

THE OLD STOCK

The Old Stock Players Present

A Play of Black Island History

Created by Ron Irving, Harry Baglole and Scott Parsons

Time: 8:00pm Admission: \$15



CLASSROOM LEARNING MATERIALS

HIS621B

History of Prince Edward Island

Prince Edward Island Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

Canada



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CHARLOTTETOWN

The Old Stock

Teacher Guide

Introduction

Themes

- Slavery
- Treatment of African Islanders
- Social Conditions of African-Islanders
- Transmission of Culture

Pre-viewing Activities

- Anticipation Guide
- Free-write Activity
- Song Analysis

Post-viewing Activities

- Historical Thinking Concepts
 - Historical Significance
 - Evidence
 - Continuity and Change
 - Cause and Consequence
 - Historical Perspective
 - Moral Judgment

Black Islanders – Part of Our Heritage

Introduction

The following activities (pre- and post-viewing) are intended to provide an entry point to critical discussion about PEI's often forgotten Black community. Their numbers were amongst the smallest of any of the British colonies and over time they became virtually invisible as members of the community either emigrated to other places or became assimilated with the existing Island population. However, the stories of PEI's earliest Black Islanders afford us a glimpse into an often ignored chapter of Island history. The goal of this study unit is to investigate some of the real stories of individuals who were brought to St. John's Island (PEI) as slaves or indentured servants. From these first African-Islanders grew a community that still exists today within many family lines.

Themes

There are several dominant themes that appear within the stories of the earliest Black Islanders and their descendents. These themes may lead to further investigations within these areas such as the broader story of slavery within the Maritimes and Canada, or a narrower focus on the contributions of women within the Black community, the competitive spirit of Charlottetown's "Bog" community, or the differences between rural and urban Black communities.

Slavery – The fact that the Island was the only Maritime colony to pass legislation on a Slave Act in 1781 is of special interest. It allowed for the baptism of slaves but ensured that the religious ritual did not exempt them from bondage. Freedom could only be gained according to the wishes (and whims) of the master—or by escape.

Treatment of African-Islanders – Despite the official abolishment of slavery on the Island in 1825 (several years ahead of other British colonies and a full forty years ahead of America's abolition), the treatment of Black Islanders and the social conditions in which they lived did not necessarily improve. Racism was especially evident in how Black Islanders were treated in cases of criminal accusation.

Social Conditions of African-Islanders – Where and how Black Islanders lived on PEI is an area of interest that speaks to the culture of a community of people who suffered many indignities and injustices. Yet, over time, theirs became a vibrant community that contributed greatly to the Island's historical past. The majority of Black Islanders lived in the area of Charlottetown known as "The Bog" although there were several others who established their lives and families in eastern and western parts of the Island.

Transmission of culture – The oral tradition of story-telling and songs was often the only means of passing down family stories to younger generations. At a time when few people were literate, especially not slaves, songs and stories held an important place. Scott Parsons' songs, written specifically for *The Old Stock*, continue this tradition and reveal much about the lives and realities of African-Islanders.

Black Islanders – Part of Our Heritage

PRE-VIEWING ACTIVITIES

ANTICIPATION GUIDE

Respond to each statement twice—once before the unit on Black Islanders begins and again after the unit has been completed. To respond, write “Agree” or “Disagree” in the space provided. A Black Line Master of the following is provided in this package.

Pre-unit

Post-unit

- | | | |
|-------|---|-------|
| _____ | Slavery existed on Prince Edward Island in the past. | _____ |
| _____ | There are many Islanders whose family trees include people of African heritage. | _____ |
| _____ | The “Bog” in west-end Charlottetown was home to all Black Islanders. | _____ |
| _____ | Racism did not exist in PEI until the 20 th century. | _____ |
| _____ | Legislation dating back to the 1700s protected slaves. | _____ |
| _____ | Rural Islanders were more receptive to the black community than city folks. | _____ |



Free-write Activity – Ask students to participate in a 3-minute free-writing activity based on what they know, don’t know, or would like to know about PEI’s African-Island past. Remind them of the rules of free-writing: 1) writing must be continuous even when ideas appear to be “stuck” – just keep pen to paper and continue writing; and 2) writing is private unless they wish to share with others. Ask students to keep their writing for comparison with another free-write session at the conclusion of the study unit. Discuss whether their thoughts, perceptions, or knowledge have changed since they began the unit.

