

**CM 590: Directed Reading  
in Christian Culture**

**African Canadian Methodism**

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**Final Paper**

African Canadian Methodism is an obscure topic that has pushed the button of curiosity on the proverbial hard drive of my being. It is a journey that began as a sacred pondering detour in a quiet moment of reflection upon the windows of Metropolitan United Church. The omission of people of color in the renderings of the Biblical Narrative spoke profoundly to me. The journey that opened and grew to become a great voyage on an immense mountain to climb. The deficiency of available material brings forward the issue of marginalization for African Canadian Methodism. It has had a pathway filled with challenge upon its broken road to the freedom path. Even so, in the words of Oracle from Isaiah there is spoken with profound diligence to the forgotten neighbor.

Isaiah 62:10,12.

*Go through, go through the gates, prepare the way for the people: build up, build up the highway, clear it of stones lift up an ensign over the peoples... They shall be called, 'The Holy People, the Redeemed of the Lord.' and you shall be called, 'Sought out, A city not forsaken.'*

The question is to reclaim a severed limb, a forgotten comrade, brother and sister on the pilgrim road...Even now another window of the Church has been moved to the Library. (See Appendix 2) It is a replica of a twelfth century French Medieval Nativity Window that depicts persons in a Middle Eastern genre in an iconographic format. The biblical figures are representative of a more pan-cultural context unlike the wider collection of Stained Glass windows that portrays a more narrow Caucasian European demographic. (See Appendix 1) The medieval window becomes the narrative for every person and all peoples.

The Stained Glass Windows at Metropolitan United hold a pivotal role in the

Sanctuary. As media of transmission for the visual word they represent a portion of the mystical legacy inherited by our medieval forebears. At first glance, the eye of the pilgrim is mesmerized by the kaleidoscope of color. Sarah Hall proposes a two-fold delineation of stain glass window: “It is an arrangement of treated glass pieces in a lead matrix. Second it is a lasting and integral part of a building, and is inspired by and connected to a vast web of people, events and spiritual aspirations, past and future.”<sup>1</sup>

A closer examination of the stained glass reveals the portrayal of Jesus’ miracles and stories dedicated in memoriam of elders and persons of leadership. A careful probe of the biblical figures represented indicates a profound absence of people of color and specifically African Canadians. The figures have an ethnic resemblance to Nordic Europeans. One may ponder “Where are the people of Canada?” Exploring deeper has ignited a search for African Canadian Methodists comparable at moments to the quest for the Holy Grail.

The quest began with many moments of metaphorical door knocking. One avenue led to the person of Adele Halliday at the Ethnic Ministries unit of the United Church of Canada. The Holy Grail became little closer. When the topic is made reference to in conversation of the eager listener, there is an instant expression of interest that indicates a hunger to know more and even a desire to lend a hand.

The tangible road of experience begins by examining the Black Experience in Canada prior to 1776, the American War of Independence, which is a date that was a milestone in Eastern North America witnessing migration shifts of populations to the

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<sup>1</sup> Sarah Hall [The Color of Light](#)  
(Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago, 1999) pg. 1

remainder of the British Colony that later became Canada. The shifting tensions of self identity and the Declaration of Independence causes a soul to wonder how the Thirteen Colonies came to exclude the recently acquired northern British Colonies, formerly New France, following the battle at the Plains of Abraham. Perhaps in the winding road of History the larger North American Union was not timely and unquestionably out of step with the pace of the newly forming alliances in the thirteen colonies. The end result was a place for Black Loyalists, United Empire Loyalists, Pennsylvania Dutch and a number of other ethnic, religious and cultural groups who made their Exodus in the face of potentially newfound challenges in Post Revolutionary America.

The fresh revelation concerning the group on the edge of the horizon known as the Black Loyalists barely recognized in the annals of history, informed the myopic narrative of History. The emigration of Black Loyalists to the British colony led to the foundation of small key settlements. One in particular, Africville, emerged in Nova Scotia. The Methodists were also on the move initially opening doors to all cultural groups but schism soon became the way of necessity. Three parallel movements developed in African Canadian Methodism: the British Methodist Episcopal (BME), the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) and the Colored Wesleyan Methodist (C.W.M.) presence all became individual denominations for a season. The information about these three key denominations is obscure and frequently layered amidst the Histories of Methodism: a reminder of God's fractured kingdom.

The schism was indicative of a more deeply rooted systemic social miasma, that of the acceptance of slavery by the Southern States and the gradual eradication of it in the Northern States and Canada. The need for a new way of freedom witnessed the

development of the Underground Railroad and the later Emancipation Proclamations of the British Empire in 1833 and the United States during the 1860's. The Methodists struggled internally searching for identity with five branches in Upper and Lower Canada.

African Canadian Methodism became yet another limb in the Body of Methodism that had heard the call of Christ to 'Go to the World'. The impact of the Revolutionary War led to thousands of free blacks and soon to be former slaves seeking refuge in the Canadas; the passage was through Windsor and other sanctuaries.

In the context of early Toronto many former slaves set up a home in this growing metropolis. The congregations of Metropolitan United began in 1818 with the building of the King St. Methodist Episcopal Chapel, in 1833 the Adelaide St. Wesleyan Methodist Church, and in 1872 The Metropolitan Wesleyan Methodist Church (the Cathedral of Methodism). When the 1872 Church was built in Toronto, there was a Black Baptist church as an immediate neighbor around the corner and British Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal and Colored Wesleyan Methodist churches just down the road on Richmond St.

