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BOSTON KING: A NEGRO LOYALIST WHO SOUGHT REFUGE IN NOVA SCOTIA

THERE WAS ONE GROUP OF LOYALISTS who were delighted to be sent to Nova Scotia, in spite of its reputation as a cold, bleak land. This was the group of Negroes who had escaped from slavery and taken refuge with the British Army. After the truce between Great Britain and the United States of America, some slave owners from Virginia and Carolina came to New York searching for their former property, but General Sir Guy Carleton ordered that all slaves should be free if they had joined the British Army or had taken refuge behind the British lines, and he issued each one with a certificate of freedom and also provided transport to Nova Scotia. It has been estimated that ten per cent of the refugee Loyalists who came to Nova Scotia were Negroes.

Among those who were brought from New York to Port Roseway in August, 1783, were Boston and Violet King, on board *L'Abondance*, commanded by Lt. Philips. They were all safely landed at Birch Town,* where each family was assigned a lot of land and exerted all their strength in order to build comfortable huts before cold weather set in. Boston King, aged 23, a "Stout fellow", was formerly the property of Richard Waring of Charlestown, South Carolina. Violet King, aged 35, described as "Stout wench", had belonged to Colonel Young of Wilmington, North Carolina.

Black labour was essential to the plantation economy of the Southern colonies of North America. On the plantation, slaves were not only the field hands working the crops; they were also the skilled labourers—the carpenters, blacksmiths, shoemakers, and weavers. Boston King was a carpenter, and he was the son of parents who were skilled and valuable plantation workers. He said in his reminiscences in the *Methodist Magazine* of 1798 that he had been born in the Province of South Carolina, twenty-eight miles from Charles-Town. His father, when he was young, had been stolen from Africa by the slave

*It was named for General Birch, commander of the City of New York, but the settlement was usually called "Burch" Town in the early days of its history.

traders; but he was exceedingly fortunate because he knew how to read and because he was "beloved by his master, and had the charge of the Plantation as a driver for many years". His mother was employed as a nurse, for she had learned the curative powers of herbs from the Indians. She was a seamstress also, "and on these accounts was indulged with many privileges which the rest of the slaves were not."

In those days children, whether white or black, were trained by the apprenticeship system, and this training began early. When Boston was six years old he was sent to the plantation house to run errands for his master, and when he was nine he was put to mind the cattle. Later he had an opportunity to travel in different parts of America with racehorses, but he suffered many hardships because the head groom was often cruel to the slaves. When Boston lost a boot belonging to the groom he would not allow the boy to have any shoes all that winter, "which was a great punishment to me".

At the age of sixteen, Boston was bound as an apprentice to a carpenter in a nearby town. He was given charge of his master's tools, and if any were lost or misplaced by the journeymen carpenters or other apprentices his master beat him severely "striking me upon the head, or any other part without mercy".

By this time war had broken out between rebellious American colonists and the British, and nails were expensive because all British manufactures were scarce. The workmen had their nails weighed out to them and made the younger apprentices watch the nails at dinnertime. Once it was Boston's turn to stand guard until another of the apprentices returned, when he went to eat. The nails belonging to one of the journeymen disappeared, and Boston was blamed for stealing them. "For this offence I was beat and tortured most cruelly, and was laid up three weeks before I was able to do any work". But Richard Waring, who owned Boston, came to town and threatened the master carpenter that if he heard of such cruel treatment again he would take the boy away and put him with another master to finish his training as a carpenter. This made him behave much better toward Boston, who "began to acquire a proper knowledge of his trade".

The battles of the war moved closer. "My master being apprehensive that Charles Town was in danger on account of the war, removed into the country, about thirty-eight miles off. Here we built a large house for Mr. Waters, during which time the English took Charles Town. Having obtained leave one day to see my parents, who lived about 12 miles off, and it being late before I could go, I was obliged to borrow one of Mr. Waters's horses; but a

servant of my master's, took the horse from me to go a little journey, and stayed two or three days longer than he ought. This involved me in the greatest perplexity, and I expected the severest punishment, because the gentleman to whom the horse belonged was a very bad man, and knew not how to show mercy. To escape his cruelty I determined to go to Charles-Town, and throw myself into the hands of the English. They received me readily, and I began to feel the happiness of liberty, of which I knew nothing before, altho' I was most grieved at first, to be obliged to leave my friends, and remain among strangers". Sir Henry Clinton and other British commanders had made proclamations offering freedom to slaves of American rebels who would run away from their masters to join the British. The loss of these slaves would help to cripple Southern plantation economy, and their labour would be useful in the British army.

