

SCHOLARS OF THE NEEDLE: HALIFAX'S AFRICAN SCHOOL,
NEEDLEWORK AND THE RECOUPING OF IDENTITY

by

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For those who inspire...Beth, Suzanne, Nat and Finn, and for all those who mark stories through thread.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the history of African Nova Scotian school children by investigating the instruction they received at segregated schools established by the British religious society *The Associates of the Late Reverend Doctor Bray*. Needlework, specifically sampler making, was commonly included as part of the curriculum for white settler girls in Nova Scotia, but the discovery of a remarkable sampler made in 1845, by Rachel Barrett, a student at Halifax's African School, is material evidence this practice was also a part of the Black schoolgirl experience in Nova Scotia. As part of a colonial education system of racialized education, needlework instruction and sampler making were paradoxical activities that represented oppression or empowerment. A visual and material analysis of Barrett's work, Nova Scotia samplers and those made elsewhere, in conjunction with archival research in local and British archives, recoups insights about the identities and experiences of Black schoolgirls in Nova Scotia.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

I am a white settler descendant and acknowledge that as a researcher my perspective is influenced by this identity. My goal with this thesis is to contribute research and scholarship on the intersections of white settler colonialism, British imperial institutions and their impacts and influences upon the social and material culture of mid-nineteenth century African Nova Scotian children. This thesis focuses on a singular needlework sampler made in 1845 by Rachel Barrett (Fig.1.1), a student at Halifax's African School, which remained in operation between 1836 and the mid-1850s.



Figure 1.1. The Rachel Barrett sampler (1845), Nova Scotia Museum, Cultural History Collection, 2018.14.1.

Sampler making was commonly included as part of the school curriculum for young girls in North America during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as a method for reinforcing and demonstrating students' knowledge of the alphabet, religion, numeracy, literacy, and in some cases mathematics, and geography. Moreover, needlework instruction was intended to prepare young girls for life in service or as a

symbol of their gentility, class, moral, and religious beliefs, depending on their social circumstances. What makes Barrett's sampler extraordinary is that it serves as evidence of the curriculum shared with students at a school specifically operated for Black children in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Until its discovery at an auction and its subsequent acquisition by the Nova Scotia Museum in 2018, sampler making as part of the curriculum at Halifax's African School was unknown. This needlework is material evidence of the inclusion of sampler making as part of the curriculum for young Black girls and situates this research within a growing field of scholarship centred on artistic and craft practices in the nineteenth century. Furthermore, wrought by her own hand rather than by another, it serves as tangible evidence marking Barrett's existence and recoups important information about the experiences and identities of young Black girls and their contributions to the history of Nova Scotia.

Needlework and sampler making in North America were key facets of most women's lives for centuries. Samplers are a form of textile that feature the hand stitching of different types of embroidery in the form of images, design motifs, or text, directly onto the surface of a base or ground fabric. The embroidered sampler as material culture, the focus of this thesis, is executed using needle and thread, such as silk, wool, or cotton. The word "sampler" derives from the Latin exemplum meaning 'a model for imitation – a pattern – an example' and defines the sampler's original purpose, which was to record different types of stitches and patterns for future reference and use.¹ In North America samplers evolved to become more pictorial. Samplers vary greatly in design and

¹ Rosanne Waine, "'On Needle-work': Reassessing the Culture of Schoolgirl Samplers", in *Charles Lamb Bulletin* 162 (2015): 90.

appearance, but nineteenth-century examples typically exhibit some common features such as a decorative border framing a central design composed of text alone, or in combination with pictures and symbols. Textual elements such as names, dates, alphabets, numbers, biblical and moral verses, poetry, hymns, and music appeared solely or in combination with a wide variety of pictorial motifs and patterns, such as flowers, human figures, buildings, ships, animals, maps, and even musical notation and astrology.² Thousands of samplers exist in museums and private collections around the world, providing evidence of the centrality of this practice among girls and women of all socio-economic, cultural, and racial backgrounds. Sampler scholarship has traditionally associated sampler making as a practice of elite and middle-class white children and women.

When examined in conjunction with historic documents, samplers reveal important insights about the lives of African Nova Scotian girls like the twelve-year old student at Halifax's African School, Rachel Barrett. Colonial educational systems intersected with the lives of free and enslaved children of African descent and, through the instruction of needlework, imposing notions of racism, class, gendered education and labour. Primary sources related to early nineteenth century African Nova Scotian children and girls are rare, and yet the substantial archives of the Anglican colonial society and fonds of *The Associates of the Late Doctor Thomas Bray* contain important information about the education system and what experiences were offered to students of the Bray schools. Scholarship on the African Diaspora and the Black Atlantic is an important part

² Deborah Young, *A Record for Time*, (Halifax: Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, 1985), 8-9; Judith Tyner, *Stitching the World: Embroidered Maps and Women's Geographical Education*, (Routledge, 2018), 21-27.

of early Nova Scotian history that continues to expand with the works of such scholars as Afua Cooper, Charmaine Nelson, Harvey Amani Whitfield, Catherine Cottreau-Robins, and Graham Nickerson bringing to the surface past lives of African Nova Scotians and New Brunswickers.³ Nevertheless, the role of needlework and its instruction in their lives remains overlooked. The absence of scholarship about African Nova Scotian children and schoolgirls, and needlework instruction, means their identities, accomplishments, and contributions remain hidden. An exploration of eighteenth and nineteenth primary sources and samplers made by Nova Scotia settlers, reveals that African Nova Scotian children and the poor and working classes were instructed in sampler making. Furthermore, this thesis will argue that needlework offered an opportunity for a form of quiet activism in alignment with self and group identity projection – this opportunity to participate and self-identify was uniquely rare for a child of Barrett’s age, gender, and race.

1.1 Literature Review

The history of Halifax’s African School was first documented by historian and provincial archivist Charles Bruce Fergusson in the 1940s, with the publication of his *A*

³ Afua Cooper, “Black Women and Work in Nineteenth- Century Canada West: Black Woman Teacher Mary Bibb” In *We’re rooted here and they can’t pull us up: Essays in African Canadian Women’s History* edited by Peggy Bristow (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 143-170, <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442683273-007>; Charmaine Nelson, and Camille A. Nelson, *Racism, Eh?: a critical inter-disciplinary anthology of race and racism in Canada* (Concord: Captus Press, 2004); Harvey Amani Whitfield, *A Biographical Dictionary of Enslaved Black People in the Maritimes* (University of Toronto Press, 2022); Catherine Cottreau-Robins, *A Loyalist Plantation in Nova Scotia 1784-1800*, Ph.D dissertation, Dalhousie University, 2012; Graham Nickerson, “Why Didn’t They Teach That? The Untold Black History of New Brunswick,” *Journal of New Brunswick Studies / Revue d’études Sur Le Nouveau-Brunswick*, Vol.12, (2020), 15–23, <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/JNBS/article/view/31423>.

*Documentary Study of the Establishment of the Negroes in Nova Scotia.*⁴ Fergusson focused his research on the history of the War of 1812 and Black Refugees drawing from “a treasure trove of primary source documents,” to provide a succinct and important summary of the school’s existence from the late 1830s through to the 1850s.⁵ He also documented the role of the London-based Church of England charitable society, known as *The Associates of the Late Doctor Bray*, drawing from the substantial Bray Archives and local educational committee records of the House of Assembly, in establishing the first schools in the province for Black Loyalists.⁶ Fergusson described the branches of needlework instructed at these schools, the names of the Black and white teachers, and administrators. Fergusson and historians who followed him such as James W. St. G. Walker and Robin Winks, who documented the history of the Bray schools in Nova Scotia, gave only passing mention to the instruction of female students and their needlework without serious consideration to their experiences.⁷ Relegated as so often has been the case by traditional history, needlework and its instruction in these schools has received little scholarly attention other than to mention that it occurred.

⁴ Charles D.B. Fergusson, and D.C. Harvey, *A Documentary Study of the Establishment of the Negroes in Nova Scotia between the War of 1812 and the Winning of Responsible Government*, (Halifax: Public Archives of Nova Scotia, 1948), <https://archives.novascotia.ca/pdf/africanns/Publication8.pdf>.

⁵ Harvey Amani Whitfield, “The African Diaspora in Atlantic Canada, History, Historians, and Historiography,” in *Acadiensis*, Vol. 46, No. 1, (Winter/Spring 2017): 218.

⁶ Fergusson, *A Documentary Study*, 58-65.

⁷ James W. St. G. Walker, *The Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone, 1783-1870*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442671447>, 99-106; Robin Winks, ed. *The Blacks in Canada A History* (Montreal-Kingston:McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005), 56-58, 127-140.

During the 1960s and 1970s, interest in a repositioned African Canadian history, written by those situated in the margins of dominant colonial discourse, expanded with Robin Winks' ground-breaking work, *The Blacks in Canada* (1971), which documented the early colonial period of Black education in Nova Scotia. Drawing from the extensive Bray archives documents, Winks built upon Fergusson's initial outline of the Bray Associates schools in the province. Winks illuminated important details from the school records remarking, "The African School was a genuine force for good."⁸ Despite this he states the early schools for Blacks throughout the Maritimes was "poor, unsystematic, and undependable", with Halifax's African School suffering from insufficient supplies.⁹ Winks concluded his narrative about the Bray school system by highlighting the racism of the white settlers and addressing the attitude of the school's local overseer Bishop John Inglis.¹⁰ In the words of poet George Elliott Clark, Winks' work, while representing a monumental effort of research, is problematic due to his "bleak rendition-dismissive view" of African Canadian history.¹¹

Subsequent authors of Black history in Nova Scotia, who reference the school in their work include, Bridglal Pachai, in *Under the Clouds of the Promised Land Vol. 1* (1987), Harvey Amani Whitfield in *Blacks on the Border* (2006), and local historian Judith Fingard's "Attitudes toward the Education of the Poor in Colonial Halifax" (2009).¹² Fingard perhaps provides the most critical and analytical interpretation of the

⁸ Winks, *Blacks in Canada*, 136.

⁹ Winks, *Blacks in Canada*, 137.

¹⁰ Winks, *Blacks in Canada*, 137.

¹¹ Winks, *Blacks in Canada*, xxi.

¹² Bridglal Pachai, *Under the Clouds of the Promised Land*, Vol.1, (1987), 51, 79, 88; Harvey Amani Whitfield, *Blacks on the Border*, 2006, 80; Judith Fingard, "Attitudes

school's history, stating that charity education served to condition the poor to accept their "station in life."¹³ Fingard's analysis of the African School within her broader study of the education of the poor in Halifax, argues that while the school benefitted from a more regular supply of funding than some of the other schools for the poor, she questions the school's quality of education based on contemporaneous observations of Black Haligonians.¹⁴ By situating the school within the broader framework of the education of the poor, Fingard explains the public's interest and motivation was to promote public order and protect property, an attitude that demonstrated a concern "about the welfare of the elite, rather than as a public duty."¹⁵ Moreover, Fingard concludes the school's curriculum was solely focused on providing industrialized instruction for the purpose of preparing students servitude or work in the trades, as opposed to developing intellectual curiosity.

Scholarship pertaining to nineteenth century Black women's history in Halifax, although limited, benefits from additional work by Judith Fingard, and Suzanne Morton, who documented the experience of Black Haligonian women. Fingard's *The Dark Side of Life in Mid-Victorian Halifax* (1989), for example, provides glimpses of the experience of Black women within the court and prison system, while comparing their lives outside of the system and in the city's poor Black neighborhood located immediately adjacent to the army barracks. Suzanne Morton's "Separate Spheres in a Separate World: African Nova Scotian women in the late 19th Century Halifax County" (1993), centres Black women

towards the Education of the Poor in Colonial Halifax", in *Acadiensis*, II (1972-73), No.2. 2009,

¹³ Fingard, "Attitudes," 16-24.

¹⁴ Fingard, "Attitudes," 16-24.

¹⁵ Fingard, "Attitudes," 27.

within the gendered separate-spheres ideology, linking the intersection of gender and race, highlighting the differences experienced between Black women and white settler women. Sylvia Hamilton in *Naming Names, Naming Ourselves: A Survey of Early Black Women in Nova Scotia* (1994), provides a useful overview of the lives of some early Black women from the mid-1600s until the early twentieth century, and highlighting and contextualizing the impact gender, in addition to race, had on their lives.¹⁶ Importantly, Hamilton identifies specific women, free and the enslaved, who despite immense obstacles triumphed and found agency and power through their roles as care-givers, orators, teachers, fundraisers, nurturers and organizers.¹⁷

Beyond Nova Scotia, John Van Horne's *Religious Philanthropy and Colonial Slavery: the American Correspondence of the Associates of Dr. Bray, 1717-1777* (1986), addresses the history of the Bray Associates and their goal of establishing schools for the religious conversion and education of enslaved and free children, and persons of colour in America.¹⁸ As the librarian of the Library Company of Philadelphia, Van Horne assembled and edited nearly two-hundred documents about the Bray Associates activities in America. A similarly detailed compendium of the Bray Associates Canadian correspondence has yet to be compiled and published. While authors of local history and African Canadian education history have drawn from these substantial archives, a

¹⁶ Sylvia Hamilton, "Naming Names, Naming Ourselves: A Survey of Early Black Women in Nova Scotia", in ed. P. Bristow, *We're rooted here and they can't pull us up: Essays in African Canadian Women's History*, (University of Toronto Press, 1994), 13-40, <https://canadacommons.ca/artifacts/1869713/were-rooted-here-and-they-cant-pull-us-up/2618626/> on 21 Jul 2022. CID: 20.500.12592/b68fdf.

¹⁷ Hamilton, "Naming Names", 40.

¹⁸ John C. Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy and Colonial Slavery: the American Correspondence of the Associates of Dr. Bray, 1717-1777*, (1986), Urbana :University of Illinois Press.

thorough investigation and analysis of the Associates members, representatives and their activities in Canada and the Caribbean has yet to be published. Van Horne discusses the Associates goal to convert or “Christianise” the enslaved through the instruction of basic literacy. He emphasizes the Associates beliefs that education would lead to faithful and obedient slaves, a belief that some slave owners resisted, believing instead it would foster discontent.¹⁹ As such, he concludes, “even those few whom the Associates did reach probably did not achieve a lasting conversion of a useful degree of literacy.”²⁰ In Van Horne’s later article *The Education of African Americans in Benjamin Franklin’s Philadelphia* (2009), the author focuses his attention on the experience of Black Philadelphians who attended the schools run by the Bray Associates, the Quakers, the Pennsylvania Abolition Society (PAS) and by some African Americans themselves. He states their efforts “represented the best hope for Philadelphia’s African Americans of becoming literate prior to the availability of public education.”²¹

Besides Van Horne, English scholar Terry L. Meyers, writes about the Bray Associates and their school in Williamsburg, Virginia, in *Benjamin Franklin, the College of William and Mary and the Williamsburg Bray School* (2004).²² Meyers described how an anonymous Virginia slave contributed to Benjamin Franklin’s recommendation of Williamsburg as a suitable location for one of the Bray Associates’ schools. As such a

¹⁹ Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 34-38.

²⁰ Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 38.

²¹ John C. Van Horne, “The Education of African Americans in Benjamin Franklin’s Philadelphia”, in *The Good Education of Youth: Worlds of Learning in the Age of Franklin*, ed. John H. Pollack, (Oak Knoll Press/University of Pennsylvania Libraires, 2009), 94.

²² Terry Meyers, “Benjamin Franklin and the College of William and Mary and the Williamsburg Bray School,” in *Anglican and Episcopal History*, Vol. 79, No. 4 (December 2010): 368–393.

property on the William and Mary College campus, known as the Dudley-Diggs house, was identified as a subject for archaeological investigation, which led to its positive identification as the original Williamsburg Bray school building.²³ This is known to be the oldest surviving building in the United States dedicated to the education of African American children. Meyers outlines the details of its brief but important operation as a school from 1774 to 1778, arguing it was well attended and its students were literate, evidencing that the intentions for this school were met.²⁴

Historian, Antonio T. Bly, builds upon this body of scholarship in his article, *In Pursuit of Letters: A History of the Bray Schools for Enslaved Children in Colonial Virginia* (2011). Bly provides an account of some of the unofficial Bray schools in colonial Virginia offering a more detailed description of the experience of the Bray scholars listed on the Williamsburg school's roster such as Isaac Bee. Bee's ability to read and write, argues Bly, most likely afforded him certain opportunities in life that were not available to those who could not.²⁵ In 2000, College of William and Mary Master's student, Jennifer Oast, devoted her thesis to the Associate's schools in Williamsburg, Fredericksburg, and Philadelphia, interrogating "the differing attitudes towards Blacks among Britons, southerners, and northerners on the eve of the American Revolution."²⁶ Scholarship on the Bray Associates and the religious education of the enslaved and American Indigenous peoples date back to 1919 with Woodson's *The Education of the*

²³ "The Bray Digges House", *Colonial Williamsburg Foundation*, <https://www.wm.edu/as/niahd/braydigges/index.php>, accessed March 2021.

²⁴ Meyers, "Benjamin Franklin," 370.

²⁵ Antonio T. Bly, "In Pursuit of Letters: A History of the Bray Schools for Enslaved Children in Colonial Virginia," in *History of Education Quarterly*, (2011), 32.

²⁶ Jennifer Bridges Oast, *Educating Eighteenth-Century Black Children: The Bray Schools*, 2000. Unpublished M.A. thesis, William and Mary College, Williamsburg, VA.

Negro Prior to 1861 (1919), and was followed by a number of American-authored published accounts in the 1930s, focusing predominantly on colonial Virginia.²⁷

E. J. Monaghan's *Reading and Writing in Colonial America* (2007) and *Reading for the Enslaved, Writing for the Free: Reflections on Liberty and Literacy* (2000), provides important insights on slave literacy, emphasizing that enslaved people learned to read and write separately, with slaveholders permitting reading but resisting and impeding the instruction of writing – a skill which was thought to be used by the enslaved to gain their freedom through the forging of travel documents.²⁸ These scholars have uncovered important insights on the Bray schools' colonial attitudes towards the education of Black Nova Scotians and the poor, and the student experience and curriculum. A deeper analysis, however, contextualizing the roles of gender, race, and needlework within its curriculum is absent.

Nevertheless, there are contemporary interrogations of European-led colonial missionary education for girls of African descent during nineteenth-century colonies in western African, Antigua-Barbuda, and Mauritius, by historians, such as Fiona Leach (2008), Harold Fergus (2003), and Tyler Yank (2019).²⁹ These studies are framed in the

²⁷ Bly, *In Pursuit*, 431.

²⁸ E. J. Monaghan, *Learning to Read and Write in Colonial America*, A Volume in the Series Studies in Print Culture and the History of the Book, University of Massachusetts Press, 2007; E. J. Monaghan, "Reading for the Enslaved, Writing for the Free: Reflections on Liberty and Literacy" *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* Vol. 108 (October 1998): 309–41.

²⁹ Fiona Leach, "African girls, Nineteenth-century Mission Education and the Patriarchal Imperative", in *Gender and Education*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (2008): 335-347; Harold A. Fergus, *Foundations of Elementary Education in Antigua-Barbuda 1838-1914*, Presented at the Antigua and Barbuda Country Conference, (Nov. 13-15, 2003), <https://www.open.uwi.edu/sites/default/files/bnccde/antigua/conference/papers/fergus.html>; Tyler Yank, "Women, Slavery and Imperial Interventions in Mauritius, 1810-1845",

experience of the students, revealing the racial prejudice and ignorance of the white colonial missionaries in charge of their education. Leach and Yank demonstrate that female students at missionary schools received a restricted curriculum due to an over emphasis on the instruction of needlework and domestic training meant to prepare them for their roles as wives and mothers. As a result, these students were assigned fewer hours for learning to read and were given fewer subjects to study, indicating their education was, in effect, another form of forced labour. Girls and women, therefore, received a restricted education due to the patriarchal hierarchy and priorities of the school's overseers, a situation which set back the advancement of girls education well into the twentieth century.³⁰ Leach acknowledges the practical benefits to needlework instruction; however, a colonial and "patriarchal perspective" fostered a mindset that disadvantaged girls and women, ultimately overshadowing any such practical benefits.³¹ These analyses contextualize gender, race, and class, drawing attention to the lives of free and enslaved female learners.

Scholars of women's history and feminist studies, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich and Rozsika Parker, discuss the far-reaching potential of the study of needlework and textiles in their ground-breaking publications *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (2002), "Of Pens and Needles: Sources in Early American Women's History," (1990) and *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (2010). Ulrich writes, "textiles may offer the richest unexplored body of

Unpublished Ph.D thesis, Dept.of History and Classical Studies, McGill University, Oct. 2019.

³⁰ Leach, "African Girls," 336, 343-345; Yank, *Women, Slavery*, 151.

³¹ Leach, "African Girls," 342-343.

information in early American women's history," and feminist historian Rozsika Parker writes, "The art of embroidery has been the means of educating women into the feminine ideal, and of proving that they have attained it, but it also provided a weapon of resistance to the constraints of femininity."³² In other words, intertwined within the history of needlework and sampler making, examples exist that demonstrate girls and women were able to use needle and thread to create "strands of resistance", becoming symbols of empowerment and self-expression in a medium that was accessible to women in the private and gendered sphere of domestic life. In *The Subversive Stitch*, Parker emphasizes that it is through the very threads of embroidery and samplers, the history of women can be traced, resulting in a story of complex paradoxes. By the eighteenth century, embroidering was considered to come naturally to women and by the nineteenth century symbolized femininity, gentility and respectability for middle and upper-class women. For the majority of working-class woman, however, needlework was an instrument of oppression and drudgery. Parker, through her examination of the material culture of embroidery, identifies a paradox – that embroidery also acted as an acceptable means of self-expression and provided an avenue for subversive resistance for some women.³³ This thesis suggests that Parker's findings also hold true for the tradition in Nova Scotia, as evidenced by a singular example of needlework produced by twelve-year old African School student Rachel Barrett.

³² Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001); Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "Of Pens and Needles: Sources in Early American Women's History," in *Journal of American History* Vol. 77, No. 1 (1990): 200–207; Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (Women's Press, 1996 [1984]), Foreword.

³³ Parker, *Subversive Stitch*, 1-16.

American and British sampler scholarship is substantial, involving hundreds of publications, documenting extant samplers, sampler designs, motifs, structure, organizing and categorizing them according to region and specific format. In 1921, Ethel Stanwood Bolton and Eva Johnston Coe (1921) documented over eight hundred samplers in the United States, identifying commonalities of design and popular sampler verse.³⁴ Authors Carol Humphrey (1997), Susan Swan Burrows (1976, 1977), Mary Jaene Edmonds (1991), Betty Ring (1993), and Glee Krueger (1978), made significant contributions to the scholarship by identifying more samplers, expanding the relationship between British religious and colonial educational practices and race, gender, socio-economics, and class. The discursive and rhetorical nature of samplers is studied by Scottish material culture specialist Rosanne Waine in *'On Needle-work': Reassessing the Culture of Schoolgirl Samplers* (2015) and rhetoric scholar Maureen Daly Goggin, in her article *An Essamplaire Essai on the Rhetoricity of Needlework Sampler-Making: A Contribution in Theorizing and Historicizing Rhetorical Praxis* (2002). Both authors discuss the sampler as a space of discourse that demonstrates schoolgirls' agency and use of the medium to express ideas and emotions.³⁵

For decades, sampler scholarship privileged the study of samplers made by white settler women or those previously made in Europe. In the 2000s, however, scholars like Gloria Seaman Allen (2003, 2007), Silke Strickrodt (2010), and Lynne Anderson (2021),

³⁴ Ethel Stanwood Bolton and Eva Johnston Coe, *American Samplers* (London: Weathervane Books, 1921).

