

Blacks were also usually depicted as unendingly stupid. The local press portrayed them in this fashion in order to support the notion that African Nova Scotians were an alien and unwanted segment of the population. In 1818, one black man stated that he did not know the “nature” of an oath, his age, and had “no religion” (*Acadian Recorder* Nov. 7, 1818, NSARM). This was taken to mean that blacks were unable to understand the most rudimentary elements of society. In particular, they supposedly did not grasp religious ideas or ceremonies that were fundamental to Anglo-American civilization:

A black servant, not an [sic] hundred miles from St. Andrews [New Brunswick] being examined in the church catechism by the minister of the parish, was asked, ‘What are you made of Jack?’ He answered ‘Mud, massa, mud.’ On being told that he should say ‘of dust,’ he replied, ‘No, massa, it no do, no stick together.’

(*Novascotian* May 3, 1827, NSARM)

African North Americans’ alleged stupidity was expressed in a press-manufactured black dialect, which implied that blacks were barely able to converse in the English language.

And, at times, linguistic deficiencies were combined with African North Americans’ reputed religious ignorance. For example, the *Novascotian* recounted the speech—“unintelligible matter”—of a black preacher. “Brar...you tink say when you die you dead for true...no such ting...nebbia see de day...dat time no mo you begin for lib..you tink say” (*Novascotian* Jan. 11, 1827, NSARM). In other words, blacks supposedly spoke mindless babble that further justified their separation from society.

Another way to examine popular racial attitudes is through the work of Thomas Chandler Haliburton. One of the few Nova Scotian authors to achieve literary fame by the 1830s, his work was widely read throughout the colony and beyond. Haliburton feared any challenges to the natural order of society, challenges that included **republicanism** and liberalism. In other words, he was an unabashed Tory. As George Elliot Clarke notes in his important essay, Haliburton believed that society functioned best under a system of paternalism in which everyone knew their respective place—especially the lower classes.⁷ Thus, it is hardly surprising that he perceived African North Americans as a threat to the established order if the benevolent institution of slavery did not control them.

Haliburton’s attitude toward the Refugees hardened over time. In 1823, he stated that they were employed as domestic servants and labourers.⁸ Six years later, in his *Historical and Statistical Account of Nova-Scotia*, the Black Refugees were depicted as ex-slaves in need of their master’s protection:

At Preston and at Hammond [sic] Plains, in the neighbourhood of Halifax, there were settlements, composed wholly of Blacks, who experienced every winter all the misery incident to indolence and improvidence, and levied heavy contributions on the humanity of their more frugal neighbours. In some instances they have sighed for the roof of their master, and the pastimes and amusements they left behind. (Haliburton 1829:292)

This book, published in 1829, indicates that the popular image of the Black Refugees, 15 years after their original settlement, continued to be one of laziness and an inability to contribute to society. In short, the Black Refugees were regarded as living proof that African North Americans were fit only for slavery.

In his literary works, as Clarke points out, Haliburton justified slavery through thinly veiled references to the plight of the Black Refugees. For example, Haliburton’s *The*

Clockmaker; or the Sayings and Doings of Samuel Slick (Haliburton's most famous book) recounted the happiness of Scip, an escaped slave, when he was reunited with his master.⁹ Although Scip enjoyed "the sweets attending a state of liberty, [he] was unhappy under the influence of a cold climate, hard labour, and the absence of all that real sympathy, which, notwithstanding the rod of the master, exists nowhere but where there is a community of interests" (cited in Clarke 1994:29). In other words, the Black Refugees needed the caring arm of slavery to rescue them from the failings of liberty. In the mind of Haliburton and other white Nova Scotians, black enslavement was preferable to black freedom for whites and blacks alike.

- The idea that black enslavement served all members of society was quite popular in
- Nova Scotia. The Refugees were thought to be living proof that freedom made blacks lazy
- and indolent. In a series of articles and editorials, Edmund Ward, editor of the *Free Press*, supported the continuation of slavery in the West Indies. Aghast at slave unrest in the Caribbean, Ward launched a series of editorials attacking any individual or institution that exhibited even traces of anti-slavery sentiment. He blamed British abolitionists William Wilberforce and Zachary Macaulay for causing "all the mischief in the West Indies." (*Free Press* Feb. 17, 1824, NSARM).

| | |
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| BOX 7.2 | Wilberforce and Macaulay |
|----------------|---------------------------------|

William Wilberforce (1759–1833) is one of the most important figures in the history of British abolitionism. Wilberforce became an anti-slave-trade activist after converting to evangelical Christianity. Wilberforce decided to use his position as an MP to decry slavery and eventually push through the anti-slave-trade bill. Although his first attempt to outlaw the slave trade failed in 1791, Wilberforce played an important role in the bill's eventual passage. The bill became law in 1807. Wilberforce believed that slaves should not be emancipated immediately but, rather, should be slowly prepared for freedom. Wilberforce retired from Parliament in the mid-1820s and died shortly before the British government emancipated all slaves in its empire in 1833. Although Wilberforce played an

important role in the end of the slave trade, he was not a moving force behind the abolition of slavery.

Zachary Macaulay (1768–1838) was the governor of Sierra Leone and editor of the *Christian Observer*. He played an important role in the abolition of the slave trade and slavery. Macaulay spent some of his youth in Jamaica as a plantation overseer. As a result, Macaulay came to dislike slavery. He spent the mid-1790s to the end of the century as the governor of Sierra Leone. After returning to England, he worked as secretary of the Sierra Leone Company. Also, he wrote many editorials against slavery in the *Christian Observer*. He also participated in the Clapham Sect, a group of evangelicals that worked for the abolition of the slavery and for other humanitarian causes.

