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Issue 4

Promised Land Chronicle

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Office of the
Community Coordinator
McGeorge Records Building
325 Grand Ave E
Chatham ON N7M5J3
519.436.0119 x351
dandrewsplp@gmail.com

Not Your Typical Class Project

Students from the Lambton Kent Composite School in Dresden embark on a unique learning experience. This fall, Devin Pearson's grade 10 English class and grade 11 Drama class collaborate on a one of a kind exploration of Dresden's past.

It began in October, during third period English. The class was assigned the task of researching historical personalities and events of importance to the Dawn Settlement, the British American Institute, the abolitionist movement and civil rights movement. A wide range of topics to be sure; but Mr. Pearson wanted to expose the students to the full spectrum of research options, topics which go unmentioned in the curriculum requirements for an Ontario Secondary School Diploma. Although the majority of students have lived their entire lives in and around Dresden, they had little knowledge or appreciation for the town's history, and the best way to get them thinking about it when it is not in the curriculum is to tie it to other existing requirements, such as learning the proper methods of writing academic essays.

Mr. Pearson – or DevinP as he has become known to the Promised Land research team – does not himself have a history background, and knew very little about this history as the project was unfolding. The PLP has provided him and his class with “technical support” including presentations, and visits of community researchers, class trips to historical sites, and on-line discussion forums moderated by Huron University College students. These “blogspots” ensured that LKCS students got access to reliable resources and timely answers to questions during the intensive research phase. By December, the research findings of this English class were turned over to the grade 11 Drama

class. Part of the curriculum requirements is for students to write scripts and produce plays, not to “merely” act. DevinP set his class to work-shopping the English class' collective research. Seek out the most adaptable stories and writing a series of small plays, vignettes, and monologues.

Students from the two classes will perform a variety of other duties related to play production, from scriptwriting to production and costume design. Other students work on videotaping the ‘making-of’ the project, a “behind the scenes” documentary, while some other focus on running a public relations campaign to engage local media to musically scoring the production. One of the students is even hand building era specific instruments for an “authentic” sound.

The key, Mr. Pearson believes, is to give the students as much latitude in planning and creating the project. This hands-off approach allows the students to take ownership of a collective learning experience, making it a shared experience that is more meaningful. Students are more likely to retain more of the lesson than would otherwise be the norm.

The Drama and English classes visited Dr. Nina Reid-Maroney's African American History class at Huron University College, where they participated in a workshop on drama and history led by Dr. Mark Blagrove, Dean of Huron's Faculty of Arts and Social Science. The event was organized by Maxine DuBuc, Manager of Community-based Learning at Huron, and supported by the RBC Community-based Learning Fund as well as by the PLP.

Addressing the Gap in National Historical Narratives at the Nation's Capital

Since the official launch of The Promised Land Project in 2007, the Principal Investigator, Dr. Boulou Ebanda de B'béri and a Curator in the Canadian Museum of Civilization (CMC), Dr. John Willis, have been exploring the feasibility and scope of an exhibit, detailing the story of the Under-ground Railroad and settlements of free black people in Canada.

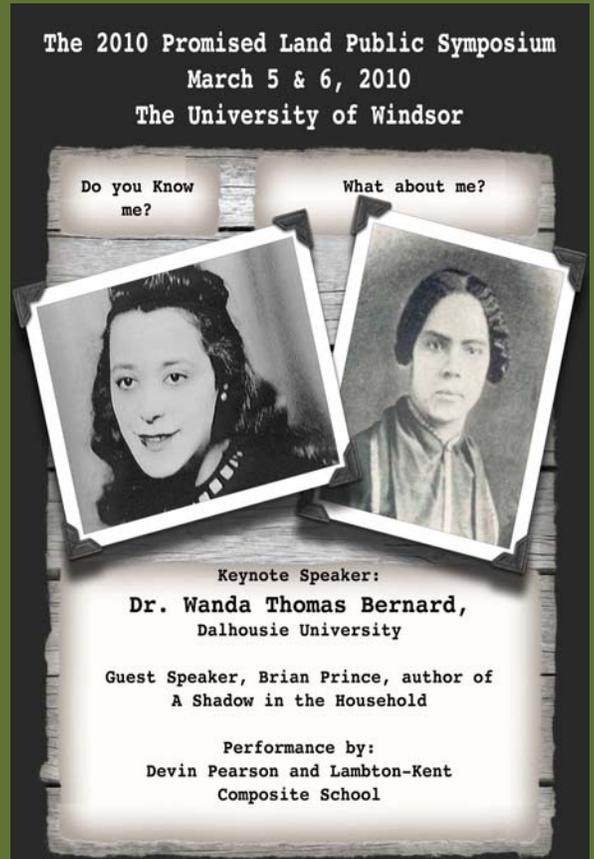
In Décembre 2009, Dr. de B'béri and Dr. Willis were in Chatham-Kent for a meeting with local community researchers and representatives of the African-Canadian Heritage sites in Chatham-Kent. The purpose of this consultation was to invite the community to participate in this conversation, and to collectively think about the feasibility and this exhibit at the CMC. This meeting focused on two key topics:

1. The need to assess the extent and nature of physical artefacts available for display via loan or purchase; and
2. The usefulness of receiving input from members of the community on the exhibit, in terms of its objectives and its thematic contours.

The CMC is a national museum, located in Gatineau (Québec), directly across the Ottawa River from Parliament Hill. Currently, there is no (nor there has not been), exhibit specifically focused on African-Canadian history at this national museum. Indeed, all participants more than welcomed this initiative, and hoped that this gap in the presentation of our national history can be addressed with this CMC's exhibit. Dr. Willis is particularly committed to bring this exhibit to fruition; and invites on the local community historians and researchers to contribute with new ideas. As a researcher in the CMC's division of archaeology and history, Dr. Willis was delighted by the reception and inputs from the Chatham-Kent meeting attendees.

Following a team-paper presentation both Dr. de B'béri and Dr. Willis presented in a Montreal's international conference on the topic of museum and history, they are now working on developing a formal proposal that will be submitted to the CMC's Board of Directors this winter. It's anticipated that over the next two years, this work will lead to a grand exhibit on the UGRR and the overall contribution of black people in our national historical narratives.

African Canadian History in Southwestern Ontario: Connecting Past and Present



For more information go to:
<http://lamacs.arts.uottawa.ca/plp.htm>

Tickets can be ordered by contacting Devin Andrews 519.436.0119 x351

Pen Pals Still Needed

The Promised Land is still looking for residents or descendants of Chatham-Kent's African Canadian community to volunteer for a letter writing campaign. A joint venture of the Promised Land Project 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. For more information see Issue #3 of the PLP Newsletter or visit the project's website at: <http://lamacs.arts.uottawa.ca/plpnewsletter.htm>

Research Highlight: Digital Diary

In 1857 an Anglican clergyman named Thomas Hughes arrived in Dresden, Ontario. As many readers will be aware from previous editions of the Promised Land Chronicle, the staunch abolitionist sacrificed a comfortable life in England to both bring the word of God and a strong moral desire to help educate the population of escaped slaves and other African Americans who had settled in the colony, Canada West.

Beginning in 1859 he faithfully served both this community and the Diocese of Huron in every aspect of clerical life until his death in 1871. During this time he established Dresden's Christ Church, as well as an adult literary group and a racially integrated mission school for the area's children.

While working as a missionary and cleric, Hughes kept a diary of his personal experiences, which has been carefully preserved by the Diocese of Huron Archives, located at Huron University College in London, Ontario.