Song Analysis – The following original songs tell the stories of several African-Islanders in PEI history. Their stories reveal actions, attitudes, and consequences that were part of the Black Island reality in the late 1700s and into the 1800s. The music itself sometimes echoes early African rhythms and later variations of blues music that are synonymous with African-American roots. See the following page for suggested discussion questions based on three of Scott Parsons’ soundtracks:

1. Dembo Suckles
2. Jupiter Wise
3. One Spanish Dollar
4. Is Sook Willin’?
5. The Old Stock
6. The Sheppard Accident
7. Klondike Gold
8. What I Am
9. Blackjack Byers

Black Islanders – Part of Our Heritage

1. ***The Old Stock*** (Track #5)

Listen to the lyrics of the song. Discuss the following questions.

- a) Who is the “Old Stock” referred to in the song? Where are these people now?
- b) What does the writer mean by “...times have changed and there’s no shame in common history”?
- c) Why do you think that Byers is a hard name? (See next song.)

2. ***Blackjack Byers*** (Track # 9)

Listen to the story in this song. Discuss the following questions.

- a) What was Blackjack’s crime? Do you think the punishment fit the crime?
- b) Consider that the standard punishment for theft at this time (early 1800s) was one hundred and seventeen lashes for both Whites and Blacks. What might account for the lighter sentence in Blackjack’s case?
- c) What was the most significant consequence of the crime for the family?
- d) How did the Byers name continue to dominate the public records and town gossip at the time? Find out more about the family from other sources such as *Black Islanders: Prince Edward Island’s Historical Black Community* by Jim Hornby, or the Black Islanders Cooperative at <http://www.blackislandersofpei.com/articles.php> Notice that historical accounts may vary according to source. How do you know which account is accurate?

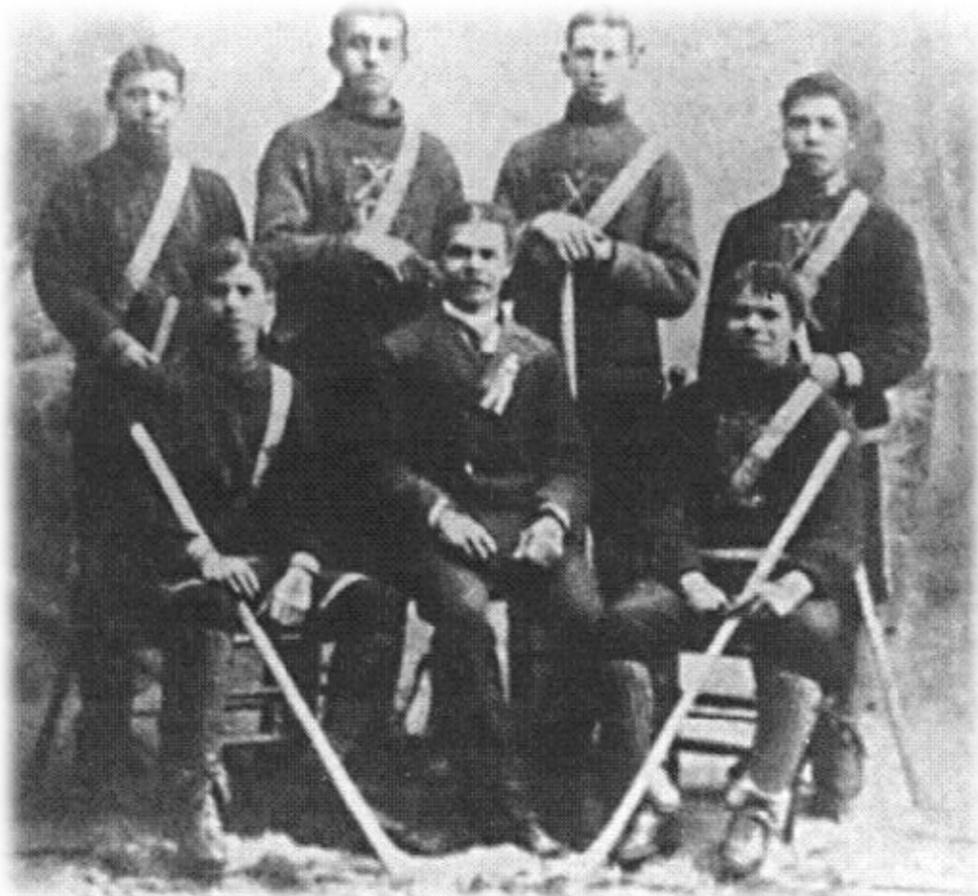
3. ***Dembo Suckles*** (Track # 1)

