

Rose Fortune



Frequenting the Annapolis Royal waterfront, Rose became Canada's first female police officer (self-appointed), imposing and enforcing curfews at the Annapolis Royal wharves and surrounding areas, well before there was an established police force. Rose commanded respect and kept peace and order on the waterfront interacting daily with white clients, including travellers, military officers, and officials and continued this work well into her 80s.

Rose was a successful and prominent businesswoman and valued member of the community a full century before civil rights and feminist movements.

Rose arrived in colonial Nova Scotia in the late 1700s as part of the Black Loyalist migration. An enterprising individual, she started a successful porter business at the wharves, with nothing more than her own grit and a wheelbarrow, which was continued well into the 1980s by her relations. Rose also built a successful wakeup call service, alerting travellers to departures at the wharves.

In time, Rose's businesses thrived and became lucrative. Her porter and baggage company became known as the Lewis Transfer, and horse-drawn wagons replaced wheelbarrows. A number of Rose's descendants are still working in the shipping and trucking business today. One of her descendants became mayor of Annapolis Royal in the 1980s (Daurene Lewis) and much like Rose, Daurene was a trailblazer in her own right, becoming the first Black female mayor in North America.

Much of Rose's perseverance, courage and resilience comes from her lived experiences as she overcame economic marginalization and racism. She had to do what was necessary to build a livelihood while experiencing hardship, prejudice, and inequality in the 1800s. Born during the American Revolutionary War, in Virginia, Rose and her family settled in the Annapolis Royal when Fortune was just 10 years old. Her parents were freedom seekers, and while granted freedom as enslaved people, it remained incredibly difficult for Black Loyalists to earn wages as the Black community was left on their own to find shelter, food and survive. Remarkably, Rose not only survived, but she also thrived.

Rose demonstrated an outstanding and unparalleled level of success and continues to be an inspiring role model for Canadians. She had a record of unequalled entrepreneurial achievements with the entrepreneurial spirit to match. Her perseverance and ability to overcome barriers and her care for the community are the very qualities that saw her named a National Historic Person in 2018. 2018 was also the year Parks Canada erected a plaque on the Annapolis Royal waterfront to recognize her many achievements and to acknowledge her remarkable legacy and to distinguish her as an important figure in Canadian history.