

“Lifting As We Climb”:
The Emergence of an African-Canadian Civil Society in Southern Ontario (1840-1901)

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

This dissertation examines Black civil society organizations that brought the African-Canadian community closer to their rights as citizens of Canada West from 1840-1901. Past scholars have applied the concept of civil society to White organizations, but the following considers civil society organizations in the context of African-Canadian life. Through a broader discussion of multiple Black cultural organizations, including literary societies, fraternal orders, religious societies, and etiquette groups, “Lifting As We Climb” highlights the community’s training of future activists and the application of the lessons learned within the walls of these groups to “mainstream” society. During the nineteenth century African Canadians experienced the harsh realities that accompanied their newfound freedom in Canada West, particularly from racist Whites. In response, the Black community utilized African-Canadian cultural organizations to create change. “Lifting As We Climb” argues that, while African-Canadian citizens came together through organizational work, for the common and overarching reason of equality, their fight against injustice resulted in the emergence of a Black civil society. Within Black civil society, participants of any “gender,” “class,” or religion had a voice. Through these organizations, African Canadians gained the confidence to challenge the status quo, but also realized that there would be sacrifices to be made, particularly in terms of their previous political allegiances. This was a change they were willing to make. African-Canadian groups also understood the significant role of children, recognizing that there would be no progress without the next generation, which is why many Black activists invested substantial time and energy into working with children: they wanted to ensure that their work would continue. This dissertation brings to light the numerous contributions of unknown, and well-known, Black activists and organizations, and demonstrates that both leaders and followers could make a difference.

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The title of this work, “Lifting As We Climb,” not only summarizes the collective action of African Canadians during the nineteenth century, it also represents my journey. Throughout this entire process I have considered myself truly blessed as a result of the amazing support system that has surrounded and guided me along the way. Any positive thoughts or words of encouragement raised me up toward my final goal. Endless gratitude goes to my supervisor, James Walker. Having the opportunity to learn what I am sure is only a fraction of his extensive knowledge will be a memory I will value forever. From the very beginning his words (especially emails) of encouragement have navigated me through this challenging process. As one of the foremost experts in African-Canadian history, his words of wisdom, criticism, and feedback have been invaluable. This work is the result of his influence.

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Dedication

To Brian: During the highs and lows you remained a constant source of strength,
always pushing me forward.

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Introduction: Civil Society: The Space In Between

“Lifting As We Climb,” the motto for the Frederic [sic] Douglass Self-Improvement Club, encapsulates the feelings and intentions of a majority of African Canadians during the nineteenth century. It was the Black community’s hope that while active and successful African Canadians were thriving in nineteenth-century Canada West (Ontario), these same individuals (and groups) would simultaneously aid their fellow community members in their struggles against poverty, illiteracy, and racism. Essentially, their mission was to assist others while they helped themselves.¹ To do this, incoming Blacks and those already residing in the province joined together for a common and overarching reason: to elevate the Black community beyond the tremendous suffering and negative stereotypes they endured under slavery so that they could achieve equality. This gathering of African Canadians to fight injustice resulted in the emergence of a Black civil society, consisting of numerous organizations with the purpose of educating and training Black citizens to fight for fair treatment and policy.

This is certainly not the first time that the Black community created a civil society, but what made nineteenth-century activists in Southern Ontario unique was their goal and tactics. Enslaved and free African Americans were working toward their own version of civil society in the US where they, not their master, held ownership over their lives. This goal was achievable once they left the United States for Canada, resulting in a reshaping of Black civil society, which meant that a new goal and strategy were necessary. It was no longer about having control over their own lives because that became a reality the second they stepped foot on Canadian soil but, rather, about gaining equality in a free society. With this new goal African Canadians organized

¹ Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy A Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 54.

into large and small groups to educate, boycott, petition, and utilize the legal system to achieve their equal rights which were promised to all British subjects.

Civil society is the space where collective action takes place. It is within this space that participants with common concerns and interests try to advance themselves and their well-being.² More specifically, Andrew Arsan, et al. add that civil society consists of challenges to the state in order to transform local societies for a common humanity centred on the principles of freedom, justice, and equality, regardless of a person's "race," "class," or faith. He also states that this concept was experienced and utilized in various, at times contradictory, ways by multiple actors.³ In this case, the varied and contradictory ways were the different tactics adopted, while the multiple actors were the countless African Canadians who either migrated to Canada West following the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which ordered the legal return of slaves to their owners, or were already residing in the country. The goal of equality did exist before the Fugitive Slave Act, but the growing number of free African-Canadian residents residing in the province increased the need for Black civil society organizations in their drive for equal rights in a free society. Before the Fugitive Slave Act, the number of African Canadians was far fewer, but the increasing numbers of Black residents were seen as a threat to Whites, therefore causing hatred toward this group to amplify. Higher levels of discrimination pushed the Black community to strengthen their defence against racism, whether in small towns, big cities, or beyond. John Ehrenberg adds that, in all civil societies, there was diversity in participation: those involved came from different families, classes, occupations, and

² https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/civil_society; Carmen Malena and Volkhart Finn Heinrich, "Can We Measure Civil Society? A Proposed Methodology for International Comparative Research," *Development in Practice* 17:3 (June 2007), 338, 340.

³ Andrew Arsan, Su Lin Lewis, and Anne-Isabelle Richard, "Editorial - the roots of global civil society and the interwar moment," *Journal of Global History* 7:2 (July 2012), 159.

circumstances of birth.⁴ Considering the circumstances of their birth, many African descendants, particularly those previously enslaved, were well suited for participation in civil society organizations. Their history of resistance made them perfect candidates. The African-Canadian community's propensity for forming and attending organizational meetings makes Ehrenberg's statement applicable to this group: African-descended people, of any circumstance, proved themselves to be joiners while living as free citizens. It would not be until after the Civil War that all African Americans would gain freedom on American soil, allowing them to use organizational work to achieve social change as free men and women.⁵ Years before, African Canadians developed numerous organizations to alter negative perceptions and unfair policy, but they had the opportunity to challenge injustice as free citizens.

The focus of this work is the associational life of African Canadians through an unconventional outlet: cultural groups. As a result, other civil society institutions commonly associated with activism receive less attention, despite contributing significantly to the cause. This includes the Black press and the church. The limited discussion of the press and church should not be misconstrued as a lack of appreciation for their contributions, but is meant, instead, to prevent the overshadowing of other civil society organizations. The press and church were extremely significant to the Black community, which is reflected in numerous scholarly works. As a result, each is only mentioned in connection to organizational work. In terms of the press, it is referred to when used as a medium for informing the public of how to form and operate civil

⁴John Ehrenberg, *Civil Society: The Critical History of an Idea* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 17.

⁵Theda Skocpol, Jennifer Lynn Oser, "Organization despite Adversity: The Origins and Development of African American Fraternal Associations," *Social Science History* 28:3 (2004), 402-403; Joe William Trotter, "African American Fraternal Organizations in American History: An Introduction," *Social Science History* 28:3 (2004), 363.

society organizations, and also how these groups used the press to spread their message.⁶ In reference to the church, its application comes through religious groups, rather than the church itself. The point is not to present the religious history of the community but, rather, to highlight the outreach provided by religious organizations that extended from the church.⁷ Therefore, when the involvement of the church and the press contributed to the creation, advancement, etc. of other civil society groups they will be mentioned. Similar reservations apply to groups such as anti-slavery societies, which would dominate much of the discussion on this topic, considering the extensive work on abolitionism and anti-slavery organizations. As well, because this dissertation concentrates on civil society organizations in Canada after 1840, a time when slavery was abolished in the country, the topic of anti-slavery would not enhance the discussion.⁸

⁶ See Robin Winks, "Source of Strength? - The Press," in *The Blacks in Canada: A History* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997); Jason Silverman, "'We Shall Be Heard!' The Development of the Fugitive Slave Press in Canada," *Canadian Historical Review* 65 (March 1984); Jane Rhodes, *Mary Ann Shadd Cary: The Black Press and Protest in the Nineteenth Century* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998); Shirley Wilson Logan, "Organs of Propaganda: Rhetorical Education and the Black Press" in *Liberating Language: Sites of Rhetorical Education in Nineteenth-Century America* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008); Cheryl Thompson, "Cultivating Narratives of Race, Faith, and Community: *The Dawn of Tomorrow, 1923-1971*," *Canadian Journal of History* 50:1 (2015).

⁷ For more information on the church see Dorothy Shadd Shreve, *The AfriCanadian Church: A Stabilizer* (Ontario: Paideia Press, 1983); Daniel Hill, *The Freedom-Seekers: Blacks in Early Canada* (Agincourt: The Book Society of Canada Limited, 1981); Winks, "Source of Strength? - The Church" in *The Blacks in Canada*; Donald Simpson, *Under the North Star: Black Communities in Upper Canada* (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 2005); Nina Reid-Maroney, *The Reverend Jennie Johnson and African Canadian history, 1868-1967* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2013).

⁸ Allen P. Stouffer, *The Light of Nature and the Law of God: Antislavery in Ontario, 1833-1877* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992); Shirley J. Yee, *Black Women Abolitionists: A Study in Activism, 1828-1860* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992); Adrienne Shadd, "The Lord Seemed to Say 'Go': Women and the Underground Railroad Movement" in *We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up*, ed. Peggy Bristow (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994); Larry Gara, *Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad* (Kentucky: The University of Kentucky Press, 1996); David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006);

This thesis does not claim that associational life was a substitute for democracy but, rather, agrees with John D. Clark's statement that civil society organizations were a complement to it. He states that civil society is a space for debate and challenging policy, but ultimately the government makes the final decision on legislation. Although the success of legislation rested on the government, civil society allows for well-informed decision-making and gives a voice to weaker groups. It is in this forum that interests and ideas are exchanged, and when participants give their support and time, opportunities arise for debating unfair policy and influencing government decisions.⁹ I would argue that in the context of nineteenth-century African-Canadian life, this group did just that. African Canadians used these organizations to gain a voice, while recognizing the government's power.

Looking at the larger picture, African Canadians also participated in social movements, which consisted of many smaller organizations that supported an overarching cause. According to Suzanne Staggenborg, a social movement can be defined as part of a series of collective actions that are enacted by participants sharing similar interests and a distinct identity. She adds that this form of resistance through collective action, which consisted of demonstrations, strikes, and boycotts, developed in North America in the late eighteenth century, but was more firmly recognized in the nineteenth century.¹⁰ That being said, I would argue that the African-Canadian community's challenge for equality falls under the umbrella of a larger social movement consisting of multiple organizations that offered numerous outlets through which literature and

Karolyn Smardz Frost, *I've Got a Home in Glory Land: A Lost Tale of the Underground Railroad* (Toronto: Thomas Allen, 2007).

⁹ John D. Clark, "The Globalization of Civil Society," in *Critical Mass: The Emergence of the Global Civil Society*, ed. James W. St. G. Walker and Andrew Thompson (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2008), 20; James W. St. G. Walker and Andrew Thompson, *Critical Mass: The Emergence of the Global Civil Society* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2008), xviii-xix, 10.

¹⁰ Suzanne Staggenborg, *Social Movements* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2008), 1-3.

debate, etiquette, philanthropy, and/or brotherhood/sisterhood were highlighted. What connected them was their drive for the rights they deserved as citizens of Canada West.

Staggenborg also states that social movements around the world employed a variety of protest tactics which could cause significant social change, sway public opinion, and influence government policies. African-descended people have used numerous protest tactics over the centuries, but Charles Tilly adds that the social movement is a product of historical circumstances and is influenced by changing political conditions.¹¹ It is the protest against injustice that brings them together, but the tactics, as a result of changing circumstances, that make each generation unique. In *A Peculiar Institution*, Kenneth Stampp states that those enslaved felt the impact of slavery “in their social status, their legal status, and their private lives – but they felt it most acutely in their lack of control over their own time and labor. If discontented with bondage, they could be expected to direct their protests principally against the master’s claim to their work.”¹² This discontent resulted in numerous forms of resistance. While acting in the role of the “happy slave,” countless slaves protested their circumstances with both passive and aggressive action. They (secretly) performed inadequate work or none at all, such as picking less cotton. In this instance, punishment was avoided by putting dirt and rocks in their collection bag to compensate for the lack of weight. They also injured crops and livestock, ran away, committed arson, and caused trouble between the overseer and his employer through continuous complaints and a lack of control, resulting in the overseer’s termination. Stampp also explains that committing acts of theft was acceptable under the legal and moral codes enslaved men and women created. According to these codes, taking a master’s property could result in

¹¹ Ibid., 1, 4; Charles Tilly, *Social Movements, 1768-2004* (Colorado: Paradigm Publishers, 2004), 14.

¹² Kenneth Stampp, *A Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), 86.

punishment from their owner, but this act was not likely to cause judgement from those in the slave quarters. To them, there was a difference between stealing and taking. Stealing from another slave was a disgraceful act, but taking from their master was acceptable: taking food to feed other slaves meant taking one form of property to benefit another form of a master's (human) property. Slave owners labelled some of these acts of protest as "rascality," but enslaved Africans knew that it was much more than that. Some actions were more subtle than others, but they slowly chipped away at the slave system. For example, some masters avoided using their good tools, which could affect productivity, because they worried that slaves would damage them. Others idled in the quarters, feigning an illness or injury. They knew their master feared permanently damaging his human property if they were actually sick, which allowed enslaved people to take full advantage of this fact. Resistance could also be specific to enslaved women, who faked a pregnancy to get out of work, in addition to earning more rations as a reward for increasing their master's workforce. Stamppp states that one slave owner believed that a slave woman's worth decreased once she reached "breeding age" because she could frequently pretend to be suffering from "female complaints." In the words of this slave owner, "You have to take her word for it ... and you dare not set her to work; and so she will lay up till she feels like taking the air again, and plays the lady at your expense."¹³

Similar to Stamppp, John Blassingame's influential work, *The Slave Community*, further argues that enslaved people resisted their bondage while living on the plantation, but mainly by maintaining their African culture. Blassingame argues that

Antebellum black slaves created several unique cultural forms which lightened their burden of oppression, promoted group solidarity, provided ways for verbalizing aggression, sustaining hope, building self-esteem, and often represented areas of life largely free from the control of whites. However oppressive or dehumanizing the

¹³ Ibid., 98, 100-109, 125-127.

plantation was, the struggle for survival was not severe enough to crush all of the slave's creative instincts.¹⁴

In the setting of the slave quarter, their resistance was not limited to breaking their master's tools and decreasing their labour; it was also achieved by gathering to form and share their own religion, culture, dancing, etc., that was distinct from their master. Basically, they resisted by retaining their emotional contact with their homeland. Slaves were able to define their conduct and behavioural patterns, and created a social system involving individual and group relationships and values which shaped behaviour and personality within the slave quarters.¹⁵ As a result, they developed beliefs and social practices in their slave quarters, but Blassingame states that they gained even more. Although Stamppp states that the quarters served as shelter and a place to sleep, not as a centre for active family life, Blassingame argues that the group solidarity formed within the slave quarters united slaves in the fight against their oppressive masters.¹⁶ Additionally, "communalism born of oppression led to an emphasis on mutual cooperation,"¹⁷ encouraged self-respect and courage, and functioned as a defense mechanism against the degrading nature of enslavement. It was this communalism that made them realize that they were stronger as a group than as isolated individuals, which is why Blassingame, just like Stamppp, recognizes that there was a code among enslaved people that required support of each other, particularly the slaves who broke plantation rules. Blassingame asserts that the slave quarter was their primary environment, and within these walls slaves formed their ethical code,

¹⁴ John Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 41.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 25, 40-42, 211.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 210; Stamppp, *A Peculiar Institution*, 292.

¹⁷ John Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 148; Trotter, "African American Fraternal Organizations in American History," 362.

while establishing a network of cooperation, communal support, and solidarity.¹⁸ For Blassingame, the slave quarter was a central part of a slave's life.

As will be discussed in subsequent pages, Black refugees brought to Canada certain practices from their American homeland, including the colour/caste system, in which "class" was determined by a number of factors including labour, skin colour, and free-born status.¹⁹ If African Americans could carry this system of classification with them into a society with established norms, it is certainly possible that a legacy of resistance could accompany them to their new home. This tradition of resistance transferred to life in Canada where African Canadians used civil society organizations to teach members how to be proper citizens and to argue for their rights. Although gathering in the slave quarter was not the same as an organization consisting of emancipated Blacks, it was not completely dissimilar. Each of these examples fueled a structure of resistance against persecution. Among the enslaved, it was their master, and eventually the system of slavery, which was affected, while among nineteenth-century African Canadians, their energy was directed toward battling the informal rules of racist Whites in free society, in addition to policies of a government claiming to be on their side. In both settings, each generation resisted in a way that suited its situation and circumstances. According to Ehrenberg, civil society is the "domain in which 'everyday life' is lived."²⁰ Forming an organization while enslaved was less likely, but resistance in slave quarters and in the field was possible, while free nineteenth-century African Canadians brought their community together through organizational work: each group banded together for a similar purpose, but in

¹⁸ Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, 41, 75-76.

¹⁹ Christian Olbey, "Unfolded Hands: Class Suicide and the Insurgent Intellectual Praxis of Mary Ann Shadd," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 30:2 (2000), 154; Lorene Bridgen, "On Their Own Terms: Temperance in Southern Ontario's Black Community (1830-1860)," *Ontario History* 101:1 (Spring 2009), 67.

²⁰ Ehrenberg, *Civil Society*, 235.

different ways. This activism and cooperation in the face of injustice links these two distinct periods of Black history and was something that was passed on to future generations. They used organizations, just as slaves used their African culture and labour protest, to achieve similar goals, including solidarity, self-respect, and the tools to verbalize against injustice. Although in a different context, this sense of cooperation continued among the next generations.

This cooperation was not so easily achieved. Staggenborg states that although social movements contributed significantly to social and political change, there was no established plan for bringing together a variety of groups and individuals, each with their own interests and opinions, to form a cohesive movement capable of creating significant change.²¹ She raises a very good point. How could it be expected that numerous participants would come together flawlessly, when their ideas and interests varied? Although the execution of resistance was not always perfect, the reason for opposition was so important that it often helped members to utilize their differences. This diversity resulted in multiple organizations that encouraged a variety of ideas, allowing for African Canadians to fight injustice from numerous angles. In this light, their differences were an advantage because African Canadians recognized that as long as the overall goal remained the same, their methods could differ. This variety of groups allowed African Canadians to fight for their rights the way they felt was appropriate, while acting under the umbrella of equality.

As will be discussed in chapter two, this type of social movement falls under the category of what Staggenborg refers to as “contentious politics,” in which there are “collective challenges, based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities.” Social movements are sustained in that they consist of

²¹ Staggenborg, *Social Movements*, 2.

multiple campaigns or at least multiple episodes of collective action within a single campaign.”²² Additionally, social movements generally use multiple organizations, but strategies and outcomes rely heavily on internal dynamics and inter-organizational alliances. Organizations can have different ideologies and approaches, and may compete with one another even though they share a common goal, but they need each other. Staggenborg adds that groups that fall under this category do not have to be politically motivated, but includes networks of individuals, cultural groups, and alternative institutions which seek to change policy. She adds that critics argue that movements involving religious and self-help motivations are often neglected, in addition to less visible forms of collective action such as those seeking institutional change.²³ Broadening this spectrum to include groups such as literary societies, religious groups, and self-help organizations is the intention of this work. It should also be mentioned that some of the following examples, more than others, can be interpreted as training for the political realm but, more commonly, these organizations contributed to the cause by informing members on how to make a political statement. Scholars have applied various aspects to social movements, but what they seem to agree on is that these movements consist of challengers who generally exist outside of the established power structure.²⁴ The following pages will give the outsider a voice.

Neither Selfishly, Nor Separately: “Respectability” and “Class”

The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 caused a mass migration of fugitive slaves and free Blacks to Canada West, forever changing the lives of incoming Blacks and residents of Canada West. The first half of the nineteenth century had only experienced a slow, but steady, flow of African Americans to Canada West and although their arrival was not completely welcomed,

²² Ibid., 5.

²³ Ibid., 6-7.

²⁴ Ibid., 5.

Whites did not yet view them as an imposing threat or drain on the country's resources. Many Whites saw the Black community as a harmless and temporary group escaping enslavement, and whose numbers were manageable. Their numbers became "less manageable" following the Fugitive Slave Act when escaping slaves took advantage of Canada West's status as free soil. Although census records are unreliable, many scholars estimate that between 30,000 to 40,000 slaves and free Blacks entered Canada West during the 1850s.²⁵ As a result, this massive increase in Black residents negatively altered the views of many Whites toward this group, thus changing the Black community's approach to "uplift" and aid. After observing the interactions of the Black and White community, the abolitionist S.G. Howe declared, "The truth of the matter seems to be that, as long as the coloured people form a very small proportion of the population, and are dependent, they receive protection and favours; but when they increase, and compete with the labouring class for a living, and especially when they begin to aspire to social equalities, they cease to be 'interesting Negroes.'"²⁶ Increased numbers were perceived as a threat, resulting in heightened opposition.

Once in Canada West, Black residents quickly realized that obstacles, particularly White racism, would cause them to rely on their own efforts and community building through separate institutions such as schools and churches. Soon after, community organizations such as literary societies, philanthropic organizations, and etiquette clubs, earned a place of value among African Canadians, however their dramatically increasing numbers meant working at a leisurely pace was not an option.²⁷ In the words of Mary Ann Shadd, the freeborn editor of the *Provincial*

²⁵ Simpson, *Under the North Star*, 9, 229; James Walker, "African Canadians," *Encyclopedia of Canada's People*.

²⁶ Samuel Gridley Howe, *The Refugees from slavery in Canada West: Report to the Freedmen's Inquiry Commission* (Boston: Wright & Potter, Printers, 1864), 33.

²⁷ Simpson, *Under the North Star*, 229.

Freeman, “We cannot begin too soon.”²⁸ These organizations, created by Black community builders, allowed newly-arrived refugees to adapt to life in Canada West by providing opportunities that were not always offered to them in the United States. Black leaders impressed the importance of self-reliance and community building through education and “respectability,” which were among the chief reasons for the formation of these civil society organizations.

In their efforts to acclimatize, African Canadians were thrust into White Victorian society, with all of the established norms and standards, to which White residents were accustomed. As a result, their “respectability” was determined by similar, but also different, factors. In order to provide context, the following illustrates the nineteenth-century environment through which African Canadians navigated. Among White residents of Victorian Ontario, “respectability” was often associated with a person’s “class.” According to Andrew Holman, by the 1850s and 1860s, Victorian Canadians began developing a three-class conception of local society: upper, middle, and working class. Originally, these categories were determined by social divisions related to past military leadership, inherited nobility, and Old World ideas about social place, but these qualifications began to lose their significance. The system that took its place consisted of a separation of the upper and middle classes based on factors such as occupation, and a divide distinguished between non-manual and manual labour among the middle and lower classes. Holman adds that by the 1890s a recognizable middle class emerged which defined itself as distinct from those above and below them. As a result, three main branches of the middle class emerged including businessmen, professionals, and white-collar workers, each having their own method of demonstrating their “respectability.” Businessmen often affected the reputation of a community based on how “pushing” they were: it was their

²⁸ “The London Convention,” *Provincial Freeman*, 24 March 1853.

drive to expand and innovate that gave them their societal position, along with their business successes. Just like businessmen, professionals were almost always self-employed “brain workers” and it was their level of education, social responsibility, financial independence, and conduct that demonstrated to others not only their “respectability,” but the status of their work. White-collar workers also contributed to the middle-class identity, but they lacked the authority that professionals held, particularly because they were not self-employed. They too were expected to demonstrate their “respectability” to the public which was through their dress, manners, and occupation, but also by filling their spare time with activities that were meant to better one’s self. This included activities such as reading, drawing, and joining clubs. In voluntary and moral reform organizations such as fraternal orders and temperance groups, the middle class shared their values and opinions with the public. If the community did not recognize the standards that the middle class set, their “respectability” was diluted: public displays such as press publications, open meetings, and public excursions (picnics and fundraisers) were essential to their image. It was in these groups, Holman argues, that middle-class identity “crystallized.”²⁹

The topic of “class” within the Black community is a complex subject, considering its multiple layers. African Canadians of all “classes” resided in Canada West, but when they entered the province from the US, many carried with them the idea of “class” differences. Specific figures such as Mary Ann Shadd, according to Shirley Yee, came to Canada West with their own assumptions that supported middle-class sensibilities.³⁰ Karolyn Smardz Frost agrees

²⁹ Andrew Holman, *A Sense of Their Duty: Middle-Class Formation in Victorian Ontario Towns* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2000), ix-x, 7, 16, 20, 28, 74-76, 98, 104.

³⁰ Shirley J. Yee, “Finding a Place: Mary Ann Shadd Cary and the Dilemmas of Black Migration to Canada, 1850-1870” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 18:3 (1997), 3.

and states that, in 1840, Toronto's Black community consisted of residents from varying financial backgrounds including cooks, bakers, grocers, hairdressers, and labourers. She adds that many of the residents travelling from Northern states entered the province in the 1850s with both wealth and the expectation for a standard of living which was not generally associated with their previously enslaved brothers and sisters. They also carried with them the social systems and customs which represented their previous lives in the cities from which they came.

According to Adrienne Shadd, Chatham also received many residents from the educated and skilled elite "classes" prior to the Civil War, but when the numerous other escaping refugees were coupled with the Black elite the result was "class" divisions in how to live daily life.³¹

Although "class" differences were a reality, in civil society organizations, no matter their "class," all African Canadians were given equal opportunity to be heard. This occurred because African Canadians genuinely wanted the community to thrive as a whole, which was not possible if only the elite succeeded. The opportunities that came to the elite, particularly because of their higher income, location, and increased literacy, were components that divided these "classes" but that does not mean that African Canadians could not co-operate to achieve their goal. They came together, acting neither selfishly, nor separately, and, as a result, membership was not solely determined by occupation, but by a number of other factors. Status and occupation could play a role, but African Canadians also believed that a person's character and influence or involvement

³¹ Adrienne Shadd, "No 'Back Alley Clique': the campaign to desegregate Chatham's public schools, 1891-1893," *Ontario History* 99:1 (2007), 77; Peter Gallego, "Number of Coloured Persons Resident in the City of Toronto & Liberties," 25 July 1840, and "Report on the Toronto Negroes for Lord Sydenham," Toronto, 5 April 1841, E. de St. Remy to Sydenham, Lieutenant Governor's Correspondence, Upper Canada, Governor General's Office, Miscellaneous Records 1835-41, vol. 5 Library and Archives Canada, GR7 G15; Karolyn Smardz Frost, "Communities of Resistance: African Canadians and African Americans in Antebellum Toronto," *Ontario History* 99:1 (Spring 2007), 54-55, 57.

in the community was a powerful determinant for a person's access. It was a case of character, not occupation.

Although many African Canadians recognized the ideals promoted within the colour/caste system which, as mentioned, was a method of determining "class" based on factors such as labour, skin colour, education, and free-born status, cooperation was possible. Whether they agreed with this system of categorizations or not, "class" remained a real form of classification, but African Canadians did not let it hinder the community's progress. Their overall goal was equality in free society, and equality was something practised within civil society: equality in free society and through civil society was more important than any differences, therefore every participant's voice was valued. This allowed for collaboration between those considered upper and lower "class" in the colour/caste system, resulting in a unified racial identity. They may have come from different backgrounds, but they were also categorized as one "class" based on their "race."³² Activists such as Mary Ann Shadd interpreted "class" as more than occupation and social background; one's "race" contributed heavily to one's identity. African Canadians of all occupations and backgrounds were categorized within Shadd's interpretation, while other groups had their own "class" as well. For example, in the *Provincial Freeman*, Shadd referred to the "separate and distinct" classes in British-American society, including the Irish, the Scotch, the English, the Canadians, and the Yankees, but also the Black community. She breaks down the latter group even further by adding that those born in the United States and Canada "are in many points very different from the descendants of Africa, in other parts of the empire. Peculiar duties rest upon us, therefore, as

³² Rhodes, *Mary Ann Shadd Cary*, 45; *Provincial Freeman*, 19 August 1854.

a class.”³³ Shadd also referred to members of “prejudiced classes,” meaning White hotel keepers and owners/operators of transportation services who refused British laws extended to African Canadians.³⁴ A year later, in 1854, Shadd discussed a “class” of immigrants continuously arriving on Canada’s shores, including Germans and Hungarians.³⁵ In a separate article favouring temperance legislation, Shadd also referenced the negative comments made by the editor of the *Planet*, who asked for a law that strictly prohibited African Canadians from drinking. In response Shadd declared that temperance laws should be enacted for every citizen, not just “‘inferior’ classes.” Her sarcastic tone tells us that African Canadians were categorized as one “class,” but also that society forced them into a racial hierarchy where they were in a “class” below Whites.³⁶

Figures such as Dr. Anderson Abbott, a prominent African-Canadian physician, agreed. When discussing African Canadians, he refers to job competition from “other classes,” in addition to prejudice and class-hatred that was comparable to that which was experienced in the United States. Additionally, Abbott requested legislation that would protect African Canadians from “the encroaching interests of other classes.”³⁷ In this instance, he is referring to White residents who promoted exclusionary policies that forced the African-Canadian “class” into an inferior position. To Abbott, Whites were a “class” and African Canadians were a “class,” but in a separate article, two years later, Abbott calls for the “obliteration of class distinction, based on

³³ “The London Convention,” *Provincial Freeman*, 24 March 1853.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ “Our Free Colored Emigrants,” *Provincial Freeman*, 20 May 1854.

³⁶ “Intemperance,” *Provincial Freeman*, 26 July 1856.

³⁷ “Colored Men in Essex in Convention,” *The Messenger*, Chatham, 1 December 1877, A.R. Abbott Papers, Scrapbook I, Toronto Reference Library.

the color of the skin.”³⁸ Organizations shared a similar opinion. From its inception in 1854, the Provincial Union encouraged unity of the Black and White “classes” in its constitution, which called for British union of each “class,” Black or White. It also discouraged the formation of exclusive communities or immigration to the West Indies because it encouraged the idea that African Canadians and Whites could not live among each other, unless the former worked under the latter. Groups such as the Provincial Union believed not only that “race” heavily contributed to “class,” but that there should be unity among each group.³⁹ Not only could a person’s “class” be determined by occupation and influence, many African Canadians spoke of “class” in terms of “race.”

In order to maintain the Black community’s success, it was important to promote proper behaviour and the opportunities available within voluntary groups. Considering the endless cases of racism of the Victorian age, many African Canadians recognized how crucial it was to achieve civility, in Holman’s terms, in order to be accepted as citizens. It is important to note that Black activists were more concerned with the uplift of the entire community, rather than elevating their specific family, or themselves, to a higher status. This separates them from current interpretations of bourgeois respectability, where it was more about the individual and his or her family’s status in the community, not the community itself. It was about more than personal gain and ambition; in order to gain equality, the Black community as a whole needed to succeed. Although African Canadians possessed shared motivations for presenting themselves as respectable, including the public display of an adherence to established social norms, they had their own reasons for promoting “respectability” in the community. For example, if African

³⁸ “First of August,” *The Messenger*, 1 August 1879, A.R. Abbott Papers, Scrapbook I, Toronto Reference Library.

³⁹ “Meeting to Organize the Provincial Union,” *Provincial Freeman*, 19 August 1854.

Canadians were identified as respectable and self-sufficient it would counter a strong argument in favour of slavery: that they could not take care of themselves and, therefore, needed to be enslaved to survive. According to Mary Ann Shadd, Canada was the place for African Americans to achieve “elevation” and disprove “two great Yankee lies ... They are, 1st. The Negro is unfit for Freedom [and] The Negro cannot live on terms of equality with the white man.”⁴⁰ If African Canadians could prove otherwise, they could change the opinion of racist Whites. Additionally, Shadd, and others, believed that this should be done not in separate settlements, but among Whites: isolation was not the answer.

Connecting the Black community to respectable voluntary associations was particularly important to African Canadians who often utilized the press to promote these groups. In *Forgotten Readers*, Elizabeth McHenry writes that the newspaper was an important way to promote voluntary organizations such as literary groups, considering the published proceedings and procedures of literary societies served as guidelines for the establishment of new literary groups. It also “promoted the expansion of this alternative system of improvement by reiterating the imperative relationship ... between the ‘moral and intellectual improvement’ of people of color and their ‘civil and political elevation.’”⁴¹ McHenry also states that groups like literary societies provided the Black community with a space to critique the racial domination of Whites and develop strategies to challenge this domination.⁴² Promotion in the press created further support and development of voluntary organizations but, unfortunately, newspapers were also a source of conflict, as they were used to spread a distorted view of the Black community.

⁴⁰ Bridgen, “On Their Own Terms”; “NUMBER TWO,” *Provincial Freeman*, 25 March 1854.

⁴¹ Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2002), 110.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 148.

The press had the power to unite the Black community toward a common cause, but it also created obstacles by allowing Whites to distinguish who was and was not worthy of citizenship, on an immense level. The *Essex Free Press*, for example, was not shy about spreading an altered view of Black men who, in their eyes, had “undoubtedly a very strong inclination to sleep in the day and to spend the night in gossip, dancing or singing. On this account he is often a nuisance to his neighbors, especially when he has [sic] awake.”⁴³ The *Free Press* adds an example describing

50 to 100 people, who begin the entertainment with hymns, going on after midnight to songs and games and often winding up toward morning with a free light. Then there is the cumfoo dance, one of the finest institutions in the world for producing nightmare[s]. Two men beat drums with the hands, the one instrument producing a tumtum and the other a rattle rattle, almost without intermission during the whole night. At intervals of about a minute the party utters a weird cry in some African language which startles you as you lie in bed vainly trying to sleep. As hour after hour passes your house appears to vibrate, the bed shakes and your spine feels as if made up of loose segments.⁴⁴

These “cumfoo” dances, comparable to “frolicks” among eighteenth-century Black Loyalists in Nova Scotia, which encouraged all-night dancing, drinking, and singing, were equally condemned as orgies. “Frolicks” became such a perceived problem in Shelburne, Nova Scotia, that the magistrate published hand bills “forbidding Negro Dances, and Negro Frolicks in this Town.”⁴⁵ Based on some of these accounts, many White residents concluded that the entire Black community behaved immorally no matter where they resided.

Exaggerated stories in the press created a false legitimacy for discrimination and did not assist African Canadians in their pursuit of “respectability” or equality. As a result, civil society organizations applied pressure to Black residents, directing them toward respectable behaviour.

⁴³“The Cumfoo Dance, One of the Popular Pastimes of the Negroes in Demerara,” *Essex Free Press*, 20 August 1897.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ James W. St. G. Walker, *Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone, 1783-1870* (New York: Africana Pub. Co., 1976), 55, 272, 309.

This, in addition to disproving justifications for slavery, would have acted as motivation for African Canadians to behave “properly.” Groups like Chatham’s Victoria Reform Benevolent Society and the Frederic Douglass Self-Improvement Club tried to overcome outside discrimination by prohibiting bad behaviour such as spending time in “bad company or out late at nights [sic] without a proper escort.”⁴⁶ Other groups such as fraternal orders were strict about only accepting members with good character and provided members with lessons in proper behaviour so that members could maintain the reputation of the Order, while literary societies were promoted in newspapers as an alternative to social evils, including idleness, intemperance, and a lack of morals.⁴⁷ These voluntary groups gave members an acceptable activity to occupy their time and helped to keep their name out of the newspaper. Members were fully aware that word spread quickly in small towns, which is why African Canadians could feel comfortable attending group meetings. Although the press could be used to promote Black civil society organizations, it could also be used to prevent African Canadians from participating in “mainstream” societies attended by Whites. This is why many civil society organizations continuously trained members to act in a respectable manner.

As I will argue in the following pages, African Canadians, mainly out of necessity, formed and joined multiple organizations to achieve their basic rights, resulting in the emergence of a Black civil society from 1840 to 1901. Choosing to begin in the 1840s is deliberate, considering the African-Canadian community’s longest running and farthest reaching organization, the Amherstburg Regular Baptist Association (ARBA), was established in 1841. Also, by 1840 many African Canadians had settled in Upper Canada/Canada West as free citizens only to realize that the government granted them freedom, but society was unwilling to

⁴⁶ By-laws of the Frederic Douglass Self-Improvement Club, Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO.

⁴⁷ McHenry, *Forgotten Readers*, 114.

accept them, resulting in a fight for equality. The situation further escalated in the 1850s with the influx of refugees and free Blacks to Canada West from the US, causing cases of discrimination to increase. African Canadians questioned why they were not treated as full citizens, but knew that they would not achieve “true” equality until they overcame informal laws established by the public. Ending this study in 1901 is due to the significant decrease in the population of African Canadians in the province by the end of the nineteenth century, as shown in the 1901 census. This was a result of the abolition of American slavery and the repeal of many discriminatory laws in the US, which caused many former residents of the US, but also Canadian-born Blacks, to explore the United States as their new home. The Fourteenth Amendment, ratified in 1868, declared that African Americans were citizens, but also allowed African Canadians to become naturalized citizens of the United States, which acted as further incentive. This significantly affected the number of African Americans who entered the country, and left, resulting in a reversed flow back to the US. By the end of the century, the number of African Canadians residing in the province had reached a record low. Recent estimates for the total number of incoming Blacks, by 1860, are between 30,000 and 40,000.⁴⁸ According to Richard Reid, the Black population in Ontario decreased by more than 22 percent from 1861 to 1871, and further dropped by 11 percent during the following decade. Colin McFarquhar adds that the 1901 census only lists 8,935 African Canadians in Ontario, which was a significant drop from the 1881 census, which lists 12,097 African-descended residents. It is important to note that the census is not always the most reliable source considering, often, the number of Black residents in the province was underestimated. This is why these figures should be roughly doubled to provide a more accurate picture, putting the 1881 figure at 21,394 and the 1901 figure

⁴⁸ Walker, “African Canadians,” *Encyclopedia of Canada’s Peoples*.

at 17,437. Using either group of figures leads one to conclude that the population had reduced by at least half by 1901, forty years after the 1861 total. According to McFarquhar, in 1901 the number of residents of African origin living in the province was lower than it had been in over half a century. The combination of an increased outflow of migrants and decreased inflow of immigrants from the US affected Ontario's Black population substantially which, in turn, significantly altered the operation of civil society organizations.⁴⁹ The post-Civil War emigration disrupted many organizations, considering some communities were abandoned, while others were left to adjust to a decreased population.⁵⁰ A reduced population caused a reduction in organizational activities, meaning that there were fewer opportunities to raise funds for the cause, but also to spread their group's message. This decrease also affected civil society organizations in another way, considering that the Civil War drained away Black leaders who, according to C. Peter Ripley, "gave purpose and energy" to the Black community. Following this exodus, there were only a few pre-Civil War Black leaders who chose Canada as their permanent home.⁵¹ With the removal of many Black residents it became more difficult for their voices to be heard, but civil society organizations adapted to Canada's changing social and political climate.

Despite this loss of African-Canadian participants, there were gains. Although a number of African Americans brought their own skills, which were used to create institutions, organizations, and the community as a whole, the experience they gained while in Canada

⁴⁹ Ibid.; Richard M. Reid, *African Canadians in Union Blue: Volunteering for the Cause in the Civil War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014), 177-179; Colin McFarquhar, "A Difference of Perspective: The Black Minority, White Majority, and Life in Ontario, 1870-1919," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Waterloo, 1998), 72.

⁵⁰ Walker, "African Canadians," *Encyclopedia of Canada's Peoples*.

⁵¹ C. Peter Ripley, *The Black Abolitionist Papers (BAP)* vol. II Canada 1830-1865 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 42.

prepared them for life in free society. This applied not only to those who chose permanent residency in the country, but also those returning to the United States following the Civil War. What they learned from living in Canada's free society would prove particularly helpful to their life as free citizens in the US. According to Ripley,

Many black leaders came to maturity during their Canadian years. They were tempered by assuming leadership roles in black communities and settlements, by creating political, antislavery, reform, and religious organizations, and by participating in a free society. Access to political or social institutions was not always easy or complete in Canada – there was prejudice, discrimination, and segregated education – but the rights were theirs nonetheless, and blacks fought hard to protect them.⁵²

Ripley adds that only a limited number of Northern Blacks and almost no Southern Blacks could have hoped to enjoy this freedom and experience while living in the United States, especially because they were denied access to the courts and schools, forced into unskilled labour and excluded from participating in society as a whole. This, in addition to the economic and political oppression they experienced, did not create ideal conditions for growth. But, in Canada West they could practise their basic rights and by the time the war ended, African Canadians possessed a knowledge of social, economic, and political issues that African Americans were drawn to during Reconstruction.⁵³ Ripley adds,

The ambitious undertakings that black leaders brought to Reconstruction echoed earlier efforts to establish a full and equitable life in Canada: organizing black churches and social organizations; supporting relief measures; establishing agricultural communities and family farms; providing access to public accommodations, to polling booths, to courts, and to schools. Blacks sought total participation in the life of both nations.⁵⁴

Black citizens who previously resided in Canada West wanted to relive what they experienced there. It was in Canada West that they proved their ability to thrive in free society

⁵² According to C. Peter Ripley, Canada West's Black population dropped from approximately 40,000 in 1859 to 15,000 in 1871; Ripley, *BAP*, 41-43.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 43-44.

by finding employment, educating their children, voting, and holding official positions, demonstrating how prepared they were for freedom. All they needed was a chance. Once in the United States, these accomplishments became a standard for Reconstruction success among African Americans. Canada was not only a place to train future generations, but also those who hoped to one day return to the United States and incorporate themselves into American society. Although many of their successes in the US were short lived, as they were later forced into second-class citizenship, they did gain the necessary tools to fight for their rights.⁵⁵ They fulfilled many of the expectations of their parents and community who began the struggle for equality years earlier. Despite the loss of civil activists on Canadian soil, their time as African Canadians contributed significantly to creating a civil society in the United States years later.

African Canadians who remained in Canada West continued to make significant changes for the better. Following the abolition of American slavery, the focus was no longer on the US, meaning African Canadians could give all of their attention to their equality in Canada West, particularly through organizational work. Because there are so many civil society organizations to consider, “Lifting As We Climb” takes a thematic approach, but this does not imply that the Black community was static. As will be demonstrated, change was not immediate but, with time, the Black community experienced numerous transformations, particularly in terms of their confidence, political expression, and the use of organizations to change the status quo.

Historiography

Studies concerning nineteenth-century African Canadians have expanded in recent decades to include a more in-depth analysis of Black activists and the institutions they used to fight for equality. Previously, during the first half of the twentieth century, the discussion of

⁵⁵ Ibid., 44-45.

African Canadians in Ontario was limited to three subjects: slavery, the Underground Railroad, and racism. By examining these categories in the Canadian context, early scholars such as Fred Landon, Robin Winks, and Daniel Hill demonstrated the significance of Black settlement and activism. Fred Landon, who was tremendously influential in the field of African-Canadian history, produced numerous articles concerning these topics, which made a positive impact on the writing of Black history in Canada. Before Landon, African-Canadian history in Ontario, or Canada as a whole, had been extremely limited. Scholarly works that followed, including Robin Wink's *The Blacks in Canada* and Daniel Hill's *The Freedom-Seekers*, continued the legacy, but branched out further into the lives and institutions that accompanied life in Canada West's Black community.⁵⁶ Each of their contributions opened the door for later historians to delve deeper and diversify the content of Black activism even further by incorporating issues of "gender," "class," and "race," but also by broadening the subject matter or concentrating its focus to bring out the details of individual communities. Gwen and John Robinson's 1989 work *Seek the Truth: A Story of Chatham's Black Community* and Donald Simpson's 2005 monograph *Under the North Star: Black Communities in Upper Canada Before Confederation* each contribute significantly to African-Canadian historiography. The scope of *Under the North Star* is quite broad, discussing the entire province, while the Robinsons' account directs its attention to a specific area: Chatham.⁵⁷ Scholarly works including Shirley Yee's discussion of blurred gender roles in "Gender Ideology and Black Women as Community-Builders in Ontario, 1850-1870" and Peggy Bristow's *We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up*, a collection of essays focussing on

⁵⁶ Karolyn Smardz Frost, Bryan Walls, Hilary Bates Neary and Frederick H. Armstrong, *Ontario's African-Canadian Heritage: Collected Writings by Fred Landon, 1919-1974* (Toronto: Natural Heritage Books, 2009); Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*; Hill, *The Freedom-Seekers*.

⁵⁷ Simpson, *Under the North Star*; Gwendolyn Robinson and John W. Robinson, *Seek the Truth: A Story of Chatham's Black Community* (Canada, 1989).

women's experiences from slavery to the early twentieth century, expand the discussion by combining "gender" and "race" to this topic. Yee and Bristow's focus is outside of associational life, but they are linked to community building and the fight for equality.⁵⁸

The concept of civil society has only recently been applied to nineteenth-century African-Canadian activism. David A. Sutherland's "Race Relations in Halifax, Nova Scotia, During the Mid-Victorian Quest for Reform," discusses "race" relations and volunteerism among Nova Scotia Blacks, while Adrienne Shadd reflects on the Kent County Civil Rights League in "No 'Back Alley Clique': the campaign to desegregate Chatham's public schools, 1891-1893." Each demonstrates that a lack of support from White residents and the government motivated African Canadians to take matters into their own hands by forming voluntary organizations. According to Sutherland, voluntary church societies were instrumental in promoting an image that justified their demands for increased civil rights, while Shadd states that Sabbath school groups and fraternal orders were significant contributors to the desegregation of schools in Chatham, whether through the education of future leaders or rallying the community for equality.⁵⁹ Other works including Colin McFarquhar's "Blacks in 1880s Toronto: The Search for Equality," which examines the Black community's efforts toward economic and social equality through letters published in White newspapers, public protest, and political motivation, while Karolyn Smardz Frost's "Communities of Resistance: African Canadians and African Americans in Antebellum Toronto" considers the role of the church as the heart, soul, and mind of the community,

⁵⁸ Shirley J. Yee, "Gender Ideology and Black Women as Community-Builders in Ontario, 1850-1870," in *Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women's History* 3rd edition, ed. Veronica Strong-Boag & Anita Clair Fellman (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1997); Peggy Bristow et al., *We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up: Essays in African Canadian Women's History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994).

⁵⁹ David A. Sutherland, "Race Relations in Halifax, Nova Scotia, During the Mid-Victorian Quest for Reform," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 7 (1996); Shadd, "No 'Back Alley Clique.'"

considering that Toronto churches hosted Sabbath schools and acted as meeting halls for social gatherings, political rallies, and for the formation of anti-slavery, benevolent, intellectual, self-help, and fraternal organizations. These authors also discuss the positive impact of specific organizations such as vigilance committees, fraternal orders, debating societies, and benevolent associations, which were extremely active in the uplift of the community. Willie J. Harrell, Jr., adds to the discussion with his examination of Black Canadian Jeremiahs, including Samuel Ringgold Ward, Jermain W. Loguen, Mary Ann Shadd, and Henry Bibb, who used newspapers, lectures, and organizations, particularly the Anti-Slavery Society of Canada, to lament the cruelties of slavery and Canadian prejudice, and gain support and acceptance from their audience.⁶⁰

Considering the extensive organizational activity of the Black community in Southern Ontario, it is appropriate to expand the discussion on this important topic. This is where “Lifting As We Climb” is significant. The previously discussed sources contribute significantly to African-Canadian historiography and act as a jumping off point for this work. They are an inspiration for this dissertation and represent multiple pieces of the puzzle. When combined, they support the idea of a nineteenth-century Black civil society in Canada West. It is the intention of this dissertation to provide a single work that can stand on its own in this argument. By discussing numerous organizations in multiple communities, rather than focussing on just one area, “Lifting As We Climb” presents the broader picture of the Black community’s resistance to

⁶⁰ According to Harrell, the jeremiad was “a form of rhetoric that surfaced from a perception of the oppression and degeneration of a culture.” In the Canadian context, slavery and Canadian prejudice were the focus of their jeremiad; Colin McFarquhar, “Blacks in 1880s Toronto: The Search for Equality,” *Ontario History* 99: 1 (Spring 2007); Smardz Frost, “Communities of Resistance,” 52 & 58; Willie J. Harrell, Jr., “‘Thanks be to God that I am Elected to Canada’: The Formulation of the Black Canadian Jeremiad, 1830-61,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 42:3 (Fall 2008), 57.

racism and its fight for equal rights in free society. Additionally, the involvement of youth groups will be explored in detail, not only by examining the organizers of youth groups, but also the participants. Cultural groups which are not traditionally linked to civil society will also be discussed. According to Andrew Holman, debating and literary societies were less recognizable in their effect on civil society,⁶¹ but “Lifting As We Climb” puts the focus on these groups and their effort to create change.

Scholars of African-Canadian historiography have also debated a key aspect related to voluntary societies: “respectability.” Among contemporary scholars there are varying opinions concerning whether the Black community emulated Whites to gain acceptance and community “elevation.” This information lends further insight to our understanding of life for African Canadians in nineteenth-century Ontario. On one side are those such as Judith Fingard and John Wong who believe that elite Blacks cared little for the lower classes and that they were only concerned with their own “respectability,” which is why they separated themselves from the lower class. In “Race and Respectability in Victorian Halifax,” Fingard examines “respectability” in the Black community and states that the social elite had little sympathy for the poor and their participation in church groups, temperance societies, and fraternal orders was meant to serve their own personal agenda by gaining White acceptance. This is evident in her discussion of four areas of “respectability,” which include prominence in organizations such as temperance groups and fraternal orders, and “tangible evidence of respect from whites.”⁶² Like Fingard, John Wong believes that similar characteristics helped the Black elite to separate themselves from their “rough brethren” to achieve acceptance. In “The Unbearable Lightness of

⁶¹ Holman, *A Sense of Their Duty*, 121.

⁶² Judith Fingard, “Race and Respectability in Victorian Halifax,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 20 (1992), 174-177.

Being Black’: Race, Class, and Victorian Vancouver [sic] First Lifeguard,” Wong examines how one Black lifeguard, Joe Fortes, challenged racial stereotypes by adopting White Victorian forms of “rational recreation,” such as swimming and enforcing White, middle-class behaviour, to gain “respectability” and approval in Vancouver, B.C.⁶³ He adds that Joe Fortes emulated White behaviour because “class” became a way to distinguish himself from those labelled as undesirable members of the community.⁶⁴ Fingard and Wong argue that in order to help the community, individual African Canadians needed to help themselves first. According to Wong, separation from the “undesirable” meant respectability,⁶⁵ but it also caused community division.

Opposing work, such as James Walker’s “On the Record: The Testimony of Canada’s Black Pioneers” argues otherwise. Although there are examples that complement Fingard and Wong, I would contend that their version is less representative of the Black community than other interpretations emphasizing the majority’s acceptance of group work. Walker states that “uplift” and “respectability” were achieved, not through separation, but through self-reliance, land ownership, self-respect, and contributions to the community. Contrary to Fingard’s argument, Walker states that “Blacks were in a position to help, and be helped by, their fellow fugitives.”⁶⁶ This was particularly true in Nova Scotia where it was not uncommon for African Canadians to sell their own property to help an indebted neighbour, while in Sandwich, Ontario, George Williams asserted that Black community members would give money to those behind in rent. It was not always about helping yourself first. Walker also states that this support system,

⁶³ John Wong, “The Unbearable Lightness of Being Black’: Race, Class, and Victorian Vancouver [sic] First Lifeguard,” *International Journal of the History of Sport* 28:11 (2011).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 1539, 1541.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ James Walker, “On The Record: The Testimony of Canada’s Black Pioneers,” in *Continuing Perspectives on the Black Diaspora*, ed. Aubrey W. Bonnett and Calvin B. Holder (University Press of America, 2009), 102, 106.

largely through organizations, was mainly local, but their concern went far beyond their immediate neighbourhood.⁶⁷

Along the same lines, Christian Olbey's "Unfolded Hands: Class Suicide and the Insurgent Intellectual Praxis of Mary Ann Shadd," argues that elite African Canadians, such as Mary Ann Shadd, had a concern for the collective welfare of the Black community and worked among subordinate classes to help them overcome their struggles and achieve community "uplift." Olbey states that this was achieved through Shadd's vision of "full participation of the fugitive population in both the society and the global struggle of their age."⁶⁸ Contrary to Wong and Fingard, Walker and Olbey argue that many leaders did not separate themselves from the poor, but tried to help the entire community without mimicking Whites to gain their acceptance. In terms of "racial uplift" and "advancement" it was the Black community's goal to raise up the entire community, not only from the unfortunate circumstances of many arriving refugees to Canada West, but also to wipe out the negative stereotypes that were a result of their enslavement.

The "Gender" Divide

Just as there are varying interpretations of Black experience among scholars, there also exists a divide among historians of "gender," particularly in terms of the restrictions of the separate sphere. Scholars such as Lynne Marks, Jeffrey McNairn, and Heather Murray explore the repressive nature of patriarchal institutions and beliefs, while Jane Errington, Jan Noel, and Julie Roy Jeffrey agree, but examine how White women were able to navigate these oppressive institutions to suit their own needs. As will be shown in subsequent pages, there are numerous

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Olbey, "Unfolded Hands," 168.

examples of Black women gaining access to the public sphere through their organizational work, despite the constraints that accompanied their role as wives and mothers.

In *Revivals and Roller Rinks: Religion, Leisure, and Identity in Late-Nineteenth-Century Small-Town Ontario*, Lynne Marks argues that a characterization of Protestantism was the exclusion of women and when they organized socials a man was always in charge. Further, many White women remained within the realm of church societies, never moving beyond congregational affiliations, but tried to gain a voice through their “hand-maidenly role.”⁶⁹ She also states that beyond

church, temperance lodges, and a few literary societies, the rich associational life of small-town Ontario was closed to women of all classes ... Indeed, since female participation in the temperance lodges and literary societies seems to have been confined largely to single women, the churches provided virtually the only organized activities available to married women in these communities. Women’s limited options underline the power of men in late nineteenth-century Ontario society.⁷⁰

As Marks explains, this exclusion was often due to social uneasiness and limited financial resources. White middle-class men had more access to public life, while the lives of White middle-class women revolved around the home and church where they were expected to remain. If they stepped outside of those boundaries they were met with resistance. In terms of financial restrictions, working-class women were excluded due to the negative stereotypes of lower-class life or were often unable to participate because of work obligations. According to Marks, Protestant culture dictated that how a person saw oneself was heavily reliant on the factors of “class,” “gender,” age, marital status, and religious faith.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Lynne Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks: Religion, Leisure, and Identity in Late-Nineteenth-Century Small-Town Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 15, 65 & 68.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 14-16, 73, 164, 171 & 178; *Daily British Whig* (Kingston), 30 April 1883.

In *The Capacity To Judge: Public Opinion and Deliberative Democracy in Upper Canada, 1791-1854*, Jeffrey McNairn argues along the same lines as Marks in terms of exclusion based on social uneasiness, but goes a step further by stating that White women were excluded from membership in debating societies because men believed that they had less of a need for this group. Women were already excluded from the political realm and men felt that women would gain nothing from participation. Despite this, women were occasionally invited to lectures, generally as guests of male members where they were limited to watching. He adds, “Those associations and activities most closely associated with democratic sociability and the public use of reason offered fewer opportunities to women. They did not overtly challenge reigning gender ideologies.”⁷² McNairn further explains that women were not welcomed in male groups because men believed the female presence threatened to replace the already established male friendships in these societies. Rather than enjoying their relationships with male members, they would be competing for female attention. Others, including legislators, were also concerned that a woman’s participation could threaten marital unity, particularly if a woman spoke against her husband’s wishes.⁷³

In *Come, bright Improvement!: The Literary Societies of Nineteenth-Century Ontario*, Heather Murray agrees and states that although women of European descent were occasionally allowed to attend gatherings and open meetings, it was only as spectators, not as club members. She adds that women’s involvement did not come until later in the century with the “boom” in literary societies which often replicated private and invitational literary societies that were

⁷² Jeffrey McNairn, *The Capacity To Judge: Public Opinion and Deliberative Democracy in Upper Canada, 1791-1854* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 88, 111.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 111.

common several decades before.⁷⁴ Adding to McNairn's observation that a female's presence could jeopardize masculine relationships, Murray states that among some White organizations, men worried that literary societies might have a "feminizing" effect. This was because of the emergence of many female literary societies during the latter portion of the nineteenth century.⁷⁵ According to John Hall and Frank Trentmann's *Civil Society*, this feeling also existed in the eighteenth century when it became a concern that "coffee houses and the culture of sociability made men effeminate and undermined the virility of the British nation. In France, men mixed with women in conversation, giving them a knowledge of the world; in Britain, ladies were sent off to talk amongst themselves about domestic decorative goods."⁷⁶

On the opposite side of the spectrum, Jane Errington, Jan Noel, and Julie Roy Jeffrey examine how White women used their role as wives and mothers to navigate a patriarchal society to suit their needs and ambitions. In *Wives and Mothers, School Mistresses and Scullery Maids: Working Women in Upper Canada, 1790-1840*, Errington challenges the opinion that women contributed little to the colony because they did not vote, participate in politics, work on the shop floor, etc., by arguing that their contributions were socially and economically valuable to the development of the colony. She demonstrates that although most middle-class women remained in the home to perform "women's work," in pre-industrial colonial society they often contributed to the family income by assisting their husbands with the family business, taking in additional work, such as cleaning, entering the market by selling goods including butter, eggs, etc., and owning and operating their own businesses by utilizing traditionally female skills.

⁷⁴ Heather Murray, *Come, bright Improvement!: The Literary Societies of Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 98, 156-157.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁷⁶ John A. Hall and Frank Trentmann, *Civil Society: A Reader in History, Theory and Global Politics* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 5.

Errington also states, contrary to Murray, that an upper-class woman's organizational work in reform societies, such as missionary and Bible groups, as early as the mid-1820s, contributed significantly to the colony's development, and also allowed women to step outside of their traditional roles. Ironically, according to Errington, the cult of true womanhood generally restricted women from leadership positions, but through it women participated in social activism and formed philanthropic organizations. They gained experience and exposure from participating in public activities such as concerts and theatrical performances, even convincing colonists to support their charities. This would prepare women for the fight for women's rights years later.⁷⁷

In Jan Noel's *Canada Dry: Temperance Crusades before Confederation*, while arguing in favour of the success of the temperance movement in terms of value, size, and impact, she also demonstrates how the movement benefited women as early as 1822. Women were seen as the victims of alcohol abuse and were able to use their role as a moral compass to gain control in the temperance movement, allowing them to move outside of their traditional environment. They also used their skills as wives and mothers to hold fund-raising bazaars and make preparations, including sewing banners and cooking, for temperance gatherings. They stepped even further outside of their established boundaries to canvass the public sphere by acting in official positions of mixed-sex temperance groups, leading pledge campaigns, and gaining subscribers for the *Canadian Temperance Advocate*.⁷⁸ Ironically, the same restrictions that were meant to limit a woman's power also provided opportunities for them: women took full advantage of this.

