

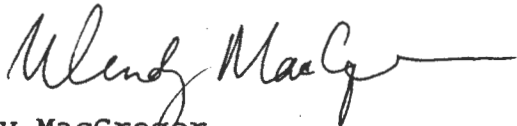
Re: Africville Reunion and Book Launch

The book, The Spirit of Africville tells all sides of the Africville story from the mouths of people who were actually there. The book launch will begin at 4:00pm on Saturday July 25. There should be about two hundred people in attendance at the launch and close to four hundred at the reunion picnic which goes on all week-end.

At the launch, members of the Africville community will speak about Africville. Some of these people will be lively senior members of the community who were raised in Africville and in turn brought up their own families there. Ruth Johnson, an elder, will be asked to perform a song she wrote about Africville. Several younger members who were just children when Africville was demolished will also speak about their experiences and their continuing battles.

If you are interested in interviews and photographs or film footage it might be best to arrange this in advance so as not to miss the opportunity if things are hectic at the launch.

I look forward to hearing from you.
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Wendy MacGregor". The signature is written in dark ink and has a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Wendy MacGregor

Contributors to the book are:

DONALD CLAIRMONT professor of sociology at Dalhousie University,
STEPHEN KIMBER author, journalist and teacher at the University of
King's College School of Journalism, BRIDGLAL PACHAI executive director
of the N.S. Human Rights Commission, and Halifax novelist and
journalist CHARLES SAUNDERS.

THE SPIRIT OF AFRICVILLE

Selected and edited by the Africville Genealogy Society

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Paperback \$19.95 Cloth \$34.95

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AFRICVILLE RESIDENTS TELL THEIR STORY IN NEW BOOK

The community that the City of Halifax tried to bulldoze out of existence is still very much alive, and this weekend Africville residents are launching a book which tells their story.

The book, titled The Spirit of Africville, combines text with extensive photographs. The many full-colour photographs of Africville show an attractive and well-located small settlement on the shores of Halifax's Bedford Basin. The book is being launched at the annual Africville reunion, on the site where Africville once stood.

"Africville suffered from years of neglect by the city," says Irvine Carvery president of the Africville Genealogy Society. "Year after year they refused our requests for basic city services such as water, sewer, paved roads, and police and fire protection. This happened even though Africville was within Halifax city limits, and residents were taxpayers like anyone else."

The book documents in one photo sequence how City of Halifax dump trucks, often used for hauling garbage, were used to move the household effects of Africville resident Dorothy Carvery. "Her experience was no different from others," says Irvine Carvery. "Yet to this day there are people who deny that those trucks were used."

The Spirit of Africville, published in coffee table format, aims to tell all sides of the Africville story. One chapter explains the thinking behind the decision of city officials to demolish the community. Another chapter records the recent reflections of many who were involved in the project. Former Halifax mayor Allan O'Brien explains why he supported the demolition at the time, though he believes it would not happen today. Former Nova Scotia deputy minister of welfare Fred MacKinnon admits that the destruction of Africville arose from a misguided bureaucratic desire to manipulate people's lives. Former Nova Scotia education minister Ron Giffen points to the role of racism in the decision.

The community feels the injustice as strongly today as it did in the 1960s and residents are pushing to have Africville rebuilt. Several months ago the provincial government agreed to rebuild Seaview Baptist Church, the heart and soul of the Africville community, on its original site. "It's the first step toward realizing our ambition to see the living community of Africville back in its old location," says Carvery.

Members of the Genealogy Society hope that their book will help other Canadians to better appreciate the importance of community, and they hope that the experience of Africville will encourage threatened communities to refuse to go along with governments who want to push them aside. "In Nova Scotia," says Carvery, "the experience of Africville has helped other black communities stand together when they are threatened by government action. We hope our book will spread this message even further."

THERE IS MORE...



Ruth Johnson, who contributed a great many artifacts to the exhibition, is the matriarch of a founding Africville family.

Ruth Johnson: This is an honour for me to be here today. My great-grandfather was the first settler in Africville. John Brown, his wife; Tom Brown, unmarried, and William Brown, just the three of them with some tools. They were the ones who were placed here from Africa. Africville was nothing but bush. Maybe [the white authorities] though they were going to Bedford Basin to drown themselves, but they didn't.

