

HISTORICAL REVIEW 12

1993 - 1994



**COBOURG AND DISTRICT
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

EXECUTIVE 1993-1994

Past President	Diana Cunnington
President	William (Bud) Barr
Vice-President	Cath Oberholtzer
Treasurer	Robert Eakins
Recording Secretary	Jim Lay
Corresponding Secretary	Babs Gardner

COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSONS

Archives	Marion Hagen
Programmes	Lorraine Oliver
Programme Committee	Elizabeth Parken
	Dorothy Sifton
	Beth Saini
Historical Review	Milne Hall
Membership	Donna McGillis
Publicity	Donna Gow
Newsletter Coordinator	Dorothy Sifton
Newsletter Editor	Douglas Sifton
Cultural Centre Liason	Peter Delanty
Co-ordinator of Volunteers	Helen Hawke

Cover Illustration - C. Gordon King Centre, Cobourg.

Cobourg & District Historical Society
P.O. Box 911
Cobourg, Ontario.
K9A 4W4

Copyright, Cobourg & District Historical Society, 1995.

HISTORICAL SOCIETY PROGRAMME 1993-1994

September 1993

SPEAKER: Professor Eric Winter

"The Making of a Myth"

page 1

October 1993

SPEAKER: Karen Walker

"Cobourg's Black Settlers"

page 12

November 1993

SPEAKER: Audrey Wilson

"Sweet Alice Remembers"

page 24

January 1994

SPEAKER: Rob Winslow

"4th Line Theatre" and

"The Great Farini"

page 25

February 1994 Film Night

"Newcomers" and "Cobourg Ontario"

March 1994

SPEAKER: Robert DeMill

"The Arthur Currie Trial"

page 30

April 1994

SPEAKER: Chief Nora Bothwell

"Historic Native Insights"

page 31

Karen Walker

"The Victoria College Museum"

page 32

Finnan McDonald

Eric Winter

It has been said that although God cannot alter the past, historians can; it is perhaps because they can be useful to him in this respect that he tolerates their existence.

- Samuel Butler

Finnan McDonald was a fur trader employed by both the Northwest Company and the Hudson Bay Company. He was born in Scotland in 1782, arriving with his family in Upper Canada in 1796. At the age of twenty-two, he joined the Northwest Company as a clerk and in 1806 he accompanied David Thompson on his explorations of the Columbia River. As part of Thompson's party, Finnan established Kullyspell House, the first European trading post west of the Rocky Mountain Divide. When Thompson left the West, Finnan remained for almost two decades. He married a facon du pays, a woman of the Pend d'Orielle band of Flatfoot Indians. With Jaco Findlay, he built Fort Spokane in Washington and later led one of the first expeditions to the Snake Country and to the Klamath Indians in northern California. In 1828, he returned from the West and settled near Williamstown in Glengarry County.

This talk provides but a brief glance at a segment of Finnan's life, and the focus is on the manner in which legends are developed from the events of history. The three elements that have been selected are components of the image that we now know. They are: 1. His battle with a buffalo through which he earned the sobriquet 'Big Finnan of the Buffalo'; 2. His appearance and character; 3. The fact that, despite the prejudice of the times, he brought his country wife back to Glengarry.

Lord Macaulay, the eminent nineteenth century historian said we tend to populate our history with giants thirty feet tall. Finnan, it seems, is on his way to being one of them. He returned from the West with a party bringing out the pelts and the records for the season, as well as traders heading East for leave or new postings. This was the York Factory Express of 1927. The party included David Douglas, the botanist after whom the Douglas Fir has been named, Edward Ermatinger, and several other traders. Ermatinger was the keeper of the official journal of the voyage. The party stopped from time to time to hunt buffalo and it was on one of these excursions that Finnan had the encounter without which he would certainly be less well known. According to popular legend, virtually unarmed, he survived a mortal combat with one of these beasts, or in plain words; he killed it.

This legend appears in several places. In the 'History of Glengarry' (1979), there is a photograph of Finnan with a footnote stating that his 'authenticated' feat of wrestling a buffalo to its death has assured him a place not only among the Glengarry folk heroes, but also in the legends of Canada and the United States. Later, the authors quote a statement of one Aleck Rory McLennan, saying it was 'the greatest fight between man and beast ever recorded'. At the time of the publication, McGillivray, the senior author, was recorded as a graduate of Queen's and Harvard, and a teacher of history at the University of Waterloo.

When there is a university history department peering over the author's shoulder, we might assume that the 'authenticated' fight was indeed properly authenticated; especially so, given the extraordinary nature of the encounter, the like of which has not been recorded in the English language since the epic of Beowulf was set down by some unknown author around 1000 AD.

Sadly, it was not authenticated. Furthermore, a portrait of Finnan, although it is pretty close to what we might imagine an intrepid bare-handed buffalo slayer to look like, is presented without any evidence that it is in fact what it claims to be. To the best of my knowledge, this photograph made its first public appearance as Finnan in 1961. It was included in an article by the journalist Frank Rasky in the now defunct magazine *Liberty*. We know nothing of its origins. (Journalists, unlike historians, are rightly sensitive about their sources.) It just might be Errol Flynn dressed up.

It seems we have a good fireside tale here dressed up as history and, like the legend of Elvis Presley, who can still be encountered picking up hitchhikers on the highway to Graceland, it comes with several variations. In one version... "he had the presence of mind to throw himself upon the vast animal, seizing it by the nostrils." In another, 'The mighty highlander wrestled and strove and at last threw the huge bull and held it down.' In a third, 'bounding from the ground as lithe and sinewy as a reddish panther...he hurled his huge whip-chord muscled body upon it.' Yet another has his horse stumbling, leaving Finnan on foot and leaving us to speculate on how the horse managed to get in and out of the canoe. Reading these accounts, it is hard to accept that this is not some dopey sheep he is dealing with, but a bison bull weighing around two thousand pounds.

