

**Grade 7 Black History
Digital Document Box**

**Archives
of Ontario**

**Archives
publiques
de l'Ontario**

Teaching Difficult Histories

Teaching difficult histories, such as the history of slavery, racism and resistance in Ontario, can be challenging. It can be especially challenging if these stories aren't part of our own lived experience. Educators might feel uncertain about how to approach these topics with care, accuracy, and respect. Still, engaging with these histories is essential to building a more inclusive understanding of the past and present.

Difficult histories are often underrepresented in textbooks and classroom discussions. The histories of Black communities in Ontario, including the realities of enslavement, discrimination, and resilience, are a crucial part of Canadian history. We can help students see the complexity of the past and recognize the contributions and struggles of people who have often been left out of the narrative by bringing these stories into the classroom.

It is important to acknowledge that teaching histories that are not your own can feel uncomfortable. This discomfort is a natural part of learning and growth. Educators are not expected to have all the answers. A respectful and supportive classroom environment allows students to ask questions, reflect critically and connect historical events to contemporary issues. Using primary sources can help ground these conversations in real voices and lived experiences. Students will use these materials to engage directly with the past, develop historical thinking skills and better understand how regular people were impacted by historical events.

Content Warning

The materials included in this document box contain historical content that may be upsetting or distressing. Many of the documents reflect the language, attitudes, and beliefs of the time in which they were created, particularly during the period of slavery in Ontario and across North America.

Some documents use outdated and offensive terms to describe Black individuals and communities. These terms were commonly used by enslavers and others in positions of power to reinforce the deeply racist and dehumanizing views that supported the institution of slavery. In many cases, the documents come from the perspective of enslavers, government officials, or others who treated enslaved people as property rather than as human beings.

We include these documents to help students and educators understand and confront the realities of the past. These sources show both the oppressive ideologies which supported systems of oppression, and the way in which those systems were resisted.

We encourage educators to approach these materials with care and to create a supportive classroom environment where students can process and discuss difficult content. It is important to prepare students for what they may encounter and to provide space for reflection and respectful dialogue.

If you or your students find any of the content distressing, please take time to pause, reflect and seek support as needed. Teaching and learning about difficult histories is challenging, but it is essential to building an informed understanding of the past and its impact on the present.

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Approach	3
Timeline	3
Slavery in Upper Canada	4
Abolition in Upper Canada	5
Post Abolition	6
Records	7



▲
Levi Veney, ex-slave who lived in Amherstburg, Ontario 1898, (I0024830)

Provincial Freeman Newspaper Date: November 11, 1854 (Vol. 1, No. 34), p. 1, Microfilm reel N 040, Archives of Ontario ▶

Related Curriculum Expectations

A3. Describe some significant events and developments, including, but not limited to enslavement, that had an impact on the lived experiences and settlement of various Black individuals and communities in Canada, up to and including this time period

B3. Describe various experiences, realities, challenges, and perspectives of members of Black settlements and communities across Canada and explore how the people in these settlements fostered a sense of belonging and pride in community



Cover: Levi Veney, ex-slave who lived in Amherstburg, Ontario (I0024830)

Approach to Document

This document is designed to bring the experience of archival research into the classroom by allowing students to directly engage with primary source materials related to Black history in Ontario. Students will work with replicas of historical documents to develop critical thinking skills, explore multiple perspectives and gain a deeper understanding of the past through the voices and records of those who lived it.

The document supports educators in teaching the Ontario Black History curriculum by providing curated resources that highlight underrepresented stories and experiences. It is organized into three key themes: Slavery in Upper Canada, Abolition, and Post-Abolition. Each theme includes a selection of primary sources such as legal documents, newspaper ads and government records, along with background context for teachers to assist in guiding classroom discussion and analysis.

