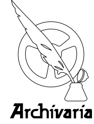
# Articles




# An Accidental Archive of the Old Durham Road: Reclaiming a Black Pioneer Settlement

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RÉSUMÉ Cet article se penche sur la manière dont des terres pourraient servir d'archives à une communauté historique « disparue » de colons noirs du comté de Grey, en Ontario. L'article considère la pénurie de ressources au sujet de cette communauté (au-delà des recensements qui notaient la race comme catégorie), ainsi que les efforts passés et présents pour nier son existence. En s'inspirant de la pensée de Jonathan Silin au sujet de l'enseignant comme « archiviste accidentel »,[1] cet article explore comment les terres le long du chemin Old Durham, où ces colons ont vécu, pourraient être considérées comme des « archives accidentelles ». Trois « preuves » de l'établissement sont examinées : des pommiers sauvages, une fondation de pierre et des tessons de faïence provenant d'un tas d'ordures de cuisine. Avec le changement des saisons, les terres cachent et révèlent, suggérant à la fois la « présence absente » littérale et métaphorique de cette communauté historique. En terminant, cet article examine la meilleure façon d'avoir accès à ces archives.

This article considers how the land might be utilized as an archive of a "disappeared" historic community of black settlers in Grey County, Ontario. The paucity of resources about this community (beyond the censuses that marked race as a category), as well as past and current efforts to deny its existence, are considered. Drawing on Jonathan Silin's notion of teacher as "accidental archivist,"[1] the article explores how the land along the Old Durham Road, where these settlers lived, might be considered an "accidental archive." Three "evidences" of the settlement are taken up: wild apple trees, a stone foundation, and crockery shards from a kitchen midden. Through seasonal changes, the land both hides and reveals, suggesting both the literal and the metaphoric "absent presence" of this historic community. In closing, the article explores how this archive might best be accessed.

1 Jonathan Silin, "The Teacher as Accidental Archivist," *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 15, no. 2 (April 2014): 133–42.


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"The records in the archives tell a very small part of a much larger and infinitely complex story."[2]

Berlin, West Germany, May 1985:
On May 8, a small group of young people arrived at the site of the Gestapo, carrying signs that read "Dig Where You Stand," and before a crowd of astonished onlookers, they began to hack at the earth, to dig into the history of the place, so to speak – to excavate the foundations of a taboo past.[3]

In the mid-1960s, my family bought three adjacent 50-acre lots from a farming family in (the former) Artemesia Township in Grey County, Ontario, along what is known as the Old Durham Road. It was, as my father called it, "scrub land," which meant that it was not really suitable for farming. But it had been farmed, because most of the land was meadow, suggesting that at some point in its post-contact history, it had been logged – cleared of the trees and underbrush. The land slopes down to the Saugeen River. The soil is glacial till, full of rocks and gravel, and the ground is full of springs, with a large expanse of swamp. It was not an idyllic pioneer farm by any stretch of the imagination, but it had been a farm nevertheless.

My family soon learned from our neighbours that the land along the Old Durham Road had been farmed first by "black slaves" who had been "given the land by Queen Victoria." I grew up hearing a few scant stories about these long-ago refugees from slavery. These stories usually came in the form of gossip or asides.[4] They were not stories that populated the current-day community's narratives about the area's pioneer settlers. As a child, I did not learn that the black settlers were the first non-native residents on the road. That particular "bragging right" was inaccurately bestowed upon the Scottish and Irish immigrants who came later. But since 1990, when I literally stumbled upon a public gathering in what had been a farmer's field, I have been attempting to uncover and piece together a history of this long-ago community.[5] As the German youth did in 1985, I have been digging where I stand.

2 Rodney G.S. Carter, "Of Things Said and Unsaid: Power, Archival Silences, and Power in Silence," *Archivaria* 61 (Spring 2006): 221.

3 Erna Paris, *Long Shadows: Truth, Lies and History* (Toronto: Bloomsbury, 2001), 32.

4 Naomi Norquay, "Remembering in a Context of Forgetting: Hauntings and the Old Durham Road Black Pioneer Settlement," *Canadian Social Studies* 47, no. 2 (2014): 127–39.

5 See Naomi Norquay, "'Dig Where You Stand!' Challenging the Myth of the white Pioneer," *Northern Terminus: The African Canadian History Journal* 1 (2002): 1–6; "Land's Memory: Looking for Traces of the Old Durham Road Black Pioneer Settlement," *Northern Terminus: The African Canadian History Journal* 7 (2010): 14–21; and "Finding Ned Patterson," *Northern Terminus: The African Canadian History Journal* 8 (2011): 13–23 (all accessed 6 February 2016, http://www.greyroots.com/collections-research/northern-terminus/?search=northern%20terminus).

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In October 1990, the local community, which included descendants of both the white and black settlers, as well as relative newcomers, gathered in a small field at the corner of the Old Durham Road and Grey County Road 14 to celebrate the reclamation of a historic burial ground where the original black settlers had buried their dead between about 1849 and 1880.[6] The then Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, Lincoln Alexander, was present to officiate at the unveiling of a large commemorative granite stone. While the community "knew" the field had once been a burial ground, it was considered abandoned, and by the 1930s the farmer who owned the land had ploughed it and planted potatoes. This burial ground, now registered with the province and known as the Old Durham Road Pioneer Cemetery, is the only remaining official marker of this historic settlement.[7]

What became Artemesia Township in the County of Grey had been territory of the Chippewa nation, which ceded this portion to the British government in 1818, with adjacent areas being ceded in 1836.[8] When the land survey was completed in 1849, 16 black families arrived on the newly surveyed road and applied for location tickets.[9] When the 1851 census taker came along, he found in Artemesia Township a well-established community of black settlers. There were 118 residents in 20 households. Each 50-acre lot had a log cabin, cleared land, crops, and farm animals. All had been in Upper Canada for at least 8 years, some for as many as 20 years; one family had been in Upper Canada for 30 years.[10] A second wave of refugees from the United States found their way to the Old Durham Road in the late 1850s and early 1860s.

Over time, the community's visible presence disappeared. Many left what had been very marginal farmland to find work in the towns of Owen Sound and Collingwood. Many intermarried with white settler families and gradually integrated into white society, as continuing racist practices and attitudes marginalized blackness. The black burial ground on the Old Durham Road, like other pioneer burial grounds, fell into disrepair, eventually becoming a farmer's field: the headstones were removed and the land ploughed up. The reclamation and rededication of the cemetery in 1990 and the recovery of four headstones from a stone pile just north of the site asserted the presence

6 Peter Meyler, ed., *Broken Shackles: Old Man Henson, from Slavery to Freedom* (Toronto: Natural Heritage Books, 2001), 201–2.

7 While oral history sources date the community to the late 1820s, I have found no official documentation to substantiate this. Extant archival records date the community as far back as the late 1840s.

8 E.L. Marsh, *A History of the County of Grey* (Owen Sound, ON: Fleming Publishing Co., 1931), 33.

9 Archives of Ontario, Crown Lands Administration Subject Files, RG 1–9, vol. 12, env. 6, MS892, reel 7, "Report of Lands Located on the Durham Road," 1849.

10 Archives of Ontario, Crown Lands Administration Subject Files, RG 1-9, vol. 12, env. 7, MS892, reel 7, "Report of Lands Located on the Durham Road," 1851.

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of this community in an environment that has been generally hesitant and even resistant to acknowledge its existence.[11] As late as 2005, the local chamber of commerce business directory for the area had this to say about the history:

> Artemesia Township was described by the Government of the Dominion of Canada as a "veritable Garden of Eden" in its solicitation for emigrants to settle in this area. With the promise of 50 acres free and 50 acres for 50 cents per acre, European settlers began arriving in the mid 1850's. By 1861 Artemesia had a population of 2,575.[12]

The historic black settlement is denied by being left out. Local history books, written prior to the cemetery's reclamation, also contain this same convenient omission. In *Split Rail Country: A History of Artemesia Township*, the biographical narratives of the ancestors of well-known families with long roots in the community leave out any reference to their black heritage. In one case, the fact that the original family had escaped from slavery is omitted, and instead the family history starts with information about the children who were "born in Upper Canada."[13] In another instance, wherein the patriarch had escaped slavery in Maryland and the matriarch was an immigrant from Ireland, the family narrative presents both as having "come from County Cork."[14] By omitting the information about black ancestors, the dominant narrative about the Scots and the Irish pioneers has, for the most part, gone uncontested. The ploughing up and removal of headstones from the burial ground suggests another way in which the community has denied this history.[15]

In casual conversations about the black settlers, I am often rebuffed with "common-sense" explanations that "disappear"[16] the community from the history: "Oh, they came here, but they left." "They weren't really farmers. They were trades people." "Slaves did not have pioneering skills." "They couldn't take the cold." "They all moved to Owen Sound and Collingwood." Recently,

11 See Meyler, *Broken Shackles*; and David Sutherland and Jennifer Holness, *Speakers for the Dead* [video] (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 2000), accessed 6 February 2016, https://www.nfb.ca/film/speakers-for-the-dead.

12 Flesherton Chamber of Commerce, *Chamber of Commerce Business Directory* (Flesherton, ON: Chamber of Commerce, 2005), 3.

13 Mildred Young Hubbert, ed., *Split Rail Country: A History of Artemesia Township*, comp. Historical Society of Artemesia Township (Markham, ON: Historical Society of Artemesia Township, 1986), 122.

14 Ibid., 135.

15 Sutherland and Holness, *Speakers for the Dead*.

16 I am deliberately using the verb *disappear* in the transitive form, in reference to the term used for victims of political persecution in Latin America (*Los Desaparecidos*, "The Disappeared Ones"). I do this in order to suggest the deliberate nature of the acts of disappearance that made this community invisible in most historical accounts. See Kwame Anthony Appiah, Henry Louis Gates Jr., and Michael Colin Vasquez, eds., *The Dictionary of Global Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 175.

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I had one conversation with an elderly community member who was incensed that new promotional literature on the cemetery claimed that some of the settlers had been Loyalists (free blacks): "They can't have been [free blacks]! They were all run-away slaves!" In this person's mind, there were two kinds of black settlers: respectable free blacks and run-aways. The term "run-away" implies someone who is leaving illegally, shirking their responsibilities, sneaking around, not putting down roots. White settlers from the British Isles were the "real" pioneers: they stayed; they persevered. They were the ones who embodied what Elizabeth Furniss identifies as "the ideals of individualism, courage, and self-sufficiency."[17]

In her study of the commemorative practices in a museum in a small city in British Columbia's interior, Furniss explores how the myth of the frontier and the idea of the white pioneer have become embedded in Canada's "master narrative."[18] The "untamed" and "untouched" wilderness is how the "frontier" is imagined. Central to the endeavour of its taming and claiming is the white pioneer, who not only ignores the presence and history of the First Nations, but also that of other immigrants groups, which in the community she studied in British Columbia included Chinese and South Asian immigrants.[19] Furniss concludes that "the accumulated silences of the frontier myth do have implications for the shaping of public consciousness. The frontier myth … encodes a systematic forgetting of contentious issues of the past."[20]

Katherine McKittrick cites the unsuccessful attempt of the (nearby) Holland Township Council in Grey County to change the name of the historic Negro Creek Road to Moggie Road (after a white pioneer settler), calling this an example of "narratives of erasure."[21] Rinaldo Walcott observed that the Negro Creek protestors who successfully lobbied for the historic name to remain "were not just marching so that the visible and tangible evidence of the past would not disappear, they were also marching because reclaiming Negro is as important a part of black historical memory and experience as any other artifact or document."[22]

I am implicated in this refusal to acknowledge the history of the black settlement and to instead privilege that of the white settlers. When we first owned the property, we learned from the elderly farmer next door that two

17 Elizabeth Furniss, "Pioneers, Progress, and the Myth of the Frontier: The Landscape of Public History in Rural British Columbia," *BC Studies* 115–116 (Autumn/Winter 1997/98): 11.

