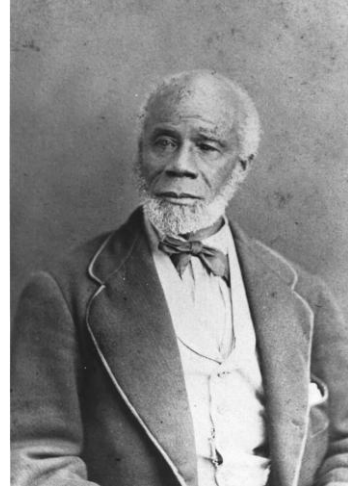


Finding Ned Patterson

Naomi Norquay



In 1966 my parents purchased three adjacent 50 acre lots in Artemesia Township in Grey County. We learned from our new neighbours that our property had once been owned by a Black preacher and that he had a home on the same hill where my parents built our cottage. As a ten year old child, I learned that Queen Victoria had given away land to escaped slaves from the United States along the road on which our property fronted: the Old Durham Road. Over the years I heard snippets of oral history about the Black preacher: he was a lay preacher; he had a gift with horses; he could make a laying horse stand up again. For some years he drove a stagecoach between two County towns, Owen Sound and Meaford.

After the release of the film, *Speakers for the Dead*¹, I became curious about this Black preacher and the other first non-Native settlers of my family's property. I made an initial trip to the Grey County Archives, which were then housed nearby in Glenelg Township. In a search through the land registries and Land Abstracts, I learned that the first of our lots, #8, Con. 1 SDR, was first owned by Royal (or Rozel) Simons, the son of Chauncey and Mehatable, who owned Lot #7. The Simons' second-born son, Christopher, is buried in the Old Durham Road Cemetery. Royal, sold Lot #8 to John Frost, a white resident of Owen Sound and father of the John Frost who penned *Broken Shackles*². In 1862, John Frost sold Lot #8 to an Edward Patterson.

At the time of my first encounter with these important historical documents, I wasn't sure which owner of Lot #8 was the Black preacher referred to in the oral history accounts from my childhood. Through my involvement with the Black History Event and then the journal, I got to know many people who shared my interest in the area's Black history. Among them was Greta Kennedy. Greta came across a photo at Grey Roots

¹ *Speakers for the Dead*, directed by David Sutherland and Jennifer Holness, National Film Board of Canada, 2000.

² *Broken Shackles: Old Man Henson from Slavery to Freedom*, by "Glenelg" (John Frost Junior), edited by Peter Meyler, Toronto: Natural Heritage Books, 2001.

Museum and Archives of a “Ned Patterson”³, and documentation that he had been a lay preacher and a stagecoach driver. She cited Ned Patterson’s death notice which described him as “a well known old coloured gentleman and bus driver back in the seventies”.⁴

These snippets of official documentation seemed to match the oral accounts of a preacher and a man who was good with horses. Having the photo helped in an interesting way. It gave me something in which to anchor my imagination. In the photo he appears as a well-dressed man in jacket, vest, shirt and tie, with a pocket handkerchief and a watch chain affixed to the front of his vest. His outfit seems in good condition - fitting of a man who held the status of preacher in his community. He looks away from the camera with gentle intensity. While not a sad face, it is a sombre one. I wish the photograph had included his hands, as they might reveal more about the man who may have made his way from enslavement in the United States to freedom in Canada. In various accounts, he is listed as a labourer, a farmer, a lay preacher and a bus - or stagecoach driver. He was also a husband and a father.

During my search for Ned these past few years, I have found reference to him in many official written documents (the census, the land registry, a farmers’ registry and cemetery listings.) Information thus provided about Ned Patterson often seems contradictory. These sources both confirm and befuddle the oral history. While land records and oral accounts place him on the Old Durham Road, he more often appears in the official written documents for Owen Sound. The Land Registry indicates that Ned purchased Lot # 8 Con. 1 S.D.R. in 1862, and then in 1868, purchased the adjacent Lot #9. The Land Registry seems to indicate that he sold both these lots in 1876, but then in 1881, bought them back and held them until 1889. A farmers’ registry from 1886-87 lists him as a farmer with a farm on the Old Durham Road. Ned is neither listed in the 1871, nor 1881 census for Artemesia Township, but he is listed as a resident of Owen Sound. Conversely, he is not listed in Owen Sound in the 1891 census, but rather in Artemesia, where he is listed as a farmer. If he sold his land in 1889, does this suggest that he continued to farm the land as a tenant farmer?

I conjecture that, like Chauncey Simons, who ventured from his farm to Owen Sound in the 1850s in search of work⁵, Ned was unable to eke out a living on his land. I am guessing that he made his permanent home in Owen Sound, but lived on his land in Artemesia during planting and harvesting seasons. That local residents tell stories of him as a Black preacher suggests that he may have tended to the spiritual needs of the adherents along the Old Durham Road and maintained a memorable presence in the community, despite his sporadic residency.

³ Grey Roots Museum and Archives, Ned Patterson image 1962.017.001, c. 1870s –1880s.

⁴ *The Times*, Owen Sound, Death notices Friday, February 19, 1904 (page 1, column 5)

⁵ *Broken Shackles: Old Man Henson from Slavery to Freedom*, by “Glenelg” (John Frost Junior), edited by Peter Meyler, Toronto: Natural Heritage Books, 2001, page 193.

From the Owen Sound records, I learned that he arrived in Canada in 1855. By 1861, he had taken up lodgings at Coulson's Hotel, which was known as a house of refuge for escaped slaves. I learned that he married and had six children. He is listed in the 1871, 1881 and 1901 census as a resident of Owen Sound. He died in 1904 and is buried in the Greenwood Cemetery in Owen Sound in a family plot that also contains his wife, Susannah, and some of their children.

Below, I have listed the information about Ned that I gleaned from various official written documents:

1861 Census (for Owen Sound)

Edward Patterson (aged 37) is listed as a resident of Coulson's Hotel
occupation: labourer

1871 Census (for Owen Sound)

Edward Patterson (aged 46) is listed along with his wife Susannah (aged 30) and
Edward Allen (aged 1 / 12 - suggesting he was one month old)
occupation: labourer

1881 Census (for Owen Sound)

Edward Patterson (aged 55) is listed along with his wife Susannah (aged 42),
Thomas (aged 7), Frederick (aged 5), Edward (Allen) (aged 3), Susannah (aged 1)
occupation: teamster

1891 Census (for Artemesia)

Edward Patterson (aged 66) is listed along with his wife Susannah (aged 51),
Thomas R (aged 17), Frederick W (aged 15), Allen E (aged 13), Susannah (aged
11), Ida Sarah (aged 9) and Sarah Allen (aged 44)
occupation: farmer

1901 Census (for Owen Sound)

Edward Patterson (aged 76) is listed along with his wife Susannah (aged 62),
Allen (aged 23), Ida (aged 19) and Lee Thompson (aged 6 - listed as a nephew of
Susannah's)
Ned is listed as a retired bus driver
his son Allen is listed as a cook
according to this census, Ned arrived in Canada in 1855
His birth date is given as : March 10, 1825
Susannah's birth date is given as: May 12, 1836
Allen's birth date is given as January 9, 1878⁶

⁶ The Cemetery Index lists Allen Patterson's dates as 1877 - 1960

Ida Sarah's birth date is given as December 11, 1881⁷

Land Registry for Artemesia Township

in 1862, Ned purchased Lot #8 Con. 1 SDR (South side, Durham Road)
in 1868, he purchased Lot #9 Con. 1 SDR
in 1876, he sold both lots
in 1881, he bought them back
in 1889, he sold them again

1865 W.W Smith Gazetteer and Directory of the County of Grey 1865-1866
lists Ned as living at Johnson's Hotel, working as a hostler⁸

1886 - 87 Farmers Registry for Grey County

lists Ned as a farmer on Con. 1 SDR , but a resident of Owen Sound

An 1858 Oxford University Press Holy Bible

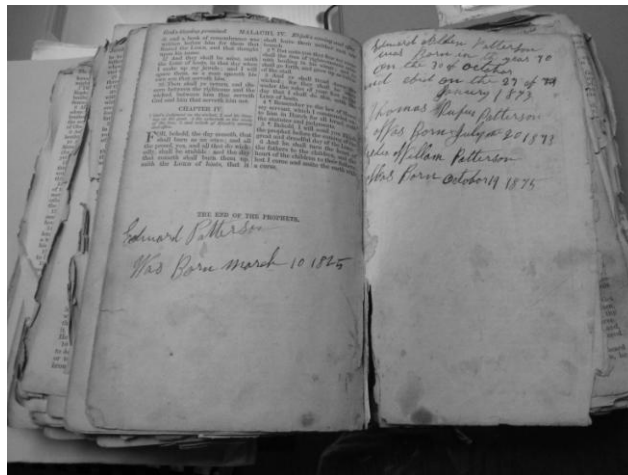
(donated, in the early 1960s, to what is now Grey Roots Museum & Archives)

Ned, March 10, 1825 - February 12, 1904

Edward Allen Patterson, October 30, 1870 to January 27, 1873⁹

Thomas Rufus, July 23, 1873

Frederick William, October 19, 1875



Greenwood Cemetery Records

“Edward Patterson, d. January 27, 1872, 2 yrs., 2 mos., 27 days, son of Edward

⁷ This date matches that provided in the Cemetery Index.

⁸ A hostler cares for horses.

⁹ The Ontario Index of Vital Statistics lists Edward Allen as dying on January 27, 1872. In the 1871 census lists Edward Allen as one month old. These dates contradict each other.

and Susannah Patterson”

“Edward Patterson, March 10, 1825 - February 12, 1904 (Masonic)”

“Susannah, wife of Edward Patterson, May 12, 1833 - September 16, 1910, asleep in Jesus”¹⁰

“Thomas Rufus, 1873 - 1923”

“Sarah Allen, wife of Francis Molock, August 8, 1840 - April 18, 1927”

“Ida Sarah Patterson, December 11, 1881 - August 10, 1954”

“Allen E. Patterson, 1877 - 1960”

While this information gives a time line and a general location for Ned for most of his years in Canada, as well as basic information about his occupation and his family, none of it animates the man. Besides containing inaccuracies, statistics such as these lack substance regarding the quality of life, the inner life of a person, their hopes and dreams, what they thought about the world around them and how they navigated roadblocks placed in their way. While I acknowledge and respect the usefulness of these historical documents, especially in the painstaking work of piecing together the lives of those who are marginal to the official record, they are not the only reliable evidence of a life lived.

While oral accounts have their own limitations, they are the historical fabric that is shaped and shared by the community in which the history took place. The first sources of information that animated Ned were my neighbours and their stories about him. The farmer who told my family about “the Black preacher” seemed amused. There was something in the tone of his voice that conjured up the early settler on our land as someone who people liked and respected. When I was older, another neighbour told me about Ned’s gift for horses. Again, there was something in her voice and the twinkle in her eye that suggested that Ned was liked and respected, and also someone who caught people’s imagination. These two stories, told by an “old-timer” and a relative newcomer, respectively, place Ned in the community in a way that statistics cannot.

My journey now attempts to come to know Ned Patterson outside the contexts of the written and oral record. I wish to know more about him, about aspects of his life that will not appear in the written record, and which have not surfaced in the oral stories I have heard about his life. And so I turn to the one thing that I share with Ned Patterson, and that is the land. My relationship to this land is an intimate one. For more than 40 years I have engaged with it as a child playing hide and seek, as a hiker and cross-country skier, as a gardener and a forester, as a forager of wild things to eat, and more recently as an amateur historian. I believe I know this land in all its seasons and through all its recent changes. The land is a site of both remembering and forgetting, through all the cyclical changes that accompany the seasons and the gradual change occurring as cleared land is reclaimed by forest. The land has the potential to both offer up autobiographical traces of this early settler and to cover his tracks at the same time.

¹⁰ The year of her birth given here contradicts the 1901 census.

This process of nature is a reminder to me of how uncovering the history of the Black settlers in Grey County has been achieved in a climate and context that still works hard to suppress that history. Gravestones have disappeared from Black settler cemeteries. Negro Creek Road has survived one attempt to be renamed after a white settler. The Old Durham Road Pioneer Cemetery Committee has met with resistance from the municipality in its bid to try to locate buried stones¹¹. Some local oral history downplays the presence of Black descendants in the community. The 2005 Business Directory for Flesherton did not mention Black settlers at all in its brief paragraph on the history of Artemesia¹².

By turning to the land, I look for evidence that is immutable, or only plausible, but capable of offering glimpses of this early settler. To do this, I draw on Marlene Kadar's notion of the "autobiographical trace"¹³, which utilizes actual historical artefacts as sites of remembering a life lived. In what follows I focus on three traces of Ned Patterson: a foundation wall, an apple tree and the refuse from a kitchen midden. Each one provides evidence of the land's memory and its cycles of remembering and forgetting. While their actual connection is speculative, I use them to provoke questions about Ned and the details of settler life along the Old Durham Road in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Foundation Wall

In her article, "Domestic Space and the Idea of Home in Auto/biographical Practices", Kathy Mezei observes that although domestic spaces (and their details, such as furniture, rooms, windows, doors and the like) are often considered banal, they are "vital to the shaping of ... memories, ... imagination and ... selves"¹⁴. Further, she argues that domestic spaces are "the product of society, they express and reinforce its norms,

¹¹ See the interview in this issue with Carolynn Wilson.

