

## Kinship and Fluid Social Structure

Both the sense of historical continuity possessed by Africville residents<sup>10</sup> and the rural characterization of the community by outsiders (and by some residents as well) were congruent with community structure. The population of Africville was always small. In 1851 there were fifty-four blacks living in the area; in 1964, at the time of relocation, the population was approximately 400.<sup>11</sup> Much of Africville's population growth took place during the last thirty to forty years of its existence.<sup>12</sup> The majority of this small population were bound together through numerous kinship ties. Approximately seventy-five percent of the relocated population were associated, either by blood or marriage, with at least one of the five principal families in Africville, families that could trace their Africville ancestry back one hundred years.<sup>13</sup> It is not surprising, under these circumstances, that the social structure of Africville can be characterized



as "fluid"<sup>14</sup>—in the sense that kinship and family systems were adaptable and there was a certain interchangeability of personnel. It was common for an older couple to "take in" a grandchild or nephew, and there were numerous instances of adoption, fosterage, and step- and half-kin relationships. The use of intimate kinship terms, such as "ma," "pa," and "aunt," to refer to more distant relatives, and even to non-relatives, was common. This structural fluidity and intimacy was compounded, in the several decades preceding the relocation, by an increasing degree of cohabitation and the presence of illegitimate offspring,<sup>15</sup> and was accentuated by the widespread use of nicknames. Haligonians who knew Africville well could often identify its residents by nicknames only; even some of the indigenous leaders were hard-pressed to identify the proper names of some Africville residents.<sup>16</sup> To the outsider (especially to many white Haligonians, welfare workers, city officials, and relocation caretakers) the Africville population appeared to be "jumbled."<sup>17</sup>