

4

SLAVE DAYS IN CANADA

BY
MRS. W. T. HALLAM, B.A.,
TORONTO

Reprinted from The Canadian Churchman.

READ BEFORE THE
WOMEN'S CANADIAN
HISTORICAL SOCIETY
TORONTO, APRIL, 1919

Slave Days in Canada

THERE was no Harriet Beecher Stowe to tell the story of slavery in Canada, and few Canadian histories make any reference to the subject, so that many of our people have never heard of this by-gone institution. But we find both from family traditions and local records that from 1749 to 1834, Uncle Toms, Topsies and old Mammies lived in almost every part of the present Canada which was settled at that time.

When the country was new the conditions of living were much harder than at present, and it was very difficult to get dependable "hired help," as we see by reading Mrs. Susannah Moodie's, "Roughing it in the Bush." We can imagine what a comfort these 'servants for life' might be to their masters and mistresses, many of whom had been unused to any manual labour.

What would the Loyalists have done, if, when driven from their homes, they had not had these faithful servants to drive the cows, or to row and sail the boats, and in many ways to relieve them on the long hard journey into the unknown land of Canada? The kindness was not all on the side of the servitors, for we read how the slaves, when given their freedom, begged to be allowed to stay in the household of those whom they loved to serve. For many, perhaps most of them, this was the halcyon period of their lives. Existence apart from their masters spelled poverty and wretchedness, for they had not much idea of making a living for themselves.

There is an old orchard between Collins Bay and Bath, Ontario, now used as a garden, which belongs to the Fairfield family. The children

of this Loyalist family brought the seeds in their pockets from the old home in Vermont, and here lie buried the slaves belonging to the Fairfield and Pruyn families. On the way over they milked the cows, which were brought with them, and sometimes the milk was the only food which they had. The old Fairfield Homestead, built in 1793, is still standing, but the negro quarters are unused, for as those who live there say, "On a hot day you would declare the slaves were still there."

In the district around the BAY OF QUINTE there were many Loyalist slave owners. More records are given of those belonging to the Church of England, because many slaves received baptism in the parish churches, but Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and even Quakers did not deem it inconsistent with their strict religious principles to hold one or more slaves as personal property. Thomas Dorland, M.P.P., of the Society of Friends, had slaves in his household as late as 1820.

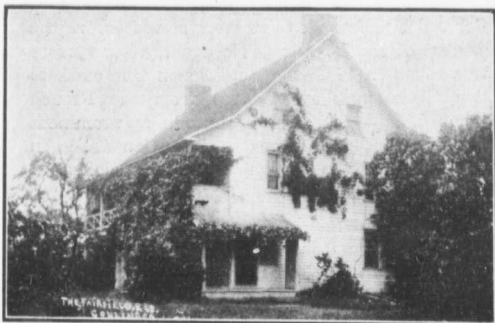
Other Loyalist slave-owners in this district were the Ruttans, Bogarts, Van Alstynes, Petersons, Allens, Clarks, Bowers, Thompsons, the Meyers, Sherwoods, Spencers, and Perrys; and it is said that the Pruyn family of Fredericksburg owned a larger number of slaves than almost any other residents in the county.

Around KINGSTON, such families as the Cartwrights, Herkimers, and Everetts held slaves.

In the NIAGARA district there were estimated to be over three hundred slaves in 1791. In the Gazette of October 11th, 1797, was printed: "wanted, to purchase a negro girl, from seven to twelve years of age, of good disposition. For fuller particulars apply to the subscribers, W and J. Crooks, West Niagara."

Another advertisement in the Niagara Herald, reads thus; "January 18th, for sale, a negro man and woman, the property of Mrs, Widow Clement. They have been bred to the business of the farm. Apply to Mrs. Clement."

Residents of YORK, from the highest officials, to private individuals, who could afford to purchase them, held slaves. We mention the Hon. Peter Russell, Receiver-General of the province, after whom Peter Street and Russell Hill were named, "whose farm called 'Petersfield' yielded under Mr. John Denison's care such quantities



FAIRFIELD HOMESTEAD, COLLINS BAY, ONT.

(Built in 1793 with slave quarters.)

of excellent potatoes and other vegetables" He advertised in the Gazette and Oracle of February 19th, 1806:—

For sale: "Peggy, age forty, 150 dollars, who, two years before had absented herself without leave; Jupiter, age fifteen, 200 dollars, payable in three years, secured by bond, but one-fourth less would be taken for ready money. The woman is a tolerable washer-

woman, and perfectly understands making soap and candles."

Mr. Russell's sister, Miss Elizabeth Russell, had a pure negress, Amy Pompadour, and she gave her to Mrs. "Captain" Denison of York. In his "Toronto of Old," Dr. Scadding tells how he used to gaze in curiosity at Amy Pompadour, knowing that she had been made a present of to Mrs. Denison.

