

Chapter Three “A Home for Our Children in the Right Place”

The first party of Black emigrants who left San Francisco bound for Victoria on April 20, 1858 was part of a diverse population hoping to strike it rich during the Fraser River gold rush. Single African American men and women as well as families came seeking freedom from racially restrictive laws, along with the peace of mind of economic prosperity. This chapter describes early Black settlement in British Columbia through case studies of first generation women who migrated to Vancouver Island between the years 1858 and 1860. By examining their work within the private and public sphere, it looks at how the province’s African Canadian women existed at the intersection of gender, race and class in the nineteenth century.

On Sunday, April 25, 1858, the Commodore docked in Esquimalt harbour with sixty-five passengers on board, part of an overwhelming influx of people who had descended upon the quiet fort town of Victoria.¹“Between March and June [of that year], ocean steamers from California, crowded with gold-seekers, arrived every two or three days at Victoria... In the brief space of four months, twenty thousand souls had poured [into a hamlet previously populated by approximately two or three hundred inhabitants.]”²

¹Edgar Fawcett, Some Reminiscences of Old Victoria. (Toronto: William Briggs, 1912), pg. 26. “All the ocean steamers docked at Esquimalt then, and the passengers were freighted round in a smaller steamer to the Hudson’s Bay wharf in our harbour.”

²Matthew Macfie, Vancouver Island and British Columbia: Their History, Resources, and Prospects. (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, & Green, 1865), pg.65.

Upon arrival, the African American settlers rented a large room from a local carpenter and spent the evening worshipping and praising God. A few days later, local Anglican minister Reverend (later Bishop) Edward Cridge called on them in the morning and extended an invitation to attend his non-segregated church, a sign of respectability for the emigrants.³ He asked the new residents why they left San Francisco to come to Victoria. People told him about the injustices they laboured under in California and that they were "much encouraged by the privileges they would enjoy [on Vancouver Island]." ⁴ In one of the few letters surviving from that period written by a Black woman, Nancy Davis Lester gave her reasons for moving to Vancouver Island. Mrs. Lester mentioned to her friend abolitionist William Still that the group who left at the end of April, 1858 had received a hospitable reception from Governor James Douglas. She told him that "it seems to be a providential provision for us who are so oppressed... that ere long we may find a home for our children in the right place." Some newspapers in California were "taunting the coloured people" who were leaving to come to Vancouver Island. "However," Nancy Lester said "our enemies are never willing that we should emigrate to a place where we will be benefitted."⁵

³For a discussion of respectability and the Black elite in Halifax during the last half of the 19th century see Judith Fingard, "Race and Respectability in Victorian Halifax," The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, Volume 2 No. 2 May 1992, pp. 169-195.

⁴ Reverend Edward Cridge Diary entry dated Thursday May, 6, 1858", Provincial Archives of British Columbia.

⁵Nancy Lester to William Still "San Francisco June 4, 1858," William Still Correspondence of the American Negro Historical Society Papers (Gift of Leon Gardiner) Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

It is difficult to know exactly how many Black women or men migrated to Vancouver Island during those early years and who they were.⁶ For women, this lack of visibility is due in part to their classification in the historical record only as wives, mothers and daughters. Women were present however in all phases of settlement from the initial party of sixty-five onwards. As Reverend Cridge described in his diary, some men had brought their wives and children with them from California while others came ahead to prepare a home. Others hoped to earn enough money in the Fraser River gold mines to buy family members out of slavery and bring them to the Vancouver Island colony.⁷ Some women came as domestic servants. Others came on their own, with sisters or aunts.⁸

⁶ The number of Black people who settled initially on Vancouver Island ranges from 300 to 800 in various accounts. Winks states that "In 1923 one of the noncommissioned officers of the [Pioneer Rifle Corps], Corporal [Samuel John] Booth, told the City Archivist of Vancouver, J.S. Matthews, that the proper figure was 600." Winks, Footnote 43, pp. 286. According to Edgar Fawcett, "eight hundred coloured persons-men, women and children-emigrated to Victoria during 1858 and 1859." Some Reminiscences of Old Victoria, pg. 215.

⁷ Cridge Diary, "Friday May 14, 1858."

⁸Information about these women is not easily extracted from a single body of documents. As the Black community in the nineteenth century British Columbia was small, there is no motherlode of primary and secondary sources to mine. It was difficult at first to ascertain even if someone was African Canadian. Included in Pilton's MA thesis appendices was an undocumented list of Black British Columbians. However, the few married women noted on this list were identified solely by their husbands' surname and only one single woman was listed. Reconstructing community life in British Columbia in the nineteenth century is difficult to accomplish for any group as the province's first federal census was taken in 1881. Working backwards, utilizing Pilton's list as well as the 1881 and 1891 manuscript census records which denote ethnicity, family genealogies were created. These genealogies were completed with details gleaned from church, cemetery and court records, along with will and probate files, birth, marriage and death records, newspapers, coroner inquests, city directories and oral histories. From the family trees, a list was compiled of 212 women who lived on Vancouver Island from 1858 until the turn of the century.

One hundred and forty women of African descent were identified as immigrating to Vancouver Island and neighboring Saltspring Island during the first decade of settlement 1858-1868. The birth places are known for approximately one hundred and ten of these women. Just over half or eighty nine of them were born in the United States. The majority were born in southern slaveholding states. Thirteen were born in Virginia, nine in Missouri and eight in Maryland. Women were born in other southern states including: Florida (6), Kentucky (3), Mississippi (3), Georgia (1), North Carolina (1) and Arkansas (1). The breakdown for those women born in Northern Free states had the majority coming from Pennsylvania (12), Massachusetts (2), the District of Columbia (2), New York (2) and one from New Jersey. Seven women were born in California prior to the emigration to British Columbia. Interestingly, twelve women were born in what is now known as the province of Ontario in Canada and four came from the West Indies.⁹ (The chart in appendix one will provide names, places of birth, dates of birth etc.) These were younger women, with a majority under the age of 35 years, either girls who had come with their families to settle on Vancouver Island, or young married women who emigrated with their husbands. A handful of the female emigrants were in their late thirties or early forties with only four women over 50 years of age. At 56, Ellen, wife of Abraham Copeland and mother of Harriett Harrison-Hogan-Staff, was the oldest known Black woman to emigrate during these early years of settlement.

