



***“THE CHURCH AT ST. CATHARINES”:
THE ST. CATHARINES BICENTENNIAL, 1796-1996***

Fortunately, Society member Jon Jouppien noticed last September that the 200th anniversary of that document was about to occur, and began mobilizing

The front of the Bicentennial Document, dated February 17, 1796. The top line reads: "Assinement [*sic*] to the Church at St. Catharines, . . ."

Photo by Dennis Gannon



**Corlene Taylor, Al Holden, and Jon Jouppien examine the
1796 Bicentennial Document.**

local heritage forces to commemorate the event. The bad news is that we became aware of this so late and that the exact bicentennial date happens to fall early in this year rather than later. The result is that there has been precious little time to pull everything together before February 17th. The following paragraphs offer the latest information about bicentennial plans, some of which are still being formulated.

Bicentennial Day Activities: On February 17, from 11 a.m. until noon, there will be a commemorative ceremony at the St. Catharines Museum at Lock 3. Featured will be a formal proclamation of the Bicentennial Year by Mayor Alan Unwin; musical offerings by the Lincoln and Welland Regimental Band and a fife and drum corps from Fort George; the firing of an antique six-pounder War-of-1812 cannon; and other activities appropriate to this occasion. After the formal ceremonies end at noon, refreshments will be served, admission to the Museum's galleries will be at the bargain rate of \$1, and other activities will go on until mid-afternoon. The general public is encouraged to attend.

Exhibit of the Bicentennial Document: St. George's Church has allowed the St. Catharines Library to put the Bicentennial Document on display for an extended period of time. It is there right now, in a glass case on the first floor of the Library, just to the left of the elevator to the second floor. It is hoped that after that display period the document can be turned over to conservation experts who will try to arrest its further deterioration and possibly repair some of the damage it has already suffered.

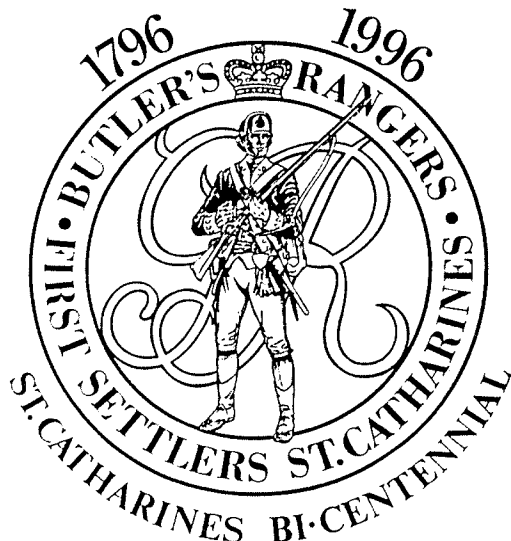
Art Exhibit: From October 27, 1996, to January 5, 1997, the Rodman Hall Arts Centre will offer a special display of art relating to St. Catharines. This event is particularly exciting since it will offer the public a chance to see significant works of art normally held out of the public view, whether in private collections or in the vaults of public institutions like City Hall or the Public Library. Included will be the works of artists of national repute like Robert Whale and as well as those of such lesser-known St. Catharines artists as C. B. Millner, W. E. Wright, and Marion Nelson Hooker.

Plaquing Ceremony: On Canada Day there will be a plaquing of the site of the original "church at St. Catharines," located on McGuire Street just southeast of the Merritt Statue. This may be followed by an archaeological exploration of the surrounding area.

Publications: Local historians and genealogists, led by Historical Society members Al Holden and Corlene Taylor, are now preparing short biographies of the 44 persons whose names appear among those supporting the new church. It is hoped that a book can be published to include those biographies along with a history of that first church building and the community it served. Rodman Hall will also be publishing a catalogue of its exhibit of St. Catharines art.

Bicentennial Mural Project: Plans are well advanced for the production of a series of 24 murals on bicentennial themes by students of the public and separate secondary schools, to be displayed in such venues as the Pen Centre and the new MTO Building. In a related development, some empty shop windows downtown may be brightened by the display of those murals or by other exhibits.

