

## BLACK LOYALISTS IN THE MARITIMES

Among those who left the American colonies for the Atlantic Region immediately following the Revolution were more than 3,000 Black Pioneers, as well as Loyalist Regiments. Others were servants or slaves of Loyalists and had no choice but to accompany their masters. Wallace Brown, UNB Professor Emeritus in History, estimates that approximately 1,200 Blacks came in this way. Some households had at least 20 slaves and advertisements for slave auctions routinely appeared in newspapers. Only one settlement, the Quaker community in Charlotte County at Beaver Harbour, prohibited slaves. At the top of their agreement was written, "No Slave Masters Admitted." The last recorded sale of a slave in New Brunswick was in 1787. By that time, masters were beginning to pay wages and slavery was slowly disappearing.

The largest group of Black Loyalists, some 1,500, settled in Birchtown, named after Brigadier-General Samuel Birch who had befriended Blacks in New York. Located across the bay from Shelburne, this was the largest free black settlement outside Africa.

The story of Black Loyalists is one of broken promises. The British had promised the same treatment to Blacks and Whites, but the majority of Blacks received no land, and those who did find their grants were smaller than those of Whites, and located on poorer soil. Black farms at Birchtown averaged 34 acres, while White farms amounted to 74 acres. Blacks received only a fraction of the promised three years provisions and, as a result, slid into chronic poverty.

When Shelburne's population fell, employment opportunities for Blacks decreased. In 1784, race riots broke out in Shelburne as disbanded White soldiers tried to drive away Blacks who lived in Birchtown and worked in Shelburne, because they provided cheap labour and competed with Whites for jobs. The bitter winter of 1798 brought terrible famine and death to the Blacks of Birchtown.

It was not uncommon for Blacks to be kidnapped and sold back into slavery or to suffer from the double standard of justice, whereby Blacks were given much harsher punishments than Whites for crimes. At least 200 Blacks left the Birchtown settlement for New Brunswick.

In 1785, the government of New Brunswick said that Blacks were to form themselves into Companies and they would then receive 50 acres each near Saint John and additional land when they proved they could develop it. There were no such restrictions on Whites. Eventually, three large tracts were surveyed: one on the Nerepis River, another on Milkish Creek and a third near St. Martins.

Blacks faced the same problems as Whites, but had the additional burdens of lack of experience, money and household goods. As a result, free Blacks tended to gravitate to towns where they could find work as servants and labourers.

Leadership was provided mainly by such preachers and teachers as Thomas Peters and Boston King. Stephen Blucke was probably the most successful Black Loyalist. He ran a school in Birchtown and owned 200 acres, a fine home and a pew in Christ Church in Shelburne. A colonel in the militia and protégé of Lieutenant-Governor Parr, he tried to persuade the government to stop the movement to Sierra Leone, which disenchanted Blacks undertook when they feared that their future in the Maritimes held little promise.

As a result of the recruitment efforts of Peters and John Clark-Clarkson of the Sierra Leone Company, a total of 1,196 Blacks agreed to resettle in Africa and embarked at Halifax on January 9, 1792. Of these, nearly 600 were from the Birchtown-Shelburne area, 220 from the Preston area, 180 from the Annapolis-Digby area and 200 from New Brunswick. The fleet of 15 ships got under way on

January 15 and arrived in Freetown Harbour between February 26 and March 9, 1792.

This departure left the remaining Blacks in the region with a leadership vacuum for decades. The sense of community had been established, however, and the unending struggle for fair treatment and equality in which they had been engaged continues to inspire their descendants and those of later migrations to the Maritimes to the present day.

For further information:

<http://www.blackloyalist.com/historypage.html>