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BLACK IMMIGRANTS INTO NOVA SCOTIA,
1776-1815

by
John N. Grant

The greater portion of the black population of Nova Scotia came not as a result of a trickling immigration but in three main waves. The three waves were similar in that each resulted from events completely external to Nova Scotian affairs and in that the immigrants were driven, not drawn to Nova Scotia. Two wars between Great Britain and the United States and an internal squabble in Jamaica precipitated the immigration of blacks to Nova Scotia. This paper will take a glance at the background events of these immigrations, without dealing with the actual settlement of the black immigrants.

The first major migration was caused by the American Revolution and brought the black Loyalists. The defeat of Lord Charles Cornwallis at Yorktown on 19 October 1781 sounded the death knell for the hope of thousands of supporters of the Royal cause in America. The Loyalists were left with a decision either to put action to their avowed principles

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and go into exile or to return to their homes and hope that former neighbors would forget their stand and allow them back into the community. Many neighbors did not forget, however, and necessity as well as loyalty brought many to the former decision.¹ For them, as for the hundreds who served in His Majesty's land forces, the decision faced was not whether to go but rather where to go. Some went to Britain; others came to the West Indies and the Province of Quebec; thousands chose Nova Scotia.⁷

Among the multitudes awaiting evacuation from New York were several thousand blacks,³ formerly slaves, who had been induced to flee from their masters and cross British lines seeking the liberty and protection promised by the proclamation of Sir Henry Clinton.⁴ Over the objections of General Washington and the American Congress, Sir Guy Carleton determined to remove the blacks from New York with the other Loyalists under his charge.⁵ Included among these Negroes were the "Black Pioneers," an all black regiment under the command of Colonel Bluck.

¹ Wallace Brown, *The Good Americans: The Loyalists in the American Revolution* (New York: Morrow, 1969) pp. 126-46 *passim*.

² *Ibid.* Brown says it is likely that 100,000 Loyalists left the United States of whom 50,000 made their way to Nova Scotia. Of this number 14,000 went to what is now New Brunswick, W. Stewart MacNutt, *History of New Brunswick*, (Toronto: MacMillan, 1963) p. 41, supplies the same figure.

³ New Brunswick Museum, Scrapbook No. 3, p. 236, Glimpses of The Past—The Loyalists (Raymond Collection). Also, see Thomas W. Smith "The Slave in Canada," *Collections of the Nova Scotia Historical Society*, X. (1896-98), 21, and Phyllis Blakeley, "Boston King, A Negro Loyalist who sought refuge in Nova Scotia," *Dalhousie Review*, XLVIII, 3 (Autumn, 1968), 351.

⁴ For an autobiographical account of a Negro who answered the call of freedom, crossed British lines, waited in fear of recapture by his master in New York, was given a certificate of freedom by the commanding officers and finally evacuated to "Birchtown" (Shelburne N.S.), see Blakeley, "Boston King" pp. 347-56.

⁵ New Brunswick Museum, Scrapbook No. 3, p. 236-7. Sir Guy Carleton stated that it would be a breach of faith not to honor their promise of liberty to the Negro and declared that if removing them proved to be an infraction of the treaty then compensation would have to be paid by the British Government. To provide for such a contingency, he had a register kept of all Negroes who left, entering their name, age, occupation, and name of their former master. This was agreed to by the Americans but, as far as can be determined, no compensation was paid. See Smith, "The Slave in Canada," p. 22, n. 1

Governor Parr of Nova Scotia, in a letter to Lord Shelburne dated July 1783, noted that he was expecting a "Brigade of Blacks" totalling 1,500 in number.⁶ Arriving at Shelburne in August, the Negroes were by order of the Governor settled "up the North-West Harbour."⁷ They called their settlement Birchtown—likely in honor of General Birch, commandant of the City of New York. These blacks were promised free land and as was given to all the immigrants, rations for three years⁸ as well as the other aid necessary for their establishment. Free blacks were settled at Digby, Annapolis, St. John N.B. and Preston, with smaller settlements elsewhere,⁹ while others found employment in Halifax and the larger centers. It is estimated that a total 3,000 free Negroes¹⁰ came to Nova Scotia of whom over one-half (1,521) were mustered in Shelburne in 1784.¹¹ Together with the free blacks, at least 1,300 slaves were brought into Nova Scotia by their fleeing white Loyalist masters.¹²

Faced by the decline of the white Loyalist settlements, a

⁶ Governor Parr to Lord Sherbrooke, July 25, 1783, Shelburne Papers, Vol. 88, p. 87, *Canada Archives Reports*. 1921, Appendix E, pp. 262-63.