Freedom for people of African descent remained unimportant to Edmund Ward. Instead, he worried about the rights of the West Indian planters: "To turn the negroes [sic] in the West Indies loose, would involve their owners in irretrievable ruin" (*Free Press* Sept. 28, 1824, NSARM). Ward poured scorn and contempt upon those who dared to "separate

the link which unites the master and slave" (*Free Press* May 23, 1824, NSARM). Ward remained convinced that he understood African North Americans' definition of freedom, which was "an exemption from labour" (*Free Press* April 27, 1824, NSARM). The *Free Press* insisted that the Black Refugees were the ultimate proof that freedom and blackness remained incompatible terms:

We need not carry the attention of our readers any distance from their fire sides to form a proper estimate of their [blacks] character, but let such of them as have lived in those British Countries where Slavery exists compare the situation of the West India negro [sic] with that of those unfortunate beings, to whom the impolitic conduct of the British government, during the recent war gave freedom and subsequently support...they are a burthen to the community in which they live. And, it will soon be found necessary to transport them to [another] country. (*Free Press* March 30, 1824, NSARM)

Ward's ideas about the Black Refugees were not questioned in any letters to the editor. Indeed, in this case the public's silence was deafening. Ward simplified the experience of the Refugees in order to bolster his arguments in favour of slavery. He never mentioned the Refugees' lack of access to land nor did he consult with government officials who might have said something positive about the Refugees. Of course, Ward's support for slavery in the West Indies should not be understood only in terms of race or racism. Many of Nova Scotia's colonial elite had mercantile interests in the West Indies. The termination of slavery, therefore, would have hurt the economic well-being of people like Ward. The lack of response to Ward's views, then, indicates that the local population, at least those who were literate, agreed with his anti-black sentiments. In a letter to the *Acadian Recorder*, "Z" seems to confirm the general consensus that the Refugees were content as slaves:

The introduction of so great a number of coloured persons into this province, has long been [a] matter of deep and universal regret; both because it is believed, they would have been in much less distressing circumstances, had they continued in their previous condition. (*Acadian Recorder* Feb. 21, 1824, NSARM)

Ward's attacks on the Refugees continued unchallenged until the 1830s. As the Crown moved closer to total emancipation, Ward's views came under closer scrutiny and criticism. Thus, in the late summer or fall of 1831 when Ward again stated that blacks were happy as slaves, a letter writer to the *Acadian Recorder* challenged traditional thinking. "Libertas" rejected the idea that "[blacks] are contented with their lot, that they enjoy every comfort, and are free from anxious care" (*Acadian Recorder* Oct. 1, 1831).¹⁰ Indeed, the letter stated "a greater libel...was never uttered."

In its editorial policy, Halifax's *Acadian Recorder* remained ambivalent about slavery and emancipation. On occasion, it condemned slavery in the United States. For example, after reporting the annihilation of a group of American soldiers by blacks and natives in Florida in 1836, the paper attributed this action to the "recent horrible persecutions against the coloured people in the South" (*Acadian Recorder* Feb. 26, 1836, NSARM). The editorial concluded by stating that tyranny "carries with it the seeds of its own punishment." But, when commenting on local events, the *Acadian Recorder* depicted the Refugees as an example of why emancipation must be gradual for the good of whites and blacks:

We have a striking instance in the county of Halifax of the consequences of emancipating slaves, unprepared for freedom. It is well known that a number of them were brought here from the Southern States at the close of the last war, and settled at Hammond's Plains, Preston and Beech

Hill...The whole or at least the major part of them, nevertheless, have since their arrival here suffered extremely from cold, hunger and nakedness, though they had good land, firewood at their doors, and labour in abundance. Many of them regret their delivery from 'the house of bondage.' (*Acadian Recorder* Sept. 15, 1838, NSARM)

The Refugees' popular image had little or nothing to do with reality. The Refugees did not have good land, ready access to employment, or sufficient timberland. The paper's willingness to assert that the Refugees wished to remain slaves served only to absolve Nova Scotia of any moral responsibility for black poverty. This editorial reinforced the notion that the Refugees desired to return to a life of enslavement. The truth about the Refugees hardly mattered to the public or to local newspaper editors.

- The colony's willingness to accept the myth of Refugee wretchedness extended to the
- point that some people simply made up stories about their misconduct. In a letter to the *Acadian Recorder*, "S" told a tale about Benjamin Smith, "one of those from the Chesapeak[e]" (*Acadian Recorder* Nov. 25, 1815, NSARM). Smith supposedly had killed his infant and attacked his wife before her white employer ably intervened. The gallant letter writer claimed he had chased this "Infernal fiend of darkness," but then reported that Smith had committed suicide before he could be apprehended. The veracity of this tale must be questioned. A search of the names of over 900 male Refugees produces no one named Benjamin Smith. In fact, his name has never surfaced in any documentation. The story, true or not, painted a stark portrait of black criminality or insanity that was rarely challenged in the local newspapers. The alleged wickedness and indolence of the Refugees
- led many to endorse their removal to some part of Africa or the West Indies.¹¹

Writing in support of the American Colonization Society, the *Free Press* stated that "the benefits which will result to our country in thus getting rid of a large and increasing portion of people of colour, whose rights are imperfectly regulated may be considered as undeniable" (*Free Press* Sept. 2, 1817, NSARM). However, part of Nova Scotia's early identity emerged from the belief that it was an enlightened country endowed with laws that made it morally superior to the United States. Thus, the editors "were not perfectly satisfied that the free blacks in this country would be willing to change their place of abode, and relinquish the protection of equitable laws, a mild government...Still the institution [the ACS] merits support and attention" (*Free Press*). Ultimately, the Crown did finance the removal of 95 Black Refugees to Trinidad, but the vast majority, like their brethren in America, resisted repeated attempts to remove them to Africa or the West Indies. Like black Philadelphians, the Refugees also found it hard to believe that whites wished to do them any favours. They remained convinced that the government would sell them into slavery (Grant 1972:283-92).

