



THE TALKING DRUM



March 2013 Volume 15 No 3

The talking drum (aka dondo, adondo, atumpan, or gan gan) is a variable pitch pressure drum that has been used for centuries as a tool for communication within and between West African rural communities. By squeezing and beating the drum simultaneously the dondo can be made to mimic the syllables and intonations of human speech.

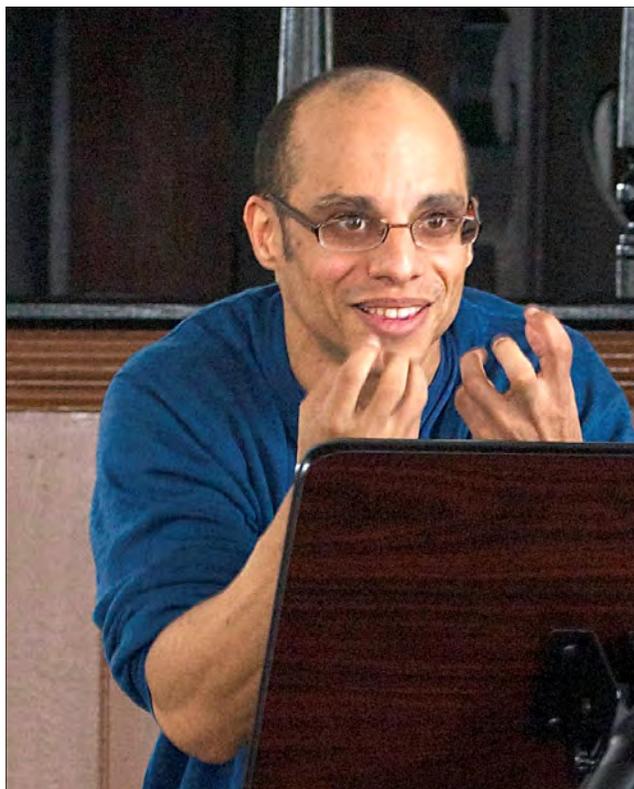
amherstburg RIVER TOWN TIMES

PROSTAFF EMPLOYMENT SOLUTIONS



The North American Black Historical Museum and Cultural Centre Inc. is a community-based, non-profit museum that tells the story of African-Canadians' journey and contributions, by preserving and presenting artifacts that educate and inspire.

History Forum - "Best yet!" says one evaluator



Dr. Harvey Whitfield, University of Vermont, captured his audience

On Saturday, February 2nd, the North American Black Historical Museum hosted the 4th Annual Freedom Landing Festival's History Forum at the Nazrey A.M.E. Church in Amherstburg. Participants, historians, and artists came together to honour sons and daughters of the African Diaspora, some familiar, some unknown. The forum opened with a moment of silence to reflect on the lives and legacies of Mrs. Leona Olbey and Mr. J. Lyle Browning. Mrs. Olbey was an active member of the Women's Auxili-

By Shantelle Browning-Morgan
Essex County
Black Historical Research Society  ECBHRS



Proud to support the Freedom Landing Festival Black History Forum.

We're working together with festival organizers to make a difference in our communities.



M04198 (0610)

ary of the North American Black Historical Museum for many years. Mr. J. Lyle Browning played a key role in the establishment of the North American Black Historical Museum and Cultural Centre.

The opening presentation, *One More River to Cross*, a true story of an incredible man named Isaac Brown who was enslaved in Maryland and eventually escaped to Canada after quite an ordeal, was delivered by historian and storyteller Bryan Prince. After watching the nationally televised edition of Alex Haley's *Roots*, Prince, like many descendants of the Transatlantic Slave Trade was eager to research his own family history. Throughout the course of his research, he located the name of

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March 2013

THE TALKING DRUM

is the newsletter of the

North American Black Historical Museum & Cultural Centre, Inc.

