

STEPHEN ROGERS

A Black Man at d'Ailleboust

Daniel B. Parkinson ©

Introduction

Stephen Rogers, a black man, was a farmer, soldier¹, labourer and fiddler who lived for many decades in Lower Canada. His presence was recorded at Montreal, Sorel, Trois Rivières, Kildare, Ramsey and d'Ailleboust. This account goes back to 1805 and the years before the two events of 1842 that were published in *Up To Rawdon*. It is based on the research of Frank Mackey of Montreal, with contributions by Marc Dixon and Daniel Parkinson.

A hardworking, English-speaking, Protestant, he established himself in a Catholic and Francophone farm community. If he was a Loyalist and veteran, as some of the documents suggest, he did not receive the benefits that were due to him as one of those. From the bare bones of the narrative collected here, one senses his strength and endurance and feels regret that he survived alone the deaths of his two wives² and four daughters. He must have loved the beautiful farm land and country around Ste-Mélanie d'Ailleboust, Berthier County, where he spent nearly half a century and where he remained in preference to urban locations.

Late in his life, Stephen Rogers brought the body of Elizabeth Thompson, who he identified as his wife, to St. John's Church that was being formed in Kildare Township, for burial. She had died at their home at Ste-Mélanie, on 6 April 1842 and was buried at Kildare, two days later. Stephen reported her age as 102. The event was witnessed by George, John and Benjamin Dixon whose family were responsible for building this church on the Eighth Range, on the property of John Dixon that was under construction in 1842. Benjamin Dixon lived on the Ninth Range and other Dixons had Kildare Village lots, on the Eighth Range, and bordered on d'Ailleboust. It is certain that Rogers, as an Anglican, was known to them. The register for burials at St. John's Church begins in 1843 and the Rev. R. H. Bourne used his Christ Church Rawdon register to record the event, but he does not mention if interment was in the proposed new church cemetery. I strongly suspect that Elizabeth's remains were not taken to Rawdon for burial, given the distance and the participation of the Dixon men.

On April 17, 1842, Rogers was baptized, with these same Dixon men as witnesses and it was recorded by Mr. Bourne in the register of the Rawdon Protestant Episcopal Church, whose mission included Kildare and d'Ailleboust. The baptism may have taken place in the home of John Dixon. Stephen is identified as the son of Robert and Jane Rogers of Elizabethtown, New Jersey (a township in Essex County), born on 10 March 1754. If this is accurate, he was 88.

Clearly, Stephen Rogers tried by renting a farm to 'settle' but income was needed to establish it and to support his wife and children and he kept returning to the military. As an apparent veteran of the

¹ We are taking Stephen's word that he was a soldier in the 84th; or he could have been employed by the regiment in any number of supporting roles. The affidavits that accompanied his application to the old soldiers' asylum are no longer in his file, see Chronology entry – 17 April 1845.

² We have not found marriage registrations for Stephen Rogers with Ann Gardner or with Elizabeth Thompson. It is possible they were not married in church. There is no death / burial registration for Ann to our knowledge.

Revolutionary War, footnote 10, why did he have to settle for a lease in a seignury?

I have named Stephen Rogers a Loyalist based on his assertions that he was born in New Jersey and that he had served in the 84th Regiment of Foot (Royal Highland Emigrants), a Loyalist regiment, which was formed during the uprising against the Crown. "In 1790 roughly 20 percent of New Jersey's 14,185 blacks were free. The Revolutionary War helped liberate many New Jersey slaves. Some took advantage of its chaos and fled their masters. Others joined the New Jersey militia or Continental army and were manumitted." (<https://nj.gov/state/historical/assets/pdf/topical/afro-americans-in-nj-short-history.pdf>) The name Rogers is not in the Ancestry census reports for 1790 and 1800.

We do not know Stephen's story before 1805. The 84th Regiment was recruited initially "amongst the highlanders who had received land grants and settled in North America at the end of the French and Indian War in 1763". But "as the War went on, new members were recruited from among the loyalists who fled north from rebelling American colonies." (from <https://www.84th-rhe.com/1780>). Rogers was not a Scottish emigrant veteran, was he then recruited in Canada and if so, how did he come to be there? Had he been a slave with a Loyalist household and emancipated? Or was he a free man who had just wandered north. We can only speculate.

