

# **Rebuilding Africville**

by

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Architecture

at

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**DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY**  
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## ABSTRACT

*Rebuilding Africville* follows on the heels of both the United Nations' recommendation to Canada to consider paying reparations to the former community of Africville, as well as the recent official public apology from Halifax Regional Municipality to former Africville residents.

This thesis examines the 1960's relocation of over eighty families from the former community of Africville, in the North End of Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada into nearby public housing. It investigates the narrative of what was, is, and could perhaps one day be. *Rebuilding Africville* challenges the idea of re-stitching community and character back to the former site of Africville. The intent of this dissertation is to design multi-owned housing for the site, as well as a central civic structure that will act as the community's anchor. The homes are designed to be inclusive to three groups of homeowners: former Africville residents, Africville descendants, and new Africville community members who simply have an interest in reestablishing Africville roots. *Rebuilding Africville* does not attempt to replicate what once existed over forty years ago; it will, however, attempt to extract elements that were once highlights of Africville and graft them with modern ideas. Today, Africville is a National Historic Site of Canada; ironically, it is also designated by Halifax Regional Municipality as a dog walk park.

*Keywords: Africville, Seaview Park, relocation, urban renewal, Halifax public housing, Canadian Black history*

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I stand on the shoulders of so many others who have made this work possible.

I promise to never forget where I come from.

Richard, you have taught me how to design with my heart. Thank you.

Monica and Gene, you both equally inspire me.

Supervisor: Richard Kroeker

Advisor: Monica Sweetapple

Advisor: Gene Daniels

External Examiner: Brian Carter

## CHAPTER ONE: 1:1000



Destruction in Africville. Photograph: Bob Brooks, from Africville Genealogy Society, The Spirit of Africville

**In order to rebuild something,  
it first has to be unbuilt.**

## Africville Apology

February 24, 2010. It is from these words that my thesis work begins.



Mayor Peter Kelly delivering the formal apology at the Gottingen Street YMCA. February 24, 2010.

On behalf of the Halifax Regional Municipality, I apologize to the former Africville residents and their descendants for what they have endured for almost 50 years, ever since the loss of their community that had stood on the shores of Bedford Basin for more than 150 years.

You lost your houses, your church, all of the places where you gathered with family and friends to mark the milestones of your lives.

For all that, we apologize.

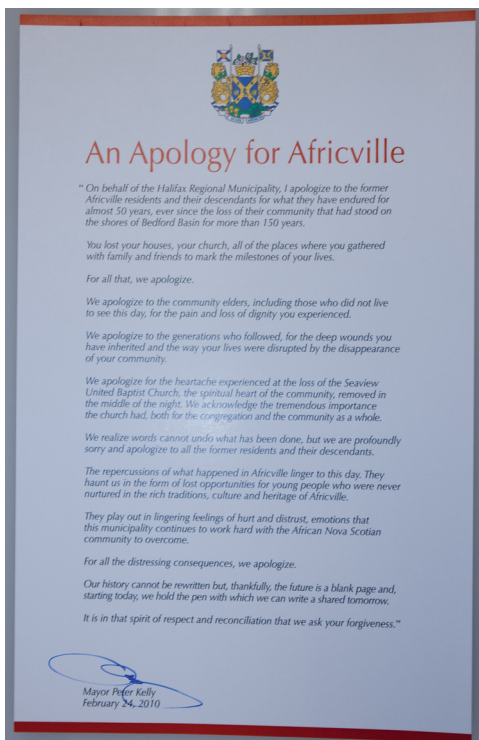
We apologize to the community elders, including those who did not live to see this day, for the pain and loss of dignity you experienced.

We apologize to the generations who followed, for the deep wounds you have inherited and the way your lives were disrupted by the disappearance of your community.

We apologize for the heartache experienced at the loss of the Seaview United Baptist Church, the spiritual heart of the community, removed in the middle of the night. We acknowledge the tremendous importance the church had, both for the congregation and the community as a whole.

We realize words cannot undo what has been done, but we are profoundly sorry and apologize to all the former residents and their descendants.

The repercussions of what happened in Africville linger to this day. They haunt us in the form of lost opportunities for young people who were never nurtured in the rich traditions, culture and heritage of Africville.



February 2010 Africville apology.

They play out in lingering feelings of hurt and distrust, emotions that this municipality continues to work hard with the African Nova Scotian community to overcome.

For all the distressing consequences, we apologize.

Our history cannot be rewritten but, thankfully, the future is a blank page and, starting today, we hold the pen with which we can write a shared tomorrow.

It is in that spirit of respect and reconciliation that we ask your forgiveness.

-Mayor Peter Kelly





Uniacke Square public housing. Halifax, Nova Scotia, 2009.

## Introduction

I am always curious to know why someone is motivated to study a particular thesis topic.

What would motivate me to write about Africville? The story of this displaced community has intrigued me for as long as I can remember. It is a story that is universal: It is simple yet complex, minor yet enormous, immediate yet remote, but most importantly, the story of Africville is current and very real. The valid inquiry of why has always -and probably will always- remain my unanswered question. Upon entering Dalhousie's School of Architecture in 2007, I have been curiously exploring the effects of the 1960's relocation. Being raised in low-income housing, I have first handedly seen how this type of living has affected me as a person, while equally having an effect on the paths of my



Rental apartment in Uniacke Square illustrating a disconnect between lease and home ownership, 2010.



Juxtaposition in Mulgrave Park public housing -a housing complex constructed in the 1960's to prepare for Africville's destruction. Halifax, Nova Scotia, 2010.

community members. I began the Master of Architecture program with the objective to study public housing -specifically Uniacke Square in Halifax, Nova Scotia. However, after discovering that Uniacke Square was the direct result of Africville's dismantling, I decided to investigate a few strata deeper and focus on Africville for my thesis.

Before my research, I had no vision of the method my ideas would shape, however, I knew strongly what I did not want: public housing. My aim of this thesis to be an offering back to my community, a complement and supplement to the very real





Lock on the outside of the basketball court, Mulgrave Park, 2010.

Africville settlement. To be honest, I was a bit trepid to cross the threshold into what is still observed as one of Canada's most highly charged Canadian History stories; but still, I have never been more certain that, as a community member, through taking on this rare opportunity to elevate Africville via an open forum architectural thesis, it will be a privilege. Below is a letter I wrote to no one in particular, moments after I heard news of the Africville settlement on February 24, 2010. After writing it, I committed that I would dedicate my thesis work to developing a housing supplement (a stage two of sorts) to this agreement.

