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Background to the Development of the Underground Railroad Terminal

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BACKGROUND
TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF
THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD TERMINAL

The property upon which THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD MUSEUM AND THE JOHN FREEMAN WALLS HISTORIC SITE stands, was purchased in 1846 by Bryan Walls' great-great grandfather from the Refugee Home Society. This was an abolitionist organization who received tracts of land from the Canadian government to be resold to escaped fugitive slaves.

Dr. Bryan Walls has developed his family's homestead as a historic site in Puce, a small community outside Windsor, Ontario. Working with his brothers and other family members, the original log cabin of John Freeman Walls, a refugee slave who arrived on the Underground Railroad in 1846, has been rebuilt. The theme "Peace and Harmony", is evident at the historic site and the caboose which houses exhibits of historical significance. On display at the historic site is also Dr. Walls' collection of African art. Several pieces of art are in the collection which is dominated by face masks showing the styles from different regions of Africa.

For students, this site offers a perfect opportunity to appreciate a segment of our history which is often forgotten. A

field trip guide has been developed to help students get the most from their visit. When students visit it is a chance to see historical buildings first-hand and feel close to those Canadians who struggled for freedom and settled our land. For history teachers and those involved in our multicultural heritage, the site provides a "piece of reality" so hard to obtain from textbooks and other printed and visual material. Students from a number of Essex County and City Secondary Schools worked at the site over the summer of 1986 as part of the Challenge '86 Job Creation Programme (sponsored by Employment and Immigration Canada). These students not only earned money for their restoration work at the site but also had a valuable opportunity for hands-on experience.

The Underground Railroad, the first great freedom movement in the Americas, is one of the grandest and most important events in North American history. This history is being brought to life through the development of THE JOHN FREEMAN WALLS HISTORIC SITE. The Historic Site is located approximately twenty miles from the Windsor-Detroit Tunnel in the township of Maidstone. A Peaceful winding stream known as the Puce River, flows quietly through the site. Beside the stream is a log cabin standing almost as straight and tall as the day it was first built in 1846. The foundation is a rock in each of the four corners. Above the rocks in the

northwest corners are the initials J. W. chiseled carefully in the grey, weathered, oak logs. To the descendants of John and Jane Walls the cabin is a symbol of freedom. At the entrance to the twenty acre Historic Site, The Government Logo crowns a historic plaque which reads:

"In 1846 John Freeman Walls, a fugitive slave from North Carolina built this log cabin on land purchased from the Refugee Home Society. This organization was founded by the abolitionist, Henry Bibb, publisher of 'The Voice of the Fugitive', and the famous Josiah Henson. The cabin subsequently served as a terminal of the Underground Railroad and the first meeting place of the Puce Baptist Church. Although many former slaves returned to the United States following the American Civil War, Walls and his family chose to remain in Canada. The story of their struggles forms the basis of the book, The Road That Led To Somewhere by Dr. Bryan E. Walls."

John Walls was the son of an African sculptor who, after he was captured and sold into slavery, became a carpenter on a small plantation in North Carolina. One hundred and two year old Aunt Stella Butler told stories of how the fugitive slaves would run through the woods by night and hide by day. They would thirst for freedom so much that at times they could be seen kneeling down and drinking from the hoof prints of cattle in order to continue their perilous Underground Railroad journey; a journey that led them to many terminals in Canada.

In 1793, Lt. Governor, Sir John Graves Simcoe and the first Legislative Assembly of Upper Canada abolished slavery and made Canada the most desirable Northern terminal. Historians estimate that 40 000 out of 4 000 000 slaves made it to Canada and that after the Civil War 20 000 returned to the United States. The John Freeman Walls story is a paradigm of the experiences of those 20 000 who chose to remain in Canada.

THE JOHN FREEMAN WALLS HISTORIC SITE and The Road That Led To Somewhere will ensure that their contribution to Canada is not forgotten or ignored.

The Ministry of Education of Ontario, in its 1983 Black Studies Guide, has listed the Historic Site as an approved field trip location and has endorsed the documented novel. Allen and Winston Walls (both secondary school teachers) have been granted sabbaticals to further enhance the educational and race relation merits of the book and The Historic Site. The OSSTF has honoured the Walls family with an Excellence in Education Award for their development of local history.

Canada has been left a legacy in terms of human rights and tolerance of the differences of others of which we can be justly proud. THE JOHN FREEMAN WALLS HISTORIC SITE, "Where The Underground Railroad Had Its End", is a living reminder of that legacy today.

31 3416 Sandwich Street
(c. 1890)

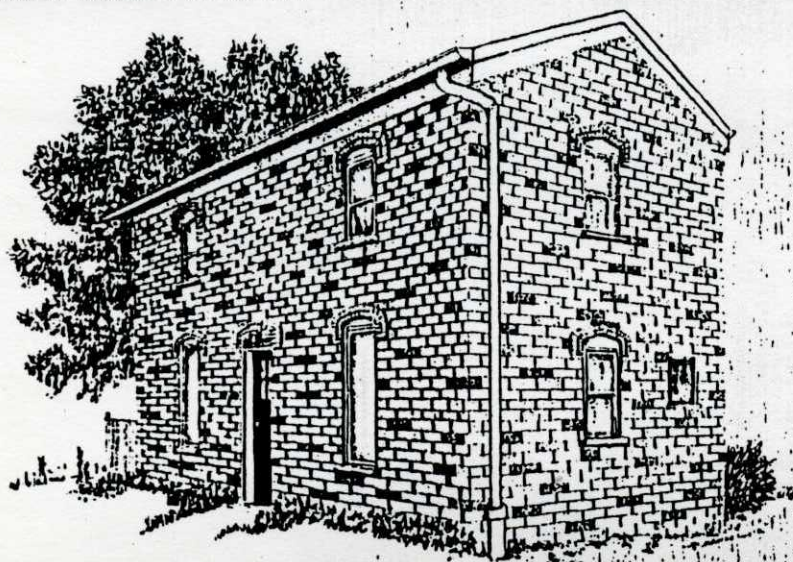
This hybrid of an "I" house and a Shotgun style house depicts a mixture of English and African design.

Present owner: Daniel F. O'Brien

32 3474 Sandwich Street
(c. 1850)

This house stands on property that was originally granted to Richard Pollard of St. John's Church.

This unique two storey brick house is only one room deep and is representative of a Canadian House type. Perhaps based on a modification of the English "I" type floor plan, the house features ten inch thick walls and a foundation which was not raised too far off the ground. Its modification with a Georgian style is emphasized by the low incline gable roof and the flat-arched labelled windows.

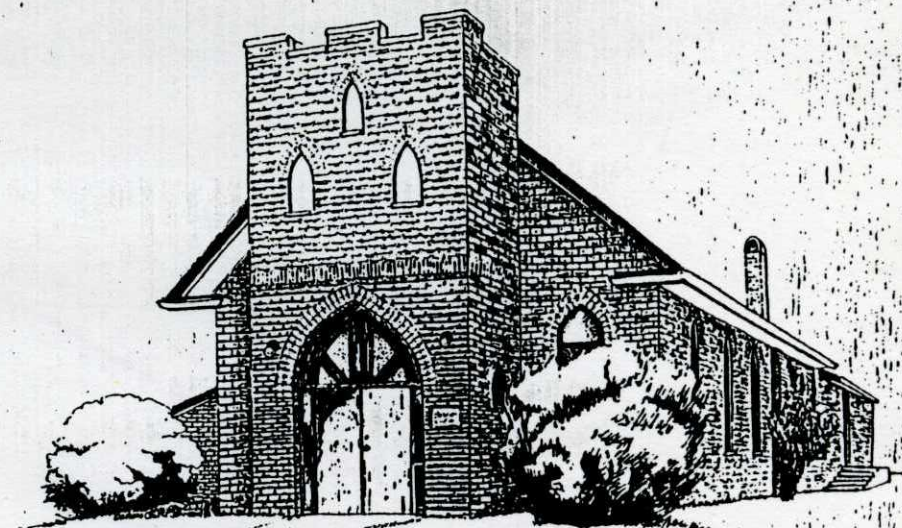


33 WATKINS HOMESTEAD
(1917)
375 Watkins Street

This modest bungalow has been in the Watkins family for two generations. Note the end facing gable and porch which is indicative of African influence on the design of the house. This was the home of the late Homer Watkins. Homer was a Senior Deacon of Sandwich Baptist Church and a member of the school board. Around the corner at 3616 Peter Street is a two storey, green clapboard house which previously had been in the Watkins family for four generations.

In recognition of Homer Watkins and his family's contribution to the community and the Baptist Church, Lot Street was renamed Watkins Street in 1963.

Present owner: Charlotte Watkins Maxey



34 SANDWICH BAPTIST CHURCH
(1851)
3652 Peter Street.

The first Baptist Church in Sandwich, constructed around 1821, was a log structure built by freed slaves.

This unpretentious, single storey building was built after the Deacons received a land grant from Queen Victoria. The original entryway was a gabled porch while the present entry was added in 1912. The battlements of the tower reflect the Gothic Revival influence which is in keeping with the Gothic

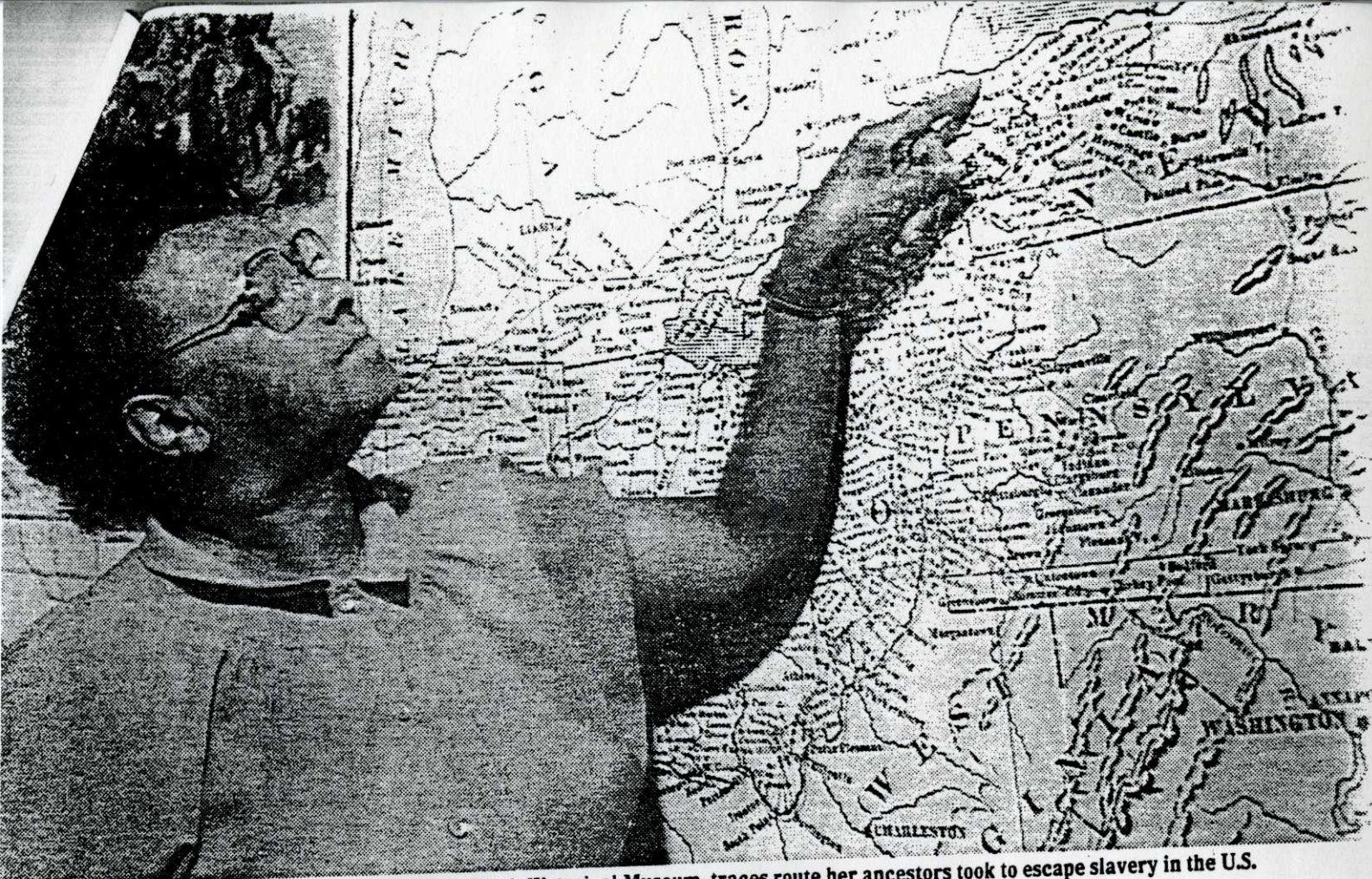
overtones of the main body of the church.

