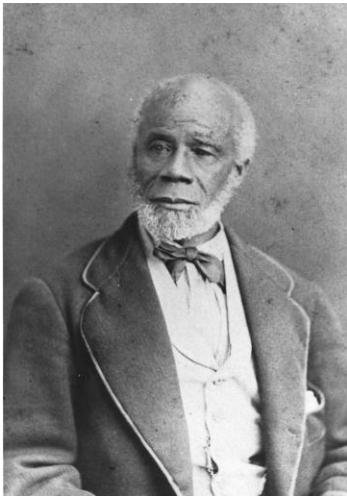


Black History Field Trip for Teachers

May 20, 2011

Naomi Norquay

On a lovely sunny Sunday at the end of May, a group of about 35 educators and children gathered at Stothart Hall in Priceville where they embarked on an exciting exploration of the historic Black community associated with the Old Durham Road in the former Artemesia Township (now a part of Grey Highlands). Organized by Gini Dickie (a Toronto District School Board school librarian) and myself (a teacher educator at York University), the day started with coffee and chat. The group included teachers from the Toronto and York Region District School Boards, as well as a couple of school principals, a superintendent, a university professor, some graduate students and the children of some of the participants.



Ned Patterson

The morning consisted of presentations. Terri Jackson and I presented on Ned Patterson, an Old Durham Road pioneer settler and citizen of Owen Sound. Petal Furness, Heritage Interpretation Supervisor at Grey Roots Museum and Archives, talked about children's programming on Black History at Grey Roots. Janie Cooper-Wilson, a descendent of the Old Durham Road Pioneer community, spoke about some of that history from her own perspective. There was a magical moment when Petal spoke about the meaningful and important connections the Black settlers had with the local First Nations people and then Janie spoke about her family's connections to the First Nation's community. You could have heard a pin drop! It was at that moment when Danielle Goyer of Danielle's Fine Foods arrived with our

lunch. Danielle later told me that she was absolutely spellbound by the stories being shared and regretted that her busy schedule kept her from spending the rest of the day with us.

After lunch we drove east on Grey Road #4, to my place, where we gathered around the foundation of Ned Patterson's house and thought about what it might have been like on a warm, sunny Sunday in the 1860s. One participant felt that actually standing by Ned Patterson's house gave her a strong spiritual connection to the land. For many of the participants, there was something special about just standing where this Black settler made his home.

We then crossed over #4 and followed a closed portion of the Old Durham Road, all the way into Priceville, stopping at the river. Janie Cooper-Wilson shared her considerable knowledge about wild

plants, sparking the imagination of some of the younger members of the group. The gentle breeze, the apple blossoms, the wild mint and the fallen-down cedar rail fence gave participants a sense of what life along the historic road would have been like. One person described the experience of walking the road as "mind blowing" because that was where escaped slaves had walked.

From there we drove out to the cemetery where we were warmly welcomed by members of the Old Durham Road Pioneer Cemetery Committee. A wonderful surprise awaited us! Shirley Hartley had brought along her magnificent tapestry quilt which was unfurled and held aloft by the two tallest in our group, Cecil Roach and Clayton LaTouche.¹ Participants were pleased to meet more descendants and learn about the reclamation of the cemetery and all the good work that the committee does. As many of them had seen the film, *Speakers for the Dead* (Holness and Sutherland, 2000), they found it quite poignant to actually visit the site.



Apple blossoms on the Old Durham Road

Why a field trip for teachers, you might ask? These committed educators plan on using what they learned to enhance the curriculum they already teach about Black settlement in Canada. They recognize the need to expand our knowledge beyond the Underground Railroad to include the stories and the history of our many Black settler communities, of which the Old Durham Road is one. And they want to return and learn more! Several of them expressed their intention to attend Owen Sound's Emancipation Day Picnic.

Gini and I are now busy planning another field trip for 2012. While the details are not worked out as of yet, there is talk of hiring a bus so more teachers can come and everyone can enjoy themselves without having to think about that long drive back to Toronto or York Region.

My thanks to Robert Fallico for his synthesis of the teachers' responses to the day.

¹ To read more about Shirley Hartley's embroidered quilt, please see Naomi Norquay's interview on page 1.