

Nova Scotia Heritage Day 2024: William Hall, V.C.

Outcomes:

African Canadian Studies 11

3B.6 ... demonstrate an understanding of the contributions that African Canadians have played in pre- and post-confederation (e.g., leadership in communities and society, military)

English 11

- 1.3 address complex issues, present points of view backed by evidence, and modify, defend, or argue for their positions in response to opposing points of view
- 4.2 view a wide variety of media and visual texts, comparing and analyzing the structure, genre, style, and cultural diversity of the different texts
- 4.3 assess ideas, information, and language, synthesizing and applying meaning from diverse and differing perspectives
- 4.4 demonstrate an understanding of and apply the strategies required to gain information from complex print texts and multimedia texts

Teacher Background Information:

William Hall, V.C. is Nova Scotia's Heritage Day 2024 honoree in celebration of his military service. Hall was the third Canadian and the first Black person to be awarded the Victoria Cross, Britain's highest award for valour in battle. To learn more about William Hall, please visit: [William Neilson Hall | The Canadian Encyclopedia](#).

The following resources come from the Nova Scotia Archives. During Hall's life and after, the voices recorded through archival records were predominantly colonialist. This is an important consideration when examining the lives and legacies of people from historically marginalized communities. The archival records include terminology which is now outdated and should not be used to refer to a person's racial identity. Students should be made aware of this prior to viewing the materials.

Suggestions for document use in the classroom:

Using the included resources from the Nova Scotia Archives, students can discuss the following questions. After students have finished their reading and discussion, they can then communicate their learning through writing and other forms of expression.

1. What can we learn about William Hall from historical records? How do historical records differ from biographies like William Hall's entry in the Canadian Encyclopedia?
2. Consider which voices are absent from the records. How might additional perspectives influence interpretations?
3. How has William Hall been remembered by Nova Scotians? Use evidence from the texts to support your conclusion.
4. *Extending the learning:* Do further research into William Hall's life. How do you think his legacy should be commemorated by Nova Scotians?

Sensitive Terminology: The following documents come from a time when the words “colored” and “negro” were used to refer to Black individuals. Students are reminded that these terms are outdated and should not be used to refer to someone’s race or ethnicity.

Source 1: Excerpt from *“A Colored Hero: William Hall, V.C., of Avonport, Presented to the Duke (of York and Cornwall). Morning Chronicle, October 21st, 1901.*

Context: The excerpt below comes from a newspaper article describing a reception held in Halifax during the visit of the Duke of Cornwall (later King George V). Hall attended the reception as an invited guest.

“Amongst those who took part in the reception [to Duke & Dutchess [sic] of Cornwall when they visited Halifax at the end of their Empire Tour] is a very humble citizen of the Province in the person of a colored man named William Hall, who had been invited by the Royal British Veterans to take part in the reception as the guest of the Society. This man wears upon his breast, in addition to his other decorations, the much valued Victoria Cross - the only decoration that can be bestowed on a King, the courtier, and the [h]umblest alike, provided he is in arms as a soldier of the King, whether volunteer, militaman or a regular, who does some deed of daring and glory in the face of the enemy.”

Source 2: Excerpt from *“Memorial Service for Brave Colored Hero” Nova Scotian & Weekly Chronicle, September 30, 1904.*

Context: The excerpt below comes from a tribute to William Hall by Rev. Knott. In the tribute, Knott describes Hall’s actions during the Battle of Lucknow. Hall was later awarded the Victoria Cross for his valour.

“Sir Colin Campbell and Sir Wm. Peel consulted and decided to send one of the Shannon’s guns close to the wall and make a breach through which they might storm the fort. The only way to approach was through the massive walls of masonry filled with holes for musketry. This approach was narrow. Up this narrow lane one of the Shannon’s 24 pounders was ordered. There however, was one man short, and William Hall, who was Captain of another of the Shannon’s guns volunteered.

‘I guess I will go with you,’ said Hall.

‘You better not,’ said the Captain, ‘it means almost certain death’.

Quick came the reply: ‘I will take the chance, sir.’”

Source 3: Photograph. *William Hall's funeral procession, 1904.*



Source 4: Excerpt from *a personal letter from Nowell Salmon to D. Mills, 1906, describing Hall's actions at the Battle of Lucknow.*

Context: The excerpt below is in response to a letter written by Mills to Salmon, trying to gather more information about William Hall. Salmon also took part in the Battle of Lucknow and was also awarded the Victoria Cross for bravery.

"The storming part, which was led in by Sir Colin Campbell himself, was brought up by a high and thick wall which was strongly held; the gun in question was run in by hand to within a few feet of the wall which it was necessary to breach; Hall continued sponging and loading after all the other members of the guns-crew were shot down for which he was awarded the V.C.

He was a fine powerful man and as steady as a rock under fire."

Source 5: Excerpt from *“Nova Scotian Negro Won Canada’s Third Victoria Cross” from ‘The Legionary’, official magazine of the Canadian Legion, British Empire Services, published in Port and Province, May 1933.*

Context: The excerpt below comes from a magazine article and describes the life and military career of William Hall. In the wake of the First World War, Hall’s accomplishments had largely been forgotten outside of his community, and the article argues that Hall deserves greater recognition.

“In the cemetery at Brooklyn, Hants County, Nova Scotia, is the grave of a very old man who died at Horton Bluff, a small community in that neighborhood, 29 years ago. Beneath a simple tombstone lie the remains of William Hall, the third Canadian to win the Victoria Cross. In the overpowering force of great events enacted within the past two decades, William Hall has been forgotten, for the deed which placed his name on the Scroll of the Immortals was performed a long, long time ago.

...

Little is known of William Hall’s early life beyond that he was reared in the Annapolis Valley, went to school at Avonport, and eventually joined the Royal Navy, probably at Halifax. From then until the summer of 1857, no records are available of this humble negro’s career. We are, therefore, obliged to span that indefinite period and to shift the scene from the shadow of the old Halifax Citadel to Hong Kong. There we find Hall serving as “captain of the foretop” on board the H.M.S. Shannon...”

Source 6: Excerpt from *Journal of Education (Nova Scotia), December 1967.*

Context: 1967 was Canada’s Centennial. As part of the celebrations, the community of Hantsport, and African Nova Scotian communities across the province honored the legacy of William Hall. Dr. Henry Chipman was a doctor in Grand Pre from 1876 to 1911.

“Allow me to say, Dr. Henry Chipman, of Grand Pre, wrote after Hall’s death, “....that I had the honor of knowing William Hall well, and a braver, truer, more modest man, white or black, never lived...”

Nova Scotia Archives - HF Pullen fonds - Correspondence and other material relation to the war medals of William Hall, 2023-020