

Class	Name	Men	No. in a	No. in a	No. in a	No. in a	No. in a	No. in a	Remarks.
Jackson's	2 <sup>d</sup> Med. Detachment	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	See? office killed in Annapolis
	Ser. W. Waller	1							do do do
	Capt. Pinkert	1							Discharged Soldier, 3 <sup>d</sup> Regt. at S. Valentin
	Will <sup>m</sup> Robinson	1	1		3				later Steward of the Genl Hospital - Settling at Annapolis.
	Stijak Wicks	1	1		1			3	Loyalist Settling at Annapolis.
	Le. Hanslaute	1						1	do do do
	Ph. Perre	1	1					2	Discharged Soldier for the Hospital settling at Annapolis.

# Frostbite to Fevers:

Black Loyalist Women in Sierra Leone

# **Frostbite to Fevers: Black Loyalist Women in Sierra Leone**

## **Statement of Intention:**

The histories of free and enslaved black peoples receive well deserved scholarly attention. Gender histories uncover the lives of black women across the Atlantic world. However, comparatively fewer essays and monographs present history of women in the early colony of Granville Town and Freetown, Sierra Leone are often overlooked. Ethnic African women who traveled to this settlement searched for home and community. They owned businesses and raised families. Women endured the threat of re-enslavement, disease and illness and the ever vigilant presence of death. They married and buried husbands, mothers, fathers, and children. We know very little of how these events impacted their relationships and actions.

This project will uncover answers to questions on whether black women's role in the migration to Sierra Leone resembled that of Great Migrations. What did freedom and liberty mean or women? What was women's role in establishing and sustaining the Sierra Leone colony? Did black women's role in colonization differ from the role of white women? These are deep, broad and cumbersome questions. They deserve attention despite the difficulty in uncovering the voices of peoples usually hidden in archives.

It is important to uncover women because often they drive political and social action in communities. Although several waves of colonists came to Sierra Leone, Black Poor of London, Black Loyalists, Liberated Africans, Jamaican Maroons, it is the women from Nova Scotia who will hold the primary focus of this work. Black Loyalist males and females were offered new lives after the American Revolution in Nova Scotia. This

new land proved nearly as inhospitable as their lives in the American colonies thus some traveled again to Africa.

Sierra Leone is a current topic of interest. The ravaged nation inspires theorizing on economic development. As a contemporary topic, Sierra Leone stories capture imagination but as a historical topic information lacks. Sources from outside of Africa provide the most knowledge about eighteenth-century colonization efforts of African Americans? Historians such as Cassandra Pybus, Simon Schama, and Iyunolu Folayan Osagie wipe away years of neglect on the entire groups of black peoples arriving, but no specificity emerges on identities within these groups, such as women, children, elderly, and light or dark skinned colonists.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cassandra Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom: Runaway Slaves of the American Revolution and Their Global Quest for Liberty* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006); Simon Schama, *Rough Crossings: The Slaves, the British, and the American Revolution* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009); Iyunolu Folayan Osagie, *The Amistad Revolt: Memory, Slavery, and the Politics of Identity in the United States and Sierra Leone* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003).

Life in Sierra Leone for black peoples' operated on a continuum of liberty. White

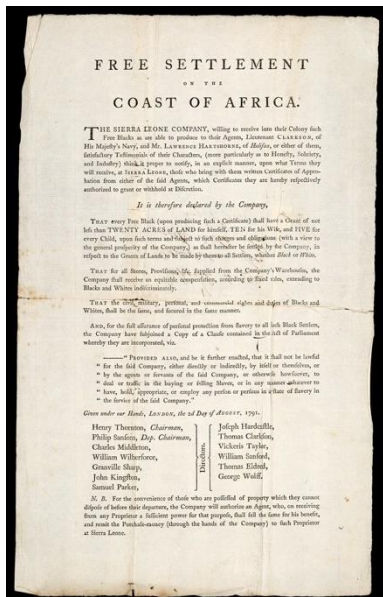


Figure 1: Information about the settlement in Sierra Leone by the Sierra Leone Company for Black Nova Scotians, 1791.

