

WESTMORLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Happy New Year everyone! I hope this year brings health and happiness to you and your loved ones.

I would like to express my gratitude to all the volunteers who have dedicated their time and effort to the Westmorland Historical Society (WHS). Our volunteers have contributed in various ways, such as cooking, cleaning, event planning, newsletter writing, and serving tables. You are the backbone of the WHS!

Before we explore our plans for 2024, let's take a quick look back at 2023. During that year, we began assessing the necessary renovations for our buildings. We upgraded the electrical system at the Bell Inn and transformed the restaurant space into a beautiful apartment that is now rented out. The Bell Inn is now fully oc-

cupied, which is fantastic news.

We are thrilled to announce that Tantramar has renewed the lease for the Village Library, and the Card Payzant building is completely rented out. The Keillor and St. James Textile Museums had a busy year with several successful workshops, and our events committee organized fantastic activities such as the grand opening events, Victorian dinners, and New Year's Levee.

In 2024, we have some ambitious plans for the Card & Payzant building and Keillor House. Although we are still in the planning phase, we are actively working on our 5-year plan, and I will keep you updated about the progress in these letters.

The WHS has a long-standing partnership with Corrections Canada, and we are pleased to report that our collaboration with Correctional Services is being reinstated. We have missed having the inmates assist with building maintenance due to COVID and health concerns.

Overall, I'm excited for new beginnings and believe that 2024 will bring change and renewal to the WHS.

Bonnie Chapman Roy

KEILLOR HOUSE MUSEUM —SPECIAL EVENTS

For updates on this year's Special Events, please check our website and/or FaceBook on a regular basis

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BERNIE’S BOYS WERE BACK AGAIN!

Once again the Victorian Christmas Dinner at Keillor House was graced by the return of the barbershop quartet and the ‘Bernie Brigade’ of first class waiters recruited from the Mathieu-Martin High School boys by their beloved teacher and our long-time WHS gardener and special volunteer, Bernie Melanson. Both the quartet and the boys did their usual wonderful job and we are grateful as always. Here is a rundown of their names, the years they served at the Victorian Christmas Dinner, and what they are doing now. It would be hard to find a more impressive lot. Congratulations to all of them, and especially to Bernie for mentoring such a fine brood.

Marc Drisdelle: 2016, 2017, 2022, and 2023 civil engineer

Martin Drisdelle: 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2022, and 2023 civil engineer

Louis Savoie : 2015- 2019, 2022, and 2023 mechanical engineer

Olivier Chiasson: 2019, 2022, and 2023 nurse

Pier Olivier Lebrasseur: 2017. 2018, 2019, 2022 and 2023 wealth management advisor

Philippe Landry: 2017. 2018, 2019, 2022 and 2023 accounting manager

Justin Lacenaire: 2017, 2018, 2019, 2022, and 2023 medical student



2017



2022



2023

SLAVERY IN THE CHIGNECTO: A FORGOTTEN CHAPTER IN LOCAL HISTORY

LOCAL HISTORIANS DON'T TALK VERY MUCH ABOUT SLAVERY IN THE CHIGNECTO. Indeed, many don't even know that it once existed here. In many ways this is understandable. It did indeed exist, but it was a long time ago, mostly before the year 1800 and very sporadically for only a few years thereafter. Moreover, it was not generally of the brutal kind that we associate with the plantations of the American South where slaves had no civil or human rights at all but were simply the property of their owners who treated them, as they did their animals, according to their own individual human nature. As always and everywhere, this ranged from kindly and noble to vicious and rotten. According to one of the few scholarly accounts of slavery in Canada, that of T. Watson Smith, a strong Methodist who hated the institution and had no inclination to play down its evils (it's available online on the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick website), "slavery throughout British North America was generally of a mild type, like that of the Northern states." If a slave owner killed his slave, he was liable to the same punishment as if he had killed a freeman. He was also criminally liable for excessive punishment that left permanent (physical) damage and he could, in theory at least, even be sued by his slave for immoderate chastisement. The legal status of slaves, who of course were exclusively black or mulatto, was almost exactly the same as that of indentured servants or apprentices, who were more often than not white. The main difference—and it was a very important one, at least psychologically—was that indentured servitude was for a contractual term, often quite a long one, to be sure, whereas slavery was for life unless the slave-owner at some point saw fit to end it by voluntary emancipation. In the course of my researches on the Keillors and the Truemans I happened across two contracts of indentured servitude. So we actually have two local examples and there must be many more I haven't seen, as indentured servitude continued long after slavery ended. In 1818 Mary Vandercraft, a Halifax single mom and presumably white to judge from her last