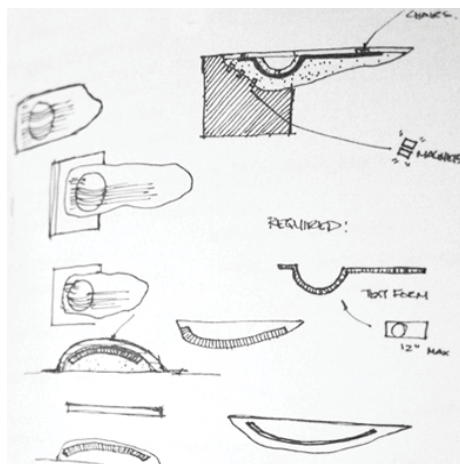
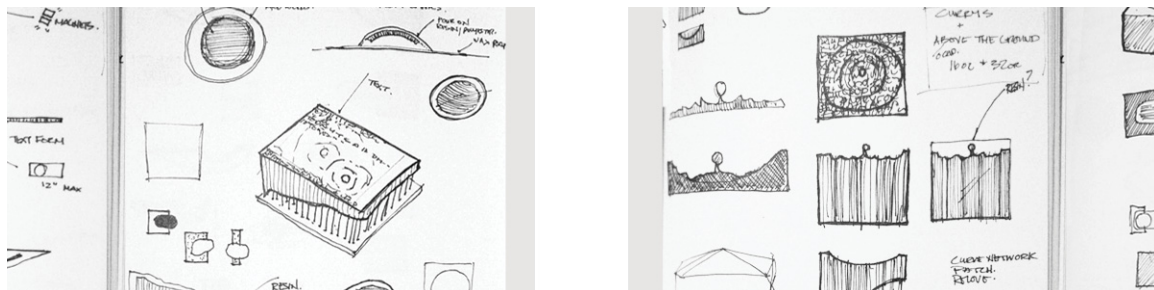
### **Dear Africville**

I never really met you, but hoped someday I would get the chance to. I remember growing up with your shadow in my backyard. Once a year I've seen the brightness and strength of your halo, but today it has been dimmed. I have the utmost respect for the society who has fought long and hard to try to right your wrong, but I see the algorithm that was chosen to reach this 'agreement' as unfit. Have you died? The last time I checked you were so resilient. So why is it now, after so many years, you submit to two gravestones – a museum and church doll house - where former residents still only have the opportunity to 'visit' you? Is it really too much

for the city of Halifax to return you to your former glory and help rebuild the community that it itself confessed it wrongly dismantled? Is rebuilding homes, lives, stories, and history less important to the city of Halifax than retaining its dog walk park? Yes. Dog. Walk. Park. Really? It's 2010, and society says: "It's time to move forward." I couldn't agree more, but why does it feel like the steps forward step back? Forty plus years later, and some say that today is a good day. No. Today is not a good day, Halifax. For me, yesterday was a good day: at least yesterday optimism existed in my thoughts of one day having the privilege to meet you. And so, Africville, I say to you this: when I see your name in your never-ending story of print, my eyes will remain vacant and dry, but until you are rebuilt, my ears will forever hear the sound of your teardrops.

Sincerely,

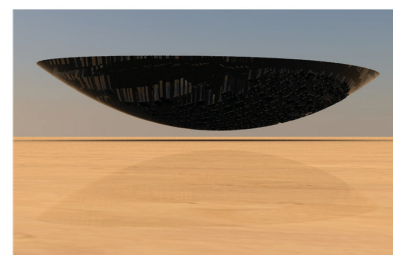
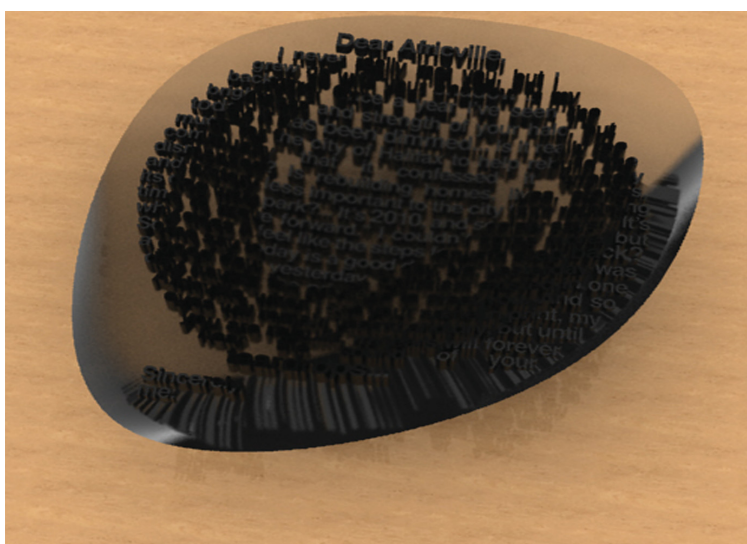
me.



Initial sketches of Puddle of Teardrops.

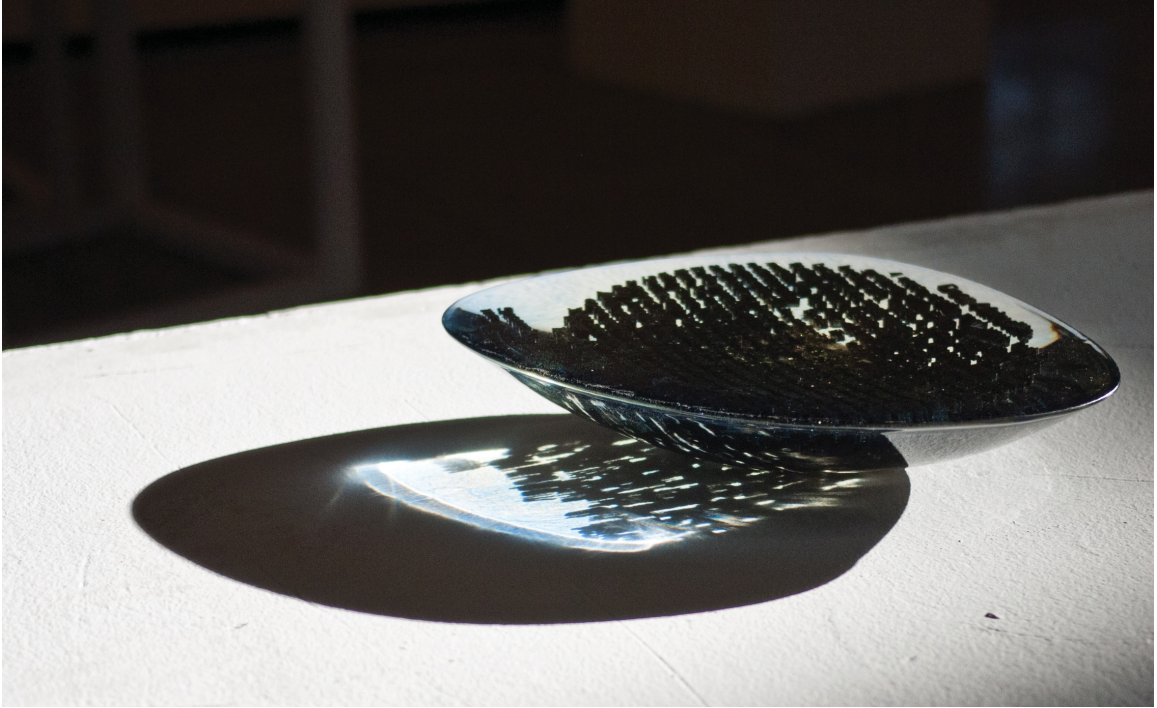
## Puddle of Teardrops

Printed using a 3d printer, this piece takes excerpts from Dear Africville and, analogous to an architectural thesis, begins to build a conversation to turn 2d text to 3d form. Created for a NSCAD University product design elective, the assignment was to design a container. My response: Puddle of Teardrops -a container that once filled, its shell is removed, and what remains is the contained, a thought within a puddle.