When there is a university history department peering over the author's shoulder, we might assume that the 'authenticated' fight was indeed properly authenticated; especially so, given the extraordinary nature of the encounter, the like of which has not been recorded in the English language since the epic of Beowulf was set down by some unknown author around 1000 AD.

Sadly, it was not authenticated. Furthermore, a portrait of Finnan, although it is pretty close to what we might imagine an intrepid bare-handed buffalo slayer to look like, is presented without any evidence that it is in fact what it claims to be. To the best of my knowledge, this photograph made its first public appearance as Finnan in 1961. It was included in an article by the journalist Frank Rasky in the now defunct magazine *Liberty*. We know nothing of its origins. (Journalists, unlike historians, are rightly sensitive about their sources.) It just might be Errol Flynn dressed up.

It seems we have a good fireside tale here dressed up as history and, like the legend of Elvis Presley, who can still be encountered picking up hitchhikers on the highway to Graceland, it comes with several variations. In one version... "he had the presence of mind to throw himself upon the vast animal, seizing it by the nostrils." In another, 'The mighty highlander wrestled and strove and at last threw the huge bull and held it down.' In a third, 'bounding from the ground as lithe and sinewy as a reddish panther...he hurled his huge whip-chord muscled body upon it.' Yet another has his horse stumbling, leaving Finnan on foot and leaving us to speculate on how the horse managed to get in and out of the canoe. Reading these accounts, it is hard to accept that this is not some dopey sheep he is dealing with, but a bison bull weighing around two thousand pounds.

When we go to the first-hand account, we get a different and altogether more plausible story. There are two recorded accounts; the more extensive is that of Edward Ermatinger who was charged with keeping the official journal of the express. The other was from David Douglas who was nearby but appears not to have actually seen the event. Ermatinger's delicate script allows for a nice compaction of the records. Generally, he places three or four daily entries onto a single page. He recounts the weather, travelling conditions, distances covered, the collection of supplies as well as any special occurrence that happened along the way. As for the encounter with the buffalo, it seems that he continued with the journal for a day or so, leaving himself one clear page on which to go back and write it up. He did not, as it turned out, leave enough space and, as a result, he has written across the page then, twisting the journal sideways, up and down it, and, finally, diagonally across it. The resulting triple layering of script is a record not easy to read - if it had been there might have been no myth.

This is not to say that Ermatinger's is the true account, because even eye-witnesses have biases. Its advantage is that Ermatinger was there. He did see what happened and he provides us with an account which is in keeping with our common-sense expectations. It gives little foundation for the stories. On the other hand, whilst we ought not to exaggerate the situation, we should not make light of it. Finnan clearly suffered some grievous injuries and narrowly escaped a very unpleasant death.

The account begins on June 2nd, 1827. Ermatinger begins by describing the success of the hunting party, beginning in the morning and continuing until what we must assume is late in the evening because he tells us that, having wounded a bull, *'Mr McD's rifle snapped and while he was endeavouring to distinguish his object in the dark of the night to have another shot the animal rushed towards him with the utmost impetuosity. Mr McD., as soon as he*

perceived him, which was not until he was very close, tried to escape by running across a small plain to shelter himself in a small hummock of woods but before he reached it he became out of breath and threw himself down trusting to fate. The first blow the animal gave him he (sic) tossed him with great violence and gored the most fleshy part of his thigh nearly to the bone. Mr McD. after this seized him by the wool of the head and held on for some time but the immense power of the animal obliged him to quit his hold - on doing this he supposes he dislocated his wrist. He remembers having received six blows one of which is so dreadful that his whole side is bruised black and blue and some of his ribs appear to be broken - the last furious butt made him call out and what is strange, the bull at the same instant fell down as if a ball had struck him. In this state they both remained for an hour while Mr Herriott ran to the boats, at least two miles distant, for help.... A large armed party being collected were devising means of extricating Mr McD. from his painful situation when one of the men's guns went off in the air by accident. This caused the bull to rise. He looked at the party most attentively for a moment, then galloped off.'

David Douglas was nearby and records the incident in his diary, but the entry contained nothing to contradict Ermatinger.

Where we have such prodigious actions, it would be appropriate to have a prodigious strength and character to match. Evidence for that is not hard to find. There is one major source from which Finnan's appearance and character has been drawn. This source is Ross Cox. Cox's opinion has been quoted so many times by so many writers of the western fur trade that it has acquired an almost impeccable authority. Of Finnan, Cox says '*To the gentleness of a lamb he united the courage of a lion. He was particularly affectionate to men of small size (Cox was himself a small man), whether equals or inferiors and would stand their bantering*

with the utmost good humour; but if any man approaching his own altitude presumed to encroach too far on his good nature, a lowering look and distended nostrils warned the intruder of an approaching eruption... His appearance was very striking: in height he was six feet four inches, with broad shoulders, large bushy whiskers and red hair, which for some years had not felt the scissors'. Bond, in his book Early Birds in the Northwest, is one of those who quotes Cox at length (to be fair he does so with the caveat that he calls the characteristic Cox style.) 'McDonald', he quotes, 'for mere love of fighting, accompanied the [Indians] in their war excursions. His eminent bravery endeared him to the whole tribe and in all matters related to warfare, his word was law. War was his glory and piping peace was his aversion. He had taken a Spokane wife by whom he had two children. A great proportion of his leisure time was spent in the company of her relations, by whom, and indeed by Indians in general he was greatly beloved. Up to the time that I (Cox) quitted the Columbia, he had escaped unharmed but I regret to state that a few years afterwards one of the enemy's balls brought him to the ground. Half a dozen savages rushed on him and commenced hacking at his skull with their tomahawks....He subsequently recovered, but I understand the wounds he then received have left evident traces of their violence on his bold and manly front.'

