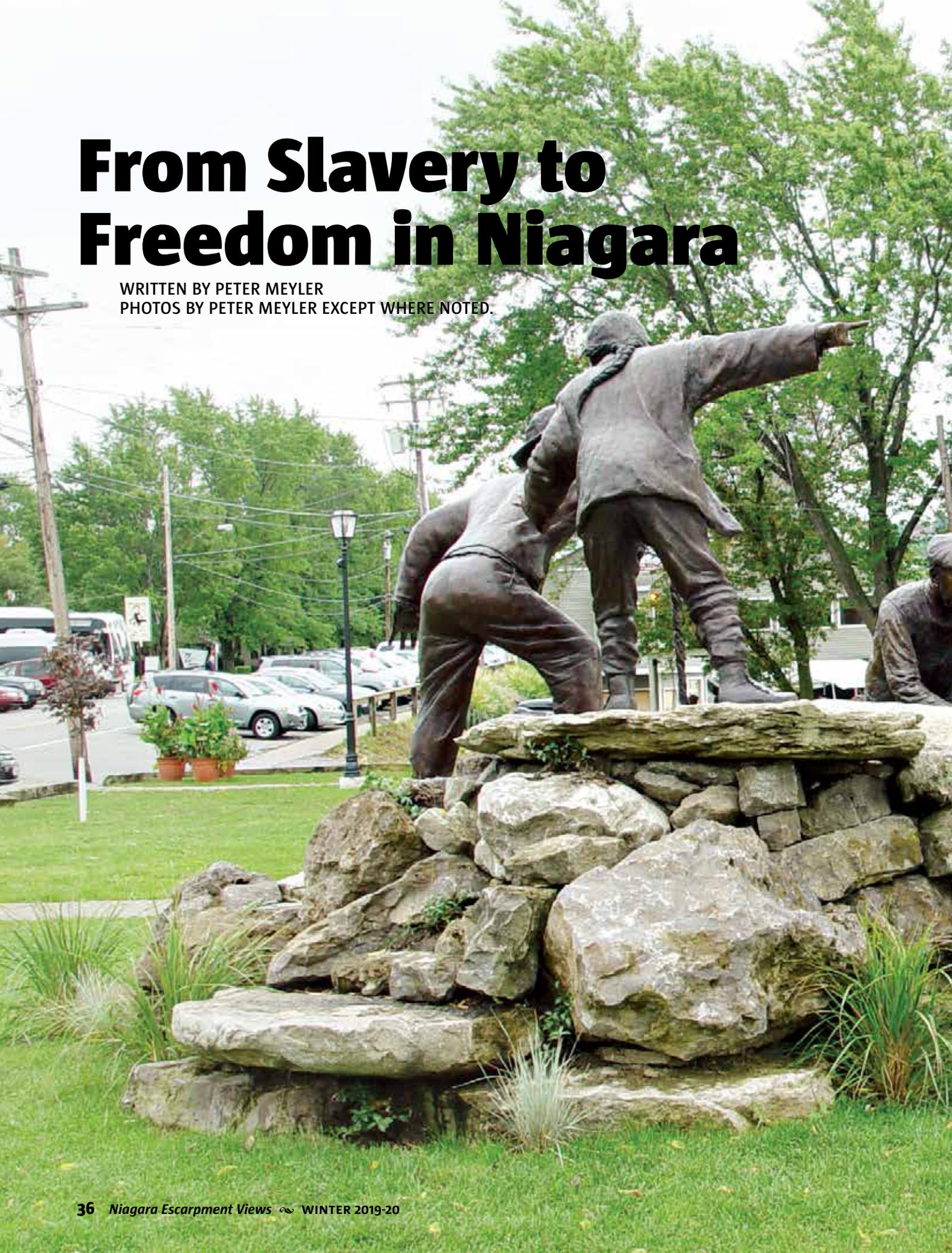


From Slavery to Freedom in Niagara

WRITTEN BY PETER MEYLER
PHOTOS BY PETER MEYLER EXCEPT WHERE NOTED.