- Despite this overwhelmingly racist environment, contemporary documents convey
- some positive images of the Black Refugees. Seth Coleman, a local storeowner in Dartmouth, who had vaccinated Refugees during the smallpox epidemic of 1814, said this about them:

Considering their Ignorance, I think them a Virtuous People, when in a former report I mentioned meeting them on the Sabbath, it would have been but justice to have added that I never found them in a rude or riotous assemblage, nor to my recollection did I ever see one of them intoxicated. (Coleman to Sabatier, Mar. 23, 1815, NSARM, 21: doc. 84)

Coleman also believed that thefts committed by the Black Refugees were the result of impending starvation rather than any inherent disposition towards criminality. A few others

also spoke out for tolerance. One writer to the *Acadian Recorder* in 1815 called for racial understanding:

Nobody who pretends a sense of decency, thinks any longer, that a difference of colour in human beings implies inequality of rights, or that because we find men ignorant, we ought to make them wretched. Ought we not rather inculcate into their minds the blessings of Religion, of Education, of Civilization, of Refinement? (*Acadian Recorder* Dec. 30, 1815, NSARM)

These opinions were based on the fundamental belief that the Black Refugees' "ignorant" condition was due to slavery rather than racial characteristics. Thus, once freed they could be brought up to the standards of Western civilization. In fact, Coleman argued that whites in the same position would have done no better than the Refugees (Coleman to Sabatier, March 23, 1815).

Some members of the colonial elite also defended the Refugees. In particular, Joseph Howe took a special interest in their plight. During the 1820s, Howe visited the black settlements and concluded that the residents lived in distressing circumstances. In *Western and Eastern Rambles: Travel Sketches of Nova Scotia*, Howe recorded the racism he observed from the local population toward the Refugees. "It has been the fashion to revile these poor devils...They are a burthen to the country, says Political Economy—they are rogues and vagabonds says the miser, who claps his hand upon his stick the moment they approach...they ought to be sent to Sierra Leone" (Parks 1973:55–6). Clearly, the majority of the population disliked the Black Refugees, but Howe defended them:

But suppose, good folks, that you were suddenly caught up and cast into Maryland—stripped to your trowsers, and a hoe put into your hand, do you think that hoeing Tobacco and Corn would come a bit more easy to you, under the burning rays of the sun, than cutting down trees and clearing land is to the negro, in a country where every thing is opposed to his accustomed habits? (Parks: 56–7)

Four years later, Howe went even further. He argued that some blacks must be incorporated into the important institutions of the colony. He stated that the Black Refugees were not "destitute either of intellect or ambition" and decried their virtual absence from the ranks of "Provincial and local functionaries" (*Novascotian* June 27, 1832, NSARM). Howe insisted the Black Refugees were as "clever" as the colony's other inhabitants who possessed more "amiable complexions" (*Novascotian*). Howe concluded, "Where would be the harm of a gentle infusion of black blood into those dignified orders of the state?" (*Novascotian*).

Joseph Howe represented the emerging impulse for reform that swept through the Western world in the 1830s. This impulse turned into rebellion in Upper and Lower Canada. **Jacksonian democracy** expanded constitutional rights to more white American males. The question we must answer is how did this affect racial attitudes in Nova Scotia? Although some scholars argue that the reform impulse represented a new era in Nova Scotia's race relations, the seeds of discord never disappeared, nor were the voices raised in support of the Refugees in the 1830s anything new (Sutherland 1996:35–54). There were similar voices of benevolent paternalism in Nova Scotia well before Howe, such as Theophilus Chamberlain and Seth Coleman. Hostile attitudes toward the Refugees did not change between 1813 and 1840. The same image of the Refugees appeared in local newspapers throughout the early nineteenth century. Certainly, Howe's attitudes were different than say Haliburton's or Ward's, but this hardly meant that race relations had improved for

to convict her of attempted arson. The court sentenced Mathews to two years in the County Work house (*Free Press* Jan. 28, 1817, NSARM).

- The Black Refugees were under the mistaken notion that they were free and equal citizens. As many had left behind the chains of slavery in the United States, they hoped to fully exercise their rights in Nova Scotia. Sadly, as had been the case with the Black Loyalists over 30 years earlier, the Refugees were barred from the very institutions that made freedom desirable. Blacks' marginal place was clearly demarcated when they attempted to vote, as can be seen during the Assembly election of 1826:

On Saturday a laughable incident enlivened the scene at the city elections. A poor man of colour, decorated with ribbons, presented himself among the crowd, and evidently not understanding his occupation, was shouldered about. Upon exclaiming, 'Me come to choose Massa Wood—he be good for de black fellow and reform,' and being hustled into a corner, the fellow exclaimed in a great fright—'Oh, don't kill poor black fellow—he mean no harm he vote for you all, and be a Radical—but don't kill him.' He looked so fully expressive of fear that he found some friends who procured him a retreat, and as he fled, he exclaimed, 'May I be d___d if I be a parliament man again.' (*Novascotian* Aug. 24, 1826, NSARM)

- The message here is clear. Blacks did not possess the full rights of citizenship. Admittedly, only a small minority of white men could vote at this time. Thus, the discrimination directed at the "poor man of colour" included mainstream ideas about class and status as well as race. Hierarchical barriers might well have been applied to poor white men who attempted to vote. However, in this particular case, the newspaper's presentation of the man's speech patterns indicate that his skin colour made the attempt at exercising the franchise even more offensive as well as amusing. The preceding quotation clearly outlines the location of the colour line in early-nineteenth-century Nova Scotia. It was drawn when the Black Refugees pushed the boundaries of their place, which was defined by their race and class.