⁹ Eighteen women were listed as being born in the United States with no further detailed information available. The birth places of thirty women are unknown. Author's notes.

Most first generation women were involved in long lasting, stable marriages interrupted only by the death of a spouse. Many were married to business or tradesmen who achieved relative economic prosperity employed as merchants, tailors, restaurant owners, bakers, draymen, carpenters, contractors, porters and plasterers. This afforded them the opportunity to live out the Victorian ideal of separate spheres, staying at home and working within the family. Mary Elizabeth Carter, wife of Paris Carter- porter and crier, raised their three sons – two of whom were born in British Columbia in 1860 and 1861, at the family homes on Fort Street and later Pandora Street in Victoria.¹⁰ Martha Jane Charity, the wife of Cornelius Hamlin Charity, a boot and shoemaker, was residing with her family in Chatham, Ontario in 1855 until 1861. Even though she was the mother of two young girls ages four and eight years old, Martha took an active part in the Charity shoemaking business. In the 1861 Canada Census, she was listed as a shoe binder and her husband as a shoe maker in Chatham. That same year however, the family moved to Victoria.¹¹ The Charitys and their children moved up and down the west coast from Victoria to

10 Mary Elizabeth Carter was born in 1826 in St. Louis, Missouri. She died October 13th, 1890 in Victoria, B. C. and is buried in Ross Bay Cemetery, Victoria, B.C.; BC Archives, Death Certificate Registration Number 1890-09-006918; British Columbia Guide and Directory for 1863, Frederick P. Howard and George Barnett Publisher, Victoria, B.C. 1863, pg.57; First Victoria Directory Third Issue, Edward Mallandaine Publisher, Victoria, V.I., 1869, pg. 21. The children of Mary Elizabeth Carter and Paris Carter were: John William Carter b. 1852 U.S.A. 1881 Census of Canada; Census Place: Victoria City Johnson Street Ward, Victoria, British Columbia; Roll: C_13285; Page: 42; Family No: 397; George Paris Carter, b. April 11, 1860, Victoria, B.C. died February 2, 1934, Victoria, B.C.; BC Archives, Death Certificate Registration Number 1934-09-494716 ; Anthony Oswald Carter b. about 1862 Victoria, B.C. died in Baltimore, Maryland about January 1907. 1881 Census of Canada; Census Place: Victoria City Johnson Street Ward, Victoria, British Columbia; Roll: C_13285; Page: 42; Family No: 397.

11 The Provincial Freeman, Chatham, Ontario, May 19, 1855, pg.8 Ad for ``Boots and Shoes``; 1861 Census of Canada, Place: Chatham, Kent, Ontario; Poll: C-1038-1039 also lists the Charity

Oakland, California and back to Victoria moving wherever prospects were best for Cornelius Charity's shoemaking business.¹² Martha did not seem to be involved in the family business during this period. In 1880, when she was living at 845 Harrison Street in Oakland, California with her husband and their daughter Eleanor, Martha was listed as having the occupation of keeping house.¹³

Victoria Richard Clanton emigrated to Victoria as a young woman with her family. She was part of a nucleus of families who moved to California from Florida and then later to Vancouver Island.¹⁴ Victoria's aunt, Sophia Page-Everton, also came from Florida. She lived next door to the Clantons and Richards on Topaze Avenue for many years.¹⁵ Born in Jacksonville, Florida,

daughters Adele and Eleanor ; First Victoria Directory, Edward Mallandaine & Co., Victoria, B.C., 1860, pg. 27 ``Charity, C. bootmaker, Government Street. Adele Charity born 1853 Chatham, Ontario died October 24th, 1874 in Victoria, B.C. She is buried in Ross Bay Cemetery near her father Cornelius Charity at G 43 E 18. City of Victoria, Ross Bay Cemetery Records; Eleanor married Francis Seymour. Her mother Martha Jane Charity was living along with Eleanor and her husband Francis Seymour in Portland, Oregon from about 1880-1901. Portland City Directory, 1901-1902, R.L. Polk & Co. Publishers: Portland, Oregon, pg. 201.

12 Cornelius Charity died May 31st, 1885 in Victoria, B.C. , BC Archives, Death Certificate Registration 1885-09-004165. Cornelius Charity spoke about how business was slow in Victoria but improving when he was visiting San Francisco purchasing goods. The Elevator, San Francisco, Friday January 24th, 1868, pg. 2. The family seemed to have moved to Oakland around 1879 as it was then Cornelius was listed in the California Voters Registers.

13 United States Census Year: 1880; Census Place: *Oakland, Alameda, California*; Roll: 62; Page: 306A; Enumeration District: 016

¹⁴Delilah Beasley, The Negro Trail Blazers of California (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), pp. 106.

¹⁵Clarissa Richard, Victoria Clanton's mother, is buried beside her sister in Ross Bay Cemetery, Victoria British Columbia. City of Victoria, Parks Department, Ross Bay Cemetery Records p. 128, Permit #1717. The tombstone inscription reads "Clarissa Richard Died August 4, 1890 aged 80 years. Also her sister Sophia Everton, January 1907, aged 80 years." F13 E20.

Victoria married Robert Thompson Clanton on Boxing Day, 1866, at St. John's Anglican Church, Victoria.¹⁶ The Clantons became moderately wealthy and influential within the Black community. Robert owned a clothing store in the 1870's.¹⁷ He later worked as a bookkeeper at M.R. Smith and Company's Crackery Factory - an African Canadian owned business in Victoria, still operating in 1901. Victoria Clanton worked at home, giving birth to five children, three of whom survived. Perhaps typically, two others died in very early infancy and were apparently buried with minimal rites within a year or two of each other in the 1880's.¹⁸

Sarah Ann Smith was married to baker Moses Rowe Smith.¹⁹ The family bakery was located on Johnston Street, when the couple first came to Victoria. The business prospered and expanded

¹⁶Clanton Family Tree Courtesy of Mr. Mel Clanton in the possession of author.