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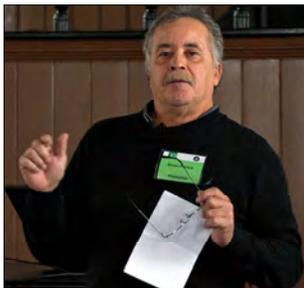
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his great-great-great-grandfather, Isaac Brown. Prince learned that Brown had resided in the Buxton area in the 1850s and died at a young age. Putting aside the research for many years, one day Prince stumbled upon some fascinating information about an Isaac Brown. Could it be the same Isaac Brown? Only time would tell. Prince discovered that Brown and his brother were enslaved on a Maryland plantation. His brother fell in love with a woman and was given permission to spend time with her as long as he returned to the plantation when expected. He failed to do so, resulting in the master, Alexander Somerville, stabbing him to death. Fourteen years later, Somerville was shot by a rifle



while reading a newspaper. He recovered but the question lingered: who shot him? Most people suspected that Brown was the perpetrator, acting out of revenge for the murder of his brother and his master's broken promise to free him at the age of 35. Brown was subsequently arrested though he professed his innocence, even after being given 100 lashes on two separate occasions. Officials even jailed his daughter in an effort to break her down to confess but she declared that her father committed no such crime.

Brown was then sold away to the deep South to prolific slave trader, Hope Slater. Along with 167 Black people, he was hoarded on to a ship destined for New Orleans. Prince noted that half of them were females with sad, dejected expressions, saying

their final goodbyes to their families as tears strolled down their cheeks. This was one of the cruelest realities of slavery—being sold away from one's family. Upon arrival in New Orleans, the men and women were physically examined by potential buyers. It was noted that Brown's back was battered from lashes-- a likely indication that he was an "unmanageable slave." As a result, Brown was given to a new owner on a trial basis to see if he could be a productive and obedient slave. If so, the owner would be required to pay later.

Once on the new plantation, Brown escaped and made his way to Pennsylvania, a free state where he was taken in by Lucretia and James

Mott, who also gave him a job. Despite his new lot in life, he longed to be reunited with his wife and 11 children who were free but still lived and worked on the master's plantation in Maryland. So, he sent a letter to them, informing them of his whereabouts. Little did he know that he just made a grave error. The letter was intercepted by Alexander Somerville. Brown was arrested and his master wished to have him extradited back to Maryland. As a result of a rarely-used law which affirmed that if there was a change in charges, the prisoner had the right to be freed, Isaac Brown was released.

A White minister named Samuel Young accompanied Brown, his wife and nine children to Canada. Along the way, the family hid out in Michi-

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Please report errors and omissions to
Kenn Stanton, Curator/Administrator
519-736-5433 nabhm@mnsi.net

Museum Membership is annual

2013 Memberships

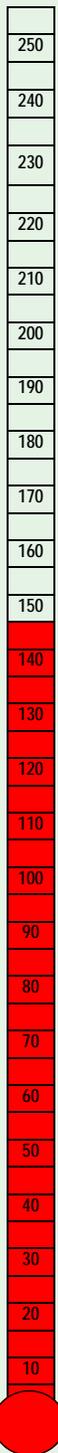
Members listed = 144
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144

(In 2012 we had 230 members.)

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Bruce Scott



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gan in an effort to avoid slave hunters. During a rainstorm, Brown boarded a ferry and crossed to Windsor. A few days later, his wife, children, and Minister Young joined him. They were then accompanied by Hiram Wilson to the Dawn Settlement of Dresden. Although Maryland officials demanded Brown's return, their request was denied. Isaac Brown was now a free man.

After the arrival at the Dawn Settlement, Prince was unable to locate any additional information on the Brown family, but the question remained: was the Isaac Brown from Maryland his great-great-grandfather? His age, name and story matched that of his ancestor but Prince could not prove it for certain. Well, his answer would soon arrive by mail in the form of a package containing a file on Isaac Brown from Maryland. The file included letters, legal papers, and a sworn deposition. From this file, Prince learned of the names of Brown's wife and daughter but they did not match the names in his family. The Isaac Brown of Maryland was not the great-great-grandfather of Prince. Despite this minor disappointment, Prince's relationship with Isaac Brown did not stop there. He and his wife Shannon followed Brown's exact route to Canada. Arriving in Maryland, they attempted to visit the former plantation which had been transformed into a nuclear power plant. However, prior to building the plant, an archaeological dig was performed, locating the slave quarters and the master's home.

The Princes also visited a tiny church built in the late 1700s with a cemetery surrounding it. Here,

they located the tombstone of Alexander Somerville, the former master of Isaac Brown, and his wife, Olivia. Inside the church, a stained-glass window containing the names of Alexander and Olivia Somerville covered the back wall, providing evidence that they were beloved members of their community.

Sadly, the Princes were unable to locate the tombstone of Isaac Brown or his wife Susanna.

The determined Prince continued to search for information about Brown. Using www.ancestry.com, he learned that Brown once resided in Chatham where he became a doctor of Herbal Medicine and changed his name to Samuel Russell. No information has been found on Brown's descendants or the two children who remained in Maryland.

