

Industrial Island – African-Caribbean Migration to Cape Breton, Canada, 1900-1930

by

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*For my mom, Hilma Burke.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

The late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries evidenced extreme changes in industry and urbanization which fueled the movement of people worldwide. Included in this movement was an African Diaspora migration up and out of the Caribbean Basin and into the United States and elsewhere, as people sought to escape economic hardships within the region. Some took the opportunity to make their way to Sydney, Nova Scotia, where they labored for the Dominion Iron and Steel Company. The story of their migration to Cape Breton is of interest because they have remained a footnote in Canadian migration history. This thesis offers an opportunity to look at the lived experiences of these African Caribbean migrants and the community they created in Whitney Pier. This community served to spread notions of racial uplift and Black nationalism, evidenced by its involvement in the then growing Garvey movement.

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED**

ACL	African Communities League
AOC	African Orthodox Church
BCN	Black Cross Nurses
DISCO	Dominion Iron and Steel Company
UNIA	Universal Negro Improvement Association

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

In deciding to do this thesis, while people wondered at my motives, I knew that with or without an MA in Canadian History, I would be doing this research – so why not do the MA? Along the way, I found many moments where I wished I had not decided to do this, when I thought “to what end?” I would like to thank those in the History Department who always had something helpful or supportive to say or suggest, most of all, Valerie Peck, without whom I doubt I would have made it to the end. I would also like to thank Shirley Tillotson, and Jerry Bannister, for their early support. Thank you to Isaac Saney for his willingness to serve on my committee and for just being Isaac. Most of all, I would like to thank my supervisor, Afua Cooper, since the opportunity to work with her was one of the main reasons I decided to do this work. Afua, your support has been invaluable.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 1920, Joseph Brooms bid farewell to his mother Hazel as he sailed from Seawell, Barbados on the *Caraquet*, destined for Canada. This was Joseph's third trip to Canada, as he had previously traveled there in 1917 and 1919. This time however, he noted his intention of remaining permanently. When Brooms disembarked in St. John, New Brunswick, his documents indicated that he would be making his way to Sydney, Nova Scotia, where he would be employed by the Dominion Iron and Steel Company.<sup>1</sup> With these three trips, Joseph had joined a stream of labour and other migrants flooding into a newly burgeoning City.

Steel making and coal transportation had transformed Sydney, Cape Breton's capital city, into a nationally important industrial centre in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> Much of this transformation can be attributed to Henry Melville Whitney, a Boston capitalist. Whitney had been operating the Dominion Coal Company in Cape Breton since 1893,<sup>3</sup> and had seized the opportunity to enter the business of steel-making in an enterprise that allowed use of coal from his mines to fuel the furnaces, and ore from his Wabana mines on Bell Island in Newfoundland as raw materials.<sup>4</sup> The steel plant opened in 1901 with the blessings of the municipality and the federal government.<sup>5</sup> In discussion of the

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<sup>1</sup> Library and Archives Canada; Form 30A Ocean Arrivals (Individual Manifests), 1919-1924; Rolls: T-14939 - T-15248.

<sup>2</sup> J.G.MacKinnon, *Old Sydney: Sketches of the Town and its People in Days Gone By* (Sydney: MacKinnon, 1918).

<sup>3</sup> Under H.M. Whitney, the ownership of several Nova Scotia coalfields was consolidated to form the Dominion Coal Company in 1893. Craig Heron, *Working in Steel: The Early Years in Canada, 1883-1935* (Toronto, 1988).

<sup>4</sup> David Frank, "The Cape Breton Coal Industry and the Rise and Fall of the British Empire Steel Corporation," *Acadiensis* 7 (October 1977): 10; Don MacGillivray, "Henry Melville Whitney Comes to Cape Breton: The Saga of a Gilded Age Entrepreneur," *Acadiensis* 9 (October 1979): 44-70; Whitney Pier Historical Society, "From the Pier, Dear! Images of a Multicultural Community.

<sup>5</sup> Government subsidies were allocated to the company, including a 500-acre tax-free site for 30 years, and free water from Sydney. They received tax-exemptions from the province and cash payments from the



opening of his new enterprise, Whitney noted: "I believe that the establishment of these iron works will be the means of introducing the town of Sydney to the length and breadth of the whole world. I cannot control my enthusiasm when I think of the future."<sup>6</sup> Not only did his company introduce the town to the world, it served to introduce people from disparate places to each other, creating a diverse migrant labour community in the early 1900s.

The community of Whitney Pier is a by-product of the influx of immigrant labourers to Sydney in the 1900s. The workers and their families came from nearby Newfoundland, from the United States, southeastern Europe, Scandinavia, Russia, the British Isles, and different parts of the Americas, and many settled in the small area that would come to be called "the Pier."<sup>7</sup> In terms of Black workers, the Plant and coal mines employed men from already established African Nova Scotian communities, or Blacks from other industrial centres in the US, such as Birmingham or Pittsburgh, but the majority were men like Brooms; men who came from the British West Indies,<sup>8</sup> and mostly from the island of Barbados, recruited as migrant labourers by steel company agents. Passenger lists, census documents, immigration records, and the community oral

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federal government. For more detail, see Ron Crawley, "Class Conflict and the Establishment of the Sydney Steel Industry 1899- 1904," in *The Island: New Perspectives on Cape Breton History 1713-1990*, ed. Kenneth Donovan (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1990), 146.

<sup>6</sup> As cited in MacGillivray, "Henry Melville Whitney Comes to Cape Breton," 66.

<sup>7</sup> Colin Howell, "The 1900s: Industry, Urbanization, and Reform," in *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation*, 167; Elizabeth Beaton, "An African-American Community in Cape Breton, 1901-1904," *Acadiensis* 24, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 65-97.

<sup>8</sup> Migrants came from Barbados, the Bahamas, Brazil, Bermuda, Jamaica, Cuba, Grenada, St. Vincent, St. Kitts, British Guiana, and perhaps other islands. For some it is difficult to tell country of origin from the census which simply listed "BWI" as origin.

history indicate that many of the Caribbean men who settled in Cape Breton during the period under examination made their way to Sydney to work in the steel plant.<sup>9</sup>

Many Anglophone West Indians left their homes in the Caribbean islands in search of work and opportunity in the early decades of the twentieth century. They made their way through the Caribbean and Latin America, to the United States and Canada, and beyond. With these migrations, they changed the makeup of the communities they joined, as well as those they passed through. For example, so many Caribbean migrants settled in New York City that by 1930, almost a quarter of black Harlem was of Caribbean origin, leading the New York Amsterdam News to declare in 1938 that, excepting Kingston, Jamaica, Harlem was ‘the largest West Indian city in the world.’<sup>10</sup> With this migratory movement, Harlem and its surroundings would never be the same again.

### **African-Caribbean Diaspora & Canada**

Both in and outside of Canada, it appears that scholars of Black history have paid cursory attention to Canadian Black history,<sup>11</sup> and while there has been a great deal accomplished in recent decades to uncover the history of people of African descent in Canada, there continue to be calls for more research and scholarship in this area.<sup>12</sup> Much continues to be needed in terms of expanding the knowledge of Canada’s place in the

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<sup>9</sup> Many West Indians also made their way to other parts of Cape Breton, and worked in the mines, including some owned by Whitney. However, the focus of this thesis is on those West Indians who settled in Whitney Pier and worked in steel.

<sup>10</sup> As noted in Winston James, “Explaining Afro-Caribbean Social Mobility in the United States: Beyond the Sowell Thesis,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 44, no. 2 (April 2002): 218-262.

<sup>11</sup> Rachel Adams and Sarah Phillips Casteel, “Introduction: Canada and the Americas,” *Comparative American Studies* 3, no. 1: 5-13; Donald Harman Akenson, “The Historiography of English-Speaking Canada and the Concept of Diaspora: A Sceptical Appreciation,” *The Canadian Historical Review* 76, no. 3 (September 1995): 377-409.

<sup>12</sup> Harvey Amani Whitfield, “Reviewing Blackness in Atlantic Canada and the African Atlantic Canadian Diaspora,” *Acadiensis* 37, no. 2 (Summer, 2008).

geography of the Black Atlantic, as well as the role of African Canadians in the history of this nation. This thesis seeks to write Atlantic Canada into the history of this migration. In the last decade, there has been an increasing focus on the ways in which the migration of African-descended people from the Caribbean has worked to shape the Canadian context. In her exploration of the history of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in Toronto, Carla Marano has gone beyond a reporting of the local context, and has also explored the broader relationship of this community with others within the Diaspora. She has utilized archival material from both the local Toronto organization as well as those of the wider transnational organization. She has also worked with oral history narratives from community elders, and in both instances, she has been able to expand our understandings of Toronto's place within the African diaspora.<sup>13</sup> In addition to Marano's work, historian Jared Toney has also explored Toronto's place within the wider diaspora, using the UNIA as a unit of analysis. He draws on narratives from elders within the Toronto community to explore the relationship between local and diasporic identities and experiences.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps the most in-depth historical exploration of African Caribbean migration through a diasporic lens is the work of Karen Flynn in her monograph, *Moving Beyond Borders: A History of Black Canadian and Caribbean Women in the Diaspora*. Exploring a mainly post-war transnational movement of workers, in this case young women from the English-speaking Caribbean into the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States, Flynn takes an intimate look at family,

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<sup>13</sup> See Carla Marano, "'We All Used to Meet at the Hall': Assessing the Significance of the Universal Negro Improvement Association in Toronto, 1900-1950." *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 25, no.1 (2014): 143-175 as well as Carla Marano, "'Rise Strongly and Rapidly': The Universal Negro Improvement Association in Canada, 1919-1940." *The Canadian Historical Review* 91, no. 2 (2010): 233-259.

<sup>14</sup> Jared Toney, "Locating Diaspora: Afro-Caribbean Narratives of Migration and Settlement in Toronto, 1914-1929," *Urban History Review* 38, no. 2 (Spring 2010): 75-88.

childhood, schooling, migration, nursing training, issues of race, household arrangements, community and political involvement and activism, and the working world of Black nurses in twentieth century Canada, the United States, Britain and the Caribbean.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to exploring the ways scholars have looked at the history of the African-Caribbean diaspora relative to Canada, several studies of Caribbean migration within the Americas informed my research and served as insight into the translocality of Black cultures, political mobilization and performative resistance.<sup>16</sup> They served as reminders of the ways in which memory and racialization can unite people separated by geography.<sup>17</sup> Existing studies of the Black Atlantic also provided the context in terms of geographies, cultures and peoples throughout this region, and of the products of this history of contact.<sup>18</sup>

### **Race and Immigration**

In addition to scholarly work placing Canada within the broader African diaspora, as Canadian historians grapple with the growing discourses around the realities of this being an immigrant nation which has seen constant change in terms of how each new

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<sup>15</sup> Karen Flynn, *Moving Beyond Borders: A History of Black Canadian and Caribbean Women in the Diaspora*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011.

<sup>16</sup> See for example, Violet Mary-Ann, Johnson, *The Migration Experience: Social and Economic Adjustment of British West Indian Immigrants in Boston, 1915-1950*. Ph.D. Dissertation, Boston College, 1993.

<sup>17</sup> See S. Hall, "Cultural Identity and diaspora," in *Theorizing Diaspora*, eds. J.E. Braziel & A. Mannur (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003); P. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity & Double-consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

<sup>18</sup> There has been extensive study of the Diasporic movement of African Caribbean people into Central America as well as the US. These studies were extremely useful in terms of methodology as well as in guiding my analyses. See for example, Bonham C. Richardson, "Caribbean Migrations, 1838-1985," in *The Modern Caribbean*, ed. Franklin W. Knight and Colin A. Palmer (Chapel Hill, 1989); Ransford Palmer, Ed. *In Search of a Better Life: Perspectives on Migration from the Caribbean* (New York, 1990); Philip Kasinitz, *Caribbean New York: Black Immigrants and the Politics of Race* (Ithaca, 1992); Ronald N. Harpelle, *The West Indians of Costa Rica: Race, Class and the Integration of An Ethnic Minority* (Quebec, 2001).

wave of immigrant has been received and treated inside its shores, there has been a growing body of literature and a renewed interest in the histories of race and immigration.<sup>19</sup> The ways in which immigration policy in Canada was historically used as “a major vector of state power through which Jim Crowism was institutionalized in Canada,”<sup>20</sup> needs to continue to be discussed and interrogated. In terms of monographs which have looked at the treatment of issues of race and immigration over the past twenty-five years, the most in-depth exploration to date has been that of Donald Avery in his publication, *Reluctant Host: Canada’s Response to Immigrant Workers, 1896-1994*. Avery makes a case for the nation’s immigration policy being based on the needs of industry, by providing evidence that the Canadian government, agricultural, railroad, mining and other industries needed cheap labour, especially to develop the West from 1896 to 1914.<sup>21</sup> Avery chronicles the experiences of European and Asian immigrants, but also makes mention of other ethnic groups and their experiences of Canadian immigration. Relative to his treatment of Blackness, Avery notes that Blacks from both the US and Caribbean who could gain access to Canada,<sup>22</sup> were relegated to low status, often temporary jobs. They were the last hired and the first fired oftentimes. He points out that for Blacks in Sydney, Nova Scotia, they “were forced to accept the most arduous and unpleasant jobs in the coal mines and steel mills of the region.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Franca Iocovetta, *The Writing of English Canadian Immigrant History* Booklet #22 of Canada’s Ethnic Group Series. (Ottawa, 1997), 22; Barrington Walker, “Introduction” in *The History of Immigration and Racism in Canada: Essential Readings* (Toronto, 2008), 11.

<sup>20</sup> Barrington Walker, *The African Canadian Legal Odyssey* (Toronto: Osgoode Society for Canadian Legal History, 2012), p. 30.

<sup>21</sup> Donald Avery, *Reluctant Host: Canada’s response to Immigrant Workers, 1896-1994* (Toronto, 1995).

<sup>22</sup> Only in times of vast work shortages or unbeknownst to immigration officials.

<sup>23</sup> Avery, *Reluctant Host*.

This exploration of the role of immigration policy in the peopling of the nation was taken up by James Walker in his look at a history of the treatment of race by the Supreme Court of Canada. Walker explores the ways in which the judicial system worked to uphold many of the racialized attitudes of Canadian society, by first tracing understandings of “race” in the Canadian context. For Walker, it was these changing understandings which underpinned the ways in which legislation was passed and or interpreted. The ways in which race was seen and understood in the period was a result of an established “global paradigm emerging from European expansion and conquest” leading to a society where “Positions in the structure had been set and were being accepted as ‘natural,’ and elaborate scientific doctrines were being developed to explain a phenomenon which had evolved circumstantially.”<sup>24</sup> Walker also traces the ways in which the legal system made adjustments based on the racial understandings and perhaps prejudices of a few powerful men. As ideas about race evolved, he notes the changes in debates within the courts. Using the legal documents from four legal cases brought to the Canadian Supreme Court between 1914 and 1955, Walker looks at how, and to what extent, the prevailing cultural sentiments relative to race and racism could affect the country’s legal system, showing the ways in which the courts found ways to circumvent the system to uphold racist beliefs.

By focusing on the Black men who worked in the Canadian railway system between 1870 and 1955, Sarah-Jane Mathieu provides an interesting look at the ways in which race and industry worked to dictate Canadian immigration policy, this time from a

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<sup>24</sup> James Walker, *Race Rights and the Law in the Supreme Court of Canada: Historical Case Studies* (Waterloo, ON, 1997), 13.

mostly transborder perspective.<sup>25</sup> Similar to Avery's look at how the economic booms post 1896 led to businesses lobbying Canada to allow the immigration of more workers, Mathieu explores how the railway industry lobbied for Black labour from the US and Caribbean, and challenged restrictive immigration and labour laws as these laws worked to limit their access to workers. In looking at the lives of the railwaymen, Mathieu provides insight into the ways in which work on the railways, whilst still governed by Jim Crow practices (she argues that these should be seen as being equally present in the Canadian context as south of the border, and uses Jim Crow as a prevalent theme throughout her book) allowed Black men to gain some degree of status socially and politically. This book provides an excellent set of examples of the involvement of ethnic and immigrant men and their involvement in activism and labour unionism, as she juxtaposes the African American struggles for civil rights with the Canadian struggles for human rights during this period.

The most recent addition to the discussion of the ways in which Canadian attitudes towards Blacks and Blackness have shaped Caribbean immigration is Christopher Stuart Taylor's exploration of Barbadian migration to Canada.<sup>26</sup> Taylor utilizes a multi-theoretical frame through which he explores the intersections of race, class and gender to examine the experiences of Black Barbadians in their movement from the Caribbean to Canada from the post-emancipation period in 1834, up to the de-racialization of immigration in 1962, with the introduction of the Canadian Points System. He explores the "push" and "pull" factors in both contexts, and critically

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<sup>25</sup> Sarah-Jane Mathieu, *North of the Color Line: Race and the Making of Transnational Black Radicalism in Canada, 1870-1955* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

<sup>26</sup> Christopher Stuart Taylor, *Flying Fish in the Great White North: The Autonomous Migration of Black Barbadians* (Halifax & Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2016).

analyzes the ways in which the state-sanctioned process prior to 1962 provide clear indications of how fundamental racism has been in terms of our immigration history.

Writing between 1995 and 2016, the historians under discussion recognized the arbitrary creation and maintenance of a racist hierarchy. This hierarchy was based on biological notions of innate differences between peoples, beginning once Europeans began contact and their project of domination of the rest of the world. There is a tracing of the movement from this understanding of race as biology to one of race as a sociopolitical construct, used to maintain this hierarchy predicated on keeping Canada a white country. There is evidence of a reluctant evolution of the understanding of who existed within the nation (or had the right to be a part of it), and who remained an outsider, a tension which continues to exist. The changes to the definition of who was Canadian were as arbitrary as the initial defining of “race,” and were dependent on the exercise of power, whether from within, or outside the State. In terms of the treatment of Blackness within this context, Canadian industry used Blacks as a cheap, dispensable labour force which could be tapped into during times of worker shortage. Prevailing notions of the unassimilability of Blacks, the understandings of their biological and moral inferiority (and lack of character) fueled the creation and maintenance of a systemically racist nation, evidence of which can be found in the immigration and judicial records of the period, records which have become a source of our understanding more about our nation through the application of micro-analyses centering race.

### **Theoretical frame**

To address the complexity of the issues of race, migration, labour, gender, and class, this study makes use of a multi-theoretical framework. As this is a study of the geo-



circularity and geo-dispossession of people of African descent within the region, focusing on the traditions of migration within the Caribbean and the Americas requires multiple lenses to allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the context. Employing a Diaspora framework allows for the examination of the multiplicity of experiences and origins that have combined to create a community of people.<sup>27</sup>

By employing a Diaspora frame, my goal with this thesis is to broaden the discourses relative to the place of Canada within the multiple trajectories of the Black Atlantic, and place the Whitney Pier Black community within these discussions of Diaspora, race and immigration. Use of the Diaspora frame is a way to make use of a theoretical concept which allows one to look critically at the movement of British West Indians, into Cape Breton, Canada; the social and political climates they experienced; their connections to other communities in Diaspora; and the evolution of their communities, including individual and community identities. Kim Butler and other scholars suggest that the types of research questions explored in a Diaspora study indicate whether the methodology the researcher is following is Diasporan in origin. She goes on to divide these questions into five dimensions of study: “(1) reasons for, and conditions of, the dispersal; (2) relationship with homeland; (3) relationship (s) with hostland (s); (4) interrelationships within Diasporan group; (5) comparative studies of different Diasporas.”<sup>28</sup> These five dimensions fit well with the study of the African-Caribbean community in Whitney Pier.

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<sup>27</sup> For more on the use of Diaspora as an analytical concept, see Kim Butler, “Defining Diaspora, Refining a Discourse” *Diaspora* 10, no. 2 (2001): 189-215. For an introduction to the use of this analytic concept in a Canadian context, see Afua Cooper, “A New Biography of the African Diaspora: The Life and Death of Marie-Joseph Angélique, Black Portuguese Slave Woman in New France, 1725-1734,” in Dawne Curry, Eric Duke, et al, eds. *Global Conversations: New Scholarship on the History of Black People* (Urbana, 2009): 46-73.

<sup>28</sup> Butler, “Defining Diaspora, Refining a Discourse,” p. 195.

To acknowledge the ways in which gender and society are implicated, and the ways in which multiple forces interact to reinforce inequalities, I also rely on an intersectional feminist framework. According to intersectionality, one cannot give primacy to one aspect of identity without interrogating the others. Thus, a woman's experience as raced cannot be examined without acknowledging the ways in which patriarchy and class also shape her life. The experiences of African-Caribbean people in Nova Scotia need to be undertaken with recognition of the ways in which their multiple identities combined to create very specific outcomes.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to looking at gender in terms of its role relative to other forms of oppression, I have recognized the need to interrogate gender specifically. The reality that Black men experience gender differently from women is something I needed to focus on as I looked at the different experiences of African-Canadian men and women. To conduct these specifically gendered analyses, I was guided by African/Black Feminist Theory,<sup>30</sup> as well as theories of Black masculinities,<sup>31</sup> each of which centres the lived experiences of people of African descent relative to their gendered existence.

This thesis also provides a rare opportunity to acknowledge a group made up of not just migrant workers, but Black migrant workers. It highlights the ways in which they constitute a specific fraction or sub-section of the working class. A Marxian analysis is premised around the existence of two main classes within the capitalist mode of

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<sup>29</sup> For more on intersectional feminist frameworks, see Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (July 1991): 1241-1299.

<sup>30</sup> See for example, Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.)* (New York, 2000); Patricia Hill Collins, *From Black Power to Hip Hop: Racism, Nationalism, and Feminism* (Philadelphia, 2006).

<sup>31</sup> See in particular, Darlene Hine Clark's anthology which focuses on themes and issues central to the historical constructions of Black masculinities. Darlene Hine Clark, *A Question of Manhood: A Reader in US Black Men's History and Masculinity, Vol. 2* (Indiana, 2001).

production – the bourgeoisie and the working class. The capitalist class maintains control of labour power, the physical means of production and of resources. This means that the working class holds no control in terms of investment or the means of production, and the worker must, according to his or her position, sell their labour power in exchange for a wage. The migrant labour force present in Sydney in the early 1900s came in response to the demands of capital. Migrant workers provided a cheap international labour pool. This was the only way the new Nova Scotia steel industry was going to be able to compete with the other major corporations – “by recruiting from new pools of cheaper labour.”<sup>32</sup> The Black Caribbean worker’s experience of, and position within, the working class differed from that of other migrants because of their status as members of the English-speaking Commonwealth (a positive) and in terms of understandings of race within this period (a negative).<sup>33</sup> A major goal of this thesis is to position the histories of this migrant community into the broader historiography of the African Nova Scotian community.

