

Black American Refugees in Nova Scotia
1813-1840

by

Harvey A. Whitfield

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

At

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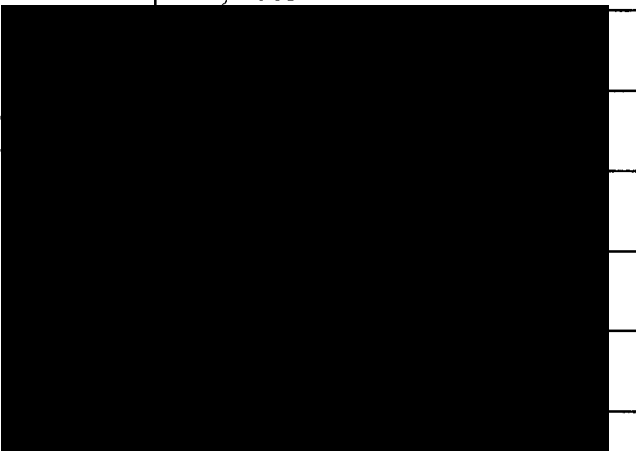
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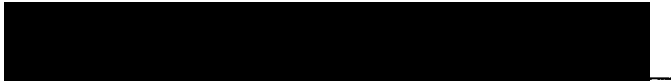
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To Robin and My Family

Table of Contents

Abstract: vi

Abbreviations: vii

Acknowledgements: viii

Chapter 1: Historical Context and Historiography. 1

Chapter 2: Refugee Origins and Escape. 30

Chapter 3: Government Policy and Black Consciousness. 79

Chapter 4: Land and Labour. 114

Chapter 5: Material Conditions and Family Structure. 185

Chapter 6: Leadership, Institutions, and Identity. 222

Chapter 7: Racial Attitudes and Race Relations. 257

Chapter 8: Conclusion. 296

Bibliography: 311

Abstract

This thesis examines the immigration and settlement in Nova Scotia of the War of 1812 African Americans. It challenges previous historians' arguments that these immigrants were the pawns of white philanthropy or pathetic wards of the colonial government. The thesis attempts to understand these African Americans' history by recognising their agency and ability to control their own destinies. The War of 1812 blacks are placed within a complex framework that explores their work patterns, material conditions, family structure, community institutions, and relations with the white community in Nova Scotia during the early nineteenth century. These immigrants hoped to find meaningful freedom in Nova Scotia through work and the formation of viable communities. Yet, poor economic conditions and racial discrimination circumscribed their understanding of freedom. Despite these obstacles, by 1840, the War of 1812 blacks had created stable families and communities.

Abbreviations

American Colonization Society (ACS)

Butler Plantation Papers (BPP)

House of Assembly (HOA)

Journal of the House of Assembly (JHOA)

Public Archives of Nova Scotia (PANS)

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Chapter 1: Historical Context, Historiography, and Language

Historical Context

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 Ile 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 brought more slaves but, most importantly, many recently freed blacks to the colony.¹

By 1784, 3500 Black Loyalists had immigrated to Nova Scotia and, in addition 1232 slaves were brought to the

¹Robin Winks, The Blacks in Canada (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), pp. 25, 37-38, 41; Bridglal Pachai, Beneath the Clouds of the Promised Land: The Survival of Nova Scotia's Blacks Volume 1, 1600-1800 (Halifax: Black Educators Association of Nova Scotia, 1987), pp. 30-37; Kenneth Donovan, "Emblems of Conspicuous Consumption: Slaves and Their Owners in Ile Royale, 1713-1760," Acadiensis 25 (Autumn, 1995), pp. 3-32; Thomas Watson Smith, "The Slave in Canada," Collections of the Nova Scotia Historical Society 10 (1899), pp. 1-161; Barry Cahill, "Slavery and the Judges of Loyalist Nova Scotia," University of New Brunswick Law Journal 43 (1994), pp. 73-135; Barry Cahill, "Habeas Corpus and Slavery in Nova

colony by their white Loyalist owners. Thus, Nova Scotia, while not dependent on slave labour, was in fact a "colonial slave society."² 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 emigrated to Sierra Leone in 1792-93 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."³ 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

Scotia: *R. v. Hecht Ex Parte Rachel, 1798*," University of New Brunswick Law Journal 44 (1995), pp. 179-209.

²Cahill, "Habeas Corpus," p. 193.

³James Walker, "The Black Loyalists in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone," (Ph.D. dissertation, Dalhousie University,

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.⁴

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 civilisation. However, the Maroons refused to change their culture. They were also frustrated that Nova Scotia's climate prevented the growing of 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

1973), p. 672. Some of the Black Loyalists received no land at all.

⁴James Walker, "The Establishment of a Free Black Community in Nova Scotia, 1783-1840", in The African Diaspora: Interpretive Essays, eds. Martin L. Kilson and Robert I. Rotberg (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), pp. 224-28.

tired of Nova Scotia, and in 1800, they also took advantage of the opportunity to emigrate to Sierra Leone.⁵

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. Secondly, 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, it still shaped the opinions of the white

⁵James Walker, The Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone 1783-1870 (London: Longman and Dalhousie University Press, 1976); Lennox O. Picart, "The Trelawny Maroons and Sir John Wentworth: The Struggle to Maintain Their Culture, 1796-1800," (MA thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1993); Mavis Campbell, ed., Nova Scotia and the Fighting Maroons: A Documentary History (Williamsburg: Department of Anthropology, College of William and Mary, 1990). John

population toward African American settlers during the post-War of 1812 period.

Scholars of early nineteenth century Nova Scotia have emphasised four important themes in order to understand the state of 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 organisations and philanthropic individuals attempted to improve the lives of the poor, immigrants, natives, 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

Grant, The Maroons in Nova Scotia (Halifax: Formac Press, 2002).

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.⁶

Historiography

Historians have long recognised the dynamic nature of Nova Scotian Pre-Confederation history. For example, Victorian scholars focused on political institutions and mercantile development.⁷ Yet, the history of the Maritime

⁶C.B. Fergusson, A Documentary History of the Establishment of the Negroes in Nova Scotia (Halifax: The Public Archives of Nova Scotia, 1948), p. 158; David Sutherland, "1810-1820: War and Peace," in The Atlantic Region to Confederation: A History, eds., Philip Buckner and John Reid (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), pp. 234-60; Judith Fingard, "The 1820s: Peace, Privilege, and the Promise of Progress," Atlantic Region, pp. 263-83; Rosemary Ommer, "The 1830s: Adapting Their Institutions to Their Desires," Atlantic Region, pp. 286-304; J.S. Martell, Immigration to and Emigration from Nova Scotia, 1815-1838 (Halifax: The Public Archives of Nova Scotia, 1942), pp. 7-33; Thomas Power, The Irish In Atlantic Canada, 1780-1900 (Fredericton: New Ireland Press, 1991); Judith Fingard, "Attitudes toward the Education of the Poor in Colonial Halifax," Acadiensis 2 (Spring, 1973), pp. 15-42; Brian Cuthbertson, Johnny Bluenose at the Polls: Epic Nova Scotian Election Battles, 1758-1848 (Halifax: Formac Press, 1994).

⁷Beamish Murdoch, A History of Nova Scotia or Acadie (Halifax: J. Barnes, 1865-67) 3 volumes; Duncan Campbell, Nova Scotia in its Historical, Mercantile and Industrial

region became peripheral to major developments in Canadian historical writing during the twentieth century.⁸ In the late 1960s, scholars argued that regional history could offer perspectives on Canada that national studies had neglected.⁹ 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.¹⁰ Yet, not all

Relations (Montreal: J. Lovell, 1873); Duncan Campbell, History of Prince Edward Island (Charlottetown: Bremner Brothers, 1875).

⁸Carl Berger, The Writing of Canadian History: Aspects of English-Canadian Historical, 1900-1970 (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1976).

⁹J.M.S. Careless, "'Limited Identities' in Canada," Canadian Historical Review 50 (March, 1969), pp. 1-10; Philip Buckner, "Acadiensis II," Acadiensis 1 (Autumn, 1971), pp. 3-9.

¹⁰Judith Fingard, "English Humanitarianism and the Colonial Mind: Walter Bromley in Nova Scotia, 1813-25," Canadian Historical Review 54 (June, 1973), pp. 123-51; Judith Fingard, "The Relief of the Unemployed Poor in Saint John, Halifax, and St. John's, 1815-1860," Acadiensis 5 (Autumn, 1975), pp. 32-55. The first edition of Acadiensis in 1971 represented an important benchmark in the history of Canadian regionalism. For more examples of the historiography produced by this journal in the early years, see The Acadiensis Index, 1971-1983; also see, J. Murray Beck, Politics of Nova Scotia: I, 1710-1896 (Tantallon: Four East Publications, 1985); T.W. Acheson, "The Great

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.¹¹

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.¹²

Merchant and Economic Development in Saint John, 1820-1850," Acadiensis 8 (Spring, 1979), pp. 3-27; Graeme Wynn, Timber Colony: A Historical Geography of New Brunswick (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981).

¹¹Julian Gwyn, Excessive Expectations: Maritime Commerce and the Economic Development of Nova Scotia, 1740-1870 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998).

¹²Janet Guildford and Suzanne Morton, eds., Separate Spheres: Women's Worlds in the 19th-Century Maritimes (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1994); David A. Sutherland, "Race Relations in Halifax, Nova Scotia, During the Mid-Victorian Quest for Reform," Journal of the Canadian Historical Association 7 (1996), pp. 35-54; George Elliott Clarke, "White Niggers, Black Slaves: Slavery, Race and Class in T.C. Haliburton's *The Clockmaker*," Nova Scotia Historical Review 14 (1994), pp. 13-40; Judith Fingard,

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?¹³

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.¹⁴ Similar to the African American population

"Race and Respectability in Victorian Halifax," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 20 (May, 1992), pp. 169-95.

¹³Ian McKay, "A Note on 'Region' in Writing the History of Atlantic Canada," *Acadiensis* 29 (Spring, 2000), pp. 89-101; Suzanne Morton, "Gender, Place, and Region: Thoughts on the State of Women in Atlantic Canadian History," *Atlantis* 25.1 (Fall/Winter, 2000), pp. 119-28.

¹⁴Gary Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); James Horton and Lois Horton, *Black Bostonians: Family Life and Community Struggle in the Antebellum North* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1979); George Levesque, *Black Boston: African American Life and Culture in urban America, 1750-1860* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994); Leonard Curry, *The Free Black in Urban America, 1800-1850: The Shadow of the Dream* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); James Horton, *Free People of Color: Inside the African American Community* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993); Leon Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961); for

in Boston and Philadelphia, the War of 1812 blacks found employment in seafaring, created separate churches, and struggled to create an identity that acknowledged their experience in North America while memorialising their distant homeland in Africa.¹⁵

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

the experience of free blacks in the south, see Ira Berlin, Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South (New York: Pantheon, 1974).

¹⁵Jeffrey Bolster, Black Jacks: African American Seaman in the Age of Sail (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); George Levesque, "Inherent Reformers-Inherited Orthodoxy: Black Baptists in Boston, 1800-1873," Journal of Negro History 49 (October, 1975), pp. 491-525; Emma Jones Lapsansky, "'Since They Got Those Separate Churches': Afro-Americans and Racism in Jacksonian Philadelphia," American Quarterly 32 (Spring, 1980), pp. 54-78; C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya, The Black Church in the African American Experience (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990); Patrick Rael, Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

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. In this sense, Nova Scotia's black population had much in common with their counterparts in the United States.¹⁶

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 Black Refugees were semi-rural people. They lived on farms approximately 15

¹⁶Kenneth Kusmer, "The Black Urban Experience in American History," in Darlene Clarke Hine, ed., The State of Afro-American History: Past, Present, and Future (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), pp. 91-122.

kilometres from the urban centre of Halifax, but still participated in city life. In short, we can understand the War of 1812 black experience in Nova Scotia as 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 the later arriving 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, attempted to settle in Nova Scotia, and abandoned the colony in protest against their treatment by the government and local white population.¹⁷ The last major black immigration to Nova

¹⁷Of course, the majority of the Black Loyalists remained in Nova Scotia, but historians and others have focused on the exodus. For example, see James Walker, Black Loyalists; Syl Cheney-Coker, The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar (London: Heinemann, 1990). George Elliott Clarke implores scholars to reconsider the image of the

Scotia, 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 importantly, 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 thusly:

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.¹⁸

Negative interpretations about the War of 1812 blacks began in the nineteenth century. Late Victorian historians argued that African Nova Scotians were lazy and burdensome

Black Loyalists that stayed in Nova Scotia. He also outlines the how the historiography has short-changed the Black Loyalists who remained in Nova Scotia, see "Syl Cheney-Coker's Nova Scotia, or the Limits of Pan Africanism," Dalhousie Review 77 (Summer, 1997), pp. 283-96.

¹⁸Winks, Blacks, p. 114.

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.¹⁹

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.²⁰ During the 1880s and 1890s, African Nova Scotians had protested against segregated schools and discriminatory hiring practices. Moreover, they had become

¹⁹Mary Jane Katzmann (Mrs. William Lawson), History of the Townships of Dartmouth, Preston and Lawrencetown (Halifax: Morton, 1893), pp. 187-88.

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.²¹ Some twentieth century historians 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."²² These enquires 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

²⁰Adams Archibald, "Story of Deportation of Negroes from Nova Scotia to Sierra Leone," Collections of the Nova Scotia Historical Society 12 (1891), pp. 129-54.

²¹Fingard, "Race and Respectability"; Judith Fingard, "A Tale of Two Preachers: Henry Hartley, Francis Robinson and the Black Churches of the Maritimes," Journal of the Royal Nova Scotia Historical Society 5 (2002), pp. 23-43.

²²D.C. Harvey, "Preface," in Documentary.

laws. Also, Carrie Best published The Clarion, which condemned Nova Scotia for its general acceptance of Jim Crowism.²³ 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.²⁴ 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

²³Constance Backhouse, "Racial Segregation in Canadian Legal History: Viola Desmond's Challenge, Nova Scotia, 1946," Dalhousie Law Journal 17 (1994), pp. 299-362; Carrie Best, The Lonesome Road: The Autobiography of Carrie Best (New Glasgow: Clarion Press, 1977); Winks, Blacks, pp. 351, 382, 419, 458, 474, 512.

²⁴Winks, Blacks, pp. 419-20.

advancement in human relations."²⁵ 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."²⁶ 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 that could be understood as a drain on the colonial treasury. Fergusson's work is important because it influenced the views of other historians.²⁷

Although writing twenty years later in the shadow of the American Civil Rights Movement, Robin Winks reached

²⁵Fergusson, Documentary, p. 1.

²⁶Ibid., p. 67.

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, create successful communities, and suffered from their "persistent lack of leaders."²⁸ 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."²⁹ Winks however offered no footnote for such a sweeping interpretation. Seemingly, he applied Stanley Elkins' argument that slavery made blacks indolent and unimaginative to the War of 1812 blacks.³⁰ Going even

²⁷Ibid., pp. 1, 66.

²⁸Winks, Blacks, p. 114.

²⁹Ibid., p. 124.

³⁰Stanley Elkins, Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959); for critiques of Elkins, see Eugene

further, he contended that the War of 1812 blacks were "[u]nderstandably unable to help themselves."³¹ Moreover, these immigrants believed that freedom "involved no responsibilities." Winks concluded that the War of 1812 migrants' experience was simply miserable.³²

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 to the actions of the War of 1812 African Americans. For example, in his 1976 essay, James Walker, who specialised in the Black Loyalist experience, pointed out that the War of 1812 African Americans faced unfair government practices and

Genovese, "Rebelliousness and Docility in the Negro Slave: A Critique of the Elkins Thesis," Civil War History 4 (December, 1967), pp. 293-314; Ann Lane, The Debate over Slavery: Stanley Elkins and his Critics (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971); John Blassingame, Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); Herbert Gutman, The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976); Lawrence Levine, Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

³¹Winks, Blacks, p. 125.

³²Ibid., p. 124.

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 criticised government policy and emphasised that at least some of them had become successful settlers.³³

Historical scholarship about the War of 1812 immigrants has not been monolithic or entirely negative. Yet, these studies do have certain limitations. Most problematic is the work of Fergusson and Winks who portray the experience of the War of 1812 blacks as being both bleak and static. Little effort is made to develop the theme of change over time. Second, these works do not examine, in detail, the diversity of actions and attitudes represented by the African American immigrants. Third, they are nearly thirty years old and thus do not incorporate recent developments in regional, national, and international historiography. This problem has been

³³Walker, "Free Black," pp. 205-36; John Grant, The Immigration & Settlement of the Black Refugees of The War of 1812 in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick (Hantsport: Lancelot Press, 1990), pp. 118-20.

compounded by Robin Winks who published a second edition of The Blacks in Canada in 1997, but chose not to revise his text.³⁴ John Grant also decided to publish his work "as it was written twenty years ago."³⁵ Fourth, little effort has been made, with the exception of James Walker's brief pamphlet, to understand the War of 1812 migrants' contribution to Nova Scotia's black identity.³⁶ Accordingly, major questions remain to be explored about these immigrants before we can definitively understand their history.

This work attempts to recognise 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

³⁴Robin Winks, The Blacks in Canada: A History (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2nd Edition, 1997).

³⁵Grant, Black Refugees, p. 10.

actions. Also, this study reassesses the documentation that Fergusson examined and by placing that evidence in a more modern historiographic perspective, 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 thesis seeks to portray these immigrants as being more than passive and undifferentiated farm labourers.

³⁶James Walker, The Black Identity in Nova Scotia: Community and Institutions in Historical Perspective

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 1783.³⁷ The word Loyalist carries a more positive connotation than does Refugee. The latter implies loss, passivity, and victimisation, 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, risked their lives in escaping from slavery, and fought for

(Dartmouth: Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia, 1985).

³⁷Fergusson, Documentary; Winks, Blacks; Grant Black Refugees; Walker, "Free Black"; Pachai, Beneath the Clouds; Frank Boyd, ed., McKerrow: A Brief History of Blacks in Nova Scotia, 1783-1895 (Halifax: Afro Nova Scotian Enterprises, 1976); Picart, "The Trelawny Maroons."

the British during the wars.³⁸ 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.³⁹ 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?⁴⁰

³⁸Walker, Black Loyalists, pp. 1-12; John Weiss, "Black American resistance to Slavery in the War of 1812: The Corps of Colonial Marines," (unpublished paper, British Association for American Studies, 1998); Frank Cassell, "Slaves of the Chesapeake Bay Area and The War of 1812," Journal of Negro History 57 (April, 1972), pp. 144-55. In 1826, the British government paid the United States government \$1,204,960 for the Refugees.

³⁹Recent scholarship has questioned the construction of Black Loyalist identity, see Barry Cahill, "The Black Loyalist Myth in Atlantic Canada," Acadiensis 29 (Autumn, 1999), pp. 76-87; for a vigorous response see James Walker, "Myth, History, and Revisionism: The Black Loyalists Revisited," Acadiensis 29 (Autumn, 1999), pp. 88-105.

⁴⁰American slaves that escaped to Upper and Lower Canada were referred to as Fugitives and Refugees.

One of the first pieces of correspondence about the Black Refugees, between Lt. Governor John Sherbrooke and Colonial Secretary Lord Bathurst, referred to the Refugees simply as "Black People."⁴¹ A year later, in 1814, they were described as Black Refugees.⁴² 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 them as "people of colour."⁴³ The Lieutenant Governor's changing labels for the Black Refugees reflected a general trend. His successor, Lord Dalhousie, usually characterised them as "Refugee Negroes," but in his diary they became "Chesapeake Blacks."⁴⁴ Government officials and the local population labelled them interchangeably as "Black

⁴¹Sherbrooke to Bathurst, 18 October 1813, Public Archives of Nova Scotia (PANS), vol. 111, pp. 66-67.

⁴²Sherbrooke to Cochrane, 5 October 1814, PANS, vol. 111, pp. 101-103.

⁴³Sherbrooke to House of Assembly, 24 February 1815, PANS, vol. 288, doc. 101.

⁴⁴Dalhousie to Bathurst, 2 December 1816, PANS, vol. 112, pp. 1-5; Dalhousie to Bathurst, 14 August 1817, vol. 112, pp. 32-35; Entry for 28 September 1817 in Majory

Refugees," "Negro Refugees," "People of Colour," and "Black People."⁴⁵ The Black Refugees described themselves in terms ranging from "Inhabitants of Colour" to "Refugees" in petitions to the government.⁴⁶ 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."⁴⁷ 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, characterisation differed with the particular circumstances of an individual or group.

Whitelaw ed., The Dalhousie Journals Volume One, (Canada: Oberon Press, 1978), p. 63.

⁴⁵Minutes of Council, 30 April 1817, PANS vol. 214 1/2; Dalhousie to Bathurst, 29 December 1816, PANS, vol. 111, pp. 6-9; Chamberlain to Morris, 4 January 1816, PANS, vol. 419, doc. 46; Coleman to Sabatier, 23 March 1815, PANS, vol. 21, doc. 84.

⁴⁶School Petition, 11 November 1820, PANS, vol. 420, doc. 22; Petition of Coloured People at Preston, 23 February 1841, PANS, Box-Crown Lands-Peninsula of Halifax-1840-45.

⁴⁷Acadian Recorder 29 August 1818.

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 recent research indicates that substantial numbers of the Refugees were from Georgia.⁴⁸ The term Refugee need not be abandoned or quarantined with quotation marks 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 recognise the similarities of the two influxes and abandon the notion popularised by Winks that one group exhibited pride, while

⁴⁸Malcolm Bell, Major Butler's Legacy: Five Generations of a Slaveholding Family (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), pp. 170-91; Mary Bullard, Black Liberation on Cumberland Island in 1815 (De Leon Springs: E.O. Painter Printing, 1983). Although these books are somewhat old, they are more recent than the work of Fergusson, Winks, Walker, and Grant.

the other one was devoid of nearly every asset--pride, skills, capital, and agency.⁴⁹

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 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

⁴⁹Winks, Blacks, p. 114.

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.

Chapter 2: Refugee Origins and Escape

Any history of the Black Refugees must begin with an examination of their encounter with American Slavery. Yet historians of Nova Scotia's Black Refugees largely have made little effort to understand the impact of the "Peculiar Institution." They offer passing remarks about the Black Refugees' origins, without first conducting a rigorous examination of relevant primary and secondary sources. Robin Winks and C.B. Fergusson are particularly prone to accept uncritically Lord Dalhousie's pejorative comment about the Refugees to the effect that without "the dread of the lash, their idea of freedom is idleness and they are therefore quite incapable of industry."¹ Neither of these pioneer scholars conducted an in-depth analysis of the slave experience of these African Americans. John Grant acknowledges that slavery must have had an influence on the Refugees, but saw it as being beyond the scope of his study to delve into the American background of the Refugees. And while James Walker has explored the American

¹Dalhousie to Bathurst, 29 December 1816, PANS, vol. 112, pp. 6-9.

slave experience of the Black Loyalists, he did not do the same for the Refugees. Accordingly, the single most important aspect of the Black Refugees' history prior to their arrival in Nova Scotia has been distorted or neglected.²

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.³ Thus, this chapter focuses on slavery during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The Black Refugees' encounter with slavery can be partially reconstructed through relevant secondary sources, diaries, shipping lists,

²C.B. Fergusson, A Documentary Study of the Establishment of the Negroes in Nova Scotia (Halifax: The Public Archives of Nova Scotia, 1948), p. 67; Robin Winks, The Blacks In Canada (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), p. 124; John Grant, The Immigration & Settlement of the Black Refugees of the War of 1812 in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick (Hantsport: Lancelot Press, 1990), pp. 118-20; James Walker, "The Establishment of a Free Black Community in Nova Scotia, 1783-1840", in The African Diaspora: Interpretive Essays, eds. Martin L. Kilson and Robert I. Rotberg (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), pp. 205-36.

claimant lists, plantation correspondence, and travel books. As the majority of Black Refugees were from two distinctive regions of the United States--the Tidewater Chesapeake and the Georgia Sea Islands (part of the Lowcountry)--this analysis addresses differences and similarities between the Chesapeake and the Lowcountry.⁴

Although slavery developed along rather different lines in the Chesapeake and 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 Tidewater counties of 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.

³Ira Berlin, "Time, Space, and the Evolution of Afro-American Society on British Mainland North America," American Historical Review 85 (February, 1980), pp. 44-78.

⁴A small contingent of Refugees were from Charleston and possibly coastal Georgia, Ship record of the *Ceres*, PANS, vol. 419, docs. 58 & 59. The vast majority of Refugees who came to Nova Scotia were from the Chesapeake and the Sea Islands.