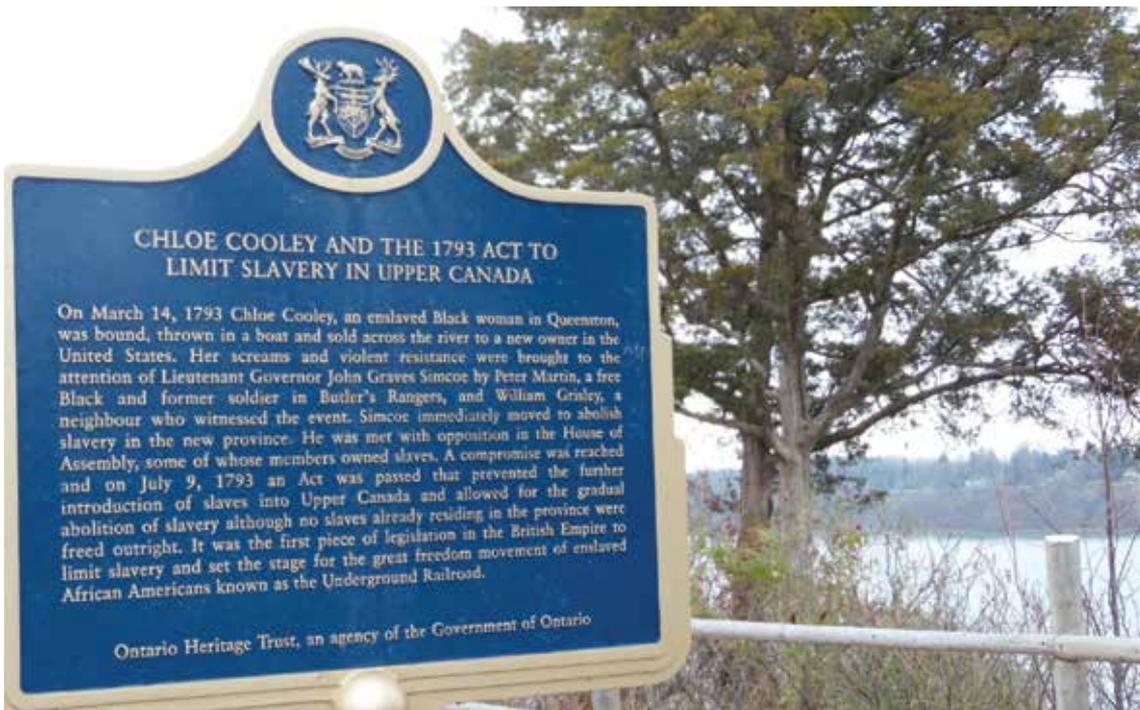
A photograph of the Freedom Crossing Monument at Lewiston, New York. The monument features a bronze sculpture of a man (Josiah Tryon) handing a baby to a woman in a boat, while another woman points across the river. A large stone plaque with a gold border is in the foreground. The background shows a grassy area with trees and a wooden fence overlooking the Niagara River.

Many historic sites along the Niagara frontier recognize African-Canadian history. African-American freedom seekers travelled hundreds of miles, through wilderness, at night, dodging slave catchers and informants. At the Niagara River, they realized the dangers of the crossing.

▲ Freedom Crossing Monument at Lewiston, New York, on the American side of the Niagara River, commemorates The Underground Railroad that helped slaves escape to freedom in Canada. The monument shows Josiah Tryon handing a baby to the fugitive mother while another woman points the way across the river. PHOTO BY MIKE DAVIS.



◀ Voices of Freedom Park at 244 Regent St. in Niagara-on-the-Lake was opened in late 2018 to feature significant members of Niagara's early Black community. PHOTO BY MIKE DAVIS



◀ The plaque beside the Niagara River, commemorating Chloe Cooley, whose capture and sale to a person in the U.S. led to a 1793 act to limit slavery in Upper Canada.

slavery, both integral parts of North American history.

Voices of Freedom

Niagara-on-the-Lake has just added another memorial to African Canadian history. On November 2, 2018, the Voices of Freedom park was officially opened in the heart of the town. The park features an art installation called Rite of Passage which features four stories, including Chloe's.