¹⁷Greater Victoria Police Archives, Charge Book, August 13, 1870 reports that Robert Clanton's clothing store was broken into by person or persons unknown. The goods stolen included: "12 Baltic shirts, 6 pairs of grey drawers and 5 lambs wool undershirts."

¹⁸PABC Will and Probate Files Call #1052, June 5, 1915. Her will mentions sons Robert Wendell and Frederick Sumner Clanton and daughter Clarissa (Clanton) Besselleu. Ross Bay Cemetery, "Clanton - infant daughter of R.T. Clanton, 19 days old born Victoria, died there July 16, 1883, buried July 19, 1883 4 pm. No officiating clergy, Hayward Undertaker, G13 W13." "Clanton-R.J., still born, Victoria born and died, July 18____? buried July 19, 3:30 pm, no officiating clergy, no undertaker, G Block 13 W13 p.60."

19 First Victoria Directory and British Columbia Directory 1868, Edward Mallandaine, Victoria, B.C. pg. 44 has Moses Rowe Smith listed as a baker on Johnson Street; He was listed as a bread, biscuit and fancy cake maker on Fort Street in the 1869 edition of the First Victoria Directory, Op. Cit. pg. 50. His business continued to be on Fort Street. His sons Hamilton and Garrett worked with him. Sarah Jane Smith nee Hamilton was born September 25, 1841 in London, Ontario. She died April 3rd, 1913 in Victoria, British Columbia. Her son Hamilton was the informant for her death certificate. On her death certificate, it said that she had lived in Victoria for 51 years at the time of her death. BC Archives, Death Certificate Registration Number: 1913-09-028749

over the next decades to become a bakeshop named the Victoria Bakery at 57 Fort Street and a steam bread and biscuit factory located at 91 Niagara Street in Victoria,²⁰ Sarah stayed at home raising their three children- sons Garrett, Hamilton and daughter Selina. Living on Douglas Street in the earlier days, the family moved by the end of the 1880s to a very tasteful and opulently decorated furnished house that they owned on Dallas Road. Pictures of the Dallas Road house found in the BC Provincial Archives show an upper middle class home. Very similar to their white counterparts, the formally decorated Smith household showed an adherence to the ideal of respectability. In the parlor, thick tasseled curtains framed the windows. Pictures were on the walls, with bric-a-brac in corner curio cabinets and on the ledge over the fireplace. Small tables and quilted chairs were strategically placed in groups throughout the parlor, so that guests could sit and engage in conversation. An upright piano off to one corner, was likely played by Selina Smith who trained at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto.²¹ The spotless dining room was also formally set with a china tea service off on a side board, pictures on the walls; lights hanging from the ceiling; a silver tray resting on the white cloth covered table with seven elegant wooden chairs gathered around it; a wicker chair off to the side.²²

20 Victoria Daily Colonist, Wednesday September 30th, 1893 pg. 2. Contains a want ad for bakers for the Smith steam bakery and biscuit factory.

21 PABC, `The Living Room of the M.R. Smith home 104 Dallas Road, Victoria. Accession number: 193501-001, file name: b-02691; the M.R. Smith home at 104 Dallas Road, Victoria. Accession number: 193501-001, file name: b-02690;

22 PABC, `The Dining Room of the M.R. Smith Home at 104 Dallas Road, Victoria. Accession number: 193501-001, file name: b-02692.

The West Oakland home of Lucinda Tilghman, an African American woman who had lived in Victoria for approximately four years from 1858-1862, was one of the sites excavated in the Cypress Archaeological Project led by Mary and Adrian Praetzellis of Sonora State University. This archaeological study is a rare glimpse in the life of an African American woman on the Pacific west coast. While she was living in Victoria, Lucinda`s troubled marriage to expressman and porter Augustus Christopher dissolved. Seven months pregnant with their daughter Selvia, she had charged her husband with assaulting her on August 15, 1859.²³ Three years later in 1862, Augustus Christopher charged black barber Robert Tilghman for having stolen his furniture and living in open adultery with his wife. The transcripts of the court trial in the Daily British Colonist mocked the sad affair with its title `` A wife for three dollars and a half .²⁴ Not long afterwards, Lucinda Christopher left Victoria with Robert Tilghman and her daughter Selina. During the journey down the west coast to Oakland California, the couple got married staying married for over twenty years until Robert died at sea near the Philippines. Lucinda Tilghman was a widow for part of the time she lived at 662 Fifth Street in West Oakland, California.²⁵ The Tilghman

²³PABC, GR 848, "Police and Prisons Department," Book B, pg.185. The charge was dismissed as Lucinda Christopher failed to appear on the August 17th court date. The \$3.50 deposited for costs was forfeited. Selvia Christopher was baptized December 28, 1859 by Rev. R.J. Dundas in the Parish of St. John. Anglican Church Archives, Victoria, British Columbia, Baptismal certificate #5, volume 95.

²⁴ The Daily British Colonist, Vol. 7 Victoria, Vancouver Island, Saturday January 11th, 1862, pg. 3.

²⁵ United States Census Year: 1880; Census Place: *Oakland, Alameda, California*; Roll: 62; Page: 220C; Enumeration District: 012;

home was not as well off as the Smith household but it shared some similarities including ``a somewhat restrained genteel assemblage`` made up of ceramics that were the same color and basic shapes and porcelain, an elegant toiletry set, a cuff link, gold pendant and a gold earring-all which speak to the refinement of the household. The dining service of the Tilghman household was also formal as was the tea and liquor service. Meals featured high-priced beef loin steaks, roasts, ham and leg of mutton....Unlike some of their neighbors, however, Lucinda Tilghman served expensive varieties of fish, including sardines, white bass, Chinook salmon, and California barracuda.²⁶ Mrs. Tilghman was treated with much more respect in Oakland than she was in Victoria. Working within the home, raising the couple`s three children, Lucinda Tilghman and her family were active members of the church. The Tilghman family was also heavily involved in what was called racial uplift, working hard to improve the lives of people within the African American community.²⁷

Maria Ann Gibbs, wife of Mifflin Wistar Gibbs, was one of the best educated and affluent women who lived on Vancouver Island in the colony`s early years.²⁸ The daughter of an enslaved woman Lucy Chinn Alexander, Maria was born in Mayslick, Kentucky in 1826. Moving with her mother and other family members to Oberlin, Ohio in 1852, Maria studied at Oberlin College from 1852-

26 Mary Praetzelis and Adrian Praetzelis, Putting the ``There`` There: Historical Archaeologies of West Oakland ``Black is Beautiful``: From Porters to Panthers in West Oakland``, Chapter 10 prepared for the California Department of Transportation, 2004, pgs. 280-281.