As part of the Promised Land Project, students in Dr. Nina Reid-Maroney's Historian's Craft class – lead by myself and Devon Elliot – have been hard at work digitizing and transcribing the diary. It covers the period from the early 1860s to the early 1870s. Fragile with age, it could not be safely photocopied or scanned using usual methods. In this case, we selected to use a tripod and digital camera set at a high resolution. The students then carefully photographed each page and are currently pain-

stakingly transcribing them to reveal for a wider audience, the thoughts and reflections of Reverend Hughes.

The photographs, along with transcriptions and annotations will be made available in the coming months on a searchable website. This site will include maps, photographs, and other material the students have uncovered in their research. The website will prove to be a valuable resource for the public history of Southwestern Ontario's Anglican and African American communities. The diary offers a unique window into the thoughts, life and times of Rev. Hughes and the pioneering society which he served.

By: Tim Compeau

(Tim Compeau and Devon Elliott are PhD candidates, University of Western Ontario)

Promised Land Public Symposium 2010

Dr. Wanda Thomas-Bernard, Director of Dalhousie University's School of Social Work, will be the keynote speaker at the 2010 Promised Land Project Public Symposium. She will speak of her latest research plans into the attraction and retention of New Canadians and the slow death of rural communities. Dr. Thomas-Bernard is co-founder of the Association of Black Social Workers and received the Order of Canada for her lifetime of work on family health, racism, and community violence.

The Symposium, titled: *African Canadian History in Southwestern Ontario: Connecting Past and Present*, will take place Friday, March 5 and Saturday, March 6, at Vanier Hall, University of Windsor. The dates are not randomly selected, as this year's event will celebrate both Black History Month and

International Women's Day. Speakers will address current topics of study in the history of Southwestern Ontario or the impact of African-Canadian women in society.

Other scheduled speakers include local author Bryan Prince and Dr. Olivette Otele from Université Paris 13 in France. Mr. Prince will discuss issues important to genealogical researchers and the roadblocks he faced, including racial profiling, while writing his latest book "*A Shadow on the Household.*" The LKCS students, meanwhile, will perform their own original dramatic interpretations of their town's history. They are part of a pilot project of the Promised Land Project and the Lambton Kent District School Board to increase student education and retention of African-Canadian history through the arts. For more event details including a complete listing of speakers and times

go to:

<http://lmacs.arts.uottawa.ca/plp>.

All members of the public are invited to attend – general admission is *free* – and walk-ins are encouraged but it is best to register ahead to ensure adequate seating. Upgraded tickets are available through advance reservations. Tickets with general admission, reserved parking and a catered lunch is available for \$20, or Premier Tickets which include admission, parking and both lunch and dinner are available for \$50. To reserve your place or order a ticket, please call or email the Promised Land Project Community Coordinator:

Devin Andrews
519-436-0119x351 or
dandrewsplp@gmail.com.

The Allied and Collateral Families of William Whipper

After uncovering an obscure 1886 newspaper article in Chester County, Pennsylvania, about Benjamin Whipper returning from Canada to his daughter's home, a small group of researchers and descendants have been mapping a far spread family tree. Bound by family bonds, historical curiosity and the support and prodding of historian Charles L. Blockson, they are self-described as the Allied and Collateral Families of William Whipper. Blockson's persistence in following the thread eventually brought together author Carole Lone Lewis (a Whipper descendant) and C.R.Cole (a "collateral and an allied" descendant) to head the informal group. Together, Cole and Lewis have traced and contacted a geographically diverse group of descendants from the Whipper family line and the families which appear in close proximity to them.

Their story takes root in post-Revolutionary Pennsylvania. Similar to the later laws of John Graves Simcoe in Ontario, Pennsylvania instituted a "gradual" abolition of slavery beginning in 1780. An individual declared a slave in 1780 – for example, as a Sall Whipper had been – would remain indentured for 28 years. A child born to a slave would also be indentured for 28 years, which was calculated as 14 years of support until they could work and 14 years to pay back the first 14 years of support. Often an off the books deal was struck to gain the child's early release by lengthening ones own indenture. Any combination of time was possible and nothing precluded a direct financial buy out. The effect on the nuclear family is simple. It is not until about 1836 that one finds complete African-American nuclear family units in the census and tax records of Pennsylvania independent of the families who at one time owned them. The Whipper family is one such example.