⁷ University of New Brunswick Archives, Diary of Benjamin Marston, 1782-87, *Winslow Papers*, Vol. 22. Marston was the government surveyor of Shelburne and to his diary is owed much of the available information of the early settlement of Shelburne.

⁸ C. Bruce Ferguson, *A Documentary Study of the Establishment of the Negroes in Nova Scotia between the War of 1812, and the Winning of Responsible Government*, (Halifax: Publication No. 8, Public Archives of Nova Scotia, 1948), p. 2.

⁹ See Smith, "The Slave in Canada," p. 22, and (Mrs.) William Lawson, *History of the Townships of Dartmouth, Preston, and Lawrencetown*, ed. Harry Piers, (Halifax: For the author, 1893), p. 156-57, and Fergusson, *Establishment of Negroes*; also, Thomas C. Haliburton, *Historical and Statistical Account of Nova Scotia* (Halifax: Joseph Howe, 1929), p. 32.

¹⁰ Eric LaBlanc, *The Negroes at Tracadie*, unpublished B.A. Thesis, St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, N.S., nd.

¹¹ James Walker, *The Black Loyalists of Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone*, The Author's notes. Walter breaks the 3000 down to 1,336 men, 914 women and 750 children. Christopher H. Fyfe, "Thomas Peters: History and Legend." *Sierra Leone Studies*, New Series, I, (December, 1953), p. 4-5, also gives the number removed from New York as 300. Not all the blacks came from New York; for example on 9 April 1785, 194 Negroes arrived at Halifax from St. Augustine. See, Lawson, *History of Dartmouth*, p. 157, n.1.

¹² Smith, "The Slave in Canada," p. 32.

famine in 1789, racial intolerance, and the militant opposition of white laborers whom they would undersell, the black settlers in Nova Scotia, whether formerly free or slave, became disillusioned within a few years with what they believed would be the land of freedom.¹³ As the number of Loyalists diminished, so did the number of slaves in the Province; for slaves themselves were obliged to follow their masters.¹⁴ The black Loyalists, however, suffered more of a disability than did their white neighbors: they were less likely to flee "Nova Scarcity" and return to the United States and possible slavery.¹⁵

Among the dejected and disappointed of the free black settlers of Nova Scotia was Thomas Peters, formerly a sergeant in the regiment of "Black Pioneers." Peters had settled at Annapolis and later applied for land in New Brunswick. Upon the rejection of his application, Peters removed to Britain where he laid a petition of his grievances¹⁶ before Lord Grenville, the Secretary of State for the

¹³ For evidence of matters related, see the Diary of Benjamin Marston, July 26-27; Phyllis Blakeley, "Boston King" and Ingraham E. Bill, *Fifty years with the Baptists*, (St. John N.B. John Barnes, 1880) pp. 19-26, and Smith, "The Slave in Canada," p. 80.

¹⁴ Smith, "The Slave in Canada," p. 118. Others were sent from Nova Scotia to places where slaves could make more money for the masters. Governor Wentworth, for example, sent nineteen Negro slaves to his cousin, Paul Wentworth, on his Surinam (Dutch Guiana) estate in February 1784. See R.V. Harris, *The Church of Saint Paul in Halifax, Nova Scotia; 1749-1949*, (Toronto: Ryerson, 1949) p. 64-65.

¹⁵ Although it is impossible to estimate any number, Robin Winks adds, "Ironically, between 1787 and 1800 in particular, fugitive slaves from British North America fled south into New England and the North West Territory to find freedom, reversing the popularly recognized direction of flow. See Robin Winks, "Negroes in the Maritimes: An Introductory Survey," *Dalhousie Review*, XLVIII, 4, (Winter, 1968-69), 457. But just as few escaped American slaves are recorded as arriving in the Maritimes, except for those aided by the British, it is questionable as to how many slaves left the Maritimes by escaping overland. Some, no doubt, were carried off by unscrupulous ship captains and unlawfully sold in the West Indies or elsewhere. Some free blacks indeed had returned to the free northern states during this time as well. See Bill, *Baptists*, p. 24.

¹⁶ Peters complains specifically that he and others of the "Pioneers," and some other free blacks, did not receive their proper allotment of land. See University of New Brunswick Archives, *Maxwell Collection*, typescript, Petition of Thomas Peters.

