

NEW BRUNSWICK BLACK HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2026 EDITION

WHY THIS HISTORY MATTERS

Researching, preserving, sharing, and connecting New Brunswick's Black history to the world.



Bringing history to life through guided Bus Tours to various sites of Black History significance



Honoring and preserving our legacy - Willow Grove Spring Clean up



Educating the future through in-school presentations and engagement



Connecting black history to the world through guided tours of NBBHS Heritage Centre

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MESSAGE FROM CO-FOUNDER & PROGRAM DIRECTOR

Five years ago, we opened the doors of the Heritage Centre with a vision – a vision that began decades earlier through dedicated research into New Brunswick’s Black history.

For many years, the founders of the Society gathered and documented the stories, records, and voices that reveal the rich history of Black communities in New Brunswick. During this time, we operated from a small space within PRUDE Inc., which allowed us to continue our work and engage with the community. In 2013, NBBHS was officially registered, further strengthening our commitment to preserving and promoting this history and in May 2021, that work took physical form when the Heritage Centre opened to the public in Saint John.

Today, that vision is transforming classrooms, communities, and conversations across our province. Students engage with stories that expand their understanding. Visitors rediscover previously hidden histories that deserve to be known. Our shared past is being preserved and brought to life in meaningful ways.

As we reflect on this milestone, we remain focused on the future – continuing to research, document, and connect New Brunswick’s Black history to generations yet to come.

With gratitude,

-RALPH TIGER THOMAS



FROM 401 VISITORS TO THOUSANDS: WHAT GROWTH REALLY MEANS TO US

Since opening in 2021, the Heritage Centre has welcomed thousands of visitors – from students on bus tours to families exploring our Time Walk exhibit. What began as 401 visitors in our first year has grown into a vibrant hub of learning and connection, reaching classrooms and communities across New Brunswick and beyond. Our programs continue to engage diverse people and groups because they align with curriculum goals and spark meaningful conversations about resilience, strength, and community.



Student reach, educators engaged, and historical sites interpreted: each number tells part of the story – but the true measure of our impact is how these experiences inspire learning, dialogue, and a sense of shared history.



Experiential learning matters. By bringing history to life through guided tours, interactive exhibits, and storytelling, we give students and visitors a chance to step into the past. They don't just read about history – they experience it, ask questions, and engage with the stories of resilience, achievement, and community.