name, apprenticed her fourteen-year old son, Isaac, to William Trueman of Point de Bute (John Keillor's brother-in-law) "to learn the art, trade, and mystery of a farmer," in other words to work as a farmhand. In 1837 John Keillor and his fellow Justice of the Peace, John Chapman, approved, as it was within their authority to do, the decision of the Overseers of the Poor for Dorchester Parish (the welfare officers of the day) to apprentice ten-year old Mary Walker, "a poor girl of colour whose only parent, the mother, is utterly unable to support her," as a domestic servant to local farmer Gideon Smith. From the contracts we learn that, although the legal status of indentured servants was vastly preferable to that of plantation slaves completely at the mercy of their masters, it was hardly an enviable condition. Until she reached eighteen or married, Mary was bound to perform "all the work that she shall be put to by lawful command of her said Master" and to "humbly and obediently demean herself toward the said Master and his family and shall not at any time absent herself from his service without his permission first obtained." Until he was twenty-one (boys' 'apprenticeships' were longer than those of girls), Isaac had to "faithfully serve" and "readily obey" his said Master both day and night. He was forbidden to marry or "commit fornication," play at "cards or dice or other unlawful games," or frequent taverns or ale houses. There was no pay for either of them apart from "sufficient meat, drink, apparel, lodging...and all things fit and necessary." However, at the end of their terms each was to get a new set of work clothes and another outfit suitable for Church, while Isaac was also to receive £25 cash or stock to that value. Physical chastisement, including whipping at the master's discretion, provided it didn't go too far, was perfectly legal, while stubbornly recalcitrant servants were classed by the law, along with

idlers, fortune tellers, beggars, and indigents who refused to work, as 'rogues and vagabonds' and as such could be turned over to a Justice of the Peace for correction. In England, whether male or female, they could then be publically whipped "until his/her back be bloody." In Nova Scotia they were sentenced to a month's hard labour at a work house. Whippings were allowed, but were not to exceed "ten stripes at one time" and could only be repeated "as necessary." The New Brunswick law, passed in 1786, was even 'milder'. There is no mention of whipping, only hard labour in a prison for up to a month.

Except for the gifts at the end of the contract, the pay and working conditions for slaves in British North America were little different from those of indentured servants. Depending on the temperament of their masters, their life could range from comfortable and secure to unpleasant and uncertain, but seldom if ever was it precarious, or unbearable for people who lived in a world much tougher than ours. The Saint John and Halifax newspapers advertized rewards for the return of runaway slaves (as well as indentured servants) and slaves sometimes went to law to gain their freedom, almost always with success. This means that they were not universally happy with their condition, but runaways seem to have been the exception rather than the rule. I found in the admittedly scanty record for the Chignecto evidence of only one runaway slave and none of any lawsuit brought by slaves against their masters. There is, however, some evidence of kindness and even affection on the part of masters and gratitude on the part of slaves, so we can at least say that there was a wide range of feeling between slaves/servants and masters, and that it was unlikely to have been extreme at either end—by the standards of the day. But the fact is, we know very little about the working conditions of slaves in the Chignecto and if this article were just about them, it would be very short indeed. Instead, what I *can* offer is some account of the slave-owners I have run across in my various romps through the records of this region, together with some indications—based on both evidence and surmise—of how they treated those whom fate had placed in their charge.

I didn't find many slave-owners—about fifteen or so—and while there were no doubt a few more that I didn't encounter or didn't realize were slave-holders (two of my discoveries were very serendipitous indeed), I don't think there were many more. From various census records we know that in 1803 there were 418 adult males in the parishes/townships of Westmorland, Sackville, and Dorchester combined. We can extrapolate from this that when slavery existed at all in the more limited area we would call the Chignecto there might have been about 350 adult men, the only ones likely to have owned slaves. Thus, if roughly fifteen of them did so, they would have represented about 4.25% of the total. In the antebellum South, by contrast, where conditions for slaves were, or could be, far worse, nearly 20% of households owned at least one slave, while in some states slaves made up about a third of the population. In all of Westmorland County by another contrast, of a total population of 3,046 in 1803, census records list only nineteen individuals or 0.63% as slaves. Statistics on such matters are probably not the best guide to reality, but at least they offer some perspective. It's hardly a full story but it's better than nothing.

So, who were the slave-owners of the Chignecto and what, if anything, do we know about their treatment of their slaves? I will discuss them more or less in the order in which they appear in the record.

Senacherib (also known as Sean) Martyn was a New Englander (exact state unknown) who served as a Captain under Colonel John Winslow in the expedition that took Fort Beauséjour from the French in 1755. He brought with him a family of slaves (number unknown) and for his services was given a substantial land grant near Westmorland Point, also known as Green Hill and later Mount Whatley. In 1783 he sold a 250-acre parcel of it to newly arrived Yorkshire immigrant Thomas Keillor (our John's father). If he ever intended to, or ever did, use his slaves to work his lands, at some point he changed his mind and emancipated them. Perhaps this was under the influence of his new wife, Widow Charity Bellamy/Bishop (it was her third marriage, contracted about 1761) who was from England, where outcries against slavery were already beginning to be heard. After a time running the tavern (near the fort) that Charity had inherited from her second husband, George Bishop—where the

first meeting of the Sackville Proprietors Committee met on July 20, 1762 to allocate the shares of Sackville Township—the couple settled at Jolicure. The freed slaves settled at Green Hill where their descendants continued to reside for some time. Whether it was a sign of affection or simply a tradition, they continued to use the family name, now spelled ‘Martin’, and some of them are still living around here.

