

## Weymouth Falls, Nova Scotia

My name is Shekara Grant and I am submitting Weymouth Falls for the Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia's Community Spirit Award 2022 on behalf of the community.

My grandmother was born and raised in Weymouth Falls, Nova Scotia. As a kid, I hated going there because, as I told my mom many times, "there's nothing there". As I grew older, I learned more about the history and the systems that took everything from Weymouth, and grew to appreciate it not for its outward appearance, but for its place in not just mine, but Nova Scotia's history that deserves so much respect and recognition.

My mother's generation was the last to enjoy Weymouth in its prime. I say this because the community used to be vibrantly filled with beautiful Black loyalist descendants who were active caretakers of their community. There is a community centre on Weymouth Falls Road that I've visited many times without knowing its history. My ancestors were not allowed to go to school with white children, so the community **built** a school house for the children, and community members volunteered as teachers. Once schools integrated, that schoolhouse was repurposed as a community centre.

Weymouth thrived until all of the jobs were taken out of the community, forcing my grandmother's generation to move to the city and beyond for work. My grandmother always said if she didn't have to leave Weymouth she wouldn't have, and that is a common feeling amongst her generation.

In the personal stories that follow many will talk about Weymouth Falls in the past tense, and if anything, I hope that serves to prove how much community spirit we have. Many of us have never lived there, but feel so intensely connected to that community and make regular visits back to our home. Currently, hundreds of Weymouth Falls descendants, led by Germaine Cromwell (Langford) and the Langford Heritage Community Council, are working to rebuild the community centre that means so much to us. I hope by the end of this submission, you too agree that there is no community in Nova Scotia who has more community spirit than Weymouth Falls.

# Weymouth Falls Reunion 2018!



## **Personal Stories**

### **Talia Schraven**

My mom took me to my first Weymouth Falls family reunion in 2018. During that trip I got to meet and connect with family who resided all over the world. We also learned about the 200+ year history of the area and the Sam Langford Community Centre (SLCC). The SLCC was created by the hard work and shared vision of the community of descendents of Black Loyalists that settled in Nova Scotia in the 1700's. During Segregation, the SLCC served as a school for the Black community and once the province integrated schools in Weymouth, it became a recreational centre, employment centre and provided a multi-purpose property to foster further growth, and an important meeting place integral to the community. The very name, 'Sam Langford Community Centre' is clear evidence of community pride as Sam Langford, one of the world's greatest boxers, was born in Weymouth Falls in 1886. Furthermore, during my visit I got to see the hard work my family members have been putting in to clear, clean, remediate and restore the SLCC. Learning about the importance of the Black Loyalists within the annals of Canadian history and the continued perseverance of my family has made me feel even more proud of my deep Nova Scotian roots. The SLCC is an inspiring reminder of what my cousin Germaine Langford always says: Although we don't all have time to volunteer we MAKE time to volunteer and build our community.

### **Juanita Peters**

I am very pleased to be writing this letter in support of the Sam Langford Community Centre and Weymouth Falls, Nova Scotia. Placed in a community established by Black Loyalists in the 1700's, this particular property and land provides a significant contribution to its people both past and present.

The Sam Langford Community Centre (as it is currently called), was once the segregated school for black people in Weymouth Falls. It also served as the location of recreational activities, the employment centre, and various other things over the 200+ year history. The current name designation alone gives immense pride to the community while celebrating an internationally acclaimed hometown hero. Sam Langford, one of the world's greatest boxers, was born in Weymouth Falls in 1886. He is still regarded as one of the best fighters in the world by many boxing experts.

I personally have to say that this centre helped shape me by giving me a space to grow artistically while under the guidance of community members with various backgrounds and experiences. A safe haven to fall down and get back up while being strongly supported by African Nova Scotians who are focused on your success.

To allow such an important landmark to disappear would be an incredible blow to African Nova Scotian history, and to the Canadian cultural mosaic.

### **Lana Cromwell**

I remember attending summer school at the community centre. My siblings had previously attended and my cousin, Mrs. Evangeline Francis (Jarvis), was one of their teachers. My grandfather wanted my mother to become a teacher but instead, thirty years later, I fulfilled that dream and am currently a professor at the Malcolm X College in Chicago. The elders and family taught us to be respectful and decent human beings, and I experienced so many life lessons I'll never forget. Much of it has to do with the community centre.

The centre holds precious moments near and dear to our entire community's hearts. It was used for school, wedding receptions, retirement parties, talent shows, dances, New Year's Eve parties, preschool, day camps, bingo, and various working projects to beautify the community and the grounds of the centre itself. Most of us had the chance to work at the centre during the summer, and what a thrill it was to work for, and be paid by, our community elders. I am forever grateful for all it has stood for... and may it continue to stand, literally and figuratively...

This community is a pillar in our lives, a keystone in our hearts and an anchor in our souls that needs to be maintained. Words cannot express how precious it is to so many. In addition to being one of the oldest Black communities in Nova Scotia and Canada, our momentous community centre is named after my great uncle Sam Langford, who is finally getting his recognition as one of the greatest boxers of all time. In 2003, The Ring magazine, Collector's Edition named him "the 2nd greatest puncher of all time" and the book "The 100 Greatest Boxers of All Time" ranked him number 8. Our community spirit is the best of the best.

### **Mrs. Phyllis (Jarvis) Moore**

I write this letter with great pride as a woman from Weymouth Falls. The new school house known as Sam Langford School holds many fond memories of my early education. The old building consisted of two levels. There were two classrooms, a girls coat room and a boys coat room on the first level. The home economics classroom was downstairs, where students were taught cooking and sewing. Outside, fairly close to the school house, there were two restrooms; one for males and one for females.

In spite of our school being small we had some of the greatest teachers. A foundation of pride and excellence was instilled in each one of us and will always remain with me.

Since the school has been transformed into a Community centre, the building has continued to be of great service to the area. It gives our families a place for learning, entertainment and sometimes special gatherings. The centre has been a landmark for surrounding communities for many generations. It would be a devastating loss to the residents and wider community with ties to Weymouth Falls to lose this centre and it should, by all and every means, be preserved.

### **Elizabeth Pleasant**

Life growing up on the Falls for me was good. At Thanksgiving the ladies auxiliary would be put on what we called "Harvest Supper". There was one at the Mount Beulah Baptist

Church Hall, and another at Saint Matthew's Anglican Church Hall. They both had them, but at different times. The whole community helped with both. They would ask the teens to serve dinner to the elders of the community. The best part would be when at the end of the night the deserts would be auctioned off. The money raised would be put towards the churches in the community as well as the community centre.

The community centre was a place for us young people to go to in the summer. There were jobs for the youth. We would help seniors stack wood for the winter, sometimes just sit and talk or have lunch with them, and carry out many other activities. There were even summer camps at one point where we would play ball behind the centre with the children. It was a place where parents always knew where their children were and knew they were safe.

Growing up on the Falls we were not only a community of all ages, we were a family village. I'm proud to call Weymouth Falls home.

### **Lee Jarvis**

The elders of the community work hard to build it up. The women's guilds (made up of ladies from both the Baptist and Anglican churches) and the community council (made up of many community members), held events such as the Harvest Suppers which brought people from all over the Annapolis Valley into our community every fall. Although they were from different denominations, both Anglican and Baptist church members assisted with both events. My grandmother, being of the Anglican faith, played the organ for both Saint Matthew's Anglican Church and Mount Beulah Baptist. I would go as well, sometimes attending both services with her.

Our community centre was the pride of our community. This is where I remember attending and performing in talent shows, Christmas concerts, and going to my first dance once I was old enough for my cousin to take me along with her. Going to summer school (day camp) was something I looked forward to every year because I loved playing games and going on field trips. There was Saturday night bingo there too, and I used to sell cards and work the canteen. My mother worked at the outreach office of the community centre, which was a satellite office for what is now Service Canada. She and another community member, along with our community council helped bring training programs in carpentry, administration, and would help people from ours and surrounding communities find jobs or training programs outside of our community. She would even help them apply for unemployment.

In later years, our community began holding reunions every few years which brought a lot of life back to our community, as many people have moved away. Community

members return from across Canada and the United States to attend, and reminisce of years gone by. Some have even returned for good.

### **Paula Cromwell**

Growing up in Weymouth Falls was amazing. Neighbours spoke to each other every day and we all looked out for each other. Lending a helping hand was a top priority. I remember if someone was out of work or just generally struggling, the community would plan a “pound party” where everyone would gift you 1lb of something- sugar, cakes, flour, meat, etc... whatever they could give. The togetherness was amazing. Children had a whole village of adults looking out for them which led to a deep amount of trust and respect for our elders and adults.

There were 3 churches in the community and everyone attended one of them every Sunday. The style and grace of our congregations were exceptional. None of the churches had event hall facilities so receptions were held at the community centre where all different religions would mix and mingle. We also hosted harvest suppers and weddings at the community centre. Youths of the community were a huge part of catering and serving staff along with mothers and grandmothers. People gathered for Bingo and summer camps were well attended and appreciated throughout all of Weymouth, not only the black community. In 2018 a committee (which I am on) was formed to save the community centre from a tax sale and bring the community back together. Since forming the committee we have held many fundraisers and volunteer days because we would like to revamp the community centre. The love and care that we enjoyed in this community is the foundation of who we are today.

### **Yolanda E. Cromwell**

I am pleased to be writing this letter to support Weymouth Falls, Nova Scotia. Growing up in Weymouth Falls- Southville there was not a lot to do or many opportunities for youth due to the closing of the factories and other businesses that employed most of the community. The Sam Langford community centre provided a place to gather with friends and family, and is where we held dances, talent shows, work outreach programs, and bingo. Bingo provided entertainment for both seniors and young adults. I was fortunate enough to be part of the summer work grant program for youths pursuing college or university. It was a great time helping out in the community by cutting grass, doing repairs, and helping out with seniors. The centre and these programs kept us from getting in trouble, or going down the wrong path in life. I went on to work for the federal government in Ottawa and am currently a dental hygienist. My community experience has allowed me to connect with my patients in an authentic manner that I am so grateful for.

We may not have come from a lot but we always had a rich foundation from our Black community. Most of us move away for work opportunities but Weymouth Falls- Southville is always our home where we intend to retire. I send my son home in the

summers to enjoy the zen of country living, to be with his extended family, and to connect with our history. We are 6-7th generation proud black Canadians.

The Sam Langford community centre is part of our history as is Sam Langford's incredible boxing legacy. We need to revive this so that our community can have a gathering place, grow with educational work programs and give our youth an outlet to have fun and create lasting memories.

### **Bonita States**

I am writing this letter in regards to the Community Centre and Weymouth Falls. I grew up in Weymouth Falls. I was 2 years old when I started going to daycare at the Sam Langford Community Centre. They used that centre for a number of things for the Weymouth Community, such as; School, Reunions, Library, Variety Shows, Dances, Church Services, Rummage Sales, Social Gatherings, and much more. It has always been a pillar in our community.

Part of what makes it so special is that it is the birthplace of the famous boxer, Sam Langford, who is related to a wide variety of people from that Community. The youth look up to Sam Langford's legacy and everything he stood for, and everything about that Community Centre is Sam Langford. It would be a shame to let our community that is so great and meaningful to our Culture wither away and be forgotten with age with no one supporting us as we try to hold onto (and rebuild) it. The community centre and our history are very important to us who are from that area no matter where we end up. I hope something can be done to show support for our community and help Restore this building.

### **Judy L. Cromwell**

The saying it takes a "village" to raise a child is so true in my village/community, Weymouth Falls. Our Sam Langford community centre was a huge part of our lives and for people outside our community. When school was out I, as did many in and around the Weymouth area, attended day camp. We had field trips, barbecues, fun activities, nature walks- you name it. It played a huge part in my life, and it also provided many summer jobs for a lot of people. The committee would provide projects which employed several people and those summer jobs turned into careers for many.

The Community Centre was also a school that my grandmother attended and dreamed of becoming a teacher. Most of my aunts and uncles did as well so for me, it holds so much history and has so much potential to keep providing for us if we can get back to rebuilding.

This huge, beautiful structure was once a provider for so many people, it would be a tragedy to see it fall out of our community. Even though many of us have moved away, this community centre always brings us back which is evident through our bi-annual reunions. Even though we can't go in the building in its current state, for a couple of days every second year hundreds of Weymouth Falls descendants meet in front of the community centre to reconnect and reminisce. Our new generation wants to

know the history and make history in this building so let's keep on giving back to the community that gave me so much. This award could be the first step to save our centre, save our history, save our community, save our memories, and be the vehicle to allow us to make more...

### **Marveline Clayton**

Weymouth Falls.

Where to begin?

I was born and raised in Weymouth Falls, Nova Scotia.

I lived there until I graduated high school in 1974.

My Grandparents Ralph and Flora Pleasant were the pillar of the Community and their house was a hang out spot for the youth.

I can still remember the feeling as a child- the love and safety to walk freely up and down the roads and be welcomed with a big smile and lots of love or a home cooked meal at each door. The entire community was one big happy family and everyone watched out for each other.

I thought the rest of the world was full of the same love and richness as my small and beautiful Black community, but I was wrong.

Now living in Ontario, I miss my community very much. I truly appreciate what I had growing up and am proud of my hometown. We care so much and when we go back I feel blessed to spend that much needed time with loved ones. Each time feels like I never even left.

My children loved spending their summers in Weymouth running around on the country roads, playing in the fields and tall grass, and visiting the waterfalls and dams. They'd play ball on the corners and street hockey in the roads, or fish in the lakes and pick wild berries that grew in abundance. These are also the things I did as a child.

As adults with their own kids, my children still love going back to my hometown. There is nothing more important than holding onto the very things that shaped me into the positive, loving, caring human being I am today.

Around 1,000 people attended our 2018 Family Reunion.

I have a lifetime of memories and am truly a proud Scotian.

There's nowhere else on God's green earth that I loved more than my hometown.

### **Moleta Grant**

Weymouth Falls is a well loved community that I am proud to call my birthplace.

I left Weymouth for the city at an early age because I needed to find employment, but my heart never left. I go home often to volunteer at fundraisers and events with the goal



of one day being able to repair the beloved Sam Langford Community Centre (which was where I went to school until schools integrated when I was 16).

We started having Family Reunions in 1995 for the Jarvis, Langford, Pleasant, and Cromwell families. Our first two were in 1995 and 1997, but for the third we decided to leave a 3 year window and do it in 2000. Sadly, many community elders passed away in those three years so out of respect for them and our desire to spend more time together as a community, we decided to keep the reunions bi-annual, until the pandemic hit in 2020.

Weymouth Falls has a knack for helping neighbours and surrounding communities. It is all for one and one for all and though many of us no longer live there, there is no shortage of help when the community needs it. We still go home all the time to lend a helping hand and check on the elders.

Over the years, a lot of us have had our homesteads sold off by the municipality despite actively trying to recuperate them. Many of us retirees are hoping and wishing to re-purchase land because Weymouth Falls is our community and we want to have homes of our own that our descendants can enjoy for generations to come.

Weymouth Falls can never be replaced in our eyes, nor in history. It was and will always be a loving Community and it's a privilege to have been born and raised there.

### **Roslyn Clayton**

My memories of Weymouth Falls as a young girl start off with a long, annual road trip from Toronto. My parents would play oldies music and the drive started around 3 am. My brother and I would pull all-nighters and when we arrived "down home" we were too excited to be reunited with our family from all over. While in Weymouth, we all stayed in the multiple homesteads that were built by our great grandparents. After breakfast, all of us cousins would gather at "the big tree" and off we'd go adventuring for the day. We would head into the woods and make our way down to the waterfall when the tide was out, then walk with sticks on the way home thinking they would help us fight off wildlife. The cousins all ate together and if we were lucky, our parents would take us to Ed's Takeout, the chip truck, or bring us a fresh catch from their daily fishing trip. There is also a fresh spring water tap that gives our community the best quality water I have ever tasted. Growing up, many of the homes didn't have indoor plumbing or clean drinking water, so having this spring available in our community shows how resourceful we were despite the difficult conditions we were subject to.

Once we were no longer able to host our bi-annual reunions in the community centre, we pivoted to its parking lot and other locations around town. In my teens we started to lose the older generation who lived full-time in Weymouth Falls, so we started staying at the Goodwin hotel instead of in homesteads. Currently, all of us descendants of

Weymouth Falls are trying to rebuild our community centre and buy back our homesteads as a grassroots initiative. Hopefully one day my daughter can make as many beautiful memories as I did at her age.

### **Stacy Grant**

My mother was born and raised in Weymouth Falls. I spent a lot of my childhood there despite living in Dartmouth, and when people would ask me where I was from, I'd always say Weymouth Falls.

My fondest childhood memories are all from this community. Every holiday and long weekend was spent there visiting my Grandmother Edna and Great Grandmother Flora until 1989, the year they both died. I'd go to summer camps, hang out in the community centre, pick strawberries, go camping, swim, dance, have sleepovers with all the kids in the neighbourhood, and hang at "the rock" on the corner. One of my favourite things to do was to play Bingo with my grandmother Edna (Even though bingo was serious business back in the day and the grandmothers would send all the kids outside to play if we became too much of a distraction).

I formed early bonds with my cousins that never faltered. Every reunion, the family gets closer and the attendance increases, with the most recent reunion having nearly 1000 people attend. Our community has all the community spirit, care and skills to host this kind of gathering and rebuild our community from the ground up (as is being done with the community centre). The amount of talent in and from Weymouth Falls is outstanding and inspiring.

To this day, when asked where my favourite place on earth is, my answer is Weymouth Falls. It's sad to see the state of the Community since the elders who have been its protectors have passed, but we are actively looking for new ways to restore and rebuild our community. When our families come together every two years for the Weymouth Falls Reunions, the Community lights up with people, laughter, spirit and so much love.

### **Ryan Clayton**

Weymouth Falls; My home away from home. I wasn't born there and I don't live there now, but it is the birthplace of my wonderful Mother and it is absolutely a part of my story.

As I write, I can imagine breathing the crisp and fresh air. I can taste the cool water from the fresh spring. My mouth is watering as I think about the delicious fish and those amazingly flavourful donairs. I can hear the Sissiboo waters moving as I walked alongside - and as I ran, when required, to beat the incoming tide. My legs are still exhausted from walking up and down Weymouth Falls Road, but I also feel a deep sense of pride taking the same paths many of my ancestors did before me.

The Sam Langford Community Centre holds a special place in my thoughts. Their mission to empower our community through Culture, Education and History is such a vital demonstration of our community spirit. Even now, the land around the centre serves as a hub for community and family reunions. For adults and youth, it is a place to make wholesome connections, historical learning, personal growth, remembering "the good times" and creating new ones.

Weymouth Falls is certainly a gem in the beautiful province of Nova Scotia. It is a must visit for all Canadians and it is well deserving of this recognition. I am honoured to have such deep and lasting connections there, and am so grateful for all of the memories during each and every visit - from my childhood to adulthood. I can't wait to bring my young children to our second home to create new, wonderful, lasting and foundational memories for them as well.

**Tracy Gottschalk-Schraven (Jarvis-Pleasant)**

I am writing this letter in support of Weymouth Falls, Nova Scotia's application to be awarded the prestigious Lieutenant Governor's Community Spirit Award 2022.

My first visit to Weymouth Falls, NS was to meet and visit my father's family in the summer of 1979. Although I was only 4.5 years old, I still remember feeling immediately comforted, loved, and included in the close-knit community. Over the four decades in which I completed university, got married, and raised my three kids, long distance calling and the advent of FaceBook (whew!) have made it possible to keep in touch with my "NS Family". With that said, this early memory made me look forward to the time I would finally go back to visit and is why I brought my own children to the 2018 family reunion in Weymouth Falls.

Introducing my children to my Weymouth Falls family, a mosaic of different family last names and people from all over, was an experience I will always cherish. It was amazing to feel that openness, joy, and togetherness I remembered from my childhood. It was as strong as ever and to share that experience with my own children was an incredible experience. Our visit has left an indelible mark on my family, and as a result, our family is looking to buy back land in the area to be close-by, contribute, add-to and hopefully be lucky enough to belong to such a beautiful familial example of perseverance: the Black Nova Scotian community.

**Marcel Jarvis**

When I think of Weymouth Falls, I think of all the incredible women that have been the biggest influences in my life. My mother and her three sisters were all born in Weymouth Falls. Despite them being forced to relocate when many employers moved their businesses out of the town, this has always been the place they refer to as home.

My first strong memory of 'home' is from a family reunion roughly 15 years ago. That time, I visited from Toronto with my mother (who is now battling dementia) and it still stands the test of time as one of my favourite memories. I was able to not only catch up with my amazing aunts, but I also met family members and saw the beautiful landscapes of the place I'd heard so much about. The whole family lended a hand to organize events which included fireworks, sporting events, and dance parties for the adults. I think what made this visit so special was how included I felt and how many options they made available for all different age groups and interests. Despite being young, I was incredibly moved by the sense of community, love and affection that I was shown.

A few years ago I returned to Weymouth as an adult to share the beauty and history of this area with my young son. It was a heartwarming and fulfilling experience to be able to show him the area and community that was responsible for influencing his father and grandmother to become the people they are today. Weymouth Falls is a beautiful, family-oriented community full of love and caring people. It is so beautiful that this love we all share for Weymouth Falls isn't just because of shared ancestry, but also because of a shared care for our community.