Listen to the lyrics of the song. Discuss the following questions.

- a) What can you deduce about Dembo’s life story from the lyrics?
- b) Who was Reverend MacGregor? Captain Creed? What roles did they play in Dembo’s life?
- c) What is meant by “manumission”?
- d) Why do you think Dembo’s name often appears in other historical records as Dimbo, Bembo, Benbo, or Dumbo? His last name is often referred to as “Sickles”.
- e) Use a globe, map, or Google Earth to trace the journey that Dembo would have taken from his birthplace (most likely in western Africa) to his eventual arrival and settlement on St. John’s Island via the United States of America.
- f) Search other sources to piece together the full story of Dembo Suckles.
- g) How does Dembo’s story fit into the bigger picture of black settlement in the Maritime region and the rest of Canada? See <http://blackhistorycanada.ca/topic.php?id=118&themeid=2> to find more information on settlement in PEI and other provinces of Canada.

Black Islanders – Part of Our Heritage

POST-VIEWING ACTIVITIES



West End Rangers Hockey Team circa 1900

Black Islanders – Part of Our Heritage

Historical Thinking Concepts

Thinking historically involves asking open-ended questions that require critical thinking skills. It is the “problematizing” of historical content to create new meaning and to arrive at plausible conclusions to new questions. Historical thinking extends beyond the simple recall of factual information and requires students to use historical evidence to develop reasoned responses. Below are brief explanations of the six historical thinking concepts that have been integrated into the study unit for *The Old Stock*, sample questions, and background information. For a more comprehensive explanation of the six historical thinking concepts and guiding examples, please refer to the following resource available in your school: Denos and Case. *Teaching about Historical Thinking*. (2006). Vancouver: The Thinking Consortium (TC2).

Historical Significance – why an event, person, or period from our past is important. Criteria used to determine historical significance include a) prominence at the time; 2) consequences (magnitude of impact, scope of impact, lasting effects); and 3) prominence (has it been remembered or memorialized in present day), or does it help us to understand a part of our history?

Why is Dembo’s story historically significant in the broader story of Black settlement in PEI and beyond?

Under French rule in the early 1700s, Île St Jean abided by laws made in France pertaining to slavery (Le Code Noir). These laws contributed to the first arrivals of African slaves as slavery was permitted at this time and labourers were in short supply. According to one historian, Kenneth Donovan, Jean Pierre de Roma owned as many as twelve slaves of whom at least four were from Africa. Later, under British rule in 1781, an act passed in St. John’s Island stating that the baptism of slaves did not exempt them from bondage. The act was repealed in 1825 long after slavery had gradually disappeared from the Island. For whatever reason, Prince Edward Island was the only jurisdiction in northern British North America to have entered slavery legislation on the books.

