

## Ontario History



# *Ontario's African Canadian Heritage: Collected Writings by Fred Landon, 1918-1967* Edited by Karolyn Smardz Frost, Bryan Walls, Hilary Bates Neary, and Frederick H. Armstrong

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Little Dipper. Many fugitive slaves never experienced the more organized Underground Railroad system popularized in the literature and which has so vividly been portrayed in this book. For the historian, and those interested in doing further research, the lack of a bibliography is another drawback. However, McClelland and Stewart have seen fit to keep the footnotes, another component that seems too often to have fallen by the wayside in today's trade publishing industry. Despite these concerns, *A Shadow on the Household* is a fascinating and highly informative chronicle, and well worth reading.

The Uncle Tom's Cabin Historic Site in Dresden, and the First Baptist Church or Heritage Room at the W.I.S.H. Centre in Chatham provide tours, video presentations, and library resources on the rich Af-

rican Canadian heritage of the area, and on the many families, like the Weems, that settled there. First Baptist is where the famous liberator, John Brown, held his secret convention to plan the raid on Harpers Ferry, Virginia. Fifteen miles south of Chatham is the Buxton National Historic Site and Museum, including a historic schoolhouse and a log cabin of one of the early settlers. All of these locations are run by descendants of the original families, bringing to life the stories of the Underground Railroad contained in the pages of *A Shadow on the Household*.

Adrienne Shadd, Toronto

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*Ontario's African Canadian Heritage:  
Collected Writings by Fred Landon, 1918-1967*

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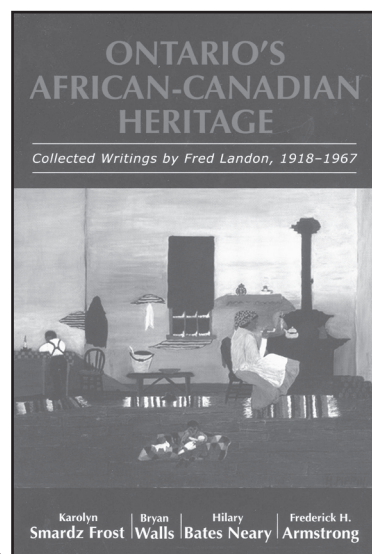
Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2009. 368 pages. \$28.99 soft-cover. ISBN 978-1-55002-814-0 ([www.dundurn.com](http://www.dundurn.com))

Fred Landon pioneered the study of Black history in Ontario. From 1918 until 1967 he wrote dozens of articles on the Underground Railroad and the experience of the fugitive slaves in the "promised land." With the publication of *Ontario's African-Canadian Heritage*, his most important works are now more readily available to both scholars and general readers interested in this important and interesting aspect of Ontario's history.

This collection contains twenty-six of Landon's most important works. The articles have been well chosen, and deal with a wide range of subjects related to the Underground Railroad. Most originally appeared in either *Ontario History* or *Journal of Negro*

*History*, but others have been drawn from less obvious sources such as *London Free Press* and *Transactions of the London and*

*Middlesex Historical Society*. The articles are not arranged in the order in which Landon wrote them, but instead chronologically by subject matter, from the first fugitive slaves and abolitionists to Abraham Lincoln, the America Civil War, and the end of need for



the Underground Railroad.

Introductory essays by the editors help the reader understand Landon's life and work. Fred Landon was born in London in 1880 and, after briefly working as a sailor, attended the University of Western Ontario. He subsequently worked as a journalist, librarian, and university teacher and researcher. He was a prolific writer, and Black history was an area of great personal interest. He continued to write on this subject until his death in 1969.

Landon's writings reflected the times in which he lived, an era in which Blacks in Ontario faced considerable discrimination. They were often denied access to hotels, restaurants, and recreational facilities such as skating rinks. Black people were also confined to a narrow and restricted range of occupations. The fact that Canada had provided a safe, legal haven from slavery in the period before the American Civil War was a somewhat more recent event than it is today, perhaps even within the living memory of some people. The Civil Rights movement of the 1960s was still far in the future when Landon published most of his papers.

