

From Sea to Rail: Black Transportation Workers and Their Families in Halifax, c. 1870-1916

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Volume 24, Number 2, Spring 1995

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad24_2art03

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Publisher(s)

The Department of History of the University of New Brunswick

ISSN

0044-5851 (print)

1712-7432 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Fingard, J. (1995). From Sea to Rail:: Black Transportation Workers and Their Families in Halifax, c. 1870-1916. *Acadiensis*, 24(2), 49–64.

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From Sea to Rail: Black Transportation Workers and Their Families in Halifax, c.1870-1916

IN TURN-OF-THE-20TH CENTURY HALIFAX, a city dependent for its livelihood on the sea and, after nationalization, on rail links to the interior, male workers found ready employment in the transportation industries. According to the city directories, between 250 and 350 men were employed in seafaring jobs in the 1890s and 1900s, and the 1911 federal census reported 458 or 3.4 per cent of male workers as seafarers.¹ The number of men involved in railway work quadrupled between the mid-1890s and 1911, by which time 1150 men, representing 8.6 per cent of the male workforce were so employed.²

Among the transportation workers could be found men of African origin whose employment was concentrated in specific job categories. Those resident in Halifax worked principally as stewards and cooks in shipping or as porters, waiters or cooks for the railways. Black workers constituted a small minority of the men employed in the transportation industries and, together with their families and other "people of colour", comprised only a tiny proportion of the total population of Halifax: about three per cent in 1881 and two per cent in the early 20th century. None the less, in the days when the shipping industry was at its height, more blacks were enumerated in the censuses as seafarers than any other single category of worker save labourer, and other sources indicate that many of the labourers were themselves members of the casual seafaring workforce. When railway employment for blacks increased at the turn of the 20th century, hardly an African-Canadian family in Halifax-Dartmouth was untouched by it. In other words the two occupations were central to the character of Halifax's small turn-of-the-century black community.³

- 1 Halifax City Directory, 1894/5, 1904/5; *Fifth Census of Canada 1911*, vol.6 (Ottawa, 1915), pp. 326, 332.
- 2 Larry McCann has compiled data for railway workers in Halifax using city directories for 1878, 1896, 1912, 1926 and the 1901 manuscript census. He kindly shared this data with me. The problem of relying on such statistics is revealed by his 1912 count which is only half of that reported in the 1911 census statistics. *Fifth Census of Canada 1911*, vol. 6 (Ottawa, 1915), pp. 326, 332.
- 3 *Census of Canada, 1880-81*, vol. 1, (Ottawa,1882), pp. 212, 406; *Fourth Census of Canada 1901*, vol 1, (Ottawa, 1902), pp. 22, 302-3; *Fifth Census of Canada 1911*, vol. 1 (Ottawa, 1912), p. 554, vol. 2 (Ottawa, 1913), pp. 194-7. Black men were also employed in the stokehold of steamships. Those reported in the 1901 census on vessels berthed in Halifax were West Indians, most of whom were short-term visitors rather than residents. 1901 nominal census, ward 3, sect.2, pp.32-4. For a quantitative analysis based on the 1871 and 1881 censuses see Linda Lever, "The Black Community in Halifax, 1871-1881", unpublished paper; for an assessment of the black elite, see Judith Fingard, "Race and Respectability in Victorian Halifax", *Journal of Imperial and*

Judith Fingard, "From Sea to Rail: Black Transportation Workers and Their Families in Halifax, c. 1870-1916", *Acadiensis*, XXIV, 2 (Spring 1995), pp. 49-64.

This paper explores the lives of black transportation workers by focusing on their patterns of employment and family life, and the social and geographical mobility they experienced. The analysis is based on the membership of the black freemasons' lodge, Union No.18, an affiliate of the Nova Scotia Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons, for the period 1870 to 1916. Although it is the only black secular organization in Halifax for which records exist, fortunately for the historian, the masonic lodge included among its membership not only prominent black citizens, but also obscure men — either short-term residents or transients — who do not appear in the standard statistical sources such as city directories and census returns.

Moreover, some features of freemasonry were particularly attractive to black transportation workers. For one thing, membership met a need for mutuality among black porters who were excluded from the railway unions and seamen who were still without access to labour organizations. Although the benefits were not extensive, sickness, funeral and widows' funds were highly prized. When John Green, a 37 year old seaman from St. Vincent, with "no family or connections in this country", died suddenly in 1876, his body was claimed by his brethren in Union Lodge who buried him with the customary masonic honours.⁴ Robert J. White, another seaman, died in a masonic bed in a private ward of the Victoria General Hospital maintained for poorer brethren by one of the city's mainstream lodges. Here the brotherhood of freemasonry crossed the much discussed colour line.⁵ Alonzo Beckles, a non-resident from Barbados, employed as a steamship stoker, received a "charitable" donation of \$15 in 1908.⁶ In addition, as scholars have recently argued, fraternal rituals were an important aspect of 19th century masculinity. The reinforcement of manliness was especially significant for men whose jobs on vessels and trains resembled women's domestic duties in the home: cooking, waiting, serving, cleaning.⁷

For the purposes of this study, then, freemasonry has the advantage of playing a significant role in the lives of men on the move. The appeal of masonic fellowship to transportation workers is well known. The international masonic network provided contacts away from home, resources in times of trouble, and a modicum of security for the family left behind. Of the 219 freemasons in Union Lodge, 114 had experience as seamen or railwaymen or both, and, of a further 18 listed simply as stewards or porters, some are likely also to have been transportation workers. As

Commonwealth History, 20, 2 (May 1992), pp. 169-95. For useful background on black seamen in an earlier period in the United States, see W. Jeffrey Bolster, "'To Feel Like a Man': Black Seamen in the Northern States, 1800-1860", *Journal of American History*, 76, 4 (March 1990), pp. 1173-99, and on black porters in Canada c.1920-1960, see Agnes Calliste, "Sleeping Car Porters in Canada: An Ethnically Submerged Split Labour Market", *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, XIX, 1 (1987), pp. 1-20.

4 *Acadian Recorder* (Halifax), 17 July 1876.

5 *Acadian Recorder*, 6 August 1895, 28 September 1901.

