

Lot 18 NDR: The Brown Family

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The census taker trod through the countryside that was Artemesia Township in the spring of 1852. Arriving at the log house of the Brown family at Lot 18 on the north side of the Durham Road¹, he recorded the names and ages of seven Canadian-born children and those of their African American parents, Lemuel and Phoebe Brown.

Lemuel had made his way into Canada years earlier. The census taker noted that he would turn 60 at his next birthday, while Phoebe would be 48. The children were listed as Benjamin (18), Mary (17), Charlotte (12), Hannah (9), Susana (5), William (3) and Louisa (1).

After arriving from the United States, Lemuel first lived in the Niagara area. The 1828 Grantham Township census shows 11 people in the Brown household. There were seven males and four females. Here he had another wife, but things obviously didn't go well in the marriage. A notice dated August 7, 1830 was placed at least twice in the *Niagara Gleaner* newspaper. It read, "Notice – Whereas my wife Rosanna has absconded – This is to all persons from harboring or trusting her on my account. Lemuel Brown. Niagara, Aug. 7, 1830."

In Niagara, Lemuel was an acquaintance of Richard Pierpoint, one of Ontario's most well-known members of the Black community. Pierpoint, an African, came to Canada in 1760 as a member of Butler's Rangers, and was listed as an United Empire Loyalist. Known as Captain Dick, he fought as a member of the Coloured Corps during the War of 1812. As a result of his War of 1812 service, Pierpoint was granted a 100 acre lot in Garafraxa Township. In 1828, at approximately 84 years of age, Pierpoint dictated his will. It included the following, "I have no heirs nor relations. I make Lemuel Brown my heir and Executor."

On September 27, 1838, Lemuel was in the Niagara courthouse with the will of Pierpoint. The old African had passed away. Half of Lot 6, Concession 1, Garafraxa Township, Lot 13, Concession 8, Grantham Township and all personal property were left to Lemuel, his heirs and assigns.

The Garafraxa lot was quickly sold to the neighbouring farmer for just over £53. Pierpoint's title to the Grantham lot was not registered in the land office. The Browns fought to get title until 1844, when their claim was finally turned down.

The Brown family moved a great deal over the years. When the Garafraxa land sale was registered on July 9, 1839, the family was in Guelph Township. In 1841, Lemuel's naturalization record shows him

¹ Lots on the north side of the Durham Road are legally referred to as Concession 1 NDR and those on the south side, Concession 1 SDR.

living in St. Catharines. When this document was signed on May 9, 1849, Lemuel was in Wellesley Township. This was part of the Queen's Bush Settlement, one of the largest African-Canadian communities in Ontario at the time.

As part of a migration from the Queen's Bush Settlement, the Browns moved north. Here we find him a farmer on the 50 acre Artemesia Lot 18 on the north side of the Durham Road. The family grew wheat, oats, potatoes and turnips on the five cultivated acres.

Their one ox provided power, while the milk cow provided the family's dairy products. Philemon Workman and his family lived on the next farm. Philemon was likely Phoebe's brother.

In 1871, Lemuel and Phoebe resided in Collingwood, the census record showing him as 70 years old, aging only 10 years in the previous 20 according to the census takers. The 1881 census lists Phoebe still in the port town, but now as a widow. Phoebe lived with her unmarried son Josh (born around 1859). After a year long illness, Phoebe passed away on August 12, 1896. She was listed as 89 years of age.

Josh worked as a steamboat cook and had a small stone cottage three streets over from his sister Hannah. She had married Joe Cooper and lived on the corner of Oak and Fifth Streets.

William worked on his Uncle Joe's fishing boat the "Lily May" and at his cork factory. Later he worked with Joe's sons at Cooper Bros. Construction Co.

Susan (listed as "Susana" in the census) had married Rev. William LeBurtis. She was a renowned herbalist who owned the LeBurtis Medicine Company in Woodstock. On visits to her family, she would collect a supply of herbs around Collingwood and New Lowell. The April 15, 1926 *Collingwood Enterprise* included this notice: "Died: On Thursday, at Woodstock, Mrs. Susan LeBurtis, nee Brown, in her 70th year. John, Alex and James Cooper of Collingwood are nephews. Born Artemesia Township, daughter of Lemuel Brown and Febe Workman, one of 17 children. Wife of Rev. Charles Wm. LeBurtis. Survived by her son, Alexander Green."



Present-day Photo of the Brown family lot