³⁵ Rosanne Waine, *'On Needle-work': Reassessing the Culture of Schoolgirl Samplers*, in *Charles Lamb Bulletin* 162 (2015), 89-99; Maureen Daly Goggin, "Essamplaire Essai on the Rhetoricity of Needlework Sampler-Making: A Contribution in Theorizing and Historicizing Rhetorical Praxis", in *Rhetoric Review*, 21, No. 4, Vol. 24, (2002): 309–328.

wrote about samplers made by girls from marginalized communities. Allen, a former curator and material culture specialist, and Strickrodt a historian of West Africa, wrote about the nineteenth century samplers of African American and African born girls. Allen drew attention to one of the largest single collections of African American samplers produced at the School for Coloured Girls in Baltimore, Maryland, while Strickrodt's research identified thirteen samplers in European and American museum collections that were made at Christian mission schools in West Africa. Lynne Anderson's *Samplers, Sewing and Star Quits: Changing Federal Policies Impact Native American Education and Assimilation* (2012), writes about two of the ten known samplers stitched by American Indigenous girls, who attended Christian mission schools in the nineteenth century.³⁶ Anderson situates the practice of sampler making and needlework instruction at these schools as an early method of cultural assimilation and the eradication of Indigenous identity. Both Strickrodt and Anderson identified the practice of "beneficiary naming", an early form of child sponsorship, as a key component of the sampler making process at these mission schools.³⁷

Globally, the list of scholarly and popular works on samplers and the history of the practice in Canada is sparse. Jennifer Salahub's Master's Thesis *As They are Fashioned so they Grow: Samplery and Quebec Samplers* (1989), discusses Quebec samplers, explaining the tradition really began with the arrival of English speaking

³⁶ Lynne Anderson, "Samplers, Sewing, and Changing Federal Policies Impact Native American Education and Assimilation," in *Textiles and Politics: Textile Society of America 13th Biennial Symposium Proceedings*, Washington, DC, (Sept.18-22, 2012), 1-9.

³⁷ Silke Strickrodt, "African Girls' Samplers from Mission Schools in Sierra Leone (1820s-1840s)", in *History in Africa*, (Cambridge University Press, Vol.37, 2010), 185-249; Anderson, "Samplers, Sewing," 2-4.

settlers, highlighting the juxtaposition of English and French traditions.³⁸ Joyce A. Taylor Dawson, takes an alternative approach to the material analysis of samplers in *Undated, Unattributable and Unfinished: Forgotten Samplers and Their Re-evaluation Through Archival Research* (2005), by examining a collection of unfinished samplers and fragments of textiles and text based documents produced at the Ursuline Convent School reveal social and historical insights about their makers, teachers and curriculum. In Atlantic Canada Deborah Young's published exhibition catalogue, *A Record for Time* (1985), features a section devoted to Nova Scotia samplers, the first of its kind to do so. Young identified over eighty-eight samplers from private and public collections including a brief analysis by the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia's curator, Dianne O'Neill on their visual characteristics, and provided information about makers' cultural, geographic and familial origins. O'Neill argued, Nova Scotia sampler makers' experienced a degree of freedom of expression in their work, evidenced by the wide range of variations apparent in Nova Scotia samplers which do not conform to specific regional or local styles and thereby, differ from a tradition particularly associated with American samplers.³⁹ The exhibit and the publication were ground-breaking for presenting samplers, quilts, hooked rugs, and other objects associated with women's domestic production as unique art forms deserving of recognition as being culturally and historically significant. In 1998 authored by JoAnn Citrigno, the Nova Scotia Museum's curatorial report *The Needle Arts in Nova Scotia Women's Lives 1752-1938* (1998), discusses Nova Scotian examples of European forms of needlework such as knitting, lace making, crochet work, art embroidery, and

³⁸ Jennifer Salahub, *As They are Fashioned, so they Grow: Samplery and Quebec Samplers*, unpublished Masters thesis (Montreal: Concordia University, 1989), iv.

³⁹ Deborah Young, *A Record for Time*, Halifax: Nova Scotia Museum, 1985.

samplers.⁴⁰ Citrigno draws from local archival sources such as newspapers, magazines, and the letters and diaries of Nova Scotian women that reference these needlework techniques. Though brief in length, the section on samplers highlights the role of the needlework instructor in the sampler making tradition, listing the names of local teachers.⁴¹ Both publications state that Nova Scotia samplers do not appear to conform to a particular style or distinguishing design element, and that sampler motifs and patterns may have been informed by the maker's cultural background. Sampler making is emphasized as a middling or upper-class tradition, rather than a practice common to children of all socio-economic and racial backgrounds.

1.2 Methodology

The story of objects is interwoven with the people who designed, made, used, owned and valued them. Scholar of material culture and Indigenous and settler textiles, Lisa Binkley and Johanna Amos, state, "Textiles, then, present an ideal vector through which to explore potential areas of connection and overlap, as the globe's most ubiquitous form of material culture".⁴² Textiles, made by hand, worn on the body, and often handed down from one generation to another, are amongst the most personal of objects, revealing information about their makers, owners, and users. As Ulrich states, objects can "challenge the compartmentalization of contemporary scholarship", forcing us to

⁴⁰ JoAnn Citrigno, *The Needle Arts in Nova Scotia Women's Lives, 1752-1938*, Halifax: Nova Scotia Museum, 1998.

⁴¹ Citrigno, "The Needle Arts", 20-23.

⁴² Lisa Binkley and Johanna Amos, "*Whig's Defeat: Stitching Settler Culture, Politics, and Identity*," in *Stitching the Self*, eds. Lisa Binkley and Johanna Amos (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 2.

reconsider and even rewrite established historical narratives.⁴³ Furthermore, the personal nature of these objects allows for their investigation through a biographical approach, in which multiple aspects of an “object’s life” or lifespan are considered. This “cultural biography of objects” as Igor Kopytoff suggests, allows for questioning an object similar to the biography of a person.⁴⁴ Borrowing from this approach, I centre my research on Rachel Barrett’s sampler by considering the contexts in which it was made.

A visual and material analysis, borrowed from the work of Linda Eaton’s *Quilts in a Material World* (2010), offers an excellent example for studying needlework objects. Eaton’s research considers the processes involved in the making of objects including, how supplies were acquired, period conventions for making, and political and economic influences in design. For over one hundred and seventy-five years, the Rachel Barrett sampler has preserved her name. It is material evidence of Barrett’s existence as an African Nova Scotian schoolgirl and provides valuable clues about her knowledge and utilization of needlework knowledge, her literacy accomplishments, and the values and beliefs of importance that were being fostered as part of her education at the African School. In the absence of personal accounts written by young Black girls in Nova Scotia the sampler’s content, composed of textual data such as the maker’s name, age, date completed, and stanzas of verse, along with its visual imagery and materiality helps to fill a gender, age, and racial gap that exists in the archival record. The sampler by its very nature blends text and textile.

⁴³ Ulrich, *Age of Homespun*, 7.

⁴⁴ Igor Kopytoff, “Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process,” in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 67.

Barrett's extraordinary sampler is significant for Black Nova Scotian history and the education of Black schoolgirls during the nineteenth century. In Chapter 2, I consider the visual and material culture of the collection of samplers made by other Nova Scotia school girls between 1778 and 1889, revealing common patterns and conventions for making samplers, and highlight certain elements that reveal their makers' creativity and agency. For this, I have constructed an inventory of white schoolgirl samplers from the Nova Scotia Museum's collection, adding to previously published information on this collection and private holdings in the province. While white schoolgirls were indeed engaged in the making of needlework samplers as part of their education, the extant sampler collection illustrates that Barrett crafted a unique and highly significant sampler based on her abilities and exposure to the cultural and political environment of the time.

While Chapter Four serves as a case study that considers the sampler as material culture, Chapter Three examines archival materials found at local and British archives. A substantial collection of published and unpublished reports, correspondence, account books and meeting minutes were compiled between 1724 and 1900 by the colonial missionary society *The Associates of the Late Doctor Bray*, digitized and made available online by the British Online Archives (BOA).⁴⁵ The Bray Associates established and financially supported schools for enslaved Black children in British colonies such as Canada, America, and in the Caribbean. The archives are part of the BOA's larger collection of colonial missionary society papers covering activity within North America,

⁴⁵ British Online Archives (BOA), "Spreading the word, Bray Schools in Canada, America, and the Bahamas, 1645-1900" collection, *Records of the Archives of the Associates of Dr. Bray to 1900*, accessed, Sept. 2021- May 2022, <https://microform.digital/boa/collections/30/bray-schools-in-canada-america-and-the-bahamas-1645-1900>.

South America, Asia, Africa, and Australasia.⁴⁶ Authored by the privileged white members of the society responsible for the enslavement and oppression of peoples of African descent, their words and language demonstrate a combination of prejudices, misbeliefs, and glimpses of humanity that changed slowly over time.

The findings at the BOA are further enhanced by those located at the Nova Scotia Archives, which include local educational records, letters and petitions to the House of Assembly written on behalf of and by Black Refugees themselves, educational records, newspapers, census data, and church records. Information on needlework practices is further supported by period instruction manual and books used by the Anglican church societies in charity schools for the poor are also consulted. Needlework instructions and educational pedagogy offer insights into class, race and gender expectations.

1.3 Chapter Outline

Scholarship on Black girls in Nova Scotia in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is sparse and what mention is made of them is cursory and peripheral to the lives of adults most especially to men. New scholarship on the practice of sampler making and its practice as part of female education in Nova Scotia, is also lacking, and past studies have framed it as being exclusively a practice of white settler girls more particularly of the middling or upper classes. The sampler, Bray Associates archives, local educational records, and period instruction books offer important insights into the education delivered at Anglican charity schools in the mid-nineteenth century. These materials examined

⁴⁶ BOA, “Spreading the word 1808-1967”, accessed Sept. 2021, <https://microform.digital/boa/series/17/spreading-the-word-1808-1967>.

along with an analysis of the sampler's design and materiality suggest Barrett's needlework education was shaped by issues of race, gender, religion and class, and reflected the social and political circumstances of Black Haligonians during the 1840s.

Chapter Two provides a definition and history of samplers and sampler-making, framing the practice as a global practice rather than as a solely European tradition and discusses the role of needlework and sampler-making in female education in Nova Scotia. Embroidery and textiles were part of the cultural traditions that had existed in Africa prior to and during the Atlantic slave trade, and needlework formed part of the stolen labour of the enslaved in North America. The early format of the sampler changed over time and space, and eventually morphed into its most recognizable form as an educational accomplishment of the nineteenth century schoolgirl. The hundreds of extant samplers in private and public collections in Nova Scotia represent perhaps some of the most numerous and informative specimens of eighteenth and nineteenth century female student work to have survived. This material culture contains important information that can be read like a text-based document, depicting biographical data or information about society's social, religious, and cultural expectations of girls and women and their education and labour. Expanding upon previous scholarship on Nova Scotia samplers, a quantitative analysis of samplers in museum collections is undertaken providing new insights on the material culture as practiced in Nova Scotia.

Chapter Three discusses the early history of Nova Scotia's segregated schools for Nova Scotia's Black children, established by the Church of England religious societies, such as the Associates of the Late Doctor Bray and the National Society. This chapter discusses the history of the early Bray schools, Halifax's African School, the schools'

white colonial administrators and teachers. It discusses how needlework was a part of the early curriculum. Most students were the children of Black Loyalists and Black Refugees, and the free and the enslaved learned alongside each other. Black students learned to read, write, and sew, against a backdrop of anti-Black racism, and impoverished living conditions.

Chapter Four disrupts the notion or myth that sampler making was solely the accomplishment of white girls and recoups the history of a nineteenth-century Black schoolgirl. Religious records and census records are examined to connect the maker of the sampler to Halifax's Black Refugee community. An examination of educational documents and needlework instruction manuals is undertaken to provide further insight on the nature of needlework instruction at the African School and the role it played in the school's public examination days. The chapter concludes with a detailed examination of the sampler's content and materiality. In the absence of other examples of extant samplers made at the school, these aspects are compared to samplers produced elsewhere, in order to discover its similarities and differences. This approach brings to the surface insights linking Barrett's role as the sampler maker to notions of self and group identity.

CHAPTER 2 NEEDLEWORK AND SAMPLER-MAKING IN FEMALE EDUCATION IN NOVA SCOTIA

A collection of samplers documented in Deborah Young's *A Record for Time*, and others held by the Nova Scotia Museum (NSM), highlights how this form of needlework was an important part of Nova Scotia's early education system. School-girl samplers were used as a way of educating female children to master basic sewing skills, and learn the alphabet, mathematics, and geography.¹ Students were taught basic stitches, such as cross-stitch, straight-stitch, and French knots, and designs such as letters and numbers, vines, and decorative symbols.² Common designs, often adopted from earlier British samplers, incorporated names, dates, places, and birth, death, and marriage details.³ Samplers documented by Young and others found in the Nova Scotia Museum's sampler collection share commonalities with those made elsewhere and some were made at schools modeled on British education systems. This chapter explores the visual and material elements of these collections of school-girl samplers, revealing commonalities and differences between the different examples as material evidence of part of Nova Scotia's early education system for young girls.

2.1 The Needlework Sampler

The type of needlework known as sampler-making discussed in this thesis, refers to a popular genre of embroidered textile that was intended to serve as a form of practicing

¹ Rosanne Waine, "'On Needle-work': Reassessing the Culture of Schoolgirl Samplers", in *Charles Lamb Bulletin* 162 (2015): 89–99.

² Waine, "On Needle-Work," 93; Young, *A Record*, 9, 56-57.

³ Young, *A Record*, 9.

stitching and documenting important information. Sampler making was a global practice dating back centuries earlier than those first documented in Europe and North America. The earliest example of a sampler found to date was made by the Nazca culture in Peru between c.200 BCE and 300 CE.⁴ Fragments of Coptic-stitched samplers have also been found in Egyptian burial grounds dating from 400 to 500 CE, and again in the fifteenth century.⁵ Early sampler making was used to record important dates and information and for practising a diverse range of hand stitched embroidery. These earliest forms functioned similarly in that stitch techniques, patterns, thread, and colour, were documented on cloth as reference for future work.

Similar to original text-based documents, such as scrolls, samplers were long and narrow in shape and could be rolled up for storage.⁶ In Europe, two types of formats developed at the same time – the band and the spot motif sampler. The former employed horizontal sections of embroidery, or bands, on a long narrow strip of fabric. Spot motif samplers were composed of embroidered designs, motifs, or sections of patterns that were placed randomly on the fabric, giving the appearance of spots of embroidery.⁷ By the

⁴ Waine, “On Needle-work,” 89, 90; “The word sampler derives from the Latin *exemplum* “a model for imitation – a pattern – an example.”; “Embroidery- A History of Needlework Samplers”, The V&A Museum, accessed Sept.10, 2021, <https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/embroidery-a-history-of-needlework-samplers#:~:text=Samplers%20in%20the%2020th%20century&text=However%20needle%20work%20guilds%20and%20art,samplers%20documenting%20historic%20English%20stitches>.

⁵ The V&A Museum, “Embroidery- A History of Needlework Samplers”, accessed, Sept.2021; Goggin, “An Essai Essamplaire,” 329.

⁶ Waine, “On Needle-work,” 90-92; Jo-Ann Citrigno, *The Needle Arts in Nova Scotian Women’s Lives*, The Nova Scotia Museum Curatorial Report #83, (1998), 20.

⁷ Carol Humphrey, *Samplers: Fitzwilliam Museum Handbook*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 3-7; Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*, 85.

nineteenth century both styles had merged.⁸ Other styles of samplers, such as mourning, family record, extract, and marking samplers developed, changing the format to a point where “they bore no resemblance to the original.”⁹ Eventually, regional stylistic groups emerged and samplers became more pictorial and ornamental, and, furthermore, became recognized as a practice of the wealthy and an emblem of the refined.¹⁰ Leading up to this transformation, two centuries of the printing press allowed for the publication and dissemination of pattern and design books, which led to the transnational sharing of designs and motifs.¹¹ As noted by women’s historian and rhetoric scholar Maureen Daly Goggin, by the eighteenth century, “a radical disruption in the purposes, subject, positions and context of sampler making” occurred.¹² What had originally been an inventive practice, morphed into a form for the demonstration and exchange of knowledge, and came to communicate a complex range of meanings involving its makers.

Sampler making was brought to Nova Scotia by successive waves of European and American settlers, who fled Europe due to devastating wars and religious persecution, and by those seeking colonial opportunities.¹³ During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, transportation and preservation of samplers allude to the importance of this form of needlework. Samplers handed down from one generation to the next,

⁸ Humphrey, *Samplers*, 6-7; Goggin, “Essai Essamplaire,” 321-322.; Elizabeth Pugh, “Samplers,” in *Antique Samplers and Needlework Quarterly*, (Winter 2003), Vol.41, 46.

⁹ Pugh, “Samplers,” 46.

¹⁰ Young, *A Record for Time*, 8.

¹¹ Goggin, “Essai Essamplaire,” 326; Tyner, *Stitching the World*, 23.

¹² Maureen Daly Goggin, “Stitching a Life in “Pen of Steele and Silken Inke”: Elizabeth Parker’s circa 1830 Sampler”, in *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework and Textiles, 1750-1950*, (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 33.

¹³ Young, *A Record for Time*, 8; Humphrey, *Samplers*, 6-7.

travelled with their owners over time or were discussed between family members separated by war or migration.¹⁴ One of the most important elements synonymous with the European practice of sampler making arose by the late sixteenth century - the practice of documenting personal information onto the sampler.¹⁵ Inscriptions containing the name and age of the maker, the date of completion, and family names and initials became a standard feature of sampler making.¹⁶ Subsequently the embroidering of alphabets, numbers, and religious or moral verses, also soon became standard elements. Moreover, makers began commonly using wool and/or silk threads on a base fabric, usually linen.¹⁷

These intentional inscriptions of personal information served to mark the accomplishment of the maker, indicating the significance of an event. Similar to signed documents, letters, or journals, this method of self-identification and expression using needle and thread, instead of pen and ink, provides valuable historical information about women and girls. These cloth-based “text(ile)s”, primarily made by female children or women who were underrepresented by the documentary record, are often the only surviving physical evidence of their maker.¹⁸ Given the inconsistent and often inaccurate

¹⁴ Young, *A Record for Time*, 8; Young documents several examples of samplers that were made in Nova Scotia but travelled with their makers to different locations, for example Lucy Perkins, daughter of planter merchant Simeon Perkins, in Liverpool, NS, in 1792, took her sampler with her upon her move to Maine and Cara Anson Elliott’s, Masters Thesis, “Exile from My Native Shore”, cites a letter written by Eliza Byles, of Halifax, written to her aunt living in Boston, containing a transcription of verse from her first sampler.; Lynn Anderson, “By Land and By Sea: Displaced Samplers Reveal Women on the Move”, in *Hidden Stories/Human Lives: Proceedings of the Textile Society of America 17th Biennial Symposium*, October 15-17, 2020, <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/tsaconf/>.

¹⁵ Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*, 86.

¹⁶ Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*, 86; Waive, ““On Needle-work:””, 93-94.

¹⁷ Tyner, *Stitching the World*, 34.

¹⁸ Goggin, “Stitching a Life,” 33. Goggin uses the term “text/iles” to describe the discursive nature of needlework.

nature of record keeping, such as census data recorded for Black people in nineteenth Nova Scotia, this form of needlework represents important historical data about early identities and educational accomplishments.¹⁹ In a world where authorship was primarily male and white these “signed” historic textiles wrought by their maker’s own hand, are unique examples of self-identification and accomplishment. The combination of textual and pictorial elements provides historians with valuable insights into the social, cultural, racial, and religious influences posed on their makers, many of whom were marginalized by society and whose voices were not privileged by the historical record.

2.2 Samplers in Nova Scotia: Making, Migration and Colonialism

While most publications documenting the history of sampler making have focused primarily on the extant examples made in Europe and the United States, hundreds of samplers made between the late eighteenth and late nineteenth centuries can be found in private and public collections in Atlantic Canada, including Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland.²⁰ Samplers in the Nova Scotia

¹⁹ Cheryl Thompson, “Black Canada and Why the Archival Logic of Memory Needs Reform”, in *The Ethics Forum*, Volume 14, Number 2, (Fall 2019): 76–106; Nova Scotia Archives, NS Census Returns, Assessments, 1767-1838, accessed Sept 2021, <https://archives.novascotia.ca/census/>.

²⁰ This was determined via a search of online museum databases, including the following: “Sampler Registry Database”, The Embroiderers’ Association of Canada, accessed Sept.2021, <https://eac-acb.ca/sampler-database/>; “The McCord Museum’s collections database”, The McCord Museum, <https://www.musee-mccord.qc.ca/en/collections/>; Jennifer Salahub, *As They are Fashioned, so they Grow: Samplery and Quebec Samplers* Unpublished Masters thesis (Montreal: Concordia University), 1989; “The New Brunswick Museum Collections Database”, The New Brunswick Museum, accessed Sept. 25, 2021, <http://website.nbm-mnb.ca/collections/online/advancedSearch.asp?txtObjectName=&txtTitleEng=&txtArtistEng=martha+jones&txtObjStartDate=&txtObjEndDate=&txtStyleEnglish=&txtMedium>

Museum's collection were made by first and subsequent generations of white settler descendants – Planters and Loyalists – who arrived during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Deborah Young in *A Record For Time*, where available, included genealogical information on each sampler documented, which included examples made by white settlers and planters from Ireland, Scotland, Germany, Britain and the United Empire Loyalists who brought with them stylistic and educational preferences, pattern books, and sometimes their ancestor's embroideries.²¹ Atlantic Canadian and women's historian, Margaret Conrad, has noted that despite the upheaval caused by the settler experience many of the women who migrated to Nova Scotia "planted their values concerning family, religion, education, gender roles, material well-being – and diary writing – firmly in Nova Scotia's rocky soil. Amongst these were concerns for ornamental refinements such as embroidery and samplers."²² Conrad writes about the daughters of Loyalist elites like Anna Green Winslow, originally from Boston, who held education in high esteem and whose copybook features a popular sampler verse of the time: "Next unto God dear Parents I address myself to you in humble thankfulness for all your care and charge on me bestowed the means of learning unto me allowed."²³ Their subsequent survival in private and museum collections is tangible evidence of their perceived value and

English=&txtCredLineEng=&txtImageId=; Anne Chafe, "Newfoundland Samplers," *The Rooms*, (Fall 1985), <https://www.therooms.ca/newfoundland-samplers>.

²¹ Young, *A Record*, 9.

²² Margaret Conrad, *No Place Like Home*, 29.

²³ Margaret Conrad, *No Place Like Home*, 29, 40; This verse appeared in William Mather's, *The Young Mans Companion: Or, Arithmetick Made Easie: With Plain Directions for a Young Man to Attain to Read And Write True English; And Short-hand ... Choice Monthly Observations for Gardening ... With Some Useful Directions for Angling ... 8th ed., with many additions*, (London: Printed for S. Clark, 1710): 100, accessed Sept.2021, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/009405578/>.

importance to family members. These samplers offer a valuable window into the experiences of young schoolgirls in the Maritimes during a period of growth and significant social and cultural change.

