

Checklist of Sources for Researching People of the African Diaspora in the Maritime Region



The migrations of people of African descent during the eighteenth century were extensive and spanned the Atlantic from the continent of Africa (including post-war migrations to Sierra Leone), to Great Britain, the West Indies, the Thirteen Colonies (particularly Carolinas, Georgia, Virginia, New York, New Jersey), East Florida, and the new British colonies of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and St. John's Island (Prince Edward Island).

The impact of the American Revolution combined with the trade in enslaved people continued the large diaspora and migration, creating new, free Black communities, while other individuals remained enslaved by patriots and loyalists alike. People of the African Diaspora existed in various states of freedom due to racism and the unclear laws surrounding slavery in the British colonies and often risked re-enslavement if free.

Remembering to think widely and creatively about finding sources is often necessary when tracing members of the African Diaspora.

Key Primary Sources

☐ **Book of Negroes:** List of Black Loyalists, both free and enslaved, in New York City in 1783 who intended to go to Nova Scotia (which included New Brunswick at that time). Searchable, digital copy available through the Nova Scotia Archives' [African Nova Scotians](#) webpage.

Printed version available in Graham Russell Hodges, ed. *The Black Loyalist Directory: African Americans in Exile after the American Revolution* ([HIL-MICGDL E277 .B57 1996](#)) which also includes listing of "The London Black Poor."

For more information on the *Book of Negroes* on [Atlantic Loyalist Connection](#) blog:

- [The Importance of the Book of Negroes](#)
- [Naming Culture in the Book of Negroes](#)
- [Named in Freedom: Children in the Book of Negroes](#)

☐ **Newspapers:** Early Maritime newspapers included advertisements related to the sale of enslaved people and searches for "runaways," along with other information such as Black-owned businesses and death announcements.

- The [New Brunswick Historical Newspapers Project](#) indexes all published titles in the province starting in 1783 as well as hosting digital content. Examples of titles: *The Royal*

Gazette (New Brunswick), New Brunswick Courier, Saint John Gazette, The Times or True Briton (Saint John).

- [Nova Scotia Digitized Historical Newspapers](#) (Nova Scotia Archives). Examples: *The Nova Scotia Chronicle and Weekly Advertiser* (Halifax), *The Royal American Gazette*, *The Port-Roseway Gazetteer and The Shelburne Advertiser* (Shelburne), *The Nova-Scotia Packet and General Advertiser* (Shelburne), *Acadian Recorder* (Halifax).
- [Island Newspapers](#) (UPEI Robertson Library) for Prince Edward Island/ St. John's Island titles. Title examples: *Royal Gazette* (Charlottetown), *Royal Gazette and Miscellany of the Island of Saint John*, *British American*, *Colonial Herald and Prince Edward Island Advertiser*.

□ **Military Records:** The following regiments were specifically formed from Black men: Ethiopian Regiment, Black Brigade, and Black Pioneers (provincial) They also provided military service in white-dominated regiments and performed roles in more informal military organizations (e.g. Associated Loyalist, Armed Boatman) as musicians, labourers, tradesmen, sawyers, pilots, spies, teamsters, servants, and guides. Women supplied military service as servants, laundresses, and cooks.

- [Ward Chipman Muster Rolls](#) (Online through Library and Archives Canada) lists Black members of loyalist regiments and their resettlement in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island.

The Chipman Muster Rolls also include: 1784 list of Annapolis County "Negroes" settled at Digby, Annapolis and Granville who drew government rations and provisions, which includes the Pioneers (vol. 24, p 69-73); military muster rolls for 1777 and 1783 (vol. 25, p 86-127); 1782-83 Abstracts of Pay, which show the salary of the regiment's members (vol. 30 p 20-36); 1781-82 Abstracts of the State of the Black Pioneers (vol. 30 p 166); a 1784 list of "Chedabucto Negroes," which is located in Guysborough County, Nova Scotia (vol 24 p 275-279); Muster Rolls: 1775-1837, roll of the late South Carolina Royalists at Country Harbour, Nova Scotia, 12th June, 1784 (Series 1 Vol. 24/253); and Muster Rolls: 1775- 1837, list of men, women, children and servants belonging to the late Royal North Carolina Regiment, settled and carrying on improvements at Country Harbour, 12 June 1784 (Series 1 Vol. 24/256). ([HIL-MICL FC LMR .C4W3M8](#))

- [Great Britain. Army. Provincial Corps. Muster Rolls: 1777-1783](#) Of particular interest are the records relating to one of only a few Black military units during the American Revolution, the Black Pioneers, which was a unit primarily used for construction and military support. Index and documents available [through Library and Archives Canada](#).

