

Lynn Jones African-Canadian and Diaspora Heritage Collection

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RESEARCH NEWS / NOUVELLES SUR LA RECHERCHE

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IN APRIL 2017, MORE THAN 100 people gathered at the Halifax North Memorial Library for the official launch of the Lynn Jones African-Canadian and Diaspora Heritage Collection, housed at Saint Mary's University. Val Marie Johnson presided over the evening, which began with a procession escorting Mrs. Colley, who opened the event with a prayer, and Mi'kmaw elder Daniel Paul, as well as music from the widely popular Burundi drummers.

This is a personal archive whose creation was an intentional act. At the tender age of eight, Lynn Jones began cutting out articles from the Truro newspaper, preserving stories pertaining to Black life in Nova Scotia and around the world. One of ten children, Lynn kept busy documenting the many activities of generations of the Jones family, from those who fought with the Black Battalion in World War I to those active today. Along the way, she added numerous documents – many of them not found elsewhere – and correspondence related to organizations such as the Black Working Group and the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) and individuals like Kwame Ture (Stokely Carmichael). The result is eighteen boxes, with talk of more to come. While the collection stretches from the 1960s to the 2010s, the bulk of material pertains to the 1980s and 1990s.

The core of the collection is a truly substantial number of clippings and entire issues of newspapers produced locally and globally, from the *North End News* and *New Maritimes* to the *Nassau Guardian* and the *Ghanaian Worker*. Several boxes contain clippings and documents related to the history of African Nova Scotians and to the antiracist struggles they launched. Very impressive is the box devoted to coverage of and from South Africa; Lynn proudly served as an NGO observer in the historic 1994 vote that saw Nelson

Mandela's election as president. Lynn's vision extended beyond a narrow definition of politics. Having competed as an athlete in the first Canada Summer Games, held in 1969, she collected a wealth of material on amateur and professional sports and on arts and entertainment, taking us from Eartha Kitt to Kirk Johnson.

Lynn graduated from Dalhousie University, having begun in the Transition Year Program founded by her brother Burnley, better known as Rocky; several boxes consist of Rocky's press coverage and organizational activities, including some of his writings. Lynn worked for decades in the federal public service. In 1979, she began her stint at the local Canada Employment Centre (CEC) and became a member of PSAC. There, she learned that the CEC's policies bowed to, if not fostered, routine forms of racial discrimination in labour markets. Soon elected as president of the local, Lynn would co-organize PSAC's first conference on antiracism as well as its antiracist training programs. While definite improvements did emerge, all was not harmonious; the collection contains documents related to a grievance launched by Lynn and others pertaining to sexual harassment and racism in PSAC in the early 1990s.

In 1990, Lynn served as an observer during the Oka resistance. In 1992, she was the first woman of colour to be elected to the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) executive, and the following year, the first Canadian-born woman of colour to run federally for the New Democratic Party.

In 1996, after the announcement that the local CEC would close, Lynn and other community activists led an occupation of its offices that lasted 122 days. This is the longest occupation of a federal government office in Canadian history – although Lynn would happily see the new generation surpass this record. PSAC provided funds necessary to sustain the occupation, although the house of labour, including the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour, provided less support than Lynn desired. Bob White, president of the CLC, attended the large demonstration at Parade Square, next to Halifax City Hall, but local unions failed to mobilize substantial numbers. Along with press clippings, the collection contains a number of handwritten and typed documents of the Black Working Group and those involved in the occupation.

Currently chair of the Nova Scotia chapter of the Global Afrikan Congress, an organization dedicated to obtaining reparations for the atrocities of the African slave trade, locally and globally, Lynn actively campaigns for justice for African Nova Scotians affected by environmental racism.

Since its opening, the collection has been consulted by researchers interested in Africville and the Nova Scotia Home for Colored Children, and it has attracted visitors such as journalist and activist Desmond Cole and American artist Amos P. Kennedy.

The finding aid for the Lynn Jones African-Canadian and Diaspora Heritage Collection is online, courtesy of the Saint Mary's University Archives: <https://memoryns.ca/lynn-jones-african-canadian-and-diaspora-heritage-collection>.