

Archival Sources Treasures from Ontario's Archives

Volume 99, Number 1, Spring 2007

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1065800ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065800ar>

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Publisher(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (print)

2371-4654 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this document

(2007). Archival Sources: Treasures from Ontario's Archives. *Ontario History*, 99(1), 107–113. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065800ar>

Archival Sources

Treasures from Ontario's Archives

E. Andrea Moore Heritage Room

A new archival repository in Windsor, Ontario, the E. Andrea Moore Heritage Room within the Northstar Cultural Community Centre, houses small, but significant collections relating to history of the local Black community. The Heritage Room has primary interest in records relating to the "McDougall Street Corridor Neighbourhood," an area which is home to a significant number of Black families. Two

collections of note are the British Methodist Episcopal [BME] Church fonds and the Emancipation Day Celebrations fonds, which were donated by Irene Moore, the daughter of the woman after whom the room is named. While

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Records relating to the residents, past and present, of the McDougall Street Corridor Neighbourhood in Windsor and to Black history throughout the city.



Emancipation Celebration Parade on Ouellette Avenue at Giles Boulevard, Windsor, c.1950. Courtesy of the Northstar Cultural Community Centre.



"Late Night Snack": Emancipation Celebration festivities at Jackson Park, Windsor, c.1944. Courtesy Northstar Cultural Community Centre.

neither collection is processed at the time of writing, it is anticipated that they will be ready for researchers in the spring of 2007.

British Methodist Episcopal Church fonds

The British Methodist Episcopal Church fonds traces the establishment of the BME congregation in Windsor. The BME Church officially started in Canada in 1856, however there is an indication of local activity as early as 1852. For African Canadians who had just arrived via the Underground Railroad, the church was not merely a house of worship but also typically the social, political and cultural core of the community.

Little early documentation remains except for members' rolls [1894, 1903, 1905, 1935] and some editions of *The Discipline*, including a rare 1873 edition for the breakaway Independent Methodist Episcopal Church started by the Rev-

Church became the preferred Church among the Episcopal population.

Many of the records deal with the razing of the old and the building of the new church during the city's period of core redevelopment in the 1960s and into the 1970s. There are also local congregation histories as well as photographs offering good documentation of the destroyed McDougall Street church. The latest records are from the 1980s, and deal with the annual BME Conference. It is estimated that the fonds will be approximately two linear feet.

Emancipation Day Celebrations fonds

The Emancipation Day Celebrations fonds document the efforts of Walter Perry, known as "Mr. Emancipation" and the British-American Association of Coloured Brothers of Ontario. According to the 1948 programme:

erend A.R. Green. Unfortunately for Green, there was insufficient momentum to sustain the movement, and the BME

in 1935, a group of forward-thinking colored men and women of Detroit and Windsor met whose sole purpose was to plan an Emancipation Celebration which would be a credit to the race. It would be, they decided, an event to which both colored and white would be welcome in brotherhood. And it was fitting that Windsor was selected as the site of this annual event since it was here the slave found Freedom.

The celebration grew into a major annual international cross-racial event, featuring carnivals, parades, beauty pageants, concerts, and keynote addresses by such notables as Mary McLeod Bethune, Julian Bond, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt and Martin Luther King, Jr. The collection, comprised of approximately 240 photographs, annual celebratory programmes, letters patent, minutes and by-laws, clippings and correspondence, ranges in date from around 1937 to 1983.

The E. Andrea Moore Heritage Room was established by the Northstar Cultural Community Centre in July of 2006 in order to collect, preserve and make available for research archival and support material relating to Windsor's Black history and culture.

For more information, contact Mrs. Nancy Allen at the Northstar Cultural Community Centre.

Sources for Black History at the Archives of Ontario

In conducting research relating to Black history at the Archives of Ontario, researchers may find relevant materials amongst private, published, or government sources. Some of the richest and most easily identifiable sources for Black history at the Archives of Ontario are those of private individuals and organizations, including Alvin D. McCurdy and Dr. Daniel Hill.

A carpenter by trade, McCurdy also became an historian through a strong interest in his family and community roots. He amassed a large collection of photographs and papers (now the Alvin D. McCurdy Collection, F 2076), which document the Black experience in Ontario, mainly from the mid-19th century to the 1980s, with an emphasis on the Windsor area. The photographs include several hundred images, ranging from studio portraits to depictions of workers, social activities, school groups, church groups and more. The papers were collected from many community members, covering areas such as education, religion, legal rights, family history, and business to form the largest single source of Black documentation in North America.

The Daniel Hill fonds (F 2130) contains papers and photographs relating to Dr. Hill (1923-2003), who was a noted Black sociologist as well as

Ontario's first Human Rights Commissioner and the father of singer Dan Hill.

The Multicultural History Society of Ontario fonds (F 1405) includes approximately 200 photographs relating to Black history. They include depictions of family life, military service, religious life (especially the African Methodist Episcopal Church) and work on the Canadian Pacific Railway. Issues relating to Black Ontarians are sometimes mentioned in the papers of historical figures who held positions of influence such as Anglican Bishop John Strachan (F 983). These passages, though fleeting, are interesting for the insights they provide into views of the period.

For the convenience of researchers, material from elsewhere such as certain personal papers of Mary Ann Shadd (F 1409) and Shadd's newspaper, *The Provincial Freeman* (1853-1857), are available on microfilm. Early editions of other newspapers such as the *Globe* are also available

Unidentified woman, circa 1890 (tintype). AO F 2076-16-4-7, I0024789, Alvin D. McCurdy fonds

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Records created by the government of Ontario and its predecessors, and records from the private sector including individuals, businesses, clubs and associations, and labour and political organizations.

for consultation on microfilm.

In addition, a range of other items can be found in the Archives' pamphlet collection by searching the Biblion database (available on the Archives' website) which covers published material. Specifically, while it may be more challenging to locate records documenting the Black expe-



rience in government records, the lives and history of some of the province's earliest Black settlers can be found in the records of a variety of government ministries.

Legal cases relating to the rights of Black Ontarians can be found amongst the Archives' court records (RG 22), including case files and judges' benchbooks. In order to search for the records, one needs to know the level of court, when and usually where the trial took place, as well as the name of the plaintiff and/or defendant. In

the area of education, some school inspectors' reports cover schools with Black pupils (RG 2-16, RG 2-17), and the Department of Education incoming general correspondence (RG 2-

12) contains correspondence of Egerton Ryerson regarding the issue of segregated schooling for Black children. These are just two areas in which the lives of Black people were documented in

however, a certain amount of background knowledge on the topic is helpful. The key lies in discerning which government departments/ministries are most likely to have interacted with the persons in question at

a given point. Archives staff may be able to offer advice once initial background research has been done. Details of many of the above-mentioned materials, including both private and government records, can be found by searching the Archives Descriptive Database located on the Archives



Children in front of the Marble Village Coloured School, c.1900. AO F 2076-16-5-2, 10024783, Alvin D. McCurdy fonds. Black Ontarians banded together to create their own schools while, at the same time, challenging their exclusion from the public schools.

government records. Other government record groups also contain information for those who are willing to invest some time and energy into pursuing a particular topic,

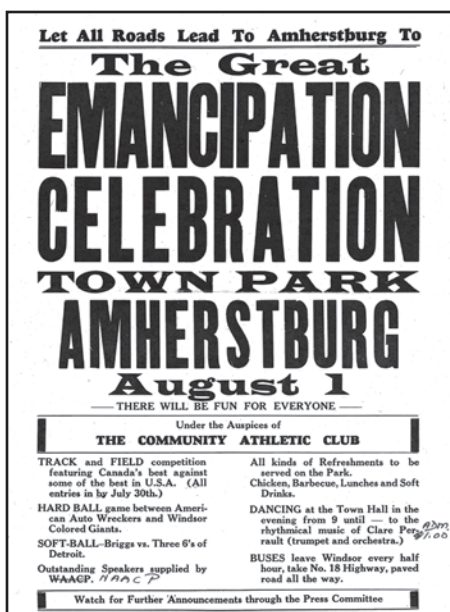
website.

Further details on a given individual can also be traced using standard tools such as vital statistics records (birth, death, marriage). If property was known to be involved, land records and estate files may also be worthwhile sources. Special guides to these popular records may be found on the Archives website.

Researchers may also wish to view two online exhibits: *Images of Black His-*



Students of King Street School in Amherstburg, with their teacher, J. H. Alexander, [ca. 1890s]. AO F 2076-16-7-4, I0027815, Alvin D. McCurdy fonds



tory: *Exploring the Alvin McCurdy Collection and Black History in Ontario*, which contain additional information and examples of photographs and documents from the Archives' collections.

As the Archives seeks to expand its holdings in this area, those interested in donating original material relating to Black history in Ontario are encour-

aged to contact the Archives of Ontario.

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Hill, Daniel G. *The Freedom-Seekers: Blacks in Early Canada*. Agincourt: The Book Society of Canada, 1981.

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Transatlantic Slave Trade

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Ghana was one of the earliest areas on the African continent to get involved with the slave trade. Known as the Gold Coast, Ivory Coast, and Slave Coast when the slave trade was at its peak, slaves actually replaced gold as the most important commodity.

When European countries set sail for Africa to capture slaves for profit, some of the African tribes sold their captives of war and their criminals to the Europeans. Soon the Europeans were building forts and castles to house the captured slaves until the slave ships arrived to purchase and transport

the slaves across the Atlantic. The history of the slave castles in Ghana is very significant because of their numbers. A few were quite notorious, such as the Elmina and Cape Coast castles.

The persons who survived the crossing from Africa to the Americans were strong, both mentally and physically. One such person was Charles Jones, who arrived in the United States on one of those slave ships. Charles Jones was sold to a plantation owner who lived in the vicinity of Raleigh, North Carolina. It was on this plantation that Charles had a son,

Allen Jones, in 1794.