18 Ibid.

19 While Furniss does not include black immigrants in her argument, their presence in B.C. dates back to at least 1858. See Wayde Compton, *49th Parallel Psalm* (Vancouver: Advance Editions, 1999).

20 Ibid., 40.

21 Katherine McKittrick, "'Their Blood Is There, and They Can't Throw It Out': Honouring Black Canadian Geographies," *Topia* 7 (Spring 2002): 27.

22 Rinaldo Walcott, *Black Like Who? Writing Black Canada* (Toronto: Insomniac Press, 1997), 43.

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of our three 50-acre lots had been owned by a black preacher. My family was amused by this coincidence because my father was also a preacher. We learned from this farmer that the site we had chosen for the cottage was on the same hill where the black preacher had had his place. My family always trotted out this story whenever we had guests at the property. I recall feeling proud of this story: we owned a unique chunk of Canadian history. But as far we were concerned, that black preacher and the settler community to which he belonged were long gone – assigned to the scrap heap of historical knowledge that got left out of the officially sanctioned history of Canada. In the end, the story was about us and not about him.

Until the reclamation of the cemetery in 1990 and the flurry of press it received, I was quite content to share the story of the black preacher as an interesting oddity or curiosity about my family's property. In the ensuing decade, after I became a professor in a faculty of education, I began to realize how incomplete and inaccurate school curricula were regarding Canada's settler peoples. There was a history right at my doorstep that had been ignored, silenced, and denied. I began spending time in the archives (the "official" archives, that is) looking for documentary remnants of what has come to be called the Old Durham Road black pioneer settlement.

When it comes to the historic black settlers, the archives present a dilemma. The only place racial identity is officially recorded is in the personal census returns. The data on race provided by the census are not necessarily accurate. In the racist and racialized context of British North America, strategic lying on the part of some settlers to hide their racial identities, and guessing on the part of census takers who thought they could "tell" race by how someone "looked," produced racial identity information that was anything but foolproof.[23] This became clear to me through my perusal of the 1851, 1861, and 1871 censuses for the Township of Artemesia. Some residents, listed as "coloured" in the 1851 census, were "English" or "Irish" in the subsequent censuses. Children whose parents were listed as "coloured" were designated "M" (for "mulatto"). In a few cases, racial designation had been blotted out. Some documents, such as the "Durham Road Registry,"[24] included places of origin. If, for example, a settler had come from an American slave-holding state, it was very likely that the settler was black. Obituaries are another source of information on race. Terms such as "coloured" or "Negro" would be used to both describe and "other" the deceased person if he or she was black. These archival sources are scant, inconsistent, sporadic, and not always accurate. Other records,

23 Sutherland and Holness, *Speakers for the Dead*.

24 Grey Roots Museum & Archives, Town of Durham Fonds, GF8S1F4I1, "Durham Road Registry," 1848–1851. It is important to note that in 2003 the Grey Roots Museum & Archives discovered that pages from this registry had been torn out. There are no entries for Artemesia Township.

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such as marriage and death registries, are only useful once black heritage is established.

The black settlers along the Old Durham Road left few remnants, few personal traces (such as diaries, letters, or photos) to the area's museums and archives. Families that may have black heritage have often been reluctant to share their keepsakes of that heritage. Karina Vernon investigated the reasons why descendants of Alberta's black pioneers were reluctant to hand over archival material to public institutional archives.[25] Community members believed that "making the archive public was equivalent to 'giving it over to white people.'"[26] They also felt that archivists would not "appreciate the memorial, spiritual, sentimental, and cultural values clinging to [the] objects."[27] Furthermore, community members worried about the kind of access to their materials family members might have.[28] Vernon regards these responses as evidence of community empowerment, not community self-silencing.

In Artemesia Township, some descendants remain ashamed of their black heritage, many do not even know that they are descendants, and some seem to be perpetrators of the silencing and denial that has for so long marked this history. For example, the South Grey Museum in the village of Flesherton (Artemesia Township) has an artifact cabinet that was lovingly crafted and donated by a descendant of a pioneering family with black ancestry. It is only within the past couple of years that the cabinet's display signage has included acknowledgement of this family's black heritage.

To attempt to understand this, I conducted a series of oral history interviews with elderly members of the community.[29] I interviewed people from three different groups: descendants of the black settlers, descendants of the white settlers, and people like myself, who had come to the area from elsewhere.[30] The information about the black settlers gleaned from these interviews was minimal, owing in part to a long-held community reluctance to talk about this settlement and to the advanced age of the interviewees. For the most part, they were recounting stories about the settlement as told to them by their elders.[31] Three of the research participants acknowledged their black ancestral identity. They all reported knowing a little about that heritage and explained

25 Karina Vernon, "Invisibility Exhibit: The Limits of Library and Archives Canada's 'Multicultural Mandate,'" in *Basements and Attics, Closets and Cyberspace: Explorations in Canadian Women's Archives*, ed. Linda M. Morra and Jessica Schagerl (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012), 193–204.

26 Ibid., 199.

27 Ibid., 200.

28 Ibid., 201.

29 This oral history project was supported by two small grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada in 2011 and 2013.

