

**Remembering in a Context of Forgetting:
Hauntings and the Old Durham Road Black Pioneer Settlement**

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Abstract

This paper explores the data produced from an oral history project about a Black pioneer settlement in Grey County, Ontario. Twelve area residents were interviewed and the data produced points to various community practices of both remembering and forgetting. I employ Avery Gordon's (2008) theorization of ghosts and hauntings to make sense of the gaps, silences, and contradictions that populated the interviews. The paper ends with a consideration of Roger Simon's (2000, 2005) plea for a practice of remembrance that is both ethical and pedagogical.

There is no future without uncanny memorial connections, without responsibilities to memories other than one's own, to memories you have no responsibility for but to claim you to a memorial kinship. (Roger Simon, 2000, p. 19)

My current research concerns the historic Black pioneer settlement along the Old Durham Road in (the former) Artemesia Townshipⁱ, Grey County, Ontario. Initially my interest in this community stemmed from the fact that my parents bought three 50-acre lots along this historic road in the 1960's when I was a child. I had grown up with a few scant tales about "escaped Black slaves" who had been given land "by Queen Victoria". Over the years, I have joined local efforts to reclaim this settler community's history through doing archival research, editing a local Black history journal, organizing annual teachers' field trips, among other things. Most recently, I have conducted a pilot project consisting of oral history interviews with people who have connections to the Old Durham Road¹. This paper stems from this project and is about hauntings. I employ Avery Gordon's (2008) definition of a haunting as "an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes directly and sometimes more obliquely" (p. xvi). A haunting usually involves violence, pain or loss and may be populated by "people who are meant to be invisible" (ibid). In this way a haunting is "that which appears to be not there [that] is often a seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities" (p. 8). A haunting thus marks an absent presence. Reflecting on photographs of a house in Port Hope, Ontario that document the removal of bricks due to their radioactivity, Roger Simon (2000) notes "the anxiety provoked by the absent presence of those bricks" (p. 14).

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The interview data suggests three kinds of hauntings. The first has to do with the gossip and whispered warnings that newcomers to the road were given by local residents about the area's Black history. Through the gossip, the Black history becomes a "seething presence" (Gordon, 2008, p. 8) that is there, and not there at the same time. The second kind of haunting has to do with the way in which this history is both denied and acknowledged through common place stories about neighbours and childhood friends, and through the persistent use of childhood nicknames. Hauntings persist in these stories because "the trouble they represent and symptomize is no longer contained or repressed or blocked from view" (p. xvi). The third kind of haunting concerns a couple of ghosts who populated the stories of two of the people I interviewed. Gordon entices: "the ghost gesticulates, signals, and sometimes mimics the unspeakable as it shines for both the remembered and the forgotten" (p.150).

The data for this paper comes from interviews I did with twelve residents in the area: 2 descendants of Black settlers, 3 descendants of White settlers and 7 who purchased property on the road or in the immediate area in the 1960's, as my parents didⁱⁱ. This project is a companion piece to archival research wherein I have been digging up the 'officially' recorded traces of this community. Acquiring knowledge and information about this community has long been hampered by practices of silence and denial. It is because of this that I locate my research in what I call a context of forgetting which can be seen in the lingering attitudes and practices among some members of the current-day community who insist that their White forebears were the first, or at least, the 'authentic' pioneers. Their silences and dismissals, their limited understanding of racism, their well-meaning banalities, and their limited knowledge of the area's first non-indigenous settlers will creep into everyday conversations. When the historic Black community is mentioned, it is not uncommon to hear responses like: "they all left", "they couldn't take the cold climate", "they weren't really famers", "they were still on the run from slave catchers", and "they all died of typhoid fever and are buried in the swamp". These pronouncements of dismissal and denial relegate this historic community to a distant, unimportant past. They were not the true pioneers. Honourific designations are only bestowed upon White settlers.

By way of a brief history of the settlement of the Old Durham Road, here is a condensed account: The Chippewa Nation ceded the land to the British Crown in what is now south east Grey County in 1818. In the first of several treaties in what would become Grey and Bruce Counties, the Crown gained 1.6 million acres for "a yearly payment for ever of 1200 pounds in goods at Montreal prices" (Marsh, 1931, p. 33). The very first settlers along what became the Durham Road were people of African descent (Davidson, 1972; Marsh, 1931). The land was not surveyed at that point in time, so the settlers basically squatted along what may have been a hunting trail, clearing the land and farming it. Varying sources suggest that these first settlers came from a variety of constituencies: United Empire Loyalists, Veterans of the War of 1812, those freed by British slave holders, and refugees fleeing slavery in the United States (Davidson, 1972; Holness and Sutherland, 2000; Marsh, 1931; Meyler, 2001). It is thought that these settlers started arriving as early as the late 1830's and the 1840's (Holness & Sutherland, 2000; Meyler, 2001). Many came from The Queen's Bush settlement in current-day Wellington County, Ontario, when attempts in the late 1840's by community members to secure Crown Patents for land

cleared and farmed, were denied (Brown-Kubisch, 2004).

The land and the road were surveyed between 1848 and 1851. Long 50 acre lots were marked out and Crown Patents were granted along the road thereafter. Settlers who qualified received 50 acres of free land and were eligible to purchase another 50 acres for a modest amount. To qualify for the patents settlers had to clear 5 acres of land and build a log cabin that was at least 16' by 20'. Many of the Black settlers became property owners and some were tenants on land owned by others. Current-day oral history suggests that some of these Black settlers lost their land through unscrupulous dealings between land agents and the growing immigrant population from the British Isles. Additionally, some may have lost their land through violence (Meyler, 2001; Holness & Sutherland, 2000).

The first census was taken in 1851 and it recorded what was already a well-established communityⁱⁱⁱ. In the new township of Artemesia, there were 118 Black settlers: men, women and children. It is believed that as early as the 1830's, what is currently known as the Old Durham Road Pioneer Cemetery, was the community's designated burial ground. The pioneer settlement dwindled as the 19th century wore on. The land was not very good for farming, so settlers struggled to keep from starving in the winter, let alone make ends meet. Most male settlers had to seek out winter employment and their offspring often left to find livelihoods in the growing urban centres of Owen Sound, Collingwood, Guelph, and Hamilton. Many also intermarried with the White settler community. Those intermarriages most often resulted in the dropping of the Black heritage from the family tree. In a racist and hardscrabble climate, there was no apparent advantage in claiming a Black heritage when one could pass for White. Black heritage became invisible as it was dropped from both private and public tellings of family histories (Hubbert, 1986; Harrison, 1992). There are many families in the area today whose Black ancestry is either kept hidden or is simply not known as a result of previous generations' thoroughness in erasing it.

For the most part, the area's Black history is relegated a few lines in the local history books (Marsh, 1931, Davidson, 1972), or left out altogether. As late as 2005, the area's District Chamber of Commerce provided this history in its annual business directory:

Artemesia Township was described by the Government of the Dominion of Canada as a >veritable Garden of Eden= in its solicitation for emigrants to settle in this area. With the promise of 50 acres free and 50 acres for 50 cents per acre, European [*my emphasis*] settlers began arriving in the mid 1850's. By 1861 Artemesia had a population of 2,575. (Flesherton and District Chamber of Commerce, 2005, p. 3)

As can be seen, the Black settlement is not denied; it is simply left out. Other 'disappearing acts' seem more insidious: The road register for the Old Durham Road (recorded between 1848 and 1851) listed the original owners of land in the various townships through which the road passed. The hand-written entries included not only the names of the first settlers, but also their places of origin. While not a foolproof marker, it is generally believed that anyone who listed an American slave state as place of origin, was likely a refugee from slavery. What is as interesting as it is alarming is that some of the pages have been torn out. This came to light in 2003 when the Bruce and Grey Branch of

the Ontario Genealogical Society and the Grey County Archives transcribed the register. The absence is noted thus: “[m]any pages have been cut out of the register” (Bruce and Grey County, Ontario Genealogical Society and Grey County Archives, 2003, p. 12). I regard this road register as a metaphor for the archives as a holder of both what is to be remembered (the road register and other historic documents), and the evidence of what is deemed necessary to forget (the effects of the torn-out pages, so visible in the document).

These acts of denial have taken place even within a context of renewed interest in the history of the Black settlement. In 1989, a group of citizens came together to reclaim the historic Black burial ground on the Old Durham Road. The burial ground, which had served the burial needs of the community from the 1830s to the late 1880s, had become a farmer’s field with all of its headstones ploughed under or removed and then thrown into a nearby rock pile or taken away and put to uses such as flooring for basements and barns. While the missing headstones were not originally the focus of this group of citizens, their disappearance sparked public controversy that was later captured in the film, *Speakers for the Dead* (Holness & Sutherland, 2000). The citizens formed a committee, known as the Old Durham Road Pioneer Cemetery Committee and they convinced the farmer who owned the land to donate it to the municipality. The burial ground was re-designated as a cemetery and registered with the provincial government. In 1990, (then) Lieu-tenant Governor Lincoln Alexander officiated at the dedication ceremony. Four headstones that were recovered from the rock pile were proudly displayed under plexi-glass and since then, the Old Durham Road Pioneer Cemetery has been lovingly cared for by members of the committee.

Since 2002, an annual day-long Black history conference has been held in the area, featuring local authors, genealogists, historians, and artists who are involved in Black history research. Grey Roots Museum and Archives produces an annual community journal, *Northern Terminus: The African Canadian History Journal*, which is now in its 12th year of publication.^{iv} The Black community in Owen Sound (which is also known as the “northern terminus” of the Underground Railroad), has held an emancipation picnic / festival for the past 152 years, celebrating Britain’s 1833 Emancipation Act which ended slavery throughout the British Empire. And most recently, the South Grey Museum, which lies in the heart of Artemesia, has installed a permanent exhibit about this historic community.

Gossip and Whispered Warnings

Shortly after my parents purchased the land along the Old Durham Road, my father hired a local farmer to cut a road through the tall field grass. I remember standing beside my father as this elderly man looked inquisitively at my father, as if sizing him up in some fashion. “You’re a preacher, eh?” he asked. “Well, you’re not the first preacher to own this place.” The farmer proceeded to tell us about a Black preacher who had owned our place “a long time ago when Queen Victoria was giving away land to escaped slaves”. I do not know if this information was given because the farmer thought it amusing or interesting that two preachers, distanced by time, circumstance and race, had owned the same property. I recall that he laughed and my father laughed in response. Looking back, I have come to see this piece of information, so casually given, as a kind of warning: we needed to know what we

were getting ourselves into. This exchange was very similar to what other newcomers to the road and area also experienced.

A mother and daughter I interviewed, like my own family, were 'newcomers' to the road. The mother (a White English post-WWII immigrant) and her late husband had purchased an old farmhouse on the road around 1960 when their two children were quite small. She noted that "the neighbours were quick to tell me: 'you are going into a *rude name* house'" (Interview, May 29, 2012). "[R]ude name house", she later explained, meant "a Darkie's house". She would not use the term "Darkie" until I pressed her to explain what she meant by "rude name". An elderly White couple that had purchased a farm kitty-corner to the Black burial ground in 1960 was warned too: " 'If you buy this house you buy right across the road from the Black cemetery.' So we were told right from the start, but we just said 'it won't bother us'" (Interview, March 17, 2012). Another elderly White resident, who came to the area in the 1950s, described how the information she learned about the Black history was "all hush-hush" and that it "circulated at the level of gossip, as if to create a sensation" (Interview, September 30, 2011). Gossip often suggests that secrets are being shared, and secrets do the work of signaling what is for public airing and what is not. In her now-classic oral history of Italians under fascism, Luisa Passerini (1989) observed that "gossip can generally influence behavior more directly" than individual testimony or cultural myths, which are often less secretive (p. 194). Gossip has an immediacy and can create an insider / outsider effect. By learning about the Black history through whispered warnings and gossip, the newcomers to the road received a lesson in the community's dominant cultural practice of silence. "A seething presence" (Gordon, 2008, p. 8), the silenced and largely invisible history boils over in the present through this constant meddling with other people's business, as if the gossipers cannot leave it alone, as if they too are haunted by the lives their secrets seek to scorn.

These stories of warning that work to signal a Black historical presence as a community secret, go hand in hand with rumours that circulate about what happened to the headstones in the Old Durham Road Pioneer Cemetery, and other Black burial grounds in the county. Long before Holness and Sutherland (2000) explored the controversy of the missing or 'disappeared' headstones in their film, *Speakers for the Dead*, stories in common circulation told of people dragging away fallen and 'abandoned' headstones behind their snowmobiles, recreation rooms having flooring made out of headstones, barns and sheds using headstones as subflooring, over which concrete was poured. All of these stories have circulated and continue to circulate as gossip because no one is ever named and no one has come forward with missing headstones. The Old Durham Road Pioneer Cemetery Committee continues to have a mandate to locate what they call 'lost' headstones and invites members of the public to drop off headstones at a local church, with no questions asked. This plea / invitation is made at the annual dedication ceremony held every autumn at the cemetery. In the spirit of 'forgive and forget', the committee, ironically, invites the community to continue the practice of 'don't know, can't tell'. Yet, still, no stone has turned up.

Knowing and Not Knowing at the Same Time

While none of the descendants I interviewed implicated themselves or their ancestors in fomenting the gossip experienced by their 'newcomer' neighbours, they were all very clear about their own attitudes towards the historic Black settlement. All of them mentioned the little church that the Black settlers attended. While that church was 'long gone' by the time my informants were born, it has held on as a marker of the community it served. One of the White pioneer descendants recalled "the older generation telling stories about walking along the road and hearing really good singing coming out of the church" (Interview, May 1, 2012). In a subsequent interview he suggested: "There's no doubt in my mind but what these singers were nice to listen to. There's no doubt in my mind at all. And they would be singing from their hearts" (Interview, September 16, 2012). The story of White pioneers walking along the road and hearing beautiful singing emanating from the little Black church is also told in the local history books (Harrison, 1992; Hubbert, 1986) and it is one that I have heard repeated from time to time in casual conversations.

I suggest that in part, it is meant to demonstrate goodwill towards this long-ago community. All the participants in the research were anxious to declare their good feelings towards the descendants of the Black pioneers who still lived in their community – declarations that I understood were meant to demonstrate that they were not racist. This same male descendant of a White pioneer family described the Black pioneer descendants in his childhood as "members of the community, just like everyone else" (Interview, September 16, 2012). Recalling one person in particular, he added: "Yes, this lady was an exceptionally fine lady in the community. Actually, the colours [*the skin-colour of our neighbours*] and that didn't mean anything to us when we were young" (Interview, September 16, 2012). It often seemed that because the Black Pioneer descendants were 'simply' neighbours; race was denied – not known, not interrogated. A female White pioneer descendant explained that, "I think I was in high school before I knew some people were Black, but to me, they were just neighbours" (Interview, July 20, 2012). However, this same person recalled a racial controversy that she remembers taking place when she was 10 years or 11 years old:

When [a White pioneer descendant] was running for Member of Parliament ... I would be 10 or 11 years old and the story – you know, at that time, it was all word of mouth. There was a story that went around that he was a Black descendant, which was literally untrue, you know. No relation whatsoever – well, he was related by marriage to some of them, the descendants. (Interview, July 20, 2012)

The colour-blindness she practised in high school is negated by this earlier memory of racialized identity politics. This knowing and not knowing at one and the same time came up in another interview with one of the female White descendants:

I was raised at Proton Station and at that time, I had no idea that these [neighbours'] kids were any different than anyone else. But I know five families and it seems to me that in most cases it was the mother that was Black. On both sides of me there were families – and like, I didn't know, but the grandmother was pretty brown. But everyone was brown in the summertime. ... I never seen her in the winter. She

wasn't very sociable and she just kept pretty much to herself. ... It must have been on the mother's side, because the first cousins on the father's side, there's no sign of it in them. (Interview, September 16, 2012)

Race haunts these stories only when it concerns Black heritage. There is never any reference to Whiteness as a racialized category. Black heritage seems to lurk in the well-known shadows. In the above excerpt, the neighbours are marked by race because they are "pretty brown". Race is evidenced in members of one side of a family, but not the other – where its absence is duly noted: "there's no sign of it in them". But just as skin colour is used as a marker of the historic Black community, it is immediately taken away: "But everyone was brown in the summertime". The community is there and then not there. It matters and then it does not matter. Race enters onto the horizon, once again through the negation of colour-blindness.

One of the Black pioneer descendants I interviewed was a man in his 70's. His heritage is mixed, being a descendent of both the Black and the White settlers. He grew up in a family that, while they acknowledged their Black heritage, identified as White. Near the end of his interview he told me that he has friends from his childhood who still sometimes refer to him in public by his grade school nickname: "Nig". "But that never bothered me. In fact, a couple of them still call me 'Nig'. It was never taken by me as slander. Most of us had nicknames among ourselves" (Interview, July 23, 2012). He insists that they say it cheerfully! They mean no harm. It doesn't really matter. But with each cheerful greeting, he continues to be marked by the very history that is publicly denied. In Merna Summers' (1974) short story, *Portulaca*, a character named H. Stanley Ungerman "was known far and wide for the nicknames he conferred on people, names that once spoken stuck like burrs" (p. 66). When the story's main character hears the nickname Ungerman has bestowed upon her, she "knew that she didn't belong to herself any more, and there was nothing she could do about it. For all the years ahead she would belong to anyone who called her by that name" (p. 74). My informant's nickname, I suggest, sticks like a burr. It won't go away and as such, it is another haunting. It is evidence that those who identify with the White community still seem haunted by a past some of them have worked so hard to ignore or deny. "Nig" acknowledges this past and works to put this Black descendant in his proper place, as someone with a heritage that can be both acknowledged and denied at the same time.

The Haunted Farmhouse

In her memoir about her life on a prairie farm, Sharon Butala (2000) provides an account of how her family's newly built house was haunted. The "rattles, bangs, pings, snaps and creaks" (p.6) and the "heavy footsteps coming up the darkened hall" (p. 7) mostly go unacknowledged, "as if saying it out loud would keep it from being true" (p. 5). While she offers her readers assurance that "the ghosts were surely the souls of dead people, and they came from somewhere" (p. 11), she admits that "we didn't know what the ghosts wanted, what they had against us" (p. 11). Butala's memoir concerns itself with her engagement with "the field", a fenced-off quarter section on the ranch which she and her

husband decided to stop using for grazing cattle so that it could to return to its natural (pre-contact) state (p. 16). Butala writes about her coming to both acknowledge and seek knowledge about the area's "Amerindian" past. Although it was never her intent to deal with the ghosts, her journey of coming to know "the field's" history resulted in the ghosts eventually leaving her and her house alone (p.189).

The mother and daughter I interviewed who had been warned that they had purchased a "rude name house" (Interview, May 29, 2013), told me about two giggling females who haunt the farmhouse. Footsteps and laughter are heard in the front upstairs bedroom, along the upstairs hallway and on the staircase. At times, the smell of bread baking or lilacs is present in the house. The mother described it this way:

There were two girls, the daughters of the family. You can hear them sometimes. They are great gigglers, I can tell you that. ... But I swear to you, I hear the girls giggling, but it's only in that one front bedroom. (Interview, May 29, 2012)

The daughter has never heard the giggling but she has heard footsteps on the stairs: "She would tell me about them and I really wanted to hear them but I never did" (Interview, May 29, 2012). The daughter did confirm that they had both experienced the smells: "We both, in the middle of the winter, could smell bread baking and lilacs. All along the front, in the spring, there's lilacs out there" (Interview, May 29, 2012). She went on to offer reassurance that "they are all good ghosts. There are no bad feelings at all. I guess we've taken care of everything. They are not mad at us" (Interview, May 29, 2012).

Who the "they" are is inconclusive. My two informants were not altogether sure. They had vague memories of asking one of the Black descendants they know about who the ghosts might be, but were uncertain as to whether this person was able to enlighten them. I learned from one of the Black pioneer descendants (Interview, February 24, 2012) that the farmhouse had been built for the mixed-race bride of a young man who was from one of the best-known White pioneer families in the township. The bride was the daughter of one of the pioneer families who were identified as Black. Her father was a Black man from Maryland, a slave-holding state, and was likely a refugee from slavery. He first settled in Hamilton where he met his bride-to-be, a young White woman from County Cork, Ireland. How the two met is not known, but they were married in a Catholic church in Hamilton in the late 1850's and moved to the Durham Road where they raised a family of four mixed-race children. The two oldest children, a son and a daughter, married into the same White pioneer family and wound up living side by side. It is this young woman, the mixed-race daughter, for whom the farmhouse was built.

During the interview with the mother and daughter they speculated about who the two ghosts might be. The mother assumed that the ghosts were children in the family. Her daughter wondered whether one of the ghosts might have been the bride, for whom the house was built. While the fact that there are ghosts continues to perk the interest of my two informants, they do not seem to be perturbed that they do not know who the ghosts were (or are). They have never visited the near-by cemetery (that initially served the White pioneer community), where the bride, her husband, and two of their children are buried. There, they could have at least learned their names and learned that a daughter in this

family died at age 29, outlived by both her parents. Gordon (2008) quotes a passage from Morrison's *Beloved* that asks an important question about ghosts who remain nameless:

Everybody knew what she was called, but nobody anywhere knew her name.
Disremembered and unaccounted for, she cannot be lost because no one is looking for her, and even if they were, how can they call her if they don't know her name?
 Although she has claim, she is not claimed. (cited in Gordon, p. 151, my emphasis)

How do we insert the ghosts into our historical accounts if we do not know who they are? How can we tell their stories if we do not know how they lived?

It was the son and/or brother of the ghosts who lived in the farmhouse when it was sold in 1960 to the newcomer family. The mother remembered him vividly as bearing what she identified as a marker of Black heritage: "He had colour. ... He was a very elderly gentleman when we met him and I think he went into a nursing home after we bought his place from him and he died not long after" (Interview, May 29, 2012). Would he have heard the ghosts? Would he have known who they were?

The absence of the ghosts' names and stories also haunt in another manifestation of omission. In recent years, Grey Roots, the county's museum and archives has built a pioneer village on land adjacent to their magnificent facility². Moreston Village as it is called, hosts year-round activities connected to notions of *the Pioneer*. Re-enactors populate the growing number of buildings that include a school house, blacksmith's shop, as well as modest log cabins. They perform a variety of pioneer tasks such as teaching unruly groups of tourist children, forging horseshoes, baking bread, walking arm and arm as they cross from the parking lot to the village. They are all White and they always seem to be smiling. A pioneer village is, after all, part teaching tool and part entertainment. Petty disagreements between neighbours, marital strife, loneliness, illness, winter starvation, pests and plagues, and racialized tensions, have no place in Moreston Village. There are no Black descendants portrayed by the eager group of volunteer re-enactors. Although Grey Roots Museum and Archives hosts the annual Black History Event, publishes *Northern Terminus*, hosts the speaker's night for the annual Emancipation Day celebrations, and houses a very fine exhibit about the Black community in Owen Sound, its pioneer village seems devoid of any acknowledgement of these first non-indigenous settlers^v.

So, I am left asking, what do the ghosts in the farmhouse on the Old Durham Road want? What troubles them? What are they trying to tell us? That they were more than the sum of their racialized heritage? That they too were happy? That they too were "real" pioneers who gentrified their lives on the frontier by planting lilacs? That kitchens full of the smell of baked bread knew no racial boundaries? That they too were here to stay? That the bride for whom the farmhouse was built was part Black and proud of it? Or are they trying to signal something else? That race, no matter how invisible, still weaves through the stories the descendants (both Black and White) tell? That as the older generation dies out, the stories they refused to tell will die with them? Are the ghosts trying to ensure we do not forget? Gordon (2008) suggests that by telling ghost stories, we "repair representational mistakes ... [and] strive to understand the conditions under which a memory was produced

² <http://www.greyroots.com>

in the first place, toward a countermemory for the future” (p. 22).

I am uncertain as to whether the story of the haunted farmhouse is widely known, as I did not learn about the ghosts until I interviewed the mother and daughter, and by this time, I had already completed most of the interviews. As hauntings and stories of ghosts are not very common, nor necessarily believed, the mother did some checking-in with me by saying: “It makes me sound like a nutcase” and later, “I honestly heard those two giggling. I truly did. I thought I was going round the bend” (Interview, May 29, 2012). This fear that one’s belief in ghosts makes one marginal or crazy is echoed in Sharon Butala’s memoir (2000), which opens thus:

Our house was haunted. ... I say ‘haunted’ blithely, without apprehension, not caring any more if I am believed or not. I know of no other word for what happened to us and there is no other explanation, although for a very long time I would never have said so out loud (p. 1).

I realize that believing in ghosts requires a willingness to believe. If one is willing to believe in ghosts, then one must also be willing to consider what they might want. I agree with Gordon (2008) on this one: “Haunting is part of our social world, and understanding it is essential to grasping the nature of our society and for changing it” (p. 27). Whether it is the ghosts that haunt the farmhouse, or the ways in which the Black pioneer settlement haunts what people say and do not say, what they know and what they do not know, what they choose to remember and choose to forget, understanding hauntings as part of our social world and as essential to our desire for change, seems key to reinserting this history into both the local and our national historical narratives.

As a former student of Roger Simon, I cannot undertake this historical research (in the archives and in oral history interviews) without giving some thought to the pedagogical imperative that both summons and drives my work. What drives me is the recognition that Canada’s historic narrative, particularly in relation to 19th century settlement, is too narrow and exclusive. I also take seriously Norman Ravvin’s (2001) warning that “[T]he Canadian past is too often made to go away without a struggle” (p. 17). I feel driven by the dearth of African Canadian stories in the current ‘pioneer lexicon’ taught in most Canadian schools. I feel an urgency to record a history that may disappear when the elderly people who still know that history are no longer able to share what they know. But what do I have? Scant actual stories about Black pioneers – nothing that adds very much to what I have already gleaned from the archives. Not really any *stories* – other than the one about the ghosts. What I do have is testimony that betrays a community’s long-held practices of dismissal and denial, that contradicts itself, that turns well-meaning community members into unwitting bigots. What use is that to this present-day community? (Just who am I to be pointing fingers? What conversations might I risk closing down?)

It is Roger Simon who summons me to consider that I have ethical as well as pedagogical responsibilities, in terms of what I might do with my new-found historical knowledge. Simon captures both the imperative and obligation to remember in his use of the Hebrew term “zakhor”. Zakhor necessitates “communicative practices” (Simon et al., 2000, p. 11). Simon, along with Mario DiPaolantonio and Mark Clamen (2005) asks: “what

practices of response to the testamentary demand for nonindifference might enable an opening to learning” (p.135)? And, “how might remembrance be understood as a praxis creating the possibilities of new histories and altered subjectivities” (ibid)? This is the juncture I am at right now. If I have grasped the urgency and poignancy of these questions, the subjectivities of my elderly research participants matter beyond what they have made available to me through digitized interviews. Their stories and their sense-making about this mostly disappeared history provide insight into how community members navigate around the shoals of race relations without the conceptual tools that are available to the likes of those of us who have access to the academy. I must not reduce their stories, their otherness, “to a version of [my] own stories” (Simon, 2005, p. 4). I am encouraged and bolstered by Roger Simon’s hopeful insistence that “[a] genuine tomorrow, not a repeat of yesterday or today, requires we reassess what we have learned and repressed; it is in this fundamental sense that *zakhor* becomes radically pedagogical” (Simon, 2000, p. 22). I am comforted to know that I will continue to puzzle over his often dense and always rich prose and attempt to tease out the urgent and the nuanced relationship between the past, the present, and the yet to come (Simon, 2000).

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ⁱ The former Artemesia Township is now part of the Municipality of Grey Highlands.

ⁱⁱ With the exception of one informant who was a post-WWII Dutch immigrant, all of the other informants were of British heritage. This includes the two Black descendants whose heritage included both Black and White settlers. All of the descendants of the pioneer settlers (five in total) had grown up on area farms. All five were elderly. Only two of this group still lived on their farm. Nine of the informants were women and three were men. Categories for data analysis included: self-identity, understandings of race, stories marked or framed by racial categories, family history, schooling, gender and class.

ⁱⁱⁱ It is important to note that there were several small Black pioneer settlements in Grey County on the mid-nineteenth century. The Old Durham Road settlement in Artemesia Township was one of several.

^{iv} *Northern Terminus: The African Canadian History Journal* is currently the only journal in Canada dedicated to African Canadian history. Produced annually by Grey Roots Museum and Archives, it publishes both peer-reviewed and general interest articles and reviews.

^v I wish to acknowledge how the very notion of a 'pioneer village' erases the indigenous history of the area. The indigenous history is still marked by its absence.