SLAVERY & ABOLITION TIMELINE

Colonel John Graves Simcoe
[Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada
1791-96, George Theodore Berthon
oil on canvas, 43 x 33", 109.2 x 83.8
cm, Government of Ontario Art
Collection, 694156



1700

1760

The British conquered New France and slavery was expanded and institutionalized under British regimes

1760

1793

The Act to Limit Slavery in Upper Canada confirmed slavery as a legal practice and introduced gradual abolition, the first anti-slavery legislation in the British colonies

1793

Moses Brantford Jr. leading an
Emancipation Day parade
down Dalhousie Street,
Amherstburg, Ontario 1894,
(I0027817)

1812

The Coloured Corps was initiated by Richard Pierpoint to support the War of 1812. Raised in Upper Canada (Ontario), it was composed of free and enslaved Black men.

1800

1812



1834

The Slavery Abolition Act came into effect, abolishing slavery throughout the British Empire, including British North America. Black Canadians began to celebrate Emancipation Day in present day Ontario, Quebec and Nova Scotia.

1834

1815-1865

Canada's reputation as a safe haven for Black people grew and thousands of African-Americans sought refuge in Upper (Ontario) and Lower Canada (Quebec) through the Underground Railroad

1865

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did slavery shape power and wealth in colonial Canadian society?
2. What does the fact that nearly one-quarter of enslaved people were children tell us about the nature of slavery in Upper Canada?
3. How might resistance, such as refusing to work or escaping, reveal about the lives and agency of enslaved people?

Slavery in Upper Canada

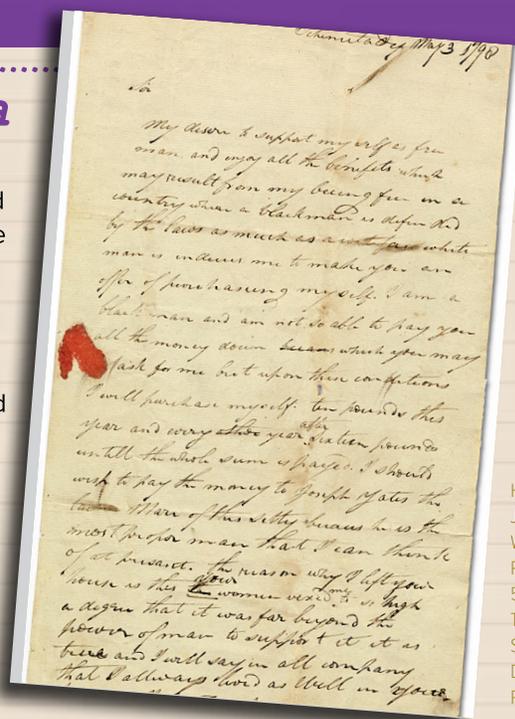
Slavery is a lesser-known part of Canada's past but it played a significant role during the colonial era. The practice began in the 1600s under French rule in New France and continued after the British took control in 1760.

Most enslaved people in New France were Indigenous. French colonists called them "Panis." About one-third of the enslaved population was of African descent. The first documented Black enslaved person in Canada was a young boy who was brought to Quebec in 1628 and given the name Olivier LeJeune by his enslavers.

The British allowed slavery to continue when they took control. The Articles of Capitulation was signed in 1760 and protected the rights of French colonists to retain their enslaved people. This legal support for slavery continued throughout the British colonial period.

Enslaved people were treated as property in colonial Canadian society. The enslavement of both Black and Indigenous individuals was supported by law and custom. Their forced labour contributed to the growth of the colonial economy.

The enslaved population of Upper Canada significantly increased when British loyalists migrated to Canada following the American Revolution and brought enslaved African people with them. Between the 1770s and 1834, more than 600 Black individuals were enslaved in Upper Canada. Although this number was smaller than in the United States, the conditions were still harsh. Enslaved people were denied basic rights, were often torn from their families, lived under constant surveillance, and had little to no freedom.



