the Grange
VOLUME EIGHT
LEGEND OF CEDAR PARK
Legend of Cedar Park

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How did you talk me into this summer school course? It's so hard to find local information on this project!

Yeah well... I thought that with my knowledge of Black History, this would be a breeze. I didn't know it would be this tricky to find Mississauga connections.

*Sigh* All I've found is this historical atlas.

Hey wait! I think I found something!

“A Fugitive Past: Black History in Mississauga” by Erin Brubacher!

...Our last stop is Cedar Park Farm, formerly at the intersection of Cawthra and Burnhamthorpe.

This is it! Keep reading.

...Perhaps one of the most economically successful farms in the area, Cedar Park Farm was home to George Woodford Ross and his wife Didamia.

It says here that the origins of George W. Ross are unclear but that he came from Virginia.

Hold up. Did you say “George W. Ross”? His name is right here on this atlas!

I wonder what life was like for them.

Is there even enough here for our project?
According to this atlas, the Ross’ farm was right down the street, at Rayfield Park.

That’s in my backyard! If only we had a way to find more info on Cedar Park Farm!

Cedar Park, eh? I can take you somewhere to learn about it.

A short drive later...

Wait, this is Streetsville. Why did you bring us here?

I promise there is more here than meets the eye.

Go on down Water Street to the old town hall. George can help you there.

Whoa! What’s going on? Why is Streetsville so muddy?

Hurry, this way, out of the mud!
Streetsville, August 1857.

My name is George and I’ve been expecting you.

Hi, I am Nala and I’m Liam.

Sounds like the lecture is about to start.

OMG... Look at the date on this sign!

Welcome friends and neighbours! I am Robert Stephens.

I’m pleased to introduce our guest this afternoon.

He was a free man, a musician, lured away with the promise of work, leaving behind a wife and children, and sold into slavery.

He endured that diabolic institution for 12 years, before making his escape back to freedom.

Please welcome Solomon Northup.

That’s him! From the movie 12 Years a Slave.

Right! That movie we went to. It was awesome!

I’m here to speak on behalf of the abolitionist movement.

And on the evils of slavery south of the border...
Send him to the gallows! Down with bloody Northup! We will chase you down!

This is not a safe situation for us.

Hurry, out the back and toward my hotel.

What was that about?!

Intolerance and a hatred of change.

This is not what we hope to build here, but the old ways are not far behind.

I must arrange safe passage for Mister Northup.

Perhaps your guests will be safer elsewhere.

Agreed.

Come this way. I have a wagon at the stables.

Benjamin, we must get along, quickly! An angry mob is not far behind.
My apologies, I didn’t introduce myself properly. I am George Woodford Ross, and this is my son Benjamin.

We are headed to our home, where we can speak in safety.

Are you alright? Yes, but that was scary. Those men were so angry.

Benjamin Paul, age 21

Not everyone shares in their sentiment, though. Our friends who support abolition are gathering at our home this evening to discuss an emancipation day gathering. I want you to meet and hear what they have to say.

We are here. Welcome to Cedar Park Farm.

It’s not like how I imagined it.

I know about the Black Settlement of Wilberforce near Lucan, Ontario, but how did you come to be here?

I was born enslaved in Virginia in 1796. My Scottish father, James Ross, was also our master.

I was born enslaved in Virginia in 1796. My Scottish father, James Ross, was also our master. Unlike other stories of slavery, I was emancipated by my father in 1802.

Together with my brothers, William and Corbin, we came to Canada in 1834. I bought this land shortly after.

I named it Cedar Park Farm after my father’s plantation.

But why name it after a place of slavery?

From then on, I trained to be a carpenter.

But why name it after a place of slavery?

There are many reasons for remembering... and reasons not to forget.
Who is that singing over there?

He is John Sheppard. He escaped slavery and made his way here by boat, through Ohio.

We shelter him here where he is safe from fugitive slave catchers.

He is safe from fugitive slave catchers.

Wow, I didn’t realize slave catchers came all the way to Canada.

Farewell, old master, don’t come after me. I’m on my way to Canada, where coloured men are free.

Welcome to my home, one that I proudly built with my own hands.

Charles Warburton, age 14

James Woodford, age 5

Corbin Levi, age 10

Welcome.

Eliza, age 17

Alexander Campbell, age 2

Celestine Sarah “Cessa”, age 7

Georgina, age 6 months

Kate “Mitylulu”, age 12

Rebecca, age 3

Didemia Anne, age 9

The dire effects of slavery

Farewell, old master, don’t come after me.

