

Feb. 2011
Issue 7

Promised Land Chronicle

Inside This Issue:

- News from Huron 2
- John McGregor SS Student Project 3
- Revisiting the Promise 4
- The Freeman Cemetery 4

**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

Digging Into the Past



Work will begin this spring on what will potentially be the PLP's most enduring legacy on the ground in Chatham-Kent. The work is part of a collaborative effort of the Promised Land in partnership with Heritage Chatham-Kent and the Municipality, as well as students of the Lambton-Kent District School Board, Memorial Restoration of Sarnia, and community volunteers.

Based on a similar undertaking at Chatham's Maple Leaf Cemetery in 2010 (see accompanying photo), the work involves restoring and preserving abandoned or neglected gravesites.

There are countless municipal, church and family plots spread across the county. A majority are no longer in use but contain the final resting places of the community's pioneering settlers. The PLP and its partners will focus exclusively upon the graves of Chatham-Kent's early black settlers, beginning in the major cemeteries and expanding out into the townships.

Over the passage of time, at too many of the abandoned sites (and even some still in use), graves become overgrown, the stones worn and toppled by weather or vandals. Grass, weeds and brush obscure and finally cover over the remnants of the stone completely.

The labour to be done will include identifying and locating graves, outlining and excavating each plot and memorial stone, and re-placing the stone on the surface for decades to come. There is no permanent way or ensuring the stones, once recovered will not meet the same fate again for another century's time.

The ultimate goal is to bring awareness of the cemeteries' historical significance and to pay tribute those who are buried there. By restoring the plots, the group will ensure that the graves are not lost, and the memory of those who came before will be noticed for decades.

All involved are in agreement that this important effort will continue in 2012 to the end of the Promised Land's mandate. For those who do this work, it will not always be easy or glamorous, but it is solemn and ultimately rewarding for those who do carry it out. Restoration activities will be supported through a combination of PLP funding, volunteer labour and community donations, and promoted in the media to make sure the wider community is aware of the efforts and understand the importance.

The PLP thanks in advance: the Municipality and Memorial Restoration for their expertise, supplies and moral backing, as well as the students who will provide the labour. Arrangements are underway to attract corporate sponsors to provide food and beverages on the work site as well as any other needed supplies.

Progress at Huron

Oberlin College

In September 2010, twenty history students from Huron University College's course, "The Historian's Craft", began a community-based learning project in partnership with the Oberlin College archives, in Oberlin, Ohio. The project is built around the correspondence of the Reverend Hiram Wilson, the Oberlin abolitionist who worked with Josiah Henson and James Canning Fuller to establish the British American Institute at the Dawn settlement. Under the direction of Oberlin College Archivist Ken Grossi, students photographed the collection forty Wilson's letters written from Canada in the 1840s and 1850s. With guidance from the class graduate assistants, Timothy Compeau and Devon Elliot (both PhD candidates in History at the University of Western Ontario) the class is now learning how to contextualize their research and explore digital history through the Wilson letters project.

The class was welcomed to Oberlin by Dr. Carol Lasser of the Oberlin College Department of History, who conducted a tour through the town and college, providing an extraordinary orientation to Oberlin's abolitionist culture in Hiram Wilson's time. Additional research at the Oberlin College library gave students a head start on the further work of the project. "By utilising Oberlin College's databases, we were able to collect more information on Hiram Wilson," writes Sinead Maume, History student from the University of Southampton on academic exchange at Huron for the 2010-11 academic year. "This not only helped create

(cont. "Huron" page 3)

Thomas Hughes Diary Project

The Diary of Thomas Hughes research website, created in 2009-2010 by Huron University College history students in partnership with the PLP, Christ Church, Dresden and the Diocese of Huron Archives, continues to draw researchers and members of the Thomas Hughes family from across the world. The project, which houses a digital copy of Hughes manuscript diary, along with a transcription and related materials, was launched in April, 2010 at a public event attended by members of the Huron and UWO communities, and by members of the Hughes family. You can find the Diary Project website at <http://www.uwo.ca/huron/promisedland>



Pictured at centre is Carolyn Lamont (Diocese of Huron Archives), with Kate Hughes Clendenning (granddaughter of Thomas Hughes) on left and, Kate's daughter Mary Genge, at the event in April.