In closing, Prince reminded the audience that there was so much recognition given to the master, his wife, and the slave trader yet none to the Brown family. "Let the research and their story be the monument to them since they did not have any tombstones. They are much deserving of our recognition."

University of Detroit Mercy Professor and Chair of History, Dr. Roy Finkenbine presented two stories of obscure early freedom-seeking slaves who escaped to southwestern Ontario prior to the Underground Railroad era.

The term "the Underground Railroad" arrived late in the history of slavery. It is believed that the term originated around 1831, when an enslaved individual ran away and his master said "he must've gone on an underground

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Steve Riley
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Smith

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Tolson-Murty,
Makai, Naomi,
Martha Elliot-
Tolson
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Karla Smith-
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Taylor Family:
Ronald,
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Hurst, Rose
Jackson, Wava
Johnson, Dorothy
Johnson, Fred

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railroad.” The reality is that it was neither underground, nor a railroad. Rather, it was a clandestine and illegal enterprise.

If the term did not appear until the 1830s, does that mean enslaved people did not try to escape from slavery before then? Of course not. African people have been attempting to flee from bondage since their arrival in the Americas and the Caribbean. Freedom was always a driving force in the lives of the enslaved.

Finkenbine shared two documents with the audience. The first was a letter written in 1820 from George Duncan to Thomas Rotch, a Quaker who expressed concern on behalf of enslaved people and the rights of free Blacks. This letter provides a rare glimpse of a runaway slave telling of his experience, including the route he took, his desire to get to Canada, and the existence of a well-organized network prior to the 1830s.

“Sir I arrived safe in Bainbridge Georgia County where I put up at a Mr. Kents where I reside now and I am treated extremely well by the people and I have just met with Thornton Taylor and we shall start for Canada in about two

weeks.”

Duncan, just 17 years old was in search of freedom. He wished to have his 14 year old lover, Edy join him.

“I want if you would be so kind to assist Edy in getting her as soon as she can and not let S. Spriggs know the road she takes.”

It is evident that Rotch was actively assisting runaway slaves with their quest for freedom. One time, he hid three slaves at his farm and when a slave catcher arrived, they requested access to his home. Rotch warned them that it won't end well if they used force to enter his home.



After sounding the alarm, a group of Quakers arrived at the Rotch farm, causing the slave catchers to leave and never return.

Finkenbine added that in the 1851 Census of Canada, there was a couple named George and Edy Duncan living in Haldimand City, on a farm with their children. They were both of African descent and were comfortable farmers, living in freedom with family. Their dream of freedom, family and togetherness came true.



The second document was an advertisement from 1827 about a runaway slave named Hamlet, who escaped in October of 1826. The ad appeared in the Detroit Gazette on April 17, 1827, revealing that Henry Somerville, Hamlet's master, believed Hamlet

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Johnson, Glenn
Johnson, Giovanna
Kamen, Mary
Karle, Thomas J
Keelan, Gerald
Kennedy, Warren
Larkin, Dileana
Lauby, Timothy
Logan, Florence
Logan, Linda
Logan, Wayne
MacDonald, Hazel
Marano, Carla
McCorkle, Elaine
McCorkle, Keith
McLaughlin, Patricia
Meyler, Peter
Pepper, Joan
Porter, Barbara
Reid, Colleen
Riley, Steve
Robinson, Thomas
Rutherford, Betty
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Watkins, Glendora
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Kekaula, Alan
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Marshall, Judge Lauren
E
McCurdy, Howard
McVean, John
Mohamed, Mohamed
Mooney, Ruth
Morgan, James
Morris, Cleata
Mulder, Norman
Neely, Patricia
McIntyre, Leonard
O'Hara, Janice
Rawlins, Judge Mich-
eline
Richardson, Rodney
Richardson, Rose Anne
Robinson-Dungy, Caro-
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Roffel, Crystal
Roth, Lou
Seecharan, Bonita

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escaped north, possibly to Detroit where in the 1820s, a small Black community was developing.

“My impression is that he has travelled on towards the frontier, and perhaps to Detroit or Canada.”

The ad, which ran until August, offered a reward of \$200.00, significantly higher than the usual \$15.00 reward. The audience learned that Hamlet was regularly taken on travels by Somerville as his personal servant.