27 Maria Gutman, ``The Tilghman Family and ``Race Work`` in West Oakland``, Putting the ``There`` There: Historical Archaeologies of West Oakland, Op Cit. pgs. 282-287.

28 Adele Logan Alexander, Parallel Worlds: The Remarkable Gibbs-Hunts and the Enduring (in) significance of Melanin, University of Virginia Press: Charlottesville and London, pg. 47

1854 receiving a literary degree.²⁹ Mifflin Gibbs, who had already settled in Victoria British Columbia, came to Oberlin in 1859, to court Maria Alexander marrying her that same year on April 29th in Lee, Iowa.³⁰ The couple journeyed back to Victoria, British Columbia where Maria gave birth to six children-Francis in 1860, Donald in 1861, Ida in 1862, Horace in 1863, Wendell in 1865 and Harriet or Hattie in 1867. She took care of the children in the home while her husband was away pursuing his various business and political interests.³¹ It would appear that as an educated and upper middle class woman of African descent, Maria Gibbs did not have a lot of support living in Victoria during this time. There were few opportunities to socialize as she had no peers within the African Canadian community on Vancouver Island and racism prevented her from forming friendships with other women. As a result by 1870, Maria and her children were living by themselves near her mother and sisters in Oberlin, Ohio.³² Mifflin Gibbs followed shortly thereafter moving back to the United States himself. Maria and Mifflin Gibbs lived apart for the rest of their lives. Never divorcing, “[they] exchanged visits, corresponded often and

29 Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Oberlin College for the College Year 1852-1853, Oberlin, Ohio: James M. Fitch, 1852, pg. 30. “Maria A. Alexander- First Year, Residence Mayslick Kentucky.

30 "Iowa Marriages, 1809-1992," database, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:XJG3-PZ9:3 December 2014>), M.W. Gibbs and Maria A. Alexander, 29 Apr 1859; citing Lee, Iowa, reference 2:3P3MDQ3; FHL microfilm 959,168.

31 Mifflin Gibbs was elected to the city council in Victoria. The British Colonist, Tuesday Morning April 9th, 1867, pg. 3. For more information on his life in British Columbia, please refer to Sherry Edmunds-Flett, *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Volume XIV, 1911-1920, “Mifflin Gibbs” http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/gibbs_mifflin_wistar_14E.html .

32 1870 United States Federal Census, Place: Oberlin, Lorain, Ohio; Poll M593_1235; Page: 660B; Image: 712; Family History Library Film: 5522734.

cooperated on a panoply of matters concerning property, finances and especially their children's well-being." Maria Gibbs lived the rest of her life with her daughters Ida and Harriet. The United States federal census found them in Washington, D.C. thirty years later in 1900 surrounded by other members of the talented African American elite.³³

There were a few married women of African descent who worked outside the home, although the number employed in paid work is not readily apparent. An informal household census by the Victoria Police Department in 1871 counted 128 Black men and 89 Black women with no occupations stated for women.³⁴ Two parent households enumerated in the 1881 and 1891 census rarely mentioned mothers/wives as having an "occupation"³⁵ but an exception to this was Adelina Phelps listed in the 1881 census as married to Edward Russell Phelps.³⁶ She was a nurse and mother of six children whose ages ranged from eight to eighteen years old.³⁷

³³ 1900 United States Federal Census; *Place*: Washington, Washington, District of Columbia; *Roll*: 162; *Page*: 15A; *Enumeration District*: 0104; *FHL microfilm*: 1240162; Maria Gibbs died Thursday July 28th, 1904, The Washington Post, Washington, D.C. Friday July 29th, 1904, pg. 3. She is buried in Westwood Cemetery in Oberlin, Ohio.

³⁴PABC, GR 428 Volume One, p. 104. The population totals in Victoria were "1615 White men, 1197 White women, 141 Native men, 219 Native women, 181 Chinese men, 30 Chinese women, 128 Black men and 89 Black women."

³⁵B-390 BC 1881 Census Victoria, Yates Street Ward.

³⁶ A jack of all trades, Edward Phelps was a house mover, contractor, farmer and pressman. He died on August 21, 1885 after a two week bout of dysentery, leaving his forty seven year old widow Adeline and their children.

³⁷Their children were Emily, Mary, Naomi, Harriet, Isabella and William H. Phelps. Province of British Columbia, Ministry of Health, Vital Statistics Division, Death Certificate #1242

However, the absence of recorded occupations, of course, does not necessarily mean that African Canadian women did not have independent means. As part of the household economy, their contributions to the family income such as taking in boarders or piece work, growing vegetables as well as raising poultry or livestock were often invisible. Elizabeth Leonard pressed charges against Timothy Roberts for twisting the necks of several of her chickens after they had run into his yard.³⁸ Death certificates as well as probate files hint at other sources of income for married women. Julia Ann Mathews, wife of John Devine Mathews a teamster, was listed in her death certificate as being a housekeeper.³⁹ Emily Rebecca Estes, wife of farmer Andrew Jackson Estes was a dressmaker.⁴⁰ The family of Joseph Montaro, cook on the steamers Enterprise and Brava,

“Edward Russell Phelps.” Adeline subsequently remarried a Newfoundland born miner named Louis Defries on October 22, 1898. Province of British Columbia, Ministry of Health, Vital Statistics, Marriage Certificate #3048, Volume 8 “Defries.”

