

Graham Nickerson

2024 UELAC Loyalist Scholarship Award Recipient

Graham Nickerson's proposed dissertation, "To be made majesties of: Black Loyalist Agency in the Black Atlantic 1783 to 1834," examines socioeconomic forces beyond the slavery/freedom binary exerted on the loyalist-era Black community and the tensions within the community differentiating aspirations and migrations of Black Loyalists within the Black Atlantic. Through the examination of vital statistic data, church records, and oral history, Graham presents Black Loyalist society not as a monolith but as a composite of groups with various attributes by which individuals identified opportunities within the Atlantic World to exert agency. He contends that Black Loyalism, the settlement of Sierra Leone, and the formation of the Number Two Construction Battalion are examples of a collection of aspirations, ranging from grand expressions of loyalty to Britain to simply avoiding time in prison.

Through the preliminary collection of oral histories and secondary sources, Graham has identified internal rifts in several Black communities that are not represented in historiography. He demonstrates how the hierarchy of colorism produced a layered Black society, embodied by Stephen Blucke's leadership in Birchtown, suggesting that a broader understanding of these and other variables contributed to the mobility of Black Loyalists within the broader White society and that this mobility drove the growth and decline of ephemeral Black Loyalist communities.

Graham Nickerson is a Black Loyalist descendant who grew up in Shelburne, spending many afternoons roaming around the environs of Birchtown, unaware of his historic ties to the community. He attended Radio College of Canada in Toronto in 1989, embarking on a long career at sea. Building his trade, he earned a BSc with a double major in Geology and Geography in 1998 from Saint Mary's University in Halifax, followed by a Master of Science in Engineering focusing on data visualization in 2001.



For the next two decades, Graham worked in the marine sector, specializing in marine survey software and data visualization. His relationship with the research team from RPM Nautical Foundation and leading survey acquisitions on marine archaeological projects sparked his interest in historical studies. In 2018, Graham returned to university to study Black Loyalist History, completing his Master of Arts in Historical Studies at the University of New Brunswick in 2022.

Currently, Graham is the board chair for the Black Loyalist Heritage Society in Birchtown and a member of the Black History Society of New Brunswick.