“He has attended me in almost every part of the United States, and likewise in Canada, and for many reasons I am induced to believe he was persuaded to abscond from humane treatment and a comfortable home by the advice of some evil disposed persons at Wilmington, Ohio, where he left me.”

Humane treatment? There was nothing humane about owning another human being and denying them their freedom.

Someone fitting the description of Hamlet was recaptured but escaped once again, challenging the myth that he was content and comfortable living as a slave.

Both documents reveal that prior



to the era of the Underground Railroad, an organized network was already in place, Canada was a major destination for Blacks escaping from slavery, and Quaker communities

were willing to help escapees in their flight. Also, slave agents were actively seeking Whites to assist them. The documents also highlight the determination of enslaved peoples to free themselves.

A great deal is known about the Black Loyalists who settled in the Maritimes but little is known about the American Blacks who remained enslaved after migrating to the area with their masters. Thanks to Dr. Harvey Amani Whitfield, Associate Professor of History at the University of Vermont, audience members received a more in-depth look at slavery in the Maritimes and how Blacks played a significant role in the process to end human bondage.

Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island saw an increase in the number of enslaved Blacks after the American Revolution when American Loyalists brought between 1100 and 2000 enslaved people with them.

Whitfield shared the story of Mary Postell, a former slave who was brought to Nova Scotia with a man named Jesse Gray and her two daughters, Flora and Nelly. Postell was born in South Carolina and was owned by Elisha Postell when the American Revolutionary War began. Upon his death, Mary escaped, taking refuge in British lines, making her a free woman.

In Nova Scotia, Postell claimed her freedom in court. She was working and living with her two children and felt that she might be sold away from her

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daughters by Jesse Gray. Despite her best efforts, Postell was un-



able to prove that she was a free woman so she and her daughters returned to Gray's residence and laboured as his slaves for nearly two years until he sold her for 100 bushels of potatoes. He eventually sold Flora for five pounds to John Henderson, who took her to North Carolina. Gray kept Mary's other daughter, Nelly, fueling speculation that he was her biological father. No further information about Mary or her two daughters has been located although there was a bill of sale in Nova Scotia for a woman named Nelly, who would have been the same age as Mary's daughter. This evidence suggests that it might have been Nelly Postell.

The Postell case, along with many others, illustrates the fact that Blacks living in Nova Scotia were under the constant threat of being sold as slaves, whether they were free or not. The decision to return Postell to slavery highlights the belief that a Black person was a slave unless proven otherwise. It also shows how elusive freedom was for Blacks. Mary Postell should be remembered for her courageous attempts to claim ownership of herself and her two daughters.

Slavery lasted longer in New Brunswick than anywhere else in the Maritimes. The majority of White people opposed slavery but they also rejected equality and citizenship for Blacks. This was a result of the belief that if free, Blacks would cause social disorder,

chaos, and possess a lack of civilization. However, throughout the Maritimes, Blacks developed

sustainable communities. Neither Nova Scotia nor New Brunswick had statute law related to slavery but surprisingly, Prince Edward Island's statute law declared that the baptism of slaves did not exempt them from enslavement.

Thanks to the efforts of judges who slowly chipped away at slavery and the courage of determined Blacks, human bondage came to an end in the Maritimes. In the courts, judges were demanding that slave owners proved their legal ownership of Blacks and if they were unable to do so, they would be set free. Some judges demanded to see the original bill of sale.

One cannot overlook the fierce determination of enslaved Blacks who escaped and testified in the courts with the goal of attaining their freedom. Whitfield reminded the audience that while it is important to celebrate Canada's legacy as a safe haven for Blacks escaping from bondage, the legacy of slavery must also be remembered as it is part of the history of Blacks in the Maritimes.



Poet and teacher Amina Abdulle draws on her childhood in Somalia, family memories, and

life in Canada to craft emotionally charged works of poetry that examine her journey as an African Canadian woman. Many of her poems invited audience members to travel to Somalia with her as she recalled "*forgotten songs, chants, old maps, Coke bottles, and digging my toes into the warm earth of home.*" The beauty of her homeland radiates through her words, providing a feeling of comfort and warmth to listeners. Recalling the war in Somalia, one of her poems opens with the line "*We forgot to be human.*" Through her gift of language, Abdulle ponders how human beings could do inhumane things to others, inflicting pain and causing hurt to so many. Perhaps, they forgot what it felt like to be human. Identity is another theme woven into Abdulle's poetry. She strongly declares that she is a chocolate woman with Black skin whose kisses hold medicines and wisdom. In another poem, she rejects society's tendency to label her as an African-Canadian. "*I am African. I am Canadian. I am not a hyphen*" asserts Abdulle as she notes that her identity has been influenced by her experiences in Somalia and Canada.

