

1990

Niagara's Freedom Trial, circa 1990s, Newspaper Articles

Lillion Batchelor

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What's New Niagara?



For thousands of enslaved Afro-Americans the road to freedom led through Niagara.

The Tourist Council hopes to capitalize on this rich and intriguing facet of Niagara history by developing black heritage tours that will visit a variety of sites throughout the Region and appeal to black tour groups that are eager to discover their roots.

The movement to assist slaves escape bondage was known as the underground railroad, a humble yet sophisticated network of safe houses and transportation networks co-ordinated by emancipation sympathizers.

According to Arden Phair, Curator of Collections at the St. Catharines Historical Museum, as a border community the Niagara Region has many connections with the underground railroad, black history in general, and is also historically linked to many notable figures and events in the United States.

"St. Catharines for instance was the location of the Confederate Headquarters overseeing covert operations in the North during the Civil War - a historical tidbit that will add colour and interest to the tour's narration." Mr. Phair says.

Gary Hardy, RNTC General Manager, believes these tours will be extremely popular with black groups of all ages and all demographic profiles.

"These tours have been very successful in the Windsor-Chatham area as more than 100 motorcoaches are expected to visit Southwestern Ontario this year generating in excess of four million dollars of direct tourism revenue."

Mr. Hardy believes that Niagara has the potential to attract even more groups because of the popularity of the area and the services that are available for group tours.

"Afro-Americans view these tours as an emotional pilgrimage back to their roots. The tour will appeal to seniors, students, mixed adults and just about everyone else wanting to explore the black experience in Niagara," Mr. Hardy says.

For thousands of enslaved Afro-Americans the road to freedom led through Niagara.

"There are 33 million blacks in the United States, a huge market that is virtually untapped."

A key feature of the tour is a visit to the British Methodist Episcopal Church in St. Catharines where Harriet Tubman (an underground railroad heroine known as the black Moses) introduced freedom to dozens of escaped slaves from the United States.

Other attractions on the tour include a visit to Bertie Hall in Fort Erie, a noted safe house, the Negro Burial Ground in Niagara-on-the-Lake and the BME Church in Niagara Falls.

The Tourist Council has put together a task force that will facilitate the development of the program including the production of a tour guide training manual, product enhancement (historical plaques, audio recreations

etc.) and all marketing logistics (production of a video, brochure shells and participation in marketplaces aimed specifically at blacks).

"We hope that our efforts will make it viable for accommodation properties throughout Niagara to package these tours and offer it to their group clientele."

"We also hope to assist receptive operators already packaging these tours by enhancing and improving existing tour sites and developing a pool of guides that everyone will be able to access. Local receptives will be able to access. Local receptives will also benefit from Tourist Council driven initiatives," Mr. Hardy says.

The black history tour task force will also be working co-operatively with tourism groups in South Western Ontario to explore common objectives including joint marketing ventures and information sharing.

If your business is interested in learning more about this unique tour opportunity, call the Tourist Council at 1-800-263-2988 or (416) 984-3626.

Black history for kids of all colors

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

By Arlene Perly Rae

THE FIRST FEMALE police officer in Canada was Rose Fortune, a black woman from Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia, in the late 18th century. Mary Ann Shadd, so black, became the first woman in North America to become editor of a newspaper, the *Provincial Freeman*, in Chatham, Ont., 53. And in 1872, Elijah McCoy, a black inventor born in Colchester, Ont., made devices to oil engines in trains and factories. To black slaves escaping north via the Underground Railroad, Canada was sometimes referred to, in code, as paradise or heaven. Though there was slavery in 18th century Canada, it bore no comparison to the extent it in the United States.

In 1792, Upper Canada's new Lieutenant Governor, John Graves Simcoe, tried to officially abolish slavery, but met resistance from slave owning members of the legislature. Slavery was finally abolished across the entire British Empire in 1834.

These are some of the eye-opening revelations from Lawrence Hill's *Trials And Triumphs: The Story Of African-Canadians* (Ambrella Press, 64 pages, ages 9-12, \$8.95). Liberally illustrated with maps and photographs, Hill's history is a welcome and timely addition to black heritage literature

for young people. It should be particularly useful for student research projects.

Along with chapters about settlers and immigrants, churches, schools, contributions to Canadian society and so on, the book includes two useful and fascinating tables at the back, one of important events in Canadian black history and the second, of events in world history relevant to blacks.

My appetite was whetted for more detail. I hadn't long to wait. Two new volumes by Newbery medal winner Virginia Hamilton landed on my desk and are just the ticket to fleshing out the historical rudiments.

