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Promised Land Chronicle

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**Office of the PLP
Community Coordinator**
McGeorge Records Building
PO Box 640 (Civic Centre)
325 Grand Ave E
Chatham ON N7M5J3
519.436.0119 x351
dandrewsplp@gmail.com

Oral History: “Voice of the People”

Summer fieldwork in 2010 brings a graduate student research team from Huron University College at University of Western Ontario to design and implement the oral history phase of the PLP. Rebecca Rahey and Shelagh Staunton, both M.A. candidates in the Public History program at UWO, are working on project design and in collaboration with PLP community partners, they will be conducting field interviews in Chatham-Kent. Their work for the project fulfils their internship requirement for the M.A. degree.

Joining the oral history team are Deirdre McCorkindale, an honours History undergraduate at UWO with a long-standing interest in African Canadian scholarship, and Jennifer Nelson, 2010 honours History graduate of Huron University College. Both Deirdre and Jennifer bring community as well as academic experience to the PLP.

The gathering of oral histories has been part of life in the Promised Land communities since the nineteenth century. Many will be familiar, for example, with the abolitionist Benjamin Drew's interviews conducted in black communities in Canada West and published in 1856 as [The Refugee; or The Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada, Related by Themselves.](#)

Oral histories always carry the authority that follows from their place as *vox populi*, and in the Promised Land communities, they have carried an additional political and ideological importance. Oral histories bear witness. They bring testimony from those whose silence in the historical record was deliberately maintained. In the tradition of using oral history to record of historical memory, the PLP oral histories will both preserve and open up that public memory to a wider audience.

Under the supervision of PLP partner Dr. Wanda Thomas Bernard of Dalhousie University, oral histories from Nova Scotian black communities will also be gathered and integrated with the oral history project. The oral history component of the PLP will thus create a new comparative framework for understanding and interpreting African Canadian history as a national narrative

Our work will be conducted in accordance with the recommendations for best practices in oral history as set out by the Oral History Association. Anyone interested in participating in the oral histories work is most welcome to contact PLP community coordinator Devin Andrews.

Dr. Wanda Thomas-Bernard Joins the Promised Land



The Promised Land is pleased to announce the addition of Dr. Wanda Thomas-Bernard to the Project's research team. Dr. Thomas-Bernard is Director of Dalhousie University's School of Social Work. Throughout her career, she has extensively studied issues of family health, community and family violence and racism, particularly in regard to the justice system.

Dr. Thomas-Bernard is a cofounder of the Association of Black Social Workers (Nova Scotia), and has experience advocating for legislative changes and new training methods incorporating Africentric and anti-racist perspectives of community violence, health and gender in the field of social work. For her efforts she is the recipient of the Order of Canada. The Promised Land is honoured to have such a distinguished Canadian joining our efforts and we look forward to her active participation.

Over the coming two years, Wanda Thomas-Bernard will lead an effort to record the oral histories and experiences of African Nova Scotians around the province. This collection of interviews will provide a record of life in Atlantic Canada for black Canadians, and form the basis of a new primary resource to community historians for generations to come.

PLP to Publish First Volume of Collective Research Papers

In early 2011 the Promised Land expects to publish its first collection of peer-reviewed research papers. *The Promised Land: History and Historiography of Black Experience in Chatham-Kent's Settlements* will be published by the African and Diasporic Cultrual Studies Series in association with the Canadian Studies Series through the University of Ottawa Press.

This first collection represents the academic contribution of research participants through mid 2009. It is also a cross section of the broad range of research carried out by members of the Promised Land or, independent students and researchers who will publish their thesis through the Promised Land. It is the first of potentially as many as three books the PLP will produce by the end of the Project funding timeline.

Included in this fist collection are works by Claudine Bonner, Marie Carter, Afua Cooper, Peter T Daleo, Boulou Ebanda de B'beri, Olivette Otele, Nina Reid Maroney and Handel K Wright. We are all eagerly awaiting the impending printing and hope it will be read within the community. This collaborative piece of scholarship can only further a broader understanding of the Promised Land communities importance.

30 Months by the Numbers

It is hard to believe, but this past January marked the mid-way point in the Promised Land Project. Where does the time go? It seemed like only yesterday the team was sitting down trying how to decide where to spend the research grant money.

This milestone is also an important administrative marker within the Project. The Social Science and Humanities Research Council requires that grant recipients take stock and report on the progress made to date toward meeting stated objectives and goals.