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 time 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 canvass of difference.⁵

⁵Philip Morgan, Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry (Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, by University of North Carolina Press, 1998), pp. 204-54, 660; Allan Kulikoff, Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake 1680-1800 (Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, by University of North Carolina Press, 1986), pp. 317-51, 396-408; Lorena Walsh, "Slave Life, Slave Society, and Tobacco Production in the Tidewater Chesapeake, 1620-1820," in Ira Berlin and

Philip Morgan, eds., Cultivation and Culture: Labor and the Shaping of Slave Life in the Americas (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), pp. 171-72; Philip Morgan, "Black Society in the Lowcountry, 1760-1810" in Ira Berlin and Ronald Hoffman, eds., Slavery and Freedom in the Age of the American Revolution (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1983), pp. 14, 92-93, 118; Richard S. Dunn, "Black Society in the Chesapeake, 1776-1810," in Slavery and Freedom, p. 60; James Sidbury, Ploughshares into Swords: Race, Rebellion, and Identity in Gabriel's Virginia, 1730-1810 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 30; Julia Floyd Smith, Slavery and Rice Culture in Low Country Georgia 1750-1860 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), p. 33; for an important discussion of the dynamics of an early black majority in the Lowcountry, see Peter Wood, Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina From 1670 Through the Stono Rebellion (New York: Knopf, 1974); Mary Beth Norton, Herbert Gutman, and Ira Berlin, "The Afro-American Family in the Age of Revolution" in Slavery and Freedom, pp. 184-85; Ira Berlin, Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 266; Sarah S. Hughes, "Slaves for Hire: The Allocation of Black Labor in Elizabeth City County, Virginia, 1782 to 1810," William and Mary Quarterly 35 (April, 1978), pp. 260-86; Lorena S. Walsh, "Rural African Americans in the Constitutional Era in Maryland, 1776-1810," Maryland Historical Magazine 84 (Winter, 1989), pp. 338-39; Joyce Chaplin, "Tidal Rice Cultivation and the Problem of Slavery in South Carolina and Georgia, 1760-1815," William and Mary Quarterly 49 (January, 1992), p. 61; Lorena S. Walsh, "Work & Resistance in the New Republic: The Case of the Chesapeake, 1770-1820," in Mary Turner, ed., From Chattel Slaves to Wage Slaves: The Dynamics of Labor Bargaining in the Americas (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 105-12; Betty Wood, "'Never on a Sunday?': Slavery and the Sabbath in Lowcountry Georgia, 1750-1830," in Chattel Slaves, pp. 79-94; Lorena S. Walsh and Lois Carr, "Economic Diversification and Labor Organization in the Chesapeake,

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 whites in general, the large size of plantations inhibited the emergence of paternalistic mutual obligations between slave and master. Eugene Genovese contends that such paternalism encouraged kindness and affection as well as hatred and cruelty.⁶ 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

1650-1820," in Stephen Innes, ed., Work and Labor in Early America (Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, by University of North Carolina Press, 1988), p. 176.

⁶Eugene Genovese, Roll Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made (New York: Pantheon, 1972), pp. 3-97.

the concerns of their slaves if it meant increasing profits.

Paternalism 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.⁷ 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), paternalism 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 stole rice and ran off for two days.⁸ In discussing the older King, famous British actress and author Fanny Kemble stated that he was the

⁷Frances Anne Kemble, Journal Of A Residence On A Georgia Plantation In 1838-1839 (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1863), p. 278. Fanny Kemble was married to Pierce Butler II (Pierce Butler's grandson). She visited his Georgia plantations in 1838-39. This visit reinforced her anti-slavery sympathies. She spoke with many people who were alive during the Black Refugees' escape some twenty years earlier, including Roswell King Sr., his son, John Couper, and many slaves.

⁸Roswell King to Pierce Butler, 23 July 1808, Butler Plantation Papers (BPP), University of Toronto, Reel #3;

"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], I should think it would be difficult to find, even among the cruel and un-scrupulous class to which he belonged."⁹ As for Roswell King Jr., she wrote, "every account I receive from the negroes [sic] 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."¹⁰

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 individual

also see King to Butler, 12 and 26 February and 4 March 1815, BPP, University of Toronto, Reel #4.

⁹Kemble, Journal, p. 167.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 232, also see 140-41, 162, 278, 280; on the limits of paternalism in the Sea Islands see, William Dusingberre, Them Dark Days: Slavery in the American Rice Swamps (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 429-436; Randall Miller, "The Golden Isles: Rice and Slaves along the Georgia Coast," The Georgia Historical Quarterly 70 (Spring, 1986), p. 92; Malcolm Bell, Major Butler's Legacy: Five Generations of a Slaveholding Family (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), pp. 531-32; for a positive view of paternalism in the Sea Islands, see Smith, Rice Culture, pp. 208-09.

members of a slave family out to other plantations.¹¹ In fact, the number of planned slave conspiracies indicates that the paternalist ideal fell far short of its goals, even on the Chesapeake's smaller plantations.¹²

The smaller size of Chesapeake plantations also offered slaves less selection in terms of marriage partners. Thus many found a husband or wife on a different plantation. In contrast, the large size of Sea Island estates allowed many slaves to find marriage partners on the same plantation. Not surprisingly, by the late eighteenth century most slave households in the Chesapeake

¹¹Morgan, Slave Counterpoint, pp. 257-61; on the sale of Chesapeake slaves outside of the region, see Dunn, "Chesapeake," p. 59; Allan Kulikoff, "Uprooted Peoples: Black Migrants in the Age of the American Revolution," in Slavery and Freedom, pp. 145-49; Lorena S. Walsh, "Plantation Management in the Chesapeake, 1620-1820," Journal of Economic History 49 (June, 1989), p. 405; on hiring, see Hughes, "Slaves for Hire," p. 260; John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 32-37.

¹²On slave discontent and rebelliousness, see Franklin and Schweninger, Runaway Slaves; Sidbury, Ploughshares, p. 140; Douglas Egerton, Gabriel's Rebellion: The Virginia Slave Conspiracies of 1800 & 1802 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Joseph Carroll, Slave Insurrections in The United States 1800-1865 (1938 repr., New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968), pp. 47-76.

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 had its drawbacks. The mobility of Chesapeake slaves meant less opportunity to create a stable family life.¹³

The most significant difference between slavery in the Chesapeake and 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 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

¹³The 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, PANS, Misc., Blacks War of 1812; on the ubiquity of inter-plantation marriage in the Chesapeake, see Kulikoff, Tobacco, pp. 358-71; on the advantages of larger plantations in the Lowcountry in terms of marriage and household structure, see Morgan, Slave Counterpoint, pp. 503, 507-10; Berlin, Gutman, and Norton, "Afro-American Family," p. 178.

cultivating their personal plots, hunting, fishing, or relaxing.¹⁴

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

¹⁴Roswell King Jr., "On the Management of the Butler Estate," The Southern Agriculturist 1 (December, 1828), pp. 523-29; Basil Hall, Travels in North America in the Years 1827 and 1828 (Philadelphia: Carney, Lea, & Carey, 1829), 2, pp. 229-30; Smith, Rice Culture, pp. 45-89; Miller, "Golden Isles," pp. 81-83; Philip Morgan, "Task and Gang Systems: The Organization of Labor on New World Plantations," in Work and Labor, pp. 189-221; Philip Morgan, "Work and Culture: The Task System and the World of Lowcountry Blacks, 1700-1880," William and Mary Quarterly 39 (October, 1982), pp. 563-99. Basil Hall was an officer in the British Army. He travelled throughout the Southern states in order to investigate the institution of slavery. He found slavery to be immoral, yet he believed abolition could not be achieved in the near future.

laborers."¹⁵ 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 operated machinery in the production process.¹⁶

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, Basil Hall stated that women performed "twice as much" cotton gathering as men.¹⁷ After the cotton gin removed the seeds, slaves cleaned out seed fragments and packaged it for shipment. Sea Island cotton production resulted in a

¹⁵Smith, Rice Culture, p. 46.

¹⁶Ibid, pp. 45-63; Hall, Travels, pp. 213-14; Morgan, Slave Counterpoint, pp.147-59.

¹⁷Hall, Travels, p. 230.

decline in slave skills. Hall stated that of 57 1/2 "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.¹⁸

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

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 229-232; Morgan, "Lowcountry," p. 107.

authority in the Sea Islands were contingent on the wishes of an owner or overseer.¹⁹

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 organisation 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 specialisation 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 sheared

¹⁹Kemble, Georgia Diary, p. 44; King Jr., "Management," pp. 524-25; Bell, Butler, pp. 144-46; Smith, Rice Culture,

corn.²⁰ In short, grain production entailed a switch from the hoe to plow and an intensification of work patterns.²¹

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

. . .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.²²

pp. 64-75; Morgan, "Lowcountry," pp. 118-121.

²⁰Berlin, Thousands, pp. 265-70.

²¹Walsh, "Plantation Management," pp. 401-06; Walsh, "Tobacco," pp. 197-98; Walsh and Carr, "Labor Organization," pp. 175-76; Dunn, "Chesapeake," pp. 50-51.

²²George Washington to James Fairfax, 1789, in John Fitzpatrick ed., The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources 1745-1799 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1931), 30, p. 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."²³

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. At times, they were successful. Slaves were very hesitant to give up rights won with one overseer when

²³Walsh, "Work & Resistance," p. 107, also see pp. 106-09; Walsh, "Plantation Management," pp. 405-06.

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."²⁴ 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.²⁵

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.²⁶

²⁴Cited in Walsh, "Work & Resistance," p. 110.

²⁵Cited in Morgan, Slave Counterpoint, p. 191.

²⁶Berlin, Thousands, pp. 268-69; Walsh, "Work and Resistance," pp. 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 as 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."²⁷ In addition to working in the fields, slave women were responsible for their own domestic duties (such as cooking and making clothes). As Walsh and Lois Carr note, female slaves suffered the double burden of

²⁷Walsh and Carr, "Labor Organization," p. 179.

gender and race and were associated with the most "monotonous" and "inglorious" agricultural labour.²⁸

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 per cent were skilled.²⁹ Herbert Gutman places the number at 15 per cent.³⁰ In a more recent study, Philip Morgan argues that in 1810 19 per cent of Chesapeake slaves were skilled or semi-skilled.³¹ 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

²⁸Ibid., p. 183, also see pp. 176-83; Walsh, "Rural," p. 327; Berlin, Thousands, pp. 270-71; Carole Shammas, "Black Women's Work and the Evolution of Plantation Society in Virginia," Labor History 26 (Winter, 1985), pp. 5-28.

²⁹Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman, Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974), p. 38.

³⁰Herbert G. Gutman, Slavery and the Numbers Game: A Critique of Time on the Cross (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), p. 51

³¹Morgan, Slave Counterpoint, p. 217.

and 34 per cent were skilled or semi skilled.³² The expansion of occupations requiring skill was usually limited to wealthy plantations and male slaves.

The focus on grain cultivation and the concomitant growth of cities required slaves to obtain new skills. The specialisation 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.³³

Hiring was one of the most important elements of Chesapeake slavery during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The switch from tobacco to mixed

³²Richard S. Dunn, "A Tale of Two Plantations: Slave Life at Mesopotamia in Jamaica and Mount Airy in Virginia, 1799 to 1828," William and Mary Quarterly 36 (January, 1977), pp. 51-55.

agricultural production left the region's wealthier planters with "obsolete" labourers, primarily women and children.³⁴ 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.³⁵

In the Chesapeake, 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 among slaves engaged in this industry. One visitor to the Lowcountry described the devastating results of rice cultivation on slaves:

The cultivation of rice was described to me as by far the most unhealthy work in which slaves were employed;

³³Berlin, Thousands, pp. 274-77; Walsh, "Plantation Management," p. 401; Dunn, "Two Plantations," pp. 52-54; Walsh, "Work & Resistance," pp. 110-11.

³⁴Dunn, "Chesapeake," p. 51.

³⁵Hughes, "Slaves for Hire," pp. 260-86; Morgan, Slave Counterpoint, pp. 515-16; Walsh, "Plantation Management," p. 405; Franklin and Schweninger, Runaway Slaves, pp. 4-6, 32-37.

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.³⁶

There were many other differences--in terms of plantation life and the regional context--between slavery in the Sea Islands and 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, 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

³⁶Hall, Travels, p. 214; Smith, Rice Culture, p. 49-50; Dussinberre, Dark Days, pp. 70-73; Bell, Butler, p. 127;

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.³⁷

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, naming patterns, religious

Morgan, Slave Counterpoint, p. 177.

³⁷Peter McKerrow, A Brief History of the Coloured Baptists in Nova Scotia, 1783-1895 (1895 repr., Halifax: Afro Nova Scotian Enterprises, 1976), p. 11.

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."³⁸

³⁸Berlin, "Time and Space," p. 54; Albert Raboteau, "The Slave Church in the Era of the American Revolution," in Slavery and Freedom, pp. 193-217; Morgan, Slave Counterpoint, pp. 420-37; Sidbury, Ploughshares, pp. 35-38; Donald Mathews, Slavery and Methodism: A Chapter in American Morality, 1780-1845 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965); Mechal Sobel, Trabelin' On: The Slave Journey to the Afro-Baptist Faith (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1979); Berlin, Thousands, pp. 272-73; King to Butler, 30 March 1804, BPP, Reel #3; Kemble, Georgia Plantation, p. 220; Dussinberre, Dark Days, p. 259. It should be noted that some Lowcountry owners believed in the importance of religious instruction as a means of control, see C.C. Jones, A Catechism of Scripture, Doctrine, and Practice for Families and Sabbath Schools. Also Designed for the Oral Instruction of Colored Persons (Savannah: T. Purse & Co., 1837); 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, PANS, Misc., War of 1812 Blacks; Mary Granger ed., Drums and Shadows: Survival Studies among the Georgia Coastal Negroes (1940 repr., Westport: Greenwood Press, 1973); Bell, Butler, pp. 126-54; Lydia Parrish, Slave Songs of the Georgia Sea Islands (1942 repr., Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992); Sterling Stucky, Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the

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 have encouraged slaves to abscond from their masters. Ideas of freedom and liberty were also imbibed through knowledge of the American and Haitian Revolutions. 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

Foundations of Black America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Margaret Washington Creel, "A Peculiar People": Slave Religion among the Gullahs (New York: New York University Press, 1988); Lorenzo Turner, Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect (1949 repr., Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1973).

from the American Revolution to justify rebellion against the white population. The possibility of freedom was more immediate among slaves in the Chesapeake than for those in the Sea Islands.³⁹

The rebellious nature of Chesapeake slaves was well known; in fact, Lowcountry masters feared the importation of these slaves as 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 realised that their chances of escape or successful insurrection were minimal. Molly, an older slave on Pierce Butler's plantation in the late 1830s, explained the difficulties of escaping to Fanny Kemble. "[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

³⁹Dunn, "Chesapeake," p. 50; Raboteau, "Slave Church," pp. 206-08; Berlin, Thousands, pp. 274-77; Sidbury, Ploughshares, pp. 48-49, 140; Egerton, Gabriel's Rebellion; Walsh, "Tobacco," pp. 188-89; James Walker, "The Black Loyalists in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone" (Ph.D. diss., Dalhousie University, 1973), pp. 1-26; Carroll, Slave Insurrections, pp. 47-76.

neber run away."⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹

Overall, slavery in 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 and manumissions became common (before they were restricted in Virginia in 1806).⁴² 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 strategically placed American slaves with an opportunity to escape the shackles of the "Peculiar Institution." Similar to events

⁴⁰Kemble, Georgia Diary, p. 140.

⁴¹Morgan, "Lowcountry," p. 140.

surrounding the Revolutionary war thirty years earlier, African Americans sought refuge behind British lines in hope of obtaining freedom. Although some runaways came to the British earlier, 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 1812.⁴³ Of that total, approximately 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.⁴⁴

⁴²The majority of free blacks resided in Maryland.

⁴³African Americans absconded before Cochrane's proclamation, see National Intelligencer, 1 May 1813.

⁴⁴John Grant, "Black Immigrants into Nova Scotia, 1776-1815" Journal of Negro History 58 (July, 1973), pp. 253-70; Frank Cassell, "Slaves of the Chesapeake Bay Area and The War of 1812," Journal of Negro History 57 (April, 1972), pp. 144-55; Fergusson, Documentary, pp. 10-13; W.A. Spray, "The Settlement of the Black Refugees in New Brunswick, 1815-1836," Acadiensis 6 (Spring, 1977), pp. 64-79; J. C. A. Stagg, Mr. Madison's War: Politics, Diplomacy, and Warfare in the Early American Republic (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); for the story of black Americans that fought in the War of 1812, see Gerard Altoff, Amongst My Best Men: African-Americans and the War of 1812 (Put-in-Bay: The Perry Group, 1996); Admiral Cochrane enjoyed a

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."⁴⁵ Indeed, the Richmond Enquirer reported that escaped slaves were often beaten or killed by local whites.⁴⁶ 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 and freed slaves as they went through them. Two large-scale slave owners in the Georgia Sea Islands, James Hamilton and Pierce Butler, lost slaves in this manner.

relatively successful career during the War of 1812. He received great support in Britain because of his stance towards American slaves and his military exploits. After the war, he was elected to parliament.

⁴⁵Cassell, "Chesapeake," p. 147.

⁴⁶Richmond Enquirer, 8 October 1813.

However, some Sea Island slaves made dangerous trips of nearly fifteen 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.⁴⁷

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 resulted from relatively selfish reasons because the British did not accept a group of slaves seeking their assistance during the retreat from

⁴⁷Charles Ball, Slavery in the United States: A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Charles Ball (1837 repr. New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), pp. 470-71; Shipping Log, Regulus, 19 February 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; Bell, Butler, p. 172; King to Butler, 18 March 1815, BPP, Reel #4. Pierce Butler and John Hamilton lost 139 and 238 slaves respectively. John Couper lost 60 slaves. Shipping Log, Regulus, 7 March 1815 in British Government, p. 63; Mary Bullard, Black Liberation on Cumberland Island in 1815 (De Leon Springs: E.O. Painter Printing, 1983), pp. 63-65.

Washington.⁴⁸ 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.⁴⁹ 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."⁵⁰ Furthermore, while the British might be accused of using American slaves in an opportunistic manner, it certainly was a reciprocal

⁴⁸Christopher George, "Mirage of Freedom: African Americans in the War of 1812," Maryland Historical Magazine 91 (Winter, 1996), p. 440; for a good discussion of the politics of slavery during the Anglo-American conflict, see Matthew Mason, "The Battle of the Slaveholding Liberators: Great Britain, The United States, and Slavery in the Early Nineteenth Century," William and Mary Quarterly 59 (July, 2002), pp. 665-96.

⁴⁹John Weiss, "Black American resistance to Slavery in the War of 1812: The Corps of Colonial Marines," (unpublished paper, British Association for American Studies, 1998).

⁵⁰Cockburn to Cochrane, 9 May 1814, Papers of Admiral Sir Alexander Forrester Inglis Cochrane 1813-15, Florida State University Library, Reel #3. Admiral Cockburn commanded raids along the Georgia Sea Islands in the winter of 1815. He also conducted raids along the Chesapeake Bay and helped torch Washington D.C. in 1814. After the war, Cockburn escorted Napoleon to St. Helena.

relationship, one that gave the British military advantages, while the Refugees achieved freedom.⁵¹

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."⁵²

⁵¹The British government's policy of dealing with free slaves was to provide them with food, shelter, clothing, and medical attention until they could be apprenticed. I discuss this in chapter three.

⁵²Cited in Bell, Butler, p. 180; Shipping Log, Regulus, 12 March 1815 in British Government, p. 63; Niles Weekly Register, 30 September 1815.

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."⁵³ 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 that recently escaped slaves had served as messengers for a British raiding party.⁵⁴ On the 25 June 1814, 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."⁵⁵ 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."⁵⁶ In 1815, the Colonial Marines played an important role in the

⁵³Cited in Cassell "Chesapeake," p. 152.

⁵⁴Niles Weekly Register, 22 May 1813.

⁵⁵Cockburn to Cochrane, 25 June 1814, Cochrane Papers.

⁵⁶Cockburn to Cochrane, 24 July 1814, Cochrane Papers.

invasion of Cumberland Island, the southernmost of the Georgia Sea Islands, helping to free hundreds of slaves.⁵⁷

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 slaves made a choice, which most owners refused to believe.⁵⁸

Instead they claimed that the British 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

⁵⁷Niles Weekly Register, 30 September 1815; Bullard, Liberation, pp. 62-80.

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 pittied 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."⁵⁹ However in another letter, he blamed his "ungrateful Negroes," arguing that more "would have gone off if they had only a chance."⁶⁰ 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.

⁵⁸Bell, Butler, p. 172.

⁵⁹King to Butler, 18 March 1815, BPP, Reel #4.

⁶⁰King to Butler, 26 February 1815, BPP, Reel #4.

In Georgia, where slave owners were permitted to implore hundreds of slaves to return, only thirteen did so.⁶¹

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."⁶² 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

⁶¹Cassell, "Chesapeake," p. 155; Bell, Butler, pp. 170-91; Bullard, Liberation, pp. 62-80; Ball, Narrative, p. 472; Niles Weekly Register, 30 September 1815. One must read the opinions of slave owners with great caution. As it was inconceivable for slave owners to consider that their property wanted liberty, many depicted the slaves' understanding of freedom in overly simplistic terms.

⁶²Ball, Narrative, p. 472.

us, offering to serve either as soldiers or sailors, if we would but give them their liberty."⁶³

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 young adult 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."⁶⁴ Recognising this offer as a mere trick, the slaves remained silent. In a few weeks, their master died

⁶³G.R. Gleig, A Narrative of the Campaigns of the British Army at Washington and New Orleans (London: J. Murray, 1821), p. 144; for the Refugees' emphasis on freedom and land, see Cochrane to Bathurst, 14 July 1814 in Cassell, "Chesapeake," p. 152. The emphasis on freedom was also the primary concern of the Black Loyalists during their escape from American Slavery, James Walker, The Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone 1783-1870 (London: Longman and Dalhousie University Press, 1976), p. 4.

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."⁶⁵ Additionally, the slaves discovered they would be sold soon. These circumstances convinced Shaw and five others that the dangers of escape outweighed the chains of slavery. They absconded under the cover of darkness and took a canoe to the nearest British vessel.⁶⁶

This short story offers a few clues as to why slaves risked life and limb to attain liberty. The overriding concern for the Black Refugees revolved around aspirations for 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

⁶⁴Morning Chronicle, 7 October 1889.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Ibid.

entailed the separation of families, proved too much for these Refugees to endure.

The Black Refugees 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 sale to other plantations, freedom might have entailed 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-life-time 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 obtain an exact number for the Refugees who escaped from the Chesapeake and the Georgia Sea Islands. Records are confusing and incomplete. Although one can check the lists of lost slaves from different states, this must be treated with care because

some Refugees went to the West Indies. Thus these documents might not be relevant to Nova Scotia. 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 per cent of runaways were male and 40 per cent female. The majority were in their twenties and thirties, with a significant minority over forty years of age. 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 in some form of family unit or kinship group in the Sea Islands and Chesapeake.⁶⁷

⁶⁷On name changing, see, Slaves on Halifax List, claimants and state; List of Slaves allowed to Virginia, Maryland, etc. at Georgia average, PANS, Misc., Blacks War of 1812; On counties of origin and numbers of escaped slaves per owner see, Claims for Slaves in Virginia, PANS, Misc., Blacks War of 1812; British Government, pp. 104-07; Claims for Slaves in Virginia, PANS, Misc., Blacks War of 1812; on gender and age breakdown of the Refugees see

In line with Philip Morgan's assertion that the majority of slave households in the Chesapeake were one-parent, my data indicate that 56 per cent of married couples had lived on different plantations. An examination of family structure suggests that over 30 per cent 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

British Government, pp. 67-106. If we add to Bayly's list earlier escapees to Halifax, the totals would be 963 men, 612 women, 216 children; shipping records include: HMS *Rifleman*, September 1813, PANS, vol. 420, doc. 1; HMS *Marlborough*, September 1813, PANS, vol. 420, doc. 2; HMS *Junon*, September 1813, PANS, vol. 420, doc. 4; HMS *Mariner*, September 1813, PANS, vol. 420, doc. 5; HMS *Diomede*, September 1813, PANS, vol. 420, doc. 7; HMS *Diadem*, September 1813, PANS, vol. 420, doc. 8; Claims for Slaves in Virginia, PANS, Misc., Blacks War of 1812; Thomas Newell and Thomas Spalding, 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 (16 March 1815), PANS, Misc., Blacks War of 1812.; British Government, pp. 60-66, 103. In 1823, the Black Refugee population stood at 876 in Trinidad, PANS, vol. 64, doc. 80.

daughters and others their wives."⁶⁸ Although black families were torn apart by hiring and sales, many slave owners had encouraged marriage and family ties in order to stabilise their workforces. This policy is reflected in the significant number of families among the Refugees.⁶⁹

The Black Refugees also possessed diverse skills and trades. In the Georgia Sea Islands most slaves laboured in the rice or cotton fields. However, there were some artisans in this region including blacksmiths, carpenters, and masons. One document, "Claims for Slaves in Virginia," lists over 150 people with occupations.⁷⁰ In this listing

⁶⁸King to Butler, 14 February 1815, BPP, Reel 4.