The first is *Many Thousand Gone: African Americans From Slavery To Freedom* (Knopf, 151 pages, ages 9-12, \$20). It is a handsome book and just brimming with individual profiles, testimonies, stories of ingenious escape and inspirational human beings, both black and white.

Each true story is briefly told, a few pages

tops, but many could effectively be turned into novels or biographies.

There's the story of Jackson, slave to William King, Vice-President of the United States. While his master was in Washington Jackson ran away and, over the next few years, set up a successful barber shop in the free state of Ohio.

Eventually recaptured, Jackson escaped again, this time disguised as a female servant travelling with his freeborn wife, a Creole woman who was able to pass for white. They pulled off this risky ruse on two fancy river boats, earning Jackson his freedom once again, this time for good.

I wondered at the courage of Alexander Ross, a white physician from Belleville, who wrote frequently about birds and insects. Posing as a muddled professor, he travelled the South frequently, ostensibly lecturing and studying. Secretly he was bringing money, weapons and food to slaves, while also advising them about routes north. He developed a code for city names and a variety of cryptic messages that assisted numerous people in their escapes to freedom.

Virginia Hamilton's second book, *The People Could Fly* (Knopf, 177 pages, ages 9-12, \$12.50 pb.) is a collection of 24 black American folktales — stories of animals, of the supernatural, and of the struggle to be free, many derived from the oral literature of American slaves. Hamilton tells them in a partially modernized and thus understandable dialect but is very careful not to lose the expressions and rhythms of earlier tellers. They are wonderful to read aloud.

Younger children will appreciate two recently released picture books along the same theme. *Sweet Clara And The Freedom Quilt* by Deborah Hopkinson (paintings by James Ransome, Knopf, 36 pages, ages 4-8, \$19) is a moving and beautiful story about a young slave girl who sews a quilt that is also a map.

Aunt Harriet's Underground Railroad In The Sky by Faith Ringold (Crown, 32 pages, ages 4-8, \$19) is an artistic triumph, combining rich fanciful illustration, in a large colorful format, with a little girl's desperate journey to freedom and eventual reunification with her brother.



Illustration by Leo and Diane Dillon from *Many Thousand Gone*.

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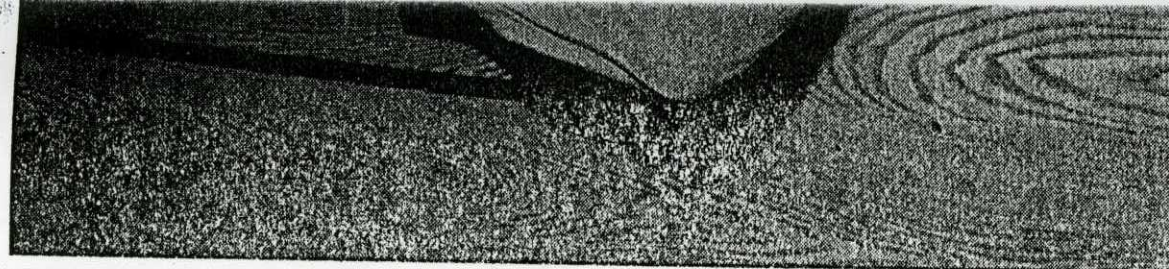
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Wilma Morrison, relaxing on a pew inside the British Methodist Episcopal Church, pores over stories of Niagara's early black settlers. Mrs. Morrison, an avid amateur historian, helped co-ordinate black history tours showcasing the Underground Railroad which conveyed fugitive black slaves to freedom.

MIKE DIBATTISTA/Review

far away from the border — and their American owners — as possible.

Mrs. Morrison's husband's grandfather, for instance, walked from New Orleans, through Niagara, to Collingwood.

A few settlements did spring up, among them, Fort Erie's Little Africa.

By the mid-1800s, about 200 blacks lived on the town's outskirts around Ridgemount Road, earning a living by cutting trees as timber for a shipbuilder on Miller's Creek.

Around 1905, Fort Erie became the first meeting place for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Unable to find a hotel room in Buffalo willing to rent to blacks, founder W.E.B. Dubois crossed the river to find more congenial surroundings.

By around 1880, a dwindling supply of wood and increased demand for coal fuel cause many 'Little Africans' to strike out for other areas of Ontario.