Colonies. In early August 1791, dispatches on the subject of the treatment of the free blacks were sent to Governors Parr of Nova Scotia and Carleton of New Brunswick. The Governors were reprimanded for the neglect complained of and ordered to inquire immediately into the facts, and if the complaints were found true, to take the necessary steps to atone for the injustice. They were further informed that since the petitioner was interested in removing to a warmer climate and since the Sierra Leone Company had expressed interest in their situation, they were to make inquiries as to how many of the free blacks desired to emigrate to that African colony. In reply, the Governors insisted that in their respective provinces no injustice had been committed, but that numbers of persons were interested in emigrating to Sierra Leone.¹⁷

On 7 October 1791, John Clarkson, agent of the Sierra Leone Company, arrived in Halifax to take charge of organizing the black Loyalists who were interested in immigrating.¹⁸ Travelling widely through the Province, Clarkson met with groups of Negroes and explained the plan, arranged for lodging, transports, and saw to all the details that necessarily would accompany such an undertaking. Clarkson labored under the difficulties of travelling to isolated communities, of facing opposition from white Nova Scotians,¹⁹ and of ignorance of the situation in England and Sierra Leone. He

¹⁷ Adams Archibald, "Story of the Deportation of Negroes from Nova Scotia to Sierra Leone," *Collection of the Nova Scotia Historical Society, VII*, (1889-91), 35-36. Also, see University of New Brunswick Archives, *Maxwell Collection*, Type-script, Dundas to Carleton, 6 August 1791.

¹⁸ For a discussion of the founding of Sierra Leone and the philanthropic group of Englishmen involved, including Wilberforce, Clarkson, etc., see Christopher Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1962). For the most complete account of the Nova Scotian blacks participating in the venture, see Walker, *Black Loyalists*. Also, see Archibald, "Deportation," and Gordon Haliburton "The Nova Scotia Settlers of 1792," *Sierra Leone Studies*, New Series III, (December, 1954) p. 16-25.

¹⁹ Many Nova Scotians were opposed to the removal because they had been told that only the best of the black population would be taken, leaving the rest behind, whom the whites feared would continue to be a charge on government. Others did not like to see a sure supply of cheap labor lost to them. See Bill, *Baptists*, p. 24 and Archibald, "Deportation," p. 140.

completely expended himself physically and, on the date of departure, had to be hoisted on board ship in a basket.²⁰

Early in the new year with costs rising, enlistments for the new colony were cut off and the transports made ready for the voyage. On 15 January 1792, the fleet, consisting of 1,190 persons—222 of them from New Brunswick—left Halifax Harbour bound for Africa.²¹ On board were “almost all the Baptists,” Moses Wilkinson’s Methodist congregation, the entire membership of Lady Huntington’s connection, and groups from Digby, Preston, Halifax, and Saint John. The British government expended close to £16,000 on the emigration of the black Loyalists, a large sum when it is considered that the entire budget of Nova Scotia in 1792 amounted to only £5,326.17.6.²² On 29 May 1792, the *Royal Gazette* announced “We are happy to have it in our power to inform the public that the fleet which sailed from hence last January with the free blacks, all arrived safe after a passage of forty days.”²³ With this notice the emigrated black Loyalists disappear from Nova Scotian history.

The second immigration of free Negroes, like the first, developed from events entirely divorced from Nova Scotian history. In Jamaica the Maroons had waged warfare against the white inhabitants of the Island since 1655, the year of the British conquest. Interrupted by periods of peace of varying duration, hostilities were resumed in 1795. The military, under the command of General Walpole and aided by Cuban bloodhounds, was able to strike quickly and the war was practically over by the end of January, 1796, although

²⁰ Archibald, “Deportation,” p. 144.

²¹ Lawson, *History of Dartmouth*, p. 156-57 says 1195 left in sixteen ships. Haliburton, *History of Nova Scotia*, p. 282 also allows sixteen ships but gives the number of persons as 1196. Blakeley, “Boston King” p. 355, also gives the number of persons as 1196 but allows for only fifteen ships. Walker, *Black Loyalists*, and Archibald “Deportation,” p. 144, allows fifteen vessels and 1190 persons. Walker gives the figures as 285 males, 349 females, 73 children, between 10 and 16, and 383 under 10 years. Also, see Gordon Haliburton, “Nova Scotia Settlers,” p. 24, n.2.

²² Bill, *Baptists*, p. 24, Walker, the author’s notes, and Fyfe, “Thomas Peters,” p. 54.