⁶⁹On family structure see, Slaves on Halifax list, claimants and state; List of slaves allowed to Virginia, Maryland, etc. at Georgia Average, PANS, Misc., Blacks War of 1812: 16 Families Listed, 56 per cent separated and reunited in Halifax; Couples Separated include, 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; also see, Norton, Berlin, and Gutman, "The Afro-American Family," pp. 175-91.

⁷⁰Claims for Slaves in Virginia, PANS, Misc., Blacks War of 1812. This document lists over 1200 slaves, approximately 150 have an occupation listed. The majority of slave names are listed with only a price. The occupations of female slaves were as follows: House Servant-20, Spinner-16, Cook-5, Weaver-5, Field Slave-3, Cook/Spinner-2, Servant-2 Nurse-1, Waiter-1. The

we find that the Black Refugees were highly skilled. In fact, even 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, only 5 per cent 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.⁷¹

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. Some 68 per cent of these Refugees were listed as farmers or labourers. The

occupations of male slaves were as follows: Carpenter-20, Field Slave-16, Sawyer-16, House Servant-14, Blacksmith-13, Ploughman-7, Hostler-3, Woodcutter-2, Cooper-2, Nurse-2, Overseer-1, Tanner-1, Smith-1, Sailor-1, Wheelwright-1, Sawyer and Cooper-1, Shoemaker and House, Servant-1, Cook and Waiter-1, Mower and Sawyer-1, Shoemaker-1, Coach Driver-1.

remaining 32 per cent were identified as holding more specialised occupations, such as blacksmith, sawyer, hostler, and shoemaker. Although the Black Refugees brought diverse skills to Nova Scotia, 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.⁷²

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 eighty 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

⁷¹Claims for Slaves in Virginia, PANS, Misc., Blacks War of 1812.

⁷²HMS *Rifleman*, September 1813, PANS, vol. 420, doc. 1; HMS *Marlborough*, September 1813, PANS, vol. 420, doc. 2; HMS *Junon*, September 1813, PANS, vol. 420, doc. 4; HMS *Mariner*, September 1813, PANS, vol. 420, doc. 5; HMS *Diomede*, September 1813, PANS, vol. 420, doc. 7; HMS *Diadem*, September 1813, PANS, vol. 420, doc. 8. The breakdown of occupations: Farmer-25, Laborer-25, Sawyers-12, Shoemaker-3, Servants-3, Washerwoman-1, Wheelwright-1, Fisherman-1, Hostler-1, Blacksmith-1, Carpenter-1.

case of "charity."⁷³ In contrast, government officers characterised 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.⁷⁴ 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."⁷⁵

Conclusion

The Sea Island Refugees carried their identities and expectations about labour to Nova Scotia. Indeed, they held onto localised or even plantation identities once in the colony. For example, the vast majority of John Couper and Pierce Butler's former slaves (nearly 200) settled at

⁷³Names, Age, Description and present State of the Blacks, Melville Island, 6 May 1816, PANS, vol. 421, doc. 1; Names, Age, Diseases + present State of the Patients, Black Hospital Melville Island, PANS, vol. 421, doc. 2.

⁷⁴Black Refugees desirous of settling upon lands at Preston, 1815, vol. 419, doc. 93.

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 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.⁷⁶

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

⁷⁵Herbert Aptheker, The Negro in the American Revolution (New York: International Publishers, 1940), p. 5.

⁷⁶For settlement patterns, see License of Occupation at Hammond's Plains, PANS, vol. 419, doc. 119; Return of the Black American Refugees residing at Hammond's Plains, PANS, vol. 422, doc. 19.

the original settlers at Hammonds Plains had abandoned the settlement.⁷⁷

For their part the Chesapeake Refugees brought their understanding of Christianity, localised 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

⁷⁷Report on Lots at Hammond's Plains, 17 June 1835, PANS, Box-Halifax County Land Grants-1787-1835, doc. 185.

their former owners' beliefs: the male head of the household needed to provide for his family.⁷⁸

Although both groups brought to Nova Scotia marketing skills, which would serve as the basis for their economic survival, the Chesapeake Refugees were better positioned to succeed in Nova Scotia for one major reason.⁷⁹ 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.

The Black Refugees' escape from slavery required a great degree of courage. Let us return to the oft-quoted words of Lord Dalhousie. Certainly, the Refugees hoped to

⁷⁸Septimus Clarke, James Hamilton, and Richard Preston, all from the Chesapeake, played an important role in the development of the Baptist church in Nova Scotia; for settlement patterns, see Report of Lands cleared by the People of Colour in the settlement of Preston, 9th May 1816, PANS, vol. 421, doc. 3; Report of the Inspection of Preston Lots, August 1818, PANS, vol. 419, doc. 90; on gender roles, see the petitions of Daniel Clayton, James Downing, Naith Johnson, and Levin Winder PANS, Land Papers RG 20 A.

⁷⁹The importance of the market for the Refugees is discussed in chapter four.

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."⁸⁰ 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.

⁸⁰Dalhousie to Bathurst, 29 December 1816, PANS, vol. 112, pp. 6-9.

Chapter 3: Government Policy and Black Consciousness

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 the factors of race, class, and a dislocated post-war economy. Indecisive government officials exacerbated many of these difficulties. Pioneer historians such as C.B. Fergusson and Robin Winks, focused on government policy, without closely examining the Refugees' responses to it. Later scholars, notably John Grant and James Walker, noted the importance of assessing the Refugees' reactions to government policy, but did not carry out an in-depth investigation of this important aspect of their experience.¹

¹For existing approaches to the Black Refugees, see C.B. Fergusson, A Documentary Study of the Establishment of the Negroes in Nova Scotia (Halifax: The Public Archives of Nova Scotia, 1948), pp. 66-67; Robin Winks, The Blacks in Canada (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), pp. 114-41; for a better treatment of the Refugees see, John Grant, The Immigration & Settlement of the Black Refugees of the War of 1812 in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick (Hantsport:

Certainly, it can be shown that complex negotiations between settlers and the Crown took place, which allow us to understand the Refugees' collective aspirations. The first generation of Black Refugees created, and in some cases re-created, communities that cannot 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.

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 believed that class distinctions were necessary for peace, order, and good government. Supposedly, the poor and rich were linked in an unequal relationship, which God sanctioned and men must obey. As Edmund Burke argued:

Lancelot Press, 1990), pp. 103-120; James Walker, "The Establishment of a Free Black Community in Nova Scotia, 1783-1840", in The African Diaspora: Interpretive Essays,

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 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 primaevial 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.²

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

eds. Martin L. Kilson and Robert I. Rotberg (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), pp. 205-36.

²Cited in H.T. Dickinson, Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Britain (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1977), p. 295.

immensely conservative time 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.”³ 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.⁴

³Cited in James Walvin, Black Ivory: A History of British Slavery (London: Fontana Press, 1993), p. 309; Eric Williams, Capitalism and Slavery (1944 repr. New York: Capricorn Books, 1966); some historians have placed British abolitionism within a more complex framework that sees this event as heavily influenced by both economic and moral reasons, see David Biron Davis, Slavery and Human Progress (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); David Turley, The Culture of English Antislavery, 1780-1860 (London: Routledge, 1991).

⁴Dickinson, Liberty, pp. 270-318; Wilfred Harrison, Conflict and Compromise: History of British Political

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 pre-ordained to remain 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.

Challenges Facing the Colonial Government

Indecision, uncertainty, and ambiguity marked Nova Scotia's policy toward the Black Refugees. These problems emanated from the fact that the imperial government had

Thought, 1593-1900 (New York: Free Press, 1965), pp. 90-177; Mark Philip, ed., The French Revolution and British Popular Politics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Theodore Allen, The Invention of the White Race: Racial Oppression and Social Control (New York: Verso, 1994), 1.

unilaterally decided to send the Refugees to Nova Scotia. In other words, they were thrust upon Nova Scotia without its consent, an initiative that became a chronic source of annoyance to the Assembly and local population.⁵

Periodically throughout the next twenty 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 between accepting the Refugees as viable settlers and viewing them as sojourners contributed to indecisive government policies.⁶

Early Government Policy: Lt. Gov. Sherbrooke

The Black Refugees arrived in Nova Scotia in increasing numbers between 1813 and 1816. The government soon realised that the trickle of ex-slaves promised to become a flood of poverty-stricken people in desperate need

⁵Journal of the House of Assembly (JHOA), 1 April 1815, PANS, vol. 305, doc. 3; Acadian Recorder 23 December 1815.

⁶Bathurst to Sherbrooke, 10 November 1815, PANS, vol. 63, doc. 121; Minutes of Council, 30 April 1817, PANS, vol. 214 1/2; Kempt to Harrison, 20 January 1821, PANS, vol. 113, doc. 35; John Grant, "The 1821 Emigration of Black Nova Scotians to Trinidad," Nova Scotia Historical

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.⁷

In the autumn of 1813, the first Black Refugees arrived in Nova Scotia. However, Lt. 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 to say:

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

Quarterly 2 (September, 1972), pp. 283-300; Fergusson, Documentary, pp. 34-37; Winks, Blacks, pp. 123-24.

⁷Cochrane to Sherbrooke, 5 October 1814, PANS, vol. 420, doc. 110; Sherbrooke to Cochrane, 5 October 1814, PANS, vol. 111, pp. 101-03; Sherbrooke to House of Assembly (HOA), 24 February 1815, PANS, vol. 288, doc. 101; Winks, Blacks, p. 120.

each until they shall be enlisted, or apprenticed, and the amount, of the expenses attending this measure.⁸

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 innovative 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.⁹ But this relatively positive circumstance lasted for less than a year; then 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

⁸Castlereagh to Prevost, 10 April 1808, PANS, vol. 420, doc. 9.

⁹Sherbrooke to Bathurst, 18 October 1813, PANS, vol. 111, pp. 66-67.

poor house where she said she would be "devoured by vermin."¹⁰

Sherbrooke's policies of selective provisioning and employment in the interior soon became inadequate as the number of Refugees dramatically increased.¹¹ 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" being desperate for food, clothing, shelter, and medical attention.¹² 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

¹⁰Rufus Fairbanks' letter, 8 March 1815, PANS, vol. 305, doc. 22.

¹¹Winks, Blacks, pp. 115-18; Fergusson, Documentary, pp. 14-16.

¹²Cochrane to Sherbrooke, 5 October 1814, PANS, vol. 420, doc. 110.

under the supervision of the Collector of Customs at Melville Island on the west side of the North-West Arm.¹³

Melville Island had been used as a prison during the Napoleonic Wars and the War of 1812. Now it served as a quarantine centre for the flood of Refugees while the government decided what to do with them. From 27 April to 26 July 1815, Melville Island received over seven hundred Refugees who were given basic medical attention. Upon arrival 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 seventy 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 poor house. Although as a short-term shelter Melville Island was a

¹³Cochrane to Sherbrooke, 25 March 1815, Colonial Office 217/96; Minutes of Council, 5 April 1815, PANS, vol. 214.

relatively successful endeavour, the government needed a more permanent solution to the Refugee problem.¹⁴

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

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.¹⁵

Throughout the winter and into the following spring the Refugees moved to settlements at Preston (924), Hammonds Plains (504), Halifax (115), and numerous smaller clusters. In some ways, the settlement plan mirrored treatment received by other immigrants in that the Refugees were given land and rations. However, black settlers,

¹⁴Melville Island Records, PANS, vol. 420, docs. 13-74, nearly all the documents in volume 420 are about the Melville establishment; Melville Island Medical Reports, PANS, vol. 421, doc. 1 & 2; John Grant, "Black Immigrants into Nova Scotia, 1776-1815," Journal of Negro History 58 (July, 1973), pp. 269-70; Grant, Black Refugees, pp. 67-72; Fergusson, Documentary, pp. 24-27; Winks, Blacks, pp. 118-19.

¹⁵Bathurst to Sherbrooke, 13 June 1815, PANS, vol. 63, doc. 12.

regardless of the size of their families or their military service, were given only ten-acre lots. In contrast, European immigrants regularly received over one hundred acres and sometimes more, depending on the size of their families and previous service to the British 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 title to good farmland. In short, the Refugees were treated differently than other immigrants in terms of land allocation.¹⁶

¹⁶Ibid; Morris to Sherbrooke, 6 September 1815, PANS,

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. Those who had been neighbours in the United States usually sought to become neighbours again in Nova Scotia. 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. In this way, Black Virginians attempted to settle together in order to preserve traditions that remained important to them.¹⁷

vol. 420, doc. 76; PANS, vol. 419, docs. 39-42; Fergusson, Documentary, pp. 12-13; Winks, Blacks, p. 121; Walker, "Free Black," pp. 227-29; on the land allocated to other immigrants, see Free Press, 22 July 1817; also see, J.S. Martell, Immigration to and Emigration From Nova Scotia, 1815-1838 (Halifax: The Public Archives of Nova Scotia, 1942), pp. 7-33.

¹⁷Report of Lands Cleared by the People of Colour in Preston, 9 May 1816, PANS, vol. 421, doc. 3; Report of the Inspection of Preston Lots, August 1818, PANS, vol. 419,

Many Sea Island Refugees also settled together. For example, the majority of Pierce Butler 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 recognise 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.¹⁸

The administration's settlement plan was bedevilled by its ambivalent nature. The government supposedly wanted the Refugees to become subsistence farmers. However, the

doc. 90; Slaves on Halifax List, claimants and state; List of Slaves allowed to Virginia, Maryland, etc. at Georgia average, PANS, Misc., Blacks War of 1812; on Black Virginian identity and culture, see James Sidbury, Ploughshares into Swords: Race, Rebellion, and Identity in Gabriel's Virginia, 1730-1810 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 11-117.

¹⁸Return of the Black American Refugees residing at Hammonds Plains, PANS vol. 422, doc. 19; License of Occupation at Hammonds Plains, 1818, PANS, vol. 419, doc. 119; the different customs and culture of slaves from the Sea Islands and the Chesapeake are outlined in chapter two.

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 realised 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."¹⁹ 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."²⁰ 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 [sic]; insomuch that it would be impossible for any persons to support families on them-And no class of settlers, let their

¹⁹Dorothy Evans, Hammonds Plains: The First 100 Years (Halifax: Bounty Print, 1993), p. 57.

²⁰Chamberlain to Morris, 11 November 1815, PANS, vol. 419, doc. 41

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.²¹

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. Levin Winder's description of the land at Preston was representative of prevalent attitudes among the Refugees. In 1821, Winder stated that:

owing to its limited [sic] size and Sterile quallity [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.²²

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.

²¹Memorial of John Chamberlain, Alexander Lyle, Alexander Farquharson, Frederick Major and Allan MacDonald-Dartmouth, June 8, 1838. . .Reside in the neighbourhood of the people of colour settled in Preston, PANS, vol. 422, doc. 49.

²²Levin Winder 1821, Land Papers, PANS, RG 20 A.

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 possibilities of 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."²³ At the very least, a credibility gap existed between the government's proclamations that they hoped to create agricultural communities capable of providing for their own subsistence and the well-known realities of sterile soil.

To be fair to the government, it is true that no one could have predicted the numerous crop failures experienced during the Refugees' first years of settlement. But this begs the question about the land placement program. Although the reasons behind government decisions may never be revealed, the outcome is clear. The result of such sterile land being forced upon the Refugees in small holdings meant they became obliged to search for menial wage labour, usually on the farms of wealthier white neighbours. The government's policy created, in essence, a marginalised agricultural class forced to seek work anywhere they could find it. Lastly, the black community's oral tradition is unequivocal on the subject.

²³Chamberlain to Morris, 11 November 1815, PANS, vol. 419, doc. 41.

You know, what the hell! So we [the speaker is talking about the government] inherited these people from slavery, we got to do something about them, so give them some land! In the province, they have been given land that was useless. . .in the hope that a combination between inclemency of the weather and the infertility of the soil we would all die.²⁴

The poor quality of land at Preston and Hammonds Plains remained a subject of discourse for many years in the white community. "Z," a letter writer to the Acadian Recorder in 1824, remarked that the Refugees' poverty was not "at all surprizing [sic], when we consider. . .the nature of the land which has been given them to cultivate."²⁵ In 1840, historian and politician Beamish Murdoch implored Haligonians to understand the plight of the Refugees. He argued that their "wretchedness" resulted from the colonial government's land policy.

The Hammonds Plains, or more properly, the Wellington settlements [a small hamlet next to Hammonds Plains] and Preston, he had visited. . .It might be supposed that the people themselves were to blame, but to a man possessing the smallest spark of sympathy, he would

²⁴Interview, tape-recorded 1969, in Donald Clairmont and Fred Wien, "Blacks and Whites: The Nova Scotia Race Relations Experience," in Banked Fires-The Ethnics of Nova Scotia, ed. Douglas F. Campbell (Port Credit: The Scribblers' Press, 1978), p. 141.

²⁵Acadian Recorder, 21 February 1824.

show their barren rocks, and ask could all the skill of Agricola [a well known expert on agricultural matters] make them productive.²⁶

Government Policy: Lt. Gov. Dalhousie

In 1816, Lord Dalhousie replaced Sherbrooke as Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia. This shift in leadership marked a transition from a period of guarded optimism to outright pessimism. During Sherbrooke's tenure, the administration had held out some hope that the Black Refugees might become valuable settlers. In contrast, Dalhousie held decidedly negative opinions about the Refugees, but these attitudes were also ambivalent. Initially, in late 1816, he argued that the Refugees were incapable of adjusting to the rigors of freedom.²⁷ But after visiting the Black Refugees in the summer of 1817, Dalhousie argued that they were industrious. Strikingly, he no longer blamed the Refugees' difficulties on their "constitutional laziness." Instead, he accused their white neighbours of erecting "insurmountable" barriers that

²⁶Morning Post, 29 October 1841.

²⁷Dalhousie to Bathurst, 29 Dec. 1816, PANS vol. 112, pp. 6-9.

inhibited the Refugees' success.²⁸ Then, in 1819, Dalhousie reverted to pessimism, concluding "the habits of their life and constitutional laziness will continue & these miserable creatures will for years be a burden upon the Government."²⁹

Although Dalhousie realised that the Refugees needed some sort of long-term support in order to become valuable settlers, he excused his failure to provide it by blaming them: as he saw it, the Refugees were simply slaves by habit and nature. Dalhousie applied to complex problems short-term solutions such as doling out rations when some Refugees were in a state of starvation or passing out blankets when they were freezing, rather than confronting the problems of land placement and removing them to a more fertile part of the province. One example of Dalhousie's ineffective policies was the attempt to regulate the Refugees' freedom of movement.³⁰

²⁸Dalhousie to Bathurst, 14 August 1817, PANS, vol. 112, pp. 32-35.

²⁹Dalhousie to Bathurst, 10 June 1819, PANS, vol. 112, pp. 78-79.

³⁰Dalhousie to Bathurst, 29 Dec. 1816, PANS vol. 112, pp. 6-9; Dalhousie to Bathurst, 10 June 1819, vol. 112, pp. 78-79 in Fergusson, Documentary, pp. 32-33.

The failure of land settlement to provide the Refugees with the necessities of life led many to seek employment in Halifax. The colonial authorities did not relish the prospect of the Refugees moving into Halifax, whether they were looking for work or entertainment. In late 1816, Dalhousie's administration passed a regulation denying rations in the settlements if the male head of the household was not present when provisions were doled out. The government justified this initiative by saying that Refugee men were "too much accustomed to leave their wives and children at the settlement, and go themselves to Halifax in search of employment or pleasure."³¹

Many Refugees ignored this injunction continuing to travel to Halifax; others simply left the colony in order to find employment. For example, John Carter did not wish to wait around for government provisions at Preston. Instead, he found work as a ship's cook.³² An early settler at Hammonds Plains, Brister Webb, ignored the government's

³¹His Majesty's Council to Dalhousie, 29 November 1816, PANS, vol. 421, doc. 37; also see, Dalhousie to His Majesty's Council, 15 November 1816, PANS, vol. 421, doc. 36.

order and became a seaman in 1817.³³ Before August 1818, Fielding Johnson left his lot at Preston and moved to Cole Harbour and Isaac Rawlins moved to Dartmouth.³⁴ The Refugees, through their actions, defied government policy. The administration could not enforce its regulations, in the end being obliged to accept the Refugees' conception of freedom.

How can historians make sense of Dalhousie's conduct toward the Black Refugees? His interactions with the Refugees must be understood in two parts. First, he had a strong belief in social hierarchy. As Peter Burroughs argues, Dalhousie had "no patience with those who showed disrespect, challenged authority, or, in the case of the lower class, had ideas above their station in life."³⁵ Certainly the Black Refugees challenged his authority by ignoring the order requiring them to stay on their farms. Second, Dalhousie regarded defiance as an attack against

³²Acadian Recorder, 29 August 1818.

³³Andrew Smith 1829, Land Papers, PANS, RG 20 A.

³⁴Report of the Inspection of Preston Lots, August 1818, PANS, vol. 419, doc. 90.

his personal character. As Murray Beck points out, Dalhousie "might change overnight his opinion of someone who, he believed, had thwarted his good intentions."³⁶ For example, in 1817, the Lt. Governor expressed sorrow at the Refugees' plight.³⁷ However, when they needed more government assistance, Dalhousie seemed to believe that the Refugees had purposely failed him and referred to them as "miserable creatures."³⁸ Dalhousie's policies toward the Refugees mixed his reactionary ideas about social class with an overly sensitive personality.³⁹

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 rationalisation for deportation,

³⁵Peter Burroughs, "Ramsey, George, 9th Earl of Dalhousie," Dictionary of Canadian Biography (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966) 7, p. 732.

³⁶J. Murray Beck, Politics of Nova Scotia: I, 1710-1896 (Tantallon: Four East Publications, 1985), p. 80.

³⁷Dalhousie to Bathurst, 14 August 1817, PANS, vol. 112, pp. 32-35.

³⁸Dalhousie to Bathurst, 10 June 1819, PANS, vol. 112, pp. 78-79.

³⁹Beck, Politics, pp. 80-88; Burroughs, "Dalhousie," pp. 722-33.

Dalhousie reasoned incorrectly that most Refugees had been taken from the United States against their will. Thus he encouraged the imperial government 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."⁴⁰

When Nova Scotian officials attempted to persuade the Refugees of the advantages in returning to the United States, they encountered defiance. Eventually, Lord Dalhousie realised that "none of them are inclined to return to their Masters, or to America."⁴¹ 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

⁴⁰Dalhousie to Bathurst, 29 Dec. 1816, PANS vol. 112, pp. 6-9.

⁴¹Dalhousie to Bathurst, 16 May 1817, PANS, vol. 112, pp. 23-26;

Nova Scotia, simply replied "oh no, -that never do."⁴² In the summer of 1815, local blacks in Halifax supposedly had expressed interest in returning to Africa.⁴³ 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 remove from the colony make unlikely the idea of approval 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.⁴⁴

In 1820, however, the Refugees were offered conveyance to and settlement in Trinidad. The Lords Commissioners of

⁴²W.S. Moorsom, Letters from Nova Scotia: comprising sketches of a young country (London: H. Colburn & R. Bentley, 1830), p. 126.

⁴³Acadian Recorder, 22 July 1815; Halifax Journal, 24 July 1815; Judith Fingard, "English Humanitarianism and the Colonial Mind: Walter Bromley in Nova Scotia, 1813-25," Canadian Historical Review 54 (June, 1973), p. 137.

His Majesty's Treasury paid for the expedition. The Refugees were also promised land and rations. The Halifax government hoped that they 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 their fear of re-enslavement.⁴⁵

⁴⁴Dalhousie to Bathurst, 16 May 1817, PANS, vol. 112, pp. 23-26.

⁴⁵Fergusson, Documentary, p. 35; Grant, Black Refugees, pp. 94-99; Grant, "1821 Emigration," pp. 289-92; John Weiss, Free Black American Settlers in Trinidad, 1815-1816 (London: McNish and Weiss, 1995). The original black American settlers were primarily from Georgia and the Chesapeake. I have had the wonderful opportunity to correspond with Mr. Weiss in late October 2002. He has gathered different lists of the settlers in Trinidad.