### **African Nova Scotian History**

The province of Nova Scotia was home to ports existing within a system of commodity exchange and commerce extending from the islands of the Caribbean, along the North American coastline to Nova Scotia and Newfoundland, across the North Atlantic to Great Britain, European ports, and into West Africa, during the height of the British Empire. These multiple trading routes and paths of movement supported a migratory tradition for people of African descent, moving within the Caribbean region

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<sup>32</sup> Craig Heron, *Working in Steel: The Early Years in Canada, 1883-1935* (Toronto, 1988), p. 75.

<sup>33</sup> For a more extensive exploration of Black migrant labour from a Marxian perspective, see Ron Ramdin, *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain* (Brooklyn, 2017).

and outward into the Empire, especially in the years following the end of the apprenticeship system in the British West Indies in 1838.<sup>34</sup>

Historians focusing on the place of African Nova Scotians in the history of the province explore three waves of immigration – the arrival of the Black Loyalists (as well as Black slaves brought by white Loyalists as part of their personal holdings), in the years immediately following the American Revolution; the relocation of the Jamaican Maroons in 1796; and finally, the influx of the Black Refugees from the War of 1812, the group from which the majority of today’s African Nova Scotians are said to descend.<sup>35</sup> Once these groups had evolved into a community, it was thought there had been no further substantial in-migration and that these three groups together defined the African Nova Scotian community.<sup>36</sup> Little is said about the possibility of a steady movement of Black bodies into and out of the various ports by way of ship.<sup>37</sup> Prior to the work of John

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<sup>34</sup> The apprenticeship system was created to allow for a gradual movement from slave labour (which ended in 1834 inside the British Empire) to a system under which all slaves over six years of age would be required to work for their former owners for an unpaid forty-five hours weekly. It worked in some places, since labourers had few options beyond peasant farms which were rarely profitable. However, beginning in 1838, many labourers, wanting complete freedom and not a variation on their lives under the slave system, left estates and began evidencing more irregular and transient work lives. The ways in which the newly emancipated in different contexts reacted to the systems of domination post-slavery are beyond the scope of this paper. For more information see Sections Two, Three and Four in Hilary Beckles & Verene Shepherd Eds. *Caribbean Freedom: Economy and Society from Emancipation to the Present, A Student Reader* (Kingston & London, 1993): 41-168.

<sup>35</sup> For more on these waves of migration and relocation see, Bridglal Pachai, *The Nova Scotia Black Experience through the Centuries* (Halifax: Nimbus Publishing Inc., 2007); Harvey Amani Whitfield, *Blacks on the Border: The Black Refugees in British North America, 1815-1860* (Burlington, Vermont: University of Vermont Press, 2006); James W. St. G. Walker, *The Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone, 1783-1870* (London: Longman and Dalhousie University Press, 1976); John N. Grant, “Black Immigrants into Nova Scotia, 1776-1815.” *Journal of Negro History*, 58 (July 1973), 253-70.

<sup>36</sup> Pachai, *The Nova Scotia Black Experience through the Centuries*; James W. St. G. Walker, *The West Indians in Canada*, Canadian Historical Association, Canada’s Ethnic Groups, Booklet No. 6 (Ottawa, 1984), 8; David A. Sutherland, “Race Relations in Halifax, Nova Scotia, during the Mid-Victorian Quest for Reform,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, 7, 1 (1996), 35-54.

<sup>37</sup> Judith Fingard raises this as a reality in her work as she includes the various West Indians resident in Victorian Halifax, acknowledging that this is not strange when one considers the fact that Halifax was a major port city, and talks specifically about the ways in which these seamen transferred their skills to life in

Johnson and Kenneth Donovan, there was also little in the way of mention of the lives and history of those Blacks who were resident in the province prior to the arrival of the aforementioned groups.<sup>38</sup> Even with this work having been done, there are still gaps in the history of Black life in the region; for example, in-depth examinations of the enslaved persons who came with the New England Planters to the Maritimes, as well as the lives of the enslaved who settled in Cape Breton as part of the Loyalist migration, have yet to be undertaken. There is an understanding that Black workers were recruited to Sydney and neighbouring towns in Cape Breton to work in the coal and steel industry.<sup>39</sup> However, beyond their relegation to a few lines discussing their recruitment as a source of labour, little has been written about this group. They are only referenced as migrant workers, although it is likely several came for other reasons, and the people have not been looked at in terms of the social histories of the communities they left behind.<sup>40</sup> My thesis offers

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Halifax. Judith Fingard, "From Sea to Rail: Black Transportation Workers and Their Families in Halifax, c. 1870-1916," *Acadiensis* 24, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 49-64.

<sup>38</sup> John Johnston, "Research Note: Mathieu Da Costa along the Coasts of Nova Scotia: Some Possibilities," *Journal of the Royal Nova Scotia Historical Society* 4 (2001): 152-64; Kenneth Donovan, "Slaves and Their Owners in Ile Royale, 1713-1760," *Acadiensis* XXV, no. 1 (Autumn 1995): 3-32; Kenneth Donovan, "A Nominal List of Slaves and Their Owners in Ile Royale, 1713- 1760," *Nova Scotia Historical Review* 16 (1996): 151-62; Kenneth Donovan, "Slaves in Ile Royale," *French Colonial History* 5 (2004): 25-4; Kenneth Donovan, "Slaves in Cape Breton, 1713-1815" *Directions: Canadian Race Relations Foundation*, vol. 4 no. 1 (Summer 2007): 44-45.

<sup>39</sup> Ernest Forbes and Del A. Muise, *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation* (Toronto, Buffalo, London & Fredericton: University of Toronto Press and Acadiensis Press, 1993). Agnes Calliste in addition to looking at the experiences of these workers, also discusses the experiences of African-Canadian domestics who immigrated in this period as well. Agnes Calliste, "Race, Gender and Canadian Immigration Policy: Blacks from the Caribbean, 1900-1932."

<sup>40</sup> Joan Weeks, Carla Marano and Elizabeth Beaton have provided the most insight into the community, with Weeks and Marano looking at the role Garveyism played in the community and Beaton examining religion. Elizabeth Beaton-Planetta, "A Tale of Three Churches: Ethnic Architecture in Sydney, Nova Scotia," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 16, no. 3 (1984); Elizabeth Beaton, "Religious Affiliation and Ethnic Identity of West Indians in Whitney Pier," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 20, no. 3 (1988); Joan Weeks, *One God One Aim One Destiny: African Nova Scotians in Cape Breton* (Sherbrooke, 2007); Carla Marano, "'Rising Strongly and Rapidly': The Universal Negro Improvement Association in Canada, 1919-1940" *Canadian Historical Review* 91, no. 2 (June, 2010).

an opportunity to look at the lived experiences of this group of Canadians, and adds to the historiographic discussions of the African Nova Scotian.

The recruitment of British West Indians could not have come about by happenstance. The longstanding relations between Canadian and British imperial business interests had created a context allowing for access to the communities making up the British West Indies. The final decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> and first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century evidenced extreme changes in industry and urbanization which fueled the movement of people worldwide. Included in this movement was the continued movement of Caribbean peoples into North America (and elsewhere) in response to the economic hardships in the region, as well as the increasing opportunities in the United States. But why Cape Breton? Why did these people choose a locale with such inhospitable climates, both literally and figuratively? Chain migration or the use of migration networks might explain the choice by some, but what else made this a place to call home?<sup>41</sup> How long did your typical African-Caribbean immigrant remain in Cape Breton? What were the ties that bound him/her to community? To answer these and other questions that arose as I explored the context, my thesis focuses on the ways in which the early 20<sup>th</sup> century migration of Blacks to Sydney, Nova Scotia worked to create a culturally distinct community in Whitney Pier, and how this community managed to not just maintain transborder ties to the rest of the African Diaspora, but took active roles in the movements that were shaping the larger world around them.

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<sup>41</sup> This concept has traditionally referred to the ways in which new migrants have been known to rely on existing paths in choosing where to travel. This way they move to areas where others can help them transition to a new life. For more on this see A. Pahjola, "Social networks – Help or hindrance to the migrant?" *International Migration* 29 (1991): 435-444.

## Sources

In terms of primary documents, this study relies mainly on the use of the holdings of the Beaton Institute at Cape Breton University, the holdings of the Nova Scotia Provincial Archives, the Whitney Pier Museum holdings, and documents from the West Indian immigration files in the National Archives in Ottawa. The Provincial Archives and the Beaton Institute contain Dominion Coal and Steel Company documents, church and missionary records, personal and official correspondence, newspaper accounts, city directories and annual reports, as well as recordings and transcripts of interviews done with community elders as parts of earlier research projects.<sup>42</sup> Transcripts of interviews conducted as part of an oral history project, “The Freedom Experience of Blacks in Nova Scotia,” which was part of a Community-University Research Alliance funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada were also vital to this study. For my exploration of Black nationalism in Canada I relied greatly on the work of Carla Marano, as well as the extensive collection of official UNIA records, convention reports, speech transcripts and correspondence making up the thirteen-volume collection from historian Robert A. Hill.<sup>43</sup> These “several points of sources for the data” were incorporated to provide a clearer picture of the community and its residents, as well as to allow for triangulation.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Joan Weeks conducted interviews with former UNIA members in Glace Bay. The Beaton Institute also holds audio recordings, some of which discuss the lives of West Indian immigrants in Whitney Pier. Joan Weeks, *One God, One Aim, One Destiny: African Nova Scotians in Cape Breton* (Sydney: Centre for Cape Breton Studies, Cape Breton University, 2007).

<sup>43</sup> Robert A. Hill, ed., *The Marcus Garvey & Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, Volumes I-XIII* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983-2016).

<sup>44</sup> N.K. Denzin, *The Research Act (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition)* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1989).

## **Thesis structure**

This thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter Two examines the ways in which the Canadian State grappled with issues of race and immigration, particularly in terms of the African-Canadian migration to Cape Breton in the early years of the twentieth century. It examines the ways in which the State's relationship to this migration required the deployment of an extensive cohort of customs and other officers and years of work on the part of the Immigration Branch and argues that the fact of Nova Scotia being a port province on the Atlantic meant it served as the Eastern gateway into Canada. By how it was policed during the period under investigation, Nova Scotia worked differently in Canada to promote the exclusion of Black bodies. Once they managed to by-pass the immigration office, this chapter examines their settlement in Sydney – using church records, newspaper articles and other evidence, I explore the early years of life and the initial formation of a separate Black community.

Chapter Three turns to the main reason this migrant population had settled in Sydney – work. It begins with an examination of the difference in designation between the African American workers who arrived at the turn of the century, and the Caribbean workers who followed them. This is followed by a close examination of the dangers of the steel making process, including the examination of Company injury documents, which add to information on industrial accidents during this period. The chapter ends with an examination of the work done by the women in the Whitney Pier community, to challenge the traditional invisibility of women in industrial contexts.

Chapter Four explores the relationship between the Black nationalist movements of the early twentieth century, and the Whitney Pier community. It begins by tracing the evolution of both the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and the African



Orthodox Church (AOC). By recognizing the ways in which the community formed part of the broader transatlantic movements, this chapter works to solidify our understanding of its diasporic connections.

Chapter Five concludes by analyzing the use of the diasporic frame to talk about the settlement of the Whitney Pier community by Black West Indians at the turn of the century

### **A note on terminology**

The region of the Caribbean is the area stretching from the Bahamas in the north, to Trinidad in the South. The category also includes continental land masses such as Belize (formerly British Honduras), Dutch Guiana (now Suriname), British Guiana (now Guyana) and French Guiana, now a French colony.<sup>45</sup> Wherever possible throughout this thesis I have used the marker “Caribbean” and not “West Indian” or “West Indies.” Scholarship exploring Caribbean migration seems to overwhelmingly follow this practice of using West Indian as a marker of identity. It originates in Christopher Columbus’ mistaken belief that he had found the Indies when he arrived in the region in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. We well know the Caribbean to be a region today. West Indian is a label of habit, and I agree with Gadsby who has contended that we should use “Caribbean to move beyond the legacies of colonial designations.”<sup>46</sup> When referring to records or literature in which “West Indian” is used, I continue that usage. I also use it in the context of the “British West Indies” as that terminology was used historically.

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<sup>45</sup> Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (London/New York: Verso, 1998).

<sup>46</sup> M.M. Gadsby, *Sucking Salt: Caribbean Women Writers, Migration and Survival* (Columbia, MI: University of Missouri Press, 2006), p. 10.

Throughout this thesis, the terms “British West Indian,” “Caribbean” and “African-Caribbean” will be used interchangeably to refer to people of African descent from British colonies of the Caribbean. I am not suggesting that all people from the Caribbean are Black or African-descended, nor am I assuming all of those who migrated to Canada from the Caribbean would have necessarily identified, or been identified as such. However, I do this with the recognition that most people from this region were of African descent, and that an understanding of the social construction of race holds that for some, regardless of personal identification, during the period under investigation, they were read or understood as “Black” or “African” simply by being from this region. I recognize that within this collective label there are a myriad of experiences, and that its singular use can be seen as problematic in many ways, as based on shade or level of perceived whiteness, one’s historic position in the social hierarchy differed. The ways in which colourism shaped Caribbean migration during the period under is something that warrants further investigation.

I use Roi Ottley’s understanding of Black nationalism to frame my own: “group solidarity...form[ed] as Negroes developed new racial sentiments and loyalties” that cut across “class lines,” bringing in turn “a growing *world* consciousness, expressed in feelings of racial kinship with colored peoples everywhere in the world.”<sup>47</sup>

This provides a good way of understanding how and why the philosophy of Black nationalism requires no geographic borders, but is instead premised on a shared set of understandings which bring people together with an expectation of transformative action.

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<sup>47</sup> As quoted in Lara Putnam, *Radical Moves: Caribbean Migrants and the Politics of Race in the Jazz Age* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), p. 5-6.

## CHAPTER TWO: “MIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT”

As the world experienced transformations arising out of changes in industry and urbanization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Caribbean was experiencing its own upheaval. Included in the broader global movement was the continued movement of Caribbean peoples into North America (and elsewhere) mainly in response to the economic hardships in the region, but also in response to several intersecting historical realities.<sup>48</sup> This chapter begins with an examination of some of the ways labour migration became embedded in the fabric of Caribbean life. By examining how Canada dealt with issues of race and migration in the early twentieth century, the chapter then explores the nation’s connection to the movement of Caribbean peoples. It also introduces the reader to the community of Whitney Pier, arising out of the migration of labourers to Sydney in the early 1900s, focusing on the African American and the African Caribbean migrants, highlighting the development of a mostly Caribbean sub-culture, with its own clubs, organizations and church.

The British West Indies had experienced a catastrophic decline in its sugar industry in the decades after emancipation as it was unable to compete with what was being produced in Cuba and Brazil by slave labour, as well as the production of beet sugar in Europe itself. The production of beet sugar had removed cane sugar from the

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<sup>48</sup> Several historians have described the ways in which Caribbean slavery and Emancipation, colourism and racism, migration for work, and the reaches of colonialism and imperialism worked to create a context of migration within this region. See for example, Winston James,  *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (London/New York: Verso, 1998); Christopher Stuart Taylor,  *Flying Fish in the Great White North: The Autonomous Migration of Black Barbadians* (Halifax & Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2016); Violet Mary-Ann Johnson,  *The Migration Experience: Social and Economic Adjustment of British West Indian Immigrants in Boston, 1915-1950*. Ph.D. Dissertation, Boston College, 1993.

position of being the main source on the market, and with competition, the price of sugar from the Caribbean dropped significantly in the late 1800s.<sup>49</sup> Workers on British Caribbean islands were laid off, and made their way to other places that could use their skills in sugar production, but not always to places where they received good treatment. As one petitioner to the British government in 1899 put it, “Her Majesty’s black and colored subjects in the West Indies have had to choose between a death from starvation in their native islands and suffering ill-treatment in the Dominican Republic because their native islands are merely islands of death.”<sup>50</sup> The absence of choice underscores the need for migration within these communities. In the case of Barbados, the overpopulation and unemployment led the government to help people to leave – beginning in the 1860s, they began sponsoring emigration from the island.<sup>51</sup> Workers endured the hardships of Jim Crow policies, disease, high death rates, discrimination and ill treatment, because wages in the new place were higher than wages at home, or because at home there was simply nothing for them. By leaving, they could send remittances home to their families, build homes on their native islands for their later return, and thus create lives they would not have otherwise had.

A need for better economic circumstances pushed migrants out of their home countries. The availability of jobs and opportunities determined where they went. Initially moving to other Caribbean islands and countries in South and Central America whose

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<sup>49</sup> Peter D. Fraser, “Nineteenth-Century West Indian Migration to Britain,” in *In Search of a Better Life: Perspectives on Migration from the Caribbean*, Ed. Ransford W. Palmer (N.Y.: Praeger Publishers, 1990), 19-38.

<sup>50</sup> Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (London/New York: Verso, 1998), p. 42.

<sup>51</sup> Christopher Stuart Taylor, *Flying Fish in the Great White North: The Autonomous Migration of Black Barbadians* (Halifax & Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2016).

plantation economies were perhaps better able to sustain them, migrants travelled to places such as Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Venezuela and Costa Rica. Major construction projects also shaped the movement of people throughout the Caribbean. In 1850, the building of the railway in Panama led a mass migration of Jamaican workers to that country. Thirty years later, men and women from all over the Americas, flocked to Panama again, for the building of the Panama Canal. The final years of the 1800s and the first decades of the twentieth century were marked by the constant movement of bodies within this region, as migrants flocked to new locales.<sup>52</sup> The ports throughout the Americas were kept busy with this burgeoning labour migration, and by 1908 there were several steamship lines traversing the region, bringing skilled and other labourers and others seeking adventure from port to port.<sup>53</sup> People learned of new, lucrative places to find work as sailors passed through towns, returnees sported new clothing and shoes, or in listening to the songs of the day.<sup>54</sup>

The former colonies of the British West Indies had maintained close relations of trade and commerce with Canada, and there has been a steady movement of people between the Caribbean and this country since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Without a doubt, this movement of bodies throughout the Caribbean region would have had to include Canada.<sup>55</sup> This begs the question, in terms of people of African descent who make up

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<sup>52</sup> Violet Mary-Ann Johnson, *The Migration Experience: Social and Economic Adjustment of British West Indian Immigrants in Boston, 1915-1950*. Ph.D. Dissertation, Boston College, 1993.

<sup>53</sup> Lara Putnam, *Radical Moves: Caribbean Migrants and the Politics of the Jazz Age* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

<sup>54</sup> People coined the term “Panama money” in the Caribbean to refer to lucrative opportunities abroad, and not only in Panama. Being able to leave home to earn your Panama money was a common goal in this period. Olive Senior, *Dying to Better Themselves: West Indians and the Building of the Panama Canal* (Jamaica: The University of the West Indies Press, 2014).

<sup>55</sup> Yet the lack of studies of West Indian migration even to the larger centres such as Toronto and Montreal suggests otherwise.

most of the population of the Caribbean islands, how did Canada as prospective host country, and later as adopted home treat them? How accessible was Canada to these populations? There is some suggestion that official access was limited, and hence some Caribbean people created their own informal means of access to Canada. For example, according to Immigration Canada, there were numerous cases of ship captains in the early years of the twentieth century, charging a small amount to bring passengers from the Caribbean and into small coastal ports in the Maritimes.<sup>56</sup> While the Immigration Office went to great lengths to stop that practice, several Caribbean migrants in Cape Breton speak of this informal migration, and the arrival of their parents in Canada “without official papers.” On June 12<sup>th</sup>, 1909, W.F. Annand sent a telegram to the Immigration Branch in Ottawa:

Vessels from West Indies are carrying Negroes landing them at different ports of Nova Scotia with little or no means and without inspection. Customs officers should be immediately instructed as to their duties as these West Indians are daily becoming a charge province.<sup>57</sup>

Upon receipt of this telegram, Immigration Branch Superintendent W.D. Scott responded by sending J.B. Williams, the department’s “travelling border inspector,” to investigate the matter of West Indian illegal immigrants entering Nova Scotia. Williams visited Port Hawkesbury, Point Tupper, Sydney and North Sydney before sending a detailed report back to Ottawa on June 28<sup>th</sup>. In his report, Williams outlined the fact that between April

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<sup>56</sup> John Schultz, “White Man’s Country: Canada and the West Indian Immigrant, 1900-1965,” *American Review of Canadian Studies* 12 (1982): 53-64.

<sup>57</sup> W.F. Annand to W.D. Scott, 12<sup>th</sup> June, 1909, Immigration Branch Records, RG76-566-810666-1, Library and Archives Canada.

1<sup>st</sup> and June 29<sup>th</sup> 1909, there had been 51 West Indians who passed through Port Hawkesbury, all bound for Sydney.<sup>58</sup> The discovery of this practice led to an odyssey beginning in 1909 and continuing well into the 1920s, reflecting the ways in which the Canadian state struggled with and questioned notions of race, identity and access.

Where were these fears and restrictions coming from? Both within the civil service and in the public, fears of an influx of Blacks from the U.S. abounded in the early years of the twentieth century. The attempts at increasing the immigration from the U.S. into Canada had not been meant to attract African Americans, and their arrival at the western borders had created distress and confusion. Canadian immigration officials worked to place whatever obstacles they could in the way of discouraging and preventing Blacks from entering the country. The new threat of Black immigration from the Caribbean simply added to the fears planted by the Blacks from the American South.<sup>59</sup> Customs officers began relying on the 1906 Immigration Act, and called upon the immigration officers to use their discretion in recognizing that Negroes were likely to become public charges (noted as l.p.c on their immigration documents) and hence burdens on the State. On this basis, they were to be denied entry into the country. Blacks were also labeled as being morally and physically unfit and there was evidence to suggest that in a climate where Canada sought to welcome agriculturalists, Negroes had not shown themselves capable farmers.<sup>60</sup> When faced with Caribbean women attempting to enter the

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<sup>58</sup> J.B. Williams to W.D. Scott, 29 June, 1909, Immigration Branch Records, RG76-566-810666-1, Library and Archives Canada.

