

This column explores innovative informal education projects being undertaken within our local museum community. As active spaces for dialogue, connection and critical thinking, it seeks to highlight programming that makes our institutions more inclusive and that encourage more meaningful engagement with our visitors.

The Importance of Including Black History in B.C. Curriculum and Heritage Programming

SPOTLIGHT ON MUSEUM ED

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As a human being, I truly believe in the equality of all people on planet earth. I also believe in the strength of human diversity to create better countries, better institutions, and better work places. It is important for our children and youth to understand why our country is so racially diverse. It is important for our youth to learn about each social group and their contributions to the growth of our country.

Understanding history and the people that lived that history is paramount to the fight against racism, because when we understand history and its subjects, we are better equipped to write laws and policies that are more equitable and just for all of us. The historic and contemporary accomplishments of Black people in B.C. are important parts towards building this understanding. By learning about the past and placing it in its true context, we can more clearly know what society must do to create equity within our human family.

When we don't teach the past, the present is not easily understandable and we run the risk of falling onto conjectures that lead to racist ideas and therefore racist behaviours. When we teach children and youth about the past, the present becomes clear and the future hopeful.

As part of B.C.'s Black History, here I share the biographies of two of B.C.'s Black teachers: John Craven Jones and Emily Arabella "Emma" Stark Clark. Both of these extraordinary individuals greatly contributed to the nineteenth century fight for equal educational opportunities for people of colour (PoC). As a student of John's, Emma became an advocate against injustice at a young age.

Both John and Emma encountered racism in every aspect of their lives, but they never gave up. Presented here are their stories of resilience and perseverance, pieced together from the limited documentation preserved amongst the white Euro-Canadian Settler narrative that dominates B.C.'s archival institutions. As other authors have noted throughout this issue, it is time to spotlight these diverse stories of our past.

John Craven and Almira (Scott) Jones, 1885.
Photo credit: Salt Spring Island Archives.



John Craven Jones (1834 - 1911)

John Craven Jones was born on September 10, 1834 in Raleigh, North Carolina. He was the second of four brothers, born free. Their father, Allan (born a slave but later became a free man) felt so strongly about the education of Black children, that he started a school. The school was burned down three times before Allan relocated his family to Ohio. It was here where Allan was able to safely oversee the education of his sons, all of whom attended and graduated from Oberlin College, the first U.S. College to accept Black pupils.

Following his graduation in 1856, John taught in a one-room school for Black students in Xenia, Ohio before moving to Salt Spring Island, B.C. in 1859. Here he pre-empted 100 acres, building a home and farm, and resumed teaching. By 1861, a log schoolhouse had been built at Central (then known as Vesuvius). John travelled by foot between the Central school and a smaller one at Fernwood, to teach his pupils. These journeys were often dangerous, as the terrain was wild, and cougars prowled the woods.

In 1867, there were only nine public schools in B.C. John taught up to twenty-five children of various backgrounds at two of these schools on Salt Spring Island. He did not receive pay for his work until 1869 when public funding for education was finally mandated. John retired to his farm in 1875, but that was not the end of his career as a teacher.

In 1882, at the age of 48, John returned to Oberlin, Ohio, where he met and married Almira Scott, a fellow graduate of Oberlin College. The newlyweds sold the Salt Spring Island property and moved to Tarboro, North Carolina, where they raised three children. John resumed his role as a teacher for nearly 20 years before again retiring to his farm. He died on December 17, 1911 at the age of 77 in Greensboro, South Carolina. John's hard work and dedication as a teacher touched the lives of many individuals and families on both sides of the continent.

Emily Arabella “Emma”
Stark Clark, 1875.
*Photo credit: Salt
Spring Island Archives.*

Emily Arabella “Emma” Stark Clark (1856 - 1890)

Emily Arabella Stark or “Emma” as she was known, was born in California on February 17, 1856. Her family moved to Salt Spring Island in 1860 when she was only four years old. There, Emma attended school where she learned Latin, Greek, geometry and geography, in addition to the traditional subjects, from her teacher John Jones.

Emma completed high school in Nanaimo. In 1874, at the age of 18, she became the first teacher at the North Cedar School and the first Black teacher on Vancouver Island (up until about 1901, a high school certificate was all that was required to teach). At that time, there were only 32 public school teachers in the entire province of B.C.

On December 27, 1878, Emma married James Clark in Victoria. Unfortunately, she died of an unknown cause on July 30, 1890 at the young age of 34. Her grave is located next to that of her grandfather, Howard Estes, at the Ganges Community Cemetery on Salt Spring Island. Emma taught many pupils during her 16 year career, advocating for an inclusive approach towards and access to education for all.



I hope that these stories have inspired you to delve into the history of your own community and to communicate your findings with the public. It is important to include and share the history of all cultural groups in Canada. Today's youth need to learn about, and experience the diversity of Canada, and its history, firsthand.



Photo credit:
Derek Ford.

Silvia Mangué Alene

Silvia Mangué Alene is an entrepreneur, the founder and manager of **Kulea Love** and Kulea Culture Society. She holds a Bachelor Degree in Business Administration from Camosun College and a post-graduate diploma in Intercultural Education from the University of Victoria.

Born in Equatorial Guinea and raised in Spain, Silvia lived in six different countries in Europe before settling in Canada. *“I took from each country the cultural aspects I liked the best and applied them to my personal life. My life experiences in these countries have helped shape who I am today.”* Silvia is passionate about women’s issues, fitness, and wellness.

Recommended Resource

bcblackhistory.ca/

**EVEN WHEN DOORS CLOSE,
CULTURE DOESN'T STOP**

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