#### BLACK EXPERIENCE IN CANADA PRIOR TO 1790

From 1628 to 1783 almost all black people in Canada were slaves. In these early years there is remembered the horrific case of Marie Joseph Angelique which vividly depicts the degree of discrimination present in New France. She was a slave who after being informed that she was to be sold was alleged to have set fire to her owner's house. The fire raged out of control, destroying nearly fifty Montreal houses. As Daniel Hill writes in The Freedom Seekers(1981)

*Angelique was arrested, convicted of arson, and sentenced to hang. A rope was tied around her neck, signs bearing the word “Incendiary” were fastened on her back and chest, and she was driven through the streets in a scavenger’s cart. Worse was to come: she was tortured until she confessed her crime before a priest; then her hand was cut off and she was hanged in public.<sup>2</sup>*

The event of Angelique’s torture is an historical reminder of the racial horrors that took place on Canadian soil.

New France officially passed into British hands in 1763 as the Seven Years War ended. For Blacks, this change brought no perceptible change in conditions. They were confirmed to be non-persons under the law.<sup>3</sup>

#### BLACK LOYALISTS AND BLACK SLAVES IN THE MARITIMES

Canada began to develop a reputation as a safe haven for Blacks during the American War of Independence (1775 – 1783). The term United Empire Loyalists is the Canadian mythology of the Mayflower. For Black communities a different narrative emerged. Some 35,000 Black Loyalists arrived in Canada in 1783. Transported by ship, most settled in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Others moved into scattered communities in Ontario and Quebec. They came with hope and promise.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to the free blacks, roughly 1,500 slaves arrived in the company of white Loyalists. In Nova Scotia newcomers were listed in the Book of Negroes: a special register for Black Loyalists. Two large Black settlements developed by 1784 in Shelburne and Birchmount, Nova Scotia. Less dramatic examples of segregation soon appeared throughout the Canadian Colonies.<sup>5</sup> The concept of a Black Loyalist is clearly foreign to many, devoid and marginalized from the Historical Pedagogy of Primary

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<sup>2</sup> Ken Alexander and Avis Glaze Towards Freedom – The African Canadian Experience  
(Umbrella Press, Toronto, 1996)

<sup>3</sup> Towards Freedom pg. 40

<sup>4</sup> Ibid pg. 41

<sup>5</sup> Ibid pg. 42

Academia. Across early Canada integrated places of work provided the only means of meaningful daily intermingling with Blacks who were designated to subordinate positions.<sup>6</sup>

There were long bureaucratic lines and delays for blacks to receive land grants. Key spokespeople Thomas Peters and Murphy Still initiated a protest against these delays. Some Black activists were successful in petitioning for land grants for some Black Loyalists. The majority remained landless and became dependent on employment offered by white farmers, tradesmen or the government.

#### LOWER CANADA

Meanwhile in Lower Canada Joseph Papineau (1799) brought before the Assembly, a petition from the electors of Montreal to Abolish Slavery. The practice of it was not widespread but it did exist. Papineau found it abhorrent that men could be bought and sold like cattle, proof of the humanity of this coopers son, seminary educated, stoutly Catholic, who cannot abide the idea of human bondage. He was horrified that high officials in the judiciary and members of the assembly and religious orders are slave owners.<sup>7</sup>

Trends were shifting in the norms of Quebec society. People were reflecting deeply upon the course of action that had been taking place in the European Continent and the cascading effect in the New World. .Note the verbiage of the First Petition of the Montreal Slave masters in 1799

*It is ordained, under the good pleasure of his Most Christian Majesty, that all Panis and Negroes which, before then were, and which thereafter should be purchased in*

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid pg. 42

<sup>7</sup> Frank Mackey Black Then  
(McGill-Queen's University Press; Montreal, 2004) pg. 44

*Canada, should appertain, in full property, to the purchasers, there of, as their proper Slaves; and the said Panis and Negroes are thereby enjoined not to leave the service of their masters, and all persons not to encourage them to desert, or harbor them, under the penalty of fifty livres:*<sup>8</sup>

The tenor of the Montreal Slave Masters as recorded by Frank Mackey indicates a cultural norm that for the most part had previously been overlooked in the paradigm of Canadian History. Recalling the landscape of the early years depicts one of liberty held in tension. The divergent perspectives of the inherent nature of society was being transformed. The core values were being challenged by fresh visions. The rising tides of American and French Revolution with slogans, “LIBERTÉ, EGALITÉ ET FRATERNITÉ” led to transformation.

In the midst of the War of Independence, in 1777 Vermont became the first state to abolish slavery. Some slaves escaped from New France and settled in free Vermont.<sup>9</sup>

British Lower Canada was facing new challenges in the plight for the Black Canadian. The Black Community was becoming a force to consider. Slavery was close to extinction in 1799 by being snuffed out by the courts.<sup>10</sup> The new philosophical understanding became a matter of discourse in the pursuit of justice. In French Canada the scales of the law determined the freedom of African Canadians.

In 1807 an Act of Parliament made enslaving British subjects illegal.<sup>11</sup> A milestone for the world emerged from the mouths of Enlightenment. The British granted freedom to runaways who joined the Loyalist cause. Opposition to slavery was growing throughout British North America as abolitionists were making inroads.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid pg. 187

<sup>9</sup> Towards Freedom pg. 274

<sup>10</sup> Black Then pg. 44

<sup>11</sup> Towards Freedom pg. 45

<sup>12</sup> Ibid pg. 45

A new bell of freedom was sounding, a new music: a fresh heart beat was calling to the hearts of the people. In 1803 William Osgoode, the Chief Justice of Lower Canada voted that slavery was incompatible with British Law.<sup>13</sup> Yet another milestone, the War of 1812, brought in its wake once again the promise of freedom; equality and land brought thousands to Canada. Once more hopes of renewal were decimated.<sup>14</sup>

Nearly two thousand “Black Refugees” came to Halifax in 1813. They were valued as manual laborers and settled in largely segregated districts in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Maritime governments were encouraging blacks to immigrate by offering a safer and more profitable existence. This situation quickly changed in the tide of recession; too many Black servants taking too many of the jobs from needy whites.

