

The Community Who had No Name

Echoes From the Past – Essay # 3



Throughout the years, Upper Hammonds Plains has played a historically prominent role in the legacy of African Nova Scotians. However, did you know that despite its exceedingly proud 200+ year heritage, the community actually had no official name for much of that history?

The origin of Upper Hammonds Plains dates back to 1815. This is when a large group of African refugees from the Chesapeake Bay area of Virginia, USA were transported to Halifax after the War of 1812, by British Admiral Alexander Cochrane with the promise of freedom from slavery. This group of refugees selected the lands north of the developing settlement of Lower Hammonds Plains as the site for their new home. Each family was allocated a ten acre lot. All told, approximately 102 lots (housing almost 500 folks) formed the original settlement.

There were many extreme hurdles faced during the establishment of this new township. Systemic racism, poor planting soil, bad weather, lack of resources/income were all challenges that got in the way of the community establishing roots. Many of the original residents either passed away due to illness or moved to a warmer climate during the first 20 years. Consequently, only 197 residents were still living in the community by 1838.

Despite the odds stacked against them, the refugees were determined to succeed. Several applied their knowledge and skill of milling lumber to set up small mills, thus providing a much needed economic stimulus. The community also leaned on both religion and education for support and hope. The early settlers were deeply devoted to the Baptist faith and the church soon became the central focal point for the community, after the first meeting place was built during the 1820's. The power of religion has remained strong within the community since the early days, Fast forward to to-day, Emmanuel Baptist Church has one of the largest congregations in the province. The impact of education started when a school was built in the community in 1822 and free education was provided for all African residents. The teacher within the community often became the community catalyst for advocating for better living conditions.

Oddly enough, the community wasn't given an official name at the time of settlement and it remained that way for over 130 years. The community was known by many names in those early years, as evidence on 18th maps. It wasn't until finally in 1946, that the residents were finally successful in petitioning for an official name for their village, selecting the name of Upper Hammonds Plains. So, the community literally had no name for over a century.

To-day Upper Hammonds Plains stands as a historical symbol for the contribution of the African culture in our province, overcoming a past where their ancestors didn't have a name to call home by.



Upper Hammonds Plains Community -1949