2.3 “Plain and Fancy” Needlework: The Evolution of Samplers in North America

Up until the mid-nineteenth century, clothing was predominantly made at home and household linens, such as sheets, towels, pillow-cases, and personal linens, were mended and cared for by hand.²⁴ Prior to the era of mass production and the invention of the sewing machine, the production of cloth and clothing was labour intensive and a gendered activity, the responsibility of women and girls in a domestic setting. This type of “plain sewing” was functional and practical.²⁵ All women, regardless of their economic standing, were expected to have knowledge of essential sewing methods such as hemming, darning, cutting, knitting, patching, and mending in order to maintain textiles that were considered valuable, either in terms of labour or currency. As such, textiles required constant upkeep to maintain them. Many garments and household textiles woven by hand at home on a loom were referred to as “homespun.”²⁶ Since homespun could be produced domestically, it was economical, and once woven, could be sewn into plain but durable clothing, bedding, towelling and other domestic textiles. This type of sewing was referred to as “plain sewing” and was the predominant type of needlework expected of poor and working-class women.²⁷ Whether homespun or store

²⁴ Citrigno, *Needlework*, 5.

²⁵ Citrigno, *Needlework*, 6.

²⁶ Ulrich, *Age of Homespun*, 84, 85, 92, 93.

²⁷ Citrigno, *Needle Arts*, 6; Tyner, 22-23.

bought, women of all economic backgrounds were expected to know the fundamentals of this type of sewing.²⁸

During the eighteenth century, a type of embroidery referred to as “marking” developed for use on cloth.²⁹ Marking involved hand stitching letters or numbers onto the surface of a textile, such as bedding, clothing, or towels, using coloured threads.³⁰ Marking was used for inventorying, rotation, and laundering of the household’s prized textiles, a process seemingly practiced by women of all economic backgrounds.³¹ As home-manufactured clothing and textiles such as quilts, sheets, towels, and personal linens were considered valuable, marking was a way to label linens to avoid confusion at communal laundries.³²

The process of learning to mark was transferred to the working of a simple sampler, which involved the stitching of repeated rows of the alphabet and numbers in simple block type.³³ Marking samplers were usually the first type of sampler a young girl stitched.³⁴ In Nova Scotia, children stitched marking samplers, featuring letters in Roman, or Italic script on fabric composed of linen, cotton or wool threads.³⁵ In the eighteenth and early nineteenth-centuries, sewing, needlework and their instruction were gendered and children as young as five learned the rudiments of literacy and began working with

²⁸ Citrigno, *Needle Arts*, 6; Margaret Vincent, *The Ladies Worktable* (Biddeford: University Press of New England, 1988), 2-5; Tyner, 21-22.

²⁹ Goggin, “Essai Essamplaire”, 323-324.

³⁰ Vincent, *The Ladies Worktable*, 6-8.

³¹ Citrigno, *Needle Arts*, 5-6; Tyner, 21-22.

³² Vincent, *The Ladies Worktable*, 7-8.

³³ Vincent, *The Ladies Worktable*, 6-8; Glee Kreuger, *American Samplers*, 15.

³⁴ Tyner, *Stitching the World*, 24.

³⁵ Young, *A Record for Time*, 8, 9; Citrigno, *Needlework*, 5.

needle and thread.³⁶ The letters themselves ranged in difficulty from simple block letters to elaborate script.³⁷ This provided the knowledge and practice needed for hand-stitching or marking the identifying names, initials, and numbers onto clothing and household linens. Embroidering required knowledge of numeracy in order to count the number of warp and weft threads of the ground fabric. In the nineteenth century, linens such as sheets, and even clothing like shirts and socks, were still being marked. According to needlework historian Margaret Vincent, over time marking became less functional but remained an important tradition.³⁸ Marked linens became heirlooms handed down from one generation to the next.”³⁹

Regardless of a girl’s economic standing, all women were expected to know the fundamentals of marking. For women of the middling sort and upper classes, they might need to instruct other female family members or domestic servants who were responsible for maintaining the household’s textiles.⁴⁰ For the latter, a sampler acted as a “material CV” and allowed the maker to prove her skills and educational attainment to potential employers.⁴¹ Thus, For the poor and the lower classes, including orphans, the instruction of plain sewing and the making of samplers provided a means of financial independence. For these women, the list of occupations and suitable means for earning a living were few and far between but domestic service, plain needlework and the textile trades, such as dressmaking, laundering, and mending, formed the majority of waged work society

³⁶ Citrigno, *Needle Arts*, 6.

³⁷ Vincent, *The Ladies Worktable*, 7.

³⁸ Vincent, *The Ladies Worktable*, 6-8.

³⁹ Citrigno, *Needle Arts*, 8.

⁴⁰ Citrigno, *Needle Arts*, 8; Tyner, *Stitching the World*, 22-23. Goggin, “Essai Essamplaire”, 322-323.

⁴¹ Goggin, “Essai Essamplaire”, 323.

deemed was acceptable for women.⁴² Working samplers required completing various steps, each of which provided a new skill that could be used for other household chores. By the end of the eighteenth century, the shape of samplers transitioned from being primarily long and rectangular to shorter and square, making them suitable for framing and display within the home.⁴³ Linen, used most often in the home and for sampler making, was cut to a particular size, and then hemmed all the way round.⁴⁴ A decorative border was then embroidered along each side framing a central design.⁴⁵ Decorative patterns practiced on samplers could then be transferred to other household items such as pillowcases, and tablecloths.⁴⁶

Ornamental or “fancy sewing”, developed alongside plain sewing, but was considered a necessary accomplishment for girls of the elite and middling classes, as it denoted gentility and refinement.⁴⁷ In earlier centuries, samplers had primarily been made by the elite, but plain sewing developed alongside ornamental sewing, and both plain and ornamental samplers came to be made.⁴⁸ For centuries, embroidery had been a method for inculcating women into the feminine ideal and came to be seen as outward manifestations of femininity.⁴⁹ Whether for display within the home or on one’s person, ornamental embroidery was intended for purely decorative purposes rather than practical.

⁴² Waine, ““On Needle Work”, 89-90; Goggin, “Essai Essamplaire”, 312.

⁴³ Goggin, “Essai Essemplaire,” 323.

⁴⁴ Citrigno, *Needle Arts*, 5; Tyner, *Stitching the world*, 34.

⁴⁵ Humphrey, *Samplers*, 7.

⁴⁶ Vincent, *The Ladies Work Table*, 7-8; Citrigno, *Needlework*, 19.

⁴⁷ Aimee E. Newell, “Tattered to Pieces: Amy Fiske’s Sampler and the Changing Roles of Women in Antebellum New England,” in *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework 1750-1950*, Maureen Daly Goggin, eds. Beth Fowkes Tobin, Ashgate Publishing, 2009, 55.

⁴⁸ Waine, ““On Needle Work”, 94.

⁴⁹ Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*, foreward.

Samplers made by middle- and upper-class girls could be displayed within the home, asserting the family's financial status and ability to either pay for specialized schooling for their daughters or to allow their daughters the time required to produce them, rather than having to perform domestic labour. As Aimie Newell has observed: "Samplers may also have functioned as conversation pieces, designed to provoke questions and guide genteel conversation, allowing the family, as well as their guest, to show taste, sensibility and discernment. A girl who was attending school was not at home to assist with the household labor."⁵⁰ Over time, samplers served as markers of accomplishment in literacy by displaying its maker's choice of verse, chosen intentionally to display moral and religious values, all of which were tied to society's proscribed notions of gentility and femininity.⁵¹

2.4 Needlework education in Nova Scotia

By the late eighteenth century, Western society's attitudes towards the education of girls changed and a greater cross section of females were encouraged to learn reading and writing.⁵² Most girls learned needlework skills at home but for those who could afford it there were more advanced individual instruction available from special tutors of needlework, often widows or unmarried women, often in need of earning additional income.⁵³ Newspapers in the New England states, Halifax, and in rural Nova Scotia

⁵⁰ Aimee Newell, "Tattered to Pieces", 56.

⁵¹ Aimee Newell, "Tattered to Pieces", 56.

⁵² Judith Tyner, *Stitching the World*, 14, 15.

⁵³ Citrigno, *Needle Arts*, 6-9.

contain advertisements by individual needlework tutors, who advertised the instruction of plain and ornamental needlework and samplers along with dancing, music, drawing, and other subjects.⁵⁴ The educational curriculum continued to expand over the nineteenth century, and sampler-making began to diminish over time.⁵⁵

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth-centuries, sewing, needlework and their instruction whether at home or in the classroom, was gendered and taught by women to girls, and occasionally a few boys, sometimes as young as five years.⁵⁶ Though some samplers were stitched by boys and even adult men, needlework instruction was typically delivered in a separate class or female department, a practice tied to femininity and gentility.⁵⁷ Sampler making was guided by the needlework instructor, who drew upon her knowledge of motifs and designs that had developed over the centuries.⁵⁸ Samplers made in the nineteenth-century display motifs that had been created in the 1500s and which had been passed down, shared, and re-used by generations of women over the centuries.⁵⁹

Teacher and widow of a military officer, Deborah How Cottnam and her daughter established a female academy in Halifax, whose students included the Byles sisters, Rebecca and Sally (Sarah), whose father was an Anglican Loyalist from Boston, the

⁵⁴ Citrigno, *Needle Arts*, 6-10; Young, *A Record For*, 8; Gwendolyn Davies, "Private Education for Women in Early Nova Scotia, 1784-1894", *Atlantis*, Vol.20, No.1, (Mount Saint Vincent University, 1995).

⁵⁵ Citrigno, *Needle Arts*, 8-10; Newell, "Tattered to Pieces", 58, 59, 62.

⁵⁶ Citrigno, *Needle Arts*, 5-6.

⁵⁷ Newell, 58-63.

⁵⁸ Helen Wyld, *Embroidered Stories Scottish Samplers*, National Museum of Scotland, 2019, X.

⁵⁹ Tyner, *Stitching the World*, 23-25; Glee Kreuger, *A Gallery of American Samplers*, 8, 23.

Reverend Dr. Mather Byles.⁶⁰ A significant amount of the Byles family correspondence to family members in the United States has survived, and includes references to the daughters sampler work.⁶¹ Their observations demonstrate the fond relationship that existed between them and their needlework teacher.⁶² A sampler made by Sally Byles has survived, stitched with the date 1781 and Halifax, suggest it was likely produced at Cottnam's academy which was operating at that time.⁶³

Prior to 1864, when the Act for Free and Universal education in Nova Scotia was passed by the House of Assembly, the vast majority of girls in Nova Scotia acquired their knowledge of sewing and literacy informally, from female family members in a domestic setting or from local "dame schools".⁶⁴ Other options for formalized learning in a classroom setting for non-elites were a small number of charity schools, run by missionaries, clergymen, and itinerant schoolmasters and their female relatives, who sometimes instructed girls in reading, writing, arithmetic, and needlework. In Halifax, the Royal Acadian School (1813) and the National School (1816) opened and admitted poor girls along with boys.⁶⁵

By 1836, the city was home to the province's largest school for African Nova Scotian children, known as the African School, located on Albemarle Street, and which

⁶⁰ Wallace Brown, "Reverend Mather Byles", Dictionary of Canadian Biography entry, accessed, April 11, 2022, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/byles_mather_5E.html; Cara Anson Elliott, "Exile From My Native Shore': The Loyalist Diaspora and the Epistolary Family", Masters thesis, College of William and Mary, 2013: 1-2, <https://scholarworks.wm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=6052&context=etd.>"

⁶¹ Gwendolyn Davies. "The Private Education", 11; Elliott, 1.

⁶² Cara Anson Elliott, "'Exile from My Native Shore'", 1.

⁶³ Citrigno, *Needle Arts*, 8; Elliott, "'Exile from My'", 1-2.

⁶⁴ Margaret Conrad, Toni Laidlaw, Donna Smyth, eds. *No Place Like Home Diaries and Letters of Nova Scotia Women*, Formac Publishing Ltd., 1988, 99.

⁶⁵ Fingard, "Attitudes Towards the Education", 18-23; Akins, *A History of Halifax*, 175.

also included needlework on its curriculum.⁶⁶ The African School followed the model set by Halifax's National School and was carrying on a tradition of needlework instruction which had existed in the province's earlier segregated schools for children of Black Loyalists and Black Refugees that were established by the English society The Associates of the Late Doctor Bray.⁶⁷ These earlier schools that operated in the city and in rural communities employed Black and white female instructors to teach girls needlework.⁶⁸

Early Bray Associates' records contain rosters kept by the teachers listing sewing, marking and knitting were taught to children as early as seven years of age in the schools at Birchtown and Brindley Town.⁶⁹ Instructors recorded the names, age, and educational accomplishments of students. One of the earliest recordings of "marking" as a subject taught at school appears in the Bray records for the Halifax school in 1793, instructed by white Loyalist Deborah Clarke.⁷⁰ Since the method of learning to mark often involved the making of samplers, it seems likely that African Nova Scotian children were making marking samplers as early as the 1790s and possibly earlier.

By the nineteenth century, linens such as sheets, and even clothing like shirts and socks, were still being marked.⁷¹ Marking was also documented as part of the needlework curriculum used at Halifax's African School during the 1830s and 1840s, when it was modeled upon the Church of England's charity system of education known as the

⁶⁶ Fergusson, *A Documentary Study*, 62-65; Phillip Hartling, unpublished report, "The African School", 1.

⁶⁷ Fergusson, *A Documentary Study*, 62-65; Hartling, *The African School*, 1-3.

⁶⁸ James W. St. G. Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, 103, 139; BOA, Bray meeting minutes 1768-1808, BRAY/f 03, Schools in Nova Scotia, 1784, 1787, 1789, 1793.

⁶⁹ BOA, Bray meeting minutes 1768-1808, 1787, 1789, 1793, 1796.

⁷⁰ BOA, Bray meeting minutes, 1768-1808, 1793.

⁷¹ Vincent, *The Lady's Work Table*, 7-8; Leena Rana, "Stories Behind the Stitches", 164; Tyner, *Stitching the World*, 21.

National system.⁷² These schools were intended for the working class in England and soon thereafter were established in Nova Scotia. As the nineteenth century progressed, instructions for teaching sewing and embroidery in schools were published and the National Society's *Instructions on Needlework and Knitting* (1838) provided directions for instructing needlework in the classroom and included sections on "marking."⁷³ Extant examples of the book found in the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and the University College of London's Library, contain physical examples of the types of marking samplers that were made as part of the book's lesson. (Fig.2.1)



Figure 2.1. Marking sampler in miniature, specimen of work accompanying the National Society's *Instructions on Needlework and Knitting* (1838), University College of London, Library, Special Collections, London, UK.

⁷² NSA, Records of the House of Assembly, RG 5, Series P, Vol.74, #184; Lois Loudon, *Distinctive and Inclusive*, (The National Society, 2012): 9-11, accessed April 12, 2022, <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-12/2012%20Distinctive%20and%20Inclusive%20-%20The%20National%20Society%20and%20Church%20of%20England%20Schools%2001811%20-%202011.pdf>.

⁷³ No author, *Instructions on Needlework and Knitting*, The National Society, London, 1838, 21.

As girls progressed in their needlework education and the level of difficulty increased, they moved from making simple marking samplers to those that involved pictorial elements, motifs, and verses, many of which were religious.⁷⁴ Sampler making, therefore, was not only a means of obtaining domestic training and basic literacy, but also a way of receiving and displaying religious and moralistic teachings and doctrine.

Catherine Thomas of Halifax, in 1824, for example, inscribed the following verse from a hymn: “When though my righteous judge shall come to fetch the ransom’d people home shall I among them stand shall such a worthless worm as I who sometimes am afraid to die be found at thy right hand.”

Although needlework instruction differed according to class and wealth, sampler making embodied plain and ornamental types of sewing. Sampler scholar Roseanne Waine described the schoolgirl sampler as both decorative and functional, and “aesthetically pleasing and practical”.⁷⁵ In other words, the sampler was in fact a “class leveler” in terms of its purpose as it combined needlework skills applicable to a variety of forms of needlework used for adorning clothing, textiles or plain sewing.⁷⁶

2.5 Nova Scotia’s School-Girl Samplers by the Numbers

In Nova Scotia samplers may be seen as invaluable historic documents offering insights on the intersections of race, gender, class, and age, in early to mid-nineteenth century Nova Scotia. Sampler making served as an important milestone in the education

⁷⁴ Leena Rana, “Stories behind the Stitches: Schoolgirl Samplers of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries”, *TEXTILE*, 12:2: 164, DOI: 10.1080/14759756.2014.11423347; Judith A. Tyner, *Stitching the World*, 23, 24

⁷⁵ Waine, ““On Needlework””, 91.

⁷⁶ Waine, ““On Needlework””, 91.

of young girls from all social backgrounds in Nova Scotia. Examples of samplers ranged in design from simple marking samplers composed of alphabets and numbers, to pictorial samplers featuring highly decorative motifs or vignettes in combination with text such as religious or secular prose. Whether ‘plain’ or ‘fancy’ samplers commonly featured the maker’s name, initials, age, and or date of completion. For children of the poor or marginalized, with limited opportunities for permanently recording their identity, inscriptions on textiles like samplers likely represented the only surviving documentation of their existence. Wrought by their own hands, stitched “text-iles”, composed of words, numbers and pictures, can be read like documents, and are important for tracing the stories and history of groups traditionally underrepresented, silenced, or absent from the archival record, such as women, children and people of colour.⁷⁷

The group of samplers studied is drawn from Young’s catalog *A Record For Time* and new examples from the Nova Scotia Museum and the online collection database for the province’s community museums known as NovaMuse.⁷⁸ Seventy-eight samplers with inscribed dates or a date attribution from 1781 to 1850 were studied. For the purposes of

⁷⁷ Goggin, “Essai Essamplaire”, 323; Lynne Anderson, “Samplers, Sewing, and Star Quilts: Changing Federal Policies Impact Native American Education and Assimilation,” *Textiles and Politics: Textile Society of America 13th Biennial Symposium Proceedings*, Washington, DC, (2012):1-10, accessed February 20, 2022, <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/tsaconf/656/>; Silke Strickrodt, “African Girls’ Samplers from Mission Schools in Sierra Leone (1820s-1840s)” in *History in Africa*, Cambridge University Press, Vol. 37, (2010): 189-245, accessed Sept. 2021, https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.library.dal.ca/stable/40864625#metadata_info_tab_contents; Gloria Seaman Allen, “Samplers from the Oblate Sisters of Providence School for Colored, Girls, Baltimore, Maryland” in *Sampler and Antique Needlework Quarterly*, (Winter 2003), Vol.41:17-30.

⁷⁸ Young, *A Record*, 24-54; Nova Scotia Museum collection database MIMS, accessed March 2021; NovaMuse collections database, The Association of Nova Scotia Museums, <https://ansm.ns.ca/novamuse/>, accessed May, 2021.

this thesis and reasons of time and scope, Nova Scotia samplers before 1780 and after 1850, or those without a firm geographic attribution were not examined nor those that might exist in collections elsewhere. Samplers excluded as described should be considered as part of any in-depth future analysis of the Nova Scotia tradition.

Given the fragile nature of textiles in general, their vulnerability to light, heat, humidity, and insect damage, and fragmentary examples of damaged and incomplete samplers, it is likely that more samplers were worked by Nova Scotians than have survived.⁷⁹ Many extant examples have survived because they were handed down generationally by female relatives and retained by succeeding family members.⁸⁰ Sometimes this information was hand recorded on notes attached to the samplers themselves.⁸¹ Some samplers were brought by settlers from their homeland, taking up space amongst the family's belongings as they travelled across water or over land, giving evidence of how valued they were as family keepsakes.⁸² Makers and their instructors, numbered amongst Nova Scotia's multiple waves of settlers from Europe, Britain, and the New England states, Black and white Loyalists, and refugees from the War of 1812, and inscribed their name, community, and age, and other particulars, allowing a picture to emerge of the sampler tradition as practiced in Nova Scotia.⁸³

⁷⁹ Young, *A Record*, 57; Renée Dancause, Janet Wagner and Jan Vuori, *Caring for Textiles and Costumes*, Canadian Conservation Institute, accessed, Sept.19, 2021, <https://www.canada.ca/en/conservation-institute/services/preventive-conservation/guidelines-collections/textiles-costumes.html>.

⁸⁰ Aimee E. Newell, "Tattered to Pieces", 56.

⁸¹ The Lucy Hartshorne sampler (73.365.2) was acquired by the Nova Scotia Museum in 1973, and contained a note on the back from past relatives documenting its maker and previous owners, Nova Scotia Museum MIMS database, accessed by author, May, 2021.

⁸² Aimee E. Newell, "Tattered to Pieces", 56.

⁸³ Young, *A Record*, 8, 9, 24-54; Philip A. Buckner and John Reid, *The Atlantic Region to Confederation A History*, University of Toronto Press, 1994, xi-xv.

Young's *A Record For Time*, is valuable as the only published documentation of Nova Scotia samplers existing in private and public collections, but analysis of the history of the practice and basic insights on the makers such as age and geographic distribution are absent. Such gaps prevent a fuller understanding of the tradition in Nova Scotia. Young's analysis focused on the artistic elements, such as the use of stitch and motif type and originality of design rather than providing a basic overview of some of the social characteristics of the makers, such as age range and communities where sampler making was prevalent.⁸⁴ The publication stands as one of the few on Canadian samplers, but published in 1985, it presents an opportunity to expand upon Young's studies by re-examining the samplers and their content for new insights on the makers and the practice. The following analysis represents a brief review of some of the sampler's most basic content in order to document characteristics not covered by Young's analysis. Data points examined included genealogical information about the maker's socio-economic background, age range, communities where sampler making occurred, inscriptions of verses, teacher and school names, and depictions of houses or buildings.

Nova Scotia samplers were made by young girls between the ages of seven and twenty-five years old with ten being the most frequently recorded age and eleven being the average.⁸⁵ These ages are comparable to makers elsewhere, where some sampler makers were in their twenties and older including some adult women who finished samplers started in their youth or who started new ones to mark an important life event.⁸⁶ This demonstrates that like elsewhere, not all Nova Scotia sampler makers were children.

⁸⁴ Young, *A Record*, 8-9, 55-58.

⁸⁵ Young, *A Record For Time*, 24-54.

⁸⁶ Newell, "Tattered to Pieces," 54.

Across the province, sampler making occurred in the city, towns and remote villages, stretching from Brier Island to Cape Breton.⁸⁷ The earliest sampler to bear the name of a community was made by Sarah Byles, who inscribed “Halifax” on her sampler in 1781.⁸⁸ Halifax appeared on a total of nine samplers represents the most inscribed place name. This may be representative of its status as the province’s largest urban centre and main seat of finance, trade, and education for the elite, middle-class, African Nova Scotians and poor children.⁸⁹ Samplers made in towns and smaller communities outside of Halifax included Yarmouth, Barrington, Clements, Annapolis, Horton, Windsor, Liverpool and Amherst, several of which appeared on multiple samplers.⁹⁰ Samplers were also made in small villages such as Great Village, Brier Island, and Bridgeport.⁹¹

Few of the samplers studied were inscribed with the names of needlework teachers, or schools.⁹² Because of this trait it is difficult to know how many girls received their needlework training in a classroom setting in Nova Scotia. Just three samplers included the name of an instructor, with Maria Grainger at eleven years old being the earliest to do so in 1788, inscribing the name of her teacher “Miss Hicks” on her sampler.⁹³ Five are inscribed with the name of a school, featuring Halifax’s “National School” on four samplers and Barrett’s “African School” being the fifth. Samplers

⁸⁷ Young, 24-54.