Just after Boston had joined the British he "was seized with the small-pox" and was taken to shelter about a mile from camp. There was no nursing and the men lay sometimes a whole day without anything to eat or drink, but Providence sent along from the York Volunteers a man whom Boston knew, and this man looked after them. The British soldiers marched off, leaving behind all those too weak to march. Boston expected to be taken prisoner by the enemy, who would not look with kindness on a runaway slave; but when the Americans learned that they were ill from smallpox "they precipitately left us for fear of the infection". Two days afterwards, waggons came to take the sick to the British Army and twenty-five of them were put into a little cottage about one-quarter of a mile from the hospital. When he had recovered, Boston marched with the army to head-quarters, where he stayed for three weeks and had an opportunity to nurse the man who had befriended him when that man was brought wounded to the hospital. Then he was sent to a camp thirty-five miles off where he acted as Captain Grey's servant for two months.

One day, when Boston was away from camp catching some fish, the Colonel received orders to decamp and all the British left in fifteen minutes. When Boston returned he found the camp empty except for a few militia commanded by Captain Lewes, who said "You need not be uneasy, for you will see your regiment before 7 o'clock to-night". Two hours later they marched off. "As we were on the march, the Captain asked, 'How will you like me to be your master?' I answered that I was Captain Grey's servant. 'Yes', said he, 'but I expect they are all taken prisoners before now; and I have been long enough in the English service, and am determined to leave them". The Negro protested and the captain replied: "If you do not behave well, I will put you

in irons, and give you a dozen stripes every morning". Boston subsided, but determined to escape at the first opportunity.

The next morning Boston was sent with a little boy to fetch a couple of horses for the Captain. When they came to the island they found about fifty horses which had belonged to the British army, which Captain Lewes had stolen while they were at Rockmount, blaming the rebels for the losses. As soon as they returned with the horses the Captain rode off. Boston seized the chance to escape to the British and after two days came to a ferry where he found that all the boats were on the other side. At last a British major came over the river and questioned the black man until he was satisfied and ordered the boat to put him over. At the British headquarters Boston told Captain Gray that Captain Lewes had deserted and about the horses on the island. Three weeks afterwards some of the British Light Horse went to the island and burned his house and captured the horses.

Boston admitted that many masters treated their slaves kindly, but he wished to be free. Indeed, "the slaves about Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New-York have as good victuals as many of the English; for they have meat once a day, and milk for breakfast and supper; and what is better than all, many of the masters send their slaves to school at night, that they may learn to read the Scriptures. This is a privilege indeed. But alas, all these enjoyments could not satisfy me without liberty! Sometimes I thought, if it was the will of God that I should be a slave, I was ready to resign myself to his will; but at other times I could not find the least desire to content myself in slavery".

Boston followed the example of thousands of Loyalist refugees in seeking safety behind the lines at New York which was the strongest post held by the British. Although runaway slaves were recognized as being free there were too many for the authorities to feed so they encouraged them to work for Loyalist masters. Boston entered service, but the wages were too low to buy clothes. While he was in New York Boston married Violet, who had been a slave of Colonel Young of Wilmington, North Carolina. In an attempt to earn more money he went out in a pilot boat, but was captured by an American whaleboat. "They carried me to Brunswick, and used me well. Notwithstanding which, my mind was sorely distressed at the thought of being again reduced to slavery, and separated from my wife and family; and at the same time it was exceeding difficult to escape from my bondage, because the river at Amboy was a mile over, and likewise another to cross at Staten-Island. I called to remembrance the many great deliverances the Lord had wrought for

me, and besought him to save me this once, and I would serve him all the days of my life”.