⁷⁷ Elizabeth Jane Errington, *Wives and Mothers, School Mistresses and Scullery Maids: Working Women in Upper Canada, 1790-1840* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), xiii, xiv, 19, 79, 83-84, 100-102, 161, 170-171, 174-175, 181, 188.

⁷⁸ Jan Noel, *Canada Dry: Temperance Crusades before Confederation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 12-13, 89-93, 96-101.

In “Permeable Boundaries: Abolitionist Women and Separate Spheres,” Julie Roy Jeffrey argues something similar, but examines their role in the abolitionist movement. Jeffrey states that because slavery was not only a moral but also a public issue, women were able to use their association as moral figures to enter the public, sometimes political, arena by leading petition campaigns and holding fairs to recruit participants and publicly discussing the political question of slavery. According to Jeffrey, when a woman used her morality and sympathetic nature to fight against the injustice of slavery, even in the public sphere, she was still within her “gender” realm because she was expected to be compassionate. Additionally, women argued that it was their obligation as women to assist their oppressed sisters, making the antislavery cause a moral issue, but also a woman’s issue. Jeffrey adds that at a time when “gender” was under construction, women were able to challenge conservative definitions of proper female behaviour, blur the lines between private and public, which expanded the boundaries of “woman’s sphere,” and introduce alternative interpretations for established gender norms.⁷⁹

“Religious Differences”

Just as with “gender,” there are also varying interpretations concerning religious divisions and unity in Canada West. Scholars such as Lynne Marks, Scott W. See, and Charles McMillan argue in favour of the divisive nature of religion, while John Webster Grant, William Westfall, and Margaret Van Die state that there was room for collaboration. According to Marks, “In small-town Ontario religion could define one as ‘other’ almost as effectively as race could. Roman Catholics, the largest minority group, could never aspire to full respectability in the dominant Protestant culture.”⁸⁰ In religious terms, Catholics were the “other.” Marks also states

⁷⁹ Julie Roy Jeffrey, “Permeable Boundaries: Abolitionist Women and Separate Spheres” *Journal of the Early Republic* 21:1 (Spring 2001), 79-80, 82-83, 87, 90-91.

⁸⁰ Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, 13.

that although hostilities varied, anti-Catholicism was continuously used to define Ontario Protestants. It was part of their identity to separate themselves from this group. There were even divisions among Protestants. For example, some women may have been more comfortable fundraising for their own church, rather than joining the interdenominational WCTU which had the potential for denominational conflicts.⁸¹ Murray adds that literary societies were no different, in that they generally forbade the discussion of religious or political issues in an attempt to evade problematic barriers for membership.⁸²

In “‘An unprecedented influx:’ Nativism and Irish famine immigration to Canada,” Scott W. See agrees with Marks that religion contributed heavily to an individual’s identity. He states that religion was often a stronger determinant of a person’s social, economic, and political status than secular factors. As a result, the intense religious convictions each group possessed created an ideal environment for denominational conflict, leading to, See argues, a Canadian nativism which rose to a level comparable to the United States. See states that economic, demographic, and social themes fueled the conflict between Irish Catholics and Protestants, particularly because of the increasing Irish-Catholic population during the 1840s, due to famine, the prevalent anti-Catholic feeling, and how these newcomers not only influenced, but were influenced by British North America’s political (voting), economic (job competition), and social (a fear of “moral contamination”) surroundings. As a result, Protestants used resources such as the press, their political power, and Protestant organizations, particularly the Orange Order, to promote a negative image of Irish Catholics.⁸³

⁸¹ Ibid., 13, 97.

⁸² Murray, *Come, bright Improvement!*, 49-50.

⁸³ Scott W. See, “‘An unprecedented influx:’ Nativism and Irish famine immigration to Canada,” *The American Review of Canadian Studies* 30:4 (Winter 2000), 430-431, 435, 442-444.

According to Charles McMillan, another organization, the Masons, found it difficult to cooperate with Catholic followers. In *Par Sit Fortuna Labori* (Let the Success be Equal to the Labour), McMillan states that although lodges promoted religious unity, Masonic periodicals reveal apparent anti-Catholic sentiments and criticism, which he further adds existed within the social religious milieu of its members.⁸⁴ See and McMillan agree that there was significant tension existing between lodges and the Catholic Church, but the former argues more extensively that it was through the press that each institution conveyed its negative opinions toward the other. For example, in response to an anti-Masonic article published in a Montreal Jesuit newspaper, *L'Ordre*, the editor of the Masons' own Montreal publication, *The Canadian Freemason*, declared that he was happy to live in a country where he could spread the Masonic message despite "Priestcraft or Jesuitical interference."⁸⁵ McMillan further examines their troubled relationship through the press by discussing the rare case of "Catholicus," a Catholic Mason, who wrote to *The Canadian Freemason* criticizing both Freemasonry and the Catholic Church, telling each party that their fraternal bond and philanthropy made them quite similar. The editor of *The Canadian Freemason* refuted his statement, claiming the Jesuits were a secret society, a common claim from the Catholic Church toward the Masons.⁸⁶ According to McMillan, the Masonic press reveals the existing tensions between Protestants and Catholics, despite the call for unity.

These scholars have made a case for the divisive nature of religion in nineteenth-century Ontario, but there are others who offer a differing opinion. In *A Profusion of Spires: Religion in*

⁸⁴ Charles A.H.G. McMillan, "*Par Sit Fortuna Labori* (Let the Success be Equal to the Labour): Freemasonry and the Emergence of A Civil Society in Canada West" (Master's Major Research Paper: University of Windsor, 2011), 5.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 7, 46.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 48.

Nineteenth-Century Ontario, John Webster Grant states that although there was increased competition between churches, in addition to a “combative spirit” among Protestants and Catholics, the demand to meet the spiritual needs of a dispersed and diverse population was a catalyst for the unity of churches. Grant states that examples of friendly interaction between denominations were frequent due to external factors, such as the need to share church buildings for religious services in order to keep down expenses, and to attend services of other denominations when ministers were scarce. Grant also states that specific initiatives involving reform were a stimulus for interdenominational cooperation among various evangelical churches, including temperance and moral improvement in the form of temperance societies, Sunday schools, and Bible and tract societies.⁸⁷ According to Grant, in many cases, Protestants living in Ontario had to cooperate for practical and moral reasons.

William Westfall shares a similar opinion in *Two Worlds: The Protestant Culture of Nineteenth-Century Ontario*, where he states that, by mid-century, internal and external factors including the diminishing hostility between certain religious groups, Anglicans and Methodists in particular, and the separation of church and state, created the ideal environment for an informal Protestant alliance. These factors broke down barriers that had previously caused religious division, allowing for Protestant cooperation. What resulted was a common Protestant culture that communicated specific ideas and attitudes through educational institutions, moral crusades, and worship which, in turn, influenced society’s views of the world.⁸⁸

In *Religion, Family, and Community in Victorian Canada: The Colbys of Carrollcroft*, Marguerite Van Die reflects on the relationship between religion and everyday life (“lived

⁸⁷ John Webster Grant, *A Profusion of Spires: Religion in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 66-67, 76-77, 111, 127-129, 233.

⁸⁸ William Westfall, *Two Worlds: The Protestant Culture of Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1989), 11, 192-193, 202.

religion”). Similar to Westfall, Van Die states that economic growth did affect moral standards traditionally associated with evangelical practices, and, through her examination of the Colby family, she explores how Protestant culture was a means to unite evangelical followers and cope with modernization. Protestants utilized voluntary societies, temperance movements, etc. to put their moral stamp on the world, but also exhibited some religious flexibility. Van Die mentions that in the Colbys’ community of Stanstead County, Quebec, for example, church membership and attendance were quite fluid, with numerous nondenominational religious social events being held, suggesting further religious cooperation. In the case of Charles and Hattie Colby, for the first eight years of their marriage they attended Methodist, Congregationalist and, at times, Anglican services all within the same Sunday. They, along with their children, also attended various religious events, including Anglican confirmation ceremonies, Congregational preacher’s farewell sermons, and occasionally evening church services with Roman Catholics. According to Van Die, nondenominational participation was not specific to the Colby family, as a “good number” of community members followed this practice. Combining social events with religion ensured that a Protestant’s secular activities remained closely linked to the holy Sabbath, which was a way for morality to combat materialism. According to Van Die, Protestants tried to avoid a separation of religion and everyday life.⁸⁹

The varying debates concerning “respectability” through individual or collective action, “gender,” and religion play a crucial role in illustrating how complex Ontario’s Victorian society was: no two experiences were exactly the same. At times, African Canadians shared a similar story with other Ontario residents, including Whites, but the harsh reactions of many racist

⁸⁹ Marguerite Van Die, *Religion, Family, and Community in Victorian Canada: The Colbys of Carrollcroft* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005), 13, 142, 156, 188-189.

Whites forced African Canadians to create their own path. Although there is overlap in some aspects of their lives, the purpose of “Lifting As We Climb” is to narrate the lives of African Canadians in their distinct journey toward equality. Chapter one, “I’ll Find a Way or Make One” argues that voluntary civil society organizations created a foundation for civil activity. A literary society was not just meant for debate, but was used as a tool to prepare members for a larger fight than illiteracy, while fraternal orders did more than give men the opportunity to meet outside of their homes, just as temperance societies encouraged more than abstinence from alcohol. Groups that are and are not generally associated with political activity used their resources to train members in the fight for equality: civil society organizations were a classroom where African Canadians learned to be activists. Chapter two, “The Ties That Bind (And Separate),” discusses the next stage in the movement toward equality by examining how members applied the skills they learned in these organizations to confront opposition and competing ideas. Ehrenberg states that voluntary associations enriched society in different ways, but “Much depends on the nature of the state and the character of the associations, groups, and movements that populate civil society.”⁹⁰ Chapter two outlines some of these outside factors, particularly living as free citizens while enduring racism, in addition to a deeper internal conflict that came directly from the Black community toward some Black organizations. Chapter three, “Setting A Standard,” highlights specific qualifications for membership, including good character, but also draws attention to allowances made despite individual differences, such as cross-class cooperation for the overall cause, while Black women gained a considerable amount of control despite living in a patriarchal society. Part of the process was to alter negative opinions, but it was also crucial to maintain a positive image: the guidelines for membership and

⁹⁰ Ehrenberg, *Civil Society*, 233, 239.

leadership upheld the “respectability” of an organization. Chapter four, “Merging Identities,” focuses on the influences that contributed to people’s identity as Black Canadian citizens, including their past lives in the United States, their appreciation for British gentility, and the drive to collectively challenge and change the political setting of mid to late nineteenth-century Southwestern Ontario. The fifth and final chapter, “Intelligent parents will raise up intelligent children” represents the last stage in the movement: the legacy of Black activism. At the close of the century, African Canadians made many strides in the right direction, but it was still necessary to train and prepare the community’s next group of leaders, just as previous activists had been taught. As long as African Canadians continued to fight for equality, Sunday Schools, etiquette clubs, and fraternal orders were of the utmost importance to the cause. “Lifting As We Climb” will demonstrate that when African Canadians came together through numerous organizations, with the purpose of training Black citizens to fight for fair treatment in free society, a Black civil society emerged. This equality was something that they were promised when given their freedom, and African Canadians were ready to collect.

Chapter One: “I’ll Find a Way or Make One”: Creating a Classroom for Activism

In their pursuit of equality in free society, the Black community directed its energy toward creating a foundation upon which African Canadians learned to fight for their rights. As will be demonstrated, this foundation involved civil society organizations that acted as a support system, but so much more. Within the walls of literary societies, benevolent associations, fraternal orders, etiquette groups, and temperance societies, members were trained to be activists. Through these groups, members projected a positive image, worthy of praise, and realized the importance of self-help, while learning literary skills, proper behaviour, and a political awareness that afforded them the opportunity to demand respect and fair laws. Each of these factors not only elevated the community, but also instilled a sense of self-respect that gave them the confidence to believe that they were worthy of equality: the latter was crucial if they expected others to accept them as their equal. These were not just political organizations, but also social groups that educated African Canadians on how to be activists. To further develop this idea, the many skills acquired within civil society organizations will be highlighted. Literary societies taught members how to read, write and debate, while etiquette groups instilled lessons on “respectability” and deportment. These, along with other organizations, also taught members leadership training, self-governance, community building, and acceptance of those with alternative views, even promoting “gender” inclusion. As will be shown in chapters one and five, the reward for their hard work was not only the altering of negative perceptions and laws, but also an assurance that the next generation of activists, whom they trained, would continue the community’s fight for equal rights. Black activists wanted a legacy that carried on their work and future generations would be a product of their success. As will be shown in subsequent

chapters, African Canadians took the skills that they acquired in these organizations and applied them to their fight for equality. Voluntary organizations acted as a classroom for social action.

Starting Point

Judith Jackson Harris, the founder of several land clubs in the United States, often expressed the motto, “I’ll Find a Way or Make One.”⁹¹ This sentiment was certainly something that Black citizens carried with them once they entered Canadian society and summed up the mindset of many determined African Canadians in Canada West, particularly those who wanted to fill the void that existed between their community and the government. To fill this void, African Canadians needed a plan. As a result, they turned to a medium that served the community well in the past: organizations. According to Robert Putnam, many nineteenth-century American organizations were imported from England and there is a pattern suggesting that many countries, not just the United States, had a period in which there were “bursts of civic reconstruction.”⁹² This also occurred in Canada West, where African Canadians used a multitude of organizations as a vehicle for social change, allowing them to engage in the pursuit of social equality. Many Black residents, free or formerly enslaved, carried the skills they acquired in the United States with them to Canada West and applied them to a new setting, while others already residing in the province before the mass migration of refugees had their own established methods. In either case these groups were a training ground for future activists, who had not yet fully developed their skills.

⁹¹ Elizabeth Lindsay Davis, *The Story of Illinois Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs and History of Order of the Eastern Star Among Colored People* (New York: G.K. Hall & Co, 1997).

⁹² Robert Putnam, “Civic Disengagement, Government and Opposition” in *Civil Society: A Reader in History, Theory and Global Politics* ed. John A. Hall and Frank Trentmann (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 239.

During the 1850s, Black residents of Canada West gathered at several conventions, or conferences, which brought to their attention the growing need to assist incoming fugitives: these conventions made Black leaders aware of current issues and how to deal with them. The Black Convention movement began in the United States in 1817 as a way to support anti-colonization and, with time, the purpose of these conventions was redirected toward uplift and abolition.⁹³ Following the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, the Black leaders of Canada West organized conventions to address relevant issues in their own community. Although conference delegates met to discuss a main issue, there were other goals peppered throughout each conference. For example, in November of 1850, delegates at the Sandwich Convention, which was organized by Henry Bibb, came together to discuss housing for an increasing Black population.⁹⁴ Elizabeth McHenry states that, in the American context, Black leaders suggested that an acquaintance with subjects like education, temperance, and industry, also known as “rallying points,” “could be a source of ‘future action [and,] attention to these tenets could form the basis for political improvement.’”⁹⁵ Leaders believed that familiarizing the Black

⁹³ The goal of colonization was to send African Americans back to their homeland of Africa. Some supporters argued that it allowed free Blacks to live in a place void of degradation, giving them increased opportunities, while also maintaining that colonization would encourage gradual abolition by removing the threat posed by free Blacks, therefore encouraging masters to free their slaves. Despite these reasons, the tone of the movement eventually catered to its strongest supporters, racist Whites, who just wanted to remove African Americans from the country. Cohabitation was not an option for them, making relocation the “solution.” In states such as Maryland, emancipated slaves who resisted colonization had the choice of re-enslavement, appealing to the courts or forced deportation. In response, the Black community protested the deportation policy, while organizing anti-colonization activity, such as following colonization agents from village to village in order to change the minds of free Blacks who were previously convinced to emigrate; Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), 199-206; Afua Cooper, “‘Doing Battle in Freedom’s Cause’: Henry Bibb, Abolitionism, Race Uplift and Black Manhood, 1842-1854,” (Ph.D. dissertation: University of Toronto, 2000), 160.

⁹⁴ Cooper, “Doing Battle in Freedom’s Cause,” 160, 168-9, 178, 185-186.

⁹⁵ McHenry, *Forgotten Readers*, 40-41.

community with these rallying points could narrow the gap between them and attaining their rights as citizens. This translated into Canada West where these rallying points were also promoted at conventions and in self-improvement societies, which increased the number of Black organizations in the latter half of the nineteenth century. For example, following the Sandwich Convention in November 1850, the Fugitive's Union Association, later the Refugee Home Society (RHS), was established in Sandwich with education, agriculture, and temperance as key components of this settlement's constitution. Article ix states that "[a]ny person who does not sell or use intoxicating drinks as a beverage ... may become a member of this association."⁹⁶ At that time, temperance was a significant issue to many African Canadians because it not only represented, in their own eyes, a way to improve their lives and reputations, but also their freedom. Many Black leaders equated intemperance with slavery because they viewed each as a form of bondage. William Whipper, the wealthy and educated abolitionist, stated "All that I have said, or that can be said against slavery, is truly applicable to intemperance ... There are probably no other two evils so closely allied, that the cure for the one is applicable to the other; and just so in their perpetuation."⁹⁷ Temperance, for some, was a symbolic way to reject slavery and aided in the practical interest of convincing Whites that Blacks were worthy of respect, not enslavement. Black leaders, including the former slave and editor of the Black newspaper the *Voice of the Fugitive*, Henry Bibb, felt that through temperance, which was cast as self-control, piety, and discipline, the Black community could challenge negative opinions. Bibb believed that this was possible when a person spent his or her money on more important things, including

⁹⁶ "Constitution of the Fugitives' Union," *Voice of the Fugitive*, 15 January 1851.

⁹⁷ "Address Delivered Before the Colored Temperance Society of Philadelphia, January 8, 1834," *The Liberator*, 21 June 1834.

clothing, food, and land purchases, rather than alcohol.⁹⁸ This may be why, shortly after the Sandwich convention in December 1850, the convention's organizer, Henry Bibb, established a temperance society in Sandwich: he strongly supported these rallying points.⁹⁹ Samuel Ringgold Ward, a former slave and activist, agreed and added that temperance permitted Black citizens to spend a larger portion of their income on their families and businesses. This, in turn, alleviated the dependency on charity, or the need to beg for money, clothing, etc. Ward stated that "there is no such thing as the elevation of any people without [temperance]."¹⁰⁰

A year later, at the 1851 North American Convention in Toronto, delegates nurtured a foundation upon which their community could achieve "elevation" through financial responsibility, temperance, education, and agriculture. For example, the Canada Mill and Mercantile Company in Buxton, which encouraged agriculture and industry through a saw mill, grist mill, and country store, was the result of a resolution at this 1851 convention. This organization provided jobs for Black citizens and allowed them to contribute to the financial welfare of the community.¹⁰¹ Additionally, at an afternoon session of the convention, a resolution in favour of temperance recommended "abstinence from all intoxicating liquors, that they may, by so doing, save dollars for themselves and their children."¹⁰² Demonstrating that

⁹⁸ Peter Carlesimo, "The Refugee Home Society, Its Origin, Operation and Results, 1851-1876" (Master's thesis, University of Windsor, 1973), 6.

⁹⁹ "Temperance Meeting in Sandwich," *Voice of the Fugitive*, 1 January 1852; "Fugitive Slaves in Canada West," *Voice of the Fugitive*, 1 January 1851.

¹⁰⁰ "Founding the *Provincial Freeman*, Editorial by Samuel Ringgold Ward (24 March 1853)," Ripley, *BAP*, 266; "Resolutions by a Meeting of Sandwich Blacks, Sandwich, Canada West (26 March 1853)," Ripley, *BAP*, 268.

¹⁰¹ Cooper, "Doing Battle in Freedom's Cause", 160, 168-9, 178, 185-186; "Fugitive Slaves in Canada West," *Voice of the Fugitive*, 1 January 1851.

¹⁰² "Proceedings of the North American Convention, Convened at St. Lawrence Hall, Toronto, Canada West (11-13 September 1851)," Ripley, *BAP*, 154.

they could be industrious, self-sufficient, and financially secure aided in their pursuit of equality by raising their community to a higher standard through group activity.

Others like Shadd expressed the need for “uplift” in the *Provincial Freeman*: “Though not poorer, less moral, or less intelligent than other poor people, still, we are very far from what we should be, and what we can be. This is reason enough, why we should make immediate efforts to raise ourselves above our present position.”¹⁰³ In her opinion, “We must meet, deliberate, discuss, resolve. We must adopt measures for our improvement; we must show what we are, and what we are capable of.”¹⁰⁴ These measures for improvement were discussed at numerous meetings, including one held in Sandwich, where, in March 1853, it was resolved that delegates be provided with statistics on churches, schools, and temperance societies.¹⁰⁵ Later that year, at a convention held in London, Canada West, on 6 April 1853, a similar request was made. In preparation, participants were asked to prepare statistics on property ownership, children’s school attendance, and the number of “Temperance, and other reform Societies.”¹⁰⁶ Shadd tried to impress the importance of these organizations as a convention topic, but there are no published statistics from this conference. The proceedings for the 1853 Amherstburg Convention, a few months later, fill this void. Records for this convention list London as having 80 members in its temperance society, while in “Chatham and Vicinity” 152 people attended their temperance societies, 20 members belonged to the Chatham Lyceum (literary), and 15 people were in the Victoria Ladies Association (Chatham). According to Gwen Robinson, at least 362 Black residents lived in Chatham in 1851, two years before the convention, but how many other towns constitute the “Vicinity” is unclear. If these statistics are applied to Chatham

¹⁰³ “The London Convention,” *Provincial Freeman*, 24 March 1853.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ “Resolution by a Meeting of Sandwich Blacks,” Ripley, *BAP*, 268.

¹⁰⁶ “Mass Convention in London, Canada West,” *Provincial Freeman*, 24 March 1853.

and a few surrounding cities it can be concluded that its temperance society had fairly significant participation, while Chatham's literary society and Victoria Ladies Association had far fewer members.¹⁰⁷ The convention records not only demonstrate that African Canadians were participating, but that delegates also encouraged the creation of these societies. For example, delegates in the convention's temperance committee, S.B. Needham and M.F. Baily of Chatham, and Lewis Clark of Sandwich, appealed "to our people in every community to organize Temperance Societies, commence agitation on the subject and never cease until the evil is banished from our midst, by the power of moral suasion."¹⁰⁸ They also created the constitution for the Provincial League, a group that encouraged agricultural, manufacturing, and commercial pursuits. Convention delegates and organizers saw a need for these organizations and their gratitude for existing self-improvement groups was made clear when participants declared that "we highly appreciate the labors of ... organizations which are formed to elevate the condition of suffering humanity."¹⁰⁹

These conventions effectively addressed the key issues mentioned above, but racism was also a longstanding problem that caused delegates to gather. Upon arrival, particularly after 1850, many free Blacks and fugitives quickly discovered that Canada West was not completely the Promised Land they had envisioned. With the abolition of Canadian slavery, the government promoted a new life for incoming Blacks which was completely different from their experience under slavery. They offered legal freedom, but many Whites still saw these new residents as

¹⁰⁷ *Minutes and proceedings of the General Convention for the Improvement of the Colored Inhabitants of Canada, held by adjournments in Amhrstburg [sic], C.W., 16-17 June 1853; Robinson, Seek the Truth, 128.*

¹⁰⁸ *Minutes and proceedings of the General Convention.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

inferior and unwanted.¹¹⁰ These negative feelings made it incredibly difficult for incoming Blacks to realize the promised vision of the Canadian government. At that time, White opposition did not hesitate to assert and defend its position at the top of society's hierarchy. Black residents were not welcome in their community institutions or organizations, prompting many African Canadians to create and join their own separate groups.

In *Come, bright Improvement!*, Heather Murray states that Mechanics' Institutes, which were local societies that educated workers, were the only cultural organizations at mid-century to make a deliberate effort to include or invite African Canadians to participate. By 1869 there were twenty-six in the province, but Donald Simpson states that there is no evidence proving the existence of a separate Black section of the Institute. Despite this, Mechanics' Institutes did sponsor public lectures presented by African Canadians/Americans. For example, the Toronto Institute advertised events and lectures in the January 1855 edition of the *Provincial Freeman*, while the *Globe* announced an upcoming lecture by Martin Delany, an African-American physician and abolitionist, at the Mechanic's Institute on the topic of "Negro and Caucasian races."¹¹¹ Additionally, Black leaders like Dr. Anderson Ruffin Abbott frequently lectured to the Chatham Institute, later becoming the director of Dundas's Institute.¹¹² These examples represent how progressive Mechanics' Institutes were in terms of "race" relations, but many organizations differed in their opinion.

Unlike Mechanics' Institutes, other groups were not as willing to allow Black participation, nor were many Whites inclined to assist those new to the area. The charitable

¹¹⁰ Simpson, *Under the North Star*, 228-229.

¹¹¹ Murray, *Come, bright Improvement!*, 54; Simpson, *Under the North Star*, 107; *Globe*, 16 September 1851; *Provincial Freeman*, 6 January 1855; "Martin R. Delany," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

¹¹² Murray, *Come, bright Improvement!*, 54.

organization, True Bands, consisting of African-Canadian men and women, were originally organized in Malden (Amherstburg), in 1854, for the purpose of aiding incoming Blacks. Members did not want to give any ammunition to racist Whites who strongly believed that the Black community was a drain on society. In order to prevent this interpretation, members of True Bands tried to give newcomers a fresh start. According to James Walker, most organizations and representatives only allowed for the temporary distribution of emergency relief for newly-arrived fugitives. Otherwise it would give the impression that African Canadians were incapable of taking care of themselves, which would, in turn, contribute to the “positive good” argument endorsed by pro-slavery supporters in the United States, which defended slavery as a beneficial, not evil, institution.¹¹³ Walker adds that begging was not exclusive to the Black community, as soliciting on behalf of Whites was common. For example, in a letter to Egerton Ryerson, who was on a fundraising tour, William Lord, the Chairman of the Cobourg Academy, supported this practice by declaring, “Beg, beg, beg it all. It must be done!”¹¹⁴ Many True Band members did not share this opinion and believed that begging “degrades us in the eyes of the world ... [and gives] cause to say ... ‘the slaves can’t take care of themselves.’ The blacks were made for slaves, and freedom is a curse to them.”¹¹⁵ African Canadians particularly objected to soliciting items such as funds and clothing in the US, on behalf of fugitives in Canada. As a result, members tried to end the begging system, in addition to taking a general interest in the welfare of other members and encouraging students to attend school. This was in addition to

¹¹³ Walker, “On The Record,” 90.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 114; Egerton Ryerson, *The Story of My Life* (1883), 153.

¹¹⁵ *Provincial Freeman*, 7 April 1855.

fighting discrimination and uniting all churches.¹¹⁶ Each of these objectives contributed to a positive community image.

Of the numerous organizations formed, one of the most important was the literary society, due to the high volume of illiterate fugitives entering Canada West. According to Donald Simpson, only 10% of African-American adults in the US had an education, meaning they were literate and received schooling in some form. As a result, there was only a slight possibility that incoming Blacks would be educated. Although they only constituted a small number, many educated free Blacks escaping US slave laws were among the very people who assisted illiterate refugees once in Canada West. This was in addition to the help received from Black community members who lived in Canada West for many years, before the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act. Among those already established in Canada West, there was a growing concern that the flood of illiterate fugitives would be harmful to their longstanding struggle for respect and equality. Rather than separating themselves from illiterate refugees and free Blacks, established community members came to their aid.¹¹⁷

Although African-Canadian leaders felt an added pressure from the community to find ways to help recent arrivals, discrimination prevented their attendance in White groups. Thus, separate literary societies were an excellent way to assist fugitives and free Blacks on a larger scale. In her discussion of African-American literary groups, Elizabeth McHenry states that “New directions in the study of black readers and reading need, however, to decenter formal education as the primary institutional force behind the reading of literature.”¹¹⁸ McHenry adds that African Americans had historically been either denied opportunities for formal education or

¹¹⁶ Benjamin Drew, *The Refugee: Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada* (Boston: John P. Jewett and Co., 1856), 236-237, 326; *Provincial Freeman*, 29 December 1855.

¹¹⁷ Simpson, *Under the North Star*, 229.

¹¹⁸ McHenry, *Forgotten Readers*, 10.

received an education that was lacking. Therefore, they had to rely on other methods and institutions to compensate for what was missing, and the literary society was an alternative means of teaching.¹¹⁹ Rather than being dominated by those from the middling ranks (young clerks, professionals, etc.) who desired to make contacts, acquire knowledge and practise their public speaking, a number of Black members started with the basics.¹²⁰ Those who were illiterate learned to read, while educated members either assisted those uneducated or improved their own skills. Additionally, for those who were beyond the age of school attendance or were required to work during school hours, literary societies could be an extension or continuation of the literacy training they received in common school: literary societies were a necessity for those with a poor education, but also enriched the educational experience of those with more schooling. Although numerous literary societies were concerned with activities such as debating and recitation, the circumstances of this mass migration may have provided more room for literacy education (reading and writing), in addition to literary education (debating and reciting) in organizations. For example, the Wilberforce Lyceum Educating Society was founded in 1850 near Colchester to encourage the development of “the rising generation in education, scientific attainments and other progressions in the English language ... as will entitle us to mix more freely in the great crowd of her Majesty’s subjects.”¹²¹ This mixed-gender association used basic educational supplies such as books and writing tablets to aid Black members in their educational “advancement,” often to assist Blacks in their efforts to acclimatize. This was in addition to

¹¹⁹ By 1840, roughly 80% of (White) Upper Canadian adults could read and write, but it was not until later in the century that African Canadians could say the same; McNairn, *The Capacity To Judge*, 84, 133-134; *Ibid.*, 110.

¹²⁰ McNairn, *The Capacity to Judge*, 84-86.

¹²¹ McHenry, *Forgotten Readers*, 110-111; Wilberforce Lyceum Educating Society, *Constitution and By Laws of The Wilberforce Lyceum Educating Society, For Moral and Mental Improvement. [Amherstburg]*: I.B. Boyle, Printer, 1850, 1; Murray, *Come bright Improvement!*, 65.

monitoring their morality and conduct in a strict manner, which was a crucial part of their strategy to integrate those previously enslaved into free society.¹²²

Education, a right not offered to slaves because it was illegal,¹²³ was an essential way to improve oneself and overcome wrongs of the past. With the exception of attending school, a literary society was the best way to accomplish this goal, and many incoming Blacks, of all ages, were keen to “advance” themselves. According to Mary Ann Shadd, “The refugees express a strong desire for intellectual culture, and persons often begin their education at a time of life when many in other countries think they are too old.”¹²⁴ Being educated meant that past restrictions enforced under slavery could no longer hold claim over those who were denied the opportunity to read and write: literacy was a rejection of slavery and a symbol of freedom. It was a way to disprove charges of racial inferiority and was among the more long-lasting efforts for self-improvement in the community.¹²⁵ Educating even the smallest of groups could lead to the education of others, producing future generations of skilled men and women. While living in Chatham, J.C. Brown expressed a similar view when telling Benjamin Drew,

Our children growing up in this country, and not having the fear of any white man, and being taught to read and write, will grow up entirely different from their fathers, -- of more benefit to themselves, of more benefit to the government, and will be more able to set good examples to the rising generation. Intelligent parents will raise up intelligent children.¹²⁶

¹²² Murray, *Come bright Improvement!*, 71.

¹²³ Before the Civil War, southern states banned the education of slaves because slaveholders, who were also lawmakers, saw literacy as dangerous. Slaveholders feared that literacy allowed Blacks to read abolitionist pamphlets which would, in turn, inspire slave revolt. Additionally, if slaves displayed their literacy, it contradicted claims of their intellectual inferiority which was a key justification for the enslavement of Blacks; McHenry, *Forgotten Readers*, 1-2, 4, 26, 33.

¹²⁴ Mary Ann Shadd, *A Plea for Emigration Or, Notes on Canada West in its Moral, Social, and Political Aspect; with suggestions respecting Mexico, West Indies, and Vancouver's Island, for the Information of Colored Emigrants* (Detroit: George W. Pattison, 1852).

¹²⁵ Yee, “Gender Ideology and Black Women as Community-Builders.”

¹²⁶ Robinson, *Seek the Truth*, 17-18; Drew, *The Refugee*, 239, 248.

Others, such as James Davis, father of the prominent Amherstburg lawyer, Delos R. Davis, agreed with these sentiments. James Davis, who was born into slavery and had no education, was determined to provide his children with every opportunity possible. As a result, he joined together with others from Colchester North and hired a private teacher to instruct the town's children. This was significant for the community considering that at that time no school was established in that area.¹²⁷ A common theme was that parents wanted to make a better life for their children and help wear away the prejudices of Whites, but many community leaders also considered what education could do for them in the present. Among these leaders was Samuel Ringgold Ward, who believed that "in this free country [Canada], where a man, if making any literary or other pretensions, is treated according to his actual worth, and admitted into circles for which he professes to be qualified, in a word, where a man stands rather upon his manhood than upon his complexion, I feel altogether small in such a presence."¹²⁸ *The Voice of the Fugitive* shares the same opinion in an article entitled, "Education," which states,

We regard the education of colored people in North America as being one of the most important measures connected with the destiny of our race. By it we can be strengthened and elevated – without it we shall be ignorant ... and degraded. By it we shall be clothed with a power which will enable us to arise from degradation and command respect from the whole civilized world; without it, we shall ever be imposed upon, oppressed and enslaved.¹²⁹

Like many others, Ward and writers of the *Voice* believed that education could not only offer African Canadians opportunities for social acceptance, but also a chance to demonstrate that their merits should surpass perceptions of the colour of their skin. Education through literary

¹²⁷ *Amherstburg Echo*, 29 July 1892.

¹²⁸ "Correspondence for the Voice of the Fugitive, No. 1, S.R. Ward's Letter," *Voice of the Fugitive*, 17 December 1851; *Amherstburg Echo*, 5 August 1892.

¹²⁹ "Education," *Voice of the Fugitive*, 15 January 1851.

societies, and other groups, brought African Canadians closer to this goal and closer to their rights.

Literary societies provided the perfect opportunity to teach and learn the value of an education and self-improvement, especially when schools could not. For example, in areas like Essex County, many Black schools received little or no financial support from the government, which devoted significant resources to building and sustaining White schools after 1840, when schools took on new importance.¹³⁰ Limited funds to Black schools ensured an inferior education and, therefore, allowed the government to keep African Canadians in their place, at the bottom. Mary Bibb, for example, encountered this problem and charged her students six cents a week to keep her school running. Unfortunately, only a few students could actually afford to pay this fee, preventing Bibb from running her school smoothly, eventually causing its closure. In some cases, the only education that children and adults received was in Sabbath Schools, once a week. Mary and Henry Bibb were among the leaders who taught reading and writing in Sabbath School, in addition to teaching Bible classes. They used the resources they had to educate their community, despite laws that separated them from a proper education. This situation was not uncommon, but some Black settlements such as Buxton were known for their superior schools, which had such quality teaching that White students in the area attended.¹³¹

¹³⁰ Paul Axelrod, *The Promise of Schooling: Education in Canada, 1800-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1997), 24.

¹³¹ The superiority of Buxton's day and night schools, established in 1850, was the result of a strong curriculum and excellent teachers from Knox Presbyterian College in Toronto. Even the settlement's founder, the Reverend William King, taught at the Buxton School, leading to a number of students qualifying for their teaching licences. Lessons, which included reading, writing, grammar, geography, and arithmetic, were so highly regarded that White children enrolled. Within five years a second school was built and two years later a third school; Simpson, *Under the North Star*, 56-57, 261-263; Afua Cooper, "Black Women and Work in Nineteenth-Century Canada West: Black Woman Teacher Mary Bibb," in *We're Rooted Here*

Unfortunately, despite the noble efforts of many teachers in other areas, not every school, including White ones, could live up to this standard, therefore literary societies compensated for an already lacking system or enhanced existing education, no matter a member's age. For example, young members of the Amherstburg Literary Association which had members as old as 69, included 14- and 15- year-old Philo Smith and Joseph Green, who wanted to "advance" themselves early in life. In fact, Philo Smith, along with George Monroe, proved competent debaters when they successfully argued whether a gun was more useful than a dog. Smith and Monroe represented the side of the gun, while Joseph Green and John Monroe represented the dog. Soon after the debate, the *Echo* described their performance: "The boys all did well in this, their first debate, discussing the question in a manner which would have been creditable to older persons."¹³² This organization gave opportunities to younger members, creating a foundation of learning for members, young and old. They shared the same attitude as members of Toronto's Young Men's Excelsior Literary Association and the Buisy [sic] Gleanors, which had members ranging from roughly the ages of 7 to 20 in 1887. While in the presence of older members and instructors, these young people learned valuable skills such as reading, recitation, public speaking, and debate, which was the foundation of many of these literary groups: this was the legacy they passed on. The Buisy Gleanors also partook in more cultured activities such as performing vocal and instrumental music, and tableaux, which further developed the minds of those of all ages.¹³³ Without literary groups, Black residents lacked the basic skills that allowed them to move beyond the negative stereotypes associated with their community.

and They Can't Pull Us Up: Essays in African Canadian Women's History, ed. Peggy Bristow et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 150-152, 156, 159.

¹³² *Amherstburg Echo*, 1 April 1881.

¹³³ Minutes of the Buisy Gleanors, Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO; *Amherstburg Echo*, 1 April 1881; *Amherstburg Echo*, 28 January 1881; *Provincial Freeman*, 7 April 1855.

Many community leaders recognized the importance of education, which resulted in the establishment of numerous literary societies, in addition to those mentioned above. They formed the Provincial Union (Toronto), the Chatham Literary Society and the Cheerful Workers (Amherstburg). These groups aided people like Wilson Abbott and Mary Ann Shadd, who were instrumental in the creation of the Provincial Union, to promote “literary, scientific and mechanical efforts.”¹³⁴ The Provincial Union, a mixed-gender group established in 1854, had two committees: the Ladies Committee met every Monday evening and was in charge of preparing articles for an annual fair in Toronto and promoting the *Provincial Freeman*, while members of both genders met each month to read, debate, and recite original pieces. Each member pledged to endorse “literature, general intelligence, active benevolence, [and] the principles of universal freedom.”¹³⁵ This is one of the earlier examples of African-Canadian men and women actively pursuing knowledge as a group and it could be argued that members, including Wilson Abbott, laid the foundation for future literary societies.

In subsequent years, leaders such as Dr. Anderson Ruffin Abbott, son of Wilson Abbott, provided Black residents of Chatham with the necessary tools for “elevation” in the Chatham Literary Society. In an 1875 inaugural address to this mixed-gender group, Abbott stressed the importance of literary societies when he told members that

The intellect of man is the noblest part of his compound nature . . . And there is no more favourable opportunity for utilizing the knowledge that he [a scholar] has gained [sic] in his walks through the fields of literature than is afforded by the Literary Society. There he can collate his treasures; arrange, embellish, and present them in their most favorable

¹³⁴ Constitution of the Provincial Union, 9 August 1854, Mary Ann Shadd Cary Papers, LAC; Adrienne Shadd, “Mary Ann Shadd Cary: Abolitionist,” LAC; Murray, *Come, bright Improvement!*, 65; Walker, “African Canadians,” *Encyclopedia of Canada’s People*.

¹³⁵ Constitution of the Provincial Union; Shadd, “Mary Ann Shadd Cary: Abolitionist.”

aspects... This is an age of unprecedented intellectual activity; and any people who are content to slumber in mental inertia may expect to wake far behind in the race of life.¹³⁶

Acquiring knowledge, according to Abbott, was accomplished and cultivated by reading and study, observation and travel, and participating in debates, but only the latter required the use of all three components. In his opinion, a person could limit his or her reading to a specific branch of research rather than expanding his knowledge with multiple topics, or travel throughout their life, never sharing what they learned with the world. Thus, any evidence of literary advancement remained hidden from the world. It was only through debate that a person truly demonstrated their literary achievements by expressing their ideas and opinions on an endless variety of issues. Abbott believed that “By taking part in debates he acquires not only the art of arranging his arguments methodically, but also, the power of expressing them with perspicuity and conciseness.”¹³⁷ A literary society was the ideal environment to combine each of these talents and put your education on display. Abbott’s words rang true in the minds of many African-Canadian followers and leaders, who emphasized their importance in the years ahead.

In the last twenty years of the nineteenth century, literary societies had a particularly strong presence in Black communities like Amherstburg, where members of the Amherstburg Literary Association participated in recitations, reading groups, and debates. Founded in 1880, this society was established for the purpose of “mental improvement,” and, according to historian and activist, Alvin McCurdy, it lasted into the 1890s. They held regular meetings on Friday evenings at the King Street School house, where members gave addresses on issues such as self-improvement and self-culture, and debated numerous topics including which was more

¹³⁶ *Amherstburg Echo*, 25 November 1887; “Inaugural Address Delivered by the President, Dr. A.R. Abbott, Before the Chatham Literary Society (1875),” Scrapbook I, Baldwin Room, Toronto Reference Library; Murray, *Come, bright Improvement!*, 53, 65, 74.

¹³⁷ “Inaugural Address Delivered by the President, Dr. A.R. Abbott.”

beneficial to man: education or money.¹³⁸ One interesting debate, entitled a “three-cornered” debate, posed the following question: “A woman is alone and ill on an island, and is discovered by one man, is brought off [the island] by a second man, and is cured by a third man, and each claims that his right to her is the best. –Whose [claim] is [the best]?”¹³⁹ The final decision was in favour of the man who brought the woman off of the island. Based on this question, it may come as a surprise that the Amherstburg Literary Association was not exclusive to men. Although not listed as officers, women such as Sarah Hughes and Maria Kirtley read essays, while a chorus was given by Annie Bush, Hughes, and Kirtley.¹⁴⁰ These women participated in more cultural-based components such as singing, but they also took part in literary activities, demonstrating their multifaceted contributions.

Literary societies also provided members with an opportunity for leadership. Among those affected were Black women who took advantage of what these groups could offer, including chances for public speaking, organizing events, debating, fund raising, and conducting meetings. Their participation in these activities was a tradition that accompanied Black women from the US. According to Heather Murray, when African-American women immigrated to Canada West, some already had experience with many educational, benevolent, abolitionist, and literary societies as early as the 1830s. This was especially true of women from cities like Philadelphia where the literary societies, the Female Literary Association, the Female Minervian Association, and the Edgeworth Literary Association were formed by 1836 and open to African-

¹³⁸ Murray, *Come bright Improvement!*, 191; *Amherstburg Echo*, 28 January 1881; *Amherstburg Echo*, 21 January 1881; *Amherstburg Echo*, 1 April 1881; *Amherstburg Echo*, 4 March 1881; *Amherstburg Echo*, 18 March 1881; Notes from Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO.

¹³⁹ *Amherstburg Echo*, 11 February 1881.

¹⁴⁰ *Amherstburg Echo*, 18 February 1881; *Amherstburg Echo*, 4 March 1881; *Amherstburg Echo*, 28 January 1881; *Amherstburg Echo*, 11 February 1881; *Amherstburg Echo*, 1 April 1881.

American women of all classes.¹⁴¹ Additional opportunities arose at the 1848 National Colored Convention in Cleveland, Ohio, when participants passed a resolution that gave women the full rights of delegates: this motion was carried with “three cheers for woman’s rights” and an invitation for women to take part in debates. This was a significant move toward gender equality in the Black community. Afua Cooper argues that “Black men in public life, much more than their white male colleagues, supported women’s rights and feminist actions. In fact, whereas white women feminist activities suffered the heckles of white men in their organizing, they could expect public and continued support from Black men.”¹⁴² Male acceptance was not the only basis for female participation, especially because Black women resisted unfair treatment. At the 1848 Ohio State meeting, for example, Black women threatened to walk out of the convention, never to return, if they were not allowed to participate. The following year, three women were appointed to the five-person business committee at the Cazenovia convention in New York and men like Martin Delany expressed support for the education of African-American girls, as part of their struggle for “elevation.”¹⁴³ African-American women, in turn, carried on their tradition of activism once in Canada West.

According to Murray, African-Canadian women often took a leading role in the creation of societies for men and women alike. For example, Mary Bibb, an abolitionist who was often present at American meetings, likely attended Canadian conventions, especially because her husband, Henry Bibb, organized several conferences. Even after her husband passed away,

¹⁴¹ Murray, *Come, bright Improvement!*, 71, 98; Julie Winch, “‘You Have Talents – Only Cultivate Them’: Philadelphia’s Black Female Literary Societies and the Abolitionist Crusade” in *The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women’s Political Culture in Antebellum America*, ed. Jean Fagan Yellin and John C. Van Horne (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 101.

¹⁴² Cooper, “Doing Battle in Freedom’s Cause,” 163-165.

¹⁴³ James Horton, “Freedom’s Yoke: Gender Conventions among Antebellum Free Blacks,” *Feminist Studies* 12:1 (Spring 1986), 69-71.

Mary Bibb acted as an officer at an 1854 National Emigration Convention, organized by Martin Delany and held in Cleveland, Ohio. Mary Bibb also applied the principles of these North American conventions to her community in the form of literary societies, just as her husband did with temperance societies.¹⁴⁴ In 1854, for example, Mary Bibb founded the Windsor Ladies Club, also referred to as the Mutual Improvement Society. This was shortly after the Amherstburg Convention in 1853, a convention organized by her husband. Peggy Bristow states that this club was the first women's literary society in Canada West, possibly in all of Canada, where members gathered to "hear speeches and improve their minds."¹⁴⁵ Soon after, the Ladies Literary Society of Chatham, founded by Amelia Freeman Shadd, became the second group of its kind.¹⁴⁶ Black women joined these groups to mentally "advance" themselves, but also to open doors for them as the century progressed: their longstanding involvement allowed for a more positive reception of the Black community, but also an easier transition into leadership roles as the years passed. This was not just in women's groups, as female participation extended into mixed-gender societies as well. Additionally, women were not limited to just membership; they could also hold official positions. Amherstburg's Social-Literary Society, for example, elected Miss Ada Christian as their president, while Miss Annie Smith was vice president in January 1895. These women shared control with men including George McCurdy, the society judge, and Delos R. Davis, who was the honorary president. It might seem that the latter

¹⁴⁴ Female attendance was not recorded at these conventions and until 1854 it was rare for Black women in Canada to attend as invited delegates, but Bibb's history of activism in the US possibly gained her acceptance; Murray, *Come, bright Improvement!*, 98; Cooper, "Doing Battle in Freedom's Cause," 168, 184-185; Ripley, *BAP*, 34-35.

¹⁴⁵ Cooper, "Doing Battle in Freedom's Cause," 168; Peggy Bristow, "Whatever you raise in the ground you can sell it in Chatham: Black Women in Buxton and Chatham, 1850-65," in *We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up: Essays in African Canadian Women's History* ed. Peggy Bristow et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 122.

¹⁴⁶ Bristow, "Whatever you raise in the ground you can sell it in Chatham," 122.

position was elected to guide other (female) members, but Miss Ella Christian filled the role of honorary president three months later, while Miss Annie Smith became the president and, Joseph Webb, a man, took over as vice president.¹⁴⁷ One could conclude that “gender” was not always a factor when determining representatives, and that Black women were able to transition beyond their traditional roles into leadership positions. Amherstburg’s Social-Literary Society, which held debates and social gatherings from 1894-1895, was among the more unique examples of female leadership in mixed-gender groups, but many Black women were familiar with activism. Establishing and leading their own groups, whether in gender-inclusive or exclusive societies, says a lot about their inclusive strategy, and the strength of these women. Within civil society, men and women were trained for leadership.

Members of Amherstburg’s Cheerful Workers, another gender-inclusive group, were also devoted to literary advancement and exposing members to leadership positions, but they combined their pursuit of knowledge with an additional cause: philanthropy. In December of 1883, the Cheerful Workers held a concert in the Baptist Church, resulting in a full house. This concert was so successful, with a \$28 profit, that they considered visiting neighbouring towns to raise further funds. The following year, the Cheerful Workers hosted a parlour concert, offering many types of entertainment including a chorus (“Spring, gentle spring”), readings by Allie Case and Sarah Alexander, a solo by Miss Lott, a duet by Annie Green and Maria Kirtley, and an essay on slang from Mamie Branton, entitled “Better late than never.” Proceeds from this event came to \$8. Another concert, held in April 1887, was a children’s concert at the King Street School house, which offered vocal and instrumental music, recitations, and tableaux. The \$9 raised went toward paying the mortgage of the Baptist Church. These concerts illustrate the

¹⁴⁷ *Amherstburg Echo*, 4 January 1895; *Amherstburg Echo*, 26 July 1895; *Amherstburg Echo*, 16 August 1895; *Amherstburg Echo*, 12 April 1895.

philanthropic nature of this literary organization. Their pursuit of funds for the Baptist Church did not end with concerts, as the Cheerful Workers also had lawn socials, oyster socials, egg socials, and a leap year social, where they provided instrumental music, literary entertainment, refreshments, and food. Supporting the church financially meant helping the entire community, and according to James Walker religion and education went hand in hand in the Black community.¹⁴⁸ Sustaining institutions like churches, while promoting culture and education, were crucial to the community's success. This explains why so many organizations extended from the church.

According to Lynne Marks, Whites did have activities such as rainbow socials, pumpkin pie parties, bread and butter socials, and the ever-popular strawberry festival, but some religious followers, particularly ministers, believed that fundraising socials took away from the real meaning of Christianity and viewed socials as worldly, unnecessary, and only useful for assisting young people in their "matrimonial projects."¹⁴⁹ Marks suggests that it was not worldliness but, rather, a minister's concern over the gender of organizers that caused opposition. It appears that these ministers were not willing to accept the feminization of this aspect of the church because they believed "this was a sphere in which he had complete control and in which the female worshippers were required to be passively pious."¹⁵⁰ According to Marks, this explanation helps us understand what appears to be an extreme response to a harmless strawberry social.¹⁵¹ In

¹⁴⁸ Minute Book of the Buisy Gleanors; *Amherstburg Echo*, 21 December 1883; *Amherstburg Echo*, 11 April 1884; *Amherstburg Echo*, 8 April 1887; *Amherstburg Echo*, 15 April 1887; *Amherstburg Echo*, 27 May 1887; *Amherstburg Echo*, 29 July 1887; *Amherstburg Echo*, 5 August 1887; *Amherstburg Echo*, 7 October 1887; *Amherstburg Echo*, 16 December 1887; *Amherstburg Echo*, 29 January 1892; Walker, "African Canadians," *Encyclopedia of Canada's People*.

¹⁴⁹ Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, 77-78.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 79.

many cases, African-Canadian socials ensured the financial survival of these churches which spread “the real meaning of Christianity,” making them within the church’s proper realm and extremely necessary to African Canadians, including their ministers who often accepted female support. To maintain the community, African Canadians needed the church, and civil society organizations played a large role in this institution’s survival: in turn, the church provided a space for many of these organizations to meet, but also offered spiritual guidance for members and the rest of the community.

The Buisy Gleanors (1887-1916),¹⁵² a junior department of the Cheerful Workers, was also established to promote “friendly intercourse...and shall consist of ... recitations [of] essay[s] and select readings of, Dialogues andto raise means to aid the Baptist cause.”¹⁵³ They met every Friday at 4 o’clock and, just like their parent organization, combined education and charity by holding regular meetings to discuss literature, in addition to hosting numerous social events such as concerts, dinners, and teas on Thanksgiving. At these gatherings they offered vocal and instrumental music to raise money for the Baptist church. They even offered to have the church’s walls papered as part of the improvements going on at the time. Their devotion to the church added to the numerous charitable efforts of their parent organization and not only united the community, but linked it to more positive images such as self-reliance and independence.¹⁵⁴

The highly-regarded literary society also offered a respectable space for courtship and social intercourse, even if that was not the intended purpose of the group. A telling example is found in the *Provincial Freeman*, after its editor, Mary Ann Shadd, attended a meeting of the

¹⁵²According to their minute book, the Buisy Gleanors existed from 1887 to 1893, but a 1916 receipt suggests that this club may have lasted longer than their minutes indicate; Minute Book of the Buisy Gleanors; Constitution of the Buisy Gleanors, Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO.

¹⁵³ Constitution of the Buisy Gleanors.

¹⁵⁴*Amherstburg Echo*, 4 November 1887; *Amherstburg Echo*, 11 November 1887; *Amherstburg Echo*, 21 March 1890.

Dumas Literary Association, a mixed-gender group. To her surprise Shadd found “all ‘love’ and not any literary matters before the house ... when the various conversations commenced among male and female.”¹⁵⁵ Their social interactions became so distracting that the secretary rose up and addressed the group, but gained no results.¹⁵⁶ This unflattering report reveals that some members had love on their minds rather than books, but it also makes known the reality of nineteenth-century life in Canada West. Many residents wanted to find a spouse and if members met regularly, these clubs created the perfect opportunity to meet potential partners. Although Shadd did not approve, some groups encouraged meeting for this reason. The Canadian Home Circle, for example, allowed fellow church members to gather regularly for a meal and entertainment, while providing opportunities to meet local families, at times resulting in marriage. The latter reason may not have been a motivator for the family of Wilson Abbott, but during the 1830s and 1840s they were involved in this group while living in Toronto. Many years later, in 1881, Wilson’s son Anderson attended social gatherings of the Dundas Home Circle, which offered musical and literary entertainment. There is also evidence from the Alvin McCurdy Fond, listing members of the Ontario Home Circle, which operated in 1882. Membership included James Smith, Walter Anderson, Miss Sarah Monroe, Miss Mary Smith, and Miss Anne Green.¹⁵⁷ At these gatherings, love was not out of the question.

Although important, finding love did not consume the minds of members who sought after friendship. At a meeting of the Dumas Literary Society, for example, members stirred up some mischief when they put a cat on another member’s face and then pulled its tail, which

¹⁵⁵ “Dumas Literary Society,” *Provincial Freeman*, 12 April 1856.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ Catherine Slaney, *Family Secrets: Crossing the Colour Line* (Toronto: Natural Heritage Books, 2003), 28, 119-120; Roll of the Ontario Home Circle, Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO.

caused it to dig its claws in the member's mouth.¹⁵⁸ Despite conflicting with the purpose of this society, just as courtship did, this example illustrates the potential for camaraderie. Life in Southwestern Ontario could be isolating, particularly for those just arriving with no contacts. Playing a light-hearted joke on fellow members had the potential to bring people together, resulting in a sense of brotherhood/sisterhood, which was necessary if they wanted to act as a cohesive group. It seems that chances for friendship, courtship, and amusement could be just as appealing as self-improvement.

The sheer number of literary groups that existed during the latter half of the nineteenth century confirms that African-Canadian men and women were heavily engaged in educational pursuits. It was their belief that education would “uplift” the community, not only by improving the lives of (formerly) illiterate Black individuals, but also by proving that they were worthy of citizenship. In their efforts to educate, they also imparted wisdom on leadership positions and self-government, while pursuing philanthropic activities to maintain the community's most valued institution: the church. In addition to the groups already discussed, there were numerous other literary societies scattered throughout Canada West, including the Lyceum (Toronto); the Mental and Moral Improvement Society (Toronto); the Windsor Ladies Club; and the King Street Literary Society (Amherstburg). Each of these literary societies had the ability to transform individuals and the community as a whole, and in different ways.¹⁵⁹

Community-building organizations were everywhere in the Black community, but concerns over “respectability” were constantly on the minds of many Black citizens beginning at their arrival. James Walker states that “Fugitive-era organizations displayed a sensitivity toward

¹⁵⁸ “Dumas Literary Society,” *Provincial Freeman*, 12 April 1856.

¹⁵⁹ Murray, *Come, bright Improvement!*, 185-186; “‘The Colored People of Canada’ by William Wells Brown,” Ripley, *BAP*, 485.

their image among whites, conscious that without respect they could not hope to achieve equal rights.”¹⁶⁰ African Canadians felt this way throughout the nineteenth century because they were constantly trying to prove themselves, even after the Civil War. Once the war ended, “blacks were no longer fugitives from American tyranny, no longer testimony to the superiority of British institutions, but unwelcome intruders.”¹⁶¹ This meant that there was an increased need to prove that they were worthy citizens, despite continued opposition. If they were unable to convince others of their “respectability” it would be even more difficult to bridge the gap between their community and their rights.

Efforts toward “respectability” should not be misconstrued as an attempt to mirror White residents. If anything, it seems that these lessons were meant to help African Canadians adjust to life in Canada West, as opposed to striving to imitate White behaviour. When subscribers read newspapers like the *Voice of the Fugitive* and *Provincial Freeman* they were being influenced by Black editors with their own ideas of what to strive for. Leaders such as Henry Bibb, editor of the *Voice*, addressed his audience by warning, “Too long, brethren, have we been conniving at our own oppression ... by imitating our oppressors in vanity and extravagance in dress, &c., which is unbecoming and impracticable.”¹⁶² To Bibb, the Black community needed to create their own identity and live more practically. While Bibb advised African Canadians on behaviour to avoid, in the early 1850s Mary Ann Shadd promoted a specific model in the *Provincial Freeman* which sponsored a West Indian, not White, example. Shadd believed that

The blacks of the West Indies, now among the wealthiest, most learned and most influential of Her Majesty’s colonial subjects, were, a century ago, as poor and as illiterate as we are now ... The difference between their present and their past condition,

¹⁶⁰ Walker, “African Canadians,” *Encyclopedia of Canada’s People*.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*; Simpson, *Under the North Star*, 229.

¹⁶² “Address by Henry Bibb, John T. Fisher, and James D. Tinsley,” Ripley, *BAP*, 171.

is the result of their own efforts ... What they are we must be. We must become such by our own efforts, as they did.¹⁶³

Shadd was neither shy about advertising accomplished groups, nor criticizing those who were not. According to Shadd, “Too many of our own people either in ill manners, coarse habits, or low cringing to the negro-haters, do too much to give occasion to the enemy.”¹⁶⁴ To improve the community, Shadd knew that it was necessary to point out any problems, in addition to offering solutions. For example, in the *Provincial Freeman*, she provided subscribers with suggestions on agriculture and “how to be thrifty.” Shadd and numerous other community leaders believed that self-reliance was crucial and they wanted African Canadians to be able to compete equally with Whites, not strive to be them.¹⁶⁵ At the Amherstburg Convention in 1853, James T. Holly, Coleman Freeman, and Lewis Clark expressed their hope that when their children became adults that they would be accepted into public affairs, alongside Whites, if they were equally qualified.¹⁶⁶ To interact on the same level with White residents, it was essential to learn respectable behaviour, not only by reading Black newspapers, but also through organizational efforts. If African Canadians achieved “uplift” through these self-improvement resources, they could impress an image of “respectability” and industriousness. As a result, they could justify their demands for increased rights and privileges, including access to better education and community institutions.¹⁶⁷ This was a key reason for why countless African Canadians invested so much of their time and energy into these groups.