Evidence – sources of information that can be used to support a theory or historical argument. Evidence may come from either “primary” sources (first-hand accounts, church or public records, photos, artifacts) or “secondary” sources (deliberately prepared accounts by historians, textbooks, movies.)

What are the challenges related to finding and interpreting historical evidence of the Black Island experience? Whose voices are missing in these records? How does their story get interpreted?

Public records often did not necessarily record slaves or designate their ethnic origins. Slaves were considered to be property of the master and their names may have been changed or modified depending on the master’s whim or the literacy level of the recorder. Historically, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia were the primary destinations of Maritime Blacks, therefore there were more records in existence in these provinces. Court records in PEI history typically over-represent Blacks which may lead to an interpretation of Black Islanders as a major criminal element in Island society. Unfortunately, the day-to-day records that could balance that image do not exist. Other primary documents such as Dembo Suckles’ last will and testament reveal facts and realities as well as attitudes of the times in which they were written. Lack of documentation about the Island’s Black community in history books over the years has contributed to a large historical gap.

Black Islanders – Part of Our Heritage

Continuity and Change – that which changes and that which remains the same over time. Change is ongoing and may occur quickly or slowly. Both change and continuity may be either positive or negative in a society. Comparisons can be made to learn more about a period of time, historical events, people, or social attitudes and trends.

How are immigration and emigration patterns similar or different between present-day and the 1700s or 1800s on Prince Edward Island?

Historically, immigrants to Prince Edward Island have been of European descent—French, English, Scottish, and Irish. However, the point of origin for some Islanders—Dembo Suckles, for example—during the colonial period would have been Africa. Others at this time, who had come via the southern states, would also be able to trace their journeys and roots to Africa. Contemporary immigration patterns to the Island still include African and Caribbean origins as well as diverse regions such as Asian or Middle Eastern countries. As in the past, some present-day immigrants choose to stay on the Island but many others go elsewhere in search of better opportunities or a larger ethnic community where they find a shared support for their own cultural or spiritual values. Out-migration from the Island was, and continues to be, a common trend for essentially the same reasons. There are many parallels in the migration patterns of both periods.

Cause and Consequence – factors that lead to historical events or significant historical decisions. This concept speaks to the “whom” or “what” that influences history and the changes or repercussions that come about because of whomever or whatever. The causal factors may be intentional or non-intentional, and the consequences may be direct or indirect.

What was the predominant factor that led to the establishment of an African-Island community in Prince Edward Island? What factors caused the community to become demographically “invisible” over time?

The American Revolution (American War of Independence) was the catalyst for the immigration of thousands of Black Loyalists to the Maritime region. However, it is probable that there were slaves of African descent here prior to this time period, mostly likely brought here by masters of high military ranking. Unlike the slaves who were promised liberty for their loyalty and service to the British Crown, the Island’s slaves and servants of this period were never given that promise. They simply remained the property of wealthy Loyalist masters or military administrators until such time that they were released of their bondage. Therefore, the Island story is unique. So too is the gradual emigration and assimilation during the 19th and 20th centuries that rendered the Black Island community virtually invisible by the late 1800s. As slavery was abolished in more and more states south of the border, many Islanders of African descent drifted toward communities where there were larger numbers and better opportunities for jobs and a good life. Others sought their African roots and liberty by crossing the ocean once again to Sierra Leone in West Africa to establish new lives. Without new immigrants of African or Caribbean heritage bolstering their numbers as in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, the Island’s Black population soon dwindled, their presence becoming less and less discernible.

Black Islanders – Part of Our Heritage

Historical Perspective – the viewing of the past through the social, intellectual, emotional, and moral lenses of the time. Being able to understand historical perspective requires more than simply putting oneself in the shoes of another person from another time. It demands that one to set aside present-day views and suspend all judgment in order to comprehend the complexities of the norms and attitudes of the period.