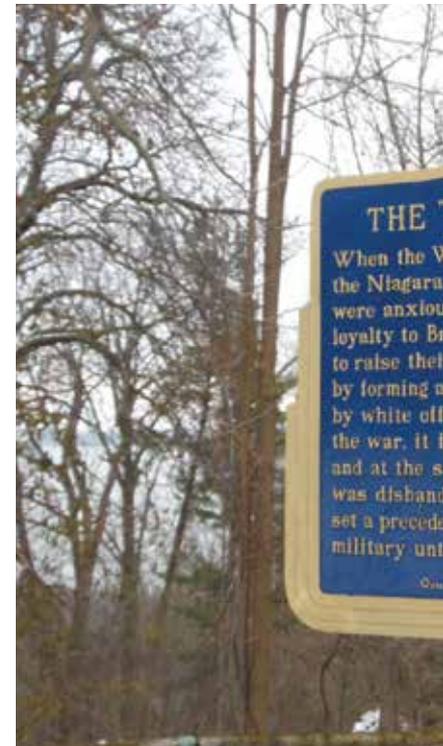
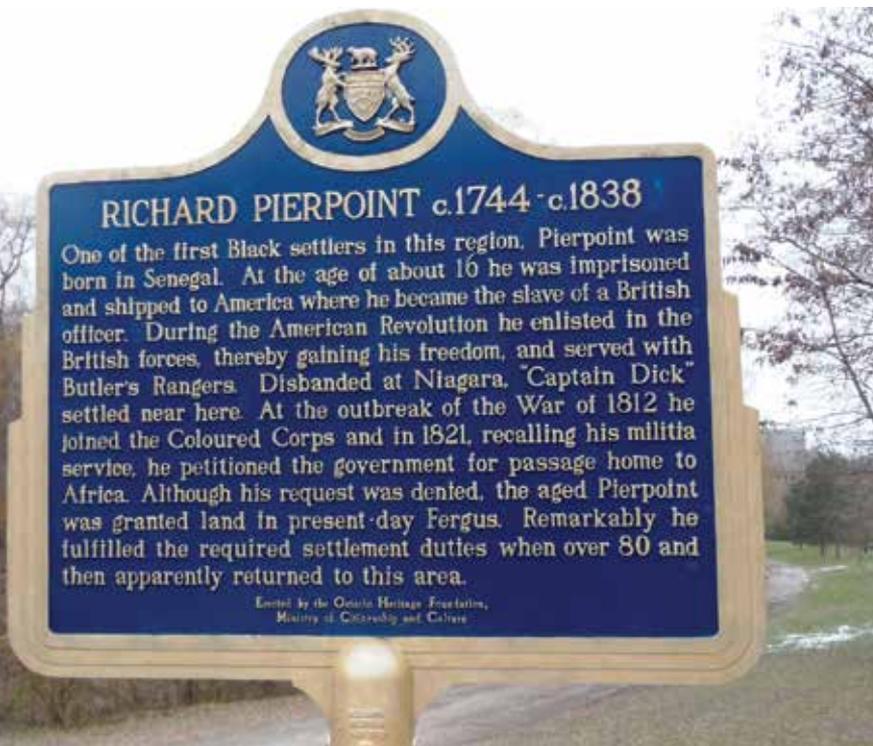
Also featured is Solomon Moseby. He was arrested and found guilty of stealing his master's horse which he had used to escape from slavery in Kentucky. He was in the Niagara Court House awaiting return to the U.S. when a riot broke out by members of the Black community who had surrounded the building. Moseby escaped and remained in Niagara, a free man.

The Waters family, who

had settled here by 1794, is also mentioned on the art installation. Members of the family received land grants, built houses and farms, took part in the War of 1812 and served in local government. They also attended St. Mark's Church, the iconic Anglican Church in Niagara-on-the-Lake. The other person commemorated was one of the earliest and most important African Canadians to settle

here, Richard Pierpoint.

Pierpoint had been captured as a 16-year-old around 1760, bought by an American officer serving with the British during the French and Indian War. During the American Revolution Pierpoint managed to escape, join Butler's Rangers and gain his freedom. He came to Niagara in 1780 as a member of the Rangers. One of only a handful of Black



▲ Richard Pierpoint was captured in Africa as a slave but became free fighting the American Revolution. After further military service, he eventually became an early Black settler of his own land. This provincial plaque is located in Centennial Gardens, St. Catharines, near Dick's Creek which is named after him.

United Empire Loyalists, he received 200 acres in what is now St. Catharines. A provincial plaque is situated in Centennial Gardens near Dick's Creek which is named after him.

Another provincial plaque relates to Pierpoint although

he is not mentioned. This plaque sits atop Queenston Heights in the shadow of Brock's Monument. It recognizes the Coloured Corps, an all-Black militia unit formed at Pierpoint's suggestion. The Corps took part in many important

battles, including Queenston Heights, Fort George and Stoney Creek. The Corps also built Fort Mississauga along Lake Ontario. Today the only shots heard here are from golfers because the remains of the fort sit in the middle of the Niagara-on-

the-Lake Golf Club. A path leads visitors to the remaining star-shaped earthworks and square brick tower.

