

Oct. 2009  
Issue 3

# Promised Land Chronicle

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## New Address

The Promised Land's Office of the Community Coordinator has moved!

As of September, the local office for the Project is now located with the Municipal Archives in the Mc George Building  
325 Grand Ave E, Chatham.

Those wishing to phone Devin Andrews, may do so at 519-436-0119 x351

## X Marks the Spot: The PLP's *GeoMapping* Project

Today, if you wanted to research your family tree or a historical figure to determine where they lived and what property they owned at a specific time, it is a long and exhaustive search. You would need to access multiple databases and archives from the Provincial Land Registry to municipal tax Registers and federal census forms, none of which are housed under the same roof. Most are not digitized, and cross checking is exhausting. But imagine having all that data at your fingertips, displayed visually on a computer screen. That is what will soon be possible with the *PLP GeoMapping* project, and available to anyone researching pioneers and settlers with ties to Chatham-Kent.

Displayed as an interactive map, users will be able to choose a time frame and see the roads and property lines as they existed during that period. Specific searches by name or property will be possible but for general searches, imagine being able to draw your cursor over the map and have properties which were either black owned or rented or, owned/rented by whites with important ties to the Abolitionist movement highlighted with pop up windows providing details of owners and residents. These details could include family and genealogical information, dates of residency, photographs and biographies, even information on where they came from if not born here, and where they went if they did not die here. It will eventually include links to archival databases and websites to

continue tracking their stories in other online databases located around the world.

This exciting tool opens up new avenues of study. With the ability to quickly and visually determine changes in demography, the expansion and contraction of settlements, or simply people's migration from place-to-place and town-to-town. Researchers can extrapolate new theories and ask questions about the everyday life experiences in 19<sup>th</sup> century Chatham, Dawn, and other county townships'.

The first basic version of this program will be ready early in 2010, thanks to the tireless efforts of PLP researchers, graduate students and staff at the Municipality of Chatham-Kent. This first version of *PLP GeoMapping* focuses on the Dawn Settlement. The next phases on other major settlements, including Chatham, Buxton, Shrewsbury and the surrounding townships will be completed in subsequent years.

***The work ahead may be long and arduous, but the pay off promises to be worth the time and effort!***

The PLP is looking for volunteers to help with the project *GeoMapping* endeavour. If you would like to share your historical biographies, family genealogical tree, pictures or other historical materials or to volunteer your time to assist building this *GeoMapping* database, please contact the Office of the Community Coordinator.  
519-436-9117 ext. 351  
[dandrewsplp@gmail.com](mailto:dandrewsplp@gmail.com)

## The Promised Land Marks the Start of Year Three

The PLP is excited by the potential that lay ahead in this, the third of its five-year mandate to study and promote Kent County's heritage.

It does take time and patience to pull together such a large and complex international research team, but we have been working steadily and the year ahead will show the results of this hard work.

The first phase of the PLPs interactive genealogical map will be

completed this fall and available on-line in early 2010. Focusing on African-Canadian heritage in the region, this visual database of property records will be a great new resource for academic and family researchers alike.

### 2009-10 Youth Focus!

Dr. John Harris, a professor of theatre from North Carolina, will be staying in Dresden during

the winter months working as an artist-in-classroom at Lambton Kent Composite School. He will oversee a pilot project where high school students research, write and star in their own theatre productions of stories from local history.

Still focusing on youth, this fall also marks the inaugural *Freedom Experience Competition*, a writing contest for young authors, held in cooperation with IMAGINATION-Ink. Award winners will be honoured during the 3<sup>rd</sup> PLP General Symposium at the University of

Windsor. Project associates are also working on a variety of collaborations including with the Essex County Black Historical Research Society to create new Black History Month classroom activity guides and; with Christ Anglican Church (Dresden) 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemorations.

And that is just to name a few of our works on the go. Our name and the results of our research will be in the news a lot this coming year. And it's just the beginning. We hope the success of this project inspires and educates the wider Canadian community.

## Pen Pals Needed

The PLP is looking for residents or descendants of Chatham-Kent's African Canadian community to volunteer for a letter writing campaign. A joint venture of the PLP and the *Antigonish Guysborough Black Development Association*, this campaign will pair volunteers from communities in Kent County (Ontario), with those from Antigonish and Guysborough Counties in Nova Scotia. Participants would be expected to write letters to one another detailing what it was like growing up in their communities and what they know of their family and community histories.

We hope that these letters will introduce residents of the different communities to what it was like living in other parts of Canada and, help us further explore similarities and differences in the community building experiences of early black settlements in Canada.