Chronology

2 January 1805

Montreal – Stephen Rogers filed a complaint of assault and battery against Joseph Pierson, a Black resident of the Quebec Suburb of Montreal, who he said had beaten him, without provocation, on 31 December (1804), and had threatened the next day "that he would have his life or have satisfaction from him." A warrant was issued for Pierson's arrest on 2 January.

Pierson posted a £20 recognizance; Jean Baptiste Laffricain (L'Africain) and Joseph Frank (Joseph François), both Black each posted a £5 bond as his sureties. The true bill found by the grand jury listed the witnesses in the case as Rogers, William Wiely and Isaac Newton, all Black, Ann Gardner [sic]³ and Elizabeth Scott. Pierson was arraigned on 15 January and tried the next day, with Rogers, Ann Gardner [sic] and Toby, a Black man, called as witnesses for the prosecution, and George Crozier also black called by the defence. Pierson was convicted and fined 5s plus costs.⁴ (Court of General Quarter Sessions of the Peace, Jan. Term 1805, R v. Joseph Pearson, Rogers complaint 2 Jan, arrest warrant and recognizance 2 and 4 Jan., indictment 10 Jan.; CQS register, 15, 16 Jan.)

20 May 1805

Berthier, Warwick County, Lower Canada – appeared before Notary Maurice L. D. deGlandons, John

³ Ann Gardner [aka Nancy Garner / Gardiner or as Nannesy] was or would become the partner of Stephen Rogers. We are sure she was living in 1805 and 1806 – 1816 at the baptisms and burials her four known children. We know that Stephen was a married man at the censuses of 1825 and 1831 but not the name of his wife. Nancy may have died, and his spouse on those dates might have been Elizabeth, both women are described in records as black.

Elizabeth Scott is not known and is possibly a black woman because all the others in this account are so identified. Could this friend of early days possibly be Elizabeth Thompson?

⁴ Jean Baptiste Laffricain died aged 35 and was buried 22 September 1815 at Basilique Notre-Dame, Montreal. He was a labourer and with his wife Charlotte had several daughters.

William Weely [sic] *negre* died at *l'hotel Dieu* on the 30 August 1809; he was 28 years old.

Rowe,⁵ farmer of Ramezay [sic], who acknowledged to have leased to labourer Stephen Rodgers [sic] of the same place, “a certain lot of ground situate, lying and being in the farm of said Rowe, and making part thereof of one arpent in superficial measure, fronting on the river L'Assomption⁶ and on all other parts to said Rowe with the house thereon erected, whereof the said Rodgers is content and satisfied for having seen and visited the same, and this until the first of May next year, this lease made for and concerning the rent of three pounds fifteen shillings current money of this Province, payable at the expiration of said term, and in case he should said Rodgers employ himself in other service than that of said Rowe, he shall forfeit all, quit the premises and account for what advances he then may have made to him, without excepting no reason whatever ... Rowe signed with us, the other declared not [sic not able to sign] being after its having been duly read.” This 1842 ‘Plan of the Ramsay and D'Ailleboust seigneuries, Argenteuil county’ at BANQ shows the juxtaposition of the two seigneuries and the Assomption River.

<https://numerique.banq.qc.ca/patrimoine/details/52327/3143114>

May 1806

Rogers left the space he rented from Rowe at the end of the contract. Justice Pierre-Louis Panet of the Court of King’s Bench, was the seigneur of both d’Ailleboust and Ramezay [sic]; it appears that he viewed Rogers as a suitable tenant and granted him Lots 7 and 8 in the Fourth Concession, on the L’Assomption River. See above map. Each lot measured three arpents in front by twenty deep. The yearly fee to the Seigneur, to be paid by Rogers, was “four Bushels of Wheat, and one Spanish Dollar, equal to five shillings Currency, for every One Hundred Acres superficial measure.” The first payment was due 1 October 1807 (Notary P. Lukin Sr, #3835, 11 Aug 1806).

12 September 1806 and 5 March 1807 and 8 April 1816

Elvira Rogers was born 12 September 1806 at “Delibat Panet’s Seignior” (d’Ailleboust). She was baptized 5 March 1807 at St. Gabriel Street Presbyterian Church. The father, Stephen Rogers, identified as a farmer. The mother was Nancy Garner and in a note the “parents cannot write.”