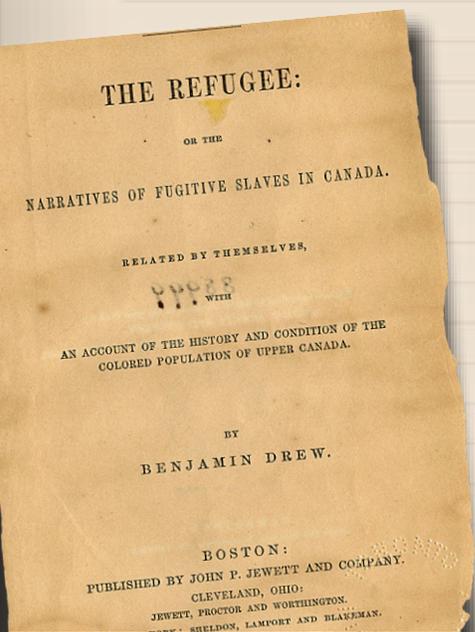
Henry Lewis letter to William Jarvis, 1798
William Jarvis Papers
Reference Code: S109 B55 PP. 56-57
Toronto Public Library (TRL)
Special Collections, Archive & Digital Collections, Baldwin Room

"My desired to support my self as free man and enjoy all the benefits which may result from my being free in a country whear a Blackman is defended by the laws as much as a white man is induce me to make you an offer of purchasing myself" - Henry Lewis

Slavery in Canada was not only about labour, it was also about power, wealth, and racial inequality. One common misconception is that slavery in Canada was less brutal due to its smaller scale. However, this view ignores the violence, control, and dehumanization that defined the system.

Nearly one-quarter of the enslaved population in Upper Canada were children. Black children inherited their enslaved status from their mothers by law. These children were considered financial assets. From a young age, they were expected to work, often alongside their mothers, and their lives revolved around labour. As they grew older, their monetary value increased. Boys were trained in farming and skilled trades, while girls were taught domestic and agricultural tasks.

Enslaved people resisted the system in many ways. They asserted their humanity, refused to work, escaped bondage, and helped others seek freedom. Even daring to dream of a different life was an act of resistance.



◀ Title page, Benjamin Drew, *A North-Side view of slavery. The Refugee: or the Narratives of the Fugitive Slaves in Canada*, Boston: John P. Jewett, 1856

Abolition in Upper Canada

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What was the purpose of the 1793 Act to Limit Slavery, and why was it considered a compromise?
2. How did the Chloe Cooley incident influence the passage of the 1793 Act?
3. How did the 1793 Act change the lives of enslaved people and their children? Was it truly fair?

Slavery in Upper Canada was not only a social practice but a legally sanctioned institution, deeply embedded in colonial law and custom. The racial chattel slavery system which primarily targeted Black individuals, was distinct from other forms of forced labor due to its legal permanence and hereditary nature. Enslaved people were considered property, there were no opportunities to become as free person, and their enslaved status was passed down to their children via the legal doctrine of *partus sequitur ventrem*.

The legal system in Upper Canada supported slavery through property and contract laws. Enslaved individuals could be bought, sold, gifted, or included in wills. This legal recognition was solidified in 1793 with the passage of the Act to Prevent the Further Introduction of Slaves, and to Limit the Term of Contracts for Servitude, commonly known as the 1793 Act to Limit Slavery. While this Act did not abolish slavery outright, it was the first legislation in the British colonies to restrict the slave trade and marked the beginning of gradual abolition.

The immediate catalyst for the Act was the Chloe Cooley incident. On March 14, 1793, Chloe Cooley, a Black woman enslaved in Queenston, was violently bound and transported across the Niagara River to be sold in New York. Her resistance and the eyewitness accounts of Peter Martin, a Black Loyalist, and William Grisley, a white laborer, brought the incident to the attention of Lieutenant-Governor John Graves Simcoe. Simcoe used the event to push for legislative change.