As far as is known, there was *no auction trade* in slaves in Ontario. They had come with their Loyalist masters, and were private property.

In LOWER CANADA, according to the diary of General Haldimand, there were slaves *before* the arrival of the Loyalists. No doubt, after Quebec was taken in 1759, the Englishmen who came to live there, purchased slaves from the French inhabitants. Sir John Johnson, a prominent Loyalist, brought 14 slaves into Canada. In 1784 there were known to be 304 slaves in Quebec.

NEW BRUNSWICK had a few settlers along the St. John river soon after Halifax was founded, who came from New England, and an extract from an old letter furnished by Archdeacon Raymond, and printed in a transaction of the Nova Scotia Historical Society, indicates the presence of slaves as early as 1767. In June 1767, James Simonds wrote to Messrs, Hazen and Jarvis, partners at Newburyport, Mass: "We have promised thirty to forty hogsheads of lime to Mr. Best of Halifax, and hourly expect a vessel for it, and have encouragement of a contract for the King's works; expect nothing but to disappoint him, as that rascal negro, West, cannot be flattered or drove to do one-fourth of a man's work; shall give him a strong dose on Monday morning which will make him better or worse; no dependence can be put on him."

After the Loyalists came to New Brunswick, there were many records of slave sales.

In 1797, Munson Jarvis of St. John, sold and delivered to Abraham DePeyster, one negro man Abraham, and one negro woman, Lucy, for £60. As late as 1799, in the St. John Gazette, a negro woman and child were offered to purchasers.

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND also received a number of slaves with the Loyalist settlers. The slaves of Col. Joseph Robinson lived in little cabins on the corner of his farm, at Little York. One, named Sancho, had saved his mistress from the sharks, when their boat had been upset at their first place of landing. Sancho lived to be one hundred and five years old.

CAPE BRETON too, which was largely settled by Loyalists, claims a number of slaves. Entries of burials, baptisms, and marriages in St. George's register, Sydney, testify to their presence on the island.

Let us go back still further, and we shall find that there were slaves in HALIFAX from the time of its settlement in 1749. Many of the upper classes were served by them. Some came from New England with their masters who were on the spot as soon as Governor Cornwallis and his retinue arrived. In the will of Thomas Thomas, late of New York, dated February 28th, 1752, we read: "All my plate and my negro servant, Orange, that now lives with me at Halifax, I leave and bequeath to my son."

In a Boston paper of 1751, there appears the following: "Just arrived from Halifax and to be sold, ten hearty, strong negro men."

SLAVES FROM ENGLAND.

Many of the English settlers who came over with Governor Cornwallis in 1749, had large numbers of "servants" on their household lists.

Where did they come from? Family traditions say that they were slaves brought from England, and what more likely than this explanation, for they would be needed for both domestic and outdoor work. But many assert that slaves *never lived* in England. Records again speak for themselves, and disprove this statement.

In the year 1709, in one of the London papers there is advertised for sale, "a black boy about twelve years of age, fit to wait on a gentleman, for sale, at Dennis' Coffee House, near the Royal Exchange."

In the year 1728, in a London daily journal, there is an advertisement for a runaway black boy, "My Lady Bromfield's black, in Lincoln's Inn Field," engraved on a collar around his neck.

In the Public Ledger of December 31st, 1761, there is advertised: "For sale, a negro girl about fifteen years of age, speaks good English, works at her needle, does household work and *has had the small-pox.*"

The Gentleman's Magazine for 1764, estimated that there were upwards of 20,000 black slaves domiciled in London alone, and these were openly bought and sold on 'Change. The mark on these slaves was a collar and padlock. Liverpool, Bristol, and other seaport towns were the homes of slaves.

These few examples serve to prove that slaves *did live* on English soil, and it would be not at all difficult to secure them for the new settlement to be formed across the Atlantic.

The slaves were not always an unmixed blessing. In a letter to his wife who was visiting in Boston, Mr. Malachy Salter, M.P.P., says: "Hagar (the cook) is doing remarkably well, the little Salters are well, but Jack is Jack still, but rather worse. I am obliged to exercise the cat or stick almost every day. I believe Halifax

don't afford another such idle, deceitful villain. Pray purchase a negro boy in Boston if possible."

In the Winniett family of Annapolis, there is an amusing tradition. During the absence of Mr. Winniett, the slave girl had provoked her mistress to the utmost of her patience. When her husband returned, Mrs. Winniett demanded a whipping for the slave at the hands of the master. He called her into an adjoining room, and charging her to scream at the top of her voice, he applied the whip with much vigour to the furniture, and then presented the maid to her satisfied mistress.