Christ Church, Chatham and the Anti-slavery Movement

Students from Huron's History program are working in partnership with the congregation of Christ Church, Chatham, to research aspects of the church's connections to the anti-slavery movement. The project, part of Christ Church's celebration of 150 years in its historic downtown Chatham church building, is supported through the CBL office at Huron University College, and by the University of Western Ontario's Public History program, under the direction of Dr. Michelle Hamilton. Craig Capaccione, M.A. candidate in the Public History program, is leading the students through field work at the Diocese of Huron Archives and the McKeough Local History Collection at the Chatham Public Library, and in the writing and production of documentary materials. Christ Church Rector, the Reverend Paul Millward, and members of the congregation will join students in celebrating the results of the research at Huron, and at a Sunday morning event at Christ Church, Chatham on March 27th.



Craig Capaccione (far right) and the students of Huron stand around the plaque commemorating Chatham's Anglican congregation at the site of its first church, St. Paul's, predecessor to Christ Church.

Progress at Huron

(continued from page 2)

the foundation for our project, but demonstrated the skills historians use in their everyday work and highlighted their transferability. It showed us how historians would approach a topic and through our later website launch we hope to learn about how historians display their findings."

The archival field work was funded by a grant from the RBC Community-based learning fund at Huron University College. As Huron history student Elisia Rutten notes, "the trip was a perfect way to start this project because it brings a stronger sense of ownership. We were there, we walked his steps, we touched his letters and now we are responsible for bringing his story to the internet where everybody around the world can read it."

Since our return to Huron, the class has been working with the Wilson letters, completing transcriptions and preparing related research materials to be included on a class website. The trip will come full circle with Historian's Craft student Ron Jenkins, who will take related photographs and video for the website during a visit to the Josiah Henson site, and a tour hosted by PLP community co-investigator, Marie Carter.

The class is preparing a public launch of the Wilson Letters website in March, in Huron's Great Hall. The event will feature a Huron History Society-sponsored talk by Dr. Roland Baumann, Archivist Emeritus at Oberlin College.

You can follow the class project as a work-in-progress by visiting our blog at <http://hiramwilsonoberlin.blogspot.com/>

University of Southampton Student Researcher

In January, 2011, honours History student Lauren Wilson of Huron UC will travel to the University of Southampton as an international exchange student. While she is studying in England, Lauren will conduct Promised Land Project research at the University of Southampton Archives and the British Library.

Second Annual Black Odyssey Student Conference at Huron, March 3, 2011

Students in the American History survey course are working on three Promised Land Community-based learning projects in the winter term. Their work includes serving on London's Black history Month Committee; working with secondary school students from Chatham Kent; and the hosting of the second annual "Black Odyssey" student conference at Huron.

The John McGregor S.S. Project

The Promised Land is going back to school... again. Following on the heels of the last school year's wildly successful pilot project involving teaching black history through the arts at Lambton Kent Composite School in Dresden, the new program is being implemented this year at John McGregor Secondary in Chatham. Taking what was learned during that first experience, the program has been modified so as to be compatible with different subjects and not strictly offered as a drama project.

Karen Locke will teach Promised Land history to her grade 12 English class this semester. Students will be encouraged to explore the history of the entire Chatham-Kent area and select their own research topics. This time out, the class will produce their non-fictional essays exploring the person, event or theme of their choice and have the opportunity to present it through various multimedia formats, such as educational websites or short "documentaries." The methods will be left to each individual student, and we can not wait to see the calibre of work produced. The youth enrolled in this "academic stream" class are in many cases university bound this coming September, and are looking for a major project to cap their high school careers.

The Promised Land also came along at a great time for Ms. Locke. This year's class reading assignment is Lawrence Hill's "The Book of Negroes," and she could not decide how to approach the material outside the context of the famous novel. She wanted to start discussions of race and issues of slavery and abolition in the Chatham-Kent context. Now the way forward is obvious, as the PLP offered to bring in a series of guest speakers and a field trip to Huron University College, with the ultimate goal of a self-directed research project on topics prepared with the help of the PLP and presented in the media of each student's choosing.

Beyond that, these students will mentor the grade 10 English class of Denise Helmer-Johnston. The younger cohort was already set to complete a unit focusing on social justice, and the opportunity presented by this project will be used to engage the younger students in the history of civil rights and social justice in Chatham-Kent such as the famous National Unity Association's struggle to desegregate businesses in the area.

In the near future, the complete activity guide developed from the LKCS and JMSS experiences – complete with modifications for multiple subject streams – will be available on-line for teacher downloads. It is expected that by the end of the PLP the downloadable guide will include video lectures, PowerPoint media and teacher aids.