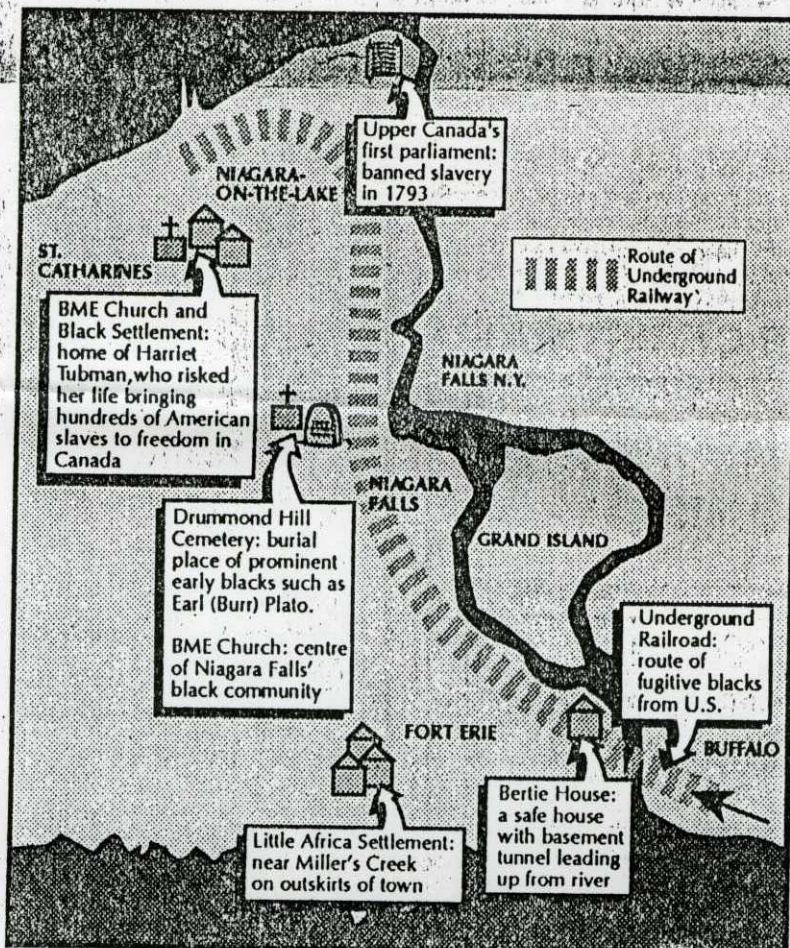
Down the river in Niagara Falls, many of the original black settlers rest in the Drummond Hill cemetery, not far from the first site of the British Methodist Episcopal Church.

Built as a meeting place in 1836, the church moved from Portage Road and Murray Hill to Peer and Grey Streets in 1856. The lot was donated by Oliver Parnall, an escaped slave who swam across the Niagara River to freedom.

The church, designated a historic site in 1986, was the centre of a bustling black community during the 1940s and 1950s; now, it nurses a congregation of three.

Sundays, the crowd swells to four or five "if the minister's family comes," Mrs. Morrison says.

"We're investigating any ways or means possible to keep the



Review Graphic / Grant Smith

church here," she notes. More and more people are coming to use a black history library which opened there in 1991.

Vandalism, and a recent resurgence in racism, worries her.

But, she notes, anti-black sentiment has always had a home in Ontario: the Klu Klux Klan, for example, was active in Hamilton in the '30s and '40s.

And recently, Heritage Front, a white supremacist group, sent feelers Niagara's way.

"I'm glad people are talking about (racism)," Mrs. Morrison says. "People can hold it up to the light, examine it and decide what to do about it."

From Niagara Falls, travellers will journey to Niagara-on-the-Lake, where black settlers helped

zans, including William Ha Merritt, who helped four Friends of Refugee Slaves S

Rev. Anthony Burns was a fabled American black who succor in St. Catharines. away slave from Virginia, captured and jailed in Massetts under the Fugitive Act. A judge ordered Burns turned to his owner — thus igning an uprising known as the ton Riots.

A Baptist minister in bought Burns, and a woma for his seminary education. graduating, he came to St. rines and ministered at the Baptist Church.

Burns died young, at 28 a grave in Victoria Lawn cen is marked by a historic plaqu

The story of fugitive black their saviors — many of whites — strikes chords in l of any color.

And the Region Niagara T Council plans to capitalize o emotion with an overall black tage package.

"We're going to train guide up plaques, and do audio ration tapes," Gary Hardy, c general manager says.

The program, to be in pla spring, should cost less \$15,000. The provincial to ministry, while not providi rect grants, will help by plu the tours in its Ame branches.

Meanwhile, Niagara Falls has already mounted its own heritage tour: a collaboratio tween owner Dave Hyde and Morrison, who met through h worker — his mother.

Mr. Hyde finds it ironic tha spite a bachelor's degree in hi and longtime residence in lara, he knew little of the U ground Railroad before me Mrs. Morrison.

But his response isn't unusu. Few people learn about the dom railroad in schools — some even believe it was an a subway-train system.

Mrs. Morrison thinks it's fir lift the veil that has so shrouded Niagara's black oneers.