¹² The paragraph reads: "Artemesia Township was described by the Government of the Dominion of Canada as a 'veritable garden of Eden' in its solicitation for emigrants to settle in this area. With the promise of 50 acres free and 50 acres for 50 cents per acre, European settlers began arriving in the mid 1850s. By 1861 Artemesia had a population of 2,575". *Flesherton and District Chamber of Commerce Business Directory*, 2005, page 3.

¹³ Marlene Kadar and Jeanne Perreault, "Introduction: Tracing the Autobiographical: Unlikely documents, Unexpected Places". *Tracing the Autobiographical*. Eds. Marlene Kadar, Linda Warley, Jeanne Perreault, Susanna Egan. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005, pages 1 - 7.

¹⁴ Kathy Mezei, "Domestic Space and the Idea of Home in Auto/biographical Practices", in *Tracing the Autobiographical*. Eds. Marlene Kadar, Linda Warley, Jeanne Perreault, Susanna Egan. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005, page 82.

social practices and ideologies”¹⁵.

The foundation of Ned’s home is right beside our driveway. Sometimes you can see it and sometimes you can’t. The summer grasses fill in and cover it so successfully that you can’t see the foundation unless you know it’s there. In the winter, being in what is called “the snow belt,” the snow covers and rarely leaves any indentation at all. The best time to see it is in the spring. The home would have been a modest structure, likely made from logs, with a field stone foundation. In the springtime, an entrance to the building is most visible. I have come to understand this doorway on both a literal and symbolic plane. Kathy Mezei suggests that doors and doorways mark “a liminal space separating outside from inside. ... As intermediary between inside and outside the door serves as a structural device of passage, entrance and departure.” The Ned Patterson we “know” is a public man: a lay preacher, farmer, stagecoach driver. The doorway to his home invites us into his life as a private citizen.



Dionne Brand’s “door of no return” marks the domestic space as a place of belonging and unbelonging¹⁶. Brand’s door of no return refers to the doors on the African holding cells, through which captured Africans passed, never to return. Doors mark both safety and danger, home and exile. Karolyn Smardz Frost notes that Thornton and Lucie Blackburn, who were escaped slaves living in Toronto and running the city’s first cab company, built a home whose structure was “a classic African American ‘shotgun house’”¹⁷. This style of building, wherein the front door lined up with the back door, had travelled from West Africa to America. Derived from the Yoruban word for house (*togun*), the alignment of the doors meant that evil spirits could easily pass through without harming the occupants¹⁸. Doorways, then, may signify much more than simple entry and exit from

a house. For escaping slaves, doors opening and closing could mean the difference between continued bondage and freedom.

The foundation wall’s stones, all moss-covered, have maintained their orderliness,

¹⁵ Ibid, page 81.

¹⁶ Dionne Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2001, page 6

¹⁷ Karolyn Smardz Frost, *I’ve Got a Home in Glory Land: A Lost Tale of the Underground Railroad*, Toronto: Thomas Allen Publishers, 2007, page 264.

¹⁸ Ibid, page 264.

all stacked and some still mortared together. The mortar is home-made, typical of the era. It is local limestone that has been fired and mixed with river sand. On a literal level, these stones provide concrete evidence of a dwelling. Symbolically, they evoke the sensibilities of setting down roots, of building order amongst frontier chaos, of cementing fragments of a life together. I salvaged a couple of pieces: the cool and rough feel of the mortar brings Ned into my grasp; a remnant of his labour or another's - someone who had a stone mason's skills. The mortar stands as evidence of the local frontier economy where goods and services are bartered, traded and sold, often between neighbours. The mortar and stone foundation gesture to Ned's participation in that local economic sphere.

Looking at the entrance to Ned's home, I wonder if he encountered his new domestic space as laden with mixed meanings: as a symbol of freedom or a reminder of confinement; as safe harbour or a dangerous space to flee from at a moment's notice. Did he seek sanctuary behind his closed door, away from a harsh climate, or the daily prejudices that may have shaped his participation in the wider community? Did he look out and feel amazement that he actually owned the land on which his house stood? Did he look out one day and realize that the landscape had not only become familiar, but also "home"?