Many more historic sites along the Niagara frontier recognize African Canadian history and culture. Oliver Parnall of Virginia survived



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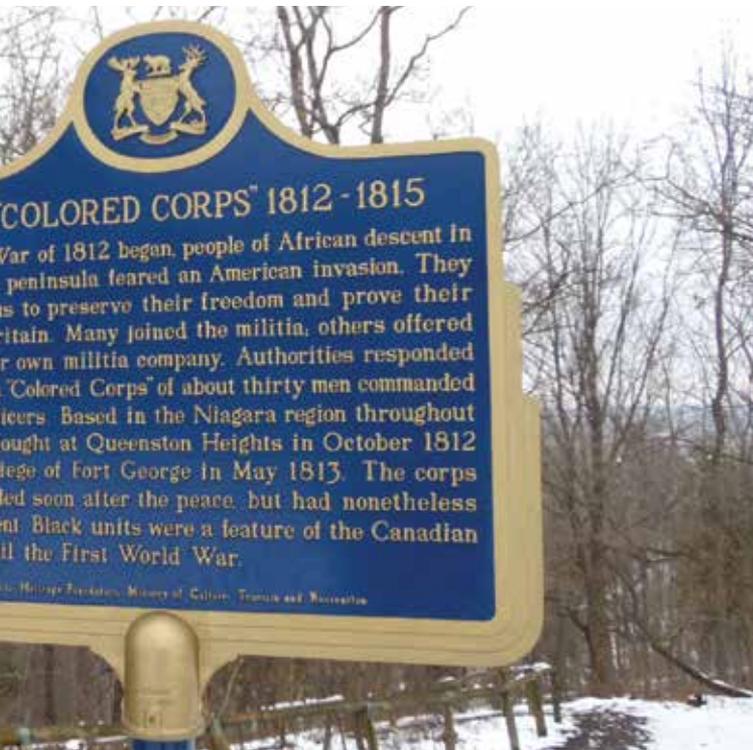
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◀ In Voices of Freedom Park, the art installation Rite of Passage has curved walls of rusted metal with historical details carved into them.
PHOTO BY MIKE DAVIS

▼ The Coloured Corps was an all-Black militia unit that was formed at the suggestion of Richard Pierpoint. The Corps took part in many important battles, including Queenston Heights, Fort George and Stoney Creek. This plaque is located on Queenston Heights in the shadow of Brock's Monument.



the swim across the mighty Niagara River, entering the cold water and pushing a small crate containing all his possessions. Parnall prospered in his adopted homeland and eventually had enough wealth to donate land for the British Methodist Episcopal

Church, an African-Canadian church that still exists as a national historic site at 5674 Peer Street in Niagara Falls.

Harriet Tubman
Another important church is found in St. Catharines and is nicknamed the Harriet



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The all-Black militia The Coloured Corps built Fort Mississauga near Lake Ontario with a view of Niagara River. Earthworks and the original central brick tower are all that remain at Niagara-on-the-Lake today.
PHOTO BY MIKE DAVIS.

Tubman Church after its most famous congregant. Officially it is the Salem Chapel British Methodist Episcopal Church. Tubman lived in St. Catharines from 1851 to 1861. She is the most famous Underground Railroad “conductor” and became its public face. She led many of her rescue missions from and to St. Catharines. There is a campaign for the preservation of this important church.

The stories of these freedom seekers inspire Lezlie Harper Wells, a tour leader with her company Niagara Bound

Tours and the recipient of the 2018 Underground Railroad Free Press Prize for the Advancement of Knowledge. Lezlie is a descendant of a freedom seeker. Her great-great-grandfather Jack Bright escaped from Kentucky and arrived in Ontario in 1851 with his brother and nine-year-old sister. Like many others, they had travelled hundreds of miles, much through unknown wilderness, much at nighttime, all the while dodging slave catchers and their informants. An estimated 40,000 African

Americans escaped slavery by crossing the Niagara River.