These factors help to explain Landon's overly positive image of the way in which Blacks were treated in early Canada. Unlike more recent scholarship, which has often noted the considerable prejudice Blacks faced, Landon argued that fugitive slaves were mostly welcomed, and faced little discrimination. He argued in 1918, "to the Black men in bondage, Canada was always the haven of refuge." (p. 75) In an article published the following year he noted that prejudice was occasional, and Canadians were "generally broadminded." (p. 139) His later articles had a similar theme. He wrote in 1956, "Black people were received with kindness, and efforts were made to assist them in their chief needs." (p. 232) Landon's overall perspective of the Black experience in Upper Canada can be summarized

by his words, written in 1925, that for fugitive slaves "there was justice and opportunity and, above all, freedom." (p. 169)

Landon was not oblivious to the discrimination Blacks faced. He noted instances of prejudice, and one interesting article in this collection deals with an act of arson against Black settlers in Biddulph Township in 1848. He noted the opposition from some whites to the establishment of separate Black communities, such as the successful Buxton settlement near Chatham. Yet discrimination was occasional and misguided, and Landon showed his pro-Canadian sentiment when he noted, in 1925, that prejudice was "sure to manifest itself occasionally in view of the nearby American influences." (p. 174)

Landon's topics of study also reflected the time period in which he wrote. White abolitionists, such as Benjamin Lundy and Charles Stuart, were subjects of articles. Landon also studied the American Missionary Association, a non-denominational religious organization that assisted fugitives in Upper Canada, and the Anti-Slavery Society of Canada. Landon relied on the writings of these abolitionists, and the reports of these organizations, and for this reason he painted a very favourable interpretation of their work. He wrote, for example, "from the United States there came workers on behalf of the fugitives whose efforts deserve every tribute that has ever been paid to them." (p. 53) Although one cannot deny the sincere efforts of these men and women who assisted the fugitives, they often faced opposition from those they sought to help, an aspect of the matter that is dealt with only briefly by Landon. The degree to which Blacks formed their own communities and institutions in Canada independent of white assistance is also treated in only a limited way, although Landon does discuss their role in helping free runaway slaves captured in Canada and their military contri-

butions during the 1837 rebellion.

None of the above comments should detract from the outstanding contribution Landon made to this subject. The fact that serious scholars of the Underground Railroad and Black history in early Canada still refer to Landon's work is a testament to his importance as a scholar. Even his overly rosy picture of race relations in Upper Canada is of value as a balance to some scholarship that has focused perhaps too heavily on the racism Blacks experienced in this province.

This collection is likely to be found most valuable for its historiographical contribution. The reader not only learns a great deal about the Underground Railroad and the work of those who assisted Black fugitives, but also how the pioneer scholar of this subject interpreted it in writings that covered half a century. *Ontario's African-Canadian Heritage* is definitely a worthwhile collection for both the scholar and the general reader.

Colin McFarquhar, Toronto, Ontario

*The Nurture of Nature:  
Childhood, Antimodernism, and On-  
tario Summer Camps, 1920-1955*

By Sharon Wall

Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2009. xx + 369 pages.  
\$32.95 softcover. ISBN 978-0-7748-1640-3 ([www.ubcpress.ca](http://www.ubcpress.ca))

I must open with a disclaimer: I am one of thousands of ex-campers that sustain Sharon Wall's account of *Childhood, Antimodernism, and Ontario Summer Camps, 1920-1955*, her subtitle to *The Nurture of Nature*. Summer camps have been in my family for several generations, and Tanamakoon and Temagami have been household words throughout my life. So have Kilcoo and Kagawong. It is an unusual privilege to review a book in which one is an anonymous participant.

Wall, a history professor at the University of Winnipeg, has written an erudite, well-informed, and thoroughly readable account of a slice of life no doubt lurking in the minds of many *Ontario History* readers and perhaps retained anecdotally in childhood letters home, stashed away in a shoebox in the attic. Now, here it is, those memoirs articulated and placed in the context they warrant, using interviews with former campers and staff to enrich the documen-

tary evidence. Wall writes of the sociology and psychology – even the anthropology – of camp life, and of the ener-

gy by private enterprise to retain for urban youth a natural world experience increasingly lost in the twentieth century. I never encountered a fellow camper from a farm. Cottaging and camping people regarded agricultural Ontario between Toronto and Muskoka or Haliburton as merely an inconsequential space en route to perceived wilderness. But then, as Wall attests, youth camps gradually introduced modernity by replacing tents with cabins, oil lamps with electricity and, in the case of Cochrane's camp in Temagami (where I canoe-tripped 28 days in 1955), by hacking out a small golf course on a Shield islet.