I’m on my way to Canada, that cold and dreary land.

I can no longer stand.

Where colored men are free.
Didamia’s father, Benjamin Paul, was reverend of the Wilberforce settlement you spoke of earlier.

If you don’t mind, I would like to hear more about Wilberforce.

Wilberforce was founded as a refuge in Canada for fugitive slaves in 1829, but it was more than that. It was one of the first Black colonies in Canada.

It grew to include schools, churches, a sawmill, and other industries.

We believed in education, and were taught to be strong and stand up for our rights.

I became a school teacher, and later, even taught my husband to read and write. I make certain that our children attend school.

But doesn’t the hatred and discrimination that still exist scare you?

I certainly worry for the world that our children will inherit, but the evils of prejudice will be washed away in time.

Everyone can learn a lesson amidst times of darkness, and understand that the value of people is not based on their colour.

Even as Wilberforce has faded, others have grown, including the Dawn and Buxton settlements.

It seems our other guests have arrived. Let us convene in the sitting room.
These youngsters, Nala and Liam, are my special guests.

At Solomon Northup's lecture today, they witnessed the intolerance we face.

And what of Mr. Northup? Will he be attending?

After today's events, that is not likely.

There is worry they may come after him.

There are stories of fugitive slaves being taken from the streets of Toronto...

Which is dangerously close to home.

Charles Willcox

With the "Fugitive Slave Act of 1850" passed in the United States, slave catchers are bolder than ever before.

And it poses a danger to all of our rights and freedoms.

Regardless of the risk, I would rather have a day free, than a week of life in slavery. Slavery is the worst evil that ever was.

Benedict Duncan

I was a slave in Maryland for twenty-eight years.

I feared of being sold, as my master's business was going downhill.

I left and walked one hundred and fifty miles of the way to escape.

Then, thankfully, I made my way into Canada with the Underground Railroad.

Without the bravery of "conductors" like "Canada Jim" and "Moses", that would not be possible for many of us.

Charles Willcox

All the more reason to provide what shelter we can.

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As your elected representative, I believe the black man should have the same civil rights and freedoms as the white man.

It is a constrained freedom though. Blacks may be free, but we have unequal access to land and to representation. There are still segregated schools, churches and associations. That cannot be ignored or misrepresented.

James Cox Aikins
Elected Representative of Peel County

Thomas Paul
Law student
Ross' brother-in-law

That is true, brother, but we are making steps. You and I own property and have a measure of prosperity, while many others are shoemakers, carpenters, blacksmiths and more.

Like us, some have been here for 30 years, laying the foundations. But this is only the beginning of a long journey.

I am encouraged that there are now benevolent literary and social societies among us, present company included, who support our cause.

Oh wow, sounds similar to organizations like the Congress of Black Women and the Black Community Action Network.

It helps greatly that we have a newspaper like The Provincial Freeman giving us black settlers a voice.

Oh an emancipation day gathering feels like it shares the spirit of Caribana.

An emancipation day gathering would give us a chance to take to the podium and speak on the abolitionist movement to a wider audience.

On behalf of the Reform Party and the Anti-Slavery Society of Canada, it is a voice we hope to spread and celebrate with an emancipation day gathering.
Come, let us walk. I find it clears minds and hearts.

Later that evening.

This book has been a constant reminder for me.

It's titled "Uncle Tom’s Cabin". Do you know it?

I do. It is by abolitionist Harriet Beecher Stowe. It was inspired by the story of Josiah Henson of the Dawn Settlement.

I find the words within to be helpful when my thoughts turn dark.

To have a reminder of the world we left behind, the importance of abolishing slavery, and to have those stories written down, it empowers my spirit.

And it shows, in your family, friends, and this farm, it is amazing.
For my children, it is a place of beginning and firm foundation.

But it is also a bridge to our past, roots that I do not want my children to forget.

For men like John Sheppard, it is a safe haven along the road to freedom. It is a place of healing and restoration.

Yet for others, unfortunately, it is a pockmark on the land, a place they feel we should not be.

For me, this is my home. Yet, I will not forget my first home either.

But we endure and thrive, encouraged by people like Charles Willcox and Robert Stephens, who welcome us and what this place stands for.

We have to remember the stories, challenges, and struggles, even as the land changes around us. We need to remember where we came from.

For me, this is my home. Yet, I will not forget my first home either.

