



Outlook

Volume 7 Number 3

Issue number 183, March 2002

Alexander Milton Ross

by Elizabeth Mitchell
HCHS Membership Director

The Underground Railroad operated from about 1840 to 1860, and especially after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in the U.S. in 1850, which empowered slave hunters to pursue fugitives onto free soil. Although Belleville was not a stop on the Underground Railroad, there is a Belleville connection to the Underground Railroad and the abolitionist movement at the time of the American Civil War, in the person of Alexander Milton Ross.

Alexander Milton Ross was born in Belleville on December 13, 1832, but he left at an early age. His father died when he was 11, and Ross left for New York City before the age of 17. While working as a compositor during the day at the *Evening Standard*, he studied medicine at night, from 1851 to 1855, and obtained his M.D. in 1855. He must have loved travel and adventure, because soon after getting his medical degree, he was appointed surgeon to an army expedition to Nicaragua. He then returned to the United States and became involved in the abolitionist movement. He was a friend of John Brown, the famous abolitionist who was executed at Harper's Ferry in 1860.

(Probably everyone has heard the well-known song from the Civil War period: John Brown's body lies a mouldering in the grave, but his soul goes marching on ...)

According to his obituary in the *Toronto Daily News*:

"He was with John Brown in Canada when the arrangements for the Underground Railway were completed. Thenceforth his services in behalf of the slaves were secret but not the less important. At great risk to himself he went actively to work with John Brown's various coadjutors in bringing the blacks from Dixie land to Canada, the real home of the free. His duties required courage, caution, and determination, and these qualities he displayed."

The poet and anti-slavery crusader, John Greenleaf Whittier, paid tribute to Dr. Ross in verse:

*For his steadfast strength and courage
In a dark and evil time,
When the Golden Rule was treason,
And to feed the hungry, crime,
For the poor slave's hope and refuge,
When the hound was on his track,
And saint and sinner, state and church,
Joined hands to send him back.
Blessings upon him! What he did
For each sad, suffering one,
Chained, hunted, scourged and bleeding,
Unto our Lord was done.*

In April 1961, the *London Free Press* had an article entitled *London and the Slave Line*, which looked back 100 years to the Underground Railroad and Alexander Milton Ross' part in it, and it gives us some insight into how it operated:

"In April, 1857 ... Alexander Milton Ross, a native of Belleville, who had lived for some years in the United States, crossed the Potomac on a 'slave-stealing' mission. Ross, then 27, was a physician who two years earlier had read *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. At Richmond, he set nine slaves on the road to Canada. At Nashville, Tennessee, he arranged for seven more to follow.

"Ross then went to Memphis. He found shelter in the house of an Abolitionist. As

he was shaving off his whiskers and changing his clothes, he heard a woman in the next room begging his host to ask Ross to take her to Canada. Her husband was already there.

"The host told Ross that the woman had fled from a cruel owner. She came in. She was a mulatto of bright and intelligent appearance. She said that her master had flogged her because she refused to marry a Negro whom he had selected for her. She showed her back, scored by the lash, and entreated to be taken to Canada, which her husband had reached two years earlier. Ross decided to take her.

"They set out that night to catch a river steamer. 'Sam' walked behind Ross, carrying his valise. The vessel was detained, but at last she sailed for St. Louis. After a few hours they left St. Louis for Chicago. The servant, Sam, kept asking: 'Is we near Canada yet?'

"At Chicago, they went to the house of an Abolitionist who kept a station on the Underground Railway. With the girl still dressed as a man they went on to Detroit. At the house of a friend, Ross arranged for a boat to put himself and Sam across the river as soon as darkness made the move safe from the slave-catchers who, acting under the authority of the Fugitive Slave Law, were watching the frontier. He had sent telegrams to friends in London, Chatham and Amherstburg to learn where her husband was and had learned that he was working as a barber in London.

"'At night,' wrote Ross, 'the poor fugitive and myself were taken silently across the river that separated the land of freedom from the land of slavery. Not a word was spoken until we touched the soil of Canada. I then told her that she was now a free woman and that no one could now deny her right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. She dropped on her knees and uttered a sincere prayer to the Almighty to protect her and to bless me for bringing her to Canada. I took her to the house of a friend

Continued on page 2.

Next Meeting

Tuesday, March 19, 2002

Guest Speaker

Allison Walker

Topic

Quinte Women of Distinction

Refreshments at 7:30 p.m.

Meeting begins at 8 p.m.

Monthly meetings are held in the Auditorium of the Quinte Living Centre

370 Front Street, Belleville

Dr. Ross “a red-hot Abolitionist from Canada”

Continued from page 1.

and, on the following day, sent her to London where she and her husband were united after a separation of two years.”