"People need to know there no shame (in slavery)," she sa

"We need to know where came from — and that we all tributed to building this countr

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Niagara-on-the-Lake

Town pioneered anti-slavery laws

200 years ago legislation was introduced that eventually outlawed slavery

By CAROLYN MULLIN
Niagara Falls Review

NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE — Niagara-on-the-Lake will again celebrate its rich heritage this summer with a re-enactment of the first anti-slavery legislation.

Although the specific details are still being worked out, the Niagara-on-the-Lake Citizens Committee on Ontario Heritage Years plans on a weekend of activities for July 9, 10 and 11 to mark the legislation's 200th anniversary.

"The legislation was very significant because it was the first of its kind for the British Empire," said Dr. Richard Merritt, co-ordinator of bicentennial re-enactments.

Britain would not pass an Act to abolish slavery until 1833 and the United States would not follow until the 1860s, Merritt explained.

The Act was passed July 9, 1793 under the first lieutenant-governor of Upper Canada, John Graves Simcoe, as a measure for providing for the eventual abolition of slavery.

One year earlier, in 1792, Simcoe had opened the first legislative assembly of Upper Canada at Niagara-on-the-Lake.

"We are putting together an educational video right now around the historical moments of the last year or so," Merritt said.

However, the taping of celebrations last September to mark the bicentennial of the opening of the legislature did not go as well as hoped.

So, while volunteers are in costume and the appropriate political guests are on hand, the committee will go before the cameras again to re-enact the legislature's opening

before taping the anti-slavery law activities.

The Friday morning taping will not be open to the public, but the festivities will move in the afternoon to Simcoe Park for a three-act play.

"We'll start with the local farmer who approaches the executive council with a story," Merritt said, adding the players will be in period costume.

According to historical accounts, the farmer tells of a black girl, Chloe Cooley, being bound and taken across the Niagara River to be sold as a slave in the United States.

Because the British Empire held no laws against slavery, Simcoe decided to draft some legislation.

The second act covers the meeting of the legislative assembly, which debated the contents of the

proposed legislation, while the third act will portray Simcoe reading the throne speech and enacting the legislation before the legislative council.

Saturday's activities include a lecture series on black history Niagara put on by the Ontario Historical Society at Navy Hall.

"The Simcoe Legacy: His Legislative Assembly," will run 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Registrations will be accepted by Lorraine Lowry, (226-9011, of the O.H.S., until 30.

Black history displays and exhibits will also be open for view at the Plafoff Community Centre.

Visitors and re-enactors will come together Sunday for an outdoor church service and gospel choirs in Simcoe Park, Merritt said.

Negro Burial Ground gets landscaping plan

NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE — Even though the town has reversed years of neglect by taking care of the Negro Burial Ground, the Niagara-on-the-Lake Conservancy wants to go one step further.

The group has devoted time and energy to plans for enhancement of the plot off Mississauga Street — including a professional landscaping of the grounds and the installation of a federal historical plaque.

"We've always been interested in helping with one thing or other that we would like to see happen, so we offered our services to the town," said Peter Stokes, a Conservancy director and past-president.

Stokes visited the grounds Monday morning with Allen Paterson, director of the Royal Botanical Gardens in Burlington, to survey the layout and future possibilities for the grounds.

Paterson will take the next few weeks to develop a landscaping plan and a tree survey based on his findings.

"We have the town's approval and hope to be able to co-operate and co-ordinate with them for the acquisition of materials for planting," Stokes said.

