

2015 Black History Event and Journal Launch

Karin Noble



Peter Meyler, Naomi Norquay and Blaine Courtney

It was a beautiful day for travel. Upon arrival, attendees were able to view the vendor and information tables while enjoying morning refreshments, including a fabulous assortment of muffins.

We began the day with “opening remarks and housekeeping” by Terri Jackson, the event’s MC. Introductions were delivered by attending dignitaries: MP Larry Miller; MPP Bill Walker; Ian Boddy, Owen Sound Mayor; Carol Barfoot, Councillor for Georgian Bluffs on behalf of Georgian Bluffs Mayor, Alan Barfoot; and Emancipation Festival Chair, Blaine Courtney.

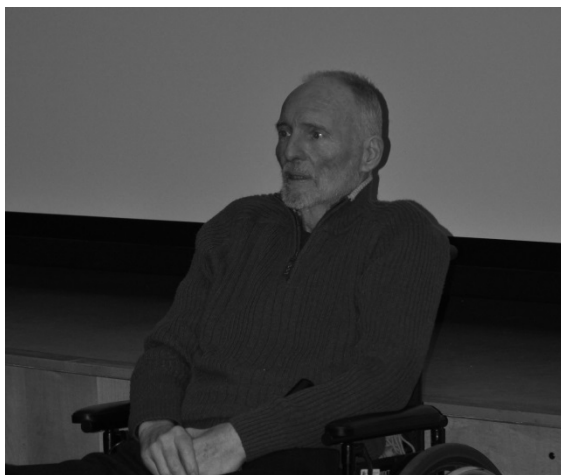
The first speaker was Lisa McAllister, who spoke about her new-found love of quilting (she’s done 10!) and the popularity of certain quilt patterns which have come to be associated with the Underground Railroad, due to books such as *Hidden in Plain View: A Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad* by Jacqueline L. Tobin and Raymond G. Dobard. She discussed that certain inaccuracies may have evolved: the Monkey Wrench pattern was not yet in

existence at the time of slavery, and there is a lack of written records on the topic. However, at the same time, the nature of escaping slavery does not lend itself to the written record. The symbolism may have been simpler, such as black fabric included in a quilt hanging outside a safe-house. In any case, the imaginative power and the teaching agency of the quilt symbolism cannot be denied.

The next speaker was Bonita Johnson-deMatteis, who recounted her journey both as an author and artist in the creation of children’s books published by the Ginger Press, and designing the Black History Cairn at Harrison Park in Owen Sound. The Emancipation Festival acknowledged the 10th anniversary of the Cairn as part of its 2014 festivities. Bonita shared her own family history, which inspired her books as well as the process of creating the Cairn. The Cairn features stones from the Stoney Orchard, site of the former Oliver Quarry where men of the Black community once worked, and are also commemorative of a tragic accident which occurred there in 1924. Bonita also echoed being artistically inspired by the Underground Railroad quilt narrative in the design of the Cairn. Finally, her presentation noted that replicas of two windows from the first British Methodist Episcopal Church in Owen Sound, otherwise known as “Little Zion”, are featured in the Cairn.¹ Looking through them, there is a beautiful view of the Sydenham River.



Rob Rolfe



Les MacKinnon

Next Rob Rolfe read poetry which is featured in Volume 12 of the *Journal*. He took his inspiration from the history of the Underground Railroad, the rugged terrain of this County and key Black History sites across it.

Ahead of lunch, Peter Meyler, Naomi Norquay and Blaine Courtney gave tribute to their friend and associate in the pursuit, documentation and advocacy of Black History in Grey County, Les MacKinnon. Their words were accompanied by the well-wishes of all the Event attendees. Les

¹The Owen Sound Mill Dam Tour details that the BME church was originally located at 745 2nd Ave. W.: item 12 <https://www.owensound.ca/tour/heritage-mill-dam-tour>. Bonita explained that only the wooden window frames exist now and are in the possession of the BME congregation at 245 11th St. W. Owen Sound.

then addressed the room with words of appreciation and encouragement.

Following lunch, researcher Peter Meyler shared material on his work regarding Richard Pierpoint, John “Daddy Hall”, and James Henson. His presentation tied in with an article appearing in Volume 12 which explores Billy Burns, who also escaped slavery with James Henson. Without the help of Burns, Henson testified in *Broken Shackles*, he would have drowned in the Ohio River.²

The day ended with the official launch of the Journal, with, as always, sincere thanks to the contributors, transcribers and assemblers. Thank you so much!

²To learn more see *Broken Shackles*, first published in 1889, and authored under the pseudonym “Glenelg”. Meyler also edited *Broken Shackles: Old Man Henson From Slavery to Freedom*, republished by Natural Heritage Books in 2001. Also see *A Stolen Life: Searching for Richard Pierpoint* by Peter Meyler and David Meyler, published in 1999 by Natural Heritage Books. Or view the Heritage Minute: <https://www.historicacanada.ca/content/heritage-minutes/richard-pierpoint>