

# COMMUNITY HERITAGE ONTARIO



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Canada's 2022 theme for Black History Month is  
**February and Forever:**  
**Celebrating Black History Today and Every Day**

Since 1996, the government of Canada's annual Black History Month campaign encourages all Canadians to learn more about Black history in Canada. As we celebrate Black History Month 2022 in Ontario, let us ALL remember the incredible influence that people of African descent have left – and continue to leave – on the cultural fabric of our country. Their early history and important legacy continues to be seen and felt in many Ontario communities.

# Colonial Canada Permitted Slavery

- Many African people were enslaved in the territories now known as Canada.
- Between 1749 and 1782, most of the Black Canadians brought to Nova Scotia had been enslaved by English or American settlers.
- Some Black people were brought to Upper Canada (now Ontario) as slaves of Loyalists who settled along the Detroit, Niagara and St. Lawrence Rivers.
- In 1793, Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada John Graves Simcoe introduced a law to free enslaved people aged 25 and over and to make it illegal to bring enslaved people into Upper Canada. Although this Act did not free all existing slaves, it contributed greatly to a decline of African enslavement in Canada.
- In 1815, freed Black veterans of the War of 1812 received grants of land in Oro Township. Unfortunately, much of the land was not suited to agriculture.
- In 1819, Attorney General John Beverley Robinson issued an order that freed all Black people living in Upper Canada.
- In 1833, slavery was abolished throughout the British Empire.

**All those who fought enslavement helped establish a more diverse and inclusive society.**

# Black Pioneers in Upper Canada

In 1850, the US passed legislation to make it easier to catch escaped slaves. When slave catchers began hunting in Northern “free” states, many Black refugees escaped to Colonial Canada.

Upper Canada became a destination for Blacks seeking freedom, and an important base for the abolitionist movement.

Along with Black Loyalists who arrived in Ontario following the American revolution, refugees from slavery established new lives in enduring Black communities and contributed to the overall defence and development of the province.

These pioneers often faced hardship and discrimination in their new homes.



(Archives of Ontario)

Free Black family in front of home in Ontario

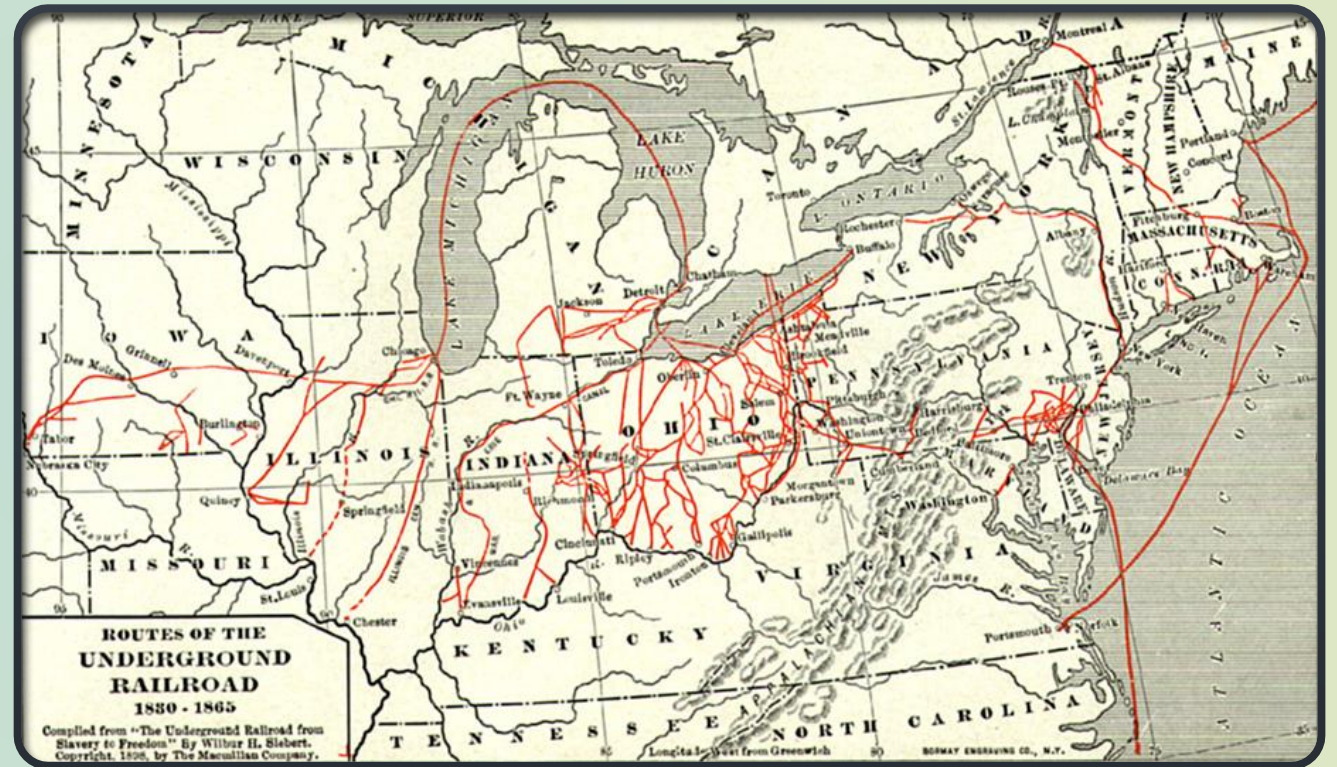
## The Underground Railroad

Between 1800 and 1865, and particularly after 1850, approximately 30,000 Black refugees came to Upper Canada via the **Underground Railroad** – the network of secret routes and safe houses used by enslaved Africans to escape into free American states and Canada with the support of abolitionists.

Upon arriving in Ontario, many newly freed Blacks settled in Amherstburg, Chatham, London, Oro, Woolwich and Windsor. Others crossed the Great Lakes to freedom and made their homes in Owen Sound, Collingwood and Toronto. Ontario has 18 different Underground Railroad heritage sites.

By the 20th century, many of these Black communities had founded organizations and institutions that fostered their unique African Canadian identities, especially as discriminatory policies were gradually abolished or reformed.

The following pages highlight **seven key sites** with conserved built heritage demonstrating aspects of life in many early Black settlements.



For Links to the sources for the introductory pages please see page 16

# Amherstburg First Baptist Church, Amherstburg, Ontario

**Built: 1848/1849 - Federal Heritage Site: 2011**

**Amherstburg First Baptist Church** has a predominantly Black congregation from in and around Amherstburg, Ontario.

It is representative of the once more numerous churches in border towns and villages built by Black congregations to accommodate the growing communities created by refugees arriving via the Underground Railroad.

These churches and congregations offered sanctuary to African Americans fleeing slavery and oppression. Upon arrival the refugees found that the church offered itself as an interim resting place until permanent housing could be found. The church also could serve as a school to educate those who had been denied that privilege, as well as function as a social centre where numerous everyday skills could be taught.

Often under the leadership of an escaped slave and/or abolitionist, the churches supported the development of other Black communities and provided leadership roles for African Canadians at a time when such opportunities were rare.





Source: Parks Canada. Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, Minutes, July 2011.  
[https://www.pc.gc.ca/apps/dfhd/page\\_nhs\\_eng.aspx?id=13291](https://www.pc.gc.ca/apps/dfhd/page_nhs_eng.aspx?id=13291)

The simple massing and modest scale of First Baptist Church are typical of the churches built by Black settlers and other Protestant groups. The churches were designed so that the entire congregation could see and hear the preacher. This simple, uncluttered auditory-hall form of the interior is a feature of many of the churches established by communities linked to the Underground Railroad in Canada.

Other common elements include, timber-frame construction, often by hand, rectangular floor plan, pointed windows and gable roof.

Other key elements that contribute to the heritage value of this church include: the setting within an older neighbourhood of Amherstburg; the timber-frame construction covered with wood siding; and the angled barrel-vaulted wooden ceiling.

# Nazrey African Methodist Episcopal Church

## Amherstburg Freedom Museum

### Amherstburg, Ontario

**Amherstburg Freedom Museum:** Initially Black settlement in Amherstburg was popular due to proximity to the American border. The Amherstburg Freedom Museum gives a fascinating look at the early community, and includes the museum, the Episcopal Church and a log cabin home.

**The Nazrey African Methodist Episcopal Church** was another terminus of the Underground Railroad (UGRR), built by hand to serve Amherstburg's growing Black community. Bishop Willis Nazrey was the first leader of the British Methodist Episcopal Church, a denomination established by UGRR refugees, a wholly Canadian denomination with allegiance to their new homeland. This Church demonstrates the importance of churches for the freedom seekers. Not only was it used to worship, but it offered a learning space for people denied an education south of the border.

