



Annual Report 2025

Black Loyalist Heritage Society

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A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Honouring Our History, Building Our Future



Dear Members and Friends of the Black Loyalist Heritage Society,

It is with great pride and deep gratitude that I present to you the 2024–2025 Annual Report of the Black Loyalist Heritage Society.



This past year has been nothing short of remarkable. In the face of staffing shortages, shifting priorities, and the everyday challenges that come with sustaining a heritage organization, our team has shown unwavering resilience, creativity, and commitment. We have not only persevered — we have thrived.

The BLHS has delivered an extraordinary year filled with relevant, thought-provoking events, powerful commemorations, and impactful community projects. Each initiative has served to advance our shared vision: to celebrate the rich legacy of the Black Loyalists as an integral part of the diverse heritage of Canada and beyond. Whether through grassroots programming, national partnerships, or global outreach, we have continued to centre the voices, stories, and enduring spirit of Black Loyalist descendants.

While this Annual Report highlights many of our key accomplishments over the past year, it does not capture the full scope of all that we have achieved. There are far too many moments of impact, connection, and growth to include in one document. What follows are exemplary and profound highlights — projects and initiatives that represent the heart of our progress. We are proud to share them with you as a reflection of our unwavering dedication to the mission of BLHS.

What makes our progress all the more inspiring is that it has been achieved not by standing still, but by moving boldly forward — listening to our community, learning from our past, and leading with intention. The pages ahead reflect the incredible breadth and depth of this work - from our successful Seafarers

Project, to our ongoing efforts to preserve and amplify Black Loyalist history through education, commemoration, and research. Among the most meaningful of these initiatives is our dedication to recognizing and memorializing the 15 Black men from Shelburne who served in the No. 2 Construction Battalion — Canada’s only all-Black unit in the First World War. Their courage, sacrifice, and service stand as a powerful testament to the legacy we are honoured to preserve and share.

I want to personally thank our Executive Director - Andrea Davis for her tireless dedication, our staff; Shari Shortliffe, Kelly Davis, and Luke Goodwin, our summer student staff, and our volunteers. I want to also single out our Board Members who are consistently working in the background through their sub-committee work and leadership. and each of you — our Society members — for your steadfast support and belief in our mission. Together, we are not only safeguarding the past but shaping a future where the contributions of the Black Loyalists are honoured, understood, and celebrated by generations to come.

I invite you to read this report with pride and with purpose. Our story continues — and with your ongoing engagement, the best is yet to come.

Key Projects 2024-2025

10th Anniversary of the Centre & Founding Member Recognition

The 10th Anniversary Celebration of the Black Loyalist Heritage Centre, held on Friday, June 5, 2025, was a resounding success. The event marked a significant milestone for the Society and featured a heartfelt tribute to the founding members whose vision and perseverance laid the foundation for the Centre.



Some of the original Members of the BLHS from left to right: Lawrence Bruce, Julia Anna Bruce, Barb Falk, Debi Hill, Wendy Barklay, Joyce Bruce, Dr. Elizabeth Cromwell, Marjorie Turner-Bailey, Richard Cromwell, Everett Cromwell

A particularly moving moment was the reading of the names of the Society's founding members—some of whom are now deceased—which served as a powerful reminder of their enduring legacy. These founding members will be remembered forever for the gift of their vision, determination and strength: Barbara Balcom, Sterling Bell, Robert Bingham, Ken Brown, Joyce Bruce, Julia Anna Bruce, Lawrence Bruce, Beverly Cox, Dr. Elizabeth Cromwell, Everett Cromwell, Richard Gallion, David Hartley Jr., Deborah Davis Hill, Avril Holden, Jeanette Johnson, Dr. Sharon Oliver, Kyle Paterson, Cassie Saunders, Charles Wesley, and Priscilla Wesley.

The celebration was attended by a wide range of guests and dignitaries, including Mayor Stan Jacklin, Lawrence Bruce, Marjorie Turner-Bailey, members of the Town and Municipality of Shelburne, The Golden Skinners, Jeanette Nickerson, and Father Ben of Christ Church Anglican. Their presence and words added meaning and recognition to an already memorable occasion. Further 10th anniversary commemorate events will continue throughout the year.