folk determined the political direction of the towns and much of the other tangible aspects of freedom and liberty were not forthcoming or sorely lacking. The background materials available to uncover their lives are more extensive than the other groups. The American Revolution is an often studied topic. The African American men and women who participated in the conflict and debate are well documented. Black loyalists, men, and women spark interest in both the United States and Canada. Lord Dunmore issued an invitation for

freedom and liberties, enslaved and free black peoples seized opportunity and fought on the side of the British to secure promised freedom. After the British defeat, black soldiers solidified respect and support through their determined fighting. Black soldiers and their families had only just begun the long fight for their freedom; slave owners were unwilling to relinquish their rights to the bodies and labor of freed African Americans.

Whether enslaved or free the black loyalists earned their freedom in the eyes of British commanders who helped many to new lives in Nova Scotia and London. White Loyalists arriving in Nova Scotia came with blacks who fought for the British in the American Revolution. Some white peoples brought their slaves with them which further abridged the ideology of black freedom. Black people in Nova Scotians (and elsewhere) continued to push against racism and bigotry. In Nova Scotia, some black peoples decided to emigrate again to Freetown, Sierra Leone.

Many ethnic African groups came to call Sierra Leone home. Examining Nova Scotians as they encounter other versions of blackness offers an opportunity to understand how different black identities are shaped, transmitted and maintained. Women often performed the tasks necessary to acculturating generation into accepted norms of black identities and ensuring they conform to ascribed identities falls to women as mothers and teachers.

## **Literature Review:**

My first searches through Fondren Library's vast database using the terms black women and colonists yielded results on the sexual coercion black women faced in frontier and colonial settlements. The many titles served as a reminder that suffering was a matter of life for black women. East Indian immigrant women in Trinidad were the most vulnerable in the community. David Trotman argues the demography of Trinidad skewed toward men and this left women under extreme pressure to conform to their role in community and conform to expectations of Trinidad society.<sup>2</sup> Even in freedom even with promises of self-determination and land and liberty. Gendered research of frontiers allows a unique understanding of the nature of such suffering. Scholars interested in women's role in the establishment of colonial enterprise can examine the works of Juliana Barr and Angela Pulley Hudson.<sup>3</sup> Although their efforts discuss native women in encounters with Europeans, they offer insight into how women traversed a world where

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<sup>2</sup> David V. Trotman, "Women And Crime In Late Nineteenth Century Trinidad," *Caribbean Quarterly* 30, no. 3/4 (1984): 60–72.

<sup>3</sup> Juliana Barr, *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman: Indians and Spaniards in the Texas Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Angela Pulley Hudson, *Creek Paths and Federal Roads: Indians, Settlers, and Slaves and the Making of the American South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

their power was limited. Barr argues that Native American women were critical in relationships between Spanish colonists and indigenous communities.

The presence of women indicated peaceful intentions and opportunity to cement kinship in the view of native peoples. *Peace came in the Form of a Woman*, shows a world where native peoples could control the terms of negotiations but in *Creek Paths and Federal Roads* Angela Pulley Hudson discusses a world where indigenous peoples were losing power. Despite this Creek men and women used whatever means and opportunities available to support their communities. Women “emerged as a distinct economic . . . [force who were] woven into the fabric of Creek social relations”.<sup>4</sup>

Black American women receive scholarly attention in Erica Armstrong Dunbar, Amrita C Myers, Suzanne Lebsack and Whittington B Johnson works.<sup>5</sup> Dunbar discusses black women’s status in freedom. Women of color “had little power and authority over their lives and those of their family members [their experiences] hinged on domestic labor kinship networks and the ability to bear children.”<sup>6</sup> As the female domestic sphere expanded to include political activism, black women had different challenges in the domestic sphere.<sup>7</sup> Lebsack argues that the dreadful exploitation of black women shield the power they wielded in communities.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Hudson, *Creek Paths and Federal Roads*, 34.