²³ *Royal Gazette and Nova Scotia Advertiser*, 29 May 1792.

the final surrender did not come until March. The Jamaican legislature, tired of the expense of maintaining peace, decided to rid themselves of the problem. Preparations were made for the exile of the Maroons and plans were laid for their settlement in Lower Canada although Upper Canada had been suggested as well.²⁴

On 26 June 1796, three transports, the *Dover*, *Mary*, and *Anne*,²⁵ sailed from Port Royal Harbour, Jamaica, arriving in Halifax, one on July 21, the two others on July 23. They landed 543 Maroon men, women and children. The Duke of Kent, then Commander-in-chief of the British Army in British North America, impressed with the manly character of the Maroons, employed the entire group to work on the new fortifications at Citadel Hill.²⁶ Sir John Wentworth, who replaced Governor Parr in August, 1792, received instructions from the Duke of Portland to settle the Maroons in Nova Scotia "if it could be done without injury to the colony."²⁷ Accordingly, two commissioners from the Island government, with credit of £25,000 Jamaica currency, expended £3,000 on 5,000 acres of land and buildings in the neighborhood of Preston. Wentworth, who appeared interested in their welfare,²⁸ obtained an allowance of £240 annually to support a school and to provide a religious instruction. Following the first winter, the Maroons, who were bred into a warrior culture and were not altogether convinced of the virtues of cultivating the soil, became increasingly discon-

²⁴ D. Brymner, "The Jamaica Maroons—How they came to Nova Scotia—How they left it," *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, 2nd series, 1, sect. 2, (1895), 81-88 *passim*. Using General Walpole as his source, the author places much less importance on the role of the dogs than does Archibald, "Deportation," p. 150, and Haliburton, *History of Nova Scotia*, p. 282-4.

²⁵ Haliburton, *History of Nova Scotia*, p. 285.

²⁶ Brymner, "Maroons," pp. 8-89. Archibald, "Deportation," p. 150 gives the number as between 500 and 600 while Haliburton, *History of Nova Scotia*, p. 285 says they amounted to 600.

²⁷ Haliburton, *History of Nova Scotia*, p. 287.

²⁸ Thomas H. Raddall, *Halifax: Warden of the North*, (New York: Doubleday, 1965) p. 123 ascribes less charitable interest in the welfare of the Maroons and points out that Wentworth took one Maroon woman as his mistress. Robin Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971, does not agree with Raddall's views concerning Wentworth's motives.

tented. Wentworth wrote of them that "they wish to be sent to India or somewhere in the east, to be landed with arms in some country with a climate like that they left, where they might take possession with a strong hand."²⁹

The unusually severe winters of 1796-97 and 1797-98 in Nova Scotia increased the discomfort and shortened the temper of the Maroons. In the spring of 1799, the Lieutenant-Governor was forced to dispatch Captain Solomon and 50 men of the Royal Nova Scotia Regiment to Preston, and to withhold supplies from the most refractory for purposes of maintaining order.³⁰ Wentworth became disillusioned with the Maroons as potential settlers; and moreover, the monies granted towards their support by the Jamaican government was running out. Since the Maroons seemed unable or unwilling to support themselves and must necessarily become a charge on the public purse, and in accordance with their own request, the Lieutenant-Governor resolved that the only course of action was to remove them, possibly to Africa. Indeed, in 1796, before the Maroons arrived in Nova Scotia, Sierra Leone had been suggested as a possible place of settlement. The Company's relations with the black Loyalists of Nova Scotia had not been entirely cordial,³¹ and they refused to entertain the notion of receiving a "body of negroes whose reputation could not be held to warrant such a step." In 1799 the Secretary of State reopened negotiations with the Sierra Leone Company on the subject of the Maroons. Responses from the Company remained cool. On the other hand, Sir John Wentworth gave his approval to the scheme and added that the inhabitants would be pleased with their removal. The Sierra Leone Company was finally persuaded to receive them and preparations were made for their transportation to Africa. "On the 6th August Wentworth reported that they had embarked and were ready to sail."³²

²⁹ Archibald, "Deportation," pp. 151-152.

³⁰ Beamish Murdoch, *A History of Nova Scotia*, (Halifax: James Barnes, 1965) III, 177.

³¹ The Nova Scotian Black Loyalists were in open revolt in 1800. Further, the settlement was for Christian Negroes and the Maroons were not Christian.

³² Brymner, "Maroons," pp. 89-90.

The second immigration and settlement of free blacks in Nova Scotia ended like the first, with their eventual emigration. It cost the Jamaican government "upwards of forty-six thousand pounds . . . and a very great outlay on the part of the British government."³³ On 1 October 1800, the Maroons arrived in Freetown Harbour, Sierra Leone, where upon disembarking they assisted in quelling the insurrection of the black Loyalists who had previously emigrated from Nova Scotia.

The third group of blacks who immigrated into Nova Scotia are the most important because their settlement became permanent. Little has been written on the background of this immigration. Therefore these black immigrants, who came as the result of the War of 1812, will be given considerable attention here.

