

# 146<sup>th</sup> Emancipation Festival

## Community, Roots & Culture

August 1-3, 2008

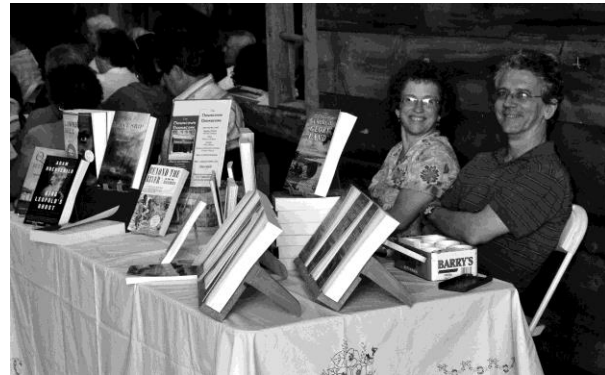
Grey Roots Museum & Archives, Harrison Park, and the British Methodist Episcopal Church, Owen Sound

### Amelia Ferguson

A weekend to celebrate and remember the journey of those who historically made the City of Owen Sound their safe haven and final destination on the Underground Railroad, the Festival also commemorates the British Commonwealth Emancipation Act of August 1, 1834. Since 1862, Owen Sound and area residents have been celebrating this occasion. Attendees also travel from all over Ontario and various places in the United States to participate in three days of music, lectures, art, games, crafts, and stories.



**Audience at the Speaker's Forum.**

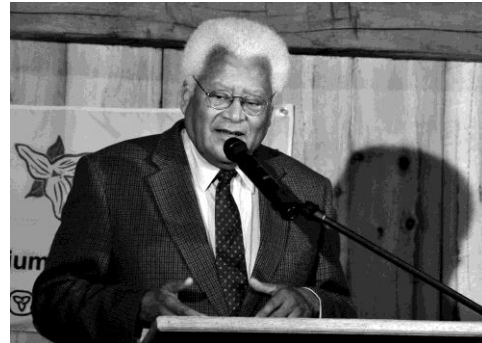


**The Downtown Bookstore at the Speaker's Forum.**

### **Speaker's Forum – Community, Roots & Culture – Perspectives**

The mid-summer evening sun peeked through the timber sided frame of the Barn located in the Moreston Heritage Village at Grey Roots Museum & Archives. It was a most enjoyable setting to take in the highly anticipated words of the evening's speakers: Bonita Johnson-deMatteis, Dr. Karolyn Smardz Frost, and Rev. James Lawson. Musical entertainment was provided by Eugene Smith and the Emancipation Jazz Band.

The night began with local artist and author, Bonita Johnson-deMatteis, speaking of the concept for her newest children’s book, *Threads: Piecing Together the Underground Railroad*. She grew up in a family which fostered its love of history and heritage through storytelling. She made promises as a young girl to never let the stories of her roots and the Underground Railroad fade. She was told, “never forget where you came from.” Now, as the author of two successful children’s books, Johnson-deMatteis has certainly fulfilled her promises.



**Above: Dr. Karolyn Smardz Frost.  
Upper right: Lisa and Dennis Scott.  
Lower right: Rev. James Lawson.**

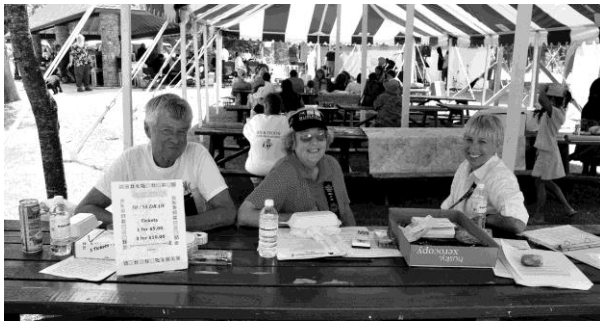
Also speaking about her latest book, *I’ve Got a Home in Glory Land: A Lost Tale of the Underground Railroad*, Dr. Karolyn Smardz Frost relayed the story of her complete immersion into the life of Thornton and Lucie Blackburn. Her journey started with an archaeological investigation into a site located in Toronto. The dig revealed remains of a residential dwelling. With her interest sparked as to who owned the property, her voyage into the world of archival documents and tracing family history began. Thornton Blackburn, and his wife Lucie, were escaped slaves from the Ohio River Valley, who made their way to freedom in Toronto. *I’ve Got a Home in Glory Land* was a recipient of the 2007 Governor General’s Award for Non-Fiction.

