THE PROMISED LAND PROJECT
2007–2012 FINAL REPORT
The Promised Land Project

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Partners and Collaborators
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(British Civilization, Université Paris 13)
The Municipality of Chatham-Kent
The Chatham-Kent Museum
Chatham-Kent Library
Chatham-Kent Heritage Committee
Distinguish Women in International Services
Uncle Tom’s Cabin,
Dresden
University of Windsor,
Ontario
UJAMMA Associates
Devin Andrews
(Community Coordinator)
OLIVETTE OTELE LECTURING AT THE 2007 SYMPOSIUM

WINNERS OF THE 2012'S YOUNG WRITERS COMPETITION
WANDA THOMAS-BERNARD AND WANDA ROBSON (SISTER OF VIOLA DESMOND) AT THE 2011 SYMPOSIUM

STUDENTS FROM JOHN MCGREGOR SECONDARY SCHOOL UNEARTHING THE BURIED GRAVESTONE OF OSBORNE BENTLY (1787–1870)

35+ RESEARCH ASSISTANTSHIPS
138 UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN COMMUNITY-BASED LEARNING
146 HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS DIRECTLY INVOLVED

45+ LECTURES, PROFESSIONAL WORKSHOPS & SYMPOSIUMS
25+ TV, RADIO, & NEWSPAPER INTERVIEWS
05 ONLINE DATABASES AND ARCHIVES

OLIVETTE OTELE LECTURING AT THE 2007 SYMPOSIUM

06 DOCUMENTARY FILMS
10 WEBSITES
02 DRAMA PERFORMANCES

ENGAGING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

WINNERS OF THE 2012'S YOUNG WRITERS COMPETITION

100 VOLUNTEERS
22 ORGANIZATIONS
10 SECONDARY AND POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

## LETTER FROM THE LEAD INVESTIGATOR

## PROJECT TEAM & CO-INVESTIGATORS

## PARTNERS & COLLABORATORS

## THE PROMISED LAND PROJECT

- What the Promised Land Project Was
- The Five Objectives of the PLP
- Adopted Methodology
  - Sample of Evaluation Tools
- Anticipated Outcomes

## PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS

- Engaging New Forms of Knowledge Mobilization
- Alliances & Collaborations
  - High Schools
  - Universities & Colleges
  - PLP Oral History Archives
- Dissemination Activities
  - Public Symposia
- Academic Outcomes
  - Student Websites
  - Publications
  - PLP Geographic Information System Database
  - Conference Papers
- Community Outcomes
  - Public Lectures
  - Documentary Films
  - Walk through the Promised Land
  - "Dawn Canada": An Original Song
  - Student Performances
  - Cemetery Restoration
  - Public Media
- Modeling How to Engage with Our High School Students
  - In the Classroom: A PLP-Based Curriculum
  - Model Result: Young Writers Competition
  - Model Result: The Simonton Table
  - Model Result: Workshops and Extra Curricular Activities

## COLLABORATORS, PARTNERS, SUPPORTERS, & FUNDING
LETTER FROM THE LEAD INVESTIGATOR

The Freedom Experience of Blacks in the Chatham and Kent Settlements: Five Years Later

The idea of the Promised Land Project (PLP) was born by accident, during a hot summer day in 2005, while returning from a camping trip with Kenzo, my then 5-year old boy. In a particularly journalistic manner, an article that appeared in the Ottawa Citizen in October 2007, captured this fortunate accident very well: "Some people return from camping trips with poison ivy. A University of Ottawa Professor returned with an idea: A million-dollar idea." This journalistic way of telling the beginning of the PLP genealogy had already begun to articulate specific Canadian symbols and gestures that would require contextualization within precise signifiers. Indeed, the PLP genealogy is made up of excellent narratives and experiences that would showcase the parallels between the Canadian grand history and other sidelined histories that are yet to become really "Canadian". Sideline histories of slavery and segregation in Canada still need to be told, to be taught, to be written again, to become natural like any other history in this great country.

Indeed, black people’s migration from the United States to Canada was a radical move and not a honeymoon. In the Chatham and Dawn Settlements, (and elsewhere in Canada) they had to fight to survive and gain respect while facing systemic segregation in public services. Between 1820 and 1870, they became organized as a network of well-connected communities and started to invest in the development of local industries, schools, and businesses. These communities worked not only to end slavery in the United States, but to develop Civil Rights here in Canada, including mounting court challenges to the established segregated schools (under the Common Schools Act of 1850), and resisting informal segregation in countless ways, including segregation in churches. A century later, their descendants challenged widespread racial segregation and were responsible for the passage of Ontario’s landmark civil rights legislation: the Fair Accommodations Practices Act of 1954. Sadly, many of the significant contributions of...
these black pioneers and Civil Rights fighters remain unrecorded, unknown, and uncelebrated in our national history. The accurate but limited description of such communities as the “final stop on the underground railroads” has pointed to the fact that this extraordinarily rich heritage has been treated as an ending rather than as a beginning.

This discovery of a different Canadian history is what motivated the Promised Land Project. That is why, when finding with Kenzo some bits and pieces of this deleted history in Southern Ontario, I decided to call on some friends, colleagues and knowledgeable community historians to help me write this unfinished Canadian History.

From the beginning, the challenges were great! We set up an ambitious program of research, with the ultimate goal to produce, a different narrative of black history in Canada. Our goal was straightforward: To recover this lost history in ways that would challenge the more familiar paradigms of “white rescue” that have dominated much scholarship on the underground railroad. Our research outcomes targeted black agency and focused not only on their process of creating freedom and community (that stretched beyond the end of slavery even as it built on the ideological foundation of the abolition) but also on using a wide variety of mediums to mobilize and disseminate this knowledge for the benefit of all Canadians.

Five years later, I am more than pleased to report that the PLP, despite being challenging and at times even heartbreaking, was not only a true learning experience but also a wonderful success story that generated unimaginable outcomes for Chatham-Kent and all black communities in Canada. The PLP sets the standard, which other communities can now follow to achieve a full integration of black history into the Canadian grand narrative. Black history in Canada can no longer remain a minor Canadian historical sideline. Black history in Canada is part of Canada’s overall history and we must remain vigilant and continue to keep the PLP’s findings alive. I invite you to participate in enriching the project’s in-temporal interactive “wiki-style” database (http://plp.uOttawa.ca). The possibilities of this virtual cloud geo-mapping are endless: it facilitates an overview of shifts in populations and the migration of early settlement communities, it can map the ownership of property in the Chatham-Kent area from more than a century ago and it can help researchers grasp the social-demographic dynamics that occurred at particular moments in history. Indeed, this online resource provides unprecedented access to the collected primary source materials (letters, tax records, journals, photographs, oral histories, family narratives, newspapers) and archives them in a searchable and concise manner. I also invite you to read and adopt for your own benefit, all of the tools that were developed via the PLP’s methodology: printed books, online audio and visual productions in addition to student creations. The tools and outcomes produced by this project are indeed wonderful models to follow. They provide effective processes for public and targeted knowledge mobilization that are creative and geared towards community engagement.

Finally, I thank everyone that was involved in this project: students, community partners and collaborators, and my co-investigators. My hope is that this project has helped everyone of us learn how to pose new sets of research questions, not only on black history in Canada but as humans as well.

BOULOU EBANDA DE B’BÉRI
BOULOU EBANDA DE B’BÉRI is an award winning scholar, the Founding-Director of the Audiovisual Media Lab for the Study of Cultures and Societies (AMLAC&S), and a Professor of Communication, Media and Cultural Studies at the University of Ottawa. Acting as the lead investigator of the PLP, Boulou Ebanda de B'béri guided the diverse body of project partners and collaborators in producing educational materials and mobilizing new forms of knowledge related to this project.

DEVIN ANDREWS joined the PLP as a Community Coordinator during its second year of operation and really helped the project achieve its community related objectives. As a close collaborator of the Lead Investigator, his main task was to create an organic connection between the local, national, and international collaborators. As well, his explicit duties included channelling everyone’s effort, energizing community partners and most importantly building new local and national partnership.

MARIE CARTER is an award winning community activist and local historian, who has made significant contributions to community development in Dresden and greater Southwestern Ontario. Apart from her research into local sites and personalities relevant to the PLP, she assisted with the coordination of research assistants and their field work and identification and collection of archival records. When not working on community history, Marie is involved with the Roman Catholic Diocese of London (ON) Migrant Workers Ministries where she serves as a rights advocate for migrant agricultural workers.
NINA REID-MARONEY is a historian at Huron University College at Western Ontario. She has over her career developed and taught university courses in African Canadian/American history. She has completed extensive research on the history of the religion and intellectual life in the Promised Land communities, and on Women’s history. Professor Reid-Maroney has established new connections between the Promised Land communities and nineteenth-century black Philadelphia. She is also an affiliated researcher with the University of Windsor’s Centre for Studies in Social Justice.

WANDA THOMAS BERNARD is a recipient of the Order of Canada and the Director of the School of Social Work at Dalhousie University. Dr. Bernard has worked over the years to foster links among academics, frontline practitioners, and the community, in particular the African Nova Scotian community. Professor Wanda Thomas Bernard graciously stepped in as the PLP’s Eastern Canadian co-investigator in 2010.

HANDEL WRIGHT is a professor based at the University of British Columbia where he is Canada Research Chair in Comparative Cultural Studies, David Lam Chair of Multicultural Education and Director of the Centre for Culture, Identity and Education. He provides the critical multicultural and integrative anti-racism perspectives and expertise in qualitative and ethnographic research needed in the PLP. Prof. Wright’s works on interrelated areas of interest for identity, socio-cultural diversity, community making, and diaspora issues.

OLIVETTE OTELE, Maître de conférence History and British Civilization, Université Paris XIII (France).

RICHARD AGBOR, Lecturer of African History, University of Buea (Cameroon).
Participants at the 2012 Promised Land Symposium

INSTITUTIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS

2 Formal Alliances
- The Municipality of Chatham-Kent (Chatham-Kent, ON)
- Distinguished Women in International Services (DWIS)

20+ Informal Collaborations
- Black Cultural Center (Dartmouth, NS)
- National Archives of Canada (Ottawa, ON)
- Oberlin College Archives (Oberlin, OH)
- State Archives of North Carolina (Raleigh, NC)
- The National Archives and Guildhall Library (London, UK)
- Canadian Museum of Civilization (Ottawa, ON)
- Parks Canada
- Lambton-Kent District School Board (LKDSB) (Lambton-Kent, ON)
- Buxton Museum (Buxton, ON)
- Black Historical Society (Buxton, ON)
- Ontario Black Historical Society (OBHS)
- London Black History Month Coordinating Committee
- Beth Emmanuel Episcopal Church (London, ON)
- Anglican Diocese of Huron Archives (London, ON)
- Museum London (London, ON)
- London Public Library (London, ON)
- Amistad Research Centre (New Orleans, LA)
- Tulane University (New Orleans, LA)
- Lucan Area Heritage Museum (Lucan, ON)
- Dresden Christ Church (Dresden, ON)
- Chatham Christ Church (Chatham, ON)
- Amherstburg Police Service (Amherstburg, ON)
- Anne Gilbert (Chatham, ON)
- Huron University College (London, ON)
- Catherine McVean Chapter of the IODE
- Chatham-Kent Community Partnership Fund
- Chatham-Kent Police Service (Chatham-Kent, ON)
- LaSalle Police Service (LaSalle, ON)
- Rotary Club of Chatham (Chatham, ON)
- Rotary Club of Dresden (Dresden, ON)
- Windsor Police Service (Windsor, ON)
- IMAGINATION Ink
PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS

- Political Sciences, University of Texas, Dallas: Researcher Narcisse Tiki helped our early understanding of social demographic mapping.
- Action Based-Learning at the University of Ottawa and the University of Western Ontario
- Collaboration with the University of Ottawa Department of History’s Community History Program.
- Collaboration with the University of Ottawa’s CO-OP Study program
- Collaboration with the University of Ottawa Community Service Learning Program
- Collaboration with Professors Michael Dove (Public History Internship Supervisor) and William Turkel (Digital History) at the University of Western Ontario to create summer student internships for UWO students and channel ITS support from UWO into the PLP.
- Huron University College’s Department of History

VOLUNTEERS

- 8 community volunteers in Nova Scotia prepared and executed the 2011 Symposium, aided by the planning Committee of non-PLP member:
  - Dr. Eleanor Wint
  - Veronica Marsman
  - Virginia Travis (First Baptist Church)
  - Marcia Strachan (DWIS)
  - Muhammad Ghaffar (Chamber of Commerce Global Experience at Work Program)
  - Jan Zhou (Chamber of Commerce Global Experience at Work Program)
  - Usama Salimi (Chamber of Commerce Global Experience at Work Program)
  - Claudia Reinstag (Chamber of Commerce Global Experience at Work Program)
The Promised Land Project (PLP): The Freedom Experience of Blacks in Chatham Kent was a five-year (2007–2012) multidisciplinary research program that focused on studying the role and evolution of early black communities in the southern part of the Ontario. The project was funded thanks to a million dollar grant awarded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) via one of its Strategic Research Programs (SRP), the Community-University research Alliance (CURA).

The Promised Land Project set out to highlight the contributions of black communities in the Chatham and Dawn Settlements and celebrate their history as one of beginning against the grain of historical ideology that defined them as the “final stop on the underground railroad”. In Canada’s grand narrative, it is usually admitted that 18th and 19th century blacks are “fugitive slaves”, disregarding their human agency and experience, as well as the diversity of individuals that constituted this migration of early African descendants in Canada-West. In addition, African-Canadians efforts in the fight to end slavery in the United States and subsequently their contribution in the building of Canada’s modern Civil Rights were disregarded. For example, it is not widely known that when Canada became a country in 1867, the sixth-largest population group was people of African descent. It is also, not widely known that in the period from 1840 to 1880, more than 28% of Chatham’s population and a majority of the Dawn Settlement’s population were of African descent, compared to circa 21% in Windsor, and only 2.2% in Toronto. Finally, it is not known that this Southern Ontario region was described by the black abolitionist Samuel Ringgold Ward as the “great moral lighthouse on the North American continent,” as it drew people of diverse social, cultural, and economic backgrounds, all of whose resources, education, and skills had a profound effect on the development of the region and on the creation of an extraordinary pre-model of multiculturalism in Canada.

The PLP sought to unearth how these communities were organized and what their contribution was in shaping a modern Canadian civil rights nation. The PLP’s research program interrogated not only the historical amnesia surrounding this extraordinary Canadian heritage, but also focused on the significant and unique history of these settlements and their connections with other Canadian communities, from British Columbia to Nova Scotia.
THE FIVE OBJECTIVES OF THE PLP

1. Protect primary historical materials
2. Make these materials publicly accessible
3. Support new academic research and teaching
4. Promote community development in this historic region of Canada
5. Use the new knowledge generated by the project to frame current discussions of ethnoracial identity, social justice, migration and Canadian multiculturalism

These key objectives were sustained by broader goals as the PLP’s team was composed by Community collaborators and Academic partners from different disciplinary backgrounds and with expectations that the project reaches specific targets and produces clear outcomes:

To explore contributions of early blacks in the Chatham and Dawn Settlements by extrapolating from land records and cross referencing with other primary sources

To document articulations of racial identity and of inter-racial cooperation (and discrimination) in the context of the black settlement at Chatham and Dawn and to identify these as a form of pre-multicultural community making

To open opportunities for action research and provide research training to graduate students

To create a database that will map and store historical materials, currently held by individuals and organizations, in a single comprehensive archive and research tool

To develop historical frameworks that will inform and bring new insights into contemporary research on migration, race, social justice and multiculturalism

To develop interdisciplinary curricula, integrating a better understanding of social history and social justice issues in the university and high school classrooms and in the community

To take advantage of the modern technologies of communication to make accessible historical facts and documents that are currently neither centrally collected nor widely known

To develop educational materials, ranging from scholarly articles and books, interactive CD-ROMs and websites, theatric scripts and photo-essay exposition, for use in schools, universities, and other public venues
The methodology of the PLP was articulated around the following: Data Collection, Archival Organization, and Data Interpretation. To ensure that these tasks met the designated objectives the methodology included: Processes and evaluation frameworks, Structures of Governance and Capacity to leverage resources.

**Data Collection:** Data included primarily local, national and international archived materials: newspaper articles, family narratives, oral histories as well as land and tax records. Members of the community volunteered their time to gather the fragile documents via workshops and annual public symposiums targeting local groups and high school students in the PLP communities. The project was able to reach its initial research and preservation objectives and start helping to catalogue utilizing new technologies of information and communication (TIC) to be preserved in perpetuity.

**Archival Organization:** The PLP worked to collect and preserve the historical materials documenting the experience of blacks in the Chatham-Kent area. The research team and community partners created a comprehensive database of letters, tax records, journals, photographs, oral histories, family narratives, newspapers, and other important primary sources.

**Data Interpretation:** All collected data were analyzed to target different types of Knowledge Mobilization and Dissemination activities (Newsletters, Books, Seminars, Lectures, Websites,...) all of which constitute the PLP Archives today.

**Project Managerial Team:** The project was lead by Prof. Boulou Ebanda de B'béri who was closely assisted by the Community Coordinator Devin Andrews, (hired in the second year of project) and the partners and collaborators named in this report.

The main investigators of the PLP invited a number of community organizations and individuals here in Canada, the U.S., Europe and Africa, to become partners to this project. These collaborators were frontline scouts that helped to identify and access local archives and historical materials. Some of these collaborators also provided in-kind and cash donations to support costs of the PLP that were not covered by the SSHRC grant.
EVALUATION TOOLS

The research activities and educative materials emerging from the PLP were assessed regularly at the end of each research period and public dissemination activity with precise tools.

**Questionnaire and interview protocol**

The “Interview and Questionnaire Form” is a tool that helped the PLP Team ensure that the research findings were effectively delivered.

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**Evaluation Matrix**

The “Matrix Review Form” is a tool that helped the PLP Team to review the focus, variables and outcomes of the project findings.
ACADEMIC BASED OUTCOMES

- Digital preservation and collection of primary historical materials and National archives that will become references for further research
- Training of graduate students in action-based research
- Delivery of new scholarship that challenges historical stereotypes of Blacks in Canada and creates a greater appreciation of the diverse backgrounds and talents of early Black migrations to Canada
- Creation of long term Canada-US cross border research partnership between all applicants and collaborators research units and institutions. This cross-border research collaboration will be structured as academic symposia, moving from site to site in and across Canada and the US after the term of this CURA. Helping to further the understanding of migration patterns, community building and contemporary issues of identity, multiculturalism and social justice.
- Edited books will involve academics and community researchers and that will appeal to both the academic readership and the general public

COMMUNITY BASED OUTCOMES

- With the support of the Municipality of Chatham-Kent, the PLP will identify special sites which will display the project markers in the community. (Please refer to page 36 for A walk through some of Chatham-Kent’s black historical markers.)
- Create mobile expositions, photo-essays, and theatrical scripts from found-historical artifacts and archives
- Strengthen local research sites and initiatives within the municipality of Chatham-Kent, through workshops, town hall meetings, and local theatre performances
- Establish yearly public events in order to present further research findings
EDUCATION

ENGAGING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

COMMUNITY OUTCOMES

35+ RESEARCH ASSISTANTSHIPS
138 UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN COMMUNITY-BASED LEARNING
146 HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS DIRECTLY INVOLVED

STUDENTS FROM JOHN MCGREGOR SECONDARY SCHOOL UNEARTHING THE BURIED GRAVESTONE OF OSBORNE BENTLY (1787–1870)

WINNERS OF THE 2012’S YOUNG WRITERS COMPETITION

06 DOCUMENTARY FILMS
10 WEBSITES
02 DRAMA PERFORMANCES

CHATHAM AUDIENCE LISTENING TO LAWRENCE HILL AT THE FIFTH ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM
ENGAGING WITH NEW FORMS OF KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION

For the Social Sciences and Humanities and Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), new forms of Knowledge Mobilization were buzz characteristics in the early 2000s and all funded projects were required to be original in the ways in which they disseminated their research findings. Knowledge Mobilization, also known as “KMD”, was particularly central for Strategic Research Grants such as the Community-University Research Alliance (CURA).

With that in mind, the project bridged institutions and articulated a collaborative alliance between the community and academic researchers. The Community offered, precisely, the sort of “front-line experience” that the CURA is designed to value and encourage. The community historical groups brought an intimate and unparalleled knowledge of the primary historical materials, as they had long acted as repositories of these treasures. The University partners spanned different institutions and cultural origins. This diverse group brought research expertise, resources and strong interdisciplinary perspectives in History, Communication Studies, Women’s Studies and affiliated Social Justice and Diaspora Studies programs.
THE PLP MET AND GREATLY EXCEEDED INITIAL OBJECTIVES AND THE FOLLOWING HIGHLIGHTS THE TANGIBLE OUTCOMES OF THE PROJECT

The PLP team of researchers worked closely with local community groups and schools to promote historical awareness. The PLP acquired and donated a complete microfilm copy of the “Black Abolitionist Papers” to the Chatham-Kent Public Library. According to Dr. Roy Finkenbine of the University of Detroit Mercy, the Black Abolitionist Papers contents and resources are of value to researchers, and more of their content still needs to be discovered. This microfilm provided an invaluable resource to local community researchers, who no longer need to travel to Toronto or Detroit to access this document.

The PLP developed original curricula for high school historical research. Through the PLP’s research activities, one of the students discovered that the apparently innocent and meaningless table in her family’s house basement may have a lot of hidden stories. It is believed that this table was built by a former slave of her Irish family, who established in Chatham-Kent around the 1830s. (Read more details on the “Simonton Table” on page 45 of this report)

Nationally, more than 138 students were enrolled in Public History or Community-Based Learning Classes based on the PLP (23 at the University of Ottawa and 115 at Huron University College).

The PLP created wonderful opportunities for graduate research, and community-based learning. At the end of the project’s 5-year tenure, more than 35 Graduate and Undergraduate students were supervised (16 in Windsor/Huron and Western; 15 in Ottawa, 2 Vancouver, and 2 at Dalhousie and in Buea and Yaoundé Cameroon) and Paris (France).

We opened linkages with researchers separated by distance from Europe (France and the UK), Africa (Gold Coast, Accra, Buea, and Yaoundé) and the United States (Massachusetts, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, New York, Maryland, and Texas) to Canada; but also within these countries and continents.

The PLP utilized technologies of Information and Communication. See the number of website generated by students and the research team, including the Geomapping Database and other techniques of representation (i.e., documentary films, books, articles, theater…) to reach the maximum number of people.
The structure of these alliances and collaborations at the core of the PLP were multidimensional. All of the partners and collaborators provided unique insights, skills and opportunities for communicating scholarship to a wider audience, and for framing public discussions of social justice, race and migration in Canada.

**HIGH SCHOOLS**

146 students were directly involved with the PLP, via a range of interdisciplinary school activities (i.e., media productions, script writing, historical research, primary data collection, blogs, music and drama, and literature.)

Some of these high school students had the opportunity to present their research findings in their schools and to the community. We estimate that more than 3000 high school students were sensitized to the specificity of Black history in Canada.

- Chatham-Kent Composite School (Dresden)
- Lampton-Kent High School (Dresden)
- John McGregor High School (Chatham)
- St. Clair College (Chatham)
- Blenheim High School (Chatham)

**UNIVERSITIES & COLLEGES**

2 Post-graduates, 35 Graduate and Undergraduate students were supervised throughout the PLP. (16 in Windsor/Huron and Western; 15 in Ottawa, 2 Vancouver, and 2 at Dalhousie).

More than 138 Public History or Community-Based Learning Class Student (23 at the University of Ottawa and 115 at Huron University College).

- Dalhousie University
- Huron University College at the University of Western Ontario
- Université Paris 13
- The University of British Columbia
- The University of Ottawa
- The University of Windsor
- The University of Buea
- Université Yaoundé II

**THE PROMISED LAND PROJECT ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES**

Throughout the five years of this project, graduate students from Huron University College collected hundreds of hours of interviews from local historians, community members in Chatham-Kent, and international partners from Oberlin (Ohio). Our partner at Dalhousie University as well, collected an important amount or oral history for the Promised Land Communities.

The central questions of this Oral History was to understand how much we know about the Promised Land Communities and to identify people that may still hold information about this project. Very soon, this data will be organized thematically and made available via the Promised Land Project main website at the University of Ottawa and PLP’s partner institutions.
DISSEMINATION ACTIVITIES

Since its inception in 2007, the Promised Land Project has held five annual general symposiums where community members and researchers have gotten together to discuss what the project means, where it is going, and what is to be done.

PUBLIC SYMPOSIA

2012 Claiming the Promise: A Retrospective on African Canadian History (Chatham, ON)

2011 Revisiting the Promise: Time, Place and Contested Space in African Canadian Communities (Dartmouth, NS)

2010 African Canadian History in Southwestern Ontario: Connecting Past and Present (Windsor, ON)

2009 See How the PLP’s Research Can Help Grow Our Future (Chatham, ON)

2007–2008 The Making of the Promised Land Project (Chatham, ON)

SYMPOSIUM PLANNING COMMITTEE MEMBERS & LOCAL VOLUNTEERS

2012
Devin Andrews
Marie Carter
Nina Reid-Maroney
Marcia Strachan
Virginia Travis
Lynda Weese

2011
Devin Andrews
Marie Carter
Veronica Marsman
Nina Reid-Maroney
Wanda Thomas-Bernard
Eleanor Wint

2010
Devin Andrews
Marie Carter
Pat Neely
Nina Reid-Maroney
Christina Simmons
McKenn Stanton

2009
Devin Andrews
Marie Carter
Nina Reid-Maroney
Hans VanderDerDoe
Lynda Weese

2007-2008
Marie Carter
Nina Reid-Maroney
Gwen Robinson
2012 CLAIMING THE PROMISE:
A RETROSPECTIVE ON AFRICAN CANADIAN HISTORY

Chatham, Ontario

This 5th annual symposium offered an opportunity to present the outcomes of the five-year multi-disciplinary research and highlight the collaborative interaction of community, students, and academics in preserving the heritage of this historic region and its linkages to the rest of the world.

For 5 years the Promised Land Project through its community engagement, research work and prior symposia has urged Canadians that continuing to refer to the Promised Land Communities as solely the final stop on the Underground Railroad misses the true point. The narrow “escape from slavery” narrative does not explore what happened once so-called fugitives found their freedom.

Though the communities themselves were small, their influence stretched across Canada and to the farthest reaches of the Atlantic world. This vital centre of culture and justice drew interracial support and forged links of freedom between Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom.

To keep this work alive, the PLP developed original curricula to engage high school students with issues of public history and racial representations in Canada’s history and produced a vast body of educational materials including: peer reviewed articles and conferences, a pending two volume book, public lectures, documentary films, and students creations (websites, essays, theatre and music).

An Evening with Lawrence Hill

As part of the fifth annual Promised Land Symposium “Claiming the Promise: A Retrospective on African Canadian History”, the symposium offered an evening with award winning and international best-selling Canadian author Lawrence Hill. His work includes “Any Known Blood” and “Some Great Thing” and the critically acclaimed and influential “The Book of Negroes.”

Lawrence Hill’s talk touched on various topics from his personal experiences growing up in suburban Toronto; the effect of these experiences on his creative work and writing about and researching “Black History” in this country.

This evening also included a reading from poet Cecily Nicholson. As well, a special award ceremony with representatives of Distinguished Women in International Service (DWIS) recognizing the winners of a local youth Black History writing competition.
2012 PROGRAM

**Topic 1: Early British Columbia and the Politics of Difference: Blackness, Feminism and Inter-raciality**
MARYAM NABAVI, DILEK KAYAALP, PATRICK RADIBE, HANDEL KASHOPE WRIGHT

**Topic 2: Claiming the Promise: Resistance and Activism in Promised Land Communities**
A Membership for Manhood: Masculine Cultures in 19th-century African-Canadian Organizations
LORENE BRIDGEN
Digital History and the Promised Land
TIM COMPEAU
Trans-Border Abolition Movements of the mid-19th Century
LAUREN WILSON
Under One Flag: Civil Rights Organizations in Canada, 1919-1945
CARLA MARANO

**Topic 3: Negotiating the Lines of Identity and Citizenship: African Canadians Engage the Politics of Belonging in the 19th and 20th Century**
An Attitude of Antagonism to American Slavery: Mary Ann Shadd Cary’s Fight for Racial Equality in British North America
MELISSA SHAW
Education and Identity: Black Female Educators in Ontario, 1950s-1980s
FUNKE ALADEJEBI
Navigating Black British Canadian Citizenship: John W. Lindsay, 1805-1876
DAN J. BROYLD

**Topic 4: Claiming the Promise: Nova Scotia**
3 People, 3 Communities, 3 Stories
CLAUDINE BONNER AND WANDA THOMAS BERNARD

**Topic 5: Race, Identity and Culture**
Borders of Identity: Crossing Boundaries in the Works of Lawrence Hill
NEIL BROOKS
Re-visioning the Dawn Settlement Part III: Dawn: A Black Utopia or Early Multicultural Experiment?
MARIE CARTER
"Why Don’t You Go to the States?": Studying African Canadian History in Canada
DEIRDRE MCCORKINDALE

Tracing our Steps: Senior Perspectives on how it feels to be overlooked as a descendant of the Underground Railroad in Nova Scotia, Canada
CAROLYN THOMAS

Cecily Nicholson with 2012 Symposium participants
2011 REVISITING THE PROMISE: TIME PLACE AND CONTESTED SPACE IN AFRICAN CANADIAN COMMUNITIES

Dartmouth (Nova Scotia)

The United Nations declared 2011 the International Year for People of African Descent, which added an increased relevance to the necessity and scope of the PLP research.