Auction Sales were quite frequent in Halifax during those early days. In the Halifax Gazette, there is advertised, May 15th, 1752; "Just imported, and to be sold by Joshua Mauger, at Major Lochman's Store, in Halifax, several Negro slaves, as follows." On November 1st, 1760, the people of Halifax could read:

"To be sold at public auction, at the house of Mr. John Rider, two slaves, a boy and a girl about eleven years of age; likewise a puncheon of choice cherry brandy."

Another advertisement stated that,

"On Saturday next, at twelve o'clock, will be sold on the Beach, two hogsheads of rum, three of sugar and two well-grown negro girls, aged fourteen and twelve, to the highest bidder."

There is a record of a slave owner who kindly gave or bequeathed *a slave for the "use and benefit of the Wardens and vestry of St. Paul's, Halifax."*

In Nova Scotia the slaves were even leased for certain periods. Lieut. Richard Best of Cornwallis, inherited a number of slaves from

the estate of his father William Best, M.P.P., of Halifax (the great-great-grandfather of the writer), who was one of the early Wardens of St. Paul's. It has been a family tradition that he brought slaves with him from England, in 1749. One was named "Portsmouth," which suggests that he was brought from the old home. On July 13th, 1784, Richard Best "leases the Gloster Farm, for twenty years, *also the use of one negro man* for and during the first five years, *also the use of one negro man* until the twentieth day of December next."

Running away seemed to be a popular form of excitement among the slaves. They were nearly always recovered for there were few hiding places, where the negroes would be safe and still be able to obtain food and shelter; and then, too, their costumes were rather conspicuous. In 1773, Jacob Hurd, an old settler of Halifax, offered a reward of five pounds, with the payment of all necessary charges, for the apprehension of "his runaway negro—Cromwell—described as a short, thick-set strong fellow, badly n.arked by small-pox, especially on the nose, and having on when he went away, a green cloth jacket and a cocked hat."

In the local journal is found the following: "Ran away from her master, John Rock, on Monday, a negro girl, named Thursday, about four and a half feet high, broad-set, with a lump over her right eye. Had on when she went away, a red cloth petticoat, a red baize bed-gown, and a red ribbon about her head." Thursday did get sent back, for she is mentioned in Mr. Rock's will in 1776. He was one of the leading men in St. Paul's Church, Halifax.

On March 11th, 1811, Secretary Jarvis had up before the Courts at Toronto, "a negro boy Prince, and a negro girl, his slaves, who had

stolen silver and gold from their master's desk, and then escaped."

"York, September 2nd, 1803.—The subscriber's black servant Peggy, not having his permission to absent herself from his service, the public are hereby cautioned from harbouring or employing her without the owner's leave. Whoever will do so after this notice may expect to be treated as the law directs." Peter Russell.

In the New Brunswick Advertiser for March, 1799, a reward of five guineas was offered for the capture of two negro men, "Gill, a dark mulatto, with short curly hair, square shoulders, bow legs, and walks clumsily; also Dick, remarkably black, with a scar on his cheek, and another on his chin."

CLERGYMEN SLAVE OWNERS.

In 1791, Lieutenant Clarkson came from England in the interests of the slaves. His journal has some startling revelations. Although he could find few instances of cruelty, he was disgusted that the masters would not all give up their slaves. He had come from intercourse with Wilberforce, Thomas Clarkson, and John Wesley, who had fired him with their zeal, and he found most of the residents of Halifax of the Conservative school. They were, he would have to admit, apart from this so called "sin," humane and godly men, generally speaking. In every part of the country, slave owners were leaders in social and religious life. Here is a record of the Rev. John Stuart, the Loyalist clergyman from the Mohawk Valley, who came to Upper Canada. "My negroes, being personal property, I take with me, for one of which being a young man, and capable of bearing arms, I have to give security, and to send back a white man in his stead."

The Rev. John Wiswall, another Loyalist clergyman, rector of Wilmot, N.S., sent the following message to his slave: "Remember me to Dinah; I allow her to live with you or where she pleases, until she hears from me. I am determined not to sell her." He also says, when speaking of his wife: "Her slaves would die for her."

The Rev. Daniel Cock, one of the first Presbyterian ministers in Truro, had two slaves. There were fierce controversies among the Presbyterian brethren as to the righteousness of Mr. Cock's proceeding, and a sermon was preached on the subject by a brother minister, but as far as is known, the slaves were retained by their master.

Benjamin Belcher, Esquire, of Cornwallis, a benevolent man and a devout Churchman, gives instructions in his will concerning his slaves: "As soon as they can learn to read, they shall be instructed in the Word of God." He also says: "I charge my children unto whom I have entrusted these negro people, never to sell, barter, or exchange them under any pretention, except for bad and heinous offences, as will not render them safe to be kept in the family, and that to be adjudged by three Justices of the Peace."