The final speaker of the evening was the highly anticipated Rev. James Lawson. Highly influenced by his father, Lawson combined a key interest in theology and spirituality with equality and activism. While at the Graduate School of Theology at Oberlin College, Lawson had the opportunity to meet Dr. Martin Luther King. This meeting would result in a close bond between the two men. Lawson moved to Nashville to teach workshops about the tactics of non-violent activism. He trained many future leaders of the Civil Rights Movement, who would later launch the Nashville Sit-Ins. His riveting lecture brought forth ideas of unity and harmony. His convictions that the use of non-violence in overcoming all struggles, whether they are economic, political, or social,

were inspiring. He asked that governments look out for the well-being of every person. He also relayed his idea that there are four evils present in the world which could very well destroy humanity: racism, violence, sexism, and materialism. He called to everyone to look fear in the eye, as it is the only force stopping us from achieving our true greatness. His last great hope is that we become a world-nation free of violence, racism, and prejudice.

### 146<sup>th</sup> Emancipation Celebration Picnic

The next day was certainly a blast. The festivities began in the early afternoon at Harrison Park and rolled on into the evening. This annual event is open to all in order to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to learn about the history and celebrate the contributions of Owen Sound's Black community.

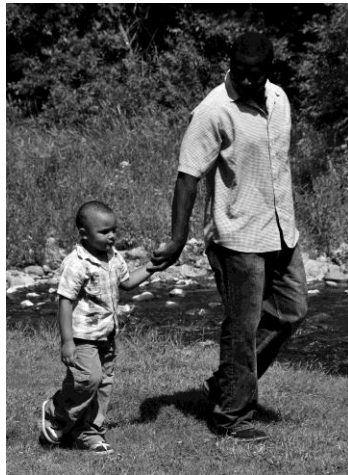


Registration table and tents at the Emancipation Celebration Picnic.

The day was filled with live music, games, races, special awards, crafts, storytelling, food, storyboards, exhibits, and a presentation at the Black History Cairn. The music included R&B, soul, and jazz genres, featuring Liberty Silver, Bobby "Dean" Blackburn & Friends, Michael Dunston, and Eugene Smith.

Children's races, family, and friends at the 146<sup>th</sup> Emancipation Celebration Picnic.





**Discovering history and family roots at the Emancipation Celebration Picnic.**



**Musical entertainment at the Emancipation Celebration Picnic.**

### **B.M.E. Gospel – 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Benefit Concert**

Sunday afternoon was the pinnacle of the weekend. The British Methodist Church was filled with “exuberant, exhilarating, and exciting” gospel music. Pastor Danny Graham, the Nursing Home Ministry Team, James Morton, Dave Cummings, Theresa Cunningham & Girls, Rollie Kuyvenhoven, Kacy & Nathan Crawford, Ruth Ann Plaxton, and the B.M.E. Choral Group, all delivered inspiring and uplifting performances. This was truly a spiritual event.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Emancipation Festival Art Show**

This annual community-based exhibit features fine arts, of all media, produced by area African-Canadian artists. This year’s show was curated by Doris Fraser and featured artists such as Susan Washington, Roxanne Joseph, and Linda Johnson.



**Above: Grandma's Creole Bread 10¢ a loaf by Anna-Maria Martin.**



**Right: Church Mother #1 by Linda Johnson.**

### **Come Celebrate With Us**

The 147<sup>th</sup> Emancipation Festival promises to deliver a fun and enlightening experience to all. The Speaker's Forum will be an evening of learning. The Picnic will be an afternoon of fun, and the Benefit Concert will be an afternoon of spiritual revival. Also included in the weekend's events are two exhibits at Grey Roots Museum & Archives. The 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Emancipation Festival Art Show will showcase pieces of all different media produced by area African-Canadian artists. This year's guest curator will be Bonita Johnson-deMatteis. Also at Grey Roots during the festivities is the exhibit *Enslaved Africans in Upper Canada*. This travelling exhibit from the Archives of Ontario examines the lives of enslaved Africans in Canada and focuses on the actions taken by slaves who resisted their servitude. It tells the story of a slave woman named Chloe Cooley, whose public resistance to being sold inspired Lieutenant-Governor Simcoe's 1793 Act to Limit Slavery in Upper Canada. This Act ultimately led to the end of slavery throughout the British Empire. Be sure to visit [www.emancipation.ca](http://www.emancipation.ca) to keep up-to-date on all the activities planned for the weekend.



**Left: 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Emancipation Festival Art Show Opening.**

**Above: Bonita Johnson-deMatteis and Doris Fraser.**