

# Finding Black History in Grey County: A Guide to Historic People and Places

Peter Meyler

*“Henson here found a large colony of African people. There was a stretch of three miles on the Durham Road which was all occupied by black families.”*

~From the book *Broken Shackles: Old Man Henson, From Slavery to Freedom*

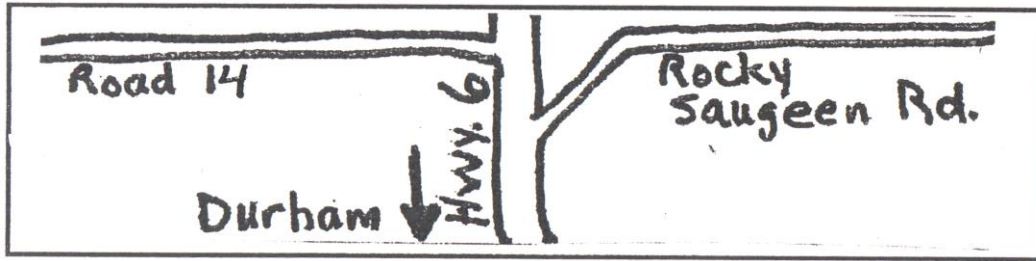
**Jim Henson**, an escaped slave from Maryland, was living in Lockport, New York, when a Black man (Chauncey Simons) arrived from Canada, and told him a wonderful story. “The Queen,” said he, “is making a present of fifty acres of land to every man, and gives him a chance to buy fifty acres more at one dollar and half an acre when he is able to pay for it. It’s just the place for a poor man,” said he. In answer to Henson’s inquiry as to the quality of the land, he stated that it was “as good as a crow ever flew over.” It was also learned from Simons that the place where Her Majesty was pleased to manifest her generosity in this hitherto unheard of manner was in the Province of Upper Canada, in the County of Grey and Township of Artemesia. Simons created considerable excitement among the black people of Lockport over the Queen’s free lands.

“The hills of Artemesia,” said he, “are full of the best gravel for making roads. Its woods of fine building timber are full of pheasants, pigeons, fox, deer and black bear. Its pebbly streams swarm with speckled trout, the finest fish in the world. These and her little lakes are the home of the mink, marten, otter, beaver, and wild duck. On their banks, cherries, nuts and berries of many sorts grow wild. Its wild plum orchards, loaded in the spring with the prettiest of white and pink blossoms, bear abundance of fruit. Its maple trees give sugar and its soil yields fine wheat and other grains and splendid vegetables. Thus are the wants of the settler well provided for. Right there is the great Cuckoo Valley, stretching from the big Artemesia Falls far away to the Blue Mountains and to Georgian Bay, presenting scenery that must please all lovers of the picturesque, the grand and beautiful. My friends, it is a wonderful land. It’s the finest country I ever clapped my eyes onto, and reminds me of what the paradise of our first parents must have been.”

## **Rocky Saugeen Park**

The Rocky Saugeen area was the home of John “Daddy” Hall, one of the most well-known Grey County settlers of African heritage. He was born at Amherstburg in Upper Canada (now Ontario). His mother was African and his father was said to be Mohawk. He was captured during the War of 1812 and taken into slavery in Virginia and Kentucky. After 13 years, he escaped and came home. He then lived at Amherstburg, the Credit River, Toronto and Newmarket prior to moving to Rocky Saugeen in the 1840s. In

1851, "Daddy" Hall moved his family to Owen Sound where he was said to be 118 years old when he died in 1900.



### **The Old Durham Road Pioneer Cemetery**

*Lot 21, 1<sup>st</sup> Concession North of Durham Rd.*

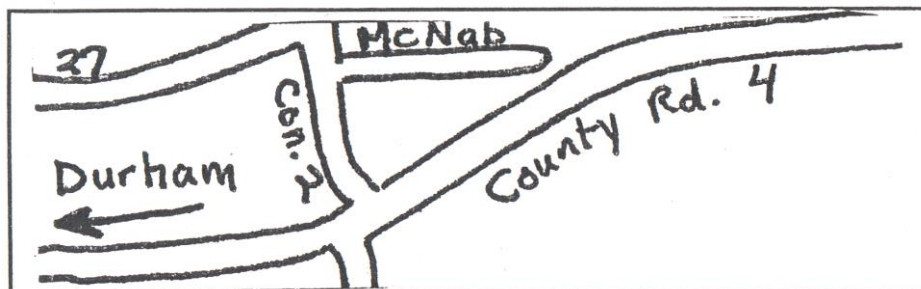
The Old Durham Road Pioneer Cemetery, which had been planted over with potatoes during the 1930s depression, is found at the corner of County Road 14 and Durham Road B. Fifty or sixty early black settlers may be buried here, but only four headstones have been recovered.

