

ABOUT BLACK HISTORY

As part of the British Empire, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia had legalized slavery from as early as 1767. However, the first sizable group of Blacks to the Maritimes occurred as a result of the Loyalist immigration following the defeat of the British by the Americans in **1781**. Three thousand free blacks or former slaves who had fought on the side of the British during the American War of Independence earned the right of passage to Nova Scotia and they arrived in 1783. In addition to this group, 1232 came as slaves to white owners.

All **Loyalists**, whether white or black were promised free grants of land. Unfortunately, many Blacks did not receive the same assistance and rights as their white counterparts. When they arrived in Saint John, 433 free Blacks were given small town lots that were too small to farm on. By 1785 blocks of 50 acres each were surveyed and given to approximately 100 Black families in areas now known as Loch Lomond, Kingston Peninsula and the Westfield area. Many Blacks were not adequately prepared for clearing and farming the land, having nothing in the way of money or provisions beyond what the government provided. As a result, countless free Blacks worked as indentured servants.

The Royal Charter that incorporated the City in 1785 placed several restrictions on members of the black community, including a prohibition of becoming freemen. After several dissatisfying years trying to settle in this new land, Thomas Peters organized an exodus to Sierra Leone. In 1792, 1196 members of the black communities of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick left for Sierra Leone to establish a new life.

Although the **1787 New Brunswick Militia Act** required all able bodied men to serve in the Militia, it was not until 1804 that Blacks were enrolled in the York Rangers. In 1813 an African Staff Company was formed and attached to the St. John County Regiment. All the Pioneers of New Brunswick's 104th Regiment in 1814 were Black. The 1st and 3rd Battalions of the York County Militia had an African Company attached until 1849. This Company usually acted as a sapper unit. Blacks continued to serve with Militia units until World War One when they became part of the regular forces.

From **1813-1816** the second most important group of Blacks came to the Maritimes. The **Black Refugees** were escaped slaves, primarily from Virginia and Maryland, who had thrown in their lot with the British during the War of 1812. Approximately 2000 blacks came, with 400-500 settling in New Brunswick and the rest in Nova Scotia. In New Brunswick, they settled in the Willow Grove area near Loch Lomond. The 371 refugees were given licences of occupation for 50 acres of land (per family) in 1817. In 1825, after ten years of struggle, those who remained on the land were given 99 year leases. In 1836 they were allowed to buy title to the land for 20 shillings.

Many churches in Saint John reserved special pews for Blacks or directed them to the balcony only. The history of **Black religion** in New Brunswick dates to 1806 when the Black settlement at Elm Hill on Otnabog Lake was established in 1806. These settlers built two Baptist churches. The African Methodist Church came to Canada during the 1840's. St. Philip's African Methodist Episcopal Church was organized in 1859. First held in a school house on the corner of Queen and Pitt Street Streets, the building was enlarged in 1870. The building had been a gift from the Centenary-Queen Square United Church to the Black Community of Saint John. Most of the Blacks in Saint John attended this church, and the building was used until 1940 when a new building was purchased at the corner of Carmarthen and St. James Streets. Today members of the Black community are spread throughout several of Saint John's churches.

By the time slavery was abolished in the British Empire in 1834 there were no slaves left in the Maritimes.

The first segregated school for Black children in Saint John, "**The African School**", opened in August of 1820. This followed the request of the Lieutenant-Governor of NB that "coloured children be taught in a separate branch of the institution". For a brief time, there were also separate schools in Elm Hill, Willow Grove, Loch Lomond, and Kingsclear. In 1848 the NB legislature provided a grant for the "Negro Day School" in Loch Lomond, which was attended by forty students. Four years later, a committee of Whites and Blacks attempted to establish a permanent school for "coloured children" in Saint John.

The first Black man to attend **university** in the province was Arthur Richardson. He began in 1883 at the University of New Brunswick (UNB) and graduated in 1886 with Honours in Classics. The first Black woman to attend was Mary Matilda Winslow. She entered UNB in 1901 and graduated with Honours in 1905. Both Mr. Richardson and Miss Winslow had to seek employment outside the province, being unable to obtain teaching positions in NB schools. Miss Winslow found a teaching position in Nova Scotia, but eventually moved to the United States.

Miss Melvina Henderson was the first Black to graduate from Saint John **High School**. She graduated with honours in the 1930's. Her matriculation (provincial government exams) marks were so high she was accused of cheating and she rewrote the exams under close supervision. The second exams were just as exceptional as the first. She won a scholarship to Teacher's College and continued her academic excellence.

For the latter part of the 19th century, and for most of this century, Blacks around the province have won recognition in many **sports**: baseball, track & field, skating, boxing and football. Ossie and Bill Stewart were 'demons' on blades as they skated with the likes of Willie Logan and Charlie Gorman. Ralph (Tiger) Thomas and Ron Brothers of Saint John are known to hundreds of boxers for their leadership in promoting the sport of boxing in New Brunswick. During the 60's Ralph "Tiger" Thomas was among the best boxers in Saint John. In the early 70's he started the Golden Glove Boxing Club. Between 1975 and 1985 it helped produce such stars as Eddie Chamberlain, Peter Britt, Kevin Watson, Bill Hickey and Tommy Young. Ralph has been inducted into the Canadian Boxing Hall of Fame, Saint John Sports Hall of Fame, and has been sportsperson-of-the-year in Saint John. Manny McIntyre of Fredericton was an outstanding player in both baseball and hockey. Rankin Wheary of Woodstock was a prominent local and regional ball player. Willie O'Ree of Fredericton became the first Black in the National Hockey League. Then there is Clifford "Nick" Skinner, known as the Colored Flash, an outstanding track star of the 1920's and 1930's who almost beat world speed skater Charlie Gorman in a foot race. During a career that spanned from 1927 to 1943 with both the Colored Aces and the Canadian Army Nick won many local and Maritime track and field events. The South End Royals of Saint John were one of the few all Black teams in New Brunswick's sport history and one of the best ball teams in Saint John. The highlight of their career came in 1922 when they were declared the Intermediate Champions of Saint John.

In 1931, Mrs. Lena O'Ree hosted the first Black **radio show** on CFBO (later to become CHSJ). The station made no attempt to publicize to the listening public that this particular hostess was Black. In addition to hosting, Mrs. O'Ree also played piano for a church choir that performed over CFBO. That choir produced a soloist, Miss Pauline Brown. She became the first Black voice to sing regularly on the local radio. In 1936, Mrs. O'Ree was responsible for the first Black woman's group being permitted to join the YWCA.

They called themselves The Recreation Club of the YWCA. This local was also one of National importance. In 1959, the Liberal party, in gratitude for the Black vote, asked Mrs. O'Ree if it could do anything for the Black community. She asked that Blacks be admitted to the dining room of the Admiral Beatty Hotel

Dr. Frederick Hodges served his city well. He was president of the Saint John District Labour (5 years). He was the first Black person to be elected to **public office** in Saint John. In 1974 he was elected city councillor for a three-year term.

Nick Skinner was one of the founders of **P.R.O.B.E.** (Provincial Resources of Black Energy) in late 60's, and the chairman of the Black community's Centennial Celebration in 1967. In the late 70's he was involved in the founding of P.R.U.D.E., which stands for Pride of Race, Unity and Dignity through Education. It develops programmes and services for the Black community in the areas of education, social and cultural development. As well, it functions as a resource center for the Black community and provides bursaries to Black students.