It is quite likely that the Black Refugees felt helpless against the hostility of the local population. Indeed, one contemporary observed that the Refugees considered "themselves an oppressed and degraded people by White People" (cited in Winks 1971:126). The colour line was starkly drawn for the first generation of Black Refugees if they attempted to enter certain spheres in society that were reserved for white males. If blacks challenged these bastions of white supremacy, they were quickly assailed with racist rhetoric and court decisions that restricted their freedom.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This analysis of race relations in early-nineteenth-century Nova Scotia suggests the need for reconsideration of the province's identity. Although in practice Nova Scotia had abolished slavery by the 1820s, we must come to grips with the legacy of deep-seated bigotry against blacks and other minorities. Support for slavery elsewhere and anti-black sentiment defined local race relations. White identity in Nova Scotia came about because of racism and hatred toward the Black Refugees. White virtue could always be juxtaposed against the supposedly lazy, degenerate, and criminal blacks. Mainstream white Nova Scotian society valued ideals of industry, morality, and honesty—in other words, everything the Black Refugees were seen as lacking.

White attitudes toward the Black Refugees in Nova Scotia echoed racial attitudes throughout North America. In contrast to the regional stereotype, which paints the

Maritimes as consistently behind the rest of North America, Nova Scotians entertained opinions about people of African descent that were in step with contemporary views expressed in the northern United States. The Refugees and other free blacks were portrayed as being a danger to the established social order. Nova Scotia's highly status-conscious society reacted to the Refugees in ways that combined their understandings about race with their beliefs concerning class. The image of the Refugees was also paradoxical. Refugees were objects of humour but were also portrayed as dangerous and depraved criminals. The Refugees were a localized version of the infamous noble/dangerous savage paradigm. While a few voices painted a positive picture of the Refugees, for the most part white attitudes were overwhelmingly negative. As a result, race relations in early-nineteenth-century Nova Scotia were essentially hostile.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why is it important to understand race beyond the notion of it as a social construction?
2. Why were the Black Refugees usually depicted in a negative fashion in the local press?
3. How and why did Nova Scotian newspapers and popular writers equate the Refugees with the dangers of early emancipation?
4. Discuss the opinions of Joseph Howe. In what ways did he represent new attitudes about racial difference? How would you characterize his views?
5. How did the colour line restrict the actions of the Black Refugees?

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NOTES

- 1 For other treatments on views about free blacks, see Litwack 1961; Curry 1981; Levesque 1994; Melish 1998.
- 2 For the views of African-Americans toward colonization, see Mehlinger 1916 and Miller 1975. Martin Delany's career is explored in Ullman 1971.
- 3 For similar ideas about free blacks in Upper Canada in the nineteenth century, see Stouffer 1984:128–50.
- 4 Letter of John Poule, Sept. 30, 1816, NSARM, 419: doc. 67.
- 5 Report on Preston, Mar. 19, 1821, NSARM, 422: doc. 19.
- 6 For press depictions of black criminality, see *Novascotian*, Aug. 24, 1825, NSARM; *Novascotian*, Aug. 17, 1825, NSARM; *Novascotian*, Jun. 15, 1825, NSARM.
- 7 The approach taken in this section benefits greatly from George Elliott Clarke's excellent essay, 1994:13–40.
- 8 Thomas Chandler Haliburton, *A General Description of Nova Scotia* (Halifax: Royal Acadian School, 1823), p. 42. There is some controversy about this book. Although it is attributed to Haliburton, Walter Bromley was possibly the actual author.
- 9 Clarke points out that Scip was probably shorthand for Scipio, a common name for male Black Refugees.

- 10 Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management only has copies of the *Free Press* to 1829. Thus, I do not know the exact contents of Ward's statements. They were probably very similar to his statements in 1824.
- 11 In other newspaper accounts of the Black Refugees, I have always been able to cross-reference any name with other documents.
- 12 Coleman Report, 16 April 1816, NSARM, 419: doc. 76; Coleman to Sabatier, March 23, 1815.
- 13 Fingard finds that efforts to educate the poor were exploitative.
- 14 Coleman to Sabatier, Mar. 23, 1815; Coleman to Truman, Mar. 5, 1815, NSARM.
- 15 See petitions of Bray Cooper, Suther Blair, Levin Winder, Daniel Clayton, Land Grants, NSARM, RG 20 Series A.
- 16 Memorial of Inhabitants of the town of Halifax on behalf of the poor Black Settlers at Hammonds Plains and Preston, Mar. 6, 1824, NSARM, 80: doc. 32.
- 17 Petition of Inhabitants of Halifax for Black Settlers at Hammonds Plains and Preston, Mar. 12, 1825, NSARM, 80: doc. 35.
- 18 For examples of the prevalence of black servants and their conflicts with white employers, see *Novascotian*, Jan. 11, 1826; *Novascotian*, Jun. 15, 1815, NSARM; for a general discussion of servitude, see Robertson 1996:57-69.

chapter eight

Conclusion

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, students should be able to:

1. Understand how the Black Refugees might be placed within the context of the African Diaspora.
2. Discuss areas in African Nova Scotian history that deserve further scholarly investigation.
3. Describe the significance of the Battle at Fuller's Farm.

INTRODUCTION

On March 25, 1818, a party of white hunters trespassed on the farm of a Mr. Fuller in Dartmouth. Fuller, a "coloured man," took exception to their presence and demanded that they vacate his property immediately. The hunters claimed that they were on common land, which belonged to no single individual or family. After trading insults, blows erupted between Fuller and the hunters. At this point, a volley of rocks thrown by Mrs. Fuller and her children struck the hunters. The hunters drew their guns and ordered the

family to retreat. In response, Mrs. Fuller defiantly informed the trespassers that this land was "our own, we are not now in the U. States, and we can do as we like here."¹

Following the "Battle at Fuller's Farm," the local authorities charged Fuller with assault. Fuller took full advantage of his new status as a British subject and made his case to the Inferior Court of Common Pleas. He justified the assault as a legitimate response to the hunters' trespassing on his private land. Fuller's barrister argued that if the roles had been reversed no court would convict a white man of assault. Unmoved by these arguments, the all-white jury convicted Fuller and sentenced him to one week in jail. After the verdict, a magistrate warned Fuller and other blacks to correct what he viewed as their deviant social behaviour:

Had you been in your own country, added the worthy Magistrate, and acted as it appears you have done in this case, you probably would have been shot. I am sorry to observe that there are too many of your colour in this country, whose conduct is highly reprehensible; and you may depend on it, if you continue the same course, it will be the means of uniting the voice of the people against you, in one loud and general complaint, to have you sent out of the Province altogether. (*Acadian Recorder* Jul. 4, 1818, NSARM)

The incident at Fuller's farm indicates the necessity of a reassessment to truly understand the Black Refugees. This short monograph has attempted to treat the Refugees as a dynamic group who, though limited by circumstances, largely made their own history. The interpretations of C.B. Fergusson and Robin Winks need to be rejected as unfair and simplistic (Fergusson 1948:67; Winks 1971:114-41). Clearly, the Black Refugees cannot be understood simply as victims of white racism or as pawns of white philanthropy doomed to a dysfunctional existence in Nova Scotia. Although the idea of black victimology has been rejected in African American scholarship for quite some time (Holt 1997:311-32), this approach has had multiple lives in African Canadian studies (Walker 1997:155-78). And, while the idea that the Black Refugees made their own history is, indeed, part of this story, it is not the only aspect of the story, nor is it the most important.

This book is about the transition of the Black Refugees from American slaves to Nova Scotian subjects. This transition required negotiating the terms of freedom as immigrants in a hostile environment and as foreigners in a colony that valued hierarchy and the maintenance of place. The Black Refugees struggled to define their place within this society through work patterns and community development. More important, the Refugees negotiated with the local government and population in an attempt to understand the contours of freedom. At times, the Refugees were able to assert their understanding of freedom by rejecting government policies, such as the attempt to send them to Trinidad or Sierra Leone. Also, they subverted regulations that attempted to impose limits on their freedom of movement by frequently migrating to the local metropolis in search of employment or entertainment. Yet the government land policy absolutely circumscribed the Refugees' understanding of freedom. They were tied to the land, with little option other than to wait until the government decided to change the tickets of occupation into freehold grants. It took the government nearly 30 years to correct this injustice. The Refugees' understanding of freedom remained constrained throughout their first 30 years in Nova Scotia by lack of employment, hostile elements of the local population, and poverty. But the creation of families and communities made the Refugees' transition from American slaves to Nova Scotian subjects more than just a dismal commentary on the failure of post-emancipation black life.

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The Black Refugee experience transcends the borders of Canada and the United States. The experience might best be understood within the framework of the African Diaspora. If, as Joseph Harris argues, the African Diaspora is defined by the voluntary or involuntary migration of peoples of African descent, the Refugees fit well into this framework (Harris 1993). Some Refugees were directly from Africa and experienced the pain of involuntary migration. Yet the 1600 African Americans who migrated to Nova Scotia made a conscious decision to start life anew in search of freedom. Once in this northern colony, the Refugees continued to migrate throughout the colony in search of better employment. Some left the colony altogether for Trinidad, while others spent many years on the Atlantic as seamen before returning home to farm. The Black Refugee experience danced along the borders of Africa, North America, and the West Indies. Indeed, to some extent, the Refugees travelled the Atlantic world to assert their right to freedom of movement, which they had been denied under slavery. This chapter explores the major findings of the thesis and possible areas of future research.

The War of 1812 presented American slaves in the Chesapeake and the Georgia Sea Islands (and a few other places along the Georgia and South Carolina coastline) with an opportunity to escape the "Peculiar Institution." By the conclusion of the conflict, nearly 3500 slaves had absconded from their owners. This event should be understood as a conscious rebellion against slavery. Indeed, the Black Refugees initiated their own fight for freedom by fighting for the British. The Refugee rebellion intersected with British intervention, which was rooted in military expediency and the emerging humanitarian critique of slavery.

The Black Refugees entered Nova Scotia from disparate backgrounds and various identities. In other words, they had a complex array of occupational skills and cultural beliefs. Some had laboured in Virginia, while others suffered in the rice swamps and cotton plantations of the Georgia Sea Islands. The Refugees possessed different skills, ranging from husbandry to carpentry. In terms of culture, the Sea Island Refugees' language and customs were quite distinct from the partially anglicized culture of their Chesapeake counterparts. The Chesapeake Refugees brought with them ideas about the importance of separate African churches. In short, these were a people with both agency and agenda.

Once in Nova Scotia, the Black Refugees encountered a host society where class and racial barriers complicated the already difficult tasks of settlement and employment. After an initial period of uncertainty, the Refugees settled on 10-acre farms at Preston and Hammonds Plains on the outskirts of Halifax. Generally, Sea Island Refugees settled at Hammonds Plains, while those from the Chesapeake located at Preston. In these first years, friendships forged during slavery were reproduced in Nova Scotia. However, husbandry at Hammonds Plains and Preston proved to be difficult because the Refugees' farms were not large enough to support even the most basic needs of any family. This situation was made worse by a post-war economic recession, sterile land, and mass immigration from the British Isles.

The Black Refugees confronted these problems in different ways. Many worked as farmers and attempted to find supplemental income through domestic service and urban labour. Some families and individuals petitioned the government for more land in order to become subsistence farmers. A few families moved into the realm of commercial farming by increasing their land holdings. Overall, the Refugees struggled to become successful farmers, but the size and sterility of their farms inhibited this endeavour.

The Refugees also found employment in Halifax as seafarers, labourers, or in more specialized occupations. For example, two Refugees opened travel lodges, and others became masons and constables. Some Refugees left Halifax County altogether in search of better employment opportunities in other parts of the colony. However, the majority of Refugees gained their subsistence through market trading. Women dominated this economic endeavour. They travelled distances of up to 15 kilometres on the weekends in order to sell produce, especially an assortment of wild berries, at the Halifax market. The Refugees actively searched for employment and farming opportunities because their idea of freedom partially rested on the notion of payment for work. Clearly, they did not simply accept their tenuous position, which was rooted in sterile soil and a contracting post-war economy.

