East Coast Engagement

Under the guidance of Dr. Wanda Thomas Bernard – Director of the School of Social Work at Dalhousie University, and long-standing advocate within the Nova Scotia black community – Claudine Bonner will be the Postdoctoral Fellow for the 2010-2011 year, and work as a co-investigator for the Promised Land Project. Claudine comes to this position from the University of Western (UWO) where she conducted doctoral work exploring by way of narrative and historical document analysis, the social history of North Buxton, one of Ontario’s black freedom villages arising out of the Underground Railroad.

While at Western, Claudine was involved in other projects undertaken by the PLP, acting as a research assistant to Dr. Nina Reid-Maroney as well as writing a chapter in the upcoming book of the Promised Land Project – clearly, Claudine is no stranger to the larger project.

The Nova Scotia project will build on the historical analyses and oral history methodology utilized in the Ontario investigation. She hopes that by exploring the history of Black identity in three Nova Scotia Promised Land Communities – Shelbourne, the Prestons, and Sydney – our understanding of historical experience will expand, thus allowing us a greater understanding and appreciation of Black history in both provinces and beyond.

Although the work undertaken by Claudine in Nova Scotia can stand alone as a comprehensive compilation of stories and experiences detailing life on the east coast, it is this link to the work already undertaken in Ontario by the Promised Land that is the most intriguing. Never before has such a study been completed that would allow researchers across the country to compare and contrast the black experience in different provinces. Just how similar or how different are the communities, and what does this tell us about Canada? We eagerly await answers, and will update readers as the project unfolds.

Ultimately, these shared histories will be combined with the broader PLP research outcomes in a single comprehensive open access database. Students, professors, and individual researchers around the country and abroad will eventually be able to access this free resource for study and cross-referencing to aid their own research.
During the fall 2010 semester, the “Historian’s Craft” class at Huron University College will be travelling to Oberlin College in Ohio on a research mission. The trip was arranged in the spring as part of a partnership between the Promised Land Project, the Office of Community-based Learning at Huron and, the Oberlin College Archives. The focus of their mission is a selection of letters written by the Reverend Hiram Wilson.

Hiram Wilson was an American abolitionist and theologian who began his studies at Lane Seminary (Presbyterian) in Cincinnati. At the time, the Seminary had recently come under the watch of its first President, Rev. Lyman Beecher (father of author Harriet Beecher Stowe). The frontier spirit was strong within the Lane community while Wilson was enrolled. Activism on topics ranging from slavery and abolition to sending blacks back to Africa was rife.

Following the famous Lane Debates of 1834, intense public reaction to the radical ideas being expressed on campus compelled a majority of the seminary’s trustees to expel certain faculty in an attempt to ease tensions. Hiram Wilson was among a group of students who, along with the expelled faculty left Cincinnati for Oberlin Ohio. Known as the “Lane Rebels” they founded their own seminary there as part of the College and continued to espouse their views on immediate abolition. Oberlin would go on to become one of the earliest mixed race College’s in the United States.

In the late 1830’s Hiram Wilson, now a graduate of Oberlin would continue to campaign for his beliefs. This included pursuit of the idea to establish schools for free blacks and former slaves, where students would improve their lives through a mix of traditional classroom education and manual labour. The product of the labour would help finance the school while concurrently teaching the students a trade.

In his youth before studying at Lane, Rev Wilson, attended the Oneida Institute, a school in Utica, New York where the students similarly earned their tuition through manual labour performed on campus. To further (continued on page 3)
Students at the University of Windsor will soon be contributing their time and expertise toward growing our understanding of regional black history. Thanks to an agreement between the Promised Land Project, the University of Windsor and our friends at the Essex County Black Historical Research Society (ECBHRS), a number of undergraduate students will focus their efforts— in exchange for research questions posed by the community. Chances to “do real history” as the students like to call it don’t come along often, and many will be excited by the opportunity to contribute to the ongoing work of community partners. For many it will be the first time that their work could live on outside the classroom after the end of the class.

As part of the learning requirements of the third year course “History Workshop,” students complete individual research work. This year the suggested topics include a number of questions posed by ECBHRS to assist “filling in the holes” within the current discourse. Completed student work will be turned over to ECBHRS and shared among member agencies in the Essex County area. The end product could take many forms other than merely traditional research papers, such as websites, short documentaries, etc. How research is disseminated is up to the student and what makes the most sense for the material. Some of the suggested topics include:

- Write a scholarly review of existing contemporary media coverage of 19th and 20th century African-Canadians in Windsor-Essex politics;
- Write a history of the early years and activities of the Hour-A-Day Study Club in the context of African American/Canadian women’s civic organizations;
- Relying on original sources remaining from two key human rights organizations in Windsor, the Coloured Citizens’ Association and the Windsor Council on Group Relations, compare and contrast approaches these organizations took to address issues of racial discrimination.

The full list of potential topics has been submitted to the class but as it is a voluntary process and up to the students what they wish to research, it is unknown how many of the suggested topics will be taken on. If this year’s experience proves successful, any research suggestions that go unselected this semester could be provided to another group of students when the course is offered again.
2011 Public Symposium
Revisiting the Promise – A Call for Participants

The Promised Land Community-University Research Alliance invites community researchers, educators, museum workers, students, artists and academics to submit proposals for presentations at its fourth annual Public Symposium, Revisiting the Promise: Time, Place and Contested Space in African Canadian Communities, to be held May 6-8, 2011 at the Black Cultural Centre in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. Co-sponsored by the Dalhousie School of Social Work and the Association of Black Social Workers, the symposium will be built around three central themes:

1. Multiple, comparative perspectives on African Canadian history and community;
2. Current social justice issues—including work on coerced or indentured labour, race, ethnicity, multiculturalism, the African diaspora, identity in Canada—and their historical context.
3. Examining modes by which African Canadians challenge and celebrate place and space in modern Canada.

We seek a variety of submissions from a broad range of participants across the community-university alliance, and welcome proposals for discussion panels, research papers, poster presentations, artistic work and performance, and discussion of work-in-progress on collaborative initiatives in the areas of education, social justice and public history. Proposals that fit one of the Promised Land Project’s four areas of concentration (History and Archives; Education-Community Links; Media and Theatrical Production; Multicultural Dialogue) are particularly encouraged.

Guidelines for submitting proposals: Please submit a 200-word proposal that describes the theme to be explored in your presentation; the method or approach used to address it; and the format (paper, panel, poster, art work, performance etc.) of your presentation. The proposal should also tell us how your presentation is related to the symposium themes, and identify the general area (History and Archives; Education-Community Links; Media and Theatrical Production; Multicultural Dialogue) to which your work will contribute. Proposals, along with your name, and contact information, should be sent via email by October 8, 2010, to Devin Andrews, Promised Land Project Community Coordinator, dandrewsplp@gmail.com, Telephone 519.436-0119 x351. A decision from the program committee will be made by November 12, 2010. Some contributors to the symposium will be invited to submit material for publication.