Understandably it is difficult to summarize such a comprehensive report in as little space as this – as it is, it was hard enough to properly

summarize the entire project within the space of the report. If you would like to receive a copy of the complete Mid-Term Report please contact the Community Coordinator. Specific highlights of the past 30 months are revealed as follows:

- The PLP has directly hired or funded the research of 29 graduate and undergraduate students. They primarily are studying at the University of Western Ontario or University of Ottawa, but also two from University of Windsor, one at UBC and one at Universite de Paris XIII. This has provided invaluable employment and research experience within their chosen fields to a new generation of scholars.

- PLP researchers and partners have also written 1 book, contributed 9 other chapters and 6 journal articles, (some have already been published while others are accepted and awaiting publication) on topics relevant to the unique history of Chatham-Kent's settlements. In addition to publications, partners and researchers have presented 16 conference papers, 4 public lectures, and were on panels or in interviews broadcast on television and radio (including in both official languages, and internationally). Such work provides invaluable exposure for the community and represents significant new scholarship into this extraordinary history.

30 Months (continued from p. 2)

- The team is very advanced in the process of developing a partnership with federal agencies such as Parks Canada and the Canadian Museum of Civilization, to research and identify historic sites and develop new tools for interpreting and displaying the PLP findings in national institutions.
- As readers will recall from previous editions of the Chronicle, a major on-line database is under construction. In utilizing GIS technology in the database application it will offer endless possibilities for social sciences and humanities researchers; allowing for instance users to observe, follow, and analyse migration experiences and trajectories of not just single person/family census and property records in isolation. As a further example of the databases' educational potential a highschool student could read Marie Carter's paper on the Dawn Settlement, then log on to this map and see the geographical positions of the BAI lands, William Whipper properties and Uncle Tom's Cabin. The site would offer pop ups and links to allow the student to follow Henson's migration experience in the United States, Europe as well as other places in Canada, or perhaps click on the online video link on this map to have a virtual tour of the Uncle's Tom Cabin; and do much more.
- New methodologies have been developed to incorporate more understanding and appreciation of the role of the African Canadian communities to Canadian history and experience (particularly the wider Chatham-Kent region's role). This classroom tested methodology will be implemented in a wide range of classrooms and subject disciplines over the coming years.

Symposium 2010 Review

The 3rd annual Promised Land Public Symposium was held at the University of Windsor on March 5-7, 2010. This was the first time the event was held outside Chatham-Kent and was well attended by a wide range of students, community groups and the general public. This international event attracted participants from as far away as Vancouver, Halifax, Pennsylvania and Britain. Also 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 and women and gender issues in African Canadian history.

Some of the fascinating papers presented included work from Funke Aladejebi on the closing of the segregated school in Colchester, Ont.; Rebecca Beusaert who presented examples of legal cases involving Black women and their media representation in 19th century Oxford County, and; Dr. Olivette Otele's recent exploration of the background and possible motivation of white British abolitionists before their involvement in the North American anti-slavery struggle.

However the audience's favourite moment was delivered by the students of Dresden's Lambton Kent Composite School. During the recent Fall semester they took part in an innovative new method for teaching African Canadian history through the arts. This was their first opportunity to perform selected musical and dramatic projects before an audience.

Attendees sat in pensive silence as one student played an original

piece of music which he says was composed after a long bout of writer's block. The block was overcome during a class trip to Uncle Tom's Cabin, where he sat beneath the trees and a clear blue sky at the grave of Josiah Henson, seeking inspiration.

Other students performed a selection of original soliloquies from the perspective of real life character's such as Tex Henson – Canada's first black paratrooper - and person's involved in the National Unity Association's fight to desegregate Dresden businesses.

Marie Carter, PLP Co-applicant, described it as a breakthrough moment when the mostly white class described a sense of stewardship in promoting and protecting this important *community history*. Rather than labelling it as "black history," the story was to them no longer one belonging to others which could be easily dismissed or set aside. Truly, a barrier of sorts had been torn down.

The great success of this year's Symposium is in no small part a result of the community. In particular, the Promised Land needs to acknowledge the efforts of volunteer members of the planning committee: Kenn Stanton, Pat Neely and Dr. Tina Simmons and; the financial or material support of their organizations, in particular the University of Windsor. They have set the bar very high for 2011.

At this time plans for the 4th Symposium are in the formative phase, and no announcements on location, dates and theme are available.

Symposium Photo Album... Wish you were here!



The Steely-eyed M.C.



You have 5 more minutes...