African Nova Scotia Seafarers Project

The African Nova Scotia Seafarers Project continues to be a cornerstone of BLHS programming. This collaborative exhibit between the Black Loyalist Heritage Society, the Nova Scotia Fisheries Museum, and the Black Cultural Centre tells the powerful and often overlooked stories of African Nova Scotian men and women in the maritime and fishing industries. The exhibit highlights the contributions of Black blacksmiths, boatbuilders, chandlers, and seafarers, weaving these narratives into a broader understanding of Nova Scotia's multicultural maritime legacy. BLHS is proud to be the first host site for the travelling exhibit, launching in fall 2025. Phase II of the project, focused on oral storytelling and interviews with descendants of Black seafarers, is being developed with support from a \$25,000 Digital Museums Canada grant.

Genealogy Project

With funding from Nova Scotia Museums of \$50K, under the leadership of the BLHS Genealogy Project Committee, and with excellent advice, guidance and support from local historian Gabriel Jones and Saint Mary's University, the Genealogy Project has progressed meaningfully. Despite initial delays due to staffing challenges, the project has resumed full momentum. Plans for the purchase of equipment—including scanners and archival software—are underway and fireproof cabinets to protect priceless documents and artifacts have been installed at the Centre.

Increased partnerships on this project include a special collaboration with Saint Mary's University; under the direction of the Dean of the Department of History – Kirrily Freeman, the university has assigned top history students to assist with



Douglas Jacklin, born in Shelburne, N.S. around 1898 served as a Pte. with the No. 2 Construction Battalion C.E.F. during WW1.

digitization efforts. Additionally, a rare first edition of David George's chronicles, an account of his life as the son of slaves, founder of the first black church in the American colonies in 1775 and one of the black loyalists who arrived in 1783, was donated to our archives.

Assisted by a grant of \$25,000 from Digital Museums Canada that was secured for oral storytelling initiatives, this work will continue over a multi-phase, and multi-year project plan towards preserving family histories and reconnecting descendants with their Black Loyalist roots.



No. 2 Construction Battalion

Commemoration Projects Special initiatives to recognize and honor the 15 local Black Loyalist descendants who served in Canada's only all-Black battalion during the First World War are underway. These memorial projects will be lasting testaments to these men's legacy and to the town's history of Black military service.

Street Banner Campaign

As part of our mission to honour the service and sacrifice of Black Canadian soldiers from our community, the BLHS is working on commemorative street banner campaign. These street banners honouring the 15 Black men from Shelburne who served in the No. 2 Construction Battalion will be proudly displayed throughout the town in conjunction with other Remembrance Day Memorial events. These banners will serve as powerful, visual reminders of the Battalion's courage and contribution during World War I, and will spark conversations about recognition and remembrance of our Black Loyalist Soldiers and deepen our collective understanding of Black military history.

Memorial Site at the Shelburne Cenotaph

BLHS secured a \$24,404 grant from Veterans Affairs Canada to install a permanent granite monument at the Shelburne Cenotaph in recognition of these 15 servicemen. The monument is slated for unveiling during the 2026 Remembrance Day services. Work continues on gathering photographs and biographies to accompany each banner and inform future educational programming.

BLHS Strategic Plan 2025-2029

This five-year plan represents the culmination of an extensive and inclusive process that engaged a diverse cross-section of our community: affiliated organizations, community leaders, students, volunteers, staff, board members, and government partners. Through surveys, focus groups, and consultations, we reached deep into the heart of this community and beyond to ensure that every voice was heard and every perspective valued.

This Strategic Plan outlines four key themes that will guide us over the next five years:

1. Increase Awareness of the Black Loyalist Legacy.
2. Engage our Communities
3. Strengthen our Organizational Capacity
4. Foster Learning and Education

Our work will be underpinned by our core values of equity and belonging, dedication, and leadership, ensuring that we remain steadfast in our commitment to inclusion, accessibility, and community empowerment. Watch for updates on the BLHS social media sites.

Grants and Financial Sustainability

In 2024–2025, the Black Loyalist Heritage Society continued to prioritize financial sustainability and strategic growth, securing critical grant funding for future projects. A major highlight was the successful \$24,000 grant from Veterans Affairs Canada for the installation of a commemorative war memorial honoring the Shelburne's fifteen No. 2 Construction Battalion soldiers at the Town's Cenotaph - a profound recognition of our community's historical contributions.