Cox, like Ermatinger, was an eye-witness and we should accord him at least equal authority. He had by this time returned to England and published his account of the fur trade in 1831. However, he was not trying to write an objective account of his experiences on the Columbia, but he was a journalist making a living at the business of writing. His book had to sell and his characters were closer to the characters of adventure fiction than to real life. He was, moreover, writing for an audience at the height of western expansion when stereotypes

of the warring savage Indian were part of the justification for the appropriation of new territory. In the United States an Act of Congress had just been passed, the intention of which was to remove the Indians to lands west of the Mississippi, and the first wagon train had already reached California.

To get more evidence we might turn to a witness who, whatever might be his shortcomings or his motives, is not having to write to the conventions of the day for a wide readership. That witness is Finnan himself.

Once a year he wrote to his friend John George McTavish. From those letters we form a more rounded picture of his personality. Finnan's letters are not well written and for ease of reading I have adapted the punctuation and spelling to modern usage. Furthermore they seem to the modern eye somewhat ill-formed, jumping from one issue to another with little of the skill of composition which is common among other correspondents. I have therefore taken some liberties with the structure in trying to render his ideas in a way that can be readily understood. In September 1815 he says, *'I would be very happy if you could take me out of this bad place. I [am] really tired of it besides I don't understand half of what the Indians say'*. From another, written only two years after Cox had left the West, *'For my part this is the last place I would wish to pass the Spring in the whole country. I am not fond of the natives and they still less fond of me'*. Of the scalping incident he says nothing but there is a passage in his letter of the 23rd April 1824 after he had returned from his expedition to the Snake Country. *'We had several battles with the nation on the other side of the mountains. Poor Michele Bordeau was killed with five more of the band. Their death was*

revenge as well as we could revenge it for no less than 68 of them remain in the plains as prey for wolves'. Here he says nothing of his own injuries but the next year he reports that, "I received myself a dirty wound in the thigh from a gun which I had in my own hands and which I am well cured at present thank God for [I was] kept long enough in bed."

'Poor Michele' rather than just 'Michele' gives an insight into Finnan which is not present in Cox's cardboard hero. To round this out a few more quotations, taken from his letters might be helpful. Here he is at the end of his term in the West being philosophical and almost poetic even though he is not quite crystal clear, *'There are great ups and downs in the world. Where I am the day I am not sure to remain the next day. [We] must keep ourselves ready for the call to the stars. Where is the day we could run jump and dance? It is passed and not to come no more. Where is the day that people could crack their jokes? We are now joined and bound under laws and regulations'*. He had a large family and reflects on this fact in a rather morose jest. In fact financially his prospects were not good. He had not been frugal and after twenty years in the Columbia District he is leaving as a clerk - the same rank with which he arrived. *'I wish to God the Company had made it law to cut (i.e. castrate) people before I came to the country so I would not be there today with such a large family on my shoulders. Not long ago she gave me a daughter. At present I have only to shake my breeches and it is sufficient for her to give me another. [While] we are in this world at least we must breed. They are the only happy hours we have at the moment. We must have something to amuse us. I am sorry you were so late in giving me your advice about Peggy (his wife). I had one on the stocks ready to be launched. It can't be helped. Its adding one to the family. The more the merrier.'* He repeats his joke about being cut adding that they will be able to save their money *'having nothing to pay for women'*.

I have, so far, used eye-witness and Finnan himself. My next piece of evidence is gossip, or if you will, oral history. It begins with the report of John Chisholm who was a lawyer and a descendent of Finnan. In the nineteen-twenties Chisholm travelled widely in the West and did a vast amount of research on this subject; much of it was genealogical and it included interviews and correspondence with members of the family. Among other things he located records of baptisms and the nuptial ceremonies of Finnan and Peggy according to the rites of the Catholic church. He also discovered the location of the grave Finnan shares with Peggy in St. Raphael's churchyard. (It had been lost in a reorganization of the site and, unfortunately, it has subsequently been lost again.) One of his informants was a great niece who had known Finnan. As well as offering an opinion that he didn't dance very well 'because he was too full of bones', she said that he was one of the few traders that was decent enough to bring back to the East his country wife. In one respect she was right, it was not a common practice to bring back country wives. In another respect we are not so sure that he did bring her back, despite the seemingly compelling evidence of the common grave.

In 1878, fifty years after Finnan had left the west, Andrew Garcia was trapping along the tributaries of the of the Missouri River. Many changes had taken place; ranching was beginning to develop, towns like Boseman were established, and across the boarder the N.W.M.P. had become a force to be reckoned with. Garcia was a trapper living with Indian women and was at the time known as 'The Squaw Kid'. He had kept some kind of journal and when he was an old man it was edited and published.

Garcia tells of the relations between the white trappers and the Indian women, of desertions by 'drunken blackguards' and then goes on to say, *'Some honest men thought nothing of*

leaving their squaw wives and families to rustle their own living. This was the case of Big Finnen(sic) McDonald. He deserted his squaw wife and family in Manitoba and went back to the county of Glengery(sic) in Ontario to live. However she was one squaw that would not have it so. Indian style she trailed Big Finnen and landed on his doorstep with four beautiful half-breed Mcdonalds. Back East near Williamstown, she found Big Finnen among his Scotch friends. Big Finnen was a good squaw chaser and a Catholic. What else could he do but take in his lawful wife and children? This good woman lived with him until her death. She raised their family which was good; its members became respected citizens who lived and died there. Today this wild squaw from the plains of Saskatchewan sleeps as she should at the churchyard of St. Mary's in Williamstown.'

Even if the story was a fiction it is hard to understand how it could come into being and survive a thousand miles from its geographical location in Glengarry county where no-one could possibly benefit from it. Its credibility, however, is helped by two other pieces of evidence. Chisholm notes that on the 6th July 1827, Thomas Destroismaisons baptised Daniel, John, Catherine and Anne, children of Finnan McDonald at Fort Alexander on the Winnipeg River. This is just a month after the encounter with the buffalo. Note there were four children in this ceremony - the same number that Garcia mentions. Three years later there is another ceremony which Chisholm brings to light and copies from the church register in Williamstown: *'On the twenty-fifth day of March in the Year one thousand eight hundred and thirty, after a dispensation of the three proclamations of Marriage Banns being granted by his Lordship the Bishop of Kingston, between Finnan McDonald, farmer, residing*

in the Gore of Charlottenburg and Peggy....daughter of.... Indian Chief of the North West of Canada....we the undersigned priest have given them nuptial benediction'. Between these two events, there is a difference of three years.