⁸⁸ Young, 26.

⁸⁹ Judith Fingard, Janet Guildford, David Sutherland, *Halifax the First 250 Years*, Formac Publishing, 1999, 5-7.

⁹⁰ Young, *A Record For Time*, 24-54, Liverpool, Amherst, Barrington and Annapolis appeared on samplers more than once.

⁹¹ Young, *A Record*, 24-54.

⁹² Young, 24-54.

⁹³ Young, 36.

produced at the National School showed dates of 1821, 1827, 1835, and 1848, confirming the practice was an important part of the school's instructional process.⁹⁴

Modelled upon the British national school system intended for the instruction of the poor and working classes, in Nova Scotia this system also served as a model for the African School.⁹⁵ The infrequent inscription of school and teacher names on Nova Scotian samplers appears to conform more closely with the British tradition, and differs from the tradition in the United States where this was more common.⁹⁶ This is interesting given the close connections that existed between the States and Nova Scotia since many sampler makers were children of settlers who had migrated from there.⁹⁷ Despite this distinction, Nova Scotia samplers shared other commonalities with both geographic regions. Nova Scotian makers selected verse that were also popular in Britain and America. These were generally taken from the Bible, hymns, religious tracts, prose, and poetry.⁹⁸ Verses were intended to advertise socially acceptable qualities and characteristics that western society proscribed for females.⁹⁹ The Nova Scotia selections express obedience, virtue, piety, industriousness, gratitude for receiving education, the evils of vanity and pride, and the fleeting nature of beauty and youth.¹⁰⁰ Some of these

⁹⁴ Young, 24-54; Nova Scotia Museum sampler, 2004.7.193.

⁹⁵ Young, 24-54.

⁹⁶ Young, *A Record*, 8, 9.

⁹⁷ Young, *A Record*, 26-54; The following are sampler makers who are either daughters or grand-daughters of settlers from the United States: Sarah Byles, Harriet E. Cutler, Elenor Ditmars, Mary Ann Ditmars, Abigail Doane, Ann Jael Embree, Ann Blagden Fairbanks, Matilda A Freeman, Hannah Fox, Mary Margaretta Legett, Lucy Perkins, Rosanna Pinkham, Mary Roop, Catharine Thomas.

⁹⁸ Citrigno, *Needlework*, 20-22; Young, *A Record*, 8, 9; Tyner, *Stitching the World*, 22-25.

⁹⁹ Young, *A Record*, 9; Tyner, *Stitching*, 22-25.

¹⁰⁰ Young, *A Record*, 9, 24-54; Citrigno, *Needlework*, 20-22.

selections were drawn from popular instruction books or were penned by popular hymn writers such as English theologian Isaac Watts. Verses included William Mather's "Next unto God Dear Parents I address Myself to you in humble thankfulness, For all your care and charge on me bestowed the means of learning unto me allowed" and "Jesus permit thy gracious name to stand as the first efforts of an infant's hand and while her fingers o'er the canvas move engage her tender heart to seek thy love when we devote our youth to God tis pleasing in his eye a flower when offered in the bud is no vain sacrifice."¹⁰¹ Sampler scholar Rosanne Waine offers further insight on this aspect stating: "this method of copying verse provided a focused and introspective activity for instilling the meanings of such messages within the maker."¹⁰²

Nova Scotian samplers like those made in England and the United States, were also made by children of all socio-economic and racial backgrounds.¹⁰³ The daughters of elite families such as the Uniackes, and the Prescotts made samplers.¹⁰⁴ The patriarchs of these families held influential positions in Nova Scotia society, including the government, merchant trade, the church, and the courts of law.¹⁰⁵ But samplers were also made by

¹⁰¹ Young, *A Record for Time*, 24-54; William Mather, *The Young Man's Companion or Arithmetick Made Easy*, R. Ware, at the Bible and Sun in Amen-Corner; J. Clarke, at the Golden-Ball in Duck-Lane; and T. Longman, at the Ship in Pater-Noster-Row, 1737, 88, Google Ebook; "Isaac Watts", Encyclopedia Britannica online, accessed Nov.2021, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Isaac-Watts>.; Bolton & Coe, *American Samplers*, 313.

¹⁰² Waine, "On Needlework", 91.

¹⁰³ Allen, *Maryland Embroideries*, 2-4; Tyner, *Stitching the World*, 22-23.

¹⁰⁴ Examples of Nova Scotia Museum samplers made by a member of the Uniacke family is 49.9.16, and by the daughter of Charles Prescott, 71.506.20.

¹⁰⁵ Brian Cuthbertson, "Richard John Uniacke", Dictionary of Canadian Biography, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/uniacke_richard_john_1753_1830_6F.html; Susan Buggey, "Charles Ramage Prescott", Dictionary of Canadian Biography, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/prescott_charles_ramage_8F.html; Young, 24-54.

children of non-elites such as Rachel Barrett, who was most likely the daughter of a Black Refugee who had escaped enslavement in Virginia, and by daughters of farmers, shopkeepers, and gardeners living in rural communities.¹⁰⁶ Although Barrett's sampler is a singularity, it seems likely that other Black students may well have produced them.

In Nova Scotia's early schools for Black children, the system followed the English charity model which included needlework on its curriculum. Early schools in Birchtown, Brindley Town, and Preston, employed Black women, usually the wives or female relatives of the schoolmaster, to teach the free and enslaved daughters of Black Loyalists, sewing, knitting, spinning, and marking, in addition to reading, spelling and religion.¹⁰⁷ Marking taught in these early schools situates needlework and embroidery within the lives of Black girls suggesting they too were a part of the sampler making tradition. By the 1840s, Rachel Barrett, a student of the African had stitched a pictorial sampler, featuring a detailed depiction of her school, along with important text documenting her name, age, and verse from "God Save the Queen." Her work is evidence that this advanced form of sampler making came to be instructed at schools for African Nova Scotian children. While we do not know if other students made samplers at the school Barrett's work disrupts the myth that sampler making was not accessible to Black students. Furthermore, samplers made by white settler children at the National School and Barrett's made at the African School, followed the British charity school model of needlework instruction and sampler making.

¹⁰⁶ Young, *A Record*, 9.

¹⁰⁷ Sylvia Hamilton, "Naming Names", 24-25, 34; James W. St. G. Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, 91-103, 139-141.

CHAPTER 3

“PIOUS DESIGNS”: THE BRAY ASSOCIATES AND HALIFAX’S AFRICAN SCHOOL (1785-1850)

During the period prior to the arrival of the Loyalists in Nova Scotia (before 1780s), white settlers from The United States arrived with enslaved Black people, who brought with them needlework skills and sewing knowledge learned as part of this enslavement. These needlework practices continued with the arrival of Black Loyalists (following the 1780s) and through their children, both free and enslaved. In the communities of Birchtown, Halifax, and Brindley Town (now known as Digby), schools for Black children were established by the Bray Associates, an English Protestant society, rooted in Britain. Students or “scholars” learned to spell, read from the Bible, and to sew, knit, and mark from Black and white schoolmistresses.¹ Under the control of the Anglican church, these schools offered basic instruction in literacy and needlework, and facilitated donations of much needed clothing. The Bray Associate school system, which was also tied to and supported by slavery, advanced the British systems of education and the charity model of schooling which was informed by attitudes of religious paternalism and racism.

The Bray Associates were instrumental in ensuring the development and maintenance of a formal education system for young Black students. This education system was supported by the Anglican church and their charitable societies which were ultimately interested in the indoctrination and assimilation of marginalized peoples.² The

¹ James W. St. G. Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, 91-103, 139-141.

² John C. Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 1-4, 20-25; BOA, “Spreading the Word collection”, Overview and Description of The Bray Associates collection, accessed Sept.,

nature of their education and the attitudes of the school's supporters provide important context demonstrating the attitudes of administrators, teachers, and the British charity method of schooling. These models determined how students learned, what they learned, and fostered expectations of student identity, and yet primary source documents demonstrate they negotiated decisions impacting their education and their participation within the learning system became events of intersection with Nova Scotia's elites.

In this chapter I take an in-depth look at the establishment and organization of the early education system for Black students in Halifax. As such, I examine the Bray Associates archives and local educational records, situating the student experience within an emerging colonial education system in Nova Scotia that provided Black students with the necessary vehicles of reading, writing, and needlework to mobilize their own self-expression as evidenced by the sampler work completed in 1845 by twelve-year old Rachel Barrett. I first examine the early schools for Black Loyalist children, and the nature of their experience in these early schools, and then, I detail the relationship between early education, and the Anglican church and charity schools in Halifax. Furthermore, I bring attention to the development of these charity schools in Halifax and how some students protested and subsequently influenced the direction of curriculum, effecting change. As a result, students effected change in their learning environment by forcing a development of the curriculum that included writing and allowed for them to participate in activities such as public examination days.

2021, <https://microform.digital/boa/collections/30/bray-schools-in-canada-america-and-the-bahamas-1645-1900>; Brendan Wolfe, "Associates of Dr. Bray", (September 07, 2021), Encyclopedia Virginia, <https://encyclopediaivirginia.org/entries/associates-of-dr-bray>.

3.1 Establishing an Education System in Nova Scotia for Black Children

This chapter draws on archive material of the Anglican missionary society known as the Associates of the Late Dr. Bray (the Bray Associates) and local documents related to schools they sponsored in Nova Scotia to expand our understanding of the experience of the African Nova Scotian students who attended them between 1785 and 1850. Provincial archivist Charles D.B. Fergusson and scholars of Black and local history such as Harvey Amani Whitfield, Bridglal Pachai, James W. St. G. Walker, Judith Fingard, and Robin Winks have included the school in their writings.³ These works provide brief but important glimpses of these schools, but absent is a detailed discussion of the Bray Associates' and the school's supervisors connections to slavery, the names of early students along with their educational accomplishments, and their status as free or enslaved students. The extensive Bray Associates archives and other period documents reveal needlework was a part of the curriculum; insights on the attitudes of supervisors, teachers, and the impacts of the school's public examination days.⁴

Founded in the first quarter of the seventeenth century, the Bray Associates and the Society for the Propagation for the Gospel (SPG) were part of a larger movement

³ Charles D.B. Fergusson, *A Documentary Study of the Establishment of the Negroes in Nova Scotia between the War of 1812 and the Winning of Responsible Government*, Publication No.8, The Public Archives of Nova Scotia, 1948, 62-4, 104-5, 112-3, 117-8; Harvey Amani Whitfield, *Blacks on the Border*, 115; Bridglal Pachai, *Beneath the Clouds of the Promised Land, Vol.1*, The Black Educators Society, Halifax, NS, 1990, 51, 79, 88; James W. St. G. Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, 41, 53, 80-84, 96, 101, 202, etc; Judith Fingard, "Attitudes towards the Education of the Poor", 16, 18-27,29, 33; Robin Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 57-59, 135-137, 364-65.

⁴ BOA, overview of the Bray Archives in "The Spreading the Word collection", states there are "24, 025 pages" detailing the activities of the society's activities in America, Canada and the Bahamas, <https://microform.digital/boa/collections/30/bray-schools-in-canada-america-and-the-bahamas-1645-1900>.

within the Church of England, aimed at spreading “the message of Anglicanism” throughout the British colonies.⁵ Anglican clergyman, Dr. Thomas Bray, was a child of the working-class poor in seventeenth century rural England.⁶ Rising through the ranks of the Anglican ministry, he became a founding member of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in 1701, and his namesake organization, in 1724.⁷ This evangelical mission work employed Church of England missionaries to teach the gospel and religious literacy in schools throughout the British colonies. The Bray Associates were established specifically to provide basic literacy and to convert enslaved and free Black people and some Indigenous peoples.⁸

The schools established by the Bray Associates became some of the first to be involved in the eradication of Indigenous culture. More concerned about the souls of Black students, they “seemingly cared little for their freedom from enslavement, or for their religious or cultural autonomy.”⁹ The Associates stated goal was to ensure children of African slaves in the colonies were “to be properly instructed in the principles of Christianity and that the great and necessary duties of obedience and fidelity to their masters and humility and contentedness with their condition would be impressed on their

⁵ Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 1; Brendan Wolfe, “The Associates of Dr. Bray”, Encyclopedia Virginia.

⁶ Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 2-4; Brendan Wolfe, “Associates of Dr. Bray”, Encyclopedia Virginia, <https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/associates-of-dr-bray/>, accessed, Sept.2021.

⁷ Van Horne, 4-7.

⁸ Van Horne, 6; Brendan Wolfe, “Associates of Dr.”.

⁹ BOA, Spreading the Word collection, Bray Schools in Canada, America and the Bahamas, 1645-1900, the Bray Archives, overview page, accessed Sept.2021, <https://microform.digital/boa/collections/30/bray-schools-in-canada-america-and-the-bahamas-1645-1900>.

minds.”¹⁰ Education was secondary to the primary goal of instilling obedience and industry, which were believed to foster a submissive and quiescent workforce. Bray himself considered Black and Indigenous people to be “the heathen of America”, accepted the institution of slavery, and was concerned “for the blacks’ immortal souls, not their temporal condition”.¹¹

Composed of some of the most powerful men in Britain, most of whom were clergy, both the S.P.G. and the Associates, supported the institution of slavery.¹² The Associates were funded by a Caribbean plantation that operated using stolen labour from the enslaved and included members, such as Benjamin Franklin, who held the enslaved.¹³ During the 1760s Franklin provided advice to the Associates on the best American communities to locate their schools, overseers, and matters related to their operation.¹⁴ In later years, some of its members came from the world of the abolition movement, including William Wilberforce and Granville Sharp.¹⁵

The first Bray schools in North America were established in the American colonies prior to the American Revolution (1775-1783), and in Nova Scotia after the arrival of 30,000 Loyalist refugees, approximately ten percent of which were Black Loyalists, and persons enslaved by white Loyalists who had left because of the conflict.¹⁶

¹⁰ *The Public Spirit Illustrated in the Life and Designs of the Reverend Thomas Bray*, The Associates of the Late Dr. Bray, (London, 1808), 66, Google ebook.

¹¹ Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 6.

¹² Van Horne, 6-7, 11; Brendan Wolfe, “Associates of Dr. Bray”, Encyclopedia Virginia, <https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/associates-of-dr-bray/>, accessed, Sept.2021; Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, 114.

¹³ Van Horne, 6-7; Brendan Wolfe, “Associates of Dr.”.

¹⁴ Wolfe, “Associates of Dr.”.

¹⁵ Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, 114.

¹⁶ Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, 37.

The first Bray schools in the United States were established in Philadelphia (1758-1776 and from 1786-ca.1900), New York (1760-1774), Newport, Rhode Island (1762-1775), Williamsburg, Virginia (1760-1774) and Fredericksburg, Virginia (1765-1769).¹⁷ Bray schools were also established in the Bahamas, Bermuda and the Barbados.¹⁸ Since S.P.G. clergy were ordained in England and swore allegiance to the Crown the American schools closed at the beginning of the “Unhappy Disputes”.¹⁹ At the war’s conclusion, the Associates turned their sights to Nova Scotia. In 1784, S.P.G. missionary Reverend John Breynton wrote to the Bray Associates stating: “I am happy in being any way instrumental in suggesting to the Associates of Dr. Bray a field for the extension of their benevolent and pious designs of promoting Christian knowledge among the negroes of the province.”²⁰

In 1785, the Associates established a school three kilometers south of Digby at a small Loyalist settlement called Brindley Town and at Halifax.²¹ A third was added a year later at Birchtown, which was home to the largest population of Black Loyalists in the province and the largest community of free persons of colour living outside of

¹⁷ Wolfe, “Associates of Dr.”

¹⁸ BOA, Bray Archives, Bray meeting minutes, May 7, 1787.

¹⁹ Edgar Legare Pennington, “Thomas Bray’s Associates and their Work Among the Negroes”, in *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, 48 (1938): 403.

²⁰ BOA, Spreading the Word, Bray Schools in Canada”, meeting minutes, November 15, 1784.

²¹ Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 54-60; Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, 47, 89, 101-102.

Africa.²² In 1787, a fourth school was established at Preston.²³ A fifth school was opened by the S.P.G. at Tracadie in 1788, and a sixth in Fredericton in 1797.²⁴

The original purpose of the schools was to convert enslaved and free Black children by supplying instruction in literacy and knowledge of the Bible. In Nova Scotia

Name	Age	Sex	Books	Proficiency	Remarks
Prince Peter	3	Male	Spelling		
Anne Robinson	13	Female	Spelling	reading	John Adams 23rd 15 Aug 1787
James Dicks	6	Male	Spelling		James D
Frederick Wilson	6	Male	Spelling		John Wilson
John Dimeson	7	Male	Spelling	reading	John Dimeson
Clay Jackson	1	Male	Spelling	reading	Clay Jackson
Charles Little	6	Male	Spelling		John Little
Walter Dicks	3	Male	Spelling		Walter Dicks
Joseph Savage	3	Male	Spelling	reading	Joseph Savage
James Walling	10	Male	Spelling	reading	James Walling
Paul Cole	13	Male	Bible	reading	Paul Cole
Ben Cole	13	Male	Bible	reading	Ben Cole
Thomas Cole	9	Male	Spelling	reading	Thomas Cole
James Wallin	6	Male	Spelling		James Wallin
John Dimeson	7	Male	Spelling		John Dimeson
John Jackson	13	Male	Spelling	reading	John Jackson
W. Moor	3	Male	Small book		
James W. Anderson	13	Male	Spelling		James W. Anderson
John B. Little	6	Male	Spelling		John B. Little
Elizabeth Thomas	10	Female	Spelling	reading	Elizabeth Thomas
James Peter	19	Male	Spelling		James Peter
John Peter	10	Male	Bible	reading	John Peter
John Peter	6	Male	Small book		
James Dicks	5	Male	Bible		James Dicks
James Dicks	3	Male	Bible		James Dicks
James Dicks	6	Male	Spelling		James Dicks
James Dicks	16	Male	Spelling		James Dicks
John Thompson	17	Male	Spelling		John Thompson
Charles Thomas	18	Male	Spelling		Charles Thomas

Figure 3.1 List of children attending the Bray's school in Halifax under the tuition of William Furmage. (BOA)The Archives of the Associates of Dr. Bray, Administrative records and letters of the Associates; Correspondence on the establishment of schools in Canada, 1785-1836.

most students who attended the early schools were free.²⁵ Although in fact most Black Loyalist children did not attend school both the free and the enslaved attended together.²⁶

²² The Black Loyalist Heritage Centre, accessed May 2021, <https://blackloyalist.novascotia.ca/>,

²³ James W. St. G. Walker stated that a school at Digby, had already been started by a Black Loyalist settler independently from the Associates, but little is known about the school except that it did not operate for long, 100.

²⁴ Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 54-60; Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, 387.

²⁵ BOA, Bray meeting minutes, 1784-87.

²⁶ Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, 103; BOA, Schools in Canada, Bray meeting minutes, 1784-87.

The earliest of the school lists to survive was dated 1787, and was recorded by the Halifax school's instructor, William Furmage, a white English missionary and follower of the Countess of Huntingdon Sect.²⁷ Twenty-four children under his care were listed "free", and six whose "condition" was listed using the term "bond." in reference to their "condition".²⁸ (Fig. 3.2)

Black Loyalist Anglican, Isaac Limerick, was the teacher at the Halifax school in 1789, and listed all thirty-two children under his charge as free, and identified that two of his newest students, William Zarne and Rose Murry had died in August of that year.²⁹ Another Black Loyalist Joseph Leonard was the schoolmaster at Brindley Town, and between 1787 and 1788, all twenty-seven of his students were listed as free.³⁰ The oldest of the enslaved students was Susanna Ester, at nineteen years old Ester, was a student of Furmage, and the youngest at five years, was little William Moor, who died in August of 1787.³¹

Reports on the schools at Birchtown and Brindley Town record the destitute conditions that existed in these communities and school attendance did not assure a life of freedom. Many free students left school to enter terms of "apprenticeship" to support themselves or their families. In these instances, apprenticeship was another form of

²⁷ BOA, Bray minutes, 1787; The Countess of Huntingdon Sect was an evangelical sect of Calvinist Methodists, who was sponsored by the Countess of Huntingdon in England, who had converted to John Wesley's methodism in 1739. She funded the training of evangelical clergymen on British soil.

²⁸ BOA, Bray minutes, 1787.

²⁹ BOA, Bray minutes, 1789.

³⁰ BOA, Bray minutes, 1789, 1787, 1788.

³¹ BOA, Bray minutes, 1787-1788; Harvey Amani Whitfield, *North to Bondage: Loyalist Slavery in the Maritimes*, Vancouver, Toronto UBC Press, 2016, 12.

enslavement or indentured servitude.³² Two documents in the Bray Archives record student names, and books read by students who subsequently left the school to enter apprenticeships. In Blucke's report from 1795, twenty-one children left the school to apprentice, and another student, a Joseph Johnstone, had died.³³ Though their ages were not recorded by Blucke some can be estimated for those students whose ages were recorded on the list for 1793 to 1794.³⁴ Locations listed alongside their names, were inferred the destination of their apprenticeship, and included Halifax, Liverpool and "Port Latore".³⁵

The widespread poverty endured by Black Loyalists was described by the local schoolmasters and Anglican missionaries, who occasionally inspected the schools. Student hardships that prevented them from attending school included, starvation, inadequate shelter, and a lack of clothing. The latter was a recurrent complaint that appeared frequently in the correspondence with the Bray Associates. In addition, court cases of the period document several cases involving Black Loyalists accused of theft of clothing.³⁶ At Shelburne in 1792, a free Black Loyalist woman, Alicia Wiggins, was convicted of stealing money and clothing, and was subsequently sentenced to "thirty-nine lashes on her back".³⁷

This situation connects to the importance of needlework skills. The following extracts from the Bray Associates correspondence relate to these circumstances and shed

³² Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, 71-73.

³³ BOA, Bray minutes, 1795.

³⁴ BOA, Bray minutes, 1794.

³⁵ BOA, Bray minutes, 1795.

³⁶ Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, 77-78.

³⁷ Harvey Amani Whitfield, "The Struggle Over Slavery in the Maritimes," in *Acadiensis*, 2012, <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/acadiensis/article/view/20066/23079>.

light on fabric and apparel benefactors in England donated in aid of this privation. In 1787, Birchtown's schoolmaster Stephen Blucke wrote:

The innumerable hardships that this new country abounds with, and the very few opportunities that the poor blacks enjoy bereaves them of the means for obtaining more than a scanty pittance of food, and in some families hardly that, which occasions the poor little objects to be in the pityfull situation they now endure, and must experience still more, if some relief is not handed them;...I apply for this relief humbly beseeching that your charity, may cover them, with a suit of clothes, a pair of shoes and a blanket....³⁸

A similar state of poverty and lack of clothing was reported at Brindley Town, by Loyalist Colonel Barton, who wrote to the Associates of "the distressed state of the Negroes there and that the children could not attend the school for want of necessary clothing."³⁹ Correspondence later that same year further documents the desperate want of clothing:

Men & Women, lame & Blind. After those had been supplied, the Men with a pair of Trousers & Jacket – the Women with a short gown and petticoat, what remained was given to such as had large Families of Children & were exceeding favor. Be pleased to return their Thanks to their Benefactor for this seasonal relief, for never was distress more apparent than amongst those poor people many of whom are almost without Clothing. Numbers of whom I fear are destitute of the necessaries of Life & before the end of the ensuing Winter will feel the most keen distress.⁴⁰

Three years later in 1791, the want of clothing had not abated. Brindley Town's schoolmaster, Black Loyalist Joseph Leonard commented: "The Winter having been very severe many of the children for want of clothing were prevented attending the school."⁴¹

³⁸ BOA, Bray minutes, December 22, 1787.

