



# University of King's College and Slavery: A Scholarly Inquiry

December 2017

## Introduction

The University of King's College is the oldest university in Nova Scotia and the oldest chartered university in Canada. King's prides itself on its history, including its founding in Windsor in 1789 by United Empire Loyalists who immigrated to Nova Scotia in the wake of the American Revolution.

In 1920, the original King's suffered a devastating fire; the university relocated to Halifax in 1923 and to its present site next to Dalhousie in 1930. Since then, King's has been academically associated with Dalhousie while retaining its distinct status as an independent college, now dedicated to undergraduate studies in the humanities and journalism and to graduate studies in journalism and creative non-fiction.

History matters to King's. For that reason, it is important that the university's history be fully explored and understood. This prompts questions as to the connections that may have existed in its founding years and the early years of the nineteenth century between slavery and King's and people associated with King's.

These questions are prompted by the reality that slavery was lawful and practised in Nova Scotia until abolished in 1834. We now more fully appreciate the importance of the broader international slavery economy of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to the economy and wealth of Nova Scotia during the early years of King's, when King's aspired to be the establishment university for Nova Scotia's elite. These questions are also prompted by research conducted at New York's Columbia University showing that slavery was part of that university's history, including when it was known, prior to the American Revolution, as King's College. (Since the late 1980s, the University of King's College has claimed to be a successor institution to the original King's College in New York.)

Inquiry into the history of King's relative to slavery has another important rationale. It is that King's cannot hope to be viewed as a welcoming community to people of African descent unless it openly and forthrightly addresses the questions that can legitimately be asked about its history in relation to people of African descent, including its history relative to the history of slavery in Nova Scotia.

Prompted most immediately by the public release of the research completed at Columbia—and inquiries from Dalhousie University about whether King's would like to have questions raised by that research referred to Dalhousie's Lord Dalhousie Panel<sup>1</sup>—the University of King's College Equity Committee was

---

<sup>1</sup> Information about the Lord Dalhousie Panel can be found at: <https://www.dal.ca/faculty/arts/iri-chair/LordDalhousiePanel.html>.

asked to provide its advice to President William Lahey on whether King's should undertake its own analysis of its history with respect to slavery. The motion unanimously passed by the Committee reads as follows:

The Equity Committee recommends that the President commission a qualified individual to research the colonial history of King's (relative to slavery including the connection of King's to Columbia and the ownership of slaves by some of King's founding fathers) and that the Chair of the Committee work with the President on developing the timeline and the process whereby the findings of the research are presented to the King's community. The Committee suggests that the research be completed by the end of November, to be submitted to the Board of Governors in January, followed by a presentation to the Faculty.

Discussions on options for implementing this recommendation have taken place between President Lahey and the Chair of the Committee, Dr. Dorota Glowacka, as well as with Professor Terra Tailleir, a member of the Committee. President Lahey has also consulted with King's professors Henry Roper (retired) and Sylvia Hamilton, King's/Dalhousie professor Dr. Shirley Tillotson, Dr. Isaac Saney and Dr. Afua Cooper of Dalhousie, Dr. John Reid of Saint Mary's University, Dr. Karolyn Smardz Frost of Acadia and York Universities and Dr. Amani Whitfield of the University of Vermont. President Lahey also consulted with Dr. Kevin Hewitt and Ms. Martha Casey of Dalhousie University.

One of the consistent themes of these discussions has been the impossibility of completing the contemplated research within the timeframe envisaged by the committee. Indeed, the very process of identifying qualified researchers to undertake or oversee the contemplated research has taken almost as long as the process of research recommended by the Committee. In addition to the time required to complete the research, researchers have individually identified limitations on their availability to work on the project, which must be considered.

Accordingly, it has become clear that the timeline for completing the research initially proposed by the Equity Committee must be adjusted to ensure its rigour and quality, including by accommodating the schedules of those who have expressed a willingness and availability to undertake the research. This flexibility is to ensure scholars who are qualified and interested in the project can participate on timelines that make their contribution compatible with their other professional obligations.

The separate papers envisaged below will therefore be completed over the next twelve to eighteen months by the authors to whom they are assigned. This timeframe includes review by the Review Panel and any adjustments arising out of that review, as each author or team of authors determines appropriate.

## **Literature Review**

To ensure research is informed and conducted efficiently and cost-effectively, it is important to ensure it builds upon what is already known. To facilitate this, the research process will begin with a literature review that encompasses the following topics, as related to understanding the history of King's relative to slavery:

- The history of King’s in New York and the establishment and early history of King’s in Nova Scotia;
- The history of King’s College in New York relative to slavery, particularly as explored in the research that has been conducted at Columbia University, with attention to specific findings or conclusions that are relevant to understanding connections between slavery and the University of King’s College in Nova Scotia or people who were later associated with the University of King’s College;
- The views, household, business, professional, religious and political lives of people who were prominent in the founding, governance and operation of the University of King’s College in its early days relative to slavery and people of African descent;
- The Loyalist experience in Nova Scotia, including that of the Black Loyalists, as well as that of the Black refugees who emigrated to Nova Scotia during and after the War of 1812, as they may pertain or be connected to the early history of the University of King’s College;
- The broader history of slavery in Nova Scotia, the British Empire and in the international economy of which Nova Scotia was a part as it may pertain or be relevant to understanding the history of the University of King’s College in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and
- The history of African Nova Scotians, African Canadians and racism in Nova Scotia and Canada as they relate to or provide context for understanding the history of the University of King’s College as it pertains to or relates to slavery in or beyond Nova Scotia.

The literature reviewed will be summarized in a paper of no more than 30 pages, inclusive of an executive summary but exclusive of references. The paper will be reviewed by the Review Panel and revised by the author (or authors) in light of the comments provided and questions asked in the review. It will then be released to the King’s and to the wider community.

## **The Specific Research Topics**

While the literature review is underway, research will be commissioned on the following topics:

1. The extent and the nature of the continuity (relationship or connection) between the University of King’s College and King’s in New York City, with a particular focus on understanding the extent to which conclusions reached in the Columbia reports on the connections between slavery and King’s in New York can or should be considered to be conclusions about the history of the University of King’s College;
2. The indirect connections between slavery and the University of King’s College (and/or people associated with King’s)<sup>2</sup> in the period between the College’s founding in 1789 and the abolition of slavery in 1834, including the ways in which King’s benefited from and existed within an economy and society that depended upon or benefited from slavery in other places, including the Caribbean;

---

<sup>2</sup> The subjects of this research should include people associated in capacities such as patrons, funders, Board members, administrators, faculty, staff, students or alumni.

3. The direct connections between slavery and the University of King's College (and/or people associated with King's), including:
  - (a) The views on slavery and people of African descent held and expressed by people associated with the University of King's College (including patrons, funders, Board members, administrators, faculty, staff, students, or alumni) between its founding in 1789 and the abolition of slavery in Nova Scotia in 1834, whether the views were expressed before 1789 or after 1834, and
  - (b) The direct involvement with slavery of the University of King's College and/or people associated with the College (including patrons, funders, Board members, administrators, faculty, staff, students, or alumni). This would include ownership of slaves or directly benefitting from the ownership of slaves. It would also be about the effect of that ownership on those held in bondage and on King's.

### **The Researchers and the Commissioning Process**

The researchers who have been commissioned to research and write the papers outlined above are respected historians who are qualified by prior work to complete the papers to a high scholarly standard on a timely basis. In addition to their qualifications by prior scholarship, their availability to complete the work within a reasonable time frame was also an important consideration in the commissioning process.

Including the voice of scholars of African descent was a key consideration. Utilizing the scholarly expertise available within the King's and Dalhousie communities, while at the same time ensuring the overall project benefits from the involvement of scholars who are independent of King's and of Dalhousie, was another important factor, as was the overall financial feasibility of the project to the University of King's College.

Applying these considerations, the following historians were asked to contribute to the project and have agreed to do so:

- **Dr. Jerry Bannister**, professor of history, Dalhousie University, will undertake the literature review. In doing so, he will assign much of the research to graduate students in history who will work under his supervision.
- **Dr. Henry Roper**, Inglis Professor of the University of King's College, has agreed to write the paper on the extent and nature of the connection between King's College New York—the institution that became Columbia University—and the University of King's College founded in Windsor, Nova Scotia, in 1789.
- **Dr. Shirley Tillotson**, Inglis Professor of King's College and retired professor of history, Dalhousie University, will write the paper on indirect connections between slavery and King's College. She will draw on the expertise of **Dr. Amani Whitfield**, Professor of History at the University of Vermont, on slavery in Nova Scotia.
- **Dr. Karolyn Smardz Frost**, adjunct professor at Acadia University and at York University, and **Mr. David States**, retired Parks Canada historian and independent genealogist, will write the papers on direct connections between slavery and the University of King's College.

## The Scope of the Papers

Within the timeframes contemplated, definitive papers on the outlined topics may not be possible. It is therefore important to recognize that this project is about starting an ongoing process of scholarly inquiry and discussion. It is also hoped the research that can be completed in the time available will stimulate further research by the community of historical researchers working in relevant fields of research. In addition, King's will have the option of commissioning further or supplemental research based on what is learned by the completion of the papers described above.

Except for the final report on the direct connections topic, it is expected that each paper will be 30 or fewer pages, inclusive of executive summary but exclusive of references. The final paper on direct connections will be 40 or fewer pages, inclusive of an executive summary but exclusive of references.

## Projected Completion Dates

In keeping with the intent of the Equity Committee's recommendations to the President for a process that is both wide in scope and timely, the decision was made to commission a series of papers from different historians instead of asking one historian to write a single paper on the general topic of "Slavery and King's." The process is also being expedited by assigning each of the topics to an author (or co-authors) well prepared by previous scholarship or strong knowledge of relevant fields of research to complete the research in a timely fashion. Further, each author (or set of co-authors) will be asked to limit their papers to a specified number of pages, not including references but inclusive of an executive summary. Finally, to support the research, King's will hire King's students to be research assistants to the commissioned researchers. Commissioned researchers will be encouraged to make use of one or more of these students on their projects. Hiring of graduate research assistants is also a possibility.

Following this approach, it is anticipated that:

- The *draft* literature review and the *draft* paper on topic #1 (the historical connection between King's College in New York and the University of King's College) can be completed **by the end of the winter term of the 2017-2018 academic year.**
- The *draft* paper on topic #2 (the indirect connections between slavery and the University of King's College) can be completed **by the end of June 2017.**
- The research on topic #3 (the direct connections between slavery and the University of King's College and its people) will take longer to complete, due to the nature and the extent of the primary research that may be necessary for these topics, as well as the potential breadth of the topic.
  - As a result, the first stage will involve the writing of an interim report of no more than 30 pages (inclusive of executive summaries but exclusive of references). It is anticipated that the *draft* of the interim report will be completed by **September 1, 2018.**

- The second stage will involve the writing of a final report of no more than 40 pages (inclusive of executive summaries but exclusive of references). It is anticipated that the *draft* of the final report will be completed by **January 30, 2019**.

Draft papers will be reviewed by the Review Panel. We expect that review will normally be completed within one month of a paper's submission to the Panel. Papers will then be revised by their author or authors (as they determine) in light of the feedback received from the Panel. It is anticipated that this revision process will normally be completed within one month of receipt of the Panel's feedback.<sup>3</sup> The papers will then be ready for release to the King's and to the wider community.

### **The Role and Composition of the Review Panel**

The Review Panel's role will be two-fold.

First, it will evaluate draft papers to determine if they meet or will, with revisions, meet the standard for publication that would be applied by a peer-reviewed scholarly historical publication. This standard will be applied in a way that takes account of circumstances under which the research and writing of papers has been completed, including to meet anticipated completion dates. Should the Panel determine that a paper does not meet a publishable standard, the author or authors will be expected to make the revisions required to bring the paper to that standard.

Second, for papers that meet the standard that would apply for publication, the Panel will ask questions and provide comments and feedback that, in its view, may improve these papers before their release to the King's and the wider community. This feedback will be provided by the Panel on the understanding that authors will decide what changes will be made to the papers, if any, before they are released.

The Review Panel will aim to provide its feedback within one month of receiving a draft paper. Researchers will aim to submit the final version of their papers to the University of King's College within one month of receiving the Review Panel's feedback.

The Review Panel will be chaired by the Chair of the University's Equity Committee, Dr. Dorota Glowacka. Other members will include:

- Professor Sylvia Hamilton
- Dr. John Reid of Saint Mary's University
- Dr. Bonnie Huskins of the University of New Brunswick
- Mr. Douglas Ruck, King's alumnus
- Mr. Don MacLean, a King's alumnus and a member of the King's Board of Governors
- Faculty member, to be appointed by King's faculty.
- Two students chosen in consultation with the King's Student Union.

---

<sup>3</sup> The statement that the authors decide what changes to make in response to feedback received from the Review Panel assume the Review Panel finds the paper to have met the "publishable standard" mentioned below under "The Role and Composition of the Review Panel." See below for discussion of "The Role and Composition of the Review Panel".