<sup>5</sup> Erica Armstrong Dunbar, *A Fragile Freedom: African American Women and Emancipation in the Antebellum City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Amrita Chakrabarti Myers, *Forging Freedom: Black Women and the Pursuit of Liberty in Antebellum Charleston* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Suzanne Lebsack, “Free Black Women and the Question of Matriarchy: Petersburg, Virginia, 1784-1820,” *Feminist Studies* 8, no. 2 (1982): 271–92; Whittington B. Johnson, “Free African-American Women in Savannah, 1800-1860: Affluence and Autonomy Amid Adversity” 76, no. 2 (1992): 260–83.

<sup>6</sup> Dunbar, *A Fragile Freedom*, 5.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 24.

<sup>8</sup> Lebsack, “Free Black Women and the Question of Matriarchy,” 272.

In free black communities, black women remained single, and thus maintained legal control over acquired property and some measure of equality. Thus black women have a long history of liberation.<sup>9</sup> Whittington comes to much of the same conclusions as Lebsack. He adds that free women were essential to finding ways to circumscribe rules about education and learning.<sup>10</sup> Amrita C Myers examines free women of color in Charleston and argues that for them freedom meant more than directing their labor but was a package including fair wages and financial independence.<sup>11</sup> These works concern black women in American context, but their presence was international due to the transatlantic slave trade.

Rebecca J Scott and Jean M Hébrard, Jon Sensbach, Lamin Sanneh, Kit Candlin and Cassandra Pybus, and Mariana Candido write about black women beyond America. Scott and Hébrard's *Freedom Papers* tells the story of one family's search for freedoms through migrating to places that served their ambition. These movements created opportunities in education and freedom of movement. Migrations into communities that had both free and enslaved peoples necessitated proof of liberty, freedom papers (birth certificates) made this possible despite a lack of a credible claim to citizenship.<sup>12</sup>

Candido makes an argument for expanding the use of uncommon colonial documents in her work on the African women in Benguela. She argues that although documents suggest a level of control over African peoples this command was written but imposed in the legal, economic and social systems that restricted life for black peoples in

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 275. This liberty was, of course, subject to the larger white world under which these women labored. This world challenged their liberty claims in many ways.

<sup>10</sup> Johnson, "Free African-American Women in Savannah, 1800-1860," 279.

<sup>11</sup> Myers, *Forging Freedom*, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Rebecca J. Scott and Jean M. Hébrard, *Freedom Papers: An Atlantic Odyssey in the Age of Emancipation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 162.

the colony. She states that “if we limited our study to the official correspondence, the legislation, or even the writings of colonial officers stationed in Benguela, we might think that African women were not active or were not important.”<sup>13</sup>

Jon Sensbach switches this narrative to an exemplary rather than an everyday woman. Rebecca Proten worked with the European Moravians in the eighteenth century. Her ministry crossed waters, but her gender put limitations on her freedom to realize the full measure of her religious identity. She was vital in proselytizing African communities on behalf of the Moravian Church.<sup>14</sup> Candlin, Pybus, Rael and Sinha recognized the centrality of women in economic enterprises in the Atlantic. Their collection of essays examines the “role of entrepreneurial women of color as the main actors in the contested, multinational colonies of the southern Caribbean” thus “this book challenges the current understanding of the dynamic between gender race and power in the Atlantic world during the Age of Revolutions.”<sup>15</sup> For the authors, free women of color were tenacious economically and very successful. The world they lived was one of movement where trans-colonial migration through the Caribbean, Spain, France, Britain, and Netherlands was not unexpected.<sup>16</sup> The first chapter of this collection argues that the late 18<sup>th</sup> century developed a ‘free colored moment’ across the Atlantic. At this time, women gained access to spaces in legal, economic, and political apparatus to grab more freedoms. Although the colonies in Nova Scotia or Sierra Leone are not discussed, they surely would be added to such a moment.

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<sup>13</sup> Mariana P. Candido, “Engendering West Central African History: The Role of Urban Women in Benguela in the Nineteenth Century,” *History in Africa* 42, no. 1 (2015): 12.

