An architectural rendering of a park area. In the foreground, there is a white bench on a paved path. In the background, several stylized human figures are walking on a path that leads up a gentle slope. The scene is overlaid with a semi-transparent orange filter.

The voices
of heroes.
Their stories,
experiences
& journeys.
All told in the
heart of Niagara
on-the-Lake

VOICES OF FREEDOM

REGENT STREET PARK

National Campaign

Note From the Chairs

A LIVING HISTORY

An accurate and complete understanding of our history is essential for establishing our true identity. This understanding allows us the opportunity to respond, and the manner of our response uncovers our character and shapes our future. The presentation of Canadian history often excludes the voices of Blacks, one of the earliest group of settlers.

The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake has set aside a significant site in the heart of the Old Town to understand, celebrate, and honour its Black history. **Voices of Freedom** is an experiential art installation designed to engage, educate, and challenge visitors about this most important aspect of our history. Voices from the past will tell their stories, enriching visitors' understanding of how they shaped our town and nation.

But **Voices of Freedom** isn't just about looking back. Ongoing research and programming will allow today's and tomorrow's voices to impact our nation's future.

It is a tragic injustice that, amidst the celebrated historical importance of Niagara-on-the-Lake, the Town's significant and nation-shifting Black history has not been given a proper "hearing."

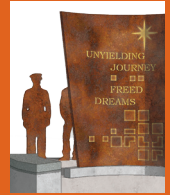
Voices of Freedom is intent on righting this wrong. Individually and collectively, all of Canada will benefit from listening to the Black voices of Canada's past, present, and future. Such a hearing is essential for our nation to move towards a fair, just, and free society.

Co-Chair, Betty Disero - Councillor,
Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake

Co-Chair, John Hawley - Founder,
The Village - Local business owner

Honorary Chair
Dr. Wilma Morrison - O. Ont.



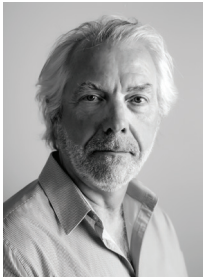


Coloured Village Motif

This motif is an artistic interpretation of the schematic plan of the "coloured village" in Niagara-on-the-Lake where a large number of the Black population settled.



“Voices of Freedom gives expression to the silenced and forgotten stories of people of African descent, enslaved, freed, and free, whose sacrifices, labour, skills, and talents contributed to the development of Niagara-on-the-Lake. **Voices of Freedom** permanently inscribes these Black men and women on the historical and cultural landscape of the town.”



Tom Ridout, OALA
Commissioned designer
of **Voices of Freedom**

Voices of Freedom honours their struggles, resilience, and contributions to our town, the province, and to our country. Key pieces of the cultural heritage of Niagara-on-the-Lake and our national history will be preserved. **Voices of Freedom** enhances the cultural and redemptive value of Niagara-on-the-Lake as a significant historic site and supports educational aims of the UN International Decade for People of African Descent.

This important public space will provide opportunities for engaging visitors with ideas and historical information on both emotional and intellectual levels. A strong experience of place will foster a broader dialogue on important social issues, in essence supporting a metaphorical passage forward that builds on historical events.



Site History



EARLY BEGINNINGS

Niagara-on-the-Lake, capital of Upper Canada (1792-1796), has had Black residents since the 1780s. It is also where the first anti-slavery legislation was introduced in the British Empire.

In the 1780s, following the American Revolution, United Empire Loyalists settled in the area. Many brought the Africans they enslaved with them. The post-revolution migration also included Black Loyalists who fought in “Butler’s Rangers” and received their freedom and land.

When Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe arrived in 1792, there were two classes of Blacks in the province: those who were enslaved and those who were free. Slaves outnumbered the free, until the early 1800s when freedom-seekers migrated into the area. A large number of the Black population settled in the “coloured village,” roughly south of William Street and between King and Butler Streets. However, racism and discrimination were a reality, and they struggled to become truly “free” and equal.

From 1796-97 until 1803 when he sold it to the Crown, David William Smith, acting surveyor general, owned the park land.

In 1803 the land was acquired by the colonial government of Upper Canada.

October 16, 1812 General Sir Isaac Brock and Colonel John MacDonnell lay in state at the Government House on the Regent Street block and it was from this site that their funeral procession began.

In the 1850s the land was transferred to the town.

Between the 1850s and 1913, the site remained unoccupied.

