



# Committee Report

<b>To:</b>	Warden and Members of Grey County Council
<b>Committee Date:</b>	December 9, 2021
<b>Subject / Report No:</b>	EDTC-CW-02-22
<b>Title:</b>	Opportunities to Promote Black History
<b>Prepared by:</b>	Jill Paterson, Manager of Museum & Archives Stephanie McMullen, Village & Volunteer Coordinator
<b>Reviewed by:</b>	Savanna Myers, Director of Economic Development, Tourism, and Culture
<b>Lower Tier(s) Affected:</b>	All
<b>Status:</b>	Recommendation adopted by Committee as presented per Resolution CW08-22; Endorsed by County Council January 13, 2022 per Resolution CC11-22

## Recommendation

- 1. That Report EDTC-CW-02-22 regarding Opportunities to Promote Black History in Grey County be received; and**
- 2. That a staff position be restructured to focus on Community Relations and \$10,000 of Grey Roots current funding be allocated as a Community Granting Fund beginning in the 2022 budget to prioritize this important work; and**
- 3. That the opportunities presented be endorsed and an action plan be developed and brought back to Council annually as part of Grey Roots work plan updates.**

## Executive Summary

During the July 8<sup>th</sup> Committee of the Whole meeting, staff were directed to take no further action towards the purchase of land in the Municipality of Grey Highlands adjacent to the Old Durham Road Black Pioneer Cemetery. After further investigation and feedback from the community it was agreed that this was not an appropriate site for the Patrol D depot location.

In the closing discussions, staff were asked to report back on opportunities to promote a greater awareness of Black history in Grey County. The following report reflects the suggestions and guidance received from community members and organizations. This should be considered a starting point for future collaboration and ongoing discussions towards finding new and innovative ways to work with community partners and share the unique and significant history of Black communities in Grey County.

## Background and Discussion

### Historical Context

Black citizens have been a part of Grey County, since the very first non-Indigenous settlers arrived in the northernmost part of the Queen's Bush. Some of these early pioneers were born in Canada, while others had only recently escaped slavery in the Upper South. All contributed significantly to the settlement of the last available land in southern Ontario in the mid-nineteenth century.

Several important Black settlements existed in Grey County including Nenagh and Virginia (now Ceylon) in the southern part of the County, Artemesia Township, around Holland Centre in the middle, and Owen Sound in the north. The small village of Priceville in southern Grey County sprang to life very early in the settlement history.

The vibrant Priceville community initially flourished. Additional European immigration in the 1850s changed the district dramatically. Although some individuals struggled to hold on to their lands, the new arrivals often forced the older residents out. Many made their way to Collingwood, Owen Sound and elsewhere. By 1930, little evidence remained in Priceville of the early Black settlement, except for their gravestones. The quest to uncover the early history of Priceville and restore the cemetery has taken the better part of the last 70 years.

In central Grey County, south of the small village of Williamsford, the fertile, yet sparsely populated land along Negro Creek and Negro Lake naturally attracted pioneers in the mid-nineteenth century. By 1851 some 50 Black families made their home in the Negro Creek district.

In Owen Sound, many Black residents first moved into the neighbourhood known as Mudtown in the 1880s. The Polson shipyard employed a large number of workmen and the sudden influx of workers to town necessitated affordable housing. Some landowners built small houses in the vicinity of the shipyard for the families of these workmen and labeled the area "Polsonville".

Some of the surnames in a 1932 directory show some Black families lived in the vicinity of Mudtown: Douglas, Boeey, Scott, Morton, Earlls. Just above the hill, on what is now 8th Avenue East, north of 16th Street, the street bore the name of the first family to

settle in the area. The Douglass family, a Black family, lent their name to the roadway, and it became known as Douglass Street.

Grey County's Black heritage stretches back to the early days of settlement. Controversy, challenge, and triumph mark the paths of individuals, and Black communities. The legacy of earlier generations lives on at Negro Creek, Priceville, Owen Sound, and elsewhere in Grey, as today's citizens work to ensure the contributions of these important pioneers are not forgotten.

### **Opportunities to Raise Awareness**

Through a series of conversations, the following projects and potential collaborations have been suggested by members of the Black community. These initiatives should be considered starting points to what Grey Roots hopes will be continued conversation and cooperation towards improved awareness and action over years come.

#### **Old Durham Road Black Pioneer Cemetery**

Following the transportation depot discussion, The Old Durham Road Black Pioneer Cemetery Committee recommends that a ground-penetrating radar study be commissioned along the edge of both the roads (Grey County 14 and Durham Rd B) in an effort to better understand the area in need of protection and ensure its properly recorded. Should the County consider any future road works outside of the existing road base, County staff would consult with an archaeologist for advice on the most appropriate form of investigation that may be required between the existing road base of Grey Road 14 and the cemetery lands prior to any works occurring.

Grey County staff will work in collaboration with the Cemetery Committee to promote and recognize the significance of the cemetery through interpretative pamphlets, signage and through website/GIS resources.

#### **A Road to Reconciliation: Recognizing the Black Settlers of Negro Creek**

With guidance from Carolyn and Sylvia Wilson of Sheffield Park Black History and Culture Museum and a group of descendants of the Negro Creek Road settlement, Black historians, and current residents, Ben Heywood-Macleod is coordinating a multiphase series of story-telling sessions, facilitated discussions, and community meetings that aim to plan a permanent physical commemorative structure at the site of the Negro Creek Settlement.

Ben Heywood-Macleod has produced a short film in 2021 entitled *As Is, Where Is (2021)* to explore the history of Black settlement in Grey Country specifically at Negro Creek Road. Through a series of interviews with descendants of the settlement, Black historians and current residents of Negro Creek Rd, the film explores the community advocacy to keep the name of the road when it was under threat of being changed in the 1990s and

looks to what more could be done in the future. Once the film has been made available to the public, Grey Roots would be an ideal location for a film screening event and could be made publicly available on a regular schedule.

### **Grey Roots Programming, Events, Exhibits**

Grey Roots is well positioned to share the stories of black history in Grey County. For many years Grey Roots has collaborated with the black community to produce exhibits, events and programming. We are eager to work with community partners to further increase and enhance our offerings.

Grey Roots is pleased to support the Owen Sound Emancipation Festival now in its 159th year. The Museum has hosted various Emancipation Festival events such as the Speaker's Forum and Gospel in the Barn. Scholars, authors, artists, musicians, poets, and performers contribute to this annual presentation of Black histories and cultures.

For the past fifteen years, Grey County Archives have partnered with Professor Naomi Norquay to produce the annual publication Northern Terminus: The African Canadian History Journal. Through essays, interviews and reviews, the journal highlights the work of organizations, historians and published authors to enhance our understanding of historical Black communities in Grey County. As we look to future enhancements of the Grey Roots website, we will explore opportunities to make the Northern Terminus issues more accessible and searchable.

Each February during Black History Month, Grey Roots presents a Black history focused exhibit in the Grey County Gallery and online. In the spring, the museum supports the Grey County Black History event organized by the Grey County Black Heritage Society (GCBHS), that coincides with the launch of the new edition of the Northern Terminus journal. An innovative idea suggested through outreach discussions is to take the spring Grey County Black History event "on the road" and tour the event to different parts of Grey County each year. This could provide an opportunity for hyper-local stories to be explored and to raise awareness of how black history touches all parts of the county. It also provides an opportunity to engage new audiences not able to travel to the museum.

In the past, the museum has also hosted travelling exhibits such as, *Enslaved Africans in Upper Canada* produced by the Archives of Ontario to further explore the inspiring stories of Black history. Grey Roots has also produced in-house Black history exhibits, such as *From Slavery to Freedom: African-Canadians in Grey County* (2002) and *Black Roots in Grey* (2016). There is an opportunity to repurpose past black history exhibits to live on as virtual exhibits at greyroots.com. In addition, these "retired" Black history exhibit panels are now on loan to Sheffield Park Black History Museum and Cultural Centre so the important content can be accessible to new audiences.

## **Black History Focused Education Programs**

A new national project called A Black People's History of Canada hosted by Dalhousie University, Halifax, has been established. Its purpose is to assist leading Black history scholars and organizations along with government agencies responsible for education in each province and territory in the creation of engaging new classroom-ready learning materials and digital media about African Canadian history.

A Black People's History of Canada is funded through the Department of Canadian Heritage and is seeking additional funding from both public and private sources. It will conduct extensive historical research that will inform new curricula and instructional media for elementary and secondary school classrooms. These will be made available, free of charge, on a bilingual website. All content will be developed and evaluated in consultation with leading educators, community organizations, and government agencies. Grey Roots staff are in early discussion with the researchers involved and are exploring opportunities to partner in this project.

The Grey County Black Heritage Society (GCBHS) has a major part of its mandate committed to increasing greater awareness of Grey County's historically important Black heritage. The society has approached the County with a request for financial support to establish an annual writing competition to be known as "The Daddy Hall Writing Awards."

Details can be reviewed here on the proposed [Daddy Hall Writing Awards](#). If deemed successful, they would be looking for ongoing financial support to sustain the anticipated interest in Black History. The group believe much can be accomplished to celebrate our county's Black heritage, including an exhibit of the writings at Grey Roots.

## **Historical Tourism**

It was suggested that Grey Roots explore opportunities to create historical tourism education and experiences to highlight Black history in Grey County.

Building on Grey Roots' History Community GIS Mapping Projects, and through continued community consultation, an opportunity exists to develop a Black History map to highlight significant Black history locations such as Old Durham Road Black Pioneer Cemetery, Owen Sound's Mudtown, or Negro Creek Road. Archival images and descriptions would accompany each marker and can be used to create permanent signage and interpretive panels/kiosks for each site.

A route to visit the various sites could then be promoted through Grey Roots and tourism channels as a way to encourage visitors and residents to explore Grey County from a Black history perspective.

## **Grey County Diversity Series with Roger Mooking**

Chef, restaurateur, and television presenter Roger Mooking and film producer Byron Wong have proposed a collaboration between Grey County Economic Development, Tourism and Culture (including Grey Roots Museum & Archives), the Grey Bruce Local Immigration Partnership (GBLIP), and community partners such as local First Nations and Indigenous organizations, Welcoming Communities, Black history and culture groups, LGBTQ+ organizations and others.

The proposed digital project would create space for underrepresented stories of Grey County history and culture and act as a foundational initiative that will be enhanced in future years through robust community partnerships, special events and public programs.

The project is a collaborative video series, hosted by renowned TV personality, author and musician Roger Mooking, who is investing in Grey County by creating a new business here. Mr. Mooking is eager to show the area's diversity to the world through storytelling. This would include living history and interviews with local historians, community and business leaders. The series would have high production values and would be distributed widely in and out of the area for many years.

Sample episode themes:

- Living Black History at the Northern Terminus of the Underground Railway
- Indigenous Pathways: Acknowledging the land and communities
- At the Intersections: Beyond Simple Identities

### **160<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Emancipation Festival, 2022**

Next year is the 160th anniversary of the Emancipation Festival in Owen Sound. The organizers suggest there is an opportunity to enhance this significant anniversary through promotional or funding support. The festival is a highlight in the County's cultural calendar and has a long history of bringing the community together from across the region. The past two years have seen the festival go virtual with great success; the 2021 programming garnered 500 views. There is some optimism that the 2022 Emancipation Festival could return as an in-person event just in time to celebrate this milestone anniversary.

### **Next Steps**

Staff believe Grey Roots is well positioned to provide a platform for much of this important community work. Grey Roots has a strong history of community engagement, support and exhibition of Black history in Grey County. That said, staff also see an opportunity to take a more proactive and purposeful approach to community consultation, education and awareness building through the mandate of Grey Roots.

As such, staff are recommending the creation of a Community Relations position to strategically focus on community building with underrepresented groups in Grey County.

The position will also aid the County as a whole to approach future dialogue and change as awareness builds locally and globally.

## Legal and Legislated Requirements

There are no legal or legislated requirements with this report.

## Financial and Resource Implications

There are no financial or resource implications with this report. The opportunities to engage in and carry out this important work will be included in the annual budget for Council consideration. Where needed funds exceed approved budgets, support will be sought through philanthropic, government and corporate funding programs.

The Community Relations position would be funded within the existing budget, along with the proposed \$10,000 Community Granting Fund.

## Relevant Consultation

- Internal – Grey Roots Museum, Grey County Archives, Planning, Transportation, Communications, Tourism, Information Technology
- External – Afua Cooper and Karolyn Smardz-Frost, 'A Black Peoples History of Canada'; Janie Cooper-Wilson, Ontario Historical Society; Ben Heywood-MacLeod – Filmmaker/Program Coordinator, "A Road to Reconciliation: Recognizing the Black settlers of Negro Creek"; Roger Mooking, proposed Grey County Diversity Series; Naomi Norquay, Old Durham Road Black Pioneer Cemetery Committee; Jane and Barry Penhale, Grey County Black Heritage Society; Jeff Smith, Owen Sound Emancipation Festival; Carolynn and Sylvia Wilson, Sheffield Park Black History Museum and Culture Centre.

## Appendices and Attachments

Nil.