

# "To ship her to the West Indies, and there dispose of her as a Slave": Connections of Enslaved People to the Loyalist Maritimes and the West Indies

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Article abstract

Historical evidence of enslaved people and Black Loyalists testifies to how slavery linked the Maritime and Caribbean colonies. These sources sometimes offer evidence about the emotions, attitudes, and actions of Black people who faced and confronted extreme violence. Free and enslaved Black people grappled with their own unfreedom as well as the oppression of their West Indian counterparts. The variations among their lives underscore the swath of outcomes and struggles that Black people endured within the transatlantic networks of slavery, but they also testify to the opportunities they seized for autonomy and the hopes and values they carried with them.

# **“To ship her to the West Indies, and there dispose of her as a Slave”: Connections of Enslaved People to the Loyalist Maritimes and the West Indies**

SARAH ELIZABETH CHUTE

Des témoignages historiques d'esclaves et de Loyalistes noirs attestent de la façon dont les colonies des Maritimes et des Antilles furent liées par l'esclavage. Ces sources fournissent parfois des preuves des émotions, des attitudes et des actions de personnes noires qui furent confrontées à une violence extrême. Les Noirs affranchis et les esclaves noirs étaient aux prises avec leur propre non-liberté et faisaient face à la même oppression que leurs pairs antillais. Les variations qu'on observe dans leurs vies soulignent toute la gamme des conséquences subies et des luttes menées par les Noirs dans les réseaux esclavagistes transatlantiques, mais témoignent également des occasions qu'ils saisirent pour devenir autonomes et des espoirs et des valeurs qu'ils portaient.

Historical evidence of enslaved people and Black Loyalists testifies to how slavery linked the Maritime and Caribbean colonies. These sources sometimes offer evidence about the emotions, attitudes, and actions of Black people who faced and confronted extreme violence. Free and enslaved Black people grappled with their own unfreedom as well as the oppression of their West Indian counterparts. The variations among their lives underscore the swath of outcomes and struggles that Black people endured within the transatlantic networks of slavery, but they also testify to the opportunities they seized for autonomy and the hopes and values they carried with them.

IN 1791, MERTILLA DIXON, A FREE BLACK WOMAN, had been working as a domestic servant for New York Loyalist Thomas Barclay's family in Nova Scotia after relocating there with them from Charleston, South Carolina.<sup>1</sup> After

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1 Although she was nominally free, Dixon's relocation should not necessarily be mistaken for a voluntary migration. Racism in the United States and in Nova Scotia meant that Black people faced exploitation and limitations on their exercise of free will; see Harvey Amani Whitfield, *North to Bondage: Loyalist Slavery in the Maritimes* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2016), 14. For more on Black Loyalists and their communities, see Ruth Holmes Whitehead, *Black Loyalists: Southern Settlers of Nova Scotia's First Free Black Communities* (Halifax: Nimbus, 2013); Carole Watterson Troxler, "Re-enslavement of Black Loyalists: Mary Postell in South Carolina, East Florida, and

Sarah Elizabeth Chute, "To ship her to the West Indies, and there dispose of her as a Slave": Connections of Enslaved People to the Loyalist Maritimes and the West Indies," *Acadiensis* 51, no. 2 (Autumn/automne 2022): 34-59.

enduring repeated threats from Barclay's wife "to ship her to the West Indies and there dispose of her as a Slave" and "being fully persuaded that she was to be put on board a vessel, then ready for Sea," Dixon fled the Barclay's household to her father's home in Birchtown. Susan Barclay was notoriously vicious to enslaved people and servants alike. Even the "refuge" of family among the largest free Black community in the Maritimes offered only minimal protection as suggested by a complaint Dixon submitted to Shelburne County's Court of General Quarter Sessions of the Peace. She anxiously petitioned for "Your Honor's Protection, until Major Barclay, can prove his claim."<sup>2</sup> Threats to send Black servants to the West Indies as slaves conjured great anxiety and fear among people whose legal status as "free" remained precarious. Mertilla Dixon took Barclay's threat seriously and implored the court to intercede precisely because there were sufficient connections between the Maritimes and the West Indies to substantiate her fears.

Though unique, the life of Mertilla Dixon is not exceptional. Her story is an entry point for thinking about a vast and powerful institution that connected the Maritimes and the British West Indies: slavery. The bonds between 18th-century British North America and the tropical Atlantic were rooted in overlapping cycles of enslavement, migration, and trade. Following the American Revolution, at least 30,000 white and Black Loyalists and roughly 1,500 enslaved people from the new United States migrated to the Maritimes – the British North American colonies of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island.<sup>3</sup> Those enslaved people forcibly relocated to the

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Nova Scotia," *Acadiensis* 37, no. 2 (Summer/Autumn 2008): 70–85; James W. St. G. Walker, *The Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone, 1783–1870* (1976; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992); Ellen Gibson Wilson, *The Loyal Blacks* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1976); and Ikuko Asaka, *Tropical Freedom: Climate, Settler Colonialism, and Black Exclusion in the Age of Emancipation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017). Two articles that should be read in conjunction with one another are Barry Cahill, "The Black Loyalist Myth in Atlantic Canada," *Acadiensis* 29, no. 1 (Autumn 1999): 76–87 and James W. St. G. Walker, "Myth, History, and Revisionism: The Black Loyalists Revisited," *Acadiensis* 29, no. 1 (Autumn 1999): 88–105.

- 2 Complaint of Mertilla Dixon, Court of General Quarter Sessions of the Peace (Shelburne County), RG 34–321, M 97, Nova Scotia Archives (NSA), Halifax. Susan Barclay's cruelty towards enslaved people is well-documented; see Carolyn Smardz Frost and David W. States, "King's College, Nova Scotia: Direct Connections with Slavery," *King's & Slavery: University of King's College*, 46–7, <http://ukings.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/KINGS-Slavery-Report-October-12-2021-FINAL.pdf> as well as Whitfield, *North to Bondage*, 79.
- 3 On the Loyalist migration to the Maritimes see Jerry Bannister and Liam Riordan, "Loyalism and the British Atlantic, 1660–1840," in *The Loyal Atlantic: Remaking the British Atlantic in the Revolutionary Era*, ed. Jerry Bannister and Liam Riordan (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 3–36; Ann Gorman Condon, "1783–1800: Loyalist Arrival, Acadian Return, Imperial Reform," in *The Atlantic Region to Confederation: A History*, ed.

Maritimes included people who had lived in North America as well as the Caribbean. Other Loyalists migrated to the Caribbean with their slaves. In the Maritimes, the threat of sale to the West Indies was a powerful notion that could discourage or provoke action among unfree Black people. Discourse and dispersion of enslaved and free people thus linked the West Indies and the Maritimes through biographical connections that were pivotal to the course of individual lives as well as to the histories of communities in the region.

Charmaine Nelson, Frank Mackey, and Maureen Elgersman have done an admirable job documenting the connections between temperate and tropical sites of enslavement.<sup>4</sup> Their works show that colonial Canada, especially Quebec, was not only embroiled with Caribbean enslavement through trade and migration, but was home to regimes of slavery and other forms of unfree labour that were equally exploitative. Following the lead of these scholars, this article elucidates the connections between another part of Canada – the Maritimes – and the Caribbean.

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Phillip A. Buckner and John G. Reid (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 185–209; Graeme Wynn, “1800–1810: Turning the Century,” in Buckner and Reid, *Atlantic Region to Confederation*, 210–33; Esther Clark Wright, *The Loyalists of New Brunswick* (Fredericton: E.C. Wright, 1955); Marion Robertson, *King’s Bounty: A History of Early Shelburne Nova Scotia* (Shelburne, NS: Nova Scotia Museum, 1978); Bonnie Huskins, “Shelburnian Manners’: Gentility and Loyalists of Shelburne, Nova Scotia,” *Early American Studies* 13, no. 1 (Winter 2015): 151–88; and Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty’s Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World* (New York: Knopf, 2011).