Rendering of Puddle of Teardrops.





Completed Puddle of Teardrops, 2011.





New replica church under construction in Africville. Eddie Carvery's Residence on left, 2011.

### **Starting Point**

It has taken a long time for me to accept that an apology, non-operational church, and museum is satisfactory for the damages incurred from the community relocation. It has taken even longer for me to look beyond the idea that Halifax Regional Municipality has given themselves gifts -in the form of two visitor centres, both of which remain under the guise of their control. Instead of allowing the settlement at hand to be exacerbated due to frustration, or allow this settlement to be Africville's conclusion, I accepted what was agreed upon as the beginning my thesis conversation; the two civic buildings would become my starting point, while Rebuilding Africville would be my means to an end.





The North End of Halifax in the 1960's. Photograph: Bob Brooks, from Africville Genealogy Society, *The Spirit of Africville*

### **Africville: An Overview**

Africville had always been on its own. It was a predominately Black settlement on the fringes of the city of Halifax's North End in Nova Scotia, Canada. Roughly four hundred people from eighty families who settled in the 1840's made up the small tight-knit community (Africville Genealogical Society 1992, 36-37). It was initially known as Campbell Road but, because of its black population, residents and non-residents quickly dubbed the community Africville.



Africville in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. Adapted image from National Resources Canada.

### **The Beginnings of Africville**

In support of the War of 1812, Black Loyalists were offered land and freedom in exchange for support to the British. After the

war however, the land offered proved barren and incapable of yielding crops sufficient for livelihood. Several families began to sell their infertile land in order to buy land in Africville, allowing better access to jobs within the city of Halifax.

In 1815, land was made available to black refugees from the war of 1812. The government had hoped the refugees would supply Halifax with fresh produce, but soil conditions were hardly conducive to agriculture. The opportunities of these free blacks were further impeded when they were awarded only 'license of occupation' rather than title to their infertile land. While they had been promised legal title after inhabiting the space for three years, it was twenty-seven years before the government fulfilled this agreement; only then could these settlers sell their plots and consider relocating to areas such as Africville (Nelson 2008, 11).

### **Unbuilding Africville**

Over a number of years, more families followed, buying land in Africville and building homes. However, since the community developed as an informal community, the city slowly zoned the area for industrial purposes -moving in its unwanted city industries to adjacent land plots, while also moving forward with plans to construct the A. Murray MacKay Bridge on Africville land.



Africville homes, 1965. Bob Brooks collection / Nova Scotia Archives and Resource Management

In 1854 the City of Halifax built its prison on the hill overlooking Africville, and placed its 'night soil' disposal pit on the eastern edge of Africville. The next decades saw the expansion of various industries in the area, including an oil plant storage facility, a bone mill, a cotton factory, two slaughterhouses, a tar factory, a coal handling facility, and a foundry. In the 1870's, the city built an infectious diseases hospital on the overlooking hill, and later added a trachoma hospital, the wastes from which poured into Africville soil... In Africville's last decade, the city moved its dump directly onto the community's land. Two years later, an incinerator appeared only fifty yards beyond the south border of Africville (Nelson 2008, 12).





Denial of city services such as clean running water, 1965. Bob Brooks collection / Nova Scotia Archives and Resource Management

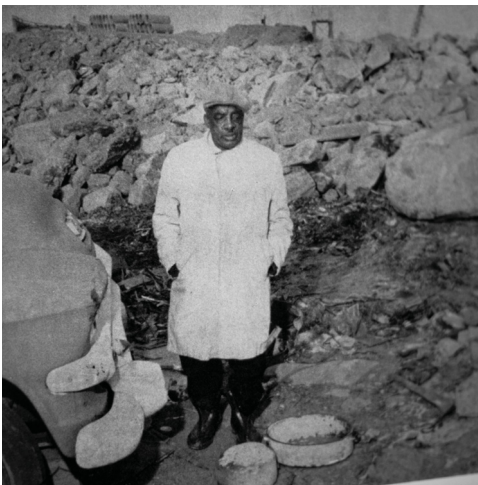
In addition, Halifax denied Africville proper city services despite the fact that residents paid city taxes. As time progressed, The City of Halifax designated Africville derelict, and in 1964 systematically pressured families to (under) sell their homes in exchange for public housing. This rearrangement would see the majority of residents relocate into newly constructed public housing – specifically Mulgrave Park and Uniacke Square. This method was given the title Urban Renewal, which innately means the process of redeveloping dilapidated or no longer functional urban areas (Africville Genealogical Society 1992, 53)



Moving day in city dump trucks, 1960's. Photograph: Bob Brooks, from Africville Genealogy Society, *The Spirit of Africville*

## Relocation

During relocation discussions, Africville residents made it very clear that they did not want to move from their community, and they were quite content with staying 'home' in Africville. Many residents argued that, since the city had neglected to provide proper city services, could the city not help provide standard services to the community? The city's response was that it would be too expensive, and that public housing would be a better option for residents and the city. Interestingly enough, the amount of money spent on creating public housing and relocation equaled the amount the city described as too expensive:



Resident Pa Carvery - Africville's last resident to be relocated, 1970. Photograph: Bob Brooks, from Africville Genealogy Society, *The Spirit of Africville*

City expenditure far exceeded the Development Department's 1961 estimate of \$70,000. In fact the total costs approximated \$800,000, the figure that the City officials earlier deemed prohibitively high for the alternative of bringing Africville up to standard in terms

of city services and housing quality (Africville Genealogical Society 1992, 67).

January 2, 1970 the last resident—Pa Carvery—was moved from Africville. Six months and eight days later there would be an opening ceremony for the new A. Murray MacKay Bridge connecting Halifax to with Dartmouth. In the year preceding Pa Carvery's move, residents were further degraded by the manner in which the city chose to move the community's belongings: residents were relocated to their new addresses in city dump trucks. As one relocate declaimed: "City people sent a truck to move my furniture. Just think what the neighbours thought when they looked out and saw a garbage truck drive up and unload the furniture." (Africville Genealogical Society 1992, 67).