We know that an important number of the Kent settlement residents are descended from those who fled slavery and persecution in the United States during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Many used the well-known paths of the Underground Railroad. In Nova Scotia, many black residents are descended from the

Black Loyalists, the free blacks and former slaves who fought for the British during the American Revolution.

But how much do you know about this history? How much more do you want to learn and share?

We would like to receive many correspondences from you. These letters could later be paired with editorial notes and commentary before being published as a primary, resource book or as a model of historical knowledge production. This exercise will be a chance to record what are fading memories of previous generations and provide a concrete account of what may have previously been our oral history.

This is a remarkable opportunity to share your stories and preserve an important part of our Canadian history.

To volunteer as a letter-writer or for more information please contact Devin Andrews, at: [dandrewsplp@gmail.com](mailto:dandrewsplp@gmail.com)

## The Freedom Experience Young Writers Competition

The Chatham-Kent Writer's Guild through IMAGINATIONInk is teaming up with the PLP to sponsor a youth writing competition on the subject of Chatham-Kent's rich African Canadian history. Open to high school aged writers, this competition is aimed at making local youth think about the events and legacy of the past while becoming more engaged and familiar with the region's historical sites. Entries will be accepted in both fiction and non-fiction categories, with applicants further divided between writers in grades 9-10 and 11-12.

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## News from Dr. Reid-Maroney

The summer's fieldwork in Chatham Kent drew two graduate students, Melissa Robinson (MA candidate, Public History) and Wyatt Smith (MA candidate, Geography), both of the University of Western Ontario. Melissa and Wyatt returned to the land records database begun last summer. They have completed the Dresden portion of the database, have set the groundwork for the *GeoMapping* portion of the project, and have established research policies for community researchers and others working with this important data set. Michele Mathany and Jamie Sparks of the Municipality of Chatham-Kent provided invaluable research assistance to the summer students.

Working with Archdeacon James Broadfoot of the Diocese of Huron Archives in London, students in "The Historian's Craft" will be digitizing and transcribing and creating scholarly apparatus for the manuscript diary of the Reverend Thomas Hughes. The undergraduates will be assisted by two Ph.D. candidates in History (UWO), Timothy Campeau and Devon Elliott. Both are trained in the field of digital history and will help create a website for student research. In November, the class will welcome a delegation from Christ Church, Dresden (the congregation Hughes founded in 1859) to Huron to discuss the work-in-progress.

Maxine Dubuc, Manager of Community-Based Learning at Huron University College has assisted in the development of in-class projects set to run this

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## Message from the Principle Investigator

Dr. Boulou Ebanda de B'éri

The Promised Project has been a challenging project, but yet, wonderfully exciting as well. We're entering our third year with confidence, and as you all know by now, the PLP is locally guided by Devin, who has been navigating through the front winds, listening to stories from the community, and making sure that the ultimate beneficiaries of this wonderful project are the people of Chatham-Kent.

Last year, Chatham-Kent library obtained the *Black Abolitionist Papers*, thanks to the PLP. With this acquisition, local community members no longer need to travel to Toronto to read this important historical archive; rather, people will come from London and other neighbouring counties to read them in Chatham. The tourism bureau of the Municipality should indeed publicize this wonderful acquisition.

Last summer, two students from Huron University College completed a historical database, under the eagle eyes of Dr. Reid-Maroney and with the help of many members of the community. This, the PLP's *GeoMapping* database will allow researchers to track down land transactions and people's movement or migration within the country and internationally. Indeed, through this database, theoretical concepts such as that of "multiple trajectories" used in the PLP protocol to suggest regional, national and international migration of the PLP communities, will become tangible. To ease the complexity of this task, the first part of this database focuses on Dresden. Chatham and the townships are our next target.

At my end, I'm working with Dr. Willis, a historian and curator at the Canadian Museum of Civilization, who visited with us and presented his work at our 2009 symposium, at St. Clair College, Thames Campus. Teaming up with Dr. Willis, we reflect on the best possible practices that could help us produce an exposition on the Underground Railroad at the Canadian Museum of Civilization. As we are still going through research and questioning, we've been invited to do a presentation at a conference taking place in Montréal this October, under the topic of *Museality* and *Intermediality*. Don't be afraid of these bizarre academic concepts, they're just words!

In short, our presentation is part of an effort to represent the experience of fugitive slaves and free people of colour who fled the U.S. for Canada during the 18th and 19th centuries on the Underground Railroad (UGRR). We would like to examine the ways in which the materials that constitute UGRR history (e.g., abstracts, subjective experiences, oral and family histories, etc.) as well as physical markers (e.g., buildings, cemeteries, roads, written memoirs, etc.) could be *re-constructed* to display, and thus, *communicate* the freedom experience of Blacks and Natives and European abolitionists, in various Canadian communities during the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. As a footnote here, the key-terms here are "*reconstruction*" and "*communication*". And of course, with Chatham-Kent being my second home, my portion of intervention in this presentation will utilize the *Promised Land Project* as my best-known case study.