In the end, only ninety-five Black Refugees migrated to Trinidad, in January 1821. These 95 migrants consisted of 81 adults and 14 children.⁴⁶ In other words, less than 6 per cent 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 importantly, 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. James Walker argues that the 95 emigrants were "all from Hammond's Plains."⁴⁷ Robin Winks maintains that "nearly all were from Beech Hill [a small black settlement 11 kilometres from Halifax]."⁴⁸ C.B. Fergusson and John Grant state that 34 families from Preston, Hammonds Plains, and Beech Hill expressed interest

Despite his outstanding work, he agrees that the exact identity of the 1821 Refugees is still difficult to discern. 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.

⁴⁶Kempt to Harrison, 20 January 1822 [1821], PANS, vol. 113, doc. 35.

⁴⁷Walker, Black Loyalists, p. 394.

⁴⁸Winks, Blacks, p. 123.

in removal to Trinidad.⁴⁹ 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."⁵⁰ Another source, "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).⁵¹

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 for the first scenario. Thomas Dines' large family signed up to emigrate to Trinidad, but his heirs were granted land in Preston in 1842.⁵² This

⁴⁹Fergusson, Documentary, p. 35; Grant, "1821 Emigration," p. 289.

⁵⁰Return of the Black American Refugees residing at Hammond's Plains, PANS, vol. 422, doc. 19.

⁵¹Those who wish to go to Trinidad, PANS, vol. 422, doc. 20. Refugee Hill was located near the North West Arm.

⁵²Ibid; Land Grant for the People at Preston, 23 May 1842, PANS, Land Grants.

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.⁵³ 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 per cent of these Refugees were from Hammonds Plains; 37 per cent had lived at Preston, Beech Hill, and Refugee Hill. The majority were married, but 56 per cent did not have any children. Nearly 40 per cent were single with no family attachments. Overall, most of the emigrants were relatively youthful without large families and as such had a lower level of attachment to Nova Scotia than older Refugees at Preston.⁵⁴

⁵³Return of the Black American Refugees residing at Hammond's Plains, PANS, vol. 422, doc. 19; Gray to James, 11 May 1836, PANS, vol. 9, doc. 58.

⁵⁴Those who wish to go to Trinidad, PANS, vol. 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 recognised 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.⁵⁵ 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.⁵⁶ Clearly, the economic success of those that 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 per cent of the Black Refugees refused to emigrate to the Caribbean. Some had established friendships, built houses, cleared land and found employment in Nova Scotia. Moreover, they realised 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.

⁵⁵K.O. Laurence, "The Settlement of Free Negroes in Trinidad before Emancipation," Caribbean Quarterly 9 (1963), pp. 31-32.

⁵⁶Cited in Fergusson, Documentary, p. 37.

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.⁵⁷

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

The Refugees' refusal to emigrate 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

⁵⁷Kempt to Horton, 4 May 1825, Colonial Office 217/144.

than that of Nova Scotia, where the produce of the earth can be obtained with little exertion."⁵⁸ Not surprisingly, the government attempted to encourage the removal of the Refugees periodically for many years, but these offers were rejected. The emerging elite 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.⁵⁹

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 marginalisation blended with efforts at mass

⁵⁸Free Press, 8 February 1825.

⁵⁹Kempt to Harrison, 17 April 1821, PANS, vol. 113, doc. 35; Kempt to George, 20 Jan 1821, PANS, vol. 113,

removal. Then, in the period 1821-40, 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.⁶⁰

doc. 38; Grant, Black Refugees, p. 98; Fergusson, Documentary, pp. 36-37.

⁶⁰Reports on Hammond's Plains, 16 January 1827, PANS, vol. 422, doc. 35- 37; there is a major decrease in government documentation about the Refugees during the 1820s as opposed to their first years of settlement.

Chapter 4: Land and Labour

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 it has been tempting to focus on their failure to garner steady employment. For example, C.B. Fergusson and Robin Winks depict the Refugees as a group satisfied to live off white philanthropy and unable or even uninterested in improving their situation through industry.¹

Robin Winks goes so far as to say 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."² This might have been true of a few Refugees. However, even these Refugees'

¹C.B. Fergusson, A Documentary Study of the Establishment of the Negroes in Nova Scotia (Halifax: The Public Archives of Nova Scotia, 1948), pp. 66-67; Robin Winks, The Blacks in Canada (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), pp. 114-41.

²Winks, Blacks, p. 125.

perceived indolence might largely have resulted from the colony's pathetic employment opportunities and rocky farmland.

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 William Moorsom 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."³

These feelings were not exclusive to male Refugees. In the 1850s, New Yorker Frederic Cozzens visited Preston. Imbued with the belief that African Americans were happier as slaves, he interrogated Mrs. Deer formerly of Maryland.

³W.S. Moorsom, Letters from Nova Scotia: comprising sketches of a young country (London: H. Colburn & R. Bentley, 1830), p. 126. Captain William Moorsom travelled throughout Nova Scotia in the 1820s. He held negative opinions about the Black Refugees.

Cozzens' conversation with the "old tidy wench" is revealing.⁴

'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.'⁵

Context and Historiography

The Refugees' farming problems must be understood within a wider framework of immigrant difficulty in British North America.⁶ It may seem sensible to compare the Refugees' experience to those of the later arriving American Fugitives in Canada West. Yet, this comparison is problematic. It can only be based on the dubious concepts of geographic convenience and racial similarity. Aside

⁴Frederic Cozzens, Acadia; or A Month with the Blue Noses (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1859), p. 64. Frederic Cozzens visited Nova Scotia in the mid 1850s. A humorist and wine merchant, Cozzens was stuck in the colony because his boat to Bermuda had been cancelled.

⁵Ibid., pp. 65-66.

⁶Some Irish immigrants to Ontario were quite successful, see Donald Akenson, The Irish in Ontario: A

from this, the differences between the Refugees and the Fugitives are numerous.

At Wilberforce and Dawn, internal feuding and incompetent leadership caused these settlements' failure rather than seasonal employment, poor access to markets or sterile soil. Also, a portion of the Wilberforce settlers were from Cincinnati.⁷ Their urban background differed greatly from Refugees who were primarily rural or semi-rural people. The American Fugitives also included free

Study in Rural History (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1984).

⁷William Pease and Jane Pease, Black Utopia: Negro Communal Experiments in America (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1963), pp. 46-83; Winks, Blacks, pp. 142-232; Daniel Hill, The Freedom-Seekers: Blacks in Early Canada (Agincourt: Book Society of Canada, 1981), pp. 67-74; Allen Stouffer, The Light of Nature and the Law of God: Antislavery in Ontario 1833-1877 (Montreal: McGill-Queens's University Press, 1992); Jason Silverman, Unwelcome Guests: Canada West's Response to American Fugitive Slaves, 1800-1865 (Port Washington: Associated Faculty Press, 1985); important primary sources are 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 (1856 repr., 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), 2.

blacks attempting to escape from the Black Codes and, after 1850, the Fugitive Slave Act.⁸ Significantly, the moderately successful settlement at Elgin was located on "the most fertile soil in Kent County," and near railroads which provided many new settlers with immediate work.⁹ It also benefited from the leadership of the Reverend William King. The Elgin settlement developed its own sawmill and gristmill. The Elgin farmers obtained good prices for wheat, corn, oats, tobacco, and timber.¹⁰ In Nova Scotia, the Refugees never enjoyed fertile land or white benefactors such as King.¹¹

⁸Adrienne Shadd, "'The Lord seemed to say 'Go': Women and the Underground Railroad Movement," in 'We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up': Essays in African Canadian Women's History ed. Peggy Bristow (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), pp. 41-68; Victor Ullman, Martin R. Delany: The Beginnings of Black Nationalism (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), pp. 122-94; Fred Landon, "The Negro Migration to Canada After the Passing of the Fugitive Slave Act," Journal of Negro History 3 (January, 1920), pp. 22-36.

⁹Hill, Freedom-Seekers, pp. 80-81; on the ideas associated with the black settlements, see Howard Law, "Self Reliance Is the True Road to independence: Ideology and the Ex-Slaves in Buxton and Chatham," Ontario History 77 (June, 1985), pp. 107-21.

¹⁰Pease and Pease, Black Utopia, pp. 84-108; Winks, Blacks, pp. 208-18.

¹¹Victor Ullman, Look to the North Star: A Life of William King (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969); for other

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."¹² In contrast, Rusty Bittermann argues that farm settlement was "a differentiating process" among the Scottish settlers at Middle River in Cape Breton.¹³ 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.

treatments of the black presence in Ontario, see Jane Rhodes, Mary Ann Shadd Cary: The Black Press and Protest in the Nineteenth Century (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); Michael Wayne, "The Black Population of Canada West on the Eve of the American Civil War: A Reassessment based on the Manuscript Census of 1861," Social History 28 (November, 1995), pp. 465-86.

¹²Rusty Bittermann, "The Hierarchy of the Soil: Land and Labour in a 19th Century Cape Breton Community," Acadiensis 18 (Autumn, 1988), p. 33; T.W. Acheson, "New Brunswick Agriculture: at the End of the Colonial Era: A Reassessment," Acadiensis 22 (Spring, 1993), pp. 5-8. In terms of New Brunswick, the Refugees experience might fit into the class of farmers that Acheson describes as "agriculturists who counted farming as one part of a team of undertakings and who were probably respectable but always a little poor and somewhat insecure" (p. 25).

¹³Bittermann, "The Hierarchy of the Soil," p. 34.

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.¹⁴

The prosperous farmers at Middle River had little regard or concern for their poorer neighbours.¹⁵ In contrast, the poverty-stricken Refugees usually relied on the farm production of their more fortunate neighbours. 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

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 47-50.

were reduced to eating potatoes alone.¹⁶ 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."¹⁷ Yet, faced with strictly seasonal labour and other difficulties the settlers abandoned their farms having made little or no improvements.¹⁸ 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.

¹⁶Stephen Hornsby, Nineteenth-Century Cape Breton: A Historical Geography (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), pp. 71-79.

¹⁷J.S. Martell, Immigration to and Emigration from Nova Scotia, 1815-1838 (Halifax: The Public Archives of Nova Scotia, 1942), pp. 17-18.

Beginnings of Preston and Hammonds Plains

By December 1816, 924 Refugees had settled at Preston, about 15 kilometres east of Halifax.¹⁹ 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 Lt. 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."²⁰ 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,

¹⁸J.S. Martell, "Military Settlements in Nova Scotia after the War of 1812," Nova Scotia Historical Society Collections 24 (1938), pp. 75-106.

¹⁹Return of Negroes by Richard Inglis, 30 December 1816 in Martell, Immigration, p. 37.

²⁰Morris to Sherbrooke, 6 September 1815, PANS, vol. 420; doc. 76.

axe-helves, oar Rafters, Scantling, [and] Clapboards."²¹ Optimistically, Morris stated that the Refugees could sustain themselves simply by selling berries to people in Halifax if all else failed. They were provided with "a few implements of husbandry" in order to facilitate the construction of cabins.²²

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."²³ In fact, the Refugee settlement was located about 20 kilometres north west of Halifax. As of December 1816, 504 Refugees had moved to Hammonds Plains.²⁴ This settlement offered the Refugees access to the main road between Halifax and St. Margaret's Bay.²⁵ According to local historian Dorothy Evans, the settlement's advantages included lumbering opportunities

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.

²³Sherbrooke to Bathurst, 21 November 1815, Colonial Office 217/96.

²⁴Return of Negroes by Richard Inglis, 30 December 1816 in Martell, Immigration, p. 37.

and its short distance to salt water. However she carefully notes that "little of the soil in Hammonds Plains was suitable for farming."²⁶

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.²⁷ Immediately, they began clearing timber and building houses in anticipation of the "severe" winter.²⁸ After visiting Preston briefly, the Refugees were "well pleased and satisfied with its quality and situation."²⁹ 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."³⁰

The Refugees were excited about the opportunity to occupy their own land. Emerging from slavery where many

²⁵Map of Hammond [sic] Plains, PANS, vol. 419, doc. 34.

²⁶Dorothy Evans, Hammonds Plains: The First 100 Years (Halifax: Bounty Print, 1993), p. 56.

²⁷Sherbrooke to Bathurst, 21 November 1815, Colonial Office 217/96.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Morris to Sherbrooke, 6 September 1815, PANS, vol. 420; doc. 76.

³⁰Ibid.

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.³¹

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.³² In the autumn of 1814, "there was no longer any demand for Negro labour."³³ Several months

³¹Sherbrooke to Bathurst, 20 July 1815, Colonial Office 217/96.

³²David Sutherland, "1810-20: War and Peace," in The Atlantic Region to Confederation: A History, eds. Philip A. Buckner and John G. Reid (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), p. 256; James Walker, "The Establishment of a Free Black Community in Nova Scotia, 1783-1840," in The African Diaspora: Interpretive Essays, eds. Martin Kilson and Robert Rotberg (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 231.

³³Martell, Immigration, p. 16.

later the situation had not improved. One contemporary observer noted a "disposition in [the Refugees] to labour, and to help themselves, but the fact is they have nothing to do."³⁴ Employment remained seasonal even during periods of economic prosperity. In other words, the Refugees had difficulty finding work during the long winters. Secondly, the Refugees faced discriminatory hiring practices. In 1838, the Preston Refugees' white neighbours recorded that:

during 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.³⁵

Although some Black Refugees found various types of employment, the majority of men remained unemployed. The

³⁴Coleman to Sabatier, 23 March 1815, PANS, vol. 21, doc. 84.

³⁵Memorial of John Chamberlain, Alexander Lyle, Alexander Farquharson, Frederick Major and Allan McDonald-Dartmouth, June 8, 1838. . .Reside in the neighbourhood of the people of colour settled in Preston, PANS, vol. 422, doc. 49.

few who found work usually cut wood or made brooms.³⁶ Some Refugees searched for menial jobs in Halifax, but without much success. Seth Coleman reported in 1815 that only four men with families had found employment. Jobless male Refugees remained at home "taking care of the Family."³⁷ 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."³⁸

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.³⁹ The Hammonds Plains Refugees expressed

³⁶Coleman to Sabatier, 23 March 1815, PANS, vol. 21, doc. 84.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹On 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,

frustration about the "small dimensions" of their lots.⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹ 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."⁴² 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,

Daniel Clayton 1823, Thomas Saunders 1823, Henry Hill 1824, and Charles Stewart 1825, Land Papers, PANS, RG 20 A; also see, Petition of the Colored People at Preston, 1841, PANS, RG 20 Series C, vol. 31, doc. 124.

⁴⁰William Days 1823, Land Papers, PANS, RG 20 A; Andrew Smith 1829, Land Papers, PANS, RG 20 A.

⁴¹On the shortage of timber, see the following petitions, Septimus Clarke 1819, James Downing and Naith Johnson 1822, Bazil Crowd 1823, and Spencer Boyd 1825, Land Papers, PANS, RG 20 A.

⁴²Charles Arnold 1820, Land Papers, PANS, RG 20 A.

government officials or local whites provided the Refugees with assistance.⁴³

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 probably around the age of nineteen. The conversation reveals what the Refugees attempted to grow, the difficulties encountered during the different seasons, and why they pursued certain agricultural practices.

⁴³Dalhousie to Bathurst, 29 December 1816, PANS, vol. 112, pp. 6-9; Dalhousie to Bathurst, 10 June 1819, PANS, vol. 112, pp. 78-79; Journal of the House of Assembly, 8 and 13 April 1819, PANS; Journal of the House of Assembly, 15 March 1821, PANS; The Memorial of Certain Inhabitants of the town of Halifax on behalf of the poor Black Settlers at Hammonds Plains and Preston, 6 March 1824, PANS, vol. 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, 12 March 1825, PANS, vol. 80, doc. 35; Free Press, 1 February 1825; Free Press, 23 January 1827; Acadian Recorder, 3 July 1830; Acadian Recorder, 22 January 1831.

'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 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.'⁴⁴

⁴⁴Morning Post, 16 January 1841. Certainly, this document might have been embellished in terms of the journalist's portrayal of the Refugees' language. If the Refugee really was around 20 years of age, he would have

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 1838.⁴⁵ 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.⁴⁶ In 1835, government official Joseph Thomas surveyed 83 lots.⁴⁷ He carefully noted the original occupant's names and whether the household had been abandoned. Nearly 65 per cent of the original occupants had abandoned their farms by 1835.⁴⁸ Preston's population declined from 924 in

been born in Nova Scotia so it is curious that he referred to the journalist as "massa."

⁴⁵Fergusson, Documentary, p. 54.

⁴⁶Return of the Black American Refugees residing at Hammonds Plains 1820, PANS, vol. 422, doc. 19.

⁴⁷Report on Lots at Hammonds Plains, 17 June 1835, PANS, Box-Halifax County Land Grants-1787-1835, doc. 185.

⁴⁸Ibid. This seemingly high rate of out-migration must be understood in light of the fact that some Refugees probably died during the scarlet fever epidemic of 1826-27.

1816 to 525 in 1838.⁴⁹ 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 ten families or less.⁵⁰ Each division, except one, had sustained significant desertions by 1842: section A, 52 per cent; section B, 48 per cent; section C, 52 per cent; section D, 42 per cent; section E, 25 per cent; section F, 40 per cent; section G, 67 per cent; section H, 80 per cent; section I, 40 per cent; and section K, 0 per cent.⁵¹ In total, 43 per cent of the households in 1818 had deserted Preston by 1842.⁵²

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 51.

⁵⁰Report of the Inspection of Preston Lots, August 1818, PANS, vol. 419, doc. 90.

⁵¹Land Grant for People of Colour at Preston, May 23, 1842, PANS, Land Grants. The Refugees at Section K probably comprised a portion of the poor. Some 3 out of 5 household heads were described as doing nothing in 1816, while there is no information about the other two household heads.

⁵²A 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. How many of these people died as opposed to 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

The group of Refugees, which remained in the settlements, was 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 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 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 moved into other farming districts.

desertion, even if we allow for deaths, remained quite significant.

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 ten years of settlement. Indeed, 70 per cent had abandoned their farms by 1827.⁵³ Second, the Preston Refugees were relatively mobile because they had fewer family members to support. An examination of 11 migrant households indicates that only one had multiple children.⁵⁴ At Hammonds Plains, 14 out of 29 migrant households had only one child. The other 15 households consisted of a wife and two or more children. However, 72 per cent of these families did not exceed more than two children.⁵⁵ 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

⁵³1827 Census, Nova Scotia, PANS.

⁵⁴Report of People off [sic] Colour at and about Preston, PANS Box-Halifax Land Grants 1787-1835, doc. 169. These are the 11 households that I could identify with certainty—there are better records of family structure for Hammonds Plains—from those who abandoned Preston.

⁵⁵Report on Lots at Hammonds Plains, 17 June 1835, PANS, Box-Halifax County Land Grants-1787-1835, doc. 185. These are the 29 households I could identify.

abandoned Preston.⁵⁶ 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.⁵⁷ 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.⁵⁸

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 weather did not destroy crops, the Refugees persistently had difficulty finding employment to supplement their meagre farming

⁵⁶Report of the Inspection of Preston Lots 1818, PANS, vol. 419, doc. 90; 1827 Census, Nova Scotia, PANS.

⁵⁷1827 Census, Nova Scotia, PANS.

⁵⁸Report on Lots at Hammonds Plains, 17 June 1835, PANS, Box-Halifax County Land Grants-1787-1835, doc. 185.

produce. In 1828, the government reported that the Hammonds Plains Refugees could not find employment in their district.⁵⁹ 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 black population had established itself as good urban labourers, ship hands, and domestic servants. In 1812, an unknown author recorded his/her 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.⁶⁰

⁵⁹Minutes of Council, 7 April 1828, PANS.

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 ship hands. 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.⁶¹

⁶⁰Cited in John Grant, The Immigration & Settlement of the Black Refugees of the War of 1812 in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick (Hantsport: Lancelot Press, 1990), p. 103.

⁶¹On African American employment, see Ira Berlin, Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 245-48; George A. Levesque, Black Boston: African American Life and Culture in Urban America, 1750-1860 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994), pp. 115-23; Gary Nash, Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community 1720-1840 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 144-54; Leonard P. Curry, The Free Black in Urban America, 1800-1850 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); Leon Litwack, North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961); Jeffrey Bolster, Black Jacks: African American Seaman in the Age of Sail (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Paul Gilje and Howard Rock, "'Sweep O! Sweep O!': African-American Chimney Sweeps and Citizenship in the New Nation," *William and Mary Quarterly* 51 (July, 1994), pp. 507-38.

The vast majority of 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.⁶² As of 1838, George Winder and Samuel Turner had given up on farming and taken up wage labour in Halifax.⁶³ Other Refugees worked as domestic servants.⁶⁴ For example, Samuel Turner employed one time Preston resident William Wiley as a servant. Wiley also worked in the fisheries.⁶⁵ Benjamin Roberts, a native of St. Mary's county Maryland, had been "in the service" of Chief Justice Blowers before obtaining land on the North West Arm.⁶⁶ E.T. Coke, who toured through Nova Scotia in the early 1830s, remarked that the Hammonds Plains Refugees were "good servants."⁶⁷ Nevertheless, many Refugees remained subject to frequent periods of unemployment.

⁶²1827 Census, Nova Scotia, PANS.

⁶³1838 Census, Nova Scotia, PANS.

⁶⁴Acadian Recorder 4 January 1817.

⁶⁵Novascotian, 23 November 1826.

⁶⁶Report to H.H. Cogswell, 15 May 1816, PANS, vol. 419, doc. 34.

⁶⁷E.T. Coke, A Subaltern's Furlough: descriptive scenes in various parts of the United States, Upper and Lower

Within the urban black community an emerging artisan class held specialised occupations such as carpenter, cooper, shoemaker, barber, dyer, butcher, and truck man.⁶⁸ 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.⁶⁹ Originally settled at Hammonds Plains, Scipio Cooper moved to Halifax and found employment as a truck man.⁷⁰ Cooper seems to have had a relatively successful business. On 11 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.⁷¹ In 1832, according to the Novascotian, one or two constables were

Canada, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia during the summer and autumn of 1832 (London: Saunders and Otley, 1833), pp. 415-16.

⁶⁸1838 Census, Nova Scotia, PANS.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Minutes of the Court of Quarter Sessions 1827-1839, 11 December 1830, PANS.

black men.⁷² In Dartmouth, Dean Atkins had served James Creighton 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."⁷³

The work of two Refugees deserves closer attention. One of the most successful Refugees in Halifax, a man named Campbell, owned a livery stable. His livestock holdings were comparable to the Lt. Governor's.⁷⁴ 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.

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.⁷⁵

⁷²Novascotian, 27 June 1832. It is unclear the exact identity of the constables.

⁷³Dean Atkins and William Wise 1821, Land Papers, PANS, RG 20 A. James Creighton was a farmer.

⁷⁴Grant, Black Refugees, p. 109.

⁷⁵Moorsom, Letters, p. 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. Here, he cleared half an acre of land and built a hut.⁷⁶ Hawkins was probably middle-aged in 1815.⁷⁷ 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.⁷⁸ A local celebrity of sorts, "mob[s] of boys" accompanied Hawkins during these walks. He also whipped the inmates of the workhouse.⁷⁹ Did Hawkins apply the lash to whites? If so, historians might have to rethink race relations and racial boundaries in early nineteenth century Nova Scotia.

The Refugees were also employed as merchant mariners. They excelled in this profession. Seafaring offered the

⁷⁶Report of Lands Cleared by People of Colour in Preston, May 9, 1816, PANS, vol. 421, doc. 3.

⁷⁷Black Refugees desirous of settling upon lands at Preston, vol. 419, doc. 90. Hawkins is listed as fifty years old.

⁷⁸T.B. Akins, History of Halifax City (1895, repr., Belleville: Mika Publishing, 1973), p. 207.

⁷⁹Ibid.

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.⁸⁰ Here, Webb found employment as a seaman, an occupation "he had always been used to."⁸¹ 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.⁸² 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 ability as seaman. According to the Reverend Robert Willis, "their

⁸⁰Andrew Smith 1829, Land Papers, PANS, RG 20 A.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Acadian Recorder, 22 July 1815.

aptitude for the service of merchant-sailors can be attested [to] by the mercantile community of Halifax."⁸³

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.⁸⁴ By 1827, he had found work as a labourer in Windsor, Hants County.⁸⁵ 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.⁸⁶ By 1827, Quarey had moved to Windsor and found employment as a labourer.⁸⁷

⁸³The Petition of the Reverend Robert Willis, D.D., Rector of St. Paul's Church in behalf of the Coloured People of Halifax, 27 January 1840, vol. 296, doc. 48. For the role of African North Americans in the merchant marine see Nash, Forging Freedom, p. 146; Bolster, Black Jacks; Ira Dye, "Early American Merchant Seafarers," Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society 120 (October, 1976), pp. 331-361.