6 Union Lodge Minutes, 21 December 1908, MG 20, vol. 2218, p. 406, Public Archives of Nova Scotia [PANS].

7 Lynn Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture, 1880-1930* (Princeton, 1984); Mark C. Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America* (New Haven, 1989); Margaret S. Creighton, "American Mariners and the Rites of Manhood, 1830-1870", in Colin Howell and Richard Twomey, eds., *Jack Tar in History: Essays in the History of Maritime Life and Labour* (Fredericton, 1991), pp. 151-4.

high a proportion as 60 per cent of the black freemasons were, therefore, seamen and/or railwaymen for some portion of their working lives.⁸

The patterns of employment in transportation were almost as numerous as the individuals employed, but three types of experience predominated. Some men were able to realize a career in transportation, either in seafaring or with the railways or a combination of both; others were employed for a transitional period in their lives and abandoned travelling occupations when an attractive city-based job materialized; the remainder incorporated seafaring and railroading into their pluralistic strategies for earning a livelihood. Personal histories elaborate these patterns and capture the family implications.

Robert J. White was a lifelong seaman. Born in Nova Scotia about 1830, he went to sea as a youth and married Elizabeth Wilcox in 1850. They raised a large family. Although White had fairly steady seafaring work, additional income was derived in the early 1870s from a liquor shop which must have been managed by Elizabeth. In the mid-1870s the family moved from Argyle Street, in the city centre, to Maitland Street, in the old north end, an area located in that portion of Ward 5 bounded by Brunswick on the east, North on the north, Agricola and North Park on the west and Cogswell on the south. There Elizabeth gave up the liquor trade in favour of a boarding house during the temperance-minded 1880s and 1890s. By the late 1890s the family also operated a variety and grocery store. Meanwhile, Robert served as a steamship steward and was variously employed for many years by steamship companies on such vessels as the *Acadian*, *Delta* and *Newfoundland*. While some of his voyages were trading cruises coastwise or to the West Indies, others were resource-based. When the *Newfoundland* became a sealer in 1893, for example, White was listed as the chief steward. He was described as “an obliging, quiet, unassuming man of very genial and affable disposition” who made “friends wherever he went”, qualities appropriate to a life of service to officers at sea.⁹

Charles Pinheiro was primarily a railway porter though seafaring initially brought him from the Caribbean to Halifax and remained one of the occupations he followed until he found steady work with the railways. He belonged to a younger

- 8 Union Lodge membership registers, Masonic Collection, MG 20, vol. 2012, No. 2, PANS. For an analysis of mid-19th century freemasonry in Nova Scotia, see Janet Guildford, “Public School Reform and the Halifax Middle Class, 1850-1870”, PhD thesis, Dalhousie University, 1990, ch. 6. For the features of black freemasonry in the United States see William A. Muraskin, *Middle-Class Blacks in a White Society: Prince Hall Freemasonry in America* (Berkeley, 1975) and Loretta J. Williams, *Black Freemasonry and Middle-Class Realities* (Columbia, Missouri, 1980).
- 9 Five of the White children were living at home in 1871 and another had married a seaman. Robert and Elizabeth were described as saloon keepers on their daughter’s marriage licence, the same year as White was listed as a seaman in the 1871 census. 1871 nominal census, ward 3, sect. 2, p. 100; 1881 nominal census, ward 5, sect. 2, SD 1, p. 91; 1891 nominal census, ward 5e, p. 21; Halifax County Marriage Registers, 15 November 1871 (459), PANS; Wills of Lucy Biddle (4894) and Elizabeth White (5129), Halifax County Probate Court Office; Halifax City *Directory*, 1876/7-1900/1; *Acadian Recorder*, 3 March 1893, 28 September 1901; *Minutes of the 26th to 42nd Sessions of the African Baptist Association of Nova Scotia, 1879-1895*; P.E. McKerrow, *A Brief History of the Coloured Baptists of Nova Scotia*, reprint edited by Frank Stanley Boyd Jr (Halifax, 1975), pp. 25, 78.

generation than White, having been born in Barbados in 1858. He is first identified as a hotel servant, in the 1881 census. After employment as a waiter at the International Hotel on Hollis Street, in 1882 he married Rose C. Bailey Dallas, daughter and stepdaughter of seafarers, and returned to sea as a steward on the *SS Acadia*. Before he joined the Intercolonial Railway in 1888 as a porter, he also worked as a waiter and bartender in town. Thereafter, until his retirement, he remained in the employ of the ICR and its Canadian National successor except for a couple of years as a Canadian Pacific Railway porter in the mid-1890s. In 1910 he landed a job as an ICR storekeeper at the railway station, which allowed him to return home at the end of his day's work. Like most of the black citizens, the Pinheiro family lived in the old north end. Late in life, Pinheiro moved to Montreal — the employment centre for black railwaymen — where he died an octogenarian, in 1944. His obituary stated that he had “worked for many years on the old Intercolonial Railway as a sleeping car porter and later for some years was porter instructor with the CNR” in Halifax.¹⁰

Although racially based job segregation often characterized their employment, the pay scales men received on ship and train compared favourably with the average wages of other African-Nova Scotians of the day. Men with full-time work on the Intercolonial Railway from the 1890s to 1910 earned between \$350 and \$450 a year. At sea, experienced, fully employed men made about \$400 in 1901; those with more junior or casual jobs earned \$240. Their male friends and kin with steady occupations in Halifax-Dartmouth seldom did better unless they were clergymen, well-established truckmen or skilled artisans in trades of high demand.¹¹

None the less, for some men employment in the transportation industries was transitional in nature, analogous to a rite of passage and willingly relinquished when more family-oriented employment came along. We see this in the case of Peter McKerrow, one of the best-known Halifax West Indians. McKerrow came to Halifax in the 1850s as a young Antiguan sailor, and in 1863 he married Mary Elizabeth Thomas, a daughter of the Reverend James Thomas, a Welshman, and his black wife Hannah. With his white father-in-law and his masonic brothers-in-law, McKerrow initiated the hat, cap and fur business of Thomas and Co., in which he worked until he retired.¹² Equally prominent in the local community was

10 Pinheiro remained in Halifax until at least 1939. 1871 nominal census, ward 5, sect. 3, p. 121; 1881 nominal census, ward 2, SD2, p. 79; 1891 nominal census, ward 5f, p. 48; 1901 nominal census, ward 5, sect. 2, p. 5; Halifax County Marriage Registers, 21 March 1882 (101), PANS; Estate of William T. Bailey (11751), Halifax County Probate Court Office; Halifax City *Directory*, 1882/3-1940; Auditor General's Reports, Railways and Canals Department, Canada, *Sessional Papers* (1893-1910); *Halifax Chronicle*, 22 July 1944. My thanks to Ken Cruikshank for drawing to my attention the railway employment data in the Auditor General's Reports.

