

“Porter Talk” Biographies – Episode 4

Interviewer

Stanley G. Grizzle, the eldest of seven children, was born in Toronto in 1918. His parents, both of whom immigrated from Jamaica in 1911, worked in the service sector: his mother as a domestic servant and his father as a chef for the Grand Trunk Railway (GTR). Poverty and a lack of opportunities led Grizzle to the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) in 1940, where he began a 20-year career as a sleeping car porter. In 1942, he was conscripted by the Canadian Government, attaining corporal status while he served as a medic in Holland. In 1962, Grizzle left the CPR and became the first Black Canadian to be employed by the Ontario Ministry of Labour. He ran unsuccessfully for the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation before being appointed by Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau as a judge in the court of Canadian citizenship in 1978. A devoted activist, Grizzle campaigned tirelessly for reforms in Canadian labour, immigration, and human rights policies. He was also an avid historian dedicated to documenting and preserving Black History in Canada. His [collection](#) is held at Library and Archives Canada.

Bill Cunningham was a Canadian journalist who worked for the CTV, CBC, and Global television networks during his long, illustrious career. In 1991, he interviewed Stanley G. Grizzle about Black experiences in Canada for a special program focused on famed pianist Oscar Peterson, which subsequently aired on the CBC. (Source: [417399](#))

Narrators

Helen Williams-Bailey was born on a farm about fifty kilometres outside North Battleford, Saskatchewan, in 1919. Her brothers, two of whom later became porters, included Tom, Roy, Lee, and Carl Williams. She moved to Winnipeg in 1942 and quickly became involved in the Ladies’ Auxiliary of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP) to support the work that her brothers Tom and Roy did on the rails. She served as the Auxiliary’s first president prior to marrying her husband, a Canadian National Railway (CNR) porter, in 1944. (Source: [417401](#) [part 1]; [417400](#) [part 2])

Evelyn Marshall Braxton was born in Saint Kitts in 1913. She immigrated to Canada in 1929, joining her mother in Montréal, where she attended school. Her stepfather, John Mardenborough, worked out of the CPR’s Ottawa Division as a sleeping car porter. She married her first husband, Norman Marshall, in 1937. Born in Toronto, he worked for the Pullman Company as a sleeping car porter until his untimely death in 1958. She later married George Braxton, a CPR porter who was an active member of the BSCP. Braxton became involved in the Brotherhood’s Ladies’ Auxiliary in Montréal in 1946, serving as its president for over sixteen years. (Source: [417386](#))

Frank Collins was born in Vancouver in 1915. He became a CPR sleeping car porter in 1933, working out of the division located in Vancouver until he resigned in 1956. Along with Ernie Lawrence, he worked hard to organize the Vancouver Division’s BSCP, beginning in 1939 through to its certification in 1944 and the signing of its first contract in 1945. He and Lawrence managed to recruit 96% of the city’s CPR porters into the union, despite the risks associated with joining. (Source: [417402](#))

Clarence Nathaniel Este was born in Antigua in 1903. He immigrated to Canada in 1926 where he quickly gained employment as a sleeping car porter for the Montreal Division of the CPR. A rank-and-file member of the BSCP, he worked tirelessly for the company for forty-two years. His brother, famed Reverend Charles H. Este, who led Union United Church for nearly half a century, was one of the only Black priests in Canada to publicly advocate for the unionization of porters. (Source: [417405](#) [part 1]; [417386](#) [part 2])

George Forray was born in Montréal in 1911 to immigrant parents from Grenada and Guadalupe. In 1937, while travelling home from Mount Allison University, the CPR recruited him to work as a sleeping car porter for the summer. Forray never returned to school and remained with the company for 40 years. He was a proud member of the BSCP throughout his service on the rails. (Source: [417383](#))

Harold James Fowler was born in Dover Township in Kent County, about 10 kilometres from the city of Chatham. He made his first trip as a CPR sleeping car porter in June 1939, running out of the company's Toronto Division to Vancouver. Fowler was a chartered member of the BSCP, serving as chairman of its Entertainment Committee for a period. He also took great pride in providing sound advice and counselling to fellow porters while they were in transit. Fowler was forced to retire from his job in 1976 due to severe arthritis in his back. Luckily, he had worked enough years to qualify for a full pension. (Source: [417393](#))