Samuel Wethered was another Fort Cumberland tavern-keeper who was also a slave owner. (Whether his tavern was the same one run by Charity Bishop/Martyn, I was unable to discover.) Like Martyn he was a New Englander, in his case from Boston, but unlike him he was not an army officer. He was one of the Planters invited by Governor Lawrence to settle Cumberland Township, where he married Dorothy Eager in 1761 and somehow acquired the tavern. We know only of one slave of his (there could have been others, but it seems unlikely, given his socio-economic status)—a servant girl who inadvertently and indirectly caused his death. As a New Englander, Wethered was more than a little sympathetic to Jonathan Eddy who famously tried to capture Fort Cumberland for the American revolutionaries in November 1776. But he was also the brother-in-law of James Law, a man of steadfast loyalty to the Crown who did not hide his views. Wethered was torn between the two sides and one result of his prevarications was that during the siege garrison troops frequented his tavern by day and Eddy’s men by night. Observing this, the garrison commander, Colonel Goreham, finally persuaded Wethered to lay a trap for the rebels: When they were safely in their cups he would light a candle in a certain window as a signal to the gunners and then exit the tavern just before it was shelled. Unfortunately, his slave girl unwittingly placed a candle in the designated window a few minutes before he could get to the task himself, and a canon ball ripped through the bar, taking half his buttocks with it. After terrible suffering he died in Goreham’s quarters soon after the rebels were routed, a martyr to the cause of loyalty and a possible object lesson to those who believed in divine retribution for the sin of slave-holding.

Samuel Wethered’s brother-in-law, *James Law*, was also a slave-owner who came to a sad end, although not because of

his slaves. According to T. Watson Smith’s account of slavery in Canada he was a Yankee trader associated with the commissariat of Fort Cumberland in the early 1760s and became “one of the most wealthy and prominent and prodigiously hospitable men in that part of the country.” Like Senacherib Martyn he received a 500-acre land grant in Cumberland Township in 1763 and he must have added to it by purchase. Howard Trueman, whose well-known work *The Chignecto Isthmus and its First Settlers* I have often quoted in these pages, says that “he was a large property owner in Point de Bute on both sides of the ridge,” and Howard had reason to know what he was talking about. Among the documents preserved in the beautiful secretary desk built by his uncle Harmon Trueman—also mentioned at various times in this Newsletter—was a deed conveying an 800-acre property from James Law to Thomas Scurr. In 1788 Scurr sold it to William Trueman Senior (Howard’s great-grandfather) after which it became known as Prospect Farm, still in the Trueman family. During the Eddy Rebellion of 1776 Law served as barracks master at Fort Cumberland and for his loyalty was rewarded, after Cumberland Township became Westmorland Township when New Brunswick was established as a separate province in 1784, with twin appointments as a Justice of the Peace and Judge of the Inferior Court of Common Pleas for Westmorland County. After starting in third place he was for a number of years the leading justice of both the Court of General Sessions of the Peace and the Inferior Court of Common Pleas, the one who charged the juries and authenticated the court’s judgments with his signature. At what point, or how, he acquired his slaves is unknown, but he certainly had some. Among the mountains of documents and other memorabilia that W. C. Milner, Sackville’s first historian, collected over the years is a bill of sale dated January 9, 1804 from James Law to Titus Knapp (of whom more anon) for “a Negro boy about twelve years old named Peter,” selling price £40. Another reference to Law’s slaves that I found was made by T. Watson Smith, and it is vague indeed. He alludes to a description of them—without saying who did the describing—as “a petted and useless lot” who thought so much of themselves that, in the crude parlance of the day, “as proud as Law’s niggers”

became a proverbial expression in this part of the country. Hardly a flattering characterization, but it at least has the merit of suggesting that Law was not altogether a harsh or demanding taskmaster. As we will see below, he was not alone in this.

Law's slaves may have been "a petted and useless lot," but they were not above the law. In January 1798 the Court of General Sessions of the Peace for Westmorland County heard a charge against 'Cumberland' Law and 'Barbados' Chandler. These would not have been the given names of white freemen. As we will see below, Charles Dixon owned a black slave called 'Cleveland', a region in Dixon's native Yorkshire, and from this I surmised that the two defendants were slaves. 'Barbados' probably belonged to Thomas Chandler, a lawyer of elite Loyalist background and a brother-in-law of Amos Botsford, of whom also more anon. In this General Sessions the person who brought the charges failed to appear as a witness and the pair was acquitted, but at the following June Sessions the grand jury presented a charge of petty larceny against Cumberland. Cumberland pled not guilty and the case went before a petit jury. It found him guilty and the court sentenced him to "thirty-nine lashes on his naked body." This seems a rather harsh punishment for stealing something worth less than £1, especially as Benjamin Tower was only fined £5 and costs for the same offence in June 1794. Moreover, it is the only whipping to be found in the surviving record of the General Sessions of the Peace (1785-1809) and it could be evidence of racial bias in the meting out of punishment (although it was perfectly in accordance with the law at that time) unless it was because Cumberland didn't have the £5 for the fine and accepted the whipping instead. James Law was on the bench of the court that found him guilty. One wonders if he couldn't have intervened in a way that would have spared Cumberland the whipping. It looks like there were limits to Law's 'petting' of his slaves.