On June 19, 1793, Attorney General John White introduced the abolition bill. Despite opposition from politicians who were themselves enslavers, the bill passed. However, it was a compromise: it banned the importation of new enslaved people into Upper Canada but allowed those already enslaved to remain in bondage for life unless freed by their owners. Children born to enslaved women after the Act would be freed at age 25, and their children would be born free. This structure aimed to phase out slavery over a generation.

The Act also required enslavers to provide basic necessities to enslaved children and to ensure that newly freed individuals were supported, often through indentured servitude contracts lasting up to nine years. This provision was intended to prevent freed individuals from becoming hospitalized, jailed, or impoverished.

Despite the Act, slavery persisted. Enslaved people continued to be sold within the province and across the border into the United States. One of the last recorded sales of an enslaved person in Upper Canada took place in March 1824 when Eli Keeler of Colborne sold 15-year-old Tom to William Bell in Thurlow (now Belleville, Ontario). It wasn't until 1834, with the British Empire's Slavery Abolition Act, that slavery was formally abolished throughout Canada.

Ran away from the subscriber a few weeks ago,
A Negro Wench,
named SUE;—this is therefore to forewarn all manner of persons from harboring said wench under the penalties of the laws.
JAMES CLARK, senior.

*Upper Canada Gazette, 19
August 1795
N31, Archives of Ontario*

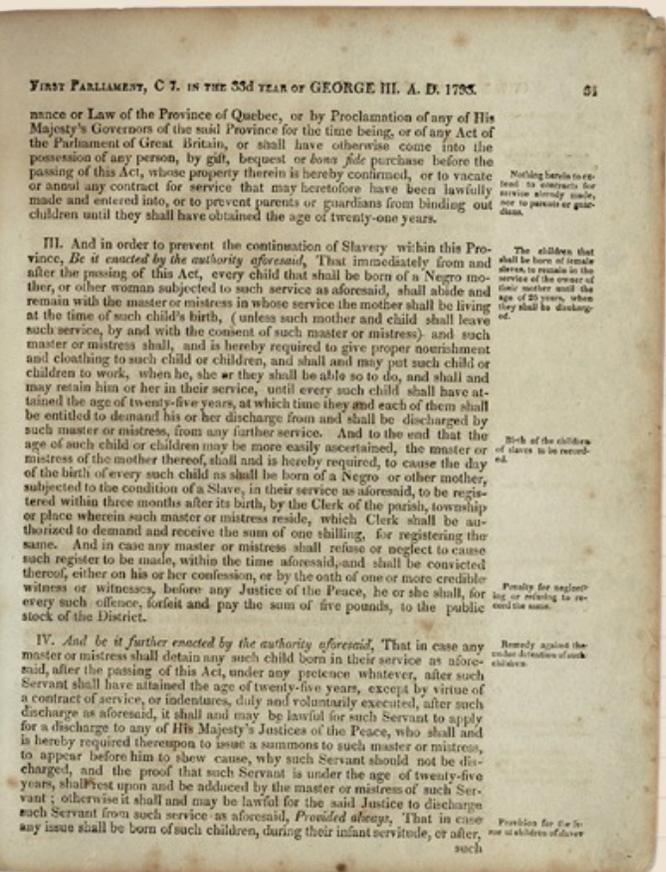
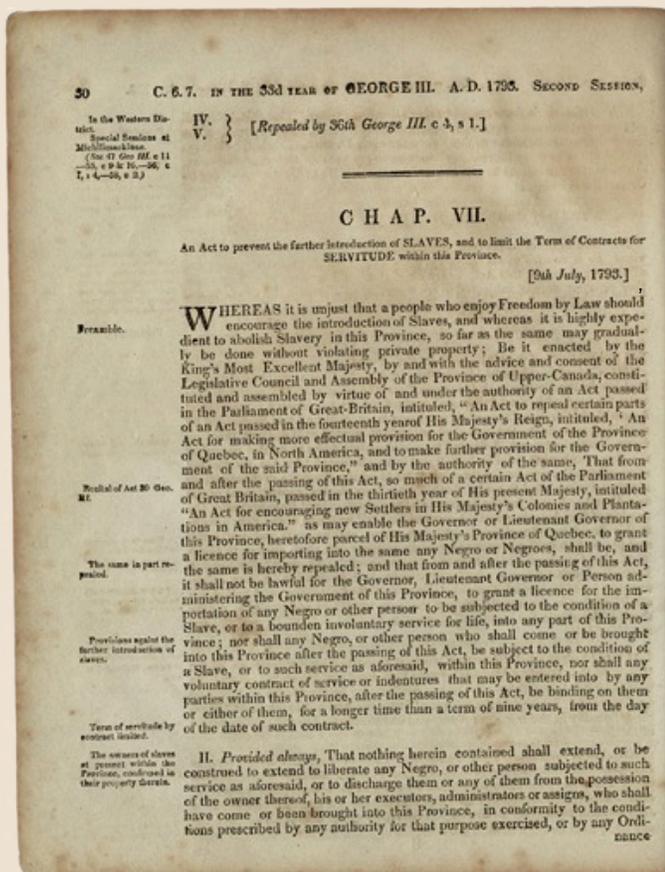
Post - Abolition in Upper Canada

