

**Birchtown Museum Site Archaeological Monitoring**  
**Birchtown, Shelburne County**  
**HRP Report A2014NS012**



**Black Loyalist Heritage Centre in Birchtown, Shelburne County  
(Nova Scotia Museum, 2015)**

**Katie Cottreau-Robins, PhD**  
**Curator of Archaeology, Nova Scotia Museum**  
**Department of Communities, Culture & Heritage**  
**August 14, 2015**

In early March 2014, following many years of planning, fundraising, community collaboration and stakeholder consultation, the physical building of the place that would feature the story of the Black Loyalists - a group of newly-freed and enslaved African-Americans forced to leave the United States, along with thousands of white Loyalists, at the close of the American Revolution (c. 1783) – was set to begin. Given the well-documented historical and archaeological significance of Birchtown<sup>1</sup>, including the land parcel that would hold the Black Loyalist Heritage Centre, the Curator of Archaeology initiated monitoring of the building site during ground-breaking and early construction ground disturbance activities.<sup>2</sup>

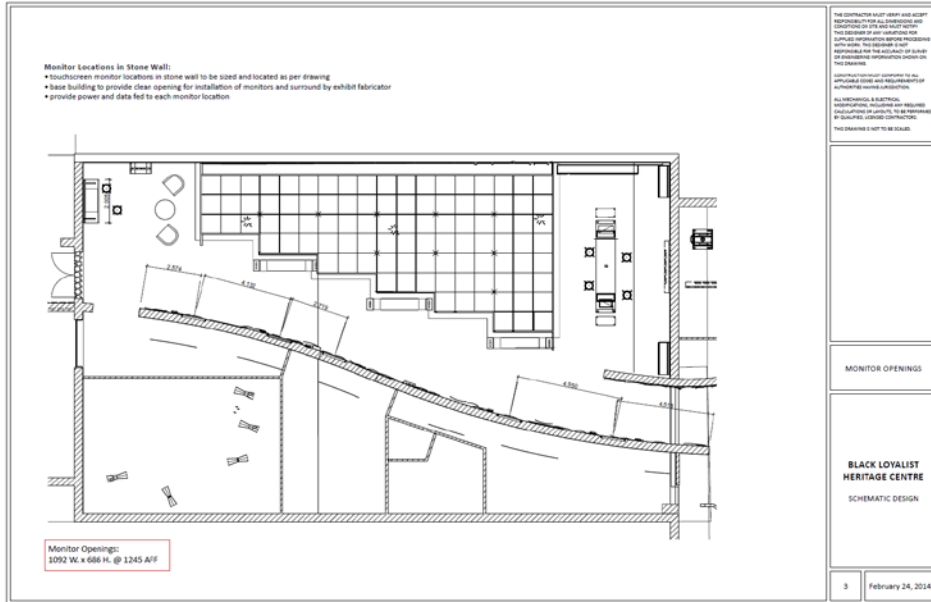
The weather was wet and rainy over the 2 days of monitoring however the work site was easily accessible from the adjacent Birchtown Road. Monitoring took place during grubbing and clearing and the removal of granite glacial erratics. Once surface and near surface clearing was completed, further topsoil was removed to several centimeters and in areas to over half a meter. No archaeological materials were observed or recorded. Due to the extensive Black Loyalist archaeological collection excavated just down the road at the Blucke Site (AkDi-23) in 1998, the reporter was well familiar with the type of artifacts to expect. Some modern glass sherds

---

<sup>1</sup> Numerous archaeology permits and reports, NSM curatorial reports, exhibits, artifacts, theses (including a Masters and PhD by the report author), and publications have been generated and are on file regarding the Black Loyalists of Nova Scotia and the archaeological and historical significance of Birchtown, Shelburne County. See the Ethnology, History and Archaeology Collections of the Nova Scotia Museum.

<sup>2</sup> The land parcel had been previously surveyed under an earlier permit (A2012NS038) by the reporter as well as Assistant Curator of Archaeology, Stephen Powell. No evidence of archaeological resources or areas of elevated archaeological potential were noted in that survey however, monitoring during ground breaking was recommended as a final precautionary step. Prior to 2012, the wider vicinity along the Birchtown Road was surveyed by archaeologist Laird Niven. However, the complete building/development footprint was not captured in that survey hence the additional 2012 review.

occasionally popped up, however no period or diagnostic artifacts or structural materials were discovered. The modern glass was not collected.



**Final schematic design of the Black Loyalist Heritage Centre in Birchtown.  
(Lord Cultural Resources, February 2014)**



**Monitoring building site ground disturbance and clearing. Some remnants of snow in the background. (K. Cottreau-Robins, March 2014)**



**Breaking down the glacial erratics on the building site.  
(K. Cottreau-Robins, 2014)**



**Typical domestic, ceramic artifacts found in Birchtown at the Blucke Site  
(AkDi-23) and directly related to the Black Loyalist settlement period. (K.  
Cottreau-Robins, 2005)**

The soil stratigraphy uncovered during the monitoring project was typical for the region. A simple vegetative leaf mat was first encountered, then a dark brown gritty soil with rocks and roots, followed by a orangy-brown soil leading to a lighter orangy-brown sterile level.