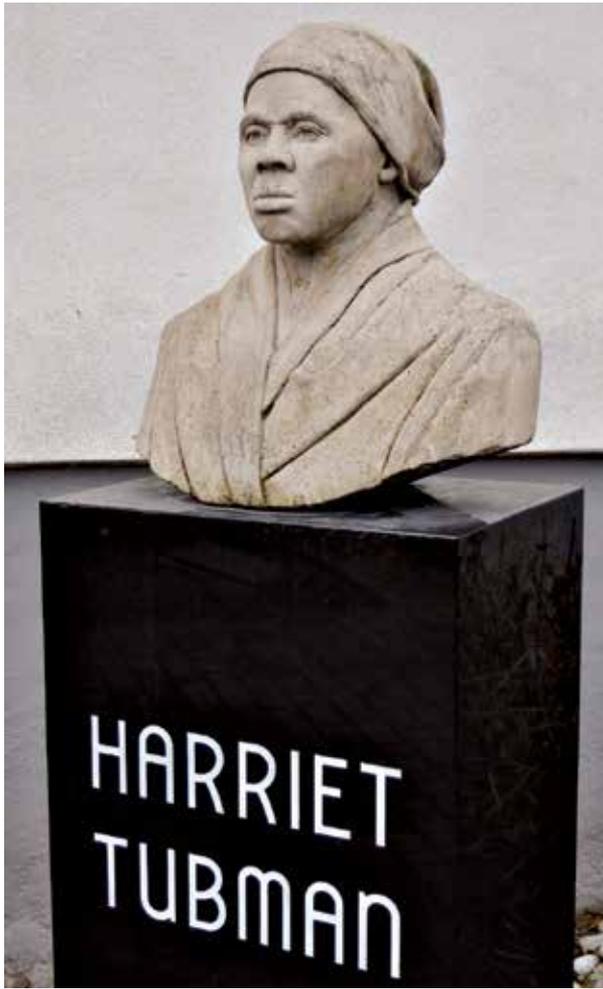
A permanent exhibit at the St. Catharines Museum and Welland Canals Centre, “Follow the North Star,” gives an insight into the African Canadian people and places that were part of Niagara’s development. **NEV**

Peter Meyler’s research focuses on Ontario’s Black history. He is co-author of A Stolen Life: Searching for Richard Pierpoint and editor of Broken Shackles: Old Man Henson From Slavery to Freedom.

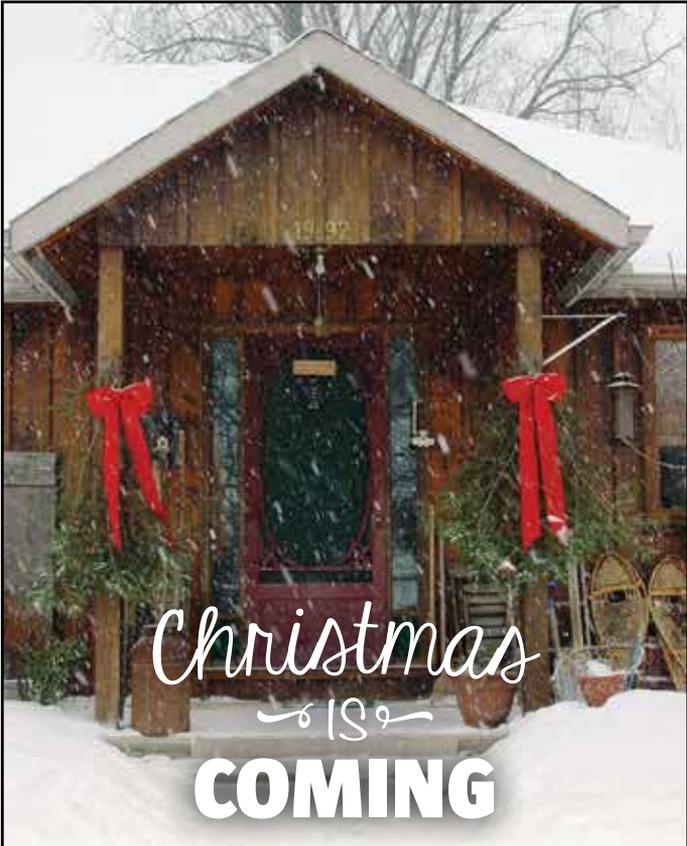
► At Salem Chapel British Methodist Episcopal Church in St. Catharines, nicknamed the Harriet Tubman Church, a sculpture and plaque commemorate the value of Tubman to the cause of freedom. On the plinth is carved “After the passing of the USA 1850 Fugitive Slave Law she said ‘I wouldn’t trust Uncle Sam with my people no longer. I brought them all clear off to Canada.’”

For our feature on Owen Sound’s role in the Underground Railroad, see “Freedom Celebration! Owen Sound’s 150th Emancipation Day Picnic,” Summer 2012.

The Underground Railroad was a secret organization of trails, safe hiding places and people helping slaves escape the U.S. for Canada.



▲ Harriet Tubman is the best-known conductor on The Underground Railroad and led many of her rescue missions from and to St. Catharines. She helped hundreds of slaves reach freedom.



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