

COMING UP: Local minorities also in museum exhibition

# Canadian slaves fled to United States

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Slavery didn't just happen in the United States.

African slavery existed in the colonies of New France and British North America for more than 200 years. It was eventually abolished in Canada in 1834.

Canadian slaves were domestic servants, fur traders, miners, fishermen, wharf workers and sailors, as well as blacksmiths, carpenters, wheelwrights and coopers, according to activehistory.ca

And just like African-American slaves, their Canadian counterparts faced inhumane treatment at the hands of their owners. Many Canadian slaves ironically fled to the free territories of the United States, according to activehistory.ca

Enslaved Africans is the Whitchurch-Stouffville Museum's newest exhibition, which opens next Thursday. Part of the exhibit is provided by Archives of Ontario.

The other component delves into Whitchurch-Stouffville's ethnic and religious minorities.

Museum staff (**curator Stephanie Foley is on the cover**) research revealed there were several Africans

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MINORITY REPORT: Check out our photo gallery at [yorkregion.com](http://yorkregion.com)  
<http://tinyurl.com/lvluupe>

within Whitchurch-Stouffville who worked as general labourers. One was even a barber in downtown Stouffville, while another was a Quaker preacher.

In the early 1900s, a number of Jewish families immigrated to the municipality.

The 1921 census indicates they came from Russia, with influxes following the Russian Revolution, Bolshevik War and Polish-Soviet war, according to Stephanie Foley, the museum's curator.

Why they chose to settle in Whitchurch-Stouffville, she has no idea.

Of the more prominent Jewish settlers was Isaac Borinsky, whom, along with his son Joseph, opened the Stouffville Creamery in 1918.

Isaac ran for reeve of Stouffville in

1931, but lost.

The 1921 census, which had its long forms released last year, also showed there were a number of early Asian immigrants. Like the Jewish settlers, why they chose this area remains a mystery to Ms Foley.

Chinese immigrants first landed on Canada's west coast in the mid-1800s, drawn by the gold rush and construction of the Canadian Pacific Railroad.

Once the gold rush ended in 1880 and the railroad's completion in 1885, the demand for Chinese labourers diminished.

To deter the Chinese from continuing to immigrate to British Columbia, the Canadian government imposed a \$50 head tax in 1885, according to [stoneskingston.ca](http://stoneskingston.ca)

Those who were here, headed east looking for work.

Little information is available about the local Asian residents, but what is known is the Fong family had The Chinese Cafe in the Silvester Block, which is the building that now houses Chic Thrills.

Enslaved Africans runs until March 31. For more information, go to [www.townofws.ca/en/explore/museum.asp](http://www.townofws.ca/en/explore/museum.asp)

## BLACK HISTORY CELEBRATED HERE

Until there is equal representation in the media and school curriculum and the achievements of blacks are widely known, there remains a need for Black History Month, according to Claudette Zabsonre, organizer of the Stouffville Multicultural Association's first Black History Month celebration.

The event takes place Feb. 22, 1 to 3 p.m. at the Lebovic Centre for Arts and Entertainment - Nineteen on the Park. Admission is free and everyone is welcome. There will be performers, speakers and representatives from the Sickle Cell Association of Ontario.

Sickle cell anemia is a hereditary blood disorder that is more prevalent in people whose ancestors came from sub-Saharan Africa, the Western hemisphere's Spanish-speaking regions, Saudi Arabia and India.

Black History Month got its start in 1926 with a week-long celebration of African-American history in February that contained the birthdays of former American president Abraham Lincoln and black abolitionist Frederick Douglass. Both men are credited with bringing an end to American slavery. It was called Negro History Week and conceived by Carter G. Woodson, according to [blackhistorycanada.ca](http://blackhistorycanada.ca)

By 1950 railroad porters within Canada's black community joined in the celebration.

In 1979, the Ontario Black History Society petitioned the City of Toronto to have February proclaimed Black History Month, according to [blackhistory-canada.ca](http://blackhistory-canada.ca)

In 1995, the Canadian government officially recognized February as Black History Month.

In the 2001 census, 0.53 per cent of Whitchurch-Stouffville's population identified themselves as black. That was 115 people in a population of 21,835.

Five years later, updated census data revealed Whitchurch-Stouffville's black population more than doubled to 260 or 1.08 per cent of its population (24,100).

In the 2011 census report, 805 local residents identified themselves as black, which constituted 2.16 per cent of the municipality's 37,210 citizens.

"We are so much richer because of our diversity," Ms Zabsonre said.

"We all have voices that need to be expressed!"

For more information on the event, go to [www.stouffvillemulticultural.com](http://www.stouffvillemulticultural.com)

- Sandra Bolan

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