Elvira Rogers, a “Negro child,” died on an unspecified date in April 1816 “about nine years of age” and was buried at Christ Anglican Church, Sorel, on 8 April 1816, the daughter of Stephen Rogers, “a Black man,” and his wife Ann, both “natives of the United States”. No address is given at the burial. Were they living on the farm at d’Ailleboust or at the barracks in Sorel?

15 & 16 July 1809

Trois-Rivières, Lower Canada – Margaret Amelia Rogers, daughter of Stephen Rogers, “a private in the Canadian Regiment [of Fencible Infantry] quartered in this Town, and Nancy Gardiner his wife” was born and in the presence of the congregation of St James Protestant Episcopal Church, baptized (BANQ, SJTR Trois-Rivières, 16 Jul 1809), witnesses: Peggy Erwin ⁷, Margaret Sinclair, Nicholas Erwin (Private Nicholas Erwin or Ervine of No. 5 Company of the Canadian Regiment).

⁵ John Row [sic] a bachelor married Ann Elliott, both of Sorel 25 Feb 1811 at Christ Church, Sorel. I believe, the Elliott family of de Ramezay are the ancestors of Grace Elliott, the mother of Pierre Elliott Trudeau.

⁶ The lots at de Ramsay run down to the Assomption River but back on the d’Ailleboust Seignior. It appears that after his lease ended in May 1806 Stephen when moved the short distance to the neighbouring seignior to rent land, as shown above and by the address used for the baptism of Elvira .

⁷ Margaret Irwin of Quebec about 25 years wife of ----- Irwin of His Majesties Canadian Regiment of Fencible Infantry died by the visitation of God in that city’s common gaol on the 13th and buried the 15th of September 1815 and note to be a coroner’s inquest.

19 October 1809

Rogers was one of 13 men discharged from the regiment on 19 October 1809, by the Commander of the Forces, with two weeks advance pay to 2 November. He must have been a strong vigorous man to be still serving in the regular army at 67, if born at the date he claimed when baptized. While most of the men were discharged for medical reasons – “Disabled from a Dislocation 1, Ulcerated Legs 1, Fits 2, Ruptured 2, Rheumatism 2, Idiot 1, Rejected being too old 1”. Rogers, Castor Geah (Castor Jay) and George Crozier (see Chronology 1805) were released as “Men of Colour.” (LAC - RG8, C Series) This is puzzling because there was another Black man in the regiment six months later and, needless to say, these men were black when they joined.

c. 1811 and 28 June 1816

The birth and baptism of Fidelia Rogers, c. 1811, has not been found.

“Fidelia daughter of Stephen Rogers, a black man and of Ann his wife, age of the chuld about five years” was buried 28 June 1816, at Christ Church, Sorel. Witnessed by Thomas Smith and her father who made his mark.

c. 1812 and 24 February 1815

Basiliste Rogers, daughter of Stephen and Nannesey (sic) Rogers (Ann Garner), “nègres de nation”, was born about 1812 and baptized, aged about three years, on 24 February 1815 at Ste-Elisabeth Catholic church in the seigneurie of d’Ailleboust. The witnesses were Joseph Dumont and Josephthe Ducharme.

January and 7 February 1816

Stephen Rogers was identified as a labourer and resident of the seigneurie of d’Ailleboust when he filed a complaint of assault against Pierre Denis Lambert; he claimed the assault had occurred “on Wednesday night the third of January last past, being in a house at Côte St. Pierre in the parish of Berthier, the name of the owner of said house deponent does not know, where he had been called to play the Fiddle [...]” (CQS, Apr Term 1816, Rogers deposition 7 Feb)

