1985

Reclaiming Your Heritage-Getting to WNY and Canada

Rev. Walter Kern

RECLAIMING YOUR HERITAGE:

GETTING TO WESTERN NEW YORK AND ONTARIO

A family trip to trace some known routes by which some Black refugees, who were trying to escape slavery, came to our area and crossed over to Ontario.

DEDICATION: To all those Black individuals who risked all for the chance to live free and have an equal opportunity to a better furure for themselves and their families.

Compiled by Rev. Walter Kern, 1985AD

OVERVIEW AND DIRECTIONS

This family trip traces some of the known routes which an escaped individual or family could have used to escape from slavery and reach freedom in Canada before the end of the Civil War. Many people quietly helped Black families at night. They didn't talk about it, so the sites have been "lost." There literally were hundreds of cellars, cubbyholes, barns and other places used for this purpose in Western New York. Family stories, if followed up on, may reveal more.

PLEASE READ THE MATERIAL PROVIDED AT EACH "STOP."
THINK AND FEEL YOUR WAY ALONG.

FIRST STOP: MICHIGAN AVENUE BAPTIST CHURCH, 511 Michigan.

Michigan is parallel to Main Street, Buffalo, between Genesee and Boardway. Now El-Bethel Alliance Church.
Beforehand read p. 1-3; READING, p.4.

SECOND STOP: BUFFALO RIVERFRONT.

Main Street to North Street, which becomes Porter Avenue. Stop in Front Park. AFTER READING *page 4..., take the Peace Bridge to Fort Erie, Ontario, Canada.*

THIRD STOP: FORT ERIE RIVERFRONT.

Take a sharp right after Customs. Turn left along the river towards Niagara Falls. Stop at the first open section along the river to READ page 7; *then/or proceed two miles in all to the Safe House, now the big-pillared Doll House Gallery near the International Railroad Bridge.* READING: pages 6/7-8. *Visit the basement.*

Continue on to Queenston, passing right by Niagara Falls. Dufferin Island Park and Niagara Glen Park are good for a picnic.

FOURTH STOP: QUEENSTON: Many Blacks once lived here.

As you come down the hill to Queenston, proceed to the War Monument and Canon. Turn sharply to the right on Queenston St. and stop at the Community Center (once a church which Blacks attended). Blacks crossed over from Lewiston. READING, p. 9-10.

FIFTH STOP: NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE: Two sites.

Return to the Niagara Parkway and go to Niagara-on-the-Lake. The Clock Tower is a landmark. Turn away from the river on King Street to Parliament Oak School (4 blocks). READING: pages 11-12½...*Then drive 2 blocks to Mary Street, turn right and*

drive to Mississauga (Route 55), turn left and park as near to the corner as possible. (Store at corner.) "Negro Burial Grounds," *(1830).* READING: pages 12½-13.

Head on Route 55 away from Niagara-on-the Lake. This is a long, nice ride through the farming area. You will see many grape vines, because this is "wine country."

Route 55 joins Route 8. You will pass under the Queen Elizabeth Way and over the Welland Canal. You will enter the City of St. Catherines on Queenston Street. Passing Victoria Lawn Cemetery, proceed well into the city to downtown. Turn right on Geneva Street and go to North Street, which is very close.

SIXTH STOP: ST. CATHERINES: Two sites.

READING, pages 14-1 ½...*Then retrace your route to Victoria Lawn Cemetery (on your right) for the Grave of Rev. Anthony Burns.*
READING, pages 1 ½

Continuing on back to the Welland Canal, Old Highway #8 goes to Niagara Falls and home. Alternate route: turn right at the canal and parallel the canal to Thorold (and the double locks). READING, p. 17. *Route 58 goes under the canal & becomes Route 57. Either turn on the Queen Elizabeth Way to Fort Erie or go to Niagara Falls, right on Stanley to the Falls and bridges to the USA.*

SOME ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND FURTHER READING

*Hill, Daniel, The Freedom Seekers: Blacks in Early Canada.

*Black History in Early Ontario. A Travelling Exhibit of the Ontario History Society and the City of Toronto Present. (Catalogue.)

*An Enduring Heritage: Black Contributions to Early Ontario, Ontario Minister of Citizenship and Culture.

Still, William, The Underground Railroad.

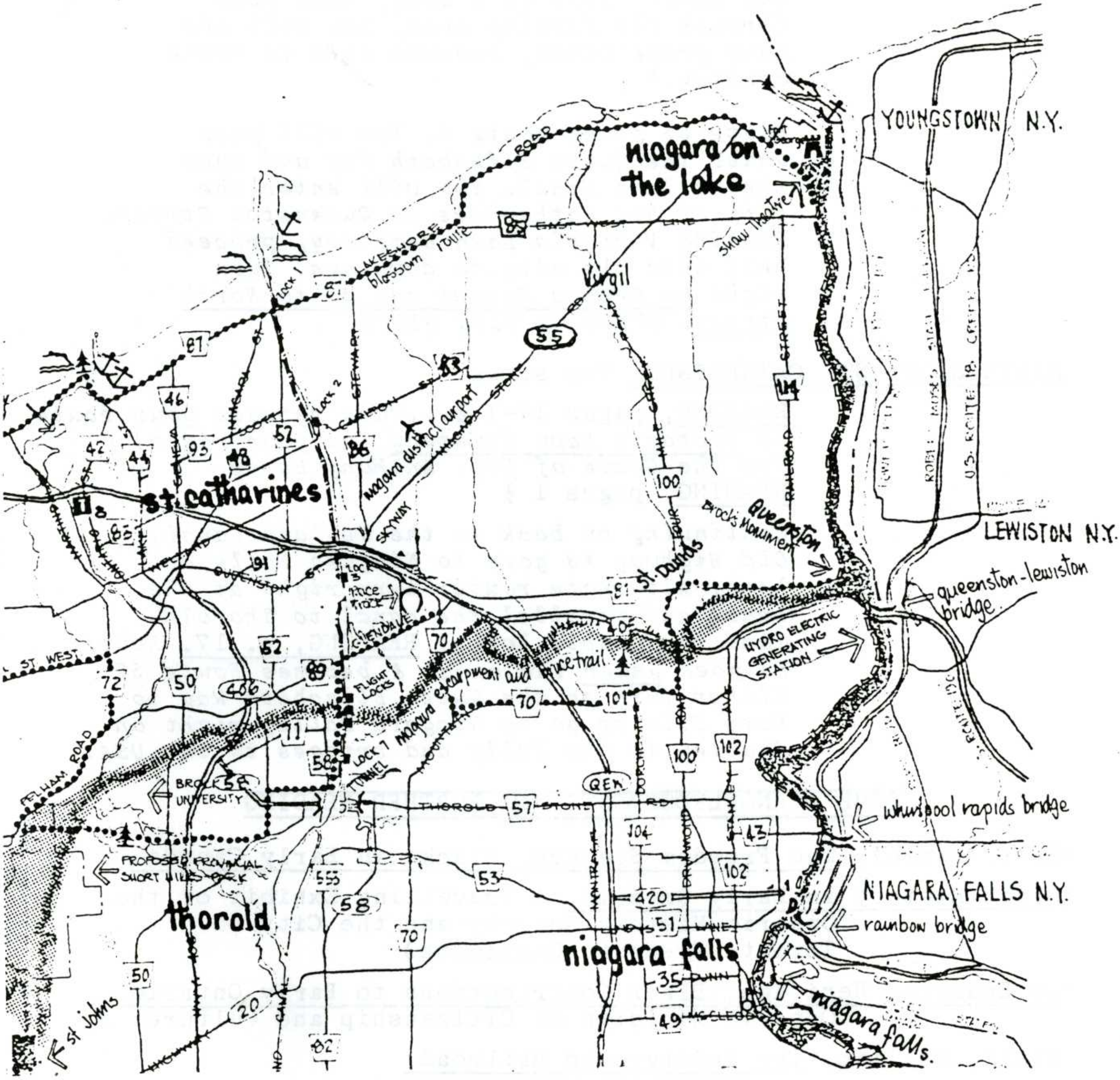
Kern, Walter, An Outline of Black Catholicism in the Diocese of Buffalo.

*Blockson, Charles, "The Underground Railraod," National Geographic, July, 1984.