- 4 Charmaine A. Nelson’s research on the ties between enslavement in Canada and the Caribbean includes fugitive slave advertisements, shipping notices, and other primary evidence from the Maritimes; see Charmaine A. Nelson, *Slavery, Geography, and Empire in Nineteenth-Century Marine Landscapes of Montreal and Jamaica* (London: Routledge, 2016); Nelson, “A Tone of Voice Peculiar to New England,” *Current Anthropology* 61, supp. 22 (October 2020): S303–S316; Nelson, “The Canadian Fugitive Slave Archive and the Concept of Refuge,” *English Studies in Canada* 45, no. 3 (September 2019): 91–115; Nelson, “Servant, Seraglio, Savage or ‘Sarah’: Examining the Visual Representation of Black Female Subjects in Canadian Art and Visual Culture,” in *Women in the Promised Land: Essays in African Canadian History*, ed. Wanda Thomas Bernard, Boulou Ebanda de B’béri, and Nina Reid-Maroney (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 43–74; Nelson, “‘Ran away from her Master . . . a Negroe Girl named Thursday’: Examining Evidence of Punishment, Isolation, and Trauma in Nova Scotia and Quebec Fugitive Slave Advertisements,” in *Legal Violence and the Limits of the Law*, ed. Joshua Nichols and Amy Swiffen (New York: Routledge 2017), 68–9; Frank Mackey, *Done with Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal, 1760–1840* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill–Queen’s University Press, 2010); and Maureen G. Elgersman, *Unyielding Spirits: Black Women and Slavery in Early Canada and Jamaica* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999). For other works on slavery in Canada, see Brett Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance: Indigenous and Atlantic Slavery in New France* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 2012); Afua Cooper, *The Hanging of Angélique: The Untold Story of Canadian Slavery and the Burning of Montréal* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007); and Marcel Trudel, *L’esclavage au Canada français: histoire et conditions de l’esclavage* (Quebec: Presses universitaires Laval, 1960).

Julian Gwyn, Neil MacKinnon, and David Sutherland have illuminated the significance of the Caribbean upon economic development in the Maritimes both as an export destination as well as the source of slave-produced imports such as rum; but this literature does not sufficiently emphasize or explore enslavement.<sup>5</sup> Every spoonful of sugar, drop of molasses, and sip of rum that colonists consumed linked the Maritimes inextricably to West Indian enslaved labour, just as Maritime-shingled houses sheltered slaveholders and as Atlantic fish supplemented the diets of enslaved people in the Caribbean.<sup>6</sup>

Black people in the Maritimes were confronted with these Caribbean connections on a daily basis. Some lived near busy ports, where brigs bound for the West Indies sailed out with their holds packed with pine and cod, some passed by townspeople haggling over the prices of puncheons of rum, and others laboured in the dwellings of their owners who kept pantries stocked with sugar and spirits.<sup>7</sup> Historians of Maritime slavery, such as Harvey Amani Whitfield, Ken Donovan, Carole Waterson Troxler, and Karolyn Smardz Frost have documented the social history of enslaved people's lives and often position the Maritimes in a broader Atlantic world context.<sup>8</sup> Recent inquiries of the

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- 5 Julian Gwyn, *Excessive Expectations: Maritime Commerce & the Economic Development of Nova Scotia, 1740-1870* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 1998); Neil MacKinnon, *This Unfriendly Soil: The Loyalist Experience in Nova Scotia 1783-1791* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1986); David Sutherland, "Halifax Merchants and the Pursuit of Development, 1783-1850," *Canadian Historical Review* 59, no. 1 (March 1978): 1-17; David Alexander Sutherland, "The Merchants of Halifax, 1815-1850: A Commercial Class in Pursuit of Status" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1975).
  - 6 Maritime vessels arrived in the sugar colonies with "pickled Herrings, Mackarel, Cod, and scale Fish," lumber, and other wood products that merchants referenced in petitions for exemptions from paying duties on Caribbean imports. Despite the prominence in the trade of poor quality "West India" grade fish, protein was incredibly deficient in the diets of enslaved people in the Caribbean, who survived primarily on grains and vegetables and used their limited fish rations to flavour their meals; see An Act for Regulating the Exportation of Fish and Lumber and for Ascertaining the Quality of the Same, 11 January 1786, Legislative Assembly: Sessional Records, RS24), S1-B4, Provincial Archives of New Brunswick (PANB), Fredericton; Petition of Forsyth, Smith and Co. of Halifax for an Exemption from Duty on Produce Imported from the West Indies, 4 March 1802, Nova Scotia House of Assembly, RG 5, ser. A, vol. 9, no. 29, NSA; James E. Candow, "A Reassessment of the Provisions of Food to Enslaved Persons, with Special Reference to Salted Cod in Barbados," *Journal of Caribbean History* 43, no. 2 (2009): 265-81 (esp. 276); and Nelson, *Slavery, Geography, and Empire*, 265n126.
  - 7 Advertisement, *Royal American Gazette*, 24 January 1785; Advertisement, *Port-Roseway Gazetteer and Shelburne Advertiser*, 12 May 1785; Advertisement, *Saint John Gazette*, 15 June 1787; Advertisement, *Saint John Gazette*, 12 February 1796.
  - 8 Whitfield, *North to Bondage*; Harvey Amani Whitfield, *Biographical Dictionary of Enslaved Black People in the Maritimes* (Toronto and Fredericton: University of Toronto Press and Acadiensis Press, 2022); Whitfield, "White Archives, Black Fragments: Problems and Possibilities in Telling the Lives of Enslaved Black People in the Maritimes," *Canadian Historical Review* 101, no. 3 (September 2020): 323-45; Whitfield, ed., *Black Slavery in the*

connections between slavery and Maritime institutions of higher education, such as University of King's College and Dalhousie University, have unveiled deep links with the West Indies.<sup>9</sup> Shirley Tillotson, for example, traces how King's College students, families, donors, and investors had economic stakes in West Indian slavery.<sup>10</sup> The vast majority of works about Maritime enslavement, though, have not prioritized an in-depth exploration of Caribbean connections, particularly at the individual level.

There are several reasons for this historiographic lacuna. First, scholars have had to define Maritime slavery in order to confront Canada's "historical

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*Maritimes: A History in Documents* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2018); Whitfield, "The Struggle over Slavery in the Maritime Colonies," *Acadiensis* 41, no. 2 (Summer/Autumn 2012): 17-44; Whitfield, "Slavery in English Nova Scotia, 1750-1810," *Journal of the Royal Nova Scotia Historical Society* 13 (2010): 23-40; Whitfield and Barry Cahill, "Slave Life and Slave Law in Colonial Prince Edward Island, 1769-1825," *Acadiensis* 38, no. 2 (Summer/Autumn 2009): 29-51; Whitfield, "Black Loyalists and Black Slaves in Maritime Canada," *History Compass* 5, no. 6 (November 2007): 1980-97; Ken Donovan, "Slavery and Freedom in Atlantic Canada's African Diaspora: Introduction," *Acadiensis* 43, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2014): 109-115; Donovan, "Female Slaves as Sexual Victims in Île Royale," *Acadiensis* 43, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2014): 147-56; Donovan, "Slaves in Île Royale, 1713-1758," *French Colonial History* 5 (2004): 25-42; Donovan, "Slaves and Their Owners in Île Royale, 1713-1760," *Acadiensis* 25, no. 1 (Autumn 1995): 3-32; Catherine M.A. Cottreau-Robins, "Exploring the Landscape of Slavery in Loyalist Era Nova Scotia," in *The Consequences of Loyalism: Essays in Honour of Robert Calhoun*, ed. Rebecca Brannon and Joseph S. Moore (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2019), 122-32; Cottreau-Robins, "Searching for the Enslaved in Nova Scotia's Loyalist Landscape," *Acadiensis* 43, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2014): 125-36; Afua Cooper, "'Deluded and Ruined': Diana Bastian – Enslaved African Canadian Teenager and White Male Privilege," *Brock Education Journal* 27, no. 1 (December 2017): 26-34; Barry Cahill, "Habeas Corpus and Slavery in Nova Scotia: *R v. Hecht, ex parte Rachel, 1798*," *University of New Brunswick Law Journal* 44 (1995): 179-209; Cahill, "Slavery and the Judges of Loyalist Nova Scotia," *University of New Brunswick Law Journal* 43 (1994): 73-135; D.G. Bell, "Slavery and the Judges of Loyalist New Brunswick," *University of New Brunswick Law Journal* 31 (1982): 9-42; W.A. Spray, *The Blacks in New Brunswick* (1972; repr., Fredericton: Brunswick Press, 2021); Jim Hornby, *Black Islanders: Prince Edward Island's Black Community* (Charlottetown: Institute of Island Studies 1991); H.T. Holman, "Slaves and Servants on Prince Edward Island: The Case of Jupiter Wise," *Acadiensis* 12, no. 1 (Autumn 1982): 100-4; Robin W. Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History*, 2nd ed. (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997). Early histories of slavery in the Maritimes include T.W. Smith, "The Slave in Canada," *Collections of the Nova Scotia Historical Society* 10 (1899): 1-161; I. Allen Jack, "The Loyalists and Slavery in New Brunswick," *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Canada* 4 (1898): 137-85; and William Renwick Riddell, *The Slave in Canada* (Washington, DC: Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1920).

