

A living link with struggles for freedom, Mrs. Carolyn Robinson of LaSalle is a descendent of Abraham Shadd, whose aid for Black refugees has inspired a commemorative Canadian stamp (below).



Commemorating Our Historic Past

Canada Post Recognizes A Black Pioneer

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY
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Many of us may have traveled along the A D Shadd Road through North Buxton without realizing the historic significance of that thoroughfare. It was named after an American who emigrated to Canada in the 1850s and who was a major player in the Underground Railroad which helped slaves escape from the United States into Canada.

Born in Wilmington, Delaware, in 1801, Abraham Shadd was a shoemaker by trade and the father of 13 children. He was associated with the Society of Friends and worked with Thomas Garrett, a Quaker involved in the Underground Railroad in Wilmington. Garrett had a record of helping more than 2,700 fugitives who passed through his hands and Shadd's home was used as a hiding place for some of them.

At the age of 31, Abraham Shadd was elected vice-president of the National Convention for the Improvement of Free People of Color and was an active agent in several anti-slavery newspapers. A couple of years later he became president of the Convention and continued speaking against the African Colonization Society for its support of black deportation to Liberia. He was also involved in the formation of the American Anti-Slavery Society.

From Wilmington, Abraham and his family moved to West Chester, Pennsylvania, where he established a shoemaking business. He supplied footwear to slaves and

continued his militant advocacy of black civil rights.

In 1851, Shadd traveled to Toronto where he investigated first hand, the opportunities and conditions for settlement in Canada West. His eldest daughter had already moved here and set up a school for fugitives in Sandwich.

The following year, Abraham bought land in Raleigh Township for his family and others. He set up and financed a school on his farm and hired a teacher.

In 1858, he became the first black man to be elected to a Canadian public office, winning a seat on the Raleigh Township Council. During his tenure, he was instrumental in establishing S.S.#13 Raleigh, which was located in North Buxton as an addition to the school system operating in the Elgin Settlement.

Today, North Buxton is a National Historic Site where visitors can learn more about the black history of the area in a national museum.

Shadd bought more property in the area and provided money to settlers. His home was always open to fugitives who needed a



place to stay and he regularly entertained prominent visitors, including John Brown, who came to observe the settlement.

After the Civil War, most of Shadd's children and many of his friends returned to the U.S., but Abraham chose to remain in Canada. He lived here until 1882, when he died of diabetes.

Because of his tireless efforts and unselfish dedication to the cause of black people, Abraham Shadd is being honored by Canada Post with a commemorative stamp. His name was placed in nomination by the Congress of Black Women of Canada, and Canada Post.

The stamp is being introduced in time for Black History Month at several upcoming events in Toronto, Montreal, Winnipeg, Vancouver, Ottawa...and North Buxton.

One of Abraham Shadd's great great granddaughters, Carolyn Robinson of LaSalle, is representing the family on February 21st in Toronto at a gala hosted by the Ontario Chapter of the Congress of Black Women of Canada.

Born and raised in the North Buxton area, Carolyn has four sisters, along with a brother who still lives on the home farm in Buxton. She's a widow, mother of three and grandmother of five.

After retiring from her medical career as a Registered Nurse, she obtained a degree in Religious Education and is an ordained minister with the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada. She's on staff at Parkwood Gospel Temple Church in Windsor as Pastoral Care Pastor and serves on the Board for the Northstar Cultural Community Centre of Windsor and Essex County.

Every year on the second Sunday of July, members of the Shadd family from both sides of the river gather in either North Buxton or Windsor for an annual picnic. The attendance is huge: the mailing list includes more than 120 families in Southwestern Ontario and Michigan.

Although much of the history of the Shadd family occurred in the United States, Canada played a significant role in their lives and in the lives of thousands of oppressed black people in the U.S., both in the era of slavery and of Reconstruction.

As Black History Month approaches and with the inauguration of the first African American president of the United States, there are ample reasons and opportunities to further explore such an influential time in the history of this part of the world. WL



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