Present owner: Baptist Church.

35 ROBINET ROW HOUSES
(c. 1918)
3381-3391 Peter Street.

These two tier row houses are reminiscent of the French "poteaux-sur-sole" style of housing. African influence can be seen in the stilt-like supports of the verandah. Built by Jules Robinet around 1918, for the workers of his brickyard, they are an example of functional architecture.

Present owner: Jaromira Benes



BETTY SIMPSON, co-founder of the North American Black Historical Museum, traces route her ancestors took to escape slavery in the U.S.

Town plays host to freedom party

Story and photo
by David Morelli
Star County Reporter

AMHERSTBURG — The North American Black Historical Museum is full of memorabilia recalling the tragedies and triumphs of black slaves.

In one display is a metal slave ring, used to chain blacks to trees before they were beaten to death.

In another is a replica of a false-bottomed horse cart, which could hide up to 10 fugitive slaves as they travelled the "underground railroad" to Canada.

This weekend, the museum celebrates the 157th anniversary of the emancipation of slaves in the British Commonwealth and the beginning of the exodus of American slaves north, many through Essex County.

BETTY SIMPSON, who founded the 10-year-old museum with her late husband Melvin 'Mac' Simpson, drew her finger along a wall-sized map of the eastern half of North America.

It went along the east coast and into Ontario — the same route her

grandfather took when he escaped slavery in the mid-1800s.

Despite recent racial tensions in Halifax and a complaint of racial discrimination by a black woman in Amherstburg who was fired from her job, Simpson said the weekend celebrations won't take on any special significance.

"IT'S TO KEEP the celebration of freedom alive," said Simpson. "It's something you don't want to lose."

Simpson and other black community leaders are hopeful next year's celebrations will return to Windsor, where at one time hundreds of thousands of people commemorated Emancipation Day.

Poor response has cancelled the beauty, fashion and talents show this year in Amherstburg. The chili cook-off and dance will be held tonight at the Amherstburg Cultural Centre beginning at 7 p.m.

Windsor artist David Alexander opens his one-month exhibition, *The Legacy Within*, on Saturday. His great-grandfather was a teacher in Amherstburg's segregated black school near the turn of the century.

Pair of Civic Holiday weekend events: *Fort Malden's Military Field Day*

On Sunday, August 4, the grounds of Fort Malden National Historic Park will once again echo with the sounds of marching feet and gunfire as 19th century military history comes alive for the Military Field Day.

See how soldiers lived and fought during the War of 1812 and the Rebellion of 1837 during tactical demonstrations held at 11 a.m., and 1 and 3:30 p.m.. Re-enactors in authentic uniforms of the British 41st and 34th Regiments of Foot, as well as American units dressed in various War of 1812 uniforms, will illustrate the evolution of tactics during the 19th century. Throughout the day, the air will be filled with smoke and fire as British and American infantry and artillery units demonstrate their martial skills.

Commencing at 10 a.m., the Fort will be abuzz with the military life of yesteryear. The cooks will be ladling up samples of soldiers stew for visitors to try. At the portable military forge, the blacksmith will be hammering out various implements essential to the 19th century soldier. At the

bivouac of the 41st Regiment, camp followers will explain what it was like to be on the campaign. In the barracks, children can partake of special hands-on activities, or they can have a go at soldiering with the Fort's mini-militia which will be "recruiting" at 2 and 4 p.m..

12:30 p.m. will see an open-air, 19th century military church service conducted for the troops and visitors by Reverend Christopher Pratt of St. John's Church in Sandwich, the original church of the Fort Malden garrison.

A highlight of the day will be a performance at 2:30 p.m. by the 5th Michigan Regiment Band. This unit wears American Civil War uniforms, and performs rousing martial music that would make John Philip Sousa proud.