9 Smardz Frost and States, "King's College, Nova Scotia: Direct Connections with Slavery," in Afua Cooper et al., *Report on Lord Dalhousie's History on Slavery and Race* (Halifax: Dalhousie University, 2019).

10 Shirley Tillotson, "How (and how much) King's College Benefitted from Slavery in the West Indies, 1789-1854," in *King's & Slavery: University of King's College*, [http://ukings.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/02001TillotsonKingsSlaveryIndirectConnections\\_Secure.pdf](http://ukings.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/02001TillotsonKingsSlaveryIndirectConnections_Secure.pdf).

amnesia” about its history of enslavement.<sup>11</sup> In order to do this, most transnational histories of slavery in the Maritimes focus on the most prominent source of Loyalist slavery: the American colonies. As such, historians have not turned as often to the tropics in their research of Maritime slavery. Second, references to slavery in the Maritimes can sometimes be hard to find. They appear in “scattered” newspaper advertisements, bills of sale, court records, and church documents that have pertinence to local processes; their Caribbean connections, if mentioned at all, are often slight and easily overlooked.<sup>12</sup>

This article aims to build on the scholarship of Canada’s history of enslavement by highlighting how these fragments can be studied in order to help better understand the Maritime’s biographical connections to the West Indies. The use of the term “biographical connection” signifies how historical patterns and processes that linked the Maritimes and West Indies – such as slavery, migration, and trade – moulded Black people’s lived experiences in those places as they moved between those regions, and even when they stayed in one place. As Whitfield writes: “Despite their brevity, biographical sketches of enslaved black people are significant because they speak to several different strands of Maritime slavery. These fragments shine historical light on . . . slave migration to the Maritimes from various points in the African diaspora, slave labour, slave community, slave/slaveholder encounters, and slave resistance.”<sup>13</sup> While economic historians and historians of Maritime slavery have addressed the economic importance of the Maritimes-West Indies trade, a biographical approach offers an additional lens through which to evaluate and emphasize the human impact of this imperial and commercial relationship between the regions.

What Black people thought about these connections remains difficult for historians to fully recover. The archive in the Maritimes, like so many throughout the transatlantic world, silences voices from enslaved and formerly enslaved people because sources were “produced in a system of violence against racialized and gendered subjects.”<sup>14</sup> Similar to what happened in New England, archival silencing reflects and is a byproduct of the historical suppression

11 Whitfield and Cahill, “Slave Life and Slave Law,” 31.

12 Whitfield, *North to Bondage*, 5–6; Whitfield, “White Archives, Black Fragments,” 328.

13 Whitfield, “White Archives, Black Fragments,” 327.

14 Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence and the Archive* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 123.



of enslaved people.<sup>15</sup> The biographical experiences of free, enslaved, and re-enslaved Black people, however, are “full of resistive promise.”<sup>16</sup> The assembly of biographical sketches inverts the purposes of historical documents originally meant to uphold subjugation and exploitation and instead allows us to use them to center the experiences of enslaved people – stories that historians have neglected for too long.

A biographical approach is valuable because it privileges the chronology of enslaved people’s life stories as opposed to those of their white oppressors, who remain more visible in the archive. The dominant narrative of Black migration to the Maritimes is centered around the Loyalist exodus from the United States, particularly because the origins of Loyalist enslavers are easier to trace than those whom they compelled to relocate with them. Investigation of biographical fragments relating to the West Indies, however, allow us to commence stories of Black people’s migration to the Maritimes largely in terms of their Caribbean and African origins, which in many cases predated their Loyalist and American backgrounds.<sup>17</sup>

These sparse sources do more than simply testify to the historical presence of enslavement, sale, and relocation between these temperate and tropical regions. They also sometimes offer evidence about the emotions, attitudes, and actions of Black people who faced and confronted extreme violence. Sketches of their lives in the Maritimes demonstrate how free and enslaved Black people grappled with their own unfreedom as well as the oppression of their West Indian counterparts.<sup>18</sup> But how exactly did enslaved and free people of African descent experience the overlapping geographies of the Maritimes and the West Indies? What did the West Indies mean to Black people in the Maritimes as both a place and an idea? What did the Maritimes mean to enslaved and free

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15 Gloria McCahon Whiting, “Race, Slavery, and the Problem of Numbers in Early New England: A View from Probate Court,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 77, no. 3 (July 2020): 405–40 (esp. 406).

16 Nelson, “Ran away from her Master . . . a Negroe Girl named Thursday,” 69.

17 On these origins, see Alexander X. Byrd, *Captives and Voyagers: Black Migrants Across the Eighteenth-Century British Atlantic World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008) as well as Michael Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

18 Through exploitation, indentured servitude, and slavery, many Black people in the Maritimes were unfree. As Jared Hardesty describes of 18th-century Boston, “rather than the traditional dichotomous conception of slavery and freedom, colonial-era slavery should be understood as part of a continuum of unfreedom”; see Jared Ross Hardesty, *Unfreedom: Slavery and Dependence in Eighteenth-Century Boston* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 2.



people of African descent in the Caribbean? The variations among enslaved people's lives underscore the swath of outcomes and struggles that Black people endured within the transatlantic networks of slavery, but they also testify to the opportunities they created for self-determination or autonomy and the hopes and values they carried with them.

This article often refers to its tropical area of focus as the "British West Indies" (or simply "West Indies"), signifying the British-occupied colonies on the islands in the Caribbean Sea. At times, the scope of this article extends to the "Greater Caribbean," incorporating places not technically in the Caribbean Sea but traditionally considered part of the West Indian subregion, such as the Bahamas.<sup>19</sup> One example from 1784 even extends to Suriname, which was a Dutch colony at the time.<sup>20</sup> Generally, the variations between, for example, Dutch Suriname and British Grenada were not nearly as stark as the difference between either of those places and Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, or Prince Edward Island. For that reason, incorporating illustrative examples from the Greater Caribbean broadens our understanding of the lived experiences of enslaved people in both the northern and tropical regions of the Atlantic. To understand the diverse experiences of Black individuals in the Maritimes and West Indies, we must first examine the stories of bonded people trafficked between the two regions and then those of Black Loyalists who were free and remained free in the Maritimes, and also those who were illegally re-enslaved in the Maritime colonies, before investigating their thoughts, attitudes, and emotions about these regional connections.

### **Movement in bondage: From the Maritimes to the West Indies**

Maritime harbours imperiled enslaved people with the threat of sales and purchases to and from the Caribbean.<sup>21</sup> These devastating voyages should be recognized as a "Second Middle Passage."<sup>22</sup> Possibly the largest single shipment southward of enslaved people from the Maritimes occurred in February 1784 when John Wentworth sent 19 slaves from Halifax to his

19 On the Greater Caribbean as a geographic scope of study, see Ernesto Bassi, "Introduction," in *An Aqueous Territory: Sailor Geographies and New Granada's Transimperial Greater Caribbean World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

20 John Wentworth to Paul Wentworth or his attorney, 24 February 1784, Sir John Wentworth Letter Book, 1783-1808, RG 1, vol. 49, p. 25, NSA.

21 Smith, "Slave in Canada," 119.

22 Nelson, *Slavery, Geography, and Empire*, 83-5.

relative Paul Wentworth in Suriname.<sup>23</sup> Examining textual and cartographic sources with special attention to the unique backgrounds and experiences of the enslaved highlights the impact of slavery and migration upon personal lives, the similarities and differences in forms of labour, and opportunities for resistance.<sup>24</sup>

The diverse origins and abilities of these people matter. They bore past histories of migration, knowledge from other locations, and specific memories. John Wentworth, who later became lieutenant governor of Nova Scotia in 1792, gave the group a favorable description. These “perfectly stout, healthy, sober, orderly, Industrious, & obedient” people were “American born” or had been “well seasoned,” probably in the Caribbean after the Middle Passage. Wentworth praised Isaac’s leadership qualities, noting he was “capable of . . . conducting the rest.” Venus apparently tended to the chickens, gardens, and cared for others in “ye hospital.” She possibly aided Quako, whose “Accident in his arm,” Wentworth warned his relative, “will require some Indulgence.”<sup>25</sup> With differing abilities, experiences, and familiarity with slavery elsewhere, the voyage held unique meanings for each of them.

One of the group’s final memories in the Maritimes was undergoing a ritual together. Thirteen days before the sailing, Wentworth arranged for the baptism of the nine men, six women, and four children destined for Suriname as well as Matthew and Savannah (who he “reserved at home”).<sup>26</sup> They did not necessarily

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23 John Wentworth to Paul Wentworth or his attorney, 24 February 1784, Sir John Wentworth Letter Book, 1783–1808, RG 1, vol. 49, p. 25, NSA; Karwan Fatah-Black, *White Lies and Black Markets: Evading Authority in Colonial Suriname, 1650–1800* (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2015), 164. Paul Wentworth’s precise relation to John is obscure (they were possibly cousins), but it is certain the two had a close friendship; see “Paul Wentworth (Counsellor)” in John Wentworth, *The Wentworth Genealogy: Comprising the Origin of the Name, the Family in England, and a Particular Account of Elder William Wentworth, the Emigrant, and of his Descendants* (Boston: Press of A. Mudge & Son, 1870), 338–44. For John Wentworth, see Brian Cuthbertson, *The Loyalist Governor: Biography of Sir John Wentworth* (Halifax: Nimbus Publishing, 1983).

24 Under British control from 1651–1667, Suriname was a Dutch colony at the time of Wentworth’s letter. Although this article concentrates on the British West Indies, I have decided to include this example partly because of Paul Wentworth’s Anglo heritage; see “Paul Wentworth of Suriname,” Legacies of British Slave-ownership database, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2146652129>. Additionally, although Suriname is not technically part of the Caribbean, scholars sometimes include it in Caribbean studies and I consider it to be part of a “Greater Caribbean.” For the English presence in Dutch Suriname, see Alison Games, “Cohabitation, Suriname-Style: English Inhabitants in Dutch Suriname after 1667,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 72, no. 2 (April 2015): 195–242.

25 John Wentworth to Paul Wentworth or his attorney, 24 February 1784, Sir John Wentworth Letter Book, 1783–1808, RG 1, vol. 49, p. 25, NSA.

26 John Wentworth to Paul Wentworth or his attorney, 24 February 1784, Sir John Wentworth Letter Book, 1783–1808, RG 1, vol. 49, p. 25, NSA; Wentworth, *Wentworth Genealogy*, 344.

know each other well. Indebted to Paul, John had recently purchased these people to use as human capital to settle his transatlantic financial affairs and exploited them while they remained in his possession.<sup>27</sup> Maritime culture and aesthetic ideals reinforced racist notions of Black subservience and white superiority, even as its economy often destabilized Black presence and community continuity.<sup>28</sup>

Paired with Wentworth's letter, a map allows us to more robustly consider the group's experiences in Suriname. According to a 1758 map by Alexandre de Lavaux, the surveyor for the Society of Suriname, Paul Wentworth owned two plantations.<sup>29</sup> As seen in Figure 1, Paul Wentworth's smaller plantation, Nieuwe Hoop, was located off the north bank of the Cottica River and likely cultivated sugar.<sup>30</sup> The larger estate, called Sorghooven, was quite far up the Commewijne River, nearly 50 kilometres south-southeast of Nieuwe Hoop as the crow flies.<sup>31</sup> If the members of the group were separated between the distant plantations, reunions would have been difficult if not impossible.

Despite the regularity of upheaval, slavery simultaneously restricted mobility in a predatory manner. In John Wentworth's eyes, one of the virtues of the women was that they "promise well to increase their numbers."<sup>32</sup> Beginning in the 1780s, British West Indian planters increasingly encouraged reproduction among the enslaved as they feared the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade.<sup>33</sup> They sexually exploited enslaved people through forced coupling,

27 John Wentworth to Paul Wentworth or his attorney, 24 February 1784, Sir John Wentworth Letter Book, 1783-1808, RG 1, vol. 49, p. 25, NSA; Judith Fingard, "WENTWORTH, Sir JOHN," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 5, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003-[http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/wentworth\\_john\\_1737\\_1820\\_5E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/wentworth_john_1737_1820_5E.html).

28 Eight years later, Wentworth continued to exploit Black domestics, including at his inaugural ball; see diary entry, 14 May 1792, Murray Family Manuscript Diary, MG 1, vol. 728, typescript transcription, NSA.

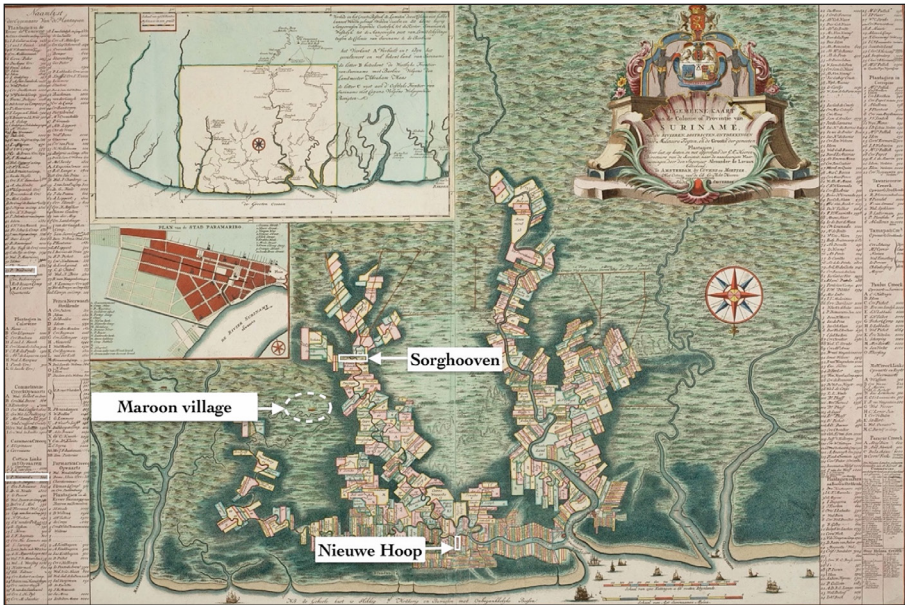
29 Alexandre de Lavaux, *Algemeene kaart van de Colonie of Provintie van Suriname* . . . [etc.], 60 × 89 cm, Amsterdam, Covens en Mortier [after 1758], HB-KZL 105.20.03, Allard Pierson Handbibliotheek, University of Amsterdam, <https://hdl.handle.net/11245/3.38619>. The textual and graphic annotations on the map are by the author.

30 Kleinhoop was a sugar plantation in the 1820s; see "Plantages / Kleinhoop," Suriname Plantages, <https://www.surinameplantages.com/archief/k/kleinhoop>.

31 "Plantages / Sorghooven," Suriname Plantages, <https://www.surinameplantages.com/archief/s/sorghooven>.

32 John Wentworth to Paul Wentworth or his attorney, 24 February 1784, Sir John Wentworth Letter Book, 1783-1808, RG 1, vol. 49, p. 25, NSA.

33 Trevor Burnard, "Toiling in the Fields: Valuing Female Slaves in Jamaica, 1674-1788," in *Sexuality and Slavery: Reclaiming Intimate Histories in the Americas*, ed. Daina Ramey Berry and Leslie M. Harris (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2018), 33-48 (esp.



**Figure 1 – *Algemeene kaart van de Colonie of Provincie van Suriname* by Lavaux, after 1758, with Nieuwe Hoop, Sorghooven, and the Maroon village indicated. In the left column, “P. Windword” and “P. Wentword” are boxed where they appear.**

Source: A. de Lavaux, *Algemeene kaart van de Colonie of Provincie van Suriname* . . . [etc.], 60 × 89 cm, Amsterdam, Covens en Mortier [after 1758], Allard Pierson Museum, University of Amsterdam, HB-KZL 105.20.03, <https://hdl.handle.net/11245/3.38619>. The textual and graphic annotations on the map are by the author.

“slave breeding,” and rape.<sup>34</sup> A proximate enslaver – male or female – was a menace.<sup>35</sup> As slaveholders, the Wentworth relatives probably took advantage of their sexual access to these enslaved women; in 1804, John had a son named George Colley Wentworth with Sarah Colley, a Jamaican Maroon and one of his domestic servants.<sup>36</sup> As Nelson puts it, slavery in the Caribbean and Canada required “constant physical, sexual, and biological coerced intimacy between

44); Sasha Turner, *Contested Bodies: Pregnancy, Childrearing, and Slavery in Jamaica* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017).

34 Thomas A. Foster, “The Sexual Abuse of Black Men under American Slavery,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 20, no. 3 (September 2011): 445–64 (esp. 454–8); Brenda Stevenson, “What’s Love Got To Do With It? Concubinage and Enslaved Women and Girls in the Antebellum South,” *Journal of African American History* 98, no. 1 (Winter 2013): 99–125 (esp. 105).