To demand their rights, it was essential for African Canadians to learn the proper behaviour that made equal citizenship possible. The *Rising Star* (Toronto), according to William

¹⁶³ “The London Convention,” *Provincial Freeman*, 24 March 1853.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ Simpson, *Under the North Star*, 93-94.

¹⁶⁶ *Minutes and proceedings of the General Convention.*

¹⁶⁷ Walker and Thompson, *Critical Mass*; Sutherland, “Race Relations in Halifax.”

P. Newman, consisted of young ladies “who resolved to get up early in the morning, walk a mile before breakfast, and marry no man that either chews tobacco, smokes, or drinks intoxicating beverages. Their numbers are small, but their heads are strong.”¹⁶⁸ Other groups, such as the Victoria Reform Benevolent Society for Social Relief, established specific rules to benefit each of its members. From its inception, in 1854 at Chatham, some of their rules required a higher standard of behaviour, while others set the bar rather low. For example, on the stricter side, members were not admitted if addicted to alcohol. This is not surprising, considering the strong connection African Canadians made between temperance and “respectability” during the latter half of the nineteenth century, but at the same time they could not have more than one husband or own a brothel, which would seem to be obvious qualifications for a respectable club.¹⁶⁹ It is curious as to why there would be such a variation in guidelines, but organizers were possibly unaware of what potential members did and did not know in terms of etiquette and tried to cover as much ground as they could. Participants, who gained entrance through the recommendation of existing members, pledged to conduct themselves in a faithful and orderly manner, to increase membership, and preside over their official positions in an honest way. If complaints were raised “the President ... shall appoint a committee of five persons, to try the accused person and ... [if] guilty, she shall for the first offence be reproved by the President, for the second offence she shall pay a fine of *fifteen shillings*, and for the third offence she shall be expelled from the Society.”¹⁷⁰ More seriously, if a member was convicted of any crime or misdemeanor, to the

¹⁶⁸ “‘The Colored People of Canada’ by William Wells Brown,” Ripley, *BAP*, 462, 484.

¹⁶⁹ Distancing oneself from promiscuity was also required in White groups such as the Friends United, which existed in the eighteenth century. Among their many rules, members who became ill from a venereal disease would receive no benefits from membership; Hall and Trentmann, “Self-help and regulation: a women’s friendly society – The Friends United,” 63-64; *Provincial Freeman*, 28 October 1854.

¹⁷⁰ *Provincial Freeman*, 28 October 1854.

point that it negatively affected the reputation of the organization, they were expelled.¹⁷¹ This organization had specific rules, but also established punishments to keep the actions of members in order and to maintain a positive image.

Among the later examples was Chatham's Maple Leaf Club, which was established in 1895 for young black men under the age of forty-five. Members of this club were not allowed to gamble, swear or smoke, and used their resources to "cultivate the highest traits of character among the members."¹⁷² This organization was restricted to men, but the nineteenth-century etiquette group the Frederic Douglass Self-Improvement Club, which briefly lasted from 1898 to 1899,¹⁷³ and promoted the "development of the arts of public and extempore speaking and elocution,"¹⁷⁴ was devoted to women. This etiquette club met every Tuesday in Amherstburg and had the motto of "Lifting As We Climb,"¹⁷⁵ which interestingly was the motto for the Black women's club movement in the US. This may not come as a surprise considering Amherstburg's

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Daniel Hill Black History Research Collection, Chatham Notes (A), AO; McFarquhar, "A Difference of Perspective," 294.

¹⁷³ Smaller, short-lived organizations dissolved for several reasons, including a decreasing population following the Civil War, limited spare time due to work commitments, and the need to adjust to the changing needs of the community. The Chatham Literary Society became the Kent County Civil Rights League, which was responsible for desegregating Chatham public schools. Despite duration and size, a group's legitimacy, according to John Clark, remained intact considering democracy allows any group, no matter its size, the right to state its opinion on matters that concern it, and as long as the group's interests do not cause harm to others they are legitimate. Elizabeth McHenry adds that an organization's impact was a result of their efforts not their numbers. Additionally, the message and purpose of an organization could live on in other groups that were inspired by them, or believed in the same goal; Clark, "The Globalization of Civil Society," 17; McHenry, *Forgotten Readers*, 109.

¹⁷⁴ Groups such as Chatham's Buds of Promise, established around 1915, continued to teach young women lady-like behaviour at the BME Church under the instruction of Helena Lynn, a music teacher at the Woodstock Institute (Chatham); Minutes of the Frederic Douglass Self-Improvement Club, Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO; Slaney, *Family Secrets*, 99; Robinson, *Seek the Truth*, 57, 92; Murray, *Come, bright Improvement!*, 192.

¹⁷⁵ Constitution and By-Laws of the Frederic Douglass Self-Improvement Club, Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO; Minute Book of the Frederic Douglass Self-Improvement Club, Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO.

close proximity to the US, the club's name and the origin of their organizer, Mary Roberts Tate of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Elizabeth McHenry argues that "Lifting As We Climb" implied that middle-class women, at that time, took on the task of educating their poorer sisters in middle-class values and behaviours which would help them project their "respectability."¹⁷⁶ Deborah Gray White adds that it was not only the duty of middle-class women to provide social services to the poor, but also to educate them, particularly Black women, on the means and benefits of achieving moral purity, which was essential in their social and cultural improvement.¹⁷⁷

That being said, there were certainly "class" divisions among clubwomen. McHenry states, for example, that "by highlighting the difficulty of selecting books and the dangers of not knowing what to read, leaders of the club movement demonstrated their own apparent superiority in matters cultural, strictly regulating the kinds of reading and types of literary activities in which club members engaged while reinforcing simultaneously the insecurities of some clubwomen and their own authority."¹⁷⁸ They shared the same struggle, but never forgot that some women would adopt leadership positions while others would remain followers.¹⁷⁹ Although some were meant to lead, while others followed, within civil society, all members had the opportunity to be heard.

The Frederic Douglass Self-Improvement Club made it clear who would directly benefit from their lessons when they resolved that "There shall [be] no one belong[ing] to this club, but respectable girls."¹⁸⁰ The main concern for this society was moral and social improvement, which was reinforced in the constitution: "Any girl caught in bad Company or out late at nights

¹⁷⁶ Minute Book of the Frederic Douglass Self-Improvement Club; McHenry, *Forgotten Readers*, 233.

¹⁷⁷ White, *Too Heavy A Load*, 70.

¹⁷⁸ McHenry, *Forgotten Readers*, 233.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*; White, *Too Heavy A Load*.

¹⁸⁰ Minutes of the Frederic Douglass Self-Improvement Club.

[sic] without a proper escort ... must explain [herself] to the satisfaction of the Club.”¹⁸¹ If disobedient, members were held accountable, considering “[a]ny member of this club neglecting to pay dues, or who shall be guilty of improper conduct, calculated to bring this club into disrepute shall be expelled from membership by a two third vote of the members.”¹⁸² Just like the Victoria Reform Benevolent Society, they were concerned with not only how individuals acted, but with how the entire group was perceived: they were fiercely protective of their image because they knew the world was watching.

The lessons learned by these etiquette groups did not appear from thin air; members used the resources available to them. Nineteenth-century rules of etiquette created guidelines that allowed men and women to, at least in their own eyes, attain “respectability,” and an essential way to learn proper behaviour was through etiquette books. Samuel Smiles was famous for his instructions on proper behaviour and he wanted to change the station of those who were worthy, one person at a time. In his book, *Self-Help*, first published in 1859, Smiles directed his energy mainly at men, but he wanted to get to the root of the problem: the individual. Changing the character of one individual after the other could lead to the transformation of entire communities, but Smiles did not believe that changing laws and institutions would create results; instead he encouraged motivation through a person’s own free and independent actions. He added that we are the masters of our habits and temptations, and English liberty relied heavily upon individual character, which ensured social security and national progress. To Smiles, liberty/freedom was the way to achieve good character while, at the same time, liberty depended on the character of individuals. This individuality was crucial to Smiles, who believed that every person could

¹⁸¹ Constitution and By-Laws of the Frederic Douglass Self-Improvement Club.

¹⁸² Ibid.

negatively or positively affect the world around them.¹⁸³ Smiles also believed that anyone, no matter his place in society, could achieve a higher standing, arguing that riches could be a misfortune because it often impeded, rather than stimulated a person's actions, while a lack of wealth could motivate. Men from a humbler rank could elevate their standing, but they had to put forth a great deal of hard work to achieve this; a life of ease and luxury neither prepared a person for challenges that lay ahead, nor did it motivate them to take action. In his opinion, individuals were stakeholders in society: they got out what they put in.¹⁸⁴

The ideals of English liberty and rising beyond your social/financial standing were also goals of the Black community. Adapting to their new lives in Canada West involved demonstrating a loyalty to the government that aided in their emancipation and what better way to do this than by being proper citizens worthy of English liberty. When Smiles stated that people of any standing could achieve "respectability," it opened the door to African Canadians, who were forced onto the lower rungs of society. Although his intended audience was generally White men, Smiles' thoughts on character and betterment certainly reflected the goals of the Black community, but his methods were not always applicable to this group. Although African Canadians did believe that an individual could positively or negatively impact the world around them, it was about more than the individual. To the Black community, they did not have time to work one by one, or one on one; their success would be in group form. The large numbers of Black refugees coming into the province required mass "uplift" and the demand for results meant that bringing more people together was necessary. Additionally, Smiles did not believe that altering laws or modifying institutions was the answer, but for African Canadians this was

¹⁸³ Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help; With Illustrations of Character and Conduct* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1861), 16-17, 206-207.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 31-32, 203, 285-286.

crucial. How could they better themselves if the law excluded, and schools and churches rejected them? Although it is unclear whether African Canadians actually used Smiles' book, they did strive to achieve many of the ideas he discussed.

The maintenance of one's masculinity and femininity were also among the valuable lessons taught during the nineteenth century. In John Young's, *Our Deportments*, which discusses an exhaustive list of subjects including manners, conversation, etiquette on visiting, letter writing, table etiquette, home culture, and how to dress. This book provided readers with the tools to properly interact and present themselves in numerous environments such as in the home and on the street. Among the many advisements for women, they were expected to travel with an escort to whom she was expected to give a sum of money which was meant to pay all of her expenses. The only other alternative was for the woman to allow the gentleman to pay her expenses upfront and be compensated once the journey had come to an end, but this was only possible at the gentleman's suggestion: the woman was not to appear as if she was paying for anything. Women were also instructed on writing letters of love and friendship, suppressing undue emotion and how to enter a room. Even the smallest details were to be controlled, including sneezing and coughing, which were to be done as quickly as possible, if at all. This may seem trivial but, at the time, it was important. These guiding principles were not exclusive to women, as men were also instructed on topics such as "A Gentleman's Conduct Toward Ladies," and "How a lady and gentleman should walk together." The latter stated that it was customary for a woman to walk on the right side of the gentleman, but if the street was crowded, the gentleman must keep the lady on whatever side shielded her from crowding. Additionally, gentlemen were also expected to be skilled in fencing, riding, shooting, and swimming, but also

carry themselves gracefully and defend a woman from insults.¹⁸⁵ This long list of expectations was studied by many citizens who wanted to fit in by accepting the social norms of the time.

Just as with Smiles' work, it is not known if African Canadians read *Our Deportments*, but many of the lessons found in this book were utilized in the Black community. The women of the Frederic Douglass Self-Improvement Club discussed similar topics to those found in *Our Deportments*, such as the art of conversation, table etiquette, street etiquette, and general rules to govern conduct. The particulars of each subject are not found in their minute book, but these titles are listed for group discussion.¹⁸⁶ Where they originally came across these lessons or how members used them is unknown, but following established societal rules was important to this group. They believed that "respectability" was an essential way to prove that they were worthy of equality, not enslavement, and their path to this goal was through groups such as their own.

To maintain this standard, members of the Frederic Douglass Self-Improvement Club were expected to morally and mentally "advance" themselves through numerous activities such as composition. At one meeting on 15 November 1898, Dora Artis, the club secretary, recited an essay that asked "How shall we raise the standard of morality among our young ladies?"¹⁸⁷ Improvement was a recurring theme as this group also discussed the etiquette of worldly manners and its ultimate success, manners as an index of character, the true woman and man, politeness, the outgrowth of good manners and the value of pleasing manners. These essays were only one method of transforming young African-Canadian girls into the respectable women that their community required. They also studied etiquette that involved the art of conversation,

¹⁸⁵ John H. Young, A.M., *Our Deportments or the Manners, Conduct and Dress of the Most Refined Society Including Norms for Letters, Invitations, etc., etc. Also, Valuable Suggestions on Home Culture and Training* (Hamilton, Ont.: F.B. Dickerson & Co., 1880), 147, 166-167, 184-85, 258, 261, 271.

¹⁸⁶ Minute Book of the Frederic Douglass Self-Improvement Club.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

street etiquette, letter writing, club etiquette, and general rules to govern conduct.¹⁸⁸ These lessons were a fixture in their members' lives and when they were not followed this group took offence. For example, the club expressed its disappointment when Dora Artis resigned without providing a proper explanation, only writing, "To the members of the Frederic Douglass Self-Improvement Club. I the undersigned wish to tender my resignation as secretary & member of the Club. Yours respectively [sic], Dora Artis."¹⁸⁹ There is no evidence for why she left, but members responded by describing Miss Artis as "not lady enough to come and let the club know, she just sent a letter of resignation, which the Club did not think was right according to the rules."¹⁹⁰ Although Artis submitted a written resignation, members did not consider this a proper exit. Artis is the only recorded example of "controversy," suggesting that all other members followed the established rules accordingly, and members had every reason to do so. Some of their activities were published in the *Amherstburg Echo*, meaning that their behaviour would have been on display for all to see, including White readers: displaying "respectability" was deliberate. According to James Walker, Canadian Blacks were conscious of being "on trial" and that their actions could affect the entire "race": they were representatives for all African Canadians.¹⁹¹ As a result, etiquette clubs, which provided a chance for moral and social self-improvement, became a necessary fixture in African-Canadian life. It was the purpose of these etiquette groups to silence negative publicity in newspapers such as the *Essex Free Press*.

This message has a long history in the Black community. At the North American Convention, abolitionists Henry Bibb, John T. Fisher, and James D. Tinsley reminded African Canadians of the responsibility that rested on their shoulders because every free Black in Canada

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.; Resignation letter of Miss Dora Artis, 24 January 1899, Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO.

¹⁹⁰ Minute Book of the Frederic Douglass Self-Improvement Club.

¹⁹¹ Walker, "On The Record," 109.

represented the millions of enslaved people who were still held in bondage. They warned that “the eye of the civilized world” was watching and determining whether they could take care of themselves or not.¹⁹² Being a representative for the community, whether in a time of slavery or freedom, was a commitment that Black citizens strived for daily. Their actions could help or harm the community’s image in an instant. Following club rules may have left the Frederic Douglass Self-Improvement Club out of the public eye, a strategy often used in the Black community.

On the lighter side of their involvement, membership kept participants occupied, but it also gave them an open invitation to respectable social events. Anderson Abbott, who was himself a member of several groups, believed

Social circles are the outgrowths of our civilization, and must necessarily exist while human nature is cast in such diversified moulds as it is. There are certain tastes, affinities, and aspirations which tend to draw people together. A refined and cultivated mind cannot find any pleasure in the society of a coarse, vulgar and ignorant one ... Some persons have literary tastes which draw them together. Some find a bond of sociability in commercial interests, and some again have peculiar idiosyncrasies [sic] which render them obnoxious to all except those alike constituted ... They are as numerous and varied as the operations of the human mind.¹⁹³

While promoting social circles Abbott warns to avoid mischief, for it is only when they conduct themselves properly that they serve to purify the community.¹⁹⁴ Cultural groups such as the Frederic Douglass Self-Improvement Club offered those in attendance a respectable form of entertainment in an appropriate environment. At one of their receptions the guest list included both women and men who were, no doubt, under the watchful eye of their guest speakers,

¹⁹² “Address by Henry Bibb, John T. Fisher, and James D. Tinsley,” Ripley, *BAP*, 174-175.

¹⁹³ ARA, “Social Circles,” Chatham, 28 August 1874, A.R. Abbott Papers, Scrapbook I, Toronto Reference Library.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

Deacon Jones and the Reverend W.J. Artis.¹⁹⁵ Socials were also quite popular among the Cheerful Workers, who held oyster socials, lawn socials, and even a pink social in the 1880s where they served a lovers' truth cake and a guess cake. Church leaders were possibly chaperons, making their attendance and behaviour at these functions acceptable.¹⁹⁶ These gatherings were held on Sunday and throughout the week, which gave Black residents numerous opportunities for respectable entertainment. As previously discussed, "respectability" was essential, particularly because of how Whites perceived them.

Among the more playful explanations, filling one's social calendar could increase membership. Quite often, African Canadians were involved in multiple groups, whether at the same time or during the span of a few years or more. Using the 1872 diary of John Travis, a Methodist farmer, Arlie C. Robbins concludes that in areas like Raleigh (Buxton), "Most of the people's social life revolved around the Lodge, the School and the Churches. Enrollment in all of these was high and quite often the same names appeared over and over again. Morning and evening services, concerts, lodge meeting, socials, bees and even funerals were occasions not to be missed."¹⁹⁷ Filling one's social calendar demonstrates the reality of everyday life in the Black community. There needed to be time set aside for advancement, but also entertainment. Through these civil society organizations, each of the following examples proved themselves to be active contributors in their community, while having a social life.

¹⁹⁵ Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, 14-5; Minute Book of the Frederic Douglass Self-Improvement Club.

¹⁹⁶ *Amherstburg Echo*, 15 January 1892; Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, 76, 95; *Amherstburg Echo*, 29 July 1887; *Amherstburg Echo*, 5 August 1887; *Amherstburg Echo*, 7 October 1887; *Amherstburg Echo*, 16 December 1887; Walker, "African Canadians," *Encyclopedia of Canada's Peoples*.

¹⁹⁷ Arlie C. Robbins, *Legacy to Buxton* (North Buxton: A.C. Robbins, 1983), 100; Canada Census 1881, Raleigh, Kent, pg. 3, file number C-13278, LAC.

In other areas like Amherstburg, involvement in multiple societies occurred regularly. Delos R. Davis, a prominent Essex-County lawyer, was a member of the Amherstburg Literary Association from 1881 to 1882, and from 1889 onward met weekly with the (Masonic) Lincoln Lodge #8. As a member of this Masonic lodge, Davis also arranged “old-time political gatherings” where political figures and members of parliament spoke to and informed citizens of Amherstburg about current issues. At an 1879 Emancipation Day celebration, Davis also encouraged the audience to fight for equality and fair treatment. Davis was also a speaker for the Cheerful Workers in 1890 and was the honorary president of the Social-Literary Society for part of 1895. This was in addition to making guest appearances for groups such as the Daughters of Union in 1896 and the AME church. He also went on to become a member of the Wilberforce Educational Institute, until his death in 1915, where he was described as “one of its strongest members.”¹⁹⁸ Davis was an educated and influential member of his community and, because he was a lawyer, Davis had the time, means, and resources to lead and participate in these organizations: these factors made him a suitable candidate for leadership. For those in unskilled positions, it would have been necessary for them to work longer hours, interrupting their involvement in these organizations.

Women of Amherstburg also flexed their activist muscles in numerous organizations. Mrs. Martha Gant was a member of numerous organizations that stemmed from the First Baptist Church, including the Church Aid Society, the Amherstburg Guild, the Women’s Guild, where

¹⁹⁸ *Amherstburg Echo*, 15 May 1896; *Amherstburg Echo*, 4 January 1895; *Amherstburg Echo*, 18 July 1890; *Amherstburg Echo*, 4 March 1881; *Amherstburg Echo*, 29 July 1892; *Amherstburg Echo*, 4 April 1884; *Amherstburg Echo*, 16 July 1886; “Old Custom,” *Amherstburg Echo*, 1 December 1949; A.C. Robbins, “Ontario Prince Hall Masons,” as found in Grand Lodge Proceedings and Other old Records prior to 1904,” Chatham-Kent Black Historical Society; Owen Thomas, “Delos Rogest Davis,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*; Natasha L. Henry, *Emancipation Day: Celebrating Freedom in Canada* (Toronto: Natural Heritage Books, 2010), 51; “Memorial Resolutions,” Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO.

she was secretary, and the Amherstburg Ladies Sewing Circle. Mrs. Ella Kirtley and Mrs. Julia Saunders were members of the very same organizations, except Kirtley was the treasurer of the Women's Guild, while Mrs. Julia Saunders was one of its founders. Kirtley and Saunders were also members of Amherstburg's Central Grove Club, a religious organization from the twentieth century. Other women from the Amherstburg Guild also participated in the Central Grove Club, including Mrs. C. Brantford, Ida B. Jones, Belle Wilson, Azalia Wilson, and Ethel Wilson.¹⁹⁹ Sara Elizabeth Nall was also active in her (Baptist) church where she acted as treasurer in 1896. This was in addition to joining the Amherstburg Ladies Sewing Circle and the Amherstburg Guild, and becoming a charter member and Royal Grand Matron of Amherstburg's Ruth Chapter #4, Order of the Eastern Star, established in 1892. Nall's memorial describes her as "a loyal supporter of ... the societies of which she was identified."²⁰⁰ These women lived a life of community activism in the nineteenth century and carried that legacy into the next.

Chatham also experienced this trend of heightened activism from residents such as Henry Weaver and the Reverend James C. Richards. Weaver, a grocer and a member of municipal council from 1891 to 1893 and 1895 to 1898, was involved in the St. John's Masonic Lodge #9 from 1874 to his death in 1916. This included the position of Grand Master from 1887 to 1892, a role that required heightened involvement. Weaver was also part of the Wellington Lodge #1065, a chapter of the Odd Fellows, which was organized in 1859 and met every Tuesday. His

¹⁹⁹ Roll for the Church Aid Society, Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO; Roll for the Amherstburg Guild, Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO; The Women's Guild, Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO; Roll for the Amherstburg Ladies Sewing Circle, Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO; "Members of Central Grove Club," Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO; "Programme for Central Grove Club at Amherstburg, Wednesday November 9th, 1921," Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO.

²⁰⁰ "In Memoriam, Sara Elizabeth Nall," Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO; Arlie C. Robbins, *Prince Hall Masonry in Ontario, 1852-1933* (Toronto: Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge, Free and Accepted Masons for the Province of Ontario and Jurisdiction, 1980), 133; Roll of the Amherstburg Guild; Roll for the Amherstburg Ladies Sewing Circle.

participation also involved acting as the first Grand Worthy Patron for the Order of the Eastern Star, founded in 1889, and the Grand Commander for the Knights Templar of Michigan and Ontario in 1893. The latter part of the century was particularly busy for Weaver, especially because he, along with his wife, Ann Rebecca, ran their own store.²⁰¹ Weaver, just like Davis, also had the resources that made the transition from participant to leader smoother. Although occupied with running his own store, he had greater opportunities to fill his schedule with organizational work because he was not consumed by his work schedule. The same applied to the Reverend James C. Richards.

The Reverend James C. Richards, who emigrated from the US in 1883, was a highly respected Bishop of the BME Church until his death in 1925 and was just as involved in his community. He joined the St. John's Lodge #9 in 1887, becoming Grand Master in 1900 until 1925, in addition to acting as Grand Worthy Patron for the Electa Chapter #1 (Chatham), Order of the Eastern Star, a position that Weaver also held. Additionally, as Grand Captain for the Knights Templar, Richards led an exhibition drill at an 1892 annual meeting, but his involvement extended outside of Masonic membership.²⁰² As the president of the Kent County Civil Rights League, Richards was instrumental in desegregating schools in Chatham. According to Adrienne Shadd, "No people had attained greatness or their rights without a struggle. The Kent County Civil Rights League was established on these principles and was poised to do just that – stand up

²⁰¹ Robinson, *Seek the Truth*, 54, 68, 110-118, 130-133; Robbins, "Ontario Prince Hall Masons," 119; "Colored Knights Templar," *Hamilton Spectator*, 17 August 1892; "Colored Belles at the Ball," *Hamilton Spectator*, 18 August 1892; <http://ckblackhistoricalsociety.org/ck-history/profilearchive/henryweaver/henryweaver.html>.

²⁰² Shadd, "No 'Back Alley Clique,'" 81; Robinson, *Seek the Truth*, 82, 113-118, 130-133; Robbins, "Ontario Prince Hall Masons"; Robbins, *Prince Hall Masonry*, 119; "Colored Knights Templar," *Hamilton Spectator*, 17 August 1892; "Colored Belles at the Ball," *Hamilton Spectator*, 18 August 1892.

for the Africans' rights and demand justice."²⁰³ Under Richards' leadership, the League took aggressive action. For example, at the 1891 Emancipation Day celebration held in Chatham, Richards, the chairperson of the festivities, declared that guest speakers would not thank and praise, as was the usual course, but encouraged Black residents to fight injustice and informed the audience of the Kent County Civil Rights League's goals and the reasons for the organization's founding, which was to unify African Canadians in their fight for redress and to overcome the lack of integrated schools, hotels, and service establishments. The day did not consist of traditional activities such as parades and church services but, rather, involved strategy making. The funds raised at this Emancipation observance went toward the League's goal of equality.²⁰⁴ Members also wrote letters to the *Chatham Planet*, distributed a petition and eventually hired a lawyer. In a speech delivered to the board of trustees, R.W.S. Johnston, also a member of the Kent County Civil Rights League, declared, "We are all citizens of Chatham and we wish to live amicably together; but I may inform you that we have got the money to go to the law with."²⁰⁵ Hiring a lawyer was a more aggressive tactic for this voluntary association, but, on 5 April 1893, it was announced that schools in Chatham would be integrated. In response, a procession led by the Detroit City Band, followed by members of the Knights Templar and Eureka Commandery No. 1, all in uniform, marched to Tecumseh Park where speeches were given by the mayor and other guest speakers. This group grew out of the Chatham Literary Association in 1891, which demonstrates that skills learned in literary groups prepared members to debate unfair policy. Challenging racist policy was also possible due to collaboration with numerous other voluntary organizations, giving them strength in numbers, roughly 600

²⁰³ Shadd, "No 'Back Alley Clique,'" 80.

²⁰⁴ *Chatham Tri-Weekly Planet*, 5 August 1891; Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 82-83.

²⁰⁵ Shadd, "No 'Back Alley Clique,'" 83; "The Vexing Color Line," *Chatham Daily Planet*, 8 December 1892.

members.²⁰⁶ According to Jeffrey McNairn, “Voluntary associations were schools for the public sphere. They brought individuals together to pursue common projects, instructing them in the public use of their reason ... Developments in ... associational ... life ensured that officials, legislators, and the most privileged no longer held a monopoly on the ability to reason in public life.”²⁰⁷ Shadd states that, while challenging segregation, almost all of those who signed the League’s petition were members of one or more Masonic orders including St. John’s Lodge, the Knights Templar, or the Oddfellows. Masonic involvement with the Kent County Civil Rights League demonstrates how multiple civil associations could achieve social change when working together. According to John D. Clark, in civil society, participants give their support and time, which provides opportunities to debate policy and influence government decisions.²⁰⁸ This group did just that.

Of all the civil society organizations, fraternal orders were among the earliest and longest lasting. As mentioned, fraternal orders confronted discrimination in Chatham schools directly and aggressively, but they also challenged prejudice within the brotherhood. In their efforts to alter negative perceptions of the Black community they endured substantial criticism from their so-called Masonic “brothers,” forcing them to start their own segregated lodges in 1851. At that time, Grand Master George Shreve of the Union Grand Lodge of New Jersey (Black) appointed Brother T.C. Harmsley to create a lodge in Hamilton. The warrant for this Black lodge was signed on 27 December 1852, resulting in the Mount Olive Lodge #1, followed by the Victoria

²⁰⁶ *The Plaindealer*, 24 March 1893; “Reminiscences of J.W. Montgomery,” undated letter from J.W. Montgomery to the editor of a newspaper, Chatham-Kent Black Historical Society; Shadd, “No ‘Back Alley Clique,’” 81, 83, 92, 94; *Chatham Daily Planet*, 2 August 1893; Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 83-84.

²⁰⁷ McNairn, *The Capacity To Judge*, 16.

²⁰⁸ Shadd, “No ‘Back Alley Clique,’” 79, 83, 92, 94; Clark, “The Globalization of Civil Society,” 20.

Lodge #2 of St. Catharines in June 1853, and the Olive Branch of Windsor in October 1854.

Within two years these lodges were represented under the Widow's Son Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Ancient York Masons, which became the Grand Lodge of the Province of Ontario in 1872. This separate Grand Lodge was necessary "Because of the unsociableness of the brethren (white) to meet with us and not giving us that satisfaction when called upon for harmonious working of the craft."²⁰⁹ Many White lodge members were unwilling to admit African Canadians as their equals, both in their organization and society as a whole. This was a common problem in other fraternal orders including the Oddfellows. The (White) Independent Order of Oddfellows also refused admission and charter status to Canadian Blacks, even putting the word "White" in their constitution, which forced them to organize their own lodges in the 1840s.²¹⁰

The female auxiliaries of these lodges, such as the Order of the Eastern Star (Masonic), were also segregated, demonstrating that discrimination was not exclusive to male organizations. African-Canadian male lodges followed the same tradition of White men in prohibiting female attendance, even though they too were forbidden from attending White lodges. Additionally, because African-Canadian male lodges, not White female orders, established their female counterpart, it meant that Black women were rejected on the basis of "race" and "gender."²¹¹ These women held the lowest spot on the societal ladder, but joining African-Canadian groups gave them the opportunity to organize and gain the experience that allowed them to speak for themselves and others.

²⁰⁹ Robbins, *Prince Hall Masonry*, iv, 28.

²¹⁰ Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 100.

²¹¹ Robbins, *Prince Hall Masonry*, 131; Robert Macoy, *The Amaranth (Independent), A Royal and Exalted Degree in the Rite of Adoption with Appropriate Ceremonies* (New York: Macoy Publishing & Masonic Supply Co., 1918), 10.

Despite the many obstacles that came their way, African-Canadian lodges, both male and female, were able to impact their community in numerous and substantial ways. Interestingly, their effect on the community was not always through typical means and they, more than any other group, applied key elements from other civil society organizations, including charity, education, and etiquette. Masonic Lodges had a tradition of community “uplift” by weaving charity into their activities and the Grand Lodge of the Province of Ontario, formerly the Widow’s Son Grand Lodge, was particularly concerned with the welfare of families of their deceased brothers. As a result, the focus of their charitable activities was directed mainly toward members and their families. Assistance, in the form of a Mutual Aid Society (later the Mutual Benefit Association in the 1890s) was an essential part of this brotherhood, even in death. According to their constitution, the widows and orphans of a deceased Master Mason would receive protection and assistance from the fraternity, based on how much the fellowship was able to extend and how much assistance was needed. This occurred at an Emancipation Day celebration when the St. John’s Lodge #9 of Chatham held an evening program at the Drill Shed and donated all the proceeds raised from tickets and food sales to their widow and orphan charity.²¹² On a separate occasion one grateful widow, Catherine Smith, thanked the Masons by saying,

I, hereby most gratefully desire to return my heartfelt thanks to the members of the Masonic Fraternity in general, and to the officers and members of those Lodges in particular, who so nobly subscribed assistance for me after the death of my late husband, Bro. George Smith, of Victoria Lodge, No. 2 ... and to state that the amount received, \$14.25, has assisted me in defraying the expenses of his sickness and burial. May the widow’s prayer for your success, and the fatherless children’s gratitude, be encouragement for the future prosperity of the time-honored noble institution of Free and

²¹² *Chatham Weekly Planet*, 3 August 1871; Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 56, 78; Robbins, *Prince Hall Masonry*, 82.

Accepted Masons. Thanking you again and again for your timely, but unexpected assistance.²¹³

The “widow’s prayer” was sent to many African-Canadian Masons who assisted Masonic families and aspired to achieve higher ideals not only intellectually, but morally and religiously.²¹⁴ Assisting people such as Catherine Smith served multiple purposes. It helped those in need, but it also connected members and their community with self-help and “uplift”: a common theme in the Black community. Masons were taught that “Masonry is love; love toward man, love for the beautiful; brotherly love, love for the good, the honest, the true.”²¹⁵ Each lodge tried to spread this message because it made them better men, inside and outside of the lodge. They learned that in order to help themselves it was imperative that they helped others.

This message was injected into their female auxiliary, the Order of the Eastern Star, which began as an organization consisting of female relatives of Master Masons called the “Female” Lodges. They existed in Canada West thirty years prior to their formal establishment in 1889. Although information on their nineteenth-century activities is scarce, their benevolence toward members and their families is evident in the teas, bazaars, and banquets held to raise funds, in addition to assisting the poor and visiting the sick.²¹⁶ According to their Instructional

²¹³ 1883 Annual Proceedings for the M.W. Grand Lodge of the Province of Ontario, Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO.

²¹⁴ 1888 & 1890 Proceedings for the M.W. Grand Lodge of the Province of Ontario, Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO.

²¹⁵ Charity was also directed toward those outside of Canada, when the Grand Lodge of Ontario asked the many lodges in their jurisdiction to raise money for their brothers in Jacksonville, Florida, who suffered a great loss due to a fire. Money was received from lodges such as the Star Lodge, with an \$8.60 donation, while the St. John’s Lodge and North America Lodge each contributed \$5. It was the Grand Lodge’s hope that “this matter will appeal to the sympathy of every Mason in our jurisdiction and that they will liberally respond to the urgent demands of our brethren who are in distress”; Proceedings of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge, A.F.&A.M. For the Province of Ontario for the Year, 1901, Chatham-Kent Black Historical Society.

²¹⁶ Robbins, *Prince Hall Masonry*, 131; Walker, “African Canadians,” *Encyclopedia of Canada’s People*.

Guide, the main purpose of this organization was to “protect the widow and orphan, comfort the afflicted, sympathize with the sorrowing, and relieve the destitute and distressed” so that they “maybe [sic] ever united in the pleasing work of increasing our own happiness and promoting that of others.”²¹⁷ Their continued effort to improve themselves and others demonstrates that they were an asset in and outside of their lodge.

Other fraternal organizations such as the Oddfellows were also known for their charitable actions. In its 2 August 1884 edition, the *Hamilton Spectator* comments that the amount of good the Oddfellows had done was impossible to tell, but added that nationally the statistics for 1882 recorded over \$67,000 accumulated for the purpose of charitable and benevolent endeavours.²¹⁸ The combined efforts of each lodge resulted in this significant contribution and emphasizes the sense of community found within fraternal orders: success came from helping others, not just themselves.

Performing acts of charity was a significant way for fraternal orders and auxiliaries to create a sense of union: members made a promise to protect and assist their fellow members, which reinforced the bond members established. In a memorial for Ezekiel Stevens, who joined the Lincoln Lodge in 1875, he was remembered as a person who was always ready and willing to do everything in his power to help a worthy brother in need.²¹⁹ Members formed close relationships with their brothers, allowing them to draw strength from each other, especially when fighting for equal rights. In fact, socialization was encouraged among Masonic lodges. In

²¹⁷ Robert Macoy, *Ritual of the Degrees of the Eastern Star and the Queen of the South, to which is added the Matron's Administrative Degree, A Book of Instruction for the Organization, Government, and Ceremonies of Chapters of the Rite of Adoption in Every Department* (New York: Robert Macoy, 1887), 157, 174-175.

²¹⁸ “The Emancipation Day,” *Hamilton Spectator*, 2 August 1884.

²¹⁹ “Memorial, Ezekiel Stevens,” Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO.

an 1895 address, Grand Master George Hughes stated that it would be beneficial for each lodge to closely cultivate and maintain social relations. He argued that this activity was essential to the survival of the institution considering socializing “preserved” the attention and interest of membership. He added, “Man is eminently social, and Masonry should be an eminently social institution. It is impossible to sustain in a fresh, healthy condition this or any other similar organization without infusing into it that pleasant social quality which lightens the heart and drives away that look of anxious care which busy life imposes ... Why not our lodges [sic] have more frequent social gatherings? Not once or twice a year, but as often as convenient.”²²⁰ To Hughes, socialization was key to cultivating relationships and maintaining membership and brotherhood.

Charitable efforts and establishing brotherhood/sisterhood were more commonly recognized ways for Masonic lodges to “uplift” their community, but they also used less likely means to raise up the community. Fraternal lodges, organizations not typically associated with literary activities, also assisted their members in educational pursuits. In “The Hidden Role of Fraternal Organizations in the Education of Black Adults,” William Muraskin argues that there was a strong desire for education among the Black middle class, but their economic base for achievement was weak. They sought instruction in manners and social graces, intellectual and practical business skills, citizenship training, and moral instruction but, at times, did not have the means to fulfill this need. As a result, the multifaceted Masonic Lodge, an organization not traditionally associated with education, but rather social and recreational activities, provided an

²²⁰ Proceedings of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of the Most Honorable [sic] and Ancient Fraternity, Free and Accepted Masons of the Province of Ontario, 1895.

environment for learning outside of a formal institutional setting.²²¹ According to Muraskin, fraternal orders have maintained roles as educators for the last 200 years, which has aided in the self-improvement of the community. He adds that governmental education institutions were only one means to achieve an education, considering the numerous voluntary organizations, including lecture societies, study groups, clubs, and library associations that fulfilled the same purpose.²²² The Black community's multifaceted approach to education speaks volumes to their ability to adapt to the needs of their community. Some members preferred a literary society for learning, while others chose the lodge, or both, as their environment for education. This non-traditional resource provided a space to learn outside of the traditional classroom.

Not only was the educational advancement of members a significant contribution, but participants also earned opportunities for leadership and self-government, which were extended to "regular" citizens, at times through elections, not just established community representatives such as ministers. According to Theda Skocpol et al., voluntary groups were "schools of self-government."²²³ They elected leaders, dealt with disobedient members, created rules to sustain their organization, organized events, kept financial records and ran committees, even those with smaller numbers. In fact, Skocpol et al. state that smaller societies provided increased opportunities for members to learn and apply these skills by serving on committees and holding official positions, which led to the "development and exercise of political abilities."²²⁴ William Muraskin also states that Masonic lodges had numerous committees, a number of which

²²¹ William Muraskin, "The Hidden Role of Fraternal Organizations in the Education of Black Adults: Prince Hall Freemasonry as a Case Study," *Adult Education* 26:4 (1976), 235.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Theda Skocpol, Ariane Liazos and Marshall Ganz, *What a Mighty Power We Can Be: African American Fraternal Groups and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), 61.

²²⁴ Ibid., 81, 84, 86.

accomplished very little but, despite this, they did boost the self-esteem of members, while providing experience on how to carry out their roles as member, chairman or secretary. It gave them a sense of responsibility and leadership.²²⁵ Skocpol et al., add that it was not only those in official positions who learned the responsibilities that accompanied each office, as all members had these rules clearly spelt out to them each time a new officer, especially among the Masons, took over a position. This repetition attached to each ceremony instructed all members on the duties of each office, whether or not they held the position in question. These groups taught members, all members, to lead and provided them with the skills to challenge unfair treatment and strengthen their racial pride.²²⁶

Among the most important aspects of organizational work was the legacy from one generation to the next. Parents who joined these organizations, not just fraternal orders, were aware of the traditions that could be passed on to their children, possibly enhancing the bond between them. In Masonic Lodges it was a longstanding tradition for relatives of Masons to join, giving them a chance to instill certain values learned in their lodge. Theda Skocpol et al., argue that as standards for manhood and womanhood changed as the century progressed, fraternal orders became an important medium for young people to learn what it meant to be a man.²²⁷ Members were given instructions to guide them toward being good men. For example, they were told to obey the “moral law,” avoid quarrels and promote the general good of society.²²⁸ These rules were taken very seriously, even those that might have been considered of minor importance. In 1879, for example, the North America Lodge, No. 11 (Windsor) requested

²²⁵ Muraskin, “The Hidden Role of Fraternal Organizations in the Education of Black Adults,” 239.

²²⁶ Skocpol et al., *What a Mighty Power We Can Be*, 61.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 98.

²²⁸ Thomas Bird Harris, *The Book of Constitution of the Grand Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons, of Canada* (Hamilton, 1866), 15-16.

permission to have Masonic members turn out in regalia for an August 1st celebration in Sandwich, but were refused because officials “could find neither law nor precedent to sustain me in so doing; for, as masons, we should be very cautious in our proceedings before the world ... As masons ... we should not be so ready to make displays, for we have a great deal to do before we can reach the top.”²²⁹ The rules, no matter how small, were followed. McNairn states that Masonic laws, including a hierarchy of leadership, were man-made and, as a result, each Mason was required to follow them accordingly because he consented to do so: Masons were bound by this code.²³⁰ Members were expected to set an example: they had to pay their dues, attend meetings and respect these rules. In his 1871 Grand Master’s Address, Benjamin Stewart declared that “Any man that claims to be a Mason, and don’t try to govern himself by its rules and regulations, cannot be considered a good Mason, it matters not how many degrees he has taken, or how well he can work. It is the internal and not the external qualification that recommends a man to the beauties of Masonry.”²³¹ In these groups boys learned how to be (good) men, a lesson that fathers wanted to pass on to their sons. They were determined to incorporate family into this organization and were told, “Remember in your deliberations that we are making history; be careful, prudent, temperate, and discreet, that future generations may be

²²⁹ Proceedings of the Seventh, Eighth and Ninth Annual Communications of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of the Most Ancient and Honorable [sic] Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons of the Province of Ontario, Dominion of Canada (1879, 1880, 1881), Chatham-Kent Black Historical Society.

²³⁰ McNairn, *The Capacity To Judge*, 74.

²³¹ Minutes of Proceeding of the Fifteenth Annual Session of the Widow’s Son Grand Lodge, F.A.A.Y.M., Held in the Town of Windsor, Ontario, 1871 (Published by Order of the Grand Lodge), Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO.

benefitted by our labor in this noble and glorious cause of Free and Accepted Masonry.”²³²

Their good behaviour was a positive reflection of the Black community, which brought them closer to the goal of equality.

Fraternal lodges not only provided members with lessons on how to be good men, husbands, and fathers; they also showed them how to express their masculinity through certain activities, particularly athletics in a public setting. For example, the Oddfellows were continuously hosting and participating in Emancipation Day celebrations, where lodges competed in numerous masculine competitions such as baseball, races, running long jump, standing high jump, and three quick steps. One race, the one-hundred yard, was strictly for Oddfellows, further tying masculinity to fraternal orders. The message was clear: only if you were a member of the Oddfellows could you truly display your masculinity in this competition. In 1884, there was also a tug-of-war competition between Hamilton’s Mount Brydges lodge and Toronto’s Peter Ogden lodge, the latter winning the competition.²³³ In these competitions, winners won more than a small prize; they demonstrated that they were men. Fraternal orders also demonstrated their athleticism with drills. In August 1892, the Knights Templar held a competition drill between members from Detroit and Chatham. The competition was judged and it was decided that the prize would be awarded to Chatham.²³⁴ Knowing what made a man was one thing, but learning how to show others that masculinity was another. Fraternal orders made it clear that masculinity, just like respectable behaviour, must be on display. Men had to be men, and women were to be women.

²³² Transactions of the M.W. Grand Lodge of the Province of Ontario, Dominion of Canada of The Most Ancient and Honorable [sic] Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons, Begun and Held at Chatham, 1883.

²³³ “The Emancipation Day,” *Hamilton Spectator*, 2 August 1884.

²³⁴ *Hamilton Spectator*, August 17 1892; *Hamilton Spectator*, August 18 1892.

Just as fraternal orders taught boys to be men, female auxiliaries instructed members on how to be women, mothers, and wives. Before enduring the hardship and cruelty of slavery, African women were not viewed as sexual and promiscuous beings, but were seen as quite the opposite.²³⁵ Unfortunately, this image was not protected on the plantation. According to Sheila Smith McKoy, under slavery the image of Black women was completely altered: they were identified as carnal monsters, sexualized by a majority of Whites.²³⁶ This belief was rooted in slavery, where Black women were at the mercy of their masters who used them to fulfill their sexual needs and increase their labour force. Black women, under slavery, and beyond, were not associated with the qualities connected with “respectability” and morality. This meant that Black women had to work twice as hard to change their image from that of “Jezebel.” As a result, Black clubwomen and female lodges organized to vindicate themselves, making Black women the focus for racial and gender uplift.²³⁷ Their objective was to help all Black women push aside negative images, but those who wished to achieve this goal through lodge membership had to be related to a fraternal member. Each candidate had to demonstrate her relation to members who, in turn, vouched for them, therefore ensuring the “respectability” of a candidate. According to the 1889 membership book for Windsor’s Household of Ruth, an auxiliary of the Oddfellows with branches also in London, Chatham, Toronto, and Hamilton, this group also required proof of relation to male members. Listed among its members are Mary E. Kelly, the mother of William Kelly, Isabella Harrison, sister of Walter Wilson, and Annie Hubbord, the daughter of

²³⁵ Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, 12-13.

²³⁶ S. Joe Brown (Introduction by Sheila Smith McKoy), *The History of the Order of the Eastern Star Among Colored People* (London: Prentice Hall International, 1997), xvi-xvii; Skocpol et al., *What a Mighty Power We Can Be*, 118.

²³⁷ Jennifer L. Morgan, “‘Some Could Suckle over Their Shoulder’: Male Travelers, Female Bodies and the Gendering of Racial Ideology, 1500-1770,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 54: 1 (January 1997), 168; Brown, *The History of the Order of the Eastern Star*, xvi; Reid-Maroney, *The Reverend Jennie Johnson*, 60.

Benjamin Vincent.²³⁸ These are among the countless examples of relatives who learned proper Masonic behaviour while strengthening the solidarity between themselves and fraternal members. Creating bonds and altering perceptions kept these organizations strong and united, which was especially helpful when dealing with racist laws and community members.

Female auxiliaries also tried to show women how to demonstrate their femininity to the public, particularly at Emancipation Day celebrations, which were also the place where many fraternal orders demonstrated their masculinity. In 1884, for example, the Hamilton and Toronto branches of the Household of Ruth rode in carriages, wearing shimmering tiaras and crowns, while displaying their regalia of gold braid and black velvet. This attracted significant attention from the audience.²³⁹ A few years later, in 1896, members of female auxiliaries once again sponsored carriages in their annual parade, but at this parade they occupied roughly seventeen of approximately twenty carriages; other carriages were used by White women. In these carriages, members of the Star Calanthe of the Knights of Pythias order, the Household of Ruth and women of the benevolent group, the Queen Victoria Benevolent Society, were dressed in beautiful gowns and hats. It was not just about looking visually appealing, but also about the grandness of it all. Appearing in their finest while riding in carriages projected a certain element of femininity and dignity, something for which other women should strive. The fact that these Black women occupied an outstanding majority of carriages not only added to the grandeur, it also showed the public numerous examples of Black feminine club members.²⁴⁰ Interestingly, at the 1884 celebration, female auxiliaries also displayed their own athletics by performing drills of their own, with the assistance of the Mount Brydges Lodge, which involved “a number of difficult and

²³⁸ Robinson, *Seek the Truth*, 42,117; 1889 Membership Book for the Household of Ruth (Windsor), No. 588, G.U.O. of O.F, Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO.

²³⁹ *Toronto World*, 2 August 1884; Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 121.

²⁴⁰ *The London Free Press*, 4 August 1896; Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 99.

intricate evolutions.”²⁴¹ Women performing drills, something they had in common with fraternal lodges, adds to Shirley Yee’s argument that gender lines were often blurred among African-Canadian settlers. Circumstances often determined gender norms and this tradition continued into the late nineteenth century. Women were expected to look feminine and regal, but there were opportunities to challenge gender conventions through athletics.²⁴² They performed drills, similar to men, but most likely had their own version of these drills. A few years later, in 1891, the *Hamilton Spectator* also lists the results of the girls’ race, the young ladies’ race and a consolation ladies’ race at an Emancipation Day celebration. Although the ratio of female competitions to male was completely unbalanced (3:12), the fact that women were able to participate in any physical activity says a lot about the inclusion of women in the community.²⁴³ As will be further discussed in chapter three, women were not just sitting in the audience, they were participating. This applied to numerous organizations throughout Southern Ontario. Black women and men created a legacy of participation and activism. They instilled lessons of brotherhood/sisterhood, charity, education, and self-government, while projecting an image of masculinity and femininity.

African-Canadian voluntary associations emerged throughout the nineteenth century in an attempt to bridge the gap between their community and governmental/societal restrictions. In order to achieve their goal of equality, African Canadians of all “classes” were accepted within civil society organizations, resulting in cross-class collaboration. This partnership was possible because members shared a common interest. This is not to say that there were not limitations in their strategy. In pushing aside their differences, it was inevitable that those from a higher social

²⁴¹ *Hamilton Spectator*, 2 August 1884; Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 121.

²⁴² Yee, “Gender Ideology and Black Women as Community-Builders in Ontario.”

²⁴³ *Hamilton Spectator*, 4 August 1891.

standing would preserve some connection to their status by imparting their knowledge to their poorer brothers and sisters, while maintaining a distance from the latter group. By stressing the importance of specific behaviour, or choosing the perfect reading material, club leaders created a hierarchy that, at times, separated them from those they were assisting. Additionally, in their efforts to uplift Black women from the negative stereotypes associated with both their “race” and “gender”, exclusive groups such as the Eastern Star extended their outreach to only those who qualified for membership: women who were related or married to lodge members. Members of the Eastern Star certainly aided those outside of their organization through charitable works, but extinguishing the image of “Jezebel” through lodge influence and instruction would occur only within lodge walls. As will be discussed further in chapter three, despite membership being more flexible in numerous groups, leadership positions were more often than not held by men from the upper echelon of society or those in respected positions such as the ministry. With time and increased education, more opportunities were created for those outside of groups such as the ministry, but men typically maintained their role as leaders throughout the century. As mentioned there are examples of female leadership in female and mixed-gender groups, but men far outweighed women in this role. Black men also played a role in a woman’s “respectability” and membership, as exclusive organizations such as fraternal orders, including the Oddfellows, required that women prove their relation to a male member to gain access. If a woman, in pursuit of a “respectable” reputation, expected to become a member she required a male representative to vouch for her, which illustrates the complex nature of “gender” in the Black community: adapting to life in Canada West allowed for fluid gender roles, but some organizations followed a tradition that contradicted this fluidity. Among White and Black female lodge members, without a male spokesperson one could not gain entry and would, as a

result, be denied the right to express one's femininity and "respectability" through this organization. In their effort to create change there were still kinks to be worked out, but they carried on despite these issues.

In order to change racist laws and institutions, African Canadians first needed to attain an image of respect, which many believed would help them achieve equality, both in legislation and the minds of their opposition. As will be discussed further in chapter two, participants in these organizations applied the lessons learned to everyday life, presenting themselves as educated and "respectable" members of society. Some were more convinced than others. In their own eyes, and among some Whites, African Canadians achieved this image as the century progressed, but others remained unmoved in their opinion. To them, nothing could alter how they felt about African Canadians because many Whites were brainwashed from birth and, to protect the status quo, they challenged attempts at "respectability" at every step. Although racism on Canadian soil is one of the more common reasons for establishing separate organizations, it certainly does not explain everything. Slavery created little, if any, opportunity for education, resulting in increased pressure for educated Blacks to teach and for refugees to learn. Additionally, following the Civil War there was increased negativity once Whites realized that many Black residents claimed Canada West as their permanent home. As a result members used these groups to "uplift" their community via education, temperance, etiquette, and philanthropy, which created a positive platform to demand equal rights. This positive platform meant that African Canadians not only achieved an improved image, but also the skills required for debating and challenging unfair policy. Etiquette groups exercised elocution and good manners, while literary societies practised public speaking and debate, in addition to providing an environment to develop strategies to challenge the domination of Whites. Groups like the Kent County Civil

Rights League, originally a literary society, and Masonic lodges countered this discrimination directly and successfully, gaining rights they deserved not only as citizens, but also as people. Additionally, opportunities for leadership, self-government, and lessons in manhood and womanhood also proved useful to members who gained confidence and self-respect. African Canadians used these organizations to “advance” themselves and their community, resulting in a classroom for activism, and certainly proved that when opportunities did not exist, they would make them.

Chapter Two: The Ties That Bind (And Separate): Challenges to and Competing Visions Within Black Civil Society

Thus far we have established that civil society organizations educated African Canadians on how to achieve equality as free citizens, but support was not absolute. At a time when African Canadians united for a common cause, they also encountered extreme opposition from the White community. Interestingly, African Canadians also differed over the methods of certain organizations, but for different reasons and in a way that was completely distinct from the operations of White opposition. In the Black community, the goal was the same, but opinions differed, as well as the strategies used to implement them. This does not necessarily mean that one side was right or wrong but, rather, that there were different means to achieve a similar end: equal rights for themselves and their community. Among Whites, on the other hand, centuries of hostility against minority groups were directed at a growing African-Canadian community which refused to sit idle against these threats. This chapter emphasizes that the Black community utilized numerous tactics learned in civil society organizations to address the varying opinions concerning the utility and even legitimacy of these organizations.

According to John McCarthy and Mayer Zald, a social movement involves “preference structures” which are defined as “a set of opinions and beliefs in a population which represents preferences for changing some elements of the social structure and/or reward distribution of a society.”²⁴⁴ On the other end of social movements are what they refer to as a countermovement, defined as “a set of opinions and beliefs in a population opposed to a social movement.”²⁴⁵ The former includes those who are in favour of something, the latter are those opposed. They add

²⁴⁴ John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, “Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory,” *American Journal of Sociology* 82:6, 1217-1218; Staggenborg, *Social Movements*, 6.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

that movements can be differentiated by the extent to which organized opposition or a countermovement are triggered. In fact, heightened activity of social organizations can be the result of a mobilizing countermovement which intends to oppose a movement's goal. This opposition can fuel a social movement. For example, sexism drove many Black women to participate, while racism also fuelled African Canadians to fight their opposition. Additionally, organizations have different structures, which affect their strategies and longevity, causing groups to either co-operate or compete with one another. In some instances, organizational interests may interfere with the attainment of movement goals or preferences.²⁴⁶ Although they are separate theories, "preference structures" (a set of opinions representing preference for change) and "contentious politics" (collective challenges based on common purposes), are connected by the Black community's fight for equal rights as free citizens of Canada West. Staggenborg adds that these concepts are not necessarily incompatible and their usefulness is partially determined by the nature of the movement in question. In this instance, the African-Canadian community shared the same goal (preference structure), but used various methods to achieve it (contentious politics).²⁴⁷ They utilized numerous outlets to get the same message across, including literary, etiquette, fraternal, temperance, and benevolent groups. The numerous examples of resistance coming from many Whites at that time also allows for this study to fall under the category of a countermovement. Discriminatory practices from Whites motivated the Black community to act.

The numerous organizations that emerged during the nineteenth century allowed African Canadians to demonstrate their diversity in a number of ways. First, with the establishment of multiple voluntary organizations, African Canadians could vocalize their support for and

²⁴⁶ Staggenborg, *Social Movements*, 6, 18.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 3, 5, 8.

opposition to the various methods for achieving social justice. Secondly, because of their differing opinions, the founders and members could tailor their group to focus on specific issues, establish certain rules, and conduct meetings in a way they decided was appropriate. As a result, organizational leaders and members could accept candidates who complemented the vision of their organization. Thirdly, the differing opinions that developed between African Canadians and Whites, and members of the same (Black) community, were also put on display. This raises the question of whether a member's allegiance to one organization conflicted with their participation in others. Disagreements over a group's establishment, principles, and practices were inevitable, yet conflicting interests among members protesting groups they secretly supported reveal an added layer: members had to withhold information in order to protect themselves and their organization. Although there were obstacles, many of these groups overcame their issues, even when they came from multiple directions.

Roots of "Racism"

A major obstacle for the Black community was overcoming the stereotypes they carried with them from slavery. Countless African Canadians tried to position themselves in a place beyond these negative images so that they could achieve equality through civil society organizations, but certain obstacles got in the way. According to David Brion Davis, racism based on the colour of a person's skin did not always exist. He argues that "the evolution of anti-Black racism [was] not the result of a simple linear progression of events,"²⁴⁸ but finds answers by connecting certain issues to the rise of racism directed toward Black citizens, including stereotypes of slaves, the symbolism of light vs. dark, and the changing view of the "Curse of Ham." In his discussion of slave stereotypes, Davis states that slavery existed long before it was

²⁴⁸ Davis, *Inhuman Bondage*, 50.

linked to African-descended people. He adds that, in our vast history, people of African descent were not overwhelmingly associated with slavery until the seventeenth century. Davis also states that slavery and negative stereotypes, including mental and behavioural inferiority, became linked to this community due to influences such as Aristotle's theory of slavery, which declares that some are meant to rule, while others are meant to be ruled. In this relationship, slavery is a positive for the slave who cannot survive on his own due to a lack of mental capacity. Although Aristotle's interpretation differed from that of a slave master in terms of viewing slaves as animals, he did believe that slaves were subhuman. Davis concludes that Aristotle provided a conceptual foundation for Southern pro-slavery ideology and scientific theories concerning racial inferiority.²⁴⁹ These stereotypes would be associated with African-descended people long after they were freed.

The negative symbolism connected to darkness, according to Davis, stems from the Bible, which describes when God brought light into the darkness, dividing day from night. With time, black became associated with darkness and evil, while white was the symbol for purity and light, as will be discussed in the Woman's Christian Temperance Union's treatment of Black members, later in this chapter. With Jesus as the light of the world, according to the New Testament, anything that was dissimilar was viewed as impure.²⁵⁰ As a result African-descended people became the target of hatred and intolerance for centuries.

In addition to stereotypes and symbolism, (mis)interpretations of the biblical "Curse of Ham" were another catalyst for anti-Black racism. Davis states that of all the passages in the Bible, Genesis: 9:18-27 has had the most tragic influence throughout human history.²⁵¹

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 54-57.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 57.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 50, 57.

