

# Spring & Summer 2006



## Black Loyalist Heritage Society

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### BLHS BOARD

Richard Gallion-President  
Marie Hopkins-Vice President  
Sharon Oliver-Second Vice  
Hank Falk-Treasurer  
Elizabeth Cromwell-Secretary  
Terry Bower-Director  
Doloras Atwood-Director  
Everett Cromwell-Director  
Lawrence Bruce-Director  
Sheila Hartley-Director  
Barb Falk-Director  
Sharon Oliver-Director  
Rev. Moses Adekola-Director

### BLHS STAFF:

Shari Shortliffe-Office Administrator  
Debra Hill-Registrar

*Don't say you don't have enough time. You have exactly the same number of hours per day that were given to Helen Keller, Pasteur, Michaelangelo, Mother Teresa, Leonardo da Vinci, Thomas Jefferson, and Albert Einstein.*

H. Jackson Brown

## The Year In Review Excerpts from the 2006 Annual General Meeting

The year began with us working on the Business Plan, which produced a report that recommended development of the Black Loyalist Heritage Site. The completed plan, presented to representatives of the Provincial Government in late March of this year, was well received, with word that discussions with funding agencies would begin in April. Those talks are ongoing at the time of writing this report.

Recommendations arising from the *Mugameh Conference* initiated the formation of a management team to oversee the implementation of the recommendations. Darlene Lawrence has continued to liaise with Dr. David Devine, James Robinson Chair of Dalhousie University, who has agreed to search for funding partners for the employment of a Research Coordinator/Manager position.

Immediately following the devastating fire of March 31<sup>st</sup>, a community meeting organized by long-time friend of the Society, Jackie Race, secured a tremendous amount of support for the rebuilding effort.

The support has been overwhelming, unexpected and far-reaching.

Letters received from school children have made us cry each time we read them as it

seems they have felt our pain and expressed themselves in writing. We have been touched by all ... and left feeling the strength and support of our community, both at home and from unknown friends far away.

Even though the events on March 31<sup>st</sup> have overshadowed everything, this small determined group has held together, supported each other, continued to search for funding and got back to business.

We secured two summer students positions and although the numbers of visitors was down, the Museum was open for the season.

Our Coat of Arms has been approved and we await the official presentation by our Governor General, which, we have been advised, should take place in the spring of 2007.

We have made many new connections this year as well, one being with Amistad America. We had the pleasure to meet with their CEO and Chair, 'Bill' Minter, here in Birchtown and discussed the idea of having the Amistad Freedom Schooner visit the port of Shelburne in August. After many calls and discussions, the ship was able to anchor in the Shelburne Harbour on August 12<sup>th</sup> and

the crew members came ashore. They enjoyed an evening tour of the Birchtown Site and then had to return to their ship for an early morning departure to Connecticut. Museum interpreters Haley & Nina Cox, along with their mom Bev, had the opportunity to dine with the crew aboard Dr. Mailman's (a local dentist) sailboat. We are now pursuing a partnership and sponsorship of Haley Cox to join the crew and make the Trans-Atlantic tour beginning in 2007. We will keep you all posted as we embark on this exciting partnership.

Our out-going President, Stanley Jacklin, went off to Africa this summer to set up training and will soon be off again, disembarking on a sabbatical in western Canada. In his (and my own) absence, Richard Gallion has done a remarkable job. We are especially grateful for his contacts within the Office of African Nova Scotia Affairs and the outstanding support we have received from them.

As always, our staff - Shari Shortliffe and Debra Hill - have been remarkable throughout this crisis and continue to be efficient. We all thank them for their continued support and loyalty to the Society.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Elizabeth Cromwell

# Fire Destroys Black Loyalist Office Building: Society Will Rebuild

BIRCHTOWN, N.S. -- Lawrence Bruce watched flames gobble the wooden structure he'd worked years to establish. The Black Loyalist Heritage Society office was going up in smoke on a warm March night and all he could think was: Why?

"I was just in awe," said Mr. Bruce, 65, who spent hundreds of volunteer hours designing the one-storey building, which contained scores of original documents and photographs on the lives of North America's first freed African slaves, who were handed freedom certificates and passage to Nova Scotia in exchange for fighting for the British during the American Revolution.

"It was like, 'I don't believe this is happening,'" he said. His wife's ancestors were among the black Loyalists. "It didn't make sense. I thought 'Maybe some fool is drunk or on dope.'" But the fact that a witness saw a car speed away just as the building's front porch lit up made him think that hate -- not stupidity -- fuelled this fire.