30 All of these "newcomer" participants were white.

31 See Norquay, "Remembering in a Context of Forgetting."

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that their parents had raised them to focus on their white identity. They did not have stories about their black ancestors beyond what they had gleaned (as adults) from census documents, marriage records, and newspaper obituaries – the usual sources for genealogical research. I am mindful of both the limits and possibilities of oral history research methodology. Alexander Freund reminds us that

> oral historians have also developed a theoretical apparatus, one that tells us that the data we captured are far from fixed, finite or complete. Memories are fleeting, products of encounters between interviewers and interviewees, effects of social discourses and narrative conventions, and only residually and indirectly connected to lived experience.[32]

As I engage in my research and reach out to both share it and find out more, I am occasionally met with stony silence, as a reminder that I am an outsider and that this history should be of no concern to me. The archive, at times, has been a refuge: a place where I can continue my "digging" without judgment. But the official archive is as much marked by its exclusions as by what it incorporates.[33] As a piece of state apparatus, the archive both sustains and derives from the seat of power. As Jacques Derrida reminds us, "There is no political power without control of the archive."[34] State power operates both through what the archive houses and "through what is missing from [it]."[35] The archive works to reify the boundary between the dominant and the marginalized. The archive is one location where what is absent becomes a presence, but also where what is deemed worth remembering "erases what has been excluded."[36]

For Jonathan Silin, the archive's boundaries (of inclusions and exclusions) map "processes of loss and recuperation, memory and forgetfulness."[37] Without the historian's desire to know, and without the descendant's curiosity, an archive is simply a holding tank. Carolyn Steedman points out that "the infinite heap of things they recorded, the notes and traces that these people left

32 Alexander Freund, "Toward an Ethics of Silence? Negotiating Off-the-Record Events and Identity in Oral History," in *Oral History Off the Record: Toward an Ethnography of Practice*, ed. Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 232.

33 See Carter, "Of Things Said and Unsaid"; I found this article to be very helpful for my understanding of the archives in relation to this particular community.

34 Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression,* trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 4.

35 Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 68.

36 Sherry Turkle, ed., *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 324.

37 Silin, "The Teacher as Accidental Archivist," 137.

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behind, constitute practically nothing at all."[38] There is no history without the interventions that piece together a story. The archive's content "sits there until it is read, and used, and narrativised."[39]

Sven Spieker observes that an archive holds the kind of information that we do not generally carry around with us when we think about individuals and communities. He suggests that

> what the archive records … rarely coincides with what our consciousness is able to register. Archives do not record experience so much as its absence; they mark the point where an experience is missing from its proper place, and what is returned to us in an archive may well be something we never possessed in the first place.[40]

It is difficult to experience what is in an archive – its actual contents. Archival material is not usually exhibited per se, but rather interpreted through text or other media.[41] The contents are mediated and reconstructed by the person who engages the archive's collection – and this is usually in written form, with digitized images of snippets of a census or land record to animate the written text. The consumers/audience of this text have to take the author's word for it, both in terms of the interpretation of the archival documents and the extent of the digging (for documents), as the "evidence" is rarely reproduced in any substantive way.

Besides the already mentioned limitations of the archive for researching the Old Durham Road black pioneer settlement, relying solely on the archives is problematic for three reasons. First, I believe this "disappeared" community is owed more than a statistical analysis. Statistical information does little to "animate" this community. It provides little in terms of challenging the ways in which the community has been dismissed as historically insignificant. Second, to rely solely on the archival record, gaps are produced and then sedimented into the historical narrative, as in "This is all we can know." Third, because the archive does not note its exclusions, it is not helpful in my desire to document both the community's presence *and* its absence.

I wish to expand our knowledge of this important historic community beyond the official documentation available to me in the various archives I have accessed[42] and the oral history interviews I have conducted with elderly members of the community. Neither the statistics on historic individuals

38 Steedman, *Dust*, 18.

39 Ibid., 68.

40 Sven Spieker, *The Big Archive: Art from Bureaucracy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 3.

41 See Spieker, *The Big Archive*; and Turkle, *Evocative Objects*.

42 The majority of my research has taken place at the Archives of Ontario (in Toronto), the Grey Roots Museum and Archives (in Owen Sound, Grey County, Ontario), and the South Grey Museum and Historical Library (in Flesherton, in the former municipality of Artemesia, Grey County, Ontario).

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nor the vague and scant recollections contribute enough to the community I wish to animate. What I am after lies somewhere beyond these two historical sources. In the spirit of the German youth who protested the official silence around Germany's Nazi past, by literally digging into the ground where the Gestapo headquarters once stood,[43] I have turned to the land itself as a source of historical record.[44]

As a white member of the community who is still regarded by some as a newcomer, my claim to this place and this work is complex. As a landowner and land steward, I am committed to locating and preserving the historical record on my own property. But I also wish to challenge the local practices of the denial and disavowal that rob us all of a more fulsome historical account. While it is not my place nor my intent to "out" descendants of the black settler community who do not wish to be so identified, I do want to contribute to the ongoing and growing community of local people who have been uncovering, legitimizing, and "normalizing" this history by insisting on its inclusion in the local historical record.[45] In *The Autobiographical Demand of Place*, curriculum theorist Brian Casemore summons us to consider that

> if we accept that place is ideological as well as physically dimensional, created in the mind and through language as well as the landscape, and thus constituted through certain values, some prejudicial, we have an opportunity to explore it as something that emerges laden with personal and public meanings.[46]

My childhood was spent roaming our land and the surrounding environs, becoming familiar with all it contained but having no context in which to understand the historical significance of fallen-down cedar-rail fencing, large piles of rocks and boulders, wild apple trees, fieldstone foundations of various dimensions, shards of crockery and china, or the occasional hand-hewn nail. Almost 50 years later, these traces still remain. Now I know their value. Now I understand the enormous loss they represent: how their persisting presence marks a festering absence. I am what Jonathan Silin has termed "an accidental

43 Paris, *Long Shadows*.

44 See Richard H. Schein, "Digging in Your Own Backyard," *Archivaria* 61 (Spring 2006): 91–104. I have been encouraged by Schein's thoughtful engagement of both the land at his doorstep and what the archives hide and reveal about an African-American historic past.