According to this biblical passage, after becoming drunk from wine, Noah uncovered his naked body. Then

Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness and told his two brothers outside. But Shem and Japheth took a cloth, placed it against both their backs and, walking backwards, they covered their father's nakedness. When Noah woke up from his wine and learned what his youngest son had done to him, he said, 'Cursed be Canaan;/ The lowest of slaves/ Shall he be to his brothers.' And he said, 'Blessed be the Lord/ the God of Shem;/ Let Canaan be a slave to them./ May God enlarge Japheth,/ And let him dwell in the tents of Shem;/ and let Canaan be a slave to them.'²⁵²

According to the passage, Ham's son Canaan was to be the lowest of the slaves, the slave of slaves. Although the actual biblical account does not reference "race" or colour, Noah's three sons have been associated with particular groups, which further encouraged anti-Black racism. Those represented by Japheth include peoples descended from Greeks and other eastern Europeans, while Shem's descendants are Arabs, Assyrians, and Israelites, while Ham is connected to Africans, especially because the name Ham was misunderstood to mean "black" or "dark." Over time, revised versions, which virtually exclude Canaan, resulted in Ham being cursed with enslavement rather than his son, Canaan. Davis adds that nineteenth-century Southern Christians, even many Northern Christians, repeatedly used the "Curse of Ham" as the most authoritative justification for the enslavement of Blacks. As mentioned, the Bible does not refer to "race" but, despite this, it was incorrectly believed that (Black) Ham must have been cursed with bondage because Black descendants were all enslaved.²⁵³ But, the "Curse of Ham" is not the reason why African people (Ham's descendants) were enslaved; it was the increasing enslavement of this group that transformed this biblical interpretation. The "Curse of Ham" became a justification for the enslavement of African peoples and therefore a cause for anti-

²⁵² Ibid., 64.

²⁵³ Ibid., 64-67.

Black racism.²⁵⁴ This sanction for African slavery increased opportunities for Whites to keep African Americans “in their place.”²⁵⁵ Apparently, (mis)interpretation is in the eyes of the beholder.

Applying the Lessons Learned

During the 1850s, an increasing number of incoming African Americans chose Canada West as their home. They built homes and institutions, and created organizations, to help them thrive. As the community grew stronger, their presence increasingly intimidated White residents whose unsubstantiated reasoning went deeper than believing African Canadians would cause trouble or be a drain on the province’s resources: one of their core beliefs was that African-descended people were inferior and subhuman, but the incorporation of Black residents into Ontario society could challenge their traditional views. This is evident in *The Refugees from slavery in Canada West: Report to the Freedmen’s Inquiry Commission*, in which Samuel Gridley Howe interviewed residents of Canada West. In one interview, an anonymous participant asserted that African Canadians were “a low, miserable set of people, and I wish they were not here.”²⁵⁶ The participant was then asked whether his negative feelings were because he believed African Canadians to be intemperate, criminals or beggars, but his response was that, in general, the Black community did none of these things. This prompted Howe to ask, “Well, if they don’t get drunk, and don’t steal over much, and don’t beg, and don’t become a public

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ This was not the first time that the “Curse of Ham” was attached to forced labour, as Ham was often identified with Asia among medieval and Renaissance writers, while the “Curse of Ham” was previously used as a justification for European serfdom and enslavement of Slavs, Turks, etc., in medieval times; Ibid., 67.

²⁵⁶ Howe, *The Refugees from slavery in Canada West*, 41-42.

charge, and if they work and support themselves, why are they not good citizens?”²⁵⁷ The interviewee then responded, “I can’t deny there’s something in that. But still, I think they are a nuisance; I wish they were out of the place.”²⁵⁸ In the minds of numerous Whites there was nothing that the Black community could do to change negative perceptions of them and their actions. The crucial reason for White disdain was because African Canadians were now entitled to the rights taken for granted by many White citizens, including access to public services, the vote, and serving on juries, in addition to being job competition.²⁵⁹ Whites found it incomprehensible that formerly enslaved people, who over the centuries had been reduced to hard labour and associated with negative stereotypes, could be placed on an equal standing with Whites. As children they were taught that African Canadians/Americans were less than human and, for many, it was impossible to remove the hateful thoughts that were ingrained in their minds. In retaliation, they tried to prevent Black residents from realizing their basic rights as Canadian citizens, through official laws and unofficial rules. According to Barrington Walker, for example, African Canadians’ right to come and go as they pleased was impeded by “sundown laws,” which were similar to a curfew or by-law that forced Black residents to remove themselves from town or remain indoors by a specific time at night.²⁶⁰

Among Black residents, responding to racism involved the courtroom, but also boycotts and protests. As mentioned in chapter one, civil society organizations such as literary societies, etiquette clubs, and fraternal orders played a significant role in increasing literacy rates in the

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ According to C. Peter Ripley, integrated juries were common in most areas of Canada West by the late antebellum period, but this was only after African Canadians put forth a challenge for this right; Ripley, *BAP*, 6-7.

²⁶⁰ Barrington Walker, *Race on Trial: Black Defendants in Ontario’s Criminal Courts, 1858-1958* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 3.

Black community. These organizations were responsible for training members from scratch: they needed to start with the basics before they could move forward. As a result of increased literacy, African Canadians sought after the information necessary to enhance their cause. Through the efforts of many community and organizational leaders/members, Black residents found what they were looking for, particularly through print media such as autobiographies and editorials that told them that the law was on their side.

Samuel Ringgold Ward, one of the more recognized figures in African-Canadian history, took advantage of increased literacy rates, considering he often used the written word to rally the Black community. One crucial way he achieved this was by informing the public of their legal rights, whether through letters, his autobiography, in editorials or at public lectures. In a letter to Henry Bibb and James T. Holly, also published in the *Voice of the Fugitive*, Ward made it clear that he believed racism was much harsher in Canada, as compared to the United States. He explained that, in the US, African Americans were slaves and “demi-freemen,” but in Canada they were legally and politically equal: Ward stated that they were as free in both the law and in fact as Whites.²⁶¹ According to Ward, the problem was due to that fact that African Americans living in Canada West, unbeknownst to many, had the law on their side, despite the continued efforts of Canadian Whites to treat them as unworthy of citizenship or respect. After being the targets of discrimination for so long, it was easy for Black residents to become angry with the treatment they received, often altering their perception of the power of Canadian laws. People like Ward had to remind the Black community that they could use the law to fight injustice. In support of this statement, Ward provided a number of examples to get his point across. He mentioned the Reverend Peter O’Banyan and his wife, Sophia, who were unjustly refused

²⁶¹ “Samuel Ringgold Ward to Henry Bibb and James Theodore Holly (October 1852),” Ripley, *BAP*, 226.

entertainment at different taverns in the Niagara District, while Ward was treated similarly by the “Yankee” Hotel keeper of Hamilton, William Weeks. He also included another personal example involving his family, who were forbidden from cabin passage on the Steamer, *Admiral*, being reduced to spending the night huddled on the deck. Ward argued that although these terrible events occurred, racism had no civil law to uphold it. He added that these tavern keepers and steamboat captains should have been fined because the British law, under the Canadian justice system, did not recognize a man based on the colour of his skin. However, in “Yankeedom,” African Americans had no legal protection against racist acts such as these. Ward even stated that he never heard of a Black person receiving reparations for maltreatment from a steamboat captain in the US, but in Canada the cases were numerous. He then provided the example of a hotel in Canada which had to forfeit its licence for mistreating Mr. O’Banyan, in addition to informing readers that trustees who denied Black children the right to attend their school must forfeit £ 5 each, while sacrificing their government funding. He then compared this example to trustees in Boston who received no punishment for denying Black children the right to an education.²⁶²

In the case of equal education, Ward is referring to a time when segregated education was punishable by law, before 1850. The 1843 School Act declared it illegal for school officials to prohibit Black children from attending common schools. One success story occurred in Hamilton during the early 1840s, after Black children were unfairly forced from mainstream education. As a result, parents requested that the city’s board of police, which also acted as the public school trustees, rectify the situation. This action provided no results, but their battle for

²⁶² Ibid., 225-227; Ripley, *BAP*, 232; Simpson, *Under the North Star*, 245.

redress continued with a petition to Sir Charles T. Metcalfe, the governor-general of the Canadas.²⁶³ In the petition, an anonymous resident wrote,

We have paid the taxes and we are denied of the public schools, and we have applied to the Board of the Police and there is no steps taken to change this manner of treatment, and this kind of treatment is not in the United States, for the children of colour go to the Public Schools together with the white children, more especially in Philadelphia, and I thought that there was not a man to be known by his colour under the British flag, and we left the United States because we were in hopes that prejudice was not in this land.²⁶⁴

When the petition came into the possession of the Reverend Robert Murray, of the governor-general's office, he demanded that the board of police explain the exclusion of Black residents. Their justification was a "strong prejudice" from White residents. As a result, the Rev. Murray forced the board to reverse its decision, thus allowing Black children to attend public schools.²⁶⁵ Under the enforcement of the 1843 School Act, Black residents had the law on their side, despite intolerable behaviour from Whites. As will be discussed further in subsequent pages, segregated education became more than socially accepted by Whites.

Ward's examples clearly downplay the failures of the Canadian justice system, as the mistreatment of Black residents continued throughout the century, but it is possible that his optimistic view was intentional. According to Donald Simpson, as a result of their experience in the slaveholding US, many Black residents in Canada refrained from challenging school trustees because they did not believe they stood any real chance of winning their case.²⁶⁶ As part of his strategy, Ward may have found it was more effective to give hope to his audience: if you

²⁶³ Ripley, *BAP*, 97.

²⁶⁴ According to Ripley, in 1834, Pennsylvania legislated a form of public education that "technically" allowed Black children to attend whatever schools they desired, despite the continuation of segregation, which even occurred in the Philadelphia schools to which the anonymous writer refers; "'The Coloured People of Hamilton' to Charles T. Metcalfe," Ripley, *BAP*, 97; Ripley, *BAP*, 98.

²⁶⁵ "'The Coloured People of Hamilton' to Charles T. Metcalfe," Ripley, *BAP*, 97-98.

²⁶⁶ Walker, *Race on Trial*, 36.

challenge unfair laws the Canadian justice system will help you in the end, unlike in the US. His portrait of Canada may not have been completely accurate, but it encouraged African Canadians to persist and use the law in their favour, despite mistreatment. It was their responsibility to defend themselves through the law: they could rely only on themselves to make change.

Ward's comparison of Canada and the United States had the potential to rally the Black community into action because it encouraged them to step outside of their former lives of bondage and, for many, let the law help them for the first time. Additionally, because his words were also published in the *Voice* numerous African Canadians would have been exposed to his message, whether it was literate African Canadians who read the words themselves or those who passed on the information after hearing it. In the US, African Americans were not considered free, therefore the law repressed them, but in Canada it could be used in their favour because it was their right as citizens to claim it. They just needed to be made aware of these rights, which is why civil society organizations were so important. The information was out there and these groups helped citizens not only to understand what they read, but also to use it to their advantage.

In *Race on Trial*, Barrington Walker argues that there was not always the positive outcome that Ward described, but offers several explanations for why favourable results could occur. He states that part of Canadian nationhood was the idea of British justice over American injustice. Each court case was an opportunity for the justice system to present itself as superior in comparison to the slaveholding US. Particularly in criminal trials, the courts often chose mercy (jail time rather than the death penalty) as a way to portray Canada as just and the United States as cruel. This may also explain why Ward was so eager to amplify this image of Canadian justice and American oppression. He was possibly aware of the benefits of playing off of this

relationship: making his audience aware of this pattern may have served them well if standing before a judge, appealing to the just nature of the courts. Additionally, factors such as “class,” reputation, and community support played an important role in the final verdict. For example, a lower-class and uneducated African Canadian who committed an offense against a wealthier African-Canadian citizen was less likely to have a favourable verdict due to their lower standing in the social hierarchy; a respected African Canadian with community members willing to vouch for him or her may have had a better chance. In this instance, civil society organizations could affect a verdict by putting in a good word or starting a petition for the accused. Additionally, judges claimed that the justice system did not recognize a person’s “race” or creed, but “race” was certainly present in the courtroom, often in contradictory ways. Barrington Walker states that there was a connection between being “socially suspect” and “legally suspect”: the validity of a conviction could depend on social concerns regarding “race.” A case was considered suspect if the courts did not comply with popular opinion concerning the fairness and objectivity of the British justice system, but also if there was any question as to whether the crime was truly an insult to established racial hierarchies.²⁶⁷ Anything that threatened the status quo was seen as dangerous.

Although there were established laws, the justice system could be influenced by society, which made it even more important for African Canadians to know how to work the system. Samuel Ward offered additional information to assist the uninformed. When compared to his letter, Ward’s autobiography, *Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro: His Anti-Slavery Labours in the United States, Canada & England*, demonstrates that his views concerning discrimination in Canada go back and forth between acceptance and rejection. Among his examples that illustrate

²⁶⁷ Walker, *Race on Trial*, 38, 46-52, 54, 60-61, 134.

the Black community's exclusion are those involving a refusal of lodging and transportation, despite the respectable appearance of the patron/passenger. His first example involved a husband and wife who were denied service at "some dozen" public taverns in 1851-1852. The wife, of lighter complexion, was originally seated on one or two occasions, but once her husband, of a darker complexion, entered there was no longer room for the couple. Ward also mentioned the case of a man attempting to use an omnibus in Hamilton in December 1851, but was told that it was full and that any available seats were meant for passengers who would be picked up along the way. Following this, several Whites were freely admitted onto the omnibus. This man received the same reception once he reached his hotel, which refused him lodging. Ward stated that despite Canada's appearance of moral superiority, the continuous acts of discrimination against the Black community demonstrated that it had much to learn and added that Canada was beneath and behind their American brethren in that respect.²⁶⁸ Although the justice system was supposedly on their side, White residents proved, time and time again, their deep-seated hatred for those they perceived as unlike themselves. Ward made this clear in his publications. As a result, the work of civil society organizations was absolutely imperative to the community's success: they could spread their message, train members, and gather the community as a form of defense.

Ward recalled another example involving a graduate of King's College in Toronto, Peter Gallego, who, after purchasing a first-class ticket, was forbidden from eating in the first-class dining area on a steamboat. Gallego ignored his exclusion and attempted to sit down. The captain provoked him by removing the chair before Gallego could sit, causing the former student to grab another chair, knock the captain down and continue eating his meal. Once the steamboat

²⁶⁸ Samuel Ringgold Ward, *Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro: His Anti-Slavery Labours in the United States, Canada & England* (London: John Snow, 1855).

arrived at its destination, Kingston, the captain complained that he had been assaulted by this passenger, who did likewise. The passenger stated that the captain interfered with his rights, but was fined five pounds. Interestingly, the captain was fined twenty. These examples led Ward to a final conclusion: the hatred of African-descended people, at that time, was sanctioned by the laws and courts in the United States, but not in Canada.²⁶⁹ This says a lot about the justice system, but also citizens who refused to abide by these laws. Although the captain was also fined, this situation should never have occurred in the first place. Gallego purchased a first-class ticket and, therefore, had the right to eat in the first-class dining area. Because the captain provoked him, Gallego should not have been fined at all. Despite what the law said, resistant Whites were unwilling to veer away from their racist beliefs. This may have been Ward's point: African Canadians possessed the basic rights as Canadian citizens, but Whites would stand in their way to maintain the status quo, so they had to stand up for themselves.

If the Black community was informed of their rights they would gain the confidence to challenge racist behaviour. After performing research at a law office, Ward declared that all of the people mentioned in his accounts had the legal right to gain redress. To him,

every man has a right to reject whom he pleases from his own social circle. Exercising this right as I do, I should be the last man in the empire to complain of it in any other man, white or black; but when it comes to ordinary public, purchased rights, legally provided, constitutionally secured, and judicially enforced, I say I not only may complain, but am entitled so to complain that my complaint shall be both heard and felt, by the aggressor and by all concerned.²⁷⁰

He then declared that he knew of no judges who would sacrifice their British integrity for the sake of prejudice and concluded that Canadian judges acted with honourable impartiality in cases

²⁶⁹ "Peter Gallego to Thomas Rolph," Ripley, *BAP*, 94; Ward, *Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro*; "Samuel Ringgold Ward to Henry Bibb and James Theodore Holly (October 1852)," Ripley, *BAP*, 225.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

between the Black and White communities.²⁷¹ Ward's positive assessment of Canada's legal system was not completely accurate as Black residents, according to Barrington Walker, also endured harsh courtroom verdicts which complied with established societal rules, but Ward's written work did rally the community: his publications may have convinced those unfamiliar and fearful of the courts to use the law as a vehicle for change. Ward's words not only informed Black citizens of their existing rights, but also provided cases of racism to Black leaders who would read his letters and autobiography, and spread the message. Ward, the president of the Provincial Union, would have discussed the content of his written work at length with his fellow members, incorporating these examples into the meeting's agenda and making sure that each person was made aware of the information and debated it thoroughly. Discussing these examples at meetings could further develop their ideas and enhance their arguments. It would then be their responsibility to inform the public: civil society organizations assisted Black activists by spreading their message beyond what an individual could do. They played a large role in motivating their community to speak out against racism. To Ward, "When publicly attacked, [negrophobia] hides its head from the indignant gaze of condemning community."²⁷² Ward wanted to spread his message to as many people as possible and literary societies played a large role in making that happen: the more people who could read his letters and autobiography, the more people learned of their legislative rights in Canada. Additionally, when organizational members became aware of the advantages of the Canadian legal system, the further the message would be spread. These organizations were working toward equality and used all the ammunition they could to motivate the community.

²⁷¹ Ward, *Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro*.

²⁷² "Samuel Ringgold Ward to Henry Bibb and James Theodore Holly," Ripley, *BAP*, 227.

The Reverend Israel Campbell, who assisted in directing the ARBA in its early years, along with performing missionary work for this organization, also chose to spread the word about legal rights by recounting his personal struggles with racism in his autobiography, *An Autobiography. Bond and Free*. Campbell and a friend, for example, were attacked after they went to the polls in Sandwich. According to Upper Canadian law, naturalized adult (Black) males owning taxable property were qualified to vote and serve on juries. Despite this, White residents refused to accept these terms and continuously tried to prevent the practise of this law on Canadian soil.²⁷³ While attempting to vote in the early 1850s, Campbell's friend was seized, forcing Campbell to fight off the attackers. When the constable arrived he demanded peace in the name of the Queen, while Campbell's friend, a lawyer, approached the group, declaring that they had as much right to vote as anyone else.²⁷⁴ Campbell then organized a meeting at the Windsor barracks and recounted these events, telling the audience that they entered Canada so that they could enjoy the rights bestowed by the British Constitution and the Queen. He added that neither recognized the colour of a man's skin and the Black community should not submit to those who do.²⁷⁵ Campbell then "called on all who were willing to meet me at the polls, to give their assent by saying aye (roughly forty). The ayes arose from almost the entire meeting."²⁷⁶ They "wanted even those who were not entitled to a vote to go to see that those who were could enjoy the privilege ... and those who were entitled deposited their votes ... We never had any

²⁷³ Israel Campbell, *An Autobiography. Bond and Free: or, Yearnings for Freedom, from My Green Brier House. Being the Story of My Life in Bondage, and My Life in Freedom* (Philadelphia: C.E.P. Brinckloe & CO., Printers, 1861); Walker, "African Canadians," *Encyclopedia of Canada's Peoples*.

²⁷⁴ Campbell, *An Autobiography. Bond and Free*.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

trouble, to my knowledge, in voting after that.”²⁷⁷ This example may be unique, considering the Black community’s struggle to cast their ballot continued beyond Campbell’s experience, but by organizing as a community, in this instance, the Black residents of the Windsor area were able to access the polls. Additionally, because voters were able to read their ballot and sign their name, most likely through the efforts of schools and literary societies, they could participate in one of the most important rights as a Canadian citizen.

Ward and Campbell’s autobiographies are further examples of how print media could advance the Black community’s call for civil rights. Certainly, their autobiographies would be circulated in numerous communities and, as the rate of literacy rose toward the beginning of the 1880s, with the help of civil society organizations, more and more African Canadians would come in contact with their ideas and lessons. Additionally, leaders such as Henry Bibb believed that the more literacy rates rose, the more citizens could familiarize themselves with the law and their rights. At the North American Convention, Bibb told his audience, “we regard education as being one of the most important items connected with our destiny, and as it is more dreaded by the slaveholders than bowie-knives or pistols, we therefore recommend, that there should be no time nor opportunity lost in educating the people of color ... Teach him to read and write intelligibly, and the slaveholder won’t have him on his plantation among his slaves. It is emphatically the most effectual *protection to personal or political liberty* with which the human family can be armed.”²⁷⁸ In an editorial, Bibb further endorses liberty through education, telling them that if they learned to read the Bible, they would be able to read other books and newspapers. This would make them more familiar with the laws of their adopted country,

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ “Address by Henry Bibb, John T. Fisher, and James D. Tinsley,” Ripley, *BAP*, 173.

helping them project an image of intelligence and usefulness in society.²⁷⁹ These leaders were teaching the community how to achieve equality. Additionally, Ward, Campbell, and Bibb certainly discussed this topic in lectures and editorials, which would further inform African Canadians of their rights, their “impartial British liberty – the ‘Liberty to feel, to utter, and to argue freely.’”²⁸⁰

This was the message that Black leaders were trying to spread to the masses, but their target was not just Black residents living in Canada, but also those living in the US. They made it their purpose to inform African Americans of the liberties they could gain if they left the US. Among the supporters was the Reverend Jehu Jones, a Lutheran clergyman who came to Toronto in 1839, and encouraged others to abandon oppression for free soil. In a letter to Charles B. Ray, the editor of the *Colored American*, the Reverend Jones confessed his confusion that so many intelligent and sufficiently wealthy Northern residents chose to remain in the US, deprived of their political, moral, and religious liberties.²⁸¹ He seemed particularly fond of Canada West when he described it as a province which “seems to invite colored men to settle down among the people, and enjoy equal laws. Here you need not separate into disgusting sect of caste. But once your elastic feet presses the provincial soil of her Britannic Majesty, Queen Victoria, God bless her, you become a man, every American disability falls at your feet.”²⁸² His appreciation of Canadian freedom is clear and the Reverend Jones felt it his duty to report this to others.

Additional print media included newspapers, particularly the *Provincial Freeman*, which also strongly encouraged African Americans to abandon “Yankeedom,” accompanied by its

²⁷⁹ “Editorial by Henry Bibb,” Ripley, *BAP*, 120.

²⁸⁰ Ward, *Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro*.

²⁸¹ “Jehu Jones to Charles B. Ray (8 August 1893),” Ripley, *BAP*, 76-78.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 78.

religious and political oppression, for Canada with its impartial laws and colour-blind Constitution.²⁸³ Moving to Canada was particularly encouraged after the *Dred Scott v. Sanford* case of 1857, in which the Supreme Court took away all a Black residents' right to American citizenship. Following this, African Americans were outraged: some held militant protests, while others considered removal to other countries. This was another instance where the *Provincial Freeman* was used as a medium to encourage African Americans to settle in Canada West. Mary Ann Shadd told African-American readers, "Your national ship is rotten and sinking, why not leave it[?]"²⁸⁴ Shadd's brother, Isaac, delivered a similar message when he declared,

Who are American citizens among the masses of colored Northern State men? There are none according to the lately declared meaning of the Constitution. We are of opinion that people proscribed in their native land, denied the rights of citizenship, without claim to government protection, must feel to be but little superior in condition to the slave, and according to the 'Fugitive Slave Law' they are all as liable to arrest, and may be subjected without the greatest difficulty on their part, to the same degradation; in reality a population of nonentities, without existence in the body politic.²⁸⁵

With his editorial, Shadd told African Americans that the Dred Scott decision declared them as trespassers in their homeland, who could easily be forced from their homes: "We shall wait patiently, but look for a hurried emigration e'er long, of a large portion of the most intelligent nominally free men to these Provinces, in search of what they so long waited for but failed to get."²⁸⁶ He then encouraged them to come to Canada where there is a prosperous and free government, and where "fugitives are men."²⁸⁷ Members of the Shadd family contributed to the cause by publishing a widespread message that promoted a life of freedom on Canadian soil and

²⁸³ *Provincial Freeman*, 25 March 1854.

²⁸⁴ Ripley, *BAP*, 371; "Meetings at Philadelphia," *Provincial Freeman*, 18 April 1857.

²⁸⁵ "Editorial by Isaac D. Shadd," Ripley, *BAP*, 371.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 372.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

a rejection of oppression in the United States. This was valuable information for civil society organizations.

Among the more well-known cases of fighting injustice were those directed at segregated schools. Separate education became increasingly common after 1850, with the amendment of the 1843 School Act, which originally made the exclusion of Black children illegal. Unfortunately, Whites saw this legislation as an opportunity to further suppress the Black community and used this law to justify the separation of citizens based on “race,” leading to the establishment of segregated schools. Whites believed that African Canadians would negatively influence their children because of their supposed bad moral habits, and would do anything to prevent their children from being exposed to this group. As a result, they used the Common School Act of 1850 to get what they wanted. This act divided the province into school districts, each having elected boards of trustees, but would provide every child in that district with free schooling as a result of local taxation which was matched by provincial funding.²⁸⁸ To support their own racist agenda, White residents altered the meaning of this act, resulting in the exclusion of Black residents. Originally this act was meant to allow for segregated schools based on “race” and religion, upon the request of twelve or more resident heads of families, but White residents distorted its meaning to suit their prejudiced views. Instead, they incorporated any head of household, including Whites, to request and impose a separate school on Black residents. Rather than fulfilling the superintendent’s (Egerton Ryerson) vision of the Black community electing their own trustees, utilizing their own taxes, and applying for their own provincial grants, the Common School Act allowed Whites to exclude them even further.²⁸⁹ Due to this, Black

²⁸⁸ Ripley, *BAP*, 8; Walker, “African Canadians,” *Encyclopedia of Canada’s Peoples*.

²⁸⁹ Walker, “African Canadians,” *Encyclopedia of Canada’s Peoples*.

residents were forced to send their children to separate schools, but many parents would not stand for it.

Often when the topic of segregated schools is raised, Dennis Hill comes to mind. According to Samuel Ward, Hill owned the largest farm and had the best education of all the rate payers in his school district of Dawn Mills, but the trustees continued to refuse Mr. Hill's son the right to attend the common school, based solely on his complexion. Hill's request for his children to attend common, or public, school not only stemmed from a desire for basic rights as a Canadian citizen, but also from the fact that separate schools were generally of poorer quality and often offered no transportation to schools that were miles away, four miles away in Hill's case.²⁹⁰ As a result, Hill protested this decision by writing to Egerton Ryerson on 22 November 1852, explaining that he had exhausted every resource, but was unsuccessful because trustees declared that it was presumptuous for a Black man to assume that his son could attend the same school as White children, even though he was among the largest tax payers in school section No. 3.²⁹¹ He added, "to be debar'd from my Rights of school privilege for no other crime then [sic] that my skin is a few shades darker then [sic] some of my neighbours, I do think it unfair."²⁹² This was especially true considering that the same trustees that excluded his children, in addition to other African-Canadian children, further antagonized the Black community by inviting White children from outside of the township and from the adjoining county to attend the school in question. In response, Ryerson advised Hill to use the law to gain results. A year later, Hill took legal action, resulting in the case of *Hill v. The School Trustees of Camden and Zone* (1853), which was the first legal challenge to segregated education. Despite Hill's determination, Chief

²⁹⁰ "Samuel Ringgold Ward to Henry Bibb and James Theodore Holly (October 1852)," Ripley, *BAP*, 225; Simpson, *Under the North Star*, 344-345.

²⁹¹ "Dennis Hill to Egerton Ryerson (22 November 1852)," Ripley, *BAP*, 243.

²⁹² *Ibid.*

Justice John Beverly Robinson of the Court of Queen's Bench ruled against him, arguing that the Common School Act of 1850 forced Black students to attend separate schools. According to this ruling, segregated education was authorized in Canada West, but Robinson's final decision had other influences.

According to Barrington Walker, Ontario courts classified African Canadians as both "dangerous Others" and a "pitiable" group in need of deliverance from their current state of existence. Although Samuel Ward endorsed the impartiality of Canadian judges, possibly as a form of encouragement for his readers/audience, Chief Justice Robinson stated that Black children did not have the same moral training as White children and, as a result, the latter would suffer if exposed to the former group. Robinson's personal (prejudiced) beliefs influenced his final verdict, in addition to a desire to maintain the sacred, and exclusionary, image of British purity. According to Kristin McLaren, the idea of British morality was so ingrained in the minds of White residents that officials responsible for upholding the education system were willing to disregard and conceal institutional segregation in order to protect that image. Along with British morality, the Canadian identity, as mentioned, involved the promotion of British justice versus American oppression, but there were exceptions when White residents felt that established norms and hierarchies were threatened. Whites applied pressure to such a degree that Chief Justice Robinson decided in favour of segregated schools "out of deference to the prejudices of the white population."²⁹³ Robinson put the wants of Whites before the needs of the Black community based on his personal prejudices and pressure from racist Whites. Additionally,

²⁹³ Ripley, *BAP*, 8, 233; "Canadian Negro Hate, No. 3," 4 November 1852; Kristin McLaren, "We had no desire to be set apart': Forced Segregation of Black Students in Canada West Public Schools and Myths of British Egalitarianism," *Histoire sociale/ Social History* (37) 2004, 33, 41, 49; "Dennis Hill v. the School Trustees of Camden and Zone," *Upper Canada Queen's Bench Reports*, vol. 11; Walker, *Race on Trial*, 20.

when a case was considered an insult to established racial hierarchies, prejudiced individuals and officials were also more than willing to go against the law or bend the rules in their favour. School trustees in Colchester and Sandwich, Essex County, for example, divided school districts in such a way as to prevent contact between Black and White residents, while Windsor trustees threatened to withhold a teacher's salary or fire them if they admitted Black children into their classroom. Ryerson admitted that actions such as these were not in the spirit of British justice, but was willing to sacrifice minor issues in order to win what he considered to be more important educational battles. He continued to allow illegal discrimination to occur because he felt powerless against local trustees: "The prejudices and feelings of the people are stronger than law."²⁹⁴ African Canadians were caught in a contradictory situation: the same legal system that aided them in asserting their rights as equal citizens also legally upheld discriminatory behaviour against them.²⁹⁵ Ultimately, Black residents were not simply fighting an unfair law; they were fighting the racist authorities and community members who ceaselessly used their resources to distort the system to suit their agenda. Officials and judges were responsible for administering the law fairly, but they were the ones who tolerated, even promoted, this illegal discrimination.

Although this court case ended negatively, this did not stop Hill from pursuing other avenues. In 1854, Hill was elected a vice-president of the Provincial Union Association, which had among its many goals the promotion of education. He was also involved with several committees investigating the Dawn Institute and conditions of Chatham's fugitives. His struggles as an individual fighting the government may have inspired him to combine his efforts with those of organizations and committees devoted to education and uplift: strength in numbers.

²⁹⁴ McLaren, "We had no desire to be set apart", 34-35, 40-41, 44; Egerton Ryerson, "Explanation of the Provisions of a Proposed School Bill of 1849," in Hodgins, *Documentary History, Vol. VIII: 1848-49* (1901), 91; Simpson, *Under the North Star*, 244.

²⁹⁵ Walker, *Race on Trial*, 3, 44.

Additionally, what he learned from his court case was valuable information that could help with an organization's strategy. Although Hill lost his case, he is an example of the heroic effort of a leader directing a campaign for justice. Civil society did not come from nowhere; it developed from actions such as these. Hill fought a racist law which inspired other groups to do likewise, and because the details of his case were published in the *Voice* countless citizens gained access to valuable information which could assist them. As a result, Black communities throughout the province protested by bringing separate school cases to court and flooding government offices with letters expressing their discontent. In the 1850s, parents sent over 20 petitions to the Education Department requesting admission for their children in common schools. During the 1870s, Black parents in St. Catharines also attempted to challenge the education system through their vote, petitions, boycotts, and court cases, while, as will be discussed further, it was not until the end of the century, in 1893, that concrete results would be achieved with the Kent County Civil Rights League successfully desegregating Chatham schools.²⁹⁶ Hill set in motion a movement against separate schools. Training received in the classroom and in civil society organizations not only helped activists to write petitions and read a ballot, but also made them politically aware and taught them how to effectively present themselves before the court.

²⁹⁶ Some Black communities such as Amherstburg, Sandwich, Windsor, and Chatham, on the other hand, preferred to follow this new act. According to James Walker, "parents were merely formalizing matters in order to apply for provincial funding and to qualify for their share of local taxation." To them, separate schools offered protection from White prejudice and an opportunity for students to grow on their own terms. Organizations such as the Provincial Association for the Education and Elevation of the Coloured People of Canada agreed; Walker, "African Canadians," *Encyclopedia of Canada's Peoples*; Ripley, *BAP*, 8, 233; "Canadian Negro Hate, No. 3," 4 November 1852, *Voice of the Fugitive*; McLaren, "We had no desire to be set apart," 41; McFarquhar, "A Difference of Perspective," 138, 142, 144; Shadd, "No 'Back Alley Clique,'" 94.

The actions of African Canadians such as Dennis Hill contributed to the larger picture and inspired others to take further action within and outside of the educational system. If the law could not give them the results they sought, some African Canadians chose other methods. When literacy rates rose, through organizational efforts, African Canadians could read editorials and autobiographies that exposed them to court cases and their legal rights. Once they had this knowledge African Canadians were able to apply what they learned through boycotting the establishments, employers, and groups that excluded them. On 4 August 1854, local Black residents of St. Catharines met in the North Street Methodist Church to protest and strategize against two public coaches, owned by two hotels, the American Hotel and the St. Catharines House, which refused black passengers, including two bishops of the AME Church. Coach drivers even resorted to violence against those who attempted to ride their coach. At this meeting, the appointed president, the Rev. Nelson Countee, addressed the audience, encouraging them to unite against the prejudice that denied the Black community their right to employ public transportation from the railway station and steamboat.²⁹⁷ The waiters of these hotels were also called upon to say some encouraging words. Included among them was the headwaiter, Mr. Dyke, employed at the American Hotel, who inspired the audience by threatening to quit his job at the hotel and urging others to take similar action rather than witness this mistreatment. Another head waiter, Mr. Morris of the St. Catharines House, offered a similar message when he asked the audience to respect themselves and cease their compliance with such demeaning treatment. Following their addresses, it was resolved that waiters would no longer work at these hotels in St. Catharines, unless their coaches accepted Black passengers. Their efforts proved successful in this instance. By the end of the month it was reported that the owner of the St.

²⁹⁷ "Proceedings of a Meeting of St. Catharines Blacks," Ripley, *BAP*, 297.

Catharines House conceded, while it was stated that the owner of the American Hotel appeared prepared to give in.²⁹⁸ Boycotting forced the hand of these hotel owners, which was a new experience for many African Canadians who were often on the other side of this situation, feeling the pressure of racist treatment.

Among the many African-Canadian organizations which experienced discrimination, fraternal orders took the brunt of this prejudice, possibly because of their longstanding history. Jeffrey McNairn argues that White “Masons even revelled in the fact that their cosmopolitanism crossed racial boundaries, prizing ‘each brother fair or dark.’ The possible inclusion of blacks with other races in the same lodge, however, was far more contentious.”²⁹⁹ Unfortunately, the latter part is especially true, but White Masons were not as cosmopolitan as McNairn claims. Rather than “prizing” Black Masons, White members constantly challenged the legitimacy of African-Canadian/American lodges, refusing to acknowledge their existence. This resistance originated from an unwillingness to accept or encourage Black equality. As a result, they tried to halt the organized action of African-Canadian members, beginning with their exclusion from White lodges, followed by continuous challenges to their legitimacy as Masons. In their minds, if African Canadians were accepted as Masons, what would be next?

Facing discrimination directly was the Widow’s Son Grand Lodge’s strategy. Instead of succumbing to opposition, African Canadians formed their own lodges and published their Declaration of Sentiments in the *Hamilton Spectator*, declaring,

Because of the unsociableness of the brethren (white) to meet with us and not giving us that satisfaction when called upon for harmonious working of the craft, We in solemn convention assembled, believe it to be our indispensable duty to act for ourselves, and form ourselves into an independent body of Free and Accepted Masons. We therefore ... declare and publish the said Widow’s Son Grand Lodge of the Province of Canada to be a

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 297-298.

²⁹⁹ McNairn, *The Capacity To Judge*, 80.

FREE AND INDEPENDENT BODY, with full power as named in the declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge ourselves to each other in the solemnities of Brotherhood.³⁰⁰

This blatant discrimination occurred despite the fact that African Canadians were legally free in Canada West in 1834, after the British Imperial Act of 1833 took effect. Regardless of what the law stated, Whites believed that Black residents were economically and socially inferior. These feelings transferred into White lodges which continuously questioned the legitimacy of Black lodges in the US, and African-Canadian lodges by extension. A primary reason for this distrust relates back to the original African Lodge #1, a Boston lodge, which was established by the Grand Lodge of England in 1784, not an American Grand Lodge. Additionally, White Masons objected to Black lodges using the word “FREE” as a term for qualification because the Grand Lodge of England originally excluded them based on their status as slaves: a slave’s master had the right to invade the privacy of a lodge if in pursuit of his slave. Originally, rejection was a product of slave status, rather than the colour of their skin, but this changed with time. White Masonic lodges began using the term “Freeborn” not only as a qualification for membership, but also, according to Jeffrey McNairn, as a way to exclude those who were not deemed capable of participating in this voluntary association. Among those prohibited were bondmen, women, and immoral men; members “must be good and true men, free born, and of mature and discreet age and sound judgement.”³⁰¹ Many Blacks were enslaved or descendants of enslaved people, meaning that one word had the power to exclude them. White members were fully aware of the harm that accompanied this restriction, but it suited their prejudiced agenda: they remained firm in their rejection of Black members. In response, with the establishment of Black lodges, “Free” was deliberately substituted, not necessarily as a qualification for membership, but to better

³⁰⁰ Robbins, *Prince Hall Masonry*, iv, 8-9, 28; *Hamilton Spectator*.

³⁰¹ Robbins, *Prince Hall Masonry*, 9, 122-123; McNairn, *The Capacity To Judge*, 69, 75.

accommodate members and their history.³⁰² Unfortunately, the conflict over “Free” and “Freeborn” remained unresolved. For centuries, generations of Whites were educated in racial hatred and instructed to treat African-descended people as subhuman. Whites refused to recognize the legitimacy of African-Canadian organizations, just as they were unwilling to accept the Black community’s equality in the eyes of the law. Acknowledging the legality of Black lodges meant that Whites would have to admit them as their equals, something many Whites were unwilling to do.

Many White lodges even appealed to the courts to prevent Black lodges from copying their name, rituals, emblems, and even charter status. Gaining charter status, particularly after the Civil War, allowed fraternal orders to claim legitimacy over unofficial groups that tried to affiliate themselves with fraternal orders without sanction. In the US, the number of applications for charter status among Black branches became more visible to White members, resulting in a conscious campaign to eliminate these Black orders altogether. According to Theda Skocpol et al., to achieve this American lodge leaders attacked corresponding orders through state-level trademark legislation which denied African-American groups the right to incorporate any of the official names and features established and practised by White orders.³⁰³ Although these laws did not explicitly mention “race,” their intention was to stop Black orders. Unless African-American orders gained legitimacy, these laws left African-American lodge members open to arrest, potentially causing the dissolution of the lodge. In Canada, White lodges could use this information to attack the legitimacy of African-Canadian lodges, which were often created by American lodge members: if their founding lodge no longer operated, why should they be allowed to continue? Some orders were more vulnerable to these laws than others, but

³⁰² Robbins, *Prince Hall Masonry*, 9, 122-123.

³⁰³ Skocpol et al., *What a Mighty Power We Can Be*, 35-36, 139-141.

fortunately for the Masons and Oddfellows, they gained charter status, legally, from British lodges. Orders not chartered by British lodges, such as the Elks and Shriners, were not so lucky: there was no European counterpart to which they could appeal, leaving them subject to more lawsuits.³⁰⁴

Lawsuits brought against Black fraternal lodges further emphasized White opposition and one investigation, questioning their legitimacy, at the turn of the century actually worked in their favour. In 1901 the Washington State committee, under P.G.M. Upton, published their findings, which stated that they could not find any fault in Black lodges, especially because they were originally given charter status from the Grand Lodge of England, a legally established lodge. The success of African-American lodges not only proved the legitimacy of their own lodges, but also their offspring, meaning African-Canadian lodges.³⁰⁵ Despite proving their legality as a lodge, numerous White orders still refused to recognize Black lodges in North America: White lodges were relentless in their attempts to stop Black participation, but African-Canadian members were taught to be persistent and never give up.

This hostility toward Masons is also apparent in the Grand Lodge of Ontario's 1873 annual report, which reprinted an attack from an American newspaper, entitled "Niggerdom in Regalia," claiming that Black lodges were a direct violation of ancient law.³⁰⁶ According to the

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 140-141.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.; Robbins, *Prince Hall Masonry*, 126-127.

³⁰⁶ This attack began with an article entitled, "Negroes Trying to Revel as Masons in Mississippi," which declared that Alexander Clark "established a n***** lodge, under a dispensation of his own, as Grand Master of N***** Masons in Missouri." The newspaper's editor, F.G. Tisdall, claimed that African-American lodges did not exist and that Clark was a fraud, "and a very black one at that. When will negroes learn to tell the truth?" In response, Clark stated that, as a Most Worshipful Grand Master, he did organize a lodge and concluded that "this statement in vindication of my personal and Masonic character, as colored Masonry, like white Masonry, needs no defense." In retaliation, Tisdall printed "Niggerdom in Regalia," proclaiming "we cannot consent directly or indirectly to elevate them to an equality with the

newspaper's editor, F.G. Tisdall, "the Grand Lodge of England had no right in 1784 to establish a lodge in Boston, as there was a Grand Lodge exercising authority established for the State of Massachusetts ... [T]he warrant granted in 1784 to the Negroes gave them no authority to establish a Grand Lodge or National Grand Lodge."³⁰⁷ Basically, he was arguing that only the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts had the authority to legitimize an African Lodge in that area. In response, Grand Master Alexander Clark cleverly counters Tisdall's statement by declaring that

the Grand Lodge of England had a perfect and unequivocal right to grant warrant No. 459, to African Grand Lodge in 1784-87, as there was no Masonic law or dogma in Masonry anywhere in the world at that time prohibiting it, and the learned 33° ought to have known that there was another Grand Lodge in Massachusetts at the same time: St. John's Grand Lodge, which was chartered in 1733 – thirty-six years before the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts, which was not chartered till the year 1769.³⁰⁸

In this debate, Tisdall introduced evidence that disproved his own argument. As a result, Clark then asked

why has our learned brother singled out the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts? For if the Grand Lodge of England had no right to grant the African Grand Lodge warrant, because of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts, which was chartered in 1769, -- eighteen years before – then certainly she had no right to grant the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts a warrant, because St. John's Lodge was chartered ... thirty six years before [it].³⁰⁹

If Tisdall's argument was correct, that would mean that any lodge created by the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts, possibly his own, would be illegitimate because the St. John's Lodge existed before it. Clark then asked whether the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts (White), and its offspring were, as a result, clandestine "or did the fact that one was issued to the white man and one to the black, make the difference, and if so, where is the Masonic law making the distinction of

white or dominant race"; 1873 Annual Proceedings of the Semi-Annual and Annual Sessions of the Grand Lodge of A.F. AND A. MASONS of Ontario, Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ 33° is a title within the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry; 1873 Annual Proceedings of the Semi-Annual and Annual Sessions of the Grand Lodge; Ibid.

³⁰⁹ 1873 Annual Proceedings of the Semi-Annual and Annual Sessions of the Grand Lodge.

color?”³¹⁰ Clark’s noble defence of Black lodges was, unsurprisingly, dismissed by many White Masons, but it encouraged members to challenge attacks like Tisdall’s through debate and a strong knowledge of Masonic history.

African-Canadian lodges, by extension, were affected by this attack because they were originally founded by an African-American lodge, the New Jersey Lodge, back in 1851. Additionally, the Grand Lodges of Michigan, Illinois, and New York set up other lodges across the province. For example, the Grand Lodge of Michigan, which was also affiliated with the Grand Lodge of Ontario at its inception in 1872, founded the Salem Lodge #12 in Windsor. Additionally, African-American Masons, such as George Shreve and Thomas Kinnard, joined African-Canadian lodges while living in Canada West.³¹¹ These connections to American lodges meant that an attack on one was an attack on all.

African-Canadian lodges also responded to attacks closer to home, as the Grand Lodge of Ontario (Black) experienced discrimination from the Grand Lodge of Canada (White), which continuously refused to recognize their lodge. This prompted them to draft a resolution in 1900, asking for acknowledgement of their legally constituted lodge, issued by the M.W. Grand Lodge of England. By 1902 there was still no response. White lodges continued to see them as clandestine, rather than “prizing” them as McNairn claims.³¹²

Unfortunately, the Oddfellows were not immune to acts of prejudice either. At an 1891 Emancipation Day Celebration, hosted by Hamilton’s Mount Brydges lodge, No. 1865, and the

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Robbins, *Prince Hall Masonry*, iv, 22, 40.

³¹² 1900 Annual Proceedings for the M.W. Grand Lodge, A.F. & A.M., for the Province of Ontario, Chatham-Kent Black Historical Society; 1902-1905 Annual Proceedings for the M.W. Grand Lodge, A.F. & A.M., for the Province of Ontario, Chatham-Kent Black Historical Society.

Peter Ogden lodge No. 812 of Toronto, attendees were unable to enjoy celebratory activities. This was due to the unprovoked actions of “small knots of white toughs” who engaged in “horseplay” at the Palace Rink in Hamilton. There were no policemen present, which was a clear indication of where law enforcement stood on this position: Black Oddfellows could expect no assistance from the police. As a result, the audience was prevented from hearing anything that was said, sung, or played on the stage. Mayor McLellan, who also acted as chairman, tried to maintain order, but eventually gave up.³¹³

Educational groups also faced extreme cases of racism, with heartbreaking results. In “A Deed of Blood,” the *Voice of the Fugitive* recounts the events leading up to the murder of a member of a Windsor debating society in 1853. After a heckler, James Tyner, refused to stop, he challenged William Burton, a younger member of the society, to step outside. He did so, but, tragically, Burton was found dead outside of the hall, stabbed in the throat.³¹⁴ This deplorable incident illustrates how challenging it was for African Canadians to organize, especially after their mass migration in the 1850s. This influx exponentially increased acts of racism such as those surrounding William Burton, but also other clubs.³¹⁵ Although not as extreme of an example, when the Amherstburg Literary Association gathered in 1881, a member was provoked to such a degree that he was forced to pull his gun on his attackers and shoot. Another group, performing recitation, songs, and dialogues at an Ingersoll church fundraiser encountered similar treatment when a mob “insulted with impunity the coloured people, who did their part with propriety and decorum ... The noisy element ... included young men and boys from Christian

³¹³ “Celebrating Emancipation, Demonstration By the Colored Citizens Yesterday,” *Hamilton Spectator*, 4 August 1891.

³¹⁴ “A Deed of Blood,” *Voice of the Fugitive*, 8 March 1853; Murray, *Come, bright Improvement!*, 68-69; “Serious Charges,” *Provincial Freeman*, 24 March 1853.

³¹⁵ “Serious Charges,” *Provincial Freeman*, 24 March 1853; Murray, *Come, bright Improvement!*, 68-70.

homes ... [who] seemed to think coloured people were fair game for rude and insulting remarks.”³¹⁶ Despite efforts to project proper behaviour, according to Marks, many Whites still believed that only they could host a respectable church social.³¹⁷

In the pursuit of self-help, temperance supporters also realized they were not impervious to discrimination when they were either excluded or driven from White groups or, as we will see, pushed into segregated branches when their presence was useful. As mentioned previously, temperance was an important issue at conventions in the early 1850s and remained so throughout the rest of the nineteenth century. Ironically, despite their efforts to incorporate temperance into the Black community, temperance advocates could not avoid racism, even from Whites promoting the same cause. Samuel Ward learned this early in his temperance advocacy. In 1851, he spoke against the Sons of Temperance, which declared it inappropriate and illegal to admit Black men into their organization. The point of Ward’s address was to highlight the discrimination present in the temperance movement, but what further proved his point was that his audience witnessed a live example of this prejudice. Following Ward’s address, a Dr. Creel rose from his seat and justified the Sons of Temperance in their “negrophobiaism.” Creel’s comments may not have been unexpected, but it certainly proved Ward’s point, as the audience “hissed him [Creel] unanimously, and as unanimously applauded my remarks.”³¹⁸ Whites viewed civil society groups such as temperance societies and literary groups as a threat because these groups wanted to alter negative opinions of the Black community, which Whites aggressively promoted: literary advancement and temperance among Black residents did not complement a White narrow-minded agenda. If they were successful in their endeavour it would

³¹⁶ *Amherstburg Echo*, 8 April 1881; *Ingersoll Chronicle*, 31 March 1887; Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, 77.

³¹⁷ Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, 77.

³¹⁸ *Voice of the Fugitive*, 17 December 1851.

change the social structure of Canadian society: with time, Whites would no longer be able to deny that African Canadians deserved equal citizenship. This was a result that Whites wanted to stop before it gained momentum: they wanted to maintain the status quo.

A female equivalent of the Sons of Temperance was the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) which treated Black women with similar disdain. From its creation in 1874 until 1892, Black women were excluded from this organization but, unlike fraternal orders, the WCTU did eventually allow for limited African-Canadian participation before the century ended: with the launching of a *separate* "Department of Work Among Colored People," Black women acted under their own isolated department, under the management of White superintendents. This was certainly not a solution and with their supposed membership came many hurdles. According to Afua Cooper, this group also employed racialized language when communicating the harmful effects of intemperance to their audience.³¹⁹ This was because the WCTU equated Africa with darkness and sin, while Europe represented purity and light. This connection made it extremely difficult for Black women, who were linked to the "Dark Continent," to identify with the WCTU and its (White) female-oriented beliefs. As a result, they did not utilize and portray African-Canadian women as active agents in the WCTU, giving Black women the sole appearance of "grateful recipients of the moral reform message."³²⁰

Naturally, some communities reacted with more resistance to the WCTU's efforts than others. The 1896 Report of the Ontario WCTU, for example, stated that Amherstburg's Black

³¹⁹ Cooper, "Doing Battle in Freedom's Cause," 327; Sharon Anne Cook, "*Through Sunshine and Shadow': The Woman's Christian Temperance Union, Evangelicalism, and Reform in Ontario, 1874-1930*" (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), 104.

³²⁰ 1892 Report of the 15th Convention of the Ontario WCTU, Canadian WCTU Fond, AO; Mariana Valverde, "'When the Mother of the Race Is Free': Race, Reproduction and Sexuality in First-Wave Feminism" in *Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women's History* ed. Franca Iacovetta and Mariana Valverde (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 15-20.

community attempted to establish a Union or “Youman’s Band,” but had not succeeded at that point, despite some interest from the community’s preacher. The following year, in 1897, “London has not a very favorable report, owing to the death of one of the most active members of the ‘Youmans Band.’ It seems almost impossible to get the women together for a meeting.”³²¹ In that same year, the WCTU’s Provincial Superintendent, Lillian Phelps, lectured for one week in Amherstburg and its surrounding area. At one meeting, held at the AME Church, a large audience gathered and proved to be quite interested in the subject at hand. At these meetings, the County President asked for signatures to pledge and more than a dozen attendees consented. At a later date the number of pledge signatures rose to twenty-two. Following her lecture tour, Lillian Phelps intended to solicit additional signatures twice a year and distribute pledge cards to those signing the book, in addition to providing each pastor with a copy of the 1896 Provincial Report, for literature. The pastors of the Methodist and Baptist church also agreed to preach on temperance occasionally and the quarterly temperance lesson was observed in their Sunday School.³²² These actions demonstrated support for temperance rather than the WCTU, despite this organization’s continued efforts to get them involved. In areas like St. Catharines, for example, the WCTU minutes stated that this organization made an effort to spark interest in their work, but they received a very limited response. Three years later, in 1900, at Essex, several meetings were held, but no bands or unions were established.³²³ Black residents may not have

³²¹ The name “Youman’s Band” was a tribute to Letitia Youman, who founded the first WCTU in Ontario; Report of the 19th Convention of the Ontario WCTU, 1896, Canadian WCTU Fond, AO; Report of the 20th Convention of the Ontario WCTU, 1897, Canadian WCTU Fond, AO.

³²² Report of the 19th Convention of the Ontario WCTU, 1896; Report of the 20th Convention of the Ontario WCTU, 1897; Report of the 21st Convention of the Ontario WCTU, 1898, Canadian WCTU Fond, AO.

³²³ Report of the 19th Convention of the Ontario WCTU, 1896; Report of the 20th Convention of the Ontario WCTU, 1897; Report of the 21st Convention of the Ontario WCTU, 1898; Report of

been willing to fully commit by forming their own chapter of the WCTU which implies that African Canadians either felt that they did not need White WCTU support to demonstrate their temperance advocacy or, possibly, that they did not feel that their support would be fully recognized and nurtured through this establishment. Years of hostility directed at the Black community made it incredibly difficult for them to combine efforts, especially on a White organization's terms. Some areas differed in their opinion of the WCTU, including cities like Welland and Toronto, which reported the existence of a Union in their area in 1897, while Hamilton maintained "one colored Union" in 1899. It appears that, in the majority of cases, African Canadians were often more willing to sign pledges and accept the WCTU's presence in their towns and cities, rather than fully commit by establishing their own WCTU branches.³²⁴ Support for the WCTU often fluctuated and some areas were more successful than others. Some felt that their assistance was necessary, while others found it difficult to fully trust the WCTU after being excluded and mistreated for so long. This reluctance not only affected WCTU membership, but also political issues they supported.

Black activists were aware of what many White WCTU members thought of them, but also came to realize that, when their presence was advantageous to mainstream causes, Whites would come calling. As a result, they used collective Black support to their benefit. If Whites were unwilling to comply with African-Canadian demands, they would feel the consequences. According to an 1899 Report, "The work of this department has suffered this year, I believe from

the 23rd Convention of the Ontario Woman's Christian Temperance Union, 1900, Canadian WCTU Fond, AO.

³²⁴ Report of the 20th Convention of the Ontario Woman's Christian Temperance Union, 1897; Report of the 22nd Convention of the Ontario Woman's Christian Temperance Union, 1899, Canadian WCTU Fond, AO.

the reaction caused through the treatment of the [local] plebiscite vote.”³²⁵ The WCTU wanted to use the Black community to gain votes for political leaders who supported prohibition, which is why, in 1899, the Superintendent, Mrs. A. Ribble, recommended the creation of Prohibition Clubs among Black voters, who should also be enlisted as “pledged supporters of prohibition candidates.”³²⁶ The WCTU knew that African Canadians took pride in the political system: “Our African friends hold very dear the token of their manhood and their freedom – the ballot, and they always like to be on the winning side.”³²⁷ The WCTU recognized that the African-Canadian vote affected their political success, particularly because the voting process was colour-blind. This is why they created voter clubs among Black residents. After years of excluding African Canadians, the WCTU made claims of acceptance because it needed their support. It fully recognized this fact in their 1898 report, when the new Superintendent of “Work Among Colored People” reported that previously “the whites had no compassion on the black man, but now we come to them for help, for assistance. We need them. Our common enemy has united us. Our boys are in danger; and as I looked the race line seemed to vanish entirely ... It is one of the greatest triumphs of Christianity that the barriers between nations and races are being lowered every year.”³²⁸

In the WCTU’s eyes, a barrier was being lowered, but this seems to have applied only when members sought the African-Canadian vote. This is not to say that African Canadians were unaware of the advantages that accompanied this relationship, and it was more than just abstinence from alcohol. The WCTU’s changing, although flawed, treatment of Black residents

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ Report of the 20th Convention of the Ontario Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, 1897; Report of the 21st Convention of the Ontario WCTU, 1898; Report of the 22nd Convention of the Ontario Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, 1899.

is evidence that racist behaviour could be altered, however slightly, particularly when there was something to be gained. Although this was not the ideal reason for changing attitudes toward this group, it was a start. In the case of the WCTU, it recognized that the Black vote was crucial to winning an election, resulting in change. One example occurred in 1899, when the title of the “Department of Work Among Colored People” changed to the “African Department.”³²⁹ It was possibly a sign of respect toward this community, or possibly not, but it does demonstrate that the WCTU did change its language to suit the time. Rather than a title that suggested Whites working among the Black community, the “African Department” almost projected a sense of independence: it implied that the Black community was more involved in their temperance work, rather than simply being told what to do. That being said, it could have also been a tool to manipulate potential members into joining, or voting. Threatening to remove their political support from temperance politicians gained them, at times, at least publicly, some respect and support from White WCTU members.

It could also be argued that African-Canadian activists consciously used the WCTU to boost their image. White members were willing to co-exist when they needed something from Black residents, but temperance groups promoted and helped members maintain a moral appearance, which was exactly the kind of image that African Canadians wanted to project. If one wanted to be a moral member of society one needed to be temperate and what better way to publicly display one’s morality than through a temperance society with a respected reputation. Members were conscious of what they could gain from joining a mainstream organization that was continuously linked to morality.³³⁰ Individual Black women such as Lucy Smith Thurman

³²⁹ Report of the 22nd Convention of the Ontario Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, 1899.

³³⁰ A respectable image also meant refraining from cigarettes. To resolve this issue, one Superintendent who visited Dresden distributed an anti-cigarette circular at one of her

were able to attract support from the Black community in the US through the WCTU, but she has a Canadian connection. Thurman was born on 22 October 1849 to Nehemiah Henry and Catherine Smith in Oshawa, Canada West, where she was raised and educated. She left the province in 1866, at the age of 17, and travelled to Maryland to teach and became associated with many prominent leaders of her time, including Frederick Douglas. By 1875, Thurman began her temperance activism, which involved becoming one of the first members of a band known as the Blue Ribboners. Her activism also included joining the WCTU, where she became one of its most successful lecturers. She lectured largely in Indiana, Illinois, and Michigan, travelling as far west as California and to every Southern state, where she took a particular interest in Southern schools. Thurman used the WCTU as a platform to connect temperance to critical issues such as racial uplift and advocacy for women and children. In 1893, Thurman was elected the first Superintendent of “Temperance Work among Colored People” in the United States, and in *Homespun Heroines and Other Women of Distinction*, Hallie Quinn Brown described her as having an active club life.³³¹ In 1896, she attended the World’s Women’s Christian Temperance Union Convention in England and, in that same year, Black women of North Carolina’s WCTU renamed their union the Lucy Thurman WCTU to honour her activism.³³² The numerous labours put forth by Thurman demonstrate her dedication to the cause and the Black community, but also that she was able to use the WCTU to gain a

presentations. Another Superintendent in Toronto sent out typewritten letters to thirty ministers in 1901, with anti-cigarette petitions and cigarette exercises, possibly consisting of activities in substitution of smoking, prepared by a Mrs. Waters; Report of the 24th Convention of the Ontario WCTU, 1901, Canadian WCTU Fond, AO.

³³¹ Hallie Quinn Brown, *Homespun Heroines and Other Women of Distinction*, (Xenia, Ohio: Aldine Pub. Co., 1926), 176.

³³² *Ibid.*, 176-177; Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 58.

respectable image. Thurman's documented activism took place in the United States, but it is certainly possible that her time in Canada West could have contributed to her activism as an adult and prepared her to navigate through the racial politics of the WCTU, and other groups, in North America.