During the last decade of the eighteenth century and the first of the nineteenth, Britain was engaged in a life-and-death struggle with Napoleon's Europe. In America, storm clouds began to gather and the British Empire was confronted with still another theatre of War. Ill feelings had marked British-American relations since the conclusion of the American Revolution. The failure of both parties to honor many of the clauses of the Treaty of 1783, the provocative habit of the British Navy of searching and seizing men and contraband merchandise from American ships, and the urging of the western "War Hawks" in the United States Congress for the conquest of Canada, all tempered the already hardening ill-will.³⁴ On 19 June 1812, President Madison, convinced that peace with honor could no longer be maintained, issued a formal declaration of war.

Ironically, only four days later, a new British government headed by Lord Liverpool, provisionally repealed the Orders in Council which had permitted the searching of American vessels. Mr. Madison's War, as it came to be called, while supported in the south and the west, proved unpopular in

³³ Haliburton, *History of Nova Scotia*, p. 291.

³⁴ For the discussion of the causes of the War of 1812, see Reginald Horsman, *Causes of the War of 1812*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1962). *passim*.

New England and New York, the chief trading areas. Lacking universal support, and being almost totally unprepared for war, the Americans could do little but launch ineffective operations against Upper and Lower Canada. In these land battles of the Upper Provinces, opposed by only small numbers of British Regulars under Sir George Prevost, and supported by the Canadian Militia, the war ground to a stalemate. At sea, where the British Navy had hitherto reigned virtually unopposed, the Americans proved more successful. The Navy of the Republic controlled the Great Lakes for much of the war and on the high seas boasted of victories in many single ship engagements. These spectacular victories, while they affected both British and American public morale, had no major effect on the British fleet, however, as her superiority in numbers and firepower did eventually and necessarily tell.

In 1813, the British government, convinced that the news of the revocation of the offending Orders in Council would not change America's determination for war, sent Admiral J. B. Warren to harry the American coast with a landing force of soldiers and marines from his fleet. On 1 February 1813, Warren placed Chesapeake Bay and the Delaware River under blockade "in the most strict and rigorous manner."³⁵ Although the blockade was later extended, "the Delaware and Chesapeake—the latter particularly—became the principal scenes of active operations by the British Navy."³⁶ Warren, receiving reinforcements with the arrival of his second-in-command, Rear Admiral Sir George Cockburn, moved his fleet into the mouth of Chesapeake Bay and blockaded rivers and landed raiding parties. The ability of British troops to move almost unopposed within a few miles of the national capital, and in those states which had support-

³⁵ J. MacKay Hitsman, *The Incredible War of 1812*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965) p. 107. This is a good general history of the War of 1812. Also, see R. Horsman *The War of 1812*, (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1969). *passim*. For the best account of the naval warfare, see A. T. Mahan, *Sea Power in its Relations to the War of 1812*, Vol. II, (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1919). *passim*.

³⁶ Mahan, Vol. II, 155.

ed the war, not only damaged American morale, but allowed the British the opportunity to cut off American supplies and destroy their "foundaries, stores, and public works." On 6 September 1813, the main portion of the British fleet sailed from the Chesapeake for the winter season, leaving behind a ship-of-the-line and some smaller vessels to maintain the blockade.

In the first few months of 1814, the warfare on the Chesapeake continued on the same general lines as in 1813. This campaign, however, was to exceed that of 1813 in "offensive purpose and vigor, and in effect."³⁷ A portion of the new found offensive mindedness was supplied by the appointment of a new Admiral to the North American station. In January of 1814, the Admiralty decided upon separation of the Royal Navy's combined West Indian and North American command. The former Admiral of the united command, J. B. Warren, was informed that his duties were to be restricted to the West Indian station while Vice-Admiral Sir Alexander Inglis Cochrane was to be responsible for the Atlantic and Gulf coasts. Relieving Warren on 1 April 1814, Cochrane, a veteran of the Revolutionary War, brought with him a desire "to give them [the Americans] a complete drubbing before peace is made, when I trust their northern limits will be circumscribed and the command of the Mississippi wrestled from them."³⁸ In an offensive effort designed to carry out his expressed wish, Cochrane, on 25 April 1814, declared all the coast,

from the Point of Land commonly called Black Point to the Northern and Eastern boundaries between the said United States and the British Province of New Brunswick in America, to be in a state of strict and vigorous blockade.³⁹

Aided by the ships and men from the European theatre, while Napoleon was considered safe on Elba Island, Cochrane strangled the economy and commerce of the American sea-

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 156, 177, 330.

³⁸ Hitsman, *The Incredible War of 1812*, p. 206.

