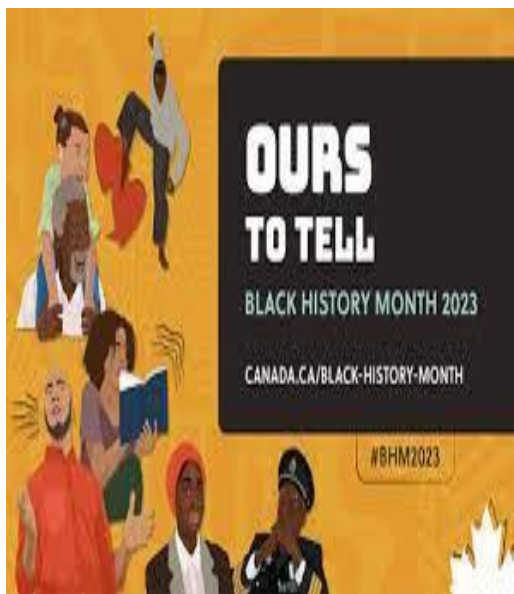


CULTURAL MOMENT FOR FEB 12TH CELEBRATES BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Every February, people across Canada participate in Black History Month events and festivities that honour the legacy of Black people in Canada and their communities. The 2024 theme for Black History Month is: "Black Excellence: A Heritage to Celebrate; a Future to Build". This theme celebrates the rich past and present contributions and accomplishments of Black people in Canada, while aspiring to embrace new opportunities for the future. The theme aligns with the 10th year of the International Decade for People of African Descent and recognizes that people of African descent represent a distinct group whose human rights must be promoted and protected. No matter where you live, we invite all Canadians to learn more about Black Canadian communities, and how they continue to help shape Canada.

In the early 19th century, the unsettled area from Lake Huron to Waterloo County and north was known as the Queen's Bush. Over 1500 Black refugee slaves escaped the southern states and began settling in this area around the 1820's. Many settled around Glen Allen, Wellesley and Hawksville. They cleared land, built homes, churches, and schools and American missionaries came to teach and preach.



Their journey to Ontario was nothing more than a miracle. In the southern states they were hunted and as they made their way north with help from the Underground Railway and Abolitionists there were still many in the northern states who would seem to be helpful but capitalize by turning in a runaway slave for the \$50.00 cash reward.

In the 1840's, the Queen's Bush land was ordered to be surveyed and with the immigration of many families from Europe and the UK in the 1850's, the Black families were forced to leave the land they had cleared and houses they had built in the years leading up to this. In the writings of Benjamin Drew who interviewed the Black refugees that settled near Glen Allen in Peel Township, William Jackson, a former slave quoted, "*There were as many as 50 families who began to clear land for farms. They settled where they found fit with no thought of price or terms of the land.*" As

they cleared the property and planted crops to sell, their lack of education, reading and keeping records left them without any means to deal with the land agents when they came to collect money for the land after the survey was done.

A great many of these refugees sold what meager belongings they had and with the Garafraxa Road (Highway 6) being surveyed and built from Fergus North around this same time, 1843, there is speculation that many of these displaced Black families travelled through our township on their way to Owen Sound. They started again, often working for others to gain money, to be financially independent, to be free and to live in peace.

From the Narratives of Refugee Slaves by Benjamin Drew 1856 Wellington County Museum and Archives

Submitted by Bonny McDougall, Wellington North Cultural Roundtable