

MHR *Connections*

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THE MANITOBA
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Celebrating Black History Month



The tenor section of the Winnipeg Hi-Life Steel Band wraps up Black History Month with a performance at Winnipeg's Centennial Library.

In 1926, February was designated as Black History Month in North America. It was at this time the contributions of Black Canadians were first recognized. Their history however, dates much further back.

Here are some examples of the people and events that helped shape Canada's culture and history.

In 1628 Olivier Le Jeune, an eight-year-old boy from Madagascar, arrived in Quebec. He is the first recorded slave purchase in New France.

In 1709 slavery in New France became legal.

In 1743 a Montreal slave named Marie-Joseph Angelique learns she is to be sold. In an attempt to escape she sets fire to her mistress's home. The fire rages out of control and eventually causes damage to half of Montreal. She is later caught, tortured and hanged. These events raise the public's awareness to the plight of the slaves.

In 1793 Upper Canada passes a law to stop people from bringing slaves into Upper Canada. The law also frees slaves who are twenty years old and older. With this act, Upper Canada becomes the first British Territory to bring in legislation against slavery. Slavery does not come to an end in the British Territories until 1834.

In the War of 1812, a group of Black soldiers, White Militia and Mohawk Indians force the American invaders to retreat in the Battle of Queenston Heights. During this war some 2,000 Black people come to Nova Scotia and New Brunswick from the United States.

Canadian Black History Continued on Page 2

Discrimination Against The Poor

The Rights Connection

Janet Baldwin Chairperson

Last month, I noted that The Manitoba Human Rights Commission has asked the government to amend The Human Rights Code to add "social condition" as a protected ground of discrimination. This month, I would like to talk about why this amendment is needed.

The Code provides protection from discrimination on a number of grounds, including "source of income". This ground, together with the way discrimination is defined in The Code, allows us to accept some of the complaints that would be possible under "social condition". However, the ground of "social condition" would more directly focus attention on poverty and homelessness in our society.

The most disadvantaged Manitobans often face discrimination based on the intersection of a number of personal characteristics, such as race, disability, age, gender, family status or economic status. Our current grounds do not adequately address such discriminatory treatment. Sometimes it is the social condition of a person that is the real basis for discriminatory treatment, rather than an isolated personal characteristic. As we approach International Women's Day, I'm reminded of the link between unequal treatment and poverty, particularly for women. Women who are single parents or elderly, and men and women who are Aboriginal, members of racial minorities, or disabled, are only too aware of this link.

Québec is currently the only Canadian jurisdiction with "social condition" as a protected ground. There, the phrase has been interpreted by courts to refer to a person's position in society, as determined by origins, education, occupation or income.

Amending our legislation to extend protection from discrimination based on "social condition" would continue Manitoba's progress towards realizing the principles and rights contained in international agreements that Canada has adopted. Worldwide, for example in the European Union, there is a shift towards improved protection for economic and social rights. Here in Canada, we join with other human rights commissions in recommending legislated protection from discrimination on the basis of "social condition".

During the early to mid 1800's more than 30,000 American Black people escape slavery in the United States and come to Canada.

In 1858 about 600 Black people from California move to Victoria, British Columbia. One of them is Mifflin Gibbs who later plays a key role in persuading British Columbia to become part of Canada. One year later, in Raleigh, Ontario Abraham Shadd becomes the first black person to be elected to public office.

In 1861 Dr. Anderson Fuffin Abbott becomes the first Black person born in Canada to graduate from medical college.

In 1909 Black farmers from Oklahoma start to settle on the Canadian Prairies.

Black Canadians serve with loyalty during World War 1 even though the Government of Canada tries to keep Black men out of the Armed Forces. Many Black soldiers are abused and some are physically attacked. During the Second World War the authorities try once again to keep Black Canadians out of the armed forces but fail.

In 1954 segregation ends in Nova Scotia schools.

In 1962 Daniel G. Hill is made the first director of the Ontario Human Rights Commission. He later becomes Chairman of the Commission.

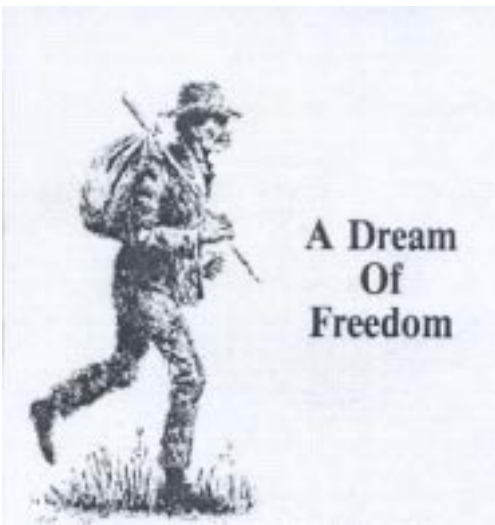
In 1964 Harry Jerome of British Columbia wins a bronze medal in the 100-meter dash at the Tokyo Olympics. He later captures the gold medal at the Winnipeg Pan Am Games in 1967.

In 1979 Lincoln Alexander becomes Canada's first Black cabinet minister serving as Minister of Labour in the federal government.

In 1984 the people of Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia elect Daurene Lewis as Mayor. She is the first Black woman to be elected Mayor of a Canadian City.

In the 1988 Olympics Ben Johnson shatters the 100-meter world sprinting record only later to be disqualified for steroid use.

In 1996 Donavon Bailey becomes the fastest man in the world breaking the world record and wins a gold medal at the Atlanta Olympic Games.



The Mysterious Path to Liberty

It was not "underground," nor was it a "railroad." Yet for an estimated 30,000 Black fugitives during the 1800's, the Underground Railroad was a passage to freedom.

The Underground Railroad consisted of a loosely organized network of slaves, former slaves, white Americans and Canadian abolitionists. Among the many non-Black people who assisted this dramatic protest against slavery were the dedicated Quakers of Pennsylvania.

There was no direct passage but rather a system of escape routes that originated in the southern states and intertwined their way throughout the North and eventually ending in Canada. Similar routes took victims of slavery into western territories, Mexico and the Caribbean.

One of the most popular points of entry into Canada was by crossing the Detroit River and landing in Amherstburg. Here the river is at its narrowest point. With their belongings strapped to their backs the fugitives swam the river in summer and braved the cold in the winter.

Mystery and myth still surrounds much of the activity of this effort to help people escape bondage. The secrecy required during the time, has now left us with scattered accounts and destroyed papers.

A few names have emerged. Researchers have recently learned of the courageous work by such people as David Ruggles, Calvin Fairbank, Josiah Henson and Erastus Hussey. The few surviving journals suggest that the true heroes of this movement were the runaway people who were willing to risk their lives in search of freedom.

<i>March Upcoming Events</i>	
International Women's Day Legislative Building March 8, 2002 11:45 am - 1:15 pm Honourable Diane McGifford, Minister Responsible for the Status of Women	University of Winnipeg presents "First and Second Generation Immigrant Youth" A Youth Forum celebrating International Women's Day March 8, 2002 12:00 to 4:00 pm Presentations by Mayor Glen Murray Dr. Constance Rooke

Reasonable Accommodation in the Workplace Seminar
March 7, 2002 9AM-12:30PM
Norwood Hotel
For more information contact the
Manitoba Human Rights Commission
at 945-3007

Harassment in the Workplace Seminar
March 8, 2002 9AM-12:30PM
Norwood Hotel
For more information contact the
Manitoba Human Rights Commission
at 945-3007