In the Norwesters' Museum in Williamstown, there is a gun mounted on the wall. It is said to have belonged to Peggy, the wife of Finnan McDonald. It suggests that she was a woman of some independence.

When Finnan left the West, he complained that he was physically broken, impoverished, and unable to provide for his family. Six months after the baptism of his children in the West, his brother John died and that event seems to have brought about an abrupt change for the better in Finnan's fortunes.

I have not at this stage tried to show what kind of man Finnan was. I have been more interested in showing what he wasn't. A full reading of his letters reveals that he was not just a long-haired macho bull-fighter., but a complex and a somewhat droll personality.

COBOURG'S BLACK SETTLERS

KAREN WALKER

Amidst the multitudes of English, Scottish, and Irish emigrants who came to early Cobourg were a number of settlers of African descent. These men and women gathered here from elsewhere in Canada and the United States and were both free men and escaped slaves. Today, more than 140 years after they arrived, these black pioneers are a little known page of Cobourg's history.

Slavery had existed in Canada long before the arrival in 1628 of the first African slave, a man from Madagascar who was sold at Quebec City. The earliest slaves in the colony were native North Americans, who were collectively known as "Pani". For 150 years, until the late 18th century, black servants were relatively rare in Canada. The demand for them began in earnest after the British conquest of New France.

Invading in 1759 with the forces of Gen. Wolfe was one teen-aged black servant who, after an eventful life, would find his way to Cobourg. His name was Thomas York. York was probably born in the U.S. and may well have come to Canada as a soldier with one of two American units that took part in Wolfe's campaign. The young slave was there on Oct. 13, 1759 when Quebec City fell to the British. In the years that followed, York remained at Quebec, his master having either been reassigned there or having sold him to a resident of the town. In Jan. 1786, Thomas married Margaret Macloud (also a slave) at Christ Church in Quebec City.

The Yorks and all the other slaves in Lower Canada became free, at least unofficially, at the turn of the 19th century. Slavery was struck down in Quebec City at this time by several landmark cases, one of which involved Elias Smith, a Montreal merchant who later moved to Port Hope. Among the slaves held by the Smith family was a woman named Jude. In 1797, Jude was jailed after attempting to run away. The law, Chief Justice James Mink said, specified that runaway slaves like her were to be confined not in a jail, but in a "house of correction". As no such "houses of correction" existed, slavery became essentially unenforceable. Some servants quickly left their masters while others negotiated contracts to end their servitude profitably. John Shutter, a son-in-law of Elias Smith, had such a contract with his servant Jack.

About 1846, Thomas York, his son Thomas Jr., and another relative, William, left old Quebec for thriving little Cobourg in the west. Here the family joined the Wesleyan Methodist Church, which is known today as Trinity United. In 1847, William bought 323 King St. W. and then sold it to John Field. The next year, Thomas York Sr., the family's patriarch, died at the venerable age of 105. In the years to come, the Yorks lived at several addresses in town, including 264, 284, and 285 College Street.

Slavery was brought to Upper Canada in the 1780s by Loyalists emigrating from the U.S. At the border, families wishing to bring in their servants had to pay a tax of 40 shillings per person because, like china and furniture, slaves were classified as household goods. Other Loyalists who arrived without servants acquired them here once the family had settled and prospered.

In this rough new land, slaves were status symbols kept mainly for housework and personal

service. In even the wealthiest households, there were usually no more than 4 or 5. Most slaves lived with one master for many years and, in time, their children were sold around the community to his friends and relations.

The largest number of black slaves in Ontario was in the Loyalist settlements between Belleville and Kingston. In our own neck of the woods, there appear to have been two early slave-holders. Just who they were is unclear at present, but one of the two may have been the Keeler family of Haldimand Twsp. Better known as a slave-holder was Timothy Thompson, one of the first judges to be appointed for our area. Thompson's household in Fredericksburg Twsp. near Kingston included at least three black servants: Pomp, Nelly, and their son Richard.

The slave trade in Upper Canada grew freely until 1793. In July of that year, the Legislative Assembly passed the first official step towards abolition in the province. John Graves Simcoe spearheaded a strong anti-slavery bill, but in the face of the province's prominent slave-owners, at least six of whom were sitting in the Assembly that term, the legislation soon became a compromise. Among the slave-holders present was Hazelton Spencer, who represented Lennox, Hastings, and Northumberland Counties. The law that Spencer and fellow legislators passed did not emancipate the slaves of Upper Canada, but it did prohibit the further importation of them from the U.S. It also directed that all slave children born in the province be freed upon their 25th birthday. For the guarantee of their eventual freedom, Canadian slaves now had to give to the master their most productive working years and the many children likely to be born to women under the age of twenty-five.

Although the clever compromise of 1793 assured them of the right, most sons and daughters of Loyalists proved to have little interest in slavery. Over the next decade or two, their society came to disapprove of the old institution. Local families Perrys, Ruttans, Dorlands, Spencers, Clenches, Huyckes, Bogarts, Wallbridges, Herkimers, Meyers and Bethunes, all of whom came from slave-holding roots elsewhere in the province, did not continue this tradition in our region. By the early 1820s, slavery had become rare in Canada.