I was born in a house with plastered walls and a dining room and a living room and a butler's pantry and parlour that we were not allowed to go in, but the best of furniture. Anybody can come to my house now to see some of the beautiful furniture that came from Africville — linen tablecloths, out of this world silver, beautiful things. There were lots of lovely homes.

There was not a home in Africville that didn't have a piano or an organ. This is why we used to go around after church and learn how to sing. We didn't need anybody to teach us how to give music. All my sisters,

all of us went to the Conservatory of Music and took music, from the violin right down to the pipe organ and taught it to the children.

So we were somebodies, we had our own stores, we had our church, our schools, we had our teachers, we had our own ministers who were born in Africville. One of the world's greatest boxers that you know was black, George Dixon was born right in Africville. Duke Ellington's wife, her father came right from Africville, so there were some very good people who came from Africville.

But Africville people were people who didn't blow their own trumpets. Unless you looked down over the hill, maybe you thought they were in Bedford Basin. But they were still down there living, minding their own business because they didn't need anybody else, they didn't need to go to anybody. They made their living, they worked at different companies and they worked and paid their taxes. They cannot say that the people in Africville were squatters because the ones who paid taxes paid a whole lot of taxes for those who were squatters. Any 'squatters' were squatting on Brown land. When the city imposed taxes on the Browns, the Browns paid their taxes. I can show you taxes when it was \$19.20 a year right up to \$385 in 1967 when they brought Africville out.

Irvine Carvery: Last year, just a little over a year ago, the Africville Genealogy Society petitioned the City for certain things and certain actions that we would like to see take place in regard to the land that's still out in Africville. One of our demands was for the City of Halifax to consider relocating the people back to the land of Africville. The land is underutilized, it's idle land and the people want to go back to the land, so why not move back?

We would like to propose to the Province of Nova Scotia and the Government of Canada and the City of Halifax that we institute a guaranteed sale of homes for the people of Africville who now own their own homes, guarantee us sale of their home at appraised value if we relocate back to our land.

As you know, there are lots of people from Africville who do not own their own homes. The cooperative housing movement in the City of Halifax has just mushroomed over the last five years. That is another kind of housing that can be provided for the people of Africville

Then, of course, you have your public housing. That also can be instituted into a planned community that is participated in by and with the people of Africville.

There are the ways and means, there is the initiative, there is the will and the power of the people of Africville to move back to their land. All we need is the involvement and the commitment of our government officials. We will be continuing that push.

What I would ask from the people who have attended the exhibit in the art gallery or the sessions here this weekend is that you support us, the people of Africville, in our efforts to get back to where we came from.

Clarence Carvery: It is such an enjoyable time remembering all of the little children's games we used to play. I can look at some people here and I can say, "I remember you, so don't say nothing to me, if you say something to me I will squeal on you."

I can remember as a young boy, one day I swore and Mrs. Ruth Johnson — a great leader — was coming out of our house. She said, "Dickie, is that you?" I said, "Yes." She said, "I don't want to hear that coming out of your mouth again." Well, neither did she, because I knew what was coming.

The community itself meant so much. Playing, swimming ... to wake up in the morning and run down and jump right off the rock in the water, tide in or out. *(Laughter)*

We used to have picnics. I remember one year we had a church picnic and we had it down in Kildare's Field, but we had it down in a little gully. I remember Stan Carvery, my uncle, built these straw huts — you would swear to God you were in Hawaii *(Laughter)* — and after they got it built, an awful windstorm came up and blew it all down. We still had the picnic though, and the water came right up from the Basin and flooded the field. The next time they built it, they built it up on the higher ground.

I look at the panel, I remember Mrs. Howe's son, Kenney. He and I used to hang around. I remember grandmother leaning over the table saying, "What are you doing? Why are they taking my home?" I said, "Grandmother, I don't know."

I can remember trucks coming in. I remember Mrs. Sarah Mantley's house — they tore it down, they never gave her time to take a stitch of furniture out of her home and knocked it down. They bulldozed it.