³⁸The Colonist, September 20, 1860. Timothy Roberts was a Black drayman who was married to a white Irish wife. He had accused Elizabeth Leonard and other members of the Black community of “being down on his wife because she was Irish, using insulting language towards her whenever she was out in the yard.” Roberts had to post two \$20 bonds to be of good behaviour, or in default to suffer one month imprisonment;” He had appeared in court a year earlier to answer the charge of John F. Clark for an aggravated assault by striking him on the head with a rock and kicking him when on the ground...The Court held that Clark had brought the assault upon himself but that it did not justify Roberts using such a weapon. He was fined \$20 and costs. British Colonist, Wednesday July 13, 1859, pg.3.

³⁹Born in Baltimore, Maryland in 1811, Julia Ann Mathews died July 23, 1887 in Victoria, BC. She was buried in Ross Bay Cemetery two days later. Province of British Columbia, Ministry of Health, Vital Statistics, Death Certificate # 1536 “Julia Ann Mathews”.

⁴⁰Emily Rebecca Estes nee Coones was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1848. She died July 29, 1889 in Victoria, BC at the age of forty one. Province of British Columbia, Ministry of Health, Vital Statistics, Death Certificate # 1949 “Emily Rebecca Estes.”

were solely supported by the earnings of his wife Annie Elizabeth Montaro and his son Francisco “Frank” Montaro after his death.⁴¹ Mrs. Ford, and Sarah Carter nee Pointer were dressmakers⁴²

Running a boarding house was a profitable activity in the growing community of Victoria for Blacks as well as Whites. Sarah Jane Douglas Moses and her husband Wellington Delaney Moses, ran a boarding house in James Bay. Childless, they had been married for three years in 1861, when no less a personality than Lady Franklin, wife of the explorer Sir John Franklin and her niece Sophia Cracroft stayed at their establishment.⁴³ According to Sophia, they were very glad to

⁴¹PABC, GR 1304 1886/1474 Box 74 ; Joseph Montaro died on January 14, 1883 in Victoria. Ten years after his death, his son Frank filed notice with the probate court asking that the family property on Fort Street in the city be mortgaged. Since his father’s death, Frank pointed out his brothers Joseph Manuel and Edward along with their sister Seraphina “imbecile and unable to gain a livelihood” were wholly supported by the monies earned by Frank and his mother. After his mother’s death, Frank was the sole support. Frank advocated mortgaging the property for \$300- \$200 for a light furniture and express truck, \$54 for two years arrears of taxes on the lot and \$25 for the water rate.

⁴² Mrs. S. Ford was a “fashionable dress maker at Mrs. Good’s Cadboro Bay Road shop in 1868 First Victoria Directory Second Issue, Op. Cit., pg. 30. Sarah Amelia Pointer migrated with her parents Nathan and Sarah Pointer from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to San Francisco, California and then to Victoria , British Columbia in 1858. She moved back to San Francisco when she married William Herbert Carter there on January 27th, 1869. Sarah and her husband William had six children. In the 1870 and 1880 US federal census records, her occupation is listed as keeping house. In the 1901 Canada Census, when she had moved back to Victoria in the two years before her mother died, Sarah Carter was listed as a dressmaker.

Ella Cooness

Adelaide Lawrence nee Mathews

⁴³Anglican Church Archives, Victoria, B.C. Christ Church Cathedral "Marriage" Folder 3, p. 19. December 14, 1858. Emily Allen, another Black woman living in Victoria was her witness. Rev. Cridge noted in his diary that Moses had been married before but, in an unexplained

get the lodging, "the very best in {Victoria} and really very tolerable -- the landlady giving up her own room above for me."⁴⁴

In a patronizing description that speaks of the class exclusiveness underlying the racial notion of separate spheres, Sophia Cracroft stated that Sarah Douglas Moses was "a queer being, wear[ing] a long sweeping gown without crinoline -- mov[ing] slowly and h[ad] a soft sort of stately way (in intention at least) which [was] amusing. Sometime (Mrs. Moses) t[ied] a coloured handkerchief round her head like the American negroes (she was from Baltimore) but on that Sunday, she wore a sort of half cap with lace falling behind, her hair being long enough to be parted. The language of both (Sarah and her husband) was very good." Obviously, to Sophia Cracroft, Mrs. Moses's aspirations to genteel womanhood were doomed to failure. In her diary, she recorded Wellington Moses's praise for his wife's excellent housekeeping and noted that Mrs. Moses had the "reputation of being a first rate cook."⁴⁵

tragedy, had lost his wife and four children.

⁴⁴Sophia Cracroft, Lady Franklin Visits the Pacific Northwest, D.B. Smith Editor, (Victoria: Provincial Archives, 1974), p. 60. In a patronizing description that speaks of the class exclusiveness underlying the racial notion of separate spheres, she stated that Sarah Douglas Moses was "a queer being, wear[ing] a long sweeping gown without crinoline -- mov[ing] slowly and h[ad] a soft sort of stately way (in intention at least) which [was] amusing. Sometime (Mrs. Moses) t[ied] a coloured handkerchief round her head like the American negroes (she was from Baltimore) but on that Sunday, she wore a sort of half cap with lace falling behind, her hair being long enough to be parted. The language of both (Sarah and her husband) was very good." Obviously, to Sophia Cracroft, Mrs. Moses's aspirations to genteel womanhood were doomed to failure.

⁴⁵ His assets were left to a woman living in San Francisco and the children of his executors. Victoria Colonist, September 23, 1862; PABC GR 848 Vol. D Police Charge Books, pp. 138-139; The Pacific Appeal, November 29, 1862 "Strangers." A microfilm copy of The Appeal can be found in the PABC. The Elevator, San Francisco, California, Friday October 16, 1868, p. 2 and The Elevator, Friday July 30, 1869, p. 2; PABC, Wellington Delaney Moses, Account Books; B-389 1881 Census District No. 188 Cariboo District and Richfield, Barkerville,

The words of Wellington Delaney Moses gave no indication that their marriage was troubled. However, a year later, in September 1862, Sarah Douglas Moses was arrested for attempting to commit suicide. She had jumped into James Bay at the foot of their boarding house stairs. Pulled out by a passerby, Mrs. Moses again attempted to throw herself in. Locked up in the city jail for 24 hours before being released, she blamed her husband's recent elopement with another woman for her failed suicide attempt. Although no written evidence actually documents his infidelity, Wellington Moses did leave Victoria around this time to work as a barber in mining camps on the present day British Columbia Lower Mainland. He later became a store owner and resident barber of Barkerville. Sarah Douglas Moses subsequently left Victoria for San Francisco on November 29, 1862. It would appear that she resided in there for a period of time as The Elevator an African American newspaper from San Francisco, listed letters received for her by its office in October, 1868 and in July of the following year. Listed as a widower in the 1881 census, Wellington Delaney Moses died in Barkerville in 1890. His will makes no mention of Sarah.

