

---

## John Marrant's *Journal*: Providence and Prophecy in the Eighteenth Century Atlantic

Joanna Brooks, University of Texas at Austin

©1999 Joanna Brooks. Any archiving, redistribution, or republication of this text in any medium requires the consent of the author.

Providence called John Marrant to Nova Scotia--a call that was felt quietly and inwardly at first, then amplified with reports of an African-American exodus to the British province, and finally confirmed through the Countess Selina of Huntingdon, who hosted the African-American evangelist's ordination in her chapel at Bath on May 15, 1785. Three months later, Marrant embarked on a three-year mission among the Blacks, poor whites, and Micmac Indians of southeastern Nova Scotia. Birchtown, a refuge for Black Loyalists and liberated slaves, became the seat of his ministry. There he founded a church, appointed pastoral assistants, and organized a school for one hundred local children.

Meanwhile, back in London, booksellers could not keep up with the demand for *A Narrative of the Lord's Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, a Black (now going to preach the gospel in Nova Scotia)* (1785). Adapted from Marrant's own ordination sermon by London Methodist William Aldridge, this short but spectacular conversion and captivity narrative drew criticism from urbane quarters. The November 1785 *Monthly Review* observed that "John's narrative is embellished with a good deal of *adventure*, enlivened by the *marvellous*, and a little touch of the *MIRACULOUS*; all which, no doubt, will go down, glibly enough, with those readers for whom this publication is chiefly calculated" (399). Nonetheless, the *Narrative* went through no less than fifteen editions during Marrant's years abroad. Only one of these, it seems, was "printed for the author."<sup>1</sup> Although the title of the work may have advertised Marrant, his race, and his mission, Marrant himself saw little or no profit from its publication.

With no regular means of support, Marrant struggled through his years in Nova Scotia. His Birchtown parishioners were so destitute that they could scarcely afford to maintain him; the ailing Countess Huntingdon did not answer his requests for support. Depleted by illness and devoid of funds, Marrant left Nova Scotia in January 1788. After a short stay in Boston, where he preached to the poor of the West End and fraternized with Prince Hall and the city's emergent African Lodge of Masons, Marrant returned to London. There he published and sold his missionary diary: *A Journal of the Rev. John Marrant, From August the 18th, 1785, to The 16th of March, 1790. To which are added Two Sermons; One Preached on Ragged Island on Sabbath Day, the 27th Day of October 1787; the Other at Boston in New England, On Thursday, the 24th of June, 1789.* The volume includes Marrant's seventy-five-page account of his North American mission, a list of subscribers, four letters written and received by Marrant during his time in Nova Scotia, and two sermons--one delivered at a 1787 funeral, the other at a gathering of Boston's African Lodge in 1789. It is the most extensive published account of Black evangelism and community life in the eighteenth century; its latter-day recovery will enrich historical, theological, and literary appreciations of Black Atlantic culture.<sup>2</sup> The circumstances for its original publication, however, were not as exalted: met upon his return to London with rumors that he had squandered the Connection's money, Marrant felt compelled to make public his missionary record. He proposes in the *Journal's* preface "to remove the prejudice of the mind of the Public in general" by setting forth an account of time and resources spent (iv). "Strict in putting the sums," he recounts that the meager ten guineas given him by the Connection

"soon ran out . . . in paying ferrings, as that country has so many large rivers and lakes to cross"; of his own funds he had dedicated "every farthing in building a Chapel, in Birch Town, which I hope is standing now" (iii-iv). Marrant was "soon reduced so low" that he "was obliged to pawn my jacket off my body, and that I did four times, in order to get over to the different places" (iv). Although these hardships ultimately accrue to "the glory of God," Marrant observes that no "Preacher belonging to the Connection could have suffered more than I have" (v).

The body of the *Journal* observes an economy of a different order, one driven by providence and accounted for in souls. Marrant is careful to remember *magnalia dei*: the twenty-pound bank note he received from an anonymous benefactor; divine intervention in the snowy woods and on ice-bound rivers; and remarkable deliverances from bears, "false brethren," and uncouth mobs. He numbers sermons preached, souls "pricked," and bodies baptized more carefully than the passing days or miles traveled. And although his record does dip into the "dailiness" endemic to life writing, Marrant's *Journal* observes neither a diurnal nor a narrative discipline.<sup>3</sup> Marrant's years in Nova Scotia do not correspond with the "rise and progress" of a given congregation; his departure from the province seems almost incidental; and the fate of the community at Birchtown was, at the time of the *Journal's* publication, a story still unfolding. But a pattern emerges *in media res*. The *Journal* is structured around those noteworthy moments when the hand of God breaks into the human order of things, making present, if only for a few minutes, the promise of graceful redemption.

Marrant was no stranger to the personal language of providence, as he had proven in his ordination sermon and his published *Narrative*. There he records the remarkable series of events that transpire between his conversion and ordination. Marrant is struck near-dead by the Spirit at a George Whitefield revival but rises to health and renewed life again after three days; he flees familial persecution for the wilderness, where he subsists on grasses and dew; rescued by an

Indian hunter, he is taken captive by the Cherokee; divine intervention saves him from death and sets Marrant on his way again. Further dangers would await him, as would further rescues, but inasmuch as the narrator survived to see his own ordination he could ascribe the whole to a providential God. Retrospect would also allow Marrant a unified appreciation of his spiritual progress, but the plot of his *Narrative* follows no teleological order. Captivity and redemption follow captivity and redemption in serial form. The same serial pattern orders the events of *A Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings and Surprising Deliverance of Briton Hammon, a Negro Man* (1760). Hammon was the first African-American to publish a personal narrative which was offered to the public as evidence of "the kind Providence of a good God." The story begins as Hammon leaves the house of his "Master," the Major-General John Winslow, and "ships" himself on an ill-fated English vessel. Shipwreck, Indian captivity, and servitude follow, then impressment, imprisonment, illness, and indenture. Thirteen years after setting forth from Plymouth, Hammon meets his American "master" on board the ship where he has bound himself to pay for passage home. He recalls, "My good master was exceeding glad to see me, telling me that I was like one arose from the dead, for he thought I had been dead a great many years" (24). In point of plot, Hammon had been rescued from death on more than one occasion. His *Narrative*, like Marrant's, presents a series of dead ends from which the narrator could manage no escape. Consequently, both writers have been criticized for their insufficient subjectivities and putatively complicit racial politics. Setting aside these questionable terms of analysis, it is possible to read these narratives on their own contingent terms.<sup>4</sup> Providence is the prime mover and proper subject; Marrant and Hammon are types of Lazarus, reclaimed from death to tell the story.

Marrant's *Journal* promises readers something his more popular, pithy, and eminently anthologizable *Narrative* cannot: an elaboration of the workings of providence beyond the safe space of the short ordination sermon, the campfire tale, and the temporarily happy ending. If John Marrant could

appear in his *Narrative* as an "artless" exemplar, his mission to Nova Scotia required that he assume a more conscious authority in the spiritual life of the Birchtown community. He would witness and participate in many individual redemption narratives as well as in the common struggle for subsistence. And if the scattered instances of grace would reveal something of a Godly design, it was Marrant's responsibility to say so. By selecting from, interpreting, and combining personal narratives he constructed the story of this people, and by framing this story within a matrix of scriptural references Marrant set forth a covenant theology. In his *Journal*, Marrant serves as the literary agent of a providence particular to Birchtown.