⁸⁴Report of Lands Cleared by People of Colour in Preston, May 9, 1816, PANS, vol. 421, doc. 3.

⁸⁵1827 Census, Nova Scotia, PANS.

⁸⁶Report of Lands Cleared by People of Colour in Preston, May 9, 1816, PANS, vol. 421, doc. 3.

⁸⁷1827 Census, Nova Scotia, PANS.

These two Refugees' decision 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.⁸⁸ 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."⁸⁹ 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."⁹⁰ Some petitioners, such as David Page, were "willing to go any distance into the woods" in order to "obtain a piece of land."⁹¹ However, most petitioners

⁸⁸Jacob Allen, Joseph Smith, Naith Johnson, James Downing, Spencer Boyd, Ben Johnson, Henry Broad, Zachariah Randal, Charles Stewart, Naith Leach, Jeremiah Page, William Raph, David Page, William Wise, William Kellum, Henry Lee Sr., Henry Lee Jr., Winslow Sparkes, and William Bunday, Land Papers, PANS RG 20 A.

⁸⁹Jeremiah Gardner and Jacob Allen 1822, Land Papers, PANS RG 20 A.

⁹⁰Black Refugee desirous of settling upon lands at Preston, 1815, vol. 419, doc. 93; Spencer Boyd 1825, Land Papers, PANS, RG 20 A.

⁹¹David Page 1825, Land Papers, PANS, RG 20 A.

settled on the "new" road toward Musquodoboit or north of the original Preston settlement.⁹²

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.⁹³ Charles Stewart had a wife and six children.⁹⁴ Henry Hill was married and the father of eight children.⁹⁵

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.⁹⁶ Naith Johnson and James Downing, both married with three children each, hoped to settle together and "make a crop [during] the incomeing [sic] season."⁹⁷ Collective farming lessened chores and

⁹²Henry Lee Sr., Henry Lee Jr., Winslow Sparkes, William Bunday, William Wise, David Page, Zach Randal, Henry Broad, Naith Leach, Spencer Boyd, Joseph Smith, Jeremiah Gardner, and Jacob Allen, Land Papers, PANS, RG 20 A.

⁹³William Raph 1824, Land Papers, PANS, RG 20 A.

⁹⁴Charles Stewart 1823, Land Papers, PANS, RG 20 A.

⁹⁵Henry Hill 1824, Land Papers, PANS, RG 20 A.

⁹⁶Henry Lee Sr., Henry Lee Jr., Winslow Sparkes, William Bunday 1820, Land Papers, PANS, RG 20 A.

⁹⁷Naith Johnson and James Downing, Land Papers, PANS, RG 20 A.

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 typical 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.⁹⁸ Yet, Piles saw better opportunities elsewhere. A scarlet fever epidemic had left many lots empty in Hammonds Plains, thus Piles moved in to increase his land holdings sometime after 1827.⁹⁹ By 1835, Piles owned two lots, one of which he occupied.

In Hammonds Plains, many Black Refugees were equally interested in continuing as farmers. There were two very distinctive traits about the Hammonds Plains Refugees' petitions. First, they placed great importance on collective or cooperative farming. Second, these Refugees

⁹⁸Report of Lands Cleared by People of Colour in Preston, May 9, 1816, PANS, vol. 421, doc. 3.

wanted land in or near the original settlement. Between 1819 and 1829, 41 Refugees petitioned for land at Hammonds Plains.¹⁰⁰ 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.¹⁰¹ 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

⁹⁹Stairs to George, 15 January 1827, PANS, vol. 422, doc. 38; 1827 Census, Nova Scotia, PANS. Piles still resided in Preston as of this census.

¹⁰⁰Dominic De Broker and 35 others 1819, Charles Arnold 1820, Robin Cunard 1821, William Days 1823, James Watson 1827, Andrew Smith 1829, Land Papers, PANS, RG 20 A.

¹⁰¹Fergusson, Documentary, pp. 51-52. The Public Archives of Nova Scotia has lost Dominic De Broker's petition. Thus, we do not know the identity of the other 35 petitioners.

settlement."¹⁰² For example, Robin Cunard hoped to "occupy Lot No. 1 abandoned by William Butler who lately went to Trinidad."¹⁰³ In 1827, James Watson sought the land of Lenin Cooper, who had died during that year's scarlet fever epidemic.¹⁰⁴ Andrew Smith had cultivated the abandoned lot of his neighbour for 12 years and in 1829 formally applied for a ticket of occupation.¹⁰⁵ 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

¹⁰²William Days 1823, Land Papers, PANS, RG 20 A.

¹⁰³Robin Cunard 1821, Land Papers, PANS, RG 20 A.

¹⁰⁴James Watson 1827, Land Papers, PANS, RG 20 A.

¹⁰⁵Andrew Smith 1829, Land Papers, PANS, RG 20 A.

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.¹⁰⁶

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.¹⁰⁷ A statistical analysis of the Refugees' land clearing reveals that at this early stage of settlement only six per cent had made few or no improvements. Some 74 per cent had cleared at least half an acre or more, while approximately 20 per cent cleared a quarter of an acre.¹⁰⁸ Clearly, work patterns indicate a general willingness to

¹⁰⁶Report of Lands Cleared by People of Colour in Preston, May 9, 1816, PANS, vol. 421, doc. 3.

¹⁰⁷Ibid.

¹⁰⁸Ibid.

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.¹⁰⁹ They were also engaged in clearing and constructing roads.¹¹⁰ The Refugees had planted "upwards of 1500 bushels" of potatoes and attempted to access the local fishery.¹¹¹ 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."¹¹² Sadly, this "industry" could not stave off continual crop shortages. Yet, the Refugees played an important role in the crop production of the Preston Township. In 1828 the community's residents,

¹⁰⁹Report of Council Committee on lands relinquished for the accommodation of the People of Colour settled in Preston, December 11, 1817, PANS, vol. 419, doc. 102.

¹¹⁰Dalhousie diary entries, 23 April 1817 and 28 September 1817, in Marjory Whitelaw, ed., The Dalhousie Journals: Volume One (Canada: Oberon Press, 1978), pp. 32 and 63.

¹¹¹Dalhousie to Bathurst, 14 August 1817, PANS, vol. 112, pp. 32-35.

¹¹²Ibid.

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.¹¹³

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

¹¹³Douglas Trider, ed., History of Dartmouth/District Families and Halifax Harbour 1800-1850 (Dartmouth: Douglas Trider, 2001) 2, p. 191. Of course, whites produced some of these crops. However, the Refugees made up at least 70 per cent of Preston's population in 1828. Thus, they played an essential role in grain, potato, and hay production. Also, they owned some of the cows, swine, and horses.

the land.¹¹⁴ 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.¹¹⁵ However, the 1826-27 scarlet fever epidemic coupled with numerous crop failures during the next five years destroyed this early success and progress.¹¹⁶ 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."¹¹⁷

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 prevalence of sickness. This led to an overwhelming feeling of despair. In 1835, they were granted ownership of 82 lots. However, 44 per cent of these

¹¹⁴The petition of the undersigned Coloured People residing at Hammonds Plains, 18 August 1826, PANS, vol. 422, doc. 33.

¹¹⁵1827 Census, Nova Scotia, PANS.

¹¹⁶Baxter to Kempt, 15 January 1827, PANS, vol. 422, doc. 35.

¹¹⁷Black Refugees of Nova Scotia, Letter, 28 July 1834, Reports of the Associates of the Late Dr. Bray.

farms were unoccupied.¹¹⁸ Although land holding remained an important community ideal, many had to find work elsewhere. 56 per cent 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.¹¹⁹

The work patterns of the Hammonds Plains Refugees' were constantly interrupted by bad circumstances. By 1826, many had improved the land and provided for themselves. However, the 1826-27 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

¹¹⁸Ibid.

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."¹²⁰ Some Refugees probably maintained two residencies, one in the city and another at the settlements.¹²¹ For example, Jacob Ford, Isaac Rawlins, and Samuel Turner worked in the Halifax/Dartmouth area during the 1820s and 1830s.¹²² Yet all were given title to

¹¹⁹Thomson to Campbell, 24 March 1837, PANS, vol. 422, doc. 44.

¹²⁰Thomas Desbrisay and Edward Lowe, 9 March 1837, Journal of the House of Assembly, No. 44, Appendix 9, PANS.

¹²¹Some probably boarded or rented out rooms in Halifax.

¹²²1827 Census, Nova Scotia, PANS; 1838 Census, Nova Scotia, PANS. The Refugees were migrating between Halifax and Preston, thus the census takers might have undercounted the number of Refugees residing in Halifax.

their farms in Preston.¹²³ Scipio Cooper worked in Halifax during the 1830s. As of 1835, he owned two farms at Hammonds Plains where he had originally settled twenty 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.¹²⁴ 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

¹²³Land Grant for the People of Colour at Preston, May 23, 1842, PANS, Land Grants.

¹²⁴Morris to Sherbrooke, 6 September 1815, PANS, vol. 420; doc. 76.

vegetables and produce to the local town market at Darien.¹²⁵ 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."¹²⁶ 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."¹²⁷ 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

¹²⁵Cited in Malcolm Bell, Major Butler's Legacy: Five Generations of a Slaveholding Family (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), p. 151.

¹²⁶Cited in Ibid., p. 134.

¹²⁷Betty Wood, "'Never on a Sunday?' Slavery and the Sabbath in Lowcountry Georgia 1750-1830" in From Chattel Slaves to Wage Slaves: The Dynamics of Labor Bargaining in the Americas, ed. Mary Turner (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 92.

neighboring countryside, were 'brought every Morning to market in profusion by Negroes.'¹²⁸

The Refugees had ample experience in the realm of marketing produce. Techniques learned during slavery were applied to 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."¹²⁹ Thus farmers sold their produce in an area referred to as the

¹²⁸Philip Morgan, Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry (Williamsburg: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, by University of North Carolina Press, 1998), pp. 372-73. Also see, Robert Olwell, "'Loose, Idle, and Disorderly': Slave Women in the Eighteenth-Century Charleston Marketplace," in More than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas, eds. David Gasper and Darlene Clarke Hine (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), pp. 97-110.

¹²⁹Fred Kilcup ed., Halifax Farmers Market: Chasing the Dawn (Halifax: City Market of Halifax Cooperative Limited, 1998), p. 17.

"Green Market."¹³⁰ Historian Arthur Eaton wrote in 1915 that the market consisted of "Chezzercookers [Acadians] and Negroes" who sold various fruits, vegetables, flowers, and poultry.¹³¹ These hawkers were arranged "along the sidewalks [and] unobtrusively offer[ed] their goods for sale."¹³²

Black Refugee marketers were an integral part of urban life and provided their families with an important source of income.¹³³

Nova Scotia offered a wide assortment of wild fruits including gooseberry, cranberry, chokecherry, strawberry, raspberry, blueberry, and blackberry.¹³⁴ 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

¹³⁰Arthur Eaton, "Chapters in the History of Halifax, Nova Scotia," Americana Illustrated (New York: The National Americana Society, 1915), p. 835.

¹³¹Ibid.

¹³²Ibid.

¹³³Free blacks found work as street vendors in Philadelphia as well, see Nash, Forging Freedom, p. 75.

¹³⁴Thomas Chandler Haliburton (Walter Bromley?), A General Description of Nova Scotia (Halifax: Royal Acadian School, 1823), p. 25.

berries."¹³⁵ 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."¹³⁶ Frederic Cozzens declared that "as every race has a separate vocation here, only of the negroes [sic] can you purchase berries."¹³⁷

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."¹³⁸ 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.

¹³⁵Acadian Recorder, 21 February 1824.

¹³⁶Campbell Hardy, Sporting Adventures in the New World; Days and Nights of Moose-Hunting in the Forests of Acadia. (London: Hurst and Blackett Publishers, 1855) 2, p. 22.

¹³⁷Cited in Marjory Whitelaw, ed., Letters from Nova Scotia (Canada: Oberon Press, 1986), p. 27.

¹³⁸Haliburton, General Description, p. 22.

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.¹³⁹

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.¹⁴⁰ 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.¹⁴¹ Supposedly, "coloured"

¹³⁹Moorson, Letters, p. 126.

¹⁴⁰Mary Jane Katzmann (Mrs. William Lawson), History of the Townships of Dartmouth, Preston and Lawrencetown (Halifax: Morton, 1893), p. 46; Joan Payzant and Lewis Payzant, Like a Weaver's Shuttle: A History of the Halifax-Dartmouth Ferries (Halifax: Nimbus, 1979). This book maintains that service was certainly regular as early as 1786. However, Lawson argues that it was hardly regular before 1816.

¹⁴¹Katzmann, History, pp. 46-47.

persons were charged much less for conveyance across the harbour.¹⁴²

The Preston Refugees "were accustomed to troop into town, across the Dartmouth Ferry, their rude wagons laden with farm produce."¹⁴³ 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.¹⁴⁴ 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.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴²Ibid., p. 48.

¹⁴³Eaton, "History of Halifax," p. 835.

¹⁴⁴Morning Post, 29 October 1840.

¹⁴⁵Novascotian, 27 June 1832.

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.¹⁴⁶ The women sold nearly everything under the sun 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."¹⁴⁷ However, the market was more than a simple economic endeavour. Refugee women used the opportunity to socialise with each other and converse with their white benefactors. They also obtained Indian Meal, a favourite food of the Refugee communities, and made sure to have "their pipes filled."¹⁴⁸ Late Victorian historian, Mary

¹⁴⁶Garcia Clarke, Onions Are My Husband: Survival and Accumulation by West African Market Women (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Felix Ekechi and Bessie House Midama eds., African Market Women and Economic Power: The Role of Women in African Economic Development (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1995).

¹⁴⁷M.G. Parks, ed., Joseph Howe Western and Eastern Rambles: Travel Sketches of Nova Scotia (1828 repr., Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), p. 55.

¹⁴⁸Ibid.

Jane Katzmann described the Refugees' seasonal market activities thusly:

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 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.¹⁴⁹

Many contemporary observers and later historians found the Refugees' berry gathering a sign of indolence or failure to

¹⁴⁹Lawson, Townships, pp. 188-89.

engage in the colony's "staple trades."¹⁵⁰ 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.¹⁵¹ They also marketed "charcoal, staves, and shingles and such other lumber."¹⁵² At Hammonds Plains, Deal Wiley engaged in barrel making to support his farming endeavours.¹⁵³ At Preston women were "generally good spinners," and engaged in the production of cloth under the direction of local weaver William McLaughlin throughout the

¹⁵⁰Winks, Blacks, p. 140. Contemporary observers such as "Z" in Acadian Recorder 21 February 1824; Moorsom, Letters, pp. 125-31; Cozzens, Acadia, p. 41.

¹⁵¹Coleman to Truman, 5 March 1815, PANS, vol. 420, doc. 132.

¹⁵²Memorial of John Chamberlain, Alexander Lyle, Alexander Farquharson, Frederick Major and Allan McDonald-Dartmouth, June 8, 1838. . .Reside in the neighbourhood of the people of colour settled in Preston, PANS, vol. 422, doc. 49.

¹⁵³Evans, First 100 Years, p. 63. Deal Wiley's son or grandson, Deal Wiley, opened his own mill after purchasing a barrel making machine from Lloyd's of Kentville in 1888. The younger Deal Wiley was 10 years old in 1846.

1820s and 1830s.¹⁵⁴ Women at Hammonds Plains worked as domestic servants and made brooms.¹⁵⁵ In times of difficulty, local philanthropic organisations such as the Ladies' Bazaar furnished "the means of employment" for the Refugees when "their ordinary occupations fail."¹⁵⁶

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."¹⁵⁷ This plan did not come to fruition. As of 1838, Winder had abandoned his house and turned to urban labour.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴Novascotian, 28 June 1827; Memorial of William McLaughlin, 14 February 1836, vol. 52, doc. 95. McLaughlin was a well-known weaver. He resided in Preston.

¹⁵⁵Novascotian, 22 February 1834; Coke, Subaltern, pp. 415-16.

¹⁵⁶Acadian Recorder, 3 July 1830.

¹⁵⁷The Memorial of George Winder 1829, PANS, vol. 57, doc. 82.

¹⁵⁸1838 Census, Nova Scotia, PANS.

William Dair owned and operated the Stag Hotel. Popularly known as "Dear's Hotel," this inn remained extremely popular throughout the nineteenth century.¹⁵⁹ 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.¹⁶⁰

This popular inn accommodated many of the province's elite, including Joseph Howe.¹⁶¹ 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."¹⁶² Nevertheless, Dair and his wife did quite well as innkeepers. Recalling the hotel's success, the Morning Chronicle reported in 1909: "a trip in

¹⁵⁹William Dair's name appears in the documents spelled in various ways: Dare, Dear, Deer, and Dair. But in the 1841 petition, he signed his name as William Dair.

¹⁶⁰Cited in Grant, Black Refugees, p. 106.

¹⁶¹Ibid.

that section of the county would not be complete without a stop being made at this favourite hostelry."¹⁶³

Women's Economy and Gender Roles

The Refugees' petitions to the government exhibit contemporary ideals about the 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."¹⁶⁴ Jeremiah Gardner stated that his large family was "depending upon him for support."¹⁶⁵ Daniel Clayton could not "with all his endeavours keep his family from suffering."¹⁶⁶ Suther Blair claimed that his wife and six children were "depending on him for support."¹⁶⁷ 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."¹⁶⁸ In other words,

¹⁶²Cozzens, Acadia, p. 43.

¹⁶³Morning Chronicle, 7 June 1909.

¹⁶⁴Zachariah Randal and Anse Moaten 1825, Land Papers, PANS, RG 20 A.

¹⁶⁵Jeremiah Gardner 1822, Land Papers, PANS, RG 20 A.

¹⁶⁶Daniel Clayton 1823, Land Papers, PANS, RG 20 A.

¹⁶⁷Suther Blair 1824, Land Papers, PANS, RG 20 A.

¹⁶⁸Thomas Saunders 1823, Land Papers, PANS, RG 20 A.

Saunders recognised 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.¹⁶⁹ 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."¹⁷⁰ Hammonds Plains resident, Widow Gingham, ably provided for her children. She maintained one of only 11 households at Hammonds Plains that did not require government assistance in 1836.¹⁷¹ These women remained the sole breadwinners for

¹⁶⁹Elizabeth Grant 1823, Land Papers, PANS, RG 20 A.

¹⁷⁰Ibid.

¹⁷¹Gray to James, 11 May 1836, PANS, vol. 9, doc. 58. There were 66 households.

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.¹⁷²

It is more difficult to discern how Refugee women perceived gender roles. For example, had gender roles and expectations changed during the transition from slavery to freedom? If so, in what ways? In 1856, Frederic Cozzens questioned Mrs. Deer, a relatively privileged ex-slave about her life in Maryland. Mrs. Deer'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."¹⁷³ Of course, her views cannot be taken as representative of most Refugee women. Certainly, many women from the Sea Islands and the

¹⁷²Desbrisay and Lowe to George, 9 March 1837, PANS, vol. 422, doc. 43.

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.¹⁷⁴

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.¹⁷⁵ In 1821, Captain Scott depicted Preston as

¹⁷³Cozzens, Acadia, pp. 64-65.

¹⁷⁴There are a few articles that deal with African Nova Scotian women in the nineteenth century, Sylvia Hamilton, "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 ed. Peggy Bristow (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), pp. 13-40; Suzanne Morton, "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, eds. Janet Guildford and Suzanne Morton (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1994), pp. 185-210.

¹⁷⁵Dalhousie to Bathurst, 29 December 1816, PANS, vol. 112, pp. 6-9.

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.¹⁷⁶

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."¹⁷⁷

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

¹⁷⁶Scott to Kempt, 19 March 1821, PANS, vol. 422, doc. 28.

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 1816.¹⁷⁸ He petitioned the government for more land in 1824.¹⁷⁹ Richard Smothers had cleared two acres of land by May 1816.¹⁸⁰ By the summer of 1818, he had constructed a double house and the following year he successfully petitioned for 130 acres of land.¹⁸¹ 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.¹⁸² In 1820, Suther Blair had six acres under cultivation. He also purchased one cow.¹⁸³ However, some of the petitioners may not have been very

¹⁷⁷Thomas Desbrisay and Edward Lowe, 9 March 1837, PANS, Journal of the House of Assembly, Appendix Number 44.

¹⁷⁸Report of Lands Cleared by People of Colour in Preston, May 9, 1816, PANS, vol. 421, doc. 3.

¹⁷⁹William Raph 1824, Land Papers, PANS, RG 20 A.

¹⁸⁰Report of Lands Cleared by People of Colour in Preston, May 9, 1816, PANS, vol. 421, doc. 3.

¹⁸¹Report of the Inspection of Preston Lots 1818, PANS, vol. 419, doc. 90; Richard Smothers 1819, Land Papers, PANS, RG 20 A.

¹⁸²Septimus Clarke 1819, Land Papers, PANS, RG 20 A.

¹⁸³Suther Blair 1820, Land Papers, PANS, RG 20 A.

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.¹⁸⁴

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.¹⁸⁵ William Robertson had cleared half an acre and built a house by the spring of 1816.¹⁸⁶ Over the next twenty years, Robertson bettered the deserted lots of his brethren. In 1842, the government granted him five lots.¹⁸⁷ A few Refugees not given land in the original settlement

¹⁸⁴Report of Lands Cleared by People of Colour in Preston, May 9, 1816, PANS, vol. 421, doc. 3; John Statton 1824, Land Papers, PANS, RG 20 A. 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.

¹⁸⁵Land Grant for the People of Colour at Preston, May 23, 1842, PANS, Land Grants.

¹⁸⁶Report of Lands Cleared by People of Colour in Preston, May 9, 1816, PANS, vol. 421, doc. 3.

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 1842.¹⁸⁸ These Refugees might have been the successful settlers that observers noted in their visits to Preston. The exact identity of the agricultural elite 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 importantly, 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.¹⁸⁹ 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 "Sixty pounds Nova

¹⁸⁷Land Grant for the People of Colour at Preston, May 23, 1842, PANS, Land Grants.

¹⁸⁸Ibid.

¹⁸⁹Charles Arnold 1820, Land Papers, PANS, RG 20 A.

Scotia currency" for 600 acres of land.¹⁹⁰ They were "granted" the land "as tenants in common" and were required to pay "one Peppercorn" every March.¹⁹¹ Two years later, the Reverend Archibald Gray visited the Hammonds Plains Refugees. He reported that only 11 households (17 per cent) were able to survive without government rations.¹⁹² These Refugees were usually granted ownership of multiple lots in 1835. Thus they also cultivated the abandoned lots of neighbours or relatives.¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰Land Grant of the 20th October 1834, PANS, vol. 419, doc. 120; these Refugees were: William Days, Abraham Smith, Hector Johnson, Cuffee Gray, Sampson Brown, Jack Harris, S. Hamilton, Gabriel Manigo, Cato Manigo, Andrew Smith, James Ellison, Joseph Holmes, Newman Brackenbury, Joseph Graham, Thomas Brunt, Charles Jackson, Alexander Emerson, Lawrence Hamilton, Patrick Bailey, Joseph James, William Marshman, July Cooper, Deal Wiley, Frederick Davis, Lewis Stewben, Israel Mott, Edward Price, William Marshman Jr., Peter Jenkins, and Reuban Davis.

¹⁹¹Ibid.

¹⁹²Gray to James, 11 May 1836, PANS, vol. 9, doc. 58; these Refugees were: Widow Gingham, William Days, Hector Johnson, Abraham Smith, Cuffee Gray, John Hamilton, Sampson Brown, Larry Hamilton, Shad Hamilton, Charles Dickson, and Andrew Smith.

¹⁹³Report of Lots in Hammond's Plains, 17 June 1835, PANS, Box-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.¹⁹⁴

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.

¹⁹⁴Cited in Fergusson, Documentary, pp. 46-47.

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.¹⁹⁵

The Refugees would only move in a large group. Lt. 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."¹⁹⁶ 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

¹⁹⁵Those that embrace the opportunity of going into the Country, 26 March 1837, PANS, vol. 422, doc. 47; Howe to George, 12 June 1837, PANS, vol. 422, doc. 48.

¹⁹⁶Campbell to Glenelg, 25 August 1837, PANS, vol. 115; pp. 56-57.

Spry Morris noted that they "would be received with no friendly feeling by the white population."¹⁹⁷

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."¹⁹⁸ Campbell asked the imperial government 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."¹⁹⁹

The penny-pinching imperial government refused this request. Lord Glenelg believed that the Refugees' failure

¹⁹⁷Morris to George, 1 August 1837, Journal of the House of Assembly 1838, Appendix number 32, PANS.