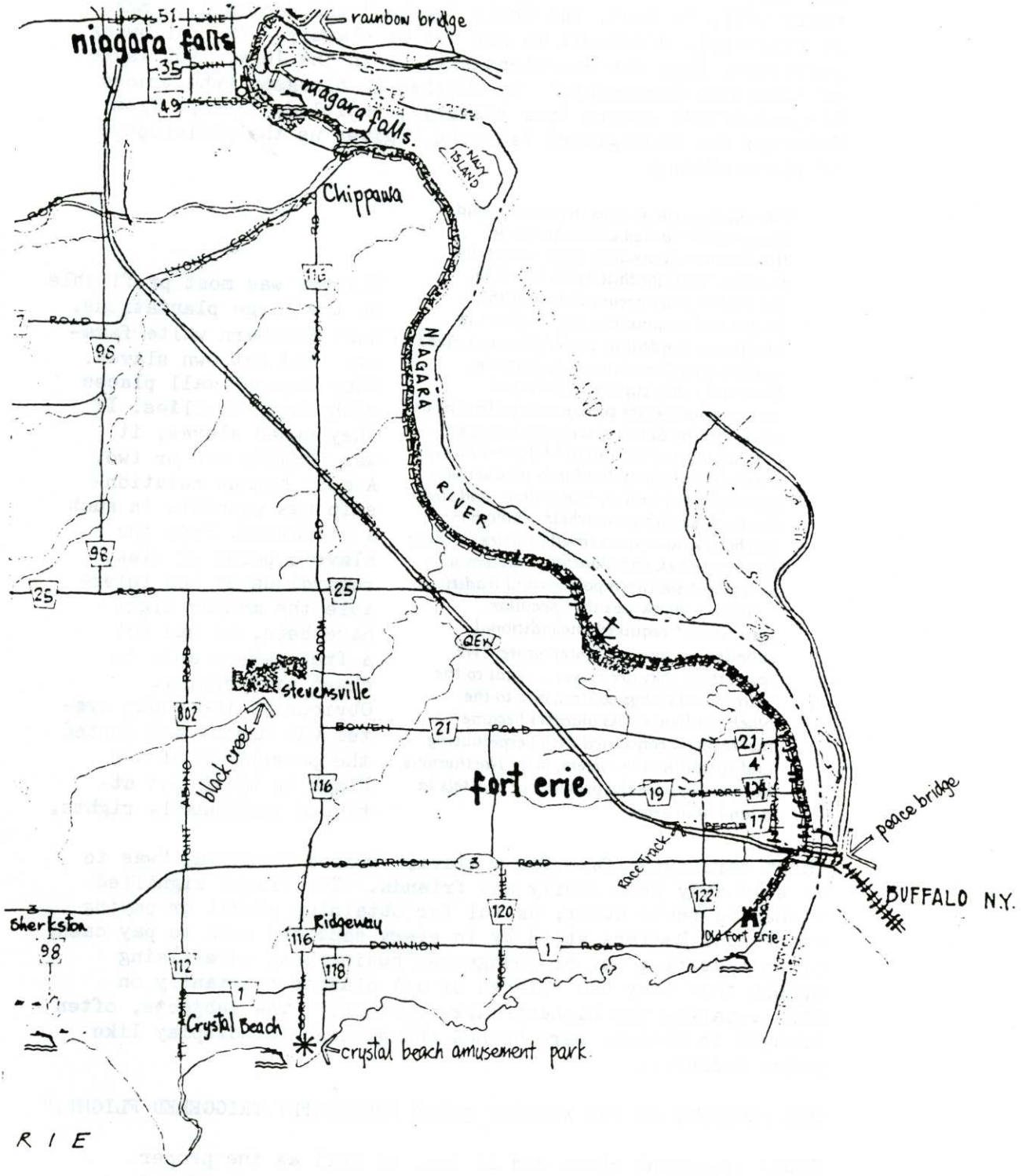
*Carnochan, Janet, History of Niagara.

Franklin, John, From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans.

* Material quoted.



YOUNGSTOWN N.Y.
niagara on the lake
Shaw Theatre
LAKESHORE ROAD
blossom route
Virgil
LEWISTON N.Y.
Queenston
Brock's Monument
St. Davids
queenston-lewiston bridge
HYDRO ELECTRIC GENERATING STATION
st. catharines
niagara district airport
SKYWAY
LOCK 1
LOCK 2
LOCK 3
FLIGHT LOCKS
LOCK 7
TUNNEL
niagara escarpment and bruce trail
BROCK UNIVERSITY
PROPOSED PROVINCIAL SHORT HILLS PARK
PELHAM ROAD
thorold
QEW
THOROLD STONE RD
whirlpool rapids bridge
NIAGARA FALLS N.Y.
rainbow bridge
niagara falls
niagara falls
st Johns


niagara falls
rainbow bridge
niagara falls
Chippawa
NIAGARA RIVER
QEW
stevensville
black creek
fort erie
peace bridge
BUFFALO N.Y.
Ridgeway
Crystal Beach
crystal beach amusement park
Old fort Erie
Sherkston
RIE

BACKGROUND READING

The ancestors of Black people were kidnapped and sold into slavery, or were born as slaves and kept in slavery against their will. In fact, the whole "system" was designed to make it extrememly difficult to get out of slavery. The following quotation, from the excellent article in the July, 1984 issue of "National Geographic" by Charles L. Blockson (who traced his ancestor's escape from slavery), entitled, "Escape from Salvery: The Underground Railroad," gives us the philosophy of slaveholding:

> "***For what purpose*** *does the master hold the servant?" asked a Southerner in the Farmer's Journal in 1853, answering frankly, "Is it not that by his labor he, the master, may accumulate wealth?" Profits did accumulate, even before the Mayflower landed; in 1619 Africans arrived as indentured servants at Jamestown. Gradually ship captains developed thriving businesses transporting Africans as slaves. In the South slavery took deepest root as gangs of the unpaid laborers turned vast tracts of cheap land into productive plantations of indigo, rice, cotton, and sugar destined for foreign markets. Though most southern whites were small farmers working for themselves, the plantation system soon dominated southern politics and traditions.*
>
> *Slavery, known as the "peculiar institution," required unconditional submission; as one planter wrote, "We teach them they are slaves . . . that to the white face belongs control, and to the black obedience." As planters became increasingly concerned with perpetuating and spreading the system, more Northerners began to oppose the presence of chattels in a land of liberty.*

Slavery was most profitable on the large plantations. Most Southern white farmers did not own slaves. They farmed small places with their families. If they owned slaves, it was usually one or two. A more humane relationship was possible in such a situation. From the slave's point of view, regardless of how tolerable the master might have been, he was not a free person able to chart his destiny. Obviously, the whole system was unjust and denied the personhood of the Black to which God attached inalienable rights.