³⁹ The Proclamation of Vice-Admiral Sir Alexander Cochrane, 25 April 1814, Admiralty Papers 1, Vol. 506, (hereafter Adm. 1 506), microfilm, Public Archives of Canada (hereafter omitted).

board and harassed its population with his landing parties of troops and marines from his vessels.

The existence of a huge fifth column within the ranks of the Americans did not go unnoticed by the British Command. Admiral Warren, however, had been instructed not to incite rebellion among the slave population, although he was ordered to receive aboard his ships any blacks who might petition him for assistance. These he was to receive as free men, not as slaves, and send them to any of several of His Majesty's colonies.⁴⁰ Captain Robert Barrie of H.M.S. *Dragon* reported to Admiral Warren on the state of the Negro population:

The slaves continue to come off by every opportunity and I have now upwards of 120 men, women and children on board, I shall send about 50 of them to Bermuda in the Conflict . . . there is no doubt but the blacks of Virginia and Maryland would cheerfully take up arms and join us against the Americans.⁴¹

Warren relayed the information to the Admiralty, but no steps were taken to utilize it until Cochrane took command. On 2 April 1814, the following proclamation, issued by Sir Alexander Cochrane, although not *eo nomine* to blacks, was given to raiding parties to distribute among the slave population.⁴²

By the Honorable Sir Alexander Cochrane, K. B. Vice Admiral of the Red, and Commander in Chief of His Majesty's ships and vessels upon the North American station, etc., etc., etc.,

A Proclamation

Whereas it has been represented to me that many persons now resident in the United States have expressed a desire to withdraw therefrom with a view to entering into His Majesty's service, or of being received as free settlers into some of His Majesty's colonies.

This is therefore to give notice that all persons who may be disposed to migrate from the United States, will with their families, be received on board of His Majesty's ships or

⁴⁰ Horsman, *The War of 1812*, p. 78.

⁴¹ Captain Robert Barrie to Vice-Admiral J. B. Warren, 14 November 1813, Adm. 1, 506.

⁴² Vice-Admiral Sir Alexander Cochrane to Edward Nicoll, 4 July 1814, Adm. 1, 506.

vessels of War, or at the military posts that may be established upon or near the coast of the United States, when they will have their choice of either entering into His Majesty's sea or land forces, or of being sent as free settlers to the British possessions in North America or the West Indies where they will meet with due encouragement.
Given under my hand at Bermuda this second day of April, 1814, by command of Vice Admiral.

Alex Cochrane⁴³

Hundreds of slaves in the Chesapeake Bay states, as well as the other areas of British blockade, seized their opportunity and made their way to the British vessels with the promise of freedom in mind.⁴⁴ Knowing that removal would reduce the affected area's contribution to the war effort, and becoming increasingly ideologically opposed to slavery, the British liberated several thousand slaves. This figure included those who departed on their own initiative, those who were enticed by their fellows to escape,⁴⁵ (sent back for that purpose) and those who had freedom forced upon them as a result of the continuous raids of the British marines.⁴⁶

Cochrane was determined to remove the slaves, not only to reduce the American work force, but also to employ blacks as active soldiers and marines. In late April or early May 1814, he ordered his second-in-command, Admiral Sir George Cockburn "to endeavor to raise a Corps of Colonial Marines, from the People of Color who escaped to us from the Enemy's shore in this neighbourhood [Chesapeake Bay] and to cause such as . . . may enlist for the purpose to be immediately formed, drilled and brought forward for service. . . ."⁴⁷ By 9 May 1814, a "considerable number" of blacks

⁴³ Public Archives of Nova Scotia, *Manuscripts documents relating to the American Refugee Negroes*, Vol. III p. 97-98 (hereafter P.A.N.S.) Vol. III, p. (or doc.) 97-8. Cochrane to Sherbrooke, 5 October 1819.

⁴⁴ Frank A. Cessell, "Slaves of the Chesapeake Bay Area and the War of 1812," *The Journal of Negro History*, LXII, 2 (April, 1972), 144-155, *passim*.

⁴⁵ R. E. Parker to the Governor, 18 June 1814, Virginia State Papers, ed. H. W. Flournoy, *Calendar of Virginia State Papers*, (hereafter C.V.S.P.) X 1808-1835, (Richmond, 1892), p. 338, reprinted New York: Kraus Reprint Corporation, 1968.

⁴⁶ John Bassett Moore, *History and Digest of the International Arbitrations to which the United States has been a Party*, 1, (Washington: 1898), p. 150.