¹⁹⁸Campbell to Glenelg, 25 August 1837, PANS, vol. 115; pp. 56-57.

¹⁹⁹Ibid.

to develop successful farms resulted from their supposed indolence.

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 mistaken & mischievous notion, that if they are to subsist at all, it must be as proprietors of Land and not as Laborers for hire.²⁰⁰

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."²⁰¹ 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 realised the reality of the Refugees' situation. However, the imperial government refused to consider them as anything but perpetual paupers.

²⁰⁰Glenelg to Campbell, 25 October 1837, PANS, vol. 422, doc. 50.

²⁰¹Ibid.

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."²⁰² Sixty-four Refugees marked this petition. They realised 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 importantly, 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

²⁰²The Memorial of the People of Collour [sic] Settled in Preston, [1838?], PANS, vol. 422, doc. 46.

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.²⁰³

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 Lt. 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."²⁰⁴ 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

²⁰³Petition of Colored People at Preston, 1841, PANS, RG 20 C, vol. 31, doc. 124. This petition is very important because, I think, it might have been written by the Refugees themselves. The authors were probably William Dair and Sampson Carter. 105 Refugees marked the petition.

²⁰⁴Ibid.

tied to the land without being able to live upon it."²⁰⁵
Finally, in 1842, the imperial government granted the
Refugees and their descendants the land at Preston.²⁰⁶

This analysis of the Refugees' labour and work patterns indicate 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

²⁰⁵Ibid.

²⁰⁶Land Grant for the People of Colour at Preston, May 23, 1842, PANS, Land Grants. The Refugees' names were registered with the government.

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.

Chapter 5: Material Conditions and Family Structure

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.¹ However, the immigrants' poverty and the region's sterile land made this aspiration hard to achieve. Thus, older historical accounts argue that most farming remained at a subsistence level.² More recent studies maintain that settlement patterns and agricultural production depended heavily on one's access to capital.³

¹John J. Mannion, Irish Settlements in Eastern Canada: A Study of Cultural Transfer and Adaptation (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974); J.M. Bumsted, The People's Clearance: Highland Emigration to British North America, 1770-1815 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1982).

²Arthur Lower, Colony to Nation: A History of Canada (1946, repr., Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), pp. 193-94; Graeme Wynn, "The Maritimes: The Geography of Fragmentation and Underdevelopment," in L.D. McCann, ed., Heartland and Hinterland: A Geography of Canada (Scarborough: Prentice Hall, 1982), pp. 156-213.

³Rusty Bittermann, "The Hierarchy of the Soil: Land and Labour in a 19th Century Cape Breton Community," Acadiensis 18 (Autumn, 1988), pp. 33-55; T.W. Acheson, "New Brunswick Agriculture: at the End of the Colonial Era: A Reassessment," Acadiensis 22 (Spring, 1993), pp. 5-26; Stephen Hornsby, Cape Breton: A Historical Geography

New settlers in Nova Scotia that did not bring their own resources suffered tremendously. Ex-Soldiers, backland immigrants, Scottish settlers in Pictou, and the Black Refugees endured food shortages and poor housing.⁴ For example, recent arrivals in Pictou were reduced to starvation during the spring of 1816.⁵ One year later, Lord Dalhousie reported that a settlement of "disbanded soldiers" was in danger of starvation and "if rations [were] stopt [sic] they must quit."⁶ 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."⁷ Difficulty in clearing frontier land remained a problem for immigrants across British North America. For example,

(Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), pp. 72-74.

⁴J.S. Martell, "Military Settlements in Nova Scotia after the War of 1812," Nova Scotia Historical Society Collections 24 (1938), pp. 75-106; J.S. Martell, Immigration to and Emigration from Nova Scotia, 1815-1838 (Halifax: The Public Archives of Nova Scotia, 1942), pp. 17-18.

⁵Martell, Immigration, p. 18.

⁶Dalhousie to Bathurst, 14 August 1817, PANS, vol. 112, pp. 32-35.

⁷Hornsby, Historical Geography, p. 74.

Irish settlers on Amherst Island (Lake Ontario) experienced problems in clearing land.⁸ Generally speaking, most recent migrants found it nearly impossible to "farm wilderness land without capital."⁹ 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. Thus 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

⁸Catharine Anne Wilson, A New Lease on Life: Landlords, Tenants, and Immigrants in Ireland and Canada (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994).

⁹W.S. MacNutt, The Atlantic Provinces: The Emergence of Colonial Society, 1712-1857 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1965), p. 157.

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.

Historians are presented with conflicting observations about the Refugees' housing. One early visitor to Preston reported that they had erected "decent [and] comfortable houses."¹⁰ In contrast, 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."¹¹ In 1827, Dr. John Carter visited the Hammonds Plains Refugees. He reported that their houses were "with two exceptions warm."¹² Carter

¹⁰Report on Preston, undated (probably 1817 because of the document's reference to rodents), PANS, vol. 419, doc. 81.

¹¹Scott to Kempt, 19 March 1821, PANS, vol. 422, doc. 28.

¹²Carter to Baxter, 16 January 1827, PANS, vol. 422, doc. 37.

said they also enjoyed the comfort of beds made of "dry hay," but some Refugees did not have blankets.¹³

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 documentation might also reflect an observer's personal opinions about the Refugees. In all likelihood, the Refugees lived in various types of housing.¹⁴ Thus some visitors to Preston might have only observed certain sections where housing could have been very poor or relatively sturdy. Since Dr. Carter visited less than twenty households, it is difficult to know if these dwellings were exceptional or typical of the community.¹⁵

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Report of Lands Cleared by People of Colour in Preston, May 9, 1816, PANS, vol. 421, doc. 3; out of 127 families, 85 lived in huts, 34 in houses, 4 in snug houses, and 4 in good houses.

¹⁵Carter to Baxter, 16 January 1827, PANS, vol. 422, doc. 37.

The heterogeneity of house construction probably reflected each family's ability to garner the necessary materials and supplies to build a dwelling. As of 1816, the vast majority 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.¹⁶

However, eight families had constructed "Good" or "Snug" houses.¹⁷ These dwellings probably had sturdy frameworks, floors, and cellars. In general however, the Refugees' huts provided only basic shelter. The over-arching problem

¹⁶Head to Morris, 1816, PANS, vol. 419, doc. 47.

¹⁷Report of Lands Cleared by People of Colour in Preston, May 9, 1816, PANS, vol. 421, doc. 3.

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 if they brought little or no capital.¹⁸ 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."¹⁹ Their dwellings generally had dirt floors and patched roofs, while holes in the house were covered by dry moss.²⁰ In Newfoundland, initial housing among indigent Irish immigrants followed this pattern. Most dwellings consisted of a clay floor and "sod walls without windows."²¹ The Black Refugees, Cape Breton backland settlers and Irish immigrants constructed and lived in similar dwellings because of a blend of inexperience and poverty.

¹⁸Martell, Immigration, pp. 7-33; Martell, "Military Settlements," pp. 75-106.

¹⁹Hornsby, Cape Breton, p. 74.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Mannion, Irish Settlements, p. 143.

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." He described the rest of the houses thusly:

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.²²

Housing remained primitive for three reasons. First, during the initial years of settlement, the Refugees constructed houses or huts along lines 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 of small dwellings—each rarely more than a single

²²Frederic Cozzens, Acadia; or A Month with the Blue Noses (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1859), p. 41.

spartan room with an earthen floor."²³ Secondly, 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 "scarecrow edifices."

The Refugees' housing problems were exacerbated by the fact that they 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."²⁴ The following year, Charles Morris reported that the Refugees were "exposed to the severity of the Weather and in want of cloathing [sic]."²⁵ In 1817, another observer found some

²³Ira Berlin, Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 133.

²⁴Fairbanks' Letter, 8 March 1815, PANS, vol. 305, doc. 22.

²⁵Morris' Report, 1816, PANS, vol. 421, doc. 22.

families "almost naked."²⁶ 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.

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.²⁷

These petitioners found some of the Refugees' children in "a perfect state of nudity."²⁸ Two years later, in 1827, one visitor to Hammonds Plains commented that the Refugees lack of clothing was "distressing." In fact, some

²⁶Report on Preston, undated (probably 1817 because of the document's reference to rats), PANS, vol. 419, doc. 81.

²⁷We 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, 12 March 1825, PANS, vol. 80, doc. 35.

²⁸Ibid.

"scarcely [had] a covering of rags for their bodies."²⁹
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."³⁰

In 1825, two separate thefts underscore the Refugees' desperate shortage of clothing. On the night of 17 January 1825, Aaron Butler supposedly stole numerous clothing articles, including stockings and a coat, from Muirhead & Roasts in Halifax.³¹ 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

²⁹Report on Hammonds Plains, 15 January 1827, PANS, vol. 422, doc. 35.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Novascotian, 13 April 1825. Aaron Butler was originally from the Chesapeake. He arrived in Nova Scotia in 1813 at the age of 24. Butler was a sawyer. See *HMS Mariner*, September 1813, PANS, vol. 420, doc. 5

Butler of larceny and discharged Patterson.³² Several months later, John Anderson, "a coloured lad," stole a hat, shoes, and other items from his former employer, Jon Tremain.³³ The police arrested Anderson who had some of the "identical articles of wearing apparel upon him."³⁴ The other clothing items, Anderson had exchanged for food. The magistrates were convinced that Anderson preferred "to live by stealing than honest labour. . .[and] very properly ordered him to the goal."³⁵ Clearly, some Refugees' lack of clothing provided an impetus for them to seek it through extra-legal methods.³⁶

The Refugees' clothing situation did improve slowly. From the time of settlement until the late 1820s, clothing remained ragged and inadequate. These problems are

³²Ibid.

³³Novascotian 15 June 1825.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶The Court records reveal, however not in great detail, a few convictions for larceny. King versus Isaac Grant Sr. and Isaac Grant Jr., 10 December 1824, Minutes of the Quarter Sessions for Halifax County September 1813 to April 1818; King versus Thomas Binkley and Anne Binkley, 8 December 1820, Minutes of the Court of Quarter Sessions December 1814 to December 1826; King versus Sampson Carter,

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 provide for their children. The Refugees probably learned to use various items for clothing. Fredric Cozzens' description of their old hats, quilts, and "indescribable bundles" may be interpreted as an attempt by the Refugees to retain older apparel in preparation for the winter.³⁷

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 literlly [sic]

13 December 1825, Minutes of the Court of Quarter Sessions 1825-1827.

³⁷Cozzens, Acadia, p. 41.

nothing."³⁸ 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."³⁹ 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."⁴⁰ Indeed, for many Refugees food remained a scarce commodity.

It is very difficult to discuss the Refugees' daily diet. However, they clearly preferred Indian Meal (corn meal), 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

³⁸Coleman to Sabatier, 23 March 1815, PANS, vol. 21, doc. 84.

³⁹Head to Morris, 1816, PANS, vol. 419, doc. 47.

⁴⁰Carter to Baxter, 16 January 1827, PANS, vol. 422, doc. 37.

please them when I name it."⁴¹ 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 1817.⁴² Both men were exonerated.⁴³ 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 "Salt Fish."⁴⁴ As the Refugees sold berries at the market, strawberries, blueberries and cranberries also served as an important addition to their diet. Frederic Cozzen's Nova Scotian companion remarked that the Refugees, "a miserable set of devils," made money during the strawberry season and "while it lasts are fat and saucy enough."⁴⁵ The Refugees' diet, when crop failures did not

⁴¹Coleman to Sabatier, 23 March 1815, PANS, vol. 21, doc. 84.

⁴²Scipio Cooper and Charles Jackson, 4 March 1817, Grand Jury Room Book 1811-1828.

⁴³Scipio Cooper and Charles Jackson, 10 March 1817, Minutes of the Court of Quarter Sessions December 1814 to December 1826.

⁴⁴Report on Hammonds Plains, 15 January 1827, PANS, vol. 422, doc. 35.

⁴⁵Cozzens, Acadia, p. 41.

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 the white petitioners of Halifax noted 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.⁴⁶

The situation remained desperate for some Refugees.

Suffering continued periodically throughout the next ten 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.⁴⁷ One year later, government officials stated that only ten bushels of potatoes remained

⁴⁶We 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, 12 March 1825, PANS, vol. 80, doc. 35.

⁴⁷The Petition of the Black Settlers at Hammonds Plains, 1832, PANS, vol. 422, doc. 42.

for the entire settlement at Preston.⁴⁸ Officials provided rations for 858 Preston Refugees. In this 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.⁴⁹

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.⁵⁰ The authorities arrested Wilson, charged him with grand larceny, and then sentenced him to six months' hard labour.⁵¹ Wilson needed to provide not only for himself, but also for his wife and five children.⁵² 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

⁴⁸Desbrisay and Lowe, 1833, PANS, vol. 311, doc. 90.

⁴⁹Return of the Distribution of Twenty-Five Pounds granted by the Honorable House of Assembly for relief of Poor Coloured People at Preston, 1833, PANS, vol. 9, doc. 56.

⁵⁰Acadian Recorder, 7 November 1818.

⁵¹Ibid.

building a hut on his farm in Preston.⁵³ 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.

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 sickness 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 ten people, consisting of seven men and three women.⁵⁴ Their ages ranged from 21 to 54, but 80 per cent were over 30 years old. These Refugees suffered from

⁵²Black Refugees desirous of settling upon lands at Preston, PANS, vol. 419, doc. 93.

⁵³Report of Lands Cleared by People of Colour in Preston, PANS, 9 May 1816, PANS, vol. 421, doc. 3.

⁵⁴Names, Age, Diseases + present State of the Patients, Black Hospital Melville Island, PANS, vol. 421, doc. 2.

ulcers, 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."⁵⁵ Twenty-one year old James Thomas had his toes amputated and suffered from an ulcer on his right foot.⁵⁶ Thomas Farmer had lost "the use of his lower extremities from Disease of the spine" and was "bed ridden."⁵⁷ A recent arrival at the hospital, Mary Christopher, suffered from dysentery. She told Leslie that "many more [at Hammonds Plains] are labouring under the same complaint."⁵⁸

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

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Names, Age, Description and present State of the Blacks, Melville Island, 6 May 1816, PANS, vol. 421, doc. 1.

⁵⁸Ibid.

others sought basic medical treatment in Halifax at the Poor House. The Refugees' poverty and distance from Halifax probably made 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."⁵⁹ Sickness and ill-health lingered in the community because the Refugees had "nothing better than salt provision to restore them."⁶⁰ 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."⁶¹ He found three women on the verge of death and numerous others "complaining" of various ailments.⁶² Clearly, the Refugees' poverty contributed to continuing sickness in the community.

⁵⁹Fairbanks' Letter, 8 March 1815, PANS, vol. 305, doc. 22.

⁶⁰Coleman Letter, 16 April 1816, PANS, vol. 419, doc. 76.

⁶¹Head to Morris, 1816, PANS, vol. 419, doc. 47.

⁶²Ibid.

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 forty Refugees per day, but many died despite their efforts.⁶³ Although the smallpox epidemic had been contained, as of early 1815, Coleman reported that between 12 to 14 Refugees remained in poor health.⁶⁴ The Refugees' squalid living conditions made the outbreak of smallpox almost inevitable. Additionally, medical provisions and better health planning might have prevented the outbreak.

The smallpox outbreak is an important aspect in the medical history of the Refugees. It occurred when they were not isolated at Hammonds Plains or Preston. Instead,

⁶³Coleman to Sabatier, 6 February 1815, PANS, vol. 305, doc. 5; Fergusson, Documentary, pp. 15-17; Grant, Black Refugees, pp. 51-52. The number of Black Refugees that died from small pox probably exceeded the number given by Coleman (less than 10), because some Refugees had been sent to the Poor House and died there of the disease. A physician at Melville Island, Dr. Almon, reported to a local paper nearly twenty years after the incident that between 40 and 50 Refugees had been "taken down" by the disease. Whether taken down means death is unknown. See Weekly Mirror, 16 October 1835.

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," and 285 blacks.⁶⁵ 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 never have contracted it.

In the late 1820s, a scarlet fever epidemic ravaged Hammonds Plains.⁶⁶ At least 21 Refugees died between October 1826 and January 1827.⁶⁷ The effects of this

⁶⁴Coleman to Sabatier, 23 March 1815, PANS, vol. 21, doc. 84.

⁶⁵Coleman to Sabatier, 6 February 1815, PANS, vol. 305, doc. 5.

⁶⁶Reports on Hammonds Plains, January 1827, PANS, vol. 422, docs. 35-38.

⁶⁷The number might have been much higher. Some probably died after the government reports were made.

disease lingered because the Refugees lacked "Clothing, Bedding, nourishment, and Medicine."⁶⁸ 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."⁶⁹ After visiting Hammonds Plains, Dr. Carter wondered "how some of these people could have struggled to exist under these circumstances."⁷⁰ The school register of Hammonds Plains in 1828 reveals the devastating impact of the disease on the community. At least twelve children had lost parents during the epidemic.⁷¹

The Refugees suffered from scarlet fever because they did not receive adequate medical advice. Although the

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 forty persons. Dorothy Evans, Hammonds Plains: The First 100 Years (Halifax: Bounty Print, 1993), p. 62.

⁶⁸Report on Hammonds Plains, 15 January 1827, PANS, vol. 422, doc. 35.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Carter to Baxter, 16 January 1827, PANS, vol. 422, doc. 37.

⁷¹Half yearly Return of the School at Hammonds Plains, Negro District, November 1828, PANS, vol. 23. The dead included: George Gingham, George Butler, Robert Roe, Cato

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 devastate 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 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

Lee, John Lamo, Jo Wiley, Cato Jenkins, John Battray, and the parent of Priscilla Mell.

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 healthcare system improved. For example, in the wake of the 1834 cholera epidemic, boards of health were created to better deal with medical problems.⁷² However, during the immediate post-war period healthcare remained sporadic and ineffective especially for recent immigrants.⁷³

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 poor 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

⁷²Kenneth Pryke, "Poor Relief and Health Care in Halifax, 1827-1849," in Wendy Mitchinson and J.D. McGinnis, eds., Essays in the History of Canadian Medicine (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988), pp. 39-61.

such as food, firewood, and clothing. The community could not have survived without a degree of 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.⁷⁴ In the years after slavery, blacks in America

⁷³Martell, Immigration, pp. 12 & 15.

⁷⁴Lee Rainwater and William L. Yancey, eds., The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy: a Transaction Social Science and Public Policy Report (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1967); E. Franklin Frazier, The Negro Family in the United States (1948, repr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

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 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."⁷⁵ 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 follow typical Anglo-American patterns of two parents and multiple children. For example, an examination of over 50 households at Preston in 1815 reveals that only one did not have two resident parents.⁷⁶ 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

⁷⁵Herbert Gutman, The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976), p. xxii.

⁷⁶Report of People off [sic] Colour at, and about Preston, 30 September 1815, PANS-Box-Halifax County Land Grants 1787-1835, doc. 169.

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.⁷⁷

The Hammonds Plains Refugees also enjoyed stable family structure. In 1820, four years after arriving in Nova Scotia, 93 per cent of households were two-parent. Sixteen years later, death had taken its toll on family structure as the percentage of two-parent households had dropped to 80 per cent.⁷⁸ Women headed 18 per cent of Hammonds Plains' households in 1836.⁷⁹ However, the vast majority of these women were widows. For example, Mrs. Jerry had to raise 11 children after the death of her

⁷⁷Land Grant for the People of Colour at Preston, 23 May 1842, PANS, Land Papers, RG 20 C; on the importance of naming patterns, see Gutman, Black Family, pp. 93-99.

⁷⁸Return of the Black American Refugees residing at Hammonds Plains, 1820, PANS, vol. 422, doc. 19; according to this document 89 households had children, 83 were two parent (93 per cent); Gray to James, 11 May 1836, PANS, vol. 9, doc. 58; on this document 53 households were two-parent (80 per cent).

⁷⁹Gray to James, 11 May 1836, PANS, vol. 9, doc. 58. Single women (18 per cent) headed 12 out of 66 households. Only one man was a single parent.

husband, while Widow Brown needed to provide for six children.⁸⁰

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 per cent of households were female-headed in 1820. In Philadelphia, during the same year, women headed 18.1 per cent of white households and 20.5 per cent of black households. By the 1830s, women headed 18 per cent of households at Hammonds Plains. In comparison, Philadelphia women headed 24 per cent of free black families and 18.7 per cent of white households in 1830.⁸¹

Some Refugee households included extended kinship connections. The extended household had been an important aspect of slave families.⁸² In Nova Scotia, it continued as

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Gary Nash, Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 162; Return of the Black American Refugees residing at Hammonds Plains, 1820, PANS, vol. 422, doc. 19; Gray to James, 11 May 1836, PANS, vol. 9, doc. 58.

⁸²Gutman, Black Family, pp. 101-229. On the extended black family, see Elmer Martin and Joanne Mitchell, The

children were looked after by grandparents 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.⁸³ Nora and Dolly Mathews lived together and raised two children.⁸⁴ Arthur Bradley and Kelly Weaver adopted George Neal in 1816.⁸⁵ John Hamilton adopted the daughter of his friend Cato Lee who had died during the scarlet fever epidemic.⁸⁶ The Refugees' family sizes and composition varied, but most households were two-parent with multiple children.

An examination of church records and marriage bonds indicate that the Refugees preferred partners within their

Black Extended Family (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

⁸³Jacob Allen and Jeremiah Gardner 1822, Land Papers, PANS, RG 20 A.

⁸⁴Return of the Black American Refugees residing at Hammonds Plains, 1820, PANS, vol. 422, doc. 19. These two might have been sisters or simply from same plantation. I am not sure.

⁸⁵Names, Age, Description and present State of the Blacks, Melville Island, 6 May 1816, PANS, vol. 421, doc. 1.

⁸⁶Half yearly Return of the School at Hammonds Plains, Negro District, November 1828, PANS, vol. 23; Return of the School Kept at Hammonds Plains, 1 July 1833, PANS, vol. 23.

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. Indeed, it is the lack of Refugee surnames in church records and marriage bonds, which suggest that Refugee marriages were conducted instead by local preachers at Hammonds Plains and Preston.⁸⁷

Generally speaking, historians cannot discern the dynamics of individual marriages. 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.

⁸⁷St. Paul's Anglican Church Marriages (1816-1877); Christ Church Dartmouth Marriages (1793-1843).

Dunmore. They charged Fletcher and Mrs. Dunmore with poisoning Charles Dunmore. However, the court acquitted the pair on the ground of lack of evidence. Although the court remained very suspicious of their innocence, "it appeared not impossible that that the deceased might have taken the fatal drug intentionally to rid himself of a miserable existence."⁸⁸ The Dunmore-Fletcher affair garnered local newspapers' attention because most Refugees maintained stable family relations. This episode, while interesting, was probably quite atypical.

As early death of husbands or wives remained a common occurrence among the Refugee communities, some re-married to fill the void left in their lives. For example, James Slaughter, a prosperous farmer and community activist had been married when he arrived in Halifax.⁸⁹ His first wife died sometime between 1815 and 1839. Slaughter married another Refugee by the name of Gracy Winder in 1840.⁹⁰

⁸⁸Acadian Recorder, 30 October 1830.

⁸⁹Report of People off [sic] Colour at, and about Preston, 30 September 1815, PANS-Box-Halifax County Land Grants 1787-1835, doc. 169.

⁹⁰Douglas Trider, ed., History of Dartmouth/District Families and Halifax Harbour 1800-1850 (Dartmouth: Douglas

Widower William Kellum, who had successfully petitioned the government for 100 acres during the 1820s, married non-Refugee Louisa Forrester in 1842.⁹¹

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.⁹² Four years later, James Bell, a white man, married Sarah Carter, a Refugee.⁹³ 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.⁹⁴

Although Nova Scotia's legal structure did not forbid interracial marriages, custom might have made interracial

Trider, 2001) 2, p. 424. The government granted Slaughter 8 lots in 1842. He was the elder at the ABA-Preston in 1854.

⁹¹Trider, History of Dartmouth, p. 426; William Kellum 1826, Land Papers, PANS, RG 20 A. At this time, Kellum was married and had two children.

⁹²Trider, History of Dartmouth, p. 424.

⁹³Ibid; School Petition, 11 November 1820, PANS, vol. 422, doc. 20.

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.

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

⁹⁴Index of Marriage Bonds 1760-1850, Government Archives, Series 1253, PANS.

protest against anti-intermarriage laws in many northern states.⁹⁵

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, it 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

⁹⁵James Horton, Free People of Color: Inside the African American Community (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), p. 143; also see George Levesque, Black Boston: African American Life and Culture in Urban America (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994), pp. 138-148. In Massachusetts, the state legislature repealed the ban on intermarriage, but hardly had any intention of approving or encouraging relationships between blacks and whites.

encouraged self-reliance and mutual support among the Black Refugees.