<sup>59</sup> Sarah-Jane Mathieu, *North of the Color Line: Race and the Making of Transnational Black Radicalism in Canada, 1870-1955* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

<sup>60</sup> This idea that migrants from the Caribbean were not agriculturalists is never challenged, despite the reality of most of the Caribbean population having spent over 400 years working the land in the building of empire!

country, an argument Immigration Superintendent Scott made against their entry was that “nearly all West Indian girls suffered from some combination of tuberculosis, immorality and insanity!”<sup>61</sup> This perspective arose out of existing stereotypes and understandings of Black bodies as hypersexual and diseased. By virtue of their race they must be seen and understood as flawed, and hence inadmissible.<sup>62</sup> In the years between 1900 and 1930, as historian James Walker points out, “positions in the structure had been set and were being accepted as ‘natural,’ and elaborate scientific doctrines were being developed to explain a phenomenon which had evolved circumstantially.”<sup>63</sup> This was evidenced in 1911, when the minister of the interior, in response to the accepted racial science of the time determined that Negroes could be banned from Canada due to their climatic unsuitability. As noted by Toney, these scientific truths about Blackness were then being used to “maintain the racial integrity of the nation.”<sup>64</sup>

The Maritimes, and the Caribbean migrants to Canada through those gates, played a vital role in the attempts at keeping Canada “a white man’s country.”<sup>65</sup> Calling on dozens of civil servants in small port locations across the province, the Immigration Branch worked to marshal the power of the State against what was being labeled an assault on the nation by people who were seen and understood as unassimilable. The report from Williams to Superintendent Scott in 1909 appears innocuous, but it ended on

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<sup>61</sup> Schultz, “White Man’s Country,” p. 58.

<sup>62</sup> For further discussion of the representations of Black womanhood, see Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, “African-American Women’s History and the Metalanguage of Race,” *Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 17, no. 21 (1992).

<sup>63</sup> James W. St. G. Walker, *The West Indians in Canada* Booklet #6 of Canada’s Ethnic Group Series. (Ottawa, 1984).

<sup>64</sup> Jared G. Toney, “Locating Diaspora: Afro-Caribbean Narratives of Migration and Settlement in Toronto, 1914-1929,” *Urban History Review* 38, no. 2 (Spring 2010): 75-88.

<sup>65</sup> Quote from a Memorandum for Prime Minister’s Use at Imperial Conference, 1917,” RG76/618/916301 as quoted in John Schultz, “White Man’s Country: Canada and the West Indian Immigrant, 1900-1965,” *American Review of Canadian Studies* 12 (1982): 53-64.



an ominous note that provides insight into the ways Blacks would experience immigration in this region for the next decade. Williams told Scott that, “the chief port where these negroes have been landing will be watched.”<sup>66</sup> This marks the beginning of a period of surveillance and weighing of Black bodies in the Nova Scotian ports to determine their admissibility. A look at the roster of customs officers at ports of entry and preventive stations across Nova Scotia during this period provides insight into how much was invested in this process of policing the border as we see that in this period there were close to 200 collectors, sub-collectors, preventive officers and other staff at work in the province. Almost every port, large or small, had a customs office.

The years were marked by many of these civil servants within the Immigration Branch, both in the small port offices and in the central Immigration office in Ottawa working to track down and confirm rumoured landings across the province. Even with the vast network of officers at their disposal (or perhaps because of it), because it could take days and weeks for letters or telegrams to be received, or even answered, confusion and misinformation were abundant. A good example of this concerned the ship the *Marion* in Port Hawkesbury. Upon receipt of notice of the apparent landing of the schooner *Marion*, L.M. Fortier, for the Department of Immigration, sent a letter to J.J. Williams, immigration inspector in Port Hawkesbury, on May 31:

Will you please advise me immediately whether this is so, and if so, whether the negroes were admitted by you after inspection, as required by the Immigration Act. If they were you should send me a copy of the ship’s manifest with all the

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<sup>66</sup> J.B. Williams to W.D. Scott, 29 June, 1909, Immigration Branch Records, RG76-566-810666-1, Library and Archives Canada.

particulars we require noted thereon. In any event I would like to hear from you in this matter without delay. Who are the owners of the Marion, and where is she now?<sup>67</sup>

When Williams replied a few weeks later, he claimed the report of the ship's landing was false:

No such vessel as the Marion has been reported, or has landed, negroes here, this season. All negroes landed here have been reported in my regular monthly statements. Any information you may have received to the contrary is false.<sup>68</sup>

While the story of the landing of the *Marion* had been disproven, there were several other ships which were determined to have by-passed the Immigration Act to smuggle West Indians into the province. In some cases, the names of the passengers were known, while in others the ship records only depicted numbers. For example, documents pertaining to the *Yolando* or *Yalondo*, which arrived at Saint John, New Brunswick on two occasions in 1912, reveal only numerical data for the human cargo from Barbados - 38 passengers on May 7,<sup>69</sup> and 25 passengers on July 25.<sup>70</sup> The ship had no living accommodations aside from the master and crew, which meant the owner had violated the Immigration Act. In this instance, the *Yolando* was charged \$100 for the infraction.<sup>71</sup> Throughout this period

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<sup>67</sup> L.M. Fortier to J.J. Williams, 31<sup>st</sup> May, 1910, Immigration Branch Records, RG76-566-810666-1, Library and Archives Canada.

<sup>68</sup> J.J. Williams to L.M. Fortier, 15<sup>th</sup> June, 1910, Immigration Branch Records, RG76-566-810666-1, Library and Archives Canada.

<sup>69</sup> W.D. Scott to Dr. Ellis and Mr. Lantalum, 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 1912, Immigration Branch Records, RG76-566-810666-1, Library and Archives Canada.

<sup>70</sup> Mr. Lantalum to W.D. Scott, 25<sup>th</sup> July, 1912, Immigration Branch Records, RG76-566-810666-1, Library and Archives Canada.

<sup>71</sup> J. Millar-Smith to W.D. Scott, 9<sup>th</sup> August, 1912, Immigration Branch Records, RG76-566-810666-1, Library and Archives Canada.

the staff of the Immigration Branch was working to keep up with what appears to have been a steady, and lucrative process of clandestine immigration, made necessary by the refusal of the State to see Negroes as admissible to the nation.

One thing that becomes abundantly clear upon a close reading of the immigration files, is even though the main rationale put forward in the years between 1900 and 1930, relates to the Immigration Branch's fear of Negroes becoming public charges, this is simply an excuse, since even those with jobs or meeting the requirements in other ways are provided obstacles to entry. Proving that one had the means of support did not mean they would be admitted. For example, at the end of July 1914 Fortier noted in a letter to W.D. Scott that his instructions to customs officers had changed from allowing Caribbean migrants into the country if they passed the required medical examination, had \$25 and had a ticket to their destination in Canada. He believed this to be insufficient toward proving that they would not become public charges. He believed there were too many of them already in the province, acknowledged several hundred were working in the Dominion Iron and Steel Company, and noted a plan to ascertain how every single Disco worker from the Caribbean had made their way into the country, to ensure none had found a loophole:

I am procuring a detailed statement from both the Dominion Iron & Steel Co. and the Dominion Coal Co., of all West Indian Negroes taken into their employ since the first of January, 1914. There will be something over two hundred names in these lists, but Mr. Young will examine them all, for a purpose of discovering how

and under what circumstances they got into Canada with a view to finding out and stopping up loopholes.<sup>72</sup>

There were hundreds of other ethnic and foreign workers employed by these companies during the period, but the Branch's investigation would be directed solely at Caribbean men, men who, by being employees of Disco, were clearly earning money. This is not about a likelihood of becoming a public charge, it is about Blackness. As had others within the Branch, Fortier had clearly appointed himself a guardian of Canada's racial purity.<sup>73</sup>

Industry did not always agree with the perspectives of the Immigration Branch, and there were several times in this period where the needs of industry were believed to outweigh the needs of the nation, and superseded immigration policy.<sup>74</sup> During those periods, regardless of the prevailing discourses, companies sought out the bodies they needed to complete the jobs. There are endless examples within Canadian history. In Sydney at the turn of the century, with the opening of Disco in a context of a limited workforce, there were multiple instances in which the company sought permission to bring in foreign workers. While these instances were not always successful as they were thwarted by the leadership in the Immigration Branch, they provide examples of how industry sought out cheap labour, regardless of colour. In the years before WWI Disco sent recruiters down to Barbados as recruiting agents, which had been part of its practice

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<sup>72</sup> L.M. Fortier to W.D. Scott, 27<sup>th</sup> July, 1914, Immigration Branch Records, RG76-566-810666-1, Library and Archives Canada.

<sup>73</sup> Shultz, "White Man's Country"

<sup>74</sup> Avery, *Reluctant Host*.

– using ethnic workers to go back home to recruit on their behalf.<sup>75</sup> This provides an answer to the question of why such a large proportion of the Caribbean population at Disco was from that island. With the difficulties in procuring employees during the war years, in 1916, Disco requested, and was given permission to import 1,000 Caribbean workers. W.D. Scott justified this concession as being for the greater good of the nation:

The production of steel and coal must go on even at some expenses to the country, and the concession is made on the principle of being the lesser evil. You can readily understand how unwilling we would be here to make the concession under any but the strongest reasons.<sup>76</sup>

According to Calliste however, it appears this 1,000 was never recruited from the Caribbean, as Disco may have filled their quota from the 1,300 Austrians who had been released from internment camps in Quebec and Ontario.<sup>77</sup> Whether through official or unofficial means however, Disco continued to provide employment to workers from the Caribbean.

### **The Formation of a New Community – First, the Americans**

The Black workers were coming into a context where they would be the racial or ethnic “other,” but it was a place filled with opportunity. Most newcomers to Sydney were attracted by the possibility of high wages, and better living conditions.<sup>78</sup> A group of Black skilled workers first arrived in the region in 1901 and quickly formed a lively

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<sup>75</sup> Craig Heron, “Working in Steel;” Agnes Calliste, “Race, Gender and Canadian Immigration Policy: Blacks from the Caribbean, 1900-1932” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 28 no. 4 (Winter 1993-94).

<sup>76</sup> W.D. Scott to L.M. Fortier, 10<sup>th</sup> August, 1916, Immigration Branch Records, RG76-566-810666-1, Library and Archives Canada.

<sup>77</sup> Calliste, “Race, Gender and Canadian Immigration Policy.”

<sup>78</sup> Beaton, “An African-American Community in Cape Breton.”

community. While Beaton states that this group was mostly all gone by 1904,<sup>79</sup> Disco appears to have continued recruiting and hiring Black men from the American South, as in 1906, the *Cape Breton Post* notes that there were approximately 150 coloured men from Alabama already working in the steel plant, and that another batch of 100 was arriving that week.<sup>80</sup> Census records suggest that some of the Caribbean workers arrived as early as 1903, but the majority arrived in the second decade of the 1900s.<sup>81</sup> This section therefore examines the creation of a Black community in Whitney Pier with the arrival of African American workers.

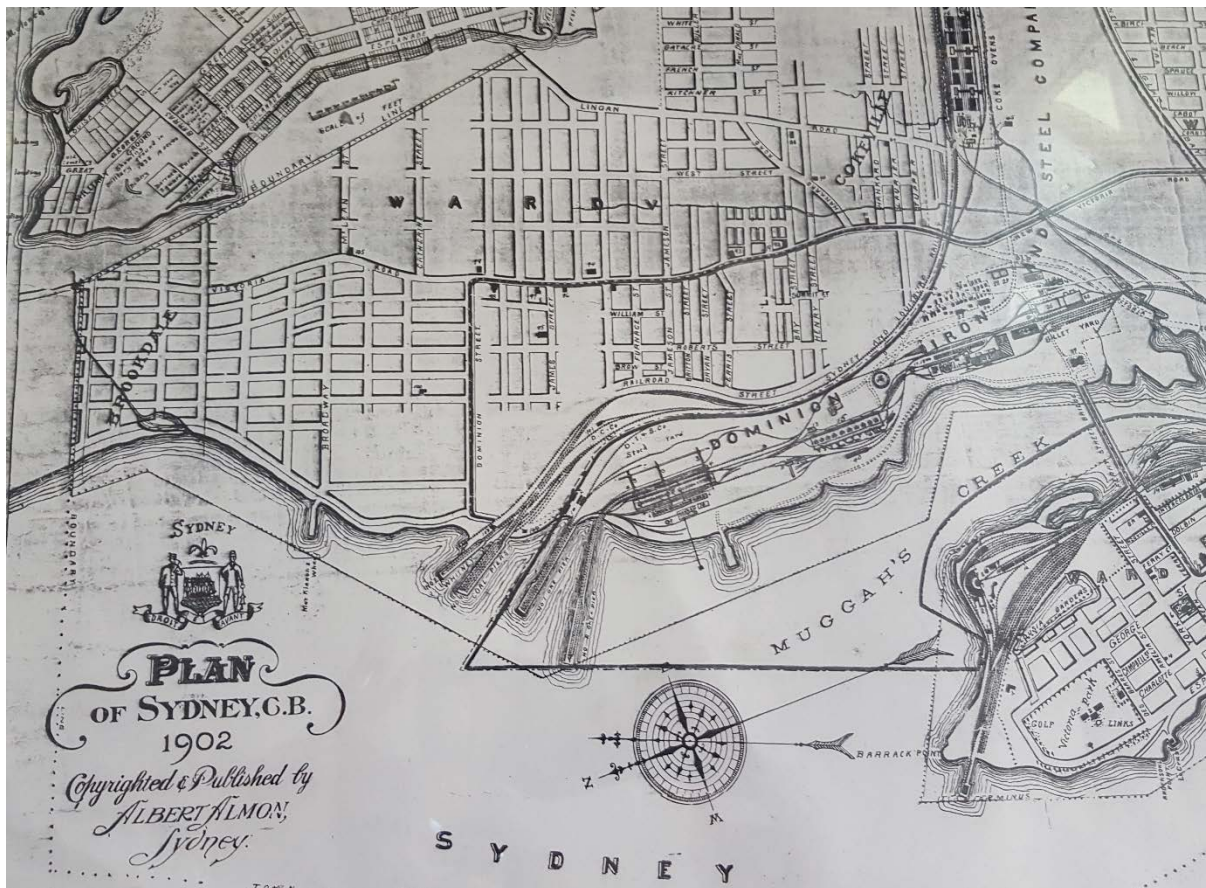


Figure 1: Portion of Albert Almon Plan of Sydney 1902

<sup>79</sup> Beaton, “An African-American Community in Cape Breton.”

<sup>80</sup> “Coloured Men Coming,” *Cape Breton Post*, July 11, 1906.

<sup>81</sup> As a port province, people from the Caribbean had been coming and going from Nova Scotia for generations, but my focus here is on the individuals who went to Whitney Pier.

In discussing the experiences of this first group of Black men to arrive in the region, recruited from the American steel centres to operate the furnaces, Beaton noted that these American Blacks had been recruited and hired based on their specialized knowledge honed in the American steel belt.<sup>82</sup> As part of the recruitment process, they had been promised good, decent accommodations, and the opportunity to bring wives, cooks or washer women with them on their arrival. Instead, once there, they were placed in company shacks and other types of rooming houses. These shacks were in Whitney Pier on the northeast side of the steel plant and the coke ovens, close to the operations. This area came to be known as “Cokeville” or “Cokovia” and while convenient to their employer for housing men who worked in this area of the Plant, it was the least desirable part of Whitney Pier for people to live in.<sup>83</sup> The steel company provided these shacks for the foreign unskilled labourers to live in at different parts of the grounds. Evidence suggests the shacks were poorly kept.

In Company letters from 1901, the superintendent is pleading for someone to renovate the shacks to allow for heat to be piped through in the winter months.<sup>84</sup> In 1901 these could already be described as substandard houses. Almost a decade later when the onslaught of Caribbean and other ethnic workers arrived, one could only imagine the conditions of these same places. A letter written in January 1908 by Blast Furnace Superintendent J. McInnis to then General Manager, David Baker reads: “I would like to call your attention to the conditions of the last lot of houses built in the Negro quarter. I have had most serious complaints from my men all about this bitter weather.” He goes on

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<sup>82</sup> Beaton, “An African-American Community in Cape Breton.”

<sup>83</sup> See Plan of Sydney, 1902, showing Cokeville in Ward V (Whitney Pier).

<sup>84</sup> Superintendent Means to Bart Bryan, 24 October 1901, Disco Letterbooks

to say, “these houses are open underneath, not boarded up at all,” and, “you can see right through them in a great many places and the snow will blow through the rooms. He ends the letter stating, “I do wish you would see if something cannot be done for the comfort of these people...the last [set of houses] are not fit to live in during cold weather.”<sup>85</sup> By April another letter is sent, this time to previously mentioned Mr. Bart Bryan in the House Department, from another Superintendent of the Blast Furnaces, Mr. S. Hutton. This letter is about the water being off in some of the houses “occupied by the colored employees of the furnaces,” including house Number 26.<sup>86</sup> No heat, open to the elements, water being shut off, the conditions of these homes will appear shocking to the modern reader.

Similar to the condition of the company shacks was the state of the rooming houses many of the men chose to live in in Whitney Pier, just outside the gates to Cokeville. Craig Heron described the Whitney Pier homes of the Poles, Russians and Newfoundlanders working in the Plant, and they appear to have been no different from the conditions experienced by first the African American workers, and later, the Caribbean and other ethnic workers.<sup>87</sup> The shacks described in the *Sydney Post* in 1905 could have housed any of these groups of labourers:

The conditions in some of these places are bad beyond description. Some of the houses are fairly clean, but the majority are exceedingly filthy. There is no sewage or water connection and the ventilation is foul. The beds are simply a big deal table about seven feet broad which runs down the whole length of the room. The

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<sup>85</sup> Superintendent McInnis to David Baker, 25 January 1908, Disco Letterbooks.

<sup>86</sup> Superintendent Hutton to Bart Bryan, 14 April 1908, Disco Letterbooks.

<sup>87</sup> Craig Heron, *Working in Steel: The Early Years in Canada, 1883-1935* (Toronto, 1988), pp. 79-81.



men wrap themselves up in their blankets and lie on this shelf as close as they can pack. There is also in the room a stove, which the inmates seem to think it a point of humour to keep as hot as possible, and hanging from the ceiling which is about ten feet high, are the spare clothes of the men. None of the beds are ever aired, for as soon as one shift is out of them, another is in.<sup>88</sup>

Most immigrant workers, legal and illegal, settled into these spaces in their first few years. Heron suggests that the Newfoundlanders came to be termed “shackers” because of the lifestyle they had adopted, living in temporary shacks on the edge of town. My exploration has shown that this designation applied not just to Newfoundlanders, but to anyone living in this kind of accommodation, as numerous men from Barbados are also listed as “shackers” in the 1911 census. There are 6 large households with Caribbean men listed as shackers, and 7 households with 3 or more “lodgers.”<sup>89</sup> In his discussion of men living in similar situations in the Sault in Ontario, Heron suggests that the men chose to live in these settings out of frugality – living this way would incur limited expenses, allowing for greater savings or remittances to be sent home. The frugality would pay off for both the worker and the Company, as they could pay these transient workers only a small stipend.<sup>90</sup>

The “lodger” designation suggests another group of men, residing in rooming houses. For some of the men who arrived in Sydney, these were likely convenient places to live without expending too much of their salary, again allowing for greater savings. Some of the larger residences were probably well-known to the workers, and places like

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<sup>88</sup> “Condition of the Coloured Shacks,” *Daily Post*, 26 November 1905.

<sup>89</sup> Census of Canada, 1911.

<sup>90</sup> Craig Heron, *Working in Steel: The Early Years in Canada, 1883-1935* (Toronto, 1988).

Brunswick House at 86 Tupper Street, owned by Adolph Collymore and his wife, both from Barbados, appeared to have been regular stops for several years. By 1921 the “shacker” designation was no longer listed in the Pier, but there are many households which appear to have one or more lodger resident, suggesting a means of income for those households.

Despite these sometimes-rough beginnings, these labour migrants quickly integrated social activity into their daily lives, as can be seen through snapshots in newspapers and elsewhere. In 1902, there were two news items in the *Cape Breton Post* that foreshadow the negative ways in which Blacks were generally depicted in the local press during the period under examination. However, the articles also provide a sense of life in Cokeville during this period. In August, a coloured man was arrested for a serious case of assault. The arrest took place during a game of baseball. In October, there is another altercation leading to a shooting, ending one man’s life and leaving the other injured. The news article in this instance described a tense relationship between two men, one from Alabama and the other from Georgia. Both men were said to have come as steel workers. The altercation was said to have occurred at a dance hall. In 1902, the *Daily Post* published articles about the Negro quarter, also depicting its inhabitants negatively. The articles paint a picture of the Black women as loud, loose and badly behaved. Beaton highlights the coded language used in the newspapers to extend judgement or heap ridicule on the residents of Cokeville in comparison to “news items about the activities of Sydney’s more ‘respectable’ citizens...piano recitals, dramatic productions, or the latest

millinery additions...”<sup>91</sup> In 1906, Frank deHart, a coloured man, was sentenced under the Scott Act, to thirty days of hard labour in the county jail for running a liquor store in Ward V. An article from September 1906 describes revelry in the Coke Ovens because of several weddings having taken place. Life in this quarter was evolving to resemble a community, and by the time the groups of Caribbean immigrants started arriving *en masse* around 1909, a vibrant, colourful community had been established. It is interesting to contrast the descriptions of a brash, bawdy frontier town, with the depictions of the Black community in Whitney Pier in the sole surviving issue of the *Nova Scotia Gleaner* published by barrister and businessman Allan Hamilton of Sydney. In the pages of the *Gleaner*, Hamilton, himself a Caribbean immigrant, upholds the mission of “race papers,” to “keep the world informed of our upward striving; to tell of the many good deeds we are doing and of the noble thoughts we are thinking.”<sup>92</sup> In so doing, Hamilton allows us insight into other aspects of the community and its culture.

### **The Caribbean Community**

By 1911, the census documented the presence of several African Caribbean men, mainly from the island of Barbados.<sup>93</sup> The oral history as well as a few primary sources suggest that in addition to the official routes into the country such as that traversed by Joseph Brooms, there were unofficial ways of entering Canada that were utilized by Caribbean people, and there had been a constant movement of these people into the region for many years. Despite this being one of the first questions I am asked, at present

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<sup>91</sup> Elizabeth Beaton provides a detailed description of the treatment of Black women in the *Daily Post*. Beaton, “An African-American Community in Cape Breton.” p. 88.

