

Christian Family History Part 1 – Escaping via the Underground Railroad

For this month's family history, we are featuring the Christian family beginning with Susan and Charles Christian. Before we begin, we would like to thank Irene Moore Davis for her significant contributions to this essay. In the Amherstburg Freedom Museum's family history collection is the Christian family binder that includes a document called "The Christian Family Story." It is written by Winifred Christian Shreve who is the great granddaughter of Susan and Charles Christian and will be discussed in further detail later. In "The Christian Family Story," Winifred writes that the story began in Mason County, Kentucky. It should be noted that, according to Karolyn Smardz Frost's book *I've Got a Home in Glory Land* (page 17) more than 40,000 people of African descent were forcibly transported by their white owners from the eastern seaboard to Kentucky in the years following the American Revolution. "The Christian Family Story" continues with a description of "Susan, a girl of African, Indian and German descent ... owned by the Sauer family. She worked in the house from a very young age. When she grew up, the Sauers selected and purchased a husband for her – Charles Christian, whose father was an African. They were both born circa 1800-1809. They continued living on the Sauer plantation with Charles working on the land (... they said he was a gardener). They had two children, Henry (1839) and Margaret. One night, when Susan was rocking the Sauers' eight year old daughter to sleep, the girl whispered something that she had overheard. The news was that the master was about to sell Henry (circa 1845). Susan and Charles devised a scheme. The next day they 'borrowed' the master's horses. They had on their usual clothes, but wore other clothes underneath. (They were told that Canada was a very cold place.) They each took a child and rode to the river. They left the horses at the river and crossed over on a skiff, and were heading for Canada, where, they heard, people were free. They went via Pennsylvania where they stayed

with Quakers for a few months because Margaret had become ill. Following the Underground Railway (1845-46) through Michigan, they crossed the Detroit River and landed at Sandwