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### Seven Sites Road to Freedom Tour, Canada

Lillion Batchelor

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ONTARIO GOES "UNDERGROUND" TO LAUNCH  
BLACK HISTORICAL TOUR PROGRAM

WINDSOR, Nov. 8, 1991 -- The Government of Ontario, in cooperation with various tourism partners, has launched a historical tour of early Black settlements in southwestern Ontario. This unique tour is aimed at promoting the achievements and contributions of early Black settlers in Ontario.

Windsor-Sandwich MPP George Dadamo officially launched the Road to Freedom tour today on behalf of Ontario Minister of Tourism and Recreation Peter North.

"Canada was the land of freedom for many refugee American slaves," Mr. Dadamo said today at Willistead Manor. "This tour will chronicle their history as they made their way to Ontario via the Underground Railroad."

About 40,000 Blacks fled to Canada between 1800 and 1862, escaping slavery in the United States. Most used the Underground Railroad, a clandestine network of safe houses and abolitionists who hid and guided slaves as they followed the North Star to Canada -- and freedom. After the Civil War, about half of them returned to the U.S. By the late 1830's, those who stayed helped establish many permanent settlements throughout southern Ontario.

Seven sites are featured on the heritage tour, including the North American Black Historical Museum in Amherstburg, the John Freeman Walls Historic Site in Puce, Uncle Tom's Cabin in Dresden and the Raleigh Township Centennial Museum in North Buxton. Three churches make up the rest of the tour. These include the First Baptist Church and the Sandwich Baptist Church, both in Windsor and the First Baptist Church in Chatham.



Mr. North said the tour should significantly boost tourism traffic in southwestern Ontario and encourage more day trips by American and Canadian visitors. Tourism revenues to the region in the first year of this tour program are expected to exceed \$2 million.

"Blacks in North America are very interested in their history and this tour gives them a chance to experience life as it was for these courageous people who underwent tremendous sacrifice in order to come to and start a new life in Ontario," said Mr. North.

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## HERE ARE BRIEF PROFILES OF THE SEVEN SITES ON THE ROAD TO FREEDOM TOUR PROGRAM

### THE NORTH AMERICAN BLACK HISTORICAL MUSEUM AND CULTURAL CENTRE 277 King St., AMHERSTBURG (519) 736-5433

Many slaves came to Amherstburg by way of the Detroit River, because it was the narrowest point in the river. The museum chronicles their sometimes perilous journey to freedom.

In the summer, many fugitives swam the river with their few belongings tied to their backs. In the winter, many saw snow and ice for the first time and crossed with great difficulty.

The complex, which includes the Nazrey A.M.E. Church and a log cabin of the same period, is situated in the midst of the original Black settlement in Amherstburg. Built in 1848, the Nazrey A.M.E. Church is one of the oldest Black churches still standing in Canada.

The Cultural Centre also features a permanent exhibit on the Underground Railroad.

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### THE JOHN FREEMAN WALLS HISTORIC SITE Puce Road, PUCE (519) 977-1588

The cabin on this site was built in 1846 by John Freeman Walls, a fugitive slave from North Carolina, and his wife Jane King Walls.

Along with Amherstburg and North Buxton, this site was one of the final stops on the Underground Railroad.

John Freeman Walls was a skilled carpenter. On land purchased from the Refugee Home Society, an abolitionist organization which sold government land to fugitive slaves, Walls built a log cabin on a foundation of four rocks. The settlement grew in popularity; at one time 70 families lived there.

At this site, Underground Railroad conductors take their passengers back in time. Visitors begin their journey in Africa, cross the Atlantic Ocean and travel through the slave states to freedom.

The story of the Walls' journey is recorded in the book *The Road that Led to Somewhere* by Dr. Bryan Walls.



**UNCLE TOM'S CABIN HISTORIC SITE**  
**Kent County Road 40, DRESDEN**  
**(519) 683-2978**

The experiences of Josiah Henson, a fugitive slave from Maryland, formed the basis of Harriet Beecher Stowe's famous book, "Uncle Tom's Cabin." First published in March 1852, the novel told the story of an escaped slave's life in the U.S. and Canada.

The book was an immediate success, selling more than 300,000 copies first year. At the time, Uncle Tom's Cabin was a best-seller, second only to the Bible.

The Dresden site includes the original "cabin," five other historical sites and Henson's gravesite.

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**RALEIGH TOWNSHIP CENTENNIAL MUSEUM**  
**County Road No. 6, NORTH BUXTON**  
**(519) 354-8693**

Founded in 1849, the Elgin Settlement is one of the oldest Black settlements in Ontario. Under the guidance and supervision of Rev. William King, this settlement flourished, becoming a self-sufficient community of some 1,500 people.

Its first school, the Buxton Mission School, was the best school in the area, attracting families from throughout the region.

Now known as Buxton, the Elgin Settlement is one of the few Black Canadian settlements still in existence in Ontario.

The Raleigh Township Centennial Museum includes a museum of Black history, library, cultural room and video room.



**FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH**  
135 King St. East, CHATHAM  
(519) 352-9553

It was at this church where famous abolitionist John Brown drew up his constitutional plans to end American slavery by starting an insurrection, Oct. 1859, at Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. Brown's coup was unsuccessful and he and many members of his band were brought to trial and executed. Brown was later vindicated when President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in 1862.

The table where Brown and his associates met in Chatham is still on display at this church.

The church itself was founded in 1841 by refugee slaves from the United States. Two years later, with a membership of 19, the church entered the Amherstburg Baptist Association under the pastorate of Elder White. It was one of five churches comprising the Association.

**SANDWICH BAPTIST CHURCH**  
3652 Peter St., WINDSOR  
(519) 252-4917

Built by freed slaves around 1821, the church is one of the oldest in the City of Windsor.

The building was built after the Deacons received a land grant from Queen Victoria. The original entryway was a gabled porch, while the present entry was added in 1912. The battlements of the tower reflect the Gothic Revival influence which is in keeping with the Gothic overtones of the main body of the church.

**FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH**  
232 George St., AMHERSTBURG  
(519) 736-4646

The First Baptist Church of Amherstburg was one of the final stations on the Underground Railroad. Built in 1836, the church celebrates its 155th anniversary this year.

The church is known as the "Mother Church" of the Amherstburg Baptist Association, for its role in forming the Association in 1841. By the late 1850's, the church had the largest congregation in the Association, which included churches as far east as Niagara Falls, N.Y., and as far west as Battle Creek, Michigan.



