Africville: An Overview

Don Clairmont

Until the heavy immigration of West Indians in recent decades, Nova Scotia was considered to have been the major centre of the Black experience in Canada. Of all the Nova Scotian Black communities Africville has undoubtedly been the best known. Books, national and international magazine articles, television and radio programs, poetry and song - all have told the story of this small Black community which, in the late 1960s was bulldozed out of existence, but which spiritually and symbolically has resisted burial.

Africville was an exceptional community and a symbol for the struggle against racism and segregation in Nova Scotia. While it was viewed negatively by Whites and Blacks alike, the community was nevertheless a magnet for both groupings. In addition, Africville represented the essence of the Black experience in Nova Scotia -- in its church soul, in its struggle against racism and even in its location, off the beaten-path, on the fringe of the White neighbourhoods. Although it was seen as a haven for the dispossessed, for most of the residents it was a community where they could trace their kinship ties to the founding families over a hundred years earlier.

Africville was founded by descendants of Black refugees from the war of 1812-1814 who were settled in the rocky, barren farmlands of Hammonds Plains and Preston in Halifax County. Seeking better economic opportunities in the City of Halifax, they purchased the properties in

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

Number of Africville Families that received a Relocation Settlement

Forty Families

Fifty-one Individuals

Present Housing Conditions

Public Housing	Home Ownership	City-Owned Houses & Rents
31	17	51

Amount of Welfare Payments: 1963-1969

1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969
None	$1,764.04	$13,333.50	$24,186.49	$61,591.44	$21,862.03	$44,911.89

Debts as of November, 1968. Data from a survey by the Social Planning Department, Halifax, City Hall

HOMEOWNERS	$24,064 * $136,000 =	$160,064
RENTALS		48,085
Public Housing		9,771
Total		$217,920

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

the late 1840s. While it was within the City boundaries, Africville was separated from the mainstream of the City by being a Black community in a racist society, as well as by its location. It was always on its own, and did not receive the services from the City government that other communities received.

The purchase of about six acres of land each by William Brown Sr. and William Arnold in the late 1840s marked the beginnings of Africville. The contours of the settlement changed modestly over the years, but at the time of relocation, Africvilleans still owned a total of about twelve acres of land in the area. The community grew as other families such as the Dixons, the Carverys and the Byers soon followed the Browns and the Arnolds. The census of 1851 reported eighty Black persons living in the Africville area. At the time of relocation in 1964 the population was 400.

Throughout its first half-century Africville was quite rural in character. Goats, chickens and horses were commonplace, and fishing in the Bedford Basin was as much a part of their ~~life~~ lives as paid employment. The population remained small as many Africville residents, like other Nova Scotians, migrated to the more prosperous "Boston States" in the last third of the nineteenth century.

In those early days, life in Africville was hard. Economically the first and second generation residents were not prosperous. Jobs were scarce and racism helped channel Blacks into the low-paying jobs. Few residents attained more than a rudimentary education in their school.

Nevertheless, the difference between Africville and other communities, including others in the City of Halifax, was not

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

overwhelming. Africville was clearly a viable community with some fine houses, plenty of space, some small-scale entrepreneurs and a strong community spirit rooted in kinship ties.

In 1883, after years of seeking financial aid, the community built a school. At that time, communities were responsible for funding their own schools, and racism often excluded "coloured children" from school attendance. The school served Africville until 1953, at which time children were transferred to integrated schools elsewhere in the City and the Africville school was closed.

Interviewed in the 1960s, virtually all the very elderly Africvilleans reminisced happily about their early years. They related stories of their parents riding on horseback through the "woods" around Africville; they talked of skating on the Bedford Basin and of riding the trains into the North Street Station. Others, referring to these early years as good years, recalled the greater independence of the residents and the greater well-being of the community in contrast to their experience in the later period. One respondent pointed out that even without City help the homes in the community were clean and well-kept.

Evidence from census data indicates that Africvilleans performed a wide variety of work between the early settlement days and the First World War. The land was not suitable for farming, but several families kept a few pigs, as well as vegetable gardens. Most Africville men were employed over the years in general labour and low-paid service work. In addition to truckmen who hauled away household waste, there were stonemasons and barrel-makers, longtime occupational specializations of

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

Blacks in Halifax County.

Most of the people who reported themselves as seamen had worked the ships travelling between Halifax and the West Indies, and they had settled down in Africville. Within the immediate area some short-term stevedoring work, especially loading or unloading coal, was available as was heavy, dirty work toting bags of fertilizer in a nearby bone-meal plant.

Africville women worked ~~to~~ what is now often called the "double day." A number were employed sewing bags in the bone-meal plant but most were employed as servants and washerwomen. Some of the elderly Africville women ~~in 1968~~ spoke of cleaning "in most houses in Richmond [north Halifax] before the explosion [1917]", following the tradition of their own mothers. Government institutions hired Africville women to cook and clean and several were employed in the hospital and the prison overlooking the community.

A church congregation was formally established in 1849. When it joined with other Black baptist congregations to form the African Baptist Association in 1854 at Granville Mountain, its pastor was the Association's founder, the great Richard Preston. Preston was also the pastor of several other congregations at that time. Although Africville never had a resident pastor, the church was always the fundamental institution in the community, and the deacons who directed the church represented Africville to outside authorities.

Social life in the first fifty years revolved around the church, with special activities that brought together both the church-going and

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

the other members of the community. Baptisms, weddings and funerals held in the church fostered a sense of community. Especially significant in this regard was the Sunrise Service on Easter Sunday, a colourful occasion like other community festivities for which Africville was well known; one resident described the service as follows:

> "They [church members led by the deacons] went into the church singing spirituals, around four or five o'clock in the morning when the sun came up, and did not come out till three p.m. ... People, including Whites, used to come from miles around to the sunsrise service, sometimes from Truro and New Glasgow and usually from Preston and Hammonds Plains".

Also, through the church Africvilleans were linked to the other Black communities in Halifax County and to White congregations in the City. Africville frequently was the site selected for the picnic activities of other Black church organizations. Bedford Basin was an ideal baptismal font and throughout the years, numerous members of the African Baptist Association were baptised by being led into the waters at Africville. In 1874, the Reverend J. Thomas conducted one of the largest baptisms on record in the Halifax area, with forty-six candidates; the ceremony it was reported, "attracted a large concourse of persons from the City."

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

The Name 'Africville'

In its early years the community was named after the road around which it grew, namely Campbell Road. "Africville" became current around the turn of the century, though this name does appear as early as the 1860s in several petitions to government and in some land deeds. In the nineteenth century both "African" and "Men of Colour" were common descriptive terms. "African village" was perhaps the equivalent of the contemporary expression "Black community". Railroad documents around 1860 referring to business dealings in the area used the phrase "African Village"; the first reference to the settlement as Africville in the minutes of Halifax City Council was in 1867.

Interviewed at the time of relocation Africvilleans had mixed feelings about the name. There was a consensus that it had been imposed by White Haligonians "because our ancestors came from Africa". At the same time there was ambivalence towards the name since it highlighted racial differences in a racist society. One elderly resident, very conscious of her people's ancestry in American slavery, was scornful of the African designation; "It wasn't Africville out there. None of the people came from Africa. You better believe it. It was part of Richmond [northern Halifax], just the part where the coloured folks lived." Some other elderly residents were more favourably disposed to the appellation, Africville, and hostile to "meddlers" who would have it otherwise.

When the Baptist church was established in the community it was designated the Campbell Road congregation. In 1885 its name was changed to Africville but in 1893 church members requested of the African

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

Baptist Association a reversion to the original name. It was later changed to the Seaview African United Baptist Church. Notwithstanding that, by the twentieth century the name "Africville" was firmly in place. In the years ahead mail was sent to persons in "Africville"; the local, segregated school bore the name, as did local athletic teams and other voluntary associations.