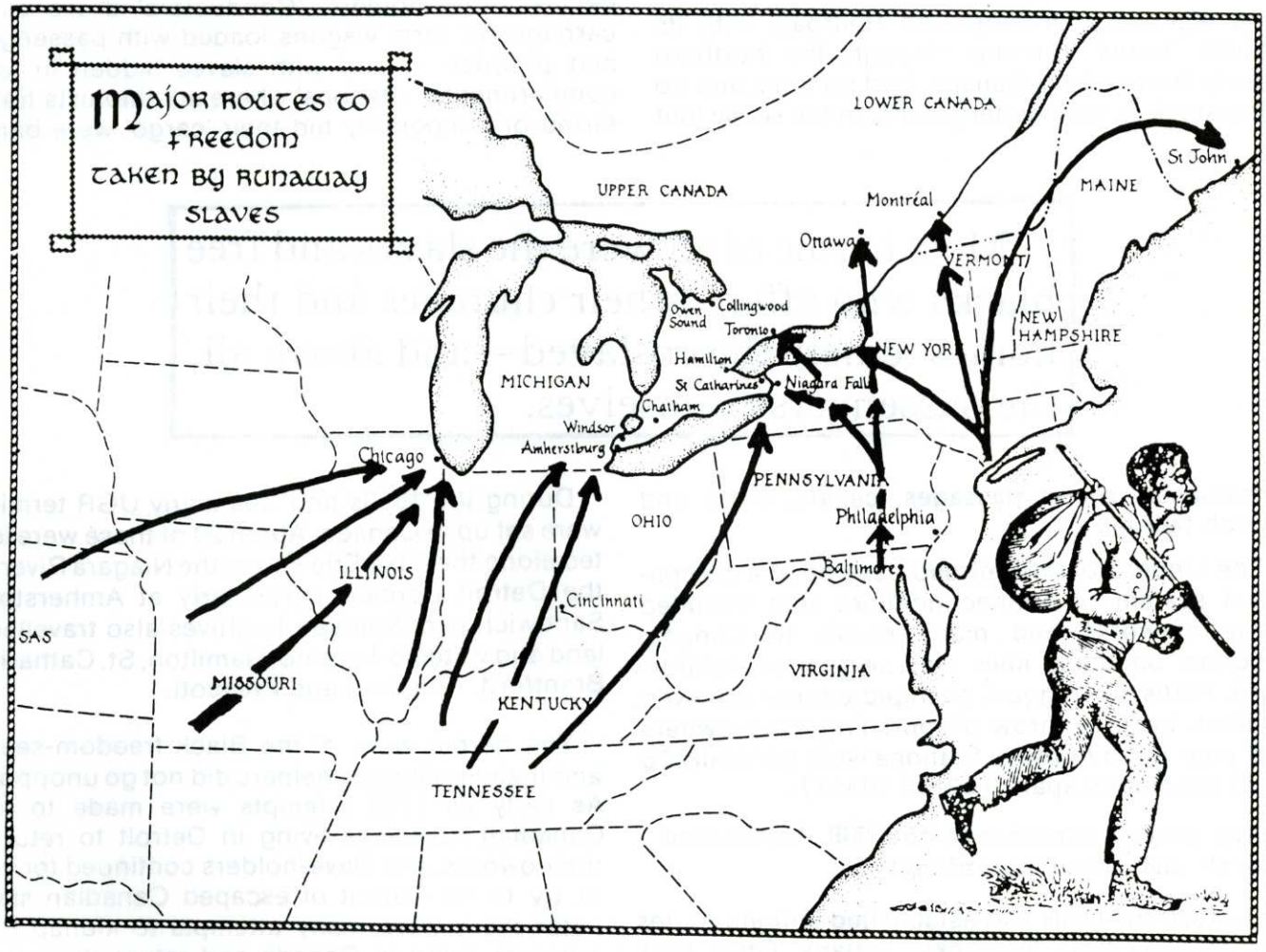
"Most terrifying fate for a slave," writes Blockson, "was to be sold away from family and friends. Yet slaves signified riches to their owner, useful for obtaining credit or paying off bonds. Dealers stood by in every southern town to pay cash, often operating out of recognized businesses, advertising openly that they had 'slaves of all classes constantly on hand...paying the highest market prices.' The subjects, often brought in chains, were washed and groomed for display like prize horses...

THE PROSPECT OF THE AUCTION BLOCK FREQUENTLY TRIGGERED FLIGHT."

Cruel treatment often did it too, as well as the proper opportunity to carry out a long-planned escape to freedom.

FLIGHT TO FREEDOM

SELF-EMANCIPATION carried fugitive slaves on their perilous journeys to the closest free territory. For some of them, the P for Pennsylvania on a marker at the Mason-Dixon Line signified success. As Americans moved west, the question of slavery dogged every step, and compromises in Congress postponed the day of reckoning. Under the Missouri Compromise of 1820, Missouri entered the Union as a slave state, Maine and lands north of 36°30' acquired through the Louisiana Purchase as free territory. In 1850 California entered free in exchange for the southern-backed Fugitive Slave Law, which forced citizens to assist slave catchers, antagonizing Northerners and spurring their support of the Underground Railroad.



• After Nat Turner's short-lived insurrection resulted in the death of more than 50 Virginia whites in 1831, the South tightened slave codes and restricted manumission.

• Some slaves stowed away on ships to the Bahamas, where the British had abolished slavery in 1833.

• The Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 modified the Missouri Compromise, leaving the question of slavery open to territorial legislatures.

• In 1857 the U. S. Supreme Court ruled in the Dred Scott case that a slave was not a citizen, nor was he freed by virtue of temporary residence in a Free State.

THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

Word of Simcoe's anti-slavery legislation spread slowly in the United States. At the end of the 18th century Canada was as remote to the southern slave as the prospect of freedom. Soon after the War of 1812, however, John Beverley Robinson, Upper Canada's Attorney General, declared that residence in Canada made Blacks free, and that Canadian courts would uphold that freedom. Slaves in the American border states began to hear that in Canada Blacks were free, and that their rights were protected by British law.

The legendary Underground Railroad, with its mythical 'trains' running through the northern states to terminals in Canada, had no track and no rolling stock. It was 'underground' in the sense that it was a secret operation carried out by courageous people linked only by their hatred of slavery and their willingness to hide, feed and help onward fugitive slaves. But the image of a secret underground railroad was so effective that in the 1800s many people believed that a train ran through a tunnel deep in the earth carrying runaways from the South to freedom in the North. Quakers and Methodists, city people and farmers, freed Blacks and slaves, most of them working out of border and northern states, used railroad terms to confuse the public and deceive slave-holders. 'Conductors' drove carts, carriages or farm wagons loaded with passengers and produce — and with slaves hidden in false compartments. 'Stations' where abolitionists transferred or temporarily hid their 'cargo' were barns, farmhouses, secret passages, cellars, attics and church belfries.

> Most heroic of all were the slaves and free blacks who offered their churches and their homes to help the enslaved—and above all, the passengers themselves.

The Underground Railroad developed a complicated system of connecting lines that included many networks and many routes to Canada. Progress on these lines was seldom straightforward. Paths zig-zagged, changed course and even doubled back to throw off pursuing slave-owners and their hired hunters. Stations were generally 25 to 30 kilometres apart (20-25 miles).

Slave owners considered the UGR "organized theft" and acted accordingly.

By 1820 the UGR had established definite routes into Canada from Kentucky, Indiana, Ohio, New York, Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, Missouri, Michigan and other states. Though more and more 'passengers' travelled these routes, some Blacks made their own escape without the help of the UGR.

During the 1830s and '40s many UGR terminals were set up in Canada. About 20 of these were located along the Lake Erie shore, the Niagara River and the Detroit frontier, particularly at Amherstburg, Sandwich and Windsor. Fugitives also travelled by land and water to Toronto, Hamilton, St. Catharines, Brantford, Kingston and Prescott.

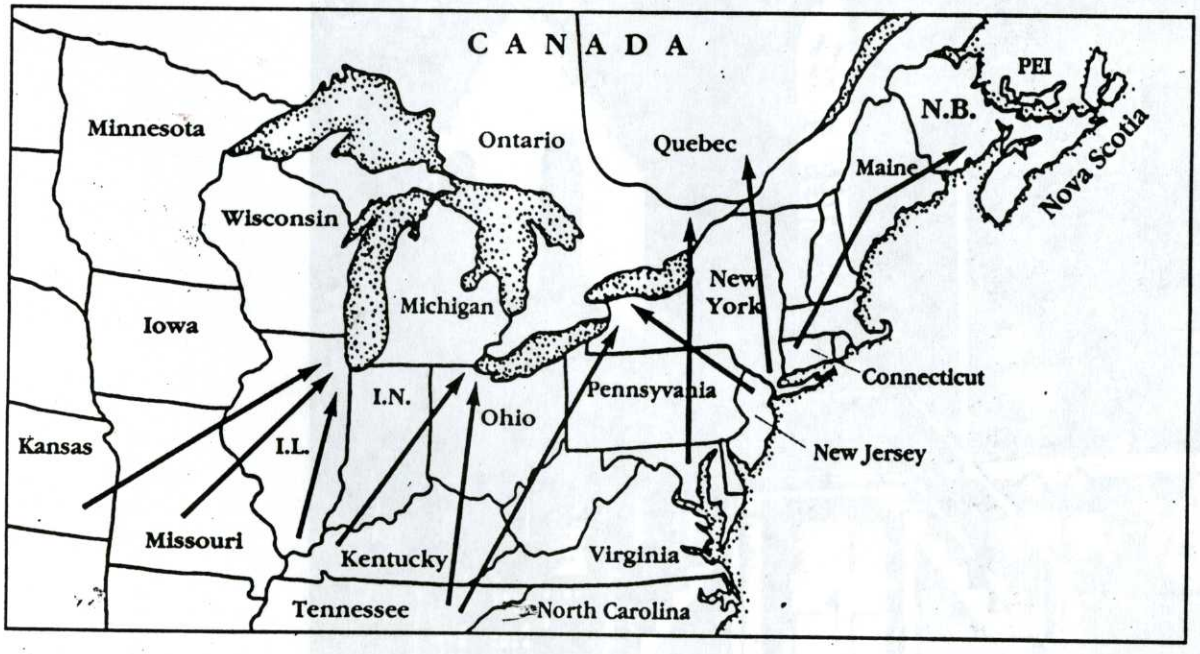
The heroic work of the Black freedom-seekers and their abolitionist helpers did not go unopposed. As early as 1796 attempts were made to force Canadian runaways living in Detroit to return to their owners, and slave-holders continued for years to try to rid Detroit of escaped Canadian slaves. Later there were many attempts to kidnap Black refugees living in Canada and return them to the U.S.A. Slave-catchers and kidnappers roamed the border towns, and Black refugees faced the constant threat of kidnapping by whites and Blacks who meant to force or trick them back in to slavery.