In 1815 the Nova Scotia legislature voted to ban further black immigration.<sup>15</sup> The author Ken Alexander recounts within his pages a fresh Canadian story that cuts to the core. The seeds of racism were long standing, unlike the white plaster epitaph that had been preached in so many classrooms ago. The term closet racists come to mind. Perhaps the systemic racist attitudes are symptomatic of the British overtones present in the foundation of early Canada. The damage resembled a great cancerous infestation that manifested as a dependent and impoverished black underclass.<sup>16</sup> The situation was marginally better for blacks in Upper Canada. Land grants were awarded to black and white war veterans settling in Oro known today as Simcoe County, Ontario.<sup>17</sup>

## BACK TO AFRICVILLE

There is no accurate historical memory in Canada of British North America’s own

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid pg. 53

<sup>14</sup> Ibid pg. 55

<sup>15</sup> Towards Freedom pg. 56

<sup>16</sup> Ibid pg. 56

<sup>17</sup> Ibid pg. 57

experience with the Negro and even a clouded awareness of an earlier Negro presence that is slighted.<sup>18</sup> In the final analysis it appears that the key point factor in the migration to the Africville area was economic opportunity although there may have been additional incentives affecting the precise location of the first homes. The incentive for migration appears to have been the hardship of life in the settlements of Preston and Hammond Communities.<sup>19</sup>

### KEY PROBLEM

The Nova Scotian government had given Black settlers only 'licenses of occupation' rather than full grants. The licenses allowed all the rights of property except those of sale conveyance. It had promised that full grants would be issued after three years to those who had developed their holdings and most Black settlers fulfilled these stipulations. However, for twenty-five years the grants were not forthcoming. The delay rendered Blacks immobile, for they could not move elsewhere without abandoning their investment and it also contributed to the perception of Blacks as second-class citizens.<sup>20</sup>

### BLACK LOYALIST AND RELIGION

James Walker indicates that despite denominational labels, the common origin and experience of the Black Loyalists sects had created almost identical doctrines, styles and organizations.<sup>21</sup> Black Maritime Canada Christians had developed a fusion in style and form. With a focus upon experimental knowledge that was considered more

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<sup>18</sup> Robin W. Winks Africville The Life and Death of a Canadian Black Community  
(Canadian Scholars' Press, Toronto, 1999) pg. 31

<sup>19</sup> Ibid pg. 38

<sup>20</sup> Africville The Life and Death of A Canadian Black Community pg. 34

<sup>21</sup> James Walker The Black Loyalists: the Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone 1783- 1870  
(Africana Publishing Company, New York, 1992) pg. 195

important than the study of authority, including, even the Bible. This knowledge came directly from God to the preacher and his congregation through visions, dreams, and the physiological experiences of the prayer meeting.<sup>22</sup> This interpretation of Christian philosophy emerged from a marginalized people. Their reliance on faith and redemption rather than scriptural interpretations bore similarity to John Wesley's pronouncement that the image of God was stamped upon their heart and was more central than 'orthodoxy or right opinions', which were he felt, at best but a very slender part of religion.<sup>23</sup> The perception of a Congregationalist perspective emerged that would become the foundation for many Black Canadian Christians within the fabric of Nova Scotian religion incorporated characteristics that were expressly condemned by Wesley. Specifically, the Calvinistic doctrine of the elect and the Antinomian belief that grace obliterates any obligation to moral law for the converted Christian.<sup>24</sup>

The fresh path of doctrinal form influenced the development in many homes of family prayer circles around a private altar. It was thought that Black preachers might often suffocate in their violent expositions and John Clark echoed Clarkson's fear that a sermon would endanger the health of the preacher delivering it.<sup>25</sup> This interior passion produced a strong reliance on the charismatic rhetoric abilities of the preacher.

Nova Scotian chapels were divided into classes, each under a lay leaders, which met weekly to discuss the state of their souls, to describe their temptations and victories and to foster Christian fellowship and mutual care.<sup>26</sup> Loyalty to a particular congregation

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid pg. 196

<sup>23</sup> Ibid pg. 196

<sup>24</sup> The Black Loyalists: the Search for a Promised Land In Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone 1783-1870  
pg. 196

<sup>25</sup> Ibid pg. 197

<sup>26</sup> Ibid pg. 197

implied the acceptance of certain political attitudes<sup>27</sup> The Black Loyalist and the interplay of such ideologies created solid political fronts.

In 1811 the Methodist missionary George Warren landed in the colony. At first things went well between the Nova Scotian Methodists and their superintending pastor. He was welcomed by the settlers as an answer to their prayers and he wisely declined to interfere with the activities of three local preachers and six class leaders, while assuming much of the administrative load and trying diplomatically to reunite the various Methodist divisions. Warren died in July 1812. Under Maxwell's new land grant scheme of 1812- 1813 a new deed had to be obtained for the Rawdon Street Chapel either by design or oversight, the grant was made out to the Nova Scotia trustees and elders, who were elected by the people. Thus the congregation remained the proprietors of the chapel, and their legal independence from the Methodist Missionary Society was assured.

<sup>28</sup> In April 1821 the Rawdon St. Chapel gathered to discuss the New Chapel. The Blacks declared that if the Whites wanted control of a chapel they should build one for themselves.<sup>29</sup> The issue fell to Governor MacCarthy. He opted for legal interpretation in January 1822 and gave the occupation of the Chapel to the Nova Scotia Trustees. The Nova Scotians of the Rawdon St. Chapel reconstituted themselves as an Independent Methodist Chapel.<sup>30</sup> They invited other Methodist chapels in the colony to join them in a new association untied to any white groups.<sup>31</sup> The new Methodists were at first known simply as the 'Settlers', 'Meeting' or 'Big Meeting'; the Nova Scotia society soon adopted the title 'West African Methodist, to distinguish themselves from the white non

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid pg. 199

<sup>28</sup> The Black Loyalist pg. 293

<sup>29</sup> Ibid pg. 294

<sup>30</sup> Ibid pg. 295

<sup>31</sup> Ibid pg. 295

Wesleyan Methodist Society.<sup>32</sup>

#### AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCHES

During the 1830's and 1840's the Black population of Upper Canada continued to grow, but at a somewhat slower rate. By 1835 Hamilton's Black population had increased enough to open an African Methodist Episcopal A.M.E. Church in a small building on Cathcart St.<sup>33</sup> Toronto in 1834 was the third largest city on the Great Lakes.

As it grew the corresponding boom in industry and business created a keen demand for skilled trades people and workers, as well as opportunities for merchants and other business people. The time was ripe for the city's first wave of Black immigrants.

Word filtered into the U.S.A. that there was work to be had in Toronto for free Blacks in the northern states. It was a city within easy reach, and for runaways it was far enough from the border to offer safety from the pursuing masters. In time Toronto became a major haven for runaways, in the old Ward 4 west of University Avenue. The growing black community created a new refugee group which settled chiefly in a working class area. It turned out to be self-supporting and no drain on the public purse. John Dann, the Upper Canada's Receiver General, wrote to an American Abolitionist. "Negroes ask for charity less than any other group, and seem generally prosperous and industrious."<sup>34</sup>

Benjamin Drew observed that most Toronto Blacks owned their own homes and some had valuable property.<sup>35</sup> Austin Steward became the President of the Wilberforce colony in 1820, he controlled the settlements affairs with the seven

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid pg. 295

<sup>33</sup> Daniel G. Hill The Freedom-Seekers Blacks in Early Canada  
(Book Society of Canada, Toronto, 1981) pg. 48

<sup>34</sup> Ibid pg. 49

<sup>35</sup> Ibid pg. 50

member board of directors and also took leadership in the A.M.E. Sunday School.<sup>36</sup>

In 1832 the Baptist and African Methodist Episcopal Churches were active in Wilberforce. The AME had no church building of its own but its members held meetings led by circuit preachers or by Austin Steward in one another's homes.<sup>37</sup>

By 1835 it had dwindled down to 20 families, and local prejudice had re-inforced the Canadian company's decision to sell no more land to Blacks during the 1830's. Any effort to attract settlers to Wilberforce was finished by 1835, and except for a few families the residents scattered. Austin Steward left in 1832 to become a full-time minister in the A.M.E. Church. All the same wide publicity encouraged American Blacks to keep coming to Canada West.<sup>38</sup>

#### THE COLORED INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY

Hill indicates that from the early days of slavery in North America the church was important to Black Culture.<sup>39</sup> The church community was an integral component in forging settlements for refugees. In 1845 the African Methodist Episcopal Church founded in Sandwich Township as small mission which in 1851 was renamed 'The Colored Industrial Society.' In effect, the church was promoting a land-colonization plan for members of the A.M.E. Church and other Black refugees. The Reverend Israel Campbell and the Reverend John Jackson were the Society's first representatives: its trustees declared,

*We have been appointed a Board of Trustees to establish a settlement of colored people in the township of Sandwich, Canada West, and an Institution in which that class of the community may receive a liberal education and thereby improve their present illiterate*

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid pg. 68

<sup>37</sup> Ibid pg. 70

<sup>38</sup> Ibid pg. 71

<sup>39</sup> Ibid pg. 74

*state and also to promote such, religious and orderly conduct among them which will tend to their spiritual and temporal happiness.*

By 1855 the project had failed, and the settlement failed. In the meantime the British Methodist Episcopal Church provided nurture and support.<sup>40</sup>

#### THE ELGIN SETTLEMENT AND THE BUXTON MISSION

The Elgin Settlement, including the Buxton Mission was the brainchild of a tough-minded intelligent Presbyterian, the Reverend William King. King was posted by the Church of Scotland to do missionary work in Canada West following the death of his wife and children. He submitted a proposal to settle Blacks in Canada.<sup>41</sup> King was convinced that his project could succeed; Blacks could own land on easy terms and gain enough education to make them independent and masters of their own skills of farming. He set up a plan of purchasing clergy reserve land.<sup>42</sup>

Edwin Larwill was inexorably opposed to Black Settlement anywhere near Chatham. He argued that Blacks were inferior; that nearby property would be devalued and that many established, respected settlers would leave the area if Blacks were admitted.<sup>43</sup>

People ignored Larwill and the Elgin settlement began. King was a staunch Presbyterian, but understanding that many of the settlers wished to continue in the churches of the slave background. He helped the African Methodist Episcopal and Baptist group organize congregations at Elgin. Thomas Stringer was the chief organizer of the A.M.E.'s and the spirit of community co-operation was so strong that everyone would help. The A.M.E.'s started with thirty members and had a congregation of 299 by

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid pg. 74

<sup>41</sup> Ibid pg. 75

<sup>42</sup> Ibid pg.77

<sup>43</sup> Ibid pg. 78

the 1860's.<sup>44</sup>

The Elgin settlers valued education highly and it was soon widely acknowledged that the Buxton Mission School was a great deal better than the district government schools. As Elgin grew and thrived, its settlers gradually overcame the prejudice and opposition of their white neighbors.<sup>45</sup> The outbreak of the American Civil War brought changes to Elgin. Forty of its men enlisted at once in the First Colonial Regiment based in Detroit. Just before the war began \$6,000.00 had been raised to build another church and more schools in Elgin, but with Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation and the end of the War some of the settlement's Black families started the long trek back to the American South.<sup>46</sup> This key fact of history cast a dark cloud on the future of many former African Canadian Methodists as they would later meet with hostile white communities who were bitter over the fractured cultural shift in Southern U.S. economics from plantation economy to a freer agrarian and industrial focus.