November 1818

Stephen Rogers launched simultaneous lawsuits against two Berthier men, Antoine Grenier and George Homery, but the outcome is not known. They concerned claims for money allegedly owed by these men. In a summary of court proceedings, Saturday, 21 November 1818, Homery (identified in other court cases as a “trader” at Berthier, named Homerich and Homerick, and husband of Josèphe Desjarlais or Déjarlais) pleaded not guilty and justification (“*non coupable et justification*”). Grenier pleaded that he owed Rogers nothing (“*Le def plaide qu’il ne doit rien*”). A hearing for both was set for 22 January 1819 but all that survives are the subpoenas issued for the summoning of witnesses for the 12 March and a “rule” requiring a couple of the witnesses to show cause why they should not be fined for failing to show up in January (BAnQ, Montreal Court of King’s Bench, civil side, register, November 1818, nos. 11 and 16, Stephen Rogers v. Antoine Grenier, and Stephen Rogers v. George Komery or Homery. The subpoenas are archived in the box containing cases numbered 294 to 299, rather than in the boxes holding documents pertaining to cases numbered 11-12 and 15-16 and are wrapped in bundles marked “Old causes 12 March” and “Old causes 13 March”).

July – August 1824

Stephen Rogers was identified as a farmer of d’Ailleboust when he voted in the Lower Canada election of 2 August (BAnQ, TL19 S41, Box 13011, poll book for Warwick County, 28 Jul-3 Aug 1824). This confirms that he was a property holder, a legitimate tenant of the seigneurie

1825 Census

Stephen Rogers, head of household, a married man aged 60 or more, and a married female of 45 or more at Ste-Elizabeth [sic] Warwick County⁸, page 1542). It appears that daughters Margaret Amelia and Basiliste had either married, moved away or were deceased.

1831 Census

Etienne Roger [sic] head of household at Ste-Elizabeth [sic], Berthier County (formerly Warwick Co.) pp 893-894. He was a married man between 30 and 60, living with a married woman of 14 to 45, both are Anglican. They were located eight households from Kildare Village. Stephen, on his 60-acre farm, of which 10 acres were under cultivation, had produced in the previous year – 2 bushels of peas, 10 of rye, 2 of corn, 17 of potatoes and one bushel of buckwheat. He had two horned cattle, one horse and a pig – with a horse and livestock he was doing well. (BAC / LAC 1831 census, Lower Canada, Berthier Co., Ste-Elizabeth, pp 893-894.

On the census roll, Rogers was at household #904 beside another Anglican family – that of J. Van Heusson [sic], the father-in-law of Orramill Gibbs (see *Joshua Gibbs Family, Immigrant Years in Lower Canada*). In 1825, the census records that Gibbs and Van Heusson lived very near the Panet manor house.

1842 Census

This census was ordered taken in September 1841 and to be completed by February 1842. Stephen Rogers lived alone at Ste-Mélanie d'Ailleboust, Berthier. He was a man of colour and an Anglican and still claiming to be between 30 and 60 years old although this is a few months before he would give his birthdate as 1754 or 88 years. His birthplace was named as Ireland, but we can dismiss this with confidence as it was consistently America in other documents. His 60 acres of farmland had only 9 in cultivation and it supported a single horse and a cow or ox. In the previous year, the farm yielded one bushel of rye, 3 bushels of oats, 2 bushels of buckwheat and 20 bushels of potatoes. The census records the seignorial tax owed for his property and he would have paid the Seigneur, in kind, whatever was agreed on in his lease.

Why was he listed as married and his wife was not in residence? Wm. Berczy, the seigneur, as a justice of the peace, signed and submitted the census on page 791; he dated it *16 Janvier 1843* therefore the data is from outside the limit. We know from paragraph one that Stephen's wife was deceased eight months previously and so she could not be enumerated. The enumerator recorded the seigneur as Wilham Borzey [sic], with a household of seven and all said to be Anglican. William died 12 December 1873 and was buried at St. John's Kildare, with a memorial stone.

Marie Elizabeth Rodgers "femme de couleur," aged about 94, was baptized a Roman Catholic on 17 March 1842 and identified as the wife of "Rodgers, by the parish priest at Ste-Mélanie, Father Robert". It was an unusual baptism. The priest named himself as *parrain* and the *marraine* was Dame Marie Emilie Panet Berczy but she signed L. A. Panet Berczy [Louise-Amélie Panet Berczy]. She and her husband William Bent Berczy were the seigneurs of d'Ailleboust at Ste-Mélanie from 1832. Marie Emilie was the baptismal name of the *marraine*. We may deduce from the first paragraph, of this essay, that Elizabeth was then mortally ill because she died three weeks later. Why was Elizabeth, ostensibly an Anglican, baptized in the Catholic church? The Rogers couple would have known that the Rev. R. H. Bourne, (missionary at Rawdon) was establishing St. John's Church on land donated by John Dixon for the Kildare community. It appears that circumstances had not permitted him to come to the ailing woman.