The 1793 Act to Limit Slavery caused slavery to begin to decline in Upper Canada. By 1810 the labour relationship between enslavers and the enslaved began to shift to indentured servitude and wage labour. Enslavement in British colonies, including Canada, was finally abolished on August 1st, 1834 with the passage of the Slavery Abolition Act. Both pieces of legislation made Canada a free land for enslaved African Americans. The image of Canada as a place of freedom for enslaved African Americans in the nineteenth century was born, and thousands of freedom seekers and free African Americans would arrive on Canadian soil between 1834 and the early 1860s. Despite this, the Black community in Canada continued to face prejudice and economic inequality

Slavery existed in Canada for over 200 years. The history of enslaved Black people in Upper Canada explains how both slavery and freedom unfolded in Upper Canada, in all of their complexities, how people of African descent experienced and challenged degrees of unfreedom while also pursuing the promise of freedom in the same space

DISCUSSION QUESTION

1. What challenges did Black communities face in Canada after abolition? Why do you think these challenges persisted?



1793 Act to Limit Slavery:

An Act to Prevent the further Introduction of Slaves and to limit the Term of Contracts for Servitude Statutes of Upper Canada

33 George III, Cap. 7, 1793

Archives of Ontario

56
Schenectady May 3 1790

Sir

My desire to support my self as free
man and enjoy all the benefits which
may result from my being free in a
country where a blackman is defended
by the laws as much as a ~~white~~ white
man is induces me to make you an
offer of purchasing myself. I am a
black man and am not so able to pay you
all the money down because which you may
ask for me but upon these conditions
I will purchase myself. ten pounds this
year and every ~~three~~ ^{after} year sixteen pounds
untill the whole sum is payed. I should
wish to pay the money to Joseph Yates the
~~law~~ Man of this city because he is the
most proper man that I can think
of at present. The reason why I left your
house is this ~~the~~ ^{your} woman vexed ^{to} ^{me} to so high
a degree that it was far beyond the
power of man to support it it is
true and I will say in all company
that I always lived as well in your
house as I should wish.