Dr. Ross returned to Canada, and during the Civil War he occupied the important position of President Lincoln’s private correspondent in Canada. The post was an important one, as Canada was in those days infested with Southern agents, who were busily plotting explosions and secret enterprises in the Northern States. He did admirable secret service work for the President, and his important services received special recognition from Lincoln.

A few months after the inauguration of President Lincoln, Ross went to Washington, where the President asked him to dinner. Lincoln introduced Ross to the other

guests as “a red-hot Abolitionist from Canada.” Ross boasted to the guests that in Canada, “under our flag, the blackest Negro is entitled to, and freely accorded, every privilege enjoyed by native Canadians. We make no distinction in respect to the colour of a man’s skin. It is true we live under a monarchical form of government; but under that government every man and woman, whether white, black or brown, has equal rights before our laws.” (Looking back, I think we would agree that this was a rather idealistic view of Canadian society.)

After the Civil War and the fall of the Confederate states, Ross offered his services to President Juarez of Mexico, and was appointed surgeon in the Republican army. The capture of Maximilian and the over-

throw of the Mexican Empire rendered Dr. Ross’ services unnecessary, and he returned to Canada, to the more peaceful pursuit of a naturalist.

He spent the rest of his life collecting and classifying the flora and fauna of Canada, and wrote many scientific books, for which he was honoured by many foreign rulers. His biography in *Canadian Men and Women of the Time* sums him up as “a radical reformer in religion, medicine, politics, sociology, and diatetics, and a total abstainer from intoxicants and tobacco.” He was a lifelong vegetarian and a prominent opponent of vaccination.

When he died in Detroit on October 27, 1897, there were tributes to him in Toronto newspapers as well as the *Daily Intelligencer*.

Tom’s Life as a Slave

by Orland French, President Hastings County Historical Society

Tom, whose last name is not known, holds a place of note in one of the sorrier sides of Canadian history. He was a 14-year-old boy from Haldimand Township who was sold in one of the last slave auctions in Canada in 1824. His first master had been Eli Keeler, either a brother or a cousin of Joseph Keeler who led 40 Loyalist families to settle in the Colborne area. Under the sale of 1824, Tom became the slave of William Bell of Thurlow Township, near Belleville.¹

He was a mulatto, a term meaning he was of mixed black and white parentage. This suggests he was the son of his black mother and a white slave master, a common illicit liaison.

The anti-slavery movement was growing in Canada around the turn of the 19th century but, unfortunately for Tom, it was a slow process which met with considerable resistance from slave owners. They saw slavery as a necessary cost of doing business.

The loyalists may have won sentimental points for remaining true to the Crown but they also brought with them cultural and economic baggage as part of their possessions. This included slaves, who were regarded as important tools in the household or on the farm.

In fact, Loyalists were encouraged to bring their slaves with them. An act passed in the British Parliament in 1790 decreed that all immigrants to the Province of Quebec (as Canada was known then) would be entitled, under a licence from the governor, to import “any negroes” they might possess.

Those who brought their slaves to Upper Canada soon found that the winds of emancipation were beginning to swirl. In its second session in 1792, the newly formed parliament of Upper Canada introduced legislation banning the importation of slaves.

Lieutenant-Governor Simcoe had pushed for complete abolition of slavery but he ran into a strong lobby of landowners and business operators who saw enslavement as essential to their livelihood. The legislature compromised in 1793: no more slaves could be imported and all slave children born in Canada would be freed on their 25th birthday.² Still, this meant they had to give their owners the most productive years of their lives.

Five years later, an attempt to restore full slavery was easily defeated in the legislature. Among those voting against the return of the practice was Northumberland’s representative, David McGregor Rogers of Haldimand Township.³

This didn’t help Tom, who was born more than a decade later. He still had to remain a slave for 25 years. The papers accompanying his sale in 1824 said he had 10 years of servitude remaining. By 1834, then, he would be 25 and a free man. However, the British Emancipation Act of 1833 abolished slavery throughout the Empire, including Upper and Lower Canada.

By that time, there were few slaves left in Canada. Slavery had become increasingly seen as an anti-social practice for a couple of decades and fell out of favour.

References:

1. Canniff, William; *The Settlement of Upper Canada, 1869*.
2. The architect of this relatively progressive compromise was Solicitor-General Robert Gray, who was lost in the sinking of the *Speedy*.
3. Walker, Karen; *When the Lakes Roared, Haldimand’s History Committee/Boston Mills Press, 1997*.

It’s that time again.
Time to renew
your
membership
in the
Hastings
County
Historical Society!