The Developing Community

"It was lovely,lovely. They talk about Peggy's Cove but I am going to tell you, it was the most beautiful sight you could want to see -Africville. You could get on à hill and look over Bedford Basin in the fall of the year, say from October to around December, and there was a sight to see, especially at twilight when the sun is sinking over the hills at Bedford...And another thing, during the war....when the convoys were in the Basin, there was another beautiful sight. It was one of the most beautiful spots I've been in, in Nova Scotia.

As Africville was developing so too was the rest of the City and the idyllic rural setting was eventually shattered by the roaring of trains and the buzzing of industries. The population of Halifax more than doubled between 1851 and 1915, and the City permitted industrial growth along the shores of the Peninsula to encroach on the residential area of Africville. Just several hundred feet from the settlement a bone-meal plant manufacturing fertilizer was constructed. A cotton factory, rolling mill/nail factory, slaughterhouse and port facility for handling coal completed the the first ring of encirclement; beyond

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

this ring were other factories and foundries.

When laying railroad tracks straight through the community in the 1850s, and subsequently expanding them twice before the First World War, the railway expropriated land from Africville residents and moved their houses without regard for the community. It was recognized by the Halifax Civic Planning Commission that these developments produced "blight and decay spreading over large areas, thereby resulting in serious reduction of residential values," yet they had not prevented this deterioration of the community.

Moreover, racism and the residents' lack of economic or political influence made the area a choice site for City service facilities not wanted elsewhere. The City closed sewage disposal pits in the south-end of Halifax under citizens' pressure and relocated them on the edge of the community in 1858. They had the Infectious Diseases Hospital built on the hill overlooking Africville in the 1870s, followed by the Trachoma Hospital in 1903. Such developments continued into the twentieth century with, for example, a stone-crushing plant and an abattoir on the edges of the settlement. A culmination was reached in the mid-1950s when the City moved the large open City dump, labelled a health menace by City council and resisted by residents of other areas, to a site just 350 feet from the westernmost group of Africville homes.

Halifax City Council minutes clearly indicate that in addition to using this area for facilities not tolerated in other neighbourhoods, the eventual industrial use of Africville lands was planned. As Halifax was experiencing industrial expansion, there were several resolutions adopted by Council to expropriate the Africville lands. While for one

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

reason or another these resolutions were not acted upon, the City's policy was spelled out in the following, a response to an interested business in 1915:

"The Africville portion of Campbell Road will always be an industrial district and it is desirable that industrial operations should be assisted in any way that is not prejudiced to the interests of the public; in fact, we may be obliged in the future to consider the interests of industry first."

In 1916, upon request of Africville residents, City Council allowed the use of City-owned property as the site for a new church in the community. A short-term lease was granted with the City engineer's recommendation as follows:

"It is not desirable that the City should part with any of its property in Africville for any such purpose, as it is probable that in the near future, all property in this district will be required for industrial purposes and it will be abandoned as a residential district."

Throughout this early period as Africville's residential value was being run down, there was little evidence in official records of any concern about this devaluation nor about what might happen to Africville residents had the land they occupied been in fact expropriated, nor what their wishes may have been. In fact there is no record of any concern for the health and safety of the Africville residents in relation to the hazards posed by these developments. One Africville resident summed up the situation saying, "They said the people in Africville encroached on the government but I would say the government encroached on the people."

The lives of Africville residents, in fact, deteriorated because of the encroaching industrial development. Complaints and petitions, whether for police services, building permits, or garbage pickup, fell

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

Claremont | Nov 5th 10

on deaf ears, and over time [illegible] ect only disinterest and disregard for their requests by the City.

This was clearly illustrated in the City's treatment of a important Africville petition in 1919. Partly as a consequence of developments relating to the First World War and partly as a natural unfolding of the City's negative attitudes and practices, bootlegging and raucous living had became a serious problem for the community. Many residents collaborated in preparing the following a petition to City Council in June 1919:

"We, the undersigned ratepayers, do hereby make application for better police protection at Africville. We base our application on the following grounds; that a police officer seldom or never visits this district, except for a warrant or subpoena; the conditions that now prevail here are worse that at any time before; that these lamentable conditions tend to turn the majority away from the good teaching which they have received; that there is now an utter disregard of the Lord's Day by many residents; that there are many persons, strangers in our midst, living openly in a state of debauchery, which must corrupt the minds of youth for we are more or less subject to our environment; that there is nightly confusion, carousel and dissipation which disturb the peaceful night; that these carousels have been the centres for spreading infection throughout the village; that we believe, if this disgraceful state of affairs continues there will be grave crime or crimes committed.

Our earnest desire is that your Honourable Body, in this period of reconstruction, carefully consider our application so that the omission of the past may be rectified and by your assistance the evil influence now at work may be greatly reduced; then shall we be better able to train the young in the way of good citizenship and place the village on a better plane of Social Welfare."

Like other Africville petitions and protests, this one received short shrift from City officials. While other Haligonians enjoyed police protection, the petitioners were advised that "the City department had no spare men to send such a distance", that the residents should "form their own police department and anyone they

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

appoint to act as a policeman, the Mayor would swear in as a Special Constable" and that "in the event of any serious trouble being reported the Chief is always in a position to send a squad to this district".

Reconstructing the history of Africville through records and interviews one could almost sense the drop in community spirit and morale that followed upon this blatant acknowledgement of powerlessness. The community had tried once again to put their community on equal footing with the rest of the City, but the officials rejected their request.

Vulnerable to Change

Subsequent to the First World War, Africville became increasingly vulnerable to relocation plans. Most residents continued to press for changes and coped as best they could. Frustrated, some ambitious and regularly-employed residents moved out of the community to obtain modern services and other opportunities, or they encouraged their children to do so. Disadvantaged and problem-laden persons, Black and White, some displaced by developments in the City centre, moved in, usually as renters on Africville land and sometimes occupying City property. The growth of population and the informality of property boundaries combined with this modest influx of renters, created an image of disorganization. The influence of church leaders also began to wane as it was clear that they could not bring about any progressive action by the City. Africville's social problems grew and it acquired a bad reputation among both Blacks and Whites in the Halifax area.

Interviewed around 1970, several non-Africville Black Haligonians recalled that when younger, they were warned by their parents against

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

ever going to Africville. Blacks in the neighbouring communities expressed similar negative views.

Increasingly then Africville became stereotyped as a slum, a hazardous place, a community of "drifters." It was an incorrect view that weighed heavily on the many sixth-generation residents with keen memories of past struggles and past glories (Africville for example produced a world champion boxer, George Dixon, an ordained minister, Edward Dixon, and a nationally recognized singer, Portia White, taught in its school). And it belied what one writer has aptly called the true story of the community, namely "the story of many persons who have managed to keep their pride despite circumstances that would have ground many of us under". In addition, of course, it disregarded the many well-kept homes and the community-spirited people striving to keep the flame alive, no matter what the odds.

Throughout this period, from the end of the First World War to the time of relocation, the City's attitude towards Africville did not change. The emphasis was on eliminating the community rather than helping it. One elderly relocatee noted in 1968: "Ever since I was old enough to understand, they [City officials] were talking about relocation. They talked about it so much that we thought it would never happen."

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

happen."

The gap between services and facilities available in Africville and those provided elsewhere in the City widened. While the rest of Halifax evolved into an attractive, modern urban site, the City failed to pave the roads in Africville. The City did not provide garbage and snowplow service, water and sewerage facilities, or building-code enforcement. City officials used as an explanation the fact that the City had zoned this residential community for industrial development. Failure to make improvements and to provide services went on even in the face of known health hazards. For example the makeshift wells in Africville ran dry in the summer and were a constant threat to health. In 1954 the City Manager noted:

"The water supply in Africville is from shallow wells which show more contamination than is desirable. The proximity of privies to these wells is particularly bad with the rocky soil conditions. The City of Halifax has been fortunate that no serious health conditions have resulted from this situation."