If James Law was indeed of a kindly and compassionate disposition, perhaps we can reward him posthumously with some empathy for his sad decline and pathetic end, which had nothing to do with his slave-holding. As stated above, he was on the first commission of the peace for Westmorland County. By the 1790s he had risen to become the leading justice, both on the

Court of General Sessions of the Peace and the Inferior Court of Common Pleas. He served with distinction on both of them until 1802 after which he was frequently absent from the bench, leaving his colleague, Samuel Gay, to charge the jury and sign its judgments. After 1805 he disappears from the court records entirely. Hints of what happened to him can be found in William Trueman's 'Memorandum of Events', a kind of diary-cum-logbook that I have also mentioned several times in recent issues of the Newsletter. We first learn that his wife, Sarah Wethered, a sister of Samuel, died on February 1, 1807, and this may have been one of the "reverses of fortune" that Howard Trueman speaks of in *The Chignecto Isthmus*. The clue as to what those reverses entailed is revealed in the entry in William's Memorandum for July 9, 1814: "This day James Law [was] let to the lowest bidder, William Trenholm, at ten shillings per week." Trueman was referring to a pauper sale, another of the methods available to the parish Overseers of the Poor for dealing with indigents, namely to contract with the lowest bidder at a public auction to board them. It was quite a come-down for one of the wealthiest and most respected men in the county, and there seems to be only one plausible explanation: that he fell victim to that age's most common reverser of fortune, Demon Rum. Not even Justices of the Peace were immune to the weaknesses that flesh is heir to.

In 1804, about the time his decline set in, Law sold "a Negro boy named Peter" to *Titus Knapp* (W.C. Milner collected the bill of sale, a copy of which is in the Mount Allison Archives) and Knapp's grandson remembered that Titus had purchased a number of other slaves at various auction sales, among them Sippio, Lucy, Nero, and Bacchus. (Milner also had the bill of sale for Bacchus, a "mulatto boy about fourteen years old.") Knapp was probably the biggest slave-owner in the Chignecto and, as we might expect, one of the richest. Born into a prosperous New York family, he came here as a Loyalist refugee after having served in the famous DeLancey's Brigade, together with Gideon Palmer, of whom also more anon. His widowed mother, who had married one, left all her property to the Quakers—somewhat ironical in that the

Quakers were the first religious sect to oppose slavery on principle—but all of her cash to Titus. So, in spite of having been despoiled of some horses, cattle, clothes, and a watch when he was captured by Patriots, he didn't arrive in Westmorland Township (formerly Cumberland) empty-handed. Not long afterwards he married a daughter of war hero and Justice of the Peace Thomas Dixson and Catherine Wethered Dixson, herself another sister of tavern keeper Samuel Wethered. Perhaps this is where he got the idea that slave-holding was not as bad as his Quaker half-brother back in New York undoubtedly thought it was. He and his old comrade in arms, Gideon Palmer, who also first settled in Westmorland Township in spite of having received a grant in Dorchester, purchased adjacent farms near the fort and went into storekeeping and trading together. They, or at least Knapp, did very well at it. When he died in 1828 he left an estate assessed at more than £13,000, one of the richest in the probate records. (By way of comparison, William Trueman, a prosperous yeoman farmer, was worth about £2800 when he died in 1826.) Knapp's house, which apparently stood, albeit in a dilapidated condition in its later years, until the late 1920s (see Colin MacKinnon's article on Andrew Kinnear in Issue 93 of the Tantramar Heritage Trust's *The White Fence*), was, in the words of a descendant who knew it, "the biggest house in those parts and all distinguished visitors were entertained there. It was a huge three-story colonial type with large fireplaces." From the size and apparent elegance of his house we can surmise that Titus Knapp's slaves were domestic servants.



Titus Knapp's wealth and social standing were assuredly a large factor in his appointment as a Justice of the Peace in 1798 as well as in his election to the New Brunswick House of Assembly in 1803, where he served until 1816. That he was one of the 'who's who' of Westmorland Township is attested by the fact that he was one of a number of prominent men, including James Law, who served as wardens of St. Mark's Anglican Church at Mount Whatley, where he and his wife are buried. I found no direct evidence of how Knapp may have treated his slaves, but perhaps the fact that he was the only owner in the Chignecto to offer a reward for the return of one (Nero) is a hint that as a task master he was not quite as lax as Law.

I mentioned above that Knapp's erstwhile comrade in arms, *Gideon Palmer*, later became his business partner after the two arrived in Westmorland Township as Loyalist refugees. Perhaps not surprisingly, Palmer was also one of the Chignecto slave-owners. I made this discovery, hitherto unknown, quite serendipitously in the course of my research on Stephen Millidge, High Sheriff of Westmorland County 1786-1803. (Tantramar Heritage Trust published my book on him entitled *Stephen Millidge: The Surprising Story of a Sackville Loyalist* in 2018.) Palmer, whose New York property (which once included a number of domestic slaves as well as a good part of Staten Island) was confiscated as a result of his service in the famous Loyalist DeLancey's Brigade, had another business associate in his brother-in-law, *Richard Wilson*, soon to become a large property holder and prominent resident of Sackville. The two had married daughters of prominent Yorkshire settler Christopher Harper and, like Palmer, Wilson had distinguished himself as a military man, in his case by having served with Wolfe at Louisbourg and Quebec and also as a Lieutenant in Col. Joseph Goreham's Royal Fencible Americans, the regiment that defended Fort Cumberland (formerly Beauséjour) during the Eddy Rebellion.