57

• Please to write to Joseph Yates what you will
• take in cash for me and let him be the man
to whom I shall pay the money yearly.
• In a supplicant manner I beg your
• pardon ten thousand times and beg
• that you would be so kind as to permit
• me to purchase myself and at as a low
• a rate as any other person. My mistress
• I also wish ten thousand pardons long life
• and good health and please to tell her I
• beg her pardon ten thousand times
• my mistress I shall always remember
• on account of her great kindness to me
• I remain your affectionate servant
Henry Lewis

Henry Lewis letter to William Jarvis, 1798

William Jarvis Papers

Reference Code: S109 B55 PP. 56-57

Toronto Public Library (TRL)

Special Collections, Archive & Digital Collections, Baldwin Room

My desired to support my self as free man and enjoy all the benefits which may result from my being free in a country whear a Blackman is defended by the laws as much as a white man is induce me to make you an offer of purchasing myself

the reason why I left your house is this your [Jarvis' wife Hannah] vexed me to so high a degree that it was far beyond the power of man to support it is true and I will say in all company that I always lived as well in your house as I should wish.

A NORTH-SIDE VIEW OF SLAVERY.

THE REFUGEE:

OR THE

NARRATIVES OF FUGITIVE SLAVES IN CANADA.

RELATED BY THEMSELVES,

88928
WITH

AN ACCOUNT OF THE HISTORY AND CONDITION OF THE
COLORED POPULATION OF UPPER CANADA.

BY

BENJAMIN DREW.

BOSTON:

PUBLISHED BY JOHN P. JEWETT AND COMPANY.

CLEVELAND, OHIO:

JEWETT, PROCTOR AND WORTHINGTON.

NEW YORK: SHELDON, LAMPORT AND BLAKEMAN.

LONDON: TRÜBNER AND CO.

1856.

Title page, Benjamin Drew, A North-Side view of slavery.
The Refugee: or the Narratives of the Fugitive
Slaves in Canada, Boston: John P. Jewett, 1856

I have all now by this means that I Samuel Jones of Cambridge the defendant Clerk of the Peace and Justice of the Peace
for and in consideration of the sum of twenty five pounds hereinafter expressed to me in hand paid by William Jones of some Settlement
in the County of Middlesex and I do hereby acknowledge myself to have sold and by this Receipt do sell
Barbara Jones and Helen both the said Slaves to a Negro Girl named Elizabeth about Eight Years old to have and to hold
the said Negro Girl for ever to my Mother the said Robert Jones his heirs Executors Administrators and
Assigns for ever and I Samuel Jones for myself Executors Administrators and Assigns do and will for ever warrant and defend
the Sale by these Presents in Writing whereby I have received the sum of Twenty five Pounds the 30th day of May 1788
at Cambridge in the County of Middlesex 1788.

Richard Jones
in presence of
Richard Jones

Sam Jones

Bill of Sale for a Slave Girl named Elizabeth, 1788:
Ontario Heritage Trust: 983.18.9

“...that I Daniel Jones of Oswegatchie Settlement district of Montreal Province of Quebec in consideration of the sum of twenty five pound Halifax currency to me in hand paid by Solomon Jones in same Settlement District and Province aforesaid and I do hereby acknowledge myself truly satisfied contented and paid by this presents do sell bargain convey and deliver unto the aforesaid Solomon Jones a negro girl named Elizabeth about eight years old to have and to hold the said negro girl forever to only proper use and behalf of him the said Solomon Jones his heirs Executors Administrators and Assigns forever and I Daniel Jones for myself Executors Administrators and Assigns do and will for ever warrant and defend the sale by their presents In witness whereof I have herewith interchangeably set my hand this 30th day of August at Augusta Anno Domino 1788”

Daniel Jones in presence of Richard Jones

ALL persons are forbidden harboring, employing or concealing my Indian slave called SALLY, as I am determined to prosecute any offender to the extremity of the law; and persons who may suffer her to remain in or upon their premises for the space of half an hour, without my written consent, will be taken as offending, and dealt with accordingly.

CHARLES FIELD.
Niagara, August 28 1802.

Sale Advertisements in Newspapers:
Reference Codes: N31 and N23, Archives of Ontario

Ran away from the subscriber a few weeks ago,
A Negro Wench,
named SUE:—this is therefore to forewarn all manner of persons from harboring said wench under the penalties of the laws.

JAMES CLARK, senior.
Niagara, August 17, 1795.