How might the views of Island slaves have differed from those of the Black Loyalist freed slaves who arrived in Nova Scotia during the American War of Independence?

How would you account for the loyalty that Island slaves often demonstrated for their masters despite being in bondage to them?

The American War of Independence created a rare opportunity for freedom for many Afro-American slaves. By declaring their loyalty to the British Crown and promising to serve as British subjects, a wave of immigration swept the New England States as former slaves signed on to ships bearing them northward to Canada and freedom. Most of the Black Loyalists would settle in Birchtown, N.S. or in New Brunswick where they expected to establish new lives with the promises of free land (although it would only be half that promised to White Loyalists) and provisions by the British government. None of the freed Black Loyalists were known to settle in PEI although some loyalists did bring their “servants” with them to the Island. During the 1780s and into the turn of the 19th century, enslaved Blacks continued to arrive on the Island, mostly brought here by wealthy Loyalists and British administrators including lieutenant-governor Edmund Fanning, Colonel Joseph Robinson, William Schurman, and William Creed, and others. Slave ownership ensured high social status amongst the Island’s elite.

Moral Judgment – an attempt to assess actions, events, or decisions through an ethical lens according to the context (norms) of the times, and in light of present-day values and sensibilities. It is important for students to understand the difference between factual statements and value statements in order to effectively comprehend the depth of this concept.

“In many ways, the lack of attention to the Island’s history of slavery says much about the general failure of Atlantic Canadian historians to examine the contours of slavery in the region.”
Harvey Amani Whitfield and Barry Cahill, “Slave Life and Slave Law in Colonial Prince Edward Island, 1769-1825,”
Acadiensis XXXVIII, no. 2 (Summer/Autumn 2009): 29-51

Conspicuous by its absence in many Island history books, the experiences of slaves and servants in Island history have contributed to what historian, Duncan Flaherty, refers to as a “collective amnesia” about slavery in Canada and in the northern states. Do you believe this omission is intentional or unintentional?

Slavery is often considered to be a construct of the southern reaches of the U.S. states – mainly Virginia or South Carolina. While some of the Island’s Black slaves and servants originated from these states (via Africa) many others were the property of masters in the New England states and cities such as Boston and New York who eventually made their way to Prince Edward Island, often with a brief stay in New Brunswick or Nova Scotia. Canada’s reputation as a “slave haven” may have been true to a degree in some parts of the country, and for a period in time, but there is no denying that slavery was very much a part of the Maritime and Canadian story. The lack of published works on this subject begs the question, “Why”? Jim Hornby’s, *Black Islanders: Prince Edward Island’s Historical Black Community* (1991), is one of the only published works to treat this chapter in history but it cannot answer the question of why most other historians chose not to do so.

Black Islanders – Part of Our Heritage

Bibliography/Annotated Weblibliography

Harvey Amani Whitfield and Barry Cahill, "Slave Life and Slave Law in Colonial Prince Edward Island, 1769-1825," *Acadiensis* XXXVIII, no. 2 (Summer/Autumn 2009): 29-51.

Jim Hornby, *Black Islanders: Prince Edward Island's Historical Black Community*. Charlottetown: Institute of Island Studies, 1991.

<http://www.blackislandersofpei.com/index.php> This local site, maintained on a volunteer basis, aims to promote awareness of the rich history of Prince Edward Island's Black community. The site contains pages that include Research (general history plus the histories of thirteen Island families); Activity and Information (a general timeline of Maritimes events, key dates); and Photos (a collection of family photos). This site would work well for research about individual stories of Black Island families and their ancestors.