In the aftermath of a major fire in 1947, the future of Africville was publicly debated. City staff and aldermen for the most part reiterated the view that rather than extending water and sewerage to Africville, "the property...be cleared in case some industry might want to go there". For once Africville residents were consulted on the matter. They expressed a strong desire to remain in the area and to work with the City in developing the community. Their views were

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

ignored.

In 1957 a fire in Africville claimed the lives of three children. The absence of a water main and hydrants in Africville made the community very vulnerable and also prevented residents' obtaining insurance coverage. In the early 1960s, after a fire had destroyed one of the best homes in the community, the deputy fire chief said "the location is inaccessible and the lack of hydrants added to our difficulty." The victim whose home was not insured was quoted as saying:

"We have all tried up here to get a proper water supply. Two houses have burned in the last five years. But it's hopeless; they just won't do anything for us."

A strong sense of alienation and powerlessness was left in the community. Clearly, the City was unwilling to provide services. Yet protests and petitions continued and sometimes there were small victories.

In the late thirties, for example, Africville residents successfully petitioned for their own postal suboffice (prior to this they had to walk seven miles to mail letters), for a few street lights and for street numbers. But the sense that the community would never be properly developed as a fully serviced urban site caused potential strong leaders to migrate -especially in the period immediately

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

following the Second World War. One local Black authority on Africville observed:

> "There seemed to be in the community the feeling that nothing could happen anyway, a sort of pessimistic,not cynical, but a lack of confidence and a feeling that nothing is going to happen and if it does, so what? There is nothing we can do about it. They tried in so many ways to get little improvements. They tried for ordinary services...and they failed....you see, the community had reached a stage where it became a sort of haven, a refuge for the people who couldn't keep their heads above the water in the City, [sic] not the stable and solid families that settled the community initially. This brought out a change in the community and in the community spirit".

As might be expected, there were corresponding changes in the vitality of the church. Baptisms became less frequent and by 1960 only a handful of the baptized residents were under forty years of age. Regular church attendance declined, rarely exceeding thirty. In the years just before relocation, the church was rarely opened except for church services, limited to one each Sunday. A minister who served Africville during the 1950s observed that "the church was the only organization [the Africville residents] had and then, the church only had a few people who were interested."

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

The church elders became less influential as both they and others acknowledged powerlessness; as one deacon observed in 1968: "The government is a powerful machine to fight against. They will use their power to defeat you. That is why I was one of the first families to move from Africville [at the time of relocation]."

Despite the racism, the stigmatization, the City neglect, the loss of much leadership potential through out-migration and the decline of the church's practical leadership, Africville continued to be a viable and valued community. It was still a place where everyone knew one another, and where most people were related by kinship to one another and to the original settlers. As noted, when consulted by City officials in 1948, the residents indicated their desire to stay and develop the community with some governmental assistance. And in the 1950s, when for a while building permits were being issued, fifteen residents (of the sixteen who applied) obtained permits to repair their dwellings or erect new structures.

Like any genuine community, Africville was clearly always being rejuvenated by new generations and new leaders even as it was being battered by formidable forces. Accommodations had to be made but the struggle for community and well-being was always enjoined and perhaps the successes were especially meaningful given the adversity faced.

The church continued to have profound symbolic importance for Africvilleans. It was the soul, the historical continuity,

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

of community, the tangible evidence of value but it was not an effective vehicle for practical social change. Perhaps the Africvilleans' profound struggle was reflected in the often moving church services for which the Africville congregation was well known. One local Black minister who served several churches in the area commented in an interview in 1968:

"If you know anything about soul music today...they had it in Africville. I always made a point when I really wanted to put some life in my church, I brought them in. Whenever I announced that the Africville group would be there, the church would be filled."

(sidebar) b 4.3.

Africville's population groupings

There were four recognized population groupings in Africville, defined by their property and housing claims, depth of their kinship ties and their involvement in the church.

The largest group of adults were residents with direct kinship links dating to the early years of the community who owned their land their homes; many were active in the church.

The second group of home owners were those Black adults who had married into the community. Typically, they had regular employment and were comparatively well-off. Some participated prominently in church-related activities and were community leaders. They were the most vocal group when it came to relocation and were among the first group to be negotiated

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

of community, the tangible evidence of value but it was not an effective vehicle for practical social change. Perhaps the Africvilleans' profound struggle was reflected in the often moving church services for which the Africville congregation was well known. One local Black minister who served several churches in the area commented in an interview in 1968:

> "If you know anything about soul music today...they had it in Africville. I always made a point when I really wanted to put some life in my church, I brought them in. Whenever I announced that the Africville group would be there, the church would be filled."

(sidebar) b 4.3.

Africville's population groupings

There were four recognized population groupings in Africville, defined by their property and housing claims, depth of their kinship ties and their involvement in the church.

The largest group of adults were residents with direct kinship links dating to the early years of the community who owned their land their homes; many were active in the church.

The second group of home owners were those Black adults who had married into the community. Typically, they had regular employment and were comparatively well-off. Some participated prominently in church-related activities and were community leaders. They were the most vocal group when it came to relocation and were among the first group to be negotiated

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

with.

These two groups, roughly two-thirds of the Africville population, lived in the main settlement area.

There were a small number of families who lived in houses built on land they did not own, and some of these residents lived there for brief periods only. This group made up roughly 5 percent of the Africville population. It included both Whites and Blacks. Virtually all adults, these poeple usually had kinship ties in the community. They inhabited the worst housing in Africville, in an area known as "round the bend."

The fourth group of residents, perhaps 25 percent of the adult population, lived in the area called "Big Town," off to the right [south?] of the main settlement. These people were Blacks who had mostly moved into the Africville area primarily in the 1930s and 1940s. They were thought to be living on land that did not belong to them, although some "Big Town" residents did own their land. To a large extent they were irregularly employed and uninvolved in church activities. The "Big Town" area had a reputation within and outside the community for its raucous lifestyle. To the extent that social control officials - police, health and welfare officials and the like - had dealings in Africville it was mostly with the residents of "Big Town."

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

RELOCATION OF AFRICVILLE

The people of Africville

By the middle of this century Africville had become a ~~only a~~ moderately diversified community. The large majority of residents were Black with deep roots in the community. Including children, seventy-five percent of all Africville inhabitants in 1959 had lived in there all their lives and about the same percentage could trace kinship ties back to the founding families a hundred years earlier. ~~Among those~~ residents born and raised in Africville, ~~the large majority (about eighty percent) had never lived anywhere else~~. About twenty-five percent had lived in Africville for less than nine years. Also within a five-year period, without any change in the overall population total, there had been a gross migration of eleven families and eight boarders.

On The Eve of Relocation

In 1959 the Institute of Public Affairs, Dalhousie University, conducted a survey of socio-economic conditions among Blacks in Halifax. Data from this survey provide a snapshot of Africville just prior to relocation. Fully fifty percent of the 394 residents counted were under fifteen years of age, roughly twice the percentage for Halifax as a whole.

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

Only a third of Africville's labour force had regular employment and fewer still had full-time work. Roughly seventy percent of the employed males and females worked as domestics/cleaners or labourers/stevedores. Tradesmen, porters, and clerical workers were few in numbers. About one-fifth of the eighty Africville households had an earned income in 1958 of more than $3000. One person reported an individual 1958 income of more than $4000, while 47% of the Africville workforce reported a 1958 earned income of less than $1000, compared with less than five percent at that level of income in Halifax as a whole.

Among the Africville residents who were out of school, more than forty percent had attained grade 6 or less and four males and one female had reached grade 10. More than sixty percent of the Africville school children were behind in their educational achievement (i.e., older than they should have been for the grade they were in) and only one of the school children at that time was beyond grade seven.

The survey asked household heads about their views on living in the community. Roughly sixty-five percent of the respondents reported their liking for living in Africville and their reluctance to move. About one quarter both disliked living there and said that they would be willing movers. Most of these were household heads who had married into the community and who were most likely to be regularly employed and earn over $3000. These people were also among the most vocal members in

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

the community.