□ **Probate Records:** Documents associated with transfer of property due to an individual's death can contain useful information about indentured and enslaved people.

Note that probate records are sometimes found in other groups of records, such as the [Shelburne County Township Records](#). ([HIL-MICL FC LPR .N6T6S5L6](#))

- [Early New Brunswick Probate Records, 1785-1835](#) are indexed online by the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick.

Example: from New Brunswick, Probate Court, Kings County, *Records*, Reverend James Scovil's will from August 6, 1804 of Kingston who bequeathed to his wife, Amy, "the use of my servant boys Robert and Sampson, the first being twelve years old ... the other ten..."

☐ **Legal Records:** Can include individual cases testing laws surrounding enslavement and re-enslavement in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.

Records to check: New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island Supreme Court, Court of General Quarter Sessions of the Peace for counties in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, and House of Assembly Journals Prince Edward Island.

Example: The brief created by [Ward Chipman for Nancy's case](#) is available online, including originals scanned from UNB Archives & SC. Also see Carole Watterson Troxler, "Re-enslavement of Black Loyalists: Mary Postell in South Carolina, East Florida, and Nova Scotia," *Acadiensis*, vol. XXXVII, no. 2 (2008). [UNB eJournal](#)

☐ **Bills of Sale:** Sometimes include transfer of enslaved people.

Can be found in registry records such as [New Brunswick, Land Records, York County \(HIL-MICL FC LPR .N4L3Y5R4\)](#), *Registry Records*: Example: Bill of sale, Benjamin Davis to John Agnew, Oct. 26, 1789: in this deed, Benjamin Davis agreed to sell to the Reverend John Agnew "four negroes named Prince, and Bella his wife, and two children named Peter and William."

Also, in personal, family records. Example: [Jarvis Family \(HIL-MICL FC LFR .J3F3C6\)](#), *Collection*, Legal Documents: Bill of Sale, John Lewis to Munson Jarvis, 1782 July 13: this bill of sale, or deed, is for the transfer of ownership of a "Negro wench named Rachel and her female child nam'd Jane."

☐ **Manumissions:** Official document of release from slavery. Sometimes found in land registry records.

Example: New Brunswick Museum, Archives, [Additional Loyalist Documents I](#), Peter Thompson papers: Peter Thompson, who had been enslaved to Charles McPherson of Saint John, was manumitted in a deed for the fee of 30 pounds.

☐ **Land Records:** Petitions and grants to request and receive land plots. Black settlers generally received less land in grants and supplies than other grantees.

- Petitions for Black Loyalists can be found in the Atlantic Canada Virtual Archives, [Black Loyalists in New Brunswick](#).
- [Nova Scotia Lands and Forests — Petitions series](#), Nova Scotia Archives.

☐ **Loyalist Claims:** Great Britain, Audit Office, Claims, American Loyalists: [Series I \(AO 12\)](#): 1776-1831 and [Series II \(AO 13\)](#): 1780-1835 includes paperwork as evidence to support their claims which could include "slaves" or servants. Some Black loyalists also made their own claims. (Loyalist Claims are also searchable through a subscription to *Ancestry*).

Examples: Black Loyalists submitting claims: March Kingston (AO 12/100/190, AO 13/130/293); Benjamin Whitecuff (AO 12/19/148, 90/3, 99, 345, 109/310 & AO 13/627); James Franklin (AO 12/99/357, AO 13/54/403)

☐ **Church Records:** Can be used for evidence of births, marriages, and burials and race is often noted. The location and denomination of individuals should be determined to narrow specific church records.

- [Marianne Otty Database](#) indexes early New Brunswick records kept by early Anglican ministers based in Queens County and includes early Black settler families.