Based on the evidence thus far, one could conclude that obstacles solely originated from Whites, but African-Canadian groups and individuals also saw the existence of certain organizations as a debatable issue. For example, it was not uncommon for religious individuals to target the strategies of organizations in their pursuit of self-help, particularly the debate between religion and education. Others argued against cultural groups that held social events, while religious groups differed over certain principles promoted within fraternal orders, creating an internal conflict for some members. Ironically, some of these same church goers also concealed their involvement in the very (Masonic) groups that they protested. Not only did this cause concern within religious groups, but also among individual members who were forced to choose between their brotherhood and their faith. Additionally, charity groups found that they were not immune to the actions of organizations and residents that disagreed with their methods.

As mentioned in chapter one, education was a crucial way to improve the lives of Black residents: many argued that it was the top priority. Others, including the Baptist minister William P. Newman, argued in favour of an alternative for "uplift": religion. In an editorial, "The Way to do Colored Canadians Good," the Reverend Newman provided the reader with five points to achieve self-reliance, particularly religious education, considering "[w]e attribute the failure of our friends [missionaries], to do us as a people, the good, they intended to do us, to

their oversight to adopt *God's* mode to accomplish the work.”³³³ He argued that their first step should have been to “*convert the people to Christ,*” rather than “the mere *intellectual* education of them.” As a result, they would be instilled with a sense of their own obligation to the community and motivated to act from principle. It was Newman’s strong belief that religion trumped education because the former taught followers to help each other. The Reverend Newman made his point even clearer by placing intellectual and physical education as the final, and least important, step. For him, “*intellectual education* is to be subservient to such an end, or it is worse than no education at all; hence, with us, the FIFTH point of great interest, is, a *physical* education. Mark! The *fifth* point, not the *first* one! The great error of our friends has consisted in making it FIRST.”³³⁴ To him, joining religious organizations and attending church were the ideal solutions to the community’s problems. “Uplift” would come, not through literary groups or etiquette clubs, but through groups associated with the church.

Other Black residents discouraged certain approaches by cultural groups. In the words of William J. Watkins, who believed in a more militant strategy, “It does no good to form good societies, and there let the professed object of their formation evaporate into windy speeches and flaming resolutions and pic-nic excursions. Hannibal said to his army ... ‘It is not words that are now wanted, but action.’ His men leaped into battle, and by united, determined action routed the enemy. Let this be our motto ... if we would rise superior to the crushing circumstances which affect us.”³³⁵ Watkins’ vision for this movement certainly differed from those who saw the value of organizational activities such as picnics and resolutions, which goes back to Staggenborg’s

³³³ “Editorial by William P. Newman,” Ripley, *BAP*, 325.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, 325, 327.

³³⁵ “Speech by William J. Watkins, Delivered at the Hall of the Mechanics’ Institute, Toronto, Canada West (25 June 1861),” Ripley, *BAP*, 447.

“contentious politics,” concerning a common purpose, but different approach. As a result, members and leaders planted their own different seeds of activism and watched them grow.

Differing over ideas and methods was inevitable and the same can be said for the various Black organizations that emerged during the nineteenth century. The Amherstburg Regular Baptist Association (ARBA) was a primary group that disagreed with many aspects of fraternal orders, particularly because of their secrecy. As a result, in 1845, the ARBA issued a ban that stated,

Whereas secret, and consequently irresponsible, societies are necessarily a violation of the Divine Law of reciprocity, and are found ... to be fraught with incalculable evils to the social, civil and religious interests of our country; therefore, resolved, that we solemnly advise all the churches composing this Association to immediately withdraw fellowship from any member that may hereafter connect with any such society, and being now a member of any secret society, shall persist in continuing in such connection.³³⁶

This ban lasted for a number of years and churches such as the Sandwich First Baptist Church were among those which resolved, in April 1853, that “we have no fellowship with Oddfellows [or] Free Masons.”³³⁷ The ARBA consisted of numerous Baptist churches throughout Canada West, meaning that their disapproval was widespread, but there is a touch of irony that accompanies this ban. The ARBA was formed on 8 October 1841, at the home of John Liberty, because Black residents were not welcome, as Christian citizens, within White churches. As a result, they invited all those of the same faith to join in the “great Celestial cause.”³³⁸ This invitation to Christian citizens is similar to the Masonic call for membership, published in the *Hamilton Spectator*, which welcomed those excluded by Whites. Each group experienced the

³³⁶ Amherstburg Association, *Pathfinders of Liberty and Truth: A Century with the Amherstburg Regular Missionary Baptist Association*, Compiled from the Minutes and Historical Essays (1940).

³³⁷ Minutes of the Sandwich First Baptist Church, 30 April 1853, Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO.

³³⁸ Shreve, *The AfriCanadian Church*, 46-47.

sting of rejection, yet the Church felt the need to promote a competing message, despite their history.

Baptist Churches were not alone in this pursuit. At the 1855 Annual Conference of the Canada District AME Church, Bishop Daniel Payne read a letter from Windsor requesting the abolition of Masonry and for the church to send “a man who (like them) is opposed to Masonry.”³³⁹ Participants at an earlier AME Conference held in the US similarly suggested that “no preacher should be permitted ‘to graduate into ministerial functions who is and continues to be a member of a Freemason’s Lodge.’”³⁴⁰ At this point, the Canada District of the AME Church had not yet separated from the American branch, meaning that many Canadian members shared this opinion. This created a problem for Masons, who had to choose between brotherhood and faith. The Reverend Benjamin Stewart, for example, was a member of the Mount Olive Lodge in Hamilton and the first Grand Master of the Widow’s Son Grand Lodge in 1856, while serving as a minister.³⁴¹ Fortunately for Stewart, no church was ever able to expose or remove Freemasonry from among its ministry and congregation, despite the fact that the 1871 membership list for Buxton’s Mount Carmel Lodge was almost identical to the names on the Church rolls. Arlie C. Robbins adds that “it is not too far-fetched to assume that Grand Master Stewart himself assisted in setting up the Buxton Lodge”³⁴² because he lived in Buxton when it was established in 1868. At this time, Buxton churches were still declaring a ban, despite its

³³⁹ Simpson, *Under the North Star*, 122; *Seventh Annual Conference of the A.M.E. Church for the Canada District* (Chatham, July 1855), 11.

³⁴⁰ Daniel Alexander Payne, *History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Nashville: Publishing House of the A.M.E. Sunday School Union, 1891), 113.

³⁴¹ The last Annual Conference of the AME Church in Canada was held in Chatham, Canada West, on 23 September 1856; Payne, *History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 113, 361; 124th Annual Session of the Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons, Province of Ontario and Jurisdiction, 1979.

³⁴² Payne, *History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 113, 361; Robbins, *Legacy to Buxton*, 110; 124th Annual Session of the Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge.

failure.³⁴³ When these African-Canadian groups took issue with another organization's methods it did not mean that they opposed Black activism or the goal of equality. Although these churches were unwilling to work with the Masons, their refusal was based on the differing strategies that each group adopted and was distinctly different from the reasoning of racist Whites: each group's non-compliance falls into a separate category.

At times fraternal orders received criticism from numerous directions and from unexpected parties, but True Band societies were not immune to the competing values of some Black residents. By 1856 this organization, consisting of African-Canadian men and women, expanded to at least fourteen groups, including those at the Black settlement, the RHS, and the city of Chatham, with 375 members during the 1850s. Just as literary societies assisted members by teaching them the basics, benevolent societies also trained numerous Black refugees in the essentials that allowed them to take care of themselves. Benevolent groups gave citizens the opportunity to focus on the fight for equality, rather than where their next meal would come from without begging. Among the many objectives of True Bands, it was necessary for members to take a general interest in the welfare of other members and to improve and encourage school attendance. This was in addition to fighting discrimination, uniting all churches, raising funds for newly arrived fugitives, and to stop the begging system entirely. This was specifically because certain Canadian "representatives" travelled to the US, exaggerating the conditions of fugitives in Canada West in order to collect money for themselves.³⁴⁴ Many African Canadians disagreed with this form of begging because they believed "we can support ourselves: but we don't want others begging over our backs: representing us as starving and freezing through our

³⁴³Robbins, *Legacy to Buxton*, 110; 124th Annual Session of the Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge.

³⁴⁴Drew, *The Refugee*, 236-237, 326; Peggy Bristow, "Whatever you raise in the ground you can sell it in Chatham," 119; *Provincial Freeman*, 7 April 1855.

own laziness and vice, and thus injuring our character while they pretend to befriend us, -- meanwhile, subserving nobody's interest but their own."³⁴⁵ Even though True Bands declared, "Under God we can take care of ourselves,"³⁴⁶ they too gained a reputation surrounded by controversy, partially due to the promises of a Mr. Fairfield and Dr. Stanton, a Quaker from Indiana. They drew in some members with the guarantee of a huge sum of money in the US that was just waiting to be sent to Canadian fugitives, but others felt that this perpetuated the very idea of begging. This created conflict with many Black residents who worked hard to convey an image of industriousness, self-help, and independence. In *A Plea for Emigration*, Mary Ann Shadd published the anti-begging sentiments of residents like Edward R. Grants, Samuel Wickham, and Robert Harris, who "do not think it right that twenty-seven thousand coloured persons, who are supporting themselves by their own industry, should lie under the disgrace of being called public beggars. We wish the people of the United States to ... send neither petticoat nor pantaloons to the county of Kent."³⁴⁷ Naturally, Shadd shared this opinion because she felt that African Canadians were fully capable of surviving without begging; "There are others (very ignorant people), who think differently."³⁴⁸ Shadd emphasized the need for community "uplift" through independence, not begging, but her targets did not remain quiet.

Shadd used numerous outlets to demonstrate the problems associated with begging, but she, and others, took it one step further by denouncing benevolent groups that became too closely associated with this practice. Although many benevolent groups had positive goals in mind, others were targeted for their methods. The entire point of benevolent organizations was to provide incoming Blacks with a fresh start that washed away negative stereotypes. If a group

³⁴⁵ Drew, *The Refugee*, 237.

³⁴⁶ "Report and Circular of the True Band," *Provincial Freeman*, 7 April 1855.

³⁴⁷ Shadd, *A Plea for Emigration*.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

did otherwise, it would have to deal with the repercussions. Many residents believed that corrupt begging in the US was a familiar practice among some Canadian men. This included Isaac Rice (White) and his supporters, a number of them Black residents who, in the 1850s, were labelled the “family compact,” including William Carter, Mr. Binga, and others. Critics, particularly those voicing their opinion in the *Provincial Freeman*, stated that Rice’s operation was completely ruining the character and hopes of the Black community in that area.³⁴⁹ They added, “Let the True Band Society look out for the poor ... and may the Society everywhere imitate the example of the Society at Amherstburgh [sic].” Unfortunately, personal attacks against William Carter, a Black man from Chatham, surfaced. The *Michigan Democrat and Inquirer* reprinted a notice copied from the *Provincial Freeman*, including a short description of Carter, followed by a warning to readers to “Look Out For the Imposter,” who was collecting money to “buy himself,” then calling him a “base imposter.” The *Democrat* then defended him, writing that Carter was a man worthy of respect.³⁵⁰ In response to these attacks, William Carter wrote that “the *Provincial Freeman* is opposed to every good and philanthropic object, which may not have been started by itself.”³⁵¹ Shadd then responded to Carter’s comments by discrediting his account and stating that he was dangerous, due to threats she received.³⁵² Despite sharing similar goals, Rice’s operation was not viewed in the same way as the True Bands’. Becoming too closely associated with begging was an issue associated with both groups’ reputations, yet one was more favourable to the public than the other.³⁵³ Having a White leader (Rice) assisting

³⁴⁹ Drew, *The Refugee*, 236-237, 326; *Provincial Freeman*, 29 December 1855.

³⁵⁰ *Michigan Democrat and Inquirer*, reprinted in the *Provincial Freeman*, 29 December 1855.

³⁵¹ *Provincial Freeman*, 29 December 1855.

³⁵² *Ibid.*

³⁵³ Ripley, *BAP*, 306.

incoming Blacks did not sit well with some residents, particularly Shadd, resulting in significant judgement toward their group, in many forms, from many directions.

It cannot be denied that, in spite of the fact that African Canadians worked ceaselessly to achieve a respected reputation, numerous Whites stood firm in their opposition, unwilling to alter their position. Stubborn residents influenced by a racist tradition that supported distorted versions of the “Curse of Ham” proved to be a significant problem in the community’s pursuit of “uplift,” continuously challenging Black civil society organizations at every step. Despite this, African Canadians remained fixed in their efforts to change the ways and opinions of White resisters. Masonic lodges and temperance groups found themselves dealing with exclusion from White groups, while some cultural and educational societies experienced more violent situations. These disturbing acts, although tragic, lit a fire in the community. Regardless of how they were treated, members knew the importance of continuing on if they wanted change to occur. They not only rallied the community, they provided a fresh start for incoming refugees by feeding and clothing them. These groups also trained members in basic skills such as reading and writing that later allowed them to advance their activism through debate, petitions, opinion pieces in the press, protests, and challenging the law: they informed and instructed the community on how to fight back. Black leaders such as Samuel Ward benefited from increased literacy rates, resulting from organizational efforts, considering more citizens were capable of reading his autobiography, letters, and editorials. Without this advantage, his message would have spread at a much slower pace. He was also able to share his written work with members of the Provincial Union, where he acted as president. Dennis Hill also sparked a chain reaction in favour of integrated schools: his knowledge from battling unjust laws would have been valuable to organizations such as the Provincial Union, which he joined following his court case, or those

who read about this incident in the press. It is a story of civil rights leadership before its time. His efforts inspired later movements against discriminatory legislation in education, leading groups such as the Kent County Civil Rights League to achieve what Hill could not, years later. The goals and tactics of the nineteenth-century Black community makes them unique. They were fighting for a common purpose, equality in free society, yet their differences allowed participants to fight injustice from numerous angles. Black residents had the ability to choose whichever organization(s) best suited their interests and opinions: these groups supported their own unique vision of how to achieve equality, but, simultaneously, they were joined together by a common purpose. Each had their way and proved their unity was stronger than the divide.

Chapter Three: Setting A Standard: Membership and Leadership

The struggle for equality united many African-Canadian men and women from diverse religions and financial backgrounds in pursuit of the same goal. But what allowed a strategy involving so many participants, with differing opinions and interests, to work? As was alluded to in the introduction, African Canadians acknowledged these differences, but were able to push them aside to alter their present situation: within civil society everyone had a voice. These agents of change helped one another, but also established rules for leadership and membership. It was crucial for participants to work together, but in order to create stability in their efforts it was necessary to establish guidelines for how to become a member and how to maintain membership. This would ensure that the reputation of the organization would be upheld. Chapter three will explore trends in who was accepted, in addition to the expectations for those who were admitted. This will highlight the specific qualifications and concessions made for membership, including gender, morals, and finances. Fleeing the US for a better life in Canada West meant that formerly enslaved and free Blacks had to acclimatize to a new, although flawed, environment with far fewer legal (and social) restrictions. Additionally, the lives of African Canadians already residing in Canada West were altered significantly due to the increased number of entering Black refugees in need: this group also had to make substantial changes to how they operated in their daily lives. Creating change not only meant altering unjust laws, but also adjusting their lives and perceptions from what they once were. The entrance of both free Blacks and those escaping slavery forever changed the lives of those residing in and entering Canada West.

Setting Aside the Patriarchy

Although previously discussed groups like the ARBA, the Provincial Union, the Social-Literary Society, and the Amherstburg Literary Association emphasized a co-existence between male and female members, it cannot be denied that patriarchal rules still existed in the Black community. This sense of male control is expressed in the *Voice of the Fugitive*, which explains the “role” of a woman. In “The Wife’s Eloquence,”

A woman has her husband’s fortune in her power, because she may, or she may not, as she pleases conform to his circumstances. This is her first duty and it ought to be her pride ... She can aid him immensely by relieving him of every care which she is capable of taking upon herself. His own employments are usually such as to require his whole time and his whole mind. A good wife will never suffer her husband’s attention to be distracted by details to which her whole time and talents are adequate.³⁵⁴

This sense of patriarchy was not uncommon among nineteenth-century Blacks, but it did not always suit life for Black residents of Canada West. When enforced, patriarchy, according to Shirley Yee, was a demonstration of freedom in their new lives, where men were dominant and women subordinate; previously men were the subordinates of their masters. Ironically, the Black community tried to apply this gender restrictive lifestyle as a way to reject their masters’ oppressive rules and their former lives as enslaved people.³⁵⁵ Yee adds, though, that these gender norms often became blurred because “Black Canadian women’s experiences as community-builders challenged simplistic notions of ‘true’ womanhood as they struggled to survive and construct family and community institutions, such as churches, schools, and benevolent organizations.”³⁵⁶ This was a result of, as Yee calls it, “the harsh realities of frontier life,” which caused gender roles to blur. She adds that Black women were required to take on

³⁵⁴ “The Wife’s Eloquence,” *Voice of the Fugitive*, 20 May 1852.

³⁵⁵ Yee, “Gender Ideology and Black Women as Community-Builders,” 437.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 434.

“male tasks” for the survival of the community. Because Black slave women were often forced to perform labour that was undefined by gender, specifically physical tasks, in addition to the skills acquired as free Blacks in the establishment of their homestead, Black women significantly contributed to the construction of their community but, at the same time, “expressed satisfaction for being treated well.”³⁵⁷ By “being treated well,” she means being treated like proper ladies. The dual nature of African-Canadian women’s lives meant that they did not want to be criticized for performing tasks commonly associated with men because they were required to survive in freedom, yet they also wanted to be seen as proper.³⁵⁸ James Horton adds that Black men and women had to adjust to these new circumstances because it was unlikely that a family could be supported on one income, making a female’s financial participation necessary and, that, therefore, gender roles were slightly less restrictive for Black women.³⁵⁹ As we will see in the following pages, in groups such as the Victoria Reform Benevolent Society, St. John’s Benevolent Association, and Chatham’s “Love and Charity,” it was necessary for women to contribute financially, while projecting a proper image, resulting in gender roles that became increasingly more fluid. This fluidity transferred into organizations where women gained more opportunities for participation, stepping outside of, or manipulating, their traditional roles, despite the restrictions of the separate sphere. As a result, many Black women found themselves either in a position of authority or involvement, not only because they pushed for and deserved these roles, but also because they were invited.

A strength of African-Canadian civil society groups was the incorporation of female leaders and members. For Black women it was even more important, in comparison to their

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 437.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*; Horton, “Freedom’s Yoke,” 60.

male counterpart, to be active, particularly in the church because it helped them challenge an unfair association with “Jezebel,” an image of immorality, promiscuity and racial inferiority that was forced upon Black women. Religious activism was one important way that women could disassociate themselves from negative opinions. Nina Reid-Maroney argues that

At the same time, women’s claim to moral authority in this work confronted and then tore down ‘Jezebel’ associations, replacing them with the ideal of strong, respectable, and educated women working for the elevation of the race and therefore for the elevation of humankind. Black women’s participation in church work, particularly through women’s associations, may well have been cast at times in familiar terms of the separate sphere, but in the context of late nineteenth-century racial politics, claiming the moral ground of the separate sphere was in itself a profoundly political act that resisted oppressive racial stereotypes.³⁶⁰

Reid-Maroney adds, “Moreover, in their understanding of the political value of church and family, and in their experience outside the home, black women in Canada also ‘blurred the line between the public and the private.’ In entering into such a bargain with Victorian notions of domesticity, black women knowingly acquired some opportunities and eschewed others.”³⁶¹

Participating in these religious groups made a statement and Black women were fully aware of this. Through this work they simultaneously distanced themselves from a negative image, while replacing it with a new, and more positive, version. They took an environment, the church, which was fairly restrictive for all women and used it to liberate themselves from oppressive stereotypes.

Within Protestant churches, Black or White, the general practice was for men to take on the position of superintendent, while women often filled the role of teachers. Although this was common, Black women did take on the role of superintendent, but it was not without difficulty. Reid-Maroney states that the acceptance of female leadership was not always common in the

³⁶⁰ Reid-Maroney, *The Reverend Jennie Johnson*, 60.

³⁶¹ Ibid.

Anglican Church. She adds that men such as Thomas Hughes, who taught in London, Canada West, with the Mission to Fugitive Slaves in Canada, part of the Colonial Church and School Society, were disgusted by racial prejudice, but to them “the dictum ‘ye are all one in Christ’ was difficult to live up to when it came to accepting the leadership of women.”³⁶² They preached acceptance of all people, but found it difficult to allow women to lead in this endeavour.

Male members were not always willing to accept female leaders, but this barrier did not stop a number of women from making a place for themselves, outside of their traditional role, in the church. There are several examples in the ARBA of female superintendents such as Sister Julia Turner for Sandwich and Sister E.W. Shreve for Buxton, as early as 1875. ARBA minutes for 1879 even reveal that Shreve was preaching to her community, despite some restrictions.³⁶³ Although there was some leeway for Black women striving for more, participation in leadership roles was not always easy. According to Reid-Maroney, the ARBA did put limitations on women’s participation with their “Articles of Faith and Practice.” This was especially true in article 17 which states, “We believe that the execution of the government of the church is committed exclusively to the brethren, but in all cases it is to be so conducted as to secure the satisfaction of the sisters, so far as they are actuated by the direction and spirit of Christ.”³⁶⁴ As a result, many women of the ARBA were restricted to Sunday school conventions, ladies sewing circles and, in 1882, the Women’s Home Missionary Society. Reid-Maroney goes as far as to say that women were not necessarily secondary outside of religious institutions, but African-Canadian churches were more conservative than their American counterpart in terms of the

³⁶² Ibid., 59.

³⁶³ Minutes of the ARBA, 1875, Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO.

³⁶⁴ Amherstburg Association, “Articles and Practice of Faith,” in *Pathfinders of Liberty and Truth*, 9; Reid-Maroney, *The Reverend Jennie Johnson*, 61.

placement of women. Despite this, Reid-Maroney adds, Black women did test this principle.³⁶⁵ Among those women was Elizabeth Shadd Shreve, who “drew converts of her own to Baptist churches and meetings on a wide-ranging circuit. As the ministers in her denomination noted, ‘she showed a great power of thought and a quick discerning eye.’”³⁶⁶ This support and Shreve’s abilities gave her the opportunity to become the first woman to address the Amherstburg Association in 1881, and the following year she became the president of the ARBA’s Women’s Home Missionary Society. Shreve was known to travel on horseback, ministering to the sick, helping the needy and preaching the Gospel to residents, regardless of their denomination, in areas such as Buxton and Shrewsbury. Her dedication to the community and commitment to rising above gender norms and religious indifference is evident. To Shreve, anyone, regardless of his or her religion, should receive “the Bread of Life,” but also any person, no matter his or her gender, should have the opportunity to offer it. Reid-Maroney adds that it was not a shortage of male ministers, due to a post-Civil War decline, in the ARBA churches that led to Shreve’s ministerial role, but because of her skill as a preacher.³⁶⁷ Shreve rose above, despite the obstacles.

Other women such as the Reverend Jennie Johnson also became religious leaders. From the time of her Baptist conversion, at the age of sixteen, Johnson was welcomed into the ministry and, in 1885, preached alongside Samuel Lynn, minister at Dresden’s First Baptist Church, at the schoolhouse for six weeks. By 1886, Johnson and Lynn organized the Union Baptist Church

³⁶⁵ Reid-Maroney, *The Reverend Jennie Johnson*, 4, 61.

³⁶⁶ Amherstburg Association, *Pathfinders of Liberty and Truth*, 30; Reid-Maroney, *The Reverend Jennie Johnson*, 61.

³⁶⁷ Amherstburg Association, “Biography of Madam E.W. Shreve,” in *Pathfinders of Liberty and Truth*, 65-66; Reid-Maroney, *The Reverend Jennie Johnson*, 61-62.

where they “assumed pastoral duties.”³⁶⁸ She recalled participating “in some of the most soul-stirring evangelistic meetings of my whole career. I well remember one season when I preached every night for nine weeks.”³⁶⁹ Johnson also stated that in her early years in Chatham Township, she converted hundreds. She was able to

sidestep the questions of gender, avoid the preoccupation with respectability and virtue, and portray her entry into the ministry in unequivocal terms ... [N]either an apprehension of unworthiness nor a shred of resistance was part of Jennie Johnson’s story. The calm with which Johnson accepted her own voice reveals much about the political setting in which she had been raised ... Black abolitionist culture in Johnson’s Canada ... mitigated the opposition – at least on the grounds of race – to black women’s speech.³⁷⁰

Certainly the need for Johnson to preach so extensively means that she had enough support to continue.

A more subtle example of women spreading the religious message from behind the pulpit comes from Miss Mamie Branton, a resident of Amherstburg and president of the Women’s Home Mission, which was part of the ARBA. According to the *Amherstburg Echo*, in April 1893, Miss Branton paid a visit to North Buxton’s Baptist residents where she “took the stand, and gave a very able discourse from the 37 chap. of Ezekiel, to a very attentive congregation. At the close she sang a beautiful missionary hymn of her own composing. She is a young lady of much enthusiasm and ability. She is visiting all the Baptist churches in the province in the interest of the society. Miss Branton went from Buxton to London.”³⁷¹ Although not technically a preacher, Branton was able to perform the duties of a preacher, in the role of missionary, mainly due to her involvement in this organization. She may not have been fully accepted by all religious leaders, but these congregations and the press welcomed her.

³⁶⁸ Jennie Johnson, *My Life* (Dresden, ON, 1951), 3; Reid-Maroney, *The Reverend Jennie Johnson*, 55-57.

³⁶⁹ Johnson, *My Life*, 3; Reid-Maroney, *The Reverend Jennie Johnson*, 57.

³⁷⁰ Reid-Maroney, *The Reverend Jennie Johnson*, 62-63.

³⁷¹ *Amherstburg Echo*, 7 April 1893.

Although there are instances where Black women felt resistance from men, the latter often demonstrated a security in their masculinity by joining groups led by women. In *Come, bright Improvement!*, Murray states that African-Canadian women “often took a leading role in the formation of circles for men and women alike.”³⁷² Although the concern for men working under female leaders was not absent from the African-Canadian community, societies such as the Amherstburg Social-Literary Society demonstrate that there were some exceptions. As mentioned, Amherstburg’s Social-Literary Society, a mixed-gender society, elected women into official positions on multiple occasions, including Miss Ada Christian (president), Miss Annie Smith (vice president), and Miss Ella Christian (honorary president). According to Murray, when White women were involved in mixed-sex societies it was generally in the capacity of secretary.³⁷³

There are a number of explanations for why men participated alongside women. These men may have been willing to push aside gender norms because they shared the same reasons for joining as women: ultimately it was about gaining equality, but they also strove for educational advancement, social interaction, or aiding community institutions such as the church. Another possibility was that gender conventions may not have been as highlighted in these organizations due to the demand for educating Black citizens and the tradition of flexibility when gender roles were concerned. Black women participated in educational, benevolent, and literary societies beginning in the early 1830s which not only earned them a reputation as dedicated activists, but also familiarized men with mixed-gender groups and female leadership at an early stage in the

³⁷² Murray, *Come, bright Improvement!*, 98.

³⁷³ *Amherstburg Echo*, 4 January 1895; *Amherstburg Echo*, 26 July 1895; *Amherstburg Echo*, 16 August 1895; *Amherstburg Echo*, 12 April 1895; Murray, *Come, bright Improvement!*, 105.

movement.³⁷⁴ Although examples of women participating in mixed-gendered organizations outnumber those of them leading, women did assert themselves as significant contributors.

Come One, Come All

Traditional attitudes stemming from the church could create barriers for women seeking leadership positions, but it also acted as an incredible source of strength in the community. This made African Canadians very protective of their religion. As a result, in their pursuit of equality, Black residents maintained a commitment to their individual faith and religious institutions, but made adjustments where necessary. These modifications included cooperation with other denominations. From the early stages of Black settlement African Canadians were encouraged to accept others unlike themselves because the movement toward equality required that all denominations work together. At the Sandwich Convention in 1850, for example, a resolution for the RHS declared, “We have assembled in convention, as a union of colored Americans, under the protection of her Majesty (Queen Victoria,) [sic] discarding all sectarian prejudices and selfishness.”³⁷⁵ In fact, James T. Holly, a Roman Catholic, was involved in the RHS, and acted as the corresponding editor and subscription agent for the *Voice of the Fugitive*. It was also his suggestion to form the North American League, an agricultural association.³⁷⁶ His heavy involvement indicates that religion was not always a barrier for participation.

Although many groups welcomed other denominations, it was often difficult for the church itself to accept certain civil society organizations. Baptist and Methodist churches banned any association with fraternal orders because they believed them to be secretive and

³⁷⁴ Murray, *Come, bright Improvement!*, 35, 71 & 73.

³⁷⁵ *Voice of the Fugitive*, 1 January 1851.

³⁷⁶ Ripley, *BAP*, 141.

dangerous to the “religious interests of our country.”³⁷⁷ The irony of the situation is that African-Canadian fraternal orders actively incorporated religion into their organization. A lecture delivered to African-American Oddfellows, declared that their lodge consisted of men from all classes, parties, and sects, from all over the world, each working together harmoniously. This declaration directly reinforced the idea that we are all different, but worthy of respect. Skocpol et al. also apply this sentiment to African-American Masonic lodges and their auxiliaries, where men and women of different churches and denominations, usually Protestant, had methods of cooperation which downplayed their religious differences. As a result, these rituals and activities were structured in such a way that Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians, or possibly all Christians, were able to congregate and work cohesively.³⁷⁸ Bayliss Camp and Orit Kent also conclude that Black lodges, particularly the African-American Elks, used explicitly Christian imagery in their rituals, choosing to utilize biblical passages, rather than secular phrases.³⁷⁹ Despite any concern over denominational conflict, Black Elks embraced religion, rather than avoiding it.

In Canada West, the same could be said for African-Canadian lodges, where men from all religions conducted their Masonic traditions together. In a speech delivered to the Britannia Lodge of the Grand United Order of Oddfellows, in Hamilton, Philip Lee, Jr., declared, “the secret Institution of Oddfellowship, which not only cultivates and improves a real undisguised friendship among men, but teaches them the important duties of society[,] is confined to no particular country... Hence Oddfellowship becomes an universal language. By this means [,]

³⁷⁷ Amherstburg Association, *Pathfinders of Liberty and Truth*.

³⁷⁸ Skocpol et al., *What a Mighty Power We Can Be*, 88.

³⁷⁹ Bayliss J. Camp, Orit Kent, “‘What a Mighty Power We Can Be’: Individual and Collective Identity in African American and White Fraternal Initiation Rituals,” *Social Science History* 28:3 (2004), 457-458.

men of all religions, and all nations are united.”³⁸⁰ There was no distinguishing a man based on his religion, or “race”: a brother was a brother.

Numerous Masonic Grand Masters took the opportunity to introduce the subject of religion, whether they were thanking God for their blessings or encouraging members to do good works to ensure happiness in the afterlife. For example, Grand Master Isaac Holden began his speech, “In humble thanks to the Great Architect of the universe” and added,

I went in all humbleness of heart to a kind and indulgent Father, feeling sure that he would not forsake me, or us, so long as I trusted our cause to His keeping. Of Him I asked a double portion of wisdom and more strength, that through that wisdom and that strength we might be enabled to show forth the beauty of that idea expressed by one of Israel’s poets, who sang before the foundation stone of the Temple was laid, ‘How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.’³⁸¹

Others shared a similar approach, including Grand Master Richard Turner Shewcraft, who, in 1879, spoke similarly when he said, “it was meet and proper that we should unite with the Wor.[sic] And Rev. Grand Chaplain, in thankful praise to Almighty God for His kind and protecting care over us, and to invoke His aid and guidance in the future, that whatever may be done to His honor and glory, and for the best interest of the craft of masonry.”³⁸² He urged members to elevate themselves in educational, social, moral, and religious “scales.”³⁸³ This trend continued throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century. In 1891, Grand Master Henry Weaver expressed the importance of good works and hope for a warm welcome in the afterlife: “‘Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joys of our Lord,’ for then, not

³⁸⁰ *Provincial Freeman*, 5 April 1856.

³⁸¹ Proceedings of the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Annual Communications of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of the Most Ancient and Honorable [sic] Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons of the Province of Ontario, Dominion of Canada, 1875, Chatham-Kent Black Historical Society.

³⁸² Proceedings of the Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth Annual Communications of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of the Most Ancient and Honorable [sic] Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons of the Province of Ontario, Dominion of Canada, 1879.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*

until then shall we know the perfectness of our work.”³⁸⁴ The following year, Weaver once again addressed members, asking them to “invoke the blessings and divine assistance of the Deity, that our successors shall or will view our labors with satisfaction and admiration, and when the square of virtue shall be applied thereto it will be pronounced square work, good and true.”³⁸⁵ Interestingly, after this statement it says, “Prayer _____.”³⁸⁶ What prayer Weaver suggested is not mentioned. He possibly left that choice up to each Mason, but it is significant that he would incorporate religion so directly, considering the differing practices and religious texts among the various members. Grand Master Weaver concluded that “Freemasonry will, if adhered to, make a man a better man, a better citizen, and a better Christian, for I assure you that its principles stand pre-eminently above any other society’s principles. She is the mother of all good societies and the hand maiden of Christianity.”³⁸⁷ Weaver’s direct connection between religion and Masonry not only demonstrates its incorporation into Masonic practices, but highlights Masonry as a tool to serve Christianity.

Grand Master George Hughes expressed a similar reverence for religion in 1895 by declaring, “‘Let there be light,’ the lips of Deity breathed Masonry into existence, and it must and shall be forevermore.”³⁸⁸ Hughes continued,

Masonry is a system of morality and a twin sister of the christian [sic] religion. Masonry is a moral, social and intellectual order with the revealed word of God for its foundation

³⁸⁴ Proceedings of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of the Most Honorable [sic] and Ancient Fraternity, Free and Accepted Masons of the Province of Ontario, 1891, Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO.

³⁸⁵ Proceedings of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of the Most Honorable [sic] and Ancient Fraternity, Free and Accepted Masons of the Province of Ontario, 1892, Chatham-Kent Black Historical Society.

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

³⁸⁸ Proceedings of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of the Most Honorable [sic] and Ancient Fraternity, Free and Accepted Masons of the Province of Ontario, 1894-1895, Chatham-Kent Black Historical Society.

and guide. Masonry publishes no sectarian creed and enquires of no man his political or sectarian opinion. She banishes atheism and infidelity from her temples and closes her portals against blind and foolish fanaticism, men of every sectarian creed worship at her altars together, all holding to the supreme belief that there is a God.³⁸⁹

Although Hughes and Weaver agreed that God was their ultimate guide, Hughes stated that there was some equality between religion and Masonry, calling them twin sisters in terms of their practices. This is a significant departure from Weaver's claim that Masonry was the servant of Christianity, but they each incorporated their own interpretation of religion into addresses. They were aware that their words would be seen by a majority, if not all, Masons in Canada West, considering these addresses were published in annual proceedings. One approach that remained constant was their continued amalgamation of all people, no matter their religion. If a Grand Master promoted tolerance, all Masons were expected to follow suit. Lodge members recognized the authority of a Grand Master's words, and adhered to them.

Lodges practised what their Grand Master preached by promoting religious diversity. Within the Lincoln Lodge #8 of Amherstburg, members included Baptist followers such as Ezekiel Stevens and Henry Young, and Methodist members including Nasa McCurdy and Thomas L. Johnson. In other lodges such as Hamilton's Mount Olive Lodge #1, the Reverend Benjamin Stewart and James Bryant, a plasterer, were of the Methodist faith, while John H. Bland, a barber, was Baptist. Although a large portion of members were either Baptist or Methodist, others were accepted. The Victoria Lodge #2 of St. Catharines, for example, allowed participation from Jacob A. Lee (a porter), from the Church of England (Anglican), while Mount Carmel Lodge #10 of Buxton, included Garrison Shadd, a Universalist, who believed that ultimately everyone will be saved, and a "Free Thinker," Abraham Shadd, whose belief system

³⁸⁹ Proceedings of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of the Most Honorable [sic] and Ancient Fraternity, Free and Accepted Masons of the Province of Ontario, 1895.

was based on his own opinion rather than accepting the views of others. They formed their own opinion based on reason and doubted or questioned religious dogma.³⁹⁰ The fact that a non-traditional Free Thinker was welcomed into this organization is further proof of the religious inclusion of African-Canadian civil society groups.

Civil society organizations promoted religious tolerance, but some groups created specifically for religious purposes found it challenging to allow outsiders to participate in certain aspects of their operation. Some welcomed them, some did not. Among the examples illustrating this union and divide is William Nazrey, who was a bishop for the AME Church since 1852, but was also elected into the same role for the BME Church. Nazrey remained a member of the AME conference, but assumed jurisdiction over both BME and AME Churches in Canada. He held this position until 30 June 1864, when he was asked to withdraw from the AME Church. Some members, including the Reverend A.R. Green, felt that Nazrey was not legally entitled to hold the position of bishop in one church, while also serving another. It is most likely that Green campaigned against Nazrey to take over his high-ranking position. As a result, Nazrey stepped away from his work in the AME Church, which worked to the benefit of the BME Church that flourished under Nazrey's leadership. Ironically, Nazrey's primary opponent, the Reverend Green, was later charged with violating his ordination vows and was expelled.³⁹¹ Despite attacks from opposition, the years that Nazrey led both churches proved the potential for long-term success when religions united.

³⁹⁰ Canada Census 1881, Amherstburg, Essex, pg. 59-60, 65, file number C-13280, LAC; Canada Census 1881, Chatham (Town), Kent, pg. 147, file number C-C-13280, LAC; Canada Census 1881, Hamilton, pg. 45 & 73, file number C-13257, LAC; Canada Census 1881, Stamford, Welland, pg. 68, file number C-13253, LAC; Canada Census 1881, Raleigh, Kent, pg. 10-11, file number C-13278, LAC.

³⁹¹ Shreve, *The AfriCanadian Church*, 81-82.

According to the *Hamilton Spectator*, Toronto's Methodist followers also made their opinion clear in July 1890, when a portion of the BME congregation wanted to become affiliated with the AME church, which is American, while others did not feel this was right, possibly a betrayal of their British loyalties. This issue surfaced after the Bishop Tanner of Philadelphia gave permission to Pastor Bayne of Philadelphia, to take over the congregation. Unfortunately, objections to this alliance found members attending services with policemen required to maintain the peace.³⁹² Intermingling with other religions could be contentious.

Organizations such as the Amherstburg Regular Baptist Association, which was composed of Baptist churches throughout the province, were more exclusive, but this does not mean that interaction was not considered. In the 1893 and 1894 minutes of the ARBA annual meeting, both the Reverends A.D. Chandler and J.A. Holt, raised the question of whether Baptists should recognize delegates who were neither Christians nor of the Baptist faith.³⁹³ Asking this question during both sessions suggests that there was considerable interest in this query, but also hints that members were contemplating the acceptance of delegates, or representatives, from other religions. No response was printed in these minutes, but as will be shown, years later, positive action was taken. The 1887 proceedings of the ARBA also mention the Baptist minister, S.H. Davis who preached before a large audience in the Methodist church.³⁹⁴ Who attended is unknown, but holding this session in the Methodist church would not only involve approval from the Baptist minister who preached, but also those in charge of the Methodist church. It worked both ways, in that each party had to be willing to cooperate with the other. As we learned with Toronto's Methodist followers, it was not always popular to be

³⁹² *Hamilton Spectator*, 22 July 1890.

³⁹³ Minutes of the ARBA, 1893 & 1894, Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO.

³⁹⁴ Minutes of the ARBA, 1887, Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO.

inclusive, even among other Methodists, but others were willing to adjust. The fact that a Baptist minister preached in a Methodist church, and that the Reverend Nazrey was able to lead the AME and BME churches for as long as he did, demonstrates that all congregations differed in their opinions, but common ground could be achieved. A desire for religious intermingling within the ARBA was promoted from many directions, including its Sabbath School. One member wrote that they sincerely hoped that all members of the Baptist Church, along with other Christian organizations, would quickly come to realize their obligation in the operation of Sabbath School work.³⁹⁵ The promotion and maintenance of Sabbath Schools created a willingness to work with other religious groups, allowing for a religious flexibility to occur. As a result, the Baptist and Methodist Sunday Schools from the Sandwich area joined together at picnics in Burton's Grove within the Sandwich Mineral Springs and "returned in the evening greatly pleased with their day's amusement."³⁹⁶ The same situation occurred on 26 July 1895, when residents of Amherstburg held their "usual" Sunday School picnic at Borrowman's Grove. The following year, the Methodist and Baptist Sunday Schools of Amherstburg came together once again for a picnic at the same location. Amherstburg's Union Sabbath School also held gatherings at the Son's Hall, where all denominations were welcomed and represented.³⁹⁷

With the beginning of a new century, the ARBA remained committed to this gesture of solidarity. In 1909, the ARBA Sabbath School welcomed to their convention Miss Kelly, a "fraternal delegate" from the AME School and Miss Hirson, from the BME Church. These visitors were referred to as "brethren," demonstrating that the ARBA was now willing to welcome delegates from other churches. That same year, the Rev. Bradby suggested the

³⁹⁵ Minutes of the ARBA, 1897, Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO.

³⁹⁶ *Essex Record*, 5 September 1878.

³⁹⁷ *Amherstburg Echo*, 26 July 1895; *Amherstburg Echo*, 17 July 1896.

establishment of a committee which would consult with other committees from BME and AME Sunday Schools at their Inter-Denominational Congress.³⁹⁸ An additional gesture of cooperation came when the AME Sabbath School Convention sent an address to the members of the ARBA Sabbath School Convention. They expressed their common interest by telling ARBA members, “Although working under different names and methods our aims are the same. We are striving to make men and women of our children, we are striving to lay the foundation for the future church, and last, but not least, we are striving to show our children the path which leads to eternal glory.”³⁹⁹ The primary objective of the Black community was to gain equality, and huge strides were made when organizations produced strong and faith-driven men and women, who would continue the traditions of the church, a vital institution in the community. Their goal of equality brought them together, despite their differences.

Other faith-based groups created specifically for one denomination, such as the Cheerful Workers and the Buisy Gleanors, also encouraged a similar practice. They were both literary societies, but were created to support the Baptist church.⁴⁰⁰ The constitution of the Buisy Gleanors declared that they would be a junior department of the Cheerful Workers, which would also manage and govern them.⁴⁰¹ This junior department was created to expand the charitable efforts of the Cheerful Workers, which was exactly what they did. They hosted numerous fundraisers such as concerts, dinners, and teas, where they provided vocal and instrumental music. Through their efforts, members of the Baptist church, but also those from other religious backgrounds, were given an opportunity to aid the Baptist cause. At a lawn social hosted by the Cheerful Workers, the program listed men such as J.H. Alexander and Delos R. Davis as

³⁹⁸ Minutes of the ARBA, 1909, Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO.

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁰ Minute Book of the Buisy Gleanors.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

providing vocal and instrumental music, recitations, essays, and addresses. Interestingly, neither man was a member of the Baptist church but, rather, respectively members of the Church of England and the Methodist church. A similar situation occurred with the Buisy Gleaners, which also listed members from the Methodist faith, including Myrtle McDowell, who sang and spoke at meetings, Bertha Wesley, who recited, and Bertha Johnson, who sang, read and spoke from the day she joined on 17 January 1890, until 1894.⁴⁰²

At gatherings in other towns such as Buxton, “both Baptist and Methodist teenagers attended for they were not about to miss out on any Sunday night fun.”⁴⁰³ This was while members of Toronto’s BME, AME, and Baptist churches happily attended gatherings, particularly youth dances, hosted by each denomination.⁴⁰⁴ Religion acted as a support system in the Black community, providing a key meeting place for spiritual guidance, social events and organizational work, but it also offered a safe environment for members. They were so committed to the success of their churches that many religious barriers were removed: they welcomed all the help they could get.

This fluidity may be the result of African-Canadian religious conversions. Although the converted accepted a new religion they remained connected to their former faith, creating greater tolerance. According to Nina Reid-Maroney, the Reverend Jennie Johnson experienced a number of religious conversions throughout her lifetime. While living in Dresden, she grew up as a member of the Church of England but with time, members of the Johnson family came to identify themselves with the BME Church. This change was based on the fact that the religious life of early settlers was predominantly influenced by the Anglican Church. The Johnson

⁴⁰² Ibid; *Amherstburg Echo*, 18 July 1890.

⁴⁰³ Robbins, *Legacy to Buxton*, 109.

⁴⁰⁴ Walker, “African Canadians,” *Encyclopedia of Canada’s Peoples*.

children, for example, were christened by the Reverend Thomas Hughes (Anglican), in Dresden, but during the same period Josiah Henson escaped bondage and brought change to the religious landscape of Dresden. Under Henson's guidance, the BME church was established and residents followed his lead in Methodist pursuits. Johnson's later attachment to the BME Church did not mean that she had severed all ties to the Anglican Church. She held an emotional attachment to the Anglican Church and her support for the BME Church was not a rejection of or rebellion against Anglicanism, but an expression of the unity of a people from the same background, with common struggles and a keenness to achieve the goal of equality in their new home.⁴⁰⁵ The conversion of Johnson, who later joined the Baptist Church, and other Black families in Dresden demonstrates that there was religious flexibility in her community. Although some early members of the Church of England remained loyal, others changed with the times. As Johnson argues, religious life was a central component in the overall picture of prosperity in the Black community, which meant that a person held religion in high standing, but at the same time was willing to alter it for the sake of the community. Although she remained attached to Anglicanism, Johnson believed that her entrance into the BME Church, and later the Baptist Church, was for the betterment of her community. This was a sacrifice that Johnson was willing to make.⁴⁰⁶

Character Over "Class"

Interestingly, among the many characteristics that defined these organizations, financial status does not appear to have been a qualification for membership, although leadership may have required more from applicants. In the American context, the Black community found itself with a hierarchy where some were more likely to hold a leadership position, while others were

⁴⁰⁵ Reid-Maroney, *The Reverend Jennie Johnson*, 53.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 53 & 56.

destined to follow. As was previously discussed, Deborah Gray White argues that middle-class clubwomen provided social services for the less fortunate, but also educated the Black community, particularly women, on morality and purity which would lead to social improvement.⁴⁰⁷ According to McHenry, in their attempt to help those of lesser means, clubwomen initiated a hierarchy. She states, “The context of club life provided an ideal network through which middle-class black women communicated and thus reinforced the standards they believed that black women of lower classes and social positions should adopt.”⁴⁰⁸ In this instance, Black women from a higher social standing were in charge and they set the rules; women of poorer circumstances were expected to follow their lead.

Something similar occurred in a number of African-Canadian organizations years prior, not always in terms of affluence, but influence. Among the Masons, roughly until the late 1870s, early 1880s, this organization accepted ministers into their leadership positions on a more consistent basis. According to Arlie C. Robbins, from the very beginning “men of the cloth” have participated heavily in Masonry, including the first Grand Master, Prince Hall, who fought for societal and educational equality for African Americans in Boston, and the Reverend James C. Richards who, a hundred years later, led the fight to desegregate schools in Chatham. Robbins adds, without question, the same leadership qualities that aided these men to freedom and then to respected positions in their community were also beneficial in their leading role within the lodge.⁴⁰⁹ Between the time of Prince Hall and the Rev. Richards, numerous other

⁴⁰⁷ White, *Too Heavy A Load*, 70.

⁴⁰⁸ McHenry, *Forgotten Readers*, 233.

⁴⁰⁹ Arlie C. Robbins, “Men of the Cloth and Freemasonry,” in *The Rev. Benjamin F. Stewart Memorial Edition Commemorating The 124th Annual Session of the Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons, Province of Ontario and Jurisdiction (1979)*, Chatham-Kent Black Historical Society.

ministers held the position of Grand Master, including this organization's first Grand Master in Canada West, the Rev. Benjamin F. Stewart, who held this honored role with both the Widow's Son Grand Lodge in 1856 and the Grand Lodge of the Province of Ontario which followed in 1872. Following the Rev. Stewart, the Rev. Thomas Kinnard and the Rev. James C. Wilmore acted as Grand Masters for this group, the latter becoming a bishop. It only made sense that the members of this organization would elect a trusted community figure to hold this coveted position, but with time residents became educated, resulting in more variety of leadership in this organization.⁴¹⁰

As time passed, schools and literary societies played the part of educator and increased the number of educated Blacks in the area. This resulted in more opportunities for those outside of the priesthood. Robbins argues that as increased educational opportunities arose for Black scholars, others qualified to lead took over a position that was once dominated by the ministry.⁴¹¹ This included those who chose a different career path, commonly those in skilled and professional occupations. For example, Isaac Holden was Grand Master in 1874 & 1879, but also earned a wage as a grain dealer, followed by Josiah F. Scott in 1875, who was a carpenter. Years later, in 1882, George Reeves, a blacksmith, became Grand Master, while from 1887 to 1892, Henry Weaver, a constable and storekeeper, held this position.⁴¹² Although there was a pattern of electing leaders from skilled and professional occupations, these Grand Masters acted alongside members who were in lower, but also higher, occupational rankings. These Grand Masters may have worked in careers that gave them a higher social status, but they could have easily been overshadowed by those who made more money or had more influence in the

⁴¹⁰ Ibid; Robinson, *Seek the Truth*, 74.

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

⁴¹² Robinson, *Seek the Truth*, 114, 119, 132-133; Canada Census 1881, Chatham, Kent, pg. 26, 85, 154, file number C-13280, LAC.

community. Although Masonic lodges tended to elect members of affluence or influence into leadership positions, “Black secret societies also offered more opportunities for prospective members to join multiclass and gender-integrated orders than did their white counterparts.”⁴¹³ This diversity made Black Masons distinct.

Electing leaders from a good social standing also occurred outside of Masonic lodges, including many of the organizations discussed thus far. Samuel Ringgold Ward, the prominent Black activist and newspaper editor, for example, was the president of the Provincial Union, while William H. Day, a respected orator, teacher, and former editor of the Cleveland newspaper, the *Daily True Democrat*, resided in Buxton and acted as chairman of Chatham’s vigilance committee. They were not alone, considering Mary Bibb, a well-known activist and educator, founded several schools and the Windsor Ladies Club, also referred to as the Mutual Improvement Society, while Amelia Freeman Shadd, also an activist and highly educated teacher, founded the Ladies Literary Society of Chatham. Other influential figures such as Ellen Abbott, a wealthy Toronto resident, founded Toronto’s Queen Victoria Benevolent Society, while her son Anderson, a doctor, was in charge of the Chatham Literary and Debating Society. E.C. Cooper, a grocer, also acted as the president for the Chatham Literary and Debating Society. Beatrice Crawford, whose father was a carpenter, acted as president of the Buisy Gleaners, while the Rev. J.C. Richards was famously known as the leader of the Kent County Civil Rights League.⁴¹⁴ Although these people only represent a small portion of the organizational leadership during the latter half of the nineteenth-century, they do suggest that it was common for

⁴¹³ Trotter, “African American Fraternal Organizations in American History,” 356.

⁴¹⁴ Ripley, *BAP*, 106, 110-111, 489-490; Canada Census 1881, Amherstburg, Essex, pg. 43, file number C-13280, LAC; *Voice of the Fugitive*; Robinson, *Seek The Truth*, 130; Simpson, *Under the North Star*, 233-234, 336; *Minutes and Proceedings of the General Convention*, 2.

influential/educated figures or those in skilled and professional positions to be elected into these roles.

Although skilled and professional workers were generally elected into leadership roles, there were a few exceptions. Lena Anderson, for example, was the president of the Frederic Douglass Self-Improvement Club, and the daughter of a waiter, while Annie Stevens, whose father Ezekiel was a teamster, led the Young People's Social Club. Interestingly, Annie's father, while a teamster, was also elected as a school board trustee in Amherstburg, further proving that influence could at times override affluence.⁴¹⁵ The ratio for leadership, though, was heavily on the side of those with skilled and professional occupations, making it clear that African Canadians shared this practice with their African-American brothers and sisters.

Membership, on the other hand, reveals a very different pattern. Rather than focusing on a person's material value, African-Canadian civil society organizations created an equal space for all "classes." For groups such as fraternal orders, members were told to base their opinion on character, not status. Who a person was and what they did for their community was what mattered most. From an early point, in 1877, Grand Master Josiah Flemming Scott declared, "Everywhere in Masonry, whether in the lecture or in symbolism, are found the breathings of virtue, of honesty, of self-denial, of justice, of charity, of true manliness. By precept and example it is your parts and duties to inculcate these lessons among those over whom you are placed, that our fraternity may be looked up to as patterns of these inestimable virtues, and so our beloved Order be everywhere ... respected and honored."⁴¹⁶ Grand Master George Reeves shared this opinion in his 1883 annual address when he told Masons, "We are measured, not so

⁴¹⁵ Minutes of the Frederic Douglass Self-Improvement Club; Canada Census 1881, Amherstburg, Essex, pg. 60 & 64, file number C-13280, LAC; "Memorial, Ezekiel Stevens."

⁴¹⁶ Annual Proceedings of the M.W. Grand Lodge of the Province of Ontario, 1877, Chatham-Kent Black Historical Society.

much by our profession, as by our practices.”⁴¹⁷ Years later, in 1892, Grand Master Henry Weaver welcomed his Masonic brothers to their annual meeting by reminding them to act as proper men. He hoped that their behaviour within and outside of the lodge would project the image of Masons as gentlemen, law abiding citizens, and good members of the lodge, to whomever they met.⁴¹⁸

Grand Master George Hughes introduced a new strategy in 1895 that asked Masons

In examining into the character and qualifications of an applicant for Masonic honors, scrutinize closely that you may be convinced in your own mind that he is a fit and proper person to be entrusted with the valuable secrets of masonry, and to be received into our brotherhood, and that too without regard to worldly wealth or honor, for Masonry does not regard a man for which wealth or fame alone can give him, but it regards him for his manhood. If he be a man of negative qualities ... if he be one of those peculiar somebodies who has never developed sufficient force of character ... he is not made of that kind of material which can profit or be profited by Masonry.⁴¹⁹

Grand Master Hughes even provided questions for Masons to ponder when considering a candidate’s character. Among his suggested questions were: What positive things do you know of him? Does he have bad habits? What people are in his circle of friends? Can he be trusted with Masonic secrets? According to Hughes, if a candidate could produce positive responses to these questions, the Masons would be proud to admit him.⁴²⁰

Amherstburg’s Lincoln Lodge #8 listened to these words and welcomed members from a variety of financial backgrounds and occupations. Among the higher-ranking members was Delos R. Davis, who worked as a lawyer in Essex County, and Nasa McCurdy and Ezekiel Stevens, who were elected to the respected position of public school trustee. The former was

⁴¹⁷ Transactions of the M.W. Grand Lodge of the Province of Ontario, Dominion of Canada of The Most Ancient and Honorable Fraternity, Free and Accepted Masons, 1883.

⁴¹⁸ Annual Proceedings of the M.W. Grand Lodge of the Province of Ontario, 1892.

⁴¹⁹ Proceedings of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of the Most Honorable and Ancient Fraternity, Free and Accepted Masons of the Province of Ontario, 1895.

⁴²⁰ Ibid.

elected twice, for the town of Amherstburg, while Stevens also served on the town council. This was while lower-income members such as John Green and William Brantford worked as cooks and labourers.⁴²¹ It might be presumed that residing in a small town with an 1881 population of roughly 2,600 people would explain why this mixed-class membership occurred, but this was also the case in larger cities. In areas such as Windsor, merchants such as Charles Simkins, who can be categorized in the professional sector, shared membership with labourers such as Edmund Walker, white washers such as William M. Jones, and dragmen (fishermen) including Abraham Wilson and John Hall. This was while Hamilton's Mount Olive Lodge #1 consisted of members with a variety of occupations including a minister, the Revered Benjamin Stewart, a barber, John H. Bland, and J.T. Bryant who was a plasterer. Among St. Catharines' members of Victoria Lodge #2, there was a barber, Frank Madden and a porter, Jacob A. Lee, while Chatham's St. John's Lodge #9 had Henry Weaver, a constable, Isaac Holden, a miller, Littleton Johnson, a labourer, and Nelson Robinson and William C. Chandler, who were farmers: these occupations fall under numerous categories, including low-skilled, skilled and professional trades. Among Dresden's Mount Moriah Lodge #11, there were several farmers including William Price, Josiah Henson and Robert Dudley.⁴²² This hodgepodge of occupations indicates that there was no occupational standard for membership. The focus was character.

⁴²¹ Canada Census 1881, Amherstburg, Essex, pg. 39, 52, 60 & 65, file number C-13280, LAC; Canada Census 1881, Colchester North, Essex, pg. 84, file number C-13280, LAC; Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, 137, 144; "Memorial, Ezekiel Stevens."

⁴²² Canada Census 1881, Windsor, Essex, pg. 14, 42, 55 & 57, file number C-13281, LAC; Canada Census 1881, Hamilton, pg. 45 & 73, file number C-13257, LAC; Canada Census 1881, St. Catharines, Lincoln, pg. 7, file number C-13254, LAC; Canada Census 1881, Stamford, Welland, pg. 68, file number C-13253, LAC; Canada Census 1881, Chatham, Kent, pg. 26, 29, 39, 42 & 154, file number C-13280, LAC; Canada Census 1881, Raleigh, Kent, pg. 30, file number C-13278, LAC; Canada Census 1881, Camden, Bothwell, pg. 27, file number C-13276, LAC; Canada Census 1881, Dover, Kent, pg. 45, file number C-13279, LAC; Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, 109, 225; Robbins, *Prince Hall Masonry*.

Fraternal orders wanted members from any position in society, not only because “respectability” was possible without status, but also because their survival depended on it. Skocpol et al. argue that although fraternal orders were more than willing to have higher-status members, such as clergy and businessmen, they could not grow without recruiting members who earned less. Accepting “ordinary” men and women meant that “black orders obviously had to interpret their moral criteria for membership as matters of character, not class.”⁴²³ The varied “class” membership among African-Canadian orders in Southern Ontario suggests that they relied on membership from labouring men to businessmen. Many saw this as an asset.

When talking about the progress of several lodges, Grand Master J.C. Richards mentioned that recent membership increased the lodge’s wealth, but not financially. He wrote, “The several lodges have augmented their roll of membership by the addition of much valuable timber, not so much so from the fee paid for membership, as in the sterling worth represented by the good character, manliness and intelligence of those who have lately been added to our ranks.”⁴²⁴ To Richards, “Masonry is not dollars and cents, neither has itself ends to attain but is a field of action for those who seek to benefit his fellow man and cultivate his own highest nature. Masonry is only a means to the end of our highest development, its true primary aim is to build up character.”⁴²⁵ It was not money that benefited the lodge but, rather, the character of a member. In his final address, Grand Master Richards, in the early twentieth century, passed on his final words of wisdom to his fellow Masons by saying “Something I want to speak Brethren on, first what Masonry is ..[.] Masonry means MANHOOD. To be a Mason is to be a good

⁴²³ Skocpol et al., *What a Might Power We Can Be*, 88.