⁴⁷ Sir George Cochrane to Wm. Hammond, 9 May 1814, Adm. 1, 507.

had enlisted and an officer of the Royal Marines, William Hammond, was put in charge of their training, later commanding them in the field. Often mentioned in dispatches for their ability in combat, the Colonial Marines quickly proved a valuable addition to the British fighting force.⁴⁸

The presence of armed blacks who "conducted themselves with the utmost order, forbearance and regularity [and who] were uniformly volunteers for the station where they might expect to meet their former masters,"⁴⁹ represented the worst fears of the southern slave holders in the United States. On 3 August 1814, the Governor of Virginia received a petition, "numerously signed" from the inhabitants of Caroline County against the call of the militia of that county into service in another county because of apprehension of slave insurrection.⁵⁰ On the following day J. P. Hungeford reported to the Adjut General:

Our Negroes are flocking to the enemy from all quarters, which they convert into troops, vindictive and rapacious—with a minute knowledge of every byepath. They leave us as spies upon our strength, and they return upon as guides and soldiers and incendiaries."

To them he attributed much of the effectiveness of British ambushes, as many of the blacks knew the country better than did the officers of the American forces.

In closing, he expressed what must have been the fear of many of the inhabitants.

The example too which is held out in these bands of armed negroes and the weakness of the resistance which as yet has been made to oppose them, must have a strong effect upon those blacks which have not as yet been able to escape."⁵¹

⁴⁸ G. C. Hormster to Captain Barrie, 1 June 1814. Adm. 1/507. Hormster approved of their conduct in the field. Sir George Cochrane reported to Admiral Cochrane on 29 May 1814, "The new raised Black Corps the Colonial Marines gave a most excellent specimen of what they are likely to be. Their conduct was marked by great spirit and vivacity and perfect obedience." Adm. 1/507.

⁴⁹ Captain Barrie to Sir George Cockburn, 19 June 1814, Adm. 1/507.

⁵⁰ Petition from the inhabitants of Caroline County to the Governor, 3 August 1814, *C.V.S.P.* vol. X, 1818-1835, p. 368.

⁵¹ J. P. Hungeford, (B.G.) to the Adjutant General, 5 August 1814, *C.V.S.P.* vol. X, 1808-1835, p. 368.

Without doubt the black troops were producing the desired effect.

In September 1814, Cochrane decided to combine the three hundred men of the Colonial Marines with two hundred from the Second Battalion of the Royal Marines to form a third battalion called the Royal and Colonial Marines. He was also determined to pay the black troops an additional eight dollars bounty for their capable conduct.⁵² The "Colonial Marines" and the other refugees from the United States who had enlisted in different regiments⁵³ served faithfully through the remainder of the war until peace was signed on Christmas Eve, 1814, and in the post-war battle of New Orleans.

When news of the signing of the Treaty of Ghent arrived, Cochrane was faced with the problem of dismantling his war machine. Regular troops could be returned to Europe where they were needed to recapture Napoleon, recently escaped from Elba and busily gathering another army. Colonial troops raised for duty only in North America had to be disbanded and provided for. The usual method was to provide incentives for their establishment as settlers in some part of the British possessions, often where they were raised. But in the case of the Colonial Marines, the latter was not possible. At the close of hostilities, they were removed to Ireland Island, Bermuda, the site of the British naval establishment to which place, along with Halifax, hundreds of the refugees, who had not joined the forces, had been sent.⁵⁴ There they took over the jobs that had employed many of the civilian blacks. Ultimately, the Colonial Marines were re-

⁵² Vice-Admiral Sir Alexander Cochrane to John William Croker, 28 September 1814, Adm. 1/507.

⁵³ Sir George Cockburn to Vice-Admiral Sir Alexander Cochrane, 15 August 1814, Adm. 1/507. In this dispatch Cockburn comments on the presence of Lieutenant Col. Brown whom Cochrane had sent to raise men, by enlisting refugee American blacks, for the West Indian Regiments.

⁵⁴ David Hardgraves, Statement, 30 May 1814, *C.V.S.P.* vol. X, 1808-1835 333; documents in the P.A.N.S; Evans to Cochrane, 1 April 1814, Adm. 1/505, which mentions the presence of refugee blacks at the British naval base on Ireland Island, Bermuda, supports this statement. Also, see Cochrane to Munro, 8 March 1815, Colonial Office 37, vol. 73. (hereafter C. O. 37/73).

duced and settled in Trinidad, where they were invited to be the first line of defense in case of slave uprisings.⁵⁵

The establishment of the Colonial Marines at the Ireland Island Naval Base in Bermuda presented Cochrane with an additional problem, namely, what to do with the dislocated civilian employees who had lost their positions. As the local laws of Bermuda did not permit the settlement of free blacks, he was forced to remove them to a colony that would receive them.⁵⁶ Thus, on 25 March 1815, Sir Alexander Cochrane addressed a letter to Lieutenant-Governor Sherbrooke of Nova Scotia informing him that he intended to send between fifteen hundred and two thousand black refugees from Ireland Island to Halifax.⁵⁷ Sherbrooke relayed the information to Lord Bathurst, adding:

This unexpected importation of so great a number of people of color for which I was totally unexpected may under the circumstances involve me in difficulty.

