

The Pioneer Negroes of Wellington County

In the early days of the eighteenth century slavery was carried on in the Southern States of America by cruel, hard, task, masters. Long days of hard labour and cruel punishment were the order of the day. One coloured gentleman by the name of Cartar had heard of a country in the north called Canada. He had a longing to go to Canada and have freedom and liberty, so he planned an escape.

He set out one evening but wasn't on his way very long when he heard the blood hounds following his trail. As he was walking past a nearby garden he took an onion and rubbed his feet well, and continued his journey. The blood hounds soon lost the trail and soon he found himself out of danger. He found his way into Canada the country of freedom and liberty and before long other families also journeyed over because slavery was abolished under the leadership of the President of United States Abraham Lincoln.

Some of these folks settled around Chatham and Windsor, while many others came to Peel Township in Wellington County. Many of them settled on farms while others were employed as farm labourers. One of the cash crops that formed part of their living was the cutting of logs from large trees. There logs were put on large piles and slightly

covered with earth and set on fire to be burned to charcoal. During the winter this was hauled to Guelph and sold there.

A great hobby of the Negroes was his horses and little did they think to drive from Glenallen to Guelph or Kitchener (then Berlin) and back home again the same day. The Negroes was never considered a good farmer as the fact was he liked his pay every Saturday night although his management seldom the best.

Among the fair sex were some excellent housekeepers who even seemed to possess the art that Aunt Jemima had to turn her pancakes and make them good. Aside from the regular duties of the house wife today, these women made yarn from wool, after the wool was made to yarn they would knit socks. The Negroes also always made their own underwear in the pioneer days. The Negro women also took great fancy at cooking and the baking of tasty bread and cakes that were made from wheat that was ground at a local grist mill. The Negro women were quite handy at making homemade straw hats which were platted from straw selected from a stack on their own farm. Such was the life of the early pioneer who came to Wellington County.

Pleasure and recreation took up

considerable time as the Negroes love to sing while others played instruments to accompany the singing. In the evening they loved to sing away their troubles of the day.

Usually on Sunday morning they would gather together in the little Methodist Church on the fourth line of Peel, a land marked until a few years ago. They would listen to the sermon, which was preached by a Minister, who brought the old time gospel. During the singing of the hymns accompanied by a squeaky old organ the place fairly rang with strong sopranos, deep lusty alto voices, mingled with plenty of tenor and rolling bass.

They would visit with their friends during the winter months with jolly, singing, talking and of course the eating couldn't be left out as there were the chief pastimes.

During the summer months they loved to entertain their friends on Sunday eve with a horse race. They raced their horses two or three abreast, from one concession to the next with the best girl beside them on the seat. Then they would stop at the corner and have a song while the horses rested for another heat.

Such were the pleasures and sorrows of the Melottes, the Armstongs, the Dunns, the Hissins, the Jacksons, the Carters,

the Douglas's and the Lawsons.

When war broke out in 1914 and work in factories was plentiful the Negroes began to leave our township and go to where Saturday was pay day for better or for worse as the Negro was never an ardent agriculturalist.

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