

The Journey From Tollgate to Parkway: African Canadians in Hamilton By Adrienne Shadd

Kate Clifford Larson

Volume 104, Number 2, Fall 2012

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1065445ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065445ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (print)

2371-4654 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Clifford Larson, K. (2012). Review of [*The Journey From Tollgate to Parkway: African Canadians in Hamilton* By Adrienne Shadd]. *Ontario History*, 104(2), 161–163. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065445ar>

appeal will largely be to those who have never visited the region or read anything about it. For that, the availability of such a book makes it a success and a good entry into the ever-increasing amount of material being written about Ontario's largest

region and, both historically and today, most important.

Michel S. Beaulieu

Department of History and Centre for Northern Studies, Lakehead University

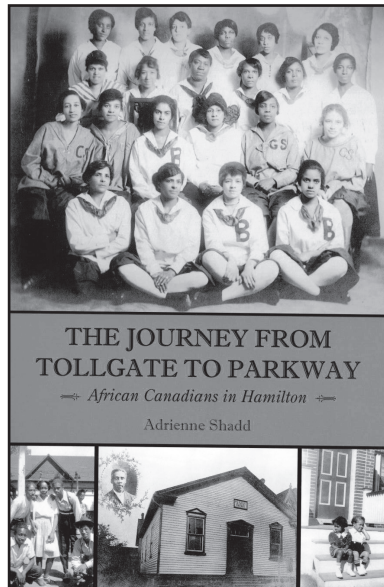
The Journey From Tollgate to Parkway: African Canadians in Hamilton

By Adrienne Shadd

Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2010. 368 pages. \$35.00 softcover. ISBN 978-1-55488-394-3. (www.dundurn.com)

In this book, historian Adrienne Shadd presents a comprehensive history of the Black experience in the Hamilton-Wentworth region. Rich in detail, peppered with real stories of long forgotten people, events, and places, Shadd has written an engaging and much needed history. Set in the larger context of Canadian history, *The Journey From Tollgate to Parkway* takes us from early Black settlement during the rise and fall of slavery, to its years as a thriving and expanding community filled with individuals who made history but who have, until now, been forgotten. Thanks to Shadd's extraordinary research, these long forgotten community and national heroes of colour, who individually and collectively shaped Afro-Canadian culture locally and nationally, are now restored to their rightful place at the center of a story of community and nation building.

Black Hamiltonians fought for free-



dom, equality, justice, and self-determination. Known as Head of the Lake in its infancy, Hamilton served as a settlement place for free Blacks who established homes and businesses there well over two hundred years ago. Later, these pioneer settlers would be joined by freedom seekers fleeing slavery and discrimination in the United States. Their stories reveal complex experiences intertwined with themes of freedom and servitude,

family and community, church and work, equality and discrimination, over two centuries of persistent settlement.

One of Shadd's strong points is her effective framing of this community's history within the context of the institution of slavery in Canada, the nation's ultimate disengagement with it, and generations of struggle to garner equality for all people of color into the twenty-first century. According to Shadd, Hamilton was not only a ha-

ven and a place of opportunity for people of colour, but it is where people of African descent established permanent “community infrastructure, bold leadership, and a solid record of political and anti-slavery activism, and racial uplift work...” This is a remarkable journey of perseverance, endurance, and tenacity.

Shadd provides us with not only rich local and regional history, but she places it all within the larger North American context. No one individual or community lives in isolation—they are influenced by the world around them, and in turn, their actions have an impact beyond their own lives and communities. Shadd demonstrates this frequently, linking together the regional, national, and international forces that shaped this community’s founding and expansion, and its struggles and long journey to freedom, independence, self-determination, and civil rights. She weaves together the stories of the tenacious pursuit of education, economic viability and sustainability, religious fulfillment, personal freedom and political power. These are themes that all readers will recognize.

Digging through stacks of newspaper accounts, personal papers, diaries, journals, census records, deeds, wills, court and civil records, and more, Shadd uncovers the mundane and the radical. Teasing out the stories of individual action and community engagement and achievements, Shadd builds a deep and inclusive narrative that provides new insight on the story of Black Canadians’ struggles for inclusion as full members of society. These local historical characters and their actions are vital pieces of the nation’s long struggles to recognize African-Canadians as full citizens.

The story of the demise of Canadian slavery, contrasted with the expansion of the institution in the Americas, underscores a main theme of the book. Once slav-

ery was outlawed, a remarkable migration, spanning decades, of formerly enslaved people from the United States helped reshape Black Canada. Writing broadly of the Underground Railroad that carried and then protected fugitive slaves fleeing America, and then more narrowly on the local level, Shadd brings to life some very exciting and tantalizing stories of courage, persistence, pain and joy. She documents the success and failures of newly arrived slaves, some of whom struggled to endure, but many of whom successfully built or rented homes, sent their children to school, and shared in freedoms unknown to them in slavery in the United States. By 1861, on the eve of the American Civil War, nearly half of Hamilton’s black residents had been born in the United States. Acknowledging that residents were diverse in background, culture, skills, and more, Shadd documents the variety of professional and skilled credentials some community members held, as well as semi- and unskilled jobs held by the rest. This brings to life a vibrant and well-established community, founded upon hard work, economic advancement, and engagement with the world around them.

Afro-Canadians and African Americans shared similar fates—they struggled through, survived, and ultimately triumphed over slavery, segregation and discrimination before and after the American Civil War. They shared in the experiences of political, social, and economic inequity that denied them equality and the full enjoyment of citizenship well into the twentieth century. The last half of *The Journey From Tollgate* carries the reader through the Jim Crow era—a nadir of discrimination, injustice, and segregation—two world wars, and the fierce Civil Rights movement. The book ends with biographies of local, contemporary activists whose struggles continue in the name of social justice,

health equity, arts and education, immigration, human rights, historic preservation, and the list goes on and on.

I have two very minor complaints. Some of Shadd's remarkable detail would be better placed in chapter notes. The desire to include much of it in the narrative is tempting, of course, especially with such significant new research just begging to be shared. Sometimes, however, the detail overwhelms Shadd's fine narrative. Additionally, Shadd sometimes seems unsure of her conclusions. She has earned her authority, however, in this field. Where she is tentative in her conclusions, she should have the confidence that her documentation does indeed support statements of fact, and that her conclusions are well measured and amply sustained. A seasoned scholar, she no longer needs to qualify her statements. She is the expert and she knows her stuff.

Shadd truly takes us on a *Journey*—a

remarkable journey filled with fascinating characters whose lives are intricately linked to the history of Hamilton and Canada. Her dogged research and relentless pursuit of long forgotten histories is a model for other communities and community historians. The history is there in every community, just waiting to be uncovered and told. Histories like this add to the diverse richness of a national narrative that has long overlooked the contributions of these Afro-Canadians.

Kate Clifford Larson

Department of History, Simmons College,
Boston

Consulting Historian and Curator, *Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad State Park and Visitor Center*, and the *Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Byway and All American Road*. Eastern Shore, Maryland.

Rebels on the Great Lakes Confederate Naval Operations Launched from Canada 1863-1864

By John Bell

Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2011. 288 pages. \$27.99 soft-cover. ISBN 978-1-55488-986-0 (www.dundurn.com)

John Bell, a former senior archivist at Library and Archives Canada, has produced a welcomed addition to a neglected area of Canadian history with his account of clandestine Confederate Navy commando operations on the Great Lakes in 1863-1864. C.P. Stacey once claimed that the American Civil War was one of Canada's greatest historical events when he wrote in *Canada and the British Army*, "To consider the history of Canada apart from that of the United States of America is not