Discussion of these and other plans is going on apace, with monthly meetings of an umbrella group Bicentennial Committee chaired by Jon Jouppien and supplemented by several subcommittees working to organize the activities outlined above. For further details on the February 17 activities, watch the pages of the **Standard**, as well as subsequent issues of this newsletter.



And what is the Historical Society's role in all this? Society members have been involved from the start, from Bicentennial Chairman Jon Jouppien on down through the various subcommittees. Furthermore, the Historical Society has donated \$100 towards the mural project. However, that is only enough to pay for the cost of materials for just **one** mural. Very little in public funds are available to make the Bicentennial happen. **If you or your business would like to be involved in supporting the various bicentennial activities, please call Jon Jouppien at 684-7986.**

The Official Bicentennial Logo

OUR OUTING IN HAMILTON



Photo by Dennis Gannon

Tour participants visited an "old friend," Robert Whale's portrait of William Hamilton Merritt, on loan to the Art Gallery of Hamilton from the St. Catharines Museum.

In late October the Historical Society became aware that the Art Gallery of Hamilton was featuring a special exhibit of the works of Robert Whale, an important nineteenth-century Canadian painter, and one known to have painted themes relating to the Niagara region. Quickly (and too late to include word of it in our October newsletter) the Society organized a bus trip to visit the exhibit -- its first such venture in some years. We were able to announce the event to those of our members who attended our November meeting, and for the general public there were announcements in the *Standard* and the other media usually used to advertise our events. To further encourage participation, we added to the art exhibit a visit to the nearby Whitehern mansion, home of Hamilton's McQuesten family, and we also suggested the possibility of participants even getting in a little shopping in downtown Hamilton during our visit.

The result was that 18 people signed up for the trip. Balancing the sale of tickets at \$18 apiece against the cost of renting the bus and paying for admissions to the Gallery and the mansion yielded a slight profit for the Society. The general reaction from the participants to the trip seemed to be, "When do we do it again?" The executive will certainly keep the success of this trip in mind, and we'll see if we can arrange another bus adventure sometime this year.

HERITAGE ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT GRANT

Each year for the past three years this Society has sought support for its activities from the Heritage Organization Development Grant program of the Ontario Ministry of Culture. In the first year, we were happy to receive a grant of \$385. In 1994, we were surprised to see our grant jump to \$965. In June of 1995 we applied once more for a grant, but by October, the usual time for the grants to be announced, our expectations were not high. By then a new provincial government had been voted into power, and the budget cuts it had initiated made it clear that such grants would be severely cut, if indeed they continued at all. A two-month delay in the announcement of the grants seemed to confirm our worst fears.

The long-expected (dreaded?) letter from the Ministry finally arrived in early December. Its opening sentence read as follows: "I am pleased to approve a 1995-96 grant in the amount of **\$1,512** to [the] Historical Society of St. Catharines. . . ." What a nice surprise! We thank the Ministry of Culture for its generous grant.

THE 1996 HISTORICAL CALENDAR:

There's really not very much to say -- they're gone! Every one of the more than 400 St. Catharines Historical Calendars for 1996 that we printed was sold, earning the Society a tidy profit that we will use for future special projects.

If we had the time and space, much could be said here about the **pleasure** of selling the calendars. Pleasure? To sell them all, we finally had to set up a table in the lobby of Corbloc (thanks to the co-operation of Windim Realty). By so doing we met people who had never before had contact with this Society, heard fascinating bits of local lore, were asked questions about the finer points of local history, received a lot of favourable comment about last summer's walking tours, and generally just did some very profitable networking. It was great fun!

One memorable development resulted from our selling a calendar to a Brock University theatre studies professor who happened by our table. He especially liked the January calendar page showing the interior of the old Grand Opera House and mailed the calendar on to a colleague of his at the University of Toronto . . . and the U of T professor liked the picture so much that he decided to include it in the soon-to-be-published second volume of his history of theatre in Ontario! That should let his readers know that more has gone on in St. Catharines than just canal digging and automobile manufacturing.

