

A Pioneer Among Teachers – An Educational Success Story

Over the years that Mrs. Caldwell worked with the Maroon Hill children in the 1940s, a number of her students won prizes in contests and competitions. One little girl in 1947 won at a public speaking engagement. By 1949 the children won three first place positions in musical festivals. Mrs. Caldwell's students were an eclectic group of fine young men and women.

Mrs. Caldwell taught at a time when presumably children were entitled to a free and accessible education system, regardless of gender, ethnicity or cultural background.

The community of Sackville can never forget Mrs. Caldwell, as she was a pioneer in this community; she contributed enormously to the education of Sackville youths. A price cannot be put on the amount of work she did, when bigotry and exclusion was an acceptable practice in educational circles.

She was such a fine upstanding citizen to work with children and families in helping black residents to enjoy the rich pleasure of the written word. It is as a result of Mrs. Caldwell's work and the determination of her students that Sackville is a little more tolerant, as residents should always be mindful of what was taken away from a group of children years ago.

Maroon Hill: Where Was It?

**The Maroons, while in Sackville,
lived on a hill now known as
“Maroon Hill.”**

**People often ask where
Maroon Hill was located.
Maroon Hill ran approximately
from Sunset Ridge (around the
location of the old Middle
Sackville School) up to the area
where Atlantic Gardens is
located today.**

Historic Black Sackville: The Maroon Hill Children & Mrs. Caldwell's Kitchen School



**Pictured above is the Mrs. Caldwell's
“Kitchen School” in 1949**

Fultz House Museum



Pleasah Caldwell with her geography class.

In 1796 approximately five hundred black residents of Jamaica known as Maroons arrived in Halifax. Not having had a school, the black population who settled in Sackville bought a condemned schoolhouse from Lower Beaver Bank and moved it down in sections and rebuilt the building on a new plot of land in Middle Sackville in 1890.

The school year in the 1890s had two terms. One term ran from May 1st to October 30th. The other term began on November 1st and ended on April 30th. The first school term lasted only six weeks, as the school was not ready for the scheduled May 1st opening. The school opened near the first of June. Mrs. Ester Oland taught the initial six-week term of study.

According to the information still available, the school sat vacant after Mrs. Oland taught, until the wife of a missionary volunteered to teach the Maroon Hill

children. The wife of Rev. C.S. Freeman taught the white children in the area earlier in the day and spent the late afternoon educating the black children at Maroon Hill School. This lasted from about 1906 to 1909. A short time after Mrs. Freeman worked with the area children, a young lady of the age of fourteen, Ms. Mable Fenerty, instructed students for two years on a permit only.

A school had been built years earlier for black children in Sackville, on land belonging to a black family for one hundred and fifty years. But over the years the influential white citizens wanted no Maroon settlement children attending school with their children, leaving the black students without a school in which to attend. The black students were treated so poorly that they no longer bothered to be present at the school site. With no black children attending school in the area, it gave the white majority the right to deny entry for subsequent generations of black families to be educated.

After the Maroon Hill School was no longer in use by the black children, a fourteen-year-old boy wandered onto the property of a Mrs. Pleasah Caldwell. He asked if her son was home, and she informed the child that her son was at school in Bedford. The boy remarked that he wished he could go to school. Mrs. Caldwell could not believe the young man when he informed her that he was not allowed to attend school.

Mrs. Caldwell had just returned from Western Canada after having lived there for twenty-eight years. She had returned to live in her grandfather's house, which happened to be situated next to the local school building. Taking to heart what the child had mentioned to her, she offered to instruct the



Pictured above is Mrs. Caldwell's dining room French class.

young teen; he was an eager student and quickly learned to read. The mother of the child in question spoke to Mrs. Caldwell to see if she would teach her daughter as well. The black residents spoke to her about taking in more students, and to become a teacher of the province in 1942.

By 1942 Mrs. Caldwell had nineteen pupils. Mrs. Caldwell housed classes in her dining room and kitchen, referred to as a kitchen school. At that time there were two sections of the first grade and one section each of grades four, six and eight. The students proceeded to learn with great speed and comprehension, and many went home to even teach their parents how to read.

One of the charming stories of Mrs. Caldwell's school was when she had four students, just one girl and three boys; they asked if they could have a Christmas concert. The children enlisted the help of fellow family and friends from the ages of five down to three-and-a-half, and proceeded to learn four carols. The children and their parents had heard about such concerts, but never actually saw one. Mrs. Caldwell's kitchen was turned into a concert venue, and a Christmas tree decorated the room. What a splendid Kitchen Concert it was during the war years.