Chapter 6: Leadership, Community Institutions and Identity

Many free black communities in North America during the early nineteenth century were composed of recent migrants from the south. Black churches were "instruments for developing community consciousness and for strengthening community bonds" among new settlers.¹ Free African Americans, like their counterparts in Nova Scotia, attended white churches before the development of separate institutions. Indeed, 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.² 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,

¹Leonard Curry, The Free Black in Urban America, 1800-1850: The Shadow of the Dream (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 194.

²Ibid., pp. 194-95.

Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Buffalo had taken root and provided the local black communities with leadership.³

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 recognised. 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

³Ibid., pp. 174-195; Gary Nash, Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 259-67; George Levesque, "Inherent Reformers-Inherited Orthodoxy: Black Baptists in Boston, 1800-1873," Journal of Negro History 49 (October, 1975), pp. 491-525; Emma Jones Lapsansky, "'Since They Got Those Separate Churches': Afro-Americans and Racism in Jacksonian Philadelphia," American Quarterly 32 (Spring, 1980), pp. 54-78; James Horton, Free People of Color: Inside the African American Community (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), pp. 34-35.

different backgrounds, community spirit probably took some time to develop. Once the Refugees had forged an identity through mutual experience, they replaced John Burton with an indigenous black clergy.

The Black Refugees arrived in Nova Scotia destitute and homeless. They were faced with the task of fostering leadership, establishing stable communities, and forging a new identity within Nova Scotia. By 1840, they had developed an indigenous leadership, created churches, and obtained the rudiments of literacy. More importantly, 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.

Although the Refugees formed internally diverse communities, those who first studied these immigrants read the situation in highly pessimistic terms, suggesting 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."⁴ John Grant offers a somewhat more nuanced perspective, suggesting that "there was often a distinction between black leaders as recognized by blacks and black leaders as recognized by white society."⁵ However, he ultimately retreats into a stereotype, declaring that lack of education resulted in "so few recognized leaders" except for Richard Preston.⁶

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 their 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

⁴Robin Winks, The Blacks in Canada (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), p. 114.

⁵John Grant, The Immigration and Settlement of the Black Refugees of the War of 1812 in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick (Hantsport: Lancelot Press, 1990), p. 116.

⁶Ibid., p. 115. Also see Frank Boyd, "Septimus D. Clarke," Dictionary of Canadian Biography (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985) 8, pp. 159-60; Frank Boyd, "Richard Preston," Dictionary of Canadian Biography (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985) 8, pp. 968-70.

rest, poor and miserable though they be, are unwilling to leave without them.⁷

Certainly, a degree of paternalism existed within the Black Refugee community. Did the community's poor want to leave the colony only to be over-ruled by the elite? Was the leadership more concerned about maintaining their improvements while shrouding self-interest in the cloak of group security?

It is possible that the leadership at Hammonds Plains and Preston consisted of ethnic bosses that controlled and exploited the communities.⁸ 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

⁷Gray to James, 11 May 1836, Journal of the House of Assembly 1837, Appendix 9, PANS.

⁸Jane Pease and William Pease, They Who Would Be Free: Blacks' Search for Freedom, 1830-1861 (New York: Antheneum, 1974), 288-90. These historians note that the black middle and upper class hoped to gain respectability in the eyes of the wider community. This goal was usually at odds with the people they claimed to lead. 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.

necessarily exploitative. In fact, hierarchies can be understood as "exchange networks based on trust."⁹ If the Refugee leadership wielded tremendous power, the majority of the population probably received something in return. This could have been food, shelter, or religious guidance. In rejecting the proposed emigration to Trinidad or creating community structures, the Refugee leadership might have simply reflected the majority's wishes. The elite probably expressed the community's interests, while serving to enhance their power.

Institutions: Religious and Educational

The Black Refugees placed great importance on religion.¹⁰ Christianity allowed the Refugees to make sense

⁹Albert Breton, "Patronage and Corruption in Hierarchies," Journal of Canadian Studies 22 (Summer, 1987), p. 31.

¹⁰Peter McKerrow, A Brief History of the Coloured Baptists of Nova Scotia, 1793-1895 (1895 repr., Halifax: Afro Nova Scotian Enterprises, 1976); Pearleen Oliver, A Brief History of the Coloured Baptists of Nova Scotia, 1782-1953 (Halifax: African United Baptist Association of Nova Scotia, 1953); Pearleen Oliver, A Root And A Name (Nova Scotia: Self-Published, 1977); Willard P. Clayton, Whatever Your Will, Lord: A Brief History Written in Commemoration of the 139th Anniversary of the Emmanuel Baptist Church, Upper Hammonds Plains, Nova Scotia (Hantsport: Lancelot Press, 1984); Donald Fairfax, Victoria

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, they 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, his conservatory of music. It was lyceum and gymnasium as well as *sanctum sanctorum*."¹¹

RD. United Baptist Church (Dartmouth: Self-Published, 1989); Savannah E. Williams, "The Role of the African United Baptist Association in the Development of Indigenous Afro-Canadians in Nova Scotia, 1782-1978," in Repent and Believe: The Baptist Experience in Maritime Canada, ed. Barry Moody (Hantsport: Lancelot Press for Acadia Divinity College and Baptists' Historical Committee of the United Baptist Convention of the Atlantic Provinces, 1980); for general treatments of the Baptist experience in the Maritimes see George Levy, The Baptists of the Maritime Provinces, 1753-1946 (Saint John: Barnes & Hopkins, 1946); George Rawlyk, Ravished by the Spirit: Religious Revivals, Baptists, and Henry Alline (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1984); Daniel Goodwin ed., Revivals, Baptists, & George Rawlyk: A Memorial Volume (Wolfville: Acadia Divinity College, 2000).

¹¹C. Eric Lincoln, foreword to Leonard Barrett, Soul-Force: African Heritage in Afro-American Religion (Garden

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. They provided a sanctuary where the Refugees could voice common concerns and issues.¹²

By the 1830s, the Black Refugees were predominantly Baptists. However, when they became Baptists is far more difficult to discern. Certainly, some of the Refugees carried the Baptist faith from the United States. However, there is evidence that the Refugees were hardly dogmatic in their religious preferences. In 1821 a religious society, the Practical Bible Philanthropists, organised meetings in

City: Anchor Press, 1974), p. viii; also see, Albert Raboteau, "The Slave Church in the Era of the American Revolution," in Slavery and Freedom in the Age of the American Revolution, eds. Ira Berlin and Ronald Hoffman (Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1983) pp. 193-217; Donald Mathews, Slavery and Methodism: A Chapter in American Morality, 1780-1845 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965); Mechal Sobel, Trabelin' On: The Slave Journey to the Afro-Baptist Faith (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1979).

Halifax around the principle that Bibles "could be of little service or use to any, except those who can read."¹³ The group stated that the "smallest particle" of sectarianism was not allowed. The Black Refugees participated in this society until one unfortunate day.

All of a sudden through the temptations of Satan, or the influence of his white subjects, all went away, or were removed, except the people of colour.¹⁴

The 1827 census also raises questions about the religious identity of the Black Refugees before the rise of the African Baptist churches. Although the Hammonds Plains Refugees are listed as Baptists, those at Preston were recorded as being Presbyterian. This might have been a simple error by the census recorder. However, it could have had some validity. Perhaps, the Refugees had been inspired by the visit of a Presbyterian preacher. If the Refugees actually were Presbyterian in 1827, religious

¹²Frank Boyd, ed., McKerrow: A Brief History of Blacks in Nova Scotia, 1783-1895 (Halifax: Afro Nova Scotian Enterprises, 1976), pp. i-xxv.

¹³Acadian Recorder, 4 August 1821.

¹⁴Ibid. I have not come across any other references to the Practical Bible Philanthropists.

identity was extremely flexible during the Refugees' first years of settlement.¹⁵

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.¹⁶

¹⁵1827 Census, Nova Scotia, PANS.

¹⁶William Moorsom, Letters From Nova Scotia: comprising sketches of a young country (London: H. Colburn & R. Bentley, 1830), pp. 126-27. One wonders who was this

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.

Prior to 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 1792.¹⁷ After undergoing a religious transformation in the United States, Burton returned to Nova Scotia. In 1795, he established a Baptist church in Halifax and twenty-five years later one at Hammonds Plains.¹⁸ 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

"sable" Reverend. I doubt it was Richard Preston, as he was very light skinned.

¹⁷McKerrow, Coloured Baptists, p. 9.

¹⁸Oliver, Brief History, p. 21; Clayton, Whatever Your Will Lord, pp. 11-12.

God. . .Father Burton preached, baptized, married, and buried his flock, as he called them."¹⁹

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, Lt. 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."²⁰ 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."²¹ By 1826, the Hammonds Plains Refugees wanted their own church and Burton supported this aspiration.²² During the scarlet fever epidemic, he petitioned the government to provide assistance to the

¹⁹McKerrow, Coloured Baptists, p. 10.

²⁰Christian Visitor, 16 July 1856 cited in Boyd, ed., McKerrow, p. 10.

²¹Clayton, Whatever Your Will Lord, p. 12.

²²The petition of the undersigned coloured people, residing at Hammond Plains, 18 August 1826, PANS, vol. 422, doc. 33.

Refugees.²³ Burton's role within the Black Refugees' communities diminished after the establishment of the African Baptist churches in 1832. He died six years later.

Eventually the Refugees, or more accurately the communities' indigenous religious leadership, wanted their own churches. This signified an important transition from dependency on whites to self-determination through the establishment of the African Baptist churches. 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."²⁴

In conjunction with aid from white evangelicals, the Refugee religious elite also harnessed genuine feelings of enthusiastic Christianity that pervaded many aspects of the

²³John Burton 1827, Hammonds Plains, PANS, vol. 443, doc. 65.

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."²⁵ 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.²⁶

²⁴Douglas Trider, ed., History of Dartmouth/District Families and Halifax Harbour 1800-1850 (Dartmouth: Douglas Trider, 2001) 2, p. 185; 1827 Census, Nova Scotia, PANS.

²⁵Report on Hammonds Plains, 15 January 1827, PANS, vol. 422, doc. 35.

²⁶Oliver, Brief History, p. 23.

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.²⁷

In 1831, at the insistence of his flock, Preston travelled to England in hopes of obtaining ordination and money for the construction of a chapel. The West London Association of Baptist Ministers ordained Preston in May of

²⁷McKerrow, Coloured Baptists, pp. 11-17; Novascotian, 27 June 1832; Boyd, "Richard Preston," pp. 968-70.

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 received comment from the Brighton Herald. "His manner of delivery is exceedingly pleasing and in his dissertation he evinces clearness and perspecuity [sic]." ²⁸

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. ²⁹

Preston's decision to build the mother church in Halifax opens up 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

²⁸Extract from the Brighton Herald in the Novascotian, 27 June 1832; McKerrow, Coloured Baptists, pp. 12-17.

Preston or Hammonds Plains. In other words, 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.³⁰ However, since he opted

²⁹McKerrow, Coloured Baptists, pp. 11-17.

³⁰Ibid., p. 17.

to spread the Gospel throughout the colony, he left each local church in 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."³¹ Hammonds Plains also enjoyed the services of local "Exhorters."³² These men held an important position in society and the church. Although unable to conduct weddings or baptisms, they preached the Gospel and held funeral services.³³ In other words, they filled the day-to-day needs of the congregation

³¹Ibid., p. 58. Rowan (also spelled Roan) was married with one child in 1833. He was 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 time 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.

³²Clayton, Whatever Your Will Lord, pp. 48-49.

³³Ibid.

because Richard Preston would have only been at Hammonds Plains sporadically.³⁴

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.³⁵ He argued that they were given to "monstrous absurdities," which replaced a true understanding of Christianity.³⁶ The Refugees' emphasis on "experiencing God" struck Nisbett as being superstitious and insane. For example, one Refugee related the story of stabbing a person on a cross, which drew blood and water.³⁷ For the Refugees, a blood vision/dream meant an intimate understanding of and

³⁴On the role of Black Fathers and the Black church more generally, see Carter Woodson, History of the Negro Church (Washington: The Associated Publishers, 1921); E. Franklin Frazier, The Negro Church in America (New York: Schocken, 1963); Charles Hamilton, The Black Preacher in America (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1972), C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya, The Black Church in The African American Experience (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990).

³⁵Nisbett's Report, 31 December 1826, Journal of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid. I am not sure whether this was a religious vision or a dream.

relationship with Christ. In contrast, Nisbett interpreted such religious stories as the height of "moral degradation."³⁸

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."³⁹ 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.⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹ 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

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Clayton, Whatever Your Will Lord, p. 34.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid.

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.'⁴²

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 (Mrs. Lawson) 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

⁴²Ibid.

and friends, and the day [was] made one of general rejoicing and festivity.⁴³

The Black Refugees forged a religious culture that expressed an understanding of 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.⁴⁴

The Black Refugees refused to compromise their understanding of Christianity. 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."⁴⁵ By 1820, Inglis concluded that the Preston Refugees were "hopeless."⁴⁶ Yet,

⁴³Mary Jane Katzmann [Mrs. William Lawson], History of the townships of Dartmouth, Preston, and Lawrencetown (Halifax: Morton, 1893), pp. 190-91.

⁴⁴McKerrow, Coloured Baptists, p. 11.

⁴⁵Inglis to Wix, 20 July 1818, Bray's Associates: Canadian Papers 1784-1836, copies USPG, Judith Fingard Papers.

⁴⁶Inglis to Wix, 21 July 1820, Bray's Associates: Canadian Papers 1784-1836, copies USPG, Judith Fingard Papers.

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 the established church. Overall, evangelical Christianity allowed the Refugees to come to terms with racism, seasonal employment, and failed farming.⁴⁷

Education

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-

⁴⁷Judith Fingard, "The 1820s: Peace, Privilege, and the Promise of Progress," in The Atlantic Region to Confederation: A History, eds., Philip Buckner and John

improvement among the community's population.⁴⁸ Yet, the Refugees continued for the most part to be reliant 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.⁴⁹ 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

Reid (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), pp. 271-76.

⁴⁸School Petition, 11 November 1820, PANS, vol. 422, doc. 22.

⁴⁹Fergusson, Documentary, p. 60.

Preston Refugees.⁵⁰ The following summer, Inglis noted that attendance at the school had increased under the diligent instruction of Fletcher.⁵¹ In 1825, Land Surveyor, John Chamberlain opened a Sunday school in Preston that was attended by 80 children (black and white), and their parents.⁵² 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.⁵³

These early schools had some success. However, Inglis believed that the Refugees' "religious prejudices and uncertain and irregular attendance" made educational progress difficult.⁵⁴ In early 1823, Inglis "advised" Fletcher to foster educational interest among the more "respectable Black men" at Hammonds Plains so that they

⁵⁰Inglis to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, 10 November 1818, Inglis Journals, PANS.

⁵¹Inglis to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, 1 July 1819, Inglis Journals, PANS.

⁵²Fergusson, Documentary, p. 61.

⁵³Hammonds Plains School Return, 1 June 1840, PANS, vol. 25.

⁵⁴Inglis to Wix, 10 January 1823, Bray's Associates: Canadian Papers 1784-1836, copies USPG, Judith Fingard Papers.

might encourage other Refugees to send their children to school.⁵⁵ 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."⁵⁶ 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."⁵⁷

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.⁵⁸ The Refugees' children were learning to read and spell by repeating after the teacher. Some were

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Inglis to Wix, 21 February 1835, Bray's Associates: Canadian Papers 1784-1836, copies USPG, Judith Fingard Papers.

⁵⁷Hammonds Plains School Return, 1 June 1840, PANS, vol. 25.

writing "monosyllable words."⁵⁹ 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."⁶⁰ Despite these achievements, education remained elusive for the Refugees. Wix complained about their "irregularity of attendance" and "constitutional inpunctuality [sic]."⁶¹

John Grant argues that the Refugees' failure to achieve 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 affairs. Schools struggled to remain open because the Refugees and their benevolent friends could not easily find teachers much less

⁵⁸Wix to Secretary of Associates of the Late Dr. Bray, 5 October 1829, Bray's Associates: Canadian Papers 1784-1836, copies USPG, Judith Fingard Papers.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid.

provide them with a decent salary.⁶² The Refugees did not lack the capacity or commitment to education, but rather their poverty and 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 disadvantage of sporadic schooling and irregular attendance.

Forging an 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: civilised, free, and Protestant. As Britain continued to forge its identity in the nineteenth century, the colonies also attempted to

⁶²Inglis to Wix, 20 July 1818, Bray's Associates: Canadian Papers 1784-1836, copies USPG, Judith Fingard Papers; Inglis to Wix, 21 July 1821, Bray's Associates: Canadian Papers 1784-1836; Inglis to Wix, 16 December 1830, Bray's Associates: Canadian Papers 1784-1836, copies USPG, Judith Fingard Papers. For a discussion of the problems faced by black schools, see Robin Winks, "Negro School

define themselves. Nova Scotia's mainstream white identity was contrasted with America. 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.⁶³

Historians agree that the African Nova Scotian community developed a separate identity from mainstream colonial society during the nineteenth century. Robin Winks sees this in negative terms, blaming the Refugees for retreating into segregated communities.⁶⁴ James Walker offers a more positive perspective, arguing that black identity might be understood as a logical and necessary

Segregation in Ontario and Nova Scotia," Canadian Historical Review 50 (June, 1969), pp. 164-91.

⁶³Linda Colley, Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

response to white hostility. Walker concludes that the Refugees sacrificed economic improvement for physical safety and cultural maintenance.⁶⁵ In a useful insight, Walker notes that group identity did not inhibit overt displays of loyal feelings to the British Crown.⁶⁶ Frank Boyd argues that, through the African Baptist movement, the black community developed "separate" institutions, which then could be used to resist white prejudice.⁶⁷ These historians have helped build the revisionist perspective found in this work. But, the separate identity of Nova Scotia blacks must be divided into Refugee and Loyalist components. In other words, there were at least two black identities. The question of when these two identities became one is beyond the confines of this work and needs to be given sustained investigation by scholars. In this

⁶⁴Winks, Blacks, p. 140.

⁶⁵James Walker, "The Establishment of a Free Black Community in Nova Scotia, 1783-1840", in The African Diaspora: Interpretive Essays, eds. Martin L. Kilson and Robert I. Rotberg (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), pp. 230-37.

⁶⁶James Walker, The Black Identity in Nova Scotia: Community and Institutions in Historical Perspective (Dartmouth: Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia, 1985), p. 19.

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?

In the beginning, self-awareness hinged more on the Refugees' experience with slavery than any localised 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."⁶⁸ Clearly, they recognised what anti-colonialist intellectual Frantz Fanon called the "Fact of Blackness."⁶⁹ 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

⁶⁷Boyd, ed., McKerrow, pp. iii-vii.

⁶⁸Zachariah Randal and Anse Moaten 1825, Land Papers, PANS, RG 20 A; also see the following petitions, William Wise 1825, William Deer and others 1824, Samuel Evens 1823, David Page 1825, Land Papers, PANS, RG 20 A.

⁶⁹Frantz Fanon, "The Fact of Blackness," in The Post-Colonial Studies Reader, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth

developed, which focused on the Refugees' loyalty to Britain and their experience in Nova Scotia.

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."⁷⁰ The Refugees and other elements of the black population also asserted their affinity for the British Crown during public parades.⁷¹ In 1838, at the celebrations for Queen Victoria's coronation, the black community participated in the procession honouring the new monarch.⁷² The black marchers, organised by the African Friendly Society, carried a pink banner that read "Victoria

Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 323-26.

⁷⁰James Barron 1818, Land Papers, PANS RG 20 A.

⁷¹The African Friendly Society (AFS) existed as early as 1831. But we only have records for it in the 1840s, through Belcher's Farmer's Almanac. This important register of the colony's organisations includes the executive of the AFS. In 1848, several members of the executive were Refugees: Septimus Clarke, Prince William Sport, Charles Roan, Robert Spriggs, and George Davis.

⁷²Novascotian, 5 July 1838.

and Freedom."⁷³ The Acadian Recorder recognised 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."⁷⁴ The Novascotian reported that they were "respectable and orderly, and exhibited an interesting specimen of the good feeling which should animate all classes."⁷⁵

Recent studies in the United States have emphasised northern blacks' attempt to define themselves as African and American in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.⁷⁶ The Refugees engaged in a similar struggle. Yet, their identity reached beyond W.E.B. Du Bois's assertion about African American's two-ness and double-consciousness.⁷⁷ Indeed, disparate elements informed the

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Acadian Recorder, 2 July 1838.

⁷⁵Novascotian, 5 July 1838.

⁷⁶Julie Winch, A Gentleman of Color: The Life of James Forten (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Patrick Rael, Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

⁷⁷W.E.B. Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folk (1903, repr., New York: Washington Square Press, 1970), p. 3. Du Bois meant that an African American always had competing internal interests within his soul—that is American-ness

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 as separate.

The Refugee identity was multiple and layered. They were Americans who memorialised 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.⁷⁸ The Refugees recognised their rights as British subjects and citizens of Nova Scotia. The Black Refugees' consciousness and identity might be described as

and Negro-ness, which threatened to tear his soul asunder (Du Bois left black women out of this well studied statement).

⁷⁸Fergusson, Documentary, p. 46.

Anglo-African North American, which was firmly embedded within the framework and institutions of the British Empire.

The Black Refugees had to overcome an early dependence on local whites before building 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 the African Baptist churches. Yet, dependency in terms of education continued throughout the Refugees first 25 years in the colony. Overall, they built communities from nothing, established religious institutions, and gained 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.

Chapter 7: Racial Attitudes and Race Relations

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 ostracised solely on the basis of race. However, race was an additional variable that makes their story especially intriguing and worthy of study.¹

The concept of race and how to understand it has become the locus of a lively debate. The employment of race as a social construct has gained both advocates and critics within the academy.² Although acknowledging that

¹Of course, other groups in early nineteenth century Nova Scotia, such as the Native peoples, faced racial discrimination.

²Barbara Jeanne Fields, "Race and Ideology in American History," in James McPherson and J. Morgan Kousser, eds., Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); Barbara Jeanne Fields, "Slavery, Race, Ideology in the United States of America," New Left Review 181 (May/June, 1990), pp. 95-118; Henry Louis Gates., ed., "Race," Writing, and Difference (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Thomas Holt, "Marking: Race, Race-making, and

race is a social construction as opposed to a biological fact is important, it hardly explains how race and racial ideas were used to define, categorise, and understand social relationships. As Ira Berlin notes, race is a historical construction. In other words, the meaning of race must be situated in a particular time and place.³

Thus, this analysis attempts to examine how notions of race informed popular ideas about Nova Scotia's Black Refugees

the Writing of History," American Historical Review 100 (February, 1995), pp. 1-20; scholars have also discussed how whiteness can be studied effectively in order to better understand racism, see David Roediger, The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class (London: Verso, 1991); David Roediger, Toward the Abolition of Whiteness: Essays on Race, Politics, and Working Class History (London: Verso, 1994); also see Theodore Allen, The Invention of the White Race: Racial Oppression and Social Control (New York: Verso, 1994) 1; Theodore Allen, The Invention of the White Race: The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America (New York: Verso, 1997) 2.

³Ira Berlin, Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 1; also see, George Fredrickson, The Comparative Imagination: On the History of Racism, Nationalism, and Social Movements (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 77-97.

and how this in turn affected relations between the colony's black and white populations between 1813 and 1840.

White racial attitudes in North America typically depicted blacks "as a permanently alien and unassimilable element of the population."⁴ 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."⁵ These ideas were environmentalist in that African North American's 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 1812.⁶ In contrast, George

⁴George Fredrickson, The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 1.

⁵Thomas Jefferson, "Notes on Virginia," in A Documentary History of Slavery in North America, ed. W. Rose (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

⁶Winthrop Jordan, White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), pp. 482-541. Other important treatments of racial attitudes in the Atlantic world are Philip Curtin, The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964); Jan Nederveen Pieterse, White on Black: Images of Africa and

Fredrickson argues that these ideas were not challenged until the development of "respectable" ethnological studies in the 1830s and 1840s.⁷ 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.⁸ 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."⁹ In 1808, the New York Manumission Society stated

Blacks in Western Popular Culture (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

⁷Fredrickson, Black Image, p. 2.

⁸Ibid., p. 4.