Two decades earlier, at the turn of the 19th century, when slavery was still in vogue, one of the first black landowners known in the province was here in Northumberland and Durham. He was John Baker, a man whose family had for four generations been the slaves of the Gray family of New Jersey and later of Cornwall, Ont. In 1795, John and his eldest brother Simon came into the possession of Robert Gray, then the Solicitor-General of Upper Canada. While sailing down from York to a trial at Presqu'ile, Simon Baker and his master were lost in the wreck of the "Speedy" in October 1804. In his will, Gray freed the Baker family and left them a considerable trust fund. John received 200 acres in East Whitby Twsp. in Durham Co., land that is now in the north-west part of Oshawa. He sold this property in 1809, apparently never having lived there. John Baker then joined the British Army and went on to serve in the War of 1812 and even at the Battle of Waterloo in Belgium in 1815. Ironically, here in the region where a slave had become a free-holder, there also occurred one of the last recorded slave sales in Canada. Among the few second and third generation Canadians who kept slaves into the early 19th century were the old Keeler family of Colborne. In 1824, Eli Keeler sold a 14-year-old slave named Tom to a man in Hastings Co. for the equivalent of \$75.

For Tom and all the Canadians still in slavery, freedom finally came on August 1st, 1834, the date of emancipation throughout the British Empire. In Upper Canada, most former slaves took their liberty to towns and counties other than where they had been held. It was the beginning of a long search for a new life, a quest that took many from place to place.

At least one family among those travelling the provinces found what they were looking for here in Northumberland. They were the Huffman family. Along with the Yorks, the Huffmans appear to have been the only Canadian-born members of the area's black community. Abraham, Mary, John, and Hanna Huffman, apparently all siblings, settled with their spouses near Bewdley before 1860. These four were born in Upper Canada in the mid 1830s, so it seems likely their parents were slaves at some time somewhere in the province. The family may well have adopted its decidedly German surname from a one-time master. Having settled in Hamilton Twsp., the Huffmans then endured their share of troubles here. John and Robert, two young sons of John Sr., soon died and were buried at Bewdley Union Cemetery. Then came the legal problems of John's sister Mary. In the late 1860s, Mary Huffman fell into a cycle of vagrancy, for which she was arrested in Cobourg several times. She died in the town jail in 1870.

Most of the black pioneers who settled in Cobourg were Americans. In America, black slavery began in the year 1620 - only a little earlier than it had in Canada - when a Dutch ship sold captives from West Africa to the colonists of Virginia. In the South, slavery became an economic and social institution lasting almost 250 years until the defeat of the Confederate States in 1865. In New England, slavery was abolished just after the American Revolution.

In New York and New Jersey, where most slaves brought to Canada had originated, it lingered until 1829.

The first of the black Americans came to Cobourg in the late 1840s. William Waddell may have been the earliest, having arrived before 1848. In May of that year, he married Catherine Tait at St. Peter's Church. For many years, the family resided on Division St. across from Trinity United. Apart from Waddell, there were also the Alexander brothers, William and George, from Baltimore, Maryland. About 1850, William purchased land at 177 Bay St. and likely built a house there. George Alexander later lived in an apartment in the Smith block at the corner of King and Division. He and his family barely escaped a fire in the building in 1881.

An infamous American law and a famous secret society greatly increased black immigration to Canada West (Ontario) in the 1850s. During this decade, tens of thousands of escaped slaves who had found freedom in the northern states were forced to flee north once again, this time from the Fugitive Slave Law. This law allowed slave-catchers to seize runaway slaves anywhere, even in the North, and return them to their former masters in the South. No one was safe. Man hunters sometimes pursued individuals who had been legally emancipated and even kidnapped those who were free born.

Also on the roads leading to Canada were other refugees who had escaped the South and the

Northern slave-catcher through the famed Underground Railway. Approximately 20,000-30,000 people were assisted by this organization between 1840 and 1860. One of the many routes used by the Railway were the lake steamers travelling from Oswego and Rochester in New York State to Ontario ports such as Kingston, Toronto, and Cobourg.

Among the black American immigrants to our area in the 1850s were the Lonsberrys: William and Hannah, David, who was probably their son, his wife Maria, and their family of 12 children. The Lonsberrys settled near Harwood in Hamilton Twsp. Another extended family arriving at this time were the Hornback (later spelled Holnback). The Hornbacks clan included Peter and Elizabeth and their sons or nephews Gardiner, Simon, and James. Gardiner Hornback and his wife Bridget raised a family of 14 in Cobourg, the first of whom was born shortly after they settled. On May 14th, 1864, two of the Hornback family, a father and a son, found themselves caught in the famous flood of the Cobourg Creek. The father managed to escape the torrent but the boy was one of the three people who were lost.

Others who settled in Cobourg in the 1850s were George and Phoebe Carter, Charles Martin, Henry Robinson, and Warren Rush. George and Elizabeth Taylor, and George and Julie Dickin were also new to town. John Bell and Isaiah Butler came to Hamilton Twsp. while Thomas Hill, Benjamin Buck, John Williams, and the Brown family arrived in Haldimand. Edward Berry settled in Port Hope as did Joshua Johnson, Joseph Sipples, and Perry and Margaret Moore.

Black immigration to Canada slowed to a comparative trickle in the 1860's at the outbreak of the American Civil War. Many already in the provinces were drawn back to the U.S. by the prospect of the end of slavery and the opportunity to fight for emancipation in the Union armies. Cobourg's black community appears to have shrunk somewhat during this era, perhaps due as much to a stagnant local economy as to the momentous events happening across the lake. Among the few new names who appeared in town in the 1860s and 1870s were William Wright, Joseph Robinson, James Hill, and Henry Bird.

Little is known about the backgrounds of most of these Americans, such as where they had come from in the U.S. and who among them were free or fugitives. The Alexanders, having been born in Maryland, and John Bell of Hamilton Twsp., who was free from Virginia, may have once been slaves; so too William Wright of Cobourg. A well known character on the streets, Wright was homeless and penniless when he died in 1875. Nicknamed 'Massa Wright', he had evidently amused the town by calling every man he met 'Massa'. It was conduct he had likely learned as a slave long ago.

In mid 19th century Canada, there was no systemic racism and most people in the provinces seem to have had abolitionist sympathies; nevertheless, many Canadian communities did not welcome black immigrants to their neighbourhoods. In the larger centres, and especially in south-west Ontario, there were many incidents of discrimination and segregation. In public rooms, like theatres and hotels and on ships, blacks were sometimes refused admittance. In schools, their children could be turned away or be made to sit in the back. The black settlers of Cobourg appear to have been treated more equitably; still, even living here, in the town

that they had helped to build, the Huffmans, Waddells, Martins, and others must have encountered many fellow citizens who wished a black man freedom, as long as he knew his place and kept it.

Likely earning themselves the respect of some and the envy of others, several of Cobourg's black community founded successful businesses. The earliest of these ventures was the Cobourg Baths, a barber shop established by William Waddell before 1848. It was located near the corner of Division and Queen Sts. Waddell appears to have sold the Cobourg Baths to William Alexander around 1849 and set himself up in a second shop, this one on King St. It was soon lost, however, in a fire that swept the main street. Once more, Waddell started over and twenty-four years later he passed on this business to his eldest son, James. James Waddell worked out of a storefront on the south-west corner of King and Division, below the offices of the Cobourg World newspaper, until his death in 1885.

Yet another business that endeavoured to keep Cobourg clean and well-trimmed was William York's barber shop, established around 1857. His business, known in the 1880s as the York's Baths, soon expanded with a sideline of 'fancy goods' such as hair components, perfume, and musical instruments. Several of Williams's children took over the shop after his death in 1873. At the turn of the century, York's sold toys and, later, tobacco goods.

Barbering and hairdressing were also the most common black businesses elsewhere in the counties. In Port Hope in the 1860s, they owned the Albert House and Concert Rooms on King St. E. (east of the old Post Office). In 1861, their hotel hosted a public appearance by

the famous circus performer General Tom Thumb. A few years later, William apparently sold the Albert and opened the Alexander House which stood near the corner of Division and University Cobourg, where he also lived.

Some of Cobourg's original black settlers and many of their children earned a living as skilled tradesmen. Among them there were blacksmiths, shoemakers, carpenters, and printers as well as a mason and a telegraph operator. Several daughters of the families worked as dressmakers. Many more in the black community worked in local business and industry and a few, notable the Lonsberrys in Hamilton Twsp., were farmers.

The average black American immigrant to Canada was male and, at the time he arrived, usually single; (it seems that there were relatively few black women settlers in Northumberland and Durham). He was also older than average, often between 30 and 40 years, before he finally married. Although there was sometimes tension between the two ethnic groups elsewhere (as in the northern U.S.), most of Cobourg's black settlers found wives of Irish birth or descent. A few of the couples appear to have met locally. There were William Waddell and Catherine Tait, William Alexander and Mary Ann Quinliven who married in 1860 at St. Peter's, and Mary Ann Wilson and Warren Rush, married in 1861. Abraham Huffman met Mary, his second wife, in the Cobourg area a few years later. Author Susanna Moodie tells a story about a particularly early interracial couple: Tom Smith, the black barber who lived in Hope Twsp. (near Dale's Corners?), married an Irish woman in the

early 1830s. Soon after their marriage, some local men decided to harass the couple with a chivaree. The mischief-making evidently soon got out of hand and ended in the death, apparently accidental, of the groom.

By the turn of the 20th century, most of the first black settlers were gone and many of their families had left town. George Taylor and William Alexander died in 1880 and George Alexander the next year. They are buried at St. Peter's Cemetery. Thomas York Jr. was 88 when he died in 1888. Both he and Gardiner Hornback, who passed away in 1900, are buried at Union Cemetery.

The York, Hornback, and Lonsberry families were among the relatively few whose children and grandchildren stayed in Northumberland and Durham into the present century. Other early families, like the Alexanders, drifted away from our area. Soon after the deaths of their husbands, Mary and Eleanor Alexander, and most of their children, moved out to Manitoba. Just what happened to others, like the Rush, Carter, Waddell, Martin, Robinson, Hill, Ben, Huffman, and Moore families, is unknown.

Of those who remained in Cobourg and area, several sons and grandsons distinguished themselves in the service of their country. George Homback, a son of Gardiner and Bridget, was a private in the No. 1 Cobourg Co. and was sent to the Northwest Rebellion in Saskatchewan in 1885. A relative of his, W. E. Holnback (Hornback), was one of the four

Northumberland and Durham men to die in the far-off Boer War. Charlie Hornback served in France in W.W.I with the Cobourg Field Battery, as did Ralph Hornback and Asa Lonsberry, a grandson of the old settler David Lonsberry. Among the Cobourg men listed on the Memorial Gates at Victoria Park as having given their lives in W.W.II is Fred Lonsberry.

To bring this short study of the Cobourg and area's black community to an end, a word or two should be devoted to a local man who did much to record Canadian black history. He was William Riddell, a Justice of the Supreme Court of Ontario from 1925 to 1945. Born in Hamilton Twsp. in 1852, Riddell attended a local grammar school and graduated from Victoria College, Cobourg. He later lived at Illahee Lodge down at the foot of Ontario St. In addition to his distinguished legal career, Riddell was a noted historian who wrote literally hundreds of articles. One of his most important was a comprehensive study of black history in early Canada. It was published in 1920. This article and several others he wrote on the subject are still consulted and quoted by authors today. To his credit, William Riddell took more than just an academic interest in black Canadians. In the 1920's, he served on the Board of the Canadian League for the Advancement of Coloured People.

Sweet Alice Remembers

Audrey Wilson

Alice Allan, who was born and raised in Cobourg, graduated as a nurse and completed postgraduate studies in Chicago. Her story of courage in facing affliction was presented by her daughter, Audrey Wilson, assisted by Laurie Wensley. Recitations of poems written by Alice delighted those present. Copies of the book, Sweet Alice Remembers, a collection of writings by Alice Allan, were available for purchase; all proceeds went to the Willow Beach Field Naturalists.

4th Line Theatre

Rob Winslow

The January meeting of the Society featured a double bill. The speaker was Rob Winslow of the 4th Line Theatre which last year produced the "Cavan Blazers" and "Susanna Moodie". A new play concerning the Great Farini is scheduled for the coming season and its author, Shane Peacock, was present.