Resolute Bay, Nunavut, 1953.  
Photograph: Gar Lunny / National Film Board of Canada collection

### **Canadian Displacement**

Displacement is not unique to Africville or Canada. It was commonplace across North America. Forced removal and relocation has happened at various time-specific stages in post-colonial Canada such as: the many First Nations relocations -specifically the High Arctic relocation in 1953 (Kulchyski & Tester 1994, 104-204), the Japanese Canadian Internment in 1942 (James 2008, 21), and the Expulsion of the Acadians in 1755 (Miller 2000, 86). Analogously, urban renewal policies were not unique to solely





Duke Tower and Scotia Square under construction at the corner of Duke Street and Barrington Street, 1967. Photograph: Nova Scotia Archives and Resource Management Photo Collection

Africville either –the policy was implemented in several Canadian cities. The ambition for urban renewal was for city and residents to both benefit in a type of modern utopia. However, essential to urban renewal, a specific intent for relocation such as construction for a new cultural or civic space was often the reasoning. When paralleling Africville's predominate black community relocation with Halifax's downtown relocation of predominately whites, the difference is purpose: Halifax's downtown relocation was completed specifically to make way for the Scotia Square shopping, hotel and office complex, while in Africville's case, no proposals for the site were officially passed. Even the new bridge was an encroachment, but most of Africville would have remained

untouched. Since the relocation - over forty years, the majority of Africville has lied under a grass blanket, remaining idle and unused. Was the relocation purpose also swept under this grass blanket in what Nelson calls a 'monumental example of racism at work in Canadian history'? In her book *Razing Africville*, academic writer Nelson argues that race, domination, and technologies of oppression were the foundations that lead Africville straight into eviction:

The deficient planning and apparent incompetence of officials in the Africville program were not mistakes; they were part and parcel of a conscious wish for Africville to simply fade away, for the visibility of segregation and poverty to subside. Given the ideological climate and history, and the way in which plans were carried out, there is no reasonable basis from which to accept that the problems following relocation were unintended or, at the very least, could not have been foreseen. There is every reason to suggest that a program of white displacement of black people, which maintained their spatial relegation and social disenfranchisement, was the logical continuation of race domination. The liberal rhetoric of integration and renewal, never realized, was in fact a discourse and practice of erasure from sight and site (Nelson 2008, 115).

What is also interesting in Nelson's writing is that her life has existed in Africville's periphery, but for her, the discussion of Africville is equally as important:

For an academic writer attempting to think critically about race, it is both a critical moment in the nation's history of racism and an ongoing struggle

for justice. As a white woman from a working-class, rural town in nova Scotia, I see Africville as a shadow of the past, mirroring the black community near my own home. Africville is far removed from my experience, yet it is inseparable from the history of white settlement, which shaped its evolution and foreshadowed its destruction (Nelson 2008, 3).

The reasons for Africville's removal will never be fully uncovered. It remains a lesson in Canadian history that is both infinite in its possibilities yet absolutely accessible. It is true that as a result of the relocation, there were several residents that gained short-term benefits, however it can be no clearer that Africville residents have weathered an inflicted storm as actors and actresses on stage, leaving the audience to listen, observe, and examine Africville.

## CHAPTER TWO: 1:500

### Africville Freelab

What is a Freelab? Every July, Dalhousie's School of Architecture hosts a design-build lab that is supervised by faculty members or sessional instructors, and involve undergraduate and graduate architecture students directly in issues of construction, performance, and materials. The teaching and construction of these design-build projects (typically done outside of formal Dalhousie University classes) concludes in a public event, raising awareness of architecture and building construction.



Africville Place Marker Totems created during Dalhousie University's School of Architecture Africville Freelab, 2008.

### Welcome To Africville Sign

During my first year of architecture school, I felt it was necessary to educate my peers on Africville. In hindsight, I was a bit naïve to think that the proposal I submitted to faculty to have Africville become a Freelab would get approval, especially because there was no open call for proposals. Fortunately, local builder and seasonal Dalhousie Professor, Kim Thompson came across the proposal and pushed to supervise it. The result was Reflecting on Africville, a collaborative response by Dalhousie University architecture students and the Africville Genealogical



Africville Place Marker Totems created during the Africville Freelab, 2008



Entrance sign created during Dalhousie's School of Architecture Africville Freelab, 2008.

Society. During the 25th anniversary of the Africville Reunion, ten architecture students designed and constructed the 'Welcome to Africville' sign, as well as totems, marking six significant community spaces. Reflected through its rough Corten steel material, the community markers and welcome sign echo the strength of Africville: cut, scarred, but remembered. These markers are totems on the site, telling the stories of a community.

The welcome sign and totems allowed me to see the importance of telling the story; however, not until I heard conversations about an actual settlement from the city did I feel I could contribute on a larger scale.





Evolution of home that would eventually become the community anchor and later be repurposed to become the site's larger community centre.

### Pilot Project

A pilot project is a compulsory preliminary design project that initiates a student's thesis work while studying in the Dalhousie's Master of Architecture program. It allows students to throw wide the net of research, and then concentrate on one place specific part of the research. My pilot project consists of a narrative to the story and site of Africville. I began by slowly reassembling what I think are the correct pieces to foster community back to the site permanently.



Model of pilot project on a salvaged railway tie from the site.



Eddie Carvery's residence just outside of Seaview Park, Halifax Nova Scotia, 2010.

### A Home For Eddie Carvery

It has been noted "Eddie Carvery's protest is the longest civil rights protest in Canadian history" (Lawlor, 2010). Eddie Carvery is an Africville resident who began protesting in 1970 (Tattie 2010, 106). He would not have known then, but he would become the face and protagonist of the Africville story. Over the years Eddie has lived in several shelters on the site including tents, sheds, and trailers. Several have been destroyed, disassembled, and moved by both law enforcement and non-supporters. My narrative begins by creating a home/space for Eddie, as he currently resides on the former site of the community's church (just outside the fenced confines of what is now Africville Park). His current living residence consists of a shed for sleeping, a trailer for cooking, a secondary



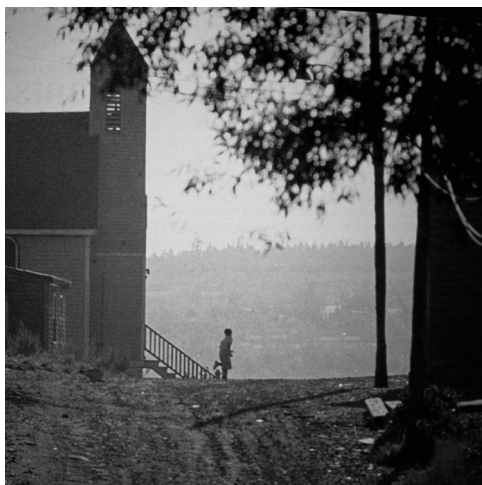
Eddie Carvery in Africville, 2010



trailer for storage, and a doghouse for his dog. His space is directly adjacent to Africville Road, and is clearly visible to street traffic, both from Africville Road and the onlooking A. Murray MacKay Bridge. Upon spotting his trailer, the first illustration one encounters is the text written largely across his trailer: 'Africville Protest.' His living residence faces the park, and is located at the west entrance gate.