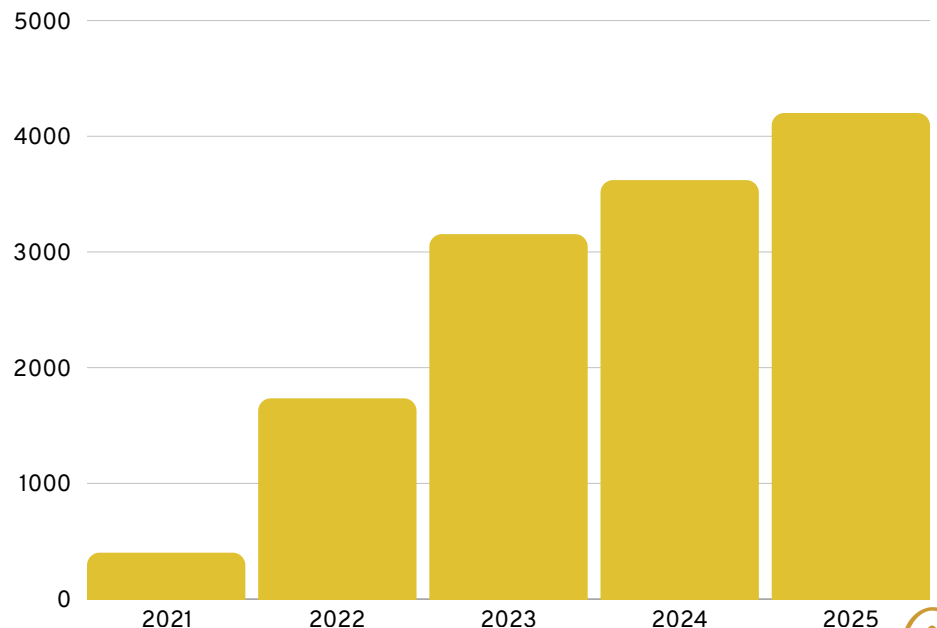


Representation in heritage spaces matters. When Black youth see their history reflected in museums, exhibits, and community events, it fosters pride, identity, and belonging. At the same time, all students gain a deeper understanding of the diversity and contributions that shape our province. This is why we actively participate in cultural fairs, community gatherings, and school programs.

The numbers show growth – but the true impact lies in the questions students ask, the stories rediscovered, and the connections communities make with a shared past.

Visitor Growth since opening the Heritage Centre

- 2021: 401
- 2022: 1,735
- 2023: 3,154
- 2024: 3,621
- 2025: 4,201



2025 AT A GLANCE: IMPACT AND HIGHLIGHTS

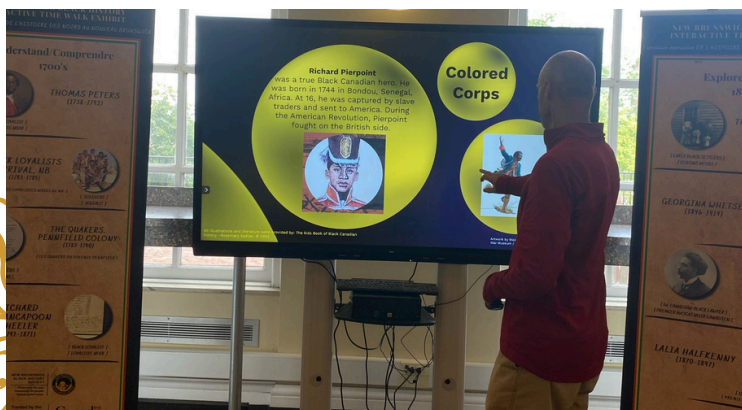
Educational Collaborations

- 33 student and educator groups from across New Brunswick visited the Heritage Centre for guided tours.
- Over 1,200 students engaged with Black history through immersive tours of the Heritage Centre and key historical sites.
- 170+ educators participated in professional learning and curriculum-support sessions.
- 3 in-school presentations brought New Brunswick's Black history directly to classrooms and communities.
- 10 Heritage & Cultural Fairs allowed students to explore the resilience, contributions, and legacy of Black New Brunswickers.
- Hosted Canadian author Lindsay Ruck during Children's Book Week and the ASD-S Summer Camp for educators, featuring walking and bus tours.
- Student projects showcased at the Heritage Centre included St. Malachy's High School "Hidden History" Project and Gibson-Neil Memorial Grade 5 Black History Project.



Interactive Time Walk Exhibit

- Traveled across New Brunswick, engaging over 35,000 participants.
- Hosted at several locations including BGC Moncton, and the first New Brunswick UNESCO Schools Conference in 2025. The Exhibit continued its travel this year 2026 with it being hosted for Black History month by the RCMP J-Division Headquarters and then Anglophone East School District in March 2026.



2025 AT A GLANCE: IMPACT AND HIGHLIGHTS (CONT'D)

Heritage Centre Highlights

- Welcomed 16 community groups and hosted 10 special events, including a CBC Radio Live Show during Black History Month.
- Total visitors: 4,200+ in 2025 including students, educators, researchers, tourists, and community members from across Canada and beyond.
- Special guests included Premier Susan Holt, Minister Isabelle Thériault, Minister David Hickey, MLA Kate Wilcott, Tracy Clinch (CEO, NB Museum), Mr. Ibrahim Guissé (UN CERD), and Phylomène Zangio (past chair, NB Human Rights Commission).
- Several additions were made to our collections, including a quilt with a Northern Star pattern, likely originating in Saint John and symbolizing the journey north to Canada through the Underground Railroad.