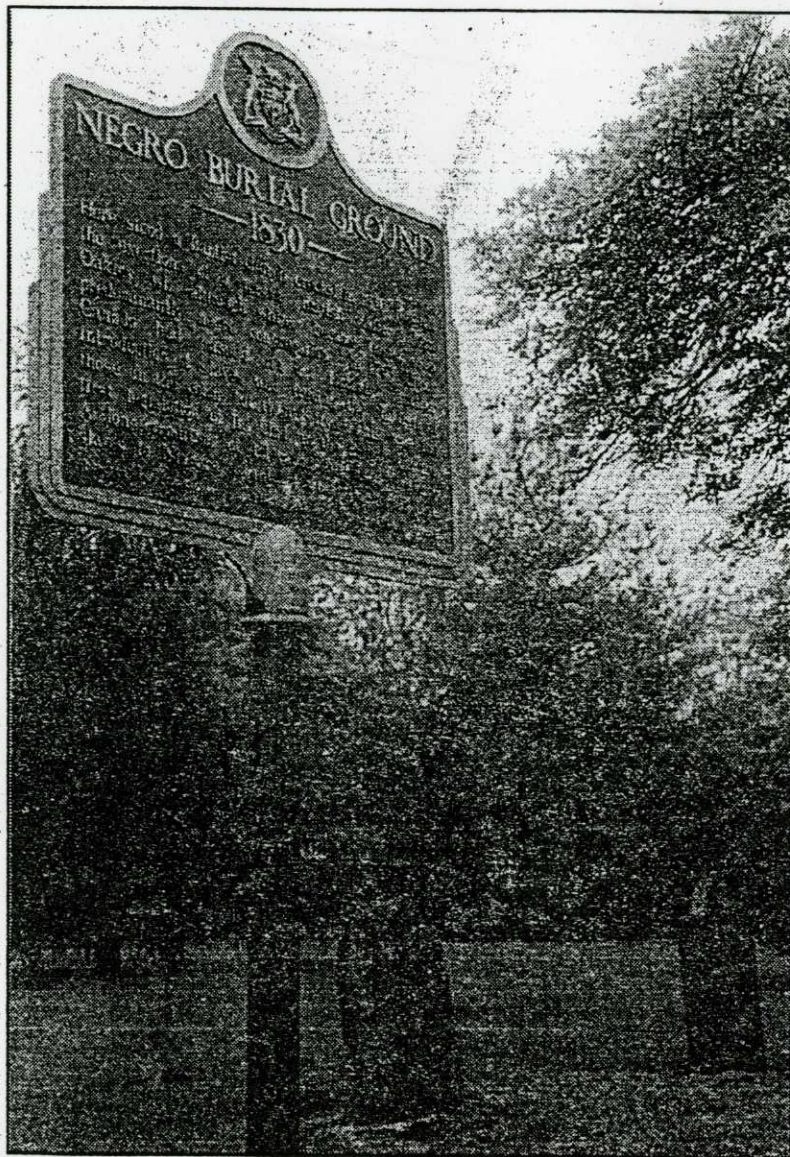
Once the sketches are in hand, the Conservancy will again approach the town for approval

before soliciting help from local nurseries and volunteers for both materials and labor.

The small lot is only a portion of the original graveyard around the old Baptist church. Three markers remain, two near the front one at the back, with nearly invisible writing.

Although called the Negro Burial Ground, the plot contains just as many white people were members of the church that was started by John Oakley in 1830.

The Conservancy also awaits word from the federal environment ministry for the placing of a plaque to accompany the provincial one at the plot's front on Mississauga Street.



The Niagara-on-the-Lake Conservancy plan to enhance the landscaping of the Negro Burial Ground off Mississauga Street with volunteer help.

(Review)

Niagara's Freedom Trail

Plaques help commemorate links of the underground railroad

By RICHARD DOUGLAS
Niagara Falls Review

FORT ERIE — The rich history of the town's role in the underground railroad is being commemorated with three plaques designating significant areas.

Called Niagara's Freedom Trail, the plaques designate areas of importance to slaves who, in the early 1800s, were fleeing oppression in the United States.

The plaques also help to illustrate the importance of the area in their pursuit of freedom.

In promoting black history, the plaques are part of a larger program that has been undertaken by the Region Niagara Tourist Council and advised by the Niagara's Freedom Trail Steering Community.

The Niagara Parks Commission was also involved in the physical setting of the plaques.

A ceremony to dedicate the plaques was held along the river yesterday with several of the people involved in their creation present.

"Fort Erie is proud... of the opportunity to recognize two things," said Mayor John Teal.

"One is the role that black heritage has played in the province of Ontario — we are proud to be a community that was a starting point for that — and we're also proud to be part of recognizing the role that Canada and the province of Ontario took in a difficult time in history and to be able to provide refuge for so many black Americans."

A member of the steering committee, Wilma Morrison, said the site of the first plaque, along the river near Beatrice Street, was especially appropriate.