2011 also marked the first time that the symposium was held outside of southern Ontario. Wanda Thomas Bernard, the Association of Black Social Workers and Dalhousie University invited the PLP to Dartmouth and reinvigorated the Promised Land’s connections with the east coast.

In addition, David Divine, the former James R. Johnston Chair in Black Canadian Studies at Dalhousie University, was one of the original PLP’s Co-Investigators, and the Eastern-Canada connection to the project. Therefore, the ‘2011’s Revisiting The Promise’ Symposium was actually a homecoming.

For the African Nova Scotian communities from Cape Breton to Shelbourne, the PLP research will not just contribute to an understanding of local identity and history but will help as well to pair our local history with that of other national and international Black diasporas. This year’s symposium represents a wonderful opportunity for comparative perspectives on the experiences of Black Canadians in different regions of this great country and will help produce new scholarships and fascinating insights into how Black communities differed in their experience and how they were same.

Youth of Today is a student youth group based at Auburn Drive High School. The goals of Youth of Today are to promote African Nova Scotian and the African Diaspora culture through a variety of organized activities and events.
2011 PROGRAM

Keynote Address
WAYN HAMILTON

Topic 1: Contesting Place, Contesting Space
A History of Marginalization – Africville: A Canadian Example of Forced Migration
MARY PAM VINCIER

Historical Amnesia and the Need for a Continued Legacy at the Dawn Settlement
MARIE CARTER

My White Friend Chip
LAURA MAE LINDO

Topic 2: History & Identity
Must You Always See the Colour of My Skin First?
ELEANOR WINT

Roots: Negotiating Space, Place and History of Black Nova Scotia
Marilyn Thomas-Houston

The Commemoration of Black History in Canada
ROSEMARIE SADLIER

Topic 3: African Canadian Identity in Social Work
African Canadian Identity in Elder Social Workers of British Columbia and Nova Scotia
ALTHEA TOLLIVER AND CHRISTOPHER WALMSLEY

Unsuitable to Become Canadian: A Changing-Same Articulation of Racial Discourses in Canada’s Promised Land
BOULOU EBANDA DE B’BÉRI AND DANA WHITNEY SHERWOOD

Topic 4: Contemporary Perspectives
African Diaspora and Settlement Issues in the Maritimes
REV. ELIAS MUTALE

Exploring Cultural Worldviews Through African Canadian Lifelong Learning Experiences
SYLVIA PARRIS WITH SUSAN BRIGHAM

Gang Related African Refugee Children in Winnipeg
OUSMANE BA

Topic 5: Comparative Histories
African-Canadian Women and the Universal Negro Improvement Association
CARLA MARANO

Lifting as We Climb: African Canadian Organizations in Southern Ontario During the 19th Century
LORENE BRIDGEN

“Prejudice is in the Land”: The Dawn of Tomorrow Narrates Canada’s Anti-Black Racisms of The 1920s
MELISSA SHAW

Topic 6: History, Historians And The Archive
John Anderson: The Photograph and Other Discursive Things
EMILIE BOONE

Reflections from a Historian Across the US Border
ROLAND BAUMANN

The Freedom Experience of Blacks in Nova Scotia
CLAUDINE BONNER

Topic 7: Reflections On Africentric Lifelong Learning
Creating and Nurturing Places and Spaces For African Canadian Learners: Reflections on Africentric Lifelong Learning Practicum Experiences
SUSAN BRIGHAM ET AL (GL ASGOW, MUNROE-ANDERSON, PARRIS, THOMAS)
2010 AFRICAN CANADIAN HISTORY IN SOUTHWESTERN ONTARIO: CONNECTING PAST AND PRESENT

Windsor (Ontario)

A departure from previous years, the 2010 event focused on themes specifically linking African Canadian history in Southern Ontario, with current issues in social justice, women and gender issues in African Canadian history.

2010 PROGRAM

Keynote Address
WANDA THOMAS-BERNARD
A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Archives
Guest Speaker: BRYAN PRINCE

Confronting the Barriers to Academic Success of African-Canadian Students
SHANTELE BROWNING-MORGAN

After Midnight
NANCY ALLEN

Women and Children First: The Role of Black Children and Women in South-western Ontario’s Temperance Movement 1850-90
LORENE BRIDGEN

From Albion to a ‘New Jerusalem’ in Southern Ontario: The journey of a few 19th Century English Abolitionists
OLIVETTE OTELE

‘In the Interests of Law & Justice?: Women, Race, & the Criminal Justice System in Late-Nineteenth and Early-Twentieth Century Oxford County, Ontario
REBECCA BEAUSAERT

Exploring African Canadian Women Educators in the 20th Century
FUNKE ALADEJEBI
“See How the PLP’s Research Can Help Grow our Future” was the theme of the 2nd symposium in 2009. Very often, local community researchers and academic researchers did not speak the same language or perform research in the same way, though both groups had similar interests. The 2009 PLP’s symposium was designed to show the benefits of this project (for both the local community and academia) and presenters were mostly guest speakers from Africa, the USA and Europe. At the 2009 symposium, the project acquired *Black Abolitionist Papers*, a rare collection donated Chatham-Kent Public Library, and one of the presentations focused on illustrating how both community and academic researchers could use this extraordinary archive.

### 2009 PROGRAM

- **Contextualizing British Influence on New Settlements in the 19th Century**
  - OLIVETTE-OTELE

- **Writing & Producing Historical Re-enactments**
  - JOHN HARRIS

- **Re-imagining the Dawn Settlement**
  - MARIE CARTER

- **The Hiram Wilson Letters**
  - NICHOLAS GLISSERMAN

- **The Black Abolitionist Papers Collection**
  - ROY FINKENBINE

- **The Back to Africa Movement**
  - ENOH RICHARD

- **Teaching African-Canadian History Today**
  - GLENN MCGINNIS

- **Report on Findings Related to the Land Records Database**
  - MELISSA ROBINSON & NINA REID-MARONEY

- **Leddy Library’s Abolitionist Writings Collection**
  - BRIAN OWENS

Chatham (Ontario)

The 1st Annual Symposium of the PLP was articulated around the following elements: (1) Team-building; (2) Exploration of the PLP’s communities and key-figures; and (3) Understanding the process of multiple trajectories. The first theme of research was “The Making of the Promised Land Project” where partners and collaborators from Europe, USA, and Canada presented their previous research, their understanding of the Promised Land Project and their contributions. Results from this first symposium, networking and individual presentations led to the design of a final program of research in 2008.

2007–2008 PROGRAM

Touring the Dawn Settlement and Uncle Tom’s Cabin
The Chatham Township Story
EDNA MEDFORD

Three Case Studies: The Promised Land Trajectories Chatham, Michigan, and United Kingdom.
VETA TUCKER
NINA REID-MARONEY
MARIE CARTER
P. CHAPMAN
OLIVETTE OTELE

Performing the Promised Land
JOHN HARRIS
SUSHEL BIBBS
KAREN BRANTLEY
ACADEMIC OUTCOMES

STUDENT WEBSITES

Promised Land Project’s Photo Archives
http://www.flickr.com/photos/amlacs/set/72157624182288110/
Photos documenting the progress of the Promised Land Project.

The Diary of Thomas Hughes
http://www.uwo.ca/huron/promisedland/hughes/index.html
The Thomas Hughes Diary Project was crafted by upper-year history students in History 3801E “The Historian’s Craft” at Huron University College. As young historians, it was the student’s goal to present a comprehensive study on the life and works of abolitionist, the Reverend Thomas Hughes. Through this project, they sought to preserve the diary in a more accessible form and present the rich history of the anti-slavery movement in Canada.

The Hiram Wilson Project
http://www.uwo.ca/huron/promisedland/wilson/index.html
This project was created by students in “The Historian’s Craft” class at Huron University College in London, Ontario. Their goal was to present a creative and informative study on the life and correspondence of abolitionist Hiram Wilson. This website presents forty of his letters in digital form while providing other useful resources and pertinent information surrounding Hiram Wilson’s legacy, his connection to Oberlin College, and the anti-slavery movement. The original letters are housed in the Oberlin College Archives, Oberlin, Ohio.

Slave Catchers of Chatham Ontario
https://sites.google.com/a/lkdsb.com/slave-catchers-of-chatham-ontario/

The Reverend Thomas Pinckney & Christ Church
http://www.uwo.ca/huron/promisedland/christ-church/index.html
As part of the larger Promised Land Project this group worked with the parishioners of Christ Church and archival records in both Chatham and London in an effort to highlight the life of Reverend Thomas Pinckney and his experience at Christ Church, Chatham in the 19th century.

Hiram Wilson: Oberlin and the Promised Land Project
http://www.hiramwilsonoberlin.blogspot.ca/

Christ Church Chatham
http://christchurch3801.blogspot.ca/

Historian’s Craft 3801
http://historianscraft3.tumblr.com/

Promised Land Professors
https://sites.google.com/site/promisedlandprofessors/

PLP Essay
https://sites.google.com/a/lkdsb.com/promised-land-project/plp-essay

Shrewsbury
https://sites.google.com/a/lkdsb.com/shrewsbury/home

Shadd Family Tree
https://sites.google.com/a/lkdsb.com/shadd-family-tree/

Exploring Bias and Information in local historical photographs
https://sites.google.com/a/lkdsb.com/photographs-promise-land-project/home

Promised Land Project Student Site
https://sites.google.com/a/lkdsb.com/plp-promised-land-project/system/app/pages/sitemap/hierarchy
This book is not yet another narrative, telling the mythic story of the Underground Railroad, with its trains, conductors, agents, safe houses, north star, wagons with false bottoms, kindly Quakers, and of course, the fleeing fugitives themselves, who once upon arriving in Canada, sank on their knees and gratefully kissed the ground giving thanks to Britain. As Afua Cooper notes, such stories that show Britain besting the American Republic, presenting itself as morally superior, and portraying a romantic history that has come to be most associated with the Underground Railroad is just a small part of a more complex History. This book opens up new kinds of questions about the very nature of Canada as a land of refuge for American runaway slaves that ultimately became a critical part of developing this nation and the conceptualization of contemporary multicultural identity in Canada. The collection of chapters contributes to the articulation of Black history not only in Canada, but farther afield to the wider Atlantic world. In so doing, the book presents a more textured and critical history.