Community Engagement & Partnerships

- Facilitated 3 virtual presentations and partnered on 32 community events celebrating Black history, including:
 - Black History Month and Emancipation Day events
 - Induction of African and African Diasporic Student Graduation Stoles at UNB
 - UNESCO NB Schools Conference and ASD-S Antiracism Summit for High Schools
- Hosted the Annual Willow Grove Spring Cleanup and a bus trip to the Tomlinson Lake Hike to Freedom, commemorating journeys of Black freedom seekers.
- Ran Easter and Christmas basket raffles with community partners, laying the groundwork for successful fundraisers.



Educational Resources & Accessibility

- Heritage Centre website became fully bilingual.
- We also added downloadable worksheets and learning resources on our website for students and families.

ARTIFACT SPOTLIGHT: THE NORTHERN STAR QUILT

NBBHS is proud to add a remarkable quilt with the Northern Star design to its collection. Carefully preserved over generations, it carries both family memory and echoes of the journey to freedom in British North America.

Quilts have long served practical and artistic purposes, often reflecting cultural storytelling. In some traditions tied to the Underground Railroad, certain patterns may have guided or encouraged freedom seekers.

Did You Know?

The North Star as a Guide – Polaris stays nearly fixed in the night sky, helping travelers maintain a northern course.

Canada as a Destination – Thousands escaped to British North America via the Underground Railroad.

Settling in the Maritimes – By the mid-1800s, many freedom seekers had settled in Ontario, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick.

Quilts and Hidden Meanings – Some oral traditions suggest patterns signaled safe houses, routes, or directions, symbolizing resilience and ingenuity.

A Quilt with a Family Story

The Northern Star quilt was donated by Elizabeth Fraser, who has traced it through several generations of her family in Saint John. Her grandfather, born in Boston, later lived in Saint John, hinting at cross-border family connections.

Ms. Fraser reflected on its significance: “The quilt pattern is the Northern Star – you are heading north to Canada. The eight points of the star are the important character.” She continues to research its origins, hoping materials and techniques may reveal its age.

Preserving Stories Through Objects

Artifacts like this quilt connect personal family histories to broader narratives. Even without all details known, they invite reflection on the lives of those who came before us.

Learn More

Visit the NBBHS Heritage Centre in Saint John or explore our exhibits online at <https://www.nbblackhistorysociety.org/> to learn more about the Underground Railroad and the courageous journeys of freedom seekers whose resilience helped shape our province and nation.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: CELEBRATING THE SEASON TOGETHER

To wrap up our activities for the year 2025, NBBHS had a wonderful afternoon at the Heritage Centre with community leaders, partners, and friends, celebrating the festive season and the rich Black history of New Brunswick.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: CELEBRATING THE SEASON TOGETHER

The highlight of the day was our annual Christmas basket raffle draw, won by **Brian Gullen!**

A heartfelt thank you goes out to everyone who supported this initiative – whether by donating towards the basket, helping with ticket sales, or purchasing tickets. Your generosity and participation made the event a resounding success!



CELEBRATING BLACK BRILLIANCE ACROSS GENERATIONS THIS BLACK HISTORY MONTH

This year, as Canada marks 30 years of Black History Month under the theme “Black Brilliance Across Generations – From Nation Builders to Tomorrow’s Visionaries,” we have continued to connect communities with the rich histories and contributions of Black New Brunswickers through research, education, and public programming. The response has been incredible, with meaningful connections formed through events, partnerships, and conversations that highlight resilience, achievement, and community.

We are deeply grateful for the interest, engagement, and support shown by diverse communities and institutions across New Brunswick and beyond, as we recognize more than 400 years of the remarkable legacy of Black Canadians.