However disadvantaged Africville residents may have been in terms of jobs, income, education and amenities, the community provided much of value for its members. For a wide variety of reasons most residents wanted to stay there and develop the community. Africville residents often used mid-city Blacks as their reference standard on housing and general life style, and they noted that Africville "was better than in the City, better than some of those slums downtown"; they added that the cost of accommodation also was substantially less in Africville. While the church was still the only community organization, Africville residents enjoyed a rich, informal and neighbourly life. And despite the poor conditions, most adults expressed optimism that their children would somehow have a better life without needing to relocate. In fact according to the 1959 survey, the number one concern of household heads was not housing or jobs but the quality of education that the children were receiving.

In sum, on all the socio-economic indicators noted above, namely size of dependent population, work, income and education, the Africville averages were less favourable than those of Blacks and Whites elsewhere in the City. And of course the lack of City services, the difficulty of securing any kind of fire insurance and City Hall's indifference to zoning, building and other specifications meant that housing varied in quality and land ownership was often not clear. Personal pride

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

and community tradition accounted for the fact that so many homes were presentable, especially on the inside. The best housing was in the main settlement area where all the homes had electricity and about fifteen had stone or cement foundations. Nineteen properties were assessed at more than $1000 in 1962.

In 1964 Reverend W.P. Oliver, the distinguished Black leader in Nova Scotia and former pastor to Africville, writing as regional representative of the Adult Education Division of the Nova Scotia Department of Education, noted the substandard level of City services to the area: "The community presents a picture of neglect, poor roads, primitive and unsanitary wells and outside privies."

City officials tried to blame residents rather than accept responsibility for the substandard services. They said that the costs of existing City services (educational and welfare services) to Africville far exceeded the taxes levied and that much tax was in arrears. They were also quick to cite appraisal reports which contended in 1961 that "only thirteen deeds could be documented" and "there were no more than two lots as marketable commodity (sic) with legal title in Africville." Yet the City did not apply the test of tax revenues compared to spending to other areas. The failure of the City to see its own role in Africville's lower standards is another illustration of racism towards the community.

When the relocation push came from City officials in the early 1960s, Africville residents were economically hard-

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

pressed and poorly organized. The social structure of the community was complex. Sixth-generation residents rubbed shoulders with White transients. A strong church tradition co-existed with a widespread and largely false reputation of raucous living.

Essentially Africville was a small Black community, with a majority of its population interrelated through kinship ties, and possessing an exceptional sense of historical continuity. But the community lacked the political power and influence. Outsiders, Black and White alike, could not see Africville as viable and its continued existence as desirable.

Moving People: Relocation and Urban Renewal in the 1950s/60s

In the 1950s and 1960s, urban renewal and public housing construction became commonplace in cities throughout Canada and the United States. In Canada, under the partnership funding of federal, provincial and municipal governments, programs were designed to demolish and rebuild downtown areas. The people displaced by these plans were usually of low socio-economic status, often ethnic minorities. Their homes, often labelled "slums" were destroyed and the area developed for business or institutional purposes. The displaced persons were offered rent-subsidized, public housing owned and managed by a municipal housing commission, although many chose to go elsewhere.

The people promoting urban renewal emphasized economic

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

revitalization, beautification, the elimination of slums and the provision of more adequate housing for the disadvantaged. Such programs were part of a widespread pattern of relocation and mobility carried out by government during this period. Large relocations took place in Newfoundland and other rural areas.

In urban renewal the demolition of housing in one area and the relocation of its residents was justified on the grounds that both the city and the residents would benefit. Beautification and civic pride, attracting industry and increased revenue from taxes were among the expected civic benefits. The residents who were directly affected would presumably receive better housing -- usually public housing.

Nevertheless, the formulation and implementation of urban renewal was controlled by politicians and planners. They assumed that the outcome would benefit the relocated residents even when the people affected disagreed and said so. Often the organizing group were in close collaboration with developers.

In the situations where the residents' needs were considered, the assumption was that life-style and life opportunities of the disadvantaged could be improved by being displaced and moved to new, usually higher-quality housing. By combining programs of educational upgrading, job-skills training and counselling with dramatic change in housing, urban renewal could solve poverty and other social problems.

In Canada, major pioneering urban renewal projects in

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

Toronto in the mid-1950s and early 1960s received positive evaluations by the original planners. One of these early activists was Albert Rose, professor of social work at the University of Toronto, who was later brought to Africville.

The large public housing areas that were constructed for relocatees (e.g. Regent Park, Alexandra Park) were deemed by researchers to represent improved housing. Studies indicated that people relocated in public housing fared better and were more satisfied than those who moved into private housing, though this comparison said more about the substandard condition of the private housing people moved into than it did about the quality of public housing.

Large rent-subsidized public housing complexes did provide better housing people could afford on the private market. Apart from housing, urban renewal in Canada received positive assessments since, unlike much American experience, it did not appear to destroy social networks and generate profound social uprooting. For example, persons displaced by urban renewal in Toronto and in Winnipeg tended to maintain their social networks and in any event they had an average length of residence in their of area of less than 10 years.

Halifax and the "Africville Problem"

As noted in Chapter 2, the relocation of Africville people and the use of the land for industrial or services purposes had been favoured by the City for many decades. Indeed, several

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

minor relocations had occurred over the years to accommodate railway expansion and many policy statements had been advanced in City Council suggesting wholesale relocation might be imminent. Two events in particular translated this longstanding intent into reality, namely the Stephenson Report of 1957 and the creation of the City's Department of Development in 1961. These events in turn relate back to the modernization and growth of Halifax and the launching of widespread urban renewal in Canada.

Stimulated by the Second World War, Halifax -- and Canada generally -- experienced significant population and economic growth in the decade, 1945-55. By 1956, its population had reached 93,000, a fourfold increase since 1856 and within the same City boundaries. The surrounding metropolitan area was also growing rapidly, gaining an additional 60,000 people between the end of the war and 1956. Industrial development, especially on the waterfront was steadily advancing, and the peninsula of Halifax was clearly being "pushed to its limits." Also, as in other Canadian cities at this time, Council was setting up committees to examine housing problems and relate to new urban renewal programs launched by the two senior levels of government.

The Halifax branch of the Community Planning Association of Canada, an influential voluntary organization of planners, politicians and high status community activists, pressed for housing reform and modernization. They encouraged the City to

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

hire a noted city planner, Gordon Stephenson, Professor of Town and Regional Planning, University of Toronto, to investigate housing conditions and needs and to recommend redevelopment policies for Halifax.

[The Stephenson Report]

Stephenson recommended urban renewal and redevelopment schemes for several areas of Halifax, including Africville. In his report he commented on Africville as follows:

"There is a little frequented part of the City, overlooking Bedford Basin, which presents an unusual problem for any community to face. In what may be described as an encampment, or shack town, there live some seventy negro families.... The citizens of Africville live a life apart. On a sunny day, the small children roam at will in a spacious area and swim in what amounts to their private lagoon. In winter, life is far from idyllic. In terms of the physical condition of buildings and sanitation, the story is deplorable. Shallow wells and cesspools, in close proximity, are scattered about the slopes between the shacks.

There are only two things to be said. The families will have to be rehoused in the near future. The land which they now occupy will be required for the future development of the City."

The report conveyed a tone and outlook on Africville that was commonplace among the experts, professionals and even activists who became involved in determining the community's future. It avoided the question of the City's responsiblity in the state of the community. Africville was identified more as a problem than an opportunity, and its people were objects of pity not justice. Rightly indignant about external conditions in the community, the outsiders had little knowledge of the history of community and its past struggles, and they put very

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

little value on the idea of community itself.

In identifying the value of the land for industrial and harbour development, the Stephenson report echoed the City's past deliberations and stimulated further activity by City staff in planning for expropriation, plans that were already afoot. In 1954 a report was approved by Council to expropriate the Africville property for industrial purposes and solve "the long-standing problem of Africville" by moving the community en masse to a properly serviced and laid-out site on City-owned property about two miles away; the report was never acted upon.