Visit the PLP's newly redesigned website at
www.Lamacs.uOttawa.ca/plp

Get involved! Post a message!

The Freeman Cemetery

A small woodlot lies on the south side of Middle Line, just east of AD Shadd Rd. in Raleigh Township. There is nothing outwardly distinctive about this plot. Surrounded by the lazy turning of the enormous windmills that have sprouted along the horizon, I was not even sure I had the right location as I stood there looking at it.

Wandering into the bush, there is a *stillness* that feels more complete than what one would normally expect to experience in a woodlot in winter. I wander deeper into the growth searching for what I was told would be there, a single little tombstone. Any other time of year, when the vegetation was dense, green and leafy, I would probably have never found it.

The stone is an oddly melancholy site, seemingly alone and out of place among the trees, the last remaining earthly proof of a life once lived. In this case, it is the life of Laura Freeman, a child of only 2 short years. Her age makes it all the more striking, that this memorial persists far longer than the tragically short life it represents.

But despite the solitary appearance, I know Laura is not alone. One hundred years ago this space was not wooded but was a functional cemetery. She is one of many who are buried in this place, its fate similar to other abandoned church and family cemeteries around Ontario.

This particular cemetery, identified in records presently as the "Freeman

Halifax 2011: Revisiting the Promise

This spring the Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia plays host to the Promised Land Project's annual public symposium. Co-sponsored by the Black Cultural Centre, Association of Black Social Workers and Dalhousie University, this will be the first time that the PLP has taken its premier event outside Ontario. The partners are thrilled to bring this calibre of event to the Halifax region. It is particularly poignant in this, the UN's International Year for People of African Descent, to have a celebration and promotion of the African Canadian community.

'Revisiting the Promise: Time, Place and Contested Space in African Canadian Communities' will take place May 6 & 7, 2011 at the Black Cultural Centre, 1149 Main Street, Dartmouth NS, and will include a multitude of speakers from around North America representing both academia and community organizations. Topics will fall into three themes: comparative perspectives on African Canadian history and community; current social justice issues including work on coerced or indentured labour, race, ethnicity, multiculturalism, the African Diaspora, identity in Canada; and examining modes by which African Canadians challenge and celebrate place and space in modern Canada.

Planned activities will also include a tour of community historic sites, a special performance and presentation by students of Auburn High School's Youth of Today youth group, opening night reception, a gala dinner and Key Note speakers Dr. Boulou Ebanga de B'beri, the Promised Land Project's Principal Investigator and MLA Percy Paris, Minister of African Nova Scotian Affairs.

Tickets are available at the door, but advanced registration is recommended. General Admission for the entire weekend is \$20 per person, and \$50 for admission including to the Closing Banquet Gala.

For more information, including the complete schedule of events please visit www.lamacs.uottawa.ca/plp. To reserve tickets contact Vivian 902-495-6190 dynamicresults@ymail.com

Cemetery" – in reference to the family name found on the majority of burials – was once attached to the Union AME, one of the many churches that once flourished in the famed Elgin Settlement. The church building itself has long since disappeared, its congregation departed or absorbed into other communities, leaving only an estimated 13 graves behind on the site. As time passed, the other stones wore down or toppled over and the woods from out which the cemetery was first carved, returned. The toppled stones have even mostly disappeared beneath the under growth and new surface soil, and largely forgotten.

As indicated, their story is not unique. Indeed Chatham-Kent is home to the largest number of cemeteries and burial sites in the province of Ontario. Most are like Freeman, and lay abandoned, some on private property and known only to the current landowners.

When we are each one day laid to rest what would we have happen to that cemetery? We believe that neat rows of stones will mark our resting places for all time, tended to by groundskeepers and visited by family and friends. But what happens over a longer timeline. Most graves are no longer visited in the large municipal cemeteries, as even those who would remember the interred have themselves passed. Stones crumble and graves become neglected. What should happen to these plots? How should we think of a cemetery, what does it represent? Is it only a disposal place for those who have come before? Is it a place for quiet reflection and solemn remembrance? Is it a place of community history? Is it parkland? What would the people of Freeman, want us to do?

Over the coming summer this is one of the many locations that the Promised Land, together with Heritage Chatham-Kent, the Municipality of Chatham-Kent and, our partners will endeavour to preserve. This historic cemetery, filled with south Kent's early black settlers, residents of the Elgin Settlement at Buxton, will hopefully be restored as part of the project to be undertaken with the students of the Lambton-Kent District School Board.