☐ **Cemeteries:** Burial locations and biographical information from grave markers.

- ["Find a Grave"](#) can be used to locate graves of individuals or family members.
- [REACH in NB](#) Remembering Each African Cemetery's History in NB is working to identify locations in New Brunswick.

Indexing books are available for main graveyards, such as [Some burial records of the Loyalist Burial Ground, Saint John, N.B.](#), [The Black Cemetery at Conway, Nova Scotia as a Reminder of Brinley Town & the Loyalists](#), and [A Library of Stone Pages : and Other Records of the Wesleyan Burial Ground, Saint John, NB](#).

Regional Sources

[Nova Scotia](#)

☐ [Nova Scotia. Public Records. Papers Relating to the Negro Refugees: 1783-1839; predominantly 1815-1839](#) These Papers contain a variety of documents such as lists of settlers and "slaves," financial papers dealing with provisioning and services to Blacks; papers relative to relocations from Nova Scotia to Sierra Leone (1791-2, 1800) and Trinidad (1821); and correspondence of the surveyors and others who had responsibilities towards the care of Black settlers.

Some specific examples from vol. 419 (1790-1834): Declaration of the Sierra Leone Company of their readiness to receive into their colony certain free Blacks, 1791 (#1); plans and descriptions of lands laid out for the Blacks at Preston, Hammond Plains etc. (#20- 40); draft of Mr. Morris' proposals for settling "people of colour" (#72); Dr. Samuel Head's Report respecting Black families settled at Preston, 1816 (#47); list of "slaves" belonging to British subjects captured on board British vessels during the late war brought into Charlestown as prisoners, 1815 (#57); and account sales of Maroon property in cattle, farming utensils, etc. 1804 (#121-131). ([HIL-MICL FC LPR .N6P8N4](#))

☐ [Nova Scotia, Public Records. Accounts of the Final Settlement of the Jamaica Maroon Concerns in Nova Scotia: 1798-1804](#) Contains accounts and receipts for articles supplied and services rendered to the Maroons, descendants of free people of African descent from the Caribbean, during their last year in Nova Scotia; as well as related to the dispensation of their property left behind. These records include detailed lists of government issued food, clothing, and other necessities. ([HIL-MICL FC LPR .N6P8M7](#))

□ **[Nova Scotia. Township Records \(Shelburne County\). Local Records: 1782-1860](#)** Relevant content includes: MG 4, Vol. 141, Local records: A muster roll of free Negroes settled at Birch Town, Port Roseway, 1784; MG 4, Vol. 141, Local Records: Muster Roll of free Negroes settled at Birch Town, 1784 August; and Muster roll of free Negroes settled at Birch Town, Port Roseway, 1784. ([HIL-MICL FC LPR .N6T6S5L6](#))

[Sierra Leone](#)

□ **[Clarkson, John. Papers: 1787 - 1853](#)** Documents of interest include: reports of the Sierra Leone Company, 1791-92 (vol. 1); John Clarkson's notebook in Halifax, 1791 (vol. 2); petitions to the Sierra Leone Company discussing hardships of life in Sierra Leone, 1783-1820 (vol. 3); a register of medical cases among the Black loyalists in Sierra Leone, 1791-92 (vol. 4); and Thomas Clarkson's papers regarding the abolition of slavery, 1787-1853 (vol. 5); a letter from Birch Town (Black settlement outside Shelburne) residents regarding emigration concerns, 1791 (vol. 1, document 23); letters pertaining to the unhappy state of the Blacks in Nova Scotia; and letters from Thomas Peters, a leading Black loyalist, 1791 (vol 1, documents 13, 24). ([HIL-MICL FC LFR .C5J6P3](#))

□ **[Great Britain. Colonial Office. Sessional Papers: Sierra Leone \(CO 270\): 1792-1801](#)**

Contains handwritten Minutes of Council meetings (Feb 1792 - Dec 1801) held at Freetown, Sierra Leone, and provides details such as dates of meetings, names of members present, statements of resolutions taken, also, transcripts of addresses, the names of those elected to council, oaths of allegiance by officials, enactments and movements of bills, ordinances, individual memorials and petitions, complaints and criminal proceedings, transcripts of letters received and details of subsequent actions, proclamations, reports, and approval of various estimates and contracts. ([HIL-MICL FC LPR .G7C6S5S4](#))

□ **[Sierra Leone Collection](#)**, University of Illinois at Chicago. The collection consists of primary documents related to the British administration of Sierra Leone, including public and private papers of British officials in the colony of Sierra Leone, 1792-1825.