In 1957 the City did expropriate some property owned by an Africville resident for a proposed Industrial Mile, a land assembly on the basin shore. While this project failed to materialize, the concept was incorporated in the City's 1962 North Shore Development Plan which called for "a limited access expressway to pass through the Africville district which is slated for removal starting in the spring"; this plan too was never implemented as such.

Although little concrete action took place with respect to these redevelopment proposals, the heightened activity and the great number of reports and council motions were clear signals of the City's eagerness to use the land for economic growth. At the same time, momentum was building on the housing front too, as a result of the Stephenson Report. In 1961, Council's Housing Policy Review Committee recommended clearance of

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

existing housing in Africville.

With the establishment of a Development Department in the same year to coordinate all phases of the development and redevelopment of the City, including an urban renewal program, the die was cast -- "to examine and recommend a solution to the Africville problem" was now a key priority for the Department. City staff reports were prepared arguing that, although Africvilleans were reluctant to relocate, complete relocation on an individual household basis was the only realistic way.

Large scale programs had been implemented in the north and central areas of the City, close to Africville. A large public housing complex, Mulgrave Park, had been built to house the many low-income Black and White families relocated by these developments and more public housing was being planned. In terms of either the number of people or the number of homes affected by the overall urban renewal at this time, Africville was to account for less than 10% of the City's relocation up to 1965.

Overall, the City's approach was a program where the priority was on urban economics and beautification, not the needs of the residents.

In the Development Department's report released in July, 1962 recommending the elimination of Africville, it was estimated that the cost of acquisition and clearance of Africville property would range between $40,000 and $70,000. Alternative housing would be offered in unsegregated,

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

subsidized rental public housing. Residents without legal title to the land where their house stood would receive a payment of $500 as compensation for giving up their home to the City. Residents with proof of land ownership -- and it was felt this would be a small number -- could claim compensation through the courts or in negotiation with the City.

There was nothing about the historical injustices, nothing about the community life and nothing about new life opportunities for the people. In October 1962 acting upon this report the Committee of the Whole, meeting in Council Chambers at the City Hall, adopted these measures unanimously.

Africville's Response

The day after the report of the Development Department was released to the press, J. Ahern, the M.L.A. for the area, called for a public meeting in Africville. He argued that relocation was unnecessary and certainly unwanted by Africvilleans, adding "Africville could be developed into one of the finest residential districts in Halifax at a very low cost."

One evening in August 1962, local politicians and some one hundred Africville residents and supporters crowded into the small Seaview African United Baptist Church. As in 1948 when the City asked for residents' views and as in 1959 when the Institute of Public Affairs undertook its survey, the

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

Africvilleans strongly rejected relocation and urged instead that they be allowed to stay in Africville and develop it according to City specifications.

No momentum of community protest or political leadership developed from this public meeting, and any potential for protest or continued resistance was undermined by the City staff and well-intentioned outsiders. Africville's own response to imminent relocation got channelled in a totally different direction, one that was in keeping with current thinking.

Formation of the Halifax Human Rights Advisory Committee

In 1961, prior to the official establishment of the Development Department an Africville resident, Joe Skinner was frustrated at not being able to secure a building permit to build a ranch-style bungalow on his Africville land. Through his railway union contacts he sought advice from the Montreal office of the National Committee on Human Rights, in the Canadian Labour Congress. He was advised, along with a handful of other Africvilleans who allied with him, to "organize the people of Africville into a group...and...press your case until the City takes remedial action." A ratepayers association was formed whose core members were Skinner, Leon and Emma Steede, deacons [need first names] Mantley and Jones, and Harry Carter.

Association members, limited in resources, perceiving themselves without local allies and increasingly worried about

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

the relocation threat, sought further assistance from the National Committee on Human Rights. In August 1962 the committee sent to Halifax "our best man in this field ... Alan Borovoy, a lawyer and our Ontario Human Rights Director ... [well-respected for] breaking down discrimination and obtaining anti-discrimination legislation in the housing field."

Borovoy travelled to Halifax from Toronto for a short visit and brought together the core members of the ratepayers association and a small group of White and Black community leaders in the Halifax area. As a result, the Halifax Human Rights Advisory Committee (HHRAC) was formed with the tasks of assisting the Africville group and, as well, becoming active in advancing human rights legislation in employment and in housing. From then on the fate of Africville and its response was inextricably linked to HHRAC.

At that time in Canada and the United States there was not only an optimism about government programs of urban renewal, but also a strong civil rights movement emphasizing individual rights and freedoms and opposing racial segregation, unfair housing and employment practices.

Alan Borovoy was one of the leading proponents of civil liberties in Canada. It is not surprising that he would emphasize that a "Black ghetto should not be subsidized" and that he would stress the importance of racial integration. From the outset he would see Africville in the context of the larger struggle against segregation in Nova Scotia, and

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

elsewhere in North America.

Like Professor Stephenson, he had little appreciation of Africville's history and of its value as a community. He perceived Africville to be a slum and relocation to be virtually inevitable. Since his organization had no resources to commit to Africville and since his contacts indicated that Africvilleans had no strong power base from which to bargain, he considered that the best strategy for Africville was to develop an organization of influential Blacks and Whites which could be an important support resource for them.

This same basic thinking appears was shared by most core non-Africville members of the new Human Rights Committee, all of whom had a record of significant involvement in the human rights field. Strongly opposed to segregation and discrimination, they considered the relocation of the residents to be inevitable and saw their role as assisting Africvilleans get the best possible deal from the City. There was some recognition, especially but not only by the Black members, that Africville was a community not just a collection of people. At the same time, they had little familiarity with Africville's people or history and most conceived the community resourceless and slum-like.

Although seventy-one persons attended meetings of the Halifax Human Rights Advisory Committee (HHRAC), over the time it dealt with Africville, the core non-Africville members numbered seven, four Whites (two educators, a businessman and a

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

union leader) and three Blacks (a principal, a lawyer and a minister). None of the local area's elected politicians, at any of the three levels of government, took on a role. Few Africville residents were involved either.

The HHRAC met forty times between 1962 and 1967 but only five Africville residents attended more than two of these meetings, seven of which were held in Africville's Seaview Church. The chief Africville participants were the Steedes and Harry Carter. The Steedes in particular were widely respected in Africville as a caring, friendly couple who could articulate the community's concerns. Still, even they had no mandate to represent the whole of Africville. They largely acted as go-betweens to the community for HHRAC and others and themselves called no meetings of Africville residents.

Once HHRAC came on the scene it became the only channel used for Africville-City contact regarding relocation plans and related considerations. Subsequently only one formal meeting of Africville residents was held outside HHRAC auspices. In October 1962 a meeting called by the Nova Scotia Association for the Advancement of Coloured Persons , chaired by Rev. W. Oliver and attended by some thirty Africville residents, was held at the Seaview Church. Published accounts indicate that the participants discussed the relocation question and concluded that under the circumstances relocation was almost inevitable and therefore emphasis should be placed on bargaining for the best terms possible.

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

Within two months of a large public meeting where most if not all Africvilleans present indicated their rejection of the City's plans to relocate them, relocation was deemed to be "almost inevitable" by the residents as well as their advocates. It would appear that the basis for independent community action was quite limited and that outside allies could not be convinced of the community's viability. From here on HHRAC's core non-Africville members became in effect the community's representatives. They focused on obtaining better terms and compensation for the residents. While the involvement of these committee members did not cause any basic alteration in the Development Department's plans about Africville, it did result in the subsequent relocation requiring a great deal more of City money and staff time than anticipated.

Throughout the fall of 1962 and the whole of 1963, the HHRAC pursued various relocation issues with both Africville residents (basically the handful identified above) and City staff (basically the Development Department). HHRAC conveyed the concerns and questions which Africvilleans and others had to the Director of the Development Department who in turn provided written responses to the committee. As represented in documents of the HHRAC, Africville residents were specifically concerned with getting a "house for a house," with meeting the costs, financial and otherwise, of new housing arrangements and in obtaining a fair deal for their property. More generally

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

they and the HHRAC members wondered about the value of the land for industrial purposes and whether there was any alternative to the individual household relocation plan being suggested.

