



New Brunswick Human Rights Commission

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The human rights picture in New Brunswick leading up to 1967

In New Brunswick at that time, a number of our communities were really victimized. If you examine the early history of our province, this has not always been the “Peaceful Kingdom.” From the very early days of our New Brunswick history, when you go back even to the time when this was part of New France, we learned as school children the heroic efforts of Charles La Tour. When Charles, who had from the King of France, the fur trade franchise, his colleague, another explorer from France who was based over in the Nova Scotia part of New France, attacked Fort La Tour, which is located where Saint John New Brunswick is now, and when Charles La Tour was down in the Boston area getting arms.

So there’s been those kinds of conflicts, and there were conflicts between the European explorers and the First Nations people who were here. And then during the American Revolution, many of the Loyalists who came up and settled in these parts included also some Black Loyalists who were freed from the bondage of slavery in the United States. And indeed much later in the mid-sixties—in the mid 1800s—the Americans fought a very bloody civil war around which slavery was a key focus.

Many New Brunswickers don’t realize that the Black Loyalists who came here with the Loyalists and many of them were even given land grants. Not too far from Fredericton, and near Gagetown, is a little community called Elm Hill. If you drive out through Elm Hill, there are a number—to this a day you can read on the mailboxes the name of the family McIntyre, which is one Black family that came with the Loyalists and were given land grants. However, the Black community in New Brunswick were not always that well treated; in fact, they were poorly treated.

This brings us down to after the Second World War. Many, many members of the Black community served with great gallantry and dignity and heroism in the Canadian Armed Forces in the struggles that we participated in against Nazism and fascism. One very well-known gentleman by the name of Joseph Drummond had served in the Royal Canadian Navy, and he, having served with the Canadian Armed Forces during the Second World War, was not prepared to accept being treated as a second-class citizen. And one case (I was home on my summer holidays from university), a barber shop in Saint John would not cut his hair, and so I said, “This is terrible,” and we had a little sit-in in that barbershop. And so I saw in my home community of Saint John New Brunswick the kind of racism that was outwardly manifested. This was not institutionalized or quiet—it was very overt.

And then to my horror, I began to discover that even in our own province a lot of the social service clubs had restrictive rules around membership so for example if one was not a white Christian certainly golf clubs will not admit you as a member. It was clear that racism—ethnocentrism—was a was alive and well, but it wasn't spoken of at that time; however, our neighbors to the south in the United States were engaged, mainly through the leadership of the Black community in the United States, in the claim and the seeking of equality—an equal opportunity, notwithstanding colour or race. That impacted upon us herein Canada.

So, in about 1965, I'd say really under the leadership of the Black community out of Saint John New Brunswick, approaches were made to the government of the province that we have to have some fair employment practice legislation and fair accommodation practices legislation to make it illegal for people to be discriminated against in employment or accommodation because of race.