Another important question Dr. Willis and I would like to be able to answer is to what extent can a national museum such as the Canadian Museum of Civilization become an open space within which "*competing national histories*" could be displayed? Key-terms here are "competing national histories", because as you know, if the PLP exist today, it is simply because what we're interested in investigating in our nation's history is still not well represented.

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Furthermore, this question is crucial because, one could also ask: what will we be doing with the Promised Land Findings at the end of this project in 2012? Should these findings remain limited to the local community or should they become a part of the National History and thus, have the right to be nationally recognized? However, these questions bring about other kinds of challenging questions. For example, how could a street corner in Chatham that hold particular importance for the Promised Land Project be displayed at the National Museum of Civilization in Gatineau?

I still don't have a clear-cut answer to these challenging questions. However, my hope is that by working with persons such as Dr. Willis and all of my research partners and collaborators, and also by receiving feedback from all of you, the PLP community members, we'll be able to articulate a concrete script by 2012.

Finally, I'd like to tell you a bit more about what's been my driving force in this project so far. As I have been telling the narrative of the birth of this PLP over and over again and in all panels I've got the opportunity to do so, what still strikes me today is the ways in which the history of many black people remains on the sidelines of the National Grand-history, a process of writing history, which, so far, is full of "black-holes." A process of writing history that I've termed to represent the "fantastic Canadian amnesia". For example, we all now know that UGRR has become one of these big categories – romantic concepts of a more complex history, a history of people, human beings with blood and flesh. But sadly enough, the ways in which this concept is still mobilized reduce to silence the names of many people that made this extraordinary Canadian history. My ultimate goal therefore, is to bring Chatham-Kent's key historical figures to the forefront, and of course, I still need you to help us raise this PLP to the national level.

As you have heard by now, the PLP team decided to take Chatham-Kent histories to nearby Windsor in 2010. Indeed, the PLP's third public symposium will be held at the University of Windsor. In addition, beside regular presentations from the PLP research partners and collaborators, we've invited the wider community to submit their abstracts on the topics of: (1) African Canadian history, connecting past and present; (2) Current social justice issues (e.g., issues of multiculturalism, the African Diaspora and identity in Canada; and (3) Women and gender in African Canadian history. This year symposium will indeed be a very special one. Local school students will perform their research on black history, we'll reedit our last year experience of having several guest speakers as well as workshops and historical performances, and in association with *ImaginationInk* and the Chatham-Kent Writer's Guild, this year symposium will be the award ceremony for the *Freedom Experience Young Writers Competition*, a contest encouraging school aged authors to submit essays and short story on the topics of the historical settlements, contemporary issues, social, political or personal; but which must deal with some aspect of the Kent Freedom Experience and local African Canadian Heritage stories.

Bye for now, stay tuned for the 2010 poster and don't hesitate to get in touch with Devin or myself for any questions.

## Dr. Reid-Maroney

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fall and winter in three of my undergraduate History classes. Placement opportunities were developed with a variety of community partners, including the Essex County Black Historical Research Society, the Rev. Delta McNeish of Beth Emmanuel Church, London; the historical committee of Christ Church, Dresden; and the Lambton Kent District School Board.

[http://www.huronuc.on.ca/about\\_huron/the\\_promised\\_land\\_project\\_plp/](http://www.huronuc.on.ca/about_huron/the_promised_land_project_plp/)

## The Freedom Experience Youth Writing

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Each category will have a top prize contributed by the PLP. Runner up prizes will be provided by the Chatham-Kent Writer's Guild. The top entries will also be published on the PLP's official website at the University of Ottawa.

The competition's official kick-off will take place at the end of summer break. The entire PLP team and its international collaborators hope that this first competition will encourage local students to actively participate in not only creative writing activity but as well on bridging local history with their classroom discussions. Winners will be announced in January, with awards reception at the 2010 PLP Symposium at the University of Windsor.

Inquiries can be sent to:

Devin Andrews, 519-436-9117 ext. 351  
or to Kathy Jordan, Chatham-Kent Writer's Guild President at 519.352.2613

### OTHER NEWS:

International Collaborator, Dr. Richard Enoch Agbor Ayukndang of the University of Buea in Cameroon, celebrated the birth of a daughter, Candis, on September 12, 2009. Mother and child are doing fine. The entire Promised Land Team wishes the family well at this joyous occasion.