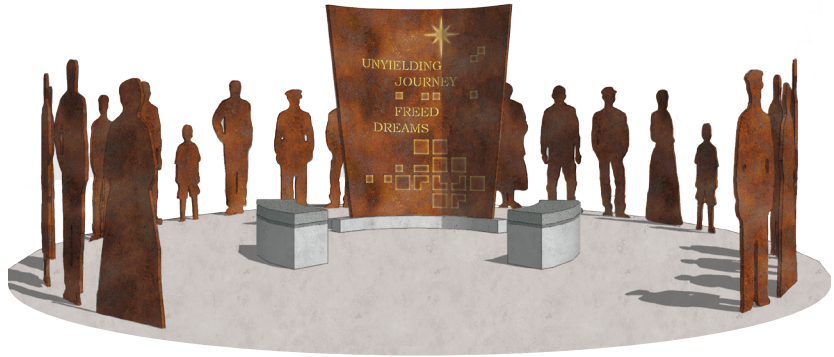
In 1913 the Niagara-on-the-Lake Lawn Bowling club leased the site and occupied it until 2011.

In 2011, The Niagara Foundation provided critical leadership to prevent development on the site and preserve it as a public space.

Between 2014 and 2017, town council and co-community voices embarked on a path that led to the adoption of the current plans for **Voices of Freedom**.

Commemorating the 225th anniversary of Chloe Cooley and the 1793 Act to Limit Slavery in Upper Canada, **Voices of Freedom** is to be completed in 2018.

How Design Goals Met



The design of **Voices of Freedom** as an art piece encompasses the whole site. The resulting space supports a strong experiential narrative by combining sculptural art with park design.

DESIGN

The Request for Proposal for the site called for an artist to ‘memorialize and celebrate the Town’s Black history’ by engaging and educating visitors. The broader concepts of struggle, journey, dialogue and community were also identified as necessary components of the piece. It was clear that the story of the Town’s Black history should offer visitors both written and allegorical information to create a richer experience. The design of **Voices of Freedom** encompasses the whole site. The site supports a strong experiential narrative by combining sculptural art with park design. By moving away from a traditional static memorial approach we increased the possibilities for successful engagement and education about our Black history.

CONCEPT

Voices of Freedom will bring visitors on a journey of awareness and appreciation for the lives and experiences of Black men, women and children in slavery and ultimately freedom. As visitors move through the space, they interact with the various components visually and physically. The information provided in the historical narrative is supported by the artistic expression of the steel forms. The art is comprised of four linked components.

Elements of the Park

Ideally located in the Old Town, **Voices of Freedom** will be experienced by residents and visitors from around the world. **Voices of Freedom** will be on the historic site donated by the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake at the corner of Regent Street and Johnson Street.



1.

PARK ENTRY
identifies the place and a symbol of hope is paved on the ground as a start point for the visitors' journey.

2.

MAIN PATH
to freedom represents the people enslaved in Niagara-on-the-Lake and other parts of Canada. It also represents the journey North of those who were escaping slavery in the United States.

3.

PASSAGE TO FREEDOM
is represented by opposing arcs of steel that represent struggle and barriers to passage. Historical dates and names are inscribed upon the walls. Open forms of people cut into the steel walls represent the diversity of Black voices.

4.

COMMUNAL CIRCLE
and wall are the focal point of the journey's end. This circle expresses the concepts of support, community, kinship, and unity. The wall presents the North Star as a beacon of hope that guided people to this place.

Voices of Freedom

CHLOE COOLEY: THE ACT TO LIMIT SLAVERY

One of the most influential enslaved persons in Canada was Chloe Cooley. On March 14, 1793, her owner Adam Vrooman forcibly transported her across the Niagara River to sell her. Days later, the Executive Council of the Legislative Assembly heard eyewitness accounts that Chloe was violently screaming and resisting. Her screams jolted the conscience of the community and served as a catalyst for Simcoe and Attorney General John White to introduce legislation to abolish slavery.

On July 9th, 1793, Simcoe gave Royal Assent to “An Act to prevent the future introduction of Slaves, and to limit the terms of contracts for servitude within this Province.” The Act did not free any existing slaves. However, it forbade the importation of new slaves and allowed for the gradual abolition of slavery in the province. It set the stage for the Underground Railroad coming north into Canada.

While she was never heard from again
Cooley’s voice changed our nation.

RICHARD PIERPOINT: THE COLOURED CORPS

Richard Pierpoint, a Black Loyalist, received land grants in the Niagara area along with other Black Loyalists, where they established homes. At the outbreak of the War of 1812, Blacks had to protect their newly-acquired freedom. Pierpoint petitioned the government proposing the establishment of a corps of “Coloured Men” to defend the Niagara Frontier. The Coloured Corps was established. They guarded Fort George and served in the Battles of Queenston Heights and Stoney Creek. Later because of their skills, they contributed substantially to the building of Fort Mississauga. In 1821, Richard Pierpoint asked the government for passage back to his native home in Senegal, Africa in lieu of the land grant he was entitled to for service in the War of 1812. Instead, he was granted land in Garafraxa Township (Kitchener area) where he died during the winter of 1837/38.