The details are sketchy (and of little importance here) but it seems that Palmer had bought a bunch of stuff from Saint John merchant John Masters but didn't have the money on

hand to pay him. So he borrowed it from Wilson. Wilson raised the payment in the form of a bill of exchange (an early form of personal cheque) to be drawn on London merchants Herbert and James Bruce with whom he had an account. Palmer then signed the bill of exchange over to Masters, but when Masters presented it to Bruce & Bruce in London the following summer they refused to honour it, probably because there wasn't enough in Wilson's account to cover it. Masters then sued Wilson and Palmer in the Supreme Court of New Brunswick and won a judgment against them that ordered the county Sheriff to seize sufficient of the goods and chattels of the defendants to satisfy the debt (the standard procedure at that time in cases of debt recovery). When sheriffs did this they were obliged to make out an inventory of the goods seized and have them valued by sworn assessors. Most of these kinds of documents, once abundant, have fallen prey to the ravages of time and neglect, but I accidentally stumbled on the ones drawn up on both Palmer and Wilson but only because I had occasion to look through the correspondence of John Murray preserved in the J.D. Hazen Collection at the New Brunswick Museum. John Murray's widow (who had been a Hazen) married Amos Botsford's son, William, who was very close to his sister, Sally, who was married to Stephen Millidge. That must have been the tortuous route by which some of Stephen's documents got into the Hazen/Murray collection, and it was only by the rarest chance that they included the two assessments of seized goods.

Now to the point of most relevance here: the inventories prove that both Palmer and Wilson were slave owners. Palmer's slave was described as "one Negro man slave, 23 years old" and valued at £60. Wilson owned "one black woman slave 19 years old" and a "female black slave 8 months old," presumably her child. Together, mother and child were valued at £35. If you think these were paltry amounts for human beings, or that slaves in the Chignecto were merely common chattels like wagons or furniture, consider what their assessed value was in relation to all the

goods seized. Palmer's total was £129 pounds and 15 shillings, or 2595 shillings. At £60 = 1200 shillings the man slave represented 46.2% of the seized goods, which otherwise comprised ten head of cattle and two bay mares, essentially much of the livestock of a working farm. Wilson's rap was £90 pounds and 8 shillings or 1808 shillings. At £35 = 700 shillings, the mother and her infant daughter represented about 39% of the total, which otherwise included a large dinner table and chairs as well as six cattle, a mare and a cart. In other words, Palmer's and Wilson's slaves were far and away the single most valuable of their 'movable goods'. Quite apart from humanitarian considerations, it would not have been in their economic interest to abuse them in such a way as to render them unfit for service.

There is no further evidence as to how Palmer and Wilson may have treated their slaves, but there *is* some that our next slave owner saw his slave as something more than just valuable property. *Stephen Millidge* whose duty it was to seize and sell Palmer's and Wilson's property later became a slave owner himself after his business as a trader and storekeeper had sufficiently supplemented his modest income as High Sheriff and Deputy Crown Surveyor. (It was in this latter capacity that he did the surveys that resulted in the magnificent Sackville Township Plan on display at the Boultonhouse Heritage Centre.) His estate inventory, drawn up in 1803, included "a black girl, a slave called Rose, about 18 years old." Assessed at £40, Rose was also the single most valuable of her master's 'household goods'. The only thing that even came close was a set of mahogany drawers with matching table and chairs that together came to a little over £27. Rose's bed and bedding were valued at a very respectable £3 (Stephen and Sally's feather bed was only assessed at £4) suggesting that the Millidges treated her well, and that she had her own bedroom in the commodious new frame house they built for themselves ca. 1800-1801. Was the spinning wheel and loom listed in the estate inventory also for her? At the time of Stephen's death there were no daughters in the house old enough to be doing much spinning and somehow I can't picture Sally hunched over a loom, although she probably did fancy needlework, as that was very lady-like. Scanty as it is, the little evidence we have suggests that Rose was treated as a

member of the family.

Sally Millidge was a daughter of *Amos Botsford*, which leads us to our next slave owner. Amos was undoubtedly the most important and influential man in both Sackville Township/Parish and Westmorland County. A once-wealthy lawyer from New Haven, Connecticut, and a leader of the Loyalist refugees, he was rewarded by the new Loyalist government of New Brunswick with appointments to most of the important offices of Westmorland County and was elected to the provincial House of Assembly where he soon afterwards was elected Speaker. His extensive land grants included Dorchester Island (known for a time as Botsford's Island) where he built a large stone mansion, which he sold a few years later when he acquired most of Westcock Marsh, where he built an even grander brick mansion on land adjacent to Malcolm Fisher's present house on Hospital Loop Road. Given his wealth and status, it would be surprising if Botsford did *not* have domestic servants, especially since he had parted ways with his wife soon after settling in Dorchester. Proof that he did, and that at least some of them were black slaves, comes from three sources: On January 11, 1806 William Truman noted in his Memorandum of Events that there had been a "great snow storm" and that a "Negor boy [William was not a great speller] belonging to A. Botsworth [he could never get Botsford's name right] was lost in the storm." In 1891 James Dixon published his biographical genealogy of the family of his ancestor, Charles Dixon, one of the earliest and most prominent of the Yorkshire settlers in Sackville (of whom also more anon). One of the documentary sources he used in compiling it was an old ledger that had belonged to the patriarch and in it he found some "facts which though in harmony with the wants of society at that age, would be sadly at variance with present conditions." Besides the shocking revelation that one of the venerable Charles's servant girls was paid in part with a gallon of rum, the ledger showed that "he purchased several Negro slaves at Halifax, one of whom he sold to his friend, the Honorable Amos Botsford, at the same price he paid." Other incidents in James Dixon's account indicate that this slave could not have been the 'Negor boy' lost in the 1806 snowstorm.