#### THE EARLIEST YEARS

During the era of slavery, the church was the only social organization that American slaver owners permitted to black slaves. Oppressed freedman found in the Christian doctrine of salvation some hope of escape from their early troubles. While American churches shared this doctrine with Blacks, they excluded them from white congregations. As a result Blacks began to form their own Christian groups.<sup>47</sup>

In 1816 Richard Allen established the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church in Philadelphia. Later in Canada Laura Haviland, a white Canadian born Quaker,

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid pg. 84

<sup>45</sup> Ibid pg. 85

<sup>46</sup> Daniel G. Hill The Freedom-Seekers Blacks In Early Canada pg. 86

<sup>47</sup> Ibid pg. 127

suggested that a Union Church be formed. There was in this colony a mixed religious element Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian and Free-will Baptists who were deeply interested in Sabbath School and class meetings, open to all who wished to enjoy them. An organization was proposed. The proposition came from the Methodists element but did not deem it wise to organize from any one denomination, as divergent opinion would create a controversy. Consequently they proposed to organize a Christian Union Church without disturbing the Church relationship of anyone. After a little discussion and explanation it was adopted.<sup>48</sup>

The new church was a great success and attendance was high until Haviland left the settlement. Then the Baptists settled to form their own church, and the Union Church was discontinued. Since most of the settlers at Puce River were Methodist, the church eventually became known as Methodist Episcopal.<sup>49</sup>

In 1848 the small Black community of Oro built a wooden church on a half-hectare of lot 11. Noah Morris, an early Black settler, sold the land to the church for one pound. The congregation chose the name 'African Episcopal Church', perhaps after the A.M.E. church. Members later called themselves British Methodists. Between the 1830's and the 1870's Oro's African Episcopal Church served about 40 families.<sup>50</sup>

#### BLACK METHODIST CHURCHES

Since most Blacks who settled in Canada had belonged to Methodist or Baptist groups in the U.S.A., they tended to attach themselves to the denominations familiar to them. The A.M.E. Church formed a congregation in Toronto in 1833 and built a church

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid pg. 131

<sup>49</sup> Daniel G. Hill The Freedom-Seekers Blacks In Early Canada pg. 131

<sup>50</sup> Ibid pg. 133

on Richmond St. east of York St. In 1851 it had 128 members. This particular piece of the history was most startling due to its proximity to the historical Metropolitan Methodist Community. They were neighbors who are absent in the narrative of Metropolitan United. The Richmond A.M.E. Church was the third largest of six reporting districts: its Sunday School has six teachers and 50 pupils. In 1835 the A.M.E. Church formed a congregation in Brantford, though there were only a handful of members. By the same year Hamilton's Blacks opened an A.M.E. church in a small log building on Cathcart St.<sup>51</sup> About 1836 the small Black community of Drummondville (later Niagara Falls) built an A.M.E. Chapel. W.R. Abbott and two other Blacks, acting for the Colored Wesleyan Methodists (C.W.M.) Church of Toronto, bought property on Richmond St. near York St. in July 1838 for £125. The congregation which started out with 40 members seems to have been founded because of the indignation its members felt towards Toronto's white Wesleyans who were in fellowship with pro-slavery churches in the American South.<sup>52</sup>

By 1850 the CWM Church of Toronto had over 100 members. Prosperity was short lived. In time a decided rift appeared, especially with well-to-do members, who began to consider that Black Churches impeded Black integration with the rest of the community. The split of the A.M.E. Church in the mid-1850's made itself felt within the C.W.M. group. Some better-off members, also began to argue that Black churches hindered social mingling of Blacks and Whites. The congregation continued however until 1875, when the death of many members and the emigration of others to the U.S.A. closed their church.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid pg. 135

<sup>52</sup> Ibid pg. 136

<sup>53</sup> Ibid pg. 136

It was about the mid-1850's when a division developed within the A.M.E. denomination. Some members wished to drop the American connection in order to identify more closely with British ideals and government. The group had a practical reason, as well as an ideological one, for their view: they thought that Blacks newly arrived in Canada, and mostly fugitives, would be more likely to find justice and security if they belonged to a church with a British name, made up of British subjects.<sup>54</sup>

In September 1856, the new British Methodist Episcopal (B.M.E.) Church was formed under the direction of the Reverend Willis Nazrey, an A.M.E. minister who agreed to become the first bishop of the new denomination. The Chatham B.M.E. Church flourished. Before he became a bishop the Reverend Nazrey had worked to found the B.M.E. church throughout Canada West. A B.M.E. congregation was formed in St. Catherine's, and a frame church built. Other B.M.E. congregations were formed in the same period in Hamilton, Niagara Falls, Bradford, Windsor and Collingwood.<sup>55</sup> The B.M.E. group at Niagara Falls met at first in a chapel on Murray Hill. Later its members built a larger church at Grey and Peter Sts. During the 1860's the Rev. William Banyard ministered there to the 42 members. The 50 member congregation at Brantford built a small frame church at Murray and Darling Streets. Owen Sound's little Zion Church joined the new B.M.E. group in 1856. By 1864 its congregation numbered 120 people.<sup>56</sup>

In 1863 Windsor's B.M.E. congregation built a church at McDougall and Assumption Streets. According to tradition this church was built at night, when its

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid pg. 136

<sup>55</sup> Ibid pg. 137

<sup>56</sup> Daniel G. Hill The Freedom-Seekers Blacks In Early Canada Ibid pg. 138

members had finished their daily work. The women carried water from the Detroit River with which they helped to mix the mortar while the men took turns working and holding torches to provide light. In Collingwood a Mr. Woods held services for many years in the homes of the B.M.E. members. Only in 1871 had these people gathered the funds to build a church. In 1898 the Church and parsonage burned down, but were rebuilt a few years later.