So, to us the moral of the story is that it's good to get out there and meet the public every now and then. We're tempted to set up our table in public spaces just for the sake of networking, never mind the severely practical need to sell our publications!

BLACK HISTORY IN ST. CATHARINES -- WHAT THE NUMBERS SAY

by Nancy Butler

Nancy Butler is co-author of the 1992 book *Slavery and Freedom in Niagara*, about the experiences of Black fugitives from slavery after their arrival in the Niagara region. She is also a former president of the Niagara Historical Society, in Niagara-on-the-Lake. In the following article Ms. Butler describes a project that she is now working on, an attempt to build up a significant data base of information about the Black population of St. Catharines, a valuable resource for persons researching the important story of Blacks from the United States who "rode" the "Underground Railroad" to freedom in Canada. She also shares with us some of her preliminary conclusions based on the information that she has collected.

To prepare for the St. Catharines Museum's permanent exhibit on local Black history (expected to open in April), Arden Phair, Senior Curator, asked me to research the local community. I willingly accepted, hoping that the data I collect will be useful for future projects, be they exhibits, books or family trees. The work has been painstakingly slow and I think it will take my lifetime (and a few others) to record the data available in the surviving municipal records.

I began by setting ambitious goals and deadlines. However, to date, I have recorded the statistics of those labelled mulatto, Negro and coloured in only the 1861 and 1871 St. Catharines census and in several years of assessment records between 1854 and 1862. The information is on a computer data base, which can produce the statistics at will.

The records show that most lived in modest frame houses and "shanties". Pigs and cows were popular animals to own, although some people had horses, but usually as part of a business. Thomas Douglas, for example, possessed several horses, but he operated a stage coach service. Nobody had any great wealth, no brick homes or private carriages -- or at least they didn't tell the tax man about them!

In 1871 only 15 children were recorded as attending school and only four in 1861. I think this is the result of sloppy reporting rather than actual fact. In any case, the school for "coloureds" must have had few students, especially considering that, in common with white children, most left at 15 to find work. Their parents, if born in the United States, were usually illiterate, which confirms that slaves were never taught to read and write. However, all those born in Upper Canada were literate, which shows that here they did have access to schooling, even if segregated.

The principal occupation was that of labourer, most likely casual labourer. However, many were servants, working for wealthy households, widows or hotels. "Barber" was a popular occupation with at least six or seven practising at any one time. Aaron Young was a barber with his own place on Queenston in 1856 and on St. Paul Street in 1858. He later challenged the colour bar at the Stephenson Hotel, where he was

working in 1867 (see *Niagara's Freedom Trail*, p. 48). I think he had a concession in the hotel but continued to operate a shop on St. Paul Street.



**Harriet Tubman, who led
hundreds of slaves to freedom
in St. Catharines.**

In the 1861 census, John W. Lindsay was listed as a "labourer". However, in the 1856 assessment record, he was listed as "gentleman". He did own three properties in St. Catharines in 1856 and 1861 and, perhaps, being a landowner elevated him to a "gentleman" status. Or again it may have been somebody poking fun.

Many blacks operated businesses. Renix Johnston, Francis Scott, and Nelson Williams were all shoemakers. There were 11 carpenters, 13 joiners, two chimney sweeps, eight masons, one watchmaker, Daniel Williams, and one jeweller, David T. Williamson, on St. Paul Street.

Many workers were associated with the spas. Thomas Douglas was a coach driver, and James Wright, a bus driver. There were 15 waiters and four servants, all working in hotels. William Riley was the only porter, but I suspect that the "waiters" and "servants" may have doubled as porters.

The women were usually laundrists (four), dressmakers (two), cooks (one), hairdressers (two), and of course, servants. Married women as a rule did not list an occupation. I presume "homemaker" was not considered an occupation in those days!

There were a few ministers, or preachers. These men may have been lay ministers and had other work that supported them.