The creator of Fourth Line Theatre, Rob Winslow, read a scene from "Cavan Blazers" and described how his sense of history and his roots in Cavan Township where the Catholic-Protestant conflict erupted more than a century and a half ago had prompted him not only to recreate that violent drama, but to research its roots in the historic tumult of Northern Ireland.

Farini, who grew up in Hope Township (his name was William Hunt) achieved worldwide fame as an aerialist. His first public high wire act was performed over the Ganaraska River in Port Hope. His interest began in the circus and his skills in performances over Niagara Falls and throughout the world won him fame and fortune. Shane Peacock, whose own roots are in Hope Township, has written a book on the subject and is now working on the play.

The Great Farini

Shane Peacock

The story of Signor Farini (William Leonard Hunt) is really the story of a dream. As a boy, Farini dreamt of turning his life into a sort of adventure novel. Then he went out and did exactly that.

His mother, Hannah Soper, was the daughter of United Empire Loyalist parents who were among the first settlers in Hope Township. His father, Thomas Wilkens Hunt, came from London, England, where his merchant class family had developed a taste for striving, believing that they could actually progress socially through hard work. Hannah's respectability and Thomas' commitment to upward social mobility influenced young Willie Hunt. Thomas came to Canada in the early 1830s, seeking business opportunities, met Hannah and married her in Port Hope in 1835. Soon they moved to Lockport, New York, where the economy was booming and Thomas set up a grocery store. Willie was born there on June 10th, 1838.

The family moved back to Canada when Willie was five, and two years later Thomas opened a general store on King Street in Bowmanville. Here he prospered, even serving as reeve for a short while, but his son, full of incredible energy and with a love of mischief was constantly in trouble. And when the wonderful American circuses came to town, he was in awe.

Though warned against attending them by his parents (who considered circuses almost immoral), there was no holding him back, and he soon began creating his own home-made trapezes and low wires and perfecting the circus star's tricks.

In 1855, the family moved back to Hope Township and Willie was apprenticed to a doctor, but his first love was still the circus and soon he built a high wire from the ground to the roof of his father's barn. He quickly became known throughout the township as an expert amateur wire walker, and in 1859 at the age of 21 (when his father was in England), he made his debut in front of 8,000 people as he walked a rope strung over the Ganaraska River at the foot of Walton Street, Port Hope for the Durham Agricultural Society Fair. He also performed a strongman routine at the town hall.

He broke with his father because of this performance and left home to seek his fortune as a travelling rope walker. In 1860, he appeared at Niagara Falls and challenged the world-renowned Blondin to a series of terrifying high-wire walks over the gorge. He stood on his head on the wire, walked in a potato sack, carried a washing machine across and walked with a man on his back. These performances brought him world-wide fame.

Soon after he joined the Northern Army and fought in the American Civil War, claiming he worked for a while as a spy and was slightly wounded in battle. He also said he showed two of his inventions, a rope bridge and shoes for walking on water, to President Lincoln. He left the army in 1862 and travelled to Havana, Cuba, where his first wife (Mary Osborne of Hope) fell off his back during a performance and was killed. Two years later he was in New York

presenting himself as an all-round athlete, doing a combined trapeze-tightrope-strongman routine and calling himself a "pangymnastikonaerostationist". That August he tried to walk along the edge of the American Falls at Niagara on stilts, and fell in, only saving himself by grabbing the branch of a tree on an island near the brink. Subsequently, he walked the rope in Ottawa (where 15,000 came to see him), Montreal, Quebec City, Halifax, and other eastern sites and claimed to have married a Halifax millionaire.

By 1866, he had a child protege and was performing at the best venues in London, England with a trapeze troupe called the "Flying Farinis". He adopted little "El Nino Farini", who became a star in his own right. Farini gave up performing in 1870 and unveiled "Lulu", his extraordinary female gymnast who could leap 30 feet from solid stage boards to trapeze bar (due to a hidden Farini invention that propelled her upwards). Lulu became a major star, though she was a mysterious personality whose gender was often questioned by the press.

In 1877, Farini became the brains behind the Royal Westminster Aquarium, a huge entertainment venue in London. Here he invented the human cannonball act (the famous Zazel was his cannonball), presented extraordinary freaks, high dives, and all sorts of other spectacular acts, all of them thrilling and some of them so dangerous that attempts were made to have them stopped. Farini acquired a reputation as a mysterious impresario with strange powers over his proteges.

In the early 1880s, his acts were the backbone of P.T. Barnum's Greatest Show on Earth. He was even involved in bringing the famous elephant Jumbo to America.

In 1885, he went to Africa, explored the Kalahari Desert, and wrote a book about it. His claim that he found the ruins of an ancient "lost city" has become a legend in southern African popular history. In the late 1880s and 90s he ran one of the world's largest theatrical agencies. In 1888 he presented a parachute jump in front of 60,000 people (including the Prince of Wales) in London, England. He also became a noted begonia-grower, was made a member of the Royal Horticultural Society, and wrote a book about begonias. He married a German concert pianist named Anna Muller, who was the daughter of the Kaiser's aide-de-camp and a former student of Franz Liszt, and they lived on an estate south of London. Farini patented about 100 inventions during this period, including folding theatre chairs, his parachute, and ways to increase the power in steam engines.

In 1899, the Farinis moved to Toronto where he was the manager of a whip company, a mining company executive, invented a huge cylindrical steel boat that rolled on top of waves, and began taking art lessons. He had a studio on Yonge Street and his paintings were shown with notable artists, including future members of the Group of Seven. The family moved to Germany in 1910, where he was caught behind German lines during the war and he spent his time writing a 37-volume history of the war from a German perspective. His knowledge of the German language was impeccable and in all he spoke seven languages.

In 1920, Farini returned to Port Hope and died of the 'flu on January 17, 1929 in his 91st year. He enjoyed good health right up until his death, maintaining it through constant exercise and work on some of the farms he owned in Hope Township.