At least 26 of the identified women were widowed before the age of fifty.⁴⁶ Most of them lived in Victoria, needing to support themselves and other family members, Like their sisters elsewhere in Canada and the United States, they found work in the service sector as domestics, laundresses and

Lightning; PABC, Probate File Call #436 July 25, 1890.

⁴⁶Some of these women included: Mary Jane Hamilton, Didamia Copeland, Catherine Gant see Probate file of husband, Harriet Staff, Mrs. Baldwin, Julia Travis, Fanny Deas, Mrs. Ford, Sarah Hobbs, Sophia Page, Adelina Phelps, Sylvia Stark, Mrs. Hayes, Ignore, Courtenay McMillan, Amanda Scott, Mary Stewart, Sydna Francis and Phillis Randall.

cooks.⁴⁷ Often a widow would have more than one occupation in her lifetime. Catherine Gant, a clothier, in the 1871 household census was listed as a nurse ten years later. In Ada Matilda Barnswell Alexander's oral history, she was also employed as a cook.⁴⁸ Rebecca Gibbs, widowed at the age of fifty six, was a writer as well as a nurse. While residing in Barkerville, British Columbia, she wrote the poem "Proclamation Day-January 1st" published in The Elevator on December 27, 1867. Around the time of her death on November 14, 1873, Rebecca was nursing a man who had an infection in the head. According to her obituary, she became infected as well and died within ten days.⁴⁹ Other women such as Mary Jane Hamilton, Phillis Randall and Adelina Phelps ran boarding houses and took in single men and women as lodgers.⁵⁰ Mary Ann Bailey, after the death of her husband Madison in August 1893, advertised in the Victoria Daily Colonist want ads for "the care of a couple of children: a comfortable home provided."⁵¹ Rachael Miller

⁴⁷Jacqueline Jones Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work and the Family, From Slavery to the Present, (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), pp. 98-99.

⁴⁸PABC GR 428 Volume One pp. 62-63; B-390 BC 1881 Census, Victoria B Johnson Street Ward; PABC, Sound and Moving Image Division #1308:1 Ada Matilda Barnswell Alexander Oral History Tape.

⁴⁹The Elevator, December 20, 1873, pg.2. According to her obituary, "he was leeches and bled freely; it was supposed Mrs. Gibbs must have had a scratch on her left arm, as in a few days, it became swollen and before death relieved her of her sufferings, it burst." The man's wife died as well. However, according to her death certificate, Rebecca Gibbs died of bronchitis at the home of Randall Ceasar on Johnson Street in Victoria. Province of British Columbia, Ministry of Health, Vital Statistics Division, Death Certificate # 66 listed her as a nurse.

⁵⁰Mr. Hamilton died in 1864. Mrs. Hamilton is listed in both the 1881 and 1891 census as a housekeeper. One of Phillis Randall's boarders John Banks died of alcohol poisoning at her house.

⁵¹Victoria Daily Colonist Wednesday September 20, 1893, p. 2.

and “the half crazy” Ignore were enumerated in the 1881 census as washerwomen.⁵² Widows like Sarah Smith, who took over her husband's steam bakery after his death or Ella Coones, who inherited the sizable estate of John Giscome, were rare.⁵³

Only one identified widow, Julia Hernandez Travis owned property in her own right prior to marriage. In 1853, she left Jacksonville, Florida, with her sister Mary⁵⁴ to join other family members who had arrived in California the year before. According to Delilah Beasley in the Negro Trail Blazers of California (1919), "When the Fraser River gold excitement reached California, the [sisters] decided to go to British Columbia and cook, at a wage of a hundred dollars a week."⁵⁵ Julia Hernandez must have prospered, since she was listed in the Government Gazette as owning a portion of five acres on Pioneer Street in Victoria.⁵⁶ She married Augustus Travis at Christ Church Cathedral on May 10, 1860. Julia's husband died sometime before 1881, since the census for that year listed her as a 46 year old widow.⁵⁷ Although she was continually employed

⁵²Government of Canada, 1881 Census, City of Victoria, Yates Street and Johnson Street Wards.

⁵³In 1891, John Giscome, a wealthy member of the Black community, who made his money mining, was listed as living with Sarah Jane Hamilton. A decade later, his housekeeper, Ella Coones, wife of Stacey Coones, inherited his estate worth \$22,252.66. PABC John Robert Giscome, Probate File "Schedule A, Affidavit."

⁵⁴Mary Hernandez Bolmer, widow, married Augustus Christopher on January 3, 1884 in Victoria, BC. See Ministry of Health, Vital Statistics, “Marriage Certificate” #496, volume 2.

⁵⁵Negro Trail Blazers, p. 122.

⁵⁶Province of British Columbia, Government Gazette, Victoria, Vancouver Island, p. 7.

⁵⁷B-390 BC Census Victoria Yates Street Ward However, The 1882-1883 BC Directory p. 76 lists Julia Travis as doing washing and ironing out of her home. Tragedy struck the Travis household repeatedly. Her eldest son William died of consumption at only 32 years of age at her

as a cook and laundress -jobs of low pay and status- Julia Travis was still an influential woman within the Black community, witnessing wills as "Julia Travis, property owner."⁵⁸ She was also active in the Anglican and Reformed Episcopalian Churches, garnering sufficient respect that after her death on May 2, 1911, Mrs. Travis was interned in a plot beside the stately grave of the eminent Bishop Cridge.⁵⁹

The respect that individuals like Julia Travis had earned within the Black community and the frontier society did not break down the walls of systemic prejudice which existed in Victoria. Racism was overt during the early years of settlement due in part to an influx of White Americans from California. P.A. Bell, editor of the African American Pacific Appeal, stated that "there [was] as much prejudice and nearly as much isolation in Victoria as in San Francisco."⁶⁰ A factious group of White Americans attempted to segregate schools and churches but failed.⁶¹ Initially, a vocal minority of Reverend Cridge's congregation complained about "perspiring Ethiopians"

home in 1894. Anglican Church Archives, Victoria British Columbia, Reformed Episcopalian Church Death Register. His brother Augustus Jr. died in 1909 after being shot by a policeman in Idaho "Sad Death: Former Resident of Victoria Shot by a Policeman in Idaho.... Travis and a friend who worked on the train had after quitting work been playfully scuffling. A policeman interfered and as Travis attempted to get away, the policeman drew a revolver and shot him. The officer is under arrest and public sentiment ran so high against him that there was talk of lynching him. This occurred on April 27th." Victoria Times, May 3, 1909 p. 16.

