

Following the Drinking Gourd

BY IAN SMITH
NORTH ESQUESING

The Esquesing Historical Society held its monthly meeting on Wednesday, April 8th at Knox Presbyterian Church. Their guest speaker was Reverend Brant Loper, who spoke about the history of the Underground Railroad that brought black slaves from the United States into Canada from about 1830 to 1860. Rev. Loper's speech was entitled "Following the Drinking Gourd" which refers to the Big Dipper where the North Star acted as a guide to runaway slaves. It is also the title of a folk song.

After graduating from a seminary in 1962, Rev. Loper's first assignment was a church in a community of 250 people in north central Ohio. Rev. Loper discovered that the church had been a station for the Underground Railroad about 100 years before. While there he wrote sermons about the church's minister at the time, George Gordon, who was a social activist and part of the anti-slavery movement. Rev. Gordon had become dissatisfied with the Presbyterian Church's not being "social activist enough", and so organized his own church, the Free Presbyterian Church, which took a strong stance against slavery.

Eli Whitney's invention of the cotton gin in 1793 expanded the market for cotton. The

seed could now be separated from the fiber fifty times faster than before, making cotton more available and less expensive. Also in 1793, a U.S. federal Fugitive Slave Law was passed, but it was difficult to enforce as northern judges and legislators restricted masters' "rights of recovery". The fugitive slaves were usually single, highly skilled, young adult males. In that same year, Canadian governor John Graves Simcoe introduced legislation to abolish slavery in Canada, but it wasn't finally abolished until August of 1833 - thirty years before the United States.

The Underground Railroad was a loose organization that began in the 1780's, and was comprised of "northerners", Quakers, Methodists and mostly free slaves who returned to help others escape. Organizers used code words, calling host farms "stations" and agents in towns the "vigilance committee". The runaways would travel by night, through swamps and dense forest, to reach the stations, which were twenty-five to 30 km away from each other. "Conductors" met them at border points such as Cincinnati, and Detroit. A small Quaker revolution in Columbia, Pennsylvania in 1804, first drew the movement to the attention of the general public. Rev. Loper said that Joseph Brant, a

noted Mohawk Indian, was among some Canadians who had slaves. He also mentioned Robert Wilson, a schooner captain who ran a passenger shipping route from Rochester, New York to Oakville, and brought a lot of runaway slaves into Canada.

The Compromise of 1850 made the northern U.S. no longer a safe haven for runaway black slaves from the south. Freedom on paper was meaningless in the north, where according to Rev. Loper bounty hunters could collect a reward of up to \$1200 for the capture and return of runaways.

According to a local history book, *Halton Hills Sketches*, written by John McDonald, a black mother and her son made their way into Canada and eventually settled in Stewarttown. Mrs. Shepherd and her son, John Henry, lived in a log cabin, in what are now the Georgetown fairgrounds. She kept house for Colonel John Murray on a farm just outside of Stewarttown, and had made an agreement with the Murrays that if anything should happen to her, that they would care for her son. A few years later she died and was buried beside the log cabin. Mrs. Shepherd's body was later moved to St. George's Anglican Cemetery.

Also mentioned at the meeting was an 1871 Census

published by the Ontario Genealogical Society. When asked their occupation, local people of "African origin" responded that there were nine laborers, six farmers, two barbers, two preachers or ministers, a blacksmith, a cooper, a white-washer, a tobacco inspector, a harness maker, a teamster, a weaver, a waiter, and a servant.

Reverend Loper was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, and came to Canada in 1975. He presently has the pastoral charge at St. John's in Georgetown.

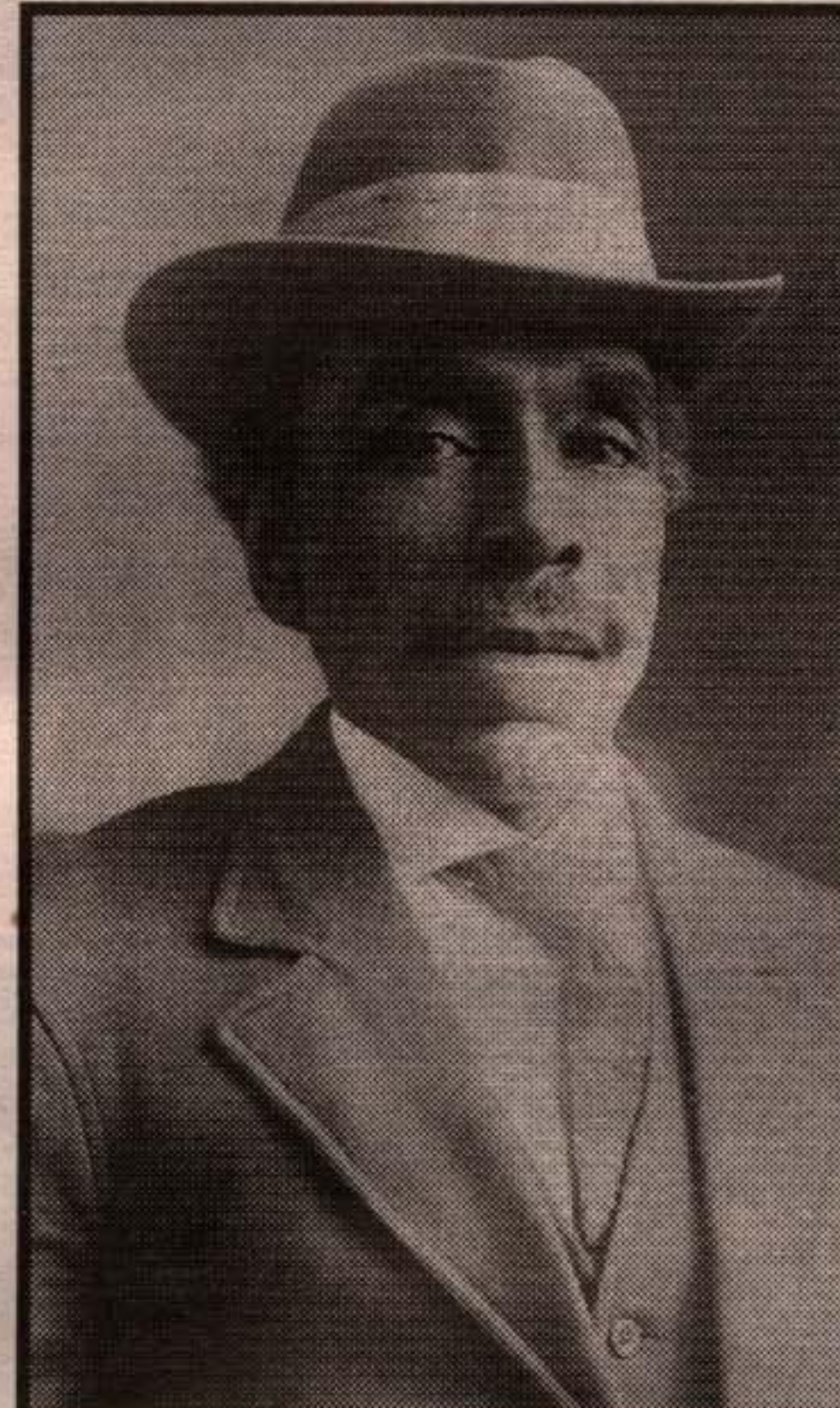


PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN McDONALD
JOHN HENRY SHEPHERD RODE
THE UNDERGROUND RAILWAY
TO FREEDOM IN ESQUESING
TOWNSHIP WITH HIS MOTHER.

The Underground Railroad in Esquesing Township

Suppliers Of Top Quality Seeds
PRO Seeds
OF CANADA

**Your last minute
seed supplier
for
spring planting**

Barley -

Chapais

Oats -

AC Stewart

OAC Paisley

Soybeans -

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Peter Lambrick

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Campbellville, ON L0P 1B0

Stewarttown Townhall becomes a memory

BY IAN SMITH
NORTH ESQUESING

On March 30th of this year, the Georgetown Little Theatre, in Stewarttown, was devastated by fire. The building was once a general store, and the Town Hall of Stewarttown as well as for the Township of Esquesing.

Esquesing Township was first opened to settlement in 1819, after having been purchased from the native people. It was located in what was then known as the District of Gore, whose council chambers were in Hamilton. Between 1821 and 1850, the Township of Esquesing held its meetings in various homes and inns in the surrounding community. The Municipal Corporations Act was passed in 1849, and the Township of Esquesing became the Corporation of the Township of Esquesing, with its own elected local government.