<http://blackhistorycanada.ca/topic.php?id=118&themeid=2> This site features a multi-layered exploration of Black history in Canada. It is searchable by Profiles, Events, Arts & Culture, Timelines, and For Teachers. There are small sections that pertain specifically to PEI but generally it is best used for a bigger, broader approach to slavery and Black culture in North America. One of the strengths of the site is the readability and ease of navigation to search specific topics.

http://www.nfb.ca/film/black_soul/ This short, animated film (9m) combines artwork and music to tell the stories that make up the cultural heritage of a young boy who wonders about his roots. Visually appealing, the images melt and reform into other shapes to symbolically translate centuries of history. The music combines African drums, the sound of chains, nature, work, and more to help tell the stories and to explain the roots of jazz music. This film works well as a way to introduce the topic of slavery, or black culture, or to present the broader picture of slavery in North America in an engaging manner. (Please note that this film has been purchased for school use with public viewing rights. It may be accessed through the provincial library system: Call #: FRVID 305.8 AME)

The Old Stock

Student/Class Materials

Performance Poster

Anticipation Guide BLM

Song Lyrics

(Please note that all songs belong to Scott Parsons and may not be copied without his permission.)

THE OLD STOCK

The Old Stock Players Present

A Play of Black Island History

Created by Ron Irving, Harry Baglole and Scott Parsons

The Arts Guild

Wednesday, March 23rd to Friday, March 25th, 2011

Time: 8:00pm Admission: \$15



Canada



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Citoyenneté et
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CHARLOTTETOWN

ANTICIPATION GUIDE

Pre-viewing Activity

Respond to each statement twice—once before the unit on Black Islanders begins, and again after the unit has been completed. To respond, write “Agree” or “Disagree” in the space provided.

Pre-unit

Post-unit

_____ Slavery existed on Prince Edward Island in the past. _____

_____ There are many Islanders whose family trees include people of African heritage. _____

_____ “The Bog” in west-end Charlottetown was home to all Black Islanders. _____

_____ Racism did not exist in PEI until the 20th century. _____

_____ Legislation dating back to the 1700s protected slaves. _____

_____ Rural Islanders were more receptive to the black community than city folks. _____

Dembo Suckles

Scott Parsons

Track # 1

He was born in Africa, Slavers raided his native place
Ran and hid in a hollow log, Dembo Suckles would soon be his name

Chorus

Dembo hid in a hollow log, slavers searched and found him there
He was dragged from his hiding place, By an iron hook stuck into
his back

He could show to his dying day, the mark left by that cruel hook
He could show to his dying day, the mark left by that cruel hook

The year of 1793, Reverend MacGregor opposed to slavery
Manumission at the standard rate, Good Captain Creed agreed to
free his slave

Chorus

Given one good cow, two sheep, one sow, and a suit of clothes upon
his back

Dembo truly a self made man, bought a hundred acres of land
Married Governor Fannings' slave, lived life to a very great age

Chorus

Jupiter Wise

Scott Parsons

Track #2

Court records from 1785, case of the King versus Jupiter wise
Convicted of assault, he was sentenced to die, the King versus
Jupiter wise
The King versus Jupiter Wise

Called him a thief and a violent slave, he never guess what his friends
would say
Meant to steal a boat for the United States and be a free man for the
rest of his days

Jupiter, Jupiter Wise, for assaulting John Clark they're gonna hang
you high
Plead Benefit of Clergy and save your life, The King versus Jupiter Wise
The King versus Jupiter Wise

Sent for seven years service to his Majesty's Isles
Case of the King versus Jupiter Wise
A slave in the West Indies, last we heard of his life
The King versus Jupiter Wise, the King versus Jupiter Wise

One Spanish Dollar

Scott Parsons

Track #3

One Spanish dollar and an English half crown
One stole bread and butter, the other five pounds
Some fish for his mother, Hanged 'till they be dead
The family was outraged, at the price that they paid

Black Peter and Sancho both hanged for their crimes
A travesty of justice on Prince Edward Isle

For one Spanish dollar and an English half crown
One stole bread and butter the other five pounds

In the cold light of morning, in the hours before dawn
Black Peter and Sancho, would soon be beyond
Their poor hearts would tremble in fear all the while
The hangman awaits them on Prince Edward's Isle

For one Spanish dollar and an English half crown
One stole bread and butter, the other five pounds
Black Peter and Sancho, both hanged for their crimes
A travesty of justice, on Prince Edward's Isle

Is Sook Willin'

Scott Parsons

Track #4

I know a secret that's very old, I know a secret if the truth be told
I know a secret though some will say, Save your secrets for the
judgment day

Well, is Sook willin', (answer) is Sook willin'
Is Sook willin', (answer) is Sook willin'
well is Sook willin' (answer) is Sook willin'
Is Sook willin' to marry you?