"The Quakers won an early and richly deserved reputation as friends of fugitive slaves. But the fellowship of the Underground Railroad was truly ecumenical, including Roman Catholics, Jews, and Protestants, as well as freethinkers, and if adherants of most other faiths were numbered among slaveholders, so (contrary to legend, alas!) were certain members of the Society of Friends" (Blockson).

Terms

1. The Underground Railroad was not a railroad at all. It was a network of paths and hiding places to help slaves escape north. It began around 1840 and ran until 1860.
2. The conductors were people, Black and white, who led the slaves from one hiding place to another.
3. These hiding places were called "stations."
4. The people who would hide escaped slaves and advise them where to find the next safe station were called "station masters."
5. Persons who gave money to assist the slaves were called "stockholders."
6. The escaped slaves were called "freight or cargo."
7. Abolitionists were people who spoke out against slavery and wanted it stopped.

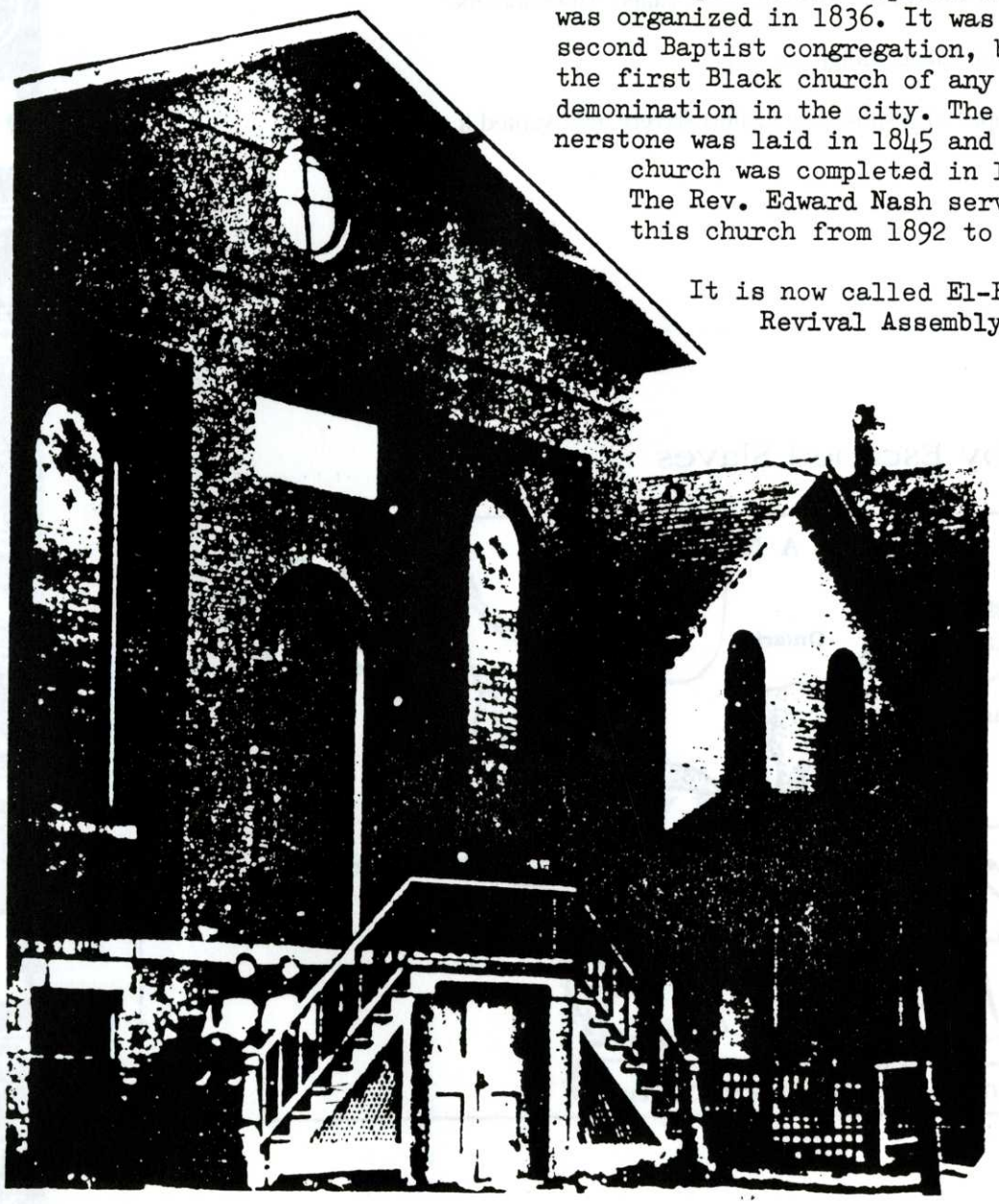
Routes Taken by Escaped Slaves



First Stop: *The Michigan Avenue Baptist Church, Buffalo.*

511 Michigan Avenue
Buffalo, New York.

Buffalo, being as close as it is to the Canadian border, was one of the main stations on the Underground. Its elusive lines came in by water and up from Pennsylvania and New York's southern tier by land. Buffalo and the surrounding countryside were dotted with the Underground's satellite stations and stationmasters. A Quaker farm in Orchard Park. A home at Utica and Linwood Avenue. The Negro Baptist Church on Michigan Avenue. A porter in the American Hotel. A ferry boat on the Niagara River. Someone patiently standing on a dock.



The Michigan Avenue Baptist Church was organized in 1836. It was the second Baptist congregation, but the first Black church of any demonination in the city. The cornerstone was laid in 1845 and the church was completed in 1849. The Rev. Edward Nash served this church from 1892 to 1952.

It is now called El-Bethel Revival Assembly.

Second Stop: The Buffalo Riverfront.

One of the two presidents of the United States from Buffalo, Millard Fillmore, was connected with this issue.

When Fillmore assumed the Presidency in 1850, he inherited one of the gravest crises the nation had ever confronted. Slavery, a long-festering sore, was infecting the Union's innards. Fillmore may have reasoned that the nation at that moment needed quiet. At any rate, he walked the tightrope and took a conciliatory approach to the thorny slavery issue. The climax was his support of the Compromise of 1850 and his use of his presidential power to keep the unruly northern Whigs in line on that unpopular bit of fence-straddling.

The most controversial part of the compromise was the Fugitive Slave Act, which gave slaveowners the right to lay claim to escaped slaves and imposed fines and jail terms on those who saw fit to give the escaped slave a helping hand. Ironically, the Fugitive Slave Act was put to one of its early tests in Fillmore's hometown.

The steamer *Buckeye* docked in Buffalo on a summer's day in 1851 with an escaped slave, Daniel, stowed away in the galley as a cook. An agent for the Kentucky slaveowner was waiting at dockside and, with a deputy U.S. marshal in tow, went below to claim the slave. Daniel tried briefly to flee his captors but he was felled, bloodied, and bruised by a billet of wood.

It looked like a simple case of a slave, having tried and failed to gain his freedom, going back to his old Kentucky home. But a lawyer, John Talcott, stepped forward on Daniel's behalf and the case went into the courts. Judge Alfred Conklin found in the slave's favor, ruling that he had escaped before the Fugitive Slave Act became law and that the act was not retroactive. The judge went on to say that disputes involving slaves ought always to be resolved in favor of freedom, citing as his authority for that opinion the Twelve Tables of Rome. It was heady stuff for Daniel.

