

Deep Canadian Roots in the Davis Family – Part 1

Have you ever considered looking into your family history? The Amherstburg Freedom Museum is here to help. We have the resources you need to get started on tracing your family roots. This month we are highlighting the Davis family. Did you know the Davis family, one of Essex County's most distinguished families, settled in the area in the 1840s? Those are deep Canadian roots. The family patriarch was James Davis Sr. and he was born into slavery in Oldtown, Virginia on 3 March 1818. He courageously escaped enslavement in 1849 and lived in Fort Erie for a short time. The following year, in 1850, James braved the terrifying journey back to rescue his family from the plantation where they remained following his escape. He and his family arrived on the dock at Malden (Amherstburg) on 15 October 1850, and lived in Amherstburg until the spring of 1851, when he purchased the west half of lot 14 on the south side of Malden Road, in Colchester North. It was there that James remained for the rest of his life. Knowing what it was like to live without an education, James was determined that his children would have more opportunities than he did. James, along with other residents of Colchester North, hired a "private lady teacher" to instruct the children of the area, including his own. This was before a school was established in the area, which demonstrates James' dedication to education and the enhancement of the next generation. He probably changed a lot of children's lives by bringing a school to the area, but he didn't stop there. Did you know after a school section was formed, James was elected as one of its trustees, a position he held for several years. James Davis Sr. died on 23 July 1892, at the age of 74, and was buried at Union cemetery at New Canaan. At the time of his death, he had ten grandchildren and one great grandchild. The service was officiated by the Reverend L. Pierce, with the help of the Reverends J.S. Masterson, W.S. Kane and G.W. Walls. In a poetic end, one of James' pall-bearers, William Edwards, arrived in Canada on the same boat that landed James and his family in Amherstburg in 1850. Want to learn more? Stayed tuned for part 2 next week.