Grant support was also received from African Nova Scotian Affairs, Canadian Heritage, the Nova Scotia Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage, and Digital Museums Canada. Several new funding applications have also been submitted, including proposals for *The Book of Negroes* Repatriation Project, gallery screen upgrades, and enhanced future programming.

BLHS has taken financial measures designed to strengthen the Society's long-term financial resilience and maximize the impact of future initiatives. For the 2024–2025 fiscal year, the Society is in a positive financial position after having received 95% of budgeted revenue. While overall expenses slightly exceeded the projected budget, grant income remained on track at 101% of estimates, despite a tightening of government funding streams.

The Board acknowledged this success while also identifying the need to align the 2025–2026 budget more closely with realistic grant forecasts and program priorities. Further funding proposals have been submitted for key projects including *Journey Back to Birchtown 2025* and critical website improvements.

Looking ahead, the Society is forecasting a pipeline of potential grant applications through to 2026 and beyond.

Annual Events 2024 -2025

African Heritage Month 2025



Jesse Ryan, Juno nominated Saxophonist

African Heritage Month 2025 was a vibrant and meaningful time at the Black Loyalist Heritage Centre, with strong attendance and community engagement throughout the month. Despite a snowstorm, nearly 90 guests gathered for the AHM Proclamation Event, underscoring the importance of this annual celebration.

A standout moment was the unforgettable evening with Juno-nominated saxophonist Jesse Ryan on February 21, whose powerful performance moved and inspired all in attendance. Another highlight was the sold-out 2nd Annual Lobster Chowder Chowdown Showdown, where local favourite Boxing Rock claimed the title for best chowder. These events not only brought the community together but also deepened public appreciation for Black heritage. Building on this success, the BLHS will continue to expand programming that celebrates the rich history of the Black Loyalists.

Journey Back to Birchtown 2024

The 2024 Journey Back to Birchtown event was held August 10–11, 2024 and featured a weekend of celebration, education, and community connection. Highlights included a gospel concert by the Sanctified Brothers, a historical walk/run by Shelburne Regional High School students, and a community breakfast. A barbecue was provided by the local Masonic Lodge. The weekend opened with the inaugural Black Loyalist Academic Conference of Knowledge, which brought together historians and genealogists to share research. Lessons learned from this year will shape the expanded 10th anniversary celebration in 2025.

Looking ahead to Journey Back to Birchtown 2025, events will include a Saturday community breakfast and Sunday church service, with music from Said, Marty, Dave, and other local talent. Planning is underway to move JBTB back to June in the future.

Black Loyalist Academic Conference-2024

Held during the 2024 Journey Back to Birchtown weekend, the Academic Conference welcomed approximately 30 historians and community members. Two formal panels, community interviews, and a "scanathon" for family records were among the highlights. There is strong interest in making this an annual event. A \$3,500 budget supported materials, videography, and travel. The event strengthened academic and community bonds and affirmed BLHS's role in leading Black history discourse.

Plans for the Black Loyalist Academic Conference of Knowledge 2025 are underway. The BLHS has approved up to \$5K in funding to support speaker costs and travel.

Annual Apple Pie Fundraiser 2024

Under the watchful eye of Barb Falk, Board Member and Chair of the BLHS Fundraising Committee, the 2024 Apple Pie Fundraiser once again proved to be a joyful, heartwarming and successful community event. Barb's happy team of by more than a dozen volunteers, raising approximately \$2,200 for the Society.

Plans are already underway for the 2025 Apple Pie Fundraiser and we know that with Barb leading this annual event, it will be another fun and successful event.



Barb Falk, Chair of the BLHS Fundraising

William Hall Commissioning Ceremony (May 16, 2024)

BLHS representation at naming Canada's ambassador ship, honoring Petty Officer William Hall (first Nova Scotian Victoria Cross recipient); BLHS involved in naming and decor decisions.

NS RCMP Apology Viewing Live (September 7, 2024)

Hosted a community live-feed of the RCMP apology for street-checks; reception followed. Site included multiple satellite viewing locations across Nova Scotia.

Federal Black Employee Network Virtual-Tour Loan (Late 2024)

BLHS virtual-tour video rented to Federal Black Employee Network; reached over 1,000 viewers, building a new partnership.

Podcast with International African American Museum (Dec 21, 2024)

Andrea Davis, Executive Director and Board members Graham Nickerson and Kelley Bruce featured on Dr. Shelley Murphy's genealogy-focused podcast at the International African American Museum in Charleston, SC, discussing BLHS's history and mission.

Christmas Event & Luncheon (Dec 2024)

Well-attended holiday celebration at the Centre; featured a festive luncheon with staff and board.

International Women's Day Panel (March 8, 2025)

Event featuring Sheila Hartley-Scott in discussion with Andrea Davis, Sylvia Bell, and Harmony Bazaar Festival contributors; ~60 attendees; strong engagement.

Run/Walk with Shelburne Regional High (June 2, 2025)

Public fitness event at the Centre in partnership with the high school.

Solo memoir-play starring Nancy Edwards, (July 2025)

Recounting a Sierra Leone public-health-nurse's journey (July 25)

“Foods That Heal” Wellness Presentation (July 20, 2025)

A July wellness presentation, “Foods that Heal” with Chef Pamela Alexander Leonforde, owner of the Afro-Caribbean vegan restaurant Café Caye Mange. Planning is underway for major culinary event with celebrity Chef Roger Mooking (tentative 2026).



Partnerships and National Engagement

The Black Loyalist Heritage Society is proud to announce its collaboration with The National Archives of the United Kingdom on a landmark international exhibition commemorating the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution. As part of this significant project, the Black Loyalist story will be prominently featured—shining a global spotlight on the courage, resilience, and contributions of Black Loyalists during a transformative moment in world history. Key artifacts, including the historic *Book of Negroes* and Certificates of Freedom, will help bring these stories to life for an international audience. This collaboration is a momentous opportunity for the BLHS to share the legacy of Black Loyalists on a world stage and to reinforce our role as a leading voice in Black heritage preservation and education.

Vice-Regal Patronage - Office of the Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia

The Black Loyalist Heritage Society was honoured to receive Vice-Regal Patronage from the Honourable Mike Savage, Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia in February 2025. This prestigious designation reflects His Honour’s commitment to community service and to recognizing organizations that make meaningful contributions to Nova Scotia’s cultural and historical landscape. The Vice-Regal Patronage significantly elevates the profile of the BLHS, both provincially and nationally, and affirms the importance and esteem



of our work in preserving and promoting Black Loyalist history. The Society looks forward to welcoming the Lieutenant Governor to future events and to proudly incorporating the Vice-Regal emblem into our official communications. This recognition is a deeply meaningful milestone in our continued growth and impact.

Policy and Governance

This past year, the Black Loyalist Heritage Society prioritized important governance updates to ensure our policies reflect today’s realities and uphold our commitment to respect, safety, and non-discrimination.

Key policies were revised—including the Code of Conduct, Confidentiality and Non-Disclosure, Conflict of Interest, and Whistleblower policies—and a new Harassment and Violence Policy was introduced. The Society’s By-Laws were also updated for greater

clarity and alignment with organizational needs. The BLHS Governance Manual, which outlines the roles of the Board, Executive Director, staff, and sub-committees, was refreshed to ensure continued relevance.

In the coming year, the Executive Director will present updates from the Nova Scotia Museum's revised Operations Manual to align with sector standards

Site and Infrastructure Improvements

BLHS Centre Signage

Thanks to a \$5,000 grant from African Nova Scotian Affairs, new signage will be installed to better direct visitors to the Black Loyalist Heritage Centre site. This visibility campaign is expected to drive more foot traffic and raise regional awareness of the Centre. Thanks to a generous contribution of \$5,000 from African Nova Scotian Affairs, and with the Board's approval to cover the remaining cost, new BLHS signage is being installed both on highways and within the Town of Shelburne. This improved visibility is expected to drive more foot traffic and increase visitor numbers to the Centre.

Pit House Restoration

The Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage has approved our application for the renewal of Pit House, a key interpretive feature of the BLHS site. This installation has suffered extensively from storm damage and other environmental harm over the past 5 years and is currently roped off for safety. The Nova Scotia Museum's



Interpretive Renewal Project Fund is prepared to invest \$20,425 for this important initiative. This project will be a priority for 2025-2026.