The slaveowner's agent went back to Kentucky empty-handed, but not before a Buffalo police magistrate fined him $50 for assaulting the slave. It had not been a good day for slaveowners.

Daniel, head high, walked out of court a free man and triumphantly crossed the border into Canada. He was not the first nor the last to do that. But he was one of the few who did it so openly. The others, 30,000 to 40,000 of them, were more furtively spirited across the border to freedom, thanks to a well-lubricated piece of human machinery known as the Underground Railroad. ("Buffalo: Lake City in Niagara Land" by Richard Brown and Bob Watson, pp. 82, 84.)

All escaped slaves were not as fortunate as Daniel.

> Fugitives were plucked from churches in Ohio, from ships in Boston harbor, from the bosoms of free wives and husbands whom they had married in the North. The runaways were not safe anywhere in the nation. Those who aided them faced criminal penalties of six months in jail and a $1,000 fine in addition to a civil liability to the owner of $1,000 for each fugitive. (Blockson).

Canada passed a law, the Act of 1793, at Newark (Niagara-on-the-Lake) which gradually abolished slavery. British authorities refused to comply with U. S. requests to surrender escaped slaves who reached its shores. Because of the Act of 1793, slaves considered that any U. S. area or city which was close to Canada a "last station" in their escape plans. The entire Niagara Frontier, but especially Buffalo, was a "last station."

> It is generally supposed that the Act passed in 1793 in Newark completely abolished slavery, but this is a misconception. It only provided for the gradual abolition of slavery. All slaves henceforward entering Upper Canada were to be free, as the sweet singer of Olney had said, "that moment when they touch our soil that moment they are free"; all children of slaves were to be free at twenty-five years of age, and any born after the Act of 1793 were, of course, free. The advertisement of the sale of slaves after this date is thus explained. That the bill was not passed without opposition we learn from a letter of Simcoe to Dundas, September, 1793, some wishing to bring in slaves for two years more, but, as usual, a compromise was made, property secured and abolition was gradual.
>
> (Carnochan).

Although there were Blacks in Buffalo, it was safer across the river in Canada. The first known Black in the area, here in the 1780s and 1790s, was "Black Joe" Hodges. Other Blacks settled in Buffalo in time. By 1832 there were 64 "colored persons," according to the "Directory for the City of Buffalo."

There is considerable argument over the exact number of slaves who reached Canada *via* the UGR. Its activists were inclined to inflate the figure, claiming that between 1830 and the mid '50s from 60,000 to 75,000 Blacks made their way into Canada West. On the other hand, doubtful Canadian census figures showed 4669 Black residents in 1851 and 11,223 in 1861. The fact is that no accurate figures can be given for the number of fugitive or free Blacks in the British North American provinces. Many Blacks who set out for Canada died or disappeared along the way. Many who reached Canada decided to 'pass' for white, and many fugitives claimed to be 'free' Blacks because they mistakenly feared that Canadian authorities would return them to their former owners, many Blacks were simply not enumerated. At a conservative guess, 30,000 fugitives may have reached Canada between 1800 and 1860.

Whatever the actual figures may be, the Underground Railroad was a phenomenal success. By the 1860s Blacks were clustered throughout Canada West, involved in the difficult task of setting up and developing their new communities.

Third Stop: Fort Erie –By the River

Before the Act of 1793 in Upper Canada which gradually abolished slavery and before its complete enforcement, sad incidents occurred.

The following incident shows that slave hunters did get across the river and occasionally kidnapped a Black person.

> A strange story is told in an 1828 paper: "Kidnapping: A black man by the name of James Smith, in the employ of R. M. Long, of Clinton, was seized a few nights ago in bed by a band of slave-holding ruffians from the south and conveyed across the Niagara River, gagged and pinioned. He was kept concealed near Lewiston, in some old barracks, and while his old Virginian master, whom he recognized, was arranging for proceeding onward. he escaped, lay concealed for forty-eight hours without fire or food and actually swam the river in the night. The poor fellow landed on the fishing ground and was first discovered by a party of fishermen buffeting the chilly element and nearly exhausted." (Carnochan).

At the big-pillared mansion (near RR Bridge).

SAFE HOUSES were required for a time in Canada as well as along the Underground Railroad. One of them in Fort Erie, Ontario, is now the Mildred M. Mahoney Silver Jubilee Dolls' House Gallery. When Blacks arrived by boat from Buffalo, old stories have it, they entered a tunnel at the shore and walked up to the cellar of Bertie Hall in Fort Erie near the International Railroad Bridge. "The Hall, which was rumoured to contain secret cellars and passages to hide runaway slaves, had been built by two abolitionist brothers, Brock and Nelson Forsyth" ("The Freedom Seekers," p. 48). The house was built around 1830 and was used as a refuge for escaped slaves throughout the U.S. Civil War (1861-1865). (An old man once told a member of the staff at the Gallery that he remembered as a child seeing the entrance to the tunnel which went down to the Niagara River. It is no longer visible.)

CODED SONGS: Spirituals which were sung by Blacks often had a coded message about their escape or the Underground Railroad. "Steal Away to Jesus" could mean tonight was the night to leave. "Follow the Drinking Gourd" was a reference to the Big Dipper and the North Star which guided their nightly progress. "Wade in the Water, Children" and "O Canaan, sweet Canaan, I am bound for the land of Canaan" could easily detect Canada in the song. Some times the waters mentioned in the song really became the Niagara.

A DOCUMENTED STORY AT FORT ERIE: "A remarkable member of the Black community in the Niagara District was Burr Plato who fled Virginia with seven other Blacks in 1856. While a slave, Plato had saved $50 in gold, and this money kept the group of fugitives alive until they reached Fort Erie a month later with only five dollars, a bag of biscuits and a strong desire to work in freedom.

"For the next several years Plato worked as a porter and a farm-hand and spent every spare moment learning to read and write. He saved enough money to buy a home on Stanley Street, where he raised a family of 10 children and took a very active part in community and political affairs. He was one of the very few Blacks of the 19th century to win election to municipal office in Canada.

"'By thrift and untiring industry he acquired education and a comfortable property and was so respected as an honest and God-fearing citizen that he was on several occasions elected to municipal office by his white neighbors.'" ("Niagara Historical Society," No. 22, p. 50.)

"Burr Plato died in 1905 and was buried in Drummond Hill Cemetery with other members of Niagara's Black families." ("The Freedom-Seekers: Blacks in Early Canada," by Daniel G. Hill, p. 211.)

"LITTLE AFRICA": "Lake Steamers and small craft often dropped runaways at Fort Erie, and a small village called 'Little Africa" soon grew up on the town's outskirts. By about 1840 there were 80 Blacks living there. Its population grew to 200 before they scattered to other parts of Ontario about 1880, when a dwindling wood supply and an increased demand for coal to fuel the railroad trains deprived these people of their chief livelihood." ("The Freedom-Seekers," p. 50.)

DRIVE FROM FORT ERIE TO QUEENSTON. (If you brought a picnic lunch, there are several nice spots right along the Parkway with picnic tables. Dufferin Island Park is above the Falls. In the city one finds several interesting sites connected with Black history for another trip. Another good place for a picnic is Niagara Glenn Park, with an interesting trail down the Gorge for another trip.)