Despite the problems associated with settlement in Nova Scotia, the Refugees persisted in their attempts to make the colony their new home. Government officials, however, had other plans. They hoped to send the Refugees to the United States, Sierra Leone, or the West Indies. After numerous efforts, in 1821 the government convinced 95 Refugees to immigrate to Trinidad. Yet this represented only 6 percent of the community. The majority refused to leave Nova Scotia. They had forged new communities at Hammonds Plains and Preston. In rejecting the proposed emigration to Trinidad, the Refugees showed that they had defined themselves as a distinct group of African North Americans. During the 1820s and 1830s, the colonial authorities offered to redistribute the Refugees in small groups throughout Nova Scotia. Although a few Refugees were tempted by the government proposal, Refugee women refused outright to move. Their stance held sway in the community. The Refugees refused requests to leave their settlements because it would have meant the destruction of community relationships and institutions.

The Refugees' strong community connections were partially influenced by poverty and semi-isolation from urban amenities. Nova Scotia's severe climate, coupled with these problems, made them prone to sickness and disease. Despite squalid living conditions that led to high child mortality rates and spousal deaths, the Refugees maintained stable families. The vast majority of households were two-parent with several children. The ability to create families was an important hallmark of freedom for the Refugees. In Nova Scotia, they did not have to fear the sale of a husband, wife, or child. Stable families served as the building blocks for strong communities that fostered mutual understanding through difficult circumstances.

The Refugee communities placed great importance on the articulation and development of separate institutions in three areas: the church, education, and, by the late 1830s, improvement associations. At the time of their initial settlement, the Refugees were somewhat dependent on the white population for religious preachers and teachers. However, as the community began to take shape in the 1820s, the Refugees developed an indigenous leadership that provided the population with religious, social, and political guidance. This culminated in the establishment of African churches in 1832 at Hammonds Plains, Preston, and Halifax. These churches served as community centres, debate clubs, and social organizations. Although separatist in intention, the Refugee leadership had taken advantage of an emerging evangelical Christian movement among the white community that had encouraged the Black Refugees to develop these churches. In terms of education, they remained dependent on white teachers but petitioned the government for schools and other educational necessities. The Refugees participated in their own improvement associations, such as the African Friendly Society and the African Abolition Society, which focused on issues that were important to the community. The Refugees' separate institutions, such as

aid societies and the church, were relatively successful. But educational advancement along separate lines remained elusive.

The development of Refugee communities was partially shaped by interracial conflict and mistrust. In the early nineteenth century, people of African descent were relegated to the lowest place in society. Generally speaking, the white population saw the Refugees as ignorant, indolent, and incapable of making any contribution to colonial society. Similar to the American Colonization Society, Nova Scotian newspapers and the colonial elite advocated the Refugees' removal from Nova Scotia. As it became clear that they would not leave the colony, the white population resorted to intimidation—such as attacking blacks at elections or throwing rocks at their churches—in an effort to circumscribe the Refugees' freedom. The Black Refugees challenged these prevalent racial attitudes through the legal system. However, they were quickly reminded of the racial codes that could be imposed by the white establishment.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Given what historians know about the African Nova Scotian community in the late nineteenth century, it seems that the largest gap in our knowledge is the period 1854 to 1870.² There are several intriguing events that raise important questions for the historical community. I would suggest three possible avenues of research that focus on church development, urbanization, and identity.

Although the Black Refugees had created separate churches in 1832 and reaffirmed this direction with the formation of the African Baptist Association 22 years later, James Thomas, a white man from Wales, became pastor of the mother church in Halifax in 1861. His marriage to a black woman from Preston, Hannah Saunders, produced numerous children, who held various positions of influence in the African Nova Scotian community throughout the later nineteenth century. What does this tell us about black identity? Did the Refugees' descendants view racial identity in very fluid terms? Some churches of the African Baptist Association revolted against Thomas. Did the placement of a white man at the head of the mother church anger members?

As the nineteenth century progressed, the Black Refugees or their immediate offspring played an important role in shaping the urban communities at Halifax and Dartmouth. They served on the executive of the African Abolition Society, African Union Society, and African Friendly Society in the early 1850s (*Belcher's Farmer's Almanac*, 1851 and 1852). In 1851, the executive of the African Friendly Society included prominent Refugees, such as Prince William Sport (president) and Septimus Clarke (secretary). The executive of the African Abolition Society included Septimus Clark (president) and Thomas Steward (treasurer). The executive of the African Union Society included Thomas Johnston (vice-president) and John Spriggs (treasurer).

In addition, many black artisans had settled into the urban centre during the 1860s. Were these individuals of Refugee descent? If the executives of African Nova Scotians' philanthropic organizations are any indication, it might be beneficial to study the expansion of Refugee influence from the rural settlements to the urban centre. When did this occur? Who was involved in this transition? Did they retain contact with family members at Preston and Hammonds Plains? I would speculate that the Refugees played an essential role in the growth of Halifax's black community. Indeed, the one substantial study about

Halifax in the 1840s and early 1850s indicates that this might well have been the case (Sutherland 1996:35–54).