⁴²⁴ Proceedings of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge, A.F.&A.M. For the Province of Ontario, 1901.

⁴²⁵ Proceedings of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge, A.F.&A.M. For the Province of Ontario, 1900, Chatham-Kent Black Historical Society.

citizen and keenly alive to the best interests of society ... They must come if they ever enter our Fraternal precincts or entering prove themselves worthy of so high honour.”⁴²⁶ This speech provides two key pieces of information: that masculinity and character were crucial elements of Masonry and how one demonstrated these ideals, which involved being a good citizen and acting in the best interest of the community. Grand Master Richards added that “Masonry rightly understood reaches the very roots of all true progress, for she directs her energies to the gathering of moral, not material wealth. She applies her efforts to the improvement, not of circumstances, but of character, and it is character that makes manhood and it is manhood that makes possible all true and lasting progress.”⁴²⁷ At that time Richards was quite ill and frail: he would die the next year, but his words remained.⁴²⁸ Masonry and good character were commonly linked and it was expected that this tradition, Richards hoped, would be passed on to future Masons.

At meetings, and in every-day life, Masonic members were expected to adhere to specific rules and set a positive example for others. Their acceptance in this organization was based on the person they were, and if a man was good enough for membership, he was expected to maintain his good behaviour. To guide members in the right direction, specific behavioural rules were provided for multiple settings such as “behaviour in the presence of [non-Masonic strangers]” and “at home and in your neighbourhood.” For example, under the rules for behaviour at home and in your neighbourhood, Masons “must ... consult your health by not continuing together too late or too long from home after lodge hours are past; and by avoiding of gluttony or drunkenness, that your families be not neglected or injured, nor you disabled from

⁴²⁶ Grand Master’s Address, J.C. Richards, 1924, found in Robbins, *Prince Hall Masonry*, 105-106.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*, 105-106.

working.”⁴²⁹ These rules were meant to be followed, otherwise there were consequences. According to William Muraskin, Masons were to be both self-governing and capable of administering justice. These lodges had always been self-governing organizations that were expected to project a certain image and those who did not were subject to punishment. Masons were always made aware of “the necessity of so living that you can feel at all times that you are in heart and soul worthy Masons, remembering that no man is a FREE MASON who is the bondman of vice or immorality.”⁴³⁰ Members not complying with established rules would have to answer to their fellow members. Muraskin adds that, in administering and applying laws within the lodge, members acted as “judge, juryman advocate, prosecutor and witness” all rolled into one: it was through Masonry that participants learned about dispensing justice.⁴³¹ Members with unbecoming behaviour could be suspended from all Masonic communication and privileges, until they completed their punishment, or when a majority of lodge members approved their readmission. Additionally, those found guilty of un-masonic behaviour, were unable to use their Masonic privileges. For example, in 1875, J.L. Dunn of the North American Lodge, No. 11 (Windsor), was suspended from his lodge for one year, or until the next annual session, but could be readmitted if he was found worthy by a majority of the members present: his crime was disobedience and using profane language while in the lodge room. Another member was expelled for theft and drunkenness, while another was charged with non-payment of dues. According to Grand Master Richards, “If their unmasonic doing is not rigorously

⁴²⁹ Harris, *The Book of Constitution of the Grand Lodge*, 12-13.

⁴³⁰ Muraskin, “The Hidden Role of Fraternal Organizations in the Education of Black Adults,” 237; Proceedings of the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Annual Communications of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of the Most Ancient and Honorable [sic] Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons of the Province of Ontario, Dominion of Canada (1875, 1876), Chatham-Kent Black Historical Society.

⁴³¹ Muraskin, “The Hidden Role of Fraternal Organizations in the Education of Black Adults,” 237.

condemned, and punished by expulsion, the time is not far distant when the Masonic institution will become exceedingly disreputable, since hypocrisy not only deserves contempt but actually produces it.”⁴³²

This management of justice also allowed for accused members to appeal charges laid against them, which could be followed by a trial to prove their innocence. In the 1883 case of John Hall, who was suspended for non-payment of dues and disobedience, an appeal was raised. It was decided that his suspension violated established Masonic laws and must be ruled as unwarranted.⁴³³ The committee on grievances agreed and concluded that the brother who suspended Hall, E.T. Patterson, should be brought before “the pedestal” of the lodge because he suspended Hall without a trial, vote or consent of the brothers from his lodge. As a result, Patterson was “reprimanded ... feelingly and fraternally.”⁴³⁴ This is a clear case where punishment for un-masonic behaviour could go beyond those originally accused: anyone could be held accountable. If a member accused his brother of bad behaviour, it was crucial to implement proper procedure, otherwise the accuser could also be charged. Patterson did not follow Masonic protocol, therefore he was at fault. If a Mason’s responsibilities as a lodge member, citizen, and family man were questioned without just cause, the accused defended his character.

⁴³² Cornerstone Ceremony, Lincoln Lodge No. 8 F. & A.M., 4 October 1953, Marsh Collection, Amherstburg, Ontario; *Amherstburg Echo*, 7 January 1898; *Amherstburg Echo*, 21 January 1898; *Constitution of the Grand Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons of Ontario* (Chatham: Planet Book Print, 1891), 22; *Amherstburg Echo*, 1 January 1892; Grand Master’s Address, J.C. Richards, 1924, found in Robbins, *Prince Hall Masonry*, 105; Transactions of the M.W. Grand Lodge of the Province of Ontario Dominion of Canada, 1883; Proceedings of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge, A.F. & A.M. For the Province of Ontario, 1902.

⁴³³ Transactions of the M.W. Grand Lodge of the Province of Ontario, Dominion of Canada, 1883.

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

Expectations were high in this group and Masons took their responsibilities very seriously, particularly when it came to assisting the families of their deceased brothers by providing them with protection and support through the Mutual Benefit Association.⁴³⁵

According to their constitution, the widows and orphans of a deceased Master Mason would receive protection and assistance from the fraternity, based on how much the fellowship was able to extend and how much assistance was needed. Any man, or lodge for that matter, that did not fulfill his or its responsibility to the Mutual Benefit Association would receive a stern message from those higher up. Further adding to this, the stern message was printed in the annual report of the Grand Lodge for all to see. For example, in early December 1882, the Grand Secretary was asked to issue requests for contributions from each lodge to assist the widow of a member from one of their “weakest” lodges. After only three lodges responded, Mount Carmel, No. 10 (\$5.25), Mount Olive, No. 1 (\$5), and Victoria, No. 2 (\$4), those who did not were sent a clear message.⁴³⁶ They were warned,

Brethren, if three lodges can do this, why cannot five contribute a sum annually to be put away for this noble and glorious purpose? ... ‘faith without works is dead.’ Need I expatiate on the need of our going to work at *once*, and by building up slowly, but surely, we will eventually be in a condition to do some good in our day and generation. Let us see, if at this session, we cannot take some action looking towards the commencement of this good work. Never again, I trust, will your Grand Master be compelled to issue circulars calling attention to this most important duty.⁴³⁷

This firm lecture also recommended a tax which would support the Widow’s and Orphan’s Fund.

A few years later, in 1888, Grand Master Henry Weaver recommended that it be the duty of every Mason to pay the sum of one dollar at the death of a brother, which would benefit his

⁴³⁵ *Amherstburg Echo; Constitution of the Grand Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons of Ontario*, 18; Robbins, *Prince Hall Masonry*, 59, 82.

⁴³⁶ Transactions of the M.W. Grand Lodge of the Province of Ontario, 1888, Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO; Transactions of the M.W. Grand Lodge of the Province of Ontario, 1883.

⁴³⁷ Transactions of the M.W. Grand Lodge of the Province of Ontario, 1883.

widow and children.⁴³⁸ Many Masons strongly encouraged contributions to this fund because it helped them provide for their fallen brother's family, and also their own after they passed on. It was basically an insurance policy that allowed members to remain the breadwinner. Although this aspect of membership encouraged men to join, these donations also promoted a lifestyle worthy of entrance into Heaven. They wanted the "kingdom of evil [to] tremble to its discomfort and find ending by reason of our great influence for good in the broadest sense of the word."⁴³⁹ Weaver's encouragement resulted in some improvement as he wrote that roughly eight or nine members joined the Mutual Benefit Association by the close of the meeting, expressing their desire to be the foremost charity in the area; this pleased Weaver greatly. This shows not only the power that a Grand Master had over other members, but also the growth in their commitment to self-help.⁴⁴⁰

The Oddfellows also had opportunities to provide for fraternal families with social insurance benefits and social welfare institutions, which they built. In a speech delivered by Phillip Lee, Jr., he stated the benevolent principles of this organization dictated, through the ties of brotherly love, that members assist the sick or distressed, protect the widow and orphan, and bury their deceased brothers: they were bound by secrecy and a moral code, which allowed them to live among one another as friends. African-Canadian members were devoted to helping others

⁴³⁸ Ibid; Proceedings of the M.W. Grand Lodge of the Province of Ontario, 1888.

⁴³⁹ Transactions of the M.W. Grand Lodge of the Province of Ontario, 1888.

⁴⁴⁰ In an 1883 report, Canadian Masons also put pressure on their American brothers after a failed attempt to start a Widows and Orphans' Association in Illinois "because the craft throughout the jurisdiction was not ready for this important undertaking." The committee for this charity implored them to consider, "In matters of ritual or fuss about regalia, we are great doers and talkers, and no Mason of Chicago would be willing to appear on the streets without the finest dress money could purchase. Should not the appeal of the widows and orphans find readier access to his heart and pocket than the charms and glitter of the regalia vender?"; Proceedings of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge, A.F.&A.M. For the Province of Ontario, 1893, Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO; Transactions of the M.W. Grand Lodge of the Province of Ontario, 1883.

because it promoted stability in their community and a sense of security among fraternal members. They knew that even after they were gone, their families would be provided for. This right was earned and shared.⁴⁴¹ It was acts such as these that helped members maintain their character.

It was in their fathers' presence that young members learned about proper manhood and, according to Skocpol et al., this occurred in conjunction with, and as a result of, growing female control over the home and church, which were two key sources for socialization. The church was integral to the definition of responsible manhood, but the feminization of this institution's congregation indicates a hesitation on the part of male members to participate/attend. The church was a core institution in which the social and spiritual lives of Black citizens revolved, considering the first thing that fugitives did once free in Canada West was build churches. It was and remains a major part of their identity, meaning they did not struggle to gain male attendance to the degree that White churches did.⁴⁴² In either case, Black men still needed an outlet where they could be surrounded by those with similar interests. They attended their church, but lodges offered an alternative to these "feminized" environments: lodges created balance. Among their brothers, men could be men and teach their sons likewise.

Women also needed a place that created balance. The Masons' female auxiliary, the Order of the Eastern Star, offered women what they needed, to a degree. When the Grand Lodge of F. & A.M. of Ontario requested the establishment of a female auxiliary in 1889, part of their reasoning was to involve their female relatives, but they also believed that through this auxiliary, they could influence women and promote the benefits of Masonic affiliation, while

⁴⁴¹ *Provincial Freeman*, 5 April 1856; Skocpol et al., *What a Mighty Power We Can Be*, 37; Simpson, *Under the North Star*, 35, 37, 120.

⁴⁴² Skocpol et al., *What a Mighty Power We Can Be*, 98; Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, 13-14; Walker, "African Canadians," *Encyclopedia of Canada's Peoples*.

relieving the worries of worthy distressed sisters.⁴⁴³ Only the female relatives of lodge members could join and they held positions such as Worthy Matron, Treasurer, and Secretary.

Interestingly, the Order of the Eastern Star also had a Patron, the first being Grand Master Henry Weaver, who guaranteed a connection between the Masons and their female auxiliary, and provided “advice in their troubles, sympathy in their sorrows, and aid in their misfortunes.”⁴⁴⁴

Although this space offered a place for women, it seems that they could not fully escape the presence of men. The Masonic lodge adopted the Eastern Star as the standard lodge for all female lodges among Black women, but were unwilling to give women complete control.⁴⁴⁵

Masonic lodges also maintained control in other ways. The instructional guide book for members of the Eastern Star included a form called the “Petition of a Lady.” This form required the petitioner (the Masonic relative) to indicate how the potential member was related, but it also called for an endorsement from a Masonic relative who believed that they were worthy of membership. Although the petition still asked candidates to indicate their relationship to a Masonic member, there are later petitions which include references from women. The latter point shows that women’s role in this organization could expand over time: they had the right to speak on behalf of a candidate. What did not change was a declaration from the potential candidate that she was respectable, and would obey the rules and regulations of the organization. Just as in etiquette clubs, a woman’s “respectability” was crucial. Additionally, earlier female lodges only offered membership to female relatives, which was another rule that has remained

⁴⁴³ 1854-1972 Historic Brochure Commemorating the 117th Annual Session of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons, P.H.A., Buxton National Historic Site and Museum.

⁴⁴⁴ Robbins, *Prince Hall Masonry*, 131-4; Macoy, *Ritual of the Degrees of the Eastern Star*, 51, 140.

⁴⁴⁵ Minutes of Proceeding of the Fifteenth Annual Session of the Widow’s Son Grand Lodge, F.A.A.Y.M., Held in the Town of Windsor, Ontario, 1871.

the same.⁴⁴⁶ Something very similar occurred among the Oddfellows, which also assumed some control over their female auxiliary. Their membership book for 1889 not only recorded the dues and fines of their members, it also had a section which explained how female members were related to male members. Interestingly, the treasury book also lists male members, but it does not require them to explain their connection to this organization.⁴⁴⁷ It seems that a woman's membership was not only reliant on her own character, but on those of her male relatives and partner.

Just as fraternal orders were expected to adhere to rules of conduct, so too were female auxiliaries. They were told,

Let us be kind, forbearing and forgiving one toward another. Let us return kindness for hostility. Let us sacredly preserve our lips from slander and evil speaking. And, finally, let us ever be governed, in words and deeds, by that gold rule, 'That whatsoever ye would that others should do unto you, do ye even so unto them.' Thus may we confidently hope that in the good providence of God, each of us will be brought, through a useful and happy life, to a blissful close, and a triumphant entrance into the city of the living God.⁴⁴⁸

Members of the Eastern Star were to be kind and generous members of society. They believed that the ultimate reward for their good deeds was acceptance in Heaven. If they did not maintain this proper conduct, they were also accountable for their actions. An Eastern Star ritual book, owned by Marriah Buckner Thomas, a member of Amherstburg's Ruth Chapter #4, states that every sister was accountable for her actions and might be tried in Masonic court for their offenses. She had the right to appeal the decision as well, just as their Masonic brothers did. Additionally, a sister's membership was forfeited when she was absent from meetings of her chapter for two years or suspended for a specific time, expelled or dismissed. A member's

⁴⁴⁶ Robbins, *Prince Hall Masonry*, 131-4; Membership Petition to Ruth Chapter #4, Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO; Macoy, *Ritual of the Degrees of the Eastern Star*, 17-18, 24-25, 33, 51.

⁴⁴⁷ Household of Ruth, No. 588, G.U.O.O.F., Windsor, Ontario, Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO.

⁴⁴⁸ Macoy, *Ritual of the Degrees of the Eastern Star*, 157.

reputation was crucial and she was instructed to protect the reputation of her chapter, just as she would her family.⁴⁴⁹

In other voluntary groups, African Canadians also admitted members based on character. For example, the Provincial Union is described in the *Provincial Freeman* as “anti-caste,” meaning that they rejected judgements based on a person’s occupation or status. The *Provincial Freeman* adds that this organization was “fully impressed with the importance of this Union to British subjects of every class, and though it may work its way slowly, it will, nevertheless, surely commend itself to the people in the end.”⁴⁵⁰ This organization believed that all British citizens, Black or White, with any “complexional characteristics,” from any “origin,” should be able to participate.⁴⁵¹ It included a number of elite citizens such as president Samuel Ringgold Ward, an editor and activist, while among its many vice-presidents were the Toronto businessman, Wilson Abbott, Thomas Smallwood, a proprietor of a Toronto saw factory, and A.B. Jones, who was a grocer and successful businessman in London. Other vice-presidents holding positions considered lower in the societal hierarchy included a Windsor farmer, Coleman Freeman, and James C. Brown, whose occupation was plasterer in Chatham, while Andrew Smith was a blacksmith in the same city. Within this organization, Mary Ann Shadd was an agent in charge of organizing auxiliaries, but she was also the treasurer and a founding member. Those involved in committee work included a minister, the Reverend J. Harper; an Amherstburg grocer; James Smith, a farmer William Bell; and a stage driver in Simcoe, Harvey C. Jackson. Some members of the Provincial Union were from the upper echelon of society, while others

⁴⁴⁹ Robbins, *Prince Hall Masonry*, 131-4; Macoy, *Ritual of the Degrees of the Eastern Star*, 26, 28, 156-157.

⁴⁵⁰ *Provincial Freeman*, 28 October 1854.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*

were not. The latter were no less worthy of participating in this group, but each held differing occupations.⁴⁵²

According to the colour/caste system, a social structure embraced by some antebellum free Blacks, “class” was determined by numerous factors such as labour, skin colour, education, and free-born status: a professional, light-skinned, educated, and free-born African Canadian was held in the highest esteem.⁴⁵³ This ideal created a social hierarchy, resulting in “class” divisions in various aspects of African-Canadian life. That being said, because African Canadians had an equal opportunity to express their opinion within civil society, these “class” divisions did not interfere with its fight for equality: numerous members were able to surpass these labels in order to achieve equal rights as citizens. The formerly enslaved Henry Bibb, for example, must be considered when discussing this topic. Among his numerous accomplishments, he was responsible for editing the *Voice of the Fugitive*, creating a temperance organization in the 1850s, and running the RHS. This was in addition to organizing and gathering with a “large group of blacks each a fugitive or a son of one,”⁴⁵⁴ at the Sandwich Convention in 1850. Among the accomplishments that stemmed from this convention was the formation of a vigilance committee which was created for the protection and assistance of refugees once they entered Canada West.⁴⁵⁵ A year later, at the 1851 Toronto convention, participants, including Bibb, formed the North American League, which was meant to assist and elevate the influx of fugitives in their

⁴⁵² Robinson, *Seek the Truth*, 128; *Provincial Freeman*, 19 August 1854; Ripley, *BAP*, 55, 158, 276, 309, 395.

⁴⁵³ Olbey, “Unfolded Hands,” 154; Bridgen, “On Their Own Terms,” 67.

⁴⁵⁴ *Voice of the Fugitive*, 1 July 1852; Simpson, *Under the North Star*, 223; “Temperance Meeting in Sandwich,” *Voice of the Fugitive*, 1 January 1852; Cooper, “Doing Battle in Freedom’s Cause”; “Mary E. Bibb to [Gerrit Smith] (8 November 1850),” Ripley, *BAP*, 109-110.

⁴⁵⁵ *Voice of the Fugitive*, 1 January 1851.

new lives through agriculture and hard work.⁴⁵⁶ Although this organization never came to fruition, Bibb's many accomplishments influenced both freeborn and formerly enslaved residents. Members recognized that enslavement was a part of a person's past, not who they were. Fugitives needed to catch up to those who were already accustomed to a life outside of slavery. Educated, freeborn, and/or wealthy residents were more prepared for their new life in Canada West, but those formerly enslaved caught up quickly. In the Provincial Union, others, including James Smith, Levi Foster, the Reverend William P. Newman, A.B. Jones, James C. Brown, and the organization's president, Samuel Ringgold Ward, were all born into slavery. They enjoyed membership, and leadership, alongside freeborn members such as Thomas W.F. Smallwood, Wilson Abbott, and Mary Ann Shadd, who rejected the colour/caste system. Years after the Provincial Union, groups such as the Amherstburg Literary Association opened up their membership to include John Alexander, a school teacher, who shared membership with skilled-trade workers such as carpenters (Nasa McCurdy), and lower-skilled labourers (James Dodson), whitewashers (Ralph Adams), and servants (Annie Bush), but also professionals such as clerks (Augustus Adams), lawyers (Delos R. Davis), and merchants (William Turner).⁴⁵⁷

This flexibility connected many African Canadians to their enslaved ancestors.

Blassingame states that among enslaved people, several factors determined a slave's status in the quarters, including their position in the plantation hierarchy. If a slave held an important post in

⁴⁵⁶ "Mary E. Bibb to [Gerrit Smith] (8 November 1850)," Ripley, *BAP*, 110; Simpson, *Under the North Star*, 113-114, 223; *Voice of the Fugitive*.

⁴⁵⁷ Rhodes, *Mary Ann Shadd Cary*, 45; *Provincial Freeman*, 19 August 1854; Ripley, *BAP*, 73, 158, 261, 292, 302-303, 309; *Amherstburg Echo*; Robin Winks, "Wilson Ruffin Abbott," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*; Tracey Adams, "Making a Living: African Canadian Workers in London, Ontario, 1861-1901," *Labour/Le Travail* 67 (Spring 2011), 10; Canada Census 1881, Anderdon, Essex, pg. 15, file number C-13280, LAC; Canada Census 1881, Amherstburg, Essex, pg. 40, 57, 64-65, 70, 89 & 105, file number C-13280, LAC; Canada Census 1881, Colchester North, Essex, pg. 84, file number C-13280, LAC; Canada Census 1881, Colchester South, Essex, pg. 11, file number C-13280, LAC.

the hierarchy, they had a higher status in the slave quarters. Other factors included strength, intelligence and even wearing bright new clothes to accompany their “common” slave wardrobe. Even the wealth of their master raised their status among slaves from other plantations because it was assumed that a wealthy owner equated to better clothing, food, and housing. These imposed classifications were an attempt to separate enslaved people, but Blassingame argues that “Recreational activities led to cooperation, social cohesion, [and] tighter communal bonds and brought all classes of slaves together in common pursuits.”⁴⁵⁸ Although there was an established hierarchy, they worked as a community, throughout history.

A lower social status may not have been a reason to exclude members from participation, but there were certain circumstances where it was a factor for inclusion, as was the case with Toronto’s Queen Victoria Benevolent Society, a self-help organization for Black women which was established in 1840. This organization, led by Ellen Abbott, lasted into the 1860s and provided sick and poor members with funds, and buried deceased members. A few years later, Chatham’s Victoria Reform Benevolent Society for Social Relief, established in 1854, used specific rules to achieve a respectable image for its members, but there were other rewards including financial support. Members paid dues and after one year they were allowed to collect benefits in times of need, similar to a type of insurance policy for ill or deceased members. If someone requested relief when fully capable of working the consequence was expulsion.⁴⁵⁹ This information is quite significant because census records, especially for 1851 and 1861, usually record only the husband’s occupation, while listing women as housewives or rarely mentioning their occupation. Their membership reveals that Black women were employed while participating in this group. According to James Walker, it was necessary for Black women to

⁴⁵⁸ Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, 42, 207.

⁴⁵⁹ *Provincial Freeman*, 28 October 1854.

contribute economically and that “At a time when the ‘cult of domesticity’ was sweeping white womanhood, black women were wage-earners.”⁴⁶⁰ William Newman described other groups, such as the Daughters of Prince Albert (Toronto). They were similar to the Victoria Reform Benevolent Society for Social Relief, as was the St. John’s Benevolent Association which gave its ill members \$2 a week and \$15 for the burial of its dead. Newman also described other cities like Hamilton as having several benevolent societies comparable to the Toronto-based organizations mentioned above, while Chatham’s “Love and Charity” was an all-female association with 90 members, which provided its sick with \$2 a week and \$20 to bury their deceased members. Chatham’s United Daughters of Zion had 80 members and gave \$1 per week to its sick members, while \$15 was designated for the burial of deceased members.⁴⁶¹ Alvin McCurdy also introduces another possible “insurance” group, existing in Chatham, called the Laboring Ladies Union Society, which was organized on 16 April 1878. Among its members were its president Margaret Lawrence; secretary, Sarah Parry; and its treasurer, Miss Freeman. According to McCurdy, there were forty members who met every second Thursday of the month at the home of Margaret Lawrence, located on William Street near King. Interestingly, McCurdy’s notes mention that there were six deaths and \$2.14 in the treasury. Only listing the number of deaths and this group’s current financial situation introduces a plausible explanation for why this group met. It, along with the group’s title, suggests that the Laboring Ladies met for a similar purpose as those societies mentioned above: financial reasons. It seems unlikely that the number of deceased members would be of importance for any other reason than for this

⁴⁶⁰ Bristow, “Whatever you raise in the ground you can sell it in Chatham,” 99; Walker, “African Canadians,” *Encyclopedia of Canada’s People*.

⁴⁶¹ William P. Newman, “The Colored People of Canada,” Ripley, *BAP*, 462, 464, 484, 471.

group to act like an insurance policy.⁴⁶² These groups, often out of necessity, were formed to help their members financially. It was a case where economic distinction and financial assistance merged, but for an unlikely reason. A lack of funds maintained membership.

In their attempt to achieve equality as free citizens, the leaders and members of various African-Canadian organizations made it clear that the goal was the same, but establishing a concrete definition of a proper leader or member was not so easily formed. Generally it involved embracing the differences of African-Canadian residents who wanted to join the various, and numerous, organizations that emerged throughout the nineteenth century. Within civil society, Black organizations such as literary, charitable, and etiquette groups made it part of their strategy to allow men and women of all religious and occupational backgrounds to participate. Who was permitted to lead these organizations was a bit more complicated, considering concepts such as “class” in the Black community involved more than occupation. Granted, wealthier African Canadians generally did organize or take control of these groups, but a person’s influence in the community could also play a role, despite his or her income. This diversity also incorporated women, who organized and managed both female and mixed-gender groups, which was often possible due to the blurred gender roles that were created as the Black community tried to adjust to life in Canada West. This strategy of acceptance offered Black women and those from diverse religious and financial backgrounds a place among those different from themselves.

⁴⁶² The Laboring Ladies Union Society, Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO.

Chapter Four: Merging Identities

From the moment that incoming refugees came to Canada West they were made aware of those involved in their (legal) emancipation. Black refugees, both formerly enslaved or free, played the most important role in their own freedom, considering the perils they encountered on their journey to free soil, but African Canadians also recognized other actors, including the British government. To show their appreciation, African Canadians expressed their allegiance in numerous ways, resulting in an added layer to their already forming Anglo-Canadian identity. This pride occurred despite not actually tracing their origins or ancestry to Britain, but through public declarations of loyalty to the Queen, military service, and Emancipation Day Celebrations, African Canadians could show their gratitude. At the same time, they incorporated their past American experience of community and resistance, which connected them to their African-American brothers and sisters still residing in the US. They could not forget the country that enslaved them, but embraced the country that freed them. These attachments remained strong, as long as this support did not hinder their pursuit of equality in Canada West. A third component involved participation in Canadian politics, particularly through the vote. African Canadians realized that they could use the polls in their favour and altered their allegiances if they disagreed with their goal.⁴⁶³ This merging of their American past with a new Anglo-Canadian cultural and political framework formed a new identity distinct to African Canadians.

British Pride and American Roots

Demonstrations of African Canadian's British loyalty were a crucial step toward proving they were worthy citizens, not a drain on society. This support could come in the form of grand gestures, but they also existed in the little everyday measures, including toasts and declarations

⁴⁶³ Ripley, *BAP*, 345.

dedicated to the Queen. This word of mouth spread a positive message about who was on the Black community's side and whom they should support. If Black citizens not born in Britain were praising the freedoms provided by the British monarchy, it helped inform new arrivals and those still in the United States, and elsewhere, of the protection provided under the lion's paw. For example, it was not uncommon to toast the Queen at Emancipation Day Celebrations. According to Henry, at these celebrations "[t]he toasts given and resolutions passed served a number of meaningful purposes. Proposed to demonstrate patriotism towards Britain and the Queen (Victoria), they illustrated how African Canadians embraced their new citizenship and the rights and privileges that came along with it."⁴⁶⁴ The *Voice* also reported the events of one Emancipation Day Celebration in 1852, in which participants sang God Save the Queen and a committee gave sentiments to:

1st THE QUEEN – May the happy and beneficent reign of our Most Gracious Sovereign Victoria the 1st, by the Providence of God, be long continued, as a blessing to her loyal subjects. 2d. THE BRITISH EMPIRE – Territory on which the sun never ceases to reflect his benignant rays ... on which every slave becomes a freeman, by the genius of universal emancipation. 3d. THE GOVERNOR GENERAL – The faithful representative of our sovereign, who merits the respect and confidence, of all the loyal inhabitants of British America.⁴⁶⁵

Also thanked were the North American League, the RHS, British and American abolitionists, the Anti-Slavery Society of Canada, Sheriffs of the United Counties of Essex and Lambton, and the orators of the day.⁴⁶⁶ Both newly arrived and longstanding Black residents of Canada West were truly grateful to the British Crown, and extensions of the Crown, for what they had done.

Recognizing organizations for their efforts, but also associating them with the good works of the British Crown, demonstrated their gratitude for the part these groups played in the community's

⁴⁶⁴ Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 33.

⁴⁶⁵ *Voice of the Fugitive*, 12 August 1852.

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

advancement and enhanced their connection to British loyalty. Recently-arrived Black residents quickly realized that once on free soil the government would leave them to fend for themselves, which is why benevolent, fraternal, literary groups, etc. were held in such high esteem. These organizations picked up where the government left off. Benevolent organizations provided food, shelter, and clothing to those without, while literary societies filled the educational void experienced by numerous incoming refugees. Fraternal orders and etiquette groups allowed members to financially provide for one another and polish their image. Speeches such as the one mentioned above not only showed the community's appreciation for a fresh start provided by the government, but also for the groups that assisted them in acclimatizing. This gratitude not only affected early arrivals during the 1840s and 1850s, but continued on. Years later, in 1890, at an AME Conference, delegates resolved that "we feel it to be our indispensable duty to pray for the happy and prosperous reign of her majesty Queen Victoria, and that every member of the royal family may be inspired with Christian fortitude and energy, and that the blessed influences of British civil and religious institutions may be extended throughout the nations of the habitable globe."⁴⁶⁷ These sentiments can be found at numerous events throughout the nineteenth century, where Black citizens paid tribute to those who played a role in their freedom and acclimation, and while doing so demonstrated their Anglo-Canadian identity.

Specific organizations also expressed their British pride by incorporating "British" topics and activities into their meetings. According to Henry, Black men and women showed their loyalty by drinking tea and hosting tea parties because it demonstrated to others that they adopted British habits. Leslie Holmes adds that each component that accompanied the act of

⁴⁶⁷ "The Colored Methodists; Final Adjournment of the A.M.E. Conference," *Hamilton Spectator*, 9 July 1890.

drinking tea, including the teacup/pot and the actual tea, was considered a patriotic act.”⁴⁶⁸ She adds “Each sip of tea was a taste of the British Empire.”⁴⁶⁹ Although showing their loyalty was important to the Black community, their reasoning goes much deeper. By adopting British practices, African Canadians linked themselves with established respectable behaviour. According to Holmes, the act of drinking tea connected participants with “respectability” because throughout Canada all things British equated with “respectability.” Drinking tea was perceived as inherently British, therefore it was an inherently respectable act, making drinkers of tea respectable by association. She adds that even using sugar in their tea, the British way, made the drinker respectable. The act of drinking tea, both publicly and privately increased a person’s “respectability.”⁴⁷⁰ Women of the Provincial Union’s Ladies’ Committee performed this simple act quite frequently. The *Provincial Freeman* reported in 1854 that “The citizens of Brantford lately organized a *Provincial Union*, and the Ladies held a Tea Meeting – which was quite profitable ... Too much praise cannot be awarded the Ladies of Brantford, for their zeal in the good cause; and we have reason to hope that their sisters in other towns will show themselves equally worthy of commendation.”⁴⁷¹ The latter came true, as Unions were formed and Tea Meetings were proposed in other areas. This included Chatham, when the *Provincial Freeman* reported,

An *organization* was effected at Chatham, and by a combination of the ladies, a tea meeting came off in the Town Hall, after but two days preparation, which reflected great credit on the citizens ... At Brantford, ... an organization was made, and a tea meeting held previously, ... the citizens taking hold of the matter in a manner worthy of them, and

⁴⁶⁸ Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 130; Leslie Holmes, “Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way Through Tea,” *Past Imperfect* 16 (2010), 86.

⁴⁶⁹ Holmes, “Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way Through Tea,” 86.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 80-81, 85.

⁴⁷¹ *Provincial Freeman*, 14 October 1854.

we have fullest assurance from the officers and members of the Female Society, that the 'Branch' shall be attended to.⁴⁷²

The article continued by informing readers that following the Chatham and Brantford meetings a society was formed in London, composed of sixty members of both genders, later holding a tea meeting at the Hall of the Mechanics' Institute. According to this report,

The Londoners had been preparing for some days, so that their proceedings were on a more elaborate scale than those at the other places mentioned. The presence of the City Band and a well-prepared corps of influential speakers – arrangements impossible in the former meetings, from the brief time to work, – gave interest to the gathering ... The ladies and gentlemen of London who got up the tea, were not behind their friends in Brantford and Chatham, in zeal for the success of the paper, and the permanency of the Union, which is regarded by all as the best organization ever attempted.⁴⁷³

Activities such as these tea meetings surely contributed to their participants' new Anglo/African-Canadian identity, but, more importantly, public displays, particularly those published in the press, were a socially accepted method of increasing a person's "respectability." Teas provided the Black community with an opportunity to better their image by encouraging proper acts of gentility within the community. It was not about appearing White; it was about appearing respectable, which often meant appearing British.

African Canadians not only used tea meetings to improve their image; they, particularly women, also flexed their activist muscles at these gatherings. When the Ladies' Committee of the Provincial Union hosted tea meetings to raise funds in numerous cities, it was its duty to promote the *Provincial Freeman* and increase membership in the Provincial Union. In each endeavour they found success, considering more Unions were formed and more tea meetings were held. In their efforts to gain further membership in the Provincial Union, members also used tea meetings to increase readership of the *Provincial Freeman*, another significant

⁴⁷² *Provincial Freeman*, 28 October 1854.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*

extension of civil society. In June 1854, the *Provincial Freeman* printed that the general agent of the association should visit communities such as St. Catharines, Hamilton, and Windsor in order to obtain further subscribers for the paper and aid in tea meetings. The article also extended an invitation to women, stating “We hope the female portion of our patrons will be active in their endeavours to put the Canada paper on a sure basis.”⁴⁷⁴ This message coincided with article v of the Provincial Union’s Constitution, published over two months after the original call for female participation, which required the Ladies’ Committee to assist “the people’s organ,” the *Provincial Freeman*.⁴⁷⁵ Black women were already branching out into the public sphere by hosting tea meetings, but this request for female participation, in the press and the Provincial Union’s Constitution, was written proof that women had a place in this movement: they played an integral part in the fight against injustice with a practice associated with femininity and “respectability.” The *Provincial Freeman* increased the community’s knowledge of their rights and kept them informed of current events, and expanding readership was an important task, one which was open to women. On several separate occasions, tea meetings were viewed as an ideal environment to assist the *Provincial Freeman*, as it was decided at a community meeting that all proceeds raised from a 17 June tea meeting would go to benefit it. Interestingly, a majority of participants appointed to the Committee of Arrangements for this June meeting were members of the Provincial Union, including Samuel Lewis, T. Smallwood, G. Carter, and J.C. Brown, and female participants Mrs. S.R. Ward, Mrs. D. Hollins, Mrs. S. Thompson, and Mrs. J. Lucas.⁴⁷⁶ The following month, Mary Ann Shadd published the events of a recent tour in the *Provincial Freeman* which described a voter meeting held in Chatham, which was attended by numerous

⁴⁷⁴ “Tour Through the West,” *Provincial Freeman*, 4 June 1854.

⁴⁷⁵ “Meeting to Organize the Provincial Union,” *Provincial Freeman*, 19 August 1854.

⁴⁷⁶ “Meeting for the ‘Provincial Freeman,’” *Provincial Freeman*, 17 June 1854.

women. The sight of so many female attendees prompted Shadd to comment, “I like that new feature in political gatherings, and you will agree with me, that much of the asperity of such assemblies will be softened by their presence.”⁴⁷⁷ At that same political gathering, there was a “strong eye” for the *Provincial Freeman*, the Provincial Union, and a tea meeting. The audience clearly felt that each of these contributors was beneficial to the community and Black women played a significant role in each of their successes.⁴⁷⁸

Black women not only succeeded in their organizational work and the promotion of civil institutions – they also realized further success while using their role as women. As Shirley Yee states, gender was more fluid in the Black community, but that does not mean that women did not feel the constraints of patriarchy.⁴⁷⁹ Using the simple act of drinking tea, a practice associated with gentility and “respectability,” Black women were able to step outside of their traditional roles as wives and mothers through the use of a traditional outlet: tea. They used their resources to access the public sphere through organizing respectable events, which were recorded in the press, not only to increase membership in the Provincial Union, but to promote another significant civil institution, the *Provincial Freeman*: Black women publicly contributed to the success of the community and used organizational work, in this case through Provincial Union tea meetings, to challenge gender norms. Through tea, women stepped outside of their traditional roles and gained access to an environment in which they would normally be denied.

Rather than using tea, the Amherstburg Literary Society used other means to demonstrate its connection to the British Empire through debating topics such as “Which is the best Government, Republican or Monarchical [?]” At the debate, W.H. Turner was positioned on the

⁴⁷⁷ “Our Tour,” *Provincial Freeman*, 5 August 1854.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁹ Yee, “Gender Ideology and Black Women as Community-Builders,” 437.

Republican side, while W.G. Kirk was in favour of the monarchical. Unsurprisingly, the final decision was given in favour of a monarchical government. Whether the opposing debaters had a chance is questionable considering this was a sensitive topic. Would they have dared to choose a Republican government and, if they had, what would that say about their loyalty? The simple things made a difference. The *Amherstburg Echo* also mentioned members of the Open Hand Society of the AME Church organizing a picnic in 1894, on the Queen's Birthday (May 24th). Members provided entertainment, including recitations, and attendees were expected to wear their uniforms. Additionally, J.H. Alexander and W.D. Balfour (MPP) were among those expected to speak. Admission was ten cents and all were welcome.⁴⁸⁰ Gathering in their finest attire to hear influential guest speakers was certainly an appropriate way to celebrate Queen Victoria's birthday.

Members of various organizations also publicly declared their allegiance to the Queen in their autobiographies. Personal accounts were an effective way to advertise to those outside of Canada West the advantages available to them in the province. In his autobiography, Samuel Ringgold Ward, the president of the Provincial Union, declared, "The freedom of my adopted country works as an antidote to the moral poisons of the slavery and the prejudice of my native country. While the latter degrades, the former elevates."⁴⁸¹ In his autobiography, the Reverend Israel Campbell said something similar following an altercation with some Irishmen who, unprovoked, attacked him. Campbell brought his case before the constable who, after some consideration, told the troublemakers to inform their fellow Irishmen to avoid conflict with Black residents if they crossed paths. He then told the Irishmen that they chose Canada because they

⁴⁸⁰ *Amherstburg Echo*, 8 April 1881; *Amherstburg Echo*, 18 May 1894.

⁴⁸¹ Harrell, Jr., "Thanks be to God that I am Elected to Canada," 59; Ward, *Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro*, 224.

could not live in their own country, but African Canadians came here so that they could enjoy a freedom that was impossible in their homeland. He concluded that the law protected African Canadians and the Queen thought as much of them as Irishmen.⁴⁸² In response, he “mentally exclaimed, ‘The Lord bless the Queen!’”⁴⁸³ Campbell wrote these words several years after co-directing the ARBA with other prominent clergy and working as a messenger for the ARBA, devoting much of his time to spreading this organization’s message. While travelling a total of two thousand five hundred and fifty miles, Campbell performed many acts in support of this organization. Among his many religious acts, he preached one hundred and six sermons, visited two hundred and twelve families, participated in twenty-four prayer meetings, distributed the Lord’s Supper six times and baptized thirteen individuals. The Rev. Campbell passed on the ARBA’s message to anyone who would listen, which can also be said for his message concerning Canadian settlement. Although Campbell left Canada West in 1856 to establish a Baptist Church in Toledo, Ohio, his autobiography continued to promote settlement in Canada West on a mass scale.⁴⁸⁴ Writers such as Campbell and Ward promoted the North, but also proudly displayed their Anglo-Canadian identity even if, in the case of Campbell, they no longer resided in the province. The Reverend Campbell carried with him to the US his Canadian heritage because he knew that in Canada West they could enjoy freedoms not available to them in the US.

As mentioned, Emancipation Day Celebrations provided the perfect opportunity to show gratitude to the Queen who granted their freedom. In his study of Emancipation Day, Jeffrey Kerr-Ritchie states that where you lived could influence how you celebrated. In areas such as

⁴⁸² Campbell, *An Autobiography. Bond and Free*, 239.

⁴⁸³ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., 291; Ripley, *BAP*, 165, 365 .

Toronto, observances were meant to demonstrate colonial patriotism by Black Loyalists, while celebrations in Southwestern Ontario provided an opportunity for self-emancipated Black residents to hold a freedom festival.⁴⁸⁵ He also reveals that the reasons why African Canadians celebrated Emancipation Day changed with time. He states that originally this celebration was a way for recently emancipated fugitives to show their loyalty and gratitude to the British crown, but was later used to draw in potential members for the fight against slavery. Kerr-Ritchie adds that this shift demonstrated strong anti-slavery beliefs and, with the incorporation of African-American customs, militancy, and the establishment of the Black press, churches, and self-improvement societies, African-Canadian culture was altered.⁴⁸⁶ This combination of British and African-American methods formed a new African-Canadian model suitable to the lives of formerly enslaved and free Blacks in Canada West. Although the new purpose of these celebrations became the abolition of slavery, African Canadians still remembered the role of the British. Once slavery was abolished, as will be shown, these celebrations evolved into politically-driven events that supported equal rights in Canada West.

As part of the festivities, participants often congregated to hear addresses on important issues. For example, on 1 August 1854, citizens gathered at the Government Grounds in Toronto to celebrate Emancipation Day. Among the guest speakers was George Dupont Wells, a local White attorney, who presented a speech written by Toronto Blacks. In the address, they thanked Queen Victoria for her and her country's efforts in abolishing slavery, writing,

We, the Coloured Inhabitants of Canada, most respectfully, most gratefully and most loyally approach your Gracious Majesty, on this, the anniversary of our *death* to *Slavery*, and our *birth* to *Freedom*. With what feelings, or what words can we adequately express

⁴⁸⁵ Jeffrey R. Kerr-Ritchie, *Rites of August First: Emancipation Day in the Black Atlantic World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007); Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 132.

⁴⁸⁶ Kerr-Ritchie, *Rites of August First*; Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 128-129.

our gratitude to England for such a boon? ... What a happy, what a proud reflection it must be to your Majesty, to know that the moment the poor crushed slave sets foot upon any part of your *mighty* dominions, his chains fall from him – he feels himself a man, and can look up.⁴⁸⁷

The Black community was cognizant of their newly possessed freedoms and Emancipation celebrations provided an environment where African Canadians could demonstrate their gratitude. For example, at yearly Emancipation Day celebrations hosted and supported by fraternal orders, citizens recognized the freeing of enslaved Africans in the British colonies. Lodges such as the Oddfellows often organized or were consistently involved in these celebrations due to one of the basic principles of their Order: devotion to Queen and country.⁴⁸⁸ Festivities often involved more light-hearted activities such as picnics, dancing, music, tug-of-war, foot races, and a parade of the Oddfellows in their white aprons and regalia. Also in attendance were female auxiliaries whose members wore beautiful gowns and hats, and rode in carriages.⁴⁸⁹ Although they represent a more subdued form of civil activity, parades allowed African-Canadian citizens and organizations to protest their slave past, and also to display their patriotism. They invested a considerable amount of time and energy into these celebrations and made sure to attend in their best attire, while participating in grand forms of entertainment, such as parades, that would attract a crowd. Higher attendance meant increased opportunities to demonstrate this organization's loyalty.

Parades also provided an opportunity to publicly protest acts of discrimination and show unity. This was not only done through marching as a group, but also by displaying their flags and banners with specific messages. For example, waving the Union Jack or red, blue, and white streamers represented loyalty to their liberators, the British Crown, while the American flag

⁴⁸⁷ "Address to the Queen," Ripley, *BAP*, 295-296.

⁴⁸⁸ Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 134.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 113.

symbolized their former life in bondage and recognized those still enslaved. Banners conveyed a similar message. At an 1852 Emancipation Day celebration held in Windsor, for example, one banner showed a man kneeling and in chains, looking up as if to ask, “Am I not a man and a brother?” This was meant to bring attention to the poor treatment and conditions of slaves, while the other side of the banner portrayed a tall man standing with broken shackles, representing emancipation.⁴⁹⁰

The freedom that was bestowed upon African Canadians affected generations of formerly enslaved people: men, women, and children. It was not just the former who were capable of expressing gratitude, as children also demonstrated their allegiance to the Queen on numerous occasions. Children were appreciative, but parents also knew that their children could spread this message of loyalty, further developing the (Anglo) African-Canadian identity of themselves and the next generation. For example, at an August 1852 gathering, Miss Jackson, daughter of Kirk Jackson of Detroit, stood at the podium to deliver a piece of her written work, which she dedicated to the Queen. The focus of her address was the beneficence of the Queen’s government in its protection of all classes of Her Majesty’s subjects. Miss Jackson “performed in admirable style, and drew down the applause of the vast assemblage.”⁴⁹¹ The involvement of Miss Jackson not only demonstrates that the Black community recognized the importance of youth participation but, also, that children learned and promoted loyalty to the monarchy at an early age. Another clear example comes from Dresden, where a group of students and adults celebrated Emancipation Day after their classes by standing around the British flag that was hung in front of their school, singing “God Save the Queen.” They then took down the flag and marched to the property of Reverend Hughes, the head of the mission school for former slaves

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid, 30-33, 113; *Voice of the Fugitive*, 12 August 1852.

⁴⁹¹ “17th Anniversary of West India Emancipation,” *Voice of the Fugitive*, 12 August 1852.

run by the Colonial Church and School Society, and enjoyed a picnic lunch. At this same lunch, the Reverend William P. Newman expressed his appreciation for the safety provided on British soil by pointing to the British flag, declaring that there was no more secure place on earth than under the British flag.⁴⁹² Without the efforts of fraternal orders who organized Emancipation celebrations, and set an example for these celebrations, these children would not have been able to address the public on these issues or express their gratitude in such a way.

This loyalty continued even after Queen Victoria's passing, when, according to their 1901 Proceedings, Masons passed a resolution to send condolences to Queen Victoria's son, King Edward the VII.⁴⁹³ Their sadness was further emphasized when the Committee on Resolutions and Regrets stated, "We have with deep regret carefully read the copy of the letter sent from the office of the R. Wor.[sic] Grand Secretary, and heartily endorse it as the unanimous sentiments of this Wor.[sic] Grand Lodge now in session."⁴⁹⁴ The King must have been moved by this gesture considering they received a response with "His Majesty's grateful thanks for its loyal and sympathetic message."⁴⁹⁵ They must have been particularly satisfied with the King's use of the word "loyal," which was an important objective for the Black community. To them, there was no higher example of endorsement for loyalty than from the King himself. Similar actions occurred with the passing of other political figures. According to the *Hamilton Spectator*, a few years before, it was resolved that the lodge would send its condolences to Lady Macdonald, following the loss of her husband, Sir John A. Macdonald.⁴⁹⁶ Showing loyalty to the Queen was a key component in the lodges' strategy, but it extended to

⁴⁹² *The Christian Recorder*, 7 September 1861; Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 90.

⁴⁹³ Proceedings of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge, A.F.&A.M. For the Province of Ontario, 1901.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁶ "The Colored Masons Pass a Resolution of Condolence," *Hamilton Spectator*, 18 June 1891.

other political figures, including the Canadian Prime Minister. Once again, fraternal orders set the tone for how to respond to this particular situation.

Asserting their new African/Anglo-Canadian identity not only involved words, but also action including military service. Although not traditionally linked to associational life, militias were also civil society organizations considering members met regularly, trained together, and shared similar interests, and their service contributed to the overall goal of equality through presentations of symbols of British loyalty. The more their loyalty was put on display the harder it was to question their rights as Canadian citizens. As a result, they motivated the community to defend their new-found freedom and the country that liberated them. Military groups took whatever opportunities they could to display examples of their enthusiasm. At Emancipation Day celebrations, it was not uncommon to display military banners which reminded Canadian citizens of the earlier military contributions of African Canadians in battles such as the War of 1812 and the Rebellion of 1837. In the Niagara region, dozens of African Canadians served in all-Black militias, including Captain Runchey's Company of Coloured Men, which was formed in 1812 to guard against American forces, while roughly two hundred African Canadians defended the Detroit frontier against American attacks during the Rebellion of 1837. Another company, comprised of one hundred African-Canadian men, was formed in 1838 to protect Upper Canada from the attacks of American supporters of the Mackenzie Rebellion. This included Black residents from Chatham, who formed two voluntary militias of eighty men. These militias also practised drills with guns from the British regular units and were active until 1843. As well, Hamilton's African-Canadian community also volunteered their services in the

Fifth Gore Militia during the Mackenzie Rebellion.⁴⁹⁷ Generations that followed recognized these acts of British loyalty and sacrifice, while paying tribute to fallen heroes. It was not just about past military service, but also keeping the memory of their service fresh and on display.

These sentiments of continued military support were highlighted in a speech delivered by George Dupont Wells, on behalf of Toronto Blacks who expressed their willingness to contribute military support and service. They wrote, “Our hearts are wholly your Majesty’s; and if the time should ever come when your Majesty might need our aid, our lives would be as they are, *at your service* ... Can it be conceived that he would not on that same spot [free soil] turn, and whilst defending the hallowed soil, that memory would not fire his brain, and gratitude nerve his arm!”⁴⁹⁸ Military service was a respected form of patriotism and as part of this loyalty they formed military groups.

On a separate occasion, on 23 June 1855, a public meeting was held at Chatham’s First Baptist Church where men such as Isaac D. Shadd and Harvey C. Jackson offered their support and service to the crown. Although the meeting’s resolutions were addressed to the Queen, they were also directed at Black citizens, reminding them of the benefits of living in Canada West and assisting the monarch who gave them the right to enjoy these benefits. It was resolved that Kent County’s Black residents, who felt a debt of gratitude to the Queen, would make known their allegiance and willingness to fight against attacks from any encroaching country. They also offered sympathy to the Queen for the loss of many brave soldiers during the Crimean War, and declared that any person who was not ready and eager to defend their Government, which

⁴⁹⁷ “Emancipation Day – The Fifty-Ninth Anniversary,” *Amherstburg Echo*, 5 August 1892; *Amherstburg Echo*, 29 July 1892; Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 13, 29-33, 62, 75, 99, 113, 121, 145.

⁴⁹⁸ “Address to the Queen,” Ripley, *BAP*, 295-296.

protected them from persecution, did not deserve the privilege of being a British subject.⁴⁹⁹

Military service helped the Black community to assert their rights as citizens, but fighting for their country offered other advantages.

Not only did military service affirm a new African-Canadian identity, it also gave them self-respect. In a letter to William Still, Robert Jones, a Philadelphia barber residing in Hamilton, connected pride and self-respect to military service when he wrote, “I thought I would try to do something for the elevation as a nation, to place them in the proper position to stand where they ought to stand. In order to do this, I have undertaken to get up a military company amongst them.”⁵⁰⁰ As a result, he helped organize Queen Victoria’s Rifle Guards, which was a voluntary militia company for Black residents. To establish this militia, Jones discussed the matter with Major J.T. Gilepon, who said that he would do all he could to aid in this endeavour. Major Gilepon referred Jones to Sir Allan McNab, who instructed him to write a petition to the Governor General, which he did successfully. Among the elected members was their Captain, Mr. Howard, 1st Lieutenant J.H. Hill, and 1st Sergeant Robert Jones. Among their accomplishments, the Queen Victoria’s Rifle Guard inspired other groups. Three years later, Black residents of Victoria, Vancouver Island, established their own version of this group in the form of the Victoria Pioneer Rifle Corps, British Columbia’s first volunteer militia.⁵⁰¹ Military service asserted members’ Anglo-Canadian identity, but also stirred up a sense of pride, while providing an outlet for those men not interested in etiquette or literary endeavours. Members gained something different from each organization, including the self-respect they needed to fight discrimination.

⁴⁹⁹ “Resolutions by a Meeting of Chatham Blacks,” Ripley, *BAP*, 321.

⁵⁰⁰ “Robert Jones to William Still,” Ripley, *BAP*, 345 & 348.

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 345.

British loyalty connected African Canadians to their new home, but some also tried to maintain their African-American roots simultaneously. Some Black residents were willing to put their history behind them, but others tried to connect the present to the past. According to Murray, debating societies had a model of operation that came in two forms: British and African American. The Wilberforce Lyceum, for example, adopted a British format which provided rhetorical tools that allowed for “cultural assimilation,” while others accepted a more community-based system developed by African Americans in the northern states, involving cultural and political work. According to Murray, African-Canadian societies drew from both influences, incorporating both cultural and civic work.⁵⁰² African-Canadian organizations created a model unique to their own needs by combining the two models. Merging their history in the United States with their recent British ties in Canada West made this new model completely applicable to their new life as African Canadians, one that only they could claim.

African Canadians were able to maintain a connection to certain aspects of their American past, but distanced themselves from others. With this new life in freedom, it was their choice to detach themselves from whatever parts of their heritage they decided: they could pick and choose the characteristics of their new African-Canadian identity as they saw fit. For example, before 1866, the Amherstburg Regular Baptist Association (ARBA) was called the Amherstburg Antislavery Regular Baptist Association, clearly an expression of solidarity toward their American brothers and sisters, considering slavery had already been abolished in Canada. Following the Civil War, when American slavery was abolished, this organization made the logical decision to omit the word antislavery since they had achieved their goal. Rather than continuing their tradition of using a name representing the US-Canadian connection, this group

⁵⁰² Murray, *Come, bright Improvement!*, 70.

became the Amherstburg Regular Baptist Association. Dorothy Shreve comments that “If this was a reflection of the diminishing importance of an American focus, Canada’s achievement of becoming a Dominion in the following year elicited a sense of patriotism from the Association. At the annual session, an invitation to participate in the work of the Consolidated American Baptist Missionary Convention received only expressions of moral support.”⁵⁰³ This was not necessarily a complete separation from their American brothers and sisters, but many African Canadians accepted that Canada was their new home and believed that they should act accordingly. The ARBA was trying to set the tone for how other organizations should proceed. It was not about abandoning their past, but accepting their present. Shreve adds that the ARBA took further action by passing a resolution to unite with the Canadian Baptist Missionary Convention to elevate the minds of religious leaders and spread the word of God. This group also decided that each travelling missionary for the ARBA was to be called a “Provincial Missionary” and, in 1876, the ARBA chose to become a member of the Western Canadian Baptist Convention.⁵⁰⁴

The AME Church also tried to distinguish itself from American churches at the Canadian Conference held at Chatham in 1854. In an address to AME followers, the Reverend Benjamin Stewart declared,

We the members of the Canada Annual Conference at the African Methodist Episcopal Church ... see the great disadvantages under which we labour by not having a discipline in conformity with the laws of the province in which we live; therefore, be it Resolved that it is our indispensable duty to have a Book of Discipline in accordance with the laws of Her Most Generous Majesty, under whose sceptre we enjoy our rights as men; and that we do hereby petition the General Conference to set us apart as a separate body.⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰³ Shreve, *The AfriCanadian Church*, 49-50.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 80-81; Payne, *History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 57, 322.

This idea was favourably received and at the 1856 Canadian Conference held in Chatham, the Bishop Daniel Alexander Payne arrived to carry out the task, which resulted in the founding of the British Methodist Episcopal Church. At that time, slavery had not yet been abolished in the United States, making it likely that this action sent a message to the US, which in recent years had passed the Fugitive Slave Act.⁵⁰⁶ If their American past hindered their pursuit of this goal, they were willing to alter their methods and previous attachments.

Years later, in the 1880s, Dresden's BME Church also struggled with connections to the US, after rejecting a proposal from Josiah Henson to unite with the AME Church in the US because its members felt it would go against their loyalties to the British crown. Among the leaders of the opposition was Walter Hawkins, who believed that they should maintain an identity that reflected the history of the Underground Railroad, one that showed appreciation of their protectors, not their oppressors. The push for union succeeded in 1884, although Hawkins and the opposing churches stayed exclusive.⁵⁰⁷ Many felt that they had left their former lives of enslavement behind when they left the US, which would be further reinforced with a rejection of American churches. These simple actions illustrated the changing views of African Canadians who chose to remain in Canada West, even after the Civil War ended. Canada was their new home and, despite the racism they experienced, Canada West provided protection from slavery when the US did not. This was a fact that remained with Black citizens.

Alternate Allegiances

African Canadians created an identity that not only involved British loyalty and African-American heritage, but also a political aspect. Nina Reid-Maroney argues that although African

⁵⁰⁶ Shreve, *The AfriCanadian Church*, 81.

⁵⁰⁷ Reid-Maroney, *The Reverend Jennie Johnson*, 54.

Canadians could not escape the fact that their behaviour could affect the lives of the community, they developed their own political identity which involved “race,” power, land, and political freedom.⁵⁰⁸ They had to stop fearing the repercussions of activism because nothing would be gained if they remained quiet and submissive. In their pursuit of equality, African Canadians were disproving that they would drain the country’s resources. African-Canadian civil society groups played a crucial role in altering negative opinions, particularly those belonging to government officials who created and enforced racist laws, and provided African Canadians with a positive platform upon which they could demand equal rights and legislation. The skills they learned from organizing allowed members to debate and argue against unfair policies and treatment, which speaks to the importance of training and preparing members of these organizations for any challenges. They became more politically aware and used the political process to defeat those who excluded them, even if it meant going against their traditional allegiances. This meant voting against Conservative candidates whom they generally favoured.⁵⁰⁹ This (former) preference for the Conservative party was equated with loyalty to the British Crown, their emancipator. Black citizens such as William P. Newman believed that the “Anglo-Canadian identity afforded black Canadians the best protection against American influence and annexationist designs on the Canadian provinces. Conservatism, he perceived hewed to traditional political principles and concern for the commonweal, which protected minorities from the excesses and prejudices of the majority.”⁵¹⁰ Many African Canadians used the political process, a privilege not offered to all Black residents in the United States, which is why African Canadians such as Newman were so loyal to Britain and Conservatism. Newman

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid., 26.

⁵⁰⁹ Walker, “African Canadians,” *Encyclopedia of Canada’s Peoples*.