The responses of the Development Department were businesslike, rational and devoid of any sense of responsibility to Africville or any special generosity on the City's part. The City said that while the area was designated for industrial usage no such plan was imminent. It said that there was no alternative to individual household relocation since the costs for bringing Africville up to City specification would be over $800,000. City officials claimed that the City would find it too costly and even morally objectionable (i.e, segregationist) to recreate Africville elsewhere in the City.

HHRAC members were assured that all Africville residents would be offered accommodation in public housing and, especially, that there was no realistic alternative to the kind of relocation envisaged by the City staff.

In May 1963 the HHRAC arranged for City staff to attend a public meeting at the Seaview Church and clarify City policy to Africvilleans. The meeting was quiet and ignited few sparks of protest. The HHRAC members were still somewhat anxious and uncertain about City claims that the demolition and relocation plan was the best or the only option for Afrciville. They decided to recommend to City Council that a noted outside specialist in the field of housing, urban renewal and social

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

welfare, Dr. Albert Rose of the University of Toronto be invited to come to Halifax to advise on the Africville situation.

In selecting Rose as an outside expert, HHRAC had selected one of the leading advocates of urban renewal in Canada. For many years Rose advocated demolition of existing neighbourhoods andthe construction of public housing as the solution to the problems of low-income housing. He had published academic papers where he argued that the first major urban renewal project in Canada had brought many benefits to the people whose community was torn down.

Rose visited Halifax on November 24-26, 1963. He discussed the Africville situation with City officials, university specialists, professional social workers and members of the HHRAC. His contact with Africville was limited to two hours touring the community in the company of City officials and to meeting once with the Africville members of HHRAC. As with Professor Stephenson and Alan Borovoy, Dr. Rose was convinced that relocation was inevitable, that Africville conditions were deplorable and that rehabilitation of the community would be too costly. Like them, he also felt that he could not recommend a segregated community, even a modern one, to replace what was there. Although very limited in his knowledge of the community he considered that action and certainly not an in-depth study was required. Moreover he believed that Africville residents and community leaders (presumably HHRAC and others) agreed that

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

the community should be cleared. Indeed in his report to Council a few weeks later Rose contended that the residents of Africville were "ready and eager to negotiate," that community leaders agreed it was a slum and that it would have been cleared a long time ago "if the inhabitants were of a different racial background." Rose, in effect, endorsed the City's proposed plan, namely to negotiate terms with the residents for relocation, without any consideration to retaining the community.

The Rose report recommended that Africville be cleared over a two- to three-year period, and the residents receive not only better housing but also employment assistance and training, compensation for furniture and equipment needs, generous welfare assistance and free legal aid. Further, the report recommended that the HHRAC be involved in designing and monitoring the relocation and that a trained social worker, operating out of the Development Department, be hired to document the needs of each Africville household.

The Rose report was praised by the local media and by City staff. The HHRAC voted unanimously to accept the recommendations of the report and on January 9, 1964 at a meeting in Africville, called by HHRAC, thirty-seven of the forty-one Africvilleans present voted to accept it. One week later City Council unanimously adopted the Rose report in principle and set up a special committee composed of members of Council, City staff and members of HHRAC to advise Council

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

concerning implementation of the report.

Implementating the Relocation

"Every year, as long as I can remember, I can remember them coming out there and surveying land and surveying all over the place. And the next thing that you know you see in the paper is where they are going to root Africville out, bulldoze Africville out". (Africville resident, 1969)

"The emphasis was on the fact it was a social problem. So finally the then City fathers in 1961-62...attempted to do something for these people who were in the community of Africville and were considered to be disadvantaged people". (Relocation Social Worker, 1969)

Africville survived for well over a hundred years in spite of City policy and actions. Understandably, then, few residents believed at the time of relocation or later that the City's motives in the early sixties were to assist Africvilleans in any significant way. Certainly the City's historical position was that the lands would ultimately be required for industrial purposes and there were such plans under consideration at the time.

In implementing the relocation program the City basically followed the policies recommended by Dr. Rose. The program was coordinated by the Department of Development. A trained social worker employed by the Province was seconded to the City for three years. He was charged with visiting and documenting the social and economic situation and requirements of each family and guiding all Africville residents through the relocation process. Regular meetings between him and the Director of Development established the basis for each negotiation with

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

individual residents, which were then carried out by the relocation social worker.

In general there were two types of "compensation" -- compensation for land and buildings, and assistance in starting anew elsewhere. The latter, as Rose specified, was especially to entail generous welfare assistance for as long as required, employment and educational rehabilitation, and help in securing better housing accommodations. Apart from property settlements, the relocation social worker was the main authority in new housing arrangements, welfare assistance and furniture money.

In keeping with Rose's recommendation, the HHRAC continued to have a significant role in the relocation process. Initially reports detailing settlements were passed on to the City Council's Subcommittee on Africville then to HHRAC before being formally submitted to City Council for ratification. Later the procedure was streamlined when these two bodies merged to form a new Subcommittee on Africville with three Council representatives and three Black non-Africville representatives from HHRAC.

Once a settlement was reached with each party, the relocation social worker's report would be submitted to the Subcommittee, then to Council's Finance Committee and finally to Council as a Whole. There were very few cases where the relocation social worker's reports were contested, though initially there was more independent checking carried out by the HHRAC representatives. Once the relocation process began

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

there was no significant formal involvement of any Africvilleans. HHRAC acted as if it were an arm of the City bureaucracy. It was given powers by the City and expected to look after Africvilleans' interests; in return, its involvement stamped the relocation program as progressive and humane.

Although the key person in the relocation process was the Director of Development, the relocation social worker was the main contact for residents. A forty-year-old Cape Bretoner, he exhibited some empathy with Africvilleans and appreciated their long struggle, and he was able to win the trust of most residents. He spent most of the first six months (i.e.,June to December 1964) meeting the residents informally in their homes and on the roads. His perception was that the community was quite divided in its views about the program and that there were five or six groups.

The relocation social worker spent most time initially with those Africvilleans who had participated in HHRAC and with influential residents who were at least somewhat willing to move. He also visited frequently with the Big Town area residents whom he sympathized with and admired because of their resourceful if somewhat rebellious and deviant life style. Relatively little time was spent with the young adults, presumably because here the critical relocation aspect was not property settlement but programs to effect new life opportunities, an aspect that in practice was accorded low priority. Comparatively little time also was spent with

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

stubborn and resistant residents.

The City strategy was to remove as soon as possible those willing to relocate, quickly demolish their dwellings and sheds and thereby underline the fact that the demolition of the community was well under way. The marginal/transient group, composed of Black and White adult renters, received the least attention since the relocation social worker shared the view of many Africvilleans and even these persons themselves, namely that they did not really belong to Africville; indeed asked how he dealt with one White transient, the relocation social worker replied: "I informed him of his rights as a citizen."

Despite, or perhaps because of, the long-standing threat of relocation, most Africville residents indicated that they were surprised when they realized that relocation actually was going to happen. Approximately forty percent of the adults interviewed in 1968-69, roughly two years after their relocation, indicated that they were very or somewhat willing to relocate upon becoming aware of the relocation program.

Many residents were confident that they could negotiate a good deal for their property while younger household heads hoped that the relocation rhetoric would be realized in new opportunities for themselves. The transients, mostly older adults without families, realistically saw themselves as outsiders without any claims, non-participants in the relocation business who accepted the "inconvenient" relocation in an unemotional fashion and simply hoped for a good deal.

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

Among the Big Town residents there was more anxiety than grief. They reported themselves (and the relocation social worker concurred in his assessment of their position) willing to relocate but scared that their lack of bargaining power and regular employment would leave them and their families without a secure haven anywhere. Elderly long-time residents clearly exhibited the greatest grief and the most reluctance to relocate.