⁵⁸PABC 1052, No. 378 "Will of Andrew Samuel Booth" August 20, 1894. Andrew Booth was the son of Julia Ann and Samuel Booth. His father Samuel had sailed from New York to the Isthmus of Panama, then to California by a pack of mules and later settled in Victoria.

⁵⁹Ross Bay Cemetery Tombstone Inscription, "George Edward Keithley, born February 9, 1858 Sacramento California. Died February 11, 1912 Victoria BC." F25 W20.

⁶⁰The Pacific Appeal, February 6, 1864, p. 3.

⁶¹Lady Franklin Visits the Pacific Northwest, p. 10.

sitting next to them in pews and advocated for a separate section for Black people in the church. This did not occur due to the support of Reverend Cridge and Bishop Hill.⁶² George Hills, the first Church of England bishop in British Columbia was very sympathetic to African Canadians within the diocese. In his diary, he recorded the visit of Mifflin Gibbs and Mr. Francis on March 26, 1860. They explained to him that “the feeling [against them][was] even more bitter than in some parts of the states of America...” Hill replied that “from whatever society they were excluded,[he] was excluded also, for [he] should belong to nothing where such unrighteous prejudices existed.”⁶³ African Canadians were denied access to various public facilities such as barbershops, pubs, hotels and theatres. Backed by threats of physical violence, this was especially true of social events. In one revealing instance, during a benefit concert for the Royal Hospital on September 25, 1861, a white man named Ryckman threw a package containing one pound of flour on Mifflin Gibbs, his pregnant wife Maria, Nathan Pointer and his daughter for sitting in the dress circle. In the ensuing fracas, Gibbs defended himself and his family physically, and was bound over to the courts for doing so, although he was arguably acting in self-defence.⁶⁴

⁶²Victoria Gazette, August 24, 1858. However a battle over segregation did take place in the Congregationalist church between Rev. William F. Clarke a staunch anti-slavery man and Rev. Matthew Macfie. Clarke conducted integrated worship services while Macfie stated he would separate Blacks from Whites. The Colonial Missionary Society failed at first to give an opinion on the matter which undermined Clarke's position. Clarke resigned and returned to Canada West. See P.H. Reid, "Segregation in British Columbia," The Committee on Archives of the United Church of Canada, The Bulletin, No. 16 (1963), pp.4-15.

⁶³George Hills, No Better Land: The 1860 Diaries of the Anglican Colonial Bishop George Hills, Roberta L. Bagshaw editor, (Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1996), pgs. 89-90.

⁶⁴Colonist, October 1, 1861. The charges were dismissed against Ryckman the white man

Religious worship was an important part of the lives of African Canadian women and men alike. Many first generation women worshiped at local churches. A number became members of Anglican and later Reformed Episcopalian congregations led by their ally, Bishop Cridge.⁶⁵ Others were Methodist, Baptist or Presbyterian.⁶⁶ In contrast to California, a separate African Canadian church was not established in British Columbia because the new emigrants decided that it was better not to form "a distinct Church organization" as they did not want to be marginalized.⁶⁷ This push for integration came from the desire to be part of the democratic tradition which provided equal access to institutions, services and the political process, rights denied in the United States.

who had thrown the flour. Mifflin Gibbs however, was convicted of assault and fined 5 for striking Ryckman.

⁶⁵PABC Add Mss 320 Volume 8 Folder 12 Cridge Papers Congregation List circa 1860-1861, p. 2. Included in this undated list were: Madison F. Bailey and his wife Mary Ann, Washington and his wife unnamed who was described by Sophia Cracroft as having excellent manners and being very light in colour. Alexander and Mary Jane Hamilton, Mifflin and Maria Gibbs were also part of Cridge's congregation, along with Gibbs' partner Peter Lester, his wife Nancy and two daughters. As well, Augustus and Julia Travis and Emma Segee were on this list.

⁶⁶These women included: Clarissa Richard, Mary Ceasar, Mary Carter, Mary Christopher, Ann Gwyne, Julia A. Matthews, Adelina Phelps, Sarah Ann Wheeler and Sydna E.R. Francis. Amanda Scott was listed as agnostic in the 1891 census. T6292 1891 BC Census, City of Victoria Yates Street Ward; but her obituary in the Victoria Times said she was a founder of the first Methodist church. Victoria Times, September 9, 1919, p. 26.

⁶⁷ Cridge Diary, May 6, 1858; Although decades later in 1891, the Puget Sound Conference of the AME Church was organized PABC "composed of the Seattle Church, and those in Tacoma, Roslyn, Franklin, Spokane; Portland and Salem, Oregon; and Victoria, Wellington, and Saltspring Island, British Columbia." Esther Hall Mumford, Seattle's Black Victorians: 1852-1901, (Seattle: Ananse Press, 1980), p. 155.