<sup>92</sup> James F. Jenkins, Chief Editor of the *Dawn of Tomorrow* newspaper, as quoted in Sarah-Jane Mathieu, *North of the Color Line: Race and the Making of Transnational Black Radicalism in Canada, 1870-1955* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), p. 147.

<sup>93</sup> Census of Canada, 1901 & 1911.

it is impossible to provide a clear outline of the numbers of Caribbean people resident in the City, or exactly when and how they arrived. From the census, there were no Caribbean residents in the City of Sydney in 1901. There are under 25 individuals listed as “Black” as their colour designation, but none of these appear to have been born outside of Canada. By 1911, there are just under 150 persons with the racial or tribal designation “Negro.” Most list their place of birth as “Barbados.”<sup>94</sup> The 1921 census highlights the growing population, with just over 450 persons listed with the racial or tribal designation “Negro.” There are, however, clues to the numbers being skewed. As noted above, in 1914, the Immigration Branch believed there were “over two hundred” Caribbean men employed at Disco. This belief challenges the census count, and suggests there were more Blacks resident in the city at this point. We do not know for certain when and how many of the African Americans had departed, and we have no sense of how many women and children were part of this community. When the UNIA opened its hall in Sydney in 1919, its new membership of 250 was said to be about half the Negro population in that area, almost three and a half times the population from 8 years prior.<sup>95</sup> In an article in 1923, the *Sydney Post* noted that there were 600 Blacks living in Sydney.<sup>96</sup> These numbers tell us that there is still work to be done and presently we have no clear way of determining the number of Blacks present in the community, and what a breakdown of their ethnic origins might have looked like.

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<sup>94</sup> Census of Canada, 1911.

<sup>95</sup> Marano, “‘Rise Strongly and Rapidly’p. 252.

<sup>96</sup> *Sydney Post* January 20<sup>th</sup>, 1923.

Year	Overall Population
1891	2,427
1901	9,909
1911	17,728
1921	22,545
1931	23,089

Figure 2: *Population of Sydney, Nova Scotia*<sup>97</sup>

Starting with the African Americans and the few local African Canadians working in the steel industry, and with the introduction of Caribbean workers, the new Negro quarter created its own microcosm of the social world, its members quickly organizing or joining churches, creating lodges and mutual aid societies, forming sporting leagues and teams, and developing a rich musical life. This section relies on church records, directories, newspaper accounts and oral histories to paint a picture of the life in the community from approximately 1909 to 1930.<sup>98</sup>

### **Religious/Spiritual Life**

The Whitney Pier Caribbean community has always had a rich spiritual life. Perhaps coming from strong religious and spiritual backgrounds, they sought out the familiar upon their arrival, or perhaps it was a quick and easy way to access community networks, but whatever the reasons, the new Caribbean immigrants developed early connections with many of the Christian churches in the area.<sup>99</sup> The multi-ethnic nature of the Pier could be read through an examination of the multiple religious denominations

<sup>97</sup> Census of Canada, 1891, 1901-1931.

<sup>98</sup> I have selected 1909 as this seems to mark the start of the busiest period of this migration.

<sup>99</sup> Beaton, "Religious Affiliation and Ethnic Identity."

present in such a small geographic area. People lived and worshiped inside their own ethnic enclaves, and the area housed “almost a score of churches and one synagogue” in the twentieth century.<sup>100</sup> Religiously, some of the Caribbean immigrants found themselves having to cross racial or ethnic lines to worship. One or two families, such as that of Dr. Alvinus Calder, a Grenadian-born a physician trained at Queen’s University, chose to attend church outside of the community. The Calder family attended services at St. Mary’s Polish parish, and there is some suggestion that they did this for convenience, as the church was close to their home, which was not in the Negro quarter.<sup>101</sup> Class may have also played a role here, as it could have been inappropriate for Calder the physician to worship with steelworkers and their families. The other congregants at St. Mary’s were mostly ethnic Polish, as well as other Roman Catholics of Slavic descent, such as Croatians, who felt comfortable with Polish language and custom.<sup>102</sup>

Several individuals and families from the Caribbean community attended St. Albans Anglican Church in the Pier. Community members believe that most Barbadians were of the Anglican faith and wished to continue their practice, so this was why they chose St. Albans on their arrival in the community. They too crossed racial and ethnic lines to worship, as this church, founded in 1904, had served mainly Newfoundlanders and Old Sydney families prior to their arrival.<sup>103</sup> Despite this, according to Beaton, “from 1912 to 1944, 41 West Indian family names are recorded.”<sup>104</sup> Interviews with community members refer to the racism experienced by those families over the years, and it is not

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<sup>100</sup> Whitney Pier Historical Society, “From the Pier, Dear.”

<sup>101</sup> Beaton, “Religious Affiliation and Ethnic Identity.”

<sup>102</sup> Whitney Pier Historical Society, “From the Pier, Dear.”

<sup>103</sup> Beaton, “Religious Affiliation and Ethnic Identity,” p. 118.

<sup>104</sup> Beaton, “Religious Affiliation and Ethnic Identity,” p. 118

surprising that in 1925, the Diocese opened St. Cyprians Mission, led by Caribbean pastor, C.S. England. This church was on Henry Street, and there is a suggestion that it was founded by the Anglican church because of the white membership not wanting Caribbean congregants in their church.<sup>105</sup> In 1930 the Mission was damaged by fire, and could no longer be used as a church. Caribbean congregants moved to other area churches, mainly the Victoria Methodist Church in the Pier, and to the United Mission.

A small number of Caribbean families attended the Roman Catholic Holy Redeemer Church. This church was the largest Christian church in Whitney Pier. Predominantly a white church, pews were initially segregated, and the oral history holds that sometime in the 1930s, a Father MacInnis “admonished the parishioners” about their not sitting with or beside the Black congregants. This must not have been enough of a warning against fraternization however, since eventually there were inter-marriages among members.<sup>106</sup>

Victoria Methodist Church was also predominantly a church with a Newfoundland congregation, but church records indicate Caribbean people in its membership, and between 1912 and 1921 there were twenty-one baptisms of Caribbean infants recorded. From 1913-1935 there were also fourteen marriages performed consisting of Caribbean couples. Some of these involved what are now well-known Caribbean names in the region – for example, Sargeant, Parris, Skeete, Callender, Moe, Trotman and Lucas.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Beaton, “Religious Affiliation and Ethnic Identity.”

<sup>106</sup> Beaton, “Religious Affiliation and Ethnic Identity.”

<sup>107</sup> Records of Victoria Methodist Church, Beaton Institute.

The United Mission served the needs of several generations of immigrants into the Pier. It began in 1912 as a mission for Italian refugees and continued in this capacity until 1918. It was an institution devoted to the spiritual and physical needs of the Black, Italian, Hungarian, and Ukrainian immigrants in the Coke Ovens area of Whitney Pier. According to community members, because the Mission was right in the community, if they needed help, that was where they went. It was a place that erased or embraced ethnicity and treated everyone as being part of a community.

St. Philip's African Orthodox Church is the only church of its kind in Canada. It is part of a larger network of churches arising out of New York City in the 1920s, and arose out of a belief that Black Episcopalians should have their own denomination. The church focuses on apostolic succession, with Peter the Apostle as its first Bishop. According to Beryl Braithwaite, the church came about partly because "the coloured people used to go to the churches down the Pier, and remarks were passed that they didn't want Blacks in their church, so they had to find some place of their own."<sup>108</sup> Most Blacks in Whitney Pier have been members of St. Philip's, although community members appear to have sometimes maintained a fluidity in terms of church membership. For example, Elizabeth Beaton noticed that some of the Caribbean names appearing in the records of Holy Redeemer also appear in the records of the Victoria Methodist Church.<sup>109</sup> To explain this, perhaps we only need think of the Black church and what it has come to represent in the Americas. According to Higginbotham, there were many roles played by the church in Black community life. It served as "an agent of social control, forum of discussion and

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<sup>108</sup> Whitney Pier Historical Society, "From the Pier, Dear," p. 84.

<sup>109</sup> Beaton, "Religious Affiliation and Ethnic Identity."



debate, promoter of education and economic cooperation, and arena for the development and assertion of leadership.”<sup>110</sup> Perhaps in these cases where people’s names showed up in the congregations of more than one church, multiple churches served multiple functions in their lives – spiritual as well as social. I will revisit discussion of St. Philip’s, it’s founding and role within the community in Chapter Four.

### **Mutual aid organizations, fraternal orders**

In similar ways to that of the church, mutual aid organizations, fraternal orders and other organizations worked to shape the identity of this small community, and also served to connect them to the rest of the Diaspora. Winston Ruck spoke of the ways in which the men of the community took pride in being members of the Ancient Order of Foresters. He said they took it very seriously, and “it was quite the thing in those days” to be a member.<sup>111</sup> This tradition of Black fraternal orders began in North America when Barbadian born Prince Hall entered the Irish Constitution Military Lodge in Boston in 1775. The organization grew to quickly become a part of the African American experience:

By the late nineteenth century, black secret societies included not only the parallel Euro-American Elks, Masons, Odd Fellows, and Knights of Pythias, but also a variety of independent orders, including the United Brothers of Friendship and

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<sup>110</sup> Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 4-6.

<sup>111</sup> Interview with Winston Ruck.

Sisters of the Mysterious Ten, the Independent Order of St. Luke, and the Grand United Order of True Reformers.<sup>112</sup>

Fraternal orders were a part of the African-Canadian experience from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and worked to instill racial pride as well as provide support to their members.<sup>113</sup>

Freemasonry was also an aspect of life in the Caribbean where it had been transplanted in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Initially the organization reflected the social order – no enslaved men or descendants of enslaved persons could be Masons, creating exclusive white, male spaces within the colonial order. However, by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, poor whites and middle class Blacks had gained access and freemasonry spread throughout the Caribbean. The Ancient Order of Foresters was transplanted to Barbados in the mid-nineteenth century, with Black men gaining access by the end of the century. It is very possible that the Ancient Order of Foresters in Whitney Pier grew out of these Caribbean connections. In 1929 Court Washington 9701 of the Ancient Order of Foresters was active in Whitney Pier. They met twice monthly at the Orange Lodge Rooms (home of the Protestant Newfoundlanders' Orange Lodge), and reports of their meetings were noted in the local paper.<sup>114</sup> They were an active part of the social life of the community, for example, hosting a harbor excursion on July 28<sup>th</sup>, 1926, where the West Indian band played for those on board.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Joel W. Trotter, "African American Fraternal Associations in American History: An Introduction" *Social Science History* 28 no. 3 (2004), 356.

<sup>113</sup> Sarah-Jane Mathieu, *North of the Color Line: Race and the Making of Transnational Black Radicalism in Canada, 1870-1955* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

<sup>114</sup> *Nova Scotia Gleaner* October 5, 1929.

<sup>115</sup> Journal, Records of St. Philip's African Orthodox Church, Beaton Institute.

The UNIA, an international Black nationalist organization formed by Jamaican Marcus Garvey, established a branch in Whitney Pier in 1919. This organization shared many features of fraternal organizations. It is therefore not surprising that the UNIA hall in Sydney was also a major part of the social fabric of the community. The origins and role of this organization in the Whitney Pier community will be discussed in Chapter Four.

### **Boy Scouts**

The minutes of St. Philip's African Orthodox Church note that on Sunday, June 27<sup>th</sup>, 1926:

A public demonstration took place in Wentworth Park in this City when Sir Alfred Pickford Scout Messenger from England visited in company with officers were received and introduced to "Picky" at Christ Church Parish Hall.<sup>116</sup>

Pickford was the Boy Scouts Association's London Headquarters Commissioner for Overseas Scouts, and his presence in Sydney a reminder of Canada's place within the colonial empire. In his book *Scouting for Boys*, Boy Scout founder Robert Baden-Powell suggested that scouting would provide a universal model for countries of the British Empire to develop the physical, mental, and spiritual development of boys.<sup>117</sup> In September, the 11<sup>th</sup> Sydney Wolf Cub Pack was officially registered (although records show they had been meeting prior to this official registration), with Rev. D.E. Philips,

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<sup>116</sup> Journal, Records of St. Philip's African Orthodox Church, Beaton Institute.

<sup>117</sup> James Trepanier, "Building Boys, Building Canada: The Boy Scout Movement in Canada, 1908-1970." (PhD diss., York University, 2015).

then pastor of St. Philip's, as Cubmaster.<sup>118</sup> The Pack Charter indicated that St. Philip's "having made application through its duly authorized representatives for the formation of a Pack of Wolf Cubs for the purposes of Character Building and Training" had been granted a charter. This Cub Pack has remained an active part of the Whitney Pier community since receiving its charter. Beginning in the early 1910s, scout movements in Canada found their memberships from within churches, especially Canadian Protestant churches, and many came to be because of the migration of people from Great Britain. They appear to have been centered around concerns for the spiritual and material futures of children and adolescents (boys in particular). According to James Trepanier, the *Handbook for Canada of the Boy Scouts Association*, focused on the role of nature, outdoor activity, and the learning about medieval and Christian heroes. While guided by these ideals and practices, the Sydney Wolf Cub Pack might be read somewhat differently however. Trepanier highlights the importance of recognizing the ways in which nationalistic and religious ideologies shaped the interpretation of the scouting movement, something very visible for example when one compares scouting in French Canada to the rest of the country.<sup>119</sup> Cheryl Thompson suggests African Canadian scout troops represent the "desire of African Canadians to participate in the values of duty, honour, and integrity for which scouting represented."<sup>120</sup> If the Boy Scout movement was instrumental in constructing notions of boyhood in Canada, how was this construction similar or different in the Pier? As a youth organization housed in a church adhering to Black nationalist

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<sup>118</sup> The Boy Scouts Association of the Province of Nova Scotia had been formally incorporated by Royal Charter in 1912. Sydney Wolf Cup Pack Charter, 1926.

<sup>119</sup> James Trepanier, "Building Boys, Building Canada: The Boy Scout Movement in Canada, 1908-1970." (PhD diss., York University, 2015).

<sup>120</sup> Cheryl Thompson, "Cultivating Narratives of Race, Faith, and Community: *The Dawn of Tomorrow*, 1923-1971" *Canadian Journal of History* 50 no. 1, 2015.

philosophies, how did this Pack differ in its beliefs and practices? The ideological discourses of masculinity are imprisoned within the metalanguage of race, which in this context, should have been countered by philosophies of racial pride and uplift. In addition to the Boy Scouts, in 1927 a Young People's Social Club (Colored) was organized under the direction of Archdeacon Philips at St. Philip's.

### **Cricket**

An aspect of British West Indian culture transplanted by the new immigrants, was a love of cricket. There were two cricket teams in the Pier, the Whitney Pier team, and the West India Cricket team. According to community members, the teams would regularly play against teams from the British boats that would come ashore at the harbor in Sydney.<sup>121</sup> They were also involved in the Nova Scotia Cricket League where they played in games across the province. According to the oral history, matches in the community were played at St. Nicholas field, and Winston Ruck recalled going on his father's truck to watch the Stellarton games. Playing cricket allowed the community members to maintain their associations with their homelands and people. As Janelle Joseph notes in her exploration of sport in the Black Atlantic, singular activities such as the playing of cricket bring with them numerous associated practices, many of which aid in the maintenance of culture.<sup>122</sup> A cricket match could last from one to several days, and spectators would come together in spaces where they could socialize, eat Caribbean food, and perform other aspects of their cultural identities.

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<sup>121</sup> "West India Cricket Club" Whitney Pier Museum.

<sup>122</sup> Janelle Joseph, "Cricket as a Diasporic Resource for Caribbean Canadians" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2010).

<b>Date</b>	<b>Match</b>	<b>Location</b>
June 20, 1914	W.I. vs Halifax Garrison	Halifax
June 24, 1914	Wanderers vs W.I.	Halifax
July 1, 1914	Sydney vs Whitney Pier	Sydney
July 4, 1914	Halifax Garrison vs W.I.	Halifax
July 8, 1914	Sydney vs W.I.	Sydney
July 9, 1914	Whitney Pier vs W.I.	Whitney Pier
July 10, 1914	Stellarton vs W.I.	Stellarton
July 18, 1914	W.I. vs Halifax Wanderers	Halifax
July 21, 1914	Whitney Pier vs Stellarton	Whitney Pier
July 31, 1914	Whitney Pier vs Halifax Wanderers	Whitney Pier
August 3, 1914	Halifax Garrison vs Whitney Pier	Halifax
August 4, 1914	Halifax Wanderers vs Whitney Pier	Halifax
August 5, 1914	West Indians vs Whitney Pier	Halifax
August 6, 1914	Stellarton vs Whitney Pier	Stellarton

*Figure 3: 1914 Schedule of the Nova Scotia Cricket League*

Active in the Whitney Pier West Indian community were two bands, both of which appear to have been vital to the community, scoring the activities of their lives. Music appears to have been a major part of the life of the community, with several members of the first generation having musical skill. They played at community events, marching down the streets of the Pier, on the lake boats as they took community members out on excursions in the summer months, at funerals and weddings, and even at events “overtown” as Sydney was referred to, to differentiate it from Whitney Pier.

This chapter has examined the movement of Caribbean people that eventually led a number of them to settle in the area of Sydney, Nova Scotia known as Whitney Pier. It

provided evidence of the ways the Canadian State addressed issues of race and migration in the early twentieth century, as a means of highlighting the atmosphere into which these new Canadians settled – a place which openly labeled them as “other,” and sought to keep them out by placing obstacles in the way of their migration. Once these people arrived however, they came together to form a rich community. The chapter concludes by looking at the evolution of the community in the first decades, using oral history and documentary evidence to highlight the development of a mostly Caribbean sub-culture, with its own clubs, organizations and church. Using telephone directories, census documents, voters’ lists one can paint a mental picture of the community outside the gates of the Coke Ovens – who was whose neighbor, and what the transition from the Caribbean sections of a street, to the Italian section, to the spaces inhabited by other ethnic groups looked like, solely based on surnames. Rows of boarding houses, small and large shacks, single and multi-family homes cramped into less than two square miles. This new community was predominantly Black and Italian, except for a few Polish and Ukrainian families.

### CHAPTER THREE: “WORKING IN THE PIER”

The previous chapter explored the arrival of Black workers to Sydney, NS in the early years of the twentieth century, mostly in response to the needs of industry. This chapter takes a closer look at the work they did once they arrived, mainly exploring the dangers of working in steel, but also discussing other types of work the men engaged in once they settled in this small community. As an industrial community, there were few women resident in the first decades. This chapter closes by looking, mainly through oral histories, at the women who lived in the community, bringing into focus the work they did, in both the formal, and informal economies.

The first group of Blacks employed by Disco, the African American steelworkers, had been hired as skilled workers based on their experience in the American steel belt.<sup>123</sup> With American management and state-of-the-art American technology, the most sensible hiring practice had been to seek out men who had worked in the industry, and even men who had already worked with these managers.<sup>124</sup> John H. Means, Superintendent of Furnaces at Disco starting in 1901 recruited his workers from the network he had developed in Alabama, Buffalo, Tonawanda, Maryland and Pittsburgh.<sup>125</sup> While the African American workers he hired did not stay for very long in the Whitney Pier community, as previously noted, the Company sought to replace them and other labourers with ethnic Europeans and Caribbean workers.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> The discussion of technology and skill is beyond the scope of this project. However, for more insight into the ways in which technology factored into understandings of the skill involved in steel making, see Craig Heron, *Working in Steel: The Early Years in Canada, 1883-1935* (Toronto, 1988), 50-72.

<sup>124</sup> Craig Heron, *Working in Steel: The Early Years in Canada, 1883-1935* (Toronto, 1988)

<sup>125</sup> Beaton, “An African-American Community in Cape Breton.”

<sup>126</sup> Beaton, “An African-American Community in Cape Breton.”



On their arrival, regardless of the jobs they did, none of the Caribbean workers were given the skilled labour designation of their African American predecessors, and they were essentially forced to accept dangerous, dirty jobs in the steel plant into the 1960s. By not being given the skilled labour designation, the Company was able to provide less pay, little job security, and limited means of advancement.<sup>127</sup> The oral history meets with this suggestion, with some community members discussing the ways their fathers had felt slighted by the Company when they would do the work but always get passed over for promotions. One woman told the story of her father being asked to do in-service training with a white man who, once he had been trained, was given a promotion while her father remained in the subordinate role. According to her, he was insulted and thought that his being good enough to train this man should have meant he was good enough to be promoted into the position. In his case, he left the Company and started his own business.<sup>128</sup>

While the politics of race shaped every aspect of their employment, another marker of working in steel was how inherently dangerous most aspects of the process could be.<sup>129</sup> As has been noted, the Black men were hired to work mainly in the blast furnace, with the understanding that they were better climactically suited to this work. Labour historians and others writing about the work of steelmaking provide insight into the conditions faced by steelworkers. John Fitch in his exploration of the steel industry in Pittsburgh highlighted,

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<sup>127</sup> Beaton, "An African-American Community in Cape Breton."

<sup>128</sup> Interview with Clotilda Yakimchuk.

<sup>129</sup> Heron, *Working in Steel*.

one of the hard conditions which the working force must face in iron or steel manufacture is heat. It is difficult to convey to the understanding of one who has never visited a mill, or who has visited one only in winter, the intensity of the heat in certain departments during the summer months.<sup>130</sup>

He went on to say, “I have seen men standing on floors so hot that a drop of water spilled would hiss like a drop on a stove...and this is a thing that they must encounter every day and for from eight to twelve hours, practically without relief.”<sup>131</sup> This was the heat to which the racial logic of the times suggested the Caribbean workers were better suited, especially the heat within the Blast Furnace and the Coke Ovens.

In addition to the heat, the steel plant was a dangerous place for workers in other ways, with flying slag, molten steel, steam, hot pipes and valves, and heavy machinery among the many hazards carrying with them the potential for causing injury. The United Steel-Workers of America Memorial Monument in Harbourside Commercial Park, on what was once Disco property, is a testament to workplace injury. The monument displays the names of 308 employees who lost their lives during the Sydney Steel Plant’s century of operation.<sup>132</sup> However, the Sydney Steel Museum reminds visitors to be cautious when thinking about these numbers, as they do not provide a full picture of the fatalities experienced. For example, according to Disco policy, unless one died on Company property, this death could not be attributed to the Plant. Thus, one could sustain an injury on the job, go home, die there, and it not be considered officially a Disco

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<sup>130</sup> John A. Fitch, *The Pittsburgh Survey: Findings in Six Volumes* (Philadelphia: Press of Wm. F. Fell Co., 1911) p. 59.