The Cost of Relocation

There was little community organization developed around the relocation. There were no general community meetings held to discuss the relocation independently of those called by HHRAC and other outside officials. The negotiation structure reduced the chances of a collective action by Africville residents. The arrangement implied that professionals were looking after relocatees' interests and that little could be gained by community mobilization.

The style of relocation negotiation by Africvilleans was "everyone for himself," tempered by various strategies to assist close family members. Significant suspicion and jealousy developed partly because of the complications of land ownership claims (only fourteen residents had clear legal title to their property) and partly because of the secrecy and diversity of the specific settlement packages arranged through the relocation social worker. The City's strategy to settle with

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

some influential residents and quickly demolish their properties yielded the anticipated results.

"There were 'community leaders' who were going to represent the people of Africville against the City...The first thing you know [these leaders]...are the first ones to move. Well! When we saw them leaving, we all figured that what's the sense of staying if the leaders of the rest of us are gone."

Residents differed in how actively they set about trying to get the best deal for themselves and their families in the relocation negotiations, from those who took an active part, to those who resigned themselves to the decisions of the social worker/negotiator. Some of the older residents set what they considered a high price and refused to budge or to enter into any negotiations at all. Very few Africvilleans used any outside assistance such as HHRAC members or free City legal and real estate services. A handful reported contact with other local Black leaders for assistance during the relocation process. Essentially Africvilleans depended upon their own resources and their relationship with the relocation social worker.

The actual relocation took place essentially between 1964 and 1967, beginning a month of the social worker taking up his duties. The first deal involved a woman who sold her house (she did not own the land) and received $500, free moving, accommodation in public housing and the cancellation of an outstanding $1500 hospital bill. The settlement was deemed fair by HHRAC which had undertaken an independent appraisal of the property.

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

All told the City spent about $550,000 for the Africville lands and the buildings; another $200,000 was budgeted (up to 1969) for welfare assistance, furniture allowance and the waiving of unpaid taxes and hospital bills. The trustees of the Seaview Church accepted a $15,000 offer for the church building and the money was deposited in an education trust fund to be used for Blacks in the Halifax area, with preference to be given to children of Africville relocatees.

City expenditure far exceeded the Development Department's 1961 estimate of $70,000. In fact the total costs approximated $800,000, the figure that was earlier deemed prohibitively high for the alternative of a separate housing development for the Africville community. Unlike most urban renewal projects, the City did not receive federal funding for the aquisition and clearance of Africville properties as the National Housing Act provided for compensation only where legal title was unquestioned.

While the relocation plans had called for educational and occupational programs and the creation of new and better life opportunities for the relocated people, in actually, virtually nothing happened along these lines. Relocatees were directed to existing programs or services. After residents had been relocated, there was almost no follow-up. The social worker, the only person assigned to this, was too occupied with negotiations and rehousing.

Black and White members of HHRAC and the Special Africville

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

Subcommittee expressed shock upon learning this fact in 1968. One noted, "I assumed there was a follow-up...I didn't know that these people were just left completely to their own resources...I should have known but I didn't."

Africville residents had no direct way, as a group, to bargain or to call attention to shortfalls in the program. HHRAC members were concerned activists but as volunteers they had limited time and resources and depended largely on the reports of the relocation social worker. He, in turn, had little time to pursue new programs and also had to balance the interests of Africvilleans with the City's concern for quick clearance at modest costs. The conflict of interests in the social worker's situation does not seem to have been a matter of concern at the time. Finally, because the goals and objectives of the program remained vague, success was difficult to guage in any event.

The benefits of relocation fell far short of the promises in other respects as well. City staff sometimes moved relocatees to run-down, decrepit city-owned housing slated for redevelopment. A number of Africvilleans also complained about being moved in "big yellow city trucks"; as one relocatee declaimed "City people sent a truck to move my furniture. Just think what the neighbours thought when they looked out and saw a garbage truck drive up and unload the furniture."

Promises and understandings in the settlement packages were often neither fully authorized nor written down and they became

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

points of contention later when the relocation social worker's job ended in 1967. Finally the relocation itself ended on a sour note when expropriation threats and intimidation were used to get the last Africville resident, "Pa" Carvery, to come to terms. Construction work on a new bridge was being delayed because its Halifax base was to be built on his property. The delay was proving costly to the City so Carvery was summoned to City Hall in December 1969 and, in the presence of several top City staff, shown a suitcase filled with money. He related the incident as follows:

"They sent for me and when I got there I was taken into someone's office. There was five or six people in the room [actually there was the City solicitor, the director of finance, the internal auditor, the social planner, the Africville Special Projects Officer and two plainclothes officers] plus a suitcase full of money tied up neatly in bundles...The suitcase was open and stuck under my nose so as to tempt me and try to pay me off right then and there...I didn't like it at all...It hurt me...I told them 'you guys think you're smart...well, you're not smart enough', then I got up and walked out of the office".

On January 2, 1970, Carvery, the last holdout, having reluctantly reached an agreement with the City, vacated his premises. Four days later his building was bulldozed.

Of course well before this, the relocation organization had been dismantled. The relocation social worker had returned to Cape Breton. Members of HHRAC had turned their attention to provincial legislation and organization. The Department of Development had turned its attention to the Halifax waterfront. Africvilleans were again on their own.

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

The Initial Impact of Relocation

Despite the substantial failure of the relocation promise, many Africville residents, especially the young adults with families and individuals without strong community ties were initially satisfied with the settlement they received from the City. Young families usually received enough to make a new beginning -- furniture allowance, social assistance and public housing units. Those who had neither property nor high expectations were often satisfied with trivial settlements, such as a few hundred dollars, some short-term welfare and rental accommodation in the City's redevelopment area. Those with bargaining power considered that they were able to get what they wanted.

Older residents with deep roots in the community were most likely to be disatisfied even when they perceived themselves as obtaining a fair deal in the negotiations. One person observed:

"I suppose I got a fair deal but we'll be in debt for the rest of our lives. I'd sooner be back in Africville. I owned my own home there. I got mortgage payments to meet here."

Housing in Halifax was in short supply and the scale of urban renewal being undertaken in these years made it difficult for families and individuals in need to secure public housing. Racism made the housing situation more difficult for Blacks. Just prior to the relocation and on the basis of a rumour that public housing for Africvilleans was to be constructed in ~~their~~ an area, some Whites arranged a protest with the message "We don't

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

want Africville people here." And during the relocation there were two instances of White neighbours' harassing Africville relocatees who purchased homes ~~in their area~~.

Nevertheless by most criteria the quality of the new housing was better for most relocatees. Twenty-eight families and seven unattached individuals obtained public housing units while twenty-four family heads became homeowners. Generally these relocatees appreciated the better facilities, services and conveniences. In some instances of home ownership there was a sense of quite complete satisfaction. For example, one relocated resident observed:

> "My children, they come to visit me and they like the home and hate going back to Montreal. This is an ideal place for an old couple to retire. We have all the conveniences. The neighbourhood is friendly and the scenery is beautiful. We have to pay twice as much now to live; we have the same amount of money coming in as we had in Africville but it's well worth it".

Relocatees who were in other rental situations, some fifty-five adults and ten families, fared less well with their new accommodations, much of which was substandard and slated for demolition.

Africville residents typically relocated in the north and central areas of Halifax, not too far from the Africville site. Most were quite familiar with their new neighbourhood, did not feel out of place there and maintained close contacts with

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

their former Africville friends.

After Relocation

The costs of relocation were not initially insignificant, and for many they increased as time went on. With better housing came increased expenditure for mortgage/rent, fuel and the like. To people underemployed, without adequate and regular income, unused to such expenditures, improved housing brought new worries, family strains and indebtedness. Since there had been no effective employment or education program, the relocatees became very dependent upon social assistance. More than half of the relocatee households regularly received City or provincial welfare, whereas prior to relocation, no more than ten percent did so. The financial pressures were very onerous for homeowners, especially among those whose relocation settlement was modest or who lacked regular employment. Within two years, five such homeowners had lost their new homes and several others were threatened with a similar fate. With public housing came bureaucratic rules affecting valued life styles; one relocatee noted, "I wanted one of my grandsons (fifteen years old) to move in with me but that would have been an extra thirty dollars a month. So that would have too much money to pay."