**CHAPTERS**

Reflections: The Challenges and Accomplishments of the Promised Land.  
**AFUA COOPER**

Part 1: Modeling the Promised Land Project: History as an Articulation

The Promised Land Project and Black Canadian History as a Model of Historical "Manufac-turation"?  
**BOULOU EBANDA DE B’BÉRI**

Multiculturalism Before Multiculturalism: Troubling Black Identity Beyond the Last Stop on the Underground Railroad.  
**HANDEL KASHOPE WRIGHT**

History, Historiography and the Promised Land Project.  
**NINA REID-MARONEY**

Part 2: From Fragments through Biography to History

William Whipper’s Lands Along the Sydenham.  
**MARIE CARTER**

‘A Contented Mind is a Continual Feast’: Tracing Intellectual Migrations through the Promised Land.  
**CLAUDINE BONNER**

Mae Alexander: Daughter of Promise.  
**CLAUDINE BONNER**

Part 3: Mapping a Selection of Historical Trajectories

Resisting Imperial governance in Canada: from trade and religious kinship to Black Narrative Pedagogy in Ontario.  
**OLIVETTE OTELE**

**PETER T. DALLEO**

Re-imagining the Dawn Settlement.  
**MARIE CARTER**
WOMEN IN THE PROMISED LAND

Edited by Nina Reid-Maroney and Boulou Ebada de B'béri

Women in the Promised Land, the second publication that will emerge from the PLP will examine African Canadian history through the lens of women’s experience. From the courtroom drama of a Victorian midwife and former slave on trial in Woodstock, to the untold story of the Canadian women of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, to the lives of working women in twentieth-century Nova Scotia, this collection will demonstrate other rich and unknown sides of the field of African Canadian history. Informed by recent work in cultural history and historiography, the chapters of this collection will bring fresh scholarly attention to vital questions of race, migration, gender, community, religion, and social justice, all of which stand at the centre of contemporary Canadian history.

Women in the Promised Land, signals the full and ironic complexity of the description of 19th century Canada as a “promised land.” Indeed, the cases, figures, and issues this new collection brings to our attention a necessity to connect our past with our present day experiences. The essays in this volume reach beyond women’s “contribution to Canadian history” to address larger historical and historiographical questions. Taken together, the essays constitute a new body of scholarship that engages the central “Promised Land” mandate to explore African Canadian history in light of its relevance for a contemporary understanding of Canada’s multilayered identity and nation building. Publication expected for 2013-2014.

THE PROMISED LAND CHRONICLES

The Promised Land Chronicle was a creation of the Community Coordinator, with the purpose of communicating directly with partners and supporters of the PLP.

- Issue 1 (January 2009)
- Issue 2 (May 2009)
- Issue 3 (October 2009)
- Issue 4 (January 2010)
- Issue 5 (May 2010)
- Issue 6 (September 2010)
- Issue 7 (February 2011)
- Issue 8 (June 2011)
- Issue 9 (January 2012)
- Issue 10 (May 2012)
- Issue 11 (August 2012)

Scan QR Code to access the chronicles online.
**A Time Machine that Helps to Revisit Century Old Multicultural Relationships.** This PLP Geomapping Database (http://plp.uottawa.ca) provides unprecedented access to the collected primary source materials (letters, tax records, journals, photographs, oral histories, family narratives, newspapers) and archives these materials in a searchable and concise manner. The Geomapping interface allows documents to be easily cross-referenced with land records and unearths the various layers of cultural, sociological and demographic facts in the evolution of these historic 19th Century Canadian communities. This database could help researchers analyze the shifts in populations and the movements of early Black settlement communities in this region of the South of Ontario and their migration throughout Canada. Some of the tools of this database make it possible to map the ownership of property in the Chatham-Kent area from more than a century ago, and helps researchers grasp the social-demographic dynamics that occurred at particular moments in history. For example, by tracing the cost of properties from their date of construction and noting the fluctuation in sales costs in relation to the buyers, researchers can analyze social and economic dimensions of, as well as demographic and cultural affiliations in particular neighbourhoods. Various other tools on this database allow users to personalize their search to specific parcels of land with features allowing users to download, print maps, and save their results in addition to sharing their findings via a variety of social media.

This interactive database is a testament to the potential of new media applications in the service of the social sciences and humanities. It utilizes a “wiki”, interface that extends the possibility for the general public to contribute...
to the archive-building by uploading new information, photos, maps, and copies of personal archives which would have otherwise remained hidden in the basements of family homes. The site is also a research tool, which works with ‘Google-Map’, allowing users to see the current state of particular parcels, and compare them with information contained on the database.

The Promised Land Project utilizes a variety of media, to centrally locate historical documents and publicly disseminate historical facts. This database will become an invaluable tool for students, historians, museums specialists as well as local community historians. It will facilitate a continuing collaboration between the community and academic partners, in creating networks and maximizing new forms of knowledge mobilization. This interactive research database is already an excellent heritage for all Canadians; a powerful testament that not only maps the great effort of these Afro-Canadian settlers but also an extraordinary opportunity to open new discussions into contemporary research on migration, race, social justice, multicultural dynamics, and human agency in the Canadian context.
CONFERENCE PAPERS

Conference papers presented by the Promised Land Project Co-investigators and collaborators.

- “Stories From the Grave: Pioneer Black Women Settlers in Canada’s British Northwest”
- “What Manner of History is This Beyond Naïve Realism in the Promised Land Project’s (Re)Telling of the Underground Railroad”
- “The Black Pioneers: A Brief History of Early Black Settlers in British Columbia”
- “Blacks, Whites, and Aboriginals in 19th Century British Columbia”


- "Modes of Historical Investigation in a Community-University Research Alliance"


- "A Contended Mind is a Continual Feast: Tracing Intellectual Migrations through the Promised Land". "Multiculturality Before Multiculturalism: Troubling Black Identity Beyond the Last Stop on the Underground Railroad".


- "The Promised Land Project: Exploring New Conjunctures for Historical Knowledge Mobilization".


- "The Black Contribution to Abolition and Emancipation". International Perspectives on Slavery and Abolition, CRIDAF, (University Paris XIII, France) 2008.


Professor Wright speaking to an audience during Black History Month in February 2009.

PUBLIC LECTURES

2012
Lambton County Historical Society (Lambton, ON).
Dresden Catherine McVean Chapter – History of ICDE and its support of local Heritage (Dresden, ON).
Glencoe and District Historical Society (Glencoe, ON).
English Class, John McGregor High School (Chatham, ON).
Inaugural Dean's Distinguished Lecture Series, University of British Columbia Faculty of Education (Vancouver, BC).
Lucan and Area Heritage Dinner (Lucan, ON).

2011
The Promised Land Symposium, Cemetery Restoration and School Curriculum Pilot Project. Essex County Black Historical Research Society.
Update on PLP activities Rotary Club of Dresden.
Promised Land Symposium, Cemetery Restoration and School Curriculum Pilot Project. Rotary Club of Dresden (Dresden, ON).
Introducing The Promised Land Project. Questers.
Questers at the Chatham-Kent Museum.
Pedagogy Day. English and History teachers from Chatham-Kent District School Board (Sarnia, ON).
Présence des Noirs au Canada. Prétextons une espèce de regard en "marche arrière" pour réfléchir un peu. Centre de recherche pluridisciplinaire sur les communautés d'Afrique noire et de diasporas (CERCLECAD) (Ottawa, ON).
Middlesex Centre Historical Society (Komoka, ON)
Black History class, St. Clair College (Windsor, ON).
Hughes Family History Seminar (Blenheim, ON).
The PLP and Chatham-Kent Black History to classes taught by Arthur Pegg. St. Clair Railroad Pioneers, St. Clair College (Windsor, ON).

2010
University of Windsor, 43-110 Past to Present: Understanding History, re: Promised Land Project and the SSHRC and CURA Process (Windsor, ON).
University of Windsor, introduction of PLP and research topic ideas for Graduate history students who had not confirmed a thesis or research paper (Windsor, ON).
History class, Blenheim High School (Blenheim, ON).
International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (IDERD).
**The Invention of a Black Subjectivity**, University of Ottawa Students’ Federation, University of Ottawa (Ottawa, ON).

Discussion of public history and the Promised Land Project in *The Historian’s Craft* historical methods seminar, Huron University College (London, ON).

Partnership opportunity with PLP/connecting students with local community groups. University of Windsor, Department of History, (Windsor, ON).

Introducing the PLP and proposal for partnership on “Heritage Roadshow” concept. Kent Genealogical Society.

*The Promised Land Project: Why are Americans Interested in Afro-Canadians of the Mid-Nineteenth Century?* Canadian Museum of Civilization (Curator’s Notebook – Lecture Series) (Ottawa, ON).

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**2009**


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**2008**

Discussion on the Promised Land Project in *African American History* seminar, Huron University College (London, ON).

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**2007**

Guest seminar in Dr. Colin Read’s *Canada and the United States* History class, Huron University College (London, ON).

Discussion on the Promised Land Project in *African American History* seminar, Huron University College (London, ON).

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**DOCUMENTARY FILMS**

- *PLP Total*, 2012
- *Wilberforce Colony*, 2011
- *Thomas Pinckney Story*, 2010
- *What is Going on the PLP*, 2010
- *The Making of the Promised Land, 2007–2008*
- *Moving on*, 2007
A WALK THROUGH SOME OF CHATHAM-KENT’S BLACK HISTORICAL MARKERS

The complete document is available online at http://artsites.uottawa.ca/lamacs/doc/walkthroughthepromisedland.pdf
BRAVE AND LOYAL COLOURED MEN: Your services are once more required to defend the Liberty you now enjoy.