One of the most important areas of future research is the question of African Nova Scotian identity. As of 1840, the Refugees still had maintained a distinct identity, but this would change over the next 30 years. But when did disparate elements of the African Nova Scotian population create an inclusive and singular black identity (that is, if such a transition happened at all)? Interestingly, in the late nineteenth century, blacks from the West Indies and the United States visited and intermingled with indigenous African Nova Scotians. What did this mean for black provincial identity? Perhaps, through an examination of African Baptist church records and residential patterns, historians might be able to unpack these interesting questions. Certainly, there are many possible avenues of further research that can be investigated by scholars.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Overall, the Black Refugees attempted to carve out a position in Nova Scotia's quickly changing landscape during the early nineteenth century. Certainly, poverty had a levelling affect on the Refugee community. However, we should not treat the Refugees in a homogenous fashion. They reacted to freedom in various ways with different degrees of success. The Refugees were not wards of the colonial government. They pursued steady employment and attempted to become successful agriculturists as is illustrated by their petitions to the government. As the society matured, an emerging leadership offered the Refugees spiritual, social, and political guidance. In the first 25 years of settlement, the story of the Refugees might be understood as an ongoing struggle. Indeed, by 1840 they still suffered from marginality in terms of employment, settlement, educational opportunities, and the judicial system. Yet careful research into the experience of the Black Refugees reveals a group determined to make a place for themselves in colonial society.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why is it important to understand the Refugees' history in terms aside from agency?
2. Why should we frame the Black Refugee experience within the framework of the African Diaspora?

RECOMMENDED READING

The African Diaspora and African North American Historiography

Davies, Carole Boyce and Ali Mazrui, eds. *The African Diaspora: African Origins and New World Identities*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999.

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NOTES

- 1 *Acadian Recorder* Jul. 4, 1818, NSARM; Ben Fuller and Maria Fuller, Jun. 11, 1818, Minutes of the Court of Quarter Sessions, December 1814 to December 1826.
- 2 The following studies offer a good understanding of the late nineteenth century: Fingard 1992:169-95; Morton 1994:185-210; Fingard 1995:49-64.

Afterword

The study of African Nova Scotians as part of the Atlantic world or African Diaspora is still in its infancy. The pioneering work of Robin Winks, James Walker, and John Grant provided an important foundation for this work. As scholars become more interested in topics that focus on the transition from slavery to freedom in the New World, Nova Scotia should garner more interest.

I conducted the research for this book as part of my doctoral dissertation at Dalhousie University in Halifax. It is important to note that I am not an African Nova Scotian but, rather, an African American. In other words, I am not a member of the local black community, though I have lived in Halifax for six years. It is important to recognize this because certainly a community member might have read my evidence in a different light. I do not claim to have an internal understanding of the diverse community that makes up the current African Nova Scotian population. Nevertheless, it is my sincere hope that people in the community will read this book and realize that African Nova Scotian history has more to it than the Loyalists and Africville.

Although this book is written for an undergraduate audience, I hope specialists in African American and Atlantic world history will find it useful and interesting. The book aims only to give people a solid understanding of African Nova Scotian history in the early nineteenth century.

Harvey Amani Whitfield
August 25, 2003

Glossary

The **African Friendly Society** was established in 1831. It seems to have promoted the black community's linkages with the British Crown. For example, the society organized black marchers for Queen Victoria's coronation parade in Halifax. The society also served as an improvement and aid society. Its executive seems to have been made up of the elite members of the black community.

Agency is the idea that people are able to influence their own destinies even if they live in a situation that is not of their own choosing. This concept has underpinned the histories of American slavery and African colonialism as well as the studies of Aboriginal people in Canada and the United States. However, the idea of agency has its critics, who argue that saying that an oppressed group has agency sometimes obscures the fact that the group in question still suffers from oppression.

The **American Fugitives** were composed of black immigrants primarily from the Chesapeake region and Kentucky. This diverse group also included free blacks from Chicago, Philadelphia, New York, and other urban centres in the northern United States. The American Fugitives began arriving in Upper Canada in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, in part because of the Abolition Act of 1793 and the War of 1812. However, the majority migrated to Upper Canada after the passage of the American Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, which allowed southern slave owners to claim their former chattel who had escaped to a northern state. The Fugitives settled throughout Upper Canada and particularly in separate black townships, such as Wilberforce or Buxton.

Assimilation is the idea that certain groups, considered foreign to the host population, can be absorbed into the dominant culture. In the United States, this is called the melting pot theory. Canada does not, at least openly, pursue this policy with its immigrants. Rather, immigrants are encouraged to keep their culture. In the context of this book, the majority of white Americans simply believed that blacks could not be assimilated into mainstream American culture on equal footing.

Backland settlers were forced to settle in some of the least fertile land in Cape Breton. These immigrants were usually reduced to squatting on land because they could not afford to pay for Crown lands. The land they occupied had limited potential, and many Backlanders were forced to seek work off their farms in order to survive.

Benevolent societies were quite common in the nineteenth century. Generally speaking, they were composed of respectable members of local communities who, supposedly, wanted to help the less fortunate. However, some scholars argue that these groups were actually mechanisms of social control—upper-class elements telling poor people how to live their own lives. In Nova Scotia, the Ladies Bazaar (made up of elite Halifax women) knit socks and provided clothing and food for the Refugees. The African Nova Scotian community also developed their own benevolent organizations in the 1840s, such as the Anglo-African Mutual Aide and Improvement Society and the African Abolition Society.

The **Black Loyalists** supported Great Britain during the American Revolutionary War because British officials promised them land and freedom in Nova Scotia. As a result, over 3000 African Americans had immigrated to Nova Scotia by the end of the war. Unfortunately, they did not obtain land or meaningful freedom, and about 1200 left the colony for Sierra Leone in 1793.

The **Chesapeake** region includes the Chesapeake Bay, Maryland, and Virginia.

Ethnic bosses are powerful personalities in a given community. Their power rarely extends beyond the confines of the community in which they reside.

The **extended household** consists of members of a household that are not part of the traditional nuclear family. This could include aunts, uncles, cousins, brothers, sisters, and in-laws.

Freehold grants allowed settlers to own the land they occupied. More important, recipients of freehold grants could sell their land if they wished to move to the city or to another farm.

Gender is a social concept that assigns particular character traits to men and women.

Gender roles are culturally determined notions that males and females have different duties and obligations in society.

Hierarchy is a system in which certain members of a community are considered more valuable than others. Lower orders are expected to be deferential and humble before individuals who are considered more important to that society.