Interviewed in 1969 the majority of relocatees - -about 70%

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

-- reported having suffered personal crises as a consequence of relocation and having trouble making ends meet. The initial satisfaction of many relocatees waned as the short-term benefits, e.g. furniture allowance, welfare, sympathetic attention of City officials, became apparent. Moreover, many relocatees found that different City bureaucrats challenged unwritten agreements they had had with the social worker concerning rental subsidy and social assistance.

On the whole Africvilleans had become more vulnerable to money problems, more beholden to others' rules (public housing or welfare authorities) and less enmeshed in family and community support systems. Further, many had lost their main bargaining chip, their property, and as one man said with grief "I will die and won't be able to leave my children anything." Small wonder then that 95% of the relocatees thought that the City got the best of the "relocation deal" and even 80% felt that they personally did not get "a good deal" from the City.

As the City became aware of the problems through the requests to the Social Planning for welfare, their response was to encourage the organization of a committee -- the Committee of Former Africville Residents -- which led shortly thereafter to the creation of the Seaview Credit Union. The modestly-funded Credit Union (the Province contributed $50,000 and the City $20,000, all of which was supposed to be repayable) was to be managed and controlled by former Africville residents in collaboration with Social Planning staff. While the Credit

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

Union was providing short-term help to those in pressing need, more attention was to be directed at long-term solutions of employment, housing and education. Within a year and a half this post-relocation program lay in ruins. The Credit Union funds were largely disbursed and there was little hope of much repayment in part because the recipients had no means for doing so and in part because disgruntled relocatees considered the loan money to be relocation compensation.

The other long-term plans for educational and employment were so modest as to be virtually irrelevant.

In the late summer of 1969, the former Africville residents formed their own Africville Action Committee. Led initially by relocatees who were pragmatic and dissatisfied less with the fact of relocation than with the terms of the relocation "exchange," this group was hoping to get more direct compensation. With wide Africville support, the organization lobbied for more just property settlements, in effect a final overall government payment that would constitute an emergency fund for the relocated residents. Over the next two years the committee mobilized support among other City organizations, wrote letters to the newspapers and met with the mayor and City council. The lack of resources and experienced leaders coupled with the bureaucratic and legal objections to proposals, and the passivity, if not cool response, of local politicians, ultimately caused the Action Committee to wear down and fade away. It did however spawn, with Social Planning, a few

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

marginally useful programs such as a special employment training project in which a handful of relocatees participated. And it was instrumental in arranging an appropriate ceremony for the old Africville community.

On Sunday, August 6, 1972 twelve hundred persons, young and old, gathered on the Africville site for a spiritual revival and memorial service; it was an honourable event for a unique community.

Africville as a Symbol

At the time of relocation many non-Africville Blacks shared the wider society's negative conception of Africville and supported the relocation program. Black leaders, aware of the causes of Africville's peculiar development (especially the racism), expressed hope that the residents would be treated fairly and generously. Some leaders called for the construction of a serviced new Africville community, but most Black leaders did not explicitly adopt this view which had the premise there was was something very valuable about the Africville community. Rather, they emphasized that the relocation should bring real opportunity for the families and individuals relocated in an integrationist context.

Apart from the Black members of the HHRAC, there was little involvement in the relocation by Blacks outside Africville. Moreover, Africvilleans apparently did not seek support in the broader Black community.

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

The climate of opinion at the time emphasized civil rights and integration rather than the celebration of the Black community in itself, and the articulation of the Black experience in Nova Scotia. In metropolitan Halifax some Black spokesmen were impatient with what they viewed then as the inward, community-looking, traditional Black leadership and were in sympathy with integration and the relocation program.

Since the relocation, however, Africville has become central in the new Black consciousness in Nova Scotia. It has become something to appreciate and identify with. Africville has become a symbol of why Black organization and solidarity are necessary to fight racism.

In the early 1970s one prominent Black leader indicated that when he went into a new community to organize the residents there, his message was "Let's pull together, or else we'll be another Africville" -- a message that was proclaimed on many occasions in the following years.

There are several reasons for the considerable change in the perception of Africville and the relocation in the years immediately following the relocation. The shortfalls in the relocation program and the subsequent protests by Africvilleans alerted Blacks to the dangers of government-initiated change where there is neither adequate acknowledgement of racism nor sufficient opportunity for participation and advocacy. Black leaders also began to draw similarities between Africville and other Black communities where deeds were in disarray, housing

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

conditions poor and the land was becoming valuable for watershed, industrial and other purposes. Perhaps most importantly there was the emergence of new cultural, organizational and political responses among Black Nova Scotians; these were associated with the growth of Black identity and pride, the promotion of unity among Blacks and an assertive, confrontational approach to racism and disadavantage.

New secular organizations have developed such as the Black United Front and the Afro-Canadian Liberation Movement. There has been a considerable increase in the number of Black professionals --lawyers, teachers and social workers. The Human Rights Commission has been set up by the provincial government after considerable pressure from Black leaders. Black artists, writers and entertainers have put expression to a new mood in the Black Community. Indeed, the Africville experience has been credited by many observers as providing a stimulus for some of these developments. Certainly too, these developments have led to redefinitions of the Africville situation. As one leader observed "This [the Africville relocation] could not happen again."

Indeed it has not. Since Africville, Black communities such as Beechville and North Preston, on the outskirts of the City, have progressed through housing cooperatives and community development programs essentially under the control of their residents.

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

The symbolic significance of Africville goes beyond the Black community. The wider Nova Scotian society has increasingly come to accept that the relocation broke up a community and did not provide an adequate substitute for the residents. The Africville experience has helped to clarify what community signifies -- not housing, sewerage etc., but identity, interdependence and need.

The Africville relocation has symbolic value as virtually the last large-scale relocation of people into public housing and the destruction of their community. Such upheavals, common in the 50s and 60s, have since become discredited. The relocation, thanks to the social worker and the Black members of HHRAC, did yield some benefits to some individuals but, like other urban renewal programs, it became largely a re-housing scheme with welfare payments added to ease the transition.

The Legacy of Africville

Where Africville once stood there is now an under-utilized park, which comes to life each summer when the Africville Genealogical Society holds its reunion weekend there. A member of the Society explained its objective as follows:

> The reunion is important to the descendants because it gives them a place to come back to and remember. And it is important to teach the children...we hope that they can learn from what has happened" (Interview, 1986)

There is still an organization among Africvilleans and the last line has not been written as far as the land usage is

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

concerned. The negative stereotype of Africville has been laid to rest and the initial City and media claims of a progressive relocation have been debunked. Asked to reflect on Africville one older relocatee in 1969 stated simply

"Africville was a place where many coloured people lived together trying to do the best they could".

Africville lives on as an indictment against racism, as a critique of technocratic, imposed approaches to social change and as a celebration of community and the human spirit. Twenty-five years ago the local newspaper proclaimed "Soon Africville will be but a name. And in the not too distant future that too, mercifully, will be forgotten". It hasn't been. It shouldn't be. It won't be.

Postscript

With few exceptions all quotations used in this paper have been taken from Donald H. Clairmont and Dennis W. Magill, The Africville Relocation Report, Volumes 1 and 2 (Halifax: The Institute of Public Affairs, Dalhousie University, 1971,1973). For a more detailed and wider reaching assessment of the Africville Relocation the reader is referred to the book by the same authors, Africville: The Life and Death of a Canadian Black Community, (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, revised edition, 1987).

Copy of excerpt from 102-5-1-44, City Clerk's historical reference files, Africville, 1965-1994, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives