



**PRESENTATION TO STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS
- CULTURE AND HERITAGE SECTOR PUBLIC HEARINGS**

JUNE 30, 2020

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Wilma Morrison

R. Nathaniel Dett British Methodist Episcopal Church
National Historic Site of Canada & Norval Johnson
Heritage Centre, Niagara Falls

(designated National Historic Site of Canada in 2000)

With Film Producer Ayo Atom Adewumi





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- Recognition and documentation of the contributions of peoples of African descent and their collective histories, past and present, through education, research and collaboration
- Development and support of educational initiatives and exhibits
- Inclusion of Black History material in school curricula

THE ONTARIO BLACK HISTORY SOCIETY

402-10 Adelaide St. E
Toronto, ON
M5C 1J3

<http://www.blackhistorysociety.ca/main.html>

Under Perpetual Threat

Fugitive Slave Chapel,
London



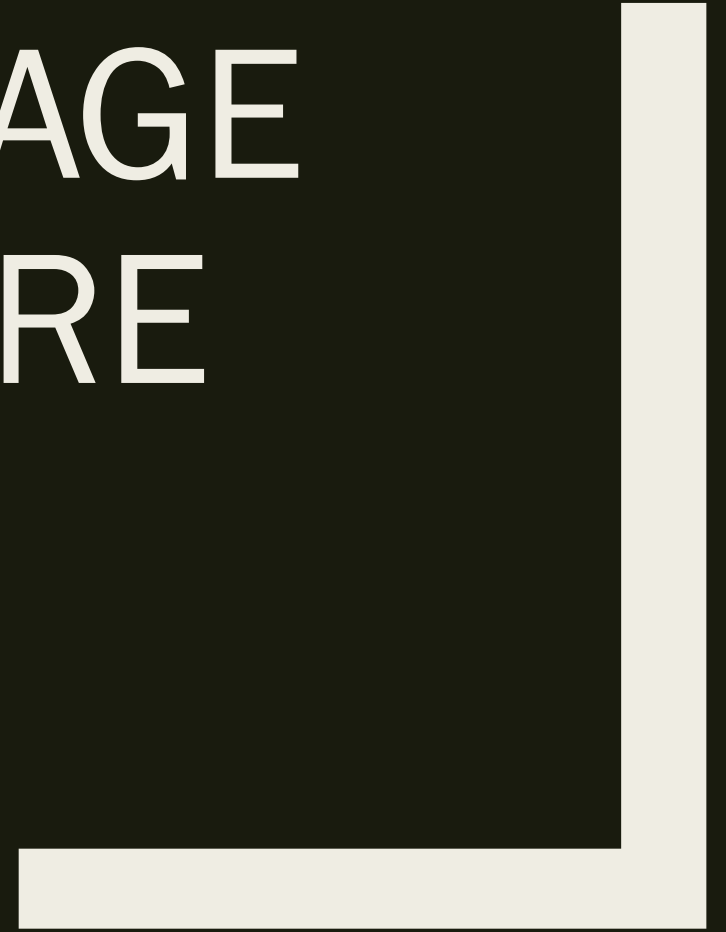
Oro African Church, Oro
Medonte



Salem Chapel BME Church, St. Catharines



INVEST IN HERITAGE INFRASTRUCTURE



#1: Improve Wellbeing, Sense of Self & Sense of Community



Youth



Seniors

#2: Improve Public Education



Amherstburg Freedom Museum



Improve Public Education



Black History in Classrooms

#3: Invest in Restoration, Conservation, Reuse, & Operations



Fugitive Slave Chapel, London



Guelph Black Heritage Society

#4: Invest in Creative Projects & Capital



#5: Invest in Digital Infrastructure



Invest in Operations & Invest in Digital Infrastructure



OBHS Emancipation Day

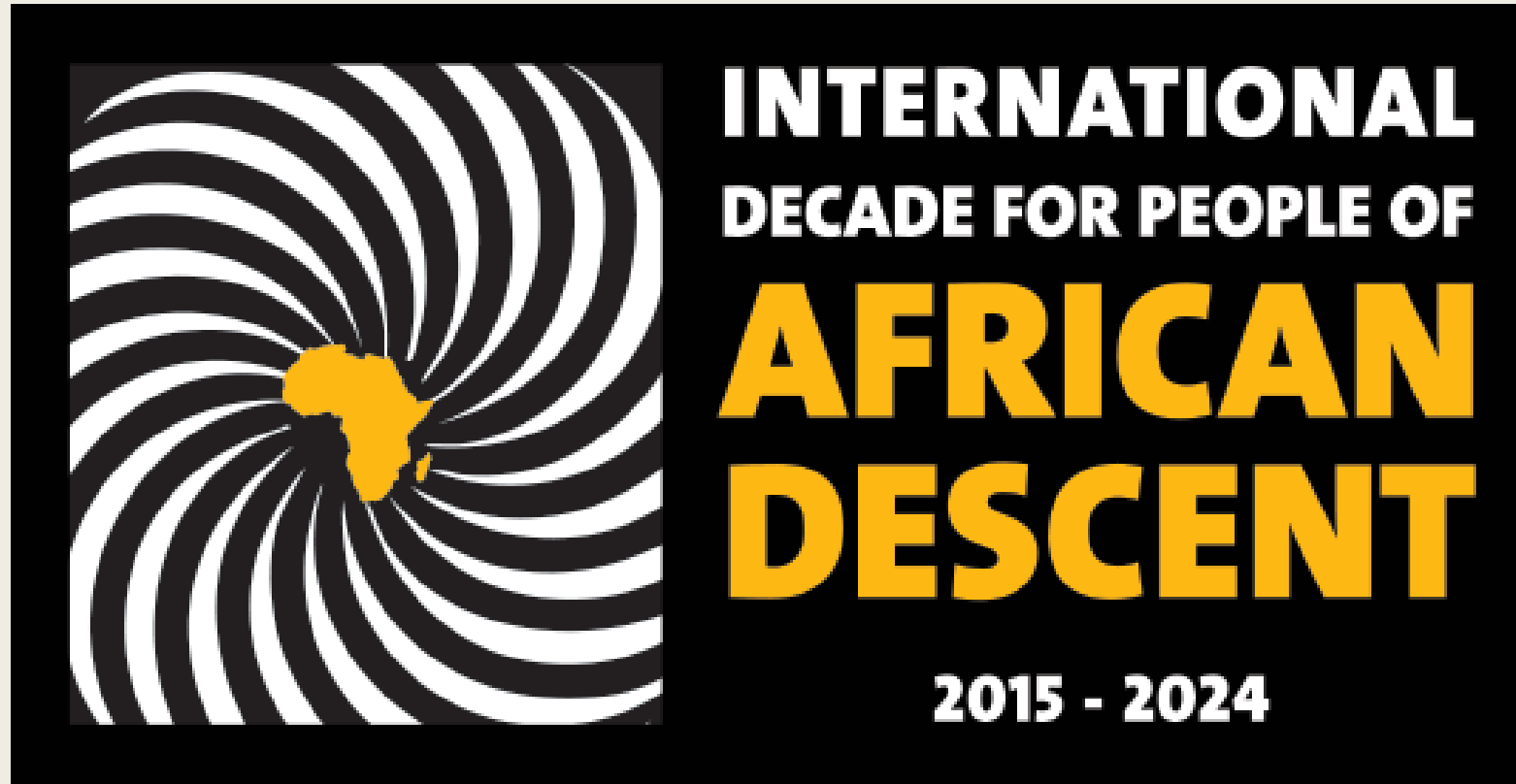


OBHS – Heritage Toronto Tour of Little
Jamaica, Eglinton West

#6: Job Creation



UN International Decade for People of African Descent





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**Submission from the Ontario Black History Society
to the Standing Committee on Finance & Economic Affairs COVID – Culture and
Heritage Public Sector Hearings**

Tuesday, June 30, 2020 at 3pm

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to these important hearings into the impact of COVID-19 on Ontario's culture and heritage sector broadly and more particularly on Black Canadian heritage organizations and sites in the province.

I adhere to the common African-centred custom in opening my words paying homage to the ancestors the recitation of their names. Today I would like to take a moment to honour the life and legacy of Wilma Morrison, who's story encapsulates my message.

- Wilma passed away on April 23rd due to COVID at the age of 91
- She advocated and was a steward for preserving and educating about Black history
- Played a role in the designation of the R. Nathaniel Dett BME church in Niagara Falls, founded in the 1830s

I am the president of the OBHS, The OBHS was established 42 years ago by Dr. Daniel Hill and his wife Donna, and several other community members

The OBHS Mission Statement

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COVID has severely impacted the operations of heritage organizations and has restricted access to them - archives, museums, libraries, heritage or historical societies. For instance, research of graduate students like myself have been paused as a result, having the domino effect of delaying our research and writing. Further along in the gradual opening, these institutions will need financial support to serve and make their materials accessible to research in a way that adheres to our new normal – processing retrievals online, etc. Researchers, film producers, and other cultural producers rely on these organizations in their work that contributes to the production of rich heritage resources.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ontario Black History Society (OBHS)'s recent programming including our summer tour to Black heritage sites for seniors is cancelled and our annual high school conference, Leaders of Tomorrow, and Emancipation Day event are pivoting online. COVID-19 is having a detrimental effect on the financial and programming stability of cultural heritage organizations like ourselves.

Black heritage sites and organizations have already been under threat, which has been exacerbated by COVID. Borrowing the question Minister McLeod asked in earlier hearings, “where will these places be in 18 – 24 months”? “What will the state and future be for Black heritage organizations and sites during and post-COVID”?

For various reasons, Black history/ heritage sites have been lost such as due to the disappearance of a sizeable Black community, lack of awareness of significance (this is where archaeology and history working together is important), destruction, lack of means to save them

Some sites in tenuous, precarious positions:

- Fugitive Slave Chapel AME Church in London, built in 1847, original structure was slated for demolition - Fugitive Slave Chapel of London. Above is the original African Methodist Episcopal Church
- Oro African Church, constructed mid 1840s
- Salem Chapel, BME Church, nationally designation, is a very popular due to its historical ties to Harriet Tubman, attracts many visitors, but in the past year had to start a crowdfunding account to help with repairs; Ontario claims Tubman as part of our heritage
- R. Nathaniel Dett Chapel, saved led by Wilma

Some Black heritage organizations and sites:

- Ontario Black History Society
- Amherstburg Freedom Museum
- Buxton National Historic Site and Museum
- Chatham-Kent Black Historical Society & Heritage Room (W.I.S.H. Centre)
- John Freeman Walls Historic Site and Underground Railroad Museum
- Norval Johnson Heritage Centre
- Oro African Church
- Sheffield Park Black History and Cultural Museum
- Uncle Tom's Cabin Historic Site (Ontario Heritage Trust)
- Essex County Black Historical Research Society
- Owen Sound Emancipation Festival
- Black History Ottawa
- Guelph Black Heritage Society

The multi-layered threats faced by Black heritage organizations and sites have existed for some time and has been exacerbated by COVID, parallel to the racially disproportionate outcomes faced by Black people

I am here to request that you include heritage organizations and sites in the recent funding announced to support Tourism, Culture, and Heritage; to expand the definition of heritage and extend support for operations and capital investments for the heritage sector

- funding the Minister has announced, the Minister announced nearly \$100million in funding for funds like Celebrate Ontario, Ontario Music Fund, etc.
- request that heritage be intentionally included, request the expansion the definition of heritage to be more inclusive and representative
- request to extend support for operations and for capital investments for heritage organizations due to COVID, existing PHO funding is insufficient

Extending funds to invest in heritage to survive COVID has several benefits:

#1: supports wellbeing for individuals and communities – sense of self, racial pride for Black youth and other Black Canadians, and a sense of community for everyone

#2: Public education

- opportunities for all Ontarians to visit sites and participate in programmes to learn about Black history
- Amidst the calls to examine and address systemic racism, Black heritage organizations and sites are effective in educating citizens about these realities from a Black perspective and historical lens to help shift public attitudes
- Heritage infrastructure can assist in educating Ontarians in developing an understanding of systemic racism and historic anti-Black racism
- Black history is excluded in the Ontario Curriculum, there isn't one thing that all students in Ontario have to learn about the 400-year Black presence in Canada, a glaring systemic absence in public education that Black heritage organizations and sites are invaluable in filling and make connections to the social movement moment we are in

#3: Investment in restoration, conservation, reuse, and operations

- sites are in jeopardy, can be restored and repurposed
- All heritage organizations and sites need support to operate, suffered dire losses due to COVID with already slim operating budgets
- Cover maintenance, repairs
- adequately fund wages for often volunteer-led organizations doing this work, individuals in need of support because of COVID

#4: Invest in Creative Projects

- fund creative projects that seek to recover Black Canadian histories when evidence is forever lost, such as the Voices of Freedom Park, creating new artifacts

#5: Specific investment in Black heritage infrastructure – such as digital infrastructure especially due to COVID

- Supporting organizations to establish new digital infrastructure to be accessible - access to collections and materials, develop new innovative websites and implement a major online digital programming upgrade for African Canadian historical organizations
 - o This is the only way to save some of our programming by revamping our offerings where we can continue our proven track record of serving and supporting Black youth, Black seniors, educators and students during emergency distance learning, and the general public
- Provide support for jurisdictions who are trying to preserve Black heritage sites but need funding support to do so

Investment in digital infrastructure allows heritage organizations to:

- Complete Digital transformation of website
- Create new innovative digital information processes to develop online visitors experience of collections
- Incorporate up to date secure methods for maintaining and preserving information
- Develop methods and practices to connect and increase engagement and use of site and materials by Canadians and worldwide
- The OBHS will have to create a virtual experience for our Leaders of Tomorrow program for example, replete with digital resources, supplemental webinars and videos to guide Black students in middle and high school towards a successful transition into post-secondary education or risk losing inspiration and leadership this initiative provides Black youth

#6: Create jobs for Black youth

Through funding various government initiatives such as the Ontario's Advocate for Community Opportunities office, the Anti-Racism Directorate, the Ontario Black Youth Action Plan, job creation can be funded to help address the chronic underemployment that Black youth experience :

- fund professional training especially for Black students to preserve and operate Black sites – archaeologists, conservationists, heritage restoration, museum interpreters; Wilma and other seniors are concerned about who will carry on this important stewardship
- Create and fund paid employment positions in heritage management to help manage sites, often many volunteers

CONCLUSION

To conclude, substantial investments like these have enormous economic and social benefits for the province, the broader heritage sector, and for Black heritage and history sites and organizations. Investments in the heritage sector will have align with addressing many issues (sustainability of heritage organizations and sites broadly and Black heritage organizations and sites specifically, Black youth employment, curriculum gaps, wellbeing during COVID, etc.) and need to be seen as integral to assisting in the province's recovery.

Investment could be a tangible demonstration of the government of Ontario's recognition of the UN International Decade for Peoples of African Descent, concrete steps to support education and preservation initiatives as outlined in the Decade's agenda ; and as concrete action in achieving the goals outlined in the Decade's Programme that member nations, and Ontario, have endorsed to mitigate the persistent, negative continuities of the legacies systemic racism that continue to negatively impact Black life

- [The UN International Decade for People of African Descent - Schedule – Ontario Order in Council 414/2017]

Intentional funding can be viewed as a tangible demonstration of the government's more recently expressed commitment to address anti-Black racism.

I encourage you to bolster the funding supports for heritage organizations and sites through various funding channels such as COVID relief funds, Infrastructure Canada, the Ontario's Advocate for Community Opportunities office, and the Anti-Racism Directorate so that 18 - 24 months from now they will continue to be integral to the province's cultural and tourism sector and a crucial support for public education, social awareness.