⁵¹⁰ “Editorial by William P. Newman,” Ripley, *BAP*, 322.

believed that the Conservative party was incapable of favouring a caste system based on “*complexional* differences” and predicted that within the next five years, Black residents of Kent and Essex County would possess the “balance of political power.”⁵¹¹ Newman’s prediction was only partially correct. They would gain significant political power, but not with the party he expected.

The Black community’s heightened political awareness certainly influenced their allegiances, and when voting for the Conservatives did not benefit this group’s strategy they went elsewhere. African Canadians were thinking for themselves and sided with those who would help in their pursuit of equality through civil society organizations. The Conservative route seemed to benefit their previous goal of independence from an oppressive master and slave system, but not necessarily their new objective. How else were they to be heard? They could be loyal to the crown, but if voting for the Reform party meant that their demands would be met, African Canadians were willing to do what was necessary. For example, in the 1850s, Black residents of Kent County used their vote to prevent two racist candidates, Edwin Larwill and John Prince, from winning an election. This was a trend that continued from the mid-1850s onward. According to Ripley, by this time African Canadians were confident enough to disturb their traditional voting habits. This confidence allowed them to challenge racist Conservatives such as Larwill, a well-known opponent of Black settlement. As a Conservative politician, he pushed for immigration restrictions, racial segregation, and black laws, but also opposed school aid for the Black community. He even cancelled his subscription to the *Essex Advocate* because it supported Black settlements, which Larwill claimed every decent White man was against.⁵¹² One of his more well-known attempts to block Black settlement was when he organized White

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*, 322-23.

⁵¹² *Ibid.*, 322; Ripley, *BAP*, 231, 382; Simpson, *Under the North Star*, 76, 160-161.

protests against the Elgin settlement in 1849. He tried to stop the funding for the Elgin settlement because of the disturbing belief that “The Negro is a distinct species of the Human Family and, in the opinion of your Memorialists is far inferior to that of the European ... Amalgamation is as disgusting to the Eye, as it is immoral in its tendencies and all good men will discountenance it.”⁵¹³ Many of Larwill’s hateful statements were made available to the community via the press, and Black residents, both previously and recently educated in civil society organizations, would have found his words particularly motivating in a way that Larwill did not intend. Larwill’s countermovement added fuel to the fire. As a result, his plan to stop the Elgin settlement did not come to fruition, considering it became the most successful Black settlement in Canada West. Additionally, Larwill’s actions obviously did not go over well with Black voters who were accustomed to voting Conservative. What a conflicting situation: should one remain loyal to the government connected to one’s emancipator, despite racist politicians representing that party? African Canadians made their choice. In 1857, Martin Delany was chosen to organize the Black vote against Larwill, and in favour of Archibald McKellar, the Reform Party candidate. When it came time to vote, three hundred Black residents marched to the Court House in Chatham, each of whom signed his name to the register. This was significant considering that half the White voters made their mark, unable to sign their name. Being able to read the ballot and sign their name indicates the success of Black civil society organizations in training members in literacy/literary skills. The final result was the defeat of Larwill, and the election of McKellar.⁵¹⁴

⁵¹³ King Papers, Memorial of the Inhabitants of Raleigh Township and Vicinity to the Presbyterian Synod at Toronto, June 1849; Simpson, *Under the North Star*, 161.

⁵¹⁴ Ripley, *BAP*, 231; Simpson, *Under the North Star*, 76, 160-161, 334.

It was not surprising that the Black community would rally against a well-known racist, but it was unfortunate when they had to come up against a former supporter. John Prince was just such an example. Prince's African-Canadian support in Essex and Kent counties stretched back to the 1830s and he even fought side by side with Black troops during the Rebellion of 1837. Prince's change in opinion came in 1857, when he supported the reinstatement of magistrates Woodbridge and Wilkinson, who provided a warrant for the arrest and extradition of Archy Lanton, a fugitive slave who had stolen two horses on his way to Sandwich, Canada West. Shortly after, on June 9, Prince gave an address before the Legislative Council, attacking Black residents, calling them immoral, thieves, and corruptors of White society. He also declared that African Canadians should be sent to live by themselves on Manitoulin Island. In response, Black residents of Toronto, Windsor, Sandwich, and Chatham held several meetings to protest Prince's betrayal, calling for his resignation. They also obtained four hundred signatures on a petition, which they sent to a number of government officials. Additionally, African Canadians further condemned Prince by resolving to use all of their resources to fight against any attack that threatened their rights and to publicly criticize those who endorsed American prejudices.⁵¹⁵ They also encouraged constituents of Prince to push for his resignation and called for the union of Black residents of Canada West in protest against Prince. Additionally, they thanked the Governor General for his quick defense of their rights against magistrates Woodbridge and Wilkinson, followed by appreciation for the "flag which gives us protection of life, liberty and property; and we pledge ourselves to Her Most Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria, to be ready at a moment's warning to defend the country of our adoption, at all hazards."⁵¹⁶ These actions

⁵¹⁵ Ripley, *BAP*, 382, 384-385; "Resolutions by a Committee of Toronto Blacks, Presented by Alexander T. Augusta, Toronto, Canada West, June 1857," Ripley, *BAP*, 383.

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 384.

eventually led to Prince's defeat. This loss was a particular gain for African Canadians, not only because their actions cost Prince his parliamentary seat, but also because he lost to the Reformist and executive of the Elgin Association, Archibald McKellar. Not only did African Canadians vote out racist politicians, they also assisted in the removal of politicians who did nothing to stop racist policies.⁵¹⁷

The Black community's political involvement certainly increased with time, but what caused this newfound confidence? There are several components which each lead back to the organizational efforts of African-Canadian activists. Already mentioned is the fact that literary organizations trained members to read and write, which would have been of the utmost importance when writing a petition or reading a ballot. Additionally, learning to debate issues, beginning with smaller topics such as who would gain credit for rescuing an ill woman from an island, would lead to larger discussions concerning equality. The skills learned in civil society organizations would have also aided them in reading about the political process and important issues of the day printed in the press. Other groups such as militias and fraternal orders provided African Canadians with the self-respect that was necessary to move forward: African Canadians needed to believe that they were worthy of respect and equality before they could demand it. Fraternal and etiquette groups also contributed by providing members with financial security, lessons in character and "respectability," and a sense of camaraderie that allowed members to come together for the goal of equality. These organizations gave African Canadians the tools to present themselves as upstanding and reputable citizens. In these organizations, they learned that their lives had value and that their voices mattered. Believing that they not only deserved

⁵¹⁷ Ripley, *BAP*, 382 & 384; Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 80.

positive change, but were also capable of making it happen, was a huge step in the right direction.

With the assistance of civil society organizations, African Canadians became increasingly aware that the Conservative party was willing to turn its back on them, particularly when it came to the integration of schools and extradition cases. Additionally, the Black community became more politically aware, resulting in increased confidence to turn toward the Reform Party, and away from their political roots. Reform Party leaders took full advantage of this change in opinion. They were fully aware of how important the Black vote was and solicited them for the support of their candidates, including *Globe* editor George Brown who, between 28 November 1860 and 18 February 1861, wrote sixteen editorials in opposition to the arrest and possible extradition of John Anderson, a fugitive slave. In return for this recognition, Black abolitionists spoke at Reform Party rallies, including one held at the Mechanics' Institute in Toronto. At this event, held in June 1861, African Canadians condemned the Conservatives and demonstrated their support of the Reform Party, especially because "agitation is the life-blood of all reform movements."⁵¹⁸ They also resolved that "all intelligent and honest men, all true conservators of the public weal, should stand shoulder to shoulder with the opponents of the present corrupt ministry; and we earnestly recommend our brethren throughout the Province to give the Reform party, in the present contest, and in all future contests, which they believe to be right, their united votes and their active co-operation."⁵¹⁹ Although their support of the Conservatives was strong politically before the mid-1850s, African Canadians could only take so much. They realized that the Conservative party's values did not match their own, resulting in a change in strategy.

⁵¹⁸ Ripley, *BAP*, 443 & 445.

⁵¹⁹ "Speech by William J. Watkins," Ripley, *BAP*, 443.

African Canadians continued to act against the Conservative party when they did not get the equality they desired. As indicated earlier, Emancipation Day celebrations, generally used to express gratitude to the Queen and the British government, took on more of a political tone as the century progressed thanks to the influence of civil society groups which organized and directed these events: they used these gatherings to express their discontent with the government. As a result, this gathering was cancelled several times throughout the province. In 1871, for example, participants protested the exclusion of Black children from local common schools.⁵²⁰ On a separate occasion, in 1874 at Chatham, the “colored Reformers of this County” cancelled many of their traditional activities in order to hold a political rally to protest discrimination and the failure of the Conservative Party to have met their needs for the previous twenty years. The protest brought together over two thousand people who marched behind the Union Brass Band from Princess and Wellington Street to Mr. Tobin’s farm. Also involved were roughly 150 carriages and wagons, carrying the chairperson and business owner, Grandison Boyd, Masonic lodge members and their families, and invited speakers. At this gathering, E.C. Cooper, a Mason, was among several guest speakers and he addressed why this political gathering was being held instead of the regular Emancipation Day celebration. According to Cooper, this change was due to a lack of effort from the Conservative party throughout its twenty years in power, but also the contributions of the Reform party, during the last three years, in the journey toward realizing the Black community’s political and civil rights.⁵²¹ Following Cooper, J.M. Jones, Esq., further criticized the Conservative Party’s attacks toward the Reverend William

⁵²⁰ Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 148.

⁵²¹ “The Reform Demonstration, A Large Gathering of the Electors. Speeches by Messrs. Cooper, Jones, Hon. A. McKellar, Q.? W. Ross, M.V.? Rev. Horrocks Cocks, Dr. Abbot [sic], Rev. Mr. Henson, and Isaac Holden, Esq.,” *The Messenger*, Chatham, 1 August 1874, A.R. Abbott Papers, Scrapbook I, Toronto Reference Library.

King, who strongly supported the Black community, particularly through the establishment of the Elgin settlement. He added,

The men who were now attacking Mr. King, and pretending to be the warm friends of the colored man, were the same people who done everything in their power to keep them out of the county 25 years ago, and would have cut their throats if they dared. It ill became these men to abuse Mr. King ... Mr. King was a true man, who had done much for the colored people from the purest motives, and the attacks upon him were merely for the purpose of destroying his influence with the people – happily, however, without success.⁵²²

His advice to this group was to refuse bribes at election time and unite as a group to vote for the party that had proven itself to be the most active and supportive in their fight for equal rights.⁵²³

The political strides the Black community took toward equality were of great significance, but it is also important to recognize those who made many of these gatherings possible. Emancipation Day celebrations were often organized and hosted by fraternal orders, particularly the Oddfellows, and by cancelling their annual event in 1871 and 1874 the Oddfellows were sending a clear message. They were no longer satisfied with merely giving thanks to the government that provided the means for their emancipation. Instead, they transformed Emancipation Day celebrations into political rallies where citizens could express their discontent and fundraise for the cause of equality. Additionally, it was often members of fraternal orders, such as E.C. Cooper, also the president of the Chatham Literary and Debating Society, and J.C. Richards, also the leader of the Kent County Civil Rights League, which achieved integration for Chatham schools, who spoke out at these rallies against the injustices experienced by the Black community. As mentioned, at an 1874 gathering, E.C. Cooper spoke out against the Conservative Party and promoted the Reform Party, while, in 1891, Grand Master J.C. Richards, the chairperson of the Emancipation Day festivities, changed the tone of the

⁵²² Ibid.

⁵²³ Ibid.

festival from one of gratitude to a day meant for strategizing: the day became more political and less celebratory.⁵²⁴ As a result, these fraternal orders altered an established tradition to suit the needs of the Black community: they provided an environment where they could rally and communicate their ideas. These events became a key component of the Black community's political activism, particularly because these events were so widespread and often gained recognition in the press. As a result, those in attendance could have a detailed account of their participation, while followers from miles away could gain access to the day's events without even attending.

On a similar note, Anderson Abbott, a member and president of several organizations, including the Home Circle, Chatham Literary Society, and the Chatham Medical Society, wrote numerous articles in Chatham and Toronto newspapers. He provided his opinion on various subjects including other organizations such as Sunday Schools and Social Circles, but also addressed political issues. He argued that the Black community's support of the Reform Party had proven beneficial, but that the Reform Party would have to demonstrate its continued support in order to retain the Black community's endorsement. He recognized that the Black community was aware of the power it held, stating that as long as it was united, it represented a political power that the government could not ignore. He also urged Black residents to speak up and demand their rights from those in power, otherwise their cause would not progress. Once the Reform Party was in power, Black leaders such as Abbott were confident that the community's voice would be heard. As a sign of support, Abbott expected the Reform Party to provide protective legislation which included equal education, a civil rights bill that prohibited "keepers of houses for the entertainment of the public" from refusing African-Canadian patrons,

⁵²⁴ *Chatham Tri-Weekly Planet*, 5 August 1891; Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 82-83; "The Reform Demonstration," *The Messenger*, Chatham, 1 August 1874.

opportunities to serve on juries, and fair competition for government offices.⁵²⁵ For Abbott, if the Reform Party was to keep the Black community's allegiance it had to demonstrate its support in deeds, not just words. He believed, "It is for these measures that we support the present administration. Let us see if they have the courage to advocate their adoption."⁵²⁶ If they did not live up to their word, the Black community was willing to alter their allegiances to a party that could satisfy their requests.

African Canadians' loyalties were complicated. They were grateful for their emancipation, yet cancelling Emancipation celebrations to hold political rallies gave the impression that they held no loyalty to the British. As a result, in 1877, African Canadians were attacked by the *Chatham Tri-Weekly Planet*, which claimed that they had become ungrateful toward their emancipators, the British Crown. In response, the president of the Chatham Literary and Debating Society, E.C. Cooper, criticized the *Planet* for targeting this group, while not drawing attention to other groups, such as the Irish, who did not celebrate the Irish Emancipation Act of 1829. Cooper asked whether the Irish were also ungrateful because of their lack of celebration of the Crown. The actual reason for not holding an Emancipation Day celebration in Chatham was, Cooper argued, due to discrimination. In Chatham, for example, only one hotel provided accommodations for Black visitors to the area, meaning that once participants arrived there would be nowhere for them to stay. Additionally, for reasons such as this, Chatham Blacks did not want or feel the need to celebrate this kind of discrimination or their limited rights. Henry states that with the 1870s came increased opposition toward these celebrations, which not only illustrates the confused state of civil rights and race relations in the province, but the Black

⁵²⁵ "Colored Men of Essex in Convention," *The Messenger*, 1 December 1877, A.R. Abbott Papers, Scrapbook I, Toronto Reference Library.

⁵²⁶ *Ibid.*

community's response to this problem: why celebrate freedom when lacking the same basic rights of White citizens?⁵²⁷

Support of Cooper appeared in the *Banner* following his response to charges of “indifference and ingratitude” toward the British Crown. The author goes on to ask

If then it is a manifestation of ingratitude and indifference to neglect to celebrate the First of August. Who are guilty? Is it the duty alone of the colored people of Canada to celebrate the day[?] Do they owe their present disenthralled position to British liberality and regard for justice? If so, we should like to know in what way or manner this very desirable state of things were brought about. Moreover, if it is a day that should be dear to every lover of liberty, what did the editor of the PLANET do on that day to hand down its memory?⁵²⁸

Cooper's supporter further comments on remarks made by racists, arguing “that we find it difficult to defend our respect for ‘British liberality and regard for justice in the face of the fact that our manhood is continually being insulted by being refused accommodation at places for the entertainment of the public’ ... The colored people have too much respect to invite their friends to a place where they cannot be treated decently.”⁵²⁹

As a result of these attacks, the community rallied together and further published their opinions on this issue. Anderson Abbott added that, upon arrival, incoming Blacks expected that British laws and justice would guarantee them the same rights as other citizens, but this had not yet become a reality.⁵³⁰ Abbott's published contribution also offered words of encouragement and advice, telling residents that their struggle to gain redress made them worthy of the name “British subjects.”⁵³¹ He then impressed the importance of their unity, in either the political, social, or religious sense, and concluded “[s]o long as we have special grievances to adjust, just

⁵²⁷ Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 80-82; E.C.C., “First of August,” *Banner*, A.R. Abbott Papers, Scrapbook I, Toronto Reference Library.

⁵²⁸ “First of August,” A.R. Abbott Papers, Scrapbook I, Toronto Reference Library.

⁵²⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁰ “Colored Men of Essex in Convention,” *The Messenger*, Chatham, 1 December 1877.

⁵³¹ *Ibid.*

so long will the necessity exist that we should be united in our efforts to remove them.”⁵³² It would not be until 1882 that the Black community, including lodges and social organizations, would gather in Chatham to celebrate their emancipation.⁵³³ African Canadians were grateful to the government which aided in their emancipation, but they needed to take action if they wanted change.

When Emancipation Day celebrations did occur, political figures, including Mayors and Members of Parliament, were welcome to take to the podium. They reminded the audience of past injustices, but also instructed them on how to better themselves, and gain their rights. The audience at an 1892 celebration in Windsor was encouraged to “stand by liberty and to prepare themselves to take that place in the affairs of the country which they were qualified to do.”⁵³⁴ Some audience members had already taken this advice, as J.H. McConnell commented on how pleased he was to see that Black residents were engaged in higher positions of municipal affairs, along with the ministry and other respected vocations.⁵³⁵ Emancipation Day celebrations allowed African Canadians to invite representatives of their choosing to these events, which showed where they stood politically. Additionally, because fraternal orders were responsible for many of these gatherings, they deserve credit for bringing African Canadians in contact with key political figures who listened to and considered their thoughts and ideas: they gave Black citizens a voice.

⁵³² Ibid.

⁵³³ Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 80-82.

⁵³⁴ “Emancipation Day – The Fifty-Ninth Anniversary,” *Amherstburg Echo*, 5 August 1892; *Amherstburg Echo*, 29 July 1892.

⁵³⁵ Ibid.

The appearance of political figures was a deliberate attempt to gain the African-Canadian vote and support, but in this strategy, which the Black community also used to their advantage, political figures offered further advice. W.D. Balfour, M.P.P., told the audience to

keep moving on and battle for their rights. They should watch themselves and they should watch the politicians. If they found the latter true, stick to them ... but if they found them playing fast and loose, then drop them like a hot potato. Colored men wanted no favors on account of their color; they only wanted equal rights with other men. There were no civil disabilities upon the colored race in this country, and almost every position in Essex County had been opened to them. The white man's prejudices against them would be worn away as they educated and improved themselves.⁵³⁶

The Reverend J.H. Campbell agreed that African Canadians did not want any favours and told the audience that they were not responsible for the colour of their skin, but they were accountable for their conduct and character. He then advised them to stop gambling and drinking alcohol, and educate their children so that they were prepared for political and community positions.⁵³⁷

Political action was not limited to cancelling Emancipation celebrations and inviting political representatives. On 29 November 1877, the *Essex Record* recorded that "a county convention" of Black residents was held in Amherstburg's town hall to discuss strategies for their financial and political elevation as a "class."⁵³⁸ After forming a committee, which included Mr. Patterson as president, Rev. J.O. Bonner, vice president, and Mr. J.A. Johnston as secretary, they considered a number of issues. This included the irony of living under a government "in her organic laws which knows no man by color or nationality, but by merit and demerit only ... [but] in some localities in the country we are prohibited from the full enjoyment of equal privileges of

⁵³⁶ Ibid.

⁵³⁷ Ibid.

⁵³⁸ *Essex Record*, 29 November 1877; *Essex Record*, 15 November 1877.

other citizens.”⁵³⁹ Responding to this, Franklin Thornton, the chairman of the Central Committee for County Conventions, declared that these organic laws gave them equal rights, but that they were useless if not executed. The overall purpose of this convention was to consider ways to encourage their financial and political elevation, and in response several resolutions were introduced: proving their independence and trustworthiness so that they can demand respect from the government; recommending education as an indispensable tool in their elevation; participation in agriculture as their chief industry; the learning of trades among young men; and following the principles of total abstinence and practising industry and economy as a means of acquiring wealth. Those who gathered at this convention were not dissatisfied with the law itself but, rather, that these laws were not put into practice. For example, Thornton mentions that the laws that supposedly made all citizens equal had also denied, for the last twenty years, Black men the right to act on a jury in the county due to the belief, among Whites, that Black men were unable to agree on a verdict. In response, Thornton argued that their differing opinion demonstrated that they were capable of forming their own thoughts.⁵⁴⁰ Thornton called for fair treatment in the creation and practise of the law, which is exactly why African Canadians came together at these meetings and conventions. Their goal was to be equal to their White neighbours. As Thornton mentioned, the aim of this resolution was to create model men and women who could command respect, but there were differing opinions on how to achieve this.

At this “county convention” held at Amherstburg, there were certainly differing opinions over how best to address other proposed resolutions, particularly among a Mr. Jackson, Branston Coleman, Rev. J.O. Bonner, William McCurdy, and Franklin Thornton. For example, when discussing the financial and political elevation of the community, Coleman thought it best to

⁵³⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.

form local associations which would be joined together under an overarching union and with governing rules. These local associations would then unite to support an independent political candidate. Although the Reverend T. Johnston agreed that the community should unite and demand respect, he made no mention of politics, while Jackson and the Rev. Bonner believed that they should not discuss politics at all. Jackson stated that they had been discussing politics for the last twenty years, but no results had occurred. Instead, he suggested a petition be sent to the Governor General to remove the “disabilities” under which they worked, while the Rev. Bonner declared that Coleman was out of order in trying to introduce politics and that any of his ideas should go through the convention’s committee first. Thornton argued in favour of education, while McCurdy, on the other hand, felt that persistent individual effort was the only way. McCurdy added that when it came to education there was considerable difficulty in the county due to the over 200 children who were deprived of school privileges. McCurdy further said that the Minister of Education was consulted on this problem and threatened to withdraw government grants if African-Canadian children were not admitted to White schools, but the issue went no further than that: “the evil was allowed to continue.”⁵⁴¹ In response, the Rev. Bonner agreed that Black children must have education, even if they had to take it by force, but noted that the law did not call for separate schools, so they should not demand separate schools, but inclusion. In terms of the fourth and fifth resolution, learning and practising trades, McCurdy and the Rev. Bonner encouraged young men to acquire land and not be lazy in tilling its soil.⁵⁴² Leaders found it easier to agree on some resolutions more than others, particularly how political they should be, although coming together in this manner was a politically-driven act. These conflicting opinions may be viewed as a limitation, but, as Mr. Thornton argued,

⁵⁴¹ *Essex Record*, 29 November 1877.

⁵⁴² *Ibid.*

differing opinions meant that they were capable of forming their own thoughts. Opposing views equated to different tactics (contentious politics), which allowed them to approach their goal from several angles.

Although, the *Essex Record* does not specify who organized this convention, it does reveal who participated. Among those in attendance were several organizational members, including the Reverend J.O. Bonner, who was a Masonic member of the Salem Lodge #12 (Windsor) in 1874 but later joined the North American Lodge #11 (Windsor). Others such as Branston Coleman also joined Lodge #11, after previously participating in North Star Lodge #7 (Windsor), while William McCurdy, a highly respected community figure, was a member of the Lincoln Lodge #8. Also in attendance was Franklin Thornton, who in July 1876 was elected president of the Royal Prince of Wales Literary Club. This literary society was opened to men and women for the purpose of spreading intelligence and social intellectual culture. Every Friday night meetings were held, where members read essays, played/listened to music, and read poetry. This society was described as being in “flourishing condition” and Thornton’s time within this group most likely contributed to his strong support for education as a method for elevation.⁵⁴³ It could also be argued that Franklin Thornton was able to polish his debating skills in the Royal Prince of Wales Literary Club, becoming a proficient debater and outspoken activist, as is shown in several editions of the *Essex Record*. Before (and after) this convention, participants invested their time and effort in these organizations, and benefitted greatly from the

⁵⁴³ Robbins, “Ontario Prince Hall Masons”; *Essex Record*, 4 November 1880; “Literary,” *Essex Record*, 9 July 1879.

lessons learned in these groups. Once the spotlight was on them, they were prepared to argue for fairer laws.⁵⁴⁴

This connection between political conventions and civil society organizations was also present a few years after the 1877 county convention. On 8 October 1880, at Windsor's Independent Hall, political activists once again held a convention to discuss the unfair exclusion of African Canadians from equal political, civil, and social rights, which were legally granted to them by Her Majesty's government. Among those involved were members of the convention committee, consisting of Richard Shewcraft and J.L. Dunn, and two familiar names, Franklin Thornton and Branston Coleman, who was elected chairman of the 1880 Convention. As mentioned, the latter two participants were involved in organizational work and the same can be said for the former. Both Grand Master Shewcraft and J.L. Dunn were members of Lodge # 7 (Windsor), later becoming members of the North American Lodge #11 (Windsor).⁵⁴⁵

Interestingly, William McCurdy, who was present at the 1877 County Convention, but was unable to attend the 1880 convention due to an illness in the family, did offer some words of encouragement. To McCurdy, a member of the Lincoln Lodge #8, this meeting was "of more than ordinary importance" and urged them to push for all their rights as British subjects, which included serving on juries. This was an issue previously raised by Franklin Thornton in 1877 and was raised again in 1880. Following the convention, the *Essex Record* published the words of J.F., a citizen pleased by the gathering of "colored ratepayers" of Windsor in 1880. J.F., along with Black and White supporters, also argued that it was only fair that Black men should be eligible to serve on juries because all people were British citizens who were subject to the laws

⁵⁴⁴ See *Essex Record*, 15 November 1877; *Essex Record*, 22 November 1877; "Correspondence," *Essex Record*, 29 November 1877.

⁵⁴⁵ *Essex Record*, 4 November 1880; Robbins, "Ontario Prince Hall Masons."

of this country. J.F. then suggested that there should be a test for jurymen, which was based on a person's intelligence, not his skin colour. Serving on a jury was a significant issue that resurfaced a number of times, which explains why J.F., Thornton, and McCurdy each expressed its importance in the press and at conventions. McCurdy concluded his message by telling participants that conventions such as these would cease to be necessary only when they achieved these rights, not a moment before.⁵⁴⁶

Many African Canadians remained firm in their stance, becoming more aware of their political power as the century progressed. They joined together using the skills they learned in civil society organizations and continued to use the vote to defeat the opposition. According to Colin McFarquhar, by the 1880s African Canadians living in Toronto achieved a higher degree of political equality than before, but still struggled to gain the social and economic equality they deserved. As a result, the Black community used their political influence to achieve economic advancement. McFarquhar states that, at this time, Black residents were confined to specific occupations. Most men were restricted to low-skilled labour such as whitewashing or service-oriented jobs such as waiting tables in restaurants, while some worked in more skilled occupations such as carpentry and painting, and as barbers. Women were forced into lower-level positions such as laundresses and servants, but also more skilled labour including dressmakers, cooks and hairdressers. He adds that Black residents were excluded from professional, highly skilled occupations, considering there was only one African-Canadian clerk in Toronto in 1881, and no Black agents, accountants, bookkeepers, physicians, or surgeons.⁵⁴⁷ McFarquhar explains that White workers often refused to work with African Canadians because they did not see them as their social equals. A clear example of this involved Albert Jackson who was hired as a mail

⁵⁴⁶ *Essex Record*, 11 November 1880; *Essex Record*, 4 November 1880.

⁵⁴⁷ McFarquhar, "Blacks in 1880s Toronto," 65-67 & 71-72.

carrier in May 1882, but was demoted to hall porter because no letter carrier was willing to train him. The Black community was outraged and protested this decision by writing letters to local newspapers, referring to White postmen as cowards, and holding a mass meeting at which they denounced the conduct of these letter carriers, while establishing a five-person committee to examine the issue. Additionally, at this time a federal election campaign was in progress and Prime Minister John A. Macdonald became aware of the situation. He did not want to see Robert Hay, the Conservative representative, lose votes and declared that Jackson would start delivering mail immediately, which he did on 2 June 1882. Although it was the Conservative government taking advantage of the situation, it was still the Black community's political power and unity that earned Jackson his job as a mail carrier, and the Prime Minister's attention to the matter. According to the *Evening Telegram*, "there is at least one time when the assurance is given that coloured people are just as good as people who are white. This is at election time. A coloured man who has a vote is of a great deal more consequence when there is an election in view than a white man who has no vote."⁵⁴⁸ As a result, African-Canadian groups, such as the Fisk Jubilee Singers, gained assistance from key political figures after being denied access to hotels in Toronto. Toronto's mayor, William McMurrich, and Edward Blake, a federal Liberal politician, offered their homes to this group, while they were in town. After hearing about the controversy, the owner of the American Hotel, which originally refused the singing group, sent a message withdrawing the Hotel's refusal of accommodation. The African-Canadian vote and avoiding bad publicity prompted not only the hotel's change in opinion, but also offers from political figures. Issues such as these were not worth losing the Black vote.⁵⁴⁹ This was an

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., 65-67 & 71-72; *Evening Telegram*, 26 May 1882.

⁵⁴⁹ *The Evening News*, 26 September 1881; *Toronto World*, 7 October 1881; McFarquhar, "Blacks in 1880s Toronto," 72.

instance when the Black community used Conservative support to gain victory, which was a different strategy from ridding the system of racist Conservatives like Larwill and Prince. It was a welcomed change.

As part of their new African-Canadian identity, this community demonstrated an allegiance to the British government through small acts such as declarations of loyalty and grand gestures such as military service and political endorsements. This political endorsement was quickly taken away once the Black community realized that the Conservative party was not on their side, resulting in a shift in favour of the Reform Party. This political power not only allowed them to eject racist politicians, it also swayed the decisions of influential political leaders, particularly to expand employment opportunities and extinguish established social rules of exclusion. As the Black community became more politically aware, they were no longer willing to follow the political actions of their ancestors if it was not to their benefit. This combination of an Anglo/African-Canadian and political identity also merged with their African-American roots. Some Black residents chose to distance themselves from the US to express loyalty to their new home, but this was not necessarily a rejection of the traditions and culture they formed in Africa and the slave quarters, particularly the sense of community and resistance. Gaining equality meant demonstrating their loyalty, while collectively resisting opposition, but it was also necessary to make their voices heard through political power. It was a balancing act, but African Canadians alone could claim this identity as their own.

Chapter Five: “Intelligent parents will raise up intelligent children:” Youth Involvement

According to Jeffrey McNairn’s definition of civil society, associations helped to “create and maintain a social space that was relatively autonomous from family.”⁵⁵⁰ This chapter argues otherwise. These Black civil society associations deliberately incorporated family, particularly young people who were meant to continue the legacy. It was part of their strategy: strength in numbers and longevity in their message. Many groups tried to involve their children, wives, etc. into this process because passing on traditions was critical to the survival of the movement. Once their goal was achieved, a new version of Black civil society would emerge for the next generation, accompanied by a new goal and lessons that would help them navigate it. This incorporation of children is a tradition that dates back to slavery. As a way to maintain their culture, slaves passed on folk tales to their children which taught them how to survive. According to Blassingame, for example, “A projection of the slave’s personal experience, dreams, and hopes, the folk tales allowed him to express hostility to his master, to poke fun at himself, and to delineate the workings of the plantation system.”⁵⁵¹ He adds, “At the same time, by viewing himself as an object, verbalizing his dreams and hostilities, the slave was able to preserve one more area which whites could not control. While holding on to the reality of his existence, the slave gave full play to his wish fulfillment in the tales, especially in those involving animals.”⁵⁵² Telling folk tales, such as those involving a clever rabbit, which represented the slave, which defeats larger animals, the master, through resourcefulness, was an instructional device for young people. They showed them how the weak could survive under harsh conditions.⁵⁵³

⁵⁵⁰ McNairn, *The Capacity To Judge*, 66.

⁵⁵¹ Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, 57.

⁵⁵² Ibid.

⁵⁵³ Ibid.

In addition to telling folk tales, a child's relationship with his or her parents was crucial. Blassingame adds that a person's most enduring idea of one's self was cultivated during childhood years as a result of his or her parents' efforts to nurture them, instilling the lesson that he or she was a unique individual, worthy of love.⁵⁵⁴ He argues that a child's parents played a huge role in determining his or her behavioural pattern, ideals, and values. Interaction between a child and his or her parent was crucial considering,

From the outset, the most important component of personality is self-esteem. Our sense of self-esteem is heightened or lowered by our perception of the images others have of us. Few adults, however, are solely dependent on the way others see them for their conception of themselves. In other words, one enters into every adult interpersonal relationship with some preconceived ideas of what kind of person he is. The most favourable aspect of this is the high opinion of ourselves which we have formed from interacting with our parents.⁵⁵⁵

It was this sense of family that reflected a pride in their African heritage, which Africans carried with them to the US, then to Canada West. Under slavery, a master did not recognize the concept of family and marriage among African-descended people the same way as he would his own, and he could revoke a marriage or separate a family instantly. Although monogamous slave families were permitted, they could be torn apart easily, and were allowed when it was beneficial to their master. Despite this, enslaved people recognized and valued family and self-respect, not only because it was a survival mechanism, but because it was strongly encouraged in their African heritage.⁵⁵⁶ This tradition continued on in African-Canadian organizations that encouraged the participation of their families. They instilled lessons on how to deal with discrimination in a country unwilling to accept them, which is why they organized groups such as literary societies, Sunday Schools, and fraternal lodges. These organizations fulfilled a similar

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid., 185.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid., 78, 185.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid., 78-80 89.

purpose as folk tales and other cultural traditions learned in the slave quarters, but it was now in a different form.

Youth in Training

The African-Canadian community's drive for change developed in many organizations, where members were determined to train the next generation for what was ahead. The minutes of the 1880 ARBA Sunday School Convention encapsulate the mindset of many organizers who believed that if they must educate and prepare their community to defend the principles of this denomination, they needed to look among themselves for training.⁵⁵⁷ Organizers knew that the next generation required training, and leaders developed the minds of their members through various techniques and methods. In literary societies, for example, members participated in debates, recitations, essay writing, and charitable events, which gave young African Canadians the confidence, poise, and self-respect they needed to adapt to life in Canada West. Dr. Anderson Abbott agreed when he addressed the Chatham Literary Society in 1875 on the importance of influencing youth through these groups. To him,

no effort should be slighted that seeks to compass with healthy influences the youth of our town; that they may grow up to be good citizens and useful members of society. In no better way can this object be affected than by organizations such as this. We have young men and women of talent in our midst. Some have a talent for public speaking; some for writing; some for reading; while others have a talent for music. The Literary Society affords each an opportunity to exercise that talent and not only to acquire increased proficiency; but to develop that which is latent.⁵⁵⁸

Nurturing the talents of young people was crucial to their development, and members displayed their abilities within the walls of their organizations and in front of the public. The Young Men's Debating Club, for example, gathered before an audience in Sandwich, at the school-room one Thursday evening in 1851 to debate whether immediate or gradual

⁵⁵⁷ Minutes of the ARBA, 1880, Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO.

⁵⁵⁸ "Inaugural Address Delivered by the President, Dr. A.R. Abbott."

emancipation was the most practical course of action. Something similar occurred, possibly in the same group, when the “young men of color in Sandwich, before a crowded house of deeply interested listeners” debated what has been the greatest evil in the world: slavery or intemperance?⁵⁵⁹ Years later, in 1880, the Sandwich Sabbath School Literary Society was also organized in Sandwich and was “progressing finely, both in numbers and otherwise.”⁵⁶⁰ Their meetings occurred every Tuesday evening, when they performed debates, speeches, songs, and recitations. The *Essex Record* praised the officers of this group for conducting meetings in a way that kept members interested.⁵⁶¹

Youth literary societies were also established in Amherstburg, such as the King Street Literary Society. Little is known about this group, but it was formed during the 1880s and was also known as the King Street School Literary Society. In *Come, bright Improvement!*, Murray states that this literary group was most likely a society for young people and she adds that one membership list only recorded men, while another list included a few women. This may mean that the group began as a gender exclusive society, but later included women. Other Amherstburg literary youth groups included the Buisy Gleanors, a mixed-gendered, youth branch of the Cheerful Workers. Their meetings featured recitations, essay readings and other activities such as prayer and singing, which would be performed in rotation so that each member could fully participate in all activities.⁵⁶² They also hosted their own themed socials as a form of entertainment and fund raising. Among the examples were a Japanese social, a rainbow social, a (Winter) Concert and Fair, and a masquerade party, which demonstrates the variety of functions

⁵⁵⁹ *Voice of the Fugitive*, 29 January 1851; “Question for Debate,” *Voice of the Fugitive*, 29 January 1851.

⁵⁶⁰ *Essex Record*, 8 April 1880.

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶² Murray, *Come, bright Improvement!*, 191-193; Minute Book of the Buisy Gleanors.

this group hosted, further adding culture to the lives of its members. The former, held in January 1892, displayed “Japanese entertainment” at the First Baptist Church, while participants wore Japanese costumes. At this function, they raised over \$13 for their Baptist Church. At these socials, African Canadians may have wanted to demonstrate that they were sophisticated and cultured. They possibly tried to silence critics who advertised the Black community as uncivilized, and their efforts started with young people.⁵⁶³

Other African-Canadian youth-based gatherings included a Rainbow social which accumulated \$7 without even charging admission. This Rainbow social, held on the evening of the Queen’s birthday, had the theme of the colours of the rainbow and it appears that each member chose a colour to represent themselves. Members such as Miss Crawford, who was in charge of ice cream, chose white; Ella, who was in charge of lemonade, chose violet; and Lizzie, who was to bring peanuts, chose green. As part of this event, it was also moved that Lena Adams “draw the colors[sic] of the rainbow,” while Miss Mamie Branton composed and sang a piece on rainbows. The third example, a Winter concert and fair, offered guests an ice palace, a fishing pond, and quilts on display, in addition to dinner, refreshments, and the sale of “fancy articles.” In a final example, the young ladies of the First Baptist church hosted a masquerade

⁵⁶³ White residents of Tillsonburg, for example, also held Japanese socials through groups such as the Ladies’ Travel Club, which incorporated aspects of different cultures including food and clothing to temporarily become “foreigners.” Small-town residents wished to abandon the monotony of everyday life, but even more so they wanted to demonstrate their ability to be cosmopolitan and culturally refined, rather than unsophisticated. Unfortunately, their cultural interpretations were grossly distorted and selective with regard to what components were highlighted and toned down. Viewed as innocent play, this activity reinforced distorted understandings of what “race” and culture consisted of; *Amherstburg Echo*, 15 January 1892; Rebecca Beusaert, “‘Foreigners in Town’: Leisure, Consumption, and Cosmopolitanism in Late-Nineteenth and Early-Twentieth Century Tillsonburg, Ontario” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 23:1 (2012), 215-219, 229, 241.

concert in the Oddfellows' Hall which drew a full house. Each attendee was asked to come as a notable figure, which is what the *Echo* states Miss Almeida Johnson did when she arrived as Ceil Pinkel. It was said that she had a good singing voice and gave two solos, while assisting in a medley and a duet with Myrtle McDowell, suggesting that Ceil Pinkel might have been a singer. Others such as Maud Holbert, Bertha Wesley, and Mary Winning gave recitations, and Bertha Johnson and Mabel Binga sang solos. There was a medley by eight participants, a dialogue by three, and three tableaux. This event was highly successful, as it raised \$25.50.⁵⁶⁴ The possibility for men and women, young and old, to attend these functions for social interaction and entertainment should not be disregarded, but hosting these receptions was mainly to “raise means to aid the Baptist cause.”⁵⁶⁵ The church was an integral part of this community, both for religious and educational purposes and young citizens reciprocated their appreciation by helping the church pay its bills.

The Frederic Douglass Self-Improvement Club, a group established in 1898 for young ladies living in Amherstburg, was not unlike the Buisy Gleanors in that they hosted events and educated its members. Although this group is considered more of an etiquette club, part of their training instilled the importance of education. This group developed skills in the art of public and extemporary speaking, in addition to elocution, composition, and reading. Members were also expected to quote and demonstrate a familiarity with specific authors such as Longfellow, Shakespeare, and Tennyson, in addition to debating. They discussed topics such as who was the greatest poet and argued “Which is the most attractive to the eye, paint and powder or human

⁵⁶⁴ Minute Book of the Buisy Gleanors; *Amherstburg Echo*, 15 January 1892; *Amherstburg Echo*, 2 June 1893; *Amherstburg Echo*, 13 December 1895; *Amherstburg Echo*, 20 December 1895; *Amherstburg Echo*, 15 December 1893.

⁵⁶⁵ *Amherstburg Echo*, 15 January 1892; *Amherstburg Echo*, 19 May 1893; Minute Book of the Buisy Gleanors.

nature?”⁵⁶⁶ The decision was made in favour of human nature. Members were expected to ponder other intellectual questions, which would be discussed at their meetings. Questions included: “Where was the first circulation of blood traced through the body and by whom[?]”; “When was the first parliament called and by whom[?]”; “What is the meaning of October and where did it derive its name[?]” and “How many times larger is the sun than the earth and its distance[?]”⁵⁶⁷ Their meetings were not just about etiquette; they were expected to extend themselves beyond just manners. For example, at their first reception, held at the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Kirtley, on King Street, participants enjoyed an evening of games, singing, and “other amusements.” The evening was such a success that guests were “kept up till the wee sma’ hours of the morning and all departed extending to the host and hostess their hearty thanks for their hospitality.”⁵⁶⁸ It is certainly possible that these events provided an environment to test the lessons learned at their meetings. Proper hosting, entertaining, and maintaining an engaging conversation would all have been expected from their guests and hosts.

The skills learned in these educational groups were highly valued, but the religious education of young people was also greatly prized. It was through participation in religious groups, both local and widespread, that African Canadians found additional ways to aid their community. One of the most prevalent forms of youth involvement came through Sunday Schools and Bible classes where children received a religious and academic education, while involving themselves in the community. In an address to the ARBA Sabbath School Convention, Ada E. Kelly, a member of the AME Sabbath School Convention, told the history of

⁵⁶⁶ Murray, *Come, bright Improvement!*, 192; Minutes of the Frederic Douglass Self-Improvement; *Amherstburg Echo*, 9 December 1898, Marsh Collection.

⁵⁶⁷ *Amherstburg Echo*, 16 December 1898, Marsh Collection; Minutes of the Frederic Douglass Self-Improvement Club.

⁵⁶⁸ *Amherstburg Echo*, 20 March 1899, Marsh Collection.

“modern” Sabbath Schools, beginning with the first recognized Sabbath School in England with Robert Raikes. Kelly referred to the religious training of children in synagogues as described in the New Testament and when Luther established a religious school during the Reformation. She also mentioned Richard Baxter and the Rev. Jos. Alleine, who gathered young people for instruction, but explained that it was Raikes who was responsible for the “modern” Sabbath School. His involvement with Sabbath Schools was the result of an encounter with the children of workmen in the factory district. The children were so noisy and dirty that Raikes asked how the children occupied their time on the Sabbath. He was told that the children swore and gambled, prompting him to hire four women to teach them. Kelly continued her address by stating that the lessons were based more on education in the beginning because the children were completely ignorant, but evolved to more religious-based education, in addition to lessons on cleanliness. It was the ARBA Sabbath School’s objective to teach religious education, but it also incorporated literary education into its lessons. She concluded that Sunday Schools produced nearly all of the community’s upright and celebrated Black residents.⁵⁶⁹ These schools were associated with self-improvement and morality, which is what any parent would want for their children.

As early as 1842, the ARBA accepted the recommendation for Sunday Schools and Bible classes “for the benefit of the rising generation and for the edification of its members.”⁵⁷⁰ The first church to establish a Sabbath School was the Second Baptist of Detroit, but no further records mention Sunday Schools until 1854, when Hamilton and Sandwich each reported the operation of Sabbath Schools. Three years later, in 1857, Amherstburg followed suit.

⁵⁶⁹ Minutes of the ARBA, 1909, Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO.

⁵⁷⁰ *Excerpts From A History of the Amherstburg Regular Missionary Baptist Association*, 23, Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO.

Unfortunately, around this time, the commitment to Sabbath Schools began to decrease, which resulted in the request for a Sunday School Convention. As part of its covenant, it was mandated that the ARBA would religiously train those under its care, particularly children, and based on its minutes it appears that members of all ages could benefit from these Bible classes. Sunday Schools were and always have been associated with children and young people, as was the case with Amherstburg's 1875 Sabbath School, which was led primarily by young people.⁵⁷¹ More uncommon was the participation of older members. In Chatham, for example, there were fifteen scholars in its Bible class in 1875 and three in its infant class, and by 1886 the school had risen to sixty members including "Class No. 1," which consisted of adult members of the church. The latter members were described as "regular and punctual in attendance and lead all the classes with their contributions. This gives good cheer and courage to all the classes and makes them interested in the school."⁵⁷² A year later, in 1887, Chatham reported that "'Our old-folks' class continues a blessing in our midst; their presence and prayers make them a great necessity to our school. Their advice in counsel has proved to have a very salutary effect for good."⁵⁷³ Years earlier and outside of the ARBA, the Union Sabbath School of Sandwich joined together to educate community members of all ages, "races," and "genders": organizers believed that this was among the best ways to instill a sense of morality and enhance a person's knowledge of the Bible. Attendance was at thirty-six members, young and old, and based on the interest from residents they expected their numbers to more than double.⁵⁷⁴ Apparently membership could go

⁵⁷¹ Minutes of the ARBA, 1888, North American Black Historical Museum (NABHM), Amherstburg, Ontario; Minutes of the ARBA, 1886, NABHM; Minutes of the ARBA, 1875, NABHM.

⁵⁷² Ibid; Minutes of the ARBA, 1886.

⁵⁷³ Minutes of the ARBA, 1887, NABHM.

⁵⁷⁴ "Union Sabbath School," *Voice of the Fugitive*, 12 February 1851.

either way: young people could join adult organizations, while older members could participate in youth groups. There was an open invitation, and many accepted.

Among the objectives of the ARBA was raising funds and promoting membership in Sunday Schools, but according to one essay, entitled “What is the Main Object of the Sunday-school?,” the primary goal was to ensure the conversion of students, teachers, and officers through teaching the Word of God.⁵⁷⁵ The author, Elder S.H. Davis, added that the church increased its membership through conversion and “Christian training” of children, but also by leading older residents away from sin. He also suggested that in Sunday Schools the lessons directed at youth should be suitable for each child: “None in our schools are too young to love and serve the Lord.”⁵⁷⁶ As Elder Davis points out, the religious education of children was not just about the present, it was about training young people to carry on the message and good works of the church.

Organizers of the ARBA Sabbath School were fully aware of the impact that children could make and they did not underestimate their potential. With the help of religious examples, Lucinda Washington wrote that “[i]nfancy and childhood are the stages most pliant to good ... Samuel was devoted to the service of religion from his infancy and Timothy from a child received lessons of piety from his mother Eunice and grandmother Lois ... Sunday schools are the arsenals of the church. There the weapons of the Christian warfare burnished brightly, gleam from afar.”⁵⁷⁷ As she adds, children were viewed as a solution to any resistance or absenteeism, but they needed to be nurtured from the very start. She wrote that children “are the bodies of reserve that may fill the broken lines of the sacramental host of God’s elect. Truth is simple and

⁵⁷⁵ Minutes of the ARBA, 1888, NABHM.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁷ Minutes of the ARBA, 1891, NABHM.

like minute drops, it penetrates the fine network of the infant intellect and trickles down upon the heart. And it is by lodging truths in the minds of the rising generations and devoting to her faith early affections and worship, that Christianity is destined to maintain her ascendancy and triumph over the world.”⁵⁷⁸ Maintaining this success depended on religious training which kept young people from “lawful pleasures and reigning vices which like the boundary between two kingdoms are always at war with each other ... The promise of the church is largely embraced in her Sunday School.”⁵⁷⁹ It was through a child’s participation that the longevity of the church was safeguarded and it was never too early to start. Without the next generation of young people to teach those who would follow, the church’s message would go no further. It was crucial to get them involved and keep them engaged.

Even though spreading religion was the central purpose of this group, they also encouraged many to express their faith while practising literary skills. After all, education, as mentioned in Ada E. Kelly’s address, was the original purpose of Sunday Schools. According to the minutes of the ARBA Sunday School Convention, the literary portion of their program required members to write and read religious essays and even poetry. One “exemplary” eleven year old girl, named “Little Winnie Francis,” proved how effective Sunday School lessons could be through her written work and public speaking. In her essay entitled “The Goodness and Greatness of God,” Little Winnie Francis retells events from the Bible and warns the audience to avoid temptation.⁵⁸⁰ Winnie was a clear example that Sunday Schools tried to mold young members into future religious leaders and supporters, but also used educational tools such as public speaking and writing to enrich the lives of young people. Additionally, openly praising

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁰ *Excerpts From A History of the Amherstburg Regular Missionary Baptist Association, 23; Minutes of the ARBA, 1892, NABHM.*

“exemplary” children such as Winnie Francis in their convention minutes not only encouraged these children to continue in their efforts, but also gave them a sense of self-worth and pride: recognizing these children showed them how important they were in spreading the word of God to others.

Winnie Francis was not the only young person who gained a sense of respect and curiosity for their religion through writing. Little Willie Grayson, of Chatham, also spoke of the importance of religious devotion and Sabbath School work in an essay entitled, “The Importance of Sunday School.” Even this young boy was aware of a legacy in organizational work when he informed listeners, “The Sabbath School has been especially adapted to bring children to learn of our Saviour. As they progress, they naturally become successors in church membership, for they are the nursery of the church.”⁵⁸¹ He then requested that parents attend Sabbath School gatherings because they were a source of moral strength and intellectual advancement, and stimulated religious enthusiasm. Grayson then stressed the importance of Sabbath Schools, particularly because of the respected men and women who traced their success back to this institution, and the crucial role of superintendents, ministers, and parents in their success.⁵⁸² Interestingly, Little Willie Grayson’s plea reveals that the religious education of children in these groups served an additional purpose: children were also meant to lead their parents down a moral path. The minutes of the Sunday School Convention reveal that “Frequently the hearts of parents are led to God through their child. ‘A little child shall lead them.’”⁵⁸³ Using children to spread the word of God could apply significant pressure to their parents and possibly other community members. The essays which children like Winnie Francis and Willie Grayson composed and

⁵⁸¹ Minutes of the ARBA, 1893, NABHM.

⁵⁸² Ibid.

⁵⁸³ Ibid.

read before an audience spread the word quickly and widely, considering their essays were often published in the ARBA proceedings.

Sunday Schools also encouraged other literary pursuits which required students to present an argument, and employ evidence such as historical examples and poetry to defend their stance: they encouraged their scholars to research and think critically. For example, in “Example More Powerful Than Precept,” Miss F. Braxton used both to prove that example (performing an action), was more effective than precept, which she described as simply directing people. To prove this, Braxton stated two underlying reasons that demonstrated this: it was pleasing to our eyes and it was natural for a person to imitate others. She also used historical and literary examples to further prove her point, stating that France would never have won as many battles without the brave actions of examples such as Joan of Arc, and her men whose courage and energy made victory possible, nor would England have as many literary works without Shakespeare who inspired countless writers. She further added that children learn by example and if poor behaviour was absorbed into their minds it could not be removed.⁵⁸⁴ Braxton then referred to Longfellow, quoting “Lives of great men all remind us We can make our lives sublime, And departing leave behind us Footprints on the sands of time.”⁵⁸⁵ She was telling people to set a good example because their children were watching, but her essay served another purpose. In composing and presenting her own literary work, Braxton also provided other members with a model of what a proper essay should look like and how to argue in their favour. These were certainly tools that children would need in the future and they learned through example.

⁵⁸⁴ Minutes of the ARBA, 1892, NABHM.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid.

Others such as Jennie Jones, an ARBA Sunday School Convention delegate from Dresden, also supported the strategy of educating children in Sunday Schools when she asked, “Where is, I ask, a more appropriate place than the S.S. to promote and cultivate their intellectual ideas that they may develop and probably be able to compare with Shakespeare or Tennyson[?]”⁵⁸⁶ In this environment, students, young and old, were able to develop their literary skills so that they could use them in the outside world. Learning how to argue and debate a topic could be valuable to someone defending their rights. Members such as George A. Smith offered advice in “Our Duty to Sunday School,” where he argued that in order for a young person to be successful in life it is imperative that they have a good common school education and Sunday School training. Additionally, parents must teach their children proper manners and good behaviour in the home which will bring them positive attention from their teachers and the outside world. Bible classes combined many of these objectives because they intended not only to spread the word of God, but also to teach “scholars” literary skills in the process.⁵⁸⁷ With increasingly educated communities, more and more members believed that in order to spread the word of God, you must be able to read it.

As eluded to in Little Willie Grayson’s essay, it was extremely important to promote the attendance of children and their parents in Sunday Schools. As a result, the minutes of the ARBA Convention introduced key questions to its readers, including “how shall we best gain the children’s attention in the Sabbath-school? [and] How shall we best gain the attendance of

⁵⁸⁶ Minutes of the ARBA, 1897.

⁵⁸⁷ The 1887 minutes of the ARBA also urged ministers to learn the common branches of education, Grammar, History, Geography, [and] Arithmetic; Ibid; Minutes of ARBA, 1875; Minutes of the ARBA, 1886; Minutes of the ARBA, 1887.

parents and guardians?”⁵⁸⁸ From creating interesting lessons, to pressuring for parental attendance, strategies for increasing membership involved numerous methods. These tactics attracted both the children who would be participating and the parents who influenced their children’s decisions. Some schools may have needed to ask these questions more than others considering the participation of children varied throughout the area, and fluctuated throughout the years. For example, in 1875, Chatham had eighteen to twenty scholars, while Buxton had forty-eight, and Sandwich had twenty five. At the end of the decade, in 1879, Chatham increased to thirty, Buxton decreased to thirty-four and Sandwich to fifteen. Amherstburg’s Sabbath School did not mention their results in 1875, but had strong numbers in 1879 with 130 scholars on the role, with an average attendance of fifty. Although schools like those in Amherstburg were going strong in the 1870s, it was a struggle for others. Reports for individual schools throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century reveal their successes and failures, and in an 1896 report the author states that there seemed to be an overall lack of interest from young people.⁵⁸⁹ The following year, Miss Mary Hammond, of Chatham, drew particular attention to one portion of this group who could show a bit more enthusiasm: young men. She explains that there was a lack of support from young men and that in most of the Sabbath Schools girls outnumbered boys, with a majority of the teachers being female: “In the church we see there the women toiling and struggling with the heavy burdens and cares of the various churches, with none to help save a few middle aged and aged men. In the Convention we meet the same ... Few, very few, are the young men that help to carry on this grand and glorious work

⁵⁸⁸ One suggestion for increasing parental participation involved “going to their houses and inviting them to the Sabbath-school.” By literally going outside of the church, members applied significant pressure to those who chose to spend their Sundays elsewhere; Minutes of the ARBA, 1875; Minutes of the ARBA, 1892.

⁵⁸⁹ Minutes of the ARBA, 1875; Minutes of the ARBA, 1879, Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO; Minutes of the ARBA, 1896.

... The harvest is great, but the laborers are few.”⁵⁹⁰ The ARBA hoped that young people would direct their energy toward celebrations and groups that uplifted the community. It is possible that essays such as those from the ARBA had the power to draw in, or pressure, more male participation, but Sunday School organizers considered additional methods.

To gain and maintain their attention, organizers drew in young members by giving them opportunities for leadership. Young people were given a chance to govern this organization, possibly teaching them how to lead in the future. There was even one Sabbath School in Amherstburg that was “conducted chiefly by young people.”⁵⁹¹ Giving young people the opportunity to lead was a possible draw to Sunday Schools, and training began at an early age.

Maintaining the interest of their students was something that teachers consistently pondered. One supporter from Buxton, Miss L. Washington, argued that when a Sunday School lesson was properly prepared and explained, it had the potential to do more good than a sermon because during their youth a child’s mind was most malleable and receptive to ideas, including the permanency of the kingdom of God.⁵⁹² Other solutions involved a more creative outlet: music. The latter component was an important way to inject culture into its young members, while maintaining their attention. One member, Emma Holt of Amherstburg, expressed the importance of music in Sunday Schools when she wrote, “If there is one part of the Sunday School service that should claim more attention than another it is the music. In fact we could not

⁵⁹⁰ The decrease in youth participation also occurred at Emancipation Day celebrations, where organizers encountered “divergent interests developing between the older and younger parties at these festivities. While adults were keen on the educational aspect of the gathering, many of the youth did not listen to the speeches.” Additionally, among Whites, young men and boys were the primary focus for self-improvement groups because they were seen as morally in the most danger; Minutes of the ARBA, 1897; *Hamilton Spectator*, 2 August 1884; Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 120; Holman, *A Sense of Their Duty*, 122.

⁵⁹¹ Minutes of ARBA, 1875, Minutes of the ARBA, 1886.

⁵⁹² Ibid.

carry one school without it ... We should [sic] not know how to proceed with the lesson unless we had first mingled together in singing the praise of our Creator, we are more capable of understanding the many truths that are contained in the lesson, if we can sing with spirit and understanding.”⁵⁹³ She not only believed that music would enhance each lesson, but that it also attracted children to Bible class because, as she explained, children who have a part to play in class are more likely to attend.⁵⁹⁴

Outside of the ARBA, Anderson Abbott expressed his support of Bible classes, but encouraged another book to complement the Bible: the “Book of Nature.” In his opinion, the Bible, the Book of Books, should be the foundation for religious instruction, but the Book of Nature could also provide valuable lessons. In fact, Abbott believed that religious principles and teachings could be more clearly explained to young minds with the use of examples and comparisons from nature.⁵⁹⁵ Abbott argued that God was the author of light and knowledge, and provided examples of instruction in nature, particularly flowers. In his opinion, flowers taught children “the tenderness of the character of God,” but also to avoid temptation. Abbott warned that some flowers are attractive to the eye, but can be poisonous. He cautioned children to “avoid all those evils, which, by their attractive appearance and seeming innocence, serve to allure the young into the paths of vice.”⁵⁹⁶ With this he asked teachers to introduce these kinds of lessons and to study nature so that they could better direct the minds of these children “from nature up to nature’s God. A high privilege and an important duty devolves upon you. To you are committed the future weal or woe of these little ones. They are fast hastening to that period

⁵⁹³ Minutes of the ARBA, 1896, NABHM.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁵ “An Address Delivered at the Sabbath School Anniversary by Dr. A.R. Abbott, Chatham, Ont., April 7, 1874,” A.R. Abbott Papers, Scrapbook I, Baldwin Room, Toronto Reference Library.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid.

of life when they are apt to break loose from the restraining influence of Sabbath Schools, and the still more affectionate restraint of parental authority ... You have a great work to perform in removing the moral rubbish.”⁵⁹⁷ Abbott concluded with a request that teachers make Sabbath School as attractive to children as possible by including a variety of exercises, and introducing “new features,” including a “floral festival” to avoid monotony.⁵⁹⁸ Whether this unconventional method was practised is not known, but it suggests the Black community’s varied approach to instilling knowledge in young people.