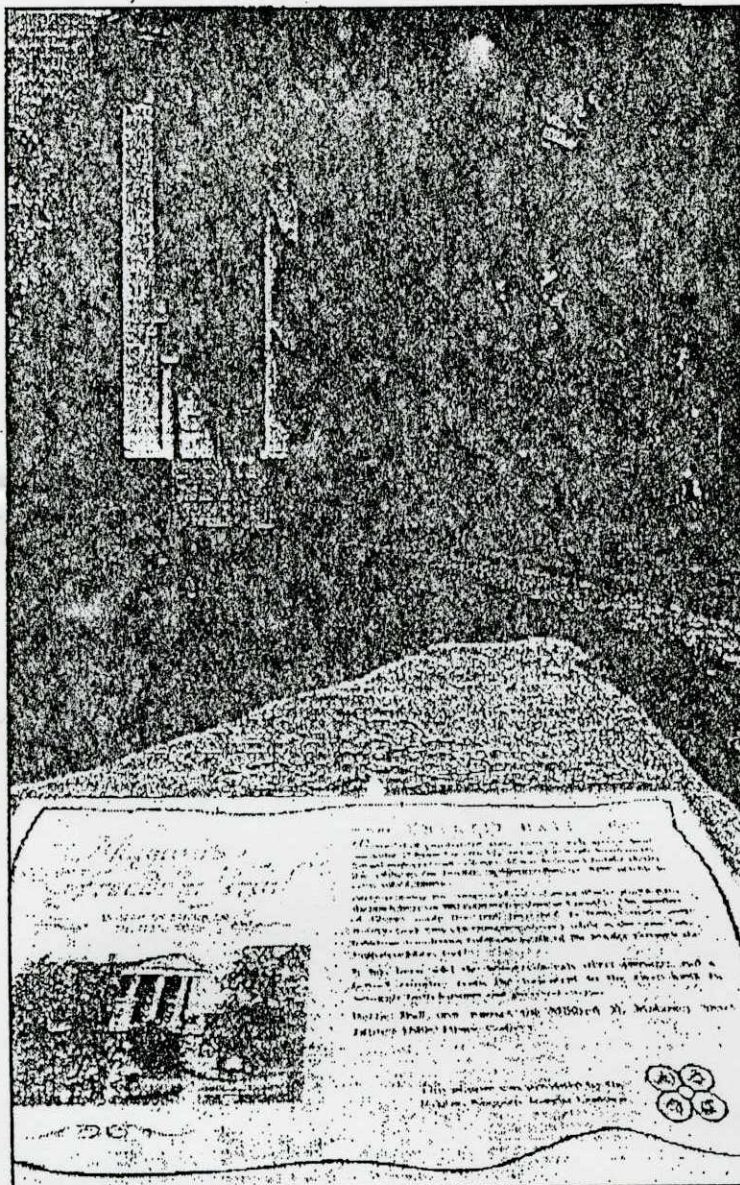
"One of the nice aspects of having a plaque here is we think in terms of our people having to come across the river," she said.

"We constantly go back to that old spiritual, One More River To Cross."

It is symbolic of the adversity that had to be overcome for people to reach Canadian shores, she said.

"We think of it as a validation of the fact that we came and we built," Morrison added. "We helped to build Canada from that time on."

And as Canada was the second country in the world to abolish slavery, she said the plaques serve



The plaque in front of the Mildred Mahoney Silver Jubilee Dollhouse Gallery is one of three along the Niagara Parkway dedicated to black history. The house was part of the Underground Railroad, which helped to transport slaves fleeing the United States. A ceremony in town unveiled the plaques, part of what is planned to be an expanded dedication of local black history.

RICHARD DOUGLAS/Review

as a reminder of the freedom this country offered to all.

The two other plaques are located in front of the Mildred Mahoney Silver Jubilee Dollhouse Gallery and the Niagara Parks Marina on the Niagara Parkway.

Beyond the memorial aspect, the trail has been developed with an eye toward attracting tourists. A

similar tour has been successful in the Windsor-Chatham area, generating more than \$4 million in direct tourism revenue.

Other features of the tour will include the British Methodist Episcopal Church in St. Catharines, where slaves were introduced to freedom, and a burial ground in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Fort Erie was popular as a refuge

FORT ERIE — The plaques which are part of Niagara's Freedom Trail serve as a concise introduction to the town's history as part of the famed Underground Railroad.

Before U.S. slavery was abolished in the early 1860s, slaves used the so-called Underground Railroad of hideouts and anonymous helpers as a means of escaping to freedom in Canada.

The three plaques stretch along the Niagara Parkway from near Beatrice Street to the Niagara Parks Commission Marina and highlight the area's historical significance.

The first plaque, near the base of Beatrice Street, is titled The Crossing and tells how ferry traffic on the river aided slaves fleeing the United States.

From 1796 until 1949 the ferries plied the waters up river from the Peace Bridge and played a major part in the Underground Railroad during the first half of the 19th century.

"Fort Erie became a popular crossing for many blacks as it is one of the most southerly points of contact with the United States," the plaque reads.

The plaque bears a picture taken in 1895 of a ferry docking.

A plaque has also been put in front of the old Bertie Hall, now known as the Mildred Mahoney Silver Jubilee Dollhouse Gallery.

The house was built by smuggler William Forsyth in the 1830s and was later used as a shelter for travelers of the Underground Railroad.

The plaque at the marina describes Little Africa, a black community that was established west of Fort Erie and east of Stevensville in the 1840s.

By 1880, the population of Little Africa grew to 200 people but soon began to decline.

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Standard June 24/83.

Parkway tour sheds light on black history in Niagara

By DEBRA ANN YEO
Standard Staff

As Wilma Morrison stood on the banks of the Niagara River yesterday, she reflected on the fugitive slaves who crossed that river into Canada almost 200 years ago.