Fearing that the rebels’ dream of American-style republicanism in Upper Canada would be the end to their freedom, the blacks of Chatham respond enthusiastically to the call for volunteers. In November 1838, they form two companies with a combined strength of 80 men, and remain active until April 1843, serving as the town’s main firefighting force during peace-time. The companies celebrate Emancipation Day with great fanfare – the 1842 festivities include the firing of the cannon at dawn, a parade through town, an elaborate dinner with speeches, and a dance at the militia parade grounds, now Tecumseh Park.

In 1856, with Dr. Martin Delany organizing the Chatham community and Rev. King at the head of the Elgin Settlement, 300 blacks march to the court house on election day and cast their votes against Edwin Larwill and in favour of Archibald McKellar, a liberal Chatham lawyer sympathetic to the black cause. Their votes carry the day, and Larwill is defeated. A point of pride for the fugitives is that every single one of them writes his own name in the register, while many whites could only make their mark.

In 1856, the Town of Chatham builds its first Town Hall for an incredibly high sum of $6,000. It stands on the north side of the Market facing King St W until its demolition in 1980 to make way for the Downtown Chatham Centre.

An escaped slave, Henry Weaver opens a grocery in Chatham at the corner of Park and Duke streets, and serves for five years as an Alderman during the 1890s.
Adrian Torrington and Marcel Gelinas are a musical duo from London, Ontario. Their project, Kuhleborn: Riversongs, is a collection of original tracks inspired by a canoe trip down the Thames River from London to Lighthouse Cove on Lake St. Clair, sponsored by the Philip Aziz Foundation for the Arts. The canoe trip was to retrace the path of William Lees Judson and Paul Peel in 1800 on a path of exploration along the river. The journey by artists and ecologists was meant to bring attention to the fragility, beauty and culture of this region and the need to strike a balance between city and environment. Torrington and Gelinas’ Kuhleborn project is a montage of stories from the Thames River Valley set to song. The Kuhleborn Riversongs is but one part of a larger project which also includes the Story Book Tree. Carved from a 5-ton trunk of an ask tree, this massive sculpture is covered with images corresponding to the Kuhleborn songs and other stories of the Thames River Valley area. Both the songs and the carving were in Ottawa, June 2009 for the 25th anniversary of the Canadian Heritage River Systems. The songs were set to be played before an audience of 300 expected international delegates. Included among the songs on the album is “Dawn, Canada” a lively piano ballad telling the story of Rev. Josiah Henson, his struggle for freedom and the birth of the Dawn Settlement for refugees fleeing slavery in the United States. The Promised Land Project has participated in the creation of this song by consulting on historical accuracies and partially financing the costs of recording time at Emac Studios and fees for back-up musicians. All of the songs on Kuhleborn: Riversongs were sponsored by individuals and organizations, while proceeds from the sales of the album and concert tour go to charity or are reinvested in the promotions and touring fees associated with the Kuhleborn project.

DAWN CANADA: AN ORIGINAL SONG BY GELLINAS/TORRINGTON

Dramatic interpretations of Dresden’s history. Lambton-Kent Composite School Drama class teacher, Devin Pearson with his students.
CEMETERY RESTORATION

Following a two day monument restoration workshop in 2005, sponsored by the Ontario Ministry of Culture and facilitated by the Municipality of Chatham-Kent Cemeteries, a group of passionate volunteers and cemetery staff formulated and focused on an ambitious plan to preserve existing monuments and markers in the local area. Since 2009, this endeavor has brought to light over one thousand recovered and preserved memorials ensuring a part of those family legacies left behind are recognized and remembered for generations to come.

The Promised Land Project joined this effort with two very specific objectives to justify its participation in the process. The first is that this is first and foremost an educational activity. As referenced above there is currently a robust volunteer organization dedicated to restoring or repairing as many graves as it can locate. The Promised Land Project is not interested in duplicating this effort nor would it be within its own mandate even if it were. By making the primary goal one of education, the PLP is not encumbered by quotas or a need to complete as many as possible. Success is gauged by what the community and those who participated in this activity learned about the deceased.

Although the cemetery is responsible for routine maintenance this is only general upkeep of the property such as cutting the grass and clearing fallen branches, dead trees and debris. Like any other piece of property, the government is not responsible for maintaining an individual grave and its marker, as it neither purchased the grave marker nor has the budgetary capacity to repair or replace them.

In the first years after a person’s passing those who dearly remember them—the family and friends—often visit. But overtime, particularly once those who remembered have themselves passed on there is no one left to tend the graves. Overtime, markers are damaged through erosion, settling ground and other natural causes or, vandalism, and human causes (lawnmowers). Compromised stones fall over and if they are not removed from their place or set back up, a stone
quickly builds up a layer of new topsoil as leaves and other organic material accumulates atop them. Each spring as the land thaws and the ground is saturated with rainfall and snow melt, the heavy stones further sink into the soft soil. Eventually the stones disappear below the surface completely. One needs only to walk through old sections of a cemetery to see the result.

- What are seemingly empty spaces in older cemetery wards we know actually contain graves? Without markers they are anonymous.
- What should become of these graves?
- What should older sections of a cemetery represent?

These should not be treated as rhetorical questions. In Chatham-Kent there are more than 200 known burial grounds; from municipal to churchyard to private; large and small, active and abandoned. It is a timely question that as residents of Chatham-Kent we decide now how we should look at and engage with these properties. Should they be left as they are, to ultimately disappear and the land be reused in the future? Are they community green spaces, or a place of memory containing the pioneers and history of the communities the cemetery served.

This partnership has chosen the path of preservation. A determined effort to save the grave markers and in turn pay homage to our ancestors and community builders.

By its very nature, the PLP is a research project furthering our knowledge of Chatham-Kent’s African Canadian community. Engaging in this activity was first conceptualized as a supplement to the PLP’s classroom-based educational activities. After having spent a semester studying and researching about local Black Canadian settlers to Chatham-Kent, the PLP and our partner Heritage Chatham-Kent, proposed to take these same students to a local cemetery to recover and restore gravestones belonging to early Black settlers. As a wrap up to the classroom educational component, it was felt that students would find greater meaning in the work and make connections to the names on the stones on a personal level. Simultaneously, it offered students the chance to be seen doing a community service by beautifying public cemeteries and showing respect to the deceased and their families.

This sort of activity as first proposed by the Ontario Ministry of Culture is permissible under Ontario Law as long as the stones are detectable from the surface and no further than 18 inches below the surface (some can go deeper if it is known how deep the grave shaft was dug, this PLP dig adheres to the 18 inch threshold to keep the risk at a minimum). This keeps the work cosmetic in nature, similar to landscaping, and reduces the risk of accidentally disturbing the grave. To dig further, or disturb the grave would be archaeological and require the presence of trained, certified archaeologists, and potentially family permissions.

To that end, PLP and Heritage Chatham-Kent received support (moral and material) from the Municipality of Chatham-Kent, Lambton Kent District School Board and Memorial Restoration of Sarnia.

Heritage Chatham-Kent, a founding member of the PLP, is a committee of Municipal Council, responsible for the preservation and promotion of Chatham-Kent’s heritage. Lambton Kent District School Board is the
area's public school board, which has allowed the PLP to pilot our curriculum activity guide in its schools. Memorial Restoration is a private company from Sarnia Ontario which has donated their expertise and time to assist with more complicated restorations, and has offered to donate equipment and materials to repair more severely damaged stones when deemed economically reasonable for them to do so.

**Work Summary**

On weekends during the spring and fall of 2011 and the spring of 2012, the partners organized small teams of volunteer students to do this work. From the beginning the PLP and Heritage Chatham-Kent emphasised that this was not to train the students to do the work or to see how many stones could be repaired. The primary goal was to provide a learning experience. If the entire day was spent working on a single stone that would have been sufficient for this goal. What the team wanted to achieve was help the students understand their community better and make the students feel a connection or a bond with the past. We wanted them to see history as filled with people they could understand, and to humanize the class work they had done, thereby making it come alive. It was one thing for a student to write a paper or a create a website about what they had discovered about local African Canadian businessmen or politicians, it is quite another to then have them find and restore the final resting place of those men and their families.

In total, during 2011 two classes were involved in the work, one in the winter/spring (2 weekends in May and one in June) and one in the fall/winter semester (1 weekend in September and 1 in October). Both were from John McGregor Secondary School in Chatham. On average they completed 2 grave markers a day. Additional plot makers and footstones were also uncovered. Each work team ranged in number of participants from a low of 2 to a high of 8, the numbers were dependent on the initiative of those individuals willing to participate. Initially, the class was to be divided evenly between the dates but because it is an extra curricular activity students could not be required to take part. Those who did were often committed and came back more than once. The teacher always took part as well. Eleven grave markers were recovered from beneath the soil and restored during 2011, all at Maple Leaf Cemetery in Chatham. 2012’s work plan involves students from John McGregor, as well as Blenheim District High School; cemeteries are once again Maple Leaf, as well as Shrewsbury Cemetery. Work is on going at the time of writing the report, and there are no totals to include as yet.

The work had no plan or indeed desire to focus on particular graves when drafting the schedule. The team wanted to avoid the optics of focusing only on famous names. This allowed the group to more adequately give back to the community and repair stones from people in all walks of life. Chatham Kent was the Promised Land for many freedom seekers, this included many who were not recorded in history as great men and women, but rather average though albeit intrepid citizens. Many names are known only to descendants and census records.

Such records were invaluable tracking down the identity of the names discovered on the stones. The greatest example was the very first stone uncovered (its story is documented in the fall 2011 Promised Land Chronicle), but in summary, once uncovered this stone marked the grave of a man – Osborne Bentley – not listed in the cemetery records as being interred at Maple Leaf, and who appears to have been given this spot within a more well known family’s plot. He also was not known to local historians and genealogists. Further research uncovered his census records from 1861, and Municipal records indicated he had purchased a number of business properties in what at the time was considered a black business district, surrounded
by the community’s well to do (including the town Alderman whose family plot he had been found in). After his death the properties were all sold to family members of a prominent Baptist Bishop. Finds like this were not entirely uncommon and the sense of discovery served to energize the students.