### **Seaview Baptist Church**

The first building to be bulldozed in Africville's destruction was the Seaview Baptist Church. The razing began at 3am, and no notice was given to residents except for the church debris pile that lay to be discovered the following morning. The narrative of my pilot project (a prelude to the larger thesis work) begins here as an analogy, but in reverse; to build a pavilion for Eddie off-site and have it placed



Seaview Babtist Church, Africville, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1965. Photograph: Bob Brooks, from Africville Genealogy Society, The Spirit of Africville

Seaview Babtist Church, Africville, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1965. Photograph: Bob Brooks, from Africville Genealogy Society, The Spirit of Africville



on his site [the site of the former church] at 3am, only to have the action discovered by others as they begin their day. The structure starts as a small 15' X 24' living structure that in time allows additions for kitchen services, bathroom services, as well as storage and extended decking. Eddie's pavilion would serve as his residence, and as a community resource centre for the preliminary planning stages of the re-development of Africville. After progression was under way, Eddie would then move into the community's first home, while Eddie's pavilion would remain intact as the community's historical landmark. It would also double as a smaller community room for meetings, events, and would take its place as the new community anchor – much like the Seaview Baptist Church.

## **Key Terms and Conditions of Settlement**

1. Acknowledgement of Loss (Apology)

Mayor Kelly delivers an apology to the African Nova Scotian community on February 24, 2010.

2. \$3 million municipal contribution to the project inclusive of both capital construction and operational costs  
Funds from the Africville Trust account and the Self Insurance Reserve will be transferred to Africville Heritage Trust.

3. Conveyance of 2.5 acres of land adjacent to and west of Seaview Park  
Two parcels of land owned by HRM (\$276,270) and Transport Canada/HPA (\$165,000) will be transferred.

4. Park Maintenance Agreement between the Africville Heritage Trust Board and HRM for the lands known as Seaview Park Staff will work with the Africville Heritage Trust and stakeholders to establish a maintenance agreement for the lands known as Seaview Park.

5. Renaming of Seaview Park to Africville - the park will still belong to HRM HRM Staff will work with the AGS, the Africville Heritage Trust Board and community stakeholders to officially rename Seaview Park.

6. Community Development - The establishment of an African Nova Scotia Affairs Office or function within HRM that would enable our organization to better engage with the African HRM community. HRM Staff will work within the Business Plan and Budget framework for 2010-2011 to outline an approach to establish a function within HRM to better serve the African Nova Scotian community and bring to Regional Council for approval.

7. Settlement of Litigation - The terms of the agreement as noted above have been approved by the Africville Genealogy Society. The other plaintiffs to the litigation were invited to a community meeting on Saturday, 20 February 2010 to approve the terms of settlement.

8. No personal compensation

Halifax Regional Municipality



# Africville

I asked him to tell me about Africville  
 and with his voice deep and clear  
 he said "Not right now dear"  
 I was a child full of innocence  
 and needed his two cents  
 to clarify the things in which I heard  
 those stories taught in school had stirred  
 something inside  
 because I knew my Daddy was full of pride  
 and the way they talked about Africville like it  
 was somewhere you didn't wanna be  
 just didn't sit right with me  
 My teacher took this negative perspective  
 which made me question her objective  
 as my young mind played detective  
 running through my Africville memories  
 collective  
 but being respectful of my teacher  
 I chose not to preach to her  
 and waited for the safety of my home to let  
 my young mind question theory  
 My Daddy had taught me to be leery  
 of the way the media portrayed us  
 so I had no trust  
 But when I asked him to tell me about Africville  
 he became somewhat still  
 See I knew what Africville was to me  
 it was something just like family  
 biggest reunion I ever been to  
 and my sister and I knew  
 the moment we were there  
 We could pick the love out the air  
 Perched high on shoulders  
 Daddy would hold us  
 as we slowly made our way through trailers  
 and tents  
 visiting Auntie this and Uncle that  
 hearing stories of the good ol days  
 my family's mischievous ways  
 bringing smiles and my Daddy's contagious  
 laugh  
 I knew then that history books were only  
 explaining half  
 But when I asked him to tell me about Africville  
 My Daddy would remain still  
 I celebrated every year  
 listening close so I could hear  
 those treasured stories memories  
 floating in on each breeze

I pieced together bonds and relationships  
 because for me it was quite a trip  
 figuring out that being my cousin's cousin  
 meant you were my cousin  
 even though there was no blood between us  
 but the thing was  
 this community  
 was built like family  
 bonded to one another  
 like a child to it's mother  
 through struggles and adversity  
 they created history  
 They built something so strong together  
 stood the test of any weather  
 and I was only getting to experience this here  
 for one weekend a year  
 I came to realize one day  
 what the city had taken away  
 when my Daddy's voice rang in my ear  
 explaining that people who called it slums  
 didn't live there  
 He finally explained the start  
 that Africville was a piece of his heart  
 and walking round with this piece missing  
 while my father was wishing  
 that we could have known love that way  
 His heart hurt to know we wouldn't get to play  
 the way he was raised  
 alongside cousins, community worship and  
 praise  
 he didn't know how to tell his babygirl  
 someone had destroyed his world  
 and though the wounds had healed  
 the scars were all too real  
 People had said to get over it cause time had  
 passed  
 but their words cut like glass  
 because a person without a start can't move  
 toward an end  
 now it's up to you and I to mend  
 this history of Africville  
 I pray each of us keeps moving uphill  
 Teaching our children about each rock along  
 the path  
 we need to come together and laugh  
 for no other reason then because we love  
 each other  
 simply for being one another  
 We need to stand up for what's ours  
 find our place among the stars  
 and make sure we understand the values of  
 community  
 The strength of our people  
 The spirit of Africville

*Africville*, written and performed by Amanda Carvery in Africville, 2010.





Resin Diorama depicting Africville in 1965. Photograph manipulated: Bob Brooks, from Africville Genealogy Society, The Spirit of Africville





An early illustration of the potential to bring community to the area. Homes shown are used as place holders until later developed.



Underused Africville, 2010.





Main illustration of proposal.

## CHAPTER THREE: 1:200

### Thesis Title:

*Rebuilding Africville*

### Thesis Question:

*Using displacement as a precursor, how can the built environment breathe new life into idle ground?*

Fast-forward from pilot project to thesis and the narrative continues. The intention of the bigger set of issues is humble: rebuild Africville by designing a community framework for residents, descendants, and like-minded community members.

### Framework

Here, it is imperative that I set out the framework in which I will proceed with my work. My thesis will not attempt to replicate what once existed over forty years ago –for



Church and community centre.



Land bridges.

the fact that no community is ever perfect; it will, however, attempt to extract elements that were once highlights of Africville and graft them with modern ideas. I am aware that there are a string of inquires that will be questioned, including: who will pay, who will get to return, who will get what land, and a host of others. I understand that I cannot be naive to these very real questions, however my focus is on the built environment rather than on an exercise in business. The tent poles of this proposal aim to set up a type of lottery where descendants would get first pick of the home site they prefer, followed by relatives and finally by like minded community members. Respectfully, descendants would obtain a home free of charge, followed by a moderate charge for relatives, and lastly, full market value for like minded community members. The architectural proposal: an integrated community that is re-stitched back to the adjacent neighbourhoods, using the site's views and topography to it's full advantage; a central multi-functional community space that will support the Africville Museum Church [under construction as these words are written] that can also be used for a fee by non-community members; implementation of a community housing fee for all will be reinvested into the community, and disallow it to ever fall into disrepair; and lastly, a boardwalk, green spaces, in addition



The big tent at the Africville Reunion, Africville Park, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 2011.