Living, working and participating in colonial society, the men, women and children of Victoria's Black community drew sustenance from each other by living in the same neighbourhoods, marrying within the community and by supporting its organizations. During the nineteenth century, single, married and widowed first generation women as well as other members of Victoria's African Canadian community lived in close proximity in the Johnson and Yates Street Wards. They often inhabited the same houses for generations. The Pierre family lived at 22 Pioneer Street for at least 30 years as did Catherine Gant and her children at 125 Blanchard Street, Nathan and Sarah Ann Pointer at 193 Johnson Street and the Lesters at 93 Vancouver Street. Only occasionally did first generation women marry or move outside the local Black community. Fanny Harris of Hamilton Upper Canada married John Sullivan Deas on September 3, 1862 in Victoria. Deas, a tinsmith, canned salmon on the Fraser River for seven years. After selling his business for approximately \$15,000 in 1878, John, Fanny and their children moved to Portland Oregon. Mary Jane Washington, wife of George Washington the African American founder of Centralia, Washington, was previously married to Stacey Coones and lived in Victoria for a number of years prior to her 1869 marriage to Washington.⁶⁸ Martha Ann Addison, who was married to Patrick Jerome Addison, left Victoria with her husband and was living in Walla Walla

⁶⁸Stacey Coones and Mary Crane were married at Christ Church Cathedral on November 22, 1860 by Reverend Edward Cridge. Stacey Coones died on May 14, 1908 in Victoria at the age of ninety five. Ministry of Health, Vital Statistics Division, Death Certificate # 021 619. In Centralia: The First Fifty Years 1845-1900, Compiled by Herndon Smith, Reprinted 1975, Mary Jane Coones was described as "a large attractive widow of 3\4 Jewish extraction...Her husband George laughed when he told of the beginning of their acquaintance....There was another man who admired her...introduced them...I'd not be the one to step in and try to take another man's girl away from him but he let down the bars and well, I walked right through."

Washington by 1864.⁶⁹ Rosanna Freeman, wife of Thomas Palmer Freeman, lived with her husband and family in Victoria from 1858 to 1872. At that time, the Freeman family moved to Seattle, Washington where they remained.⁷⁰

69 Anna Addison Date of Death April 16, 1910 Washington. *Washington Territorial Census Rolls, 1857-1892*. Olympia, Washington: Washington State Archives. M1, Roll V228_18 Line 2; Patrick Jerome Addison, Date of Death April 22, 1900, Walla Walla County Auditor, Death Records, 1891-1907, Washington State Archives, Digital Archives, <http://digitalarchives.wa.gov>, [September 20, 2020]; *Bureau of Land Management, General Land Office Records; Washington D.C., USA*; Federal Land Patents, State Volumes, Patrick J Addison, June 30, 1876, Walla Walla Washington, Township 007n Range 038E Lot 2, Section 4, Accession Number: WAWWAA 016455 Document Number 281.

70 Year: 1880; Census Place: *Seattle, King, Washington*; Roll: 1396; Page: 238C; Enumeration District: 007; 1900; Census Place: *Seattle Ward 2, King, Washington*; Page: 7; Enumeration District: 0086; FHL microfilm: 1241744;

Like many Black people elsewhere, African Canadian women on Vancouver Island were actively engaged in public efforts to 'uplift the race'. Although there is only direct evidence of Nancy Lester's ties to the abolitionist movement, women such as Sarah Pointer, Maria Gibbs, Sydna E.R. Francis, Julia Ann Booth and Nancy Lester herself were married to men with a history of involvement in the movement.⁷¹ African Canadian women from Vancouver Island publicly supported the Pioneer Rifle Corps, a volunteer militia made up of Black men. At one event, Sarah Amelia Pointer gave a speech and presented a silk flag sewn by the women to the Rifle Corps.⁷² Two years earlier, the women had presented \$100 to the company to help with operating expenses.⁷³ The Committee of Coloured Ladies, as they called themselves, took their responsibilities seriously. In 1863, for example, they held a donation party on New Year's Eve to raise money for ex-slaves in the United States. The president of the committee, Emily Allen wrote directly to the vice-president of the United States Hannibal Hamlin, requesting that the enclosed draft for £86 14s 9d. Sterling be sent to Beaufort, South Carolina, for the benefit of the contrabands. In the same letter she mentioned \$170 sent to the city of Philadelphia for the same purpose.⁷⁴ The women cooked for and participated in the annual Emancipation Day celebrations

⁷¹ Rudolph Lapp, Blacks in Gold Rush California, (London: Yale University Press, 1977); Mifflin Wistar Gibbs, Shadow and Light: An Autobiography, with Reminiscences of the Last Century, (Washington, 1902).

⁷²Chronicle, March 15, 1864.

⁷³Colonist, January 9, 1862.

⁷⁴Victoria Daily Chronicle, July 10, 1863.

and acted in dramas at the Pioneer Hall.⁷⁵ Individual acts of kindness were common and extended across colour lines. For example, The Daily British Colonist reported that "Mrs. Lester donated Fruit, Vegetables, and Eggs to the BC Protestant Orphans' Home."⁷⁶ The women often took children or seniors into their homes or nursed them through illnesses. Catherine Gant and her husband William for the three years prior to his death, supported a White child that had been abandoned by its mother.⁷⁷ Godfrey Kennell was living with Amanda Scott at her home when he passed away at the age of sixty eight in 1903.⁷⁸

As the evidence presented here suggests, community ties were strong amongst Black people who settled on and around Vancouver Island in the nineteenth century. Through their labour-inside and outside of the home, their social and benevolent activities as well as religious involvement, the women of the African Canadian community built better lives for themselves and their children. They sought integration in public institutions like schools and the church, but maintained the unique constituency of the local Black community by almost exclusively marrying and settling within its boundaries, a pattern which continued well into the 1880s and 90s. This being said, these African Canadian women also had a larger vision, evident from their activities undertaken in

⁷⁵Daily British Colonist, Tuesday Morning July 4, 1874 and PABC Oral History Tape Mrs. Ada Barnswell Alexander.

⁷⁶Daily British Colonist, Wednesday Morning July 8, 1874.

⁷⁷The British Colonist, Tuesday Morning, August 27 1867, p.

⁷⁸PABC GR 1304, "Probate file of Godfrey Kennell," December 10, 1903. Amanda Scott, a native of Mississippi, died September 25, 1919 in Victoria, BC. Ministry of Health, Vital Statistics, Death Certificate #71125 "Amanda Scott."

the public sphere towards improving conditions for Black people both at home and in the United States. Intimately connected through family\kinship ties and community obligations, the interwoven private and public spheres of British Columbia's early African Canadian women were not easily separated.