When Allen grew older, he was trained by his master to be a blacksmith and gunsmith. Allen eventually married a slave named Temperance and they started a family. Allen purchased his family's freedom. Having built schools with other free blacks, only to have them razed by arson, Allen Jones believed it was time to leave the south. They relocated to Oberlin, Ohio, because, since 1833, its college began to admit Blacks.

Prior to the Civil War, Allen Jones witnessed the graduation of four of his five

sons from Oberlin College. One of them, James Monroe Jones, moved to Chatham, Ontario, in 1849. He established his business on Head Street as a highly skilled gunsmith and engraver. He was also an early Justice of the Peace in Chatham.

This family was very much a part of what was happening in Chatham during the 1850s. James and his wife Emily Francis encouraged their children to appreciate the value of a good education. Their daughter Sophia was born in Chatham in 1857 and became a medical doctor, graduating from the University of Michigan in 1885.

This story is representative of some of the early Black citizens who survived the transatlantic slave trade to triumph over bondage, acquire freedom and build prosperous, successful lives.

In its Heritage Room, the Chatham-Kent Black Historical Society maintains files on the Jones family, as well as many other Black families and individuals who made Chatham home. In addition to continuing this valuable research, the Society houses an exhibit entitled *Black Mecca: The Story of Chatham's Black Community*, which opened January 2005. This exhibit features local

artifacts and three audio-interactive life-size figures of importance to Chatham history. Visitors can also view a video presentation and hear a talk, by special request, given by local historian and author Gwendolyn Robinson. Our annual John Brown Seminar in early May attracts guests and participants from across North America. Opened in 1996, the Heritage Room also boasts a growing library of primary and secondary resources, including census, land registry and military records, original photographs and newspaper articles. We hope to see you there!

Grey County Black History

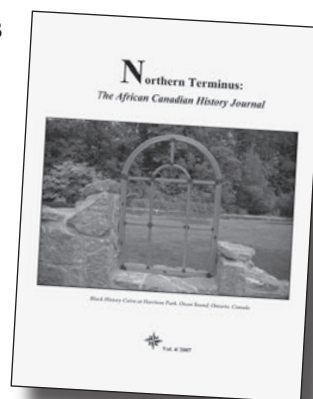
Grey Roots Museum & Archives

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For the past six years in April, a gathering to celebrate Black History has been held in the Town of Durham, Grey County: The Grey County Black History Event. We focus on the Underground Railroad in particular and look to represent Grey County Black Heritage in some regard at each Event.

The Event Committee is also a proud supporter of *Northern Terminus: The African Canadian History Journal*, which is published by

the Archives at Grey Roots Museum & Archives. We are currently beginning work on our fifth volume. The goal of this annual journal is to provide readers with information about the historical Black community of Grey County. The focus is on historical events and people, and the wider national and international contexts that shaped Black history and presence in Grey County. Through essays, interviews and reviews, the journal highlights the work of area organizations, histori-



ans and published authors. For more information, please visit www.greyroots.com/collections-research/archives/northern-terminus.

Karin Foster, Archivist

Uncle Tom's Cabin Historic Site

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The Ontario Heritage Trust's Uncle Tom's Cabin Historic Site celebrates the achievements of Reverend Josiah Henson – an important community leader, author, preacher and a 'conductor' on the Underground Railroad who worked with energy and vision to improve life for the Black community in Canada.

Uncle Tom's Cabin Historic Site is owned and operated by the Ontario Heritage Trust, an agency of the government of Ontario dedicated

to identifying, preserving, protecting and promoting Ontario's historic sites. Last year, Uncle Tom's Cabin Historic Site worked with Dr. Afua Cooper, Dr. Karolyn Smardz Frost and Ms. Adrienne Shadd – leading historians in the field of black history – to develop a new exhibit on Josiah Henson and the Dawn Settlement called "I'll Use My Freedom Well."

The 200th anniversary of the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade has provided exciting opportunities for Uncle

Tom's Cabin Historic Site to build on this important work. With support of the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, the site is pleased to be undertaking a number of exciting commemorative projects to mark this important anniversary that will be announced throughout the year.

Uncle Tom's Cabin Historic Site is open to the general public annually from Victoria Day until the end of October. Group tours are welcome year round.

The Harriet Tubman Institute for Research on the Global Migrations of African Peoples York University, Toronto

The Harriet Tubman Institute for Research on the Global Migrations of African Peoples at York University is involved in various projects that are important in the reconstruction of the history of people of African descent in Canada. The Institute is concerned with the movement of people of African descent to the Maritimes and to Upper Canada in the early period of British occupation, the history of the Underground Railroad

and the abolition movement in Canada, and the links between Upper Canada, the Maritimes, and the Caribbean in the nineteenth century.

The Institute collaborates with the Buxton Historic Site and Museum and institutions in the United States, the Caribbean, Central America and elsewhere on Canadian-centred and other projects.

The Tubman Institute, which Governor General Michaëlle Jean formally inau-

gurated on 25 March 2007, the bicentennial of the enactment of the British law

to abolish the slave trade, incorporates the Harriet Tubman Resource Centre on the African Diaspora and is associated with the Canada Research Chair in African Diaspora History, held by Distinguished Research Professor Paul E. Lovejoy.