In 1871 three saloonkeepers were black: Charles Burns, George Page and Robert Young. I suspect they had tavern licences and had a bar in their homes. Charles Burns and Robert Young lived together in 1861, and Robert Young was a waiter. Then both he and Charles Burns become saloon keepers in 1871. I think they may have been friends and started the business together.

The most common addresses were on North and Geneva streets and Welland Avenue, near the two Black churches -- the B.M.E. Church and Zion Baptist -- that were both located on Geneva just south of Welland. Other Black residents were scattered on Academy, Cherry, Church, King, Lake, Niagara, Ontario, Queen, Queenston, Somerset, St. Paul, Water, William and Yates streets. Of course, a very few lived on

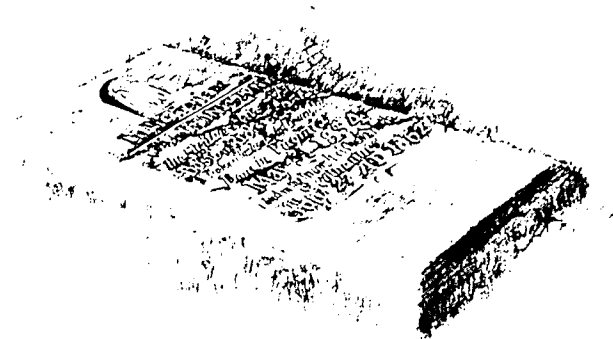
other streets. Most of these were servants, with a few exceptions. John Hamshire, a carpenter, probably worked in the shipyards, and lived nearby, on Hainer Street in west St. Catharines.

J.P. Merritt and W.H. Merritt were the prime property landlords -- especially in the North Street neighbourhood. Others were Robert Leeper, Rufus Wright and Daniel McGuire. As noted above, one landowner was black -- John Lindsay.

I also read *The Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada* by Benjamin Drew, published in Boston in 1856. It contained the first-person accounts of the flights to freedom of several St. Catharines residents: James Adams, William Johnson, the Rev. Alexander Helmsley, Dan Josiah Lockhart, John W. Lindsey, William Grose and David West.

I was able to follow some of their stories in the St. Catharines records. James Adams rented a house on North St. from Merritt. Born in 1808, he married Jane, and was a labourer. William Johnson, also a labourer and married to Martha, lived on North Street. Elizabeth Helmsley, who took in laundry, might have been the widow of the Rev. Helmsley. Dan Josiah Lockhart, another labourer, rented a place on North Street, owned by William Merritt. Born in 1812, he was married to Laura. John Lindsey (or Lindsay), born in 1806, and his wife, Harriet, had a large family according to the 1861 census. His land holdings are mentioned above. William Grose or Gross, born in 1839, worked as a waiter and servant and rented on William Street from Daniel McGuire. Finally, David West became a joiner and rented a house on Geneva Street from Joseph Wilkins. It appeared that few owned property, most worked as labourers and all married (or were already married to) women who had also escaped from slavery.

One slave, who ended his life in St. Catharines, was the Rev. Anthony Burns. I have not been able to find any documentation on him in the records in St. Catharines other than those relating to his death and burial, but I have unearthed some contemporary documents in the Boston Public Library concerning his childhood, his escape to Boston, his arrest there, his subsequent trial, and finally his return to Virginia to his master. These helped to explain how some slaves managed to escape.



In the 1840s and 1850s, the large number of slaves in Virginia made it more profitable for slave owners to hire their slaves out than to sell them. Burns was hired out from the age of seven, always on a one-year contract to different employers. As he grew older, he became responsible for getting his own annual work contracts and giving his wages to his master. This struck me as giving an incredible responsibility as

**The Grave of the Rev. Anthony Burns
in Victoria Lawn Cemetery**

well as freedom to a slave, but it gave Burns experience in job hunting, working for different employers and in different fields. Also his short-term contracts meant that nobody could identify him easily. His last employer couldn't pay the contracted annual fee to the master, so he and Burns negotiated a deal whereby Burns would look for day work and pay the employer every month. Burns found work unloading and loading boats in Richmond. In this way, his escape to Boston by boat was not noted until his next "pay" day, and he, with his considerable work experience, easily found employment in Boston. His subsequent recapture and extradition trial roused abolitionists to riot in Boston. When a few years later when he came to St. Catharines, he was already well known, although not yet thirty. He died two years later, in 1862, and was buried in Victoria Lawn Cemetery in St. Catharines.