³⁹ BOA, Bray minutes, October 13, 1788.

⁴⁰ BOA, Bray minutes, October 13, 1788.

⁴¹ BOA, Bray minutes, 1791.

By December, Leonard had received another donation of fabric and supplies for the making of clothing, including: “1 dozen boys strong shoes, 1 dozen ditto for Girls, 50 yards of blue Nap. Boys, 37 yards of dark striped linsey, 20 yards of Ozenbrigs, 2 ft of thread, 2 gross of black horn buttons, 1 jacket for a pattern, 1 piece of Binding.”⁴² Unlike the previous shipment of ready-made clothing, except the shoes and shifts, the clothing required manufacturing.

Due to the unequal distribution of adequate supplies and materials for the Black Loyalist settlers in comparison to the white settlers, English charity was relied upon to supply a portion of those needs.⁴³ In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, clothing was a highly visible marker of social status which linked its wearer to class and social status.⁴⁴ In the United States, the term “ozenbrig” or “osnaburg”, referred to a plain coarse woven linen or hemp fabric, some of which was made in Germany and in parts of Great Britain, and was popularly imported for making shirts and shifts for the enslaved.⁴⁵ Given the Bray Associates connections to slavery and their mandate for converting the enslaved through education, it seems likely these donations of clothing from Britain, and organized by the English members, perhaps influenced the benefactor’s selection of clothing fabric for the Nova Scotia Black Loyalists. Examples of racial stigma and clothing in Nova Scotia continued well into the nineteenth-century as evidenced by the accounts of historians such as Thomas B. Akins. In his “*History of the City of Halifax*” Akins wrote,

⁴² BOA, Bray minutes, Dec.30, 1791.

⁴³ Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, 106.

⁴⁴ Linda Baumgarten, “Clothes for the People, Slave clothing in Early Virginia, Colonial Williamsburg”, 1988, accessed October, 2021, <https://research.colonialwilliamsburg.org/DigitalLibrary/view/index.cfm?doc=ResearchReports%5CRR0409.xml>.

⁴⁵ Linda Baumgarten, “Clothes for the People”.

“At the close of the war a quantity of American soldiers’ uniforms, taken at Castine, in Maine, were served out to the Chesapeake negroes. Their grotesque appearance in the blue and yellow coats, occasionally intermixed with the green and red facings of the corps called the York Rangers, (at the peace disbanded in Halifax) must be within the recollection of many of our old inhabitants.”⁴⁶ These uniforms of the enemy, captured as spoils of war by the British during the War of 1812 would never have been worn by the soldiers who captured them, but apparently were given to Halifax’s Black men to wear.⁴⁷ Historian Suzanne Morton has written about the racist and derogatory descriptions of Black women and their choice of clothing which appeared in Halifax’s newspapers later in the century.⁴⁸

Bray historian, John Van Horne, concluded that the Associates’ schools were not attended by a large majority of the Black population in the American colonies, and although the schools in Nova Scotia were for both the free and the enslaved, most students who attended were free.⁴⁹ The Bray Associates early connections and mandates related to enslavement may have influenced the type of clothing Black Loyalists made and wore. Needlework learned at these schools was used for the manufacturing of these garments which would have signified the status of its wearer as an enslaved person, irrespective of their status as free. Racially segregated schooling once established in the province through the Bray schools became widespread and embedded in the provincial

⁴⁶ Akins, *History of Halifax*, 164.

⁴⁷ Kevin Robins, Parks Canada historian and Army Museum Curator, telephone discussion with the author, Sept. 25, 2021.

⁴⁸ Morton, “19th century Black Women”, 33.

⁴⁹ Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 38.

school system that continued up to the 1980s.⁵⁰ This pattern of segregated education and settlement, tied to colonial and religious paternalism contributed to a legacy of racism that plagued Black lives in Nova Scotia for generations.

3.2 St. Pauls Anglican Church and Halifax's Bray school

Power for administering education and hiring teachers for the Bray schools in Nova Scotia resided with Nova Scotia's oldest Anglican congregation, the Halifax parish of St. Paul's Anglican Church, who acted on behalf of the London based Associates (Fig.3.1).⁵¹

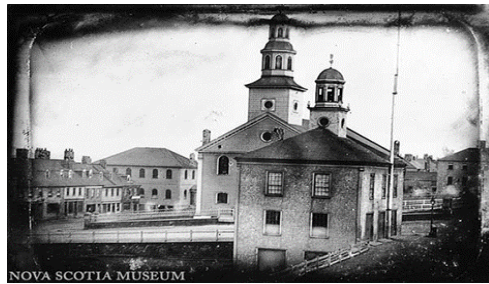


Figure 3.2. Early photograph (ca.1853) of St.Paul's Anglican church, Nova Scotia Museum, Cultural History Collection, 75.70.3.

Its officers which over the years included the church's rectors and the Bishop of Nova Scotia. These officers represented the highest ranks of the Anglican church in Nova Scotia and included the Reverend Charles Inglis, the first colonial Bishop in British North

⁵⁰ "African Heritage Month Narratives – Canada's History of Segregation", African Nova Scotia Affairs, <https://ansa.novascotia.ca/content/african-heritage-month-narratives-week-three>, accessed Feb., 2022; David W. States, "Presence and Perseverance: Blacks in Hants County, Nova Scotia, 1817-1914", unpublished Master's thesis, Atlantic Canada Studies, St. Mary's University, 2002, 84.

⁵¹ Built in 1750, the church was a significant and powerful symbol of England's established church, and today is the oldest building in Halifax, and oldest Anglican Church in North America. "St. Paul's Anglican Church", St. Paul's Anglican Church, accessed, Sept.2021, <https://stpaulshalifax.org/>.

America.⁵² Three generations of prominent colonial Loyalists, the Inglis family, played important roles in the operations of Halifax's Bray school. Since St. Paul's was the seat of the bishopric, it was involved in matters affecting all the Bray schools in the province at the top of the decision-making hierarchy in Nova Scotia. The bishop and the rectors reported directly to the Associates in London and acted on their behalf. St. Paul's rector acted as the Halifax school's superintendent, occasionally inspected schools in other communities and oversaw the activities of all the Bray school teachers. This management structure existed for the duration of the Halifax school, which also received financial support from the Legislature and from the Bray Associates in the form of funding or school materials between 1785 until 1860.⁵³

During the 1780s and 90s, a succession of St. Paul's rectors, helped to establish the Bray schools in the province, and their correspondence with the Associates documents the names of the schools' early teachers. Most of those named were the prominent male Black Loyalist religious and community leaders. With one exception the names of wives or daughters were not documented. The first rector of St Paul's responsible for establishing a Bray sponsored school in the province was an S.P.G. missionary from England, the Reverend John Breynton, who himself had enslaved people prior to the American Revolution.⁵⁴ At Halifax, Breynton selected a part of the city's

⁵² Judith Fingard, "Charles Inglis", Dictionary of Canadian Biography, accessed Sept.20, 2021, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/inglis_charles_5E.html.

⁵³ Winks, *The Blacks In Canada*, 58, 134-137; Pachai, *Beneath the Clouds*, 49-50.

⁵⁴ Nova Scotia Archives, "African Nova Scotians in the Age of Slavery and Abolition", MG 100, volume 113, number 51 (microfilm 15169), Nov.1776, <https://archives.novascotia.ca/africanns/archives/?ID=12&Page=200402017>.

former Orphans' house, where he had previously instructed the city's poor orphans.⁵⁵ The first teacher of the Halifax school he hired was an unnamed "capable and serious Negroe woman", which likely made her the province's first female Black school teacher within a formalized system.⁵⁶ Breynton's letter to the Associates about her clearly demonstrates paternalism and racism. He wrote in 1784, "The exorbitant price of labour in this Province obliges me to go to the extremity of the allowance of £12 sterling for each Negro taught to read; when times grow more favourable some abatement may be expected."⁵⁷ In Halifax at this time paid labour supplied by free people of colour was in high demand. As the school's first teacher she taught thirty-six children, free and enslaved, to read from the Testament and Bible and sewing.⁵⁸ The prominent Black Anglican Mrs. Catherine Abernathy, taught at the school in Preston, including reading, spelling and needlework.⁵⁹ At Halifax, the unnamed Black schoolmistress was replaced the following year by William Furnage.⁶⁰ By 1791, a large proportion of the Black Loyalists, including the province's first female Black teachers, had departed the province in search of a better future, as part of the mass exodus of Black Loyalists to Sierra Leone.⁶¹ Historian James W. St. G. Walker points out that the repercussions of this departure of established Black leadership, including the Black teachers, meant in isolated

⁵⁵ Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 59; BOA, Bray minutes, July 11, 1785; Akins, *History of Halifax*, 42-43.

⁵⁶ Winks, *Blacks in Canada*, 59; BOA, Bray minutes, Nov.15, 1784.

⁵⁷ BOA, Bray minutes, Nov.15, 1784.

⁵⁸ Walker, *Black Loyalists*, 102.

⁵⁹ Walker, *Black Loyalists*, 103.

⁶⁰ Walker, *Black Loyalists*, 102.

⁶¹ Walker, *Black Loyalists*, 138-140.

communities Black people began to lose a measure of independence and control at the early Bray schools.⁶²

Two years later, in 1793, the Halifax school reopened, and North America's first colonial Bishop had been installed at St. Paul's Church, prominent New York Loyalist, the Reverend Dr. Charles Inglis. Thereafter Charles, son John and grandson, Charles, became involved with the school for almost the entire duration of the school's existence. John, who would eventually follow in his father's footsteps to become bishop, played a greater role in the school than his father, taking great interest in its affairs including arrangements for a new building and its reopening as the African School in 1836. Like Breynton, Charles too had been a slave-owner prior to the war.⁶³ In 1793, the new rector of St. Paul's, the Reverend Robert Stanser hired the white Loyalist, Deborah Clarke, assisted by her widowed daughter Mary Fitzgerald to teach at the school.⁶⁴ In 1784, Clarke had previously advertised her services as a private instructor of reading, spelling, sewing and marking in *The Nova Scotia Gazette*.⁶⁵ Clarke recorded lists containing student names, ages, reading level, and needlework instruction.⁶⁶ The school continued to

⁶² Walker, *Black Loyalists*, 382, 341.

⁶³ Karolyn Smardz Frost, and David States, "King's College, Nova Scotia: Direct Connections with Slavery, September". Presented to William Lahey, President, University of King's College and Dorota Dr. Glowacka, Chair, King's and Slavery: A Scholarly Inquiry, 2019. <https://ukings.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/20200910KingsSlaverySmardzFrostStates.pdf>, section 1, 3.

⁶⁴ Judith Fingard, "Reverend Robert Stanser", *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/stanser_robert_6E.html; BOA, Bray minutes, 1793.

⁶⁵ Young, *A Record for Time*, 8.

⁶⁶ BOA, Bray minutes, 1793, 1796.

operate under Fitzgerald until 1824 and from thence 1824 until 1829 under a “Mrs. Cormick” whereupon it closed until its reopening as the African School in 1836.⁶⁷

3.3 Writing and Protest

In 1814, children were instructed in reading, spelling, religion and needlework but began to leave Mrs. Fitzgerald’s school to attend the newly opened Royal Acadian School on Argyle Street, so that they might learn writing and arithmetic. Reverend Stanser wrote to the Associates about the school stating that:

“it takes in all descriptions of children, and consequently some of the negro children who have been longest under our care have left us and been admitted on purpose to be instructed in writing and arithmetic; and the parents of some of the scholars who would in a little time leave Mrs. F. to go out to service, etc, etc, have consulted me respecting their sending them to this new establishment to learn to write and cipher.”⁶⁸

Five years later in 1819, the number of boys in attendance under Mrs. Fitzgerald’s tuition had dropped from over fifteen to just seven while the number of girls remained about the same.⁶⁹ At this point, a change of direction occurred as Reverend Stanser wrote: “The Girls are, also taught needlework. Hitherto, she has not taught them to write; and as the facilities for instruction in this town are great, the children soon leave her school on that account: she has therefore promised her Endeavours to teach writing.”⁷⁰ Having been

⁶⁷ BOA, Spreading the Word 1808-1967, Rules and Reports of the Associates BRAY/REP/1/f 3. 1814, 1819, BRAY/REP/1/f 4, 1829; Fergusson, *The Establishment*, 60-62.

⁶⁸ BOA, Bray Annual Reports, January 5, 1814.

⁶⁹ BOA, Bray Annual Reports, 1814, April 10, 1819,

⁷⁰ BOA, Bray Annual Reports, April 10, 1819. The annual reports for 1814 and 1819 quoting Stanser’s letters do not include writing in the list of subjects taught to boys, and Stanser’s wording in the 1814 annual report stated: “some of the children who have been

denied access to this instruction, students protested by transferring to the Royal Acadian school and received lessons in cyphering and writing. Given the drop in attendance for boys had occurred by the time of her report, suggests the Royal Acadian's expanded offering may have been the cause. Stanser's words suggest that competition along with dwindling attendance at the Halifax Bray school, prompted Cormick to reverse this course. It seems logical to conclude that the loss of students may have threatened her livelihood which may also have hastened her decision to reverse course.

3.4 Halifax's African School 1836-1855

By 1834, the city had approximately five hundred people of African descent and three-hundred children of school age and no school for them to attend or a teacher to instruct them.⁷¹ The city's demographics had changed and the Black population had increased due to an influx of thousands of Black Refugees who had escaped from the United States during the War of 1812.⁷² Economic depression in the province after the war, prompted African Nova Scotians living in rural areas to move to the city for employment and the support of living amidst a community of their own.⁷³ Since 1829, the city's Black children were without a school.

longest under our care have left us to be admitted on purpose to be instructed in writing and arithmetic.." so despite Stanser's phrasing in the 1819 reference, it seems likely that neither boys or girls were instructed in writing by Mrs. F.

⁷¹ Phillip Hartling, "The African School", unpublished report, Nova Scotia Archives, 1-3; David A. Sutherland, "Race Relations in Halifax, Nova Scotia, During the Mid-Victorian Quest for Reform", *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, Vol.7, No.1, 1996, 37.

⁷² David A. Sutherland, "Race Relations", 37.

⁷³ The National Archives, UK, Exhibit: "Black Presence in Britain 1500-1850", <https://nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/blackhistory/rights/emancipation.htm>; David A. Sutherland, "Race Relations", 37.

In 1834, the same year in which Britain's Act for the Abolishment for Slavery was enacted, Black Haligonians assembled at the Baptist African Chapel, to discuss the education of their children.⁷⁴ By now, the city's Black children had been without a school for some years and clearly, had grown weary of watching their children go without education and were ready to act on their own. Fingard has stated that this spurred the Church of England to finally act, having felt responsible for the blacks while also wishing to retain a monopoly over charity education of the poor.⁷⁵ Shortly thereafter a city lot was purchased from funds which had been raised for this purpose and which evidently had been sitting in the bank account for some time.⁷⁶ The new bishop, John Inglis explained to the Bray Associates that the building delay had been due to his interests in erecting a structure "at a minimum of expense".⁷⁷ A portion of those funds had been raised by Black Haligonians themselves which Inglis then redirected in order to discourage feelings of ownership in the property amongst the Black benefactors. In 1835, Inglis wrote: "they have raised £15 of their own money towards the school and have put forward six names of their number as trustees and one name as a teacher."⁷⁸ Inglis went on to say: "lest they think this amount entitles them to some form of ownership, I have directed it towards the expenses of the school, for which the amount will cover for the next year."⁷⁹ Inglis redirected their contribution from the building of a permanent schoolhouse and therefore a valuable property, to the less significant and more tertiary general "expenses". Though

⁷⁴ Fingard, "Attitudes towards the Education", 24.

⁷⁵ Fingard, "The Education of the Poor", 24.

⁷⁶ BOA, Bray minutes, 1834.

⁷⁷ BOA, Bray minutes, 1835.

⁷⁸ BOA, Bray minutes, 1835.

⁷⁹ BOA, Bray Annual Report, BRAY/REP/1/f 4, 1835; BOA, Bray minutes, Jan.16, 1836.

considered a school of charity, some parents of students who attended the African School paid tuition or contributed money for the operation of the school in 1837, at “£20.00” and in 1842, contributed “£3,10” in school fees.⁸⁰ Inglis clearly wished to avoid any suggestion of ownership or control of such property by Halifax’s Black community.

On January 4th, 1836, the African School opened at its new “convenient” location on Albemarle Street.⁸¹ According to one of St. Paul’s later rectors and historians, the school was located at the centre of one of Halifax’s earlier Black neighborhoods, which was located a short distance away from St. Paul’s and the church’s partial charity school for white children, the National School, on Argyle street.⁸² Historian Judith Fingard described the neighborhood as follows:

The rough neighborhood extended to Albemarle Street one block east of Barrack....These Upper streets changed little between the 1830s and the 1870s. These areas were also the most crowded of the city; Albemarle and Grafton, for example, being known in the 1850s as the two most populous streets in the city.⁸³

While Inglis’s efforts to establish the African School demonstrate humanitarianism, his own misbeliefs and racialized ideas were reflected in attitudes and policies toward the participation of the city’s Black community.

⁸⁰ NSA, Willis’ report to the House of Assembly, 1837, RG 5, Series P, Vol.73.

⁸¹ BOA, Bray minutes, Jan. 16, 1836; *Hutchinson’s Halifax City Directory for 1869*, lists “#143 Albemarle Street” as the location for the “Inglis school”, by which time the name of the school had changed. *McAlpine’s City Directory for 1881* lists the school as #155.

⁸² Rev. George Hill, “A History of St. Paul’s Church”, in the *Collections of the Royal Nova Scotia Historical Society*, (Halifax, 1889), Vol.2, 72; “Halifax and its People”, Nova Scotia Archives, accessed Sept. 12, 2021, <https://archives.novascotia.ca/halifax/archives/?ID=7>.

⁸³ Judith Fingard, *The Dark Side of Life in Victorian Halifax*, PottersfieldPress, 1989, 25.

Since most Black Haligonians were either Baptists or Methodists, religion was not used as a discriminating factor for admittance to the school. Inglis wrote: “The one rule of admittance is that the children attend church at St. Paul’s and Sunday School”.⁸⁴ Thus, students whose parents were dissenters also attended church services at St Paul’s. In Nova Scotia, Black Anglicans had been excluded from attending Anglican churches, and were forced to hold services at their own homes or elsewhere.⁸⁵ In 1821, it was noted that white children attending services at St. Paul’s sat in “galleries cut into the steeple of the church” but there was no mention of where Black students sat.⁸⁶ Interracial churches had existed in New England prior to the war, where Black members were usually segregated and seated in the rear of the church, the upper gallery, or in other areas apart from the main white congregation.⁸⁷ Continuance at the daily school depended on good behaviour and was considered a “favour”.⁸⁸ In a letter to the Bray’s just a few months prior to the school’s opening Inglis asserted that there was to be “no reward, no punishment, and no emulation, and mis-behaviour results in the children being sent home.”⁸⁹

However, nine months after the school opened, tragedy that struck the school was met with resilience. A fire that had started at the Peter Morrissey Brewery, a few doors

⁸⁴ BOA, Bray minutes, Jan. 16, 1836, Jan.21,1845; Whitfield, “The Struggle Over Slavery”, 92, 93.

⁸⁵ Walker, *Black Loyalists*, 102-104; Winks, *Blacks in Canada*, 138.

⁸⁶ Nova Scotia Archives, Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, Nova Scotia, Canada records, C/Can/NS 4, Folder 39, July 17, 1821.

⁸⁷ Richard Boles, “Interracial but Not Integrated: Colonial Churches in New England”, Presentation, accessed, June 28, 2022, <https://forum-network.org/lectures/interracial-not-integrated-colonial-churches/>.

⁸⁸ Fingard, “The Attitudes”, 21; BOA, Spreading the Word, 1808-1967, Bray Schools in Canada, America and the Bahamas, 1645-1900, Correspondence on the Establishment of Schools in Canada, Correspondence concerning the school at Halifax. 1784-1836, BRAY/CANADA/1/f 3, Nov.11, 1835.

⁸⁹ BOA, Bray correspondence, Nov.11, 1835.

away causes significant smoke and fire damage.⁹⁰ During the fire, most of the furniture and supplies were saved by the schoolteachers, husband and wife Daniel and Jane Gallagher, who had contributed a great deal of their personal salaries to the school. The Bishop along with his eldest son Charles were “one hundred miles” away when the accident occurred, but “hastened to town” as soon as they heard the news.⁹¹ Inglis wrote, “The Gallaghers carefully saved the books, and other property of the school, to the neglect of their own furniture and clothes most of which were lost”.⁹² Such personal risk and sacrifice illustrates the value the Gallaghers placed upon the continued operation of the school, which after all was both the source of their livelihoods and their place of residence. Despite the setback the school opened just five weeks later and was described by Charles,

“In about five weeks, by vigilance, patience, and kind treatment, the school was organized to such an extent that it was considered in a state to be visited by the Members of the House of Assembly, several of whom inspected it, expressed much gratification and declared that their strong prejudices against the people of colour were entirely removed by what they had observed in the deportment and proficiency of the children.”⁹³

Operating under what must have been the most challenging of conditions, children continued to receive lessons at the school.

Although personal accounts by the children are absent from the records and it is unknown how children felt about the school, the commitment of the Gallaghers and the children to continue their education is evident by the conditions under which they

⁹⁰ Hartling, *The African School*, 1; BOA, Bray Report for 1836, Nov.15, 1836.

⁹¹ BOA, Bray Annual report 1836, Nov. 15, 1837.

⁹² BOA, Bray Annual report 1836, Nov. 15, 1837.

⁹³ BOA, Bray annual report 1837, April 3, 1837.

learned. Evidently classes still drew such attendance and a shed given by the Lieutenant Governor, was lined with canvas and erected over the floor of the school, which was too small to accommodate “all those who wished to learn”.⁹⁴ A description of the school as it operated in this way appeared in a Halifax newspaper, *The Guardian*:

“The external appearance of the School House, is rather repulsive, owing to a fire which took place in its vicinity some years ago, which made it necessary to pull a portion of it to pieces; and in consequence of a paucity of funds, it has remained nearly in the state in which that calamity left it—had it been a Theatre, the same tale would not perhaps have been told. But the old adage “necessity is the mother of invention” was never more clearly verified, for a cheap and ingenious scheme has been devised for the protection of the children from the action of the weather, which it is hoped will soon be succeeded by a thorough and permanent repair of the building. All the horror however vanishes on your entering it—there appears order, cleanliness, ventilation and health—and their concomitants cheerfulness and intelligence gleaming in every eye and countenance and all save the necessary sounds of distinct question and answer is still as the grave.”⁹⁵

The public examination was attended by local dignitaries and some of Nova Scotia’s highest-ranking elites including the Lt. Governor, and Judge Brenton Haliburton.⁹⁶

The commitment of the Gallaghers and the influence of school programming on the students, viewed by government officials evidently contributed to the eventual rebuilding of the school. Finally, in 1842, a new building was completed drawn from donations from the Associates, the House of Assembly, and private donors.⁹⁷ According to Inglis, the new structure was larger and more comfortable than the prior one with the addition of a new classroom for the female students and two separate rooms as living

⁹⁴ NSA, House of Assembly records, RG 5, Series P, Vol. 72, Feb.21, 1837.