45 Among these efforts are the Annual Black History Event, currently held at Grey Roots Museum and Archives in Owen Sound, Ontario; the Speakers' Forum at the annual Owen Sound Emancipation Festival (now in its 155th year); *Northern Terminus: The African Canadian History Journal* (a community publication produced annually by the Grey Roots Museum and Archives); the South Grey Museum's new and permanent black history exhibit; and the work of the Old Durham Road Pioneer Cemetery Committee.

46 Brian Casemore, *The Autobiographical Demand of Place: Curriculum Inquiry in the American South* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 7.

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archivist"[47] each time I return to the land with ever-deepening insights into what it holds. I have come to think of the land as an accidental archive of the black settlement.

The land, as archival document,[48] works on both a literal and metaphoric level. On the literal level, the physical remnants of the settlement are everywhere to be found, but you do have to know how they signify. Without the mediation of historical knowledge, the remnants may not be readily connected to the settlement. On a metaphoric level, how the land holds and reveals these remnants suggests something about the patterns and practices of disappearing and reappearing that have occurred and are occurring over time (across the historical landscape). In what she terms "a geography of resistance," Cheryl Janifer LaRoche created a black settler archive when she explored four free black communities in Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio that had participated in various practices of support and collusion in what is broadly known as the Underground Railroad.[49] Drawing on archaeological findings, local histories, and oral history interviews, she reconstructed these four long lost communities. A crucial aspect of her exploration is the land itself. In many parts of the United States, as in Artemesia Township and elsewhere in Canada, black settlers often received the poorest land. Citing both topographic maps and soil analyses, LaRoche explores how "poor-quality land functions as an important marker for locating black settlements along the Underground Railroad."[50] La Roche also points out that building foundations say something about how these settlers organized themselves into communities. The proximity of their homes, the location of their churches and cemeteries, provide insights into how they functioned as communities and endured practices of marginalization.

James Deetz's classic study of the archaeology of early American life looks at various remnants of Anglo-American and African-American material culture in the 17th, 18th, and early 19th century: building foundations, crockery shards, clay pipes, gravestone carvings – the "small things forgotten"[51] that speak to daily aspects of life in historic times. His inclusion of African-American examples challenges long-held assumptions that had previously excluded black lived experience from the American historical landscape. I would argue that in documenting these archaeological findings and thinking about them collectively, Deetz, like LaRoche, has amassed an archive about black settler life. With a dearth of written sources (the "usual suspects" in an

47 Silin, "The Teacher as Accidental Archivist," 133.

48 Cheryl Janifer LaRoche, *Free Black Communities and the Underground Railroad: The Geography of Resistance* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2014).

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid., 101.

51 James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten: An Archaeology of Early American Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1996), 4.

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archive), the land proves to be a welcome accomplice in building what Ann Cvetkovich refers to as the community or grassroots archive.[52] Citing the Lesbian Herstory Archives in Brooklyn and the Gay and Lesbian Historical Society in San Francisco, Cvetkovich advocates archival practices that remain outside of the dominant realm. Lesbian and gay archives

> address the traumatic loss of history that accompanied sexual life and the formation of sexual publics, and they assert the role of memory and affect in compensating for institutional neglect. Like other archives of trauma, such as those that commemorate the Holocaust, slavery or war, they must enable the acknowledgement of a past that can be painful to remember, impossible to forget, and resistant to consciousness.[53]

Cvetkovich calls for an archive of feelings and cites, as an example, the Lesbian Herstory Archives as providing “an emotional rather than a narrowly intellectual experience.”[54] She also cautions that as lesbian and gay histories get embraced by mainstream institutions, it will be important not to forget the long traditions of exclusion and marginalization, nor to forsake “the more queer collections and strategies of the grassroots archives.”[55]

What I am after in the archive I wish to create about/for the Old Durham Road black pioneer settlement are artifacts that document “a geography of resistance,”[56] the “small things forgotten,”[57] and the trauma of exclusion and denial.[58] The archive I am conjuring has both literal and metaphoric attributes. I have chosen three remnants to explore: apple trees, a foundation wall, and some contents of a midden (refuse heap). Moving from the exterior vestiges of community to the interior of a settler’s home, I investigate both the public and the private.

### *Apple Trees*

Old, gnarled apple trees dot the landscape along the old road (Figure 1). Some still bear fruit, while others are hollowed-out trunks, fallen-down, and rotting. There are also many younger trees, the offspring of the original apple trees that the settlers planted. According to Michael Pollan,[59] settlers grew apple trees for cider. In Ohio, settlers had to plant 50 apple or pear trees before they could

52 Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 14.
53 Ibid., 241.
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid., 245.
56 La Roche, *Free Black Communities and the Underground Railroad,* ix.
57 Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten*, 4.
58 Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*.
59 Michael Pollan, *The Botany of Desire: A Plant’s-Eye View of the World* (New York: Random House, 2001), 22.

