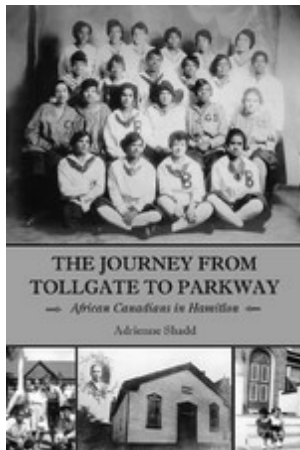


The Journey from Tollgate to Parkway: African Canadians in Hamilton

Adrienne Shadd

Natural Heritage Books, Toronto, 2010



Adrienne Shadd's *The Journey from Tollgate to Parkway* tells a largely unknown history: the impact of African Canadians in Hamilton. Of course, the parkway in the title is taken from the Lincoln Alexander Parkway, named for probably the most distinguished resident of the city. The Honourable Lincoln MacCauley Alexander had been a Member of Parliament, the Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario, and a leader in breaking down racial barriers.

Ms. Shadd traces the determination of Hamilton's African residents to build a better life for their families and community members. She covers more than 200 years of history and includes an overview of slavery in Upper Canada.

The Journey from Tollgate to Parkway is full of stories, anecdotes and statistics that provide a rich, complex and satisfying experience. I liken the book to pepperpot*, thick with a multitude of ingredients and spice, with echoes of Africa.

Like most African Canadian histories, only bits and pieces of information are available to researchers and writers. However, the amount of documentation uncovered, during what must have been a tremendous amount of research time, is astounding. These provide the richness of the book. The flavour is provided by the myriad of personal stories. Spice is provided by the fighting spirit of Hamiltonians, as they battled ignorance and prejudice. This is demonstrated by a story recounted by Ray Lewis, a world-class sprinter, who worked as a railway porter:

I remember a man said, "Boy, boy..." He called me "Boy" about a dozen times, and I ignored him. Then he said "Porter..." and I said, "Oh, were you calling me?" and I smiled right in his face. He took a ginger ale and left, and he was on the train three days and never spoke to me anymore.

In addition to the historical documents, the author spoke with a number of individuals with personal knowledge of Hamilton's community members, including Wilma Morrison of Niagara Falls. She provides first hand accounts of the role of the Stewart Memorial Church in the social life of the community.

In reminiscing about the late 1940s, Wilma Morrison recalled how the youth group of the church, led by Oliver Holland, held sit-ins in different Hamilton restaurants to combat segregated service.

Some of the individuals mentioned in the book are fairly well known, such as Lincoln Alexander and Enefers Griffiths, whose home is now the Griffin House National Historic Site of Canada. However, others are virtually unknown, such as that of Julia Berry, a tollgate keeper referenced in the book's title. In the 1881 census, Julia's husband Henry is listed as a labourer, while she is listed as a toll keeper. The couple eventually had 10 children, according to family members, some of who still live in the area.

Sadie and William Carter, another Hamilton couple, are also virtually unknown today, but were popular across much of North America. As proprietors and managers of both the Canadian Jubilee Singers and the Canadian Colored Concert Company, they toured widely. For example, the 1894-95 Jubilee Singers' tour lasted forty-seven weeks with stops in New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, with a final show in London, Ontario. Ms. Shadd notes that William died while on the road in 1906, but that the companies continued to perform for years thereafter.

Adrienne Shadd has managed to uncover the stories of many other such individuals. Because of her work, they and their lives can no longer be considered unknown and left out of Ontario's history.

The Journey from Tollgate to Parkway provides a valuable read for those interested in learning about one of Ontario's earliest and longest-standing African Canadian communities. Shadd links the people, places and events of Hamilton to the wider world of African American and African Canadian struggles and triumphs. Everyone and everything is included, from the barbers, to the grocers, to the whitewashers, and even to the cooks, who well may have been simmering a variant of Philadelphia pepperpot for Hamiltonians. A tasty read indeed.

*Pepperpot is a thick soup of various meats, tripe or fish with dumplings and vegetables that is highly spiced. It is popular in the West Indies and is considered the national dish of Guyana. John Lewis Krimmel's painting *Pepper-Pot: A Scene in the Philadelphia Market*, exhibited in 1811, shows an African American woman doling out pepperpot soup. Pepperpot is still available at Philadelphia's City Tavern.



Peter Meyler