Grounds tours of Fort Malden will be offered for those interested in military fortifications, and an interesting film on cannons - their manufacture and use - will be shown on a continuous basis in the Fort's theatre.

Emancipation Celebration marks 157th year

The 157th Emancipation Celebration offers plenty of food and fun, and kicks off with its Second Annual Chili Contest at 6:30 on Friday, August 2 at the Recreation and Culture Centre on Victoria Street.

There will also be a dance following the chili contest, with music provided by a disc jockey.

On Saturday, there will be food booths and barbeques at the North American Black Historical Museum on King Street. Also at that site, there will be a David Alexander art show reception, and talent show in the late afternoon; and a fashion show at General Amherst High School which starts at 7 p.m.

The anniversary celebration of the British Empire's abolition of slavery will wind up on Sunday with plenty of activities, starting with

breakfast at 9 a.m. at the museum cooked by Men United For God. You are asked to bring a can of food for the needy for the MURG Food Bank.

Again, there will be food booths and a barbeque at the museum on Sunday; and a religious program beginning at 3:30 p.m., also at the museum - unless rain moves the event indoors to the nearby First Baptist Church. This program will include the presentation of the museum-sponsored "Person of the Year" Award.

The final event of the celebration is a musical drama, "Watch the Lamb", performed by W.O.R.D. Ministry, starting at 7 p.m., followed by an ice cream social. Both of these events will take place at the First Baptist Church on Gore Street.



Drawings trace black heritage

By Cindy Kavanaugh/Star County Reporter

AMHERSTBURG — Black slavery and emancipation are traced in strong charcoal images by David Alexander. It's a legacy that's painful for the 44-year-old artist and art teacher to deal with.

His 22-piece show, which opened Saturday as part of the 157th anniversary of the emancipation of slaves in the British Commonwealth and the beginning of the exodus of American slaves north, illustrates the struggle of black people. It will remain on display for the month of August at the North American Black Historical Museum in Amherstburg.

"It's cathartic for me," the Windsor native said. "There is pain involved, but there's also release in it."

He said it's important to remember the past, although it is at times painful, in order to avoid repeating wrongs in the future.

The show, entitled *The Legacy Within*, takes the viewer from the pain of abduction to the sanctity of the safe house, to celebration in the final piece, *Come Let Us Sing*.

The first piece, *The Scribe*, is a self-portrait with dark circles under his eyes, weary as he begins to tackle the history of his people.



ALEXANDER

HE USES POETRY and various techniques with black charcoal, including wet and smeared, dry and smeared and cross-hatching, to portray the story of the black people.

Each drawing is accompanied by a poem, and the title of each piece is written on it in an alphabet Alexander created. The alphabet is called *Yan'kah*.

In *Passage*, the fourth in the series, he describes the black people as "fetal prisoners" in the "hellish belly" of a ship.

In the fifth piece, heavy charcoal is smeared violently to give the feeling of oppression, the piece's title.

His work is sometimes described as "moving," "emotional" and "vivid," but he prefers "allegorical" and "expressive."

In *Oppression*, a hooded figure appears, and, Alexander said, is meant to be allegorical. "The hooded figure symbolizes the various shadowed sides of human nature," he said. "It could symbolize the id — out of control and fearful — or the superego — the controlling factor."

THE HOODED figure holds a balance scale in the next piece, titled *Just Us in the Balance*. A thin child crouches on one side of the scale and a stack of silver pieces weighs down the other end.



HARRISON

The drawings also illustrate shackles, farmers helping blacks to safety through the Underground Railroad, and the burning of kerosene-soaked wooden crosses by "masked intruders."

Betty Simpson, who organized this year's events, was disappointed that many of the weekend events were cancelled, but was impressed by Alexander's art show.

A chili cookoff drew only a few entries. Doris White placed first, Helen Johnson second and Wayne Hurst third.

Bishop Arthur Harrison, a bishop in the Ontario Church of God in Christ since 1965, was named person-of-the-year Sunday.

A dance scheduled for Friday night was cancelled because of a poor turnout. Poor response previously had cancelled a beauty, fashion and talent show.

Simpson said she hopes the event, which used to attract hundreds of people, will resurrect itself next year when it is expected to return to Windsor.