**The Taylor Log Cabin** is an example of the living spaces built by early Black settlers.

Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, Minutes, Dec. 1998

<https://www.historicplaces.ca/en/rep-reg/place-lieu.aspx?id=6054> Amherstburg Freedom Museum: <https://amherstburgfreedom.org/about-the-museum>

**Built: 1848 - National Historic Site: 1999.** The Church is a vernacular stone chapel descended from an early Methodist congregation established in 1826. Key elements that contribute to the heritage value of this site include: its location in a historic section of Amherstburg; its timber and limestone rubble construction; its open auditory hall plan. The denomination flourished until the late 20th century when many dwindling congregations consolidated and reunited. The Church is now managed as part of the Amherstburg Freedom Museum.





# Buxton National Historic Site and Museum North Buxton, Ontario



**The Buxton National Historic Site and Museum built 1849** is a hugely important site in North American Black history. The museum is a tribute to the **Elgin Settlement**, the largest and most successful settlement of Black refugees in Ontario, established by Rev. William King and a non-government association which included then Governor-General Lord Elgin.

King, a former slave owner turned abolitionist, bought 9,000 acres (36 km<sup>2</sup>) of crown land in Southwestern Ontario and created a haven for fugitive slaves and free Black people.

He brought fifteen of his former slaves with him to where they could live a free life. The Elgin Settlement was divided into 50-acre (200,000 m<sup>2</sup>) lots. These sold for \$2.50/acre, with six percent interest, and could be paid over the course of ten years.

**The Elgin Settlement**, also known as Buxton, was one of four organized black settlements developed in Canada.

When news of the Elgin settlement spread, White settlers became worried and attempted to block its development with a petition. Regardless of this sentiment, plans for the settlement went ahead.

For many fugitive slaves, the Buxton settlement was their final stop on the Underground Railroad journey from the United States. William King believed that Black people could function successfully in a working society if given the same educational opportunities as White children. The building of a school and church in the settlement was a priority for him. By the 1860s, at least 2,000 people lived there, and the settlement had gained a reputation for the superior education provided to its students at the local school.

African Canadians established farms, performed manual labour, and founded businesses, including blacksmith shops, livery stables, carpentry businesses, grocery stores, boutiques, and pharmacies. They developed communities with schools, churches, newspapers, and benevolent societies.

Opened in 1967, **The Buxton Museum** is one of Ontario's largest national historic sites. The museum complex includes the main building, with exhibits about the community and its history, an 1861 schoolhouse, an 1854 log cabin, and a barn. Local historic church cemeteries are next to the museum. The museum is in North Buxton, Chatham-Kent, Ontario.

Buxton Museum: <http://www.buxtonmuseum.com/history/virtual.html> Trans Canada Trail:

<https://tctrail.ca/stories/5-canadian-heritage-sites-to-visit-during-black-history-month/>

Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buxton\\_National\\_Historic\\_Site\\_and\\_Museum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buxton_National_Historic_Site_and_Museum)

Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black\\_Canadians\\_in\\_Ontario#Settlements](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Canadians_in_Ontario#Settlements)

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# FUGITIVE SLAVES IN CANADA.

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## THE ELGIN SETTLEMENT.

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THERE WILL BE A PUBLIC MEETING IN  
**FREE SOUTH LEITH CHURCH,**  
ON  
THURSDAY EVENING NEXT, AT 7 O'CLOCK,  
TO HEAR STATEMENTS FROM  
**THE REV. WILLIAM KING,**  
formerly a Slave Owner in Louisiana, United States, and  
**WILLIAM H. DAY, ESQ. M.A.,**  
A Deputation from Canada, whither the Thirty Thousand have fled, escaping  
from American Slavery.

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The Rev. WILLIAM KING liberated his own Slaves, and in this respect  
is mentioned in Mrs Harriet Beecher Stowe's work, "Dred," as "Clayton."  
As this is a work of general benevolence—simply to give the Bible to  
those in Canada who have heretofore been deprived of it—it is hoped that  
there will be a large attendance at the Meeting.

Leith, 29th November 1859. Barrell & Myers, Printers, Leith.

# Oro African Methodist Episcopal Church, Simcoe County



Destination Ontario: <https://www.destinationontario.com/en-ca/things-to-do/arts-cultural-experiences/museums-heritage-sites/rediscover-black-history-ontario> Canada's Historic Places: <https://www.historicplaces.ca/en/rep-reg/place-lieu.aspx?id=12100>

**BUILT: 1849 - NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE: 2000**

Location: Corner of Line 3 North and Old Barrie Road West, Oro-Medonte Township. (Just east of the Penetanguishene Road).

