

## Our Scholastic Roots Run Deep

### **Echoes From the Past – Essay #11**



Formal schooling in Hammonds Plains can be traced back to the very earliest days of permanent settlers arriving in the area. Several of the first European settlers of Hammonds Plains (late 1700's) were educated folks who greatly valued the ability to read and write as a key life asset. Consequently, these early settlers promoted education for their children. Home schooling was the norm at the time where individual parents or a group of neighbours got together to pool their resources to present learning experiences for their children.

In 1816 when lots in Upper Hammonds Plains were divided to form a historic African Canadian community, the Nova Scotian Governor issued a grant of 100 pounds (\$175 in today's dollars) to build a school along with a small house for a school master. The school lot was established on the hill overlooking Taylor Lake. The school opened in 1820, making it the first official school in the Hammonds Plains area. During the early years the school operated with support from donations (The African Society of London was a major donor). These donations helped to pay for books and school materials along with the teacher's salary. By 1828 the school had 55 students ages 6-16, who were all African Canadian students. During some of the very early years, there were times when the school did not operate as no teacher could be found.



Interestingly enough, the earliest teachers at the Upper Hammonds Plains school were white, with some having connections to local families. By the 1830's, some local white children were permitted to attend the school, although they were, according to records, charged tuition for attending.

Accounts also indicate that two unofficial schools had formed in the village of Hammonds Plains (one at English Corner and one near the Lucasville Road) by 1830. There was also evidence of a night school for young men over 15 years of age, located in the cellar of a local residence. Around 1840 a community school was established for families of Hammonds Plains residents at the newly built meeting house which was located next to the community cemetery of the time, recognized today as the First Baptist Church Cemetery.

Today's large modern schools in Hammonds Plains highlight the importance of education in our community so it is only fitting that we come to appreciate the depth of our scholastic roots. It is notable that the scholastic roots in Hammonds Plains were well established before education was formalized in Nova Scotia in 1864 with the Free Schools Act.