Sherbrooke also informed the Minister that

Since the commencement of the late war with America about 1200 negroes (including men, women, and children) have been brought into the Province by the King's ships from the United States.⁵⁸

Together with the approximately 1200 refugees who had arrived during the war years, Sherbrooke had now to expect an additional number. Sir Alexander Cochrane's estimation was high. Instead of the 1500 to 2000 he forecast, approximately 800 additional refugees arrived in the Province. The earlier arrivals, who generally came in smaller numbers and at scattered intervals, apparently had no trouble in obtaining employment in the booming war economy of Nova Scotia. Those, however, who landed in the year that followed April

⁵⁵ Donald Wood, *Trinidad in Transition*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 38.

⁵⁶ Vice-Admiral Sir Alexander Cochrane to Secretary of State James Munro, 8 March 1815, C. O. 37/73.

⁵⁷ Vice-Admiral Sir Alexander Cochrane to Lieutenant-Governor Sir J. C. Sherbrooke, 25 March 1815, C. O. 217/96.

⁵⁸ Lieutenant-Governor Sir J. C. Sherbrooke to Lord Bathurst, 6 April 1815, C. O. 217/96.

1815, were not so fortunate, as peace brought a general decline in business and prosperity.⁵⁹ These refugees were housed at the former military prison on Melville Island until positions could be found for them.

The black refugees were not the first foreigners that Melville Island had known. During the long conflict with France, the British had employed it as a prisoner-of-war camp and the War of 1812 added Americans to the list. During the early 1800's new barracks were added to house the prisoners.⁶⁰ Fortunately for the black refugees, the end of the war and exchange of white prisoners vacated the premises for the use of the Negroes. Otherwise it would likely have been necessary to house them, as many Loyalists had been housed, in unsanitary bulks floating on the harbor or under canvas during the long cold winter.

During the first three month period that followed Cochrane's letter, a total of 727⁶¹ persons were received at the island with an average of 39 a day in the establishment's hospital and it seems that 76 of them died.⁶² A Halifax contractor, Lewis D. Molitor, was engaged to feed the refugees with a stipulated diet.⁶³ Doctors from the city were employed to care for them, vaccinating them against small-pox as they arrived in the Province.⁶⁴ Clothing and shoes were also supplied to the refugees who came in need.⁶⁵ During the fourteen months that the establishment existed, T. N. Jeffery reported that he had received "about eight hundred negroes of different ages and sexes" of whom many were "in a most distressed state afflicted with small pox, and

⁵⁹ James S. Martell, "Halifax During and After the War of 1812," *Dalhousie Review*, XXIII, 3 (October, 1943), 292.

⁶⁰ Major H. Logan, "Melville Island, The Military Prison of Halifax," *The Annual Journal of the United Services Institute*, VI (1933), 12-15, *passim*.

⁶¹ Lieutenant-Governor Sir J. C. Sherbrooke to Lord Bathurst, 23 September 1815, C. O. 217/96.

⁶² P.A.N.S., vol. 420, doc. 13.

⁶³ P.A.N.S., vol. 420, doc. 17.

⁶⁴ Murdoch, *History of Nova Scotia*, vol. III, 269.

⁶⁵ P.A.N.S., vol. 420, doc. 131, Jeffery to Cogswell, 9 January 1816.

⁶⁶ P.A.N.S., vol. 420, doc. 64, 82, 126, etc.

various other diseases." Of those afflicted many died "not less I believe than one eighth."⁶⁷

On 20 June 1816, Governor Sherbrooke ordered the establishment to be closed; and the few remaining refugees went to one of the established settlements or, if physically unable, to the Military Hospital for medical attention.⁶⁸ Governor Sherbrooke, anxious to increase the population of the province, was determined to settle the blacks in Nova Scotia and proceeded with his plans.

As stated above, the story of the settlement and the continuing history of the black communities is left to another place, but at Preston, Hammond's Plains, and other communities, the refugees made their homes and in many cases, their descendants and the descendants of the earlier immigrants, live there to this day.

⁶⁷ T. N. Jeffery to Major General G. S. Smyth, 5 August 1816, C. O. 217/93.

⁶⁸ P.A.N.S., vol. 421, doc. 34, Jeffery to Cogswell, 30 July 1816.