Though his life may not have been the most important ever lived by a Canadian, it was undoubtedly the most colourful.

The Arthur Currie Trial

The March 1994 meeting was held in the Old Bailey Courtroom of Victoria Hall because that was the site of the Arthur Currie trial. The speaker was Robert DeMill whose Master's thesis dealt with the topic.

The presentation dealt with three aspects of the trial: an overview of the nature of the action in World War I, the last one hundred days of the war when Currie's generalship was particularly called into question and the trial itself.

The trial was a libel suit launched against the Port Hope Evening Guide for an article published in 1927. The article criticized the action at Mons, France on the last day of the war, November 11, 1918, but the issues were also personal, involving the former government minister responsible for militia, Sam Hughes and his son as well as the editor and publisher of the Guide, Fred Wilson. Although Currie won his suit, the sensational trial brought into question a great many practices concerning managing and reporting military operations.

Historic Native Insights

Chief Nora Bothwell of the Alderville First Nations Reserve addressed the April 1994 meeting. Chief Bothwell is the first woman to be named chief from those of reinstated status, and she holds a Bachelor of Arts in Native Studies from Trent University. She outlined the history of the Alderville band of 208 members who had moved from Grape Island in the Bay of Quinte to the 3600 acre tract assigned in 1837. The name Alderville commemorates Reverend Alder who was a missionary to the band at the time.

Chief Bothwell pointed out that three historic treaties, one from the 1690's, the 1788 Gunshot treaty, and a 1923 document form the basis for negotiations. She emphasized the current efforts to recapture the skills and customs of her people and the importance of First Nations traditions to establish a sense of identity.

The Victoria College Museum

Karen Walker

A little known cultural institution of nineteenth century Cobourg was the Victoria College Museum. The diverse exhibits of this small but significant museum fascinated students and townspeople alike for more than forty years, giving them glimpses of a wide natural and cultural world.

The Victoria College Museum began in the 1850s as a geological and palaeontological collection of the College's Natural History Department. Under the direction of Professor Whitlock, a large number of specimens were purchased or donated by alumni and faculty. Among the earliest known acquisitions were fossils from the Niagara Peninsula that had been collected by Mr. DeCew and fossils from the Gaspé collected by Rev. Tollman. In 1863, Professor Harris journeyed to Bonn and purchased additional fossils as well as rocks and minerals and a particular prize, what was then the world's largest meteorite. This 313 lb. curiosity became a favourite with local souvenir hunters who, over the years, took such a toll that Cobourg's meteorite eventually ranked as only the world's second largest. In addition to serving as interesting exhibits for visitors, the Museum's fossils and rocks were studied in the College's Natural History and Geology classes.

In 1872 the Victoria College Museum was fortunate to receive a fine collection of ancient Egyptian antiquities. It was donated by Rev. Dr. Lachlan Taylor, a resident of Precious

Corners who had taught at Victoria in 1850. Dr. Taylor had acquired the artifacts, which included a 2500 year old mummy named An-Tjau and his sarcophagus, jewellery, and a mummified cat and ibis, in 1859. Like the geological and palaeontological specimens, the Egyptian collection was also used for classroom instruction. They were studied in the College's Theology classes. Theology had been introduced into the curriculum in 1871 by Dr. Nathaniel Burwash, a nephew of Dr. Taylor. Both the College and its Museum were expanding in scope.

Many more historical and anthropological collections came to the Victoria College Museum during the 1880s and 1890s. They came through sales or donations from alumni who, like Dr. Taylor, had become missionaries and teachers around the world. There were collections of Native British Columbian masks, carvings, and weapons from Rev. Robinson and Dr. Crosby and an array of objects from Oceania. In 1891 the College acquired a selection of Japanese antiques, including weapons, prints, pieces of armour, musical instruments and clothing, collected by E. Odum. The cost of purchasing these for the Museum was defrayed by Senator Sanford.

During the early years, the Museum's displays were likely located in the main hall of the College building. In 1878 they were moved to the newly constructed science building, Faraday Hall. Named after a British physicist, this two-and-a-half storey brick structure was the first Canadian university hall especially built for the study of the sciences. The museum's exhibits, which filled eleven showcases, were located on the second floor amidst laboratories and classrooms.

In 1892, Victoria College moved to Toronto to incorporate into the University of Toronto. The Museum continued to grow in its new home as more objects and collections arrived. These included horse-trappings, beadwork, and clothing of Plains tribes, a collection of mounted butterflies, a group of eight hundred Chinese coins, a stuffed Hooded Seal, and a second collection of ancient Egyptian artifacts. Among the many benefactors of the Museum were C. Massey, J. Treble, and Rev. Hart, all well remembered alumni of Victoria.

Among the men who supported the College's Museum at the turn of the century there was one with a particular dream. He was Charles Trick Currelly, a native of Exeter, Ontario with family roots in Port Hope, who had graduated from the Victoria in 1898. A chance meeting in England with then-Chancellor Burwash spawned the idea of developing Victoria's Museum into a world class institution. They soon convinced alumni and the College's Board of Regents to provide some funding for their ambitious plans, and by 1903 Currelly was purchasing objects for the Museum. His prizes included a group of Egyptian antiquities valued at the time at over \$1,000.

In a few years, the enthusiasm for expanding the Victoria College Museum on a grand scale had waned. The potential costs involved were becoming apparent. With his funding from Victoria College cut, Currelly rethought his plans and began to campaign for a museum attached not to Victoria College, but to the University of Toronto as a whole. Victoria's old collections remained important as they were the core around which this larger institution was built. The College's objects were likely featured in exhibitions organized between 1907 and 1909 to stimulate interest in Currelly's plans. His dream to build a world class museum at the University of Toronto was realized in 1914 with the opening of the Royal Ontario Museum. The Victoria College Museum's own collections were eventually transferred to the ROM and placed on permanent loan. Here the old objects which stood in Cobourg's Victoria College and Faraday Hall for more than forty years remain today.