I found one other reference in the voluminous Botsford papers I have gone through in the course of various projects in local history to what I am pretty sure was a female domestic slave and her young son. In one of a series of letters to his son William, dated June 23, 1798, Amos wrote: "I am sorry to inform you of the death of little Robert. While I was gone to Amherst the day I left home Dina was washing and left him in the kitchen to go into the garden to hang out the clothes. She must have stayed some time, for when she came back she found him in the fire. He had crawled in or fallen in and his legs and thighs almost roasted, so that he died the same night after." Her name (not a common one for white women of the day, but, according to a website on slaves' names, "generally recognized as referring to a woman who had come from slavery"), as well as the mention of her domestic duties, leave little doubt in my mind that Dina was a slave. Whether she was the one Botsford bought from Charles Dixon, there is no way of knowing, any more than there is of whether Amos owned other slaves besides her, poor little Robert, and the boy who was lost in the snowstorm. To me, it seems more likely than not that he did, but I can't prove it. His report to William on Robert's tragic death seems genuinely tinged with sorrow, suggesting that Dina and her young son were considered members of the family.

Speaking of 'members of the family', the slaves of another Chignecto slave owner may have been 'members of the family' in more senses than one. The slave owner was Edward Barron after whom Dorchester's Father of Confederation, Edward Barron Chandler, was named. As detailed in the September 2023 issue of the Newsletter, he was an officer in the British Army who fought with Wolfe in the battles for Quebec and Canada, and was duly rewarded with a land grant at Minudie, where he also became an important figure in local government and affairs. Although not outstandingly wealthy, he had a domestic slave named Phebe, probably bought at Halifax, as well as a few (white) tenants on his modest estate, all of which, besides his status as a British officer

who had served under the most famous general of the day, seems to have prompted him to give himself airs. Resentment over this in some quarters was not assuaged by his position as the leading Justice of the Peace in Cumberland County and the administrator of a new and very unpopular poll tax. This led a group of the disgruntled to pen a scurrilous pamphlet against him and nail it to his gate post. The details are murky, as the record is extremely thin, but in it they called him “the notorious old stallion,” which seems to have been a smutty allusion to improper relations with Phebe. In any case it enraged him enough to assault the author of the pamphlet—who in turn brought a charge against him at the General Sessions of the Peace. The rest of the legal battle is irrelevant here, but there is some evidence in Barron’s will that there just might have been some truth to the insulting insinuation. Besides freeing Phebe upon his death, along with her son, Hugh Cumming, “at the age of twenty or sooner if she desires,” he bequeathed “two cows and six ewes” to “the child or children she is now pregnant with” and arranged to have a log house built for her “in such manner as are generally built by the French at Minudie.” This may or may not be evidence that the relationship between them was closer than it should have been between master and servant, but it is surely evidence that Barron felt a good deal of affection for Phebe and didn’t want her to be left destitute after his death.

So far, all of the Chignecto slave-owners I have discussed were, with two exceptions (Samuel Wethered and Edward Barron), either traders associated with the commissariat at Fort Cumberland or well to do Loyalists. But there was another exception in the person of the aforementioned *Charles Dixon*, who, together with Christopher Harper, was among the most prosperous of the Yorkshire settlers in the Chignecto. (Dixon, who had owned a paper factory back in Yorkshire, was actually wealthier than Harper, who was an uncommonly prosperous tenant farmer there.) We learned above that he bought several black slaves in Halifax (where they were freely for sale) and sold one of them to Amos

Botsford. Here is the place to add that he sold another to Richard Wilson. Whether this was the nineteen year old girl and her infant daughter seized by Sheriff Millidge I know not, but it seems rather unlikely, suggesting that Wilson had other slaves besides her. But the important point here is that Dixon also bought another slave in Halifax, one he named ‘Cleveland’ after the Yorkshire district he (Dixon) came from. He paid the handsome sum of £60 for him, meaning that Cleveland must have been a healthy young male like Palmer’s twenty-three year old, and kept him for himself. By now you will not be surprised that someone in 18th century Chignecto bought a slave. But if you know anything about the man, you will be surprised, and probably somewhat outraged, that this someone was Charles Dixon. Dixon was an early convert to Methodism, originally an evangelical movement within the Church of England. It was founded by John Wesley, whose writings on just about every subject of concern to Christians were the guiding light to all practicing Methodists. And one of the best-known facts about Wesley was, and is, his utter opposition to slavery. (He even wrote a famous book on the subject that exposed all its cruelties as well as refuted all the justifications for it in his time.) Moreover, William Black, the apostle of Methodism in the Chignecto and a close acquaintance of Dixon, was also an outspoken opponent of slavery. Nonetheless, according to T. Watson Smith’s researches, besides Dixon at least two other Yorkshire settlers in the Chignecto had slaves, William Bulmer of West Amherst whose brother was married to a Dixon daughter, and Thomas Watson of Fort Lawrence, who was the Cumberland County sheriff for a time. I don’t know anything about Bulmer’s and Watson’s slaves, but there may be evidence to mitigate any harsh judgment we might have of Dixon’s slaveholding. It comes from his grandson, James, whose biographical genealogy is the only source on this subject. James tells us that his grandfather bought Cleveland in Halifax but also that he “subsequently” (which leaves the time lapse vague) “gave him his liberty and paid him regular wages.” James knew Cleveland personally because after Charles’ death he lived as a very old man in the household of James’ father. James remembered that as he lay dying Cleve-

land expressed a wish to be buried somewhere near his old master, Charles, who left him a small legacy in his will. Here we have oral testimony and perhaps some documentary proof of another affectionate relationship between master and slave. Perhaps Charles Dixon was a better Methodist than a hasty judgment of his relationship with Cleveland would allow us to suppose.