⁹Cited in Gary Nash, Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840 (Cambridge:

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.¹⁰

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 republican society. Thus the possibility of removing them from North America gained popular support. The idea that free blacks should be colonised in Africa gained its greatest support from the American Colonization Society (ACS), founded in late 1816 with Bushrod Washington as president. This organisation 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

Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 179; for other treatments on views about free blacks see Leonard Curry, The Free Black in Urban America 1800-1850: The Shadow of the Dream, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); George Levesque, Black Boston: African American Life and Culture in Urban America, 1750-1860 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994); Joanne Melish, Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England 1780-1860 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

¹⁰Cited in Fredrickson, Black Image, p. 4.

blacks roaming around the United States fuelled a general fear about the poorer classes. The ACS believed that blacks and whites could never co-exist in a bi-racial democracy. One of the organisation's more prominent members, Senator Henry Clay stated that free African Americans represented "a dangerous and useless part of the community."¹¹ 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.¹²

The movement 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 colonisation 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

¹¹Cited in Nash, Forging Freedom, p. 238.

¹²Fredrickson, Black Image, pp. 6-8; also see Philip J. Staudenhaus, African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961); Leon Litwack, North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

do 'a great good' for a people they hated."¹³ Most African Americans agreed with Martin Delany's characterisation of the ACS as "one of the Negro's worst enemies."¹⁴

Racial Attitudes in Nova Scotia

The Black Refugees' image among white Nova Scotians mirrored views expressed about 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.¹⁵

¹³Nash, Forging Freedom, p. 238.

¹⁴Cited in John Hope Franklin And Alfred Moss, From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), p. 169; for the views of African-Americans toward colonisation, see Louis Mehlinger, "The Attitude of the Free Negro toward Colonization," Journal of Negro History 1 (June, 1916); Floyd Miller, The Search for a Black Nationality: Black Colonization and Emigration, 1787-1863 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975).

¹⁵JHOA, 1 April 1815, PANS, vol. 305, doc. 3.

The Assembly believed that innate black racial inferiority made assimilation unthinkable. Moreover, they 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.¹⁶ These views formed the basis of racial doctrine prevailing 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 being 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.¹⁷

In the eyes of many Nova Scotians, the Black Refugees personified depravity, dependency, and idleness. The idea that the Refugees were lazy reached into the highest

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷For similar ideas about free blacks in Upper Canada, see Allen Stouffer, "A 'restless child of change and

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.¹⁸

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."¹⁹ Another letter writer, "A RESIDENT MECHANIC" complained in 1817 that the Black Refugees lived in palaces and lazily existed in the sunshine.²⁰

This image had little basis in reality in that the majority of Black Refugees lived in huts with no cellars.

accident': The Black Image in Nineteenth Century Ontario, "Ontario History" 76 (June, 1984), pp. 128-50.

¹⁸Dalhousie to Bathurst, 29 December 1816, PANS, vol. 112, pp. 6-9.

¹⁹Acadian Recorder, 23 December 1815.

Moreover, reports to the government challenged the popular perception of the Refugees as being indolent. 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."²¹ Another local official stated that "[m]any of them are industrious."²² 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 of the Refugees as lazy readily persisted.²³

Black women were considered more depraved than their male counterparts. 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.

²⁰Acadian Recorder, 26 July 1817.

²¹Letter of John Poule, 30 September 1816, PANS, vol. 419, doc. 67.

²²Report on Preston, 19 March 1821, vol. 422, doc. 19.

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 skelleton [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.²⁴

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."²⁵ In the white Nova Scotian imagination, Black women were a degraded and disgusting element in the population.

Blacks were usually depicted as unendingly stupid. The local press portrayed them in this fashion in order to

²³For press depictions of black criminality, see Novascotian, 24 August 1825; Novascotian 17 August 1825; Novascotian 15 June 1825.

²⁴Acadian Recorder, 23 December 1815.

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."²⁶ 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 civilisation.

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.'²⁷

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

²⁵Acadian Recorder, 30 December 1815.

²⁶Acadian Recorder, 7 November 1818.

²⁷Novascotian, 3 May 1827.

speech-- "unintelligible matter"-- of a black preacher.
 "Brar. . .you tink say when you die you dead for true. .
 .no such ting. . .nebba see de day. . .dat time no mo you
 begin for lib. . .you tink say."²⁸ 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 including republicanism and liberalism.
 In other words, he was an unabashed Tory. As George
 Elliot Clarke notes, Haliburton believed that society
 functioned best under a system of paternalism in which
 everyone knew their respective place--especially the lower
 classes.²⁹ Thus it is hardly surprising that he perceived

²⁸Novascotian, 11 January 1827.

²⁹The approach taken in this section benefits greatly
 from George Elliott Clarke's excellent essay, "White
 Niggers, Black Slaves: Slavery, Race and Class in T.C.
 Haliburton's *The Clockmaker*," Nova Scotia Historical Review
 14 (1994), pp. 13-40.

African North Americans as a threat to the established order if they were not controlled by the benevolent institution of slavery.

Haliburton's views toward the Refugees hardened over time. In 1823, he stated that they were employed as domestic servants and labourers.³⁰ 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 Plains [sic], 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.³¹

This book, published in 1829, indicates that the popular image of the Black Refugees 15 years after their

³⁰Thomas Chandler Haliburton (Walter Bromley?), 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, possibly Walter Bromley was the actual author.

original settlement continued to be one of laziness and inability to contribute to society. In short, the Black Refugees were regarded as living proof that African North Americans were only fit for slavery.

In his literary works, as Clarke points out, Haliburton justified slavery through a thinly veiled reference to the plight of the Black Refugees. Haliburton's Slick recounted the happiness of Scip, an escaped slave, when he was reunited with his master.³² 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."³³ In other words, the Black Refugees needed the

³¹Thomas Chandler Haliburton, An Historical and Statistical Account of Nova-Scotia (Halifax: J. Howe, 1829), p. 292.

³²Clarke points out that Scip was probably shorthand for Scipio, a common name for male Black Refugees.

³³Cited in Clarke, "Black Slaves," p. 29; of course Haliburton satirised nearly everything under the sun, but his views about blacks took on an additional level of hatred that cannot be understood simply as satire. The same could be said of his views of the Irish.

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 personality 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."³⁴ Freedom for people of African descent remained unimportant to Ward. Instead he worried about the rights

³⁴Free Press, 17 February 1824. William Wilberforce (1759-1833) was an anti-slavery politician. He gave numerous speeches decrying slavery and helped push through the anti-slave trade bill. Zachary Macaulay (1768-1838) was the Governor of Sierra Leone and editor of the

of the West Indian planters: "to turn the negroes [sic] in the West Indies loose, would involve their owners in irretrievable ruin."³⁵ Ward poured scorn and contempt upon those that dared to "separate the link which unites the master and slave."³⁶ Ward remained convinced that he understood African North Americans' definition of freedom, which was "an exemption from labour."³⁷ 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.³⁸

Ward's ideas about the Black Refugees were not questioned in any letters to the editor. Indeed, in this

Christian Observer. He played an important role in the abolition of the slave trade and slavery.

³⁵Free Press, 28 September 1824.

³⁶Free Press, 23 May 1824.

³⁷Free Press, 27 April 1824.

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. The lack of response to Ward's views indicates that the local population, at least those that were literate, then 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.³⁹

Ward's attacks on the Refugees continued unchallenged until the 1830s. As the Imperial government 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

³⁸Free Press, 30 March 1824.

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."⁴⁰ Indeed, the letter stated "a greater libel. . .was never uttered."⁴¹

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."⁴² The editorial concluded by stating that tyranny "carries with it the seeds of its own punishment."⁴³ But, when commenting on local events, the Acadian Recorder depicted

³⁹Acadian Recorder, 21 February 1824.

⁴⁰Acadian Recorder, 1 October 1831. The Public Archives of Nova Scotia 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.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Acadian Recorder, 26 February 1836.

⁴³Ibid.

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.'⁴⁴

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 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 [sic]." ⁴⁵ 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. ⁴⁶

Writing in support of the American Colonization Society, the Free Press stated that "the benefits which

⁴⁴Acadian Recorder, 15 September 1838.

⁴⁵Acadian Recorder, 25 November 1815.

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."⁴⁷ 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."⁴⁸ 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. Similar to black Philadelphians, the Refugees also found it hard to believe that whites wished to do them any favours. They remained

⁴⁶Ibid. In other newspaper accounts of the Black Refugees, I have always been able to cross-reference any name with other documents.

⁴⁷Free Press, 2 September 1817.

⁴⁸Ibid.

convinced that the government would sell them into slavery.⁴⁹

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 them during the small pox epidemic of 1814, said this about the Refugees.

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.⁵⁰

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 toleration. One writer to the Acadian Recorder in 1815 called for racial equality.

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

⁴⁹John Grant, "The 1821 Emigration of Black Nova Scotians to Trinidad," Nova Scotia Historical Quarterly 2 (September, 1972), pp. 283-92.

⁵⁰Coleman to Sabatier, 23 March 1815, PANS, vol. 21, doc. 84.

we not rather inculcate into their minds the blessings of Religion, of Education, of Civilization, of Refinement?⁵¹

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 civilisation. In fact, Coleman argued that whites in the same position would have done no better than the Refugees.⁵²

Some members of the colonial elite also defended the Refugees. In particular, Joseph Howe took a special interest in their plight. As a young man, 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 popular 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

⁵¹Acadian Recorder, 30 December 1815.

⁵²Coleman to Sabatier, 23 March 1815, PANS, vol. 21, doc. 84.

miser, who claps his hand upon his stick the moment they approach. . .they ought to be sent to Sierra Leone."⁵³

Clearly, the majority of the population disliked the Black Refugees, but Howe defended these people.

But suppose, good folks, that you were suddenly caught up and cast into Maryland—stripped to your trowsers [sic], 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 [sic], in a country where every thing is opposed to his accustomed habits?⁵⁴

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."⁵⁵ Howe insisted the Black Refugees were as "clever" as the colony's other inhabitants who possessed more "amiable complexions."⁵⁶

⁵³M.G. Parks, ed., Joseph Howe Western and Eastern Rambles: Travel Sketches of Nova Scotia (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1973), pp. 55–56.

⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 56–57.

⁵⁵Novascotian, 27 June 1832.

⁵⁶Ibid.

Howe concluded, "where would be the harm of a gentle infusion of black blood into those dignified orders of the state?"⁵⁷

Joseph Howe represented the emerging liberal 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 effect 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.⁵⁸ 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

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸David A. Sutherland, "Race Relations in Halifax, Nova Scotia, During the Mid-Victorian Quest for Reform," Journal of the Canadian Historical Association 7 (1996), pp. 35-54.

throughout the early nineteenth century. Certainly, Howe's views were different than say Haliburton or Ward, but this hardly meant that race relations had improved for the Refugees. If race relations really started to improve over time and especially in the 1830s and 1840s, why did appeals to racism become so prevalent--and well accepted-- by 1850? The reason is because an underlying dislike for the black community still permeated everyday society in Nova Scotia despite the reform impulse of Joseph Howe. Racial attitudes were remarkably static throughout the Refugees' first 25 years in Nova Scotia.

Race Relations in Nova Scotia

Historians have begun to explore race relations in Nova Scotia during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but their perspectives differ. C.B. Fergusson, an apologist for the status quo, focuses on white philanthropy while insisting erroneously that blacks were not restricted from voting.⁵⁹ Robin Winks states that the Refugees, "unwittingly fanned the sparks of a more

conscious, more organized, white racism than Nova Scotia had known."⁶⁰ Moving beyond such judgmental accusations, James Walker notes that in a society accustomed to thinking of blacks as slaves, it remained difficult for ordinary whites and government officials to take black claims for equality seriously.⁶¹ Sociologists Donald Clairmont and Fred Wien conclude that the Black Refugees were a besieged minority facing racist legislators and a hostile population.⁶² The three latter scholars offer a perspective, which this work shares.

Race relations in early nineteenth-century Nova Scotia were steeped in conflict. Seth Coleman noted that the Black Refugees had "many Lurking Enemies" and were

⁵⁹C.B. Fergusson, A Documentary Study of the Establishment of the Negroes in Nova Scotia (Halifax: The Public Archives of Nova Scotia, 1948), pp. 66-67.

⁶⁰Robin Winks, The Blacks in Canada (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), p. 114.

⁶¹James Walker, "The Black Loyalists in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone" (Ph.D. dissertation, Dalhousie University, 1973), p. 68.

⁶²Donald Clairmont and Fred Wien, "Blacks and Whites: The Nova Scotia Race Relations Experience," in Banked Fires: The Ethnics of Nova Scotia, ed. Douglas F. Campbell (Port Credit: The Scribblers' Press, 1978), p. 154.

regularly referred to as "Thievish Black dogs."⁶³ He also stated that there "are many more complaints, in Our Country Neighbourhood, of their becoming a heavy tax by their Beging [sic]."⁶⁴ Theophilus Chamberlain hoped that the Refugees would "laugh at the squibs that ignorance or ill nature and contempt has induced some silly body to through out [sic] against them."⁶⁵ Race relations were further strained by the fact that white settlers, according to Lord Dalhousie, "abused and cheated" their black neighbours.⁶⁶ Dalhousie also stated that negative ideas about the Refugees were held by all elements of white society. "The Legislature [and] the inhabitants of this Province generally consider them a class of people that never will do well and therefore will not give them any countenance or assistance."⁶⁷ Robert Willis, Anglican Archdeacon, stated

⁶³Coleman Report, 16 April 1816, PANS, vol. 419, doc. 76; Coleman to Sabatier, 23 March 1815, PANS, vol. 21, doc. 84.

⁶⁴Coleman to Truman, 5 March 1815, vol. 420, doc. 132.

⁶⁵Chamberlain to Morris, 4 January 1816, PANS, vol. 419, doc. 46.

⁶⁶Dalhousie to Bathurst, 14 August 1817, PANS, vol. 112, pp. 32-35.

⁶⁷Dalhousie to Bathurst, 29 December 1816, PANS, vol. 112, pp. 6-9.

that the Black Refugees' children, "were excluded from other schools because Whites would not allow their children to mix with them."⁶⁸ In 1833, vandals attacked the African Baptist church and shattered 90 panes of glass.⁶⁹ Visitors to the colony were struck by the racial prejudice endured by the Black Refugees. John McGregor argued that the Refugees were forced to "feel that they must ever remain a separate people."⁷⁰

Although white racism was pervasive, there were certain instances of interracial co-operation. For example, some Black Refugees worshipped alongside whites in Hammonds Plains and attended schools with white children.⁷¹ Seth Coleman defended the character of the Refugees, lived among them, and supported destitute widows out of his own

⁶⁸Cited in Robin Winks, "Negro School Segregation in Ontario and Nova Scotia," Canadian Historical Review 50 (June, 1969), p. 168.

⁶⁹Acadian Recorder, 28 September 1833.

⁷⁰John McGregor, Historical and descriptive sketches of the Maritime colonies of British North America (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown & Green, 1828), p. 126.

⁷¹Fergusson, Documentary, pp. 58-65; Judith Fingard, "Attitudes Towards the Education of the Poor in Colonial Halifax," Acadiensis 2 (Spring, 1973), pp. 15-42, Fingard finds that efforts to educate the poor were exploitative.

store.⁷² James Bell filed a petition on behalf of the Black Refugees for the construction of a school and offered to serve as its headmaster in 1820.⁷³ Sympathetic whites usually wrote the Black Refugees' land petitions and signed statements about the applicant's good character.⁷⁴ In 1824, concerned white Haligonians implored the government to provide relief for the Black Refugees at Hammonds Plains and Preston.⁷⁵ In 1825, a philanthropic group of white women devoted one day each week to "making up garments of various kinds" for black women and children.⁷⁶ Captain Moorsom, a British traveller, was struck by the "romantic halo" around the Black Refugees, stating that any white who visited their settlements was questioned about the

⁷²Coleman to Sabatier, 23 March 1815, PANS, vol. 21, doc. 84; Coleman to Truman, 5 March 1815, PANS, vol. 420, doc. 132.

⁷³Preston School Petition, 11 November 1820, PANS, vol. 422, doc. 22.

⁷⁴See petitions of Bray Cooper, Suther Blair, Levin Winder, Daniel Clayton, Land Grants, RG 20 Series A;

⁷⁵Memorial of Inhabitants of the town of Halifax on behalf of the poor Black Settlers at Hammonds Plains and Preston, 6 March 1824, PANS, vol. 80, doc. 32.

⁷⁶Petition of Inhabitants of Halifax for Black Settlers at Hammonds Plains and Preston, 12 March 1825, PANS, vol. 80, doc. 35.

Refugees' welfare on his/her return to Halifax.⁷⁷

Nevertheless, these interactions took place in a hierarchical power structure within which the Refugees were always at a distinct disadvantage.

The Black Refugees challenged the colour line and attempted to negotiate the limitations placed on them by the white population. However, the colour line was most often drawn when blacks were perceived as pushing the boundaries assigned the first generation of Refugees. For example, challenges to white supremacy in politics and the law usually elicited a forceful application of the colour line. Violent actions on the part of the Black Refugees were not tolerated under any circumstances. The motives behind acts of resistance meant very little to the legal establishment or the local white inhabitants. In his important pamphlet about racial discrimination, Walker argues that the colour line was upheld by "attitude rather

⁷⁷W.S. Moorsom, Letters from Nova Scotia: comprising sketches of a young country (London: H. Colburn & R. Bentley, 1830), pp. 127-28.

than by law."⁷⁸ Interestingly, an examination of the colour line in regards to the Black Refugees reveals that legal means were used to assert it when some doubt might have existed.

Black servants endured very close contact with the white population. Although domestic service offered the Refugees a stable income, it usually served as a site of racial conflict. The Halifax Poor House and other "benevolent" institutions occasionally hired out Black Refugees to local families, which must have reminded some of slavery. Servants had very few rights in regards to their new masters. At times, black servants revolted against the treatment they received from their employers. This usually resulted in racist rhetoric and discriminatory legal methods, which left little doubt as to the position of the colour line.⁷⁹

⁷⁸James Walker, Racial Discrimination in Canada: The Black Experience (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1985), p. 8.

⁷⁹For examples of the prevalence of black servants and their conflicts with white employers, see Novascotian, 11 January 1826; Novascotian, 15 June 1815; for a general discussion of servitude, see Allen Robertson, "Bondage and Freedom: Apprentices, Servants, and Slaves in Colonial Nova

For example, 14 year-old Rhino Mathews attempted to burn down the house of her employer, John Sewell. Despite two press accounts of the story, little effort was made to find out why she set the fire. Did she simply hate Sewell? Had he sexually or physically abused her? Was he too demanding of her? Clearly, Mathews' resisted some aspect of her employment (that is if the fire was not an accident), but this attack on society's hierarchy by a servant girl was simply unacceptable. Her race made this act all the more abhorrent. The Halifax press insisted that the young girl had crossed the colour line. The Acadian Recorder expressed relief that Sewell's house had not been badly damaged, but then went on to condemn all black domestics.

On Tuesday evening last, a fire was discovered in the house of Mr. John Sewell, which appears to have been deposited there by a Negro Girl, in his service, about the age of fourteen years, but was Providentially extinguished in its infancy. The circumstance ought to caution the Public against placing too much confidence in Negro Domestics, and at the same time convince them that no kindness, comfort, or hospitality, can insure their integrity, and it will be well if the inhabitants do not ere many years

Scotia," Collections of the Royal Nova Scotia Historical Society 44 (1996), pp. 57-69.

regret the encouragement of a race whose principles are so repugnant to the dictates of gratitude and morality.⁸⁰

Herein lies the colour line in Nova Scotia. It could be quickly applied and in the broadest of terms. Mathews' reasons for starting the fire meant nothing in the face of her inherently evil act, which supposedly all black domestics were capable of committing. Although the evidence against Mathews was weak, the court nevertheless directed the jury to convict her of attempted arson. The court sentenced her to two years in the County Work house.⁸¹

The Black Refugees were under the mistaken notion that they were free and equal citizens. As many had left 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 thirty 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.

⁸⁰Acadian Recorder, 4 January 1817.

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.'⁸²

The message is clear here. 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 Nova

⁸¹Free Press, 28 January 1817.

Scotia. It was drawn when the Black Refugees pushed the boundaries of their place, which was defined by their race and class.⁸³

It is quite likely that the Black Refugees felt helpless against the hostility of the white judicial establishment and prejudice among the local population. Indeed, one contemporary, observed that the Refugees considered "themselves an oppressed and degraded people by White People."⁸⁴ 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 which restricted their freedom.

Of course, one might point to the very few interracial marriages as an exception to the general rule of racial hostility. The fact of the matter is that intermarriage was hardly common. Those that dared to engage in such unions probably faced tremendous discrimination.

⁸²Novascotian, 24 August 1826.

⁸³Ibid.

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 sentiments 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. The ideals of mainstream white Nova Scotian society were simply everything the Black Refugees were not: industrious, moral, and honest.

White attitudes toward the Black Refugees in Nova Scotia echoed racial thought in 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

⁸⁴Lawrence Hartshorne cited in Winks, Blacks, p. 126.

blacks were portrayed as being inherently a danger to social order. Nova Scotia's highly status-conscious society reacted to the Refugees in ways that combined understandings about race with their beliefs concerning class. The image of the Refugees was also paradoxical. They were objects of humour, but were also portrayed as dangerous and depraved criminals. The Refugees were a localised 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.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

On the 25th of March 1818, a party of white hunters trespassed on the farm of Ben 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 Maria 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.²

The incident at Fuller's farm is indicative of the reassessment necessary to understand the Black Refugees. Of course, this study is not the first to reconsider the work of C.B. Fergusson and Robin Winks. In particular, John Grant and James Walker began to chart a different

¹Acadian Recorder 4 July 1818; Ben Fuller and Maria Fuller, 11 June 1818, Minutes of the Court of Quarter Sessions December 1814 to December 1826.

²Ibid.

course toward a reassessment of the Refugee episode. Their work was the first to see a need to view the Refugees as being more than a passive and inert group. This thesis has attempted to elaborate on this theme by treating the Refugees as a dynamic entity who, though limited by circumstances, significantly shaped their own history. The older interpretations of Fergusson and Winks simply do not survive close inquiry.³ The Black Refugees were more than victims of white racism and pawns of white philanthropy doomed to a dysfunctional existence in Nova Scotia.⁴ This chapter sums up the major findings of the thesis and suggests possible areas of future research.

³C.B. Fergusson, A Documentary Study of the Establishment of the Negroes in Nova Scotia (Halifax: The Public Archives of Nova Scotia, 1948), p. 67; Robin Winks, The Blacks in Canada (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), pp. 114-41.

⁴The rejection of the victim approach to black history has long been accepted in African American historiography, but this approach has had multiple lives in African Canadian historiography, see Thomas Holt, "African-American History," in The New American History, ed., Eric Foner (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), pp. 311-332; James Walker, "Allegories and Orientations in African-Canadian Historiography: The Spirit of Africville," Dalhousie Review 77 (Summer, 1997), pp. 155-78.

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 freedom by fighting for the British. The Refugee rebellion interacted 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 Anglicised culture of their

Chesapeake counterparts. The Chesapeake Refugees brought ideas about the importance of separate African churches to Nova Scotia. In short, these arrivals were a people with both agency and an 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 ten-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 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, in terms of husbandry, 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 specialised 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 in the face of major obstacles rooted in the factors of sterile soil and a contracting post-war economy.

Despite the problems associated with settlement in Nova Scotia, the Refugees persisted in attempting to make the colony their new home. Government officials had other plans. They hoped to send the Refugees to the United States, Sierra Leone, or the West Indies. In 1821, after numerous efforts, the government convinced 95 Refugees to emigrate to Trinidad. Yet, this represented only 6 per cent 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 organisations. 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 being 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.

Overall, the Black Refugees attempted to carve out a position in the quickly changing landscape of Nova Scotia during the early nineteenth century. Certainly, poverty had a levelling affect on the Refugee community. However,

this should not be used to 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.

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

1870.⁵ 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, urbanisation, 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

⁵The following studies offer a good understanding of the late nineteenth century: Judith Fingard, "Race and Respectability in Victorian Halifax," Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History 20 (May, 1992), pp. 169-95; Suzanne Morton, "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, eds. Janet Guildford and Suzanne Morton (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1994), pp. 185-210; Judith Fingard, "From Sea to Rail: Black Transportation Workers and Their Families in Halifax, c. 1870-1916," Acadiensis 24 (Spring, 1995), pp. 49-64.

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.⁶ Also, 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 organisations 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

⁶Belcher's Farmer's Almanac, 1851 and 1852. In 1851, the executive of the African Friendly Society included 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).

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.⁷

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 thirty years. The question is when did disparate elements of the African Nova Scotian population create an inclusive and singular black identity (that is if it 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

⁷David A. Sutherland, "Race Relations in Halifax, Nova Scotia, During the Mid-Victorian Quest for Reform," Journal

questions. Overall, there are many possible avenues of further research that can be investigated by scholars.

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