Upper Canada Gazette, 19 August 1795
N31, Archives of Ontario

FIVE DOLLARS REWARD.

RAN away from the Subscriber on Wednesday the 25th. of June last, a NEGRO MAN servant named JOHN, who ever will take up the said negro man and return him to his Master shall receive the above reward and all necessary charges.

THOMAS BUTLER.

N. B. All Persons are forbid harbouring the said Negro man at their peril.—NIAGARA, 3d July, 1793.

Upper Canada Gazette, 4 July 1793
N31, Archives of Ontario



Moses Brantford Jr. leading an Emancipation Day parade down Dalhousie Street, Amherstburg, Ontario 1894, (I0027817)

Dear Sir

York 19. September 1801

My Slave Peggy, whom you were so good to
promise to assist me in getting rid of, has remained
in Prison ever since you left this (in expectation of your
sending for her) at an Expence of above Ten pounds
Halfpence, which I was obliged to pay to the Goalers —
and release her last Week by Order of the Chief Justice.
She is now at large, being not permitted by my Sister
to enter this House, and shows a disposition as far as
to be very troublesome, which may perhaps compel me
to commit her again to Prison. I shall therefore be glad
that you would either take her away immediately, or re-
turn to me the Bill of Sale I gave you to enable you to
do so. For tho' I have received no Money from you for her,
my property in her is gone from me while you hold the
Bill of Sale; and I cannot consequently give a valid
Title to any other who may be inclined to take her off
my hands. I beg to hear from you soon, & am very truly
Dear Sir your most obedient humble servant.
Capt. Elliott Mrs Mrs Mr. Dickson Peter Russell
Sandwich

"My Slave Peggy, whom you were so good to promise to assist in getting rid of, ... is now at large, being not permitted by my Sister to enter this House, and shows a disposition at Times to be very troublesome, which may perhaps compel me to commit her again to Prison. I shall be glad that you would either taker away immediately, or return to me the Bill of Sale I gave you to enable you to do so."

Peter Russell to Matthew Elliott,
York, 19 September 1801

**When he could not sell Peggy, he advertised in
the Upper Canada Gazette:**

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

C. A. P. LXXIII.

An Act for the Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Colonies; for promoting the Industry of the manumitted Slaves; and for compensating the Persons hitherto entitled to the Services of such Slaves. [28th August 1833.]

WHEREAS divers Persons are holden in Slavery within divers of His Majesty's Colonies, and it is just and expedient that all such Persons should be manumitted and set free, and that a reasonable Compensation should be made to the Persons hitherto entitled to the Services of such Slaves for the Loss which they will incur by being deprived of their Right to such Services: And whereas it is also expedient that Provision should be made for promoting the Industry and securing the good Conduct of the Persons so to be manumitted, for a limited Period after such their Manumission: And whereas it is necessary that the Laws now in force in the said several Colonies should forthwith be adapted to the new State and Relations of Society thereof of the said Slaves; and that, in order to afford the necessary Time for such Adaptation of the said Laws, a short Interval should elapse before such Manumission should take effect; be it therefore enacted by the King's most Excellent Majesty, by and with the Advice and Consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the Authority of the same, That from and after the first Day of August One thousand eight hundred and thirty-four all Persons who in conformity with the Laws now in force in the said Colonies respectively shall on or before the first Day of August One thousand eight hundred and thirty-four have been duly registered as Slaves, and who on the said first Day of August One thousand eight hundred and thirty-four shall be actually within any such Colony, and who shall by such Registers appear to be on the said first Day of August One thousand eight hundred and thirty-four of the full Age of Six Years or upwards, shall by force and virtue of this Act, and without the previous Execution of any Indenture of Apprenticeship, or other Deed or Instrument for that Purpose, become and be apprenticed Labourers; provided that, for the Purposes aforesaid, every Slave engaged in his ordinary Occupation on the Seas shall be deemed and taken to be within the Colony to which such Slave shall belong.