Finding appropriate graves (i.e. belonging to Chatham African Canadian citizens) was not as straightforward as some might think. Maple Leaf cemetery is not segregated. However, the plots were sold publicly and we could see a trend, as friends and associates would often deliberately buy plots near one another. Alderman Henry Weaver’s family plot, was in the row adjacent across directly across from Bishop Walter Hawkins and Bishop Nazrey, with members of their congregations in the vicinity. “Clusters” or “pockets” of the community exist throughout the cemetery, interspersed throughout white graves, driving home how deliberately open and unsegregated the lay out is. The students took pride in this fact about their town, and enjoyed pointing out how close prominent white names were to prominent black names, in particular how well known racist politician Edwin Larwill, who had lost his seat in Parliament over his objection to the Elgin Settlement, was buried very near Abraham Shadd.

In conclusion, this project was extra curricular and an entirely voluntary addition to the classroom activity, but took on a life of its own. The students took as much joy and reward from the cemetery work as from anything else they did during their high school careers. It will linger with them as a life lesson far longer than other school work, these stones and the names or lives they represent have been returned to the light and will stand as testimony to the founders of this community for decades to come. The effect for the community has been noticed. As Heritage Chatham-Kent Hans Vanderdoe remarked “When was the last time you heard of teenagers going into the cemetery and doing good?”
**Newspapers**

Re: Cemetery Restoration.


Re: Promised Land Symposium.


Re: Cemetery Restoration Project.
*Chatham Kent Daily Post*, May 9, 2011.


*The Michigan Citizen*, Apr. 6-12 2011.


Re: Interview with Marie Carter.


“Multiculturalism model: Promised Land project has real potential”. *Chatham This Week*, Dec. 2006.

**Radio**

“Early Shift with Tony Doucette”. Re: Devin Andrews on Cemetery Restoration Project.
*Chatham This Week*, Jun. 10, 2010.


**Television**


Project Summary/Reasoning
The goal of this project was to facilitate student learning of African Canadian History through the Arts, Social Sciences and language training. The school program was a practical multidisciplinary study that allowed students to learn about the historical presence of the African Canadian settlements that emerged in Canada during the 19th century and well as the intercultural and international relationships that resulted from their presence in Canada. Indeed, the neglected and unknown contribution of the African Canadians to our National experience is significant and needs to be better disseminated and widely learned. The role of these pioneering settlements in the modern civil rights movement in 20th century Canada and their contributions to the global effort to abolish slavery here at home and abroad are all virtually absent from the national narrative.

Program objectives
This activity does not imply creating new curriculum requirements during the semester but rather relies on existing curriculum. Indeed, the learning of this unique history is complementary, the “theme” by which other subjects achieve existing curriculum requirements. Students taking this program will:

- Visit local historical sites, libraries, and museums
- Understand how to do historical archival research
- Read and analyze historical materials
- Write essays or scripts based on historical experiences and findings
- Network with University Students
- Work in teams
- Present an oral defence or dramatic performance

This sequential process is anchored in archival research, essay writing, oral presentation, networking, and practical hands-on creative activities that allow students to direct the learning process. They decide which locally based stories and people are of interest to them and explore that through the arts. In studying what is of interest to them and internalizing the story through creative expression it is believed that they will remember the lesson for a longer period of time, possibly as even a life experience.
Curriculum Requirements

English – This classroom activity piggybacks upon the core Ontario Curriculum requiring:

a) students learn the proper form and usage of non-fiction essay writing and;

b) students learned tools and methods of research including how to recognize and reference legitimate sources.

Drama – This classroom activity piggybacks upon the core Ontario Curriculum requiring

a) Students write and workshop original scripts and;

b) Students perform in a stage production as practicum learning experience.

Activity Phase One (English Curriculum)

This phase of the project began in the English class and was scheduled for approximately 4 weeks. Actual duration can vary depending on the needs of the students, accessibility of necessary records locally and the time a teacher has to contribute to the program. Any program being run in the vicinity of Huron University College (a partner of the PLP) may apply to HUC’s Community Based Learning program for a limited number of history students to be assigned to your class as mentors. These mentors meet with the students during the first days of this phase. The class is divided into teams and assigned to the various mentors. The mentors establish a blog and maintain contact with the students assigned to their team and teach them valuable tools for researching history and what is or is not a reliable source. They can also provide a list of suggested reading and help locate resources.

During this opening week, the teacher should arrange for classroom visits from local historians and field trips to museum or historic sites. Further information about this can be obtained from the PLP website (lamacs.arts.uottawa.ca). The visiting lecturers will be a great introduction to the history and the historical material with which the teacher may or may not be familiar. Review a list of local events and persons of interest, this can be compiled from the PLP material or from local historians. Combined with the mentors and the guest lecturers, students will now select an event or person to study and over the next three weeks research and write an academic essay. The teacher’s role during this period is to provide all the instruction necessary to help students properly write an essay, as well as arrange for trips to libraries or round out the instruction with videos and relevant readings related to African Canadian history. There is no video or book recommended, but selected in consultation with the guest lecturers and mentors if you are familiar with the material is recommended.

At the end of the four week period the class will have produced a collection of historical research, primarily essays. Teach this phase as you would any other essay writing assignment. Grading will be based on participation and whether or not the student learned proper essay writing procedures. The use of African Canadian history is only the context or “backdrop” upon which this is done. The goal of learning the history is not part of the grading system or a portion of the English curriculum. It is suggested that you make this theme a larger part of the semester. Students and teacher could explore oral presentation assignments, documentary film making, web-pages or short stories/fiction writing based on the same material. When the essays are completed at the end of the 4 weeks turn copies of the material over to the Drama class, they will continue with the second phase of this project.

Activity Phase Two (Drama Curriculum)

The second phase is run in the Drama class. It is also scheduled for up to 4 weeks. As part of the Ontario curriculum requirements for senior level drama, students are required to write scripts and
workshop scripts. To begin the second four week phase, students will receive visits from the same classroom guest lecturers and field trips as an orientation to the history. They are then handed the research and essays completed by the English class. Much as the students in English were responsible for selecting to study the events and people of interest to them, the Drama students will select the essays which they find both the most interesting and “useable” from a script writer’s perspective. Because the essays would also include a list of sources, students have the option of returning to the same sources to help round out their background study of the material as they turn the essays into scripts. Give the students as much leeway as necessary in not only the selection process but also the style of writing they wish to pursue. Encourage them to explore one-act plays, short plays and soliloquies to tell the story. At the end of the four week period, the students will turn in the material they have written.

Grading is based on the quality of work and if they successfully mastered the art of script writing. The teacher is not responsible for grading the accuracy of the history. Although it is important, it is understood that in non history subjects, the teacher does not always have the background necessary to judge accuracy, do not worry about learning all the history yourself.

Also part of the objective of the overall process is to give the students as much leeway as possible to be creative. It is the belief that they will retain the knowledge and appreciation of the history for a longer period because they internalized the process and were creative in its telling. That is the ultimate objective, knowledge and appreciation of the important local history. Provided the students are not being discriminatory or deliberately rewriting the material in an offensive manner they should be allowed some manoeuvrability in the adaptation of history to art. Truth and fact are important, look for credible use of source material and citation in the research phase; impress upon the students the importance of accuracy and fairness but grade as per the curriculum requirements, which in this case is on participation and script writing ability.

**Activity Phase Three (Drama Curriculum)**

This final phase is also part of the Drama curriculum. While grading the scripts submitted in the second phase, the teacher selects the best work for theatre performance. The class is then given these scripts and prepares them for performance. This phase could take 4-6 weeks with the intention of performing the selected scripts/scenes as part of the performance or practical exam at the end of the semester. Grading will be based upon the student’s performance of the script and their acting or production role abilities.

To further engage the various creative skills of individual students, it is recommended that specific students be assigned production roles...
other than strictly on stage. In the past this has included asking musically inclined students to score the productions; technically talented students can be responsible for designing sound and lighting requirements; budget permitting, fashion minded students can look into period costume etc. The finished production does not have to remain as an in class piece and could be used as part of a community or school-wide performance perhaps in relation to Black History Month (February).

It is extremely important to note that because the characters in the production/scripts may be largely black, the racial composition or identity of the students in the class does not. It is just as important that students of other racial identification be allowed to explore and experience this component of Canadian society and their community's history. This practicum is part of the learning experience transcending merely writing about people and places in an academic paper or work of fiction. One popular method of incorporating a discussion on race in the classroom is to reverse the race roles on stage. It is ultimately up to the discretion of the teacher and the students in how this is done and for whom – if anyone – it is eventually performed.

Race can be a delicate subject when it arises in classrooms. Please be cognizant that this activity is not appropriation. It is important to acknowledge the race issue in an open manner. This is not an overt part of the lesson this activity is trying to achieve with any kind of tangible outcome but, it can be a valuable and perhaps necessary introduction to the unit and get the students thinking and discussing issues in a mature manner. This project by its very nature promotes intercultural dialogue, it is only natural that students will raise questions in class, and having a positive outlet for free discussion can be helpful and necessary for the overall learning process. Please let this happen and encourage it as you feel appropriate.

Race is not as straightforward as the traditional and sometimes predominant societal archetypes still present. How does anyone know whether the students are “white” or “black” and what does that label mean? For those confident in raising these thoughts directly, it can be one of the most interesting things to acknowledge before moving on to the research. Most Ontario high school students will have discussed matters of race and identity, if they do it at all, with reference to only one text: To Kill a Mockingbird. It seems teachers/students feel safe as long as the subject comes out of the “distant” American experience, but shy away from exploring the issue from the Canadian experience, be it literary or historical.

In particular when it comes to the concept of “ownership of history” and “appropriation of history” and the deliberate rewriting or reinterpretation of history can evoke strong opinions. However do not feel that your race or the predominant race within the classroom exclude this discussion or study of this history from being appreciated. Men can teach women’s history without appropriating it and vice versa. How can we truthfully study Canadian history,
if due to perceived racial sensitivities we cannot explore all people’s contributions to it, and still then claim to know all aspects of Canadian history? If exploring and writing about this particular history cannot be done by a “white” student, does this mean that likewise a German student cannot study and write about Chinese history; can a Russian person be interested in Ancient Egypt or the Hindu faith? How would one arbitrarily draw these lines of what are permissible subjects a person can study and contribute to?