Apple Tree

Right next to the foundation wall which remains of Ned Patterson's home, is a wild apple tree. It is one of dozens that dot the landscape – both on the property and along

the Old Durham Road. They are the off-spring of the original trees planted by Ned and other settlers. According to Michael Pollan in *The Botany of Desire: A Plant's-Eye View of the World*¹⁹, settlers grew apple trees for cider. Apples, like humans, are zygotes. They do not reproduce exact replicas of themselves. There is no telling what the fruit of any given apple tree will be like. All the apples we eat today come from grafts. Settlers didn't usually purchase grafts from travelling "Johnny Appleseeds," they purchased apple seedlings²⁰. Cider can be made from just about any apple, sweet or sour.

I wondered how it might be that Ned Patterson, a lay preacher, would grow apples for cider. Michael Pollan's account of John Chapman (a.k.a. Johnny Appleseed) in the Ohio frontier suggests that perhaps because there were no biblical references to cider (only to grapes and wine), many Puritans and other religious types did not oppose the drinking of cider²¹. John Chapman, a highly religious man, was no exception, and cider was a ubiquitous part of pioneer life, often being safer to drink than water. In Ohio, settlers had to plant 50 apple or pear trees before they could receive the deed to their land²². According to Pollan, apple trees symbolized "an idealized or domesticated version of a forest" and as such were thought to be "a comfort on the frontier"²³.



The blossoms on the tree near Ned's home are wonderfully pink and resplendent in the spring. They fruit in late summer and the apples that do not fall to the ground get eaten by deer in the winter. Their brown leathery skins hold in a thick, fermented syrup, not unlike applejack (a highly potent cider made from frozen apple pulp).

Their presence on the land gesture towards Ned's domestic life. It is this life that remains invisible in the written record and oral accounts. The apple trees invite me into that domestic sphere. Mindful of Kathy Mezei's observation that societal practices shape domestic spaces²⁴, I note that while Ned's home

¹⁹ Pollan, Michael, *The Botany of Desire: A Plant's-Eye View of the World*, New York: Random House Publishing Group, 2001

²⁰ Ibid, page 15.

²¹ Ibid, page 20.

²² Ibid, page 16.

²³ Ibid, page 16.

²⁴ Kathy Mezei, op.cit., page 81.

is private, the presence of apple trees bespeaks his place in a community and within a set of social relations as a neighbour, a co-labourer, and a pioneer settler. I imagine him as someone who respected traditions, and who marked the seasons by the apple trees that blossomed and fruited. I acknowledge that he likely did all of this amidst a wider culture that enforced unwritten racial codes of behaviour and exclusion. The apple trees' annual cycle calls forth remembrance of a life that remains largely forgotten and at times disavowed. Their insistence on being a part of the current landscape, part of the reclaimed forest, is, for me, a reminder that forgotten and denied history will continuously seek out opportunities to be discovered.

Kitchen Midden

Every spring when I turn the soil in the garden, I find little pieces of broken crockery: patterned porcelain and china, thick bits of earthenware; and hand-hewn nails. Being far enough north, the ground freezes in the winter and then thaws and expands in the springtime. The expansion pushes things to the surface. The local farmers always joke that stones are the first crop off their fields. Frost heave, then, becomes an insistence that we remember. The ground literally holds the past in its grip, and then lets go and pushes it to the surface. If you pay attention when you dig, you can uncover what has been forgotten.



It is quite likely that my garden is where Ned had his kitchen midden (the refuse heap), a stone's throw from the stone foundation of his house. The midden marks another boundary between the inside and outside spaces of the settler's life.

There is an intimacy about these fragments of crockery. They are unassuming, easily overlooked and discarded again. But they hint at Ned's domestic arrangements, to a life lived not only on the land and in the pulpit, but also in the kitchen, in the quiet of the evening or early morning. They remind me that while the oral history only concerns Ned Patterson, he had an entire household living with him at the time of the 1891 census. The kitchen midden is a reminder of both the intimacy and the immediacy of family life.

Conclusion

Both literally and metaphorically, I try to piece these found fragments together. As traces of a life, they open up spaces of interrogation that are often overlooked when we only rely on the same regimes of documentation and standard research tools. They place Ned within not only a community but also a landscape. They help us wonder about what he thought and felt - about his life, his freedom, the choices he made, the changing

seasons, or perhaps, the angle of light in the forest on a mid-February afternoon. As offerings from the land's memory, I note the seasonal pattern of remembering and forgetting. In a context that both acknowledges Ned Patterson and disavows him at the same time, the shards of crockery, the apple trees and the foundation wall persist and situate his life in this landscape. As I come to know this man, a fellow sojourner on the land, I look forward to this spring's blossoms.