The Negro was thankful not to be in jail and that his master used him “as well as I could expect”. He visited a lad he had known in New York, who was being punished by being confined in the stocks because he had tried to escape but had been recaptured and brought back to Brunswick tied to the rail of a horse. Thinking about this punishment and about how well he was treated, Boston tried to resign himself, but still could not find the least desire to content himself in slavery.

Boston noticed that at low water some of the people waded across the river instead of using the ferry, but that there were guards posted to prevent the escape of prisoners and slaves. One Sunday morning about one o'clock he crept quietly down to the riverside and found the guards either asleep or in the tavern. “I instantly entered into the river, but when I was a little distance from the opposite shore, I heard the sentinels disputing among themselves: One said, ‘I am sure I saw a man cross the river’. Another replied: ‘There is no such thing’. It seems they were afraid to fire at me, or make an alarm, lest they should be punished for their negligence. When I had got a little distance from the shore, I fell down upon my knees, and thanked GOD for this deliverance. I travelled till about five in the morning, and then concealed myself till seven o'clock at night, when I proceeded forward thro' bushes and marshes, near the road, for fear of being discovered. When I came to the river, opposite Staten-Island, I found a boat; and altho' it was very near a whale-boat, I ventured into it, and cutting the rope, got safe over. The commanding officer, when informed of my case, gave me a passport, and I proceeded to New-York.”

About this time peace was restored between America and Great Britain, “which diffused universal joy among all parties, except us, who had escaped from slavery, and taken refuge in the English army; for a report prevailed at New-York that all the slaves, in number 2000, were to be delivered up to their masters, altho' some of them had been three or four years among the English. This dreadful rumour filled us with inexpressible anguish and terror, especially when we saw our old masters coming from Virginia, North-Carolina, and other parts, and seizing upon their slaves in the streets of New-York, or even dragging them out of their beds. Many of the slaves had very cruel masters, so that the thoughts of returning home with them embittered life to us. For some days we lost our appetite for food, and sleep departed from our eyes. The English had compassion upon us in the day of our distress, and issued out

a Proclamation, importing, "That all slaves should be free, who had taken refuge in the British lines, and claimed the sanction and privileges of the Proclamations respecting the security and protection of Negroes. In consequence of this, each of us received a certificate from the commanding officer at New-York, which dispelled all our fears, and filled us with joy and gratitude. Soon after, ships were fitted out, and furnished with every necessary for conveying us to Nova Scotia. We arrived at Burch Town in the month of August, where we all safely landed. Every family had a lot of land, and we exerted all our strength in order to build comfortable huts before the cold weather set in."

"Bishop" William Black, the Methodist missionary in the Maritimes, was pleased with a visit in the spring of 1784 to Birch Town, the Negro settlement six miles from Shelburne. There were already two hundred Negro Methodists there, organized into fourteen classes, led by a crippled coloured preacher nicknamed "Old Moses". John Wesley himself took a deep interest in the Negroes at Birch Town and promised them books for their classes.

Among those converted was Boston's wife, Violet King. "As she was the first person at Burch Town that experienced deliverance from evil tempers, and exhorted and urged others to seek and enjoy the same blessing, she was not a little opposed by some of our Black brethren. But the trials she endured with the meekness and patience becoming a christian; and when Mr. FREE-BORN GARRETTSON came to Burch Town to regulate the society and form them into classes, he encouraged her to hold fast her confidence, and cleave to the Lord with her whole heart."

Freeborn Garrettson, the enthusiastic young American preacher who had freed his slaves, had come to Shelburne in 1786 to smooth out difficulties which had arisen there. He received a greater welcome from the blacks than from the whites, for a white mob tried to push his temporary preaching station over and threw stones and rotten eggs. Boston himself was converted to Methodism by Mr. Garrettson, and began to preach in Birch Town and Shelburne.