35 Trevor Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and his Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Donovan, “Female Slaves as Sexual Victims in Île Royale,” 149; Whitfield, *North to Bondage*, 76–8; Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers, *They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

36 Anya Zilberstein, *A Temperate Empire: Making Climate Change in Early America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 140.

whites and blacks wherein black bodies became the necessity of white power, society, sexuality, economy, and family.”<sup>37</sup>

The enslaved men had occupational skills that Paul Wentworth probably considered desirable for Suriname’s riverine and jungle environment. They had been “expert” boatmen in Halifax, a crucial asset for traveling or transporting market goods to the colonial capitol Paramaribo. Lymas, John, and Isaac were equipped to clear land, chop wood, and construct buildings. At least Quako had likely been a field labourer on a tropical plantation before.<sup>38</sup> Despite the application of their previous experiences, tropical plantation life was different from northern slavery. Experiences in or transitions from one site of enslavement to another would have been immensely difficult on emotional, physical, and spiritual levels.

Like their adult counterparts, enslaved children faced grim prospects. In Suriname, youths as young as five were in the fields, cooking sugar, or learning a craft.<sup>39</sup> Children’s labour outside of the fields resembled tasks performed in the Maritimes. William could have tended livestock or served his owner as a page. Celia, Venus, and Eleanora possibly learned domestic skills such as cooking, sewing, and washing, and may have been vulnerable to sexual abuse. Furthermore, separation from parents, even if temporary, would have been common on the plantation, where only some women looked after children while their mothers laboured during the day.<sup>40</sup>

Whether grown or growing, enslaved people of all ages actively sought autonomy. The 1758 map by Lavaux (see Figure 1) reveals the potential for a specific form of resistance. A Maroon village, a community of self-liberated formerly enslaved people, appears in the densely forested region at the southern head of the Cottica River.<sup>41</sup> If anyone successfully escaped Paul Wentworth’s plantation, they may have joined this settlement. For reasons relating to geography, labour, and economy, such communities did not exist in the Maritimes as enslaved people were often isolated and under their enslavers’

37 Nelson, *Slavery, Geography, and Empire*, 116; Charmaine A. Nelson, “Our Unspoken Discomfort with Interracial Relationships,” *Walrus*, 1 October 2020, <https://thewalrus.ca/our-unspoken-discomfort-with-interracial-relationships/>.

38 John Wentworth to Paul Wentworth or his attorney, 24 February 1784, Sir John Wentworth Letter Book, 1783-1808, RG 1, vol. 49, p. 25, NSA.

39 Ramona Negrón, “The Enslaved Children of the Dutch World: Trade, Plantations, and Households in the Eighteenth Century” (MA thesis, Leiden University, 2020), 54-6.

40 Negrón, “Enslaved Children of the Dutch World,” 55-8, 44.

41 Lavaux, *Algemeene kaart van de Colonie of Provincie van Suriname*, OTM: HB-KZL 105.20.03, Allard Pierson Handbibliotheek, University of Amsterdam.

close watch.<sup>42</sup> The social structure of plantations, however, created more physical distance between enslaved people and enslavers. Though experiences of these 19 people in Suriname are unrecorded, the dense jungle geography may have facilitated marronage or other forms of resistance in ways that differed from what was possible in the Maritimes.<sup>43</sup>

Far from bucolic, enslavement in the Maritimes caused “accident[s]” and required vast amounts physical effort to clear land and tend to livestock, often in miserable weather, brutal temperatures, and with insufficient clothing.<sup>44</sup> In Suriname enslaved people were more likely to face the misery of cultivating plantation crops such as sugar cane, while in the Maritimes everyday domestic duties and agrarian responsibilities often restricted enslaved people’s movements and forced them to attend to their enslavers’ every beck and call. Enslaved people experienced Maritime enslavement, then, under the same roofs as their enslavers and in regular contact with them. It was no less violent than enslavement in the greater Caribbean, but it was considerably different in terms of climate, labour, and interpersonal relations.

Some of these enslaved people may have been distraught to leave the Maritimes, while others may have long desired to return to the tropics. The southward sailing shaped the personal lives of these 19 individuals and countless others. Fragmentary primary sources such as Wentworth’s letter and Lavaux’s map can be pieced together to offer a limited but instructive glimpse into the vulnerability and experiences of enslaved people in northern and tropical slavery settings. This also reveals the different opportunities for liberation from a greater Caribbean plantation and from the equally dangerous, exploitative, and predatory environment of the Maritimes.

### **Movement in bondage: From the West Indies to the Maritimes**

It was common for enslaved people in the Maritimes, like those John Wentworth owned, to be sent to the West Indies, but migrations also occurred in the opposite direction. Enslaved people from the Caribbean travelled alone, in groups, or with their enslavers to the Maritimes. Sailing north was as dangerous as crossing over from Africa, and, as enslavers brought or bought enslaved people from the tropics, enslaved peoples’ personal histories from the

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42 Whitfield, *North to Bondage*, 72.

43 Nelson, *Slavery, Geography, and Empire*, 106; Bassi, *Aqueous Territory*, 69.

44 John Wentworth to Paul Wentworth or his attorney, 24 February 1784, Sir John Wentworth Letter Book, 1783-1808, RG 1, vol. 49, p. 25, NSA.



West Indies shaped their experiences of enslavement in the Maritimes. Archival traces of interregional connections forged by northward migrations offer clues about labour, language, and the production, severance, or maintenance of intimate relationships. Details about enslavement in terms of these regional connections deepen our comprehension of the Atlantic context in which the Maritimes was situated.

In 1784, when Hector ran away in New Brunswick, his enslaver Frederick William Hecht placed an advertisement to try to recover him. Hecht described Hector as having craftsmanship skills or “by trade a cooper.” It is possible that local merchants used his handiwork to transport local salted fish to the West Indies. He had arrived in the Maritimes from “St. Augustine . . . via New-York.” Even during the mildest of conditions, a voyage northward would not promise comfort, but Hector suffered a particularly frigid December sailing. At some point along his journey from the warm shores of East Florida to the chilly coasts of New York and New Brunswick, he “had his feet frost bitten on the passage, and” – perhaps consequentially – “has a very lazy gait.”<sup>45</sup>

Through descriptions of the language, runaway slave advertisements from the Maritimes offer fragmentary evidence of an enslaved person’s heritage as in the case of Hector.<sup>46</sup> He had probably been born somewhere in the Caribbean (or possibly Africa) and grew up there, as Hecht noted he “speaks English like the West India negroes.”<sup>47</sup> This brief linguistic detail reveals that this man’s connection to the West Indies produced a recognizable marker in his speech, despite also having lived in numerous other locales along the British Atlantic. As a vestige of their Caribbean backgrounds, enslaved people’s language played a role in how others remembered, recorded, and related them to the West Indies. For example, like Hector, an enslaved woman in Shelburne named Betty Anna may have spoken with a marked accent, as her enslaver said she and her fellow bondswoman used creole vocabulary – “their own language.”<sup>48</sup>

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45 Runaway slave advertisement, *Saint John Gazette*, 15 July 1784. For more on the origins and ethnicities of the enslaved in Canada, see Nelson, “Tone of Voice Peculiar to New England.”

46 On runaway slave advertisements, see Gomez, *Exchanging our Country Marks* as well as Shauna J. Sweeney, “Markey Marronage: Futigive Women and the Internal Marketing System in Jamaica, 1781-1834,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd ser., 76, no. 2 (April 2019): 197-222 (esp. 209-10).

47 Runaway slave advertisement, *Saint John Gazette*, 15 July 1784.

48 William Booth to Samuel Proudfoot, Shelburne, 31 August 1789, in William Booth, *Remarks and Rough Memorandums: Captain William Booth, Corps of Royal Engineers, Shelburne, Nova Scotia, 1787, 1789*, ed. Eleanor Robertson Smith (Shelburne, NS: Shelburne County Archives and Genealogical Society, 2008), 131-2.



Primary sources show that enslaved people carried West Indian accents to the Maritimes, but they seldom tell us other habits, preferences, or memories they brought with them during their voyages north.

