The Black Refugees

A third wave of Black migration into Nova Scotia came during and after the War of 1812, once again in connection with an international conflict. As had happened during the American Revolution, the British once again issued proclamation aimed at attracting Blacks in the United States to relocate to British colonies. As with the Black Loyalists, a large number of American Blacks once again chose Freedom in Nova Scotia over slavery in the United States

In 1813-1814, approximately 1200 Black Refugees from the Chesapeake Bay area of Virginia and from Georgia arrived in Nova Scotia aboard British ships. Another 800 southern American Blacks came to Nova Scotia at the end of the war via Bermuda. Smaller numbers continued to trickle into the province until 1816.

Though there were labour shortages in Nova Scotia at the time, the Black Refugees were not welcomed. A number of Refugees were quarantined on Melville Island, near Halifax, and the local House of Assembly petitioned to end the Black immigration. Lieutenant Governor Sir John Sherbrooke dismissed the petition.

Almost 1000 Refugees ended up in Preston. Other areas settled by War of 1812 Refugees were Upper Hammonds Plains, Beech Hill (later Beechville) and Windsor Road (Sackville). Collectively, the newcomers faced discrimination in land grants, jobs, and the distribution of supplies. Their situation was made worse by the "year with no summer" followed by the "year of the mice"- a crop destroying infestation of rodents. There was also an economic recession at the end of the war.

Ninety-five Refugees would not make Nova Scotia their home– opting instead to migrate to Trinidad– but most did remain. They overcame obstacles of poor land and widespread racism to not only survive, but thrive. Some of their customs, language, and religious practices remain a part of the African Nova Scotian community to this day.