Flagraising Ceremony to kick start Black History Month 2026 - 2nd February 2026



Black History Month in-school presentations



THIS BLACK HISTORY MONTH



NBBHS had 19 guided bus tours to Black history sites bringing history to life through experiential learning and Visits by 31 diverse groups to the Heritage Centre with over 500 participants engaging with our Exhibits.

We are grateful for the support of community partners, including **PALS (Partners Assisting Local Schools)** and **PRUDE Inc.**, for coordinating some of these guided tours.



11 presentations facilitated to various groups, and 4 information booths set up at community partner locations, connecting the public with New Brunswick's rich history.



17 community engagements with diverse community groups

YOUTH VOICES: SHAPING BLACK HISTORY TODAY

NBBHS gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Department of Canadian Heritage for the 2026 Black History Month Community Engagement Series, which included:

- Youth Voices: Black Canadian Experiences, Identity, and the Future
- Black History in the Marketplace: Community, Culture, and Entrepreneurship

As part of the Youth Voices event, students engaged in interactive discussions exploring:

- Identity and Belonging: How growing up as a Black Canadian shapes their sense of self.
- Community and Legacy: Learning about Black New Brunswick history and the contributions of past generations.
- Vision for the Future: The hopes and ambitions youth carry forward, and the ways they aim to contribute to their communities.

One participant, Maryam Mustapha, shared her experiences as a young immigrant navigating life in Canada while discovering the rich history of Black communities in New Brunswick. She reflected on the challenges of adjusting to a new environment, while celebrating the resilience, creativity, and leadership of Black Canadians.

Through her participation, Mariam highlighted how learning about local Black history helped her feel connected to both her own heritage and her new home. She emphasized the importance of sharing these stories, noting that understanding the past gives her hope and inspiration to shape the future.

Mariam's journey reminds us that youth voices are vital in keeping history alive, and that personal stories help bridge generations, cultures, and communities.

Key Takeaway: Black history is not only a past to be remembered—it is a living, evolving story shaped by today's changemakers.



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REPRESENTATION IN LAW AND JOURNALISM DID NOT BEGIN RECENTLY — IT HAS DEEP ROOTS IN NEW BRUNSWICK.

Abraham Beverley Walker broke barriers few could imagine. Born in New Brunswick to a Loyalist Black family, he became Canada's first Canadian-born Black lawyer and the first Black law student at the University of New Brunswick. He was also among the earliest Black intellectuals in Canada to publish a magazine.

Walker's path was challenging. He honed his skills as a secretary and stenographer, studied in Washington, D.C., and returned to Saint John to continue his legal career. In 1881, he became a solicitor of the Supreme Court of New Brunswick and was called to the Bar in 1882. Yet racial discrimination limited his practice and excluded him from many professional opportunities.

Determined to be heard, Walker launched *Neith* in the 1890s, a magazine covering literature, science, philosophy, and social justice. His 1897 series, *The Trials, Hardships and Destiny of the Negro Race*, called for fairness and equality. He also founded the African Civilization Movement, encouraging educated Black people to help establish model communities in Africa. Walker died in 1909, but his influence continues to resonate.

Rediscovering Walker's Legacy: For many years, Walker's remarkable story remained largely unknown. Interest in his life was renewed when NBBHS Co-founder and Program Director, Ralph "Tiger" Thomas, encouraged local historian Peter Little to research Walker while exploring a possible family connection. Although the link could not be confirmed, Little became deeply fascinated by Walker's achievements and continued investigating his life and legacy.

Little's research led to the publication of a biography and helped bring renewed recognition to Walker's contributions. In 2019, Walker was posthumously awarded the Order of New Brunswick. His previously unmarked grave received a headstone in 2021, and in 2023 the University of New Brunswick Saint John named a roadway after him—the first campus road named for an individual. Walker's story reminds us that the struggle for justice and representation has deep roots in New Brunswick.

Source:

Little, Peter (2019). *Abraham Beverley Walker: Canada's First Black Lawyer*.

Learn More

Visit the NBBHS Heritage Centre in Saint John or explore our exhibits online at <https://www.nbblackhistorysociety.org/> to learn more about Walker and other Black pioneers who shaped our province and nation.