In the midst of enslaved people retaining identifying aspects from the Caribbean, including language and culture, relationships dominated if not defined enslaved people's personal experiences in bondage. And these relations could change dramatically with forced migrations from the West Indies to the Maritimes. One enslaved couple, Kate and Manuel Jarvis, migrated to Nova Scotia as a result of their individual sales.<sup>49</sup> "Dr. Bond" of Yarmouth bought Manuel in December 1801 for 39 pounds from Colonel Lewis Blanchard in the West Indies, and by March of the next year, he purchased Kate from the same owner. Manuel and Kate were married shortly after her arrival to Nova Scotia.<sup>50</sup> Sold just three months apart, we must consider why Dr. Bond bought both Manuel and Kate specifically. It is possible that Manuel may have petitioned his enslaver to purchase someone he already considered a partner, or that Kate may have persuaded Blanchard, her enslaver in the West Indies, to sell her to Bond so she could be with Manuel. The couple's relationship may have been strengthened or forged out of their common history in the West Indies, similar (albeit not simultaneous) voyages north, and shared ownership under Blanchard and Bond. It is equally possible that Bond may have forced this marriage upon Kate and Manuel to capitalize on their reproductive potential. Forced sex and "slave breeding" was prevalent throughout the Atlantic world and wreaked physiological and psychological damages upon enslaved men and women alike.<sup>51</sup> Though the fragmentary documentation does not elaborate on the nature of their relationship, Kate and Manuel's marriage provides some evidence for how forced relocations between the Caribbean and Maritimes consequentially shaped their intimate lives.

Rather than experiencing the voyage as a result of being sold, some enslaved people in the West Indies migrated to the Maritimes alongside slaveowners with whom they lived and possibly had intimate relations. Betty Hume was one enslaved woman who lived in New Brunswick in 1787. Seven years before her arrival, a man named John Hume purchased her at Carriacou ("one of the

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49 Smith, "Slave in Canada," 63-4. See also Sharon Robart-Jackson, *Africa's Children: A History of Blacks in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia* (Toronto: Natural Heritage Books, 2009) (esp. 48-9).

50 Smith, "Slave in Canada," 63-4.

51 Foster, "Sexual Abuse of Black Men under American Slavery," 454-8.

Leeward Islands").<sup>52</sup> At the time, Betty was around 26 years old. The next year, in 1781, John agreed to work as a mason for a man named James Wilson, who, in return, paid John and offered room and board to him and two enslaved Black people, one of whom may have been Betty.<sup>53</sup> John and Betty moved to Grenada within the next four years. There, in 1785, Betty gave birth to "a Mulatto boy," who was born "in a state of slavery to the said John Hume."<sup>54</sup> Although we do not know much about Betty's enslavement, it is possible that she laboured domestically. Unlike field slaves, enslaved women and men working within a household laboured in close proximity to their enslavers. As Brenda Stevenson explains, "The labor and domiciles for domestics, of course . . . allowed slaveholding men greater physical access."<sup>55</sup> It is very possible that John or another white man may have been the boy's father, given that Betty's son was mixed race.<sup>56</sup> The birth of this child in Grenada brought the new responsibilities and supplemental work of motherhood upon Betty, in addition to the labour she performed for John. The move from "Carriacow" to Grenada was not the last migration in Betty's life. Within two years of the birth of her son, she moved with her enslaver to New Brunswick. In May 1787, John emancipated the mother and child in Saint John.<sup>57</sup> It is unknown what happened to Betty and her son after their liberation.<sup>58</sup> Whatever the particularities of their relationship, it is clear the decisions John Hume made, including moving to New Brunswick and emancipating Betty and her son, significantly impacted the lives of the enslaved mother and child. Experiencing New Brunswick first in bondage and then in some version of freedom, Betty doubtless drew upon the knowledge, skills, and memories she had acquired in the West Indies.

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52 Smith, "Slave in Canada," 61.

53 Agreement between John Hume and James Philips Wilson, Carriacow, 6 December 1781, Saint John County Probate Court Records, RS 71, F10924, PANB.

54 Quoted in Smith, "Slave in Canada," 61.

55 Stevenson, "Concubinage and Enslaved Women and Girls in the Antebellum South," 108.

56 "Hume, Betty," in Whitfield, *Enslaved Black People in the Maritimes*, 89.

57 Smith, "Slave in Canada," 61.

58 John died in 1805, and his will, written in 1803, shows that he bequeathed his entire estate to a son and two daughters, so it is possible that Betty also knew and travelled to New Brunswick with John's family; see Lorenzo Sabine, *The American Loyalists, or Biographical Sketches of Adherents to the British Crown in the War of Revolution; Alphabetically Arranged; with a Preliminary Historical Essay* (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1847), 373 and Abstract for John Hume, Wallace Hale's Early New Brunswick Probate 1785-1835 database, #8304, RS 71, PANB, <https://archives.gnb.ca/Search/MC3706/Details.aspx?culture=en-CA&abstract=8304&section=NameIndex>.

Relationships – old or new, abusive or romantic, parent-child, enslaver-enslaved, or between enslaved people – occupied important spaces in the daily lives of enslaved people in the Maritimes. These people used the same skills they had in the Caribbean, adapted to different conditions of enslavement, and sometimes entered a new phase of freedom. Like those of their free Black Loyalist counterparts, biographical sketches of the enslaved unveil how people of African descent brought and sustained connections between the West Indies and Maritimes consciously and unconsciously through their lived experiences, cultural identities, and relationships in the context of enslavement.

### **An insecure freedom: Black Loyalists in the Maritimes and West Indies**

Like enslaved people, Black Loyalists carried personal connections to the West Indies with them as they entered the Maritimes. Freeborn or self-emancipated, Black Loyalists voluntarily moved to the Maritimes after the British evacuation of New York in 1783. During the war, British officials like Lord Dunmore promised freedom to enslaved Black people who escaped their Patriot enslavers to join British lines. Thus, many Black Loyalists had backgrounds in bondage. Their diverse life stories in the Maritimes sometimes ended in settlement and entrepreneurship. Other times, however, these free people were illegally enslaved and some were sent to the Caribbean. In short, arrival in the Maritimes did not guarantee freedom. Far from being a safe haven for Black people who escaped slavery in support of the British, the region was a site of regular exploitation, struggle, and possible re-enslavement – often in the West Indies.

The Book of Negroes demonstrates these ties. A “stout boy” named Jack Sweley, for instance, left in the brig *Kingston* for Port Roseway.<sup>59</sup> Sweley had been “born free in the Island of Jamaica,” so, at just 12 years old, he had spent time in the Caribbean, New York, and Nova Scotia. He had worked as “an apprentice to Robert Lavender,” with whom he traveled to “Port Roseway” (later named Shelburne). This brief entry in the Book of Negroes leaves us to wonder about Sweley’s personal life, such as whether or not he had been separated from relatives, what skills he used as an apprentice, and whether he had been obliged to migrate with the Lavenders.

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59 Book of Negroes, Guy Carleton Papers, NSA, <https://archives.novascotia.ca/africans/book-of-negroes/>.

Other documents, however, tell us more about his story. After Robert Lavender died, the Jamaican-born young man moved to Lunenburg in 1786.<sup>60</sup> It seems as though Jack soon went by John and also started using Lavender as a last name.<sup>61</sup> Poll tax records indicate his occupation of “labourer” in 1793, and records in 1838 list him as a “farmer” with a wife and three children.<sup>62</sup> In 1810, John Lavender was granted 50 acres of a recently escheated lot after unsuccessfully petitioning for 300 acres two years prior.<sup>63</sup> These records invite questions: if Lavender’s petition for 300 acres was denied, why were 50 granted two years later? And what kind of memories from the West Indies did Lavender carry with him as he established himself, his family, and his farm in Nova Scotia? The details of John Lavender’s life may be obscured, but these documents do tell us about his tenacity to procure his own land and the existence of his connections to other people in the community as well as providing an interesting glimpse into the life of one Black Loyalist whose journey began in the West Indies and ended in freedom the Maritimes.

Although Lavender left the West Indies as an apprentice, other Black Loyalists had been enslaved before their wartime escape from bondage brought them to the Maritimes. One woman named Betsey had previously been enslaved by Mr. Davis in the West Indies. At 60 years old, she travelled with “a fine boy 7 years old” to Port Roseway.<sup>64</sup> Their ages suggest they were possibly grandmother and grandson, but they may have been unrelated. Since enslaved mothers, in the Caribbean and elsewhere, were extremely vulnerable to intense physical demands, stress, illness, separation, sale, and death “the grandmother role, expressed through fictive or blood kin, became more

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60 Cory Lavender, email message to author, 29 July 2020; Petition of John Lavender for Land in Lunenburg, 20 October 1808, transcription in the author’s possession. I am very grateful to Cory Lavender, a descendant of John, for sharing with me this petition of 1808 and the undermentioned warrant of 1810.