The greatest roadblock in tracing their story has been the extensive contradictory evidence in family oral history and inconclusive or contradictory written records. The Allied and Collateral Families are looking to better understand and untangle the inter-relationships. The family name Whipper appears among the early enslaved of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Here one finds record of Sall Whipper as being owned by the Morrison family at Drumore. Sall Whipper is interestingly also later interchangeably referred to and recorded as "Sarah Morrison." She is listed among the Morrison family household in Drumore as late as 1850, age 98.

What is known is that Sall had a daughter named Nance and three male children: Thomas, Benjamin a.k.a John and James Whipper. All are born between 1775 and 1785. These siblings, combined with incomplete genealogical data, account for much of the later confusion when looking at the Whipper family. Nance is the mother of William Whipper. All of Nance's children were fathered by her Caucasian owner/employer. One primary source record lists William's birth on 2/22/1804. This meant that William Whipper was indentured to his biological father until the year 1832 and will only be first independently recorded in the US census of 1840 at Columbia, Pennsylvania.

Nance would have more children than William. Conclusive records include the names: Benjamin P Whipper, Alfred Whipper and Mary Ann Whipper-Hollensworth. William Whipper would in his lifetime also identify a nephew, James Whipper-Purnell. Most family oral traditions name the nephew's mother as "Hannah, a sister of William Whipper." The questions remain as to who was Hannah; who's child is James; is James biologically related at all.

A direct male Hollensworth line (descended through Jeremiah Hollensworth, brother-in-law to William's sister Mary Ann) was conclusively identified and took part in DNA testing. The test identified a genetic haplogroup for James Hollensworth (Sr.), the father of both Jeremiah and James B Hollensworth (James B being the husband of William's sister, Mary Ann). Others in the Allied and Collateral families have tested their DNA but they are in broken lines and not direct descendants. The present hope is to identify a direct female line from Mary Ann to test for DNA markers belonging to Nance and Sall/Sarah and identify a specific African geographic region of origin. At this time, identifying a descendant from the two male Whipper lines (Caucasian and African) is more daunting, and potentially impossible. It is a tremendous undertaking which if successful will yield multiple results for all involved, from genealogical family data to ethno-cultural identification.

It was the search for more information on Mary Ann Whipper and her children that led the research group to the Promised Land Project, and the work it is performing in Kent County, Ontario. As the original newspaper article that launched their search mentioned, Benjamin Whipper had returned to Pennsylvania from Canada. Familiar names to the Allied and Collateral Families lived and worked in Kent.

William Whipper went on to amass a great financial wealth in his time. Together with his business partner, James B Hollensworth, he used his resources to secret fugitive slaves and freemen (including family) north to Canada. As local historians discovered, William together with James Purnell, would purchase over 100 residential properties in Dresden, Ontario. In addition to that he was also owner of several businesses, though the full extent of his holdings and investments is still under investigation.

Although there is no evidence that William lived in Dresden himself, his wife Harriett did reside there during the Civil War, and is found in the 1861 census. As well, James Purnell, James B Hollensworth and William's sister Mary Ann would all settle there to oversee the combined business ventures and Canadian end of the UGRR activity. James B Hollensworth became a pillar of the local community, operating many rental properties and successful business enterprises in his 40 plus years at Dresden. He and Mary Ann had three children. Following her untimely early death, James would marry two more times (first to Margaret Turner and later, Mary Smith), producing two more children and raising several step children. It is not believed that any direct living descendants of Mary Ann and James Hollensworth (from any marriage) reside in southern Ontario today, but the PLP's mission to track the "trajectories" of Kent County's African-Canadian Settlers – including Whippers, Hollensworths, Smiths, Turners and Purnells - is the kind of connection for which the Allied Families was searching.