Preservation not an impossibility

The following are Gerry Boyce's notes on the inspection by Per Neumeyer of the UEL monument on March 4, 2002.

1. Acting on a resolution of Belleville City Council, the Parks and Recreation Department invited Per Neumeyer, an expert on concrete preservation, to visit the UEL Monument.

The following members of the ad-hoc Monument Committee were present: Doug Moses, Director of Parks and Recreation Dept., June Dafoe, UE, W. Bro. Gary Foster, W. Bro. Bill Goodfellow. Also present were Gerry Boyce, HCHS heritage advisor, Doug Knutson, HCHS director, Jack Press, Heritage Belleville, and Bev Boyce, HCHS member.

It should be noted that the HCHS and Heritage Belleville reps had learned about the time of Per's visit by chance and that no invitation had been extended to them by Parks and Rec staff, prior to this chance discovery. Both Jack and Gerry later advised the group that this was unfortunate, especially in light of the fact that Gerry's presentation to Council on February 25 had stressed the need to involve Heritage Belleville in such matters and that one councillor had supported that view in the discussion.

The group met at the Monument at 11 a.m. and agreed with Doug Knutson's request that he be allowed to videotape parts of the proceedings in connection with a project he is working on relating to the Loyalists' ongoing role in our history.

Per checked over the monument and took several photographs. The group then moved to City Hall for a discussion lasting about an hour and a half.

The following points summarize Per Neumeyer's presentation:

- his main concern is the preservation of concrete monuments and structures
- there is no doubt that this monument can be repaired; there is no sign of serious damage
- the monument seems to be fairly sound – a solid foundation below and no sign of movement
- the concrete seems to have been well mixed
- some cracks are just surface cracks
- if the monument is repaired, it should be painted with a special breathable potassium-silica paint
- sandblasting and waterproofing will destroy rather than preserve the monument
- there is external evidence of rust from the interior reinforcing rods, especially about two feet above the ground, at the bench level

- it is impossible to tell how serious the internal rusting is; when the reinforcing bars (rebars) rust the metal expands and the pressure can lift floors in buildings (example: the Whitney Block in Toronto)
- rusting is a progressive thing
- if the cracks were sealed and the rebars exposed and coated, the monument would last for some time
- the cost of repairs could be from \$10,000 to \$15,000; he would need time to come up with a specific quote
- the normal guarantee for such repairs is two years; guarantees for five or ten years are rare
- after the two years, regular maintenance is essential – cracks need to be sealed immediately and rust signs dealt with by exposing and coating the reinforcing rods
- repair materials are always weaker than the original materials – probably last only 40 years
- standing water is a problem, as are salts in the water; the concrete acts as a wick
- its position in a low area may be a problem – drainage needs to be and can be improved, but a high water table could also be a problem
- pollution (such as acid rain) is another problem
- it is impossible to estimate how long the monument will last – it takes 90 to 100 years for concrete to cure – this

concrete has not yet reached its greatest strength; it should last another 50+ years

- the monument definitely could be lifted – either with or without the base; the log cabin on top could be lifted off – perhaps at a cost of \$5,000 – and placed elsewhere in the park

- plaques could be placed on the monument, using stainless steel pins; however, it would be preferable to have such plaques on a separate, freestanding monument

Doug Moses and others present thanked Per for his time and efforts on behalf of the monument.

There was considerable discussion concerning the process to date and the future of the Monument Committee.

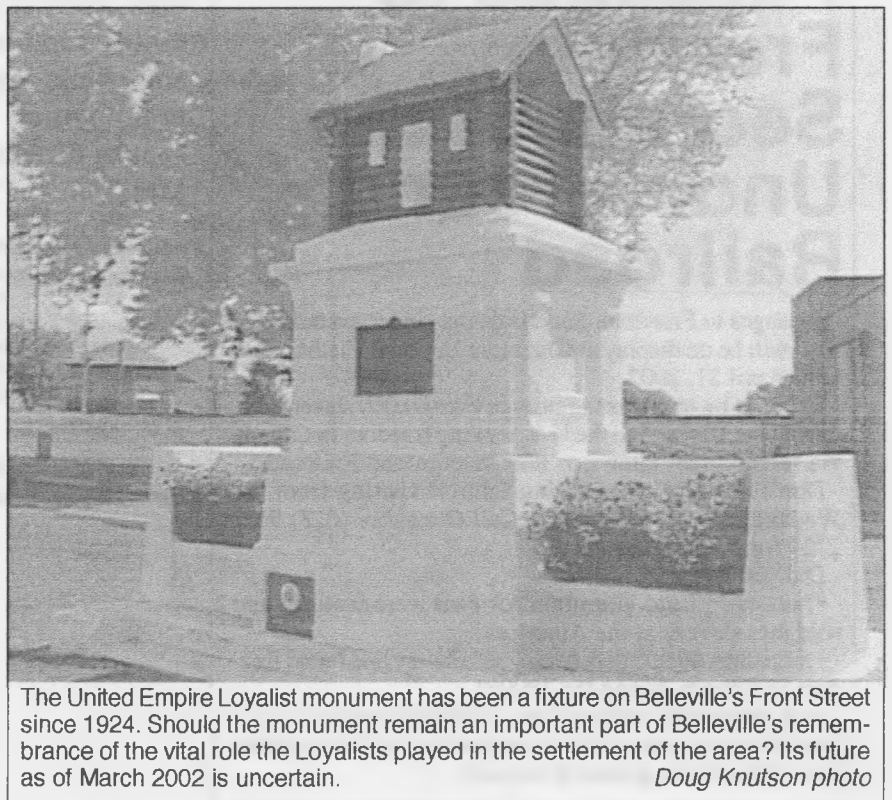
Doug Moses and June Dafoe outlined parts of the process.