#### A PILGRIM PROPHET ON THE WAY – Mary Shadd

On Broadway in the heart of New York City at a time when colored women hardly dared to think of riding in the cars Mary Shadd threw up her head, gave one look, and a wave of the hand. There was such an air or imperative command in it that the large, coarse, ruffian driver who had been “known to refuse colored ladies.” capitulated. As though “suddenly seized with paralysis” he brought his team to a halt and Mary entered the car, and rode to her distinction “without hindrance.”<sup>57</sup>

An event of enormous importance to Shadd’s life, as well as to the lives of all Black Americans, was the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850. This legislation, Bearden and Butler write, “sought to expedite the process where by slave owners could hand down and legally reclaim fugitives from service. A terrifying aspect of the Fugitive Slave Act was that it did not formally discriminate between slave and free blacks. Thus free Blacks in the northern states feared that they would be mistaken for fugitive slaves and arrested. Widespread miscarriages of justice ensued as free Blacks were arrested, returned to “owners” and separated from their families. Canada became an increasingly attractive alternative, especially since Canadian law did not discriminate between Blacks

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<sup>57</sup> Mary Shadd [A Plea for Emigration](#)  
(Mercury Press, Toronto, 1998) pg. 13

and Whites, and did not allow for extradition to the United States.<sup>58</sup>

Mary Shadd arrived in Toronto, Canada West in early September 1850 just in time to attend the North American Convention of eminent emigrationist Black Leaders who had gathered at St. Lawrence Hall to discuss emigration, the Fugitive Slave Act and other important issues.<sup>59</sup>

## THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

Late in the 1700's New England Quakers began sheltering fugitive slaves, some of whom escaped into Canada. Others, both free blacks and fugitive slaves, moved into the North West Territory which through Congress' passage of the Northwest Ordinance (1787) had been made free. In 1793, the same year that Simcoe's Act was passed in Upper Canada the U.S. federal government enacted the First Fugitive Slave law.<sup>60</sup>

"The Free Slave" by George W. Clarke, an American abolitionist states:

*I'm on way to Canada. That cold and distant land. The dire effects of slavery, I can no longer stand. Farewell old master, don't come after me. I'm my way to Canada where colored men are free.*<sup>61</sup>

By the time of the Emancipation Act of 1833, which had abolished slavery throughout the British Empire, the practice of slavery had all but disappeared in Canada. Sympathy for Blacks fleeing U.S. slave-holding territories was growing in British North America. Canada, free of fugitive slave laws and refusing to repatriate runaways seemed an oasis of tolerance.<sup>62</sup>

Black and white abolitionists on both sides of the border had already established

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid pg. 15

<sup>59</sup> Ibid pg. 15

<sup>60</sup> Ken Alexander Towards Freedom: The African-Canadian Experience  
(Umbrella Press, Toronto, 1996) pg. 57

<sup>61</sup> Ibid pg. 57

<sup>62</sup> Ibid pg. 58

an informed network of “safe houses” and secret routes north to protect fugitive slaves.

By 1830, this network developed into an organized system called the Underground Railroad (U.G.R.). Though estimates vary, between 1815 and 1860 approximately 80,000 slaves escaped via the U.G.R., and roughly 50,000 of whom came to Canada.<sup>63</sup>

#### GEORGE BROWN OF THE GLOBE

George Brown developed an active interest in the public protest against American Slavery now fast arising in Canada.<sup>64</sup> For Brown there was a drive for liberation of the Slaves. He had a strong enthusiasm for them. George Brown was a leader of the Liberal Party and also the rival of John A. MacDonald and a key founder of Confederation and the Globe news paper, later the Globe and Mail.<sup>65</sup>

#### REVISITING AFRICAN CANADIAN METHODISM

Black Methodists went further toward self segregation than the Baptists had done, for rather than establishing separate associations within the large Church, they ultimately founded quite distinct sects, three of which were active in British North America: the African Methodist Episcopal Church, or B.M.E.; and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, or A.M.E.Z. groups. Each of these drew Negro Methodists away from the white chapels until relatively few remained in the parent body. Both the A.M.E. and the A.M.E.Z. church organizations were brought to British North America by the early fugitive slaves. As the presiding elder of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the Canadas and northwestern New York observed before the separation. Methodism was able to hold Negroes, and by the 1860’s several of the once-thriving

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid pg. 58

<sup>64</sup> J.M.S. Careless George Brown of the Globe Voice of Upper Canada 1818 –1859 Vol no. 1 & 2 (Dundern Press Ltd., Toronto, 1989) pg. 103

<sup>65</sup> Ibid pg. 103

churches were down to a handful of members.<sup>66</sup>

The A.M.E. organization entered Upper Canada in the 1820's. The B.M.E. Church was a logical progression. The B.M.E. Church operated only in the Canadas at first and A.M.E. Churches in the Maritimes Provinces.<sup>67</sup> The formation of Union Churches meant continued disunity for several of the former B.M.E. churches which had enjoyed their short-lived independence too much to forfeit it merely because the Fugitive Slave Act posed no further threat.<sup>68</sup> B.M.E. churches attempted unsuccessfully to shift its attention toward the Maritime Provinces. In 1925 the Methodist Churches throughout the Dominion merged with the Congregational and most of the Presbyterian churches to form the United Church of Canada. The B.M.E. and A.M.E. sects remained outside largely because they represented uncompromisable or conservative positions or doctrinal issues but also because the Negro ministers did not wish to be displaced and because the merger had been difficult enough to effect without raising, amidst white churches, the question of interracial worship.<sup>69</sup>

The single exception was the Union Church of Montreal. It began in 1907, an all- Negro congregation of American origin which was carried into the United Church of Canada and placed under the vigorous guidance of a West Indian born Congregationalist, Rev. Charles H. Este. The United Church agreed in 1926 to "recognize them as our brothers in Christ" without absorbing them; and the United

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<sup>66</sup> Robin Winks The Blacks in Canada  
(McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 1971) pg. 355

<sup>67</sup> Ibid pg. 356

<sup>68</sup> Ibid pg. 358

<sup>69</sup> Ibid pg. 358

Church of Canada would, by the 1950's , be the most vigorous of all three major church groups in promoting equal rights for blacks.<sup>70</sup> The thread of this cloth begins with John Wesley.