⁹⁵ “African School Examination”, *The Guardian*, Oct.30, 1839, Canadiana Online.

⁹⁶ “African School Examination”, Canadiana Online.

⁹⁷ BOA, Bray Annual Report for 1842, Mar.5, 1842.

space for the teachers.⁹⁸ Attendance at the daily school for that year was ninety-six day students, and eighty attended evening classes.⁹⁹ A possible explanation for this high number may be that a new and more comfortable learning space attracted and retained more students. By 1845, forty-five males and twenty-eight females attended the school.¹⁰⁰ One of those twenty-eight females was the twelve-year old sampler maker, Rachel Barrett. Barrett would have received instruction from both Gallaghers, learning to read, most likely write and possibly arithmetic, from Daniel Gallagher and acquired her skills in needlework and made her sampler under the guidance of Jane.

By 1855, after a teaching career of forty years, in failing health Gallagher retired.¹⁰¹ On November 14, 1854, an African Nova Scotian teacher named Francis Duporte, was hired to replace Gallagher.¹⁰² The school was split up into separate departments of learning for the boys and girls with a widow, Mrs. Millard instructing the girls in needlework and literacy.¹⁰³ In later years, the school's name was changed to the Inglis School and by 1858 the Bray Associates were experiencing financial hardships which diminished their annual grants to the Nova Scotia schools, but still managed to contribute small amounts of money up to 1904.¹⁰⁴

3.5 Curriculum 1785-1800

⁹⁸ BOA, Bray Annual Report for 1842, Mar.5, 1842.

⁹⁹ Hartling, *The African School*, 2.

¹⁰⁰ Hartling, *The African School*, 2.

¹⁰¹ Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 136; BOA, Bray minutes, Mar.15, 1853, Nov.20, 1855.

¹⁰² BOA, Bray minutes, Dec.19, 1854.

¹⁰³ BOA, Bray minutes, Dec.19, 1854; Nov.20, 1854.

¹⁰⁴ Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 136-137.

The primary goal of the Bray Associates was the Christian conversion of enslaved persons and this followed the earlier philosophies of John Locke. Accordingly, education and Christian conversion was to be achieved by knowing the Bible, which intertwined religious instruction and reading. This was the case for all children who acquired learning in the colonies from the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries. Education historian, Jennifer Monaghan writes “The seventeenth century curriculum followed the outline sketched by British philosopher John Locke, who in 1693, characterized it as the ordinary road of the horn book, primer, psalter, testament, and bible.”¹⁰⁵ Children were taught to read using verbal instructions, involving orally spelling letters and syllables.¹⁰⁶ The primary textbooks used for religious instruction and reading in the early Bray schools was the Bible and “testaments” with an emphasis on learning the catechism.¹⁰⁷ Since the Bray schools were based upon Anglican church doctrine, religious and other religious books such as “*Foxes Lessons*”, “*Bacon’s Sermon on the Mount*”, “*Religion Made Easy*” and “*Watt’s Hymns*”.¹⁰⁸

Only a small number of school registers or lists for the early Bray schools have survived, but they offer important details about the school’s attendance and how the school and curriculum were structured. Lists of students including, name and ages, and the level of books they had attained exist for the Birchtown, Halifax, Preston and

¹⁰⁵ E. J. Mongahan, “Literacy, Instruction, and Gender”, 19.

¹⁰⁶ E. J. Mongahan, “Literacy, Instruction, and Gender”, 19.

¹⁰⁷ Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, 90, 102, 103; Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 58; BOA, Bray minutes, Birchtown, Nov.15, 1784, Halifax school lists, 1787, 1789, Digby school lists, 1788.

¹⁰⁸ Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, 90, 102, 103; Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 58; BOA, Bray minutes, Birchtown school list, Nov.15, 1784, Halifax school lists for 1787, 1789, Digby school lists for 1788.

Brindley Town schools.¹⁰⁹ The data as recorded by the teachers, reveal that children attended as young as four years and up to nineteen years of age. Most girls who learned sewing, knitting, or marking had some form of literacy; with the lowest number of students proficient in spelling and the most advanced recorded as reading the “Bible”. Children learned spelling using psalters, spelling books, and testaments from the Bible. Reading and religious instruction in colonial times used a format that relied on memorization and oral repetition. After learning the alphabet, children progressed to learning spelling by memorizing and repeating out loud the words broken into mono or polysyllables.¹¹⁰ These books aided the teacher in instructing the liturgy and the catechism, which was composed of the “Apostle’s Creed,” the “Ten Commandments,” and the “Lord’s Prayer.”¹¹¹

3.6 “They Who Can Write Hold Power”

According to historian of education Jennifer Monaghan, spelling books like *Dilworth’s Spellers*, presented reading curriculum in a more elaborate or systematic fashion.¹¹² Tables of words were followed by lessons in reading based on vocabulary already learned. The general instruction method followed for all children during the colonial period involved the learning of reading through oral methods and it did not require the skill of writing, which was usually reserved for boys and men of standing.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ BOA, Associates minutes, Nov.15, 1784, June 4, 1787, Halifax and Birchtown school lists, 1787, 1789, Digby school list, 1788.

¹¹⁰ Monaghan, “Literacy Instruction and Gender”, 22.

¹¹¹ John Lewis, *The Church’s Catechism Explained by way of Question and Answer and Confirmed by Scripture Proofs*, Oxford, 22nd edition, 1724, Google ebook.

¹¹² Monaghan, *Learning to Read*, 72-73; Monaghan, “Reading for the Enslaved”, 315.

¹¹³ Monaghan, “Reading for the Enslaved”, 312-322.

Monaghan writes: “Because of the tight link between Christianity and reading, conversion implied reading instruction. It did not, however, imply writing instruction.”¹¹⁴ Although Monaghan believed writing was not instructed at any of the American Bray schools, recent research has elicited evidence that it occurred at the Bray school in Williamsburg.¹¹⁵ In the antebellum period even reading became increasingly prohibited.¹¹⁶ Being able to “read writing,” as Monaghan labeled it, involved an understanding of cursive hand-written script, which differed from the reading of printed type.¹¹⁷ This prohibition was rooted in the slave owner’s wish to prevent slaves from forging passes needed for travel off plantations, the belief of the enslaved that baptism implied freedom, group gatherings by the enslaved and a perceived threat of revolts, the rise of abolitionism, and because of the understanding of the broader powers implicit in the forming of letters and the composing of words.¹¹⁸ Unlike reading which was believed to promote docility via the instruction of Christianity, writing was viewed as a skill of power.¹¹⁹ Despite these prohibitions, enslaved people found ways to learn in secret, wrote travel passes, letters and became published authors.¹²⁰

¹¹⁴ Monaghan, “Reading for the Enslaved”, 316.

¹¹⁵ Monaghan, 320-321; Valerie Scura Trovato, *Slate Pencils?: Education of Free and Enslaved African American Children at the Bray School, Williamsburg, Virginia, 1760-1774*, Masters thesis, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Va., 2016, 50-53.

¹¹⁶ Monaghan, “Reading for the enslaved”, 309, 324-337.

¹¹⁷ Monaghan, “Reading”, 312-321.

¹¹⁸ Monaghan, “Reading”, 318-337.

¹¹⁹ Monaghan, “Reading”, 318-321.

¹²⁰ James W. St. G. Walker, “Boston King”, Dictionary of Biography entry, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/king_boston_5E.html; James W. St. G. Walker, “John Marrant”, Dictionary of Canadian Biography entry, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/marrant_john_4E.html; “Phyllis Wheatley”, Encyclopedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Phyllis-Wheatley>; “Frederick Douglass”, Encyclopedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Frederick-Douglass>; Lucinda MacKethan,

Documents examined related to the early Bray schools in Nova Scotia, reveal with one exception, an absence of substantial references to the instruction of writing and the use of slates. A single mention of writing appears on the list for the Halifax Bray school, written by Reverend Furmage in 1787.¹²¹ His list which contains the names of nine children, six boys and three girls between the ages of nine and eighteen years old, details who was learning “writing”.¹²² (Fig.3.2) All of them were listed as being free. Those who were unfree had the lowest level of instruction, which was spelling.

In the Bray archives, references to slates in relation to this early period of the schools don’t appear with frequency until the nineteenth century. Digby’s SPG missionary, the Reverend Roger Viets, wrote in 1821, that “the slates are a very welcome present. They will be of use in teaching the blacks to write which could not be done heretofore through want of paper and pens, they not being able to provide themselves with those materials”.¹²³ In 1821, after Mrs. Fitzgerald had begun to instruct writing at the Halifax school, Inglis wrote to the Bray’s reporting the lack of “copy-books, pens, ink, slips and other articles of stationery” due to their expense.¹²⁴ Cyphering, and arithmetic also seem not to have been introduced into the Bray schools, until competition for the education of the poor was introduced by the popular Royal Acadian School. These references suggest the instruction of writing using slates did not become common until

“Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs: American Slave Narrators”, National Humanities Centre, Teacher Serve, accessed May, 2022, <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/freedom/1609-1865/essays/douglassjacobs.html>.

¹²¹ BOA, Bray correspondence, 1787.

¹²² BOA, Bray correspondence, 1787.

¹²³ BOA, Bray minutes, June 4, 1821.

¹²⁴ BOA, Bray minutes, Annual Report 1821, Jan.10, 1821.

after the 1810s, and yet, girls learned to mark letters on fabric through their needlework instruction, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

As Fingard has stated, Walter Bromley's monitorial Royal Acadian school which opened in Halifax in 1813, represented a brief but important step forward for a free and universal education of all children.¹²⁵ The school provided instruction in writing and cyphering to admitted Black children. Jennifer Monaghan wrote about the power implicit in the ability to write, stating "they who can write hold power" and cited author of *Handwriting in America*, Tamara Plakins Thornton, who stated: "writing, even when it is just penmanship is the beginning of self-identity."¹²⁶ In 1814, having been denied, students at the African School responded by transferring to the Royal Acadian School. Apparently, their attendance at the Royal Acadian school was short-lived, but the impact of their departure would seem to have had the desired effect.¹²⁷ A form of protest, by transferring to the Royal Acadian school to learn arithmetic and writing, the children demonstrated agency, and power, which contributed a positive change at the Bray school with the promise from Fitzgerald to teach writing. Perhaps through the loss of attendance and thereby a loss of income contributed to the change.

3.7 The African School and the National system

¹²⁵ Fingard, "Attitudes", 24; Fergusson, *The Establishment*, 58; Akins, *History of Halifax*, 158-159, 174; Judith Fingard, "Walter Bromley", Dictionary of Canadian Biography entry, accessed, Sept. 2021, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/bromley_walter_7E.html.

¹²⁶ Jennifer Monaghan, *Reading for the Enslaved*, 321; Monaghan citing from Tamara Thornton's *Handwriting in America: A cultural history*, 1998.

¹²⁷ Fingard, "Attitudes", 24; Fergusson, *The Establishment*, 58; Akins, *History of Halifax*, 158-159, 174; Judith Fingard, "Walter Bromley".

A few years after the Royal Acadian school opened, another school opened intended to supply charitable instruction to poor white children, called the National School.¹²⁸ Like the African School it too was associated with St. Pauls' Church, and was managed by its leaders.¹²⁹ Based on an English model of education, its system would eventually serve as a model for the African School and training school for some of its teachers.¹³⁰ In receipt of more regular funding than the Royal Acadian, Fingard, states this advantage ultimately allowed the Anglican church to maintain their monopoly over the education of the poor.¹³¹

The National School operated on a new system of monitorial education also known as the National system, the Madras, or Dr. Bell's system, which shared in some of the original principles established by the Bray Associates a century earlier.¹³² By 1836, when the Bray school reopened under the name of the African School, the National School had become a fixture of the city.¹³³ The African School's new teacher, Daniel Gallagher, received training himself at the National School for three months and in 1823,

¹²⁸ Fingard, "Attitudes", 16-28; "The National School", Nova Scotia Archives, accessed Nov.2021, <https://archives.novascotia.ca/halifax/archives/?ID=7>.

¹²⁹ Fingard, "Attitudes", 19.

¹³⁰ Fergusson, *The Establishment*, 64; BOA, Bray Annual report for 1823.

¹³¹ Fingard, 16-28.

¹³² Lois Loudon, *Distinctive and Inclusive*, The National Society, (2012), 9-11.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-12/2012%20Distinctive%20and%20Inclusive%20-%20The%20National%20Society%20and%20Church%20of%20England%20Schools%201811%20-%202011.pdf>. Accessed, April, 2022.

¹³³ "The National School", Nova Scotia Archives, <https://archives.novascotia.ca/halifax/archives/?ID=7>, accessed Nov.2021; Fingard, 16-17.

schoolmistress Mrs. Cormick, had also received training there,¹³⁴ By 1841, Willis, envisioned the African School might act as a training college for Black teachers.¹³⁵

A product of England's "National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor," the society was established in 1811, so "that the National religion should be made the foundation of national education and should be the first and chief thing taught to the poor."¹³⁶ As the century progressed, the Church of England began to establish a network of schools across Britain and in British colonies called "National Schools", with teachers trained on the National system, who provided mainstream education to the working classes.¹³⁷

This "system of self-mutual tuition" used older or more advanced students, or "monitors", to instruct the younger or less advanced.¹³⁸ Monitorial education had developed as a method to aid lone teachers in over-crowded classrooms in urban settings and to promulgate Anglican doctrine.¹³⁹ The society also,

required that children received into these schools be, without exception, instructed in the Liturgy and Catechism, and to constantly attend Divine Service in their Parish Church...and that no religious tract be admitted into any school but which are, or shall be contained in the catalogue of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.¹⁴⁰

Like the Bray Associates before, the national system used basic instruction in literacy, religion moral teachings and manual skills like needlework to "deliver the poorer classes

¹³⁴ BOA, Bray reports, Annual Report for 1823.

¹³⁵ Nova Scotia Archives, Records of the House of Assembly, Willis petition to House of Assembly, RG 1, Volume 297, #160, 1841; Fergusson, *The Establishment*, 64.

¹³⁶ Loudon, *Distinctive*, 13.

¹³⁷ Loudon, *Distinctive*, 15-16, 18.

¹³⁸ Loudon, *Distinctive*, 11-13.

¹³⁹ Loudon, *Distinctive*, 11.

¹⁴⁰ Loudon, *Distinctive*, 16.

from their impiety, immorality, and ignorance of the Gospel.”¹⁴¹ Additionally, subjects were taught using a specific set of practices or rules for learning, classroom organization, and behaviour. This system had developed as part of the charity and Sunday School movements in Britain that were part of broader social reform movements in response to detrimental impacts of the industrial advancements and a rising population of the urban poor.¹⁴² The system still functioned to indoctrinate the masses in the teachings of the Anglican church as a response to what it viewed as increased competition from other denominations.¹⁴³

The national system placed particular emphasis on religion, moral instruction, discipline, and industry, qualities tied to class consciousness, and in the colonies, to racism and colonial paternalism. Like the Bray Associates, schools wished to inculcate a satisfaction with their “station in life”.¹⁴⁴ This notion was noted by Fingard who observed that Halifax society was preoccupied with the notion of whether a literate and intellectually stimulated lower class would be satisfied with their so-called lot in life.¹⁴⁵ This had been expressed by the plantation and slave owners of the southern colonies, when the Bray Associates embarked upon their Pious Designs a century earlier.¹⁴⁶ Ultimately, both systems were intended to inculcate a pious and submissive workforce

¹⁴¹ Loudon, *Distinctive*, 15.

¹⁴² Loudon, *Distinctive*, 9.

¹⁴³ Tom Walsh, “The National System of Education 1831-2000”, in *Essays in the History of Irish Education*, (Palgrave MacMillan London, 2016), 8.

¹⁴⁴ Loudon, *Distinctive*, 9.

¹⁴⁵ Fingard, “Attitudes”, 40-42.

¹⁴⁶ Brendan Wolfe, “The Associates of Dr. Bray”, Encyclopedia of Virginia, accessed Sept.2021, <https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/associates-of-dr-bray/>.

prepared for a lifetime in service or forced labour to an hierarchy of wealthier white people.

In the early 1800s, the national system's creator, Dr. Joseph Bell, wrote of the "schools for the negro children" of the West Indies, need only be Sunday schools since they would "allow them to operate at the cheapest level."¹⁴⁷ Sunday schools were limited to teaching reading and religious instruction, and therefore were similar to the earlier Bray schools. Despite his recommendation, Charles Inglis, Esq. and Daniel Gallagher, followed more closely the model of the National School's common day schools as evidenced by offering a curriculum more advanced than what was typical for Sunday schools.¹⁴⁸ Described by the local press, the school's administrators "went to great pains to establish this advanced system which was established directly to combat the bigotry and notions of inferiority of these poor children's faculties and capabilities".¹⁴⁹

Since monitorial systems depended on older or more advanced pupils to instruct younger ones, students were typically organized into classes according to their ability and advancement in a particular subject.¹⁵⁰ Interestingly, despite this key tenet, almost no references to monitors or assistants appear in the archives related to the school. The system was developed on the belief that children would advance according to their

¹⁴⁷ Rev. Andrew Bell, *A System of Mutual Tuition and Moral Discipline, or a manual of instructions for conducting schools through the agency of themselves*, London, 1823, 133, accessed April 12, 2022, Hathitrust, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044096982350&view=1up&seq=11&skin=2021>.

¹⁴⁸ Nova Scotia Archives, "Education records," Census Return of Schools in the city of Halifax, December 31, 1850, RG 14, Vol. 30, #30.

¹⁴⁹ "African School Examination", *The Colonial Churchman*, Oct.30, 1839, Lunenburg, NSM.

¹⁵⁰ *The National Society's Instructions on Needle-work and Knitting*, The National Society, London, 1838, 79.

natural ability and that children should learn things in simple progression.”¹⁵¹ Monitorial systems provided exposure to leadership opportunities but since few references to such activity were documented it is difficult to know to what extent this existed at the school.

The following passage in the 1823 edition of Dr. Bell’s “*A System for Mutual Tuition and Moral Discipline or Instructions for Conducting schools through the agency of the scholars themselves*” provides a useful summary of the seven key practices the system operated upon and offer insights on student learning at national schools:

1. The reading of prayers at the opening and closing of school each day;
2. Instruction is carried out by copying lessons from the book, memorized, and then written in script as spelled from the book;
3. The alphabet, writing and spelling are learned simultaneously, by a uniform series of lessons;
4. Monosyllables and polysyllables are learned using spelling and syllabic reading;
5. Group vocal repetitions of verbal readings;
6. The learning of sentence structure broken down into pauses or distinct ideas;
7. After a verbal reading, children question one another on its meaning.¹⁵²

Writing, cyphering, and arithmetic were also offered, and slates which allowed for the temporary marking their letters and numbers, for practicing these lessons.¹⁵³ Slates were usually double sided allowing writing or arithmetic to be practiced on each side, with the child’s name at the bottom.¹⁵⁴ According to the manual, once a child mastered their “copying” lessons on slate, “as a reward for their proficiency” they advanced to using pen and ink and were encouraged to “immediately learn to make their own pens

¹⁵¹ Rev. Andrew Bell, *A System of Mutual Tuition*, front cover, 67, 68, 79-80.

¹⁵² Rev. Bell, *A System*, 79-81.

¹⁵³ Rev. Bell, *A System*, 24, 48, 72-73.

¹⁵⁴ National Museum of American History, “[Slate Pencils, Box of 5 | Smithsonian Institution \(si.edu\)](https://www.si.edu/object/slate-pencils-box-5%3Anmah_1122579)”, accessed, May, 2022, https://www.si.edu/object/slate-pencils-box-5%3Anmah_1122579; Rev. Bell, *A System*, 79.

themselves.”¹⁵⁵ Supplies such as these were critical for learning but in the Bray schools, were not adequately supplied parents were too poor to afford pen, paper and ink, and even slates were frequently in short supply.¹⁵⁶

Despite these inadequacies, the children learned these important skills, as demonstrated by Willis who wrote, “they are solving problems in the respective rules of arithmetic as far as geometrical progression” and that children “were expert at finding the value of any quantity at a given price.”¹⁵⁷ In 1843, Willis wrote: “That several of the boys who have left the school learned Geometry, Trigonometry, Navigation, Geography, and English Grammar; the two last branches were also learned by the female children.”¹⁵⁸ Navigation was particularly important given the city’s stature as a seaport, and Black Refugees found work on fishing vessels or merchant ships.¹⁵⁹ Industrial in focus, rather than intellectual, these skills prepared them for employment in trades. Boys were encouraged to go into the trades regardless of the challenges presented by racism. This is evidenced by the efforts of a student, William Butler, who upon leaving the Hammonds Plains Bray school during the 1840s, was encouraged to enter an apprenticeship in the painting trade.¹⁶⁰

In addition the school served students with visual impairments, including a blind boy, “who read for himself on one of those books with raised letters”, a referral to an

¹⁵⁵ Rev. Bell, *A System*, 83.

¹⁵⁶ BOA, Bray Annual Reports, 1836.

¹⁵⁷ BOA, Bray minutes, Jan.21, 1845.

¹⁵⁸ NSA, House of Assembly records, Feb.4, 1843, RG 5, Series P, Vol.#73.

¹⁵⁹ Whitfield, *Blacks on the Border*, 82-83.

¹⁶⁰ BOA, Bray minutes, Rev. Willis to Bray Associates, Jan.18, 1848. Willis gave the name of a student of the Hammonds Plains school, “William Butler”, who went “into the painting business” and “whose master was much pleased”, concluding this might help open the way to “coloured boys in obtaining trades”.

early system of imprinted or indented printing, most likely braille.¹⁶¹ This inclusion within a formalized school system, which could be described as an early example of integrated learning for children with sensory disabilities, pre-dated the opening of the Halifax School for the Blind (1871) by thirty years.¹⁶² For Gallagher, who was visually impaired himself, such an offering must have been particularly significant. In 1854, his duties as schoolmaster at the school ended due to encroaching blindness.¹⁶³ The schoolmistress, Jane Gallagher, however, continued to instruct the female students in branches of needlework such as plain sewing, knitting, marking, carding, and spinning separately in her apartments.¹⁶⁴ Unlike the National School, Black girls received their instruction in reading, writing, geography, English grammar and arithmetic at the African School from the schoolmaster and alongside the boys. While this differed from the situation at Halifax's National School, it was in accordance with the format of the national system as outlined in the "*A Necessary Doctrine and Scholarship for any Christian Youth*", (1822) which stated: "Having been taught to read gratuitously in the Master's School, a child is, in the case before us, removed and placed under the charge of the School-mistress."¹⁶⁵ Composed of one classroom "29 x 21" feet in size, the African School contained at least one blackboard, a few maps, and furniture most likely comprised of benches, desks or tables, which were typically arranged around the outside

¹⁶¹ "African School", *The Colonial Churchman*, June 2, 1836, NSM.

¹⁶² Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority, "Our History", <https://apsea.ca/about-us/our-history.html>, accessed, June 5, 2022.

¹⁶³ Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 136.

¹⁶⁴ BOA, Bray minutes, 1852; Records of the House of Assembly, RG 5, Series P, Vol. 72, 1836, Feb.21, 1837, NSA.