<sup>14</sup> Jon F. Sensbach, *Rebecca’s Revival* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

<sup>15</sup> Kit Candlin et al., *Enterprising Women: Gender, Race, and Power in the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 14.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*



This moment Sanneh takes advantage of in his considerations of Sierra Leone, Liberia, and the missionary endeavors of African Americans and Africans. British Olaudah Equiano and American Paul Cuffee carried a blackness separate from West African chiefdoms, caught in the world of power gold, and slave trading. This work focuses on the anti-slavery movement among black peoples as an expression of evangelical faith.<sup>17</sup>

Whittington Johnson argued that women did not present a strong voice in colonization debates. W. Bryan Rommel-Ruiz also contends that “the stories of the African colonization movements in Rhode Island and Nova Scotia illuminate two dimensions of the Black Atlantic. First, in Rhode Island, movement leaders such as John Quamine and Newport Gardern reflect the ways Atlantic Creoles played a key role in promoting colonization and how their creole identities factored into the ways they envisioned African migration. While in Nova Scotia, economic independence (that is the control of land and labour) factored in the ways free blacks defined freedom, although one that contrasted sharply to the libertarian political economy that characterized the Atlantic Anglo-American worldview.”<sup>18</sup>

Although essential for those wanting a deeper knowledge of the colonization movements as a whole does little to interrogate the role of women in these moves. The same goes for Simon Schama’s *Rough Crossings* that although discusses white women’s reputations among their black husbands in London does not uncover the role of black

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<sup>17</sup> Lamin Sanneh, *Abolitionists Abroad: American Blacks and the Making of Modern West Africa* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

<sup>18</sup> W. Bryan Rommel-Ruiz, “Colonizing the Black Atlantic: The African Colonization Movements in Postwar Rhode Island and Nova Scotia,” *Slavery & Abolition* 27, no. 3 (2006): 350–51.

women.<sup>19</sup> This same ground is covered by Jennifer Morgan as she discusses Anna Falconbridge's role in the Sierra Leone Company.<sup>20</sup> They do not elaborate on women's efforts. This is not so for Cassandra Pybus. Across four texts she inserts black women into narratives of black settlement.<sup>21</sup> Under her pen, black women emerge as lighting rods for colonial uncertainty. Mary Perth grew successful which made her a target of weary men.<sup>22</sup> Whether financially independent or not black women arriving in the colonies were expected to act as helpmate and caregiver within the settlement. One of women's most important role was that of teachers of cultural identity that David Northrup, Emma Christopher, Shirley Yee, James W Walker and James Sidbury discuss in their works.<sup>23</sup> Yee explains the tensions black women contended with in their multiple identities in communities and society. Women traversed a world of male domination no matter their place. In black migration discourse, some parroted the ideology of Eurocentric, racist, classist sexism complicating narratives on black freedom and identity.<sup>24</sup> Women whatever they believed acted as conduits for different identities.

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<sup>19</sup> Schama, *Rough Crossings*.

<sup>20</sup> Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> Cassandra Pybus, *Black Founders: The Unknown Story of Australia's First Black Settlers* (Sydney: University New South Wales Press, 2006); Cassandra Pybus, "'One Militant Saint': The Much Traveled Life of Mary Perth," *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 9, no. 3 (2008): 1–9; Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom*; Cassandra Pybus, "'A Less Favourable Specimen': The Abolitionist Response to Self-Emancipated Slaves in Sierra Leone, 1793–1808," *Parliamentary History* 26 (2007): 97–112.

<sup>22</sup> Pybus, "One Militant Saint."

<sup>23</sup> David Northrup, "Becoming African: Identity Formation among Liberated Slaves in Nineteenth-Century Sierra Leone," *Slavery & Abolition* 27, no. 1 (2006): 1–21; Emma Christopher, "A 'Disgrace to the Very Colour': Perceptions of Blackness and Whiteness in the Founding of Sierra Leone and Botany Bay," *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 9, no. 3 (2008), [https://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal\\_of\\_colonialism\\_and\\_colonial\\_history/v009/9.3.christopher.html](https://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_colonialism_and_colonial_history/v009/9.3.christopher.html); Shirley J. Yee, *Black Women Abolitionists: A Study in Activism, 1828-1860* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992); Shirley J. Yee, "Finding a Place: Mary Ann Shadd Cary and the Dilemmas of Black Migration to Canada, 1850-1870," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 18, no. 3 (1997): 1–16, doi:10.2307/3347171; James W. St G. Walker, *The Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone, 1783-1870* (University of Toronto Press, 1992); James Sidbury, *Becoming African in America: Race and Nation in the Early Black Atlantic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>24</sup> Yee, "Finding a Place."