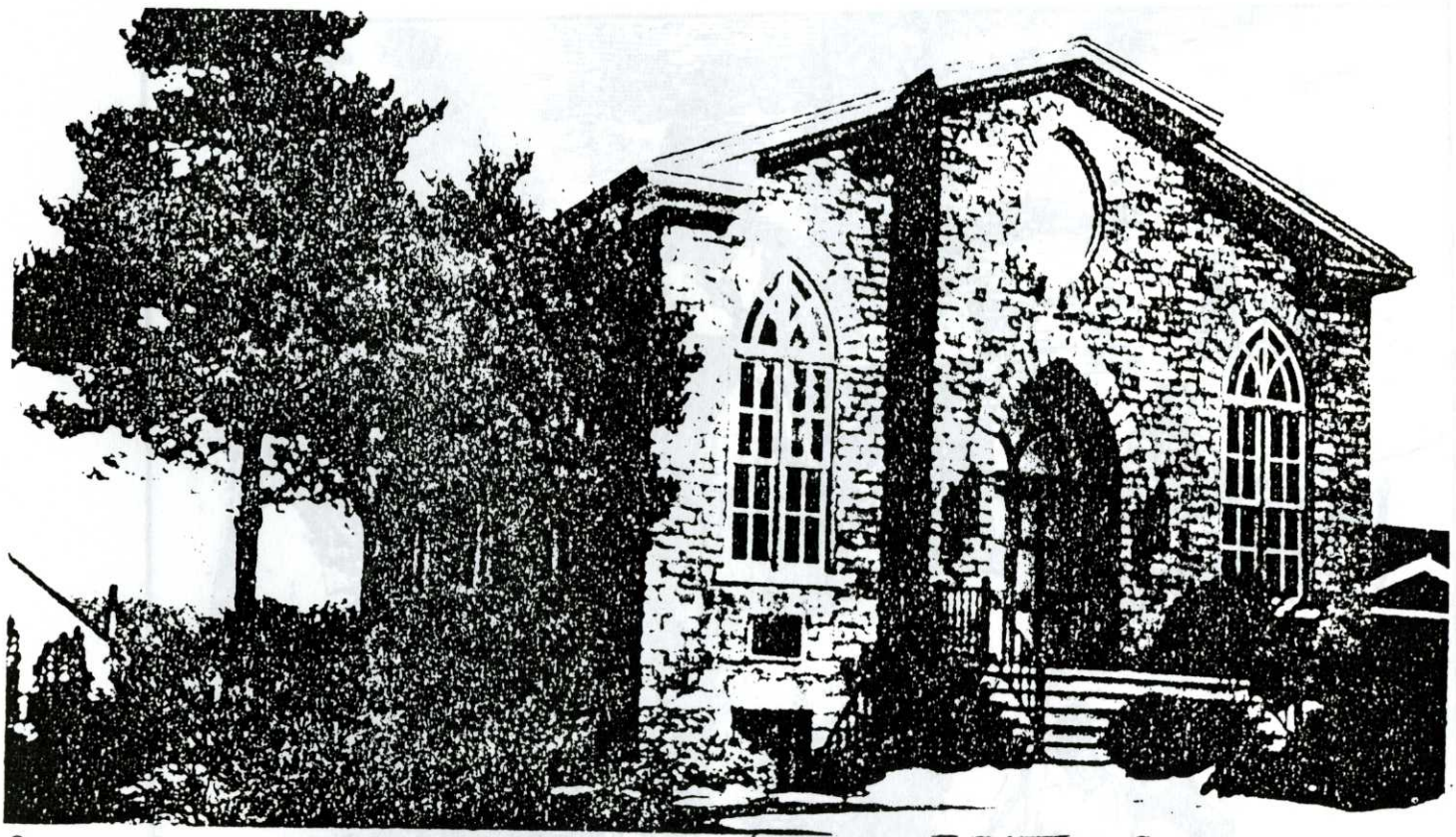
Our next stop is Queenston (originally called Queen's Town).

Fourth Stop: Queenston

I'm on my way to Canada
That cold and distant land
The dire effects of slavery
I can no longer stand —

Farewell, old master,
Don't come after me.
I'm on my way to Canada
Where coloured men are free.

In the Niagara *Mail,* August 10th, 1853, is found the following account of another slave reaching Niagara by a perilous land and lake journey. The steamer *Chief Justice Robinson* picked up a colored man about twelve miles from Niagara, floating on a raft made of a gate. He escaped from Tennessee and came to Lewiston, but was afraid to go on one of the steamers to cross and tried to cross the river on the gate, but the current being strong, he was drifted out into the lake. He said, "Thank the Lord, Massa, I am a free man now." The poor fellow must have been carried on his precarious support a distance of twenty miles. What must have been his thoughts on that broad and lonely field of waters?



Queenston Baptist Church (1842-45) had a substantial number of Blacks in its congregation. This handsome Gothic Revival style building became the Queenston Library and Community Centre in 1972.
(About half of the congregation was Black.)

I'm on my way to Canada
That cold and distant land
The dire effects of slavery
I can no longer stand —
Farewell, old master,
Don't come after me.
I'm on my way to Canada
Where coloured men are free.

Before the middle of the 19th century small Black communities were firmly rooted in six areas of Canada West: along the Detroit frontier, that is at Windsor, Sandwich, Amherstburg and their environs; in Chatham and its surrounding area, where the all-Black settlements of Dawn and Elgin were established; in what was then the central section of the province, particularly London, the Queen's Bush, Brantford and the Black settlement of Wilberforce (now Lucan); along the Niagara peninsula at St. Catharines, Niagara Falls, Newark (Niagara-on-the Lake) and Fort Erie; in the larger urban centres on Lake Ontario, that is, Hamilton and Toronto; at the northern perimeter of Simcoe and Grey Counties, especially in Oro, Collingwood and Owen Sound. Besides these centres of Black population, small clusters of Blacks, as well as individual Black families, were settled throughout Canada West.

Black refugees arriving in Canada knew that hard work lay ahead of them to make it in a cold climate, but they were happy to be free and offered a opportunity.

Fifth Stop: Niagara-on-the-Lake.

When you arrive in Niagara-on-the-Lake, turn away from the river on King Street (at the Clock Tower). Four blocks away in Parliament Oak School. The Anti-Slavery Act of 1793 was passed at this place.

Great Britain recognized the birth of the United States in 1783 and made peace with its former colonies. At that time Québec west of Montréal — the area soon to become Upper Canada, then Canada West and finally Ontario — was a vast wilderness with fringes of white settlement along the Upper St. Lawrence River and the lower Great Lakes. The end of the Revolutionary War left in a hostile and dangerous environment about 100,000 American colonists loyal to Britain. These people included soldiers of American units who had fought on the British side. About 40,000 of these chose to resettle in the British North. The British government encouraged the Loyalists. It offered them military commissions, administrative positions, generous grants of land and permission to bring slaves.

When the Loyalist settlers reached their destinations, their slaves helped to build the first homes and to clear and farm the land. Many of the 285 veterans of Butler's Rangers, who settled in Niagara Township, brought Black slaves with them.

John Graves Simcoe

The voices of leaders opposed to slavery were already being heard when Upper Canada was founded in 1791. In that same year the reformer William Wilberforce first introduced in the British House of Commons a bill to stop the importation of slaves in Britain's colonies. One of his supporters was Lieutenant-Colonel John Graves Simcoe. Simcoe was well known in England as a soldier who had led the Queen's Rangers in the American Revolutionary War and as the member of Parliament for St. Mawes, Cornwall.

He spoke against slavery in the Commons, arguing that Christian teaching opposed it and the British constitution did not allow it. Shortly afterwards Simcoe left England to take up his appointment as the first Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada. When he arrived at its capital, Niagara (which he re-named 'Newark'), he pledged himself never to support any law that "...discriminates by dishonest policy between the Natives of Africa, America or Europe."

There were barely 14,000 people living in the pioneer province of Upper Canada when Simcoe arrived. He immediately realized that its ruling class took slavery completely for granted. His earliest advisors included prominent slave-owners. Nine members of the Legislative Council, the appointed upper house, were slave-owners or members of slave-owning families.

Early in 1793 Simcoe learned of a brutal incident involving a slave. In an official letter to London he reported

> ... a violent outrage committed by one Fromand *(in fact, Vrooman)* ... residing near Queens Town *(Queenston)* ... on the person of Chloe Cooley a Negro girl in his service, by binding her, and violently and forcibly transporting her across the *(Niagara)* River, and delivering her against her will to certain persons unknown ...

The sale of Chloe Cooley dramatically illustrated a slave's total lack of protection. It stunned and offended Upper Canadians and became a *cause célèbre* for all opponents of slavery.

In spite of its limitations, Simcoe's law helped to change public attitudes to slavery. After the turn of the 19th century, most Canadian Blacks were free. For decades they had served their owners as domestics and attendants, and farmed and cleared their land. After 1800 they began to work as tradespeople and labourers needed by the fledgling province. Moreover, Simcoe's action in support of human rights affected thousands of Blacks in the United States. Learning that they would not be enslaved north of the American border, they soon began the trek to freedom and a greater measure of security in Upper Canada.