¹⁶⁵ Jonathan Trist, *A Necessary Doctrine and Scholarship for any Christian Youth*, London, 1822, 115, Google ebook.

limits of the room.¹⁶⁶ Books used at the school included, *Morrison's Bookkeeping*, *Walkingame's Arithmetic*, *Murray's Grammar*, *Lunnie's Grammar*, spelling cards, the Bible and "the books of the National Society".¹⁶⁷

While attendance was important and often lamented as in need of improvement, children usually drew praise for their skills in needlework and singing. Inglis wrote "the singing of the children is beautiful. Most of them have good voices and a correct ear."¹⁶⁸ Willis's reports to the House of Assembly also contained references to the girls' needlework skills adding that such instruction affords "constant employment and the means of support."¹⁶⁹

Another important component of the national system the African School adopted were public examinations or visitations.¹⁷⁰ These were conducted for evaluating progress. Since the African School's continued existence depended upon charity, a successful review of its progress was important. The school's key sponsors were the local House of Assembly, and the Bray Associates. While the latter depended upon a steady stream of written reports and correspondence, the former had the option to visit the school in person and examine the children's progress themselves. Both organizations relied heavily upon regular reports from the school, containing observations on attendance, curriculum, and

¹⁶⁶ NSA, Education Records, Report of the Board of Commissioners of Schools for the City of Halifax, 1850, Educational Records, RG 14, Vol.29, #1; Rev. Bell, *A System of Mutual Tuition*, 123; Fergusson, *The Establishment*, 63-64.

¹⁶⁷ NSA, Education Records, Report of the Halifax School Board, 1850, RG 14, Vol. 29, #1.

¹⁶⁸ BOA, Bray minutes, March 3, 1836.

¹⁶⁹ NSA, House of Assembly records, Feb. 6, 1845, RG 5, Series P, Vol.74.

¹⁷⁰ NSM, *The Colonial Churchman*, Jan.12, 1837; NSM, *The Colonial Churchman*, Dec.13, 1838; Canadiana Online, "African School Examination", *The Guardian*, Oct.30, 1839.

“the moral and intellectual improvement of the children.”¹⁷¹ Willis’s petitions to the House of Assembly frequently contained invitations to visit the school stating “That your Petitioner respectfully solicits the Members of your Honourable Council to visit the school, at anytime, where you will have an opportunity of witnessing the improvement of the children.”¹⁷² On at least one occasion, after cancelling the schoolmistress’s salary, the House of Assembly sent a Committee to visit the school and their report was so favourable that her salary was continued.¹⁷³

As part of these public visits, Nova Scotia’s elites, were included and their visits were reported on by the press, *The Guardian* (1839) and the *Colonial Churchman* (1837, 1838). A favourable impression of the performance of the school children was crucial to the success of the visit as children were judged upon their progress behaviour, deportment, cleanliness, responses to questions and pronunciation.¹⁷⁴ According to the writer of an article in *The Guardian* they seemed to have lost “all their broken and foreign ways of speaking.”¹⁷⁵ The author noted, “and their concomitants, cheerfulness, and intelligence gleaming in every eye and countenance and all save the necessary sounds of distinct question and answers, [the children] were still as the grave.”¹⁷⁶ Moreover, the girls ability with the needle also received attention, evincing “much high praise from one of the more highly qualified judges”.¹⁷⁷ In the absence of personal accounts by the

¹⁷¹ NSA, House of Assembly Records, 1846, RG 5, Series P, Vol.74, #9.

¹⁷² NSA, House of Assembly Records, Feb.6, 1845, RG 5, Series P, Vol. 74.

¹⁷³ Fergusson, *The Establishment*, 63-64; BOA, Bray Annual Report for 1844.

¹⁷⁴ NSM, *The Colonial Churchman*, Jan.12, 1837, June 2, 1836; Canadiana Online “African School Examination”, *The Guardian*, Oct.30, 1939.

¹⁷⁵ NSM, *The Colonial Churchman*, Dec.13, 1838.

¹⁷⁶ Canadiana Online “African School Examination”, *The Guardian*, Oct.30, 1839.

¹⁷⁷ Canadiana Online “African School Examination”, *The Guardian*, Oct.30, 1839.

students themselves, the biases of these contemporary accounts must be acknowledged but also provide important insights on what students learned, how they learned, and what was expected of them. Some demonstrate students had a degree of agency and valued their education enough to withdraw from the school to learn writing at another. In an age when children were to be seen and not heard, the act of expressing their desire to learn writing and then acting upon it by transferring to a competitor's school, was a powerful message. Women instructors, Black schoolgirls and needlework contributed to the positive messaging and promotion of the school and provided girls with practical skills that assisted their families. Students gained visibility as learners and engaged with the highest levels of society, and female students using their skill with the needle impressed government officials who had withdrawn the schoolmistress's salary to reverse their decision. Despite colonial and paternalistic educational models that emphasized religion, industriousness and subservience, the school in providing a forum for their visibility facilitated an important environment aimed at combatting ignorance and bigotry, and one that fostered humanitarianism. The instruction of needlework which had been embedded in the schools' curriculum since its beginnings and a skill associated with domesticity and manual industry played an important role in public perceptions of the school. As will be discussed in the next chapter, needlework and embroidery by the school's female students, even within an imposed system of racialized education and gendered labor, involved complex notions of self and group identity, agency, and respectability.

CHAPTER 4

THE RACHEL BARRETT SAMPLER: MATERIAL CULTURE, IDENTITY, RESPECTABILITY

In December of 1845, Rachel Barrett completed a sampler as part of her education at the African School. Barrett's embroidery documented her name and age, status as a student, and a completion date. The survival of a sampler made during the mid-19th century by a Black school girl is rare and offers important insight into an emerging education system for Black students and the lives of Black Loyalists and their descendants in Nova Scotia. Rachel was most likely the child of a local barber, and escaped Black Refugee, and former slave, William Barrett, who arrived in Nova Scotia in the late 1810s.¹ From local census and church records,

For William, a tribute to his life and service as a Deacon in the African Baptist Church appeared in the 1871 edition of the church's printed Circular, after his death.² William Barrett was baptized and eventually ordained a Deacon within the church by

¹ James Thomas, "The Circular Letter to the African Baptist Association, convened at Hammonds Plains, September 30, 1871", in *Annual Minutes of the Eighteenth Session of the African Baptist Association, 1871*, Acadia Library Special Collections, Digital Archives, Y450, H33, 1871, accessed, Nov. 2021, <https://archives.acadiau.ca/islandora/object/special%3A580>, 10-12; Peter MacKerrow, *A Brief History of the Coloured Baptists of Nova Scotia and their First Organization as Churches A.D. 1832*, Halifax, NS, Nova Scotia Printing Company, 1895, 53-54; The Name "William Barrett" is documented in: "Halifax List of Black Refugees 1813-1834", Nova Scotia Archives, accessed Sept.2021, <https://archives.novascotia.ca/africanns/halifax-list/?Search=>. Connecting William Barrett to Rachel, are Marriage Registrations for Halifax 1763-1945 and Death Registration records for Halifax 1865, Nova Scotia Archives. The marriage registration for Jan.18, 1865, documents a "William Barratt/born in Virginia" as father of the bride to "Mary Ann Barratt" upon her marriage to "dyer" "Richard Whidden/English", with a "Rachel Barrett" listed as a "witness". On July 22, 1865, "William Barratt" died at the age of 72 years, born in "Virginia", with "Richard Whidden" as the "signature of informant."

² Thomas, *Annual Minutes*, 10-12.

fellow Black Refugee from Virginia, and renown founder of the African Baptist Association and African Abolition Society, Reverend Richard Preston.³

A close examination of the sampler's content demonstrates that there was an additional purpose at play behind the design and making of the sampler. Due to the lack of references to samplers and the instruction of sampler making at the school, it will be compared to samplers produced elsewhere. Its images and words link directly to the social and political activism of the Black Refugees and their descendants and a heightened consciousness of their group identity.⁴ The sampler illuminates an additional dimension of understanding to this aspect of the Black Nova Scotian experience during the mid-nineteenth century and connects the construction of this identity directly to the education of their children.

4.1 "Habits of industry": needlework and the African School

For Halifax's newly emancipated Black population, needlework instruction at the school during the 1830s and 1840s, represented practical benefits such as skills useful for domestic purposes and as an additional means of support while simultaneously imposing

³ Acadian University Digital Archives, *Minutes of the United African Baptist Association, 1871*, 10-12.; Frank Boyd Jr., "Richard Preston", Dictionary of Canadian Biography, accessed Nov.2021, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/preston_richard_8E.html.

⁴ Harvey Amani Whitfield, "The Development of Black Refugee identity in Nova Scotia 1813-1850", in *Left History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Historical Inquiry and Debate* (Fall, 2005), 19-21, DOI:10.25071/1913-9632.5679; David Sutherland, "Race Relations in Halifax, Nova Scotia, during the Mid-Victorian Quest for Reform", in *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, Volume 7, Number 1, 1996, 36-48, accessed Sept.2021, <https://www.erudit.org/fr/revues/jcha/1996-v7-n1-jcha1003/031101ar/>.

colonial values. In the same year that Rachel completed her sampler, the school's supervisor Robert Willis, wrote:

the comfort of the children is greatly increased by the instruction of the female scholars in carding, spinning, knitting and sewing; and that such habits of industry formed in youth must be a handmaid to virtue, by affording constant employment, and the means of support.⁵

As the nineteenth-century advanced, and African Nova Scotian women worked as teachers, seamstresses, dressmakers, domestic servants, and laundresses.⁶ Part of the curriculum at the school gave girls access to skills and materials for clothing themselves and their families; however, these were wrapped up within imperial notions of virtuous industry and morality.⁷ These beliefs were an extension of the Bray Associates "pious designs" from a century earlier. African education historian, Fiona Leach, has written about the negative impacts of needlework instruction in West African mission schools, which contributed to a pattern of inferior education for girls that lasted up to the mid-twentieth century.⁸ In Nova Scotia, Judith Fingard emphasizes the African School's curriculum was decidedly industrial rather than intellectually advanced, tying this to the attitudes of Halifax's white upper classes and the delayed and limited access to education of the poor in the province.⁹

⁵ NSA, Records of the House of Assembly, Feb.6, 1845, RG 5, Series P, Vol.74.

⁶ Morton, "Separate Spheres", 78; Syliva Hamilton, "Naming Names, Naming Ourselves: A Survey of Early Black Women in Nova Scotia", in *We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up: Essays in African Canadian Women's History*, 1994, 13-40.

⁷ Ulrich, *Age of Homespun*, 117.

⁸ Fiona Leach, "African girls, Nineteenth-century Mission Education and the Patriarchal Imperative", in *Gender and Education*, 2008, 20:4, 335-347.

⁹ Fingard, "Attitudes", 15-42.

While these narratives acknowledge the oppressive and negative associations between women and needlework, a complex and sometimes controversial relationship which had existed over time, they ignore the positive benefits and experiences that needlework and its instruction offered to African Nova Scotian girls. In the United States, Black material culture scholars such as Victoria Rovine, and Kelli Racine Coles point out that scholarship on the needlework of Black girls and women has, until recent decades, been sorely lacking and placed their involvement with the medium at the margins.¹⁰ In fact, Coles states, “Needlework knowledge was likely passed down through the generations and brought with ancestors, grandparents, parents, or possibly some girls themselves, across the Atlantic from their African home villages and tribes.”¹¹ Their “needle wisdom,” passed from one generation to the next, was embedded in their work throughout the colonial period and travelled with the enslaved as they migrated north from southern plantations.¹² Coles makes the point that a rich history of textiles and embroidery existed in West Africa, from where most Africans were stolen for enslavement.¹³ Strickrodt observed of this region, needlework was considered a male practice.¹⁴ Furthermore, a rare example of a West African textile tradition from the nineteenth century exists in the Nova Scotia Museum’s collection. “Margru’s cloth”, was

¹⁰ Kelli Racine Coles, “Schoolgirl Embroideries and Black Girlhood in Antebellum Philadelphia”, in *Hidden Stories/Human Lives: Proceedings of the Textile Society of America 17th Biennial Symposium*, (October 15-17, 2020), <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/tsaconf>, 1-16.

¹¹ Coles, “Schoolgirl Embroideries”, 7.

¹² The term “needle wisdom” is cited in the following: Mirra Banks, *Anonymous Was Woman: A Documentation of the Women's Art Festival: a collection of letters to young women artists*, (California Institute of the Arts, 1974), 5; Coles, “Schoolgirl Embroideries”, 7.

¹³ Coles, “Schoolgirl Embroideries”, 7.

¹⁴ Strickrodt, “African Girls”, 200.

gifted by Sarah Margru Kinson, a survivor of the slave trading vessel *La Amistad*, to a Nova Scotian missionary wife and descendant of a Loyalist enslaver, Eliza Ruggles Raymond, sometime during the mid-1800s.¹⁵ Another example of the importance of embroidery which continued to play within the lives of African American girls is demonstrated by “Ashley’s sack”, an embroidered cotton sack found in the collection of the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C..¹⁶ Simply embroidered text in multiple coloured threads records the story of the sack and its makers--a gift from a mother to her nine year old daughter separated as part of a slave sale.¹⁷

Needlework instruction provided girls with a way of earning a wage and the skills needed for clothing themselves and their family. In 1847, Reverend Willis wrote, “the female scholars knit and sew, and have become so expert, that they are able to make their industry profitable both to themselves and their parents by selling their work when finished.”¹⁸ And in 1845 wrote: “Several of the children manufacture the socks and

¹⁵ Nova Scotia Museum, Cultural History collection, “Margru’s cloth”, 2004.7.206.

¹⁶ Nora McGreevy, “History of Now – A Simple Cotton Sack”, *Smithsonian Magazine*, June 18, 2021, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/how-simple-cotton-sack-tells-epic-tale-loss-love-and-resilience-180978009/>.

¹⁷ McGreevy, “A Simple Cotton Sack”.

¹⁸ BOA, Bray minutes, July 20, 1847; Unlike the British Missionary Society schools in Sierra Leone or at the Catholic Oblate Sisters school in Baltimore, Maryland, documentary evidence connecting the female attendees of the African School to large scale manual labour and clothing production for generating income for the schools’ operations, were not found by the author in the Bray archives or in the local education and House of Assembly records. While some labour, such as wool preparation for homespun cloth occurred, and female students who made clothing for themselves and their families were allowed to take in work for hire as a means of supporting themselves, no written evidence could be found for larger scale schemes of labour that occurred at schools elsewhere, such as those in West Africa as described by Dr. Silke Strickrodt in “African School.

stockings which they, their parents, and brothers and sisters require....making and mending their own clothes greatly contributes to their comfort and places in their hands a branch of economy which will greatly contribute to increase the comfort of the rising generation.”¹⁹ Instruction in needlework at the school also provided another benefit, one tied to the school’s public examination days. When covered by the local press, the children’s needlework and their instructor received public praise, elevating the humanity of the children and situating them within the imperial learning context of the school . Black people, especially women were commonly treated as objects of disdain, prejudice, and ridicule in the local newspapers.²⁰ Such portrayals evincing praise of Black youth were important for countering widespread prejudice about intelligence.²¹ The following report on the public examination day at the African School appeared in *The Guardian* in 1839, demonstrates the writer’s acknowledgement of the myth, and attempts to dispel it through praise, while still using words denoting subservience:

The general proficiency of the classes respectively examined was truly astonishing and well calculated to destroy the opinion which is by some entertained the natural dullness and ineptitude of the Africans and their descendants. Specimens of plain sewing, marking, spinning and knitting, the work of the Females of the School, were also submitted for examination, and were pronounced by a Lady competent to judge, to be highly creditable to the Female instructor, as well as to the girls instructed, for the cleanliness of the articles, and the neatness with which the work was executed.²²

Attendees of the public examination included, provincial elites, such as the “Chief Justice, Sir R.D. George, Bart.,G.B. Creighton, J.C. Haliburton, and Charles H. Wallace”.

¹⁹ BOA, Bray meeting minutes, January 21, 1845.

²⁰ Whitfield, *Blacks on the Border*, 86-87; Morton, “Separate Spheres”, 75-76.

²¹ Whitfield, *Blacks on the Border*, 86-87.

²² “African School Examination”, *The Guardian*, October 30, 1839, Canadiana Online.

Nova Scotia's Governor, Sir Colin Campbell had also planned to attend, but "was prevented by temporary indisposition."²³ Public examinations were an important feature of the national system of education, and in the context of the African School created spaces where race, gender and class intersected. The qualities of "neatness" and "cleanliness" singled out as points of praise, were important criteria in the production of needlework at that time. They are mentioned in the first instructions under the General Rules in the National Society's manual on needlework titled "*Instructions in Needle-work and Knitting as Derived from the Practices of the Central School of the National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church*" published in 1838. The "Rules" stated, "The beauty of needle-work consists in its regularity and cleanliness, every child must be taught to wash her hands before she begins, to make her stitches exactly the same size, and to set them at a regular distance from each other."²⁴ Needlework also was seen as a promulgator of proper behaviour or demeanor. In 1839, Willis wrote to the members of the Assembly stating, "By sewing and knitting more mischief has been prevented than by the consideration of prudence or the arm of authority."²⁵

²³ "African School Examination", *The Guardian*, October 30, 1839, Canadiana Online.

²⁴ The National Society, *Instructions on Needlework and Knitting*, 5.

²⁵ NSA, House of Assembly Records, Feb.9, 1839, RG 5, Series P, Vol. 72; Willis may have been quoting the words of eighteenth-century Swiss writer and physician, Johan von Zimmerman, which appeared in an 1822 publication about the national system of education by Jeremiah Trist, *A Necessary Doctrine and Erudition for any Christian Youth*, London, 1822, https://www.google.ca/books/edition/A_Necessary_Doctrine_and_Erudition_for_a/-44NNSAQUYcC?hl=fr&gbpv=1&dq=jeremiah+trist+a+necessary+doctrine&printsec=frontcover.

4.2 The Sewing Mistress and Needlework Lessons

In 1836, Bishop Inglis's eldest son, Charles Inglis, MD, Esq. asked the schoolmaster's wife, Jane Crozier Gallagher, "to devote the afternoon of each day to the instruction of the female portion of the scholars, who were so far advanced as to be able to read, in carding, spinning, knitting and sewing; for which Mrs. Gallagher received no remuneration for the first eighteen months."²⁶ Charles who had studied medicine in London, on occasion assisted his father as his personal secretary.²⁷ He attended the school daily from 9:00 a.m. until 3:30 p.m. and was involved with the school in the months leading up to its opening and for some time afterwards.²⁸ The following account from Gallagher provides the only written explanation providing specific details of Jane's instruction: "What Mrs. Gallagher formerly did was simply to teach the girls sewing, knitting, etc by coming into the school for an hour or two in the day, or taking them into her own room..."²⁹ Jane taught for fourteen years, from 1836 until 1850, at which time she ceased to instruct when her salary was permanently discontinued by the local Legislature.³⁰

As schoolmaster of the African School, Daniel received a salary of £110 per year from the provincial treasury.³¹ After a year, Jane was awarded a salary of £40 per year, an amount less than half her husband's.³² In the 1840s, female teachers struggled against

²⁶ BOA, Bray minutes, June 15, 1852.

²⁷ NSA, Library and Archives Canada, United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Archives, Canadian correspondence, Letter from John Inglis to Rev. Edwin Arnold, January 2, 1833.

²⁸ BOA, Bray correspondence, January 4, 1836.

²⁹ BOA, Bray minutes, Nov. 16, 1852.

³⁰ BOA, Bray minutes, 1851.

³¹ Fergusson, *The Establishment*, 63.

³² Fergusson, *The Establishment*, 63.

gender ideology that restricted access to fair wages and professional respect.³³ Jane's salary having been suspended in 1844 by the government, was then reinstated upon a successful "visit by the committee members to the school" who "witnessed the children's progress for themselves."³⁴ By 1852, attendance at the school had declined to the point that Willis and even Gallagher himself agreed did not justify the continuance of a funded position for needlework instruction at the school.³⁵

Despite the lack of personal accounts written by Jane Gallagher, needlework manuals published during the early to mid-nineteenth century, and Gallagher's observations help shed light on her teaching methods and the reaction of her students. In 1845, Willis wrote the following description:

In the afternoon of each day all the female scholars, who can read, go to Mrs. Gallagher, the schoolmistress, and attend to making branches of female industry, carding wool, spinning, knitting, and sewing are learned, and most of the children become very expert in each department. Several of the children manufacture the socks and stockings, which they their parents and brothers and sisters require; and Mrs. Gallagher has frequently much pleasure, when they bring to the school stockings which they commenced and finished at home, in order to let her see how nicely they have done this work. Making and mending their own clothes greatly contributes to their comfort, and places in their hands a branch of economy which will greatly contribute to increase the comfort of the rising generation.³⁶

These plain sewing techniques were described in the National Society's publication "*Instructions in Needlework and Knitting*". Other manuals were published for use in other schools, but instructions varied little, suggesting teaching methods for needlework were

³³ Janet Guildford, "Separate Spheres: The Feminization of Public Teaching in Nova Scotia, 1838-1880", in *Acadiensis*, Vol.22, No.1, (Autumn 1992), 2.

³⁴ BOA, Bray minutes, Jan. 21, 1845.

³⁵ BOA, Bray minutes, Nov.16, 1852.

³⁶ BOA, Bray minutes, Jan. 21, 1845.

similar.³⁷ The “*Instructions*” contained thirteen chapters each devoted to a different needlework technique, beginning with hemming and ending with knitting. The introductory chapter also entitled “Instructions,” provided an overview of the national system approach to the “regulations” of needlework. As part of needlework instructions, students were taught precise methods for holding and positioning the needle in unison during group lessons. The following description demonstrates how needlework classes were arranged:

Their proficiency in needle-work and in the usual manner, with benches on three sides of a square. Each class has a separate drawer for the work, etc and every child has a bag marked with her number in her class or in the school to contain her things. An Assistant Teacher is placed over each of the three sides of the class; a Teacher superintends the whole class and is answerable to the Mistress for the conduct of her Assistants and the improvement of her girls. She has charge of the work drawer belonging to the class, and has under her care a stock of needles, cotton, pins, thread, scissors, etc, for all of which she is responsible.³⁸

Important skills not included in the book, were the carding spinning and knitting of wool, and weaving, methods related to needlework and the production of clothing and textiles essential to settlers in the colonies. In 1837, Willis, wrote:

That upwards of fifty pounds of wool were spun and carded last summer, to enable the Schoolmistress to instruct the girls belonging to the school to manufacture it into necessary articles of clothing, and that eighteen children are now knitting and enjoying the comfort of this their new branch of industry; and had there been room, a loom and weaving would have been also introduced.³⁹

In Europe, weaving was men’s work, but in Nova Scotia and other colonies, women wove durable and warm cloth out of woolen homespun for use in clothing and bedding,

³⁷ Leena Rana, “Stories Behind the Stitches”, 165; Waive, ““On Needlework”, 91.

³⁸ The National Society, *Instructions*, 5.