But she wasn't looking back at the suffering they had escaped. She was recollecting the freedom they gained in coming here and looking forward to spreading the word about the contributions of blacks in Niagara history.

Morrison gathered with others on the Niagara Parkway, south of Old Fort Erie, to help unveil a plaque commemorating Niagara's role as a terminus of the Underground Railroad.

The monument designates a former Fort Erie ferry crossing and landing used by hundreds of escaped slaves — passengers who

travelled along the "railroad" in the early 1800s.

The plaque is one of three along the Parkway which mark points of interest on a black history tour being developed by the Niagara Region Tourist Council.

Council chairman Noel Buckley described the tour as a product to be developed in the ongoing bid to bring tourists to Niagara.

In a news release, council general manager Gary Hardy noted that similar tours in the Windsor-Chatham area of Ontario are expected to generate more than \$4 million in direct tourism revenue this year, an amount he believes Niagara could top.

But Morrison, who is president of the Niagara Black History Association, pointed out the tour is more than a product to the black community.

"It's a validation of the fact we came and

we built. We helped to build Canada from that time on," she said.

The other two plaques identify Bertie Hall, a former safehouse where slaves took refuge from bounty hunters who crossed into Canada, and Little Africa, a black settlement that used to exist near the Miller's Creek Marina.

"We always think of the War of 1812 and '14, the natives that were in this area. Now we have another part of history that's going to be duly recognized," said George Bailey, spokesman for the Niagara Parks Commission.

A second unveiling of sorts at Navy Hall in Niagara-on-the-Lake yesterday proved black history will be recognized in more ways than one this summer.

Members of the town's Citizens' Committee for Ontario Heritage Years announced plans

to re-enact the passing of Upper Canada's Emancipation Act on July 9, 1793.

The law, which was instigated by Lieutenant-Governor John Graves Simcoe, banned the importing of slaves into Canada and permitted the children of slaves born after July 3, 1793, to be freed when they turned 25.

Morrison said the legislation, the first of its kind in the British Empire, was "a very, great event in the times of black people" which spawned the creation of the Underground Railroad.

The re-enactment in period costume will take place in Simcoe Park on July 9.

Other planned events include a black history display at the Plaford Street community centre, blues and jazz in the park July 10 and a revival church service and gospel choirs in the park July 11.

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Toronto Sun

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Page

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Black history part of Ontario

33

By KEN BECKER
Canadian Press

Pilgrims from coast to coast are being beckoned to some of the shrines of black history, all in a corner of southwestern Ontario.

"But this is not just black history — this is Canadian history," says Glen Dodds of Underground Railroad Heritage Tours.

The 42-year-old Toronto entrepreneur says he formed the company a couple of years ago after learning about the black communities that flourished in the area between lakes Erie and St. Clair.

The peninsula was the terminus of the Underground Railroad, a network of safe houses that ferried fugitive slaves during the mid-1800s from the U.S. South to freedom in Canada, where about 30,000 settled.

Heritage tours

Last year, Dodds began booking bus tours to key heritage sites:

— **Uncle Tom's Cabin:** A novel of the same name by Harriet Beecher Stowe stirred the abolitionist cause in the years before the U.S. Civil War. Josiah Henson, model for the leading character in the book, escaped slavery in 1830 and founded a community near Dresden, Ont., where his cabin and grave are now a historic site.

— **Raleigh Township Centennial Museum:** A community of 1,500 former slaves grew from what was called the Elgin Settlement, founded in 1849, in what is now North Buxton, Ont. The attraction includes many original structures and houses a museum of black history.

— **John Freeman Walls Historic Site:** Includes a cabin built in 1846 by the fugitive slave from North Carolina. When viewing the site at Malden, Ont., guides dressed as "railroad conductors take you back in time ... as you walk the historic walkway," says the narration of a video about the tour.

— **The North American Black Historical Museum and Cultural Centre** in Amherstburg, just south of Windsor, near the Detroit River crossing that was the path from slavery for many.

In his first year of operation, Dodds sought business south of the border.

He reached out to a growing black middle-class seeking travel destinations tied to a search "for their roots." Many were going to Africa and the Caribbean.

Dodds got them to look closer to home.

His company distributed a brochure urging Americans to "follow the north star — the guiding light of the Underground Railroad." The brochure is titled: The Road That

Led to Freedom — An African-American Heritage Tour.

Dodds says he signed up groups — from schools, churches and community organizations — mainly from the Detroit area but also hired tourists from New York, Washington and as far away as Seattle.

With agents in several states now plugged into the tours, the native of the Caribbean island of St. Vincent wants citizens of his adopted country — he's lived in Canada since 1966 — to climb aboard.