Operations and Museum Performance

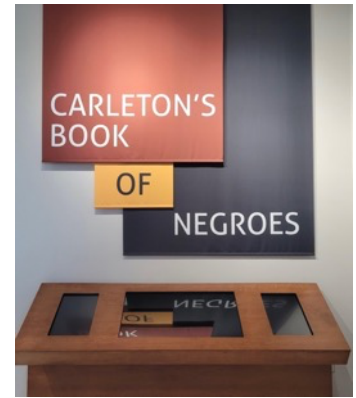
Admissions: Tours increased significantly during the 2024 tourist season and are trending in the same direction for 2025. Seasonal hours now extend 7 days/week, 9:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Canada Strong Pass: Canada Strong Pass - In Nova Scotia, Children aged 17 and under will receive free admission to all 28 sites of the Nova Scotia Museum including the BLHS. People aged 18 to 24 will receive 50 per cent off admission fees.

Gallery Upgrades: *Lord Cultural Resources*, one of the world's most impactful cultural planning firms for museums, has offered support for screen content updates in the Lindsay Gallery; pricing is under review.

Touchscreen Kiosks: Two new kiosks and a server upgrade were approved for installation by Real Simple IT.

Digital Exhibits: *The Book of Negroes* digital display is under review for replacement.



Human Resources

Curator Visitor Experience

The Black Loyalist Heritage Society is currently in the final stages of hiring for a newly created position: Curator, Visitor Experience. This enhanced role incorporates program development, outreach, grant writing, marketing, and social media content creation—all designed to enrich visitor engagement and expand community reach. The position, which will be filled in July 2025, is a critical investment in strengthening the Centre's capacity for programming and ensuring meaningful, inclusive experiences for all visitors.

Financial Performance The 2024–2025 fiscal year concluded with strong financial results and a continued commitment to sound fiscal management. As of the third quarter, the Society had received 93% of expected revenues while spending only 80% of budgeted expenses, positioning us for a healthy year-end surplus. This reflects not only prudent budget planning but also the strength of our financial oversight mechanisms.

The Audit and Risk Sub-Committee, working closely with the Executive Director and Office Administrator, continues to provide strong leadership in monitoring, evaluating, and guiding the financial operations of the Society. Key developments this year included the Board's decision to investigate the implementation of digital banking through CIBC, improving efficiency and security in our financial transactions. It is expected that this will occur over the next 6-12 months.

In the months ahead, the Audit and Risk Sub-Committee will meet to review outstanding audit recommendations from our official auditors - Grant Thornton. With careful attention to both detail and long-term sustainability, the Society remains well-positioned to support our growing operations and mission-driven priorities.

Looking Ahead

As we reflect on an outstanding year, we are filled with deep gratitude and renewed determination. The past twelve months have been a testament to the strength of our mission, the resilience of our community, and the enduring power of Black Loyalist history to educate, inspire, and unite.

We are proud of the ground we have covered—projects completed, grants secured, partnerships strengthened, and stories shared. But we know our work is far from finished. Looking ahead, we embrace the responsibility of carrying this legacy forward with even greater purpose and passion.

The stories of the Black Loyalists—and those of their descendants—are not just fragments of the past. They are living histories that continue to shape the present and influence the future. As stewards of this legacy, we are committed to making Black Loyalist history more accessible, more engaging, and more visible to the world.

In the coming year, we will continue to invest in programs that amplify Black voices, deepen community connections, and invite new generations to explore their roots. We aim to harness technology, storytelling, and education to bring our history to life in ways that resonate widely—across classrooms, across borders, and across time.

We see a future where descendants of the Black Loyalists feel a powerful sense of belonging and pride, and where all Canadians see themselves reflected in a more inclusive national narrative. Whether through heritage interpretation, repatriation efforts, artistic expression, or the simple act of gathering to remember—we will continue to lead with integrity, inclusion, and innovation.

Once again, to our Executive Director, members, staff, volunteers, funders, and partners: thank you. Your unwavering support fuels our progress and empowers us to dream bigger. Together, we will continue to build a legacy worthy of the ancestors who laid its foundation—and ensure that the story of the Black Loyalists lives on, stronger than ever, for generations to come.



Sheila Hartley-Scott
 President,
 Black Loyalist Heritage Society



Black Loyalist

HERITAGE CENTRE

— PRESENTED *by* EMERA —

A PART *of* THE NOVA SCOTIA MUSEUM