³⁹ NSA, Records of the House of Assembly, RG 5, Series P, Vol.72, Feb 21, 1837.

such as quilts and rugs.⁴⁰ During the 1840s, Nova Scotia produced homespun cloth woven on looms in households, longer and later than in other parts of Canada and North America.⁴¹ Large scale textile manufacturing and mechanized mills were not yet in place in the province, and the production of homespun allowed households to avoid the expense of purchasing cloth from the store and supplied a cloth that “was close to indestructible”, withstanding harsh physical labour and cold winters.⁴² In 1836, William Mclaughlin, “a weaver by trade,” who lived near the Black settlement at Preston, petitioned the House of Assembly, insisting, “the black women who generally are good spinners and that if he had the means to procure wool, that many who are now in a state of starvation would thus be enabled to procure a livelihood.”⁴³

4.3 Rachel Barrett’s Sampler, 1845

Barrett’s sampler is singular and includes extraordinary details that reveal important clues about the educational experiences and knowledge of Empire by this young girl. The sampler is made using a plain open weave linen ground fabric, at “x “ in size which had become popular by mid-century due to a reduced amount of labour and time needed for embroidering designs.⁴⁴ Barrett’s sampler includes a depiction of the African School in

⁴⁰ Beatrice Craig, *Backwoods Consumers and Homespun Capitalists: The Rise of a Market Culture in Eastern Canada*, (University of Toronto Press, 2009), 187; Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun*, 5-11.

⁴¹ Beatrice Craig, Judith Rygiel, and Elizabeth Turcotte, “Survival or Adaptation? Domestic Rural Textile Production in Eastern Canada in the Later Nineteenth Century”, in *The Agricultural History Review*, 2001, Vol. 49, No. 2 (2001), 164-168.

⁴² Beatrice Craig, Rygiel, and Turcotte, “Survival or Adaptation?”, Beatrice Craig, *Backwoods Consumers*, 182-192.

⁴³ NSA, House of Assembly records, February 14, 1836, RG 5, series P, vol.52, number 45.

⁴⁴ Young, *A Record*, 9.

Halifax as a central motif occupying the upper half of the fabric, features some interesting architectural details, consistent with the style of architecture present in Halifax at that time including mullioned windows, gables, barred windows at street level, and the paneled door with its surrounding transom lights. (Fig.4.1)



Figure 4.1. Photograph showing Halifax's National School building on the corner of Argyle Street across from the Grand Parade, two blocks below Albemarle Street, and architecture of the surrounding buildings. (ca.1887) W.D. O'Donnell, Nova Scotia Archives, accession no. 1984-565 / negative N-4421.

The name “African School” is also stitched prominently on the front of the school along with a date of completion “December 11, 1845”. Flanking each side of the school are a variety of typical sampler motifs such as a crown, a bowl of fruit, and flowers. Occupying the bottom half of the sampler is verse from “God Save the Queen!”, and below that her name and age thereby “marking” her identity. The apparent simplicity of her stitching, all executed in cross-stitch, and the textual data imparted, is deceptive and belies the importance of her accomplishments and of her identity as a young African Nova Scotian.

Close examination of the sampler reveals that Rachel applied a basic cross or sampler stitch, she would have learned at school, while drawing from her experience as a needle artist and her creativity to complicate the method of application. Rachel worked her sampler primarily in cross-stitch over two warp and two weft threads, using thick wool thread. The cross-stitch was the most common embroidery stitch used on samplers during the nineteenth century.⁴⁵ Rather than simply stitching these elements consistently over two ground threads in each direction, for some details Rachel has gone to the extra effort of stitching over just one thread of linen in each direction. In addition, despite the importance of the rule of stitch “consistency”, whereby all stitches are to be crossed in the same direction, she has staggered her stitching direction in other areas creating an effect of texture that appears to compliment rather than detract from the depiction of the school. These variations reflect a choice, a decision she made that involved more time to stitch and was harder to see to sew it given its smaller area of threads. Stitching over one thread in each direction was a technique typically used to depict elements of special importance and allowed the stitcher to delineate them to a greater level of detail. Sampler historian Glee Krueger writes:

The sampler makers were also absorbed by the rendering of architectural details, and their naïve way of creating shutters, cupolas, rooftops, pergolas, fences, fan-lights, and bell towers never ceases to amaze and charm. Seated figures, furniture, flying birds, feeding rabbits, galloping horses, cats walking fence railings, etc. - all are disposed in a noteworthy way, if the embroideress fancied the subject matter.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ V&A Museum, “Embroidery A History of Needlework”.

⁴⁶ Glee Kreuger, *A Gallery of American Samplers The Theodore H. Kapnek Collection*, E.P. Dutton in association with the Museum of American Folk Art, New York, 1978, 19.

Using this technique, Rachel selected the school's roof, with two unusual triangular pieces at opposite ends, the door, the transom lights, the basement, and the windows.⁴⁷

Thick wool threads were used for stitching the schoolhouse and a few of the floral motifs which appear to be a thicker thread than such was used on other contemporaneous Nova Scotian samplers.⁴⁸ A finer thread of either silk or cotton was used to stitch the text, the strawberry border, and the remainder of the floral motifs. While other Nova Scotian samplers were commonly made using wool thread, the thickness of the thread was typically finer and more suited to the size of the ground fabric. For makers, finer sized wool, silk, or cotton embroidery threads decreased the amount of stretching or pressure on ground fabric fibres. Silk thread, although commonly available from merchants in Halifax at this time, would have been more expensive. Rachel has also left blank rows around each of the windows, suggesting the form of what would be window framing. In addition, a portion of one of the three gables is stitched in a different coloured thread, implying there was a scarcity of thread and a need for using what was available. Two samplers made by students of the white only National School, also exhibit changes in thread colour mid-way perhaps demonstrating a shared characteristic unique or distinctive to charity schools where money and resources could have been in short supply, such as schools for poorer students. These choices might indicate a scarcity of resources, or a situation warranting the careful economizing of thread, but Barrett also demonstrates her knowledge and understanding of embroidery design and the medium

⁴⁷ Email communication from architecture historian Allen Penney, Nov.23, 2019.

⁴⁸ Based on a visual survey of the collection in Young's *A Record for Time*, 24-54, and of samplers belonging to the Nova Scotia Museum's cultural history collection, examined between Sept.2021 – April, 2022.

with which she was working. In choosing the wool to depict the school, she prioritized its usage to portray a motif that would be enhanced by a thicker fibre using a technique that conveyed texture and dimension.

What is particularly compelling about this sampler is the inclusion of a verse from the chorus of the Royal Anthem (now known as the British National Anthem) also cross-stitched in a fine black thread. For educational purposes, verses from the Bible, moral and educational books, writings, poetry, and even written music, were popularly featured on samplers.⁴⁹ No other samplers in Young's publication or the Nova Scotia Museum's collection feature verse from the royal anthem. This choice of verse may have been a rare one in the context of the British Atlantic sampler making tradition and was extremely apt given the imperial roots of the school and its association to commemorative activities Black Refugees were engaging in at that time.⁵⁰

In examining the social and political climate of the time the sampler was made, the choice of verse may be explained by issues concerning image and identity that Black Refugees and their descendants were dealing with in Halifax during the 1840s.⁵¹ Race, identity, patriotism, and progress were concepts of prime concern for Black Nova Scotians during this time period.⁵² The Black Refugees had received licenses of occupation for poor quality lots of land for farming and settlement, causing them economic hardship. White society viewed them with extreme prejudice and the colonial

⁴⁹ Waine, "On Needle-work", 90-93.

⁵⁰ Whitfield, *Blacks on the Border*, 84, 85, 103; Natasha Henry, *Emancipation Day: Celebrating Freedom in Canada*, Dundurn Press, 2010, 132-137.

⁵¹ Whitfield, "Black Refugee Identity", 18-19.

⁵² Whitfield, "Black Refugee Identity", 18-19.

government considered them as a financial burden.⁵³ Seen as burdensome by the colonial government and the public, repeated attempts in the form of resettlement offers from the Trinidadian government were made but were mostly rebuffed.⁵⁴ Many Black men encountered anti-Black racism and could not find work.⁵⁵ Undeterred by these obstacles, Black Refugees organized a series of public activities designed to impress upon government and the public their loyalty to the British crown. Despite backlash against their increased presence in these public events, they persevered, and in doing so maintained their association with Britain while developing their community identity.⁵⁶ As historian David Sutherland, has explained this type of activism was a way to justify their demands for civil rights and included public parades commemorating Queen Victoria's coronation.⁵⁷ Members of the African Friendly Society "wore beautiful outfits and carried signs, which claimed that Britain and the new Queen offered and secured black freedom."⁵⁸ Speeches were given by the African Friendly Society, which honoured British liberty and described themselves as loyal subjects.⁵⁹ Political meetings and other public displays of loyalty helped challenge racist assumptions and helped define and publicly demonstrate their distinct group identity.⁶⁰

In 1846, the Reverend Preston founded the African Abolition Society and parades, picnics, and dinners were held annually commemorating the inauguration date of British

⁵³ Whitfield, *Blacks on the Border*, 52-54; David Sutherland, "Race Relations", 37.

⁵⁴ Whitfield, *Blacks on the Border*, 59-62.

⁵⁵ Whitfield, *Blacks on the Border*, 107, 108.

⁵⁶ Whitfield, *Blacks on the Border*, 108.

⁵⁷ Whitfield, *Blacks on the Border*, 100-101; Sutherland, "Race Relations", 38.

⁵⁸ Whitfield, *Blacks on the Border*, 101.

⁵⁹ Whitfield, *Blacks on the Border*, 103.

⁶⁰ Whitfield, *Blacks on the Border*, 99-103.

emancipation, August 1st, 1834.⁶¹ In 1851, (Fig 4.2) a notice appeared in *The British Colonist*, announcing a procession would start from the African School and end at the Baptist African Chapel on Cornwallis Street.⁶²

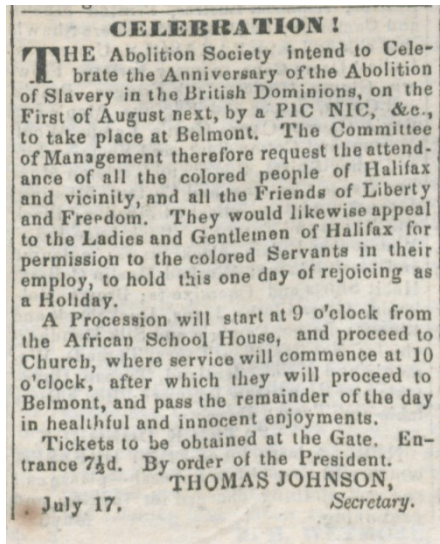


Figure 4.2. Notice from The British Colonist newspaper, announcing the Abolition Society's plans to celebrate the "Anniversary of the Abolition of Slavery", and a procession starting from the African School. Nova Scotia Archives, *The British Colonist*, Halifax, NS, July 19, 1851, microfilm 8512.

Advertised as a starting point for the parade's route, the African School was clearly being used by the members of the Abolition Society, and the congregants of the African Chapel, to publicly symbolize freedom, and loyalty.⁶³ Whitfield wrote: "These public celebrations and political agitation provide our best insight into the process of constructing the political side of their African British North American identity".⁶⁴ These assertions of loyalty to the crown which was led and supported by Black societies and churches, were significantly linked to and supported by the African School.

⁶¹ Natasha Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 134-137.

⁶² Frank S. Boyd Jr., Dictionary of Canadian Biography entry, "Richard Preston", http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/preston_richard_8E.html.

⁶³ NSA, *The British Colonist*, July 19, 1851, microfilm 8512.

⁶⁴ Whitfield, *Blacks on the Border*, 115.

In 1836, Bishop Inglis wrote to the S.P.G., reporting the “flourishing” nature of the school, the presence of “eighty scholars” and at a public examination they sang “God Save the King” in two stanzas which his son Charles had added, offering thanks for “emancipation.”⁶⁵ The school, modelled upon the British National system, and its administrators, promulgated British culture and loyalty and the school’s supervisor, Robert Willis, was a member of the St. George Society, an organization dedicated to honouring and promoting British culture.⁶⁶ In 1840, Willis delivered a sermon to the society’s members during a celebration honouring Queen Victoria’s marriage to Prince Albert. According to an account in the *Colonial Pearl*,

The sermon discussed the duty of honouring the sovereign, - subordination and charity. After the conclusion of divine service, the fine choir of St Paul’s sung with excellent effect three verses of the “National Anthem,” arranged as follows: (several of the congregation joined in the anthem.) ‘God save our gracious Queen! Long live our noble Queen! God save the Queen!’⁶⁷

These examples of the school’s associations with Britishness and loyalty provide important context and illuminate the deeper meaning of the verse’s words on the sampler, and despite its singular usage, demonstrates it to be a choice in perfect keeping with the sentiments and goals of the school and the community it served.

Given this, it is important to question the degree of freedom or personal expression Rachel had in the making of her sampler? The sampler, stitched by Rachel Barrett, and designed by Gallagher, reflects choices made by both females. As instructor,

⁶⁵ BOA, USPG, Canada Records, C series records relating to Nova Scotia to c.1860, Inglis to the USPG, Feb.,1836.

⁶⁶ Judith Fingard, “Robert Willis”, Dictionary of Canadian Biography, University of Toronto/Laval, Sept. 1977-2022, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/willis_robert_9E.html.

⁶⁷ Canadiana Online, *The Colonial Pearl*, April 25, 1840.

Gallagher most likely created the design, with Barrett making choices about colour and stitch type. Her choice to dedicate extra time and effort in illuminating the architectural details of her school, demonstrates the school's importance to her as a motif. Rachel as a maker of this image and text, contributed to a model of image projection adopted by her community as an act of resistance and agency. The Black Refugees and Rachel understood the power of language and images. Rachel's action in the projection of this image, represented an act of empowerment and agency. Her experience in making this sampler might have represented a quieter version of the public processions and picnics held in honour of emancipation and Britishness in the shared goal of combatting racism, resisting deportation, and forming identity.⁶⁸

As a young Black girl, Rachel Barrett, attended the African School against a backdrop of racism, segregation, economic disadvantage, and inter-racial frictions.⁶⁹ Is it possible that her hours spent at school, might have offered a respite from some of these struggles? As the school offered the opportunity to clothe herself and her family, might she have viewed it as a source for improving the quality or at least material comfort of her life? A comment written by Inglis implies the children wished to attend even after being sent home as punishment. He wrote: "No rewards- no punishments- and no emulation are allowed. If the children misbehave, they are sent home, but are generally found at the door crying for readmission."⁷⁰ Such specific and personal observations of the children's behaviour are rare, and therefore tend to stand out amidst the Bray's archives. It might also be a case of hyperbole, which Inglis might have felt was necessary

⁶⁸ Whitfield, *Blacks on the Border*, 84-115.

⁶⁹ Whitfield, *Blacks on the Border*, 100-108.

⁷⁰ BOA, Bray correspondence, Feb., 1836.

in order to impress the Associates and to ensure their sponsorship of the school continued.

Rachel's sampler falls within a stylistic format that first became popular in England and then in North America, and which involved the depiction of houses or buildings, and are often referred to as 'building samplers'.⁷¹ It is the only sampler out of the collection of Nova Scotian samplers studied that features a specifically identified Nova Scotian building and because of this is a unique example of this type of sampler. During the 1830s, African American girls made samplers at the Roman Catholic School for Coloured Girls, in Baltimore, Maryland. Operated by "the first permanent order of Roman Catholic religious women of African descent in the United States", the Oblate Sisters order continues to this day, and maintains an archive and the single largest collection of African American-made samplers.⁷² Sampler and textile historian Gloria Seaman Allen notes, two samplers made by students at the school feature buildings, with one conforming to a regional group of samplers known as the "Baltimore building samplers."⁷³ Other examples feature some text referencing schools and yet none feature depictions of buildings with the level of architectural detail or a signboard such as Rachel's.⁷⁴

Samplers were also made by "liberated" African children in Sierra Leone, girls who had been rescued from illegal slave ships by the British navy's anti-slave trade or

⁷¹ "Embroidery- A History of Samplers", V&A Museum, <https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/embroidery-a-history-of-needlework-samplers>, accessed Sept., 2021; Allen, "Samplers from the Oblate", 17-30.

⁷² Allen, "Samplers from the Oblate", 17-30.

⁷³ Allen, "Samplers from the Oblate", 17-30.

⁷⁴ Allen, "Samplers from the Oblate", 17-30.

who were born to parents who had been rescued from these ships.⁷⁵ The African samplers demonstrate a variety of styles and designs, while following a common sampler format that included a decorative border with centralized rows of alphabets, numbers, verse, and pictorial motifs, along with makers' names and ages.⁷⁶ Unlike the Nova Scotia sampler, wool fibres were apparently not used and buildings were not depicted.⁷⁷ African samplers from these schools were most often produced as "souvenirs" for English and local benefactors who supported the school.⁷⁸ An unfortunate component of this practice, a type of early child-sponsorship, which for an annual payment of £5 the sponsor was permitted to provide an English name to replace the stitcher's African one.⁷⁹

It seems unlikely Rachel's sampler was made as part of such a child sponsorship scheme at the African School in Halifax given this type of activity was never documented in the comprehensive Bray archives. Nor has it been found in the local archives. While a single mention of "specimens of children's work" produced at the African School appeared in a letter to the Bray Associates in 1837, no further references could be found.⁸⁰ In general, fundraising schemes in connection with the Halifax school appeared infrequently. Barrett or the school, could have sold the work, or she may have retained the sampler for herself, possibly as a visual resume of her needlework skills, her attendance at the school with its demonstration of loyalty to procure future work, or it

⁷⁵ Strickrodt, "Mission Schools", 192. Historian Silke Strickrodt wrote that these girls attended British Church Missionary Society schools and identified an example made under the instruction of teachers with Nova Scotian ancestry.

⁷⁶ Strickrodt, "Mission Schools", 201-211.

⁷⁷ Strickrodt, "Mission Schools", 201-211.

⁷⁸ Strickrodt, "Mission Schools", 201-211.

⁷⁹ Strickrodt, "Mission Schools", 201-211.

⁸⁰ BOA, Bray minutes, July 20, 1837.

may have been displayed as one of the “specimens of work” at one of the school’s public examination days.⁸¹

The Rachel Barrett sampler is significant due to its rarity as an example of an embroidered pictorial sampler stitched by an African Nova Scotian girl, and because it is tangible physical evidence of the type of educational instruction young girls, most likely children or descendants of the Black Refugee population, daughters of servants, seamen, and other waged labourers, received at the African School during the 1840’s. Since no mention of samplers appear in the school’s documents this embroidery is evidence that the tradition of sampler making was being transmitted from the schoolmistress to students at the African School. The sampler is also the product of two individuals and represents a relationship between two females from very different backgrounds, coming together through the making of a textile, and the transmission of knowledge in the form of a centuries’ old needlework tradition. The transference of these skills involved the imposing of an identity upon Black Nova Scotian children, one that their parents and other members of the community had found necessary to promote, as a way of challenging racism, resisting the colonial government’s efforts at deportation, proclaiming loyalty to Britain and citizens of liberty, while developing a unique community identity.

Finally, it is important to note that, while it is possible to derive some idea of the challenges of life that a young Black girl like Rachel Barrett may have experienced while growing up and going to school in Halifax during this time-period, it is impossible to know her true feelings about this work. Her exceptional attention to details revealed by

⁸¹ *The Guardian*, October 30, 1839.

her stitching and the inclusion of the school in these details, suggest her life as a student was important. As illustrated by the cultural and political context of the time, the outward charm of the sampler belies a lived experience of the racialization of the African Nova Scotian experience in mid-nineteenth century Nova Scotia. Black material culture scholar Kelli Racine Coles (2021) cites Saidiya Hartman, describing this type of paucity of archival material as “the violence of the archives.” An examination of this only known example of student work from the African School represents an important opportunity to address “the archives void of Black girls’ voices” and the lack of scholarship on the lives and needlework of African Nova Scotian girlhood.⁸²

⁸² Coles, “Schoolgirl Embroideries”, 299.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

When Rachel Barrett stitched her name, age, and image of the African School onto her sampler she demonstrated her skill and knowledge with the needle as a vehicle through which she revealed her literacy and marked her identity. The sampler is a rare example of nineteenth-century Black schoolgirl embroidery and situates sampler making and needlework as part of the history of African Nova Scotian girls and their education. While early schools in Nova Scotia were underfunded, under resourced and beset by disaster, students continued to engage in their school lessons. These lessons would have been similar to those taught to white schoolgirls and is evidenced through the extensive collection of samplers held in the region's museums and personal collections. Although Barrett's sampler is similar in some of its motifs and modes of making, its singular design is highlighted by the imagery and its reference to the African School and the royal anthem.

The completed sampler signified her position in Halifax and Nova Scotia society as a loyal British subject and African British North American. Barrett stitched the sampler at a time when the Black Refugees were using public displays of loyalty to the Crown, some of which involved the African School, to define themselves as a distinct group entitled to the rights of British subjects. Barrett's actions as its maker speaks to a mode of needlework that signified schoolgirl accomplishment and that afforded her a measure of agency, and as a participant in community activism.

Made as part of Barrett's student experience at Halifax's African School, its production within a system of racialized, gendered and segregated education, reveals the paradoxical nature of such instruction that existed for Black schoolgirls. Needlework was

supported as an educational exercise informed by the British and colonial models of religious schooling and was part of the Bray schools' early curriculum and the ability to do basic needlework made many young girls suitable for domestic service, an underlying objective of the school's purpose. Student participation within this construct in some circumstances helped to combat racism. In situations and spaces where student accomplishments were displayed such as the African school's public examination days, race, gender, and class intersected, and Black schoolchildren became visible to white society as scholars and needleworkers attached to respected institutions connected to the colonial government and Great Britain. In spite of negative racialization and marginalization of their education within this system, students excelled, and their achievements were permanently documented and proclaimed by the press.

The African and Bray schools emphasized an industrial rather than intellectual education, was underfunded and under resourced, but it also provided access to reading, forms of writing instruction, arithmetic, and the ability to spin, knit, sew, and to embroider or mark letters and numbers using needle and thread. Girls learned literacy and numeracy skills in the classroom alongside boys. Their education in needlework and marking provided the ability to permanently mark identity and the ability to make clothing and raise income. Rachel Barrett's sampler composed of text and images, including a detailed image of her school with its prominent sign board identifying the school's name, defines it as more advanced than a simpler alphabet or marking sampler. While we cannot know how Barrett felt about her needlework, her work demonstrates her advancement in sampler making, and the choices she made in the execution of its design.

The sampler may have served multiple purposes such as acting as a demonstration of loyalty to Britain and the crown while embodying white settler society's traditional notions of gendered labour, class, feminine virtue, and respectability. Possibly it was designed or displayed to impress those in control of government funding who visited the school during public examination days. The sampler's unique inclusion of verse from the royal anthem distinguished it from samplers made by white settler girls in Nova Scotia highlighting the importance of this selection of text. This selection aligned with activities of agency and activism that had been adopted by Halifax's Black community, including processions and picnics that included outward expressions of loyalty that were tied to Black Refugee identity formation. Led from within the community itself these activities were important signifiers of agency and community activism. While Barrett experienced racism and indoctrination within the white colonial system of education, her stitching of these specific images and words was a form of activism that supported her community in its development of its unique British North American identity.

As demonstrated by feminist scholars and historians Rozsika Parker and Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, the relationship between women and needlework in Europe and North America has been paradoxical. Barrett's sampler is another important example of this and illuminates our understanding of her role as a maker and student at the African school during the mid-nineteenth century. As a singular specimen of student work to survive from the African school, the sampler situates Black schoolgirls as part of the global history of sampler making and allows for the recouping of Barrett's personal identity and her identity as a young Black Haligonian.

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