#### JOHN WESLEY

Methodism usually dates its birth to May 24, 1738 at Aldersgate in London. On that day John Wesley's religious conversion was confirmed as felt his "heart strangely warmed." He joyfully reported the event to his brother Charles, who had a similar but more private conversion at about the same time.<sup>71</sup> John Wesley found the writings of the prominent Anglican non-juror, William Law, with their emphasis on inward holiness through self discipline and practical Christianity, to be an invaluable guide.<sup>72</sup>

#### SPLINTER CONNEXION FROM THE UNITED STATES

The British Methodist Episcopal Church connexion; an offshoot of the Black African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States, and which continues to operate as a separate denomination in Canada to the present day. Although it answered a distinct need by serving a largely ostracized black clientele, it was substantially ignored by other Canadians.<sup>73</sup>

Originally the Methodist Evangelical Revolution of the 18<sup>th</sup> century had been popular because it appeared to break the fetters of special conformity, as well as to promise universal salvation. Methodism forged a new equality in the quest for salvation by partially breaking down the old barriers of nationality, ethnicity, class and race.<sup>74</sup> The evangelistic churches especially the Baptists and Methodist drew in the

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid pg. 358

<sup>71</sup> Neil Semple The Lord's Dominion- The History of Canadian Methodism  
(McGill-Queen's University Press; Montreal, 1996) pg. 9

<sup>72</sup> Ibid pg. 10

<sup>73</sup> Ibid pg. 123

slaves and former slaves in the United States precisely because they offered freedom of worship and the potential for a transformed and emancipated community. The evangelists held out at last liberation in the next world through personal salvation and earthly hope through self esteem and self-help. <sup>75</sup>

The entry of the denomination into British North America was an extension of its work with escaped slaves and free Blacks in the Northern States. Over the first half of the nineteenth century, as the number of blacks increased, many of the northern states passed restrictive “black codes” limiting their property and labor rights. As previously indicated ex-slaves crossed the border and settled in Upper Canada especially at Niagara and east from Windsor. <sup>76</sup>

The response of Canadian Methodists to the slavery issue was not particularly noteworthy. When the Methodist church officially noticed the question at all it opposed slavery and in 1833 congratulated the British government for outlawing the practice in the British Empire. With regard to slavery in the United States, Methodists generally joined their fellow citizens in arguing that despite its immortality Canadians should not get involved in an internal American question. <sup>77</sup> The only real condemnation among mainstream Methodists came from British Wesleyans. Ephraim Evans while editor used the Christian Canadian newspaper to attack the institution and to call for assistance for Blacks in the province. <sup>78</sup> As with all splinter denominations of the first half of the nineteenth century, these churches (African Episcopal Zion Church and the Wesleyan

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid pg. 123

<sup>75</sup> Ibid pg. 124

<sup>76</sup> Ibid pg. 124

<sup>77</sup> Ibid pg. 125

<sup>78</sup> Ibid pg. 125

Methodist Connexion of America) wove their own spiritual experiments into the fabric of Canadian Methodism and the Protestant vision of the nation.

The forged iron of shackle and chain brought slaves to this New World. Both New France and the Thirteen Colonies and likely New Spain had forcibly removed indigenous Africans from their homelands to enter into a relationship of confined proprietorship. The evolution of social understandings and ethical developments encouraged segments of society to control the social norm of slavery.

Ronald Wright indicates “as civilized people we tend to think not do we smell better but behave better than barbarians or savages. This notion has trouble standing up in the court of History.”<sup>79</sup> The errors of the Battle of the Plains of Abraham circa 1759, the American Revolution 1776, The French Revolution 1789, the War of 1812, the Emancipation Proclamation for the British Empire in 1833, and the American Civil War 1860’s witnessed enormous shifts in populations and understandings. For a season the African Canadian Methodists emerged, thrived and forged a piece of the Kingdom of God. The shadow of cataclysm fell upon their road as their communities shatter and the splinters of people left for the American South seeking to be the “Balm of Gilead” but meeting a bitter and defeated white remnant. It is a legacy of Methodism and a portion of the fabric of a Canadian Society that needs to be proclaimed from the mountain tops. Metropolitan United Church at best maintained a status of innocent bystanders. The torch of redemption is sought to bring healing and resurrection to the broken bones and lives of our African Canadian forebears. At present Metropolitan United Church has opened the doors to all peoples of every demographic and has in essence brought healing to the

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<sup>79</sup> Ronald Wright [A Short History of Progress](#)  
(House of Anansi Press Inc., Toronto,2004) pg. 4

deficiencies in the ideologies of our forebears. The Stained Glass windows stand as a reminder of where the people have walked they can enable the community of faith to be the compass for the new way forward. This road of the past continues to inform the stones that we are presently cutting on the way ahead. It is invitation to transformation as Mark Gornik implies in his book To Live In Peace Biblical Faith and the Changing Inner City. It is a modern parable of hope for the once devastated urban neighborhood of Sandtown in Baltimore that became the living embodiment of the city of God.

*“Community Development is both a set of practices grounded in the image of God and artistry rooted in spirituality. As artistry, it involves, like sculpture something new...the artistry of community both the now and the not yet of God’s reign”<sup>80</sup>*

The not yet of God’s reign the reclaiming of the forgotten histories of African Canadian Methodists enables the celebration of a much broader and deeper Canadian narrative that will continue to open new pathways for dialogue and the celebration of God’s Emmanuel.