MARK YOUR CALENDAR FOR OUR UPCOMING EVENTS

TICKETS!

1 TICKET FOR \$2
3 TICKETS FOR \$5
7 TICKETS FOR \$10

GET YOUR TICKETS IN PERSON AT THE NBBHS
 HERITAGE CENTRE
 OR

E-TRANSFER to
donation@nbblackhistorysociety.org

ONCE YOU'VE MADE THE E-TRANSFER FOR YOUR TICKETS,
 KINDLY SEND AN EMAIL TO
info@nbblackhistorysociety.org
 or call us at (506) 214-2316

DRAW DATE

Easter Basket Raffle is on!

Ticket sales are on for our Easter Basket Raffle!

The winning ticket will be **drawn on April 2nd 2026**.
 Special thanks to the generous donors who
 contributed items to make this basket extra special.
 All proceeds support our work in preserving and
 promoting Black history across New Brunswick.



Annual Willow Grove Spring Clean-Up – May 23

NBBHS invites you to join us for the annual
 community clean-up at the historic Willow Grove
 Black Settlement Burial Ground and Church site to
 help preserve the site while honouring and learning
 about local Black history.

Volunteer Registration:



HIKE TO FREEDOM
 Northernmost Terminus of the Underground Railroad

Carlingford, New Brunswick
 Saturday, October 3, 2026 • 12pm - 6pm

- Follow the 2.8 km trail where freedom seekers once walked in the 1800s.
- New Brunswick Black History Society Exhibit
- 5th NH Volunteers Civil War Encampment & Musket Demonstrations at 1pm & 2pm

Annual Tomlinson Lake Hike to Freedom - Oct. 3rd

Join NBBHS in commemorating the courageous
 journeys to freedom via the Underground Railroad.
**Reserve your seat for Bus transportation from
 Saint John to Perth-Andover by scanning the QR
 code or email:**

info@nbblackhistorysociety.org



- Donation Options
- Fridge Magnet
- Branded Pen
- Branded Tote Bag

Ongoing Donor Initiative expressing our appreciation!

Supporters receive exclusive NBBHS-branded gifts
 for helping keep Black history alive.

For your gift delivery, simply e-transfer your
 donation (plus \$5 for postage) to
donation@nbblackhistorysociety.org and include
 your name, address, and phone number in the
 remark.

LOOKING AHEAD: 2026 AND BEYOND

CONTINUE PRESERVING BLACK HISTORY FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

Our mission is rooted in research, documentation, and preservation – ensuring that the stories of Black New Brunswickers remain part of our shared history. Through partnerships with educators, museums, and community organizations, we continue to expand public understanding of the province’s Black heritage. Whether through exhibits, walking tours, curriculum support, or historical research, our goal remains the same: to ensure these stories are preserved and accessible for generations to come.

As interest in Black history continues to grow, the Heritage Centre stands as a place where history is not only remembered but actively explored. Our interactive Time Walk exhibit continues its journey, inspiring students and community members alike. After being hosted at the RCMP J Division Headquarters in Fredericton for this year’s Black History Month, it is now hosted by the Anglophone East School District in Moncton, bringing history to life in new communities across the province.



Black history lives every day through the leadership, resilience, innovation, and achievements of Black individuals and communities across New Brunswick, Canada, and beyond.

While we honor February as a time of reflection and celebration, our commitment extends well beyond one month. Preserving heritage, advancing understanding, and fostering opportunities for future generations remain at the heart of our work every day.

THANK YOU TO OUR COMMUNITY PARTNERS



SAINT JOHN



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NEW BRUNSWICK MULTICULTURAL COUNCIL
CONSEIL MULTICULTUREL DU NOUVEAU-BRUNSWICK



NBTA
New Brunswick Teachers' Association



*Thank you for your continued
support!*

Contact Us



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See more on our
website, here!