The original two and a half-story structure was built around 1849 by David Cross, with the intention of it serving as a hall for both the Esquesing Township Council, and the local community. It had two stores and living quarters on the ground floor, with a public hall on the top floor. In October of 1850 the Esquesing Agricultural Society Show was held in the building, which was also used as a dance hall and an electoral polling station. But the Council's monthly meetings were still held at McKenzie's Inn.

The Esquesing Council's first meeting in its own office was in 1879, in a building owned by and rented from John Tracy. It was on the north west corner of Main and John Streets across from the public hall built by Cross. The township finally decided to buy the Stewarttown public hall in 1924, and the Council Chamber was set up next to the village store in what used to be a harness shop. The upper floor of the hall was used for community dances in the 1930's, and was eventually condemned.

The building was renovated after the Second World War and in 1948 was reopened as

the Stewarttown Memorial Hall. The new building was reduced to one story, and had a stage at one end with dressing rooms on either side.

The Esquesing Council eventually had a new hall built on Trafalgar Road which they moved into in August of 1963. In 1974 Esquesing Township was incorporated into Halton Hills which moved into the new hall on Trafalgar Road. The Halton Hills Public Works Department now uses that building.

The Compass thanks Mark Rowe, from the Esquesing Historical Society, and the Halton Hills Public Library for their help in acquiring photographs and information.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ESQUESING HISTORICAL SOCIETY
THE OLD STEWARTTOWN TOWN HALL, CIRCA 1900, PLAYED A VITAL
ROLE IN ESQUESING TOWNSHIP AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY.

Halton 4-H Program Overview

BY BETTY BROWNRIDGE
SOUTH ESQUESING

The purpose of the 4-H program is to foster the personal development of youth 10 to 21 years of age. In 4-H, young people are encouraged to develop self-confidence and a sense of responsibility.

Through project work and interactions with each other, 4-H members cultivate skills in communications, leadership, problem solving and goal setting, which will serve them well into the next millennium. These skills are achieved by participating in one or more of the 80 projects offered by the 4-H program.

Project topics fall into several categories: Fun and Leisure, Food - Glorious Food, Personal Skills, Plants and Soils, Animals and your Environment. Individual projects range from Drama and Art, to Money and Marketing, to Conservation and the Great Outdoors.

1998 Halton 4-H Executive

President - Annette Winter;
Vice-President - Nancy Comber; Secretary - Eleanor Lutes; Treasurer - Murray Brownridge; Coordinator - Austin Carpenter; Directors - Lorna Wilson, (Provincial); Joan Lambrick, Patty Lasby, Tyler Brander, Marie Martin and Holly McGaffin.

The sign-up night for Halton 4-H was held on March 11, at Hillcrest Church Hall. The Bread Adventure project was already organized with the group calling themselves "The Ashgrove Bread Bonanza". They had their Achievement Day on April 6,

with 19 members completing. Thirty six volunteers lead these projects and organize these programs in Halton Region. There are more than 100 young people enrolled.

Upcoming Clubs are Forestry and other non-competitive clubs. For more information call 4-H Coordinator Austin Carpenter at:

905-877-5537



1998 4-H Club Registration

Maple Syrup - 23 members, Achievement Day - April 5.

Great Chicken and Egg -

two clubs, 16 members, Achievement Day - T.B.A.

Citizenship & Community -

9 members, Achievement Day - T.B.A.

Veterinary Club - 2 clubs -

14 members, Achievement Day - T.B.A.

Soil and Crop Management -

9 members, Achievement Day -

Georgetown Fair.

Rabbit Club - 20 members,

Achievement Day - Georgetown

Fair.

Sheep - 14 members,

Achievement Day - Georgetown

Fair.

Heavy Horse - 17 members,

Achievement Day - Georgetown

Fair.

Beef - 12 members, Achievement

Day - Acton Fair.

Livestock Photo - 12 members,

Achievement Day - Acton Fair.

Light Horse - 10 members,

Achievement Day, Milton Fair.

Junior Dairy - 26 members,

Achievement Day, Milton Fair.

Senior Dairy - 12 members,

Achievement Day - Milton Fair.

Fitting Club - 12 members,

Achievement Day - T.B.A.

Judging Club - 20 members,

Achievement Day - T.B.A.