### **Price Burial Place**

An unmarked cemetery west of Priceville, on the north side of County Road 4 (Lot 49, on the 1<sup>st</sup> Concession N.D.R.) is reported to be the burial site of "Colonel" Price. Price is said to have been a black settler.

### **Darkies Corners, East of Durham**

Many names of black settlers have been lost over the years, however, some local place names indicate that African communities existed in the area. One of these is Darkies Corners, found at the crossing place of the Saugeen River east of Durham. It is located north of Grey Rd. 4 on Concession Rd. 2 EGR (East of Garafraxa Road) at McNab Lane.



### **Louis Craig family**

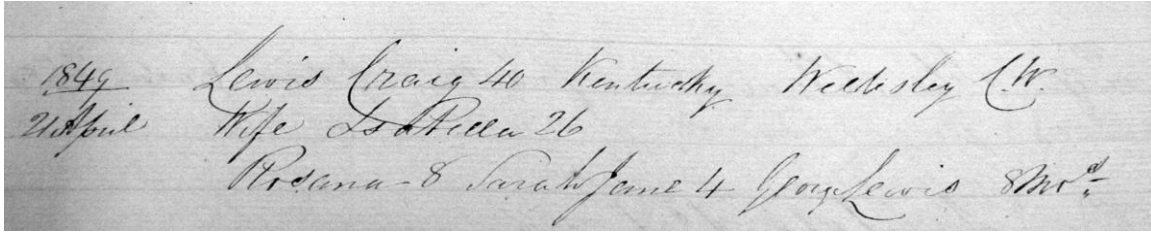
*Bunessan at Baptist Church Road*

Louis Craig came from Kentucky and received land in Glenelg Township in 1849 with his Irish wife Susanna. At that time, their children were Rosanna, Sarah Jane and George Lewis. Neighbours remembered Louis' story of escaping through swamps, hiding out during the daytime, and of the kind people who helped him on the way to Canada. The scar on his neck from a slaver's lash also was recalled. The Craig land was located at Grey Rd. 4 and Baptist Church Road, east of the Bunessan School House.

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Entry for Lewis Craig in the Old Durham Road Registry

**Gabriel Black family**

*Lot 21, 1<sup>st</sup> Concession South of Durham Road*

In 1861, the census showed a population of 2,575, with 471 landowners. A gazetteer noted that “a very large amount is yet unpatented.” However, one patentee was African American Gabriel Black. The 1851 census shows 28 year-old Gabriel, his 21 year-old wife Elsey, and their Canadian born children, Peter (age 8) and Sarah (age 1), in Artemesia on lot 21 on the 1<sup>st</sup> concession on the south side of the Durham Road. Gabriel Black also had owned land in several townships of Grey County.

**The Simons Family**

*Lots 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 1<sup>st</sup> Con. South of Durham Road and Lot 12 1<sup>st</sup> Con. North of Durham Road*

Chauncey, the man who promoted the township to African Americans, was associated with lots 7, 8, 9, and 13 on the 1<sup>st</sup> concession, S.D.R., while Rozel is shown with lot 12 on the north side of the Durham Road. In the 1851 census, the Simons household consisted of 47 year-old Chauncey, 48 year-old Mehilebe and 18 year-old Rozel, all born in the United States. The Simons children were Christopher, 15, Charles, 13, and Rosannah, 10. At that time, the family had one acre under cultivation and a cow to provide milk and butter.

**The Schoolhouse**

In 1865, one-half acre of the Black family lot was severed for School Section No. 7. The previous year the average attendance had been 46 for Miss Margaret Laidlaw, the teacher. The school is still in the same location, but is now a residence.



S.S.#7 Artemesia

**Christopher J. Simons**

The Old Durham Road cemetery was the last resting place of the 17 year-old son of Chauncey Simons.

**James Handy, Snr.**

*Lot 30 and 31, 1<sup>st</sup> Con. South of the Durham Rd.*

One of the found headstones belongs to 95 year-old James Handy, who died March 27, 1863. The Handys were the first settlers on lots 30 and 31 on the 1<sup>st</sup> concession south of the Durham Road. Early land records also connect James Senior, James Junior, and James Handy III to lots 24, 25, and 26 along the Durham Road