11 For railway porters' wages see Auditor General's Reports, Railways and Canals Department, Canada, *Sessional Papers* (1893-1910); other wages, including those of seamen, are reported in the 1901 nominal census, e.g. William Joseph, ward 5, sect. 9, p. 9; Wilfred Samuels, ward 5, sect. 2, p. 16; Daniel Thomas, ward 3, sect. 2, p. 34; crews of various steamships, ward 3, sect. 2, pp. 32-34.

12 Judith Fingard, “Peter Evander McKerrow”, *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. XIII (Toronto, 1994), pp. 656-7.

Charles F. Biddle, who was a seaman on his marriage to Louisa (Lucy) Turner in 1844. One of the seafarers making the transition to shore, and sometimes described as an unspecified labourer (1871), he was firmly established as a coal hawker during the two decades before his death in 1897.¹³ Demus (Demas) Skinner, another seaman who married and came ashore, took up trucking, served in the Licensed Truckmen's Union, and remained a truckman until his death in 1920.¹⁴ Although abandoning the sea on marriage, or shortly thereafter, was by no means the rule, opportunities for landward employment, especially in their own businesses or in multi-racial occupations like trucking, where they were well respected, proved particularly attractive for men who could never hope to rise very far in the seafaring hierarchy.

Skills learned at sea also provided some men with useful experience which they transferred to more prestigious, city-based jobs. George Roache was a seafaring cook-steward by the age of 17, following in the footsteps of his stepfather James H. Martin, another cook-steward and freemason. When Roache returned to Halifax after a prolonged period in Boston, he entered the catering trade and became a restaurant proprietor and grocer, establishing Roache's Lunch Rooms, not the most attractive name for an eatery, which is perhaps why it was renamed the Delicatessen during the war. His catering ability earned him considerable respect in the community at large.¹⁵ The women in Roache's family were talented pioneers. Roache's first wife, Blanche Russell, was the first black woman to attend the public high school in Halifax. Their daughter was the first black student of the Halifax Conservatory of Music.¹⁶ The masonic membership also affords an example of a master mariner who found a land-based job in Halifax closely related to his nautical expertise. This was Clifford Edmund Ward, a Barbadian with membership originally in a Scottish lodge, who opened the only marine school in Halifax in the first decade of the 20th century, where he prepared the white masters and mates who successfully sat their certification examinations before the local marine board.¹⁷

Although porters were somewhat less likely to leave transportation during the pre-war period than were seamen, John D. Curl, an Australian-born porter, opened

13 Marriage Bond, Biddle-Turner, 2 November 1844, PANS; 1881 nominal census, ward 5, sect. 2, SD 1, p. 91; *Acadian Recorder*, 15 February 1897.

14 Halifax County Marriage Registers, Skinner-Clayton, 13 July 1870 (307), PANS; 1881 nominal census, ward 5, sect. 2, SD2, pp. 14-15; 1901 nominal census, ward 6, sect. 7, p. 5; *Acadian Recorder*, 4 August 1893; *Morning Chronicle* (Halifax), 3 August 1920.

15 1881 nominal census, ward 5, sect. 2, SD 1, p. 172; Advertisement for Roache's Lunch Rooms, on Gottingen Street, Halifax City *Directory*, 1914; *Acadian Recorder*, 19 April 1918. For an appreciation of his catering by the Licensed Victuallers's Association, see *Acadian Recorder*, 28 July 1910.

16 See Halifax Schools Registers for the high school (Halifax Academy), November 1885-April 1886 and May-October 1886, PANS; *Acadian Recorder*, 27 September 1890; *Atlantic Advocate* (Halifax), April 1915; Fingard, "Race and Respectability in Victorian Halifax", pp. 182, 184.

17 Halifax City *Directory*, 1907/8-1914; *Acadian Recorder*, 3 July 1914. For examples of the examination of Ward's marine school graduates see *Acadian Recorder*, 7 June, 7 July, 1 December 1905, 14 February, 22 March, 9 May, 6 June, 8 August 1906, 10 January, 26 February 1907.

his own cigar store in Halifax within four years of his initiation as a freemason and his marriage to a Cape Breton woman in 1903.¹⁸ Beresford Augustus Husbands, a Barbadian seaman, worked for the ICR as a porter between 1904 and 1909 and then opened an advertising agency, and, additionally in 1914, a West Indian products import company.¹⁹ Self-employment was an attractive alternative to wage labour.

For a third category of men, going to sea and running the road lay at the heart of the occupational pluralism, or strategy of alternatives, essential for overcoming the inadequacy of seasonal jobs, artisanal obsolescence and entrepreneurial failure. William Chearnley, a barber, left his trade to work as a porter between the mid-1880s and mid-1890s, but he subsequently returned to the tonsorial art.²⁰ As Chearnley's occupational profile indicates, jobs at sea or on rail, advantageous though they may have been in some respects, were not necessarily the employment of first resort. This also applies to Peter Bushenpin, a well-respected Halifax cooper of longstanding. By the time he was in his fifties, and his five children were grown, he had become an ICR employee, first as a cooper, but soon in a service rather than in an artisanal capacity, and he continued as such until his death in 1909.²¹ Similarly, David Jones, a native of Hammonds Plains in Halifax County, made the transition from cooper to porter, a change which, in his case, involved removal to Montreal with his Halifax-born wife to work for the CPR, before becoming a restaurant proprietor and hotel keeper.²² A career in business or the trades rather than transportation seems to have been preferred if it could be sustained; for older men, however, work with the railways — either temporarily or until retirement — could constitute a vital fall-back position when their accustomed occupations failed.