Senacherib Martyn; Samuel Wethered; James Law; Titus Knapp; Gideon Palmer; Richard Wilson; Stephen Millidge; Amos Botsford; Charles Dixon; Edward Barron. These are the ten Chignecto slave owners for whom I have seen evidence that they were indeed slave owners. T. Watson Smith mentioned two other Yorkshire Methodists (but not Charles Dixon) as slave owners: *William Bulmer* of Amherst, who on his death in 1791 freed his slave called 'Black Jack', and *Thomas Watson* of Fort Lawrence, Sheriff of Cumberland County, who bequeathed his daughter a "Negro girl called Sarah who was known at a very advanced age by a subsequent generation as Sally Surrey." He also mentions in passing Samuel Gay of Cumberland Township (Westmorland after 1784) and Colonel Henry Purdy of Fort Lawrence. I know little of Henry Purdy except that he was a Loyalist, but a fair bit about Samuel Gay that makes me feel sure that he was indeed a slave owner.

Samuel Gay bore most of the hallmarks of a slave owner that you must be coming to expect by now. He was, like a number of the others, a Justice of the Peace for Westmorland County as well as a judge on the Inferior Court of Common Pleas, where he eventually succeeded James Law as the leading justice. He was also the county Treasurer and, along with Amos Botsford and Charles Dixon, one of the first four members of the House of Assembly representing Westmorland. About the only thing that might have given him a pang of conscience about slaveholding was the marriage of his sister to William Black, the 'apostle of Methodism' in the Chignecto. Perhaps his conscience was salved by his close friendship with Stephen Millidge, and by extension with Amos Botsford, based on a common interest in partying and a strong identification with

the Loyalist cause. (Gay was not actually one of the 1784 Loyalist refugees; he had come to Nova Scotia with his father and an uncle in 1776 after the revolutionaries captured Boston, but he was loud in his praises for the British constitution, as was Stephen Millidge.) Needless to say, he was also a large landowner with a (presumably) stylish and commodious house at Aulac near that of James Law. I know nothing about his slave, or slaves, but I was not surprised at T. Watson Smith's revelation that he had some.

Another Chignecto slave owner identified by T. Watson Smith was *James Hewson*. As mentioned above, in 1804 James Law sold "a Negro boy named Peter" to Titus Knapp. This information was also uncovered by Smith, who went on to add, "this boy was again sold, about 1810, to *James Isaac Hewson*, with whom he remained until after the emancipation of slaves." Smith didn't mention his source of this information, but slavery was officially abolished in the British Empire in 1834. He also didn't say anything about Hewson but the above mentioned Howard Trueman knew that as a young man he came to Nova Scotia in 1783 with his widowed mother and a group of other Loyalists. After first settling near Wallace they moved to Fort Cumberland where Mrs. Hewson opened a small store, taught school, and saved her money while James worked as a clerk for Titus Knapp and Gideon Palmer. By 1796 the Hewsons were prosperous enough to purchase a substantial farm at Jolicure Point, more accurately at La Coup. Later, I found out that Hewson's wife, Jeruishia, ran an inn there known as 'Hewson's Inn on the Great Marsh'. My work on local government in early Westmorland County revealed that on the death of William Trueman the Elder in 1797 Hewson succeeded him as one of the two county coroners, an office not quite as prestigious as that of Sheriff or Justice of the Peace, but one that allowed him to add the honorific 'Esquire' to his name. We learn from Howard Trueman that he was also one of the churchwardens of St. Marks' Anglican Church at Mount Whatley, so he was definitely one of the county elite.

Finally, there was one other Chignecto man for whom I

found at least a scintilla of evidence that he was possibly, and probably even likely, a slave owner. Above I mentioned a Barbados Chandler who was charged along with Cumberland Law with some kind of petty crime, most likely theft, and speculated that both of them were black slaves. I also speculated that Barbados—who may have been bought there—could have belonged to *Thomas Chandler* and now it is time to make the case that Chandler is a likely suspect of having been a slave owner. He was a son of Joshua Chandler, a very prominent New Haven (Connecticut) lawyer who, like his lawyer son-in-law, Amos Botsford, lost all his property—which very likely included domestic slaves—when he joined the Loyalist cause against the American revolutionaries. In the end Joshua's loyalty cost him even more than that. Sailing from Halifax to Saint John to file his claim to compensation for his losses as a Loyalist, he and three of his children were drowned, along with the documents needed to complete the case. As a result the family received considerably less than what they had lost but Thomas made up for it becoming a half-pay officer in the British Army and practicing law with his brother-in-law Amos Botsford. In 1793 he was elected (along with Amos) as one of the four Westmorland County members of the House of Assembly. (He only served one term, however.) The evidence is circumstantial, but I think it allows us to say that Thomas Chandler was at least a likely candidate for having been a slave owner.

