

Black History Guide

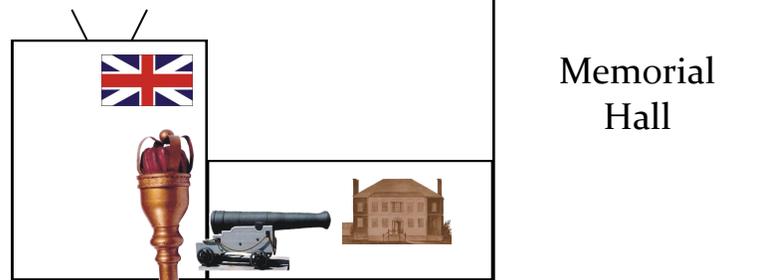
OUR STORY

The Niagara Historical Museum is committed to telling the stories of all the peoples who have contributed to the history of Niagara-on-the-Lake. Our galleries have integrated the Black history components into the main text, inclusive, not exclusive of other events.

If you wish to focus on the components of the galleries that have Black history elements, this guide will point out these aspects and expand on them.

This guide works exclusively for the permanent gallery located at the beginning of your tour. The galleries in Memorial Hall change on a regular basis and may or may not have a Black history component at any given time.

The symbols used on the following pages correspond to the symbols on the text panels to assist your tour.



THE LOYALISTS

In 1784 more than 4,000 Blacks lived in British colonies north of the United States. At least 1,800 were slaves. During the American Revolution, Loyalist forces set up a slave trade, and many Blacks were captured and sent to Montreal as war booty to be sold. At the same time, the British and Americans offered freedom to slaves who signed up for military duty. Some Blacks fought with British units such as Butler's Rangers.

At the close of the Revolutionary War. They needed to find a new home and some chose to come to Niagara. The roster of Black Butler's Rangers includes Jack Baker, George Martin, Peter Martin, Richard Pierpoint, James Robertson (Robinson?) and Prince Robertson.

Niagara's second census (1783) identifies 10 Blacks living in Niagara. Most were brought here by their masters who had lost their homes in the United States following the war. We know that Richard Pierpoint lived in Niagara for several years as a freeman following the Revolution, but he was never granted land in Niagara.

For more information see the text panels titled: "The Loyalists" & "John Butler"



THE CAPITAL YEARS 1792-1796

As stated earlier, slaves were common in Niagara following the American Revolution. Many Niagara land owners held and those who represented the new colony of Upper Canada held slaves.

However, the first Lt. Gov. of Upper Canada, John Graves Simcoe was concerned with the abolition of slavery. His wishes went unanswered by the Legislative Assembly until the plight of Chloe Cooley brought the issue to the forefront. On March 14, 1793 Ms. Cooley, an enslaved Black woman in Niagara Township, was bound, thrown in a boat and sold across the river to a new owner in the United States. Her screams and violent resistance were witnessed by a neighbour, William Grisley, who informed Peter Martin, himself a free Black and former Butler's Ranger. They brought the incident to the attention of Lt. Gov. Simcoe who reached a compromise with the House of Assembly and in 1793 an Act was passed to limit slavery in Upper Canada.

For more information see the text panels titled: **"The Simcoes"** & **"A Mortal Wound to Slavery"**



BATTLEFIELD NIAGARA: THE WAR OF 1812-14

When the call went out to locals to raise arms against the invading Americans, local Blacks responded. The Coloured Corps fought with distinction at on the Niagara frontier including the Battle of Queenston Heights and the Battle of Fort George. Niagara Blacks in the unit included; James Waters, Humphrey Waters, John Delay, John Jackson, Robert Jupiter, Richard Pierpoint, John Saunders and George Martin.

For more information see the text panel titled: **"African Canadian Defenders of Canada"**



REBUILDING NIAGARA

Following the War of 1812-15, the town was rebuilt. The southern lots furthest from the river were largely undeveloped, although Black Loyalists, the Waters brothers, held land in this section. This area attracted new Black arrivals from the US and it soon became known as the "coloured village". The new arrivals changed the character of the town. They attended local churches and schools. Many Blacks worked in town, with the two most common occupations being "labourer" or "teamster", but some were carpenters, barbers, blacksmiths or other common occupations. One Black settler, John Waters was elected to council several times.

The Underground Railroad predominately involved Niagara Falls and St. Catharines. However, there are records of many crossings from Lewiston, New York to the village of Queenston. In 1854 Mary Ann Shadd, the editor of the black newspaper, "The Provincial Freeman", wrote the following about Niagara. "The coloured citizens are prosperous. Nearly every family possessing a homestead. There is no prejudice."

At its peak the Black population of Niagara comprised 5% of the community. The decline of Niagara to surrounding communities slowly meant the end of a large Black community. Many moved to towns that had service industry jobs or returned to the United States following the Civil War.

For more information see the text panels titled: **"The Moseby Affair"**, **"Niagara as Refuge"** & **"William Riley"**

"SLAVERY AND FREEDOM IN NIAGARA"

For more details on Black History purchase a copy of this excellent publication from our gift shop.

NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE BLACK HISTORY SITES

Parliament Oak School
Negro Burial Ground - Mississagua Street
William and Susannah Steward Homestead - Butler Street
Vrooman's Point - Niagara Parkway
Queenston Heights

OTHER PLACES IN NIAGARA TO VISIT

Salem Chapel - St. Catharines
St. Catharines Museum
Bertie Hall - Fort Erie
Noval Johnson Library & BME Church- Niagara Falls