While seafaring and railroading provided relatively reliable jobs for black men and a major material basis for getting ahead during the transitional period from mid-19th-century pre-industrial city to early 20th-century wartime city, employment in transportation was not without its own uncertainties. For the seafarer the major problem remained the danger of the occupation. In the masonic records, nine seamen are listed as lost at sea or deceased in foreign ports while engaged on voyages; an equal number of seamen were noted as missing, perhaps for similar reasons. Marine disasters produced widows and orphans. Being a member of the most prominent mixed race family in Halifax was no protection against widowhood for Rachel C. Thomas, another daughter of James and Hannah Thomas, who married William J.S. Garner, a Bahamian seaman, in September

18 *Halifax City Directory*, 1904/5-1910; Halifax County Marriage Registers, Curl-Ford, 23 September 1903 (384), PANS.

19 *Halifax City Directory*, 1902/3-1915.

20 *Halifax City Directory*, 1875/6-1900/01.

21 1871 nominal census, ward 5, sect. 4, p. 35; 1881 nominal census, ward 5, sect. 2, SD1, p. 59; 1891 nominal census, ward 5g, p. 24; *Halifax City Directory*, 1880/1-1908/9; *Acadian Recorder*, 25 November 1909.

22 Halifax County Marriage Register, Jones-Francis, 26 October 1871 (556), PANS; *Montreal City Directory*, 1897/8, 1901/2, 1905/6, 1910/11.

1882 about the same time as he joined Union Lodge. He was lost at sea the following January, leaving Rachel a widow at the age of 23. Rachel Garner soon remarried, an option sometimes available to younger widows.²³ Sarah Bunyan also remarried within a couple of years of the death, in 1890, of her husband Charles, a Barbadian sailor. On being widowed again, she had to take up work as a charwoman in order to support her two sons by Charles. Her declared wages of \$150 in 1901 may have been scanty but they apparently enabled her to keep her teenaged boys in school.²⁴ Benjamin Reid's widow Mary found employment as a school teacher, probably in a private-venture black school.²⁵ Older widows, such as Adelaide Martin, had grown children on whom they could rely. Adelaide's marriage to freemason James was her second to a Caribbean seaman, and children from both marriages probably provided her with support after James' death in 1888, when she was 46. She also inherited property from her parents, which she assigned in her will exclusively to her maiden daughter "in consideration for her faithful and affectionate care for me in the late years of my life, when I was, and am now deprived of the use of my limbs through illness".²⁶

For the seaman's wife and family, a major problem was the uncertain support which characterized the seafaring life. The death of a husband might have been preferable to the long, unexplained absences which some wives endured. In such circumstances, women were left to guess when their grass widowhood became real widowhood. Eliza Joseph faced this dilemma. Married in 1883, after the birth of their child, to William T. Joseph, an Antiguan then preaching and teaching in Preston, Halifax County, Eliza was left to her own devices in 1885 when William went to sea. After two years he returned, but soon shipped out for Jamaica where he subsequently claimed to have taught school. He did not send any money to his wife and she eventually assumed he was dead. She remarried in 1890 and removed to the city, where William found her and her new husband. In 1894 he had her arraigned in county court on the criminal charge of bigamy. There Eliza found a relatively sympathetic judge who sentenced her to eight days in jail on the grounds that she "had been deserted by her husband and left without food or fuel with a young child, and did not marry until she believed after three years' absence that he was dead".²⁷

23 Halifax County Marriage Registers, Garner-Thomas, 27 September 1882 (350), PANS; Halifax City *Directory*, 1884/85; *Acadian Recorder*, 5 August 1893.

24 Halifax County Marriage Registers, Bunyan-Reed, 13 November 1884 (430), Robinson-Bunyan, 6 September 1892 (346), PANS; 1891 nominal census, ward 5g, p. 31; 1901 nominal census, ward 5, sect. 9, p. 12.

25 Halifax County Marriage Registers, Read [Reid]-Richardson, 20 December 1876 (473), PANS; Halifax City *Directory*, 1883/84; 1891 nominal census, ward 5f, p. 86.

26 Halifax County Marriage Registers, Martin-Roche [Roache] (née Grandison), 16 October 1867 (75), PANS; Will of Adelaide Martin (6107), Halifax County Probate Court Office; 1871 nominal census, ward 5, sect. 4, p. 25; 1881 nominal census, ward 5, sect. 2, SD1, p. 172; 1891 nominal census, ward 5g, p. 31.

27 Halifax County Marriage Registers, Joseph-Gross, 3 October 1883 (382), Tolliver-Gross, 7 January 1890 (21), PANS; *Acadian Recorder*, 30, 31 May, 7, 16, 22, 30 June, 5, 7 July 1894. Quotation from *Acadian Recorder*, 7 July 1894. Bigamy is discussed by James G. Snell, *In the Shadow of the*

Like the wives of other working-class men, those of black seamen and railwaymen were often required to supplement their husbands' income. Recall Elizabeth White with her liquor, boarding and retail variety establishments. Moreover, women who were periodically left to fend for themselves acquired a degree of self-assertion which took a number of forms, including Eliza Joseph's bigamy. The marriage of Annie E. Joseph and James S. Knight provides another instructive example, because Annie used the nascent legal aid services to secure assistance when her marriage failed, and relied on her mother for the support she needed as a separated wife and, subsequently, as a widow. In 1880, at the age of 28, Annie, a sailor's daughter, Baptist, and sometime teacher, married James, a Demeraran, Anglican mariner in his mid-thirties. The marriage produced two daughters in the early 1880s but was not otherwise a great success. In January 1885 James and Annie signed a legal separation in which they assumed responsibility for their own debts, a provision which suggests that Annie may have continued to teach. By December, however, she had lost her self-sufficiency and reported Knight to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty for refusing to support his family. Knight voluntarily made a small contribution to his estranged wife and, for the next three years, appears to have provided weekly child-support contributions until one or both of his children died. Annie sued him in court for \$40 in bills contracted during one child's last illness and, on her failure to win in 1888, she turned again to the SPC for redress. Given the legal ruling against her, she had to rely entirely on James's goodwill, which was demonstrated when he agreed to settle at least some of her debts. However, her demand for his continued financial assistance convinced the SPC agent that she was insane, an interesting male interpretation of an assertive woman.

