

KING HERITAGE & CULTURAL CENTRE

Photo Courtesy of CBC

FOREWORD:

For this week's edition, the KHCC reached out to King Township's volunteers in search of a community perspective.

Two youth volunteers, Nirali and Patel, researched the history of Black Canadian settlements and migration. While they cover similar topics, each writer provides a unique lens to provide a dual-perspective thought piece.

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- Anita is an avid reader but also enjoys creating her own stories!*

"Early Settlement & Migration Patterns of Black Canadians"

By Nirali Patel

Early settlements and migration patterns for Black Canadians have been marked by a complex tapestry of challenges, resilience, and contributions that have significantly shaped Canadian society. While often overshadowed by dominant narratives of European settlement, the presence of Black Canadians dates back centuries, with their experiences intertwined with issues surrounding slavery, discrimination, and the trail for freedom and equality.



One significant migration pattern occurred during the era of the Underground Railroad in the 19th century. Fleeing slavery in the United States, many Black individuals sought refuge and freedom in Canada. This period saw the establishment of settlements across the country, including in areas such as King Township and York Region. These settlements served as havens for freedom seekers, providing opportunities for community building and cultural preservation.

One notable settlement in the region is the community of Priceville in Grey County. Founded by Black settlers in the mid-19th century, Priceville became a thriving agricultural community known for its industriousness and resilience. Despite facing discrimination and marginalization, residents of Priceville forged tight-knit communities and contributed to the economic and cultural fabric of the region.

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Migration patterns for Black Canadians continued throughout the 20th century, with many individuals and families relocating to urban centers in search of employment and better opportunities. Cities like Toronto became hubs for Black cultural expression and activism, fostering vibrant communities and artistic movements.

Today, the legacy of early settlements and migration patterns for Black Canadians is evident in the diverse tapestry of Canadian society. Black Canadians have made significant contributions to various fields, including the arts, music, literature, science, and politics. Their experiences serve as a testament to resilience in the face of adversity and a reminder of the ongoing struggle for equality and justice.

*Photo: Southwestern Counties in Canada West with Black Settlements, 1855
Courtesy of Archives of Ontario*

“Black Communities Migration to Canada & The Underground Railway”

By Anita Safardoust

The migration of Black individuals to Canada has been a significant part of Canadian history and has added to the rich diversity of our nation. It all began in the 1800s. Between 1800-1865, several Black communities had been established across Canada, with over 30,000 individuals who arrived through the Underground Railroad.

The Underground Railroad was created in the 19th century by a group of abolitionists who lived in Pennsylvania. The organization was an undercover network, in which they helped African Americans escape from enslavement, travelling across America to Canada. By 1861, about 30,000 Black individuals resided in what is now known as Ontario, with some destinations near our community such as Toronto, Hamilton, and Oakville, originating from places such as Kentucky and Virginia.

The Underground Railroad was not an actual railroad, even though it is in the name. However, the Railroad was a network of people across America and Canada with safe homes that helped those who were enslaved get to freedom in the North. Those who were part of the organization shared its main goal for human rights and equality among communities.

Throughout the Underground Railroad, there was a secret language and symbols to mask the network and help keep slaveholders in the dark about what was occurring to free those who were enslaved. Some

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codes included “stations” or “depots”, which referred to hiding places, and “conductors” which were the guides throughout the Railroad.

One of the most well known conductors was Harriet Tubman, also known as “Moses of her people”. Harriet Tubman will forever be an important part of Black history because of the 13 missions she took part in to rescue over 70 enslaved individuals. Harriet Tubman herself escaped slavery and after reaching freedom, she went back to help others in her community. In many ways, she symbolizes the importance of supporting one’s community for the better and inspires change for others in the future.



Photo: Harriet Tubman, 1868. Public Domain

The Underground Railroad would not have had such a great impact if it was not for Black communities who were resilient, brave, and decided to risk their lives to help others get to freedom. This was a journey that was not only dangerous, but also could put themselves at high risk of being re-captured by slave catchers.

The Underground Railroad continues to be a symbol of courage and bravery against oppression. Throughout centuries, Black individuals have faced intense discrimination but have continued to enrich our country and communities. Black history and Black communities have had a significant impact on Canada and continue to shape its heritage into the future.

Photo: Wilbur H. Siebert, 1898, Underground Railroad Routes, Public Domain.