Separate identities emerged among black settlers with the various origins in Sierra Leone thus it is important to examine women who carry out the everyday mandates of social order.

Trinidadian East Indian women felt the impact of immigration differently. Male population outnumbered women; colonial mandates privileged East Indian customs while making demands on women that ensured that they could never uphold them, and women had few economic opportunities. Women were greatly victimized in nineteenth century, Trinidad. The majority of murders committed by East Indian immigrants were “murders of women who were either wives, concubines or fiancées.”<sup>25</sup> The harsh labor system in Trinidad adversely affected the lives of all black and brown people but most acutely in the disenfranchised East Indian communities. Immigration meant uncertainty.

Most works on Sierra Leone and Nova Scotia concern the uncertain internal political business of the colony between black and white peoples yet ignore the place of women. Despite this failing, they are useful when uncovering how different forms of freedom are expressed. In Amelia Blyden, Stephen Braidwood, Jeffery McNarin, Harvey Whitfield, Sylviane Diouf, George Brooks, Bronwen Everill, John Grant, and Sara Fanning freedom has different meanings for and by different peoples.<sup>26</sup> Freedoms for

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<sup>25</sup> Trotman, “Women And Crime In Late Nineteenth Century Trinidad,” 62.

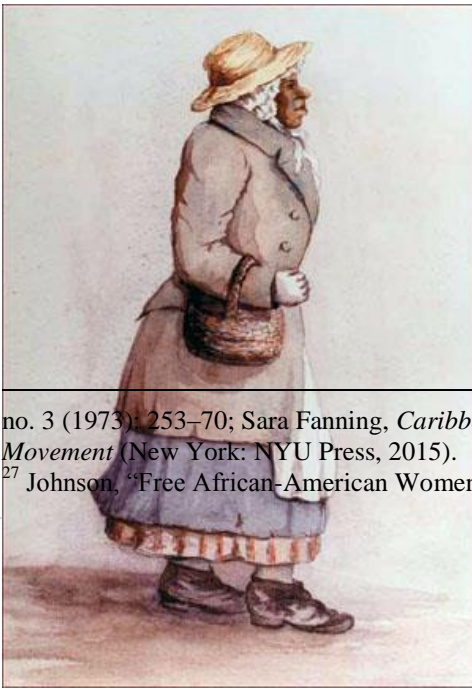
<sup>26</sup> Nemata Amelia Blyden, “‘Back to Africa.’ The Migration of New World Blacks to Sierra Leone and Liberia,” *OAH Magazine of History* 18, no. 3 (April 1, 2004): 23–25; Stephen J. Braidwood, *Black Poor and White Philanthropists: London’s Blacks and the Foundation of the Sierra Leone Settlement, 1786-1791* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1994); Jeffrey L. McNairn, “British Travellers, Nova Scotia’s Black Communities and the Problem of Freedom to 1860,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, 19, no. 1 (2008): 27–56; Harvey Amani Whitfield, *Blacks on the Border: The Black Refugees in British North America, 1815-1860* (Burlington: University of Vermont Press, 2006); Sylviane A. Diouf, *Slavery’s Exiles: The Story of the American Maroons* (New York: NYU Press, 2014); George E. Brooks, “The Providence African Society’s Sierra Leone Emigration Scheme, 1794-1795: Prologue to the African Colonization Movement,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 7 (1974): 183–202; Bronwen Everill, *Abolition and Empire in Sierra Leone and Liberia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); John N. Grant, “Black Immigrants into Nova Scotia, 1776-1815,” *The Journal of Negro History* 58,

black peoples in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone were dependent on their proximity to slavery, economic opportunity, land, and the benevolence of white peoples nearby. Emigration made the different objectives and identities of African peoples more visible in the affiliations and associations that connected them. Women were doubly important because they often labored in the households of white families as caretakers and washerwomen to the household.<sup>27</sup> They were important in judging the mood and space for black uplift.