New England ministers had pursued similar projects in the seventeenth century, drawing from individual lives and weather patterns the cues to a common story. William Bradford attempted to compose a holy history of events unfolding at Plymouth; conscience prompted him to abandon the work rather than impose his own hopeful design on the Plantation's increasingly scattered fortunes. Increase Mather narrowed the scope of his investigation to the most remarkable instances, hoping to find God's meaning more explicit. In *The Doctrine of Divine Providence Opened and Applied* (1684), Mather explained:

There are some events of providence in which there is a special hand of Heaven ordering of them. There are *Magnali Dei*, things wherein the glorious finger of God is eminently to be seen. E.g. 1. There are eminent preservations and deliverances, which every one may see the name of God written upon them in plain legible characters. (12)

Mather saw the "name of God" written "plainly" in "eminent" instances, but he hoped the methods of "natural philosophy"--systematic observation, collection, and deduction--might reveal more of God's intention. His *Essay for the Recording of Illustrious Providences* (1684) advances this encyclopedic project. Cotton Mather profitted from the scholastic

habits of his father's generation in his composition of the *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702) and put the weight of providential evidence to proto-nationalist purposes. "Remarkable rescues from Death have been receiv'd by so many Thousands among us," he explains, "that there hath been scarce one Devout Family which hath not been able to bring in something unto the Heap of these Experiences" (10). It would seem that the finger of God preferred to interpose itself upon the "American Strand."

New England's models of providential history would not transfer to Birchtown. This was no settlement of willing pilgrims but a group of refugees assigned to an unlikely province. The community was founded in flight and set apart by skin color; in Nova Scotia, as in America, there would be poverty, illness, and persecution. Marrant did not attempt to collect common evidences of divine selection, nor did he impose a pattern of development on the people's shared history. Instead, he set forth a covenant theology comparable to that of the early Quakers: the people would know its chosenness in its experience of sufferings. It was proof enough of providence that this Lazarus community lived to tell its stories. Marrant's *Journal* records these in serial form, chronicling the interstices between an accidental world and the realm of eternal significance.

What fascinates about the *Journal* is Marrant's specificity of purpose. Few itinerants assumed roles as covenant theologians, historians, or political activists in the towns where they preached. Eighteenth-century Huntingdonian or Methodist missionary writings rarely engage with local "peoples" in any intimacy. But Marrant came to Nova Scotia seeking his own people--Black Loyalists from America, including members of his own family.<sup>5</sup> The text for his first sermon at Birchtown was Acts 3: 22: "For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you" (11). Marrant believed himself divinely appointed to serve his "brethren," the Blacks of Birchtown, as a "prophet." Contemporary readers accustomed to liberal

applications of the term "prophet" must not underestimate the power of Marrant's claim. In this instance, "prophet" is neither a metaphor for accomplished subjectivity nor a rhetorical flourish.<sup>6</sup> Rather, it is nominative, present-tense, and practical, marking the temporal and spatial domain of Marrant's discourse. The time of the prophet is the fullness of time, the time of the Spirit; the place this prophet has been called to is Birchtown, a community established in a particular historical moment on the basis of a shared history. And while human history could not be wholly reconciled with eschatology--Birchtown was never "translated" like the apocryphal City of Enoch, though its residents did eventually remove themselves to Sierra Leone<sup>7</sup>--the prophet could call the community to a greater consciousness of divine presence manifesting itself among them.<sup>8</sup>

Popular demand for prophecy crested during the war-torn years of the early American republic, and if God did not readily provide emissaries of political promise, the nation's newspapers did.<sup>9</sup> A proclamation on "The Future Glory of America" (1774) was sometimes credited to "a young lady in Virginia;"<sup>10</sup> "Merlin's Prophecy" (1778), found on board a seized British ship, claimed that "the British empire will be rent in twain"<sup>11</sup>; and in "The Prophecy of King Tamany" (1782), the "Indian chief ... fam'd of yore, / Saw Europe's sons adventuring here/... and sighing, dropt a tear."<sup>12</sup> But Marrant's *Journal* marks no interest in national destinies, nor in the apocalyptic or millennialist concerns of modern American "prophetic" cultures.<sup>13</sup> His mission was not to peer into the future, but rather to turn his people's "face Zion forward" and, by implication, to turn their backs to the ways of this world (87).

The American popular press had a place for prophets of this kind too, and most often it was in parody. "The Mahometan Hog: A Tale" (1781) compares "the prophet of the Turk," who forbids Muslims to eat pork, with the "preacher" who charges the "multitude" to "Renounce the world!" and worldly pursuits such as card playing and theater.<sup>14</sup> Islamic prophets also figured prominently in ethnographic reports from Britain's Middle Eastern colonial

fronts.<sup>15</sup> Islam's pledge-- "There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet"--had posed a serious doctrinal challenge in the seventh century to a Catholic belief in the accomplishment of all things in Christ. Had eighteenth-century Americans still believed themselves to be chosen people, the implications of that doctrinal divide might have been more pronounced: if God continued to initiate covenant relationships with a plurality of modern peoples, could their nation still stake an exclusive claim to divine favor? But such questions were never seriously raised because there were more pressing items on America's post-colonial agenda. The threat of other prophets and other peoples would be played out as a sort of national pastime, in the street-level intolerance of radical religious difference.<sup>16</sup>

The promise of a covenant relationship with the Almighty did not lose its attraction among those who found the tender mercies of the "Redeemer Nation" to be cruel. Marrant's *Journal* of his mission to Birchtown demonstrates the abiding power of covenant theology in early America's marginal communities. It also evidences the early development of a Black Atlantic theology elaborated by nineteenth-century Black nationalists and emigrationists. This chapter will focus on the constitution of Marrant's prophecy and Birchtown's peoplehood in the text of the *Journal*. The prophet and his people came to recognize each other in the serial interventions of providence.

\*\*\*\*\*

John Marrant's ministry took root in a covenant sensibility cultivated long before the preacher arrived in Birchtown.<sup>17</sup> During the summer of 1783, at the close of the Revolutionary War, over 23,000 Loyalists migrated to Nova Scotia. Three thousand African-Americans made the journey; many had liberated themselves from slavery by enlisting in the Loyalist army and expected to find the British war-time promise of "Freedom and a Farm" realized in Nova Scotia (Walker 12). About 1,500 of these

"Black Loyalists" chose to establish their own community on a rocky shoulder of Port Roseway directly across the harbor from the populous Loyalist settlement at Shelburne. They called the place Birchtown in honor of British Brigadier General Samuel Birch, whose signature authorized their certificates of passage. Although Birchtown came to be known as a refuge for Blacks who were fleeing slavery and abuse in other parts of the province, it provided no buffer against the racist economic policies of the Nova Scotian colonial government. Land-ambitious Shelburne Loyalists sought to take advantage of Birchtown grants, going so far as to order a survey to reapportion one hundred acres of Birchtown for themselves (Blakely and Grant 274). Although surveyor Benjamin Marston eventually induced Shelburne leaders, in his words, to "overhaul that business," the problems continued (Walker 85-86). The few Blacks whose grants were actually finalized found their lots, on average, half the size of those awarded to whites settling in the area (Blakely and Grant 276). Most Birchtown residents, however, faced the first winter without a "Farm"--some purchased town lots with their own funds, some turned to sharecropping. Many enrolled as laborers in Colonel Stephen Blucke's "Black Pioneer Corps" and survived the snows in army barracks or tents, subsisting on provisions of "meal and molasses" (Walker 45). Economic deprivation made Blacks a targeted source of cheap labor and, consequently, a scapegoat for poor whites. In July 1784, Shelburne's disbanded soldiers found their army provisions cut off and reacted by rioting. Benjamin Marston recorded that they "[rose] against the Free negroes to drive them out of [Shelburne], because they labour cheaper than they--the soldiers" (Wilson 92). A resident of Liverpool, Nova Scotia heard that "some thousands of People Assembled with Clubbs & Drove the Negroes out of the Town" (Perkins 93). Attacks on Birchtown, a refuge for those fleeing Shelburne, continued for a month (Walker 49).