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**Figure 1:** Apple Tree on Lot 9, South Side of the Old Durham Road.

receive the deed to their property. Pollan suggests that apple trees symbolized "an idealized or domesticated version of a forest" and as such were thought to be "a tremendous comfort on the frontier." [60] Historical accounts of late-18th-century and early-19th-century Upper Canada mention apple orchards as key components of settlement.[61] The 1851 census for Artemesia lists a handful of apple orchards in the vicinity of the Old Durham Road. Settlers may have purchased apple seedlings from these orchards. They made cider and vinegar from the apples and also dried them to store for the winter.[62]

In this Methodist community, one wonders how the making and drinking of cider could be acceptable. Pollan points out that in America many Puritans and other religious groups did not oppose its production and consumption because the Bible does not mention cider – only wine![63] Cider was a ubiquitous part of pioneer life, often being safer to drink than water, and cider vinegar

60 Ibid., 16.

61 For accounts of apple orchards in early Upper Canada, see Dorothy Duncan, *Hoping for the Best, Preparing for the Worst: Everyday Life in Upper Canada, 1812–1814* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2012); and John Howison, *Sketches of Upper Canada, Domestic, Local, and Characteristic* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1821; repr. Toronto: Coles Publishing, 1970.)

62 Pollan, *The Botany of Desire*; Duncan, *Hoping for the Best, Preparing for the Worst*.

63 Pollan, *The Botany of Desire*, 21.

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was used as a disinfectant. Today, the apple trees closely mark the changing seasons: their blossoms are wonderfully pink and resplendent in the spring; in the summer, small green apples begin to form; in the fall, their fruit comes in an array of colours, from pale yellow to deep red; and in the winter any remaining apples have brown leathery skins and hold a thick, fermented syrup, not unlike apple jack (a highly potent cider made from frozen apple pulp).

The apple trees suggest a number of things to me about the pioneer settlement. First and foremost, they suggest community. Harvesting apples, pressing cider, and then drinking it speak of community, of sharing, of putting away stores for the winter. They also signify tradition: following the fruit-bearing cycle dictated by the seasons, cider making would have been an annual fall event. That the apple trees endure suggests to me the capacity of the land to hold memory – evidence, if you like – of this forgotten and denied history. The apple trees participate in this act of hiding and then disclosing. They assert a continual presence of the members of this historic community, who were not "on the run," who cultivated and maintained the same kinds of settlement activities as their white neighbours. It is important to note that these activities are the hallmark of pioneer villages where mostly white enactors attempt to replicate pioneer life. Cider was for survival, but also for celebration. Planting apples trees was both a literal and symbolic act of putting down roots. The apple trees also invite us into the domestic sphere.

### *Foundation Wall*

The foundation wall of the home of the black preacher who owned our property is right near our driveway. Sometimes you can see it and sometimes you cannot. The summer grasses fill in and cover it so successfully that you cannot see the foundation unless you know it is there. Because the county is located in what is called the snowbelt, in the winter the snow covers and rarely leaves any indentation at all. In the early spring, before the new grass has begun to grow and the land is still "compressed" as a result of the snow load, the stone foundation is easy to see. Besides marking the outline of a home, it also is a record of the duties that settlers had to agree to undertake in order to receive the crown patent for their 50-acre lot (figure 2).

Kathy Mezei observes that although domestic spaces (and their details, such as furniture, rooms, windows, doors, and the like) are often considered banal, they are "vital to the shaping of … memories,… imagination and … selves."[64] Further, she argues that domestic spaces are "the product of society,

64 Kathy Mezei, "Domestic Space and the Idea of Home in Auto/biographical Practices," in *Tracing the Autobiographical*, ed. Marlene Kadar, Linda Warley, Jeanne Perrault, and Susanna Egan (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005), 82.

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**Figure 2:** Foundation Wall of a Settler's Home, c. 1855, Lot 8, South Side of the Old Durham Road.

they express and reinforce its norms, social practices and ideologies."[65] The footprint of this particular domestic space matches the size required for settlement: the foundation is 18 by 22 feet. The foundation wall is made of field stones, now all moss covered but still maintaining their orderliness, some still with mortar in between. The mortar is homemade, typical of the era. It is local limestone that has been fired and mixed with sand.[66] On a literal level, these stones provide evidence of a dwelling. Symbolically, they evoke the sensibilities of setting down roots, of building order among frontier chaos, of cementing together fragments of a life. The mortar stands as evidence of the local frontier economy where goods and services were bartered, traded, and sold, and where neighbours came together to help each other. Together, the stone wall and the mortar point to craft and skill and thereby challenge the often-heard comment that the black settlers had the wrong skill set for the hard pioneering life on the frontier.

65 Ibid., 81.

66 Several of the elderly informants in the oral history interviews mentioned the presence of lime kilns on the farms where they grew up.

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A narrow indentation leading into the foundation suggests a doorway to a cellar. I have come to understand this doorway on both a literal and metaphoric plane. Kathy Mezei suggests that doors and doorways mark "a liminal space separating outside from inside.… As intermediary between inside and outside the door serves as a structural device of passage, entrance and departure."[67] The doorway invites us to consider the residents in their domestic sphere, as private citizens.

Dionne Brand's "door of no return" marks the domestic space as a place of belonging and un-belonging.[68] Brand's door of no return refers to the doors on the African slave-trade holding cells, through which captured Africans passed, never to return, on their way to enslavement across the middle passage. Doors mark both safety and danger, home and exile. Karolyn Smardz Frost notes that Thornton and Lucie Blackburn, who were refugees from slavery living in Toronto and running the city's first cab company, built a home whose structure was "a classic African American 'shotgun house.'"[69] This style of building, wherein the front door lined up with the back door, had travelled from West Africa to America. Derived from the Yoruban word for "house" *(togun)*, the alignment of the doors meant that evil spirits could easily pass through without harming the occupants.[70] Doorways, then, may signify something much more than simple entrances and exits. For these refugees from American slavery, doors opening and closing might mean the difference between danger and safety or between continued bondage and freedom.