Campers in Africville Park (formerly Seaview Park), Halifax, Nova Scotia, during the annual Africville Reunion, 2011.



Africville Park (formerly Seaview Park), Halifax, Nova Scotia, typically used daily as a dog walk park, 2010.

to commercial spaces for public use that will allow Africville to become not solely a community, but also a destination.

My thinking throughout this thesis is to consider how to get Halifax behind such a project, and have them see that this proposal could be a viable plan for not only Africville, but for the city as a whole. Has allowing the land to lay idle for over forty years aided them in any way? Has it produced revenue? Honestly, I can not think of the land's deliverables beyond the annual week-long Africville Reunion. It saddens me to think that perhaps dogs are the only ones benefiting from relocation. Given that Halifax Regional Municipality has the most degree-granting institutions per capita in Canada, it's rational to say that it is a very intelligent society (Nova Scotia Business Inc.). Nova Scotian's must be able to do better. Right? The difference I see in other relocation

programs is the one thing that sets Africville apart: purpose. Since there was no physical purposeful reason for the uprooting of this community, that means there are also no tenants to evict from the land. Surely given the right plan, the city might see that there is both accountability and opportunity to help foster the city's community and citizens. Assuredly, the taxes to be made from homes, the pride of a successful city community, and a real ending to an apology should contrast enough with the amount of money taxpayers have already spent on a fenced dog park for 40 plus years. Surely, if not exactly this plan, the city should at least be inspired to see that there are better alternatives than a dog walk park and wasted tax payer's money.

## **Design**

Africville hugs the shores of the Bedford Basin in Halifax Regional Municipality's North End. The site is a bookend to three of Halifax's key streets: Barrington, Gottingen (the north section of this street was renamed to Novalea Street after it was unfavorable to share an address with the turmoil created as a result of Uniacke Square public housing), and Robie. Seaview Park (renamed in 2010 as Africville Park) is a fraction of the original settlement. Over time, the land has been encroached by railway lines, a neighboring port, a city dump, industrial usage, and most





Paper site plan illustrating land re-stitching through off-ramps, homes, land bridges and bike network.

notably, the A. Murray MacKay Bridge (largely its off ramps and approaches). The majority of the land, however, is still left undeveloped.





Paper site plan illustrating the commercial space under the bridge.

## Site Strategy

Below are a list of the major site moves I feel are imperative in order to re-connect the community back to the city:

- Reclaim a large part of the original site by creating a tighter off ramp and on ramp for the A. Murray MacKay Bridge. Presently, the ramp cuts through the site, resulting in inaccessibility to approximately half of the site. The bridge also serves any connection to the rest of the city.

- Restore some of the topography where the bridge connects to the ground. By allowing a continuous space under the bridge for pedestrians and commercial space, it will allow land to become re-stitched back into the city, facilitating pedestrian movement once again.

- Re-connect Gottingen Street to Africville, allowing direct vehicular access to downtown, (which would interestingly become bookended by two National Heritage Sites – Halifax Citadel and Africville).

- Connect Robie Street through a land bridge.

- Integrate a system of bike lanes that connect the waterfront and Africville to the interior of the city, as well as link the community of Dartmouth via bridge bike lanes.



-Create approximately 100-150 homes to be built by both trades and future homeowners to replenish the roughly 400 displaced residents.

-A central civic space that evolves from Eddie Carvery's pavilion and later is repurposed as the community's multipurpose centre



- Retain waterfront access to both community and general public.

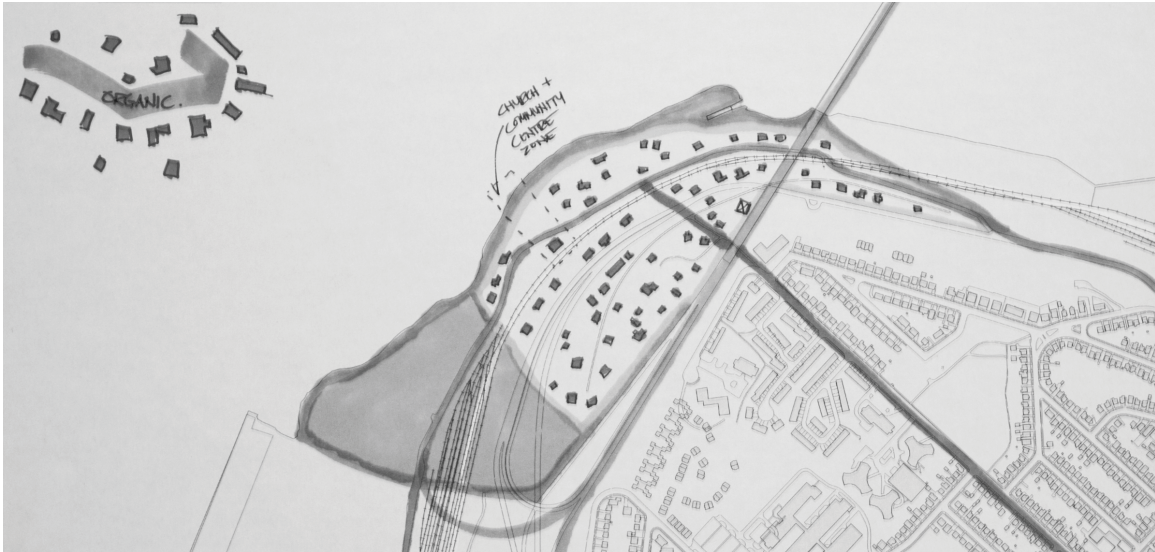
-Create small commercial space opportunities that enhance the community and pull the public to the site



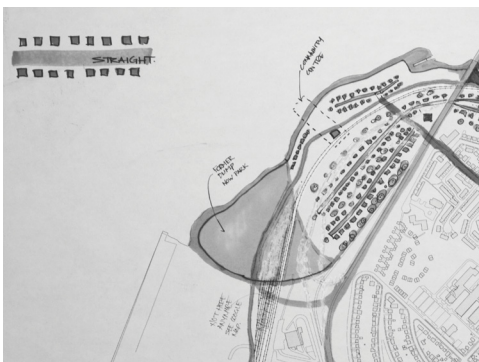
Continuing the narrative, the framework I envision for the site is one that will allow homes to be constructed over time ( just like



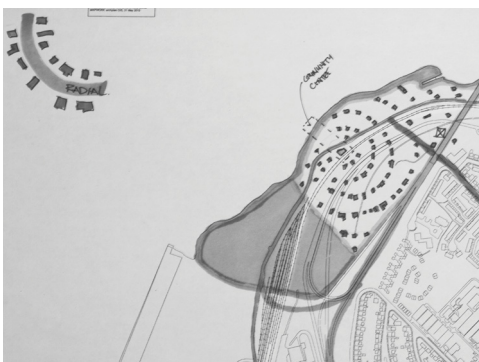
Progression from Eddie Carvery's Home to the new community of Africville.