Pierpoint’s strong leadership and bold voice
influenced the outcome of the War of 1812.

THE WATERS FAMILY: ROOTS OF BLACK SETTLEMENT

Since the establishment of the Town, Black settlers have established roots in the community. One longstanding family of African roots is the Waters family. Humphrey Waters Sr., his wife Ann, and sons Humphrey Jr. and James moved to Niagara-on-the-Lake in 1794 from Kingston upon receiving land grants. James was appointed sergeant in the Coloured Corps, while Humphrey Jr. served as a corporal. After the war, their families were able to rebuild their houses and farms. Humphrey Jr. and his wife Catherine Servos had several children, including John Waters and Daniel Servos Waters. Daniel owned a livery stable while John was a landlord and served as a Town councillor for six years. The Waters family were members of St. Mark's Anglican Church. The Waters family, like many Black families, have roots going back generations.

The Waters family's voices were those of community builders.

SOLOMON MOSEBY: THE MOSEBY AFFAIR

With slavery abolished in 1834 in Canada and throughout British territories, the number of freedom-seekers in Niagara-on-the-Lake and other places in Ontario grew. Solomon Moseby was enslaved in Kentucky when he escaped in 1837 on his master's horse and successfully made the extremely dangerous journey to Niagara. Moseby was located by bounty hunters and was charged by his master, in absentia, in a Kentucky court for horse stealing. He was found guilty and a warrant was issued for his arrest. Moseby was arrested and held in the Niagara courthouse. He was ordered extradited. Two to three hundred Blacks from the Niagara region, led by the women of the group, blocked the jailhouse for days against Moseby's extradition. A riot ensued and Moseby was able to escape. Two Black men were killed by law enforcement. White allies offered support by donating food and offering shelter. Moseby fled to Montreal and later to England. He returned to Niagara to live in freedom. The Moseby Affair reflected the extent to which Blacks would defend freedom on British soil.

Moseby's voice was a rallying cry for justice.

National Campaign

“Early Freedom Seekers, such as my great-great grandparents, escaped from slavery, found freedom in Canada, and set down roots in Niagara. We are excited about how **Voices of Freedom** will demonstrate their changed lives and how their new voices gave them freedom to live as they wished.”

—DONNA FORD, PRESIDENT OF THE CENTRAL ONTARIO NETWORK FOR BLACK HISTORY

Niagara-on-the-Lake is especially rich in history and significance. Events and people here have impacted Canada and even the world. Our rich Black history has not been told and it needs to be. You have just heard from four of these “voices” and there are so many more.

Will you join your voice with ours to ensure these significant nation shaping stories are heard? The more complete our understanding of Canada’s history, the brighter our future will be.

—Voices of Freedom Committee

Acknowledgments

“Niagara-on-the-Lake Town Council joined their voices for this incredible legacy project with their commitment to provide this strategic and historically significant site right in the heart of the Old Town.”

— Pat Darte, Lord Mayor, Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake



Pat Darte, Lord Mayor

Voices of Freedom is a project of the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake. The Voices of Freedom committee is a subcommittee of Communities in Bloom and is made up of the following volunteers and residents of Niagara-on-the-Lake:

Shirley Cater Manager of Planning, Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake

Nicole Cripps Special Events Officer, Niagara-on-the-Lake Chamber of Commerce

Betty Disero (Co-Chair) Councillor, Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake

Donna Ford President, Central Ontario Network for Black History

Paul Hancock Retired business owner and NOTL resident

John Hawley (Co-Chair)- Founder, The Village, Local business owner

Denise Horne Planner, Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake

Sarah Maloney Kaufman Managing Director/Curator, Niagara Historical Society & Museum

Martin Mazza Councillor, Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake

Wilma Morrison O. Ont. (Honorary Chair) - President, Niagara Black History Association

Paul Shepherd Past President, The Niagara Foundation

Alexis Spieldenner Executive Director, Bravo Niagara! Festival of the Arts

Raymond Tung Urban Design Specialist, Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake

Kevin Turcotte Manager of Parks & Recreation, Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake

Mario Vecchi Niagara-on-the-Lake Resident Representative

John Wiens Deputy Lord Mayor, Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake

Fundraising Committee
Paul Hancock, John Hawley, John Wiens



Dr. Wilma Morrison, O. Ont.

Thank you

The Niagara Foundation.

Carol Appel, RFP artistic advisor.

Gary Hall, Gary Hall Design.

Natasha Henry, African Canadian Historical Research and Curriculum Consultant.



VOICES OF FREEDOM

National Campaign

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For more information
on the park please visit:
vofpark.org

This project has been
generously supported by



“Voices of Freedom is a hymn
sung in celebration of the many
voices who helped build this
wonderful country.” —WILMA MORRISON O. ONT.

vofpark.org

Thank you for your generous support.