The geographic and economic distance between Shelburne and Birchtown helped underscore the settlers' growing sense of religious independence. Anglican pastors William Walter and George Panton

occasionally visited Birchtown to perform baptisms, but Sunday services were a Shelburne-only affair. Christ Church's twenty-shilling pew fees proved prohibitive to Black participation, except in the case of Stephen Blucke, the Church's only Birchtown communicant (Walker 69-70). Blucke was eventually appointed head of a Birchtown school organized by Dr. Bray's Associates; Isaac Limerick, a "Preacher & an Exhorter," was made master of another sponsored by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (Wilson 121-129; Walker 82). Birchtown also became an object of Methodist interest, drawing special attention from John Wesley himself. After a visit to the region in 1784, Wesley wrote:

The little town they have built is, I suppose, the only town of negroes which has been built in America--nay, perhaps in any part of the world, except only in Africa. I doubt not but some of them can read. When, therefore, we send a preacher or two to Nova Scotia, we will send some books to be distributed among them; and they never need want books while I live. (Blakely and Grant 278; Wilson 96)

American itinerants Freeborn Garrettson and John Oliver Cromwell were sent to Nova Scotia in August 1785 and like the Anglicans they made Shelburne their home base. Garrettson thought that his former assistant, African-American exhorter Harry Hosier, might do better in Birchtown than he could. "There are several thousand coloured people in this province," he wrote to Francis Asbury in April 1786, "and the greater part of them are willing to be instructed. What do you think of sending Harry here this spring?... I have no doubt but the people will support their preachers in this country" (Bangs 161; Simpson 250-251). But Asbury never sent Hosier to Nova Scotia and Garrettson instead appointed Birchtown residents Moses Wilkinson and Boston King as his pastoral assistants.

The blind and crippled Wilkinson had escaped slavery in Virginia; King left a bound apprenticeship to join the Loyalists in South Carolina. Both men arrived in Nova Scotia on the ship *L'Abondance* in

August 1783 and thus could claim a place among the first settlers of the community. Wilkinson's disabilities were a source of distinction during his early years at Birchtown, when the faithful would gladly carry him to an appointed place and wait to hear him preach. Among his first converts was Violet King, who preceded her husband as an exemplar and exhorter. Although both men attained local fame for their fervent preaching, it was difficult for "the people" to see King and Wilkinson as "their preachers." Economic necessity would force King to leave Birchtown in 1787 to seek work elsewhere in the province. Wilkinson's distinctive profile degenerated with the novelty of his disabilities, and he came to be known in town as "the old blind man" or "the blind cripple." This unhappy characterization also marked the limitations of Wilkinson's pastoral authority: within the Wesleyan order of things, he would always be subject to the rules of the Methodist Society and to the direction or discipline of his white superiors. The regular stipend Wilkinson received from an anonymous English benefactor would only confirm local perceptions of his dependency. So no matter how sympathetic John Wesley's pledge of books and preachers, the Wesleyan Connection could not make good on the promise of independence which Birchtowners had gathered to fulfill.

Other "peoples" who gathered to Nova Scotia had developed independent religious practices. Charismatic itinerant Henry Alline ignited an ecclesiastical uprising in the province in the late 1770s. Alline, who was born in Rhode Island in 1748 and came to Nova Scotia in 1760 with his parents, believed that "Yankee" migrants had been chosen out of a backslidden New England to preserve the gospel in the wilderness. They were, he preached, "a people on whom God had set His everlasting Love," and the province was "as the Apple of His Eye" (Rawlyk *Ravished*, 10). Redemption for them was a means of transforming the mundane hardships of the province--in Alline's words, the world of "Turnips, Cabbages, and Potatoes"--into the "ONE ETERNAL NOW," and of sharing that habitation with God (Rawlyk *New*, 10). Even after Alline's departure from Nova Scotia in 1783 and his death in 1784, popular

worship in Nova Scotia retained his distinctive New Light and Dissenting imprint. In fact, some historians credit him with preparing the way for the development of dissenting Black Nova Scotian churches.<sup>18</sup> At Digby, exhorter Joseph Leonard convened worship meetings in his own home, baptized children and converts, and administered communion to sixty families. Chastised by the bishop for these "irregularities," Leonard demanded ordination and explained that his congregation wanted "to be entirely independent and separate from the whites, and to have a church of their own" (Walker 68). Emigrant and ex-slave David George, who established one of America's first Black churches, at Silver Bluff, South Carolina in 1773, found in the remnants of the Allinites at Shelburne an audience receptive to his Baptist gospel. Although he preached in Birchtown with some success when rioting drove him from Shelburne in 1784, he did not claim the place or its people as his own. As soon as violence subsided, he returned to Shelburne to reorganize his congregation.

By the mid-1780s, Nova Scotia was home to a remarkable assembly of Black preachers and its Black communities were engaged by a similarly intensive religious concern. But Blackness alone would not commend a preacher to a people, nor would it seal the covenant between them. David George, Moses Wilkinson, or Boston King each could have answered Birchtown's basic needs for services and ceremonies. None of them, however, would suit the community's sense of itself as a "people." Their hopes for land and freedom led them out of America; the isolation, harshness, and racial hostility of their wilderness settlement proved them a people set apart.<sup>19</sup> But only God could choose a covenant people and that choice could only be confirmed in sensible manifestations of a particular Spirit. These were the works that John Marrant came to perform.

His mission to Nova Scotia was a kind of Black Atlantic homecoming for Marrant. Long before he set foot in Birchtown, he knew intimately its residents' experience of war-time displacement and post-war wandering. He had been impressed into the Royal

Navy, wounded in battle, and hospitalized in England. Denied a sailor's pension upon his discharge, he worked for three years in London, feeling keenly his separation both from God and from his familiars. In his *Narrative*, Marrant remembers:

During this time, I saw my call to the ministry fuller and clearer; had a feeling concern for the salvation of my countrymen: I carried them constantly in the arms of prayer and faith to the throne of grace, and had continual sorrow in my heart for my brethren, for my kinsmen according to the flesh. (95)

For the apostle Paul, writing to the Romans, "kinsmen according to the flesh" meant a scattered and unconverted Israel (Romans 9: 2-4). To Marrant and to the Huntingdonians he sought to convince of his calling, "flesh" meant race. And his "countrymen," some of them fellow Charlestonians, had found refuge in another country. This much Marrant learned from his Loyalist brother, who communicated by letter Birchtown's need for a pastor of its own.

But Marrant was no ordained minister. He was a stranger in London, many miles and years removed from his spectacular conversion in Charleston in 1768 and the local fame that followed. He had, however, found an opportunity to revive his spiritual "gifts" in exile, exhorting on Monday nights at the Spa-Fields chapel of the Countess Huntingdon. The letter from Birchtown became his calling card with the Huntingdon Connection. Marrant carried it first to the Reverend Thomas Wills, who submitted it to Lady Huntingdon and eventually to the witnesses present at Marrant's ordination in May 1785 (Whitchurch 22). There Marrant was set apart for the sake of Nova Scotia and its aboriginal inhabitants, as his *Narrative* proclaims.<sup>20</sup> Although he would come into contact with locals and natives, it is likely that Marrant went to Nova Scotia with his own "kinsmen" in mind.

He arrived at Shelburne on December 16, 1785, disappointed by this "new uncultivated place" where "the people seemed all to be wild." Others had

complained about Shelburne's population: Nova Scotia Governor John Parr once grumbled that it was "composed chiefly of the Dregs and Banditti of [New York] Boston or other Sea Ports," and Benjamin Marston observed "very few people of education among" the town's "mixed multitude" (McKinnon 74-76). Marrant's chief complaint was not the lack of culture but rather his own alienation. He wrote, "I was obliged to conclude with Abraham, and said, 'Sure the fear of God is not in this place'" (9; cf. Genesis 20: 11). Like Abraham, he was a stranger in a strange land, not yet among his own people. More familiar signs soon appeared. Marrant met an old acquaintance in a Shelburne coffee house, "asked him several questions about the people," and learned of "several of them of whom [he] knew" (10). That night, in prayer, it was "impressed upon [his] mind, that God had some people in this place," and he decided "to stay one week" (10-11). Further confirmation came the next morning when Marrant recognized a former schoolmate at the lodge's breakfast table. "He did not know me, until after breakfast, when I took him into a private room and made myself known to him," Marrant writes. "He then burst into a flood of tears, and I wept also." These friends soon conducted him to Birchtown, where he met more familiar souls, with whom he "talked about old times, which made us shed many tears" (11). After years of separation, Marrant was restored to his "people" by providence. He returned to Shelburne on December 19 just to retrieve his belongings.

\*\*\*\*\*

On the morning of Sunday, December 20, 1785, Marrant initiated his ministry at Birchtown with a sermon from Acts 3: 22 - 23. The *Journal* does not reprint the full text of this scripture: "For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people." Marrant does, however, note the effects of his preaching. He writes, "Here

God displayed his divine power . . . Ten [in the audience] were pricked to the heart, and cried out, 'Men and bretheren what shall we do to be saved' (11-12). That afternoon he would preach again, "to a larger congregation than the morning, of white and black, and Indians, when groans and sighings were heard through the congregation, and many were not able to contain" (12). In the evening he gave a third sermon from John 5: 28 -29: "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." Six in the audience had to be "carried out" and Marrant himself was struck dumb for five minutes by "the display of God's good spirit" (12). For several days following he preached morning, afternoon, and evening sermons, as "the people were running from all quarters, very desirous to hear the word of God" (12). He baptized ten converts and married four couples on Christmas day.

In his *Journal*, these ecclesiastical "marvels" are all the evidence Marrant gives of his calling. Nowhere in the text does he call himself a "prophet." But when he spoke these words--"A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me"--to his Sunday morning audience, the message must have been clear. Marrant was one of their "brethren," returned from his wandering, and "raised up" to fulfill a designated purpose. And his prophetic appointment implied that the community was participating in a Godly design. Their status as a "people" and his stature as prophet were reflexively confirmed. Marrant built upon this basic identification a ministry distinguished by its intimacy and immediacy. He was the only ordained minister in residence at Birchtown, the only Black man authorized to administer saving ordinances upon request. His autonomy was further bolstered by the Huntingdon Connection's loose ecclesiastical order. There were no overseers to consult, no rules to read, no membership books to keep--just the poetic simplicity of local communion and a Calvinist gospel more attuned to grace than method. Marrant did not come to Birchtown as an agent of the Wesleys but as

an unalloyed agent of Christ and as a servant to the "people."

But his profile would be sharpened by the presence of antagonists. His first day's sermon had set his his ministry in oppositional terms: "Every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people." So when local Wesleyans attempted to stir up a partisan spirit against him, they only succeeded in setting the stage for his success. A prominent Halifax Methodist warned Birchtown by letter that a man who "did not come from Mr. Westley [sic]" would shortly arrive. According to Marrant, this admonition "inflamed the minds of the people":

Some cried one thing and some another; but God over-ruled all things for his glory, and I was permitted to preach in the Arminian meeting (because there was no other in the place) to a very large congregation . . . Here Mr. Marchenton's letter proved fruitless; the people determined to hear for themselves. (11)

Against the machinations of the "Arminians," as he called them, Marrant established himself as the pastor of "the people." An attack on him was an attack on them; his enemies were their enemies and, in the idiom of evangelical piety, enemies to God as well.

Had the Wesleyans properly anticipated Marrant's popular appeal, they might not have focused their objections to his ministry on the minister himself. But according to the *Journal* they engaged Marrant in a series of dramatic public confrontations. The Wesleyans' questionable ecclesiastical tactics turn inevitably to Marrant's literary success in presenting himself as a figure of resistance and a symbol of Christian triumph. In April 1786, when Marrant was away for a short period of itinerancy, false reports of his drowning during a river crossing reached Birchtown. Marrant's *Journal* reports that "the Arminian," probably Moses Wilkinson, put the rumors to sectarian purposes, "and had drawn some of the weak ones away, telling them that they would never see me any more." When Marrant returned unharmed, the people "rejoiced" to see him and



"would not let [his] feet touch the ground." That his life was never in danger did not compromise the symbolic value of the incident. It became, in Marrant's *Journal*, an indictment of Wilkinson's faithlessness and a vindication of the gospel cause itself: "Here God disappointed the devil of his hope, by restoring me to them in such a wonderful manner, which he did the fullness of his gospel thus, in this time of mourning" (33). Marrant would prove God's promise of "restoration" from death, both in his administration of a reviving grace and in his own exemplary deliverances from physical danger.

He also pledged himself as an instrument of more general relief by taking an activist role in Birchtown's struggle for economic survival. In May 1786, town residents asked Marrant to bear their petition for "tools, spades, hoes, pickaxes, hammers, saws and files . . . and blankets" to the provincial governor in Halifax because "their colonel," the sometimes unreliable Stephen Blucke, had "gone out of town, and had left them" (33).<sup>21</sup> Marrant hesitated, then called a town meeting, and "found it was the request of the whole": "I enquired into those things they had and found they really stood in want of more" (35). He successfully presented their petition to the provincial government and sent the supplies home, extending his own return trip to allow for itinerant preaching. Upon his return, Marrant found, once again, the town misled by "the Arminians" who had seized control of the goods and distributed them by sale. Moses Wilkinson had gone so far as to sell the town chapel to the Wesleyan Society for three guineas. Marrant writes, "The old blind man, who preaches for the Arminians told me, that I should not preach there any more. I answered him, that the place was built for the people at large, not more for one connection than another; and, with God's leave, this night I was determined to preach in it" (37). The misappropriation of common property was a bad faith transaction but Wilkinson's outright sale of the church was a betrayal, in Marrant's words, of "the people at large." Marrant would prove the people's case against sectarian controversy in the people's church.

Had Wilkinson intended to produce a morality play,

he could not have chosen a more significant venue for a showdown with his evangelical rival. But he gravely underestimated the role "the people at large" would play. That evening, Marrant records, "a multitude of people gathered together and found the [church] doors shut against them"; "denied" the key to the place by town "elders," the people "took it away" from them, entered the building, and "prepared for preaching" (37). Wilkinson seized center stage, but the audience was in control. Marrant records, "The old man, in order that I should not preach, came in and sat in the desk, and began to give out an hymn, but nobody would sing with him until I came in, and he not knowing that I was in, I gave out the same hymn over his head, when the house rang with the praises of God" (37). Wilkinson, blind to Marrant's presence behind him, believed the audience had responded to his call. Marrant played along with the people:

After singing, he went immediately to prayers. Some of the people touched him, and asked him whether he knew what he was about; and while they were talking together, I went to prayer, and when he heard me, he crept out, and I saw him no more that night. Here we see, by this, that the devil can never stand against the truth, but will always fly. (37)

Wilkinson, sadly, never saw what hit him. Defeated by his own bad plot, he became a symbol of evil overcome. Marrant, on the other hand, became an emblem of prophecy fulfilled. He did preach in the church that night, accomplishing his own word and God's will. His text was Luke 13: 21, wherein the "kingdom of God" is compared with "leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened." Perhaps the hidden "leaven" came to stand for the recovered tools, the reclaimed chapel, or the power of truth revealed. The implications of the "Kingdom of God" for Birchtown are more clear: God intended his Kingdom to prosper, and true gospel ministers would contribute to the common uplift. Marrant spent the rest of the month conducting town meetings, redistributing supplies,

returning money, "confirming the people and setting all right again" (38).

Moses Wilkinson's errors proved costly to the Wesleyan Society, which soon lost half of its Birchtown membership. Society leaders blamed Marrant for their troubles, describing him, in the Manichean rhetoric favored by both sets of evangelists, as a devil. In April 1786, Freeborn Garrettson advised John Wesley that

A negro man, by the name of Morant, lately from England, who says he was sent by lady Huntingdon, has done much hurt in society among the blacks at Burch town. I believe that Satan sent him. Before he came there was a glorious work going on among these poor creatures, now . . . there is much confusion. The devil's darts are sometimes turned upon his own miserable head. (Bangs 152; Simpson 246)<sup>22</sup>

Recognizing that circuit overseers' neglect had contributed to the growing "confusion," Garrettson decided to visit Birchtown on July 5, taking advantage of Marrant's summer itinerancy. But Marrant returned to Birchtown on July 4, discovering "the Arminian's" impending visit. "The people [were] all turned upside down again," he writes, "expressing how glad they were I came that day" (38). Together they planned to play along with the Wesleys; Marrant would attend Garrettson's service unannounced, ensconced among his people in the audience. A similar strategy orders Marrant's account of the meeting. In the *Journal* too he plays the anonymous observer, sitting "pretty close to the pulpit, that nothing should slip" (39). And so the events unfold: Garrettson begins with song and prayer, then announces his Wesleyan agenda, and says he is "very sorry that they had a man come from England, and was not of Mr. Wesley's society, and had sown the seeds of discord." All this Marrant records without comment. But when Garrettson gets personal-- "He even went so far as to call me a devil"--Marrant materializes in a moment of inflection. Quickly he disappears again when "the

people" come to his defense:

One of the elders rose up, and told [Garrettson] if he came to preach the Gospel of Christ, for to preach it; if not, to come down out of the pulpit; for, says he, you had no business to rail against a person that you never discoursed with, nor have seen; but this one thing we did know, we never heard the Gospel of Christ till he did come, and we know that God hears not the prayer of a sinner. I can testify, and several others who are now in the congregation, that God made him the instrument of our souls conversion, for the devil never converted a soul in his life, nor never can he; I wish Mr. Marrant was here to answer for himself. (39)

But Marrant did not need to "answer." Every time Garrettson called him out, the people responded in his behalf. When Marrant rose to leave at the close of the meeting, "the whole house moved" with him (40). Even Freeborn Garrettson was, eventually, moved; on his way out of town, he stopped in at Marrant's morning prayer service, "wept much," and "expressed himself much hurt for what had happened" (41). At evening service, Marrant finds vindication in scripture-- "Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (cf. 1 John 4: 1-3)--and in the Spirit-filled "groaning and crying" of his congregation. Justice, in the prophet's *Journal*, is ultimately poetic; when the signs and wonders approve him, he need not speak for himself.

In Garrettson's *Journal*, the episode ends differently as the people are successfully convinced of Marrant's bad "character" and Stephen Blucke promises to have him "put out of town" (Simpson 128). By September, Garrettson reported to John Wesley that "most of the coloured people whom Morant drew off have returned" (Bangs 158; Simpson 249). But he was not there in late December to see God begin "a good work" among the people-- "there was one soul born with the new year" among the Huntingdonians, Marrant writes, "and I believe two at Mr. Westley's meeting [sic]" (44). Nor was Garrettson there on covenant night, January 1, 1787, to administer the

sacrament to his own society, "a great many" of whom "came and begged to be partakers" with Marrant's congregation. And John Marrant, not Freeborn Garrettson, would have the final word in the Wesleyan controversy:

So we see here the greatest enemies of Christ's church frequently make a great profession, and have a name or an office in the church, when at the same time are destitute of the vital power of true godliness; they live by a name themselves, and they want a great many names to be set down in their society books to make a fair shew; but they care nothing about real religion; from such religion as this, good Lord deliver us. (60-61; cf. Acts 4: 1, 2 Timothy 3: 1-7)

In their intermittent "deliverance" from Arminian plots, Marrant and his people forged a congregational identity. It was Marrant against the Wesleyan establishment, his community against their "Society," and false prophets against "real religion."

\*\*\*\*\*

These signal instances occupy only a few pages of the *Journal*. The rest of the story takes place beyond the four walls of the Birchtown chapel, within the broader proving grounds of the Nova Scotian wilderness. Marrant was a devoted itinerant, pastoring also to poor white fishermen and Micmac Indians scattered in small settlements between Shelburne and Liverpool. For the people of Sable River, Jordan Point, and Ragged Island--places that do not show up on modern maps of the region--and for the people of Birchtown as well, daily life was far more dangerous than a little doctrinal error. Poverty, illiteracy, famine, cold, illness, isolation, and violence threatened both body and soul. When Marrant visited Jordan River, bearing a letter of recommendation, he found that the letter's intended recipient was illiterate; moreover, his family had "lived there above twenty years" and "never heard the word of God." Marrant writes: "I abode there all night, and discoursing with him, I found that he was ignorant of God and himself. I asked him what he thought would become of his wife and three children, if they should die in that

state. He answered nothing, but cried" (27).

Death was a constant worry for Marrant too. His travels put him, with Paul, "in peril at sea, in peril in the wood, in peril in the city" (61; cf. 2 Corinthians 11: 26), and false reports of his death by illness or accident were always in circulation. The "vital power" of Marrant's ministry was proved in its promise of victory over death. This victory, according to the Calvinist gospel of the Huntingdon Connection, was not in universal salvation nor was it accomplished through good works. It was the will of God in triumph over the forces of this world. To those who lived and died at the mercy of this world's invisible forces, divine omnipotence must have seemed a sympathetic doctrine indeed. It could bring greater clarity to the chaos of human hardship, whether or not one managed to "overcome" that hardship in his lifetime or on her own merits. It reserved the work of redemption to God and introduced at every mortal instance the possibility of divine intervention.

Marrant relied on this possibility as often as he preached it. There were so many souls in isolated places, so many obstacles in his path. Rarely could he stay for more than a few days in one place, and conditions were scarcely comfortable:

In my greatest illness my chief diet was fish and potatoes, and sometimes a little tea sweetened with treacle, and this was the best they could afford, and the bed whereon I laid was stuffed with straw, with two blankets, without sheets; and this was reckoned a very great advantage in these parts of the globe; for in some places I was obliged to lay on stools, without any blanket, when the snow was five and six feet on the earth, and sometimes in a cave on the earth itself. (47)

Exhaustion, exposure, and illness often limited his pastoral activity. When a smallpox epidemic afflicted the region in 1787, Marrant was housebound with "the spitting of blood" for seven days. On the eighth day, he tried to preach at his regular Sunday

Birchtown service but was overcome by illness  
mid-sermon:

The blood came running out at my nose and mouth, so that the people were all frightened. They took me out of the pulpit and carried to my house . . . . [I] was grieved to see so many precious souls that came so far that morning to hear the word of God, and was deprived of hearing it. (59)

The spring of 1787 also brought a general famine. Marrant "had many distressing objects" that were "continually coming begging": they "were really objects of pity," he writes, "and were perishing for want of their natural food for the body" (50). But the pastor could not offer them "natural food," as the Huntingdon Connection had failed to respond to his own requests for relief.<sup>23</sup>

But no matter how unpromising the towns seemed, no matter how short the time allotted, no matter how keenly he felt his mortal limitations, Marrant made his pastoral rounds with the assurance that God was in charge of outcomes. Huntingdonian doctrine taught that all things would find their resolution in a divinely predetermined order; to surrender to the will of God was to fulfill it. All Marrant had to do was preach "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believed" (52; cf. Romans 1: 16) and make way for the reconciling works of the Spirit. When the Spirit descended on Marrant's worship meetings, it did so with vital force. It was manifest not only in the people's voices--the *Journal* records their "moans," "cries," and "shouts"--but also in their bodies. At one Micmac Indian village, "the Indians would not go away till twelve o'clock. I informed them that . . . they had better go home and get a little sleep. Three of the women answered, they did not want any sleep. However they went home, but I believe they did not sleep, for in the morning they were there before five o'clock" (17). Sometimes the people sang and shouted through the night; if Marrant retired, they went on without him. The people at Ragged Island "seemed to want no sleep; however I left them praising of God, and I went to bed and got a little sleep. I awoke about

three o'clock, and hearing them praising the Lord, I rose up and joined them, and so continued till morning" (20). Within the space of a Marrant revival, the Spirit could loosen the bonds of human time. For a few hours, death might lose its sting; the grave could claim no victory in the presence of the Spirit.

Marrant preached a discourse of death and new life for "mourners" and "wounded souls." The people, in turn, acted on the gospel promise by building regeneration into their ritual. Witness Marrant's account of one Birchtown service:

God's word went as a two-edged sword, and poor sinners were slain. I concluded the discourse, and came out, leaving several of them lying on the floor stretched out as though they were dead. I went immediately to bed, in order to get me some rest, and awoke about two o'clock, finding the people were still in the meeting, and continued till four o'clock before they left the meeting. (44)

It was the same among the Micmac Indians. At a baptismal service near Green's Harbour, the Spirit leveled several worshippers and rendered Marrant mute "for about five minutes." When he recovered, he "took the bason" in his hands and "baptised them on the floor." At evening service, Marrant reports, "God was pleased to comfort the mourners" and one girl "rose up in the time of preaching, crying out, and declaring to the congregation--that her sorrow and sighing had fled away" (19). Like Lazarus, the redeemed became wonders to the community, walking exemplars of the resurrection hope.

The *Journal* serializes these "resurrection narratives," depicting Marrant in a variety of roles. Sometimes he is present as a witness only and sometimes the work requires of him a physical struggle. At least once, when he tried to convert a former prostitute, Marrant paid the price of redemption with his own blood. The "abandoned woman" drove him from her house with a pair of fireplace tongs, wounding him in the process. He fled to a nearby barn and prayed,

lifting my hand up which was then bleeding,  
and the blood trickling all over my face,  
begging the Lord to search my heart,  
whether I had lost these drops of blood for  
the gospel of Christ, and the good of souls . .  
. . [I said] If it is his will that I should spill  
more blood, in his cause, I was willing. (22)

Marrant returned and subdued her, using words "furnished" him from the story of Christ's crucifixion. As he went to prayer, she "fell off from the bed, as though she was shot, and screamed out with a loud voice, and stretched herself off, as though she was going out of the world" (22). The next morning, a "frightened" multitude gathered; to them Marrant preached from Luke 13: 5, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." Several converts were made over the next two days as the woman fared "worse and worse," growing "pale as death." Her recovery came on the third day when she "got up" and "praised God in a remarkable manner," then recognized the wounds in Marrant's hands and "begged" forgiveness from him. He writes, "I told her that Christ had pardoned her and [that] I had nothing against her" (25). Marrant offers no exegetical improvement on the episode, his own hand in the work being eminently seen.

But the means of deliverance were not always within the realm of Marrant's prophetic command. Another of the *Journal's* resurrection narratives finds Marrant very much yoked to his people in their struggle for survival. In March 1787, Marrant found two women at the outskirts of Birchtown "who had been over to Shelbourn, to beg something to eat," but they "had not strength to reach home with it." One was "irrecoverable," the other "partly chilled with the cold, the snow being four feet on the earth" (49). Marrant tried to revive her:

I took some rum out of my knapsack, and gave her a little of it to drink, and rubbed her face with some, and moved her about as well as I was able, and sometimes we both fell down together, I being so weak after my late illness; but, by the help of the Almighty God, I got her a mile nearer the town. (49)

That the prophet and his people "fell down together" did not compromise their common faith; theirs was a community founded on shared history, a bond felt most powerfully when circumstances pressed them together. And they would take turns saving each other. Indeed, a few months later, the scene was perfectly reversed when Marrant collapsed in the snowy woods and two women came to find him. The *Journal* relates: "One was rather frightened and started back, the other came and laid her hand upon me, perceiving life was still in me; she said to the other, he is alive, so they raised me up, and two men came and took me away" (65-66). Although Marrant correlates his story with the story of Christ's resurrection, like Lazarus he does not claim the power of salvation as his own. Significantly, it is the women who "raise him up," fulfilling "the commandment of God in delivering *his people* from the jaws of death" (66, emphasis added; cf. Psalms 22: 1-31). Marrant's story merges with the collective story of deliverance.

The *Journal*, finally, does not tell John Marrant's personal history; it gives us few details about his closest relationships and mentions nothing of his family. Nor does it tell us the names, in most cases, of the individuals and families who considered themselves his followers. Marrant himself had but a partial knowledge of their individual lives; he was present to witness instances of divine intervention and to call down the Spirit in their meetings, but the demands of his calling never let him stay to see the full story unfold. Time after time, he concludes his daily transactions by noting that, having done all he could in their behalf, he left his people "in the hands of God." Into these "hands" Marrant commits his own life too, whenever he finds himself in circumstances beyond his control. Invoked repeatedly throughout the *Journal*, they give grace a particular and consistent shape. They are the sign under which all providences are gathered, the common denominator of this "people"'s Godly experiences.

There is in this phrase, "the hands of God," an appreciably poetic quality. But the power of these "hands," according to the *Journal*, is not ultimately literary; at times the "hands of God" intervene in the

text with literal force. So it was when John Marrant lost his way in a Nova Scotia swamp and, exhausted from wandering, he laid himself down to rest. Twice he "felt something push" him, and twice he ignored the prompting. He writes:

I was touched again in the former manner, but more powerfully, which was accompanied with a voice which I thought said arise, why sleepest thou in a dangerous place? I arose with surprise, and searched all about for a quarter of a mile round, and fancying that there was some human person laid by, but had hid himself; but after a little while it came into my mind that it was the Lord, then I wept, and was full of trouble, because of my slothfulness in going to sleep in a wilderness, where I was certain I had lost my way. (55; cf. Luke 22: 45-46, Ephesians 5: 14-16)

The force of this intervention recalls Marrant to a lively sense of his own mortal limits. For contemporary readers of the *Journal* it is a moment of awakening to the limits of literary interpretation. Glossing these hands as a metonym for grace will not displace them as an agent of the narrative's progress. Formulated categories such as "imaginary" or "supernatural" may contain this outbreak of spiritual experience, but they do not free us from Marrant's spiritual address.

"The hands of God" are axiomatic, indicating the possibility of meanings beyond the comprehension of the text. "I assure thee, Reader," writes Marrant in another instance, "I am at a loss for words; but this I know, experience goes beyond expression" (66). He recognized that some readers would never be "satisfied" with "the reality" of his *Journal*; even "the Bible, with all its divine beauties, is not sufficient to satisfy" some readers, who "are ever learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (77-78). The reality of the resurrection narrative, like the fulfillment of the resurrection hope, was conceivable only for those "willing" to "leave this body," "sympathis[e]" with their "fellow creatures,"

and turn their "face[s] Zion forward" (87). The truth of providence, for Marrant and his followers, was to be found in shared experience and collective anticipation.

\*\*\*\*\*

There were, to be sure, competing narratives of providence circulating in the eighteenth century.<sup>24</sup> All of these came with particular proofs, but each account seemed "common sense" to its author and adherents. Adam Smith, for example, found providence in the operations of political economy. He too believed that unseen "hands" acted in the public interest, as he explains in *Wealth of Nations*:

[An individual] generally, indeed, neither intends to promote the public interest, nor knows how much he is promoting it. By preferring the support of domestic to that of foreign industry, he intends only his own security; and by directing that industry in such a manner as its produce may be of the greatest value, he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was not part of his intention. (351-352)

The provenance of these "invisible hands" was not so evident to the settlers of Birchtown, nor were these "hands" capable of intervening with saving grace in the lives of Marrant's people. Indeed, the phenomenological frameworks and political systems naturalized by common sense empiricism would prove no habitation in the wilderness.

But the "hands of God" pointed always to the possibility of another economy, another reality: Zion. Marrant preached this possibility consistently during his three years in Nova Scotia. In Birchtown, he saw a people set apart, chosen to participate in the unfolding of a peculiar providence; he believed it was his mission to articulate this promise, to reveal the workings of God in their midst. And two years after Marrant left Nova Scotia, in 1791, his entire

Birchtown congregation made exodus to Africa, seeking to fulfill a holy destiny they believed their own. Led by two Marrant-appointed successors, they disembarked at Sierra Leone singing songs of Zion from the pages of the Huntingdon hymnal (Fyfe 54).

Marrant did not see Zion built up in his lifetime. No prophet, save Enoch, ever has. But he succeeded in constructing a people, a Zion-discourse, and a common sense of expectation. History cannot disprove this hope, and herein lies the prophetic power of Marrant's *Journal*. "To be a prophetic Afro-American Christian," writes Cornel West, "is to negate what is and transform prevailing realities against the backdrop of the present historical limits" (19-20). Or, as John Marrant shows us, with some help from the hand of God, to awake from the dust and to "face Zion forward."

©1999 Joanna Brooks. Any archiving, redistribution, or republication of this text in any medium requires the consent of the author.

---

**WORKS CITED**

- Andrews, William. *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of African-American Autobiography*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986.
- Bangs, Nathan, ed. *The Life of the Rev. Freeborn Garretson*. Fourth ed. New York: T. Mason and G. Lane, 1839.
- Blakeley, Phyllis R. and John N. Grant, eds. *Eleven Exiles: Accounts of Loyalists in the American Revolution*. Toronto: Dundurn Limited, 1982.
- Boyer, Paul. *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992.
- Burr, Adam and Susan Potkay, eds. *Black Writers of the Eighteenth Century*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995.
- Cahill, Barry. "Stephen Blucke: The Peril of Being a 'White Negro' in Loyalist Nova Scotia." *Nova Scotia Historical Review* 11.1 (1991): xxx.
- Carretta, Vincent, ed. *Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the Eighteenth Century*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1996.
- Charles, R. H. *The Book of Enoch*. London: Oxford University Press, 1913.
- Clairmont, Donald and Fred Wien. "Blacks and Whites: The Nova Scotia Race Relations Experience." *Banked Fires: The Ethnics of Nova Scotia*. Ed. Douglass Campbell. Ontario: Scribblers Press, 1978. 141-182.
- Clarke, George Elliot. *Fire on the Water: An Anthology of Black Nova Scotian Writing*. Nova Scotia: Pottersfield, 1991.
- Costanzo, Angelo. *Surprizing Narrative: Olaudah Equiano and the Beginnings of Black Autobiography*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1987.
- Couser, G. Thomas. *American Autobiography: The Prophetic Mode*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1979.
- Creel, Margaret Washington. *"A Peculiar People": Slave Religion and Community Culture Among the Gullahs*. New York: New York University Press, 1988.
- Darsey, James. *The Prophetic Tradition and Radical Rhetoric in America*. New York: New York University Press, 1997.
- Foster, Frances Smith. "Briton Hammon's Narrative: Some Insights into Beginnings." *College Language Association Journal* 21 (1977): 179-86.
- . *Witnessing Slavery: The Development of Antebellum Slave Narratives*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979.
- Fyfe, Christopher. "The Countess of Huntingdon's Connection in Nineteenth-Century Sierra Leone." *Sierra Leone Bulletin of Religion* 4.2 (December 1962): 53-61.
- George, David. *An Account of the Life of Mr. David George, from Sierra Leone in Africa*. 1793. Carretta 333 - 350.
- Hammon, Briton. "A Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings, and Surprizing Deliverance of Briton Hammon, a Negro Man." 1760. Carretta 20 - 25.
- Hodges, Graham. *Black Itinerants of the Gospel: The Narratives of John Jea and George White*. Madison: Madison House, 1993.
- King, Boston. *The Memoirs of the Life of Boston King, a Black Preacher*. 1798. Carretta 351 - 368.
- Kirk-Greene, Anthony. "David George: The Nova Scotian Experience." *Sierra Leone Studies* 14 (1960): 96-110.



Laurence, Richard. *The Book of Enoch the Prophet*. 1883. San Diego: Wizards Bookshelf, 1977.

Loggins, Vernon. *The Negro Author: His Development in America to 1900*. New York: Kennikat, 1964.

MacKinnon, Neil. "The Loyalists: 'A Different People.'" *Banked Fires: The Ethnics of Nova Scotia*. Ed. Douglass Campbell. Ontario: Scribblers Press, 1978. 141-182.

Marrant, John. *A Narrative of the Lord's Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, a Black, (Now Going to Preach the Gospel in Nova-Scotia) Born in New York, in North-America. 1785*. In *Black Atlantic Writers of the 18th Century*. Eds. Adam Potkay and Susan Burr. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996.

Marrant, John. *A Journal of the Rev. John Marrant, From August the 18th, 1785, to The 16th of March, 1790. To which are added Two Sermons; One Preached on Ragged Island on Sabbath Day, the 27th Day of October 1787; the Other at Boston in New England, On Thursday, the 24th of June, 1789*. London: Printed for the Author, 1790.

McKerrow, P. E. *A Brief History of the Coloured Baptists of Nova Scotia, 1783-1895*. Halifax: Afro Nova Scotian Enterprises, 1976.

Montgomery, Benilde. "Recapturing John Marrant." *A Mixed Race: Ethnicity in Early America*. Ed. Frank Shuffleton. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993. 105-115.

----- "Towards Conceptualizing Diary." *Studies in Autobiography*. Ed. James Olney. New York: Oxford UP, 1988.

Oliver, W. H. *Prophets and Millennialists: The Uses of Biblical Prophecy in England from the 1790s to the 1840s*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978.

Perkins, Simeon. *The Diary of Simeon Perkins, 1780-1789*. Eds. D.C. Harvey and Bruce Fergusson.

Toronto: Publications of the Champlain Society, 1958.

Rawlyk, George A., ed. *New Light Letters and Songs*. Nova Scotia: Lancelot Press, 1983.

Rawlyk, George A. *Ravished by the Spirit: Religious Revivals, Baptists, and Henry Alline*. Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1984.

Saillant, John. "Remarkably Emancipated from Bondage, Slavery, and Death: An African-American Retelling of the Puritan Captivity Narrative, 1820." *Early American Literature* 29.2 (1994): 122-40.

----- "Wipe Away all Tears from Their Eyes': John Marrant's Theology in the Black Atlantic, 1785-1808." Unpublished manuscript, 1998.

Schomburg, Arthur. "Two Negro Missionaries to the American Indians, John Marrant and John Stewart." *Journal of Negro History* 21.4 (October 1936): 394-410.

Sekora, John. "Is the Slave Narrative a Species of Autobiography?" *Studies in Autobiography*. Ed. James Olney. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988. 99-111.

----- "Red, White, and Black: Indian Captivities, Colonial Printers, and Early African-American Narrative." *A Mixed Race: Ethnicity in Early America*. Ed. Frank Shuffleton. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993. 92-104.

Shippo, Jan. *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985.

Simpson, Robert Drew, ed. *American Methodist Pioneer: The Life and Journals of the Rev. Freeborn Garrettson, 1752-1827*. Rutland, Vermont: Academy Books, 1984.

Smith, Adam. *Wealth of Nations*. 1776. Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1991.

Toulouse, Teresa. *The Art of Prophesying: New England Sermons and the Shaping of Belief*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987.

Ulrich, Laurel Thatcher. *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812*. New York: Vintage, 1991.

Walker, James W. St. G. *The Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone*. New York: Dalhousie University Press, 1976.

Walls, A. F. "The Nova Scotian Settlers and their Religion." *Sierra Leone Bulletin of Religion* 1.1 (June 1959): 19-31.

Weber, Max. *On Charisma and Institution Building: Selected Papers*. Ed. S.N. Eisenstadt. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968.

West, Cornel. *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982.

Wilson, Ellen Gibson. *The Loyal Blacks*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1976.

Winship, Michael. *Seers of God: Puritan Providentialism in the Restoration and Early Enlightenment*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.

Zafar, Rafia. *We Wear the Mask: African-Americans Write American Literature, 1760-1870*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

## Notes

1. Publication for this edition follows: *John Marrant, A narrative of the Lord's wonderful dealings with John Marrant, a black, (now going to preach the gospel in Nova-Scotia)* . . . [Text from] Psalm 110: 3 and Psalm 96:3. Fourth edition, enlarged by Mr. Marrant, and printed (with permission) for his sole benefit, with notes explanatory (Printed for the Author, by R. Hawes, No. 40, Dorset-Street, Spitalfields, 1785)

2. Arthur Schomburg, an intrepid archivist of Black Masonic history, was the first to rediscover Marrant's Journal but did not sponsor a reissue of the work as he had with Marrant's Sermon to the African Lodge of Freemasons (1789) and Marrant's *Narrative*. Vernon Loggins briefly and dismissively mentions the work: "The Journal, supposedly written by Marrant without aid, is scarcely more than an adaptation of the *Narrative*. . . . Even though Marrant had evidently by 1789 become something of a racial leader, neither the Journal nor the Sermon contains the slightest allusion to the pitiable condition of his people in American life" (33-34). See also Costanzo and Potkay and Burr. The most extended treatment of Marrant's *Journal* to date is John Saillant's "'Wipe Away all Tears from Their Eyes': John Marrant's Theology in the Black Atlantic, 1785-1808."

3. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich powerfully counters the conventional dismissal of diaries as trivial, arguing that "the real power" of the diary is its "dailiness, the exhaustive, repetitious dailiness" (9). On patterns of diary writing, also see Felicity Nussbaum, "Towards Conceptualizing Diary."

4. See Montgomery; Foster, "Britton Hammon's Narrative;" Sekora, "Slave Narrative;" and Sekora, "Red, White, and Black." Marrant and Hammon are treated in tandem in several major studies of early Black writing: Foster, Witnessing, Costanzo, Andrews, and Zafar. Andrews measures these narratives against autobiography and concludes that the authority of Hammon and Marrant is compromised by the mediation of an amanuensis. In a moment of putatively sympathetic criticism Andrews writes, "Thus from the outset of black autobiography in America the presupposition reigns that a black narrator needs a white reader to complete his text, to build a hierarchy of abstract significance on the mere matter of his facts, to supply a presence where there was only 'Negro,' only a dark absence" (32-33). Zafar reiterates and extends this critique.

In his study of eighteenth-century Black Calvinist Lemuel Haynes, John Saillant states his strong objection to the critical dismissal of early Black "selves" and rejects William Andrews's argument that "only liberation from providential arguments allowed black autobiographers to perceive the human evil in enslavement and oppression" as a "misunderstanding not only of eighteenth-century Calvinist doctrines of causality and blame, but also of the way in which a black Calvinist like Haynes used them" ("Remarkably Emancipated," 135-136). Graham Hodges reads in late-eighteenth century African-American narratives as a significant reworking of the European picaresque: "events are episodic and coincidences underscore the chaos and decadence of the world" but meaning resides in "shared events and fabulous adventures which illustrate God's direct intervention with his people" (36-37).

5. The *Book of Negroes* lists "Melia Marrant" and two Marrant children among those who migrated to Nova Scotia. Historian Margaret Washington hypothesizes that Melia Marrant "may be the sister or wife of John who was impressed into the British Navy during the war and eventually went to England. His services to the British would enable his family to be given a certificate of freedom, and he related in his narrative that he had family in Nova Scotia" (376n.12). Curiously, Marrant records in his Journal no family reunion; he does, however, mention travelling with one or two small boys. Their relationship to John Marrant remains undetermined.

6. See Couser and Toulouse.

7. Canonized references to Enoch's translation are limited to Genesis 5: 24 and Hebrews 11: 5. For apocryphal versions of the story, see Charles and Laurence.

8. My formulation of prophetic discourse has been influenced by James Darsey and Max Weber. Darsey classifies Old Testament prophecy as "apodeictic," or demonstrative (19). Weber identifies the process of "charismatic authentication" as the distinguishing mark of a prophet (253-254), and he emphasizes the simultaneously interpretive and advocative nature of prophecy: "To the prophet, both the life of man and the world, both social and cosmic events, have a certain systematic and coherent meaning. To this meaning the conduct of mankind must be oriented if it is to bring salvation, for only in relation to this meaning does life obtain a unified and significant pattern" (266).

9. See Oliver.

10. "A Prophecy of the Future Glory of America," *Massachusetts Spy-Boston* 24 Feb. 1774: 41. Variants were published in *Connecticut Courant* 1-8 March 1774: 41; *North Carolina Gazette* 7 Apr. 1775: 43; and *Maryland Journal* 15 May 1776: 5041. See also "A Prophecy of the Future Glory of America, Written in the year 1777, By a Young Lady in Virginia," *Independent Gazeteer* 11 May 1782: 41 and reprinted in *Massachusetts Spy-Worcester* 6 June 1782: 41.

11. *Massachusetts Spy-Worcester* 23 July 1778: 41; *Pennsylvania Gazette-Philadelphia* 8 August 1781: 32; *New Jersey Gazette-Trenton* 15 August 1781: 32.

12. *Freeman's Journal* 11 Dec. 1782: 31; *Independent Ledger* 6 Jan. 1783: 13; *Massachusetts Spy-Worcester* 9 Jan. 1783: 41; *Boston Evening Post* 11 Jan. 1783: 13.

13. See Boyer.

14. *Boston Evening Post* 20 Oct. 1781:31; *Norwich Packet* 15 Nov. 1781:41; *New Jersey Journal* 28 Nov. 1781: 41,42; *Vermont Journal* 23 Oct. 1783: 41.

15. See the "Extract of a late letter from a gentleman at Constantinople, to his friend in London," which records in verse "The Prophecy of Ackmet Almack of Cordistan," *Boston Evening Post* 10 Dec. 1770: 22; *Massachusetts Spy-Boston* 7-10 Dec. 1770: 32; *Boston Post Boy* 10 Dec. 1770: 11,12; *New Hampshire Gazette-Portsmouth* 28 Dec 1770: 12; also published as a pamphlet. In "The Story of Zeyn Alasman, Prince of Balsora," *New Hampshire Gazette-Portsmouth* 19 Feb. 1762: 31, the "General of the Saracen Army" criticizes (again, in verse) the "Christian chiefs in the siege of Damascus" for being "rebellious to your own great prophet / Who mildly taught you.

16. Prophecy culture returned as a national question with the establishment and growth of the Mormon Church in the 1830s. Mormons believe Church founder Joseph Smith to be a prophet. The implications of this doctrine have set the Church apart doctrinally, culturally, and even geographically from mainline Christianity and mainstream American culture. See Shipps.

17. In composing this treatment of Birchtown history, I have relied primarily on Walker, Wilson, and Blakely and Grant. See also Clairmont and Wien, Mackinnon, Kirk-Greene, McKerrow, and Walls.

18. See Walker and Rawlyk.

19. See Walker, 64-87. George Elliot Clarke, a contemporary scholar of Black Nova Scotian writing, calls this people "Africadia," "a community set apart by worship--but also by geography" (16).

20. Reverend William Aldridge updated the 1788 edition of Marrant's Narrative with news that Marrant had "visited the Indians in their Wigwams" but says nothing of Birchtown.

21. Stephen Blucke, the Colonel of the Black Loyalist muster corps, appears as a fascinating footnote in almost every study of the Nova Scotia Loyalists. Blucke, a mulatto, was distinguished by local authorities as a "yellow man;" his rank afforded him certain economic and social privileges. He was Birchtown's only communicant at Shelburne's Anglican Church, uniquely willing, if not uniquely able, to afford the twenty-shilling pew fees. He eventually disappeared from Birchtown under mysterious circumstances; legend has it that his body was discovered near the Bay of Fundy, decimated by a wild animal. The letters appended to Marrant's Journal include one from Blucke's wife Margaret to Marrant, dated October 12, 1789, in which Mrs. Blucke complains that her husband has proved an unreliable letter carrier and apologizes for the consequential delays in her communication with the minister: "I have wrote to Mr. Blucke, and that repeatedly, but no satisfaction I can receive from him, or nothing I can depend on . . . . My good sir, you see I am entirely at a loss how Mr. Blucke goes on, and you will be pleased to give me as full an account as you can about him" (84). See also Cahill.

22. In 1786, Garrettson wrote to Francis Asbury: "In and around Shelburn there are between two and three hundred members, white and black. Much hurt has been done by a black man sent by Lady Huntingdon, as brother Cromwell was not able to attend them constantly" (Bangs 161; Simpson 251).

23. The *Journal* includes one of Marrant's letters to Countess Huntingdon, in which he asks for renewed financial support: "Our friends naturally sympathize with us, and we are glad of their advice, that advice gives us the same refreshing pleasure as a shower of rain does the weary traveller in the desert of Arabia" (81).

24. Winship gives a detailed intellectual history of early American providentialism.