<sup>131</sup> John A. Fitch, *The Pittsburgh Survey*

<sup>132</sup> For a detailed discussion of this monument, see Lachlan MacKinnon, “‘To Those Who Lost Their Lives’: Reading a Labour Landmark in Sydney, Nova Scotia,” *Labour/Le Travail* 72 (Fall 2013): 101-128.

fatality.<sup>133</sup> One's immigration status factored in here as well. For example, while most Newfoundlanders who worked at Disco were officially Canadian immigrants, there were several who arrived illegally into Canada. No records of illegal immigrants such as these made it into the company records, since technically these workers did not exist.

According to the Sydney Steel Museum, many Black workers also did not make it onto the fatalities lists kept by the company. As evidence, they point to two cases which were reported in the press, but those men's names were not included on the official company casualty list:

In 1905 four blacks were killed when a high voltage cable fell across the metal building they were in. Although the Halifax Evening Herald made note of it, their names are not on the official company casualty list. In 1901, the Halifax Evening Herald reported sixteen fatalities at the Sydney Plant. The Memorial Monument only lists six deaths, so it is likely the other casualties were Newfoundlanders and Black workers.<sup>134</sup>

Dominion Iron was not unique in this realm. According to Fitch, a study of the records of the coroner for Allegheny County over a 12-month period indicated that there had been 195 deaths from work accidents in blast furnaces and in iron and steel mills.<sup>135</sup> The names listed of course were just the fatalities, the list provides no insight into the men who might have lost valuable work time because of injuries on the job.

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<sup>133</sup> Sydney S. Slaven, "Making Steel – A very Challenging Occupation," [http://www.sydneysteelmuseum.com/history/challenging\\_occupation\\_1.htm](http://www.sydneysteelmuseum.com/history/challenging_occupation_1.htm) ; MacKinnon, "To Those Who Lost Their Lives."

<sup>134</sup> Sydney S. Slaven, "Making Steel – A very Challenging Occupation," [http://www.sydneysteelmuseum.com/history/challenging\\_occupation\\_1.htm](http://www.sydneysteelmuseum.com/history/challenging_occupation_1.htm)

<sup>135</sup> Fitch, *The Steel Workers*.

Although the 1900s brought with them greater automation within the industry, and machines led to a doing away of the brawn associated with many of the practices of the previous centuries, workers were still required to operate and assist in the maintenance of the machinery inside the plant. The steel-making process remained labour-intensive despite the addition of new state of the art machinery geared at simplifying the process. For the furnace operators, their driving force was tonnage. This required faster work, with novel and often dangerous equipment.

In the Sydney plant, by 1905 this equipment included steam driven or electrically powered cranes, mechanical doors, different types of conveyors and cars, and a network of rails used to move material from one part of the plant to another.<sup>136</sup> In terms of workplace casualties, these “railroads in the yards, dinkey trains throughout the mills, and traveling cranes overhead, as destroyers of life, are much more to be feared than blast furnaces, converters, and rolling mills.”<sup>137</sup> However, in addition to now having to work around the new machines, there were still large numbers of men needed to do the “bull work” of furnace cleaning, or lifting bales of wire and carrying material through the plant, all work needing to be done by hand and which was dependent on individual strength and stamina.<sup>138</sup> This of course meant the possibility of human error, especially in contexts of longer shifts, and miscues because of fatigue. After all, it has been shown that “over half the accidents in the steel mills [thus] are due to causes common to all heavy mechanical work.”<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Heron, *Working in Steel*.

<sup>137</sup> Fitch, *The Steel Workers*, p. 64.

<sup>138</sup> Beaton, “An African-American Community in Cape Breton;” Heron, *Working in Steel*.

<sup>139</sup> Fitch, *The Steel Workers*, p. 64.

Descriptions of the occupational hazards present in the blast furnace and the accidents they typically lent to are included in the document “Occupational Hazards at Blast-Furnace Plants and Accident Prevention – Based on records of accidents at blast furnaces in Pennsylvania in 1915.” This document was compiled by the Department of the Interior and Bureau of Mines in the US, and lists, injuries in hand labour; operation, maintenance and repair of equipment; falling and flying material, falls of workers and miscellaneous accidents.<sup>140</sup> The literature on steel making suggests that the accident rate was high in these contexts, but goes on to point out that there is little in the way of primary data to provide evidence of injury rates or the types of injuries sustained by plant workers in the day-to-day operations. In Canada, there was no process in place for reporting industrial accidents prior to 1910, and Canadian steel companies kept very few records of their early years.<sup>141</sup> However, according to Heron, in 1912 the high number of incidents at Disco was enough to warrant further investigation by Nova Scotia’s factory inspector. According to Heron, “He examined a sample of 100 serious accidents and fatalities in a three-month period and concluded that 89 of them ‘were due to the ordinary risk of the occupation and could not be prevented by any known guard or protection.’<sup>142</sup> While sparse in number, there are some blast furnace records from Disco which do provide some insight into the day-to-day individual tragedies endured by the men in this part of the plant between 1906 and 1912, the majority being burns or injury from heavy machinery, in keeping with the common occupational hazards of the industry. Heron

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<sup>140</sup> Frederick H. Willcox, “Occupational Hazards at Blast-Furnace Plants and Accident Prevention – Based on records of accidents at blast furnaces in Pennsylvania in 1915,” (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1917).

<sup>141</sup> Heron, *Working in Steel*

<sup>142</sup> Heron, *Working in Steel*, p. 50.

points out that photographs of steel production from the early years provide insight into how little protective clothing or equipment was used by the workers.<sup>143</sup> It is not surprising therefore when Fitch describes the frequency with which “men on the pouring platforms and the vesselmens in the Bessemer departments have their clothes burned full of little holes.”<sup>144</sup> Most of the accidents noted in the Disco Blast Furnace reports did not come about because of any exceptional disaster, but rather, appear to have stemmed from several causes, which, except for hot-metal and cinder burns, could be found in other contexts. For example, while cleaning stoves, a hot valve fell on Joseph Graves’ head and arm, resulting in his having to be sent to the hospital. Blast furnace Helper Jos Best shows up three times in the records, first having his arm burned while at work around the furnaces in December 1906, then again when he “got his arm burned while drilling out iron notch”<sup>145</sup> in April of 1912, and finally, on May 2<sup>nd</sup> 1912 when he was “struck on [the] hip with sledge hammer” and sent home. Adolph Collymore was struck by a piece of flying cinder, resulting in a burned foot. Perhaps the most horrifying accident outlined in these records was the incident in which Furnace Man Edward Brown lost three fingers on one hand and was expected to lose one on the other hand. According to the report, “While moving scrap with crane the trolley came off. While replacing trolley on wire the crane started and ran over his hands.”<sup>146</sup> What these records tell us is how typical of the industry the injuries sustained were.

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<sup>143</sup> Heron, *Working in Steel*

<sup>144</sup> Fitch, *The Steel Workers*, p. 65.

<sup>145</sup> The iron notch is a peripheral opening in the upper part of the hearth, which is normally kept closed by blocking it with a fireclay mix. Before removing hot metal, the clay mix must be drilled out, and will be replaced once the metal has been poured. This process is repeated every 3-4 hours. For more on this process, see Ahindra Ghosh and Amit Chatterjee, *Iron Making and Steelmaking: Theory and Practice* (New Delhi: PHI Learning Private Limited, 2008).

<sup>146</sup> Disco Blast Furnace Correspondence.

Steelmaking was dangerous business, and being off the job because of injury for most could have meant an inability to provide for their families, both in Sydney and elsewhere. The Brookland Hospital, which ran from 1904 to 1919 was sponsored by Disco and included a general men's ward, a woman's ward, and an eighteen-bed ward for steelworkers. The records for Brookland Hospital were lost, most likely in the fire of 1913.<sup>147</sup> The mutual benefit society records are all that remain. According to those documents, there was no difference between workers. The only division was between management and the workers. Their steel worker's ward was almost always full. The Sydney City Hospital continued to record the high number of injuries and hospitalizations of Disco workers upon its opening in 1917. In 1919 alone there were 366 hospitalizations of Disco employees at the new Sydney City Hospital.<sup>148</sup>

Interestingly, the Disco departmental injury records may have also been a window into the politics of race inside the furnace, if only in terms of labelling. Almost all the documents include a label or identifier for the worker. These labels were the only indication found in the records in terms of a racial identity or origin, and allowed me to pull the records of injured Black or Caribbean men. The labels include American Negro, American (Colored), Barbados, Barbadian, Barbadoes Nigger, Darkey and West Indian. There seems to be no clear reasoning behind the labels. One might suggest that "Darkey" might be used in the cases where someone is from somewhere other than the commonplace Barbados or America but of African descent, but there is nothing to corroborate this. Perhaps an American Negro is today's African American, while An

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<sup>147</sup> According to the Annual Report, there was a "disastrous fire" in Whitney Pier on June 12, 1913 which destroyed several homes and other buildings. City of Sydney Annual Reports. (Sydney, NS: Macadam Printing Company Limited, 1920).

<sup>148</sup> City of Sydney Annual Reports.

American (Colored) is today's mixed-race person of a lighter complexion. How one would explain the differences between Barbados, Barbadian, and Barbadoes Nigger escapes me. Most reports were completed by the "clerk in the Blast Furnace Office," but that could have been several different individuals, each with a different way of referring to people based on origin, common practice or personal racial politics. Perhaps it was just handy - the transient nature of the workforce meant that oftentimes names were lost to history, records listing only descriptive features and other means of identification.<sup>149</sup>

The transient nature of this workforce was shaped in part by the unsteady production levels at the Company. Men went to work and would sometimes find themselves sent home on a slow day, or be told they were not going to be needed for an indefinite period. As Heron noted, "In the 1920s there were always dozens, sometimes hundreds, of anxious workers outside the plant gates at Algoma and Disco hoping to be hired."<sup>150</sup> So while they might have been recruited to work at Disco, this employment did not guarantee a steady wage. The oral history suggests that several men supplemented their incomes by making use of skilled trades they had brought with them from the Caribbean islands or by whatever means they had available to them. As one woman tells it, "in addition to working in the steel plant and then setting up his own business, my father taught music. He made a little extra money on the side teaching music."<sup>151</sup> Another woman shared the fact that her father had come from a family in Barbados where painting was their trade, something they found they were able to rely on in Sydney as well. "So, when he came here that's what he started out doing 'til he got in the plant and then he got

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<sup>149</sup> Heron also noted similar uses of nicknames in company documents from his study. Craig Heron, *Working in Steel: The Early Years in Canada, 1883-1935* (Toronto, 1988).

<sup>150</sup> Heron, *Working in Steel* p. 30.

<sup>151</sup> Interview with Clotilda Yakimchuk.



more work with the painters.”<sup>152</sup> It is well-known within the Sydney area that many of the men who had come from the Caribbean had come with skilled trades. Many had apprenticed in these roles in the Caribbean. Almost all the interviews making up the oral history for this project speak to the skilled trades of the men from the Caribbean community. Reference is made to men who could start their own businesses relying on these trades – as barbers, carpenters, shoemakers, painters, and so on. A few also talk about the ways in which the immigrants parlayed these skills into currency, creating a barter system within the Pier. Several people from the Pier reference service exchanges as everyday events in the community when they were growing up. For example, in one interview a community member reminisced about the practice:

I can go back and think of Mr. Wilfred Smith, now he was a tailor and I remember my dad going to him and he would say now Wilfred, my boy needs a new pair of pants and he would say come here boyie, and size me up, and boom, boom in about an hour or two he was at the door here, the pair of pants for the boy. And no money was exchanged. But say the next week if Wilfred needed a counter built or something done in his place, my dad was there to get it for him.<sup>153</sup>

This is an example of the existence of an informal economy in Whitney Pier, where community members, particularly those who might not have had the funds to pay for services, were able to trade for them.

It is challenging to write the history of workers whose departures were frequent and destinations were rarely final, and even *moreso*, whose immigration status was oftentimes questionable. In addition, the workers in this story left few written sources

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<sup>152</sup> Interview with Iris Crawford.

<sup>153</sup> Interview with Teddy Bryan.

about their lives and work. As a rule, many individual labourers appear in the records only briefly, leaving no clue as to what happened to them in their later lives. Fragments such as the injury reports provide us with brief insights into the day-to-day experiences within the plant, including injuries which have not been recorded elsewhere during a period which might have been otherwise lost to history. A small notation like “got his arm burned while drilling out iron notch,” while seeming innocuous, tells the reader a bit more about the nature of the work, just how specialized, dangerous and intricate this work was, and underscores the reality that the refusal on the part of Dominion Iron to apply a specialized label to this group of workers, sometimes had little to do with the ability of the individual worker.

While many of the oral history interviews referred to the ways in which the Caribbean men who migrated to the Pier came with skilled trades, and many of them parlayed these trades into supplementary jobs and or businesses that took them out of the steel plant, there is little in the way of documentary evidence to provide a timeline as to when and where these men provided their services. The pages of the *Nova Scotia Gleaner* provide some clues. According to Winston Ruck, his father George did not work long at the steel plant, and operated a trucking business, “Ruck and Arthur, furniture moving and general trucking” in the Pier until his death in 1936.<sup>154</sup> He also offered his services as an “expert plasterer.” Another advertisement noted “R. Best Expert Custom Tailor. Pressing. Repairing. Cleaning. Dying. All work promptly attended to.”<sup>155</sup> According to the oral history, several men in this community were skilled tailors, among them Gerald

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<sup>154</sup> Interview with Winston Ruck; *Nova Scotia Gleaner* October 5, 1929.

<sup>155</sup> *Nova Scotia Gleaner* October 5, 1929.

Blackman, Wilfred Smith, and a Mr. Brewster. Mr. N.B. Crawford was a “watchmaker and jeweler, cleaning and repairing [of] watches at reasonable prices.”<sup>156</sup> A community member spoke of some of the difficulties inherent in owning one’s own business in this period: “He had his own shop on Victoria Road when he first came, and it caught fire and he lost everything. I remember \*\*\*\* and \*\*\*\* saying the fire was suspicious. So after that he just did his business out of his home, and he had a watch making and jewelry shop on Lingan Road.”<sup>157</sup> For some of the men it was the long hours of work required to support the family: “...between the steel plant and his carpentry work I don’t know when the man slept. He would sleep for a couple of hours and then boom, he would be gone to the steel plant. He would come home, sleep for an hour and then gone off to a carpentry job.”<sup>158</sup>

### **Women’s Work**

Most women making up the Caribbean community in Whitney Pier “came up” from the islands sometimes more than a decade after the influx of male migrant workers which had begun in earnest around 1909. The men who had settled in the Pier wrote letters home and told others of opportunities in Sydney. Some of them returned home themselves and spread word that there was work available, some brought wives and children back with them. This use of familial and community networks in the process of moving from one locale to another, meant that for some, they moved to seemingly familiar communities, with already established ethnic neighbourhoods. Some women came singly seeking better opportunities, others followed husbands and other members of their families, slowly integrating themselves into the growing Caribbean quarter. Initially

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<sup>156</sup> *Nova Scotia Gleaner* October 5, 1929.

<sup>157</sup> Interview with Iris Crawford, names redacted by author.

<sup>158</sup> Interview with Teddy Bryan.

peopled mostly by immigrant men, in the years between 1911 and 1921 the number of women resident in the Pier grew.<sup>159</sup> It was the arrival of these women and children, and their settlement in the area as families, that marked the establishment of Whitney Pier as a “community.”<sup>160</sup>

Officially, few of these women worked outside the home. While the theme of women and work is a very common one, there is a need for historical writing centered on the working lives of women of African descent in Canada. This section therefore aims to provide living testimonies about the work of individual women and their families, building on the existing literature. In this chapter, I have taken “women’s work” to mean any labour-intensive output, paid or unpaid, undertaken by the Caribbean women in Whitney Pier from 1900 to 1930. Similar to the ways the men supplemented their labour, the women of the community worked equally hard to ensure the survival of their families. Because of being shut out of the official workforce, these women were forced to join the informal economy. People writing about the community have consistently repeated the skilled trades the men had brought with them from the islands, and how they parlayed them into secondary (and where possible, primary) income streams. The work of the women has been woefully understudied and made invisible. Yet all the interviews reference mother’s work. Clearly this is something that requires closer study.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Census of Canada, 1911, 1921.

<sup>160</sup> Whitney Pier Historical Society, “From the Pier, Dear.”

<sup>161</sup> I have begun to take this up elsewhere, see C. Bonner and W. Bernard “Labouring for Change: Narratives of African-Nova Scotian Women, 1919 – 1990,” in *Women in the “Promised Land”: Essays in African Canadian History* by W. Thomas Bernard, B.E. de B’beri & N. Reid-Maroney (Eds.). (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press, *in press*).

Even if they wanted to find jobs, for women coming from plantation economies and entering the world of industrialization, either they would not have had the skills, or those jobs were not open to them. Secretarial work and working in stores was something reserved for white women at this time. Many of the people interviewed, the children of the immigrant generation, spoke of being the first Black person in whatever employment role they found once they were done school in the 1940s and later. For the immigrant generation, most positions had not been open to them. Unless the Caribbean woman found work in a house as a housekeeper, or took a position as a cleaner - the kinds of jobs relegated to poor immigrant women - their job was to take care of their home and family.<sup>162</sup>

This is perhaps why their children remember their mothers and the mothers of their friends always being home. The children left school every day, to be fed hot lunches and suppers, Caribbean meals made in different climes. The children and grandchildren of this generation speak lovingly and longingly about the foods their mothers would prepare – souse and pudding, cou-cou, chicken and rice, among the most often repeated favourites. According to them, while they love this food, many find it too labour-intensive to prepare. They remembered their mothers sending home to Barbados for the ingredients for making these meals, until the Canadian government halted the mailing of those foods. Then one or two of the grocery stores in town would have the items brought in from Montreal.<sup>163</sup> Souse and pudding is a combination of pork and sweet potato, served with

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<sup>162</sup> The records of the Immigration Branch during this period suggest that there was a clear market for Caribbean women in Nova Scotia to work as domestics, but this was dependent on the individual employer. Several of these women were employed in the province. There is no other documentary evidence of this employment. J.J. William to W.D. Scott, 29 June 1909 RG76-566-810666-1, Library and Archives Canada.

<sup>163</sup> Whitney Pier Historical Society, “From the Pier, Dear.”

pickled cucumbers and peppers. The “souse” is usually made from pickled pork, with pig trotters, ears, snout and tongue the preferred pieces. These pieces are mixed with pickled onions, cucumbers, limes, peppers and parsley. The “pudding” is made from steamed potato with chillies and herbs, which are stuffed into pig intestines (like making a sausage) and boiled. This meal is believed to have connections to haggis, introduced to Barbados by indentured Scottish servants in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In Barbados, this is traditionally a Saturday meal. Cou-cou, is a meal very like the Italian dish, polenta, or the West African fufu. It is a very simple, inexpensively prepared dish which is a staple in many Caribbean islands where it had been a part of the diets of African-descended peoples since colonial times. It consists mainly of corn flour (cornmeal) and okra. Some of the respondents recall the importance of constantly stirring this mixture with the “cou-cou stick” or having to face the wrath of their mother, since a constant stirring was required to achieve the right consistency. Cou-cou is one half of the national dish of Barbados, and is usually served with flying fish. The respondents all spoke of “cou-cou and gravy,” perhaps more affordable, whilst remaining nostalgic. As one community member noted, “cou-cou was a mainstay...it was an easy meal, and a cheap meal, because all you had to have was a little oat meal, corn meal and a little red gravy, and a can of fish seasoning...”<sup>164</sup> Beryl Braithwaite thought it was very sad, the ways in which there used to be West Indian, Hungarian, Polish and Ukrainian foods readily available in the Pier, but lamented that the younger generations had stopped preparing these foods.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Interview with Teddy Bryan.

<sup>165</sup> Whitney Pier Historical Society, “From the Pier, Dear”

In the early years of the century however, Caribbean food remained an important part of the community. Several women in the community supplemented their family incomes by making use of their culinary skills. They would make Caribbean buns, flapjacks, fruitcakes and breads, in addition to the souse, pudding, cou-cou, and anything else they could, and provide them to the scores of men living singly in the rooming houses in the quarter. Rooming houses like the previously mentioned Brunswick House at 86 Tupper Street, where there would be more than twenty men at a time, able to buy foodstuff for their lunch cans during the week. They provided a substantial customer base for some of these women, and according to descendants, the monies made here, allowed many women to help in sending their children off to school, and provided many other opportunities.

These small, informal catering businesses were made possible by the fact that although prohibited within City limits, many families in the Pier kept small farms. They had chickens, pigs, and horses, in addition to small subsistence gardens. In addition to providing for the family table, the animals and produce brought in extra cash – families sold eggs, chickens and pigs, as well as prepared meals. According to Beryl Braithwaite, when she lived on Tupper Street as a child, “everybody had cows and chickens in the back yard. But then there was [the passage of] a City Ordinance that this was within City limits, so you had to get rid of all the cows, chickens and pigs.”<sup>166</sup> Of course, the Caribbean families were not the only ones in the Pier finding it necessary to rely on

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<sup>166</sup> Whitney Pier Historical Society, “From the Pier, Dear” p. 85.

small-scale gardening and subsistence farming, and according to MacKinnon, many families continued this practice well into the 1960s.<sup>167</sup>

In addition to the men in the Pier who had been trained as tailors back in the Caribbean, some of the women were skilled seamstresses.<sup>168</sup> One woman said on her arrival to Sydney, her mother had made coats, dresses, pants, whatever was needed, because she was good with the needle and thread. So, she sewed for people to add to the family income. She was so successful at this that she could sponsor some of her siblings to come to Canada in the 1950s and 60s.<sup>169</sup>

Some Caribbean women in the Pier ran their own rooming houses, and sometimes other businesses. Among them was Mrs. Lavina Grant who was operating a grocery and fruit business at 77 Tupper Street in 1923. She was the only Caribbean woman listed in this community as a business owner.<sup>170</sup> The 1921 census indicates she had 3 lodgers listed with her at this same address that year. They are all males, between the ages of 29 and 32, each listed as “labourer” in the steelworks. Lavina is the head of the household and her occupation is listed as “housekeeper.”<sup>171</sup> According to the oral history, at some point her daughter “came up” to live with her, having first spent time in the US as a domestic, and she met and married one of the men living in her mother’s rooming house (not one of the men listed in the census, suggesting that Lavina was not limited to just

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<sup>167</sup> Richard MacKinnon, “Making a House a Home: Company Housing in Cape Breton Island,” *Material History Review* 47 (Spring 1998), 46-56.