The free rations which the British government provided for the Loyalist refugees while they were getting settled in their new homes came to an end, and few people had cleared enough land to raise sufficient food for the winter. Although the land along the Atlantic coast of Nova Scotia is poor and rocky, the Negroes at Shelburne had been given such barren land that they were forced to work the land of white men "for which they were entitled to half its produce. It has reduced them to such a state of indigence" wrote John Clarkson

in his journal in 1791, "that in order to satisfy their landlord and maintain themselves they have been obliged to sell [all] their property, their clothing and even their very beds". Boston observed:

About this time the country was visited with a dreadful famine, which not only prevailed at Burchtown, but likewise at Chebucto, Annapolis, Digby, and other places. Many of the poor people were compelled to sell their best gowns for five pounds of flour, in order to support life. When they had parted with all their clothes, even to their blankets, several of them fell down dead in the streets, thro' hunger. Some killed and eat their dogs and cats; and poverty and distress prevailed on every side; so that to my great grief I was obliged to leave Burchtown, because I could get no employment. I travelled from place to place, to procure the necessaries of life, but in vain. At last I came to Shelwin [Shelburne] on the 20th of January. After walking from one street to the other, I met with Capt. Selex, and he engaged me to make him a chest. I rejoiced at the offer, and returning home, set about it immediately. I worked all night, and by eight o'clock next morning finished the chest, which I carried to the Captain's house, thro' the snow which was three feet deep. But to my great disappointment he rejected it. However, he gave me directions to make another. On my way home, being pinched with hunger and cold, I fell down several times, thro' weakness, and expected to die upon the spot. But even in this situation, I found my mind resigned to the divine will, and rejoiced in the midst of tribulation; for the Lord delivered me from all murmurings and discontent, altho' I had but one pint of Indian meal left for the support of myself and my wife. Having finished another chest, I took it to my employer the next day; but being afraid he would serve me as he had done before, I took a saw along with me in order to sell it. On the way, I prayed that the Lord would give a a prosperous journey, and was answered to the joy of my heart, for Capt. Selex paid me for the chest in Indian-corn; and the other chest I sold for 2s 6d and the saw for 3s 9d altho' it cost me a guinea; yet I was exceedingly thankful to procure a reprieve from the dreadful anguish of perishing from famine. . . .

While I was admiring the goodness of GOD, and praising him for the help he afforded me in the day of trouble, a gentleman sent for me, and engaged me to make three flat-bottomed boats for the salmon-fishery, at £1 each. The gentleman advanced two baskets of Indian-corn, and found nails and tar for the boats. I was enabled to finish the work by the time appointed, and he paid me honestly. Thus did the kind hand of Providence interpose in my preservation; which appeared still greater, upon viewing the wretched circumstances of many of my black brethren at that time, who were obliged to sell themselves to the merchants, some for two or three years; and others for five or six years. The circumstances of the white inhabitants were likewise very distressing, owing to their great impru-

dence in building large houses, and striving to excel one another in this piece of vanity. When their money was almost expended, they began to build small fishing vessels; but alas, it was too late to repair their error. Had they been wise enough at first to have turned their attention to the fishery, instead of fine houses, the place would soon have been in a flourishing condition; whereas it was reduced in a short time to a heap of ruins, and its inhabitants were compelled to flee to other parts of the continent for sustenance.

The next winter the same gentleman hired Boston to build more boats, and then asked him to go to Chebucto [Guysborough] to build a house because he planned to move there with his family. He offered to pay Boston £2 a month in cash, and give him a barrel of mackerel and another of herring for his next winter's provision. But when they arrived the employer did not have enough men to go on a fishing voyage to the Bay of Chaleur for the salmon fishery, and persuaded Boston to accompany him. Boston found the captain a fine man to work for, except that he cursed and swore continually. In August they returned to unload the vessels, and then set herring nets at Pope's Harbour.

On October 24, we left Pope's harbour, and came to Halifax, where we were paid off, each man receiving £15 for his wages; and my master gave me two barrels of fish agreeable to his promise. When I returned home, I was enabled to clothe my wife and myself; and my Winter's store consisted of one barrel of flour, three bushels of corn, nine gallons of treacle, 20 bushels of potatoes which my wife had set in my absence, and the two barrels of fish; so that this was the best Winter I ever saw in Burchtown.