When I look at the foundation as a remnant of this historic settlement, I wonder if the black settlers encountered this new domestic space as laden with mixed meanings: as a symbol of freedom or a reminder of confinement?; as safe harbour or a dangerous place to flee from at a moment's notice? Did they seek sanctuary behind the closed door, away from a harsh climate or the daily prejudices that may have shaped their participation in the wider community? Did they look out and feel amazement that they actually owned the land on which their house stood? Did they look out one day and realize that the landscape had not only become familiar, but also "home"? To move further into this domestic space, we must go outside to where the midden (the refuse heap) must have been.

67 Mezei, "Domestic Space and the Idea of Home," 94.

68 Dionne Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 2001), 6.

69 Karolyn Smardz Frost, *I've Got a Home in Glory Land: A Lost Tale of the Underground Railroad* (Toronto: Thomas Allen, 2007), 264.

70 Ibid.

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**Figure 3:** Shards Found in Author's Garden, Lot 8, South Side of the Old Durham Road.

### *The Midden*

Every spring when I turn soil in the garden, I find little pieces of broken crockery, which include patterned porcelain and china and thick bits of earthenware, as well as the odd hand-hewn nail, and even broken pieces of clay smoking pipes (figure 3). Being far enough north, the ground freezes in the winter and then thaws and expands in the spring. The expansion pushes things to the surface. The local farmers always joke that stones are the first crop off their fields every year. Frost heave becomes an insistence that we remember. The ground literally holds the past in its grip, and then lets go and pushes it to the surface. If I pay attention when I plant my garden, I often uncover what has been forgotten. It is quite likely that my garden is where the midden used to be – a stone's throw from the foundation wall. James Deetz comments on refuse practices in early America and notes that archaeological evidence suggests "all waste materials were simply thrown out, and often at what to us would have been an alarmingly short distance from the door."[71] The midden marks another boundary between the inside and outside spaces of the settler's life.

There is an intimacy about the fragments of crockery. They are unassuming, easily overlooked, and discarded again. I have yet to attempt any identification

71 Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten,* 172.

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of the fragments, in terms of what exactly they are and where they might have been made,[72] but I take to heart Deetz's observation that "pottery is largely utilitarian. Its interpretation relates to the everyday aspects of past life rather than the more esoteric."[73] Among my spring findings are shards of clay smoking pipes. It is possible that these pipes were homemade, but they may have been purchased or bartered, just as the household crockery may have been. The midden's remnants point to the settlers' domestic arrangements, to life lived not only on the land and in the community, but also inside the home. They are a reminder of both the intimacy and the immediacy of family and domestic life.

## On Being an Accidental Archivist

As traces of lives lived long ago, this accidental archive opens up spaces of interrogation that are often overlooked when we rely only on the same regimes of documentation and the same standard research tools. They place these settlers not only within a landscape, but also within a community. In the offerings from the land's archive, I note the seasonal patterns of remembering and forgetting. In a context that both acknowledges these settlers and disavows them at the same time, the apple trees, the foundation wall, and the shards of crockery persist and continue to situate this historic community in the known and knowable past. This land, as archive, provides both literal and metaphoric evidence of the community and of its history of being silenced and denied. This land is a living and breathing archive, embedded in and connected to black presence, then and now. This land "holds in it the possibility to speak for itself,"[74] to assert itself, if you will, as a viable alternative to the institutional archive, which may be defined by all of its exclusions and the inertness of its holdings.[75]

In Geneva, New York, there is a government "fifty-acre tree archive"[76] of apple trees from around the world. There are some 2,500 varieties. This archive has a curator whose mandate is to preserve and expand the apple's genetic diversity.[77] Michael Pollan connects this global apple archive to the

72 For an interesting analysis and use of these shards, see Martha Griffiths, "Grey-Blue Willow," *Northern Terminus: The African Canadian History Journal* 12 (2015): 1–13; and Martha Griffiths, "Casting Seams" (master's thesis, Ontario College of Art and Design University, Toronto, 2014).

73 Ibid., 69.

74 Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), x.

75 I thank peer reviewer 2 for this insight.

76 Pollan, *The Botany of Desire*, 43. See also the centre's website, accessed 6 February 2016, http://www.ars.usda.gov/research/projects_programs.htm?modecode=80-60-05-00.

77 Ibid., 52.

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importance of apple trees in the settlement of America's "frontiers" as they moved farther and farther west. This archive lives and breathes! It inspires me to consider creating a catalogue of the varietals of wild apple trees growing along the Old Durham Road, grouping them by colour, size, and taste.

But my accidental archive is of no use at all unless it is accessed by those interested or curious in coming to know the past differently. I have engaged this archive's contents in several ways. I have roamed the land, looking for "content." I have taken photographs of this content and used them in presentations and papers (such as this one). I have also conducted tours along the Old Durham Road and invited participants to walk on the land, stand in the indentation that was once the doorway to a settler's home, bite into an apple, walk around a stone pile, and trace a fallen cedar-rail fence through the tall grass. Finally, through digital images, I have introduced my teacher-education students to this archive and the historic community it documents.

"The day my partner of 30 years, the photographer Robert Giard, died," writes Silin at the beginning of his article, "I became an archivist."[78] Is archiving something we owe the dead? Archiving often follows a loss. Ann Cvetkovich acknowledges that "any archive is haunted by the specter of death."[79] The disappearance and subsequent denial of the black settlement along the Old Durham Road represents a history of loss and, as such, a traumatic loss of history. Something is owed to these long-dead settlers. There is an urgency about finding, documenting, and, where possible, protecting and preserving the material remains of this community. My archivist work is sporadic: determined by time, energy, weather, and season, and governed by the willingness of landowners to let me come and look. This archive of apple trees, stone foundations, indentations, rock piles, pottery shards, hand-hewn nails, remnants of lilac bushes, non-indigenous plants, fence lines, embedded barbed wire, and displaced tombstones, while extensive, may not survive the vicissitudes of time, inattentiveness, or the inevitable inadvertent and/or wilful destruction. Many of the once-cleared acreages (such as my family's) are filling in and reverting to forest.