Abdulle closed with a short story about the first time she visited a Christian church at 21 years of age as a Muslim woman.

While in the church, she saw a breathtaking image of Jesus on

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the stained-glass window. She was swept away by the music and seduced by the violin as the symphony played and she thought “Jesus smiled at me through rain-bow-stained glass.”

Through her poetic talents, Abdulle encourages an acceptance of self, a celebration of all heritages, and the realization that we are constantly evolving and changing.



The conference closed with an entertaining performance highlighting the artistic legacies of Shelton Brooks and Sophie Tucker. Brooks was a popular musician and jazz composer from Amherstburg, who wrote some of the biggest hits of the first third of the 20th century. Tucker was a multi-talented songstress with an enormous voice.

Windsorite Heidi Toffan played the role of Sophie Tucker, one of the most popular entertainers in America during the first half of the 20th century. Like Tucker, Toffan was a powerful force as she belted out hit after hit while showcasing her



vibrant personality. Performing a selection of Brooks’ music from 1910 to 1919 were Chris Nease and friends. Brooks’ first hit song, “Some of These Days” became Tucker’s theme song. She performed it for 55 years.

Audience members could be seen swaying, tapping their feet, snapping their fingers, and bobbing their heads as they delighted in the sounds of Brooks’ music and the outstanding voice of Tof-

fan. Toffan, Nease and friends truly captured the essence of Tucker and Brooks.

In addition to a stellar lineup of presenters and artists, attendees enjoyed a delicious lunch provided by Koolini’s Italian Eatery. This afforded participants an opportunity to interact with the speakers and artists.

Once again, the forum was a success. It was a reminder of our responsibility to remember. Remember those who might not have been celebrities. Those who might not have tombstones, appear in school textbooks or have holidays named in their honour. Those whose presence

may practically be unknown. We must remember and rejoice in the fact that our ancestors were heroes and heroines who resisted, survived, and overcame. In spite of hardships and humiliations, they made significant contributions to the struggle for freedom, justice and equality. We have much to acknowledge and celebrate for our very existence is a result of their courage, strength, determination, sacrifices, and struggles. To honour them, we must erect our own monuments by conducting research and keeping their stories alive. As Prince stated in his presentation, “they are much deserving of our recognition.”

The African race is a rubber ball. The harder you dash it to the ground, the higher it will rise.

~African Proverb

- Shantelle Browning-Morgan
Essex County
Black Historical Research Society



In Remembrance



Richard L. Hampton
78, of Indianapolis, Ind., transitioned on Wednesday, January 16, 2013. Born on November 27, 1934 in Noblesville, Ind.

“I know that he enjoyed being a member of the North American Black Historical Museum & Cultural Centre.”

- Benita Hampton
Daughter



Charity Bingo Night

8 pm @ Breakaway Gaming Centre
Crawford at Wyandotte
Vote for NABHM

If you're a Bingo player, please go to
Charity Night and vote for the museum,
NABHM
Each vote earns \$10 for the museum.



Fundraising Committee Meeting
5:30 pm @ Hilton Park Terrace



Board of Directors
10 am
Regular meeting
@ United Way, Windsor



Programming Committee
12:30 pm
Regular meeting
@ United Way, Windsor

Bingo Hosting
Paradise Bingo
Dougall Ave, Windsor
2:45 am - 4:45 pm



ECBHS
7 pm
@ United Way

Museum
closed
for Holy Days

Bingo Hosting
Paradise Bingo
Dougall Ave, Windsor
12:45 pm - 2:45 pm

March Community Events

A listing in the calendar is not an endorsement by the museum.

Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
					Mar 1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

The North American
BLACK HISTORICAL MUSEUM
presents

classical *spiritual*
**Wilberforce University
Concert Choir**
jazz *gospel*
from Wilberforce Ohio

Sunday, Apr 14 at 3 pm
St. John the Baptist Church, 225 Brock St., Amherstburg

\$20 \$18
for members
\$16 each
for groups of 10+
Students admitted free
when accompanied by a ticket holder

FREEDOM LANDING FESTIVAL

Purchase tickets online at
www.blackhistoricalmuseum.org,
at the museum (277 King St.) or
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www.blackhistoricalmuseum.org
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