We can only speculate about what happened thereafter between Annie and James Knight. There is strong circumstantial evidence that they were reconciled. Perhaps this was an outcome of an improvement in Knight's ability to provide support, as suggested by Jane Lewis' research on the reconciliation of legally separated British couples of a similar period. Between 1888 and 1891, Knight operated an oyster saloon/restaurant on Argyle Street. A son was born in 1888. By the time James moved his restaurant to Creighton Street in 1892, however, he was again living separately from Annie. Omission from the directories for the next few years suggests that he returned to sea. The entry for 1901-02 and the 1901 census identify him as a short-term ICR employee. He described his status in 1901 as divorced, while Annie claimed to be married. A restaurant on Duke Street, and another temporary reconciliation with Annie, followed. Before his death in Buenos Ayres in November or December 1906, however, Knight had returned to sea as steward of the Norwegian barque *Orion*. His brief obituary notice in the press in February 1907, when the news of his demise finally reached home, acknowledged a wife but no living children. In April, Annie claimed his modest estate as next of kin. It consisted of two adjacent properties, comprising a house and shop on Creighton Street, and another house on Creighton Street in which Annie lived. A rival claim, entered by a surviving brother in Demerara in 1908, did not dispute Annie's marital

right to her dwelling house.²⁸

Through her trials and tribulations in a troubled marriage, Annie appears to have relied on her mother, with whom she resided both before and after the deaths of her seafarer-father and her husband James. While kin support was undoubtedly vital in helping her to overcome her domestic problems of the 1880s, Annie continued to maintain a strong, independent presence in the black community by teaching Sunday school in Cornwallis Baptist church and participating in its welfare.²⁹ Although the Knights left no children, their contribution to the community was marked by James' prominence in the freemasons (he took his turn as master of Union Lodge in 1889-90), by Annie's high profile activities in one of the two black churches, and by their residence as property owners in the old north end, the major black neighbourhood of turn-of-the-century Halifax.

For James Knight, a man with a plurality of occupations, railway employment was brief and distinctly that of a casual nature, but for others caught up in the contraction of the merchant service and the competition for jobs at sea, employment by the Intercolonial Railway (as well as the Grand Trunk in central Canada) and the Canadian Pacific acted as an increasingly necessary alternative to seafaring. It is fitting, given the traditional emphasis in the Maritimes on the shift from sail to rail, that black seafarers often turned to the railways for employment. Railroading also enabled the erstwhile seamen to retain more frequent contact with their families in Halifax. Barbadian James McN. Daniels, one of the nine seamen known to have made this transition, was initiated into freemasonry as a mariner in 1887. First listed in the directories as a steward, he was, in 1891, according to the census, living with Gracie Johnson and their two small children and working as a cook in a restaurant, probably his own. At about the same time he sailed as steward on the *SS Beta*. He appears also to have begun his railway employment as a porter later in 1891. Daniels continued to work as a porter for many years, though when he married Gracie in 1894 he described himself as a sailmaker, his seafaring trade at some point perhaps, but certainly not his Halifax-based employment. Later, as an Intercolonial employee, he became prominent in the black community and was lodge master for the last three years of Union's existence.³⁰

For black porters and their families, the uncertainties of railroading lay more

28 Halifax County Marriage Registers, Knight-Joseph, 25 November 1880 (457), PANS; SPC papers, MG 20, vol. 516, No. 6, 15, 16, 21 December 1885; No. 8, 3, 12 September, 8 October, 10, 22, 23 November 1888, PANS; 1901 nominal census, ward 4, sect. 5, p. 9 and ward 5, sect. 9, p. 10; Halifax City *Directory*, 1881/2-1904/5; *Acadian Recorder*, 16 February 1907; Estate of James Solomon Knight (6416), Halifax County Probate Court Office; Jane Lewis, "The Working-Class Wife and Mother and State Intervention, 1870-1918", in Jane Lewis, ed., *Labour and Love: Women's Experience of Home and Family, 1850-1940* (Oxford, 1986), p. 108.

29 Halifax City *Directory*, 1883/4-1918; *Minutes* of the African Baptist Association of Nova Scotia, 24th Session, 1877, 26th Session, 1879, 27th Session, 1880, 39th Session, 1892, 42nd Session, 1895, 50th Session, 1903.

30 1891 nominal census, ward 5g, p. 19; 1901 nominal census, ward 5, sect. 8, p. 10; Halifax County Marriage Registers, Daniels-Johnson, 14 April 1894 (118), PANS; Halifax City *Directory*, 1887/8-1915.

with discriminatory labour practices than with accidents and absences. In March 1898, for example, a major controversy occurred over the employment policies of the Intercolonial Railway. The perceived redundancy of sleeping car porters on the Maritime express, operating between Halifax and Montreal during the slack season, resulted in the dismissal or demotion of seven black porters, six of whom, including James Daniels, were domiciled in Halifax. Their duties were added to those of the white conductors. Two other Halifax men, employed as assistant cooks, one of whom was Charles Pinheiro, were also affected. All eight Halifax men were freemasons. While the Tory press used the incident as part of a continuing attack on federal Liberal railway patronage, the exposé also revealed the tenuous features of black working-class life and the impact of the introduction of the colour line in a government institution. Porters Thomas Arthur, Joseph H. Berry, James McN. Daniels and Charles T. Dixon had been receiving wages of \$35 a month. Since they were regular employees of the ICR, they were offered positions in the dining car service as lunch counter operators at wages of \$20 plus board. Dixon soon threw up this inferior employment and successfully sought employment with the CPR, while the others continued to run with the ICR. As the opposition *Herald* asserted, “The cold facts are that six poor men have been summarily deprived of their means of livelihood, and that three others have been given temporary employment at one-half their former salaries”.³¹

The black community reacted to the discrimination with an “indignation” meeting at which they drew up a letter of protest to submit to Halifax’s members of parliament. In early April, the Reverend J. Francis Robinson, the African-American pastor of Cornwallis Street Baptist Church, preached a suitably political sermon on the dismissals, in which he equally deplored racism and capitalism. While he did not advocate radical protest, he endorsed the importance of both civil rights and trade unionism as protest strategies. If whites could use the vote and industrial action to oppose their oppressors, he argued, why not the blacks also:

For 250 years this race served in bondage, suffering the most poignant sensations of shame, immorality, demoralization and degradation. Its men have been victimized, and they are still victimized, proscribed against and imposed upon by the dominant race both in the United States and here in Canada. They are not only deprived of the privilege of their civil rights, but in many instances denied the human right to gain an honest livelihood for themselves and families....the colored voters number about 1,000 and that was sufficient number to give them the balance of power....[Moreover,] were the Negro porters and the race as strongly organized into labor protective unions, etc., like their white brothers, the I.C.R. would not have succeeded so well and peaceably in displacing their