In 1791, Boston King removed to Preston, near Halifax, where "Bishop" William Black had appointed him to care for the Wesleyan society of about thirty-four. While Boston was preaching at Preston, Lieutenant John Clarkson arrived at Halifax as the agent for the Sierra Leone Company. This company had been incorporated in Great Britain to trade in Africa and to re-establish former slaves on the African continent to show that the Negroes could support and govern themselves in their homeland. Lieutenant Clarkson visited various parts of Nova Scotia to arrange to transport the free Negroes to Sierra Leone, but ran into some opposition from white people who did not want to lose a source of cheap labour and from others who claimed that the negroes owed them money.

By December, 1791, one thousand Negroes had assembled in Halifax

to wait for ships to be chartered by the Nova Scotia Government to take them to Sierra Leone. To reward the black people for their good behaviour, Clarkson ordered an issue of fresh beef for Christmas dinner and distributed clothes to those in need. On New Year's Day about thirty of the Negroes came to Clarkson's door with their guns to fire a salute and wish him many happy returns of the day.

Clarkson had a high opinion of the Negroes at Preston, for he wrote in his journal: "there are not better workmen, or more honest and sober than those of the town of Preston, and in consequence of this good character, I have promised, to buy all my fowls etc of them, in preference of others for my sea stock at the regular market prices". The Preston people sailed to Sierra Leone on the *Eleanor*, 270 tons, with some negroes from Halifax, and Clarkson wrote: "This vessel will contain the flower of the Black people".

On January 15, 1792, a fleet of fifteen ships, with 1196 blacks on board collected from various parts of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, sailed from Halifax for Sierra Leone, under the charge of Lieutenant Clarkson. A violent storm scattered the fleet, a fever raged on board some of the ships, and there was more sickness after their disembarkation at Sierra Leone.

At first Boston worked for the Sierra Leone Company for three shillings a day, and preached to the native inhabitants, but he had to use an interpreter because he did not understand their language. The Governor encouraged Boston to open a school. His pupils increased from four to twenty, fifteen of whom continued to attend steadily for five months. "I taught them the Alphabet, and to spell words of two syllables; and likewise the Lord's-Prayer. And I found them as apt to learn as any children I have known".

Then the company officials offered to send Boston to England for two or three years schooling so that he might be better qualified to teach. "On the 26th of March 1794, we embarked for England, and arrived at Plymouth, after a pleasant voyage, on the 16th of May. On the 1st of June we got into the Thames, and soon after, Mrs. Paul, whom I was acquainted with in America, came to Wapping, and invited me to the new Chapel in the City-Road, where I was kindly received".

Boston was at first shy about preaching before white people who were so much better educated than he, but

one Sunday, while I was preaching at Snowfields-Chapel the Lord blessed me abundantly, and I found a more cordial love to the White People than I had ever experienced before. In the former part of my life I had suffered greatly from the

cruelty and injustice of the Whites, which induced me to look upon them, in general, as our enemies: And even after the Lord had manifested his forgiving mercy to me, I still felt at times an uneasy distrust and shyness toward them; but on that day the Lord removed all my prejudices; for which I bless his holy name.

In the month of August, 1794, Boston journeyed to Bristol, where Dr. Thomas Coke met him and conducted him to Kingswood-School. Dr. Coke was John Wesley's right-hand man and had been in America as the Superintendent of Missions, and he expended his fortune for missions. While Boston was at Kingswood he wrote an account of his experiences which was published in the *Methodist Magazine* of 1798. Little has appeared in print of the opinions of the Negro Loyalists, and this makes these reminiscences of Boston King more interesting and valuable. In September, 1796, after continuing his education at Kingswood for two years, he embarked for Sierra Leone to resume his employment as a schoolmaster. He soon had forty scholars whom he was attempting to teach the English language and also "some knowledge of the way of salvation thro' faith in the Lord Jesus Christ".

FARMER

Frederick Candelaria

old skin fields
lie in folds
wrinkled like
parchment crinkled
and dry as eyes
too tired to cry