Charles Allen Milton Hog was born in Montreal in 1921. His family left Canada when he was three years old and settled in Jamaica, the birthplace of his parents. Searching for adventure, Hog returned to Canada in 1946 and got a job one year later as a CPR sleeping car porter in Montreal. He spent the next 18 years of his life on the rails. Inspired by the work that had been done by Jamaica's People's National Party to unionize sugar cane workers, he quickly joined the Montreal Division's BSCP when it was just starting. He served as a local member of its Grievance Committee and routinely counselled Arthur Robinson Blanchette, who conducted all Canadian BSCP business and reported directly to A. Philip Randolph, organizer of the American BSCP and its first president. Hog also served as the BSCP representative for the Quebec Labour Council. In his later years, he was heavily involved in human rights activism, serving as a founding member of the Negro Citizenship Association in Montreal. (Source: [417405](#))

Odell Holmes was born in Clearview, Oklahoma, in 1915. When Holmes was two years old, his family immigrated to Canada, settling in Maidstone, Saskatchewan, where most of his mother's family already resided; they came to the country as part of the Great Migration of 1910. His father remained in the U.S., formally separating from his mother. After Holmes's mother remarried, the family moved to Lloydminster, where he worked several low-paying, menial jobs before gaining employment as a sleeping car porter with the CPR's Calgary Division in 1940 and then its Vancouver Division in 1961. During Holmes's thirty-eight-year career, he was heavily involved in the union movement, serving as President of both the Calgary (fourteen years) and Vancouver (thirteen years) Divisions of the BSCP. (Source: [417389](#))

Joseph Morris Sealy was born in Halifax, Nova Scotia in 1910. He became a CPR sleeping car porter in 1928 and laboured for the company for 46 years. Sealy was a proud union man, serving as the president and vice-president of the BSCP's Montréal Division. (Source: [417386](#))

Roy Williams was born in 1903 in Waco, Texas. His large family, which included twelve children, immigrated to Canada in stages. Williams himself came in 1910 as part of the Black Migration movement, settling with his family members in North Battleford, Saskatchewan, before moving to a homestead in Hillside. Seasonal jobs in construction and farming occupied his youth until the job crisis caused by the Depression led him to Winnipeg in 1936 to work as a sleeping car porter for the CPR. One year later, the company transferred Williams to Calgary, where he remained on the job 32 more years. Williams played an integral role in organizing the BSCP in Calgary and later served as Secretary-Treasurer of the union local for sixteen years. His wife, Cordie Williams, was also involved in the union movement, through her participation in the BSCP Ladies' Auxiliary. (Source: [417402](#) [part 1]; [417389](#) [part 2])

Scholars, Storytellers, and Community Knowledge Keepers

Dr. Melinda Chateauvert holds a PhD in American History from the University of Pennsylvania. Her 1998 book, *Marching Together: Women of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters*, documents the actions African American women in the United States and Canada undertook in organizing local chapters of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the first international Black trade union in the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations. It continues to be a seminal text in labour history. Prior to her retirement, Dr. Chateauvert served as Associate Director at the Front Porch Research Strategy.

Dr. Steven High is a Full Professor of History at Concordia University; he also founded the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling there. He holds a PhD in Canadian History from the University of Ottawa. Dr. High's most recent award-winning book, *Deindustrializing Montreal: Entangled Histories of Race, Residence, and Class*, tells the story of two neighbourhoods, one predominantly white and the other black, situated in Montreal's southwest district.

Dr. Saje Mathieu is an Associate Professor of History at the University of Minnesota. She holds a joint PhD in History and African American Studies from Yale University and has been a fellow at the Warren Center and the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute at Harvard University, the Center for American Studies at the University of Heidelberg, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Her first book, *North of the Color Line: Migration and Black Resistance in Canada, 1870-1955*, details the history of African American and West Indian sleeping car porters in Canada and the social, cultural, legal and political impacts of their employment. Dr. Mathieu's current work is focused on the global experiences of Black soldiers during World War I.

Dr. Dorothy Williams holds a PhD in Library and Information Sciences from McGill University and currently works as a researcher at Concordia University within its Quebec English-Speaking Communities Research Network. She was bestowed a CBC Black Changemaker Award in 2022 and a Library and Archives Canada Scholar Award in 2023. In spring 2024, she was accorded the Ordre de Montréal, the city's highest honour for outstanding contributions made to the city's development and renown, as well as an Honorary Doctorate from the Université du Québec à Montréal. Dr. Williams' books, *Blacks in Montreal: 1628-1986* and *The Road to Now: A History of Blacks in Montreal*, are classics in the fields of Black studies and Black history in Canada. Dr.

Williams is also a pedagogical pioneer who has long contributed to the development of curriculum pertaining to [Black history in Canada](#), as well as a community knowledge keeper. The archival collection she cares for in her home is one of the most extensive existing archives to document Black experience in Montreal.