<sup>168</sup> According to Barbados census reports, between 1891 and 1921 approx. ten thousand women in Barbados listed occupations in needlework, dressmaking or millinery. Irma Watkins-Owens, “Early Twentieth-Century Caribbean Women: Migration and Social Networks in New York City,” in *Islands in the City: West Indian Migration to New York* by Nancy Foner, Ed. (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001).

<sup>169</sup> Interview with Clotilda Yakimchuk.

<sup>170</sup> The other women listed between 1914 and 1928 were all from Newfoundland or Russia.

<sup>171</sup> Census of Canada, 1921.



these three lodgers).<sup>172</sup> According to Beryl Braithwaite, when Marcus Garvey visited the Pier in the 1930s, it was at Mrs. Grant's house that he stayed.<sup>173</sup> Another woman, Margaret Lawrence was the head of her household and also listed as a "housekeeper," in the 1921 census, whilst having 4 men between the ages of 19 and 35 listed as boarders in her home at 25 Curry's Lane.<sup>174</sup> These men are also listed as labourers in the steelworks. In the Caribbean quarter of the Pier in 1921 there are close to 80 households of three or more persons, and it appears that for many households, having one or more lodgers or boarders was the norm. This appears to have been the case throughout the region, with these boarders staying within their ethnic enclaves. While rare, some of these boarders or lodgers were women, some accompanying husbands, others listed singly.

Housekeeping, or the act of running a household remains a woefully neglected aspect of women's work. Another aspect relates to the ethic of care – the duties of child, community and elder care, which tend to be rolled into expected "women's work" and hence seen to be of little or no value. The children and grandchildren of this community neither ignored nor forgot this care they experienced or received. They took for granted the reality that their and their friends' mothers were always home, but they all referenced the ways in which the women worked to care for them and those in the community. There were formal ways in which this was done, in terms of church committees and groups like the Black Cross nurses,<sup>175</sup> but there were also informal acts of caring. One woman recalled the story of a Caribbean widow with five children who said she never had to worry about finding food for her children because the other ladies from the community

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<sup>172</sup> Interview with Whitfield Best.

<sup>173</sup> Interview with Beryl Braitwaite.

<sup>174</sup> Census of Canada, 1921.

<sup>175</sup> See Chapter Four

would always bring food to the house. The women would have “pound parties” when there was someone who got laid off work, got hurt, or was without income for whatever reason. At the parties these individuals would receive groceries for up to a month to ensure they never had to go without food.<sup>176</sup>

In addition to helping the women provide food for the household, members of the community also assisted in the hands-on care of the children. Many recalled the ways in which socialization did not just take place within their family, and they were required to “mind their Ps and Qs” whenever within range of an adult from the community, for fear of being reprimanded. One member of the community shared her experience of losing her mother at an early age, and the role of the community in caring for her and her father during this period. The women took care of her physically – washed her hair and clothes – and ensured that she had things only her mother would have provided for her, like homemade cookies. In this place, far away from home they had recreated close-knit structures of community support in which they took care of each other, regardless of official familial bonds. Their Caribbean-ness was what held them together.<sup>177</sup>

In thinking about women’s work in this context, it is vital that we consider what it may have meant for some of these women to be resident in Sydney and to be working in the informal economy. Many of these women, like the men from the community, left behind children in the Caribbean, while they sacrificed to create better future circumstances. An example is the previously mentioned Lavina Grant, who had left her

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<sup>176</sup> Interview with Iris Crawford.

<sup>177</sup> I have taken up the discussion of the importance of an ethic of care within the African Nova Scotian communities elsewhere, see C. Bonner & W. Bernard “Kinship and Community Care.” *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement (JMI)* 4, 1 (2013).

daughter behind while she had gone to Sydney, and opened a rooming house. While she was gone, Lavina's daughter had been raised by her grandmother back in Barbados, and once this daughter was old enough, she followed her mother out of the Caribbean and made her way to the United States as a domestic, and eventually moved to Sydney to join her mother. Three generations of the Brooms family followed this pattern, first with Joseph leaving his mother Harriet behind, where she helped in the rearing of his children, including Eril who arrived in Sydney many years later. Soon after her arrival in Nova Scotia, Eril found work as a laundress in the city hospital, where she remained for many years until she too could "bring up" her daughter who shared her family narrative.<sup>178</sup>

These types of fostering situations were not uncommon. Many families were separated in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in the Atlantic region as those who could, sought opportunities elsewhere. Some families sent their children born abroad, home to the Caribbean whilst they continued seeking opportunities in the new industrial economies; while others left their children and families behind in the Caribbean whilst they went to find work.<sup>179</sup>

In addition to the work noted above, the women also found other creative ways of making and investing their own money, among them participation in a practice known as "sou-sou" within the community.<sup>180</sup> According to one woman,

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<sup>178</sup> C. Bonner, "Raising Family Far from Home: West Indian Women in Nova Scotia 1900-1930," paper presented at the annual meeting of the Berkshire Conference of Women Historians, Toronto, ON 2014.

<sup>179</sup> For more on this see Violet Johnson, "The Migration Experience: Social and Economic Adjustment of British West Indian Immigrants in Boston, 1915-1950;" Irma Watkins-Owens, "Early-Twentieth-Century Caribbean Women: Migration and Social Networks in New York City," in *Islands in the City: West Indian Migration to New York*, ed. Nancy Foner (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001).

<sup>180</sup> The oral history interview elicited this memory of a practice the women called sousou, but its origin is unclear. The practice is known by multiple names across the Caribbean and Americas – susu in Trinidad; sousou in Martinique; asue in the Bahamas; meeting turn in Barbados and partner in Jamaica, for example. For more on this practice, see B. Stoffle, T. Purcell, R. Stoffle, K. Van Vlack, K. Arnet, and J. Minnis, "Asu and Meeting Turn: The Resilience of Rotating Saving and Credit in the Bahamas and Barbados" *Ethnology*

many of these women got together, and each week they would contribute either 5 or 10 dollars, and what you'd do is it would be called "your turn" and it would be your turn one week, and somebody else's turn the next, and each one would get a turn. I remember Mrs. \*\*\*\* would have 2 or 3 turns, because she would put in \$15 instead of \$5, so it meant that 3 times during this period, she would get three times the amount because that money would come to her. That was called *sousou* by the women.<sup>181</sup>

What she describes, is a system of rotating credit,<sup>182</sup> a concept arising from the cultural practices of African-descended communities and common throughout the Diaspora. ROSCAs represent a type of savings and microcredit system arising out of the coming together of people who know and trust each other, usually living or interacting within a small community. This practice has allowed women the opportunity to take the monies earned in the informal economy into an accessible system of banking and credit.

This chapter has outlined the ways, through the formal and informal economies, men and women in the new Caribbean community in Whitney Pier contributed to the feeding, clothing and care of members of their households. The men worked long hours in the loud, hot, dangerous spaces in the steel plant, in the coal mines, or relied on skilled trades brought with them from the Caribbean. By cooking and serving as informal caterers in the community, operating subsistence gardens, taking in boarders, working informally at skilled tasks, doing in-service or cleaning jobs, and undertaking household

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48(1) 2009, 71-84; S. Ardener & S. Berman, *Money-Go-Rounds: The Importance of Rotating Credit Associations for Women* (New York, NY: Berg, 1995).

<sup>181</sup> Interview with Clotilda Yakimchuk.

<sup>182</sup> Referred to in the literature as rotating savings and credit associations, or (ROSCAs).

tasks which supplemented the household income, the women in the community counter the narratives of what was considered work during this period. They challenged taken-for-granted notions of womanhood as they exhibited agency in the creation of and participation in informal market systems.

## CHAPTER FOUR: “BLACK NATIONALISM IN SYDNEY”

The early decades of the twentieth century evidenced a series of changes in terms of racial consciousness on the part of people of African descent in the Diaspora. These changes were represented in art, literature, politics, and religious activities, including calls for changes in the working and living circumstances of Blacks. Building on the impetus of political movements at the turn of the century such as Sylvester Williams’ African Association,<sup>183</sup> several groups and conferences lead by African and African-diasporic activists and intellectuals arose in the early decades of the twentieth century. Among the noteworthy global movements for change, was the Pan-Africanist movement of Jamaican Marcus Garvey.

The small Caribbean community in Whitney Pier displayed their connections to the Blacks in Africa and its Diaspora by developing a relationship with Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), and becoming home to Canada’s only branch of the African Orthodox Church (AOC). Scholars have disputed whether the AOC was a creation of Garvey and the UNIA, or if George Alexander McGuire, religious leader in the UNIA and first Bishop of the AOC, simply used his UNIA connections to grow his church.<sup>184</sup> With both the UNIA and the AOC having been very active in the lives of many members of the Whitney Pier community, a closer look at both organizations and their presence in the community is warranted. This chapter provides an

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<sup>183</sup> Williams’ group sought to bring African peoples together from around the world to discuss and build on shared interests.

<sup>184</sup> Elizabeth Beaton, “Religious Affiliation and Ethnic Identity of West Indians in Whitney Pier,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 20, no. 3, 1988; Robert Hill, ed., *The Marcus Garvey & Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, Volumes 1-4* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

exploration of the formation of both the UNIA and the AOC, and their relationship to the small community of Whitney Pier.

The last decade has provided scholarship underscoring the ways in which the UNIA, not only maintained a strong presence in the lives of many Blacks in Canada, but also served as a unit of social cohesion.<sup>185</sup> The organization provided opportunities for the maintaining and passing on of culture, as well as the creation of diasporic networks in the first decades of the twentieth century. Historian Carla Marano has provided extensive evidence of the breadth of the organization across Canada, drawing on the records of the UNIA both nationally and transnationally, whilst centering Toronto's branch of the organization within her scholarship. Other scholars have written about the ways in which the presence of the UNIA within Toronto and other urban spaces in Canada, worked to shape the evolution of the different Black communities.<sup>186</sup> These explorations highlight the ways in which the organization existed within a social space that transcended national boundaries, and was premised on upholding the main tenets of Garvey's philosophies on race, underscoring the importance of self-help, mutual aid and economic development for Blacks, both on the African continent, and for those in the Diaspora. This chapter seeks to add to the growing literature on the role of the UNIA in Canada, by exploring its presence

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<sup>185</sup> See Carla Marano, "'We All Used to Meet at the Hall': Assessing the Significance of the Universal Negro Improvement Association in Toronto, 1900-1950." *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 25, no.1 (2014): 143-175 as well as Carla Marano, "'Rise Strongly and Rapidly': The Universal Negro Improvement Association in Canada, 1919-1940." *The Canadian Historical Review* 91, no. 2 (2010): 233-259 and Jared Toney, "Locating Diaspora: Afro-Caribbean Narratives of Migration and Settlement in Toronto, 1914-1929," *Urban History Review* 38, no. 2 (Spring 2010): 75-88.

<sup>186</sup> For more on this see Leo Bertley, "The Universal Negro Improvement Association of Montreal, 1917-1979" (Ph.D. diss., Concordia University, 1980), Natasha Henry, *Emancipation Day: Celebrating Freedom in Canada* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2010).

in the Whitney Pier community, and its relationship to St. Phillip's African Orthodox Church, the only church of its kind in Canada.

The Universal Negro Improvement and Conservation Association (UNIA) and African Communities (Imperial) League (ACL) were both founded in 1914 by Jamaican-born Marcus Mosiah Garvey.<sup>187</sup> The UNIA was founded as a benevolent fraternal organization for African-descended peoples, while the ACL was the commercial and political wing of the organization.<sup>188</sup> Association founder Garvey was a self-educated man who had worked as a journalist and printer in Central America, Jamaica, and in Britain. In 1916, he moved to Harlem, New York, where he established a headquarters for his new organization. The goal of the UNIA was to “unite all the negro peoples of the world into one great body,”<sup>189</sup> a message that was readily received by Black Americans, who were struggling to define themselves beyond the negative perceptions of white America. As many made their way back to America in the postwar years, they found themselves returning to a country that was ill-prepared to treat them as equals. At the end of WWI, Black men in America returning from war were sometimes met with violence. Not only was their citizenship being challenged, but for these men, their very manhood was in question. Coming back from a Europe where many had experienced none of the racism of home, they were ill-prepared to return to the *status quo*. Many were ready for a

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<sup>187</sup> “and Conservation” was removed from the title when it was incorporated in New York in 1918.

<sup>188</sup> It was through the ACL that Garvey launched and ran many of the UNIA's business ventures such as the Black Star Line, the Negro Factories Corporation and the journal *The Negro World*. For more on this, see Robert Hill, ed., *The Marcus Garvey & Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, Volumes 1-4* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); Robert Hill & Barbara Bair, eds., *Marcus Garvey, Life and Lessons: A centennial companion to The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*.

<sup>189</sup> Amy Jacques Garvey, ed., *The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey* (New York: Routledge, 1967, second edition), x.



race-conscious ideology, and talk of Black nationalism.<sup>190</sup> Garvey was committed to, and promoted the instilling of racial pride. He believed that Blacks needed to also be self-sufficient, that the system of white racism was too entrenched within American society, and hence advocated the formation of, or settlement in a nation of Africans for Africans. He believed strongly in the “confraternity among the race; to promote the spirit of pride and love.”<sup>191</sup>

According to historian Robert Hill, the political ideology at the heart of the Garvey movement was born out of a “fiercely proud and independent peasantry” living in the Caribbean in the post-emancipation decades, coming together with the unbridled optimism of America.<sup>192</sup> Arriving in America, Garvey was emboldened by what he saw as endless possibilities for political and economic success. His was a message that was clearly needed at the time that the UNIA came into being, as evidenced by the rapid growth of the organization in the United States, Caribbean, Latin America, Africa, and Canada. The growth of the organization was aided by the increasing migration of African-descended people throughout the Americas and beyond. Black workers made their way up and out of the Caribbean Basin by ship, traveled throughout North America on trains, made their way out of the South by various means. As they moved, these migrants took the UNIA and Garvey’s message with them. The UNIA had established 700 branches in thirty-eight states by the early 1920s. While chapters existed in the larger urban areas

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<sup>190</sup> Edmund David Cronon, *Black Moses: The Story of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1955); E.U. Essien-Udom, “An Introduction to the Second Edition,” in *Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey or Africa for the Africans*, compiled by Amy Jacques Garvey (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1967, second edition).

<sup>191</sup> William L. VanDeburg, *Modern Black Nationalism: From Marcus Garvey to Louis Farrakhan* (New York: New York University Press, 1997.), 11.

<sup>192</sup> Robert A. Hill, ed., “General Introduction,” in *The Marcus Garvey & Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, Volume I: 1826-August 1919* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983): xxxvi.

such as New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles, Garvey's message reached into small towns across the country as well.<sup>193</sup>

This was the birth of Garveyism, a Pan-Africanist philosophy and what was to become a global mass political movement of mostly poor and working-class Blacks, working together across borders to achieve a vision of social, political and economic freedom. Garvey's newspaper, the *Negro World* for which he acted as publisher, in its weekly issues, published in English, with Spanish and French pages, circulated the globe and called on Black people across the globe to take a stance, and to challenge their oppression. Through the pages of the *Negro World* they could see they were not alone in their struggles – the United Fruit Company worker in Guatemala could see that he or she had the same struggles as their brethren on the sugarcane plantations in Cuba. Through the pages of the *Negro World*, Garvey called on Blacks to work toward the liberation of Africa, and the acquisition of political and economic power. People responded because they could identify with each other through the mutuality of race, as well as in terms of their status as second-class citizens. They saw the UNIA as a place where they were celebrated and where they could hope, dream and find means to fulfil these dreams.<sup>194</sup> Garvey set up a Liberty Hall in Harlem in 1917, and over the next five years, the organization grew to encompass over a million members, in Liberty Halls across three continents.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> E.U. Essien-Udom, "An Introduction to the Second Edition," in *Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey or Africa for the Africans*, compiled by Amy Jacques Garvey (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1967, second edition).

<sup>194</sup> Frederick Douglass Opie, *Black Labor Migration in Caribbean Guatemala, 1882-1923*, (Florida: University Press of Florida); Sarah-Jane Mathieu, *North of the Color Line: Migration and Black Resistance in Canada, 1870-1955* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

<sup>195</sup> Essien-Udom says this number is a conservative estimate, as Garvey believed the organization had up to six million members at its height. E.U. Essien-Udom, "An Introduction to the Second Edition," in

According to historian Tony Martin, Garvey envisioned a network of Black “business enterprises established by UNIA branches all over the world...linked, according to Garvey’s grand design, into a worldwide system of Pan-African economic cooperation.”<sup>196</sup> Throughout the years of its existence, branches of the UNIA worked actively to accomplish this vision, purchasing properties, creating businesses, and so on, in keeping with this notion of economic freedom.

### **The UNIA in Canada**

There were 32 UNIA halls established throughout Canada, and among them, 12 were to be found in Nova Scotia, with three on the island of Cape Breton. These three halls were established in Whitney Pier, Glace Bay, and in New Waterford, all communities with Caribbean migrant populations.<sup>197</sup> Marano points out that people from the Caribbean joined the UNIA oftentimes because of their frustration over their low-paying jobs; and historian Winston James points to the “rigorous gatekeeping on the basis of race” often encountered by skilled workers from the Caribbean, as impetus for turning to Black nationalism.<sup>198</sup> It is common knowledge that the Caribbean migrants were hired as labourers, relegated for the most part to low-status and low-paying positions in the steel company. They were also not allowed to join the labour unions until much later.<sup>199</sup>

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*Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey or Africa for the Africans*, compiled by Amy Jacques Garvey (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1967, second edition).

<sup>196</sup> Tony Martin, *Race First: The Ideological and Organizational Struggles of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1976), 35.

<sup>197</sup> Marano has noted that UNIA Halls seemed to mainly exist in places where West Indians settled. See, Carla Marano “‘Rise Strongly and Rapidly’: The Universal Negro Improvement Association in Canada, 1919-1940,” *The Canadian Historical Review*, 91, no. 2 (2010): 233-259.

<sup>198</sup> Carla Marano, “‘Rise Strongly and Rapidly’: The Universal Negro Improvement Association in Canada, 1919-1940,” *The Canadian Historical Review*, 91, no. 2 (2010): 233-259; Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Verso, 1999), 84.

<sup>199</sup> Elizabeth Beaton in conversation with the author.

This suggests a context that needed an organization such as Garvey's, which sought to address the needs of Black workers. At the 1921 convention, the Canadian delegates "spoke very encouragingly of that country as a good field for the association, declaring there was little or no opposition to the movement, the chief difficulty being the serious economic conditions existing."<sup>200</sup> Clearly, the Blacks in Canada were concerned with their financial situations.

In addition to the labour and other economic woes being voices by the Black community, in ways reminiscent of some of the experiences of their American brethren, the racial climate would have also been trying. On March 28, 1917, the *SS Southland* sailed out of Halifax Harbour with over 4,000 troops, including members of what would become known as Canada's first and only Black battalion. Their departure marked the end of a three-year struggle on the part of African Canadian communities across the country, the result of then ongoing debate surrounding the inclusion of people of African descent in the Canadian Expeditionary Force. The history of this group demonstrates the courage and determination of African Canadians to serve their country, despite the pernicious effects of racial discrimination, and the long-standing prejudices that prevailed regarding Black courage, industry and patriotism. At the outbreak of the War, Black men were routinely turned away from recruiting stations across the country, although there was no official legislation denying their enlistment. According to Walker, this was in keeping with the general sentiments surrounding the concept of "race" during this period.<sup>201</sup> For nearly two years, Canadian Blacks and other visible minorities petitioned the government, seeking to

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<sup>200</sup> Robert A. Hill, ed., "Convention Reports," in *The Marcus Garvey & Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, Volume III* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

<sup>201</sup> James Walker, "Race and Recruitment in World War I: Enlistment of Visible Minorities in the Canadian Expeditionary Force," *Canadian Historical Review* LXX, 1 (1989): 1-26.

enlist in the armed forces as part of their national duty. Many also saw their enlistment as a means of themselves and their communities being seen and treated as men in contexts where they continued to be second-class citizens.<sup>202</sup> Among this group were many of the recently-arrived Caribbean migrants resident in Whitney Pier. Some of them found units in which they enlisted and across Canada, over 400 Black men served in these units. For many others however, the experience was negative. A group of approximately fifty men from Sydney, both Canadian and West Indian, attempted to enlist sometime in 1916, but were told they were not wanted in a “white man’s war.”<sup>203</sup> Several such stories abound in terms of the willingness of Black men to take up arms, to no avail. A response from Major-General W. Gwatkin, then Chief of the General Staff, provides evidence of the racial attitudes that prevailed in the Canadian military at the time. He wrote in a memo dated April, 1916:

Nothing is to be gained by blinking facts. The civilized negro is vain and imitative; in Canada he is not being impelled to enlist by a high sense of duty; in the trenches he is not likely to make a good fighter; and the average white man will not associate with him on terms of equality. Not a single commanding officer in Military District No. 2 is willing to accept a coloured platoon as part of his battalion; and it would be humiliating to the coloured men themselves to serve in a battalion where they were not wanted.<sup>204</sup>

In the face of such adamant refusal, their hopes were not to be easily met. To gain access to the military, they would have to enforce their civil rights through open challenges to

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<sup>202</sup> Walker, “Race and Recruitment in World War I.”

<sup>203</sup> Calvin W. Ruck, *Canada’s Black Battalion: No. 2 Construction, 1916-1920* (Dartmouth, N.S.: Minuteman Press, 1986).

<sup>204</sup> As quoted in James Walker, “Race and Recruitment in World War I.”

the government.<sup>205</sup> Extensive pressure was placed on both the military and on the country's government by members of the clergy, educators and community leaders. A long series of letters and petitions survive, bearing witness to the determination of African Canadians to demonstrate their loyalty to Canada and to the Crown. The fact that Canada was struggling to meet the year-end goal of half a million volunteers in 1916 would of course have played a part in the changing of heart in terms of the enlistment of Black soldiers. "The need for more men was acute, especially as enlistment figures fell...and recruiting officers reached out to find men where they could."<sup>206</sup> Thus, the No. 2 Construction Battalion received authorization on July 5<sup>th</sup>, 1916, and recruited men from across the nation.