31 This account is derived from the daily press: *Halifax Herald*, 25, 28, 29 March, 8, 11, 13, 14, 15 April 1898; *Morning Chronicle*, 25 March, 13 April 1898. Quotation from *Halifax Herald*, 29 March 1898.

colored labor and substituting white in their stead.³²

The railwaymen appear not to have shared his militancy. Although some of them were in the forefront of the struggle for racial equality, expressed most forcefully in Halifax in the school de-segregation campaign of the last quarter of the 19th century, they did not take up Robinson's challenge. They just wanted their jobs back. Most of them remained in or returned to ICR service within a couple of years. One of the side effects of the ICR dismissals was the acceleration of employment with the CPR, as Dixon's experience illustrates. Like Pullman, the CPR appears to have preferred blacks for the position of sleeping car porter.³³ The ICR, on the other hand, reduced its proportion of black porters in the early 20th century, at least temporarily. Moreover, a policy of not promoting black porters to conductors emerged, which was formally recognized in the ICR regulations of 1913. Perhaps to compensate, wages were improved in 1913 and rooms at lay-over points were provided for sleeping car crews who had previously had to stay cramped up in the cars.³⁴

As a result of the geographical mobility inherent in the work on vessels and on trains, the seafarers and porters who came to Halifax either became new residents, or, as sojourners, provided opportunities for forging links between the local population and black communities elsewhere. Union Lodge catered to both groups. By the first decade of the 20th century, Nova Scotia's grand lodge officials claimed that only half of Union's members were permanent residents of Halifax-Dartmouth.³⁵ This made it unique: no other masonic lodge in Nova Scotia functioned as a national, let alone international, fraternity. Although not all the sojourners and non-residents were transportation workers, they included British naval sailors on vessels stationed in Halifax; railway employees domiciled in Montreal (sometimes after a spell in Halifax), or, initially in Montreal and then in railway centres to the westward such as Toronto, Winnipeg and Vancouver, as well as in western American states; Caribbean and Bermudian seafarers employed in the steward's and engineer's departments on vessels in the West Indies trade; seafarers

32 *Halifax Herald*, 6 April 1898. On trade unionism among white trainmen, see Hugh Tuck, "W.C. Van Horne and the 'Foreign Emissaries': The CPR Trainmen's and Conductors' Strike of 1892", *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 6 (Autumn 1980), pp. 73-87, and (as J.H. Tuck), "The United Brotherhood of Railway Employees in Western Canada, 1898-1905", *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 11 (Spring 1983), pp. 63-88.

33 William H. Harris, *Keeping the Faith: A. Philip Randolph, Milton P. Webster, and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, 1925-37* (Urbana & Chicago, 1977), ch. 1.

34 Auditor General's Reports, Railways and Canals Department, Canada, *Sessional Papers*; *Acadian Recorder*, 25 January 1912, 12 August 1913; "Agreement Governing I.C.R. Employees.—Rules, Regulations, and Rates of Pay Governing Service of Certain Classes of Employees on the Intercolonial and Prince Edward Railways", *Labour Gazette*, 14 (October 1913), pp. 466-74. For the institutionalization of racial segregation in railway employment see Agnes Calliste, "The Struggle for Employment Equity by Blacks on American and Canadian Railroads", *Journal of Black Studies*, 25, 3 (January 1995), p. 307.

35 *Proceedings of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge, Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons of Nova Scotia*, 23rd Annual Communication, 1888, p. 38, and 51st Annual Communication, 1916, p. 86.

resident in Boston and San Francisco; and transportation workers who lived in regional towns, including Liverpool, Yarmouth, Moncton and Saint John.

Most such men remain shadowy figures except for those who met with an unusual fate. George J. Clay, a CPR sleeping car conductor, who joined the masons in 1887 as a non-resident member, lived with his brother in Montreal until he was murdered on the banks of the Lachine Canal in 1892. Another CPR employee resident in Montreal, James S. Barbee, a married man, was initiated in 1899, a year before he was crushed to death between two street cars. Charles Perry, a native of Weymouth, Nova Scotia, boarded in the old north end of Halifax while he worked on the Halifax-Montreal ICR run for several years in the 1890s, employment that terminated when he was confined to a mental asylum.³⁶

Because of the geographical mobility, employment at sea or on rail helped to protect resident blacks from upheavals in the local economy and from the lack of opportunity in occupations which depended on the small black clientele of Halifax city, the town of Dartmouth and Halifax county. But the demographic impact of the two activities of seafaring and railroading had diametrically opposite effects. Seafaring brought to the city marriageable men who frequently settled in Halifax. The trains, on the other hand, promoted the exodus of young Nova Scotians, especially to the railway centre of Montreal, where masonic links endured, and threatened to decapitate the vibrant black community which developed in Halifax's old north end in the last quarter of the 19th century.³⁷

For many of both the sailors and the porters initiation into Union Lodge coincided with marriage. Some of the bridegrooms were Halifax- or Nova Scotia-born, but a very significant proportion came from the British West Indies. At least 42 of the 132 freemasons with experience in transportation were born in the Caribbean and Bermuda, and, with a few exceptions, worked their shipboard passage to Halifax as young men. Those who became resident freemasons found that their West Indian origins did not exclude them from the indigenous African-Canadian community in Halifax and its environs. For a couple of generations before the War, the influx of men from the British West Indies was steady, socially acceptable to the host society, and contributed significantly, through marriage, to the formation of the black community. With few exceptions, they married locally born women. Some of the women, like Rose Bailey Dallas who married Charles Pinheiro and her step-sister Catherine who married Thomas Arthur, another

36 *Montreal Gazette*, 23, 25 April 1892, 13, 14 April 1900; *Acadian Recorder*, 6 February 1896. Barbee and his wife visited friends in Halifax in the summer of 1898. *Acadian Recorder*, 29 August 1898. Clay was described as a conductor by the *Gazette*. In various sources, including the Masonic membership lists, 10 railway men in this survey are identified as conductors, all with the CPR where a company designation is given. These references relate to the 1890s in seven cases and 1900, 1904 and 1910 in the other three. It may be that the terms conductor and porter were used interchangeably, or perhaps there was more flexibility in employment opportunities for blacks in the 19th century.

