

## **Black History in Peel: Introduction**

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Mississauga (formerly Toronto Township in the Region of Peel) was not one of those places where black people congregated in the early to mid-nineteenth century. In the Peel region, (what now comprises Mississauga, Brampton and Caledon) there was no African Methodist Church (a sure sign of a black community), no predominantly black schools or established neighbourhoods. One can imagine the difficult decision this must have been to not only leave familiar people and surroundings in the United States, but also chose to resettle in a predominantly white and British settled area such as the Peel Region. Why individuals chose to come to this region is mostly lost to time. Likely for some the distance from the American border was an incentive. Slave catchers would be less likely to search such an unlikely place. For others it was probably a stopover on the way to a better life. Indeed our research shows that most black settlers left this area by the end of the nineteenth Century. With both Oakville and Toronto on either sides (both with more established black populations) the Peel Region would not seem to be the most desirable end point.

But who did come here? Who were some of the early black settlers who chose to make this area their home, even if for a short time? Those that were here left very little proof of their existence in the way of tangible records or documents. Through census records, town council records, birth, death and marriage certificates we have tried to piece together a fascinating depiction of the lives of individual people. There were approximately sixty to seventy recorded black settlers who are known to have lived in the Peel Region in the nineteenth century. They lived from the tip of Port Credit, through to Northern Caledon. Alexander Hunter in Port Credit, the Jackson family, who owned a barber shop in Brampton and the Spenser family in the Toronto Townships are just a few examples of people who made their home here for many years. As previously mentioned, most families only stayed here a short time.