[West Indies \(Caribbean\)](#)

□ **[Great Britain. Colonial Office. Original Correspondence: West Indies \(CO 318\): 1699-1830](#)**

Volume 76: Commissioners of Legal Enquiry in the West Indies, 1822-1828, Free People of Colour, Disabilities and Grievances. In these memorials by free, Black persons from different islands are outlined the legal distinctions and disabilities under which "free coloured inhabitants" laboured for which they request redress, and ultimately equality under the law as British subjects. Most memorials provide situational and historical context, the grounds for redress in specified laws or regulations; as well as, the laws deemed prejudicial and oppressive, and their arbitrary and unequal distribution.

Volume 83: Commissioners of Enquiry into the state of the 'captured negroes' in the West Indies, 1823-1824, which includes reports, examinations, and correspondence related to enquiries into the state and condition of Africans liberated from slavery under acts for abolishing the slave trade. ([HIL-MICL FC LPR .G7C6A4C6S5](#))

□ [Jamaica. Assembly. Journals of the Assembly of Jamaica: 1664-1826](#) The types of documents found in the minutes include instructions, bills, accounts, reports, messages, petitions, acts, complaints or grievances, letters, and returns. The minutes dealt with all aspects of Jamaican life, including matters relative to its Black members - free, enslaved, or otherwise. Available online through [Center for Research Libraries Global Resources Network: Digital Collections](#). (HIL-MICL FC LPR .J3A8J6)

Digital Projects

- [Black Loyalist Refugees – Port Roseway Associates, 1782 to 1807](#) by Library and Archives Canada, digitizes and indexes the Muster Book of Free Blacks who settled in Birchtown, Nova Scotia.
- [Black Loyalists of Annapolis County](#) story map from Mapannapolis, Nova Scotia.
- [Black Loyalists: Our History, Our People: Documents](#) site explores an untold story of how Canada became the home of the first settlements of free Blacks outside Africa.
- [Digital Library on American Slavery](#) houses tens of thousands of records relating to all fifteen slave states and Washington, D.C. as well as a number of northern states with detailed personal information about over 100,000 individuals, including enslaved people, enslavers, free people of color, and more.
- [The Geography of Slavery in Virginia](#) contains a comprehensive digital collection of advertisements for runaway and captured slaves and servants from newspapers in Virginia and Maryland, covering the years from 1736 through 1803.
- [New Brunswick Loyalist Journeys](#) see the biographies of in Moses Simpson in York County; Gabriel Johnson in St. John County; and Richard Corankapoon in Kings County for details of Black lives in New Brunswick supported with primary documents for examples of how biographies can be reconstructed.
- [Our Black Heritage: Early Black Settlers of York-Sunbury Counties 1783-Present](#) from the Fredericton Region Museum, New Brunswick.
- [Legacies of British Slavery](#) contains a database searchable by slave-owner or an individual related professionally or personally to a slave-owner. It can be used as an index to slave compensation returns in *Treasury 71*.
- [The Loyalist Directory](#) of the United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada lists the loyalists who have been proven by the Association members, and sometimes provides basic information.
- [The Prince Project](#) database of enslaved people in Maine.
- [Slavery Adverts 250 Project](#) chronicles the role of newspaper advertising in perpetuating slavery in the era of the American Revolution.

Key Secondary Sources

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_____. [Blacks on the Border : The Black Refugees in British North America, 1815-1860](#). HIL-STACKS FC2350 .B55 W45 2006

Other UNB Archives & Special Collections Resources

- Bibliography of primary sources: [Loyalists and Slavery in Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and New Brunswick: Selected Documents from The Loyalist Collection](#) .
- [Black History Subject Guide](#) for The Loyalist Collection.

Contact mic@unb.ca for inquiries regarding The Loyalist Collection.

Link to digital copy: [Research Help | The Loyalist Collection](#)