Hiring out became a popular practice among slave owners in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as a result of the changing economy in the Chesapeake region. Generally, wealthier planters hired out surplus slaves, usually women and children, to less-well-to-do farmers.

Historiography is the body of literature written about a particular subject. For example, this book is part of the historiography about the Black Refugees. Historiography is also understood as the methods of historical scholarship.

Jacksonian democracy (Andrew Jackson, president of the United States, 1829–37) refers to the period when the American franchise was expanded to include more white males. Before Jackson's presidency, the franchise was restricted to certain upper-class elements of the white male population. Jackson's policies have been portrayed as helping the working classes of urban centres throughout the U.S. and farmers on the American frontier. More recently, historians have emphasized the middle-class nature of his policies—that is, Jackson's policies created new opportunities for small business owners and farmers. It is unclear, however, how helpful Jacksonian democracy actually was for those who fell outside of the emerging middle class. Perhaps, while recognizing the importance of Jacksonian democracy, we can also understand it in terms of its limitations, especially regarding the poor and women.

The **Jamaican Maroons** resisted British colonial rule for several years. By the mid-1790s, however, the British overcame the Maroons and sent them to Nova Scotia in 1796. In Nova Scotia, the local government attempted to impose Christianity and other aspects of Western civilization upon the Maroons. By 1800, the Maroons opted to remove to Sierra Leone.

The **Lowcountry** is the coastal region of South Carolina and Georgia.

The **Maritime region** consists of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island. These provinces are located in eastern Canada.

Race is a system of classification that divides and separates human beings according to physical characteristics, such as skin colour. Typically, physical characteristics are sociologically marked as being significant, thus "racializing" a group of people.

Republicanism is the belief that a country's citizens should have the final say in the formation and policies of that particular state's government. Republican governments do not have monarchs or appointed heads of state (e.g., Governors General or lieutenant-governors).

The **Sea Islands** are located off the coast of Georgia and South Carolina.

The **task system** required slaves to work intensively at a given assignment. Once slaves completed their work, they could spend the rest of the day as they pleased.

Tickets of location forced the Refugees to live on farms as squatters rather than as owner-occupiers. As a result, they could not sell their land in order to move to more productive farms.

The **Underground Railroad** was a series of paths and trails that American slaves used to make their way from the southern United States to Upper Canada (Ontario). There were some safe houses along the way in which African Americans took refuge in order to hide from pursuing slave catchers. Slaves usually travelled under the cover of darkness in order to reach a safe area that might be home to antislavery activists. Historian James Walker notes that it is debatable how many slaves actually enjoyed the popular image of the Underground Railroad—that is, benevolent white safe houses, specific paths, and secure passage to Upper Canada.

War of 1812 blacks and Black Refugees refer to the same group of people that immigrated to Nova Scotia during and immediately after the War of 1812. They settled primarily on rural farmlands outside of Halifax. Unlike the Black Loyalists or Jamaican Maroons, the majority of the War of 1812 blacks remained in Nova Scotia despite difficult conditions.

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Dispatches from Secretary of State to Lieutenant Governor (1838) {RG 1}

Dispatches from Secretary of State to Lieutenant Governor (1839) {RG 1}

- Ethnic Groups: Blacks {MG 15}
- Files of the House of Assembly (1815–1818) {RG 1}
- Files of the House of Assembly (1819–1822) {RG 1}
- Files of the House of Assembly (1823–1828) {RG 1}
- Files of the House of Assembly (1826–1829) {RG 1}
- Files of the House of Assembly (1828–1831) {RG 1}
- Files of the House of Assembly (1829–1831) {RG 1}
- Files of the House of Assembly (1832–1833) {RG 1}
- Files of the House of Assembly (1834–1835) {RG 1}
- Files of the House of Assembly (1836–1837) {RG 1}
- Files of the House of Assembly (1838–1841) {RG 1}
- Grand Jury Room Book (1811–1828)
- Governor's Petitions (1780–1891) {RG 1}
- Halifax County: Judicial Proceedings and Magistrates Papers (1799–1879) {RG 37}
- Index of Marriage Bonds (1760–1850) {Public Records List Series 1253}
- Journal of the House of Assembly (1819) {RG 1}
- Journal of the House of Assembly (1821) {RG 1}
- Journal of the House of Assembly (1837) {RG 1}
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- Land Grants, County Papers (1781–1858) {RG 20 Series C}
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- Legislative Assembly of Nova Scotia (1758–1968) {RG 1}
- Legislative Files of the Council (1809–1816) {RG 1}
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- Legislative Files of the Council (1823–1830) {RG 1}
- Legislative Files of the Council (1830–1832) {RG 1}
- Legislative Files of the Council (1832–1836) {RG 1}
- Legislative Files of the Council (1837–1838) {RG 1}
- Legislative Files of the Council (1836–1838) {RG 1}
- Legislative Files of the Council (1839–1841) {RG 1}
- Lieutenant Governor's Letter Book (1808–1816) {RG 1}
- Lieutenant Governor's Letter Book (1816–1820) {RG 1}
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- Lieutenant Governor's Letter Book (1828–1836) {RG 1}

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- Marriage Bonds (1763-1864) {1253 Public Record List Series}
- Minutes of Council (1799-1815) {RG 1}
- Minutes of Council (1816-1819) {RG 1}
- Minutes of Council (1818-1825) {RG 1}
- Minutes of Council (1826-1832) {RG 1}
- Minutes of Council (1832-1837) {RG 1}
- Minutes of Council (1838-1841) {RG 1}
- Minutes of the Court of Quarter Sessions (1814-1826)
- Minutes of the Court of Quarter Sessions (1817-1829)
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- Negro and Maroon Settlements (1790-1834) {RG 1}
- Negro and Maroon Settlements (1813-1816) {RG 1}
- Negro and Maroon Settlements (1816-1818) {RG 1}
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- Official Correspondence and Legislative Papers (1802-1815) {RG 1}
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