Three early planning studies of home arrangements. Above: the preferred organic planning study.



Straight planning study.



Radial planning study.

the original Africville settlement).” In addition, the construction I see best fit is a system similar to barn raising and modern day Habitat for Humanity. Here, all community members help construct each house with skills that are easily trainable, such as hammering, wall construction, drywall, painting etc. This will provide residents with a sense of ownership and pride as a result of personally building their community from hand.

## Land

The aim of the proposal is to treat the site as community land, where there is an understanding of shared space between residents. The idea of marking ones property is a removed idea, and that the land between homes is mutually shared just as it was in the original settlement.





Africville Store, 1965.  
 Photograph: Bob Brooks, from Africville Genealogy Society, *The Spirit of Africville*



A. Murray MacKay Bridge approach to the site at the end of Novalea Street (Gottingen Street), Halifax, Nova Scotia, 2010.



As land is divided up into rough plots, each resident will have the chance to site their own home according to their preference. Analogous to dropping a deck of cards, the placement of homes becomes less prescribed, and offers unique opportunities for shared spaces. Although organic in plan, central to the proposal is a main ordering system of roads that allow services to be run underneath easily to serve the community. Several land bridges are incorporated into the idea which will allow pedestrian access to cross over the bridge approach as well as over the train tracks.

### **Commercial Area**

To contrast with what is commonly viewed as the final destruction of Africville -the A. Murray MacKay Bridge, I propose using the bridge as a means to attract people to the site. By altering the space underneath the bridge to allow a small commercial zone, the community will reestablish the services it once had, a general store and post office. This will also allow the opportunity to set up spaces such as a local bakery, restaurant, cafe, and/or arts and crafts store. The commercial zone also incorporates open spaces that allow views as well as outdoor areas for specialized gatherings or summer patios. With a planned commercial area, the site will have an opportunity to become





Illustration from commercial space facing the A. Murray MacKay bridge.



Illustration of commercial path extending over bridge.



Illustration of proposed bicycle lane on A. Murray MacKay bridge.



Illustration from land bridge connecting the community back to the city.



Illustration from harbour with the replica church in the forefront.

a destination, while also allowing pedestrian access to both residences and the public waterfront.

## Homes

Traditional Africville homes were very modest. They reflected any typical Halifax home, while also keeping with east coast vernacular: shingled cladding and variations of pitched roofs. Over time, just like the community, homes were adapted in the form of porches and add-ons, according to household requirements. All homes sprouted in the community organically; homeowners did not follow a larger city plan, but followed what felt natural in the landscape, what was available, and what they could afford.

Through analyzing the homes of Africville, it can be no clearer that the variations of roofs, house orientation, and diverse use of colour supported the community's unique identity. It is here where I begin to draw inspiration to envision formally what the homes of Africville might look like in the future. My response is, but not limited to five different homes that can all be altered and orientated to suit its owner.



Sectional model of proposal.







Illustrations of home evolution -the grey massings are abstractions of pre-existing Africville homes.



Africville homes Photographs: Bob Brooks, from Africville Genealogy Society, The Spirit of Africville





Typical Africville homes - used as inspiration for proposed homes, 1965. Photographs: Bob Brooks, from Africville Genealogy Society, *The Spirit of Africville*



Home one.

I arrived at the first home by merging at a typical pitched Africville home with the current glass condo style of living. The result is the structure of a barn with both ends capped with glass. The exterior is clad with a lattice of 1x1 wood. Under the lattice lay various windows and skylights to allow light in throughout the day, while also allowing light out in the night - analogous to the escaping light of a barn at day/night.

The second home was the result of imagining the want for both an elder and a young





Home two.



Home three a.



Home three b.

family to live near each other. This home is designed to allow both homeowners the best of both worlds: to maintain a disconnect through identity and independence, yet a connectedness through dependence. Because the home of the elder is single storey, as a want not to use stairs, the roof of this home is connected via elevated walkway to the larger home to be used as the larger home's patio. The roof of the larger home is a green roof. The cladding is exterior wood panels that follow the window lines around the buildings and wrap the homes together

The third home is very traditional to the community. Drawing from both former homes as well as other coastal communities - specifically Newfoundland, Greenland and Iceland, the simple form took shape. I imagine the nostalgia of this home to be what some traditional residents would prefer. The form can be pushed or pulled longitudinally to suit the owners needs. The two variations represented accommodate a single couple on two floors, or an elderly couple on one floor with a mezzanine room for a visiting grandchild. In keeping with a cold+wet climate tradition, a porch was included to regulate the home's temperature and to store boots. The cladding is traditional painted shingles.



Home four.



Home five a.



Home five b.

The fourth design has the most modern aesthetic of the group. It is a play on the way roofs and add-ons were connected in the former community. The simple move of cutting a corner is a literal analogy to the way short cuts were required to keep up with the changing family climate. In keeping with the tradition of add-ons, a pitched roof porch was also included. The roofs on this home were directly inspired by the coloured roofs of Iceland. On the top of this home is a roof top patio, while the cladding is horizontal wood siding.

The fifth home was realised through the tradition of adding on space. In this iteration, instead of building out horizontally, the homeowner has the future opportunity to build vertically one storey. The exterior finish on this home is vertical wood siding, allowing the viewers eye to move up vertically. The top of this home is a green roof and patio.

These homes represent an idea of individualism within a larger collective. Like their owners, each home can be customized roughly by orientation, exterior paint colour, front door style, and interior finishes. The exterior colour palette to be realised is, in a large extent, a reflection of the community. I see this as one of the most important strategies for the proposal, as it allows for quick cost effective updates



A larger scale of Home two, showing the only floor of the one bedroom residence and the upper floor of the three bedroom residence.

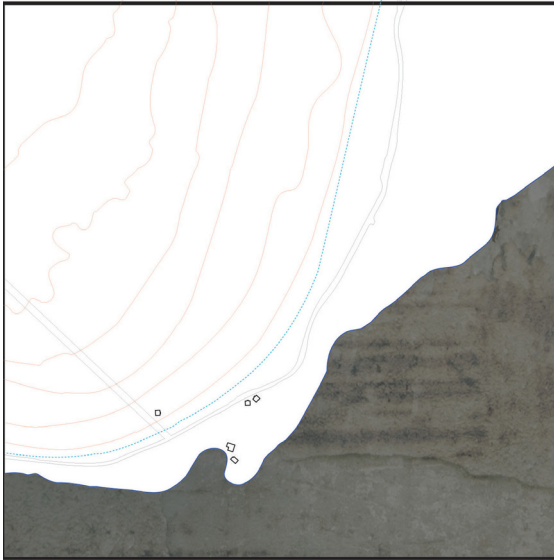
that the community can actively participate in long after the community itself is built and established, while also providing the seaside neighbourhood with a strong identity.