At Niagara-on-the Lake there was at least 14 Black familes by 1840. The names of some of them are known:

Andersons, Brights,
Banisters, Carrets,
Birds, Matrins,
Spriggs.

They lived two blocks from the school on Mary Street.

(Turn right and go down to the store.)

From King Street turn right and drive down Mary Street to Mississauga (Route 55). Turn left and park as near to the corner as you can. This a very historic cemetery.

(If you returned to walk along the shops, Mississauga runs into Queen Street.)

NEGRO BURIAL GROUND 1830

Here stood a Baptist Church erected in 1830 through the exertions of a former British soldier, John Oakley, who although white, became pastor of a predominantly negro congregation. In 1783 Upper Canada had passed an Act forbidding further introduction of slaves and freeing the children of those in the colony at twenty-five. This was the first legislation of its kind in the British Empire. A long tradition of tolerance attracted refugees slaves to Niagara, many of whom were buried here.

Baptist (Colored) Graveyard.—A white child, the daughter of Rev. John Oakley, was buried here along with many dusky Africans who had escaped from slavery by the underground railway or otherwise. Here, too, is buried a hero whose name should not be forgotten, though it is unrecorded in granite or marble—Herbert Holmes, a teacher and exhorter who organized a band of several hundred to surround the jail to prevent the return of Moseby, an escaped slave, to bondage. Holmes and Green were shot and buried here, having given their lives to save their brother from slavery.

A slave named Moseby, who, to expedite his escape from Kentucky, had taken his master's horse for the first part of his flight, had reached Niagara and was working for a farmer near the town. His master followed and demanded his return to the United States on the charge of horse-stealing. Some such charge was often trumped up, true or false. Meanwhile, pending the decision of the magistrate, Moseby was lodged in Niagara jail, and the excitement was intense among his black brothers. Messages were sent out in all directions and soon several hundred blacks assembled round the jail, which they guarded for a fortnight or more, to prevent the giving up of the prisoner. Great sympathy was shown by the townspeople, as food and shelter had to be provided. Meanwhile Sir Francis Bond Head, the Governor, gave his consent; constables,

bombardiers, sheriff, all were assembled. the wagon containing the prisoner and guards was driven out, the crowd of blacks, women as well as men, surrounded it, Moseby jumped out, and in some way his handcuffs were freed and he escaped into a cornfield. However, the Riot Act had been read, the order to fire given and the leader of the movement, an educated mulatto teacher and exhorter named Herbert Holmes, was shot, and another, named Green, stabbed. At the inquest the verdict of "homicide, whether justifiable or not," was given after seventeen hours' debate. The papers of the day variously described the event as mob law or a brave deed. The two heroes, for so we must call them, are buried in the Baptist graveyard, but no stone marks their grave. Many were arrested and lodged in jail till, at the breaking out of the Rebellion, a colored company was formed and the black prisoners were allowed to enlist. The colored company did good service under Johnson Clench as captain, whom they adored.

A REAL STORY:

Rev. Peter Carter,
descendant of George Thompson
(co-founder of St. Augustine
"Colored" Church, Buffalo)
and Leonora Berry. (Grandparents).

Leonora was born in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario in 1871. Her mother, Caroline Barry, born in Virginia, was reputed to have been brought out of slavery as a child, when Colonel Peter Servos, an ardent abolishionist, went down there and assisted the family's escape.

On reaching maturity Caroline remained in the Servos household as a cook. She died in the early 1900s. She could have escaped sometime between 1850-1855.

Sixth Stop: St. Catherines.

Route #55 from Niagara-on-the-Lake becomes Route #8. In the process you have gone under the Queen Elizabeth Way and over the Welland Canal. Route #8 is also Queenston Street as you head into St. Catherines. St. Catherines is famous, for the purpose of our trip, with...

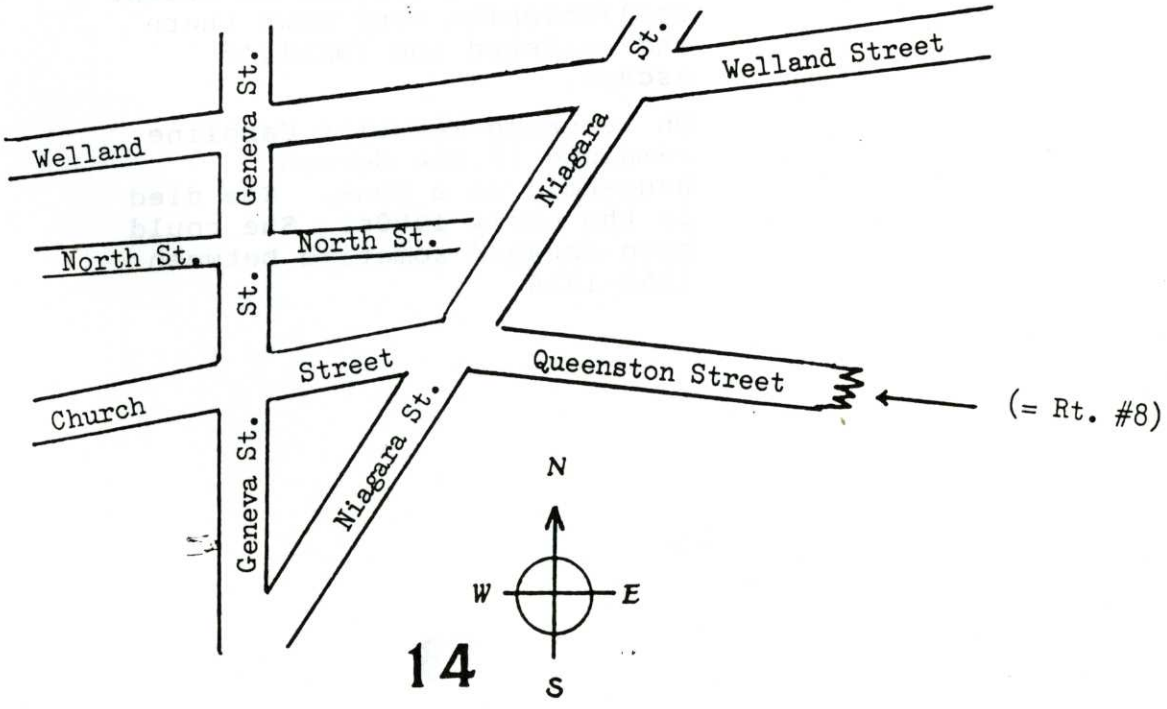
HARRIET TUBMAN

REV. ANTHONY BURNS.

As you enter St. Catherines, you will find large cemeteries on both side of the street. There is a historical marker at the entrance to Victoria Lawn Cemetery - the one on the left:

> In Memoriam
> REV. ANTHONY BURNS
> The fugitive slave of the Boston Riots, 1854
> Pastor of Zion Baptist Church,
> Born in Virginia, May 31, 1834
> Died in the triumph of faith in St. Catherines,
> July 27th, 1862.

Drive on to the downtown area and look for Geneva Street, just after Niagara Street. Stop at North and Geneva Streets at Salem Chapel BME Church.



HARRIET TUBMAN

Harriet Tubman lived in a rented room on Geneva near North Street.*

"Most notable of all 'slave-abductors' was Harriet Tubman, called the 'Black Moses' of her people. She was born a slave about 1820 on a large plantation in Bucktown, Maryland. After her escape about 1848, she made at least 19 trips into the South to guide Blacks to the North. When it became hazardous for runaways to remain there, she made at least 11 more trips to bring more than 300 'charges' to Canada. Most of these rescue forays ended at St. Catherines, at the home of Reverend Hiram Wilson, the leader of the refugee community there.

