

5 Black Jamaicans Who Counted

February is Black History month. Much will be said about . Much will be said about some of Jamaica's popular black contributors to history (Marcus Garvey, Bob Marley, Louise Bennett etc) but there are some lesser known women and men that contributed to black history in Jamaica and worldwide.

Dr. Harold Moody (1882 - 1947)

Born in Kingston Jamaica on the 8th of October 1882, Dr. Harold Moody went to London in 1904 to study medicine at Kings College. He found it hard to find work and lodgings; after winning many prizes and qualifying as a doctor in 1910 he was denied a hospital house appointment because the matron refused 'to have a coloured doctor working at the hospital'. In February 1913 he started his own practice in Peckham which became very successful.

In 1921, Moody was elected to the chair of the Colonial Missionary Society's board of directors, and 10 years later, became president of the London Christian Endeavour Federation. The contacts he acquired while involved in these and other organisations helped him to help the stream of black people who came to him in distress, having experienced at first hand a degrading, or humiliating aspect of the colour bar. Soon, other middle class black people joined him in this crusade for equal rights, and before long they realised it was time to form an organisation. Dr. Moody has served as president of The League of Coloured Peoples, a group whose main goal was to promote equality.

The League of Coloured Peoples was born at a meeting at the Central YMCA Tottenham Court Road on 13th March 1931. At first, the League had four aims:

1. 1. To protect the social, educational, economic and political interests of its members
2. 2. To interest members in the welfare of coloured peoples in all parts of the world
3. 3. To improve relations between the races
4. 4. To cooperate and affiliate with organisations sympathetic to coloured people

A fifth aim was added in 1937 - 'to render such financial assistance to coloured people in distress as lies within our capacity'.

Dr. Moody died on 24th April 1947. The league he founded survived him by four years. His whole adult life he struck blow after blow in the struggle against racism.

John Brown Russwurm (1799 - 1851)

Born in Port Antonio, Jamaica, John Russwurm was sent by his white father to Quebec in 1807 to go to school. In his early teens Russwurm rejoined his father in Portland, Maine, where he was given an opportunity to continue his intellectual development. In 1824, Russwurm enrolled in Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine, from which he graduated in 1826 with one of the first bachelor's degrees earned by an African American in the United States.

Migrating to New York, Russwurm formed a partnership with Samuel Cornish, a black Presbyterian minister, and they published the first U.S. black newspaper, Freedom's Journal, to counteract the racist views of the mainstream press. Freedom's Journal was offered for sale in the United States, Canada, England, and Haiti. David Walker, one of the newspaper's agents, first published his powerful Appeal in Freedom's Journal, lending support to the paper's editorial contention that the time had come for black Americans to plead their own cause in their own way.

By the time the newspaper ceased publication in 1830, Russwurm had moved to Liberia, where he became editor of the Liberia Herald and superintendent of education in Monrovia, the capital of Liberia. Russwurm's decision to emigrate to Liberia angered some of his black compatriots in the American antislavery movement, who felt he was deserting the cause. To Russwurm, however, Liberia offered a genuine opportunity for African Americans to put racial prejudice behind them and build a just and workable society. Russwurm remained a committed African colonizationist for the rest of his life.

Mary Seacole (1805 - 1881)

Mary Jane Seacole (1805 – 14 May 1881), sometimes known as Mother Seacole or Mary Grant, was a Jamaican nurse best known for her involvement in the Crimean War. She set up and operated boarding houses in Panama and Crimea to assist in her desire to treat the sick. Seacole was taught herbal remedies and folk medicine by her mother, who kept a boarding house for disabled European soldiers and sailors.

Confident that her knowledge of tropical medicine could be useful, and after hearing of poor medical provisions for wounded soldiers during the Crimean War, she travelled to London to volunteer as a nurse. Relying on her experience in

the Caribbean, she applied to the War Office and asked to be sent as an army assistant to the Crimea. She was refused, mainly because of prejudice against women's involvement in medicine at the time.

Seacole then, borrowed money to make the 4,000-mile (about 6500 km) journey by herself. She distinguished herself treating battlefield wounded, often nursing wounded soldiers from both sides while under fire. When the conflict ended in 1856 she found herself stranded and almost destitute, and was only saved from adversity by friends from the Crimean War who organised a benefit concert.

Seacole was lauded in her lifetime, alongside Florence Nightingale, but after her death she was forgotten for almost a century. Today, she is noted for her bravery and medical skills and as "a woman who succeeded despite the racial prejudice of influential sections of Victorian society". Her autobiography, *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands* (1857), is a vivid account of her experiences, and is one of the earliest autobiographies of a mixed-race woman.

Robert Sutherland (1830 - 1878)

Robert Sutherland, a native of Jamaica, (1830-1878) was the first known graduate of colour at a Canadian university, and the first Black man to study law in North America. A graduate of Queen's University. Sutherland qualified to practice law in Ontario under the then prevailing system of apprenticeship and examination. In 1852 with honours in classics and mathematics. He graduated from Osgoode Hall in Toronto in 1855, and practiced law for 20 years in Walkerton, Ontario to become Canada's first black lawyer. Arthur Wint (1920 - 1992)

Arthur Wint was Jamaica's first Olympic Gold medalist, winning the 400metres race at the 1948 London Olympics. He served as a Flight Lieutenant with the RAF during WWII. After the war he studied medicine, then later became a surgeon who cared for the poor in rural Jamaica. He was High Commissioner to Great Britain from 1973-1978, moving among prime ministers, presidents and queens.

He overcame racism and prejudice in the RAF, and later in British society at large, to become the darling of the British media. In fact, through his athletics, and later as a diplomat, Arthur Wint helped Jamaica on the world map. A statue outside the National Stadium in Kingston, Jamaica memorializes him.

He was inducted in the Black Athlete's Hall of Fame in the US (1977), the Jamaica Sports Hall of Fame (1989) and the Central American & Caribbean Athletic Confederation Hall of Fame (2003).