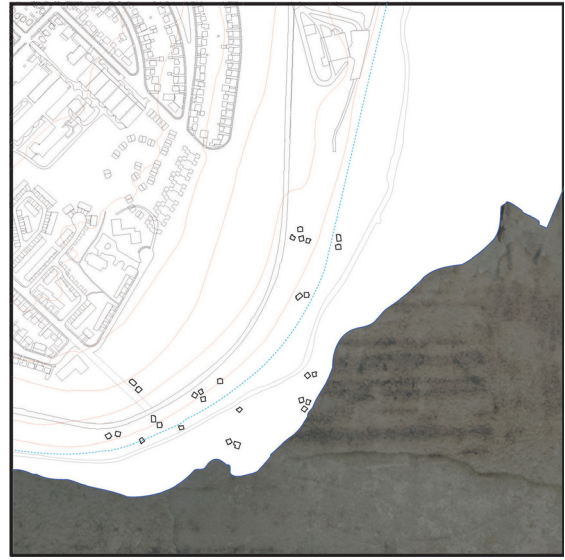
A larger scale of Home two, showing the rooftop patio and green roof.



## Community Growth



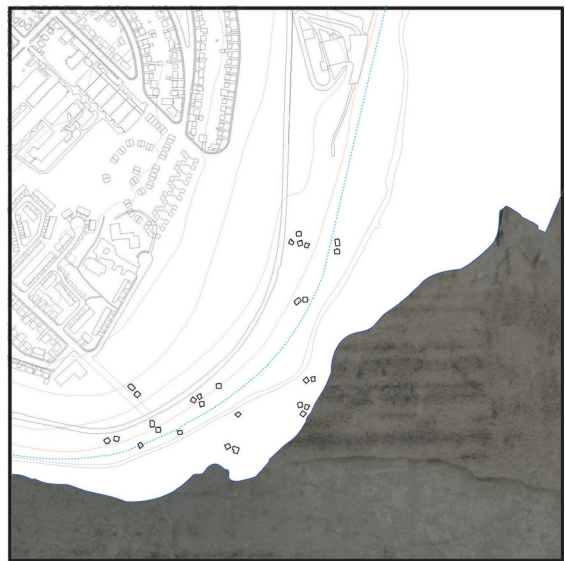
Early 1900's



Mid 1900's

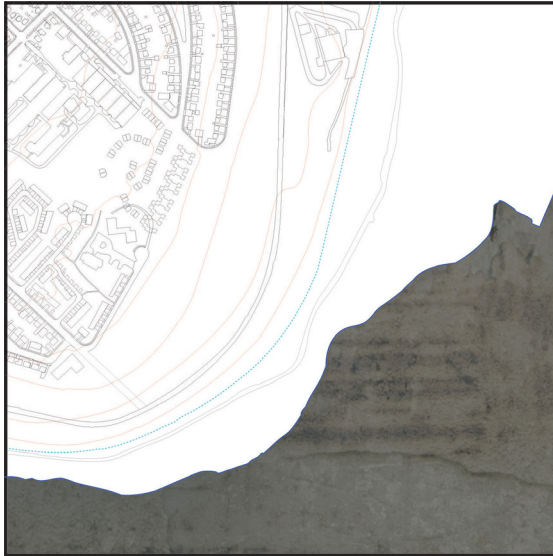


3am 1967 -demolition of church.



1968 -partial demolition of community.





1969 -Africville fully demolished.



1970 -A. Murray MacKay Bridge built.



2010-official apology to theAfricville community and replica church built.



3am -prebuilt home for Eddie Carvery transported to site.

Start of thesis study



City services installed.



Expansion of Eddie Carvery's home and construction of commercial buildings under bridge.



Initial homes built.



Completion of all 100-150 homes.





Land bridges and bicycle network built.



Future densification.

End of thesis study



Potential wharfs.



Potential expansion of wharfs, boardwalk and community.

## CONCLUSION: 1:100, 1:50, 1:1

*Rebuilding Africville* is as much of a conclusion as it is an introduction to what is yet to come.

So where does this work go from here? I am both idealistic and self-assured in my thinking that this proposal could begin tomorrow. The satisfaction of my creative hand being realised is not what I am most interested in for Africville. The seed of my idea is, in its simplest form, to see community return to the very idle Africville Park. It is obvious that neither Halifax nor Africville cannot un-ring the bell, undoing what has already been done in the past. However, Halifax has a responsibility not to just apologise in part, but fully, even if it means returning land back they would rather keep. Equally, Africville will have to realise that this new community will not be the same, but rather a new start for future generations. To be short, there is no reason why we cannot make better use of this land -and regardless of how much time has passed between relocation and now, today is as good as any to at least begin.



Eddie Carvery beside new replica church under construction, adjacent to Africville Park, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 2011.

Things that will require further consideration once the project moves ahead would be to zoom in on the proposal and its features. The three chapter titles of this work [1:1000, 1:500, and 1:200] correspond to the various





A pixelated image of Africville. created from various images and media articles of the community over the past 40 years. Some voids represent the pixels that did not develop as a result of relocation, while others represent the pixels that could develop in the future, 2011.

scales the project requires in order to filter through the community's intricacies. It would be reasonable to say that *Rebuilding Africville* still has at least three more chapters [1:100, 1:50, and 1:1] before seeing a new community re-realised.

As the only person from the Nova Scotia Black community to go through Dalhousie's School of Architecture, I feel it is not only important but a responsibility to give back to my community in what I see as a much needed conversation to the possibility of not ending the story of Africville. This work begins to build a conversation of how to move forward.

While concluding my examination presentation, I described to the committee that I would end with my beginning. I went on to explain that during my first site visit to Africville for this research, I walked around the former community in search for a starting point –something to grab hold of as I begin to take on a thesis that inevitably would also carry the weight of the story of Africville. That summer day I could see nothing past the newly manicured lands. So, much like I was taught in architecture school, –that the most interesting conditions are always found when two materials meet- I slowly gravitated to the water's edge. Here is where the rug of grass could no longer hold on to

what was swept beneath it. Concrete, rebar, stairs, glass... these are today's remains of Africville as a result of the city's decision to bulldoze the community off the edge of the land into the water. Besides literally finding pieces of the former community, I stumbled upon a weathered rock that lay in pieces on the edge of the site's shoreline. Instantly, without thinking, I started to stack the rock back together, and out of all the pieces of the community that lay on the water's edge that day, this rock was the only artefact I decided to take home.



Rock from the edge of the site's shoreline, found in pieces and reassembled, Africville Park, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 2010.

It wasn't until I was near completion of this thesis report that I discovered that the same thing I was trying to do on my very first day of thesis is exactly what I am still doing on my last: *Rebuilding Africville*.





Final Master of Architecture examination, Exhibition Room, Dalhousie's School of Architecture, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 2011.



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