The long wait and perhaps the negative experiences of being rebuffed by the military made it difficult for the new No. 2 to find men, and the unit found itself faced with the same issues of diminishing volunteer numbers, even with the Borden government having passed the 1917 Military Service Act, a law mandating conscription. Records suggest that with the passage of this act, Canadian military commanders were concerned with not being able to recruit enough Black men for the unit, quite the contrast from a year prior, where Black men had been rebuffed in waves.<sup>207</sup> With conscription, several men from Sydney who had been previously refused access to the military, were forced to enlist.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Robin Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1971).

<sup>206</sup> Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, p. 317.

<sup>207</sup> Calvin W. Ruck, *Canada's Black Battalion: No. 2 Construction, 1916-1920* (Dartmouth, N.S.: Minuteman Press, 1986); James Walker, "Race and Recruitment in World War I: Enlistment of Visible Minorities in the Canadian Expeditionary Force," *Canadian Historical Review* LXX, 1 (1989): 1-26.

<sup>208</sup> Ruck, *Canada's Black Battalion*

During this period, the January 1917 issue of the *Atlantic Advocate* posted a strong letter urging “every colored man and woman” to “take a pardonable pride in the battalion.” The letter also “appeals to patriotism” and urges those wishing to “shape the future of the race” to join the No. 2.<sup>209</sup> The men of the battalion joined in the recruitment efforts, as noted in the *Advocate*, which described concerts being put on by the colored band of the No. 2. At strength, the Battalion was made up of 605 men of all ranks from across Canada, the Caribbean and The United States, and nineteen officers, under the command of Lieut. Col. Daniel H. Sutherland, a railroad contractor from River John in Pictou County with the sole black officer being their captain and chaplain, Reverend William A. White.<sup>210</sup>

The struggles of the unit would continue on the other side of the Atlantic as well. Whilst being members of the Expeditionary force, most Black Canadians had not been permitted to bear arms nor to serve in integrated units. Upon arrival in Europe, the limited size of the No. 2 resulted in it being relegated to serving as a labour company attached to the Forestry Corps. With just over 600 men, the Canadian unit was under-strength for a battalion, but over-strength for a company. The only viable solution was to re-designate the unit, which meant a reduction in rank for Lieut. Col. Sutherland to the rank of Major to be able to remain with his unit. Whilst stationed in France, the unit was used to perform logging duties, to build roads, and restore buildings, among other construction

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<sup>209</sup> *Atlantic Advocate* January, 1917, 1, no. 7

<sup>210</sup> For more on the leadership of this unit, see Calvin W. Ruck, *Canada's Black Battalion: No. 2 Construction, 1916-1920* (Dartmouth, N.S.: Minuteman Press, 1986); James Walker, “Race and Recruitment in World War I: Enlistment of Visible Minorities in the Canadian Expeditionary Force,” *Canadian Historical Review* LXX, 1 (1989): 1-26.

duties.<sup>211</sup> In the No. 2 Construction Battalion, although they worked side by side with white units, they were to remain segregated in their non-working activities. They endured a multiplicity of slights in their time overseas, many of which were stark reminders of the realities of a racialized social order both there and back at home in Canada.<sup>212</sup> As Walker made clear, “throughout the ranks of the Allies, with the partial exception of the French, non-white soldiers and workers were humiliated, restricted, and exploited. It was simply not their war.”<sup>213</sup>

Returning after the war were men like Harold Best, who had arrived in Canada in July 1917 from Barbados, and had joined the Nova Scotia Regiment less than a year later, in May 1918.<sup>214</sup> The Canada to which he returned was in many ways quite different from the one he had left. With the men having gone off to war, many communities had called upon women and workers of colour, including even more Caribbean migrants to take on their jobs in the factories, in the mines and elsewhere. Black employees gained access to spaces of employment that had previously been closed to them.<sup>215</sup>

As Walker notes, the experience of these men in WWI provides evidence for the racial sentiments in Canada during this period. Once again, the stereotypes of the period erased logic and evidence. The dissatisfaction Blacks felt with conditions at home in Great Britain, Canada and the US after WWI made the Garvey movement very appealing

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<sup>211</sup> Calvin W. Ruck, *Canada's Black Battalion: No. 2 Construction, 1916-1920* (Dartmouth, N.S.: Minuteman Press, 1986); James Walker, “Race and Recruitment in World War I: Enlistment of Visible Minorities in the Canadian Expeditionary Force,” *Canadian Historical Review* LXX, 1 (1989): 1-26

<sup>212</sup> Walker, “Race and Recruitment in World War I.”

<sup>213</sup> Walker, “Race and Recruitment in World War I.” p.24.

<sup>214</sup> Interview with Whitfield Best; Canada. "Soldiers of the First World War (1914-1918)." Record Group 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 4930 - 35. Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.

<sup>215</sup> Sarah-Jane Mathieu, *North of the Color Line: Race and the Making of Transnational Black Radicalism in Canada, 1870-1955* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).



globally.<sup>216</sup> In Sydney, the Liberty Hall opened on Lingan Road in 1919, with a membership of about 250.<sup>217</sup> Marano notes, “the *Negro World* reported that ‘down in Sydney more than half the Negro population’ claims membership to the UNIA and they ‘labor with the most indefatigable determination to see the realization of the highest hopes – a free and redeemed Negro race.’”<sup>218</sup> Grenadian-born Alvinus Calder, became its first president.

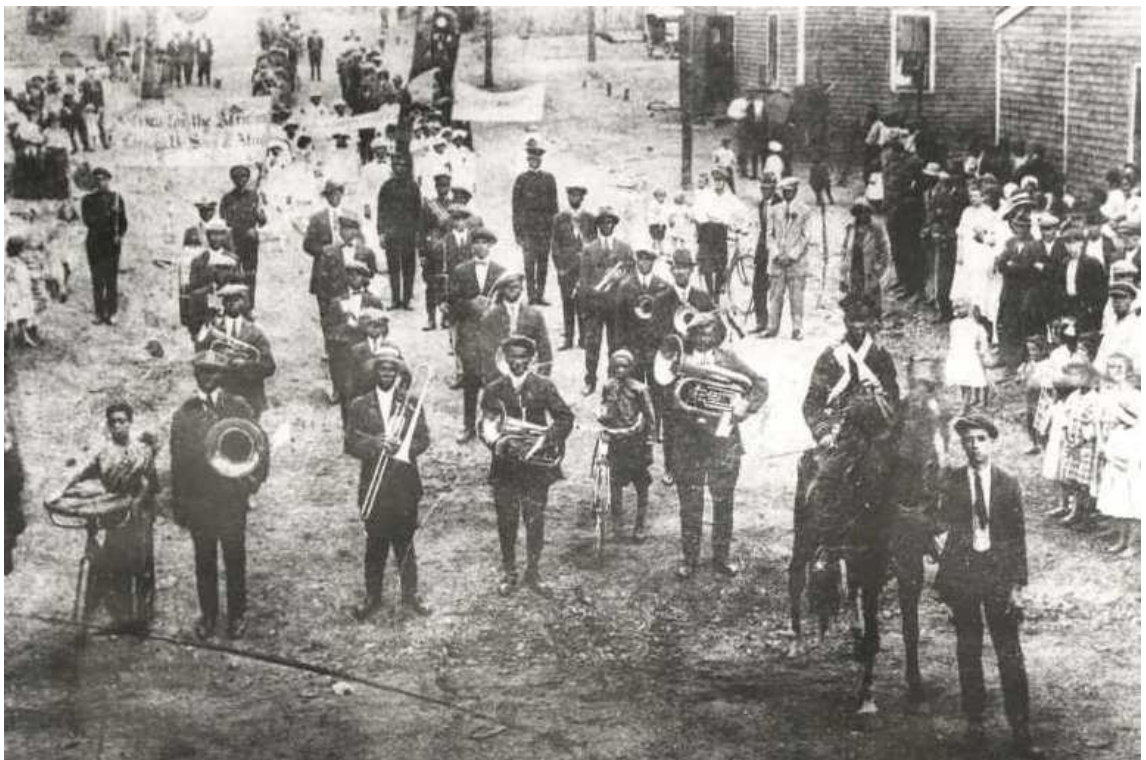


Figure 4: United Negro Improvement Association Band

In 1921, the local *Sydney Post* shared a photograph depicting members of the United Negro Improvement Association Marching Band on Laurier Street in the Pier, followed by Black Cross nurses in uniform, as well as others carrying banners

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<sup>216</sup> Mathieu, *North of the Color Line*.

<sup>217</sup> Joan Weeks, *One God, One Aim, One Destiny: African Nova Scotians in Cape Breton* (Sydney: Centre for Cape Breton Studies, Cape Breton University, 2007), 37.

<sup>218</sup> Marano, “‘Rise Strongly and Rapidly’p. 252.

proclaiming, “Africa for the Africans.” The photograph also depicts a large group of Black onlookers.<sup>219</sup> The UNIA band appears to have been an active part of the community, playing at parades, funerals, political meetings, sometimes with the West Indian Band, which was also active.<sup>220</sup> As one community member whose father was a member of the band recalled, “They played for parades, and anything that required music, these men were available.”<sup>221</sup> While they remember the bands, community members also recalled the Black Cross Nurses in the Pier. One woman noted, “The Black Cross Nurses was an organization very similar to your community workers, where they had people from the community who would, when women had their babies, ... go into the home and cook and clean and help look after the other children...it was a support for other women in the communities.” Community elder Beryl Braithwaite also remembered the nurses as mainly midwives who had been going around the community for years and years, going into women’s homes and helping with childcare and housework.<sup>222</sup> Black Cross Nurses (BCN), as an auxiliary of the UNIA, were expected to “carry on a system of relief and ... attend to the sick of the Division to which the public Auxiliary is attached.”<sup>223</sup> Once they were formally chartered, each UNIA division would have had its own BCN. The BCNs became a formalized professional body with specialized training. According to historian Natanya Duncan,

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<sup>219</sup> United Negro Improvement Association, 78-112-1862, Beaton Institute, Cape Breton University.

<sup>220</sup> Records of St. Philip’s African Orthodox Church; Elizabeth Beaton, “Religious Affiliation and Ethnic Identity of West Indians in Whitney Pier,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 20, no. 3, 1988.

<sup>221</sup> Interview with Clotilda Yakimchuk.

<sup>222</sup> Joan Weeks, *One God, One Aim, One Destiny: African Nova Scotians in Cape Breton* (Sydney: Centre for Cape Breton Studies, Cape Breton University, 2007).

<sup>223</sup> Robert A. Hill, ed., “Convention Reports,” in *The Marcus Garvey & Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, Volume III* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 766.

Within the auxiliary, careful instruction was provided to each member, in most cases by either a trained nurse or doctor. At the end of courses that lasted from six months to a year, a graduation ceremony was held and diploma issued prior to the donning of either the all-white uniform worn in public events or the green and white uniform worn while at work, which each member had to purchase personally.<sup>224</sup>

In Toronto, the BCN was a popular auxiliary, and its members were required to take the St. John's Ambulance course in first aid.<sup>225</sup> It is not known if the Nova Scotia BCN required its membership to complete St. John's Ambulance training as well. Active in a period when nursing schools were not admitting women of colour, BCNs served an important role in the Black community, creating both a practical and a representational space. For example, during a period where there would have been limited public health services, theirs would have been a necessary presence in terms of ensuring that Black women in the community had access to pre- and post-natal care and education. This photograph and the oral history both tell us there was an active BCN in Nova Scotia. This raises many questions, such as the number of women involved, who they were, where they would have received their training, what service as a BCN in Nova Scotia might have looked like, and how long the group was active. This however goes beyond the scope of this thesis.

The *Negro World* also noted that the Sydney UNIA was operating a night school for adults under the direction of George Creese in 1921. In other UNIA divisions night

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<sup>224</sup> Natanya Duncan, "The 'Efficient Womanhood' of the Universal Negro Improvement Association: 1919-1930," Ph.D. diss., University of Florida, 2009, p. 136.

<sup>225</sup> Marano, "'We All Used to Meet at the Hall.'"

schools were organized by the BCNs.<sup>226</sup> At present, it is not known if this was the case in the Sydney context. Creese, a native of St. Vincent, and a shoemaker by trade, was an active member in the UNIA in New Aberdeen (Glace Bay), Nova Scotia, and served as UNIA High Commissioner of Canada. He was a Canadian delegate at the UNIA International Conventions in 1920-1922. At the 1920 Convention in New York Creese provided the international audience with insight into the lives of Blacks in Cape Breton:

We have many [black] skilled mechanics, printers, carpenters, masons, photographers, engineers, riveters, but they cannot get employment at their trades. Hence they have to seek work in the steel plants as labourers, as bricklayers, and as firemen...A system exists there of collecting a poll tax, everyone being required to pay \$10 for police protection, good streets, etc. If the tax is not paid, the police call at the house and take the individual to jail. This practice applies only to the colored people...Housing conditions, too, are deplorable in Eastern Canada and in Nova Scotia. Rents are excessively high.<sup>227</sup>

In this singular paragraph Creese paints a vivid picture of life for Blacks in the 1920s Maritimes. His statement echoes the issues raised by Winston James about the lack of access skilled tradespeople from the Caribbean had in the workforce. He provides further evidence for the importance of the steel company in their lives as a result of their inability to work in their trades. Discussion of the poll tax and its impact on the Black community is interesting. In its early years, the City of Sydney, incorporated in 1904 was very reliant on its poll taxes. The taxes were collected by the local constables, and the City Charter

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<sup>226</sup> Duncan, "The 'Efficient Womanhood' of the Universal Negro Improvement Association.

<sup>227</sup> Robert A. Hill, ed., "Convention Reports," in *The Marcus Garvey & Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, Volume II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 535.

provided a warrant to the officers which allowed for seizure of property in cases of delinquent payment, and where individuals were unable to provide the monetary value of this property to pay their taxes, the warrant allowed for the arrest of their person.<sup>228</sup> While this made no reference to race, the financial circumstances of the Blacks in Sydney may have meant that the paying of the poll tax was not always within their means, and there may have been cases of men being arrested for non-payment. We can only speculate, as the records for the Sydney Police during this period are believed to have been lost in one of several fires in the first decades of the twentieth century.

Regardless of different Atlantic communities having their own UNIA divisions, Garveyites from one division appeared to travel readily to meetings and events at others. As Beryl Braithwaite noted, “They would come to Sydney of there was special meetings. And in New Waterford, they had a UNIA in New Waterford also and they would come to meetings here in Sydney.”<sup>229</sup> Marano points to a tight-knit community in Glace Bay, centred around the UNIA Hall, but the visiting between community halls for meetings and social events suggests a tight-knit Caribbean community across Cape Breton. For example, Marano notes that members from New Aberdeen and New Waterford held a parade and mass meeting with the Sydney division in August 1925, and a private convention in 1933.<sup>230</sup>

According to the *Nova Scotia Gleaner*, the Whitney Pier UNIA Hall had 31 financial members on the books as of their meeting of September 15<sup>th</sup>, 1929.<sup>231</sup> The issue

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<sup>228</sup> “K,” General Warrant for Poll Tax, City of Sydney Charter.

<sup>229</sup> Weeks, *One God, One Aim, One Destiny*, 70.

<sup>230</sup> Marano, “‘Rise Strongly and Rapidly,’ 252.

<sup>231</sup> “UNIA Reorganized,” *Nova Scotia Gleaner*, 1, no. 3, 1929.

of “financial members” versus others is something Marano raises in her look at the history of the UNIA in Canada. She notes the existence of a two-tiered system of membership in the UNIA, with active members who paid dues, and regular members who attended events and volunteered their time. While there were 31 financial members on the books in 1929, we have no way of knowing how many regular members there might have been.<sup>232</sup> The organization was still clearly an active part of the community’s social life, with the UNIA band in attendance at most events, members of the community joining in celebration at their annual picnics, participating in boat cruises chartered by the UNIA, and attending UNIA parades. The Liberty Hall was at the centre of much of the events, and held dances, dramatic events, musicals and athletic activities.<sup>233</sup> Beryl Braitwaite remembers, “our entertainment was at the UNIA Hall, which was on Lingan Road. They would have dances and concerts. We held beauty contests and they had their meetings there also in the UNIA.”<sup>234</sup>

### **St. Philip’s African Orthodox Church, Sydney, NS**

Closely affiliated with the history of the UNIA is the history of the formation of the African Orthodox Church. This church was founded by George Alexander McGuire, who, like Garvey, had been born in the British West Indies. McGuire was born in Antigua in 1866, and lived there until completion of his studies at the theological seminary in 1894, when he made his way to the United States. He worked for several years as an ordained Episcopal priest, mainly to Black congregants. In 1910, he received his medical degree in Boston, after which he served as a Protestant Episcopal Minister until 1913,

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<sup>232</sup> Marano, “‘We All Used to Meet at the Hall’; *Nova Scotia Gleaner*,

<sup>233</sup> Beaton, “Religious Affiliation and Ethnic Identity.”

<sup>234</sup> Beryl Braitwaite, as quoted in Joan Weeks, *One God, One Aim, One Destiny: African Nova Scotians in Cape Breton* (Sydney: Centre for Cape Breton Studies, Cape Breton University, 2007), 70.

when he returned home to Antigua, where he worked as both a family doctor and minister. In his years in the Episcopal church, McGuire had been disheartened by the racism he saw, and on his return to the US, he became involved with other independent Black Episcopal clergy who were also dissatisfied with the Church. They were disappointed at the subordinate role of Blacks, and for the West Indian ministers, they recognized that they had received better treatment in the West Indian Anglican church. With this realization, McGuire began to articulate his belief in the importance of and need for separate spaces for Blacks to worship.<sup>235</sup>

Garvey and McGuire became acquainted in 1918 on McGuire's return to America, and McGuire became involved with Garvey's organization, rising very quickly through the ranks. Both men held similar views in terms of racial pride, and self-determination, and both thought the church should work to dispel notions of Black inferiority, and advance the cause of the Negro in America. Garvey named McGuire Chaplain-General of the UNIA, before his ordination as Bishop of the African Orthodox Church. In fact, in 1920, McGuire had ordained Richard Hilton Tobitt, who was then sent to the West Indies as a general missionary, by both the AOC and the UNIA. Historian Karl Pruter suggests this ordination of Tobitt was important on a few levels. First, having not yet been consecrated Bishop, McGuire's right to ordain may have been in question. Secondly, Pruter points to the fact of McGuire having been dressed in episcopal robes for the ceremony, purchased for him by Garvey. Would something as minor as this purchase, something not done for any of the other clergy working with the UNIA, have cause rifts

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<sup>235</sup> Clearly indicating a desire for a Black church before ever encountering Garvey.

in the organization?<sup>236</sup> In his role as Chaplain-General, Garvey directed the other clergy within the UNIA as they saw to the spiritual needs of the membership.<sup>237</sup> If the other clerics were at odds with him in any way, it would have had a negative effect on the spirituality of the UNIA.

McGuire sought ways of establishing an independent Black church, which he was able to do on November 9, 1919 when he resigned from the Reformed Episcopal Church and founded the Church of the Good Shepherd as an Independent Episcopal Church. McGuire's resignation was necessary, because his standing in the UNIA was now in conflict with the fact that the Reformed Episcopal Church possessed a mostly white membership and leadership. The need for a Black church meant they needed to separate from this organization.<sup>238</sup>

Regardless, McGuire in his role as Chaplain-General of the UNIA, had continued working toward the formation of the independent orthodox church, expecting that it would become the church of the UNIA, but in 1921 when McGuire was elected as Bishop of the Independent Episcopal Church, while both the election and the formation of the AOC were noted in the *Negro World*, there was a clear statement made, disassociating the UNIA from the AOC. The editorial clarified the position of the UNIA, that they favoured

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<sup>236</sup> For some, this may have marked the start of tensions between McGuire and the other clergy, with others sensing a special relationship between Garvey and this new church. Karl Pruter, *The Strange Partnership of George Alexander McGuire and Marcus Garvey*, (San Bernadino, CA: Borgo Press, 1986); Randall K. Burkett, *Garveyism as a Religious Movement: The Institutionalization of a Black Civil Religion*, (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1978).

<sup>237</sup> Randall K. Burkett, *Garveyism as a Religious Movement: The Institutionalization of a Black Civil Religion*, (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1978).

<sup>238</sup> A statement in the *Negro World* goes on to outline the hope that The Church of the Good Shepherd would become the mother church of their congregation which it suggests is already growing. Robert A. Hill, ed., *The Marcus Garvey & Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, Volume III* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983): 693-4; Karl Pruter, *The Strange Partnership of George Alexander McGuire and Marcus Garvey*, (San Bernadino, CA: Borgo Press, 1986).



all churches, but adopted none as the UNIA church.<sup>239</sup> Despite this, McGuire continued in his dual roles, as the spiritual leader of the UNIA, and as the Bishop of the new AOC. He continued his quest to build a church to unite all Negroes in a church they could call their own. He founded, edited and published the journal of the AOC, *The Negro Churchman*, which kept him in direct contact with his growing flock. McGuire was apparently unsatisfied with his status and sought consecration from the Russian Orthodox Church, which refused because the AOC would not become part of the Russian Orthodox Church. He next approached the American Catholic Church, and one of its bishops, Archbishop Joseph Rene Villate, who agreed to consecrate McGuire. A ceremony subsequently took place on September 29, 1921 at the Church of Our Lady of Good Death in Chicago.<sup>240</sup> George Alexander McGuire was enthroned as Bishop of the new African Orthodox Church the following day in New York City.<sup>241</sup> Again, the *Negro World* both acknowledged the events, and made clear that the UNIA endorsed the AOC only as much as it endorsed all of the other churches with which its members were affiliated, and pointed out that Bishop McGuire had resigned from his position as Chaplain-General upon his election to the episcopate.<sup>242</sup> There were issues between McGuire and Garvey, evidenced by the *Negro World* going as far as warning readers that any suggestion of a

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<sup>239</sup> Randall K. Burkett, *Garveyism as a Religious Movement: The Institutionalization of a Black Civil Religion*, (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1978).