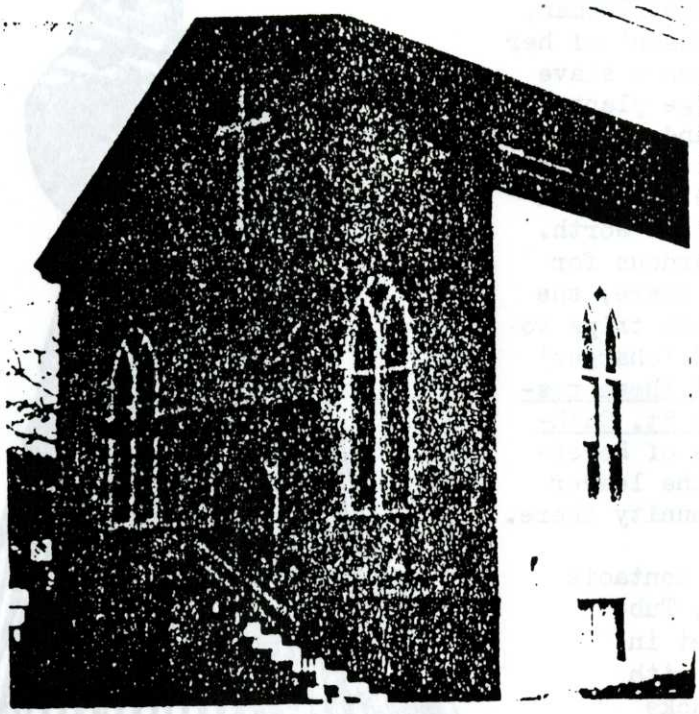
"Working with free contacts and trusted slaves, Tubman arranged to meet in swamps and forests with small groups of Blacks whom she then piloted through Maryland, Delaware, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and on to Canada. She travelled only at night, and her compass was the north star; on cloudy nights she guided herself by the moss growing on the north side of trees. Her parties used disguises while they travelled through the South and fake passes when they reached Northern states...Tubman made Rochester, N.Y. a key stop-over on her trips. There her fugitives received help from the Black emancipator, Frederick Douglass, before they went on to small towns farther upstate. They were hidden in cellars and cubbyholes in Williamston before they were smuggled to the docks of Puttneyville. Captains of lake boats took them from there to Niagara Falls, where they crossed over the suspension bridges to Canada. Government officials evidently looked the other way.

* *Probably it was in the block across the street from Salem Chapel BME Church on Geneve at North.*

"At the height of Tubman's activities, a group of slave-owners put a price of $40,000 on her head. Undaunted, she carried on. Dr. Michael Willis, the principal of Knox College in Toronto and president of the Anti-Slavery Society of Canada raised money for her to make more trips...

"Shortly before the outbreak of the American Civil War Harriet returned to the U.S.A. She joined the Union Army and served as nurse, scout and sky. After she finally retired to Auburn, N.Y., she founded a home for the aged. She died there on March 10, 1913 after a lifetime of courageous service to her people."

("Freedom Seekers, pp. 35-39)



SALEM CHAPEL BME CHURCH, Geneva Street (1855) is on the same street as Zion Baptist Church, where Rev. Anthony Burns ministered. Salem Chapel is still used by a Black congregation and is one of Ontario's earliest known Black congregations.

Zion Baptist Church was built in 1853 and was demolished in 1958. Here Rev. Anthony Burns served from 1860-1862.

REV. ANTHONY BURNS

Before Rev. Anthony Burns came to St. Catherines, he was the center of a famous legal battle in Boston. Burns escaped from Virginia in 1854. He reached Boston, but his master, Colonel Charles Suttler, traced him there and had him arrested. In the "cradle of liberty" news circulated that a Black who sought his liberty might be enslaved again. 2000 people gathered for a mass demonstration and meeting. Then the crowd stormed the courthouse to free Burns, but failed. One person was killed and others injured before artillery troops dispersed them and restored order. The courthouse was surrounded with a chain and guarded by marines and state troopers.

Even with 50,000 people gathered outside, the judge upheld the Fugitive Slave Act and ordered Burns returned to his master in Virginia. The latter sold him to someone in North Carolina. Boston's Twelfth Baptist Church raised the money to buy Burns' freedom. He received the opportunity to attend Overlin College, Ohio in 1855 through a Boston woman's generosity. He finished his studies in 1857.

After an unhappy ministry in Indianapolis, where he experienced local prejudice against free Blacks, He came to St. Catherines. Although he was in poor health, he worked hard serving his church, paid off the debt and won the respect of people in the wider community. His short service ended two years after he came and he is buried in what is now Victoria Park Cemetery.

About 50 years ago, his unmarked grave was discovered and a monument raised in his honor. A historical marker reminds the passerby of this heroic man who lived from 1834-1862.

Return.

You are invited to visit the cemetery by reversing your route into the city and visit Rev. Burns' grave.

ON YOUR WAY HOME TO BUFFALO, you might wish to turn to your right when you reach the Welland Canal. Here one can see Lakers and ocean-going ships from around the world. Black troops were involved in keeping order during the labor troubles when the canal was being built.

Black troops fought with honor on both sides of the American Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the War Between the States and other wars. They also served as peace keepers. In July of 1840, 50 Orangemen celebrating at Duffin's Inn were surrounded by Irish canallers. Shots were fired by both sides. The fracas was quelled by twenty-five Black troopers, but two men were lost their lives and seven other were wounded.

During a strike, unoccupied canallers decided to tangle with the Black troops stationed at Port Robinson. As the crowd marched towards them, the troopers formed a line across the road with their guns loaded and bayonets fixed. It seemed that blood would flow, but the courage of the Black troops and of the canaller's priest, Father MacDonagh changed things. The priest galloped up on his much respected black horse, stopped and drew a line across the dirt road. After telling his parishioners that he would invoke all the Church's penalties against anyone who crossed that line to fight, the priest mounted his horse as the Black troops stood at the ready. Father MacDonagh, love and admired by his canaller parishioners, charged into the Irish crowd with riding crop striking any man he could reach. This action and the sight of the unbending line of troops defused the situation. "Although there was plenty of conflict during this troublesome decade of strikes and fights," one reads in "Freedom Seekers, "the Black soldiers were well behaved, kept their tempers and did not abuse their power."

A TOAST AMONG BLACKS IN 1830:

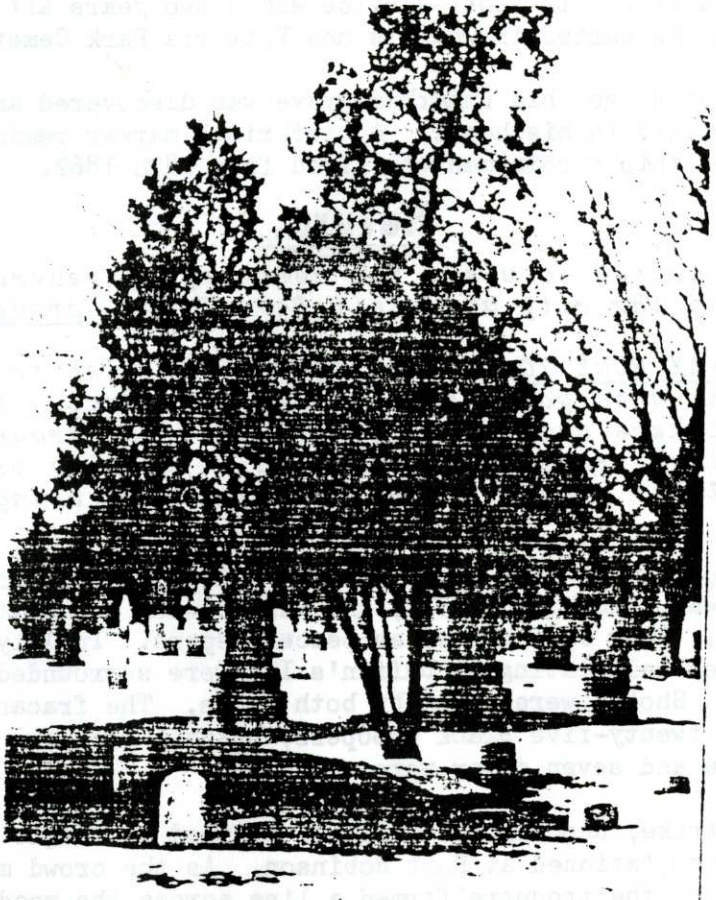
"TO THE KING, CANADA, AND THE UNITED STATES."

After the Civil War (1865), some Blacks crossed the Niagara River again.

THE GRAVE OF

REV. ANTHONY BURNS (1834-1862)

Victoria Lawn Cemetery
St. Catherines, Ontario



The grave of Rev. Anthony Burns (1834-62) at Victoria Lawn Cemetery, St. Catharines.