History lesson

"We want to go mainstream," he says, noting he has solicited business from Canadian school boards by stressing the historical value of such field trips for students.

Barbara Theobalds, who is helping market the tours for the company, says there is widespread interest from "whites, blacks and Asian kids — and teachers who want to make a lesson of it."

The tours run May through October, taking about 40 people — a bus-load — at a time. Prices range from \$50 per person for a day-long trip to selected sites to a two-day tour for \$149.

For more information, contact Underground Railroad Heritage Tours, 33 Beatty Ave., Toronto, M6K 3B3; phone 536-1455.

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Black history highlights society agenda

Special to The Review

This newsletter contains a brief report on the Bertie Historical Society's Feb. 17 and March 17 meetings, both held at Crystal Ridge library.

Feb. 17 — Museum curator Jane Davies challenged us with a video quiz on our historical heritage.

She intends to come back next year and complete our quiz so you history buffs bone up!

March 17 — Bev Jewson gave us detailed information on the June 5 society bus trip to Simcoe.

The cost per member is \$27 for the bus and lunch. She outlined the itinerary:

Members were able to sign up and told to pay at the April or May society meetings.

Guest speaker was April Oake of Ridgeway, who spoke to the 40 or so members present on local black history.

She was hired by the Town of Fort Erie to research local black history for the purpose of creating a car and bus tour itinerary featuring sites important to black history.

April opened by telling us that there were locations in Fort Erie and Bertie Township known as "safe"

houses. The Underground Railway was a system used to bring slaves from the American south to safe haven in Upper Canada (Ontario).

Slavery in Upper Canada had been abolished in 1793 by Lt.-Gov. John Graves Simcoe.

These safehouses were operated by anti-slavery men and women, who were mainly Quakers, Wesleyan Methodists and Covenanters. She pointed out that the Quakers — with their bonnets and plain, gray clothes — would dress up the fleeing blacks in Quaker disguises and safely transport them across the Niagara River to freedom.

She said it is believed that thousands of fleeing slaves crossed the Niagara in the Fort Erie area over the years as early as after the War of 1812 until after the American Civil War of 1861-65.

One of the Fort Erie taverns built by Robert Ingraham in 1828 at Black Creek served many purposes such as a hotel, coach stop, jail and store. Around 1850 it was designated a safe house.

Bertie Hall (now the Mildred Mahoney Doll House) was another significant "safe" house. Built circa 1827 by William

Forsythe Sr., there was said to be secret passages and a tunnel leading to the river's edge. Forsythe was a known smuggler of contraband.

It is said that an addition was built to house the escaped slaves as they were in transit to other parts of Ontario.

Several locations are found in Greater Fort Erie where black freed slaves founded little settlements. One was the Bertie Hill Settlement at Fort Erie's south end. High, Stanton, John and Murray were some of the streets found on which black people resided.

Located on Murray Street was the British Methodist Episcopal Church for blacks and the Alley school on John Street where many of the blacks attended.

Little Africa was another centre located east of Stevensville and it stretched from Ridgemount Road to the shipyards at Miller's Creek. In 1840 the population was about 80 but it rose to 200 by 1880. Many of the residents made their income by cutting

wood for the railroads, mainly the Canadian Southern.

As coal supplanted the need for wood and the forests diminished the settlement broke up and most moved away. The Colored Cemetery on Curtis Road was the local burial place but only one stone marker, for the Russell family, has been identified by census records as being black.

Other areas are of interest too, such as Windmill Point where Quakers such as Benjamin Baker and his Society of Friends planned ways to help blacks in many states come to Canada. He would cross the frozen lake to come to Silas Carter's mill with grain to be ground and return with the grain still unmilled.

As a strong abolitionist he would be bringing hidden escaped slaves to freedom.

The Charles Hibbard farm at the bend on the north side of Michener Road in Ridgeway once housed Josiah Henson of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* fame. The author of the

novel, Harriet Beecher Stowe, is said to have used Josiah Henson as her inspiration for Uncle Tom. This book was one of the catalysts for the American Civil War.

Henson crossed over from Buffalo to Fort Erie on Oct. 28, 1830. He lived in a two-storey shanty on Hibbard's farm located near Little Africa. Henson moved on to Dresden, Ontario where he is credited with establishing freely held farms for escaped slaves.

He was a minister for the African Free Methodist Church. He fought in the Rebellion of 1837 where he was a captain of the 2nd Essex Company of Colored Volunteers.

Another point of interest was the Erie Beach Hotel located at the end of Helena Street. On July 5, 1905 the hotel was the site of the first meeting of Niagara Colored Association which was the predecessor of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).