⁸ The parish of Ste-Mélanie was established in 1832. Previously, Rogers address was in the Parish of Ste-Elizabeth which is now known as Ste-Elisabeth. The changing county names Warwick, Berthier and Joliette only reflect jurisdictional changes.

I propose that Elizabeth was a servant in the Berczy household, at some earlier time, and that Stephen appealed to Louise-Amélie because both he and his wife were unbaptized and Elizabeth was dying and fearful for her mortal soul. Louise-Amélie was a good Catholic, educated by the Ursulines in Quebec City and could appreciate their fear and she persuaded the parish priest to grant baptism to a dying, Anglican black woman. The fact that Stephen was fearful of death is borne out by his own baptism shortly after his wife was buried. Louise-Amélie knew Father Robert was well aware that William Berczy was Protestant and that she married him in the Anglican cathedral in Montreal, in 1819. Did Louise-Amélie use her *droit de Seigneur* or had Father Robert done this from Christian charity? Or did Elizabeth have a legitimate death bed conversion? This conjures a dramatic scene worthy of Mazo de la Roche.

17 April 1845

A petition to Sir Richard Jackson,⁹ K.C.B., Commander of the Forces in North America from Stephen Rogers, formerly a soldier in the 84th Regiment of Foot (Royal Highland Emigrants) in the First American War, the regiment was disbanded in the Fall 1783 and subsequently in the Canadian Fencibles.¹⁰

“The petitioner has had the honour to have served Her Majesty’s grandfather [Queen Victoria and George III] on various occasions as will appear by the accompanying certificates which he humbly submits to your excellency in the hope of his being found worthy of a place in the asylum for pensioners at Sorel or will grant your petitioner, now upwards of 80 years such other assistance as your Excellency in your wisdom, and from your well known benevolence to worn out soldiers may be pleased to allow him and as in duty bound will ever pray.”

In the hand of scribe Jacob Sicard, and to which Rogers made his mark.

January 1852 Canadian Census

The census’ manuscript returns are lost, but in the “Second Report of the Secretary of the Board of Registration and Statistics, on the Census of the Canadas for 1851-52,” Stephen Rogers is listed in a table of centenarians living in Lower Canada, as a 104-year-old native of Africa [sic], a widower, and resident of Ste-Mélanie (Census of the Canadas 1851-52, v. 2, p 27) This adds six years to what he declared at his baptism, or born in 1748 ,which is doubtful but it was accepted that he had reached a great age.

⁹ He exercised the powers of the Governor General after the death of Lord Sydenham in 1841 until his successor, Sir Charles Bagot arrived in early 1842. The capital was in Montreal 1845-1849. Jackson died in Canada, 9 June 1845. One wonders if anyone reviewed this petition before filing it. A hospital for military pensioners had closed in 1830 was there another? As far as we know Stephen was still on his farm, alone, at almost or more than 100.

¹⁰ This reference to the American Revolution, 1776-1783, corroborates Rogers’ birth in 1754, however in the petition he is less specific “upwards of 80 years”.

A recruitment poster for Captain William Dunbar’s Royal Highland Emigrants clipped from *The Derby Mercury* (Derbyshire, England) from 6 Oct 1775 asked for men to engage ‘for present troubles only”, promised 200 acres to each soldier with 50 additional acres for married men and with 50 for each child, anywhere in North America, plus one guinea levy money. Dunbar was amply rewarded with land at Rawdon as described in updates to <https://uptorawdon.com/>. At the end of the American Revolutionary War in 1783, the regiment was disbanded, and the men and officers of the regiment were offered land grants in Canada. The men of the 1st battalion settled in Upper Canada, along the St Lawrence River, while the 2nd Battalion men received land in rural Nova Scotia.

The regiment was raised in Canada at the start of the American rebellion in 1775 by Lt. Col. Allan MacLean. As the War went on, new members were recruited from among the loyalists who fled north from rebelling American colonies.