Between 1819 and 1826, the British granted twenty-five plots of land in Oro County to Black settlers, eleven of them former soldiers who received their grants in acknowledgement of military service. In 1829-1831, thirty more black families augmented the settlement.

Although the area had strategic value, the land was both remote and agriculturally poor. The church remained active until around 1900 when the community itself faded away.

Fortunately, concerned community residents have collected funds for its restoration and preservation as a witness to an early African Canadian settlement associated with Black militiamen from the War of 1812.

The church is the oldest log building in Ontario built by African Canadians. With its gable roof, open volume interior and minimalist detailing, the church sits in the grassed rural landscape of its associated burial ground containing unmarked graves.

# Salem Chapel, St. Catharines, Ontario

**BUILT: C.1853 - NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE: 1999**

The Salem Chapel was an important centre of abolitionist and civil rights activity and was the cornerstone of a growing community of African American refugees from slavery in the United States.

The most famous and celebrated member of the church was **Harriet Tubman**, who lived in the area for most of the 1850's, and who led many fugitives to freedom via the Underground Railroad to St. Catharines, Ontario. After achieving her own freedom from slavery in Maryland by fleeing to Upper Canada, she later helped hundreds more slaves escape. During the time she lived in the town, she regularly attended the local Salem Chapel.

The church is a well preserved, three level chapel which is gable-fronted and set on a high foundation. The stucco building is distinguished by its regularly arranged pointed-arch windows, modest scale, and overall simplicity.

Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British\\_Methodist\\_Episcopal\\_Church,\\_Salem\\_Chapel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Methodist_Episcopal_Church,_Salem_Chapel)  
Salem Chapel – [Niagara's Black History](#) – YouTube Black Settlement in St. Catharines, Ontario - [YouTube](#)



# Sandwich First Baptist Church

Windsor, Ontario

Circa 1909



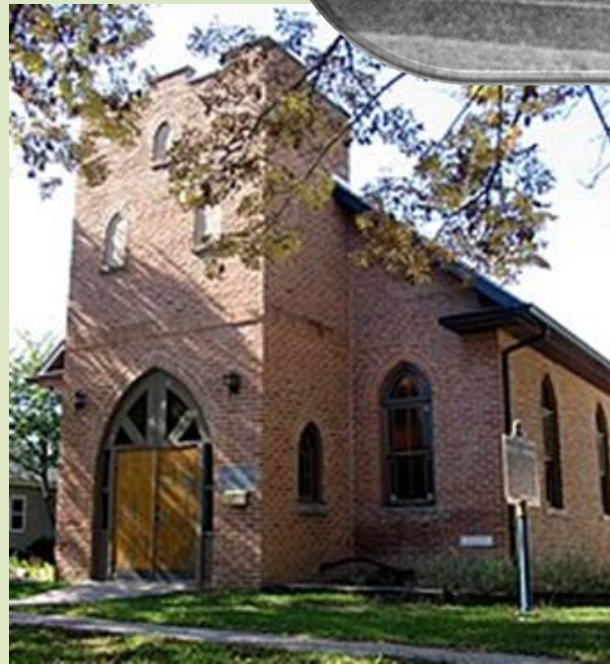
**Sandwich First Baptist Church**, located in the Sandwich neighbourhood of Windsor, Ontario, was established to serve a community of refugees who had fled slavery on the Underground Railroad. Other members were free African Americans who had emigrated to escape rampant racism, harassment, oppressive laws and codes, and fear of being captured and enslaved. The Church was heavily involved in anti-slavery activism like monthly anti-slavery rallies and hiding fugitives from U.S. slave catchers.

Constructed on a 0.5-hectare (1.2-acre) patch of land granted by the Crown, the church is a small, gable-roofed church set close to the street.

Similar in design to other early Black churches in Upper Canada, it is distinguished by use of brick as a building material. The labour force consisted of the able-bodied members of the Church community, who made or paid for the bricks. The church's wooden floors, ceiling, and wainscoting were fashioned by hand.

A two-storey crenellated tower stands at the entrance of the church. This was added in 1920 to replace the old wooden entrance which had fallen into disrepair. Other Gothic revival decorations, such as arches and pointed windows, were gradually added, and an extension was made to the rear of the church at an unknown later date.

Sandwich First Baptist Church is now one of the oldest continuously active Black churches in Canada. It has vast significance to the Black community of Sandwich and Windsor, as well as to African Canadian history.