37 On seafaring see Judith Fingard, *Jack in Port: Sailortowns of Eastern Canada* (Toronto, 1982), and Eric W. Sager, *Seafaring Labour: The Merchant Marine of Atlantic Canada, 1890-1914* (Kingston & Montreal, 1989); on black railway workers in Montreal, see Robin W. Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History* (Montreal & New Haven, 1971), ch. 10.

Barbadian, were the daughters of an earlier generation of seafaring Caribbean immigrants who had married in the city.³⁸ The West Indian newcomers acquired some of the best educated and most talented wives that the community had to offer. Annie Elizabeth (Bessie) Howell, for example, was the daughter of a well-respected Barbadian whose seafaring occupation had brought him to Halifax where he married a sailor's daughter and worked as a hotel waiter. Bessie, a popular vocal performer, taught music before her marriage, in 1897, to Austin Price, a Roman Catholic from St. Lucia, who worked as a cook-steward on steamers operating out of Halifax until he became employed as an ICR porter in the early 1900s.³⁹ Bessie's sister, Laura, who also married a West Indian railway porter, was the first black woman to attend the city's Dalhousie College and command a regular teaching position in the public schools, albeit Maynard public school for black pupils.⁴⁰ Another teacher was Annie Joseph who married seafarer James Knight, after employment as the first teacher in Dartmouth's public school for blacks.⁴¹ Other wives were prominent in the widespread temperance movement. Virginia Lewis, Eliza Joseph's successor as spouse (probably common law) of William Joseph, was a "faithful worker in all church, Sunday School and temperance work", and the Right Worthy Lodge Deputy of Morning Glory Lodge of the Independent Order of Good Templars.⁴²

Hailing from many different locations in the Caribbean, particularly the eastern islands, these eligible marriage partners shared a common outlook which strengthened loyalty to and respect for British forms and institutions and reinforced integrationist aspirations. They were clearly drawn to the British forms of freemasonry available in Halifax and to other British fraternal orders like the IOGT and the Manchester Unity Oddfellows (IOOF). According to the marriage records, the family background of many of these immigrants was artisanal. Occupations can be identified for the fathers of 23 of the West Indians in this survey who married in Halifax. While a few were labourers and farmers, the rest included an Antigua drug dispenser, an Antigua merchant, a Bahamian tailor, a Barbadian

38 For Pinheiro-Dallas see above, note 9; Halifax County Marriage Registers, Arthur-Dallas, 13 October 1884 (377), PANS.

39 1891 nominal census, ward 4, p. 16; 1901 nominal census, ward 5, sect.5, p. 12; Halifax County Marriage Registers, Price-Howell, 27 October 1897 (423), PANS; Halifax City *Directory*, 1904/5-1914.

40 *Acadian Recorder*, 1 December 1899; Fingard, "Race and Respectability in Victorian Halifax", p. 188.

41 *Morning Chronicle*, 3 December 1874.

42 Virginia Lewis married Joseph R. Eily in 1894, the same year of the Eliza Joseph bigamy trial but the registers record no subsequent marriage between Lewis and Joseph who was, nevertheless, recorded as her husband in the 1901 census. Halifax County Marriage Registers, Eily-Lewis, 25 March 1894 (113), PANS; 1901 nominal census, ward 5, sect. 9, p. 9; *Acadian Recorder*, 21, 27 September 1907. There is no evidence to support Suzanne Morton's claim that the IOGT was an exclusively masculine form of institutional social life. Suzanne Morton, "Separate Spheres in a Separate World: African-Nova Scotian Women in Late-19th-Century Halifax County", in Janet Guildford and Suzanne Morton, eds., *Separate Spheres: Women's Worlds in the 19th-Century Maritimes* (Fredericton, 1994), p. 205.

cabinetmaker, a Barbadian clerk, a Barbadian goldsmith, a Barbadian mason, a Jamaican brassmith, a St. Kitts policeman, two carpenters (Antiguan and Barbadian) and two shoemakers (Antiguan and Barbadian).⁴³ Not surprisingly, mariners were also represented, numbering at least five and including a Barbadian master mariner and a Bermudian pilot. In most cases the occupations of their wives' fathers were a good deal more humble, especially given the preponderance of labourers', farmers', and mariners' daughters from Halifax County.⁴⁴

Another characteristic which distinguished the West Indian and Bermudian men from their wives and in-laws was their adherence to the ritualistic churches and previous experience of a racially integrated religious life. Those immigrants who married Nova Scotia born women included 15 adherents of the Church of England and two Catholics. Charles Pinheiro, one of the longest lived freemasons in this focal group, remained a member of St. Paul's Church of England, his only concession to local preferences being a Methodist marriage, and even that was by a white Methodist preacher, not the black pastor of Zion African Methodist Episcopal church. His daughter, on the other hand, had an Anglican marriage ceremony. In religion, as in other matters, however, the men's frequently peripatetic work habits and separation from their blood-relatives normally strengthened the influence of their wives within the family. The women's continued participation in the local black churches gradually all but extinguished the alternative affiliations represented by the West Indian husbands. With the exception of the Pinheiros, the maternal preferences definitively influenced the children, who were brought up either in the African Baptist or the African Methodist Episcopal church, both, to all intents and purposes, staffed by African-American clergymen whose major bond with the husbands was often as brothers in the masonic craft.

Absorption into the local community meant taking up residence in the old north end. Sixty-three of the 70 transportation workers in this study, both immigrants and longtime residents, whose Halifax place of residence can be identified for some portion of the 1870s-1915 period, lived in or moved to the old north end. Many owned property through the provision of mortgages obtained privately or from the Nova Scotia Building Society. The area was also home to most of the rest of the urban black population.⁴⁵

43 Halifax County Marriage Registers, Samuels-Skier, 14 September 1898 (305); Sasso-Hamilton, 31 May 1894 (202); Garner-Thomas, 27 September 1882 (350); Pinheiro-Dallas, 21 March 1882 (101); Daniels-Johnson, 14 April 1894 (118); Arthur-Dallas, 13 October 1884 (377); Bunyan-Reed, 13 November 1884 (430); James-Brown, 23 July 1866 (529); Thomas-Phillips, 4 August 1904 (313); Joseph-Gross, 3 October 1883 (382); Parris-Pearce, 19 September 1895 (345); Weeks-Griffith, 29 April 1913 (167), PANS; Fingard, "Peter Evander McKerrow", p. 656.