For the most part, this archive will be accessed through digitized facsimiles. While I conduct at least one annual tour, inviting those interested to join me on a walk that is designed to "visit" various archived "items," this accidental and disparate archive, for the most part, sits unattended, its transformations unwitnessed, its losses unnoted. But is it an archive if no one comes to visit? Can this accidental archive be sustained if no one comes to have a look, experience, and thereby imagine this community?

78 Silin, "The Teacher as Accidental Archivist," 133.

79 Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 249.

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Until I read Silin's similarly named paper, I did not see the pedagogical mandate I was creating by conceiving and imagining this archive. Silin regards the work of teaching as including the work of archiving. Archiving presupposes a pedagogy. In his descriptions of "teachable moments" and the everyday work of documenting students' learning, Silin observes that "when familiar images are rearranged, reorganized, and regrouped new relationships, juxtapositions, and ideas are revealed.… forgotten documents … disturb taken-for-granted assumptions about how the world works."[80] Teachers retrieve "archived" incidents to enable reflection and transformation. They recognize that revisiting past experiences, through the application of knowledgeable and appropriate interpretive lenses, can help work toward a better future. While we may owe something to the dead, we most surely owe the living a more fulsome account of our history.

While it is not very feasible to bring people/learners to my accidental archive, I do bring the archive (at least, images from the archive) to learning environments. In my teacher-education class last year, I provided photos of crockery shards, building foundations, and apple trees, as well as passages from various texts and digitized images of entries from the land registry and the personal census. Working in groups of five, participants examined the names and ages of the members of a settler family, a map showing where they had lived, and a selection of the photos, text passages, and digitized images. While the digitized land registry and personal census entries were specifically about each family, the photos from the accidental archive were not. They were intended to evoke ideas about the life in community that the settlers might have shared. The quoted passages from period texts were about Artemesia Township, specifically from *Broken Shackles*,[81] or more generally about life in Upper Canada at that time.[82] Author Margaret Atwood's poetic interpretation of Susanna Moodie's life in the bush[83] was included to illustrate how history can be animated through fictional accounts. Each group of students was asked to consider three questions: From the resources available to you, what do you know about this family? What don't you know? What would you like to know?[84] After discussing the "unknown," each group chose one

80 Silin, "The Teacher as Accidental Archivist," 140–41.

81 Ibid.

82 See Duncan, *Hoping for the Best, Preparing for the Worst*; Howison, *Sketches of Upper Canada*; Susannah Moodie, *Roughing It in the Bush: or, Forest Life in Canada* (London: R. Bentley, 1852; repr. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1962); Catherine Parr Trail, *The Canadian Settler's Guide* (Toronto: C.W., printed at the Old Countryman Office, 1855; repr. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969).

83 Margaret Atwood and Charles Pachter, *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (Toronto: Macfarlane, Walter & Ross, 1997).

84 The basic premise for this workshop comes from the work of my colleague Kathleen Gould Lundy, *Teaching Fairly in an Unfair World* (Markham, ON: Pembroke Publishers, 2008).

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family member for someone in their group to role-play. The group then took turns asking the character questions. A story about the family emerged as the character's answers were further probed. The result was a series of dramatized narratives that animated the small amount of historic data provided.

What was interesting to me about the work my students produced was the power of the items from the accidental archive. In the narratives, the apple trees were in bloom, laden with fruit, and even chopped down. The stone foundations became cabins and housed scenes of domesticity and family and community tensions. A piece of clay pipe inspired the imagining of a community griot. None of these narratives was "true," but each embodied truths and provided enormous insight into what it might have been like to live in that community at that time. They addressed racial conflict, love, worry, and hope. They were funny, ironic, and sad. They wove the "small things forgotten"[85] into a larger narrative that challenged the myth of the centrality of the white pioneer to Canada's settlement. In so doing, they explored how historical experiences might have been felt.

Diana Taylor maintains that performance allows us to "take seriously the repertoire of embodied practices as important systems of knowing and transmitting knowledge. The repertoire, on a very practical level, expands the traditional archive."[86] Furthermore, "embodied performance"[87] addresses the emotional content of history that is not normally "recognized in texts and documents."[88] My accidental archive, I suggest, enhances the possibilities for exploring buried histories of trauma and loss. It can be used to summon and challenge teacher-education students to think beyond the dominant narratives of "the Canadian pioneer." In a small but significant way, the students' dramatic narratives become acts of resistance and reclamation. The historic settlers they breathe life into get rewoven into the fabric of history and memory. Moreover, they "assert the role of memory and affect in compensating for institutional neglect."[89]

In the winter months, Grey County closes in. The storms off Lake Huron to the west and Georgian Bay to the east bring blankets of snow. The archive "disappears." The ground freezes and the apple trees sometimes lose branches to snow load or ice. But come spring, the apple trees produce leaves and blossoms and the midden may offer up new treasures. The stone foundations will be their most visible, and the land contours may evoke new interpretations of the historic past. The cycle of seasons covers and then uncovers as it pushes

85 Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten*, 4.

86 Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Cultural Memory and Performance in the Americas* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 26.

87 Ibid., 49.

88 Ibid., xviii.

89 Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 241.

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buried evidences to the surface: evidences that announce, without fail, the amazing vibrancy and resilience of this long-ago community. This accidental archive annually enacts the important process of memory and recovery for all who wish to explore it.

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