Organizers and instructors invested substantial energy into promoting and increasing Sabbath School attendance. They wanted to spread the message to as many people who would listen. As a result, Sunday School teachers were instructed to be punctual because making children wait might discourage them from attending. It was also suggested that they be “well acquainted with human nature ...[,] study well the word of GOD” and never do anything contrary to what they taught.⁵⁹⁹ It was their heavy responsibility to make each lesson engaging for children, making no excuses for a lack of planning. Each teacher should instill in their students the importance of preparation, and lead through example, while taking pleasure in Sunday School work and the progress of each child: “A flourishing Sunday School is a great spoke in the prosperity of the Church.”⁶⁰⁰ Parents were always warned to set a good example and there was just as much pressure on Sabbath School teachers.

Increasing Sabbath School attendance was not an easy task, but possibly more difficult was maintaining the attention of those who graduated from Sabbath School. Once these students

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁹ Minutes of the ARBA, 1897; Minutes of the ARBA, 1880, NABHM.

⁶⁰⁰ Minutes of the ARBA, 1897.

got older it was necessary to create a new outlet for religious devotion, one that would sustain them until they were ready for the next stage, involving missionary work, the ministry, etc. It was recommended that all of the churches within the ARBA Sabbath School create “‘Baptist Young People’s Unions,’ especially for the benefit of the young members and other young friends.”⁶⁰¹ Many members of the ARBA were very much in favour of youth groups and one member, John Montgomery, of Chatham, even wrote an essay discussing the benefits of Young People’s Societies, although it was not published in the convention minutes. Others, such as the members of the Committee on General Business, further encouraged older members to advance the efforts of their Young People’s Societies by helping and cheering them on in their work.⁶⁰² This strategy continued into the beginning of the next century when the Rev. S.O. McDowell suggested that the Sunday School Convention target a specific group, with the creation of a young people’s union for older teens. The union was meant to fill the gap between youth involvement in Sunday Schools and the active participation of adult members in church work. The point was to make sure that there were no opportunities for children to lose interest in Christian works: keep the children involved and they will not stray. Members shared his opinion, resulting in several unions being established in various churches of the ARBA.⁶⁰³ There is even evidence demonstrating the success of youth groups, considering George H. Talbot began his involvement through leadership in the Young People’s Union of the Windsor Church and later became part of the administration for the Sunday School Convention. He also represented the ARBA among young people of the Ontario and Quebec Convention. His son, Lyle, also went on to be the president of the Baptist Young People’s Convention. In addition to these

⁶⁰¹ Minutes of the ARBA, 1893.

⁶⁰² Minutes of the ARBA, 1894.

⁶⁰³ “Becoming United,” Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO.

efforts, it was recommended that teachers form discussion groups led by their pastors and superintendents. Some communities took a bit longer to establish youth groups such as these, considering it was not until 1929 that the Rev. A.R. James, pastor of Windsor's Baptist church, established a convention of the Young People's Unions at North Buxton.⁶⁰⁴ Sabbath Schools for young children were an effective way to draw children to religious and literary education, but it was just as important, possibly more important, to keep young teenagers interested. What good would it have been to invest time and effort into children who would later turn their attention elsewhere?

If this attention toward religious works was maintained, the next step was for former pupils of these Sabbath Schools to apply what they learned. The ARBA Sabbath School appointed young people as missionaries who organized and assisted Sabbath Schools. Their lessons were put to good use in and outside of Canada, as the Southern United States was also part of their plan to increase Baptist participation. In the 1875 minutes of the ARBA, Sister Julia Turner, a Sandwich Sabbath School teacher, reported that "She believed the children to be making as rapid progress in Canada as elsewhere, according to their circumstances. That Missionaries had gone from Canada to the South. Missionaries who were educated in Canada, are now preaching to this down-trodden race; and gentlemen in legislative halls in many of the Southern States, and representatives in the halls at Washington, all from Canada."⁶⁰⁵ In 1894, a report of the Executive Board reveals their successes elsewhere with the establishment of Sabbath Schools where none previously existed, in addition to providing reading material to those in need.⁶⁰⁶ A few years later, in 1896 and 1897, the ARBA continued to send missionaries

⁶⁰⁴ Shreve, *The AfriCanadian Church*, 102, 109.

⁶⁰⁵ Minutes of the ARBA, 1875; Minutes of the ARBA, 1896; Minutes of the ARBA, 1897.

⁶⁰⁶ Minutes of the ARBA, 1894.

to organize Sunday Schools in any area where they had the power to do so. They were instructed to visit at least four times a year to weaker schools and twice a year to more prosperous schools. Although the schools visited were encouraged to raise whatever money they could to pay the missionaries' expenses, the ARBA Sabbath School Convention covered their travelling costs. Years earlier, Sister Elizabeth Shreve had high expectations to expand the church's influence even further. In a report discussing her Sabbath School in Buxton, she spoke of her desire for the "cause of Christ" to spread throughout every church and the world. It was the sole object of a missionary to advance these schools in Baptist values and goals.⁶⁰⁷ Their training had come full circle. Those who learned skills in these Sunday Schools were now expected to pass them on to the next generation. The time and effort their teachers had invested were now being transferred to future religious leaders and teachers.

Leaders of the ARBA Sabbath School also recognized the importance of a parent's influence and asked, "What is the duty of the parents in the work of the Sabbath School?"⁶⁰⁸ A parent's guidance was an extremely important part of the cause and, from very early on, the *Voice of the Fugitive* directed this point to a particular group: women. In "Woman's Influence," the author stated that a woman's influence, to a great extent, made a man who he was. A child spent so much time in his or her mother's company that what she said and did was absorbed into the child's mind: "The prayer that she taught him first to lisp is never forgotten."⁶⁰⁹ In all aspects of a child's life, a mother's role was held in the highest standing. The article goes on to say, "The noble qualities displayed by illustrious men are generally the fruit of seed sown in

⁶⁰⁷ Minutes of the ARBA, 1875; Minutes of the ARBA, 1896; Minutes of the ARBA, 1897.

⁶⁰⁸ Minutes of the ARBA, 1879.

⁶⁰⁹ "Woman's Influence," *Voice of the Fugitive*, 29 January 1851.

infancy. “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.”⁶¹⁰ A mother’s guiding hand led her child down the right path toward success.⁶¹¹

Members directly involved in the ARBA also believed in a parent’s influence, but children used subtle methods to guide their parents. Mrs. Alice Blackwell, of Chatham’s Sabbath School, expressed the importance of parental support in her essay titled, “Sabbath School Work,” which encouraged parents “to lead their little ones to and from the Sabbath School, teaching them this is the right way. Making sure we (parents) live very close to our precepts, that the child may see no error and be constrained to follow.”⁶¹² But, if parents were not attending, their children could also provide a lesson at home. When telling their parents of the day’s lesson, children were teaching them the importance of religion, but they could also apply guilt when they attended and their parents remained absent both from church and from setting a good example. In one essay, Jennie Jones told the story of a child who “said to its father while ascending the side of a vast rock: Papa, be careful how you step, for I have got to step in the same place you do to reach the summit in safety.”⁶¹³ She then stated, “Oh that every parent would consider these words; take heed and step properly to land their children safely into immortal glory. The steps of our Saviour are the proper steps to pursue in order that your children doing likewise they may be able to pass from the S.S. to the church, from the church to the conventions ... and from thence to that eternal convention that not only convenes for one or two days, but for eternity.”⁶¹⁴ Parents needed to know that their actions had consequences and in

⁶¹⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹¹ Ibid.

⁶¹² Minutes of the ARBA, 1891.

⁶¹³ Minutes of the ARBA, 1897.

⁶¹⁴ Parents were also told that if they had time to gossip or sit idle, they should read instead. This activity would draw their attention away from bad habits; Minutes of the ARBA, 1892.

this case the consequence was that their children might take on their bad habits. In the words of Miss F. Braxton, just as with a “Woman’s Influence,” “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.”⁶¹⁵ This same message carried on as the century progressed. These essays were not only meant to teach young children, but also provide an important lesson for parents.

There was a lot resting on the actions of parents, who were to set a good example, but children were also expected to take over the roles filled by adult members. Success involved both parties, but they had to be prepared and willing to take on these responsibilities. Lucinda Washington, of Chatham, recognized this when she wrote that the advancement of the church relied upon the early training of its members. This religious training, learned in the nursery and in school, guided members throughout their lives, acting as a moral compass.⁶¹⁶ Her advice to the audience was to “[t]each nothing you even suspect will need to be untaught as moulding [sic] is more durable than remodding [sic] ... Seek to make what is good, attractive; and what is bad odious and repulsive.”⁶¹⁷

Avoiding Temptation

Among the things that were to be made repulsive was alcohol. This was a common theme in the Black community stemming back to the 1850s, especially because temperance was one way that African Canadians could, according to many community members, achieve a moral reputation. African Canadians, inside and outside of the ARBA, wanted to introduce temperance to children before they had an opportunity to drink a drop of alcohol. According to the *Voice of*

⁶¹⁵ Ibid.

⁶¹⁶ Minutes of the ARBA, 1891.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid.

the Fugitive, in 1851, nearly all of the people of New Canaan abstained entirely from the use of intoxicating drinks. The article adds that they had recently had interesting meetings on the subject and that “The school children, without exception, have attached their names to the Cold Water Army, and they sing Temperance Hymns and Songs finely.”⁶¹⁸ The following year, James Underwood, a Black teacher in Amherstburg, founded the Young Men’s Education and Temperance Society after “realizing the moral depravity of the young men of that vicinity, or in the like manner to the young men of any vicinity where they have not regularly organized Societies.”⁶¹⁹ Underwood was determined to assist young men in their moral elevation.⁶²⁰

Other efforts included youth organizations that were not created specifically to promote temperance but, rather, to provide entertainment for young people void of temptation. For example, in December 1892 members of the Juvenile Club of the First Baptist Church held an old-fashioned tea meeting at the church, raising \$24.35, while in April 1897 the youth members of Amherstburg’s First Baptist church, possibly the Juvenile Club, hosted a Japanese juvenile tea party, which offered music, tea, and cake. It is important to note that, just as with adults, youth tea meetings went beyond British loyalty and temperance; they were also about projecting a respectable image, even among children.⁶²¹ Prohibiting the use of alcohol among young adults was also important in groups that supported temperance, but were created for another purpose. For example, at a 20 December 1898 meeting, the Frederic Douglass Self-Improvement Club passed a rule that no wine be served at any of the club members’ houses during the holidays. Whether this rule was meant to prevent alcohol use during the holidays only, or act as additional reinforcement during a time when people, who regularly enforced temperance, could be

⁶¹⁸“Temperance, Schools, &c.,” *Voice of the Fugitive*, 26 March 1851.

⁶¹⁹“For the Voice of the Fugitive,” *Voice of the Fugitive*, 18 June 1851.

⁶²⁰ Ibid.

⁶²¹ *Amherstburg Echo*, 2 April 1897; *Amherstburg Echo*, 9 December 1892.

increasingly tempted by alcohol, is not clear. That being said, members of the Frederic Douglass Self-Improvement Club made a statement against alcohol.⁶²² It was crucial for children and young people to learn the importance of abstinence from alcohol earlier in life, so that they were not exposed to the dangers of liquor later on.

Although it is possible that the ARBA Sabbath School Convention may have condemned intemperance from the beginning, evidence of direct action among children did not occur until later in the century. In order to promote this message more directly within the ARBA, a temperance committee within the Sabbath School Convention was created in 1893 to actively condemn intemperance and “to hasten the coming of Christ’s Kingdom on earth.”⁶²³ To increase the number of temperate followers, the committee relayed an invitation to ARBA members the following year asking “those who are worthy to sound their voices to exhort and preach, in season and out of season, and to do all in their power to destroy this greatest evil in our land and break down this stronghold [sic] of Satan.”⁶²⁴ Among those who preached, each minister was asked to deliver a special sermon devoted to the subject of intemperance to children once every two months.⁶²⁵ This was quite significant because if every minister associated with the ARBA preached on this subject, a multitude of Sabbath Schools would benefit greatly, but it could be for additional reasons.

Devoting temperance sermons specifically to children, just like publishing the praises of young people who composed and read religious essays, instilled a sense of self-worth.

Recognizing their efforts gave children the pride they needed in a society that looked down on

⁶²² *Amherstburg Echo*, 11 February 1881; *Amherstburg Echo*, 18 February 1881; Minute Book of the Frederic Douglass Self-Improvement Club, 20 December 1898; Amherstburg Association, *Pathfinders of Liberty and Truth*, 10.

⁶²³ Minutes of the ARBA, 1893.

⁶²⁴ Minutes of the ARBA, 1894.

⁶²⁵ Ibid.

them. If religious leaders were paying particular attention to them and taking the time to address them specifically, there was the potential for increased self-esteem: the children who heard these sermons felt needed. The combined efforts of ministers and the temperance committee could certainly make an impact on young members who were expected to make a difference. These sermons continued for several years, but as of 1896 convention ministers were required to give sermons on intemperance once every three months. Why there was a reduction in temperance sermons among children is unclear. It is possible that they were changing their strategy, but it was not because intemperance was no longer an issue. Intemperance in the church was recognized when the Temperance Committee reported in 1896 that “The great evil of intemperance is still working great destruction and misery in our midst, and as its baneful influence is felt even in our churches, we do recommend that all ministers of the gospel be requested to preach against this great evil.”⁶²⁶ A year later, pastors were asked to further reduce their special sermons by preaching on intemperance once every six months. Members were once again encouraged to give up this king of evils, which caused harm to the church, and be temperate in all aspects of their lives. At the turn of the century, in 1907, this committee continued to push for two temperance sermons each year to every school, but also asked congregants to increase their efforts to eliminate intemperance in their communities through word and deed. They also recommended that superintendents use their resources to ensure that a proper quarterly temperance lesson was conveyed to young people.⁶²⁷ Apparently, religion did not mask intemperance and the Temperance Committee wanted to instil this lesson as early as

⁶²⁶ Minutes of the ARBA, 1896.

⁶²⁷ Minutes of the ARBA, 1897; Minutes of the ARBA, 1907, Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO.

possible. It believed that it was its duty to “save our boys and girls from the great gulf that awaits those who are not temperate.”⁶²⁸

This conviction becomes clear upon further examination of ARBA Sunday School essays which reveal the thoughts of teachers and students on temperance. Based on this evidence, temperance increased as a topic of interest among these Sabbath Schools during the 1890s. For example, in an 1893 essay entitled “Wise Men on Wine,” Miss Etta Foster wrote that alcohol “use, [sic] causes, woe, sorrow and sadness, anger and quarreling: foolish sayings even upon subjects they would be wiser not to mention.”⁶²⁹ She then referred to St. Augustine who declared that wine was the “Mother of all mischief.” Miss Foster used this essay as an opportunity to inform people and give advice: once again, it was about setting a good example. At the end of her essay, she asks listeners to consider an example: “Pliny the Younger relates: - Antiochus, at a banquet, having forced his minions to take an excess of wine, was killed by them, and he there from drew this moral, If we tempt others into error the consequences will fall upon us.”⁶³⁰ Foster was not alone in this opinion, as another essay, “Young Men in Christian Work,” echoed this theme. It declared, “Young man! You are wanted from the street corners, from the saloons and playhouses, from the idler’s promenade. Turn your steps into the highway of noble aim and earnest work. Waste not your time in idleness and folly.”⁶³¹ The previously discussed essays of the ARBA Sabbath School focused on guiding children down a righteous path through religion. For many African Canadians, these essays not only informed, they instructed.

⁶²⁸ Minutes of the ARBA, 1909.

⁶²⁹ Minutes of the ARBA, 1893.

⁶³⁰ Ibid.

⁶³¹ Minutes of the ARBA, 1897.

Sabbath School was an alternative to activities that required children to spend their time in bad company. Without teachings from the Bible, it was argued, children remained unprotected from vice.⁶³² How children spent their free time was of great concern, particularly because it could be a positive, or negative, reflection on the community. One member of the ARBA Sabbath School, Jennie Jones of Dresden, expressed her concern for youth activities and asked, “Is it not better to see on a Sunday groups of little children wending their way with their books in their hands to S.S. rather than see them idling along the streets and probably venturing into some evil place of pleasure where they are charmed by songs of the world instead of the beautiful songs of Salvation that are sung in praises to God in the S.S.[?]”⁶³³ Jones then offered a solution to this idleness and mischief and suggested that a child who learned the perpetual greatness of God, Sunday after Sunday, was bound to continue in Christian ways, promoting the Baptist faith in their manhood and womanhood: “We know the old are continually fading and dying away, and it is an inevitable fact the young must take their place.”⁶³⁴ Many people, especially Jones, positioned Sunday Schools in a place of great value. To them, “God has placed us in the world to improve the time, not only for our own personal benefit, but for the benefit of the rising generation.”⁶³⁵ This was a sentiment that continued in the Black community. They believed that these schools were a long-lasting solution that would train young members to be good Christians, so that they too could teach the next generation to be void of mischievous behaviour. Youth groups such as the Buisy Gleanors, Sabbath Schools, etc. kept young members out of trouble, instead of creating it. They offered proper entertainment such as concerts, picnics, and socials. One report from William Wells Brown stated that the Sayer Street Church

⁶³² Minutes of the ARBA, 1893.

⁶³³ Minutes of the ARBA, 1897.

⁶³⁴ Ibid.

⁶³⁵ Ibid.

in Toronto was effectively bringing children off the streets.⁶³⁶ These activities kept children entertained, while preventing them from doing what they should not.

The efforts of parents, organizers, and teachers of Sabbath Schools did pay off, considering members continued to join and participate in the Amherstburg Association throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They kept children away from trouble for decades. In fact, Dorothy Shadd Shreve states that between 1847 and 1897 membership increased in some Baptist churches, including Amherstburg, Buxton, Chatham, London, and Windsor. This was despite a substantial decrease in population due to the Civil War. It was certainly possible that as the Black population decreased, Black residents came together even more: those who might not have previously attended church could have felt the call to this institution for the betterment of the community. Although there were fluctuations in the numbers, and some churches failed to survive, numerous churches participated in the ARBA for decades. Shreve also states that Baptist churches continued to join or maintained their membership with the ARBA well into the twentieth century, beyond the 1950s. From 1907 to 1977, for example, the Baptist Churches in Chatham, Dresden, Puce, and Windsor experienced increases. Once again the numbers did rise and fall, but each of these churches experienced an increase, Windsor being the most successful with an increase from 166 in 1907 to 267 in 1977.⁶³⁷ As long as the community needed the ARBA, this organization would be there for them.

The ARBA's continued high membership was a major achievement in the Black community, which also made strides in the fight against alcohol in other groups. In addition to

⁶³⁶ In England, the Boy Scouts were a solution to the "street-urchin" problem because giving boys beanies and badges was meant to keep them out of trouble; Putnam, "Civic Disengagement," 239; *Amherstburg Echo*, 9 December 1892; *Amherstburg Echo*, 18 December 1891; "'The Colored People of Canada,' by William Wells Brown," Ripley, *BAP*, 462.

⁶³⁷ Shreve, *The AfriCanadian Church*, 62-65.

creating their own temperance groups, in and outside of the church, African Canadians also found some influence among the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), despite separate participation in the Department of "Work Among Colored People."⁶³⁸ Not unlike ministers and church organizers, WCTU Superintendents were fully aware of the potential children had in this organization and wanted to take advantage of that resource. In 1898, fifty-eight pledge cards were distributed in Sabbath Schools, including Kent (Chatham), and it was also suggested that, twice a year, each local Superintendent or President should give a temperance talk at the Sabbath School. This was in addition to potentially appointing a committee to interview ministers and/or Sabbath School Superintendents. Through them, members were introduced to pledge rolls and temperance literature.⁶³⁹ A year later it was further suggested that the Superintendent of the Work Among Africans, formerly Work Among "Colored" People, visit the local Sabbath School once every quarter and distribute pledge cards, in addition to holding mothers' meetings where possible.⁶⁴⁰

The WCTU's efforts to promote temperance in Sunday Schools extended further into youth branches called the Band of Hope. For example, according to Lillian Phelps, the Superintendent for Work Among "Colored" People, the city of Guelph established a Band of Hope where she reported that the children were interested in the temperance cause. The same could be said for Kent, where a Miss Reddick successfully established the same group, and the following year, in 1898, a Band of Hope was established in Hamilton where "Good work is

⁶³⁸ Cook, "*Through Sunshine and Shadow*"; Report of the Sixteenth Convention of the Dominion Woman's Christian Temperance Union, 1893, Canadian WCTU Fond, AO; Report of the 20th Convention of the Ontario Woman's Christian Temperance Union, 1897.

⁶³⁹ Report of the 18th Convention of the Ontario WCTU, 1895, Canadian WCTU Fond, AO; Report of the 19th Convention of the Ontario WCTU, 1896; Report of the 20th Convention of the Ontario WCTU, 1897; Report of the 21st Convention of the Ontario WCTU, 1898.

⁶⁴⁰ Report of the 22nd Convention of the Ontario WCTU, 1899, Canadian WCTU Fond, AO.

being done” and in Otterville where a Band of Hope brought temperance into the lives of a number of families.⁶⁴¹

As mentioned, the limited success in gaining political support from African Canadians created an obstacle for the WCTU, but Mrs. Ribble provided a possible solution in 1899. In her words “Our hope then is in the youth.”⁶⁴² To gain their support she visited numerous day schools, leaving pledge cards with the teachers so that children could sign them after consulting their parents. This was in addition to providing four Sabbath Schools with pledge rolls and visiting three Sabbath Schools on “temperance Sunday” so that she could review their lessons with them. Her actions seemed to have had some effect considering a report from Kent revealed that support was increasing as a result of several public meetings where ninety-seven temperance pledges were signed. She also distributed pledges in Sunday Schools and at day schools, which resulted in fifty-four pledges being signed, in addition to leaving four pledge rolls in a number of Sabbath Schools and distributing literature mainly concerning narcotics.⁶⁴³

The next year, in 1900, Mrs. B.D. Livingstone, the Superintendent, reported that while visiting Dresden she came across a boy who asked her whether she would be preaching that night. In response she said that she did not preach, but rather talked, and then asked the boy if he would come hear her speak. At the gathering, “Sure enough, the first face I looked into at the meeting was the same little urchin, and his mother was with him.”⁶⁴⁴ Although her choice of words in describing the child was not appropriate, this example does show the power of a child’s influence, considering the little boy and his mother attended her meeting together. In other areas

⁶⁴¹ Report of the 19th Convention of the Ontario WCTU, 1896; Report of the 20th Convention of the Ontario WCTU, 1897; Report of the 21st Convention of the Ontario WCTU, 1898.

⁶⁴² Report of the 22nd Convention of the Ontario WCTU, 1899.

⁶⁴³ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁴ Report of the 23rd Convention of the Ontario WCTU, 1900.

like Toronto, it was reported that fifteen children in the Sunday School signed the pledge during 1901, while three Sunday Schools in Essex were supplied with quarterly lesson leaflets. Leaflets were given to each minister of the Baptist Association.⁶⁴⁵ These examples do not imply a total success for the WCTU, but they seem to have had more success among young supporters. This may have been because the WCTU often introduced temperance into Sabbath Schools that children already attended, rather than having them come to separate meetings. Children were already comfortable in this environment and may not have felt pressured to participate like adults in their community.

Passing the Torch

Many children found guidance in these youth organizations, at times joining multiple groups simultaneously. A clear example comes from Miss Bertha Wesley, the daughter of an Amherstburg labourer. She started participating at age 14, and from 1892 to 1897 the *Amherstburg Echo* recorded her activities in numerous, often short-lived, organizations. Among her many endeavours, she was the treasurer of the Young People's Social Club (1892-1893) in 1892, a presenter for the Buisy Gleaners in 1895, the treasurer for the Social-Literary Society in 1895, chorister in April 1895 and a member of the AME Sabbath School: 1895 was a particularly busy year for Miss Wesley. She also provided musical entertainment at AME church functions in 1893 and 1894, and in 1897 became the musical director for the Oxford Club (1892-1897). Miss Wesley participated in these activities while between the ages of 14 and 19, in addition to receiving an education. Wesley attended the King Street School in Amherstburg, under the instruction of J.H. Alexander, until at least 1893, possibly acquiring a job afterward.⁶⁴⁶ Miss

⁶⁴⁵ Report of the 24th Convention of the Ontario WCTU, 1901, Canadian WCTU Fond, AO.

⁶⁴⁶ *Amherstburg Echo*, 29 January 1892; *Amherstburg Echo*, 11 January 1895; *Amherstburg Echo*, 4 January 1895; *Amherstburg Echo*, 12 April 1895; *Amherstburg Echo*, 12 February 1897;

Wesley invested a lot of time and energy into these groups while attending school and possibly working, which was generally the case for a lot of activists. She, like many others, had additional priorities, but helped to train future activists, despite being young herself.

Young people absorbed the lessons and behaviour of their parents and group members welcomed them with open arms. Fraternal orders were determined to incorporate their family into the lodge because they wanted them to learn the same values they did, so that they could also become good citizens. They provided a safe environment, void of White criticism, where members and their sons could teach, learn, and perfect the values and skills required for achieving proper manhood and respect.⁶⁴⁷ Skocpol et al., agree and state that “[d]uring a time when gender roles were rigidly enforced, fraternal orders incorporated young men symbolically, morally, and socially into the company of fathers and family men.”⁶⁴⁸ They taught boys to be men, a lesson that fathers wanted to pass on to their sons. Men such as William Brantford, Sr., a labourer, and his son, William Brantford, Jr., were both members of Lincoln Lodge #8, while others like Delos R. Davis, who is also listed as a member of the Lincoln Lodge #8 in 1889,

Canada Census 1881, Amherstburg, Essex, pg. 42, file number C-13280, LAC; Public School Daily Register for Recording the Attendance of Pupils, King Street School (Amherstburg), 1893, Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO.

⁶⁴⁷ White Masons, just like African Canadians were expected to behave as good citizens, while teaching their sons to be masculine and to respect and adhere to rules of conduct. What distinguished these two groups was that White Masons did not have the same worries as African Canadians. Whites may have used the lodge as an environment to discuss their own issues and concerns, but African Canadians needed a place to instill their own distinct values without any worry of racist retaliations from White members. In fact, White Masons made it clear that members must be “free-born, and his own master,” which made a union of (Black and White) lodges impossible. Not only did men teach their children to be masculine and good citizens, they also taught their children the skills to cope with racism; Harris, *The Book of Constitution of the Grand Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons*, 12-16, 56; Phillip Gordon Mackintosh and Clyde R. Forsberg, “Performing the Lodge: Masonry, masculinity, and nineteenth-century North American moral geography,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 35 (2009), 452, 458; Muraskin, “The Hidden Role of Fraternal Organizations in the Education of Black Adults,” 237.

⁶⁴⁸ Skocpol et al., *What a Mighty Power We Can Be*, 98.

passed on Masonic lessons to his son, Delos Rogest Davis, Jr., who became a member of the Star Lodge in New Canaan, and later Grand Secretary in 1904. A further example from the McCurdy family of Amherstburg revealed their long association of Masonry. Nasa McCurdy was the Grand Tyler, similar to a guard, for the Widow's Son Grand Lodge in 1871 and his son George Sr., grandson George Jr., and great grandson Alvin were all dedicated members. Mrs. George McCurdy also contributed to her family's Masonic history, considering she was a conductress for Amherstburg's chapter of the Order of the Eastern Star.⁶⁴⁹ She would have also valued these lessons, as members of the Eastern Star were instructed to "be as careful of the reputation of your Chapter as of that of your family; and as you would admit none to the society of the latter whose character is bad, so should you carefully exclude such from the former."⁶⁵⁰ Each of these men (and women) appreciated the Masonic tradition and wanted their children to enjoy it as well, but there were expectations. It was their hope that the values they supported and taught would not only help their own children, but also extend to the entire Black community.

Those outside of fraternal orders also tried to pass their values on to their children. For example, Mary Hammond, a Chatham delegate for the ARBA Sunday School Convention, took a stand against those not contributing in "Christian work," and was described by Alvin McCurdy as a "fine type of the power of Christian womanhood exerting its force behind the scenes to

⁶⁴⁹ 1891-1892 Minutes of the Lincoln Lodge #8, Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO; Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 99-100; Robbins, "Ontario Prince Hall Masons"; Correspondence from Grand Secretary Davis, Jr., 23 May 1912, Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO; Robbins, "Ontario Prince Hall"; 1881 Canada Census, Amherstburg, Essex, pg. 39, file number C-13280, LAC; 1903 & 1904 Proceedings of M.W. Grand Lodge, A.F. & A.M.; 1871 Minutes of the Fifteenth Annual Session of the Widow's Son Grand Lodge, of Canada F.A.A.Y.M.; Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO; "A Service of Memory for George D. McCurdy (1969)", Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO; "Eastern Star," Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO.

⁶⁵⁰ Macoy, *Ritual of the Degrees of the Eastern Star*, 26, 28, 156.

produce great off-spring and to influence mankind for good.”⁶⁵¹ Not only did Hammond guide young participants of the ARBA, she also influenced her daughters who followed suit.

Hammond went on to marry William Williams who faithfully served as a deacon of the First Baptist Church of Chatham. She was also a devoted member of the Women’s Missionary Circle, which was something her daughters were passionate about. Her daughter Clarabelle became a missionary under the Women’s Missionary Convention at Zion Baptist Church in St. Catharines until shortly before her death, while her other daughter, Annabelle Williams Price, acted as treasurer for Chatham’s First Baptist Church for over fifty years and from an early age was a worker for her church’s Sunday School and Mission Circle.⁶⁵² This family’s devotion to the church benefited their community for decades.

Other families such as the Abbotts showed their support through organizational work and rallying the community toward educational pursuits. Wilson Abbott, who adamantly claimed that he was freeborn, worked his way up from illiteracy to promote education in his family and community. Among his many educational endeavours, Abbott acted on the board of the Provincial Association for the Education and Elevation of the Coloured People of Canada with men such as Isaac Cary, and defended separate education for Black students. Abbott also founded the Provincial Union in Toronto and acted as vice president in 1854.⁶⁵³ Abbott’s love of education was something he shared with his wife Ellen who, according to Catherine Slaney, was quite unique for a Black woman in the early part of the nineteenth century because she could read and write. She is often credited with helping her husband become a proficient reader. This is in addition to participating in organizations such as the Home Mission Society of the BME

⁶⁵¹ Notes of Alvin McCurdy, Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO.

⁶⁵² Ibid; Shadd, *The AfriCanadian Church*, 120.

⁶⁵³ Constitution of the Provincial Union, 1854, LAC; Walker, “African Canadians,” *Encyclopedia of Canada’s People*; Slaney, *Family Secrets*, 14, 18-19, 28, 103.

Church which strongly promoted education as the best means for achieving social and economic elevation. This appreciation for reading and writing would have ensured that her children received a similarly high level of education.⁶⁵⁴

The Abbott children were keen students who appreciated and absorbed their parents' love of knowledge, and because they came from a prominent family they had many opportunities to further themselves. Amelia Etta, who later married John Watkins, a Toronto clerk, became a well-educated patron of the arts, while William Henson Abbott attended Victoria College, a Methodist Theological university, becoming an ordained BME minister in 1875.⁶⁵⁵ Of all the Abbott children, the accomplishments of Anderson Abbott are the most recognized. Anderson, who was educated at the Buxton School, and later Oberlin College in Ohio, not only graduated from the Toronto School of Medicine in 1857, he also became the first Canadian-born Black doctor to receive a licence to practise medicine in 1861. As well, he served as a member of the Ontario Dominion Medical Association and president of the High School Board of Trustees in connection with the Wilberforce Educational Institute, which provided secondary education and teacher training in Chatham, from 1873 to 1880. This was in addition to delivering lectures on racial issues to the Provincial Association for the Education and Elevation of the Colored People of Canada, on whose board his father served, and acting as president of the Chatham Literary and Debating Society, and the Chatham Medical Society in 1878.⁶⁵⁶ Even when he and his family moved to Chicago in 1891, he became the Treasurer and Secretary of the Sumner Club, which

⁶⁵⁴ Walker, "African Canadians," *Encyclopedia of Canada's People*; Slaney, *Family Secrets*, 13, 21, 216; Murray, *Come, bright Improvement!*, 65.

⁶⁵⁵ Only after four years in the ministry, he withdrew because of a wrongful attack on his character; Slaney, *Family Secrets*, 23-24.

⁶⁵⁶ Murray, *Come, bright Improvement!*, 65; Winks, "Wilson Ruffin Abbott," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*; "Dr. Anderson Ruffin Abbott," Daniel Hill Papers, LAC; "The First Black Doctor in Canada"; Owen Thomas, "Anderson Ruffin Abbott," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*; Slaney, *Family Secrets*, 53.

promoted professional networking and socializing among African-American professional businessmen, doctors, clergymen, etc. At meetings, members discussed literary topics, while enjoying a meal. His commitment to these groups was long lasting, but it is possible that among these many accomplishments the most important achievement was passing on his love of education to the next generation. His daughter, Helene, became one of the first Black kindergarten teachers for African-American children in the US. From 1892 to 1902, she helped introduce early childhood education for Black children of working mothers and was said to be “an interesting type of the young women who bring to the colored schools of the country everything that is best in modern pedagogy.”⁶⁵⁷ In addition to Helene, Anderson’s oldest son, Wilson, followed suit. He attended the University of Toronto, Cornell University, and the Medical College at the University of Illinois, receiving degrees in Pharmacy and Medicine, and later becoming a professor of biology and chemistry.⁶⁵⁸ Each of these accomplishments links back to education. It is apparent that the Abbott family learned the importance of education from previous generations and continued to pass it on. This was an important message impressed on the Black community. From an early stage, Henry Bibb wrote, “our people should strive to educate their children, it is certainly the most effectual way in which they can elevate them; it will not only enable them to repel successfully all the wicked encroachments which may be made upon their rights, but it is the meet valuable legacy that a father can bestow upon his son.”⁶⁵⁹ Wilson and Ellen Abbott created a legacy of education for their family. They, in turn, used these opportunities to help themselves, their children, and their community.

⁶⁵⁷ Fanny Barner, “The Colored Woman of Today” in *Godey’s Magazine, Lady’s Book, Anniversary Number*, Vol. 11897, The Godey Company of New York, July 1897, 29-30; Slaney, *Family Secrets*, 108, 123, 135.

⁶⁵⁸ Slaney, *Family Secrets*, 137.

⁶⁵⁹ “Schools in Canada,” *Voice of the Fugitive*, 17 June 1852.

This influence was not just a result of the efforts of parents directed toward their own children. Evidence linking the work of Black activists and the inspiration they found from their Sunday School teachers or organizational leaders is rare, but there are examples demonstrating this legacy. One example that occurred at the very beginning of the twentieth century comes from the Reverend Robert Lewis Bradby, who was born in 1877, at Middlemiss, Ontario. He briefly served at churches in Amherstburg and Chatham, eventually serving in Windsor, beginning in 1902. While there, he acted as the president of the Sunday School Convention and increased the church's attendance, particularly among young members. Among his admirers was the Reverend Lawrence McDowell, whom the Reverend Bradby baptized, licensed, and ordained in Windsor. Dorothy Shadd Shreve states that the Reverend McDowell was greatly influenced by the Reverend Bradby, and followed in his footsteps by being involved with youth work. The Reverend McDowell was credited with "being the instigator of various young people's auxiliaries."⁶⁶⁰ He also acted as the moderator for the ARBA in 1912 and 1913, and became the president of its Sunday School Convention. In addition to the Rev. Lawrence McDowell's work, his brother Arthur acted as deacon of the First Baptist Church in Windsor and held numerous offices in the church, while his sister, Eloise McDowell Taylor, continued this tradition of activism by becoming the president of the Mission Circle for twenty years and vice-president of the Women's Home and Foreign Missionary Convention, from 1946 to 1956. The Rev. Bradby's influence can also be seen with the Reverend Charles Levi Wells, who was born in Colchester South Township in 1883, and was also ordained under the Rev. Bradby. The Rev. Wells also acted as moderator of the Association for three years and became a member of the Children's Aid Society, in addition to establishing new goals for young members of the church

⁶⁶⁰ Shreve, *The AfriCanadian Church*, 105-106; Amherstburg Baptist Minutes, 1911.

and the ARBA.⁶⁶¹ Whether or not they were related to those they inspired, each participant played a role, and we must remember the countless unrecognized African Canadians who encouraged the organizational work of future generations.

Not only was there a history of activism among the emerging generations of African Canadians, there were also rare examples of organizations that re-imagined themselves in order to survive along with the next generation. For example, one Amherstburg organization, the Church Aid Society, was a mixed-gender society which was created in 1850, out of the First Baptist Church. From the Church Aid Society came the Amherstburg Guild in 1899, and then the Women's Guild in 1909 due to the efforts of Mrs. Saunders and Mrs. Nancy Jones. The latter organization was led by its president, Mrs. Holbert, and vice president, Mrs. E. Chapman, and was established for the social benefit of the church and congregation. The Women's Guild raised over four thousand dollars, which was spent on decorations for the church, two pianos, and an organ.⁶⁶² Interestingly, a majority of the original members of the Women's Guild were part of the Amherstburg Guild, established years earlier, meaning that either the Amherstburg Guild coincidentally had many of the same members, or the Women's Guild took over the Amherstburg Guild years later. This name change was possibly to keep up with the changing times. The roster for the Amherstburg Guild lists only women, meaning that the newly named Women's Guild suited the membership of this group more appropriately. Originally, this organization may have accepted men and women, but altered its membership to only include women in the years to come. At one point it was written that "the Women's Guild & missionary are the only ones now in existence ... the church has no Debts on it. The doors are still open."⁶⁶³

⁶⁶¹ Shreve, *The AfriCanadian Church*, 106-108, 121.

⁶⁶² "The Women [sic] Guild," Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO.

⁶⁶³ "History of Amherstburg Baptist Church," Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, AO.

The fundraising skills of the Women's Guild certainly assisted the Baptist Church in keeping its doors open and it seems that the essence of the Church Aid Society lived on in its offspring. To keep up with the changing times, other organizations like the Chatham Literary Society also changed. Out of this group came the Kent County Civil Rights League, which went on to desegregate public schools in Chatham. They may have learned valuable lessons while operating as the Chatham Literary Society, and transferred these teachings into a newer version of their organization, one that aided the community with its changing needs. These groups, local or widespread, reimagined or in tribute to those that came before, tried to reach the same goal of equality through the use of Black civil society organizations. Harsh treatment and unfair social laws made this difficult and their methods differed at times, but they came together for a common purpose, until the next goal was set in motion.⁶⁶⁴

As part of their strategy to achieve equality in free society, African Canadians were adamant that their children and other young people be involved. It was the role of leaders and members to equip them with the tools they needed to not only adjust to life in Canada, but deal with a society that did not accept them. It would then be their responsibility to pass these lessons on to the generation that followed. Training children to face these challenges was a tradition that emerged in slavery, when children were told folk tales that enforced the survival of the clever

⁶⁶⁴ This legacy of activism continued into the twentieth century, with groups such as the Eureka Club, formed by Toronto women in 1910, the Sunshine Club, established by the women of Buxton's BME Church in 1916, and in 1935, the Hour-A-Day Study Club, previously the Mother's Club (1934), where members set aside at least one hour each day for encouraging educational pursuits. Other more far-reaching organizations include the Canadian Negro Women's Club, which began in 1951 at Toronto and sponsored the Congress of Black Women, with chapters all over the country, and the Universal Negro Improvement Association, with chapters in Canada, the US, and Caribbean; Peggy Bristow, "The Hour-A-Day Study Club," in *And Still We Rise: Feminist Political Mobilizing in Contemporary Canada*, ed. Linda Carty (Toronto: Women's Press, 1993), 151-152, 155, 157.

and prepared. In the nineteenth century, this stood true, but their methods and goals changed. Rather than receiving survival lessons in the slave quarters, children were instructed within the walls of these organizations. They were taught that they deserved a place in free society and it was their duty to enforce and spread this message: by participating in these organizations, African-Canadian youth demonstrated their worth. Sunday schools, literary societies, etiquette groups, temperance societies, and fraternal orders each instilled their own lesson, often with a dual purpose. Literary societies provided education and confidence when they taught members to compose, debate, and recite their written work, while Sunday schools combined religion and education when asking their students to argue and think critically about religious issues, temperance, and community uplift. Other groups such as etiquette clubs made sure that members learned the importance of proper behaviour, while setting a good example for their community through charitable acts, in addition to ensuring that they were familiar with the work of influential writers and poets. Simultaneously fraternal orders instilled a sense of self-respect, charity, and tradition that their ancestors passed on to them.

This strategy was not always easy, as members, at times, had to apply pressure on children and their parents to attend. The discrimination they experienced was often enough motivation for members to join, but when residents needed that added push, these organizations tried to draw them in with other methods. The ARBA tried to overcome this issue with the inclusion of music into lessons and youth groups for teenagers. Temperance groups encouraged children to bring home pamphlets to their parents, while offering an alternative to bad behaviour. Some literary societies allowed children to participate alongside adults, while others even gave young people an opportunity for leadership. As a result of these efforts, the tradition of activism came in many forms. The continued existence of youth groups throughout the nineteenth

century and into the twentieth century is a clear example of this legacy, but the passing of traditions from parent to child, and leader to member, or member to member, kept the message alive. This is in addition to organizations such as the Church Aid Society and Chatham Literary Society altering itself to suit the time in which members lived and survived for decades. Each is an example of how the Black community adapted itself to gain equality in free society.

Although racism remained part of their experience, they used the tools available to them so that future generations were prepared for what came next. In each instance, intelligent parents raised up intelligent children.

Moving Forward: Conclusion

With the mass influx of Black refugees at mid-century, the lives of those already residing in the area, but also those entering Canada West, would forever be changed in significant and numerous ways. Upon arrival, Black refugees had not yet organized, but worked quickly and collectively to establish institutions and organizations that were vital to their survival and the advancement of the community. By 1901 African Canadians had created a new landscape, which was very different from when they entered the province in the 1840s and 1850s. But it was not just the landscape that changed. Through their organizational work, African Canadians were transformed into confident activists who created positive change along the way. This was especially true in terms of their political awareness and allegiances. Following the abolition of Canadian slavery, African Canadians strongly supported the political group that played a part in their emancipation, the Conservatives, but came to realize that they were no longer on their side. As a result, they went against the political choices of their ancestors who settled in Canada West decades before, realizing that if change was to occur they would need to make it happen themselves. They may have remained grateful to the Conservatives, but came to believe that progress would only occur with the Reform Party. In exchange for their vote, African Canadians expected Reformers to reciprocate this good will. This new confidence was the result of an increasing political awareness, which men like Samuel Ringgold Ward would have appreciated. For years, he used his autobiography and numerous addresses to continuously demonstrate that African Canadians could and should use the law in their favour. If they recognized this power, they could make a change for the better. This recognition gave them the confidence to not only use the polls to vote out racist politicians, but also to demand fair legislation from Reformers if they expected their continued endorsement.

This was a significant change from a time when African Canadians had to fight against racist resistors to even vote at the polls. They trained the community to achieve a platform to demand rights and once they were confident enough they made a significant move in their favour.

Also changing was the political tone of events such as Emancipation Day celebrations. Initially, the intention of these gatherings was to demonstrate loyalty and gratitude to the British government which passed emancipatory legislation, but they were later used as a tool to draw in potential members in their fight against slavery in the US. With time, African Canadians used Emancipation Day celebrations to make a political statement concerning their own lives in Canada West.⁶⁶⁵ Following the abolition of American slavery, there was no longer a need to recruit anti-slavery activists because their goal had become a reality. For years, African Canadians used their resources to assist enslaved African Americans, but with emancipation they could redirect their attention to helping those in their new homeland. Injecting a political component into these celebrations certainly sent a message. While hosting this gathering, they invited certain political figures to speak, which made it clear who they supported and where they stood politically. The Black community also used Emancipation Day celebrations to express their displeasure with the government, particularly when they boycotted this event. In its place, residents protested unfair laws and practices at political gatherings and demonstrations, where they explained their rights and goals. These public gatherings in place of Emancipation celebrations, in addition to their changing political allegiances, demonstrate that as the century progressed the Black community's support of the British was not as strong as it was before the 1850s. They were no longer willing to sacrifice their rights in favour of British loyalty, which proved to be of little use. With the passing of each decade, it became clear that British devotion

⁶⁶⁵ Kerr-Ritchie, *Rites of August First*; Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 77, 128-129.

would not help them in their fight for equality, but African Canadians also realized the political power they possessed.

African-Canadian civil society altered considerably not just in terms of allegiances, but African Canadians residing within it found themselves changing as well. How African Canadians used civil society organizations throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century is an indication of the changing needs and progress of the Black community. In the beginning stages of this civil society, following the mass influx of Black refugees to Canada West, there was a substantial need to assist this group in adjusting to their new life. This meant that groups such as True Band societies were necessary to deal with the overwhelming task of taking a group with no clothing, money, property or employment, and giving them a fresh start. With time, and with the assistance of charitable groups, African Canadians were able to acquire the resources they needed to help themselves and others. As a result, there was no longer a need for conventions that discussed “elevation” through rallying points such as financial responsibility and agriculture; it was now about applying the skills they learned in these organizations to demand equal rights. As well, charitable organizations such as True Bands were no longer needed either. African Canadians wanted to project an image of independence, rather than be seen as a group that relied on charity. Benevolent groups served their purpose in the early stages, but the spirit of these organizations lived on in other African-Canadian groups that continued to support one another in a new way: the need for support still existed, but it was handled in a different form. Rather than soliciting for clothing and shelter, church youth groups held festivals and functions to earn money for the cause, while women of the Eastern Star also

held teas, bazaars, and banquets to raise funds.⁶⁶⁶ Other organizations such as fraternal orders created and contributed to a fund for widows and orphans to ensure that their family would receive financial relief after they passed on. Similar groups such as Toronto's Queen Victoria Benevolent Society, created in 1840, also assisted sick and poor members, and lasted into the 1860s: their longevity demonstrates that African Canadians wanted self-supporting groups where they contributed to a fund. Members tried to earn these resources themselves, rather than relying on non-Black charitable organizations to do it for them. True Bands may have suited their needs when they first arrived, but once they caught up they could devote their time to groups that complemented the image they wanted to portray. The Black community adapted these organizations to their changing needs.

The needs of the community also changed in terms of literacy. The increasing rate of educated African Canadians toward the end of the century meant that literary societies no longer needed to place such an emphasis on literacy education (reading), but could now place more attention on literary education (debating and reciting). Groups emerging in the 1880s and 1890s, such as the Amherstburg Literary Society, the Buisy Gleaners, and the Frederic Douglass Self-Improvement Club were able to focus on creating confident and eloquent speakers, rather than teaching members to read, as occurred in earlier groups such as the Wilberforce Lyceum Educating Society in the 1850s. Public speaking and debates were important tools that gave members the confidence and poise they needed to demand equal laws. Literary education became more relevant to the task at hand. For these reasons, African Canadians can be held responsible for positive change within their community.

⁶⁶⁶ Robbins, *Prince Hall Masonry*, 131; Walker, "African Canadians," *Encyclopedia of Canada's People*.

In challenging the baseless ideals of racist Whites, African Canadians experienced many successes. Among the numerous advancements in civil society it was not just their ability to vote as citizens. The fact that they could effectively use the polls to prevent racist candidates from office and use their vote to sway the decisions of political figures was a significant step in the right direction. In the latter case, despite resistance from White workers, Prime Minister John A. Macdonald demanded that Albert Jackson begin his position as a mail carrier immediately, because he did not want to see Robert Hay, the Conservative representative, lose votes in the federal election in 1882. The power of the African-Canadian vote also resulted in organizations such as the WCTU, which previously rejected the Black community, to seek their participation, although it was in a limited capacity. Joining together as a collective also allowed African Canadians to significantly transform the education system, which was previously a segregated institution. The Kent County Civil Rights League, with the cooperation of many fraternal organizations, played a pivotal role in the desegregation of Chatham schools, which was one of the Black community's greatest successes at the end of the century. This was an outcome that Dennis Hill longed for in the 1850s, but it would take a few decades, and collective effort, before positive results would occur. Their actions set a precedent for other educational battles in future court cases. African Canadians also disproved the "positive good" theory, demonstrating that they were capable, self-sufficient men and women, going a step further by becoming successful doctors, lawyers, and politicians, even becoming respected school board trustees. This was in addition to preparing Black residents for the challenges they would experience in the US. It was because of their efforts that African Americans returning home could face their challengers directly. In their previous lives, the Black community could not have imagined a time when any of this would have been possible.

These successes did not make the challenges any less real. In their fight for equality, African Canadians consistently encountered resistance from racist Whites who were brainwashed from birth to think that African-descended people were subhuman. Despite considerable developments within the Black community, by the end of the century, certain organizations were still unwilling to accept them as members. As we learned, the Grand Lodge of Canada (White) refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of Black lodges, despite being a legally constituted lodge through the authority of the Grand Lodge of England. After drafting a resolution in 1900, requesting recognition, this Black fraternal order still had not received a response by 1902.⁶⁶⁷ Other organizations such as the WCTU technically accepted African-Canadian members, but only allowed for limited participation through the Department of Work Among “Coloured People,” later changed to Work Among Africans. By 1901, this department was still in existence, rather than fully incorporating African-Canadian activists into their organization as full members. This resistance prevented African Canadians from being fully integrated into society, considering African Canadians, out of necessity, were still operating other separate civil society organizations including literary societies and etiquette clubs.⁶⁶⁸ Examples expand beyond organizational work to include mainstream institutions, where racist Whites would never completely accept them no matter what African Canadians did to improve their image. Although the Kent County Civil Rights League desegregated schools in Chatham this was only the beginning: there were still many schools that needed to integrate, but they would continue to face racist school trustees and judges along the way. It would not be until 1964 that the Ontario legislature banned separate schools. The following year, the last segregated school, in

⁶⁶⁷ 1900 Annual Proceedings for the M.W. Grand Lodge, A.F. & A.M., for the Province of Ontario; 1902-1905 Annual Proceedings for the M.W. Grand Lodge, A.F. & A.M., for the Province of Ontario.

⁶⁶⁸ 1901 Report of the 24th Convention of the Ontario WCTU, Canadian WCTU Fond, AO

Colchester, closed for good.⁶⁶⁹ By the end of the nineteenth century, African Canadians encountered a significantly reduced population, which presented new challenges. They could no longer consider their numbers to be a source of strength, although decreased numbers at the end of the century did encourage heightened cooperation of those of different faiths. Toward the end of the century, organizations such as the ARBA found themselves welcoming delegates from the AME and BME church, while Methodists preached within the walls of Baptist churches: with reduced numbers, African Canadians came together even more. With fewer participants, members of these organizations had to rework their strategy and adjust to a new century. As they would learn, there was still work to do in the twentieth century.

Black activists made considerable progress toward equality during the nineteenth century, but there was still more to do. As part of their updated strategy for equality, members included full integration into free society as part of this equality. African Canadians certainly attained political, and some social, equality, but equal and integrated, although similar, are not the same. To win significant battles in terms of equality in the eyes of the law, within their own community or from a portion of transforming White residents is one thing, but complete acceptance into mainstream organizations and institutions was something to strive for in the twentieth century. According to Colin McFarquhar, by 1901 Black residents were becoming slightly more integrated into mainstream society in terms of where they lived, but that was not enough: further inclusion was what they wanted. They would also find themselves fighting for economic equality through more diversified occupations for African-Canadian workers, who by 1901 were still concentrated in low skilled jobs. African Canadians were no longer willing to accept that

⁶⁶⁹ Walker, "African Canadians," *Encyclopedia of Canada's Peoples*.

White collar jobs were off limits.⁶⁷⁰ With the new century their goals had expanded beyond equal rights.

“Lifting As We Climb” is a study that broadens the definition of civil society by applying this concept to nineteenth-century African Canadians in an unlikely way. Often scholarly interpretations apply the concept of civil society to White organizations, but this work highlights the Black community’s use of (mainly) cultural groups, including literary societies, fraternal orders, religious societies, and etiquette groups, to achieve their goal. Cultural groups did not have to take on more aggressive tactics, such as protests, in order to be political, or to contribute. Additionally, civil society organizations were not only meant to achieve the daunting task of the abolition of American slavery, they were also used to help the Black community adjust to their new lives as free citizens in their new home. This group built up their own community in Canada West.

Not only does this dissertation highlight the political nature of cultural groups, but also their tactics. Although an effective method, protest was not the only significant way to alter unjust laws. Less visible forms of collective action such as education and etiquette may not appear to have caused change in the same way as more aggressive methods, but it prepared members for the outside world. Due to an initial high level of illiteracy, many participants had to start from scratch. As a result, these groups began their training of future activists, with the basics such as reading, debating, public speaking, and respectable manners, but the true purpose of these exercises were not always on the surface: they instructed members on how to be leaders and participants worthy of their goal. Debating proposed topics within the walls of their organization, for example, made members ready for larger debates against White resistors, while

⁶⁷⁰ McFarquhar, “A Difference of Perspective, 66, 76, 78.

public speaking and etiquette gave them the poise needed to make their case. These organizations helped them to create a platform to demand equal rights, but also allowed them to project an image of respect, industriousness, and worth. They proved themselves to be joiners, not a drain on society. From these groups, participants gained self-respect and opportunities for self-government, but also gained a sense of camaraderie that was necessary to cooperate with those inside and outside of their group. Fraternal orders did something similar by providing members with brotherhood and guidelines to be proper gentlemen, but also a respectable medium to help those in need. These subtle acts served more than one purpose and once these skills were learned, the process would gain momentum.

African Canadians' efforts to challenge a countermovement generated by racist White residents illustrate their multifaceted approach to this cause. In the second phase, beginning in roughly the 1880s, African Canadians applied what they learned in these organizations, to the outside world. They used petitions, boycotts, lawsuits, political involvement, and written material such as newspapers and autobiographies to take a stand. Generally the focus has been racism from White residents, but it is also important to remember that African Canadians had differing ideas and methods for achieving the community's objective.

Through a discussion of "race," "class," "gender," and religion, chapter three illustrates the vision African Canadians had for civil society organizations, while tackling key concepts that are often not combined or are understudied in the context of nineteenth-century African-Canadian associational life. Arguing that, within Black civil society, participants of any "class," "gender," or religion cooperated in support of the overall cause provides an updated description on this group's strategy for change during the nineteenth century. Also updated is the concept of "class" among African Canadians which was not only determined by a person's occupation, but

also character or “race,” which is an added layer to the description of “class.” This untraditional definition of “class” is a significant departure from discussions of this topic. Generally, the standard approach has been that “class” equals status or occupation, but there were so many more factors that did and did not encapsulate a person’s social standing.⁶⁷¹ Additionally, highlighting the participation of women in groups that acted like an insurance policy draws attention to their financial contributions, which are generally overlooked because census records ignore or improperly classify them, relying more on their husband’s occupation. Black women’s support for their families, along with their organizational work, is a significant example of Black women stepping outside of their established roles. In groups such as the Victoria Reform Benevolent Society for Social Relief, for example, it was mandatory that members work, otherwise they did not qualify. The financial contributions and extensive efforts of female members and leaders act as an extension of Shirley Yee’s argument concerning the fluidity of gender roles in the nineteenth century. Patriarchy existed, but Black women were able to use organizational work to alter unrealistic gender ideals, even gaining experience through their work in the church, which in other contexts was generally more conservative than other institutions, and viewed as restrictive for White women.⁶⁷²

Out of their efforts to achieve equality African Canadians created an identity that was specific to their own community and their needs, the focus of chapter four. Consisting of (British) gentility and loyalty, traditions from their American homeland, and also a political component, this combination formed into a distinct African-Anglo identity. Practising British habits in order to gain a respectable image is particularly significant because it further demonstrates that the Black community was not trying to mimic Whites, but adopted an

⁶⁷¹ Adams, “Making a Living,” 21.

⁶⁷² Yee, “Gender Ideology and Black Women as Community-Builders,” 437.

approach that made them appear respectable through British behaviour. African Canadians were aware that they were “on trial” and if a connection to British respectability improved their image, they were willing to adopt specific measures. Although they shared some cultural norms with Whites, they had their own reasons and practices for promoting a respectable image. It was not about personal ambition; Black activists wanted to uplift the entire community. If this meant abandoning their traditional political allegiances, it was a move they were willing to make. By instilling a sense of community, resistance, and tradition, African Canadians maintained a connection to their ancestors, but their political actions made it clear that they were willing to separate themselves from the choices of those who came before them. They learned from their (African-) American ancestors and the first African-Canadian settlers who arrived before the 1840s, but they were not willing to set aside their rights for previously established loyalties to the British government that protected them, or the country of their birth. This is what makes Black activists who fought for their rights between 1840 and 1901 so unique. While remaining cognizant of their allegiances, they created their own path, particularly if it conflicted with their strategy for equality.

The final goal of this work, found in chapter five, is to draw attention to unlikely participants: children. Jeffrey McNairn states that family was autonomous from civil society, but “Lifting As We Climb” argues that family was crucial in this movement. Their success and the survival of their message were dependent on the young participants who were expected to pass the torch to those who followed them. Often adults are the focus, but children held significant influence over their parents and even adult members in the organizations they joined. Rare examples, such as Little Winnie Francis and Little Willie Grayson, who wrote and delivered speeches before members of the ARBA Sunday School Convention, give us a glimpse into the

minds of these young, but “exemplary,” as the ARBA described them, participants. They were not just present; they had their own opinions on how to proceed. Specific examples of the children who succeeded their parents and leaders also demonstrate the continuity of this legacy.

Although equality in the fullest sense of the word is something that African Canadians and other minority groups still struggle to achieve, the Black community made significant strides in their fight for social justice in these years. As a result of the efforts of free Blacks who were rejected by their homeland, the formerly enslaved, and African Canadians already residing in the province, incoming refugees were able to make new lives for themselves. Black activists took a group of previously enslaved (and free Black) citizens, who were generally illiterate, unemployed and economically underprivileged when they set foot on Canadian soil, and transformed them into the people they really were: respectable, industrious, and worthy contributors to free society. These organizations and their members provided African Canadians with an opportunity to live as free citizens in free society, which was something completely different from what many were used to. While living as free citizens, they nurtured those who joined these groups, giving their children and themselves the self-respect they needed to create change. For those who chose to return to the US, their experience in Canada West helped them navigate the challenges they would face following the Civil War. In the case of those who remained on Canadian soil, they continued a tradition that their ancestors put into motion, but made adjustments where necessary. Beginning with their relatives in Africa, who were inhumanely forced into enslavement, African Canadians continued the legacy of resistance and action that exists to this day. In moving forward, this group progressed beyond their original selves, becoming confident and politically aware participants in free society. Along the way, members of this movement could count on others to lift them as they climbed.

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