II. And be it further enacted, That during the Continuance of the Apprenticeship of any such apprenticed Labourer such Person or Persons shall be entitled to the Services of such apprenticed Labourer as would for the Time being have been entitled to his or her Services as a Slave if this Act had not been made.

III. Provided also, and be it further enacted, That all Slaves who may at any Time previous to the passing of this Act have been brought with the Consent of their Possessors, and all apprenticed Labourers who may hereafter with the like Consent be brought, into any Part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, shall

A. D. 1833. 3° & 4° GUILIELMI IV. C. 73.

shall from and after the passing of this Act be absolutely and entirely free, and all Intents and Purposes whatsoever.

IV. And whereas it is expedient that all such apprenticed Labourers should, for the Purposes herein-after mentioned, be divided into Three distinct Classes, the First of such Classes, and comprising all Persons who in their State of Slavery were usually employed in Agriculture, or in the Manufacture of Colonial Produce or otherwise, upon Lands belonging to their Owners; the Second of such Classes consisting of preadial apprenticed Labourers not attached to the Soil, and comprising all Persons who in their State of Slavery were usually employed in Agriculture, or in the Manufacture of Colonial Produce or otherwise, upon Lands not belonging to their Owners; and the Third of such Classes consisting of non-preadial apprenticed Labourers, and comprising all apprenticed Labourers not included within either of the Two preceding Classes; be it therefore enacted, That such Division as aforesaid of the said apprenticed Labourers into such Classes as aforesaid shall be carried into effect in such Manner and Form and subject to such Rules and Regulations as shall for that Purpose be established under such Authority, and in and by such Acts of Assembly, Ordinances, or Orders in Council, as herein-after mentioned: Provided always, that no Person of the Age of Twelve Years and upwards shall by or by virtue of any such Act of Assembly, Ordinance, or Order in Council, be included in either of the said Two Classes of preadial apprenticed Labourers unless such Person shall for Twelve Calendar Months at the least next before the passing of this present Act have been habitually employed in Agriculture or in the Manufacture of Colonial Produce.

V. And be it further enacted, That no Person who by virtue of this Act, or of any such Act of Assembly, Ordinance, or Order in Council as aforesaid, shall become a preadial apprenticed Labourer, whether attached or not attached to the Soil, shall continue in such Apprenticeship beyond the first Day of August One thousand eight hundred and forty; and that during such his or her Apprenticeship no such preadial apprenticed Labourer, whether attached or not attached to the Soil, shall be bound or liable, by virtue of such Apprenticeship, to perform any Labour in the Service of his or her Employer or Employers for more than Forty-five Hours in the whole in any One Week.

VI. And be it further enacted, That no Person who by virtue of this Act or of any such Act of Assembly, Ordinance, or Order in Council as aforesaid, shall become a non-preadial apprenticed Labourer, shall continue in such Apprenticeship beyond the first Day of August One thousand eight hundred and thirty-eight.

VII. And be it further enacted, That if before any such Apprenticeship shall have expired the Person or Persons entitled for and during the Remainder of any such Term to the Services of such apprenticed Labourer shall be desirous to discharge him or her from such Apprenticeship, it shall be lawful for such Person or Persons so to do by any Deed or Instrument to be by him, her, or them for that Purpose made and executed; which Deed or Instrument shall be in such Form, and shall be executed and recorded

Apprenticed Labourers to be divided into Three Classes, viz. preadial attached, preadial unattached, and non-preadial. Proviso.

Apprenticeship of the preadial Labourers not to continue beyond 1st August 1840;

of the non-preadial not beyond 1st August 1838.

Before the Apprenticeship is expired, the Labourer may be discharged by his Employer.



Levi Veney, ex-slave who lived in Amherstburg, Ontario 1898, Alvin D. McCurdy Fond, Archives of Ontario (I0024830)