SLAVE BAPTISMS.

Lieut. Clarkson's statement that the slaves were regarded as no higher than beasts, was not true, at least in most cases. The sacrament of baptism would not have been given them unless their masters had realized that they had souls to save.

The Church register at Bath, during the time when Rev. John Langhorne was rector, gives the baptisms of slaves belonging to the Sherwoods, Spencers, Meyers and other families. St.

Mark's, Niagara, has the record: "Marriage, February, 5th, 1797, Moses and Phebe, negro slaves of Mr. Secretary Jarvis."

Sir John Wentworth, first Loyalist Governor of Nova Scotia, had nineteen christened on February 11th, 1784, at St. Paul's Church, and then sent them to his friend at Dutch Guiana. He wrote: "I am much interested in them, insomuch that I have had them christened, and would rather have liberated them than sent them to any estate that I am not sure of them being treated with care and humanity."

Several years before Mr. Clarkson had come to Nova Scotia, some slave owners had written out deeds of manumission. In 1781, Richard Wenman, Esquire, arranged to "give unto my negro named Cato, his liberty." In 1790, Colonel John Burbidge who was "beloved for his piety, integrity, and benevolence," freed his six slaves, but on certain conditions. They were to be dismissed with two good suits of clothing. All of these slaves had received baptism. At the same time, his nephew, Lieut. Henry Burbidge (the great-great-grandfather of the writer) freed all of his slaves on the same terms as those of his uncle. Both of these men came from England.

In 1808, a bill was introduced to regulate slavery in the province, but it did not become law. A number of cases came into the courts, and gradually one slave after another was freed, so that the early part of the nineteenth century saw this province pretty well rid of the system.

The last slave sold on New Haven Green, Connecticut, came from Halifax. She was baptized "Lois Tritton." The Tritton family moved to New Haven during the latter part of the eighteenth century, and Richard Tritton had inherited a slave named Tombo, valued at £80, from the estate of his father-in-law, William Best, Esquire. Lois was no doubt one of his

slaves, and received the family name at her baptism, a common custom.

In Upper Canada the institution was slower in dying out, although such men as Governor Simcoe and Chief Justice Osgoode were bitterly opposed to it. Solicitor Gray also was against it, although he owned two slaves. An Act was passed in 1793, making it unlawful to bring any more slaves into the province, and also ordering that the children of slaves should be made free at the age of twenty-five years. It is said that three hundred slaves were set free in 1800, following the declaration of Judge Osgoode, that slavery was contrary to British law. The Act of the first parliament under Governor Simcoe had made illegal any slave sales; but this did not mean freedom for all slaves. According to the statements of both Mr. J. C. Hamilton and the Rev. T. W. Smith, from whose papers many of these notes have been taken, slavery in Canada was not really abolished until 1834, when the British Emancipation Act, with the signature of William IV., made *slavery illegal wherever the British flag waves*. Mr. Smith says that a record was found which states that two slaves, named Hank and Sukey were claiming their liberty as late as 1834. So we see that some masters meant to hold on to what they considered their property as long as they could, in spite of public sentiment to the contrary.

Several instances have been found where the slaves would not leave their master. Such was the case with the slaves of Captain Elijah Miles, of Maugerville, N.B., whose kindness had so attached them to him, that it took a long lapse of time to detach them from their old master. Their baptisms are recorded in the parish register.

An amusing story has been passed down of two slaves, Manuel and Kate, who lived in Yarmouth. When they were liberated, Manuel rushed into the kitchen shouting, "Kate, we're free, we're free." So filled were they with the joy of freedom that they could not be induced to remain in service even with the offer of good wages. They did not know how to make a living, but Manuel had frequent recourse to his master's well-known potato bin, and Kate went around the town selling molasses candy to the youngsters. She also made many visits to her former mistress, and was never turned away hungry. Kate lived until about 1880.

It is not possible in a short paper to more than touch upon this subject. I have not spoken of the refugee slaves. Splendid papers have been written about them by Miss Murray, of Kingston, and Miss Carnochan, of Niagara, who have brought to light real tragedies about these followers of the North Star, to whom "Canada" was a magic word. It is estimated that more than 30,000 slaves found a refuge here. Chatham, Ontario, claims to have been the home of "Eliza."

While we do not believe that any such story as "Uncle Tom's Cabin," could have been written about our slaves, yet we are thankful that our honoured ancestors answered the call of freedom for the blacks, and gave them up without much fuss, though they might not have been inflamed with fanatical zeal; and when we read David Livingston's report in 1873, of the accursed traffic in human flesh, away off in Africa by the Arabs, we are relieved that our country, before he spoke, had taken her stand against this unhallowed institution.