"The image of fire, it makes you think of Alabama or someplace like that." The RCMP have said the fire was arson and are investigating. So far, no arrests have been made but Sergeant Barry MacLellan said police have a "solid" lead. But Sgt. MacLellan said there is nothing to indicate the fire is race related. However, others in Nova Scotia's black community are concerned. The fire at the black Loyalist society's office was one of three vandal attacks with racial overtones in the

province in the past three months.

Wayn Hamilton, CEO of the provincial Office of African Nova Scotia Affairs, said the province's black community isn't sure how to react. "That whole issue of talking about race in an open, constructive dialogue is something that causes people a lot of anxiety," Mr. Hamilton said. "We don't really know how to sit down and have mature conversation about differences on race."

Mayann Francis, who heads the provincial human-rights commission, urged Nova Scotians to speak against the attacks. "When you don't have dialogue, you don't find solutions," she said. "When you have these dialogues you begin to isolate the perpetrators."

In Birchtown, which is about 200 kilometres south of Halifax on Nova Scotia's South Shore, the volunteer members of the black heritage society are devastated. Mr. Bruce said the centre was a resource for people researching their family roots. Visitors from across North America would come to the rural headquarters, located near the port town of Shelburne, where the majority of 3,500 black Loyalists were dropped off by British ships in 1783.

"This was the largest group of freed Africans in the world," Mr. Bruce said, standing beside a replica pit house across the road from the razed office. "They were so important and yet they were forgotten."

On the night of March 31, Mr. Bruce said, he was at home when a fellow volunteer called to say the office was on fire. He raced to the scene, where other



volunteers had already gathered.

Firefighters were able to save four computers that contained descendants' names. Some file cabinets containing original documents were also pulled from the burning building, but suffered water damage. A bag of costumes used for period plays was salvaged, but the clothes are smoke damaged and will be destroyed.

"It was heartbreaking really," Mr. Bruce said. "All we could do was stand and watch it happen and give each [other] a hug."

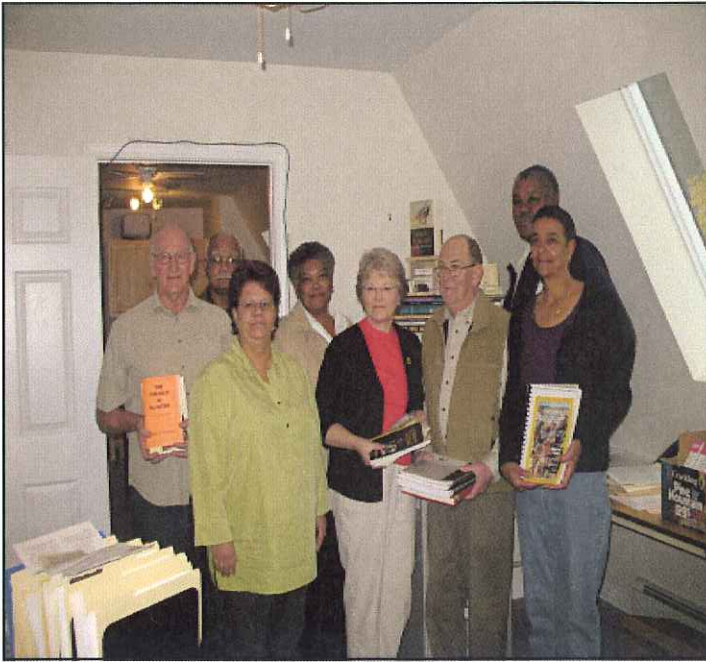
The society, which came together in the early 1990s when a landfill was proposed for the site, has been heartened by a wave of donations, which have poured in from across Canada since the fire.

Right now, the society's office is temporarily operating in a room above a gift shop. Not for long, Mr. Bruce said. The office will be rebuilt and the damaged documents restored, and databases will one day be up and running again. "We will build again," he said. "We've come too far now to stop."

Jane Armstrong

Photo courtesy of Sandor Fizili  
Excerpted from an article appearing  
in the Globe & Mail on Sat., May 6





From left to right: Hank Falk, Everett Cromwell, Debra Hill, Elizabeth Cromwell, Betty Camp, Bill Camp, Barb Falk, Richard Gallion

The sponsor-a-book campaign has been extremely successful to date! A great big "Thank You" to all who have helped to support this initiative. Our reference library is as crucial as our genealogical data. You can still make a donation by contacting Bill & Betty at the following address:

**The Whirligig Book Shop**  
**131 Water Street, Shelburne NS**  
**BOT 1WO**  
**(902) 875-1117**  
**[the.whirligig@ns.sympatico.ca](mailto:the.whirligig@ns.sympatico.ca)**

#### HUMOR:

The following was overheard at a recent 'high society' party.