<sup>240</sup> There remains confusion/controversy around this decision on the part of Villate. However, extended details of McGuire's journey to his consecration by Villate are beyond the scope of this paper. For a more detailed telling, see Karl Pruter, *The Strange Partnership of George Alexander McGuire and Marcus Garvey*, (San Bernadino, CA: Borgo Press, 1986); A.C. Terry-Thompson, *The History of the African Orthodox Church*, (New York, The African Orthodox Church, 1956).

<sup>241</sup> The name of the church had been agreed upon at a synod of the Independent Episcopal Church some weeks prior. Karl Pruter, *The Strange Partnership of George Alexander McGuire and Marcus Garvey*, (San Bernadino, CA: Borgo Press, 1986); Randall K. Burkett, *Garveyism as a Religious Movement: The Institutionalization of a Black Civil Religion*, (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1978).

<sup>242</sup> Or was forced to resign. Richard Newman, "The Origins of the African Orthodox Church, *The Negro Churchman: The Official Organ of the African Orthodox Church*. (Millwood, NY: Kraus Reprints Company, 1977).

different relationship between the AOC and the UNIA was deception on the part of the speaker.<sup>243</sup>

Perhaps Garvey was eager to hold on to membership across religious affiliation, and as such felt it imprudent to appear to favour any one church. Perhaps, McGuire and Garvey parted ways over Garvey's refusal to make the AOC the official church of the UNIA, something that McGuire had clearly worked toward. In New York on December 18<sup>th</sup>, 1921, the rift between McGuire and Garvey was discussed extensively in a speech by Garvey, during which he referred to "someone" who "wanted to remain in the Universal Negro Improvement Association, get as much as he could from the association and at the same time use the people he met through the UNIA for his own personal ends financially." He went on to provide details of this someone having been caught taking \$5,000 from the organization, and that for him, this meant this person had lost out on future opportunities to continue stealing from the UNIA and its members. He also suggested that beyond just stealing, the issue revolved around this person's inability to separate his commitments to his own church and religion, and his commitments to the UNIA. He suggested the party in question would not denounce his religion at the request of the UNIA, but when it suited him, would leave this same religion for another. He was clearly referencing McGuire having been named Bishop of the Independent Episcopal Church but having still sought consecration from Archbishop Joseph Rene Villate through the American Catholic Church. He suggested these new vows somehow negated this person's previous vows to the UNIA. It is possible Garvey was referring to someone

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<sup>243</sup> Randall K. Burkett, *Garveyism as a Religious Movement: The Institutionalization of a Black Civil Religion*, (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1978).

else at this point, but highly improbable. Later in the speech he devoted time to speaking about McGuire by name, in a section titled “Dr. McGuire’s Schemes Exposed.” In this part of the speech he suggested that McGuire was leading a crusade against him in the press, as he had published information that had been in private letters and telegraphs between the two of them. According to Garvey, McGuire had also accused him of sending telegrams when he had not:

I did not send telegrams about the doctor [McGuire] to Sydney, N.S. It was after an appeal was made to me from Nova Scotia by the High Commissioner, Hon. G.D. Creese, of the Dominion of Canada, that through skillful designs they had changed the Liberty Hall of Sydney, N.S. into some orthodox church and that orthodox church had taken away the lease of the building of the UNIA, and that there was great confusion and the people wanted to know whether we were first for the orthodox church or for the Universal Negro Improvement Association, and I sent a telegram to Sydney N.S., that we had nothing to do with McGuire’s church, and that those people who desired to go to him could go, but those who stuck by the association would receive the protection of the UNIA. What else could you expect me to do?<sup>244</sup>

This speech raises several questions in terms of the dispute between the two men, all of which are beyond the scope of this discussion. It does highlight a public and slanderous rift at this juncture. However, for the topic at hand what the speech does is tell us that Garvey was directly in touch with the Whitney Pier community and that theirs was a

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<sup>244</sup> Robert A. Hill, ed., *The Marcus Garvey & Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, Volume IV* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983): 292.

known division of the UNIA. It also raises questions about McGuire's process in terms of the establishment of St. Philip's in the Pier – when the church was formed, were the members under the impression that they were joining a UNIA church? Did that shape people's willingness to join or not join? Did McGuire knowingly push this agenda, or did he himself believe this new church was going to become a part of the UNIA?

While the answers to these questions might not be known, what is known is that in June 1921, in response to a request from Black steelworkers in Sydney, Reverend William Earnest Robertson had been sent from New York by Reverend McGuire, to lay the groundwork for the creation of a church in Whitney Pier.<sup>245</sup> Almost all the interviewed members of the community noted that the request for a minister or a church arose because of the racism the people in Whitney Pier were experiencing at the time. Yet, Robertson remained in the Pier for a year, during which he dealt with obstruction from some of the community who were uninterested in the creation of a Black church. This obstruction included direct attacks on Reverend Robertson, and his place of residence, as well as in the temporary location of the new church.<sup>246</sup> Regardless, upon his departure in 1922, the foundation had been laid for the new church, and Reverend Robertson was succeeded by Rev. Arthur Stanley Trotman as leader of the new St. Philips African Orthodox Church.<sup>247</sup> Trotman was truly a part of the community, a Barbadian steelworker who became a religious leader. In the first issue of *The Negro Churchman*,

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<sup>245</sup> Robertson was McGuire's number 2 in this newly formed denomination, and would go on to a long career in the church, succeeding McGuire as Archbishop upon his death in 1934. Randall K. Burkett, *Garveyism as a Religious Movement: The Institutionalization of a Black Civil Religion*, (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1978).

<sup>246</sup> Records of St. Philip's African Orthodox Church.

<sup>247</sup> Rev. George Anthony Francis, "History of the Black Population at Whitney Pier" (Sydney: Beaton Institute).

McGuire stated that the Church had “extended its missions through several states, into Canada, Cuba, and Hayti.” Bishop McGuire also reported that there were already “10 Priests, 4 Deacons, 2 Sub-deacons and several Deaconesses, Catechists and Seminarians in training.”<sup>248</sup> St. Philip’s had become another connection between this community and the broader diaspora.

In its first few years of existence, St. Philip’s held its services in St. Mark’s Presbyterian Church on Henry Street, in a building on Victoria Road, and in a building on the corner of Lingan Road and Tupper Street, a location which appears to have been the home of the then minister, Archpriest Philips.<sup>249</sup> In 1923, Bishop McGuire went on a pilgrimage to the churches in New England and then visited Sydney, Nova Scotia’s St. Philip’s African Orthodox Church. On September 10<sup>th</sup>, 1924, Reverend Arthur Stanley Trotman, was consecrated at the Church of the Good Shephard, by Reverends McGuire and Robertson, both from the AOC. St. Philip’s had its first Bishop. Bishop Trotman remained there only a short while, and was succeeded by Archpriest Dixon Egbert Philips in December 1925. At this point the congregation agreed to purchase land on Hankard Street from William Fitzgerald, then Mayor of Sydney, on which to erect a permanent church.<sup>250</sup> Payments were made to Fitzgerald by Church trustees through the Royal Bank of Canada, and Church records note the continued payments on the lot over the next few years.<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> *Negro Churchman*, I (March, 1923), 1.

<sup>249</sup> Records of St. Philip’s African Orthodox Church.

<sup>250</sup> Fitzgerald, owned a large portion of the Pier. City of Sydney Annual Reports (Sydney, NS: Macadam Printing Company, Limited); Elizabeth Beaton, “Religious Affiliation and Ethnic Identity of West Indians in Whitney Pier,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 20, no. 3, 1988.

<sup>251</sup> Journal, 1926-1930, St. Phillips African Orthodox Church, Sydney.

The building housing St. Philip's once stood "just inside gate number four" of the steel plant, and had served as a storage shed. The building was sold to the St. Philip's congregation after Dr. Alvinus Calder and others approached the officials at the steel plant and negotiated its purchase.<sup>252</sup> As part of the agreement, the community had to arrange for the building to be moved from its location on the grounds of the steel company, to the newly purchased lot. The membership, including then Reverend Philips, "put wooden rollers like poles on the tracks...and they literally hauled that building over the tracks to where it is present day...Reverend Philips, he was up front and he had a big harness on his shoulders and he was pulling."<sup>253</sup> St. Philip's almost immediately became the heart of the community.

Many aspects of the social lives of the Caribbean community in Whitney Pier were centered around St. Philip's. Community members recall annual church picnics (for example, their annual Dominion Day picnic) and pie socials. The Church often went on excursions, sometimes venturing as far as New Campbellton, or Louisbourg on the old lake boats. They would pack big baskets of food, and make a day of it. The West Indian band and UNIA band would often play music on the boats as they travelled.<sup>254</sup> St. Philips mirrored the UNIA in terms of its creation of new social spaces for these immigrants and their families, and many of the events hosted the same names either as officiants, presenters or attendees. This has perhaps fed the continued confusion as to the affiliation of the AOC and UNIA. However, the role of both in raising race-consciousness and work

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<sup>252</sup> Elizabeth Beaton, "Religious Affiliation and Ethnic Identity of West Indians in Whitney Pier," *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 20, no. 3, 1988; Jennifer Reid, "A Toolshed from Gate #4: The Dominion Iron and Steel Company and the Formation of an African American Church," *Historical Papers 1999: Canadian Society of Church History*.

<sup>253</sup> Interview with Whitfield Best.

<sup>254</sup> Journal, 1926-1930, St. Phillips African Orthodox Church, Sydney; Interview with Winston Ruck.

toward the advancement of members of the Black community made them equally attractive in a context of racism and discrimination.

The St. Philip's journal reported several community, City and national events, highlighting the ways in which its membership was aware of the happenings around them. For example, in an entry from June 21, 1926 Archdeacon Philips notes, "A citizens meeting was held in court house at 2:30pm. Mayor J. McConnell for the purpose of investigating and readjusting the financial affairs of this city. A delegation was voted to go to Ottawa."<sup>255</sup> There had been a large strike at Disco in 1923, and the City's annual reports outline the ways in which Sydney struggled financially in the years immediately following. Another St. Philip's journal entry provides the reader with insight into the state of national politics:

The month of June witnessed a dissolution of the Federal Government in Ottawa. The King government lost the confidence of the people and the Rt. Hon. Arthur Meighen, Leader of the Opposition was declared Acting Premier.

Here, Philips makes note of a moment in Canadian political history. Seeking to dissolve parliament and call an election, Prime Minister Mackenzie King had been forced to resign when then Governor General, Lord Byng, refused to allow this action. Lord Byng had then asked Meighen to form a ministry, which he accepted, and was named Acting Premier. He served in this role from June 29, 1926 to September 25, 1926.<sup>256</sup> A post from

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<sup>255</sup> Journal, 1926-1930, St. Phillips African Orthodox Church, Sydney.

<sup>256</sup> Larry A. Glassford, "MEIGHEN, ARTHUR," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 18, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–, accessed August 3, 2017, [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/meighen\\_arthur\\_18E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/meighen_arthur_18E.html).

July 26<sup>th</sup> 1926 indicates just how involved the Caribbean community could be, in the affairs of the City (and the nation):

A political meeting was held this evening at the area rink when the Rt. Hon. Arthur Meighen Premier of Canada addressed over three thousand on the policy of the Conservatives of which he was leader. The West Indian Band under Jr. McKnight, Director was in attendance. <sup>257</sup>

This tells us that members of the Caribbean community were not just witness to the happenings of the day, they were active participants.

In this chapter I have explored the ways in which the Black nationalist discourses of the early twentieth century impacted life in Whitney Pier. I examined the relationship between Marcus Garvey and George Alexander McGuire, and subsequently, the Universal Negro Improvement Association and the African Orthodox Church. Both organizations, could be examined as they are on the surface, as a church and a fraternal organization. However, what makes them worthy of discussion in this context is the part they play in highlighting the connections between this small Caribbean community and the broader movements of the early twentieth century. These connections indicate the ways in which both the UNIA and AOC worked to connect people across continents into singular notions of racial pride and community. Both movements very early in their evolution were sought out by the Whitney Pier community, indicating a strong identification with their racial identity and with the racial politics of the period.

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<sup>257</sup> Journal, 1926-1930, St. Phillips African Orthodox Church, Sydney.



## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Between 1900 and 1930, people of African descent, originating in the British West Indies, made their way to the remote location of Sydney Nova Scotia. The majority were part of a transnational industrial workforce that moved throughout the Americas in response to opportunity. This group was affected by many of the same global pushes and pulls that had brought Italians, Ukrainians, Poles and other Europeans across the continent and into Canada. Using the tools of microhistory, this thesis has chronicled the origins and diasporic connections of the Whitney Pier Caribbean community. In setting out to write this, I had wanted to document how and why Caribbean people had managed to make their way to Sydney, Nova Scotia, in the early years of the twentieth century; and how and why enough of them had remained in the region, enough that they could be referred to as a vibrant Caribbean community well into the 1960s. I recognized that there had been little written about this community, beyond a line or two of mention that men from the Caribbean had been brought to Nova Scotia to work in the coal mines and in the steel plant in the early 1900s.

In narrating the history of this community, I have pieced together fragmented and often-neglected source materials to bring an only somewhat-known aspect of Canadian history to light. In a period where people in Nova Scotia struggled with the extremes of racism to the point of the region being dubbed “Little Mississippi,”<sup>258</sup> people of African descent from the Caribbean were making their way to Sydney for work. Little in the documentary evidence speaks to the stark realities of Jim Crowism they would have experienced on a day-to-day basis, beyond perhaps the language in some of the

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<sup>258</sup> Robin Winks, *Blacks in Canada*.

documentation from Disco, and mentions of segregation and discrimination in the churches. But from their initial interaction with the Immigration Branch to becoming settled in this country, their every experience was bound in the metalanguage of race. Beginning with a revisiting of the dimensions I outlined in Chapter One as indicative of whether a methodology is diasporan in origin, this chapter traces the labour migration of Caribbean peoples to Sydney Nova Scotia in the early decades of the twentieth century, and outlines the process of creation of a cultural community.

They left their home countries for a multitude of reasons, chief among them the realities of high unemployment and extreme poverty in their homelands. Starting at mid-century the British West Indies found itself at an economic disadvantage as they could not compete with sugar production in other contexts, and faced with limited opportunity, people sought better lives elsewhere. Many traveled to places in the Spanish Caribbean to find employment, including to work on large construction projects brought about by a new and burgeoning transportation industry. Many of the new migrants to Nova Scotia made their way to the Maritimes on board ships that had arrived, not from their homeland directly, but via some other location. This begs the question, was this indicative of their having worked in this other place first, or was this just a part of a migration to Sydney? What it does underscore are the ways in which Caribbean people moved throughout the ports in the Americas in the years under investigation. The transient nature of the period and these workers is one of the things that makes studying this migration difficult.

In Chapter Two I examined the dual processes of migration and settlement, with an eye to the ways the Canadian State worked to keep these invading bodies out of the country. I revisited some of the documentary evidence from the Canadian Immigration

Branch during this period and examined how the province of Nova Scotia played a prominent role in the maintenance of gatekeeping based on an arbitrary racial hierarchy. I contend that while the story of race and immigration from the west is that of Asiatics being kept out at all costs; and at the Canada-US border the job was to limit the access of African Americans and any questionable ethnics; the story of the Atlantic border, beyond limiting the smuggling of contraband, was mainly focused on keeping Caribbean people out. To this end, the ports of Nova Scotia remained on high alert for over two decades while their staff attempted to make sense of a practice that would not be written into law. This sense-making involved a construction of who was, and with that determination, who was not, a Canadian citizen. It also highlighted Canada's place in the politics of race in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, as the science of eugenics was gaining a foothold in European circles and in Canada.

Regardless of where the migrants settled, they maintained their connections "back home." For many, their migration had meant leaving loved ones behind while they sought opportunities elsewhere. Very few families arrived in Sydney intact. In the early years of the formation of the Caribbean community and of the larger ethnic community around it, there were few women present, and this only changed in the interwar years. The arrival of the women and children signalled the real start of the community, as its transient nature began to change. The Caribbean migrants worked to maintain their connections to the homeland by performing culture, something that is evident in the maintenance of foodways and music practices from the homeland. The children of the first generation talk about the ways in which as children, they were always playing baseball or cricket which

is also indicative of the ways in which members of the community worked to maintain cultural practices.

Many of the second generation also discuss the trips they had taken “back home,” or talk about the extensive familial connections they have there. The records of St. Philip’s also provide insight into the comings and goings of community members, noting who has recently returned from the islands, or was just about to return.

Whatever their reasons and wherever they might have stopped *en route*, the new Caribbean migrants found their way to Nova Scotia. They entered a nation that was struggling to deal with the changes that came with modernity, in terms of the mass migration of new races of people. The Immigration Branch worked to keep the new migrants out, and in Nova Scotia in particular, Blacks were not welcome. They therefore entered a space in which they were relegated to a second-class status. The informal racial politics that shaped their experiences at the border, were extended in the war years, and Blacks had to demand their right to serve. The new Caribbean migrants joined the war effort in WWI, and on their return, experienced a province that continued to express its racism openly.

Yet, this was their new home. The Dominion Iron and Steel Company anchored many of the new migrants to this community. They arrived and were housed either on the Company grounds, or they sought housing nearby, just outside the gates of the Coke Ovens. Many of the men would be employed by this company until their retirement. Within this context, they managed to build a vibrant community with a rich set of associated institutions. Coming from varied backgrounds, the new community members

attended different churches throughout the Pier, but came together at picnics, sporting events, political gatherings and socializing.

The networks within the African Diaspora in the Americas, have always been extensive. In a context where migration has been a central part of people's experience, everyone had an aunt in Havana, an uncle in New York City and a cousin in Caracas. The labour migrant's world created a context for extensive networking. The advent of improved travel by ship or train created even wider networks. The Black nationalist UNIA served to underscore the diasporic connections from one context to the next as the *Negro World* served to highlight the similarities between communities and peoples. By traveling from their homelands to Sydney to work in the business of steel, the members of the Whitney Pier Caribbean community had joined this network of African diasporic peoples in the Americas.

In Chapter Three I explore the world of work for the new migrants. A large part of this experience was shaped by the ways in which Black (and poor white and ethnic) labour was being used in the process of modernization, as society shifted away from agriculture. By limiting the use of skilled help, Disco could employ an endless stream of labourers for several years, and among them, this new group of Black men. Little has been written about the experiences of Black men in industry in Canada beyond their experiences on the railway, so this study provides some insight into different working experiences of Black men in the early years of the twentieth century. In the world of steelmaking they were relegated to some of the most dangerous and physically strenuous jobs in the plant, in an industry fraught with accidents and fatalities. They experienced the politics of race in terms of the parts of the plant they could work in, and the jobs they had

in whatever area they were able to find work, usually in the blast furnace or the coke ovens. The evidence points to a disproportionate concentration in jobs with precarious hours, low wages, and unpleasant, if not dangerous environments for this sub-class of workers. As W.D. Scott noted in 1918, “Coloured labour is not generally speaking in demand in Canada and it is not only regarded as the lowest grade, but it is the last to be taken on and the first to be discharged in most enterprises.”<sup>259</sup> A better case could not be made for the existence of a split labour market.<sup>260</sup> In a context where the steel workers engaged in numerous acts of labour unrest, seeking better working conditions, these men were not welcomed into organized labour groups until much later, and relied on their brethren on the rails to fight for better working conditions on their behalf. Some of the men in the community also earned money working at trades they had brought with them from the Caribbean, as did some women. The chapter closes with a look at the ways the women of the community participated formally and informally in the world of work.

Chapter Four takes a close look at the early years of the UNIA and the philosophies of Marcus Garvey, as well as the subsequent relationship between Garvey and the founder of the Black nationalist African Orthodox Church, George Alexander McGuire. The racial climate in Sydney appears to have led members of the Caribbean community to reach out to Garvey’s organization in New York, and McGuire, his then Chaplain-General, dispatched his number two, Rev. Robertson, to lay the groundwork for the formation of St. Philip’s African Orthodox Church. The church and the UNIA both

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<sup>259</sup> W.D. Scott to W. Cory, 25<sup>th</sup> April, 1918, Immigration Branch Records, RG76-566-810666-1, Library and Archives Canada.

<sup>260</sup> For more on this see the political economy examination of Caribbean migrants by Agnes Calliste, “Race, Gender and Canadian Immigration Policy: Blacks from the Caribbean, 1900-1932,” *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 28, no. 4, 1993/4.

became central pieces in the Caribbean community. The two organizations provide evidence of the significance of this community in the broader diaspora, despite its small size. The founding and continued presence of St. Philip's in Whitney Pier made this a unique community in Canada, as St. Philip's is the only church of its kind in the country. The two organizations, with their race-conscious ideologies, promoted race pride and self-determination in their community. They brought the community together at picnics, Black nationalist celebrations like Emancipation Day as well as national holidays like Dominion Day, and provided venues for drama, sport, worship and education. In the Sydney context, it was difficult to tease the two organizations apart, as many of the same individuals worked to support both.

In narrating the evolution of this community, one of the questions I found myself asking was, is this really a Caribbean community? The records are difficult to make sense of, because they simply divide the Blacks in Whitney Pier into the African-Americans or the West Indians. Even the Canadian Blacks from Guysborough and elsewhere are indistinguishable in the telling. The knowledge that many Caribbean workers changed their names upon arrival makes the "official" record even less reliable.<sup>261</sup> What we do know to be true is that whatever the number of Caribbean migrants in the early 1900s, they made an indelible imprint on the identity and culture of the area. Perhaps future historians will work to resurrect the Americans in the re-telling of this migration, but for the people who descend from this community and those who know of the region, the Blacks in Whitney Pier came out of a Caribbean migration.

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<sup>261</sup> Interview with N. Gibson, Ralph Trotman, Vernal Tull & Mae Crawford

There are many additional questions that remain unresolved, and hence directions for future study. This project was limited to the small community bounded by Curry's Lane, Hankard Street, Laurier Street, Lingan Road and Tupper Street. Caribbean migrants settled in other places in Cape Breton - mining communities as well as in Sydney. As Blacks sought to escape the vestiges of racism, many among the social and intellectual leadership set out to establish themselves as racial exemplars, embracing the ideals of Victorian respectability, with many Caribbean migrants, becoming active in community and church leadership. An exploration of the ways in which Caribbean ideas of uplift and resistance shaped the African Nova Scotian community would provide an opportunity to take a closer look at the other UNIA communities on Cape Breton island. There is also room for a broader examination and discussion of the role and experiences of the ethnic and racialized worker within the broader field of labour and working class history, a topic which seems for the most part to have been ignored.



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