44 Halifax County Marriage Registers, Ward-Tyler, 9 May 1904 (159); Fubler-Earle, 14 October 1914 (615); Higgs-Parsons, 16 November 1880 (436); Roachford-Callender, 18 October 1911 (454); Walsh-Riley, 19 September 1883 (356), PANS. For Caribbean immigration of the pre-war period and later see Agnes Calliste, "Race, Gender and Canadian Immigration Policy: Blacks from the Caribbean, 1900-1932", *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 28, 4 (Winter 1993-94), pp. 134-5.

45 See, for example, property deeds relating to Charles F. Biddle and James McN. Daniels: Halifax County Deeds, Book 176 (1872), No. 535, Book 213 (1878), Nos. 1070, 1281, Book 234 (1883), No. 1218, Book 243 (1883), No. 1219, Book 298 (1893), No. 1159, Book 316 (1896), No. 1393,

From their residences in the heart of the old north end, the black freemasons, both transportation workers and others, launched their sons and brothers into the one railroad employment readily open to blacks in the early 20th century and encouraged their daughters to marry resident and non-resident railwaymen. Perhaps because uniforms were popular and wages were good, regular railway employment meant an enhanced social status in the black community and attracted young, well-educated men who might have had prospects in other areas were it not for racial discrimination. The evidence of dependence on the railway by the 1890s and 1900s is striking for prominent members of Halifax's black population. Peter Bushenpin's family provides a case in point. Peter and his wife Esther had five children: two daughters and three sons. The eldest, Ella, married a Jamaican-born railway porter in 1888 at the age of 22. Before Peter himself turned to the ICR for employment in his old age, his two elder sons, Theodore and Robert, entered the employment of the CPR and moved to Montreal. In less than 12 months in 1904-5, the family suffered devastating losses: the two porter-sons died of tuberculosis at the ages of 27 and 31 respectively, evidence perhaps of the reputedly appalling living conditions of black railwaymen in Montreal.⁴⁶

In 1909, Charles Pinheiro's daughter, Ethel, possibly his only child and certainly his eldest, married Lester E. Ince, also a Barbadian and an employee of the CPR and, more briefly, the ICR. Pinheiro's Ince grandsons became porters before and during the Second World War. Pinheiro's wartime death in Montreal suggests another instance of relocation of the younger generation, if we assume that he ended his days in the care of his family.⁴⁷ Two of Demus Skinner's sons joined their father in Union Lodge. Although the eldest, Joseph, started his life's work with his father as a truckman, he had become an ICR railway porter by 1899. His second son, Demus jr, was briefly an ICR porter in 1900-02. Another son, Andrew, followed his brothers into the railway but not into freemasonry.⁴⁸ Peter McKerrow's two elder sons turned to the railway when the family fur business closed. In the 1900s both James T. McKerrow and Joseph B. McKerrow, by then railway porters in central Canada, became non-resident members of Union Lodge after the death of their father in 1906.⁴⁹ Although William B. Thomas, McKerrow's brother-in-law and fellow furrier and many time master of Union Lodge, was not personally involved in transportation, his family too was drawn into the vortex of the railway. His eldest son, John B. Thomas, was working for the Grand Trunk Railway in Montreal in 1904. A couple of years later a younger son, William, who was living at home, was listed in the city directory as an ICR porter. In 1909 Thomas, like his

Book 318 (1896), No. 1394, Book 322 (1897), No. 757, PANS. For the location of the old north end, see above, p. 51.

46 Halifax County Marriage Registers, Findlay-Bushenpin, 18 September 1888 (366), PANS; Snow's Funeral Home Register 2, p. 8 (6 March 1904), p. 38 (6 February 1905), PANS; *Acadian Recorder*, 7 February 1905.

47 Halifax County Marriage Registers, Ince-Pinheiro, 22 June 1909 (228), PANS; Lester Ince appears in the Halifax *Directory* until 1920 and was listed from 1916-18 as being on army service. He was reported to be at the European front by spring 1915. He was not in a black contingent. *Atlantic Advocate*, 1, 1 (April 1915), p. 14. Ernest and William Ince appear in later volumes of the *Directory*, both in residences formerly or concurrently occupied by Pinheiro.

48 Halifax City *Directory*, 1894/5-1911.

49 *Maritime Baptist* (Saint John), 16 January 1907.

fellow freemason Bushenpin, lost his eldest son to tuberculosis after John had been with the railway for six years.⁵⁰ Clarence Harvey Johnston, a younger brother of the first black lawyer educated in Nova Scotia, joined Union Lodge as an office clerk in 1914, but was soon working as a station porter for the Intercolonial Railway.⁵¹ While railway employment became a desirable occupation for blacks, over the longer term so many relatively well-educated sons, sons-in-law and brothers in dead-end service jobs surely suggests a narrowing of job opportunities rather than an improvement in status.⁵²

Although only a fraction of black seamen and railwaymen became freemasons, masonic lodge membership, a dynamic source which provides a sense of time and place, serves to confirm the centrality of employment on rail and sea to the coloured community. The work provided a certain degree of protection for a marginalized population, but resulted in job specialization which was as ghettoizing as it was sustaining. Given the similarity of the jobs open to African-Canadians in vessels and railway cars, there was movement from one to the other, especially from the declining seaward sector to expanding railway employment. Both types of work attracted a disproportionately large number of West Indian men who intermarried with local women. By the 1890s, the centralization of the economy and the development of the Canadian West drew both established transportation workers and young men just entering the workforce to the railway centre of Montreal. As marriage partners, Nova Scotia women assumed a central economic and community role in the frequent and, in the case of seamen, prolonged absences of their husbands. By the early 20th century they were moving to Montreal with their husbands or bidding farewell to their children as the latter joined the railway-driven exodus.

50 *Acadian Recorder*, 11 October 1904, 31 May 1909; *Halifax City Directory*, 1907/8.

51 *Halifax City Directory*, 1914; Barry Cahill, "The 'Colored Barrister': The Short Life and Tragic Death of James Robinson Johnston, 1876-1915", *Dalhousie Law Journal*, 15, 2 (Fall 1992), pp. 336-79.

52 For memoirs of similar experiences of black porters see Michael Tutton, "Racism on the Railway", *Halifax Mail-Star*, 3 February 1995.