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Reading L3

Slavery in Canada

Slavery Abolition Act, 1833

The **Slavery Abolition Act 1833** was an Act of the Parliament of the United Kingdom abolishing slavery throughout the British Empire. The movement towards anti-slavery began in 1783. In 1793 the Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada John Graves Simcoe signed the Act Against Slavery. This Act was passed by the local Legislative Assembly, and it was the first legislation to outlaw the slave trade in a part of the British Empire.

In 1808, Parliament passed the Slave Trade Act of 1807, which outlaws the slave trade, but not slavery itself. Britain used its influence to coerce other countries to agree treaties to end their slave trade and allow the Royal Navy to seize their slave ships.

The **Slavery Abolition Act 1833** came into force in the following year on August 1, 1834. With this Act, only slaves below the age of six were freed in colonies. Former slaves over the age of six were re-designated as apprentices and their servitude was abolished in two stages.

The Act also provided compensation for slave-owners. The amount of money to be spent on the compensation claims was set at £20 million.

US Fugitive Slave Act of 1850

The **Fugitive Slave Act of 1850** was one of the most controversial elements of the 1850. By 1843, several hundred slaves a year were successfully escaping to the North, making slavery an unstable institution in the border states. In response to the old Fugitive Slave Act, the **Fugitive Slave Law of 1850** penalized officials who did not arrest an alleged runaway slave and made them liable to a fine of \$1,000. Law-enforcement officials everywhere were required to arrest people suspected of being a runaway

slave. The suspected slave could not ask for a jury trial or testify on his or her own behalf. In addition, anyone aiding a runaway slave by providing food or shelter as subject to six months' imprisonment and a \$1,000 fine. Officers who captured a fugitive slave were entitled to a bonus or promotion for their work.

The Underground Railroad

The **Underground Railroad** was a network of secret routes and safe houses established in the United States during the early to mid 19th century, and use by African-American slaves to escape into free states and Canada with the aid of abolitionists.

British North America, where slavery was prohibited, was a popular destination, as its long border gave many points of access. Most former slaves settled in Ontario. This was due to a provision in the 1793 Act to Limit Slavery which stated that any enslaved person who reached Upper Canada became free upon arrival.

The Underground Railroad was neither underground nor was it an actual railroad. They used railway terminology to help the slaves escape and it consisted of meeting points, secret routes, transportation, and safe houses.

Escaped slaves would move north along the route from one way station to the next.

"Conductors" on the railroad came from various backgrounds. Their ranks included free Blacks, fellow enslaved persons, white and Aboriginal sympathizers, Quakers, Methodists and so on.

Safe houses were operated by station masters. They received escapees into their home and provided meals, a change of clothing, a place to rest and hide. William Still assisted many freedom-seekers in their journey to Canada.

Ticket agents coordinated safe trips and made travel arrangements for freedom-seekers

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by helping them to contact station masters or conductors.

The routes that were travelled to get to freedom were called "lines." The network of routes went through 14 Northern states and two Canadian provinces.

The decade of 1850 to 1860 saw 15,000 to 20,000 fugitives reach the Province of Canada when it became the main terminus of the Underground Railroad. The newcomers migrated to various parts of what is now Ontario, as well as other regions of British North America.

During this time, Black Canadians contributed significantly to building strong communities and to the development of the provinces in which they lived and worked. Some lived in all-Black settlements, such as the Elgin Settlement and Buxton Mission. Others chose to live in racially integrated communities in towns and cities.

They helped to establish a range of religious, educational, social and cultural institutions, political groups and community-building organizations. They founded churches, schools, benevolent societies, fraternal organizations and two newspapers.

These individuals helped to operate various businesses such as grocery stores, ladies boutiques and hat shops, blacksmith shops, a saw company, pharmacies, herbal treatment services and carpentry businesses.