61 John Lavender’s 1808 petition states “your Petitioner was born in Kingston Jamaica a British West Indies Island.”

62 John Lavender, Lunenburg, Lunenburg County, 1793, Commissioner of Public Records, RG 1, vol. 444½, no. 4, NSA; John Lavender, Lunenburg Township, Lunenburg County, 1838, Commissioner of Public Records, RG 1, vol. 449, no. 163, NSA.

63 Interestingly, the other 250 acres of the lot were granted to the infamous Doctor John Bolman, who virtually enslaved Lydia Jackson, described in the subsequent section; see Warrant in favor of Doctor John Bolman and John Lavender, 12 July 1810, transcription in the author’s possession as well as Petition of John Lavender for Land in Lunenburg, 20 October 1808, in the author’s possession.

64 Book of Negroes.

central to childrearing.”<sup>65</sup> It is unknown whether Betsey and the boy remained together once in Nova Scotia. We can only wonder what sort of life lessons, stories, warnings, explanations, or care Betsey offered the boy. In their journeys northward as free Black Loyalists, generations carried past experiences of enslavement in the West Indies with them.

Following their arrival, Black Loyalists’ consciousness about the West Indies was not restricted to their enduring memories of it. Entering Shelburne, Halifax, or Annapolis Royal, they encountered a peculiar and tragic economic connection between the regions. Historian Robin Winks notes that word of Black people “being carried off to sea and sold in the West Indies” was not uncommon and doubtless caused great anxiety for Black Loyalists who lived in the Maritimes.<sup>66</sup> As Whitfield notes in his study of Loyalist slavery in the region, there are numerous examples where Black people in the Maritimes were sold south to bondage in the West Indies.<sup>67</sup>

One instance of this insecurity can be seen in the 1787 case of Dick Hill. Hill had received a General Birch Certificate, a certificate of freedom issued in New York “to any black who could prove the minimum residence requirement and status as a refugee.”<sup>68</sup> GBCs promised freedom to the bearer and permitted them “to go to Nova-Scotia or wherever else He may think proper.”<sup>69</sup> Three years later, Hill experienced first-hand the tenuousness of his freedom. In Shelburne, an individual or group of people illegally forced Hill onboard a schooner destined for the West Indies. Gregory Springall, the Shelburne justice of the peace, signed a document detailing the event: “Immediately upon hearing of the Complaint of a Negro being put on Board Capt. McDonald [...] a letter was wrote to Capt McDonald to send the Negro on Shore.” This prompt action occurred because “the free pass of Genl Birch [was] produced.” It is not known how or by whom the certificate was furnished. Dick Hill’s champions may have seen him being taken on board, or perhaps they noticed a suspicious absence of the man they knew and loved. Sadly, and despite the expeditious efforts of those demanding Hill’s liberty, “the Vessell was got underway and

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65 Barbara Bush, “African Caribbean Slave Mothers and Children: Traumas of Dislocation and Enslavement Across the Atlantic World,” *Caribbean Quarterly* 56, no. 1 (March-June, 2010): 69–94 (esp. 82).

66 Winks, *Blacks in Canada*, 40.

67 Whitfield, *North to Bondage*, 15.

68 Walker, *Black Loyalists*, 11.

69 General Birch Certificate for Cato Ramsay, 21 April 1783, Gideon White Collection, MG 1, vol. 948, no. 196, NSA.

almost out of the Harbour,” meaning it was too late to stop the schooner.<sup>70</sup> The odds for reclaiming freedom were even worse for people who did not possess a GBC. The abduction and re-enslavement of Dick Hill to the Caribbean is just one instance of Black Loyalists losing their freedom in the Maritimes.

Attempted legislation reflects the tenuousness of Black Loyalist freedom. In 1789 an unpassed bill in the Nova Scotia Assembly readily acknowledged how some white people utilized abduction and deceit to send free Black people to the West Indies, stating that “attempts have been made to carry some of them out of the Province, by force and stratagem, for the scandalous purpose of making property of them in the West Indies contrary to their will and consent.”<sup>71</sup> Though presented as an effort to protect free Black Loyalists, the true aim of this act was to protect slavery by incorporating it into statute law.<sup>72</sup> Although unpassed, this bill reflects the attitudes of Nova Scotian enslavers, the offenses against Black freedom, and the popular recognition of the West Indies as a common terminus or waypoint for re-enslaved Black people in the Maritimes.

Five years later, a young indentured servant met a similar fate as Dick Hill and the free Black people alluded to in the unpassed 1789 bill. In 1794, the Shelburne grand jury received a complaint that “a Negro Boy formerly bound to John Stuart, & by him transferr’d, to some person in Liverpool, has lately been Carried off to the West Indies, & left Bound (as it is said) to some person there.”<sup>73</sup> The kidnapping and enslavement of this young boy probably meant the devastating separation from his family and likely upset the rest of the Black community in Shelburne and Birchtown. As the grand jury’s complaint suggests, free Black people hesitated to send their children into indentured servitude because of the insecurity of their freedom. The jury urged against the abduction of this child less out of concern for its illegality, which only received parenthetical mention, and more out of fear that “a transaction of this nature . . . if Overlook’d, will be productive of much injury to the community

70 Paper Respecting Dick Hill, a Free Negro Man sent to West Indies from Shelburne in Joshua Wise’s Schooner Commanded by Captain McDonald, 1787, Shelburne, RG 60, #25.3, NSA.

71 An Act for the Regulation and Relief of the Free Negroes within the Province of Nova Scotia, In Council, 2 April 1789, RG 5, Series U, Un-passed Bills, 1762–1792, NSA.

72 Whitfield, *Black Slavery* in the Maritimes, 129.

73 Black Boy Carried Off, 22 April 1794, Shelburne County Court of General Sessions of the Peace, RG 34–321, J 145, NSA.

in preventing the Negroes from Binding out their Children in the future.”<sup>74</sup> In other words, the Shelburne grand jury was more interested in maintaining the supply of cheap and exploitable Black labour than preventing the kidnapping and trafficking of people of African descent. Parents, meanwhile, lived in a state of fear for the safety of their families, and they grieved sudden losses of their children.

Due to the connections to the Caribbean, Maritime society was not a secure place for Black Loyalists to live out their promised freedom. As Carole Watterson Troxler explains, many people “were illegally seized by white Loyalists as they left Nova Scotia to move or trade with the Bahamas, the West Indies, and the United States.”<sup>75</sup> Some Black Loyalists, like Jack Sweley, Betsey, and the seven-year-old in her care, carried memories of the West Indies with them to the Maritimes. Others, like Dick Hill and the young indentured boy, discovered the horrifying fragility of their freedom as Black Loyalists when white traders and captains abducted them and shipped them to the West Indies. The unequal, frequently hostile environment for free and enslaved Black people in the Maritimes engendered anxiety and grief among families and communities.

### **An ocean away and too close for comfort: Maritime attitudes toward the West Indies**

Whether free or enslaved, Black people in the Maritimes did not have to spend time in the West Indies or even know anyone sent there to understand its hostility. As the example of Mertilla Dixon shows, white oppressors weaponized this knowledge – playing upon fears of toil, abuse, and separation as they threatened to ship Black individuals to the tropics. In spite of these efforts, Black people in the Maritimes sought protection through the courts, escaped through the wilderness, or fled otherwise with their families. Black and white people alike uttered statements about the Caribbean fully comprehending the menace it posed for people of African descent. To them, the West Indies felt closer than the tropical region where it was physically situated, and it was closer. The West Indies existed in the Maritimes: on the pages of its newspapers, on the shelves of its storehouses, among the cargo of its ships.

74 Black Boy Carried Off, 22 April 1794, Shelburne County Court of General Sessions of the Peace, RG 34-321, J 145, NSA.

75 Carole Waterson Troxler, “Uses of the Bahamas by Southern Loyalist Exiles,” in *The Loyal Atlantic*, ed. Bannister and Riordan, 185-207 (esp. 200).



It fell upon ears in hissed and hushed whispers. It crept into the thoughts of people who feared to learn what this place might mean for them, and it haunted the minds of those who already knew.

In his account of his journey to Nova Scotia to organize the 1792 Black Loyalist migration to Sierra Leone, British abolitionist John Clarkson mentioned several stories of free Black people who were sent or nearly sent to the Caribbean. Clarkson recorded the life of Lydia Jackson in particular because “it will serve to give some idea of the situation of the Black people in this Province.”<sup>76</sup> Impoverished and deserted by her husband, Jackson resorted to indenturing herself to Henry Hedley, a Loyalist in Manchester, Nova Scotia. She believed it would be a one-year term, but Hedley took advantage of Jackson’s illiteracy and tricked her into signing an indenture for 39 years. He then sold her to Doctor Bolman in Lunenburg (the same man previously referenced in the story of John Lavender), who was “a very bad master, frequently beating her with the tongs, sticks, pieces of rope &c. about the head & face,” and sometimes did so with his wife. Bolman, in one instance, and “in the most inhuman manner stamped upon her whilst she lay upon the ground” while Jackson was in the late months of pregnancy and it appears the unborn child did not survive.<sup>77</sup> Jackson was wary of her enslaver; before he stomped on her pregnant body, “she had spoken with the least intention of giving offence.”<sup>78</sup> How did an ever-present fear shape the tone, behavior, and actions of Lydia Jackson and others towards unpredictable and violent oppressors?