A less direct, less tangible but still valuable objective of this process is to break down barriers and promote dialogue. The research process and the end products produced by the students will be more open honest and complete if this happens. The overall learning process offered by the activity need not encompass only practical graded material.

Optional Activity/Classes
This project is considered an organic template. It does not have to begin or end with these three phases and two classes. Be creative, open and flexible to generate a unique learning experience. With sufficient interest from other classrooms and departments in the school there are ways to engage further students such as:

Visual Arts: students design poster art or sculpture pieces based on the events and persons explored in student research or in combination with the drama class production (including set pieces). It has also been recommended that some schools consider producing poster artwork as part of a community awareness program in partnership with historic sites.

Music: students score the Drama class production, or write their own pieces based on study of 18th, 19th and 20th century period music from African rhythms, slave songs and spirituals to ragtime, jazz and blues.

History/Civics/Law: students, particularly in History could be substituted for the English class in the above scenario. The History class would become responsible for writing the academic non-fiction essay, leaving the English course to write poetry and fictional works based on the research. The era studied by the History unit does not need to be limited to Canada’s post-Emancipation slave era or the time of frontier settlement and the Underground Railroad, but also cover the 20th century and the struggle for civil rights. Likewise a course in civics or law could cover a unit of study focusing on civil liberties and civil rights development in Canada.

Multi-Media/Communications: Assign students to create a “behind the scenes” video or documentary chronicling the school’s work on the project in-class, before the final product is created. This could be combined further with the art student’s assignment to create a wider community awareness campaign, with the video possibly aired through community access television.

By engaging multiple classes simultaneously the project becomes a larger school community wide experience that both teaches and enlightens the student body. The same project can be shared by not only multiple subjects but also grade levels. If engaging multiple classes such as this it is highly recommended that the program be run over a school year rather than a single semester. Having such a large multidisciplinary project can be daunting but the payoff of a large scale single learning experience engaging a large percentage of the student body has its own rewards.
Model Result: The Freedom Experience Young Writers Competition

The Freedom Experience is the name given to life in Canada for thousands of refugees fleeing slavery or persecution in the United States during the nineteenth century.

Many arrived via the Underground Railroad and became the pioneering settlers of communities in Chatham-Kent and elsewhere around Ontario. The dangerous trip to Canada made by these individuals and families marked the beginning of productive lives which helped to build this country. Their enduring contribution to both the Canadian experience and the struggle to end global slavery is often neglected. By studying and promoting both the stories of their lives and the legacy which they left us, we can address this oversight.

The Freedom Experience, Young Writers Competition was a contest accepting entries – in both fiction and non-fiction categories – from high school aged authors in Kent County. Essay and short story topics ranged from the historical setting to contemporary issues, social, political or personal; but needed to deal with some aspect of the Kent Freedom Experience and local African Canadian Heritage stories. While researching their topics, authors were highly encouraged to visit local historical sites and museums.

Writing Contest Winners

The Promised Land Project and Distinguished Women in International Service would like to thank all the students this past year who participated in the Freedom Experience Young Writers Competition. Submissions we received from students at schools in Chatham Kent, and divided amongst three categories: non-fiction, fiction and interactive. One top prize was handed out in each category, and these contestants made certain it would be a difficult choice for the judges. The winners were:

  ALLIE YOUNG
* Best Fiction: “Finding Where I Belong”
  BETHANY BAKER
* Best Interactive: “Semiotics and the Study of Photography”
  BECKY POLLARD & MELANIE CHARGONEAU

The winners received their prize on stage at the Capitol Theatre during the fifth annual Promised Land Symposium, on Friday, June 15th, 2012 in Chatham-Kent. The awards were handed out by Micheline Rawlins of DWIS, and directly preceded the appearances of Cecily Nicholson and Lawrence Hill.

Each winning entry was awarded a cash prize of $100. Versions of their work will be available at or linked to the Promised Land Project website: www.lamacs.uottawa.ca. Also receiving a $200 award of recognition that evening was Lambton Kent Composite School. The cheque was presented to Devin Pearson, a dedicated teacher from the school who has worked with the Promised Land Project before and organized large class projects rather than individual essays. This year’s project revolved around producing two newspapers, one written in 19th century Dresden as if covering local events as they occurred, and the other in the present, covering the class quest for knowledge and truth as they delved into local Black history.

Sponsors

The Promised Land Project (PLP) IMAGINATION Ink
On the morning of May 8, 1858 in Chatham, John Brown held a series of secret meetings over his plans to establish a revolutionary government of freed slaves. The records say that Brown met with twelve whites and thirty-four blacks in the First Baptist Church to approve the constitution of the new republic.

Tina Simonton is a student at Blenheim District High School who is already dreaming of a life at University of Guelph this fall. Like most students in her position she looks forward to the end of High School, she just needs to complete this one last semester.

Heading into her final classes she did not know about the Promised Land, and nothing of its ongoing work in local schools. Nor did she suspect that an old family legend would become the centrepiece of an English class project and equally intrigue so many historians.

Unlike many students choosing a research topic, hers had a personal connection. Her family owned a fine antique table that, as the story goes, was built and given to their ancestors as a gift by a black farmhand they had once employed. The table has fine crafted details and appears to be the work of a skilled tradesman. Who was this unknown man? What was his story? Surely someone of this skill would have built more than the one table, have we perhaps discovered a talented furniture maker whose wares are spread around the region? Tina was determined to discover the identity of the man, and confirm the story attributed to the table.

The Simonton Clan arrived in Chatham-Kent from Ireland in the 1830s, some of the first settlers in Howard Township. Within two decades, two Simonton brothers were working what was for the time a large farm near Botany, and needed labourers to tend it all. One such farmhand was a man whose name is lost today, but is attributed to be the craftsman behind the tale table.

Tina has documented the story as it survives today from interviewing many members of different branches of the family. They all know the story, and the details are nearly identical. This man is a self emancipated slave, who made his way to Canada and by the 1850s was employed on the Simonton Farm. Neither his name nor place of origin is known. Apart from having possessed the skills to make the table, he is said to have been experienced with horses. Both the Simonton brothers and the farm where he had been enslaved in the US raised horses, so it was a natural fit, possibly the primary reason he was hired by the Simontons.

The Farmhand had left behind a wife and child when he fled to Canada, and somehow after settling into life at the Simonton farm wrote or made contact with his former slaver master and brokered a deal to purchase his family’s freedom. Whether the fee was steep so as to help recoup the cost of his own freedom is uncertain but it was such that it would take many years of working for the Simontons to raise sufficient funds.

The Simonton brothers felt for the man, and after a while decided to get involved. They negotiated their own deal with the slave-owner, to buy two horses from him, but the deal included the man’s wife and child as well. One of the brothers travelled to the States to complete the transaction and bring the people and horses home. In exchange, the man agreed to continue working for the Simontons to pay back the rest of the
money the Simontons had contributed to buying his family’s immediate freedom.

When the term was up, the grateful farmhand gave the table to Simontons as a gift of thanks. Supposedly he made it himself from a single piece of wood cut on the farm. Talking with young Tina about the deal today you can hear her irritation that everyone she spoke with universally agrees that the two horses purchased in the deal were stud colts, one black and one bay, of good blood lineage “Every Simonton knows the colour of the horses and nothing about the people.”

The table has recently been reviewed, via photograph, by an expert in early Ontario furniture. He agrees it has a very “Kent County look to it,” and was probably made in the 1850s or 60s. However, because of the complexity of the turned elements and a few tell tale features he believes it was more likely made by the Robert Smith Company of Chatham. Smith’s was a large operation once located on King St W near William and backing onto Jahnke St. It was a steam powered shop employing on average 30+ people at any given time. Therefore, although disappointing for Tina, it is far more likely that the table was purchased rather than built by the farmhand.

Because of its labour force, the time period and the shop’s location in town, one can easily speculate that a significant percentage of the Robert Smith workforce was African Canadian. Whether or not the Simonton farmhand was later one and had a role in making the table can not be determined. At this time there is no comprehensive list of Smith employees and apprentices.

Despite this minor set back, Tina’s primary task remains: who was the farmhand? Where did he come from? What happened to him and his family? In her near future she plans a trip to the Ontario Archives in the hope of finding tax assessments and census documents from the period which may have captured the names of other residents and employees at the farm. We can’t wait to see what her search reveals.

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**MODEL RESULT: WORKSHOPS AND EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES**

2012

Grade 12 World History class, BDHS. (Bradford, ON) Feb. 2012.

Grade 12 English class, JMSS. (Chatham, ON) Feb. 2012.

Black Odyssey Conference III, (for students from Montcalm Secondary School (London, ON) and Arthur Voden Secondary School (St. Thomas ON)).

Historian’s Craft Website and Films Launch.

2011

Walking tour to students from Huron University College’s Historians Craft class.

Grade 12 English class, JMSS. (Chatham, ON) Feb. 2011.

Grade 10/11 Drama class, LKCS. (Dresden, ON) Sept. 2011.

Grade 11 English class, JMSS. (Chatham, ON) Sept. 2011.

Black Odyssey Conference II.

Hiram Wilson Letters Website Launch.

Thomas Pinckney video premier, Christ Church (Chatham, ON).

2010

History and drama workshop, LKCS. (Dresden, ON).

Hughes Diary Project Launch.

2009

“Anti-slavery education in black and white”. Black History Month exhibit, HUC (London, ON).

Hughes Diary Project Open House.
We set out to augment the official grand narrative of Canada by drawing attention to its unspoken, silenced, and deleted slave history. This was achieved through a collaboration between multiple generations of people, geographies, cultures, and disciplines. The dialogue that arose from this venture crossed academic and community boundaries and forged racial, cultural and intellectual bridges where there were divisions and gaps.
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The Municipality of Chatham-Kent
The Chatham-Kent Museum
The Chatham-Kent Library
The Chatham-Kent Heritage Committee
Distinguished Women in International Services (DWIS)

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AMLC&S

Audiovisual Media Lab for the study of Cultures and Societies