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<sup>80</sup> Mark Gornik To Live In Peace Biblical Faith and the Changing Inner City  
(William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids Michigan U.K., 2002) pg.

APPENDIX 1

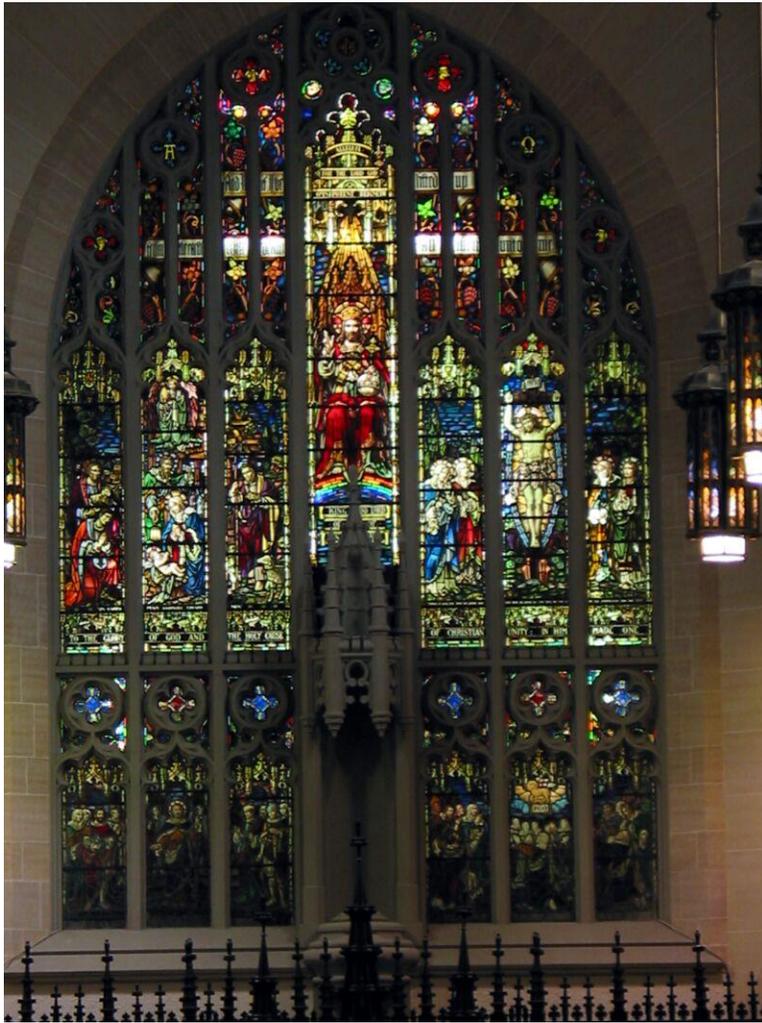


Photo by Gary Fisher

*APPENDIX 2*



Photo by Gary Fisher

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Alexander, Ken      Towards Freedom: The African-Canadian Experience  
Umbrella Press, Toronto, 1996

Looking at the struggle for freedom justice, peace, and equality in Canada. Blending historic events and people with contemporary issues, black nation-builders contributing enormously to Canada's evolving democracy.

Careless, J.M.S.      George Brown of the Globe Voice of Upper Canada 1818 –1859  
Vol no. 1 & 2

Dundern Press Ltd., Toronto, 1989

George Brown was a key figure in the landscape of early Canada as an editor of the Globe newspaper, a politician and an abolitionist.

Clairmont, Donald     Africville: the life and death of a Canadian Black Community  
Canadian Scholars' Press, Toronto, 1999

The examination of this pivotal black maritime community and it's role in the Canadian Landscape will inform inquiry of African Canadian Methodism.

Gornik, Mark R.        To Live in Peace  
William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company;  
Grand Rapids Michigan, 2002

Mark Gornik speaks of the power of transformative change. The community of Sandtown in Baltimore had become a ghost town, a shadow of its former self. Mark Gornik heard the call to rebuild the Phoenix from its ruins. The renaissance of Church, Education and Health Care Systems, Labour renewal and rebirth of community spirit.

Hill, Daniel G.        The Freedom-Seekers Blacks in Early Canada  
Book Society of Canada, Toronto,1981

The story of people seeking the new life in Canada and the formation of Black Colonies. The author explores the theme of Black Methodism that will enable further development of the exploration of the African Canadian Experience.

Mackey, Frank         Blacks then: Blacks and Montreal, 1780's –1880s  
Montreal-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 2004

The author begins with the life of a slave born in Montreal in 1768 and places the issue of slavery from abstract social understanding to one of personal incarnation.

New Revised Standard Version of the Bible  
World Publishing; Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1989

This version of the Bible has been used in the quoting of Scripture. As a contemporary interpretation it utilizes more recent scholastic research in Biblical translation.

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An account of Canadian Methodism and its impact on transitions and trends in religious art architecture. The nineteenth century witnessed many innovative developments. The advent of the Oxford movement amidst the Romantic Era saw the manifestation of Gothic Revival. A re-discovery of the philosophy and theological integration of the medieval era.

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The Fugitive Slave Law instituted in 1850 that allowed the armed pursuit of any African Americans in any part of the United States encouraged the emigration of countless thousands to Canada West.

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Walker examines the cultural phenomena of Black Loyalists in Nova Scotia.

Winks, Robin         The Blacks In Canada  
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Slavery in New France is part of the hidden story that we are unearthing as an integral part of the Canadian landscape.

Wright, Ronald       A Short History of Progress  
House of Anansi Press Inc., 2004

In this work Ronald Wright shows how our modern predicament is as old as civilization, a 10,000 we unleashed but have seldom controlled.