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76 C.B. Fergusson, ed., *Clarkson’s Mission to America, 1791-1792* (Halifax: Public Archives of Nova Scotia, 1971), 89.

77 It was not uncommon for enslavers throughout the Atlantic world to injure and abuse pregnant enslaved women. This did, however, harm their own economic interests since children born to enslaved women became the property, and therefore capital, of the enslaver. In 1833, a Pictou newspaper reprinted excerpts from a pamphlet by Henry Whitely entitled “Three months in Jamaica in 1832, comprising a residence of seven weeks on a Sugar Plantation,” which included an incident involving “another of the whites in this estate [who gave] his ‘housekeeper’ (concubine), a cruel beating with a supplejack while she was in a state of pregnancy, and for a very trifling fault”; see the newspaper article “Slavery in the West Indies,” *Colonial Patriot* (Pictou, NS), 27 August 1833, NSA. Likewise, the famous 1831 narrative of Mary Prince, who had been enslaved in the West Indies, contains her witness of the abuse of a woman named Hetty, whose enslaver severely beat her during her pregnancy. Consequentially, her child was stillborn. After this loss, her enslaver and his wife repeatedly flogged Hetty, and she died from these wounds; see Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave* (Urbana: Project Gutenberg, 2006), [www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/17851](http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/17851) as well as Fergusson, *Mission to America*, 90 and Whitfield, “White Archives, Black Fragments,” 339.

78 Fergusson, *Mission to America*, 90.

When Jackson sought the aid of an attorney, Bolman used his power to silence the case as he “then or soon after expressed his intention of selling her [to] some Planter in the West Indies to work as a slave.” His actions show that he believed merely mentioning the West Indies could control Lydia Jackson. Clarkson did not share for how long Bolman threatened sale to the Caribbean, but he wrote that she was still working for him several years later when she escaped “in a wonderful way through the woods” to reach Halifax. Did she flee because she believed a sale to the tropics was imminent? In Halifax, she submitted a complaint about Bolman to the governor and chief justice but to no avail. Finally, John Clarkson met, advocated for, and advised her. He probably encouraged her to join the exodus to Sierra Leone. Importantly, Clarkson also wrote in his diary “I do not know what induced me to mention the above case as I have many others of a similar nature; for example, Scott’s case, Mr. Lee, Senr. case, Smith’s child, Motley Roads child, Mr. Farish’s negro servant, &c.”<sup>79</sup> How many of these people – and how many others – lived with the daily threat of sale to the West Indies?

Clarkson’s usage of the word “child” in several of the above listed names bears an important point relating to how these shipments threatened Black families. During a deposition for the 1805 case of *Richard Hopefield v. Stair Agnew* in New Brunswick, Richard Hopefield, Sr. discussed his family’s familiarity with the West Indies. In the 1780s, both he and his wife had moved to the Maritimes separately from the American colonies, but unlike Richard, who was indentured, his wife Statia had migrated to Saint John with her enslaver. Richard and Statia probably met in New Brunswick, married, and had several children.<sup>80</sup> At one point, the unity of the family came into question when, according to Hopefield, Statia “had been put on board a vessel by one Phineas Lovitt in order as the deponent was informed to send her to the West Indies to be sold.” This southward migration ultimately did not go through – “she was relanded by order of Governor Carleton who set her at liberty” – yet the possible shipment of his wife to the Caribbean had been impressionable enough for Hopefield to include it in a deposition he gave over ten years later.<sup>81</sup>

After this event, Richard and Statia sadly faced more hardship and their safety was uncertain. After the couple lived a few years together as free

79 Fergusson, *Mission to America*, 90.

80 Whitfield, *North to Bondage*, 105; Bell, Cahill, and Whitfield, “Slave Life and Slave Law in the Maritimes,” 373.

81 *Richard Hopefield v. Stair Agnew*, 1802/1805, RS 42, Supreme Court Original Jurisdiction Records, PANB.

people, Joseph Clarke re-enslaved Statia. It is easy to imagine that the couple, already intimately aware of how easily enslavers could traffic humans to the Caribbean, lived by certain precautions and with a great deal of worry. Despite the enormous risks involved with escape, at some point Statia and Richard weighed their options and recognized that running away was the only chance to stay together, probably because Statia's enslaver threatened separation. In 1792, a pregnant Statia, her husband, and their two young children fled from Clarke. Surely the memory of previously almost losing Statia to the Caribbean coursed through the minds of the husband and wife as they prepared to escape. Tragically, Clarke captured Statia, separated her from her spouse and children, and sold her away to another New Brunswicker – Joseph Hewlett.<sup>82</sup> The story of Statia's family demonstrates the risks enslaved families in the Maritimes were willing to take to avoid separation and the peril of Caribbean slavery. This incident also shows vulnerability and violence in the Maritimes, particularly through the contempt that white enslavers had for Black families.

Through complaints to the courts, instances of near re-enslavement, and records of families escaping together, it is obvious that the West Indies occupied space in the thoughts, whispers, and petitions of Black people in the Maritimes who sought to avoid enslavement, separation, and forced migration. As an idea, the West Indies existed in the Maritimes because it pervaded Maritime thought. The notion of the West Indies burdened the hearts and minds of Black people in these colonies at the cost of their physical safety, control over their bodies, and unity of their families. Like the enslaved people who travelled to the Maritimes from the West Indies or vice-versa, and like the free and re-enslaved Black Loyalists whose origins or fates lay in the Caribbean, the individuals who lived with the persistent threat of shipment to the West Indies were part of the political, sociocultural, and imagined realities that connected the British colonies of the north and the tropical Atlantic.

## Conclusion

The story of Mertilla Dixon captures two fundamental and interrelated aspects of the connection between the Maritimes and West Indies. First, the fear that Dixon and other free and enslaved Black people had of being disposed "as a Slave" from the Maritimes to the Caribbean exemplifies the tight commercial and imperial connections that knitted the British Atlantic together, bonds

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82 "Hopefield, Sr., Richard," in Whitfield, *Enslaved Black People in the Maritimes*, 86-8; "Statia [Patience]," in Whitfield, *Enslaved Black People in the Maritimes*, 88.

rooted in a vast and transatlantic commitment to slavery. Second, the “West Indies” had a powerful discursive function in the Maritimes that both Black and white residents comprehended and deployed in their conflicts over exploitation.<sup>83</sup> Dixon’s pursuit of justice through the Court of General Quarter Sessions demonstrates her political savviness in navigating the Loyalist judicial landscape in order to avoid shipment to the Caribbean. Her complaint to the court contains all the information we have about her life, and it is unclear if she ever received the protection she sought. As limited as the archive is, its brief mention of her testifies to the profound links between the Maritimes and West Indies and, importantly, to Mertilla Dixon’s humanity. She was intelligent, resourceful, and courageous. She felt anxious. She sought autonomy and self-sufficiency. Like other free and enslaved Black people in the Maritimes, Mertilla Dixon was a whole person with a family, feelings, an opinion, a sense of justice, and a notion of hope.

The biographical connections – the migrations, experiences, and memories – of slavery in the Caribbean and in the Maritimes had a significant impact upon the lives of people of African descent. For some of the free Black Loyalists who chose to migrate to the Maritimes, the West Indies were part of their backstories. At other times, the relationship between the regions produced horrifying sales, forced relocations, and abductions in both directions of enslaved and free Black people. Even for community members who never directly experienced this traffic, knowledge of these events created an atmosphere of fear and uneasiness. The West Indies coursed through enslaved people’s minds in the form of threatened and actual separations and sales. Examining documentation from the Maritimes renders our understanding of the interchanges with the Atlantic world more complete. More importantly, tracing the fragmented stories of enslaved individuals along these lines of exchange affirms the human worth of those who personally experienced the full potential, heartbreak, promises, deceit, aspirations, and brutality of these connections.

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83 Complaint of Mertilla Dixon, Court of General Quarter Sessions of the Peace (Shelburne County), RG 34-321, M 97, NSA.

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