We have now counted fifteen known or likely slave owners in the Chignecto and there may have been more, but I don't think there were many more. What they had in common—not too surprising, given the price of slaves—was their membership in the county elite and, with the exception of Charles Dixon, Samuel Wethered and Edward Barron, a close identification with the Loyalists. Far from being cheap, disposable chattels, their slaves were among the most valuable, if not the most valuable, of

their movable goods—by a wide margin. This alone means that their owners had to be well off, and that it was not in their economic interests to abuse them or exploit them unmercifully, quite apart from any humane impulses they may have had. Most, if not all, of the Chignecto slaves seem to have been domestics—cooks, house keepers, baby sitters, gardeners, farm workers, maybe even valets in some cases, rather than the drudging, sweating, frequently bleeding field hands of the southern plantations. Plantations didn't exist in British North America and this was one of the main reasons for the early and peaceful demise of slavery here. (Slave labour was actually uneconomical in regular mixed farming.) The other main reason for its increasing rarity and final abolition in the British Empire in 1834 was its growing unpopularity as a moral wrong. During the 18th century antislavery sentiment steadily rose throughout the Western World (and *only* in the Western World), especially among evangelical Christians and Enlightenment thinkers convinced of universal human rights as well as the equality of all souls before God. Lingering belief in the sacredness of property ensured that slavery remained technically legal long after it was generally thought to be morally wrong but more and more judges in British North America and the northern States made it increasingly difficult for slave owners to enforce it at law, particularly in the cases of runaway slaves. Both in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick their owners had to produce documentary proof of ownership, and sympathetic judges regularly found flaws in the documents, and set the slaves free.

As a matter of fact, slavery came very close to being abolished by judicial decree in New Brunswick in 1800, i.e. a number of years before some of the slave sales we encountered in this article. It was challenged in the Supreme Court when a runaway (and recaptured) slave named Nancy caught the attention of firebrand reformer and lawyer, Samuel Denny Street. Street obtained a writ of *habeas corpus* from Judge Isaac Allen, a slave owner himself and an old friend of slave owner Stephen Millidge, ordering her owner, Caleb Jones, to bring her into court and prove his right to hold her as a slave. Prominent lawyer Ward Chipman,

another of Millidge's old friends, agreed to defend her as a "volunteer for the rights of humanity." When Jones was able to document his purchase of Nancy the case turned—apparently for the first time—on whether slavery was actually legal in New Brunswick. The four judges on the bench were evenly divided. Chief Justice Ludlow and Justice Upham decided that it was, while Justice Allen and Justice Saunders decided that it was not. Since the court was evenly divided, no judgment was entered and Jones regained possession of Nancy. However, he was so rattled by the uncertainty now surrounding his right of ownership that he returned her to her previous owner and got a refund. He then entered into an agreement with her to serve fifteen years as an indentured servant, after which she would be free to leave. Isaac Allen put his money where his mouth was and immediately freed his slaves. Apparently the Nancy case occasioned a *crise de conscience* in him, and no doubt in others as well. Slave owning continued to be technically legal until 1834, but only under a darkening moral cloud. In fact it's doubtful if it had ever enjoyed majority approval. The result was that emancipation (often on the death of the owner) or conversion to indentured servitude became the common practice until slavery faded away entirely, leaving only memories, some nostalgic, some bitter, among some, and few regrets among most. To return to where we started from: Within a few generations most would be surprised to learn that it had ever existed in the Chignecto. But it did.

Gene Goodrich

THE KEILLOR HOUSE BROWNFIELD POTTERY



When Nellie Palmer—whose story we told in the September 2022 and February 2023 issues of this Newsletter—was briefly studying music in New York City after breaking her engagement to John Clarence Webster she received a letter, dated May 3, 1898, from a Dorchester friend or relative anxious to see her home again. By way of enticement Dolly shared some of the latest tidbits on Dorchester life—the births, deaths, afternoon teas, nasty colds, etc.—that were the talking points of the day. She particularly enthused over the “swell party” that Mary Jane Keillor, widow of Thomas, had recently put on in the homey but gracious stone house built by her long-deceased father-in-law, John Keillor, Esq. “Everything was lovely; lovely custard made with one pint of milk, yolks of ten eggs & a cup of cream, cream whip, Russian Bear & all sorts of delicious things. It was quite an undertaking for such an old lady don’t you think?” (Mary Jane was about 78 at the time.) We can be sure that the repast was not only delicious but most attractively served on Mary Jane’s best dinner ware. Unfortunately, Keillor House today has only one plate and few pieces of silverware that actually belonged to the second generation of Keillors, but it does have a number of other items donated over the years that are very like the ones that could have graced the table at Mary Jane’s “swell party.” These handsome specimens, displayed in a cupboard on the west wall of the kitchen, were manufactured by the Brownfield pottery in Colbridge, North Staffordshire. Although not quite as prestigious as Wedgwood, Brownfield was a very respectable brand, identified on a website I consulted as “one of the top ten Staffordshire factories.” They would have made comfortable companions for the Currier and Ives lithographic print, the “bear facts” of which were detailed in the September 2021 issue of the Newsletter.

Gene Goodrich



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PRESERVING THE PAST FOR THE FUTURE

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