"My ancestry goes back all the way to Alexander the Great," said Christine.

She then turned to Miriam and asked, "How far back does your family go?"

"I don't know," replied Miriam, "All of our records were lost in the flood."

## Acadia University Supplies Summer Research Intern

*By Renée Richardson*

This summer I was provided with a wonderful opportunity to work with the BLHS community. Beginning in May, I was enlightened with the tremendous knowledge Debra Hill has acquired over the years, concerning Black Loyalist heritage. Unfortunately, unintended circumstances had brought us together; however, I believe portent information will be produced despite the events.

BLHS has certainly not been discredited since the fire. Only the opposite has happened. I have seen and spoke with media and government officials on site. Documentaries have been made, numerous articles and media reviews have centered on the works taken place on site. I have had numerous discussions with tourists passing by and community members; there is certainly a sense of a strengthened community now in Birchtown.

I am guilty in admitting that my knowledge of Black Loyalists previous to my internship was minimal. Being native of Queens County, I felt that what I had acquired through schooling concerning Black Loyalists was not enough. For the pertinent history Black Loyalists bring to the South Shore of N.S., students are not provided with nearly enough valid material to learn such facts.

After understanding the work that is currently being done in Birchtown, reading text books and genealogical data, I realize not

only does BLHS need to strive for well deserved status within the provincial museums of Nova Scotia; but also establish heritage in the minds of young locals so that knowledge on these issues and facts can flourish and provide a platform for the future of BLHS. The history of Black Loyalists is not only of tremendous importance to the heritage of Birchtown, the South Shore and Nova Scotia but for the entire Canadian Mosaic as well.

Through numerous obstacles this group has prospered and will continue to grow. I am pleased to be able to continue my work here throughout the school year. I will be producing thesis work through Acadia University dedicated to BLHS. I am happy to produce over the course of the next year, recognition of Black Loyalists as one of the founding settlers of Canada and their links to other minorities in the area, those being Acadians and Natives.

Through genealogical research, I plan to demonstrate links that appear throughout decent lines between these three groups; which in turn shall only strengthen the theory that Black Loyalists are a key aspect in today's society in Nova Scotia. I certainly gained a passion for the work that is done in Birchtown this summer. This is the first time in my academic career that I have seen such a tight knit group of individuals who dedicate themselves in such a way to their heritage and community, so much so that it has touched my heart.

## Giftshop Merchandise

BLHS Ball Caps	\$14.99
BLHS Bucket Hats (Black Green Tan)	\$18
BLHS Coffee Mugs	\$9
BLHS fitted Ladies T-Shirts (White, Blue, Pink)	\$14.99
BLHS Golf Shirts (white) M L XL	\$15
BLHS Photo Sunrise Over The Burial Grounds	\$22
BLHS Polar-Fleece Throws	\$25
BLHS Pull-On Hoodies (Red Grey Navy Black) L XL XXL	\$38
BLHS T-Shirts (Black Grey Navy Green) L XL	\$17
BLHS Zipped-Front Hoodies (Red Grey Navy Black) L XL XXL	\$45

<i>Arising From The Ashes</i> CD—Freetong Players, Sierra Leone	\$15
<i>Back Talk—Plays of Black Experience</i> Louise Delisle, Playwright	\$18.16
<i>Colors of My Memories</i> by Christie Cromwell Simmonds	\$16
<i>Famous Nova Scotians</i> —Murray Barkhouse	\$23
<i>In Our Time</i> —African Canadian Achievements	\$20
<i>Journey—African Canadian Achievements</i> Instructional Guide	\$16.95
<i>Whylah Falls</i> Audio Book—George Elliot Clarke	\$23



**OUR MISSION STATEMENT:** The Black Loyalist Heritage Society is committed to discover, interpret, safeguard and promote the history and heritage of Black Loyalists and their descendants in North America.

**OUR MANDATE:** To ensure the chronicles and contributions of Black Loyalists share a place with other communities that shape Canada's cultural mosaic.



**BLACK LOYALIST HERITAGE SOCIETY**  
 104 OLD BIRCHTOWN ROAD, PO Box 1194  
 SHELBURNE, NS, B0T 1W0

### MEMBERSHIP / RENEWAL MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

SINGLE: \$12.00    FAMILY: \$15.00    ORGANIZATION: \$20.00

NAME (S): \_\_\_\_\_

MAILING ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

*CHEQUES/MONEY ORDERS PAYABLE THE BLACK LOYALIST HERITAGE SOCIETY. MEMBERSHIPS RENEWED ANNUALLY ON OR BEFORE THE DATE OF THE ANNUAL MEETING.*

ENCL./ \$ \_\_\_\_\_