I still intend to keep searching for more documentation on the life of Anthony Burns and other blacks in St. Catharines, and I would welcome any information readers can contribute. I hope that the results of my research will aid the designers of the exhibit on our local Black history that will open later this year at the St. Catharines Museum. I will be depositing my notes and data base in the Museum for use in future projects.

Postscript: On February 15 Nancy Butler will address the Niagara Historical Society about new findings she has made about the Solomon Moseby affair, an instance in the late 1830s when a former slave was almost returned from Canada to his slave masters in the United States (Thursday, February 15, 7:30 p.m., Navy Hall, Niagara-on-the-Lake; call 468-3912 for further information).

HISTORY OF THE GRANTHAM ACADEMY



Photo by Joyce DeForest

Society guest speaker Professor James Love (right) talking with Society member John Wilson after Professor Love's informative December 7 talk to the Society about the history of the Grantham Academy.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND ELECTION OF OUR NEW EXECUTIVE:

The Society's Annual General Meeting will take place on Thursday, April 4, and at that time the Society will elect a new executive. The current President's term is about to end, so there will be a considerable shuffle in the executive. Would you like to serve, have a chance to find out what goes on behind the scenes in this Society, and have direct involvement in determining the direction of this Society? If so, please contact Past President John Burtiak, Chairman of the Nominating Committee, and volunteer your services (688-5550, x3264).

UPCOMING HERITAGE EVENTS

Until December 31, 1996, St. Catharines Museum, Lock 3, 1932 Government Road:

9 a.m.-5 p.m. "Many Rivers to Cross: The African-Canadian Experience" a display of 95 photographs, organized by the Multicultural History Society and the Museum of Civilization, Ottawa.

February 15, 1996 (Thursday), Navy Hall, Niagara-on-the-Lake:

7:30 p.m. Nancy Butler addresses the Niagara Historical Society about the case of **Solomon Moseby, an escaped slave almost sent back to slavery in the United States in the 1830s.** Free -- everyone welcome.

February 17 (Saturday):

11 a.m.-noon: Ceremonies marking the **bicentennial of the first known use of the name "St. Catharines"** (St. Catharines Museum, Lock 3; 984-8880)

9 a.m.-4 p.m. The **sixth annual Niagara Heritage Showcase at the Pelham Library, Fonthill, featuring exhibits by scores of heritage groups from throughout the Niagara Peninsula** (682-6053).

1:30-5:00 p.m. **Navy Hall, Niagara-on-the-Lake: Fort George sponsors its first-ever Antiques Road Show:** bring your heirlooms and keepsakes and receive instruction in how to keep them for years to come. Included: a guest speaker on the preservation of artifacts and antiques (468-4257).

February 19-24, Niagara Falls, Ontario:

Heritage Week in Niagara Falls will be marked by a full program of special events, including a guided tour of the Loretto Christian Life Centre and the Mount Carmel Spiritual Centre (February 20, 7:00 p.m.); **a guided tour of Christ Church and St. Patrick's Church** (February 22, 7:00 p.m.) (reservations are required: 356-8080), and **special exhibits at the Niagara Falls Public Library** (February 19-24).

March 7 (Thursday), St. Catharines Public Library, 54 Church Street:

7:30 p.m.: Margaret Glassford talks about **women in business in St. Catharines** (sponsored by the Historical Society of St. Catharines -- 682-6053).

March 22 (Friday), Pond Inlet, Brock University, St. Catharines:

7:30 p.m.: Ramsay Cook, Professor of History, York University, and Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, will speak about **"New Theories, Old Questions: Nationalisms in Canada"** (free, everyone welcome).