Now love is a mighty and wonderful thing
doesn't care what religion or songs you sing
Doesn't care 'bout the color of your skin
Doesn't care if it's a sin

Well is Sook willin'...

Hope for better things to come, hope and the day is won
Hope as love shines through
To a better day for me and you

Well is Sook willin'...

The Old Stock

Scott Parsons

Track # 5

Hmmmnn Hmmmnn, It's been a long time, it's been a long long time

(spoken) The Old Stock are still here, just can't be seen
For a long time, perhaps it was better that way

I recall, my father said to me, folks round here have plain forgot
They're a part of the old stock, the old stock with ancient Africa in
their veins

The old stock, he'd laugh and say, things aren't always what they seem
He'd point out many people in the community

Now times have changed and there's no shame in common history
The old stock lives on and on inside of you and me

You got a hard name, you got a hard name my son
Byers a hard name, a hard name my son
Byers's a hard name, part of the old stock

The Sheppard Accident

Scott Parsons

Track # 6

A shocking calamity for the Sheppard family, February 1869

Sheppard and his son, cutting fence rails in the woods
Sent home with a full load, the boy did not return
Sheppard searched and found, tipped over on the ground
The horse had fallen a short distance from the house

Returning to the scene, Sheppard shocked by what he saw
The dead boys feet stuck out from underneath the horse
Sheppard crawled on hands and knees, threatened friends and family
Taken to the Georgetown jail by the law

A lunatic they said, caused by the accident
The unfortunate man was brought to town
To the asylum he was sent, by the local government
To live out, the rest of his life

The bereavement of the family, a shocking calamity February 1869

Klondike Gold

Scott Parsons

Track #7

Lemuel and Robert of the Sheppard family left Cardigan 'round 1896
They worked in Maine for years, to earn enough money
To go in search of Klondike gold

A good many hard knocks, we went hungry more than once
Just kept on diggin' all the day
The nights were hard and black, they could tear a man asunder
Better fellows, we watched as they went under

Then there it was one day after years of arduous toil
We finally struck the paystreak
We headed back to Maine, gold nuggets that we gave
To loved ones who helped us on our way

Home to Prince Edward Isle, with a fortune and a smile
We helped the whole community
We believe in church and farm, and spinning Klondike yarn
With our good friends and family

What I Am
Scott Parsons
Track # 8

Everybody wants to know what I am, what I am, what I am
Everybody wants to know what I am, what I am

I am an Englishman, I am an African,
I am an Indian, I am a human

Some folks don't understand, there's already enough pain,
Some folks don't understand, inside we're all the same
Some folks don't understand, there's better things to do
Some folks don't understand, no matter what you do
Everybody want to know
Everybody want to know
(repeat all)

Blackjack Byers

Scott Parsons

Track # 9

Lt Colonel Robinson, a loyalist from the states
Brought to the Island of St John's, a couple who were slaves
Blackjack and Amelia Byers might have their liberty
At the end of one year, if they were well behaved

1804 the story goes, Blackjack before the court
Stealing to the value of ten pence, they tied him to a cart
From Harvies Brig at Pownal Square, they whipped him to the stocks
Thence to the wharf and back to gaol, their hopes of freedom lost

Soon after this, notorious judicial punishment
Was laid upon two of their sons, they hanged them for their sins
Sancho stole bread and butter, Peter a few coins
A travesty of justice on the Island of St John's