**Built: 1851/1852 - National Historic Site: 1999**

Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sandwich\\_First\\_Baptist\\_Church](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sandwich_First_Baptist_Church) University of Windsor <https://collections.uwindsor.ca/omeka-s/nwoc/page/video> Canada's Historic Places: <https://www.historicplaces.ca/en/rep-reg/place-lieu.aspx?id=13374&pid=0>

# Uncle Tom's Cabin Historic Site

## Dawn Settlement, Dresden, Ontario



**Established: 1841 - Ontario Heritage trust: 2005**

**Uncle Tom's Cabin Historic Site** is an open-air museum that documents the life of Josiah Henson, a former slave, abolitionist, and minister who played a key role in Ontario's Black history. In 1830, Henson fled slavery in Maryland and Kentucky with his wife and four children. He later embarked on courageous trips to the US as a "conductor" of the Underground Railroad and guided over one hundred people to freedom in Upper Canada (now Ontario).

Through his autobiography, he served as the inspiration for the title character in Harriet Beecher Stowe's anti-slavery novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Accordingly known as "Uncle Tom", Josiah Henson was one of the most famous Canadians of his day. Henson's celebrity raised international awareness of Canada as a haven for refugees from slavery.

A significant Black abolitionist and community leader, in 1841 Henson was instrumental in founding the Dawn Settlement near present-day Dresden, Ontario. He established its vocational school, the British American Institute, the following year.

**The Dawn Settlement** was formed, beginning in 1841, with a 121 hectares (300 acres) property purchased as a refuge and a place of work for former slaves from the United States. It was a rural community where Black people could pool their labour, resources, and skills to help each other and incoming settlers. It contained farmland, a sawmill, gristmill, brick yard, rope manufactory and school. The British American Institute taught a variety of scholastic and practical skills to its students who had access to the community's resources to hone their trades.

At its peak, there were approximately five hundred settlers residing in the Dawn settlement. The settlement went into decline after the school was closed in 1868. Some Blacks returned to the United States after emancipation was proclaimed in 1865. Others moved to other nearby communities, thus contributing to the establishment of a significant Black presence in this part of Ontario. Henson himself remained at the settlement, passing away in 1883. He is buried near his home.

**Uncle Tom's Cabin Historic Site** provides interpretive videos, interactive exhibits, programs, activities, numerous artifacts, and tours that reflect early Black life in Ontario.

Situated on the grounds of the former Dawn Settlement, the two-hectare (five-acre) site consists of the Josiah Henson Interpretive Centre, plus three historical buildings including the Josiah Henson house and a sawmill. There are two cemeteries; one of which holds Henson's gravesite.

**Black History Month programming takes place each February.**

TransCanada Trail: <https://tctrail.ca/stories/5-canadian-heritage-sites-to-visit-during-black-history-month/> Ontario Heritage Trust: <https://www.heritagetrust.on.ca/en/properties/uncle-toms-cabin> Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black\\_Canadians\\_in\\_Ontario#Settlements](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Canadians_in_Ontario#Settlements) Ontario Heritage Trust: Uncle Tom's Cabin Historic Site - Ontario Heritage Trust Discovering Dawn | Episode 1: Thomas Hughes and Christ Church Anglican - YouTube



**Josiah Henson**  
**AKA *Uncle Tom***

**The information and pictures that celebrate Ontario's Black History was compiled from many reputable online sources. In some cases, text excerpted from the source sites has been edited or condensed.**  
Terry Fegarty & Nancy Matthews, CHO Board, also volunteer on their Municipal Heritage Committees.

## Sources and links for further research:

Ontario Heritage Trust <https://www.heritagetrust.on.ca/en/pages/our-stories/slavery-to-freedom/history/black-settlement-in-ontario>

Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black\\_Canadians\\_in\\_Ontario#Settlements](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Canadians_in_Ontario#Settlements)

Ontario Heritage Trust on Twitter ["Check out our forum from 2021, "Beyond the Underground Railroad – #BlackHistory in Chatham-Kent" featuring the curators from Uncle Tom's Cabin Historic Site, the Buxton National Historic Site and Museum and the Chatham-Kent Black Mecca Museum.](https://t.co/ScduZEKt1a)  
<https://t.co/ScduZEKt1a> / Twitter

Canada.ca <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/campaigns/black-history-month/historic-black-communities.html>

Re Amherstburg Museum: Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, Minutes, Dec. 1998  
<https://www.historicplaces.ca/en/rep-reg/place-lieu.aspx?id=6054> Amherstburg Freedom Museum:  
<https://amherstburgfreedom.org/about-the-museum>