Heritage Belleville was invited to become a member of the committee.

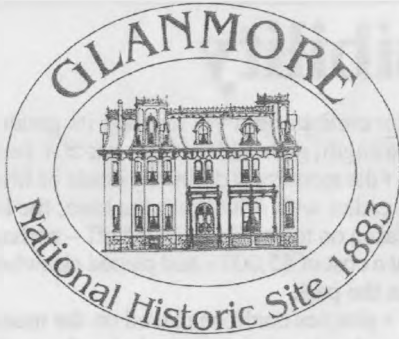
The HCHS was asked whether it wished to “return” to committee membership. Gerry and Doug Knutson advised the HCHS directors of the request at the meeting on March 5.

There was a general feeling that the meeting had helped to address the main issues and make all parties more aware of the pros and cons of the monument's preservation, relocation or replacement.

*submitted by Gerry Boyce
for the HCHS Directors' Meeting
on March 5, 2002*



The United Empire Loyalist monument has been a fixture on Belleville's Front Street since 1924. Should the monument remain an important part of Belleville's remembrance of the vital role the Loyalists played in the settlement of the area? Its future as of March 2002 is uncertain.
Doug Knutson photo



G LANMORE

National Historic Site

257 Bridge Street East,

Belleville, Ontario K8N 1P4

(613) 962-2329

Original treasure returns to Glanmore

A small ornamental porcelain basket caused quite a bit of excitement at Glanmore National Historic Site recently.

The hand-painted porcelain basket was one of many original items that were sold in 1971 just prior to the purchase of the home by the city of Belleville and Hastings County for use as a museum.

Owned for three decades by the

mother (now deceased) of one of the museum's volunteers, the basket was donated to the museum in December of 2001.

The basket features a cherub on the handle and is decorated with gold beading.

Why did the museum staff find this delicate piece of ceramic so exciting?

Curator Rona Rustige ex-

plains, "Glanmore has some furnishings, such as the dining room table and chairs, but nothing that speaks directly of Mrs. Phillips'

personal taste as this artifact does."

This charming porcelain basket will soon be prominently displayed in the museum.

Several other pieces, sold in 1971 have made their way back to Glanmore including the brass vigil lamp which now hangs in its original location above the grand staircase.

"We are always hoping to find more original pieces," added Ms. Rustige.

If you have an original treasure from Glanmore and would like to donate it to the museum, call Rona Rustige, Curator, at (613) 962-2329.

Passages to Freedom: Secrets of the Underground Railroad

Passages to Freedom: Secrets of the Underground Railroad will be on display at Glanmore National Historic Site until April 21, 2002

This exhibit explores the story of over 40,000 slaves who, during the 1800s, fled the U.S. seeking freedom in Canada via secret routes known as the Underground Railroad.

Don't miss this fascinating Exhibit visiting from the Welland Historical Museum. Call Glanmore (613) 962-2329 for more information.

Did you know ...

- between 10 and 11 million Africans were captured and sold into slavery in the Americas?
- more than 40,000 people escaped slavery and found freedom in Canada during the 1800s?
- Dr. Alexander Milton Ross, a Belleville native, is believed to have been active in conducting fugitives to freedom in the Underground Railroad?

Outlook is published for the friends and members of the Hastings County Historical Society.

It is edited and produced by Lewis Zandbergen.

Anyone wishing to submit articles or information may contact the editor at 613-395-3022, or E-mail lewzan@reach.net

Thank you to *The Community Press* for its assistance.

PLEASE NOTE!

The Deadline for the March 2002 issue is Friday, March 22, 2002

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