We have to remember the stories, challenges, and struggles, even as the land changes around us. We need to remember where we came from.

Please take this book, as my gift to you. Take it and be inspired to share our history.
Oh wow... we are back, and in Rayfield Park.

We used to play in that playground all the time, but had no idea where we really stood.

So, was I right? Was there more here than meets the eye?

Yes! there were Black Settlers and abolitionists who lived and worked, right here, on this land.

And Mississauga has its own stories to tell.

And as Didamia said, we can all learn a lesson amidst times of darkness.

Liam, you take this. I have it already and it is a good book to read. It might not be a Mississauga story, but as George said, it inspired many who came here.
A few early Black families settled in Historic Mississauga (formerly Toronto Township). Distance from the American border and relative geographic obscurity were incentives. Those that came included Black Loyalists, emancipated former slaves, fugitive slaves and free Blacks looking for a new home and protection under British rule. Early census records, council records, birth, marriage and death certificates provide a glimpse into this part of our City’s past. Much of this story is sparsely documented, and photographs are few. Some fugitive slaves, like Benedict Duncan, found their way to Canada via the Underground Railroad.

One of the best-documented early Black families in historic Mississauga was the Ross family of Cedar Park Farm located today near Rayfield Park just off the intersection of Cawthra and Burnhamthorpe roads. George Woodford Ross (c1796-1878) was an emancipated former slave from Urbanna, Virginia. His father and slave-owner was James Ross, a Scottish-born land-owner. As the narrative goes, James emancipated his children, and three half-brothers (George Woodford, William Woodford and Corbin Lane), all came to Canada in the 1830s, adopting the Ross name: “I, James Ross of Town of Urbanna in the County of Middlesex, considering that my mulatto slave, Mary Woodford (now deceased) and her daughter, Nancy Woodford, were the gifts of my two good friends, the late Clement Nicholson and Annie his wife as by their Deed recorded … DO EMANCIPATE and SET FREE all the children of the said Mary, to wit, Nancy Woodford, Frances Woodford, William Woodford, David Woodford, and George Woodford …”

In James Ross’ 1825 will, the Cedar Park Farm plantation in Virginia was to be divided among the Woodford children. It is likely that this allowed George Woodford Ross to come to Canada and eventually purchase his own farm here in historic Mississauga. George’s wife was Didamia Paul - a school teacher from the historic Wilberforce Settlement near what is now London, Ontario. Didamia’s father, Benjamin Paul, had helped to establish Wilberforce. George and Didamia were married in 1834, and in 1836 purchased a 200-acre farm in historic Mississauga. They had 11 children, one of which (Rebecca) had a son (Private Wilfred Arthur Winstanley Cook of Cooksville) who served, fought and fell during the First World War.

During the time that Cedar Park Farm existed, Solomon Northup (Twelve Years a Slave) visited Streetsville in August of 1857. The Globe newspaper recounted the harsh welcome he received. On the other side advocates of the Anti-Slavery Society of Canada were championed by Reform politicians George Brown of The Globe, and local elected Reformer James Cox Aikins. Another likely supporter was Charles Willcox, a wealthy local farmer and family friend of the Ross family. With the growth of the abolitionist movement, interest developed in many communities to hold Emancipation Day gatherings to recognize the freedoms of Black people in the British Empire. The legacy of Emancipation day continues with the annual Toronto Caribbean Festival (Caribana) in celebration of a wider African and Caribbean diaspora.

Like the historic Anti-Slavery societies, the formation of anti-racist movements like Black Lives Matters and the creation of the Anti-Racism Directorate in Toronto serve to uphold civil rights and freedoms. Others like the Black Community Action Network (BCAN) in Peel and the Congress of Black Women (Mississauga Chapter) amongst many others seek the betterment and social well-being of Blacks in Mississauga by working to address racial inequalities, injustices and misrepresentations.
Founded in 1960, Heritage Mississauga is a not-for-profit charity whose focus is researching, recording and celebrating Mississauga’s vibrant and diverse heritage. Heritage Mississauga is known for its research programs, publications, outreach presentations, community partnerships and unique events.

Located in the historic Robinson-Adamson House, known as “The Grange” (built circa 1828), Heritage Mississauga is a passionate advocate for history and heritage in the City of Mississauga.

With the support of the City of Mississauga, our partners, members, donors, corporate sponsors and volunteers, Heritage Mississauga continues to accept the challenge of promoting awareness of our heritage, and a sense of place and time in our city.