The primary debate that emerges through the previous scholarship on black emigration concerns black awareness on the harshness of settlement. Historian, Simon Schama and Sylviane Diouf agree that blacks were not unwittingly led by a crippled pipe to freedom. The path to freedom could be cycloidal. The specter of re-enslavement shadowed each step black people took away from the chains of slavery. Men and women knowingly followed a flawed liberty as their best hope for self-determination.

## Methodology and Resources

To accurately unearth black women in the colonial enterprise of Sierra Leone. Particularly the role and lives of women from Nova Scotia, a social and cultural study are



important. Women participated in economic and political institutions as leaders and helpmates in black communities. Whether their position and importance altered in Sierra Leone will add to

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no. 3 (1973): 253–70; Sara Fanning, *Caribbean Crossing: African Americans and the Haitian Emigration Movement* (New York: NYU Press, 2015).

<sup>27</sup> Johnson, “Free African-American Women in Savannah, 1800-1860.”

current knowledge of how enslavement and disenfranchisement affected gendered identity.

Uncovering women's role in the colony, as well as their relationship between themselves, requires an analysis of cultural history as well. Women's gender role carried meaningful expectations for themselves and the community of women as a collective.

Figure 2: Rose Fortune, ca 1854, Nova Scotia Museum

Their identities were shaped not only by their productive activities in home and town life but in their cultural productions of stories from their pasts and expectations of the future.

Several historians have produced valuable gender history on African women in freedom. These secondary sources give a broader picture of the general activities and expectations of white women and black women by communities and society. The use of monographs dealing with the workings of black women within Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone before migration is also necessary. Analysis of letters from those who lived in the colony of Sierra Leone offer insight



Figure 3: "Bedford Basin near Halifax, by Robert Petley, 1835.

into the workings and expectations of the time. These same notions are voiced in official documents and newspapers. Newspaper articles give a picture of the expectations and intentions of white peoples gave toward black colonial migrations. Weaving both secondary and primary sources allows for both a historiographical underpinning in

research and acknowledging the many pasts, alongside representing many stories in a single narrative.

I also propose to use many images that represent this history. Artists created lasting depictions of the world they lived. This skews reality toward hope or representation of despair. Images that show variances in expectations of Nova Scotians are necessary to illustrate a moment in time that took the effort to capture. The created artifact that survives time shows people and places as they were but also as some think they ought to have been.

The images of the women of Nova Scotia illustrate a white gaze on the black body that later generations must contend in Sierra Leone and across the globe. In the illustrations of ship and harbor show the expectations of black peoples that energized their migration and fueled their disappointment. The use of these methods will help unfold a deeper understanding of the black women from Nova Scotia who moved to Sierra Leone.



Figure 4: Ships of free slaves from Nova Scotia arrive in Sierra Leone, January 15, 1792.

Many of available sources on Sierra Leone are found in primary source anthologies and online archives such as Gale News Vault, Google Books which has nineteenth-century travel journals, the Black Loyalist website from Cassandra Pybus and the Canadian Online Archives. Fondren Library also houses microfilm from the Huntington Collection of the Zachary McCaully Papers. Gale News contains historical

newspapers from England and her colonies. What the hierarchy and how they phrased the events in Sierra Leone sheds light on the workings in the colony that may have involved women. Newspapers are also an expression of societal frustrations. The unrealized expectations of Granville Town provide ink for journals.

Travel journals present a contemporary view of the place from individuals closer to the events. Although they have their challenges in concealing voices, they are useful to understand the networks within colonies. The Black Loyalist Website from Cassandra Pybus provides background on connections in the colony and a road map toward deepening knowledge of the people who lived in Sierra Leone. The archives online from Canada and the Zachary McCaully papers allow for sources to read against and along the grain. Without such varied materials narrating the past would be difficult.

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