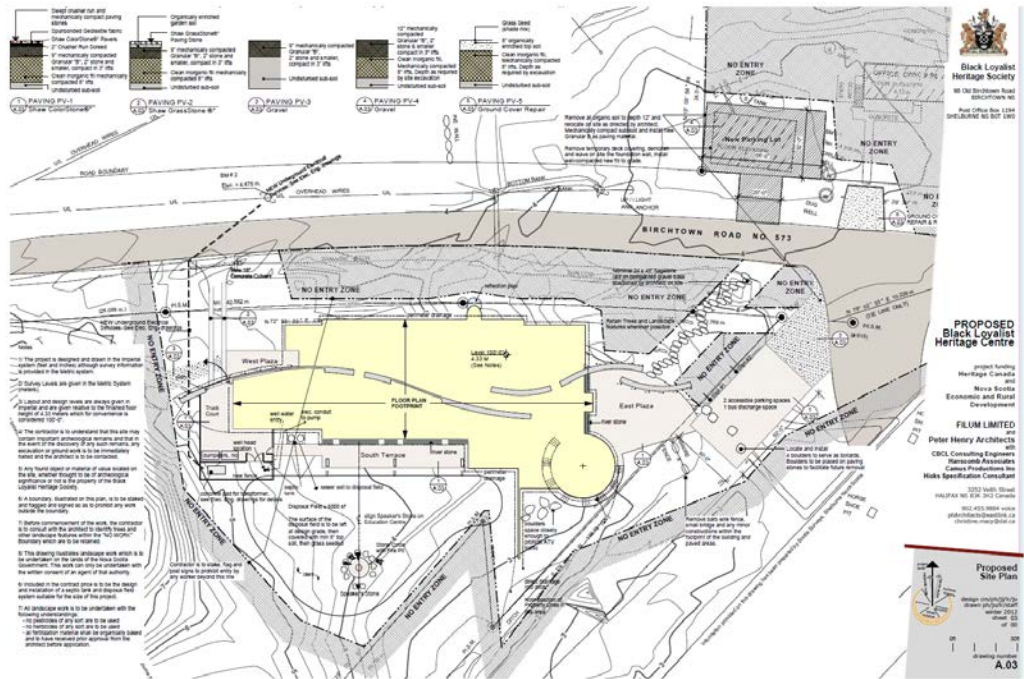


**Notice the lighter, orangy-brown soil uncovered beneath the darker brown top soil. (K. Cottreau-Robins, 2014)**

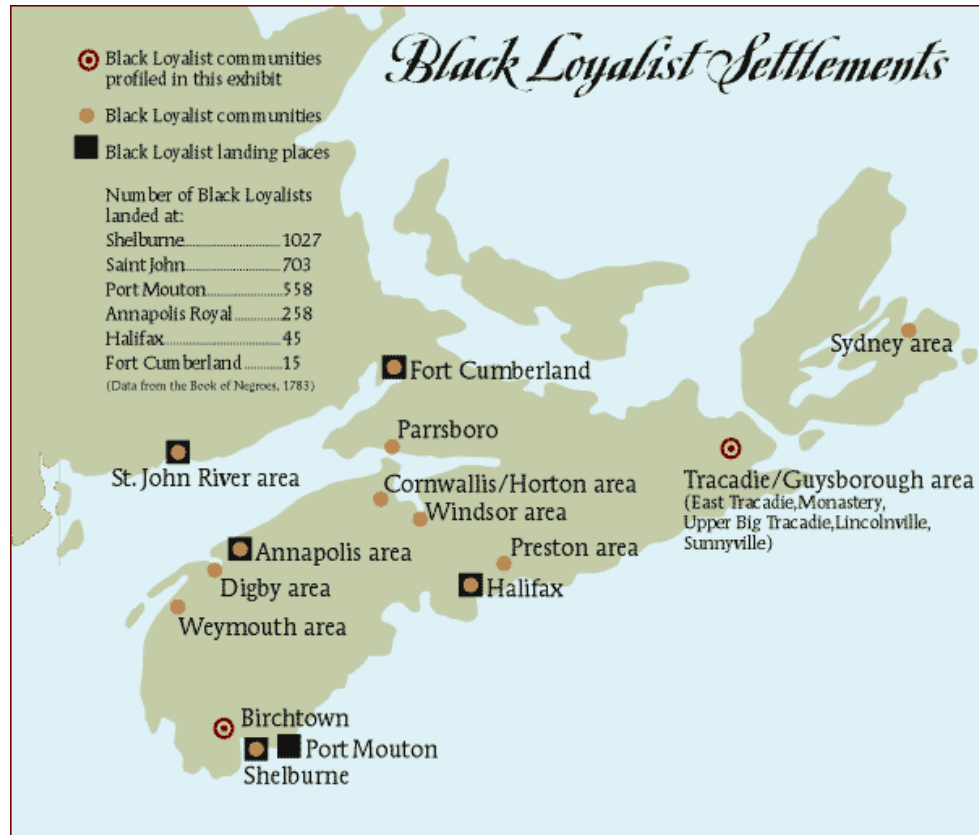
Overall, the monitoring project was uneventful which was welcomed given the building stage was now underway and previous investigations of the area had taken place. The reporter continued to keep in touch with the Site Manager, Beverly Cox, as the building progressed to ensure no new finds were exposed. The reporter also visited the site a few months later. Given the Centre is open to the public now and part of the Nova Scotia Museum family, there are no further recommendations.



Checking in on the building site following the monitoring stage.  
(K. Cottreau-Robins, July 2014)



Schematic of the Black Loyalist Heritage Centre on the Birchtown Road,  
Birchtown. (FILUM Limited and Peter Henry Architects, 2012)



**Black Loyalist settlement map developed by the Nova Scotia Museum as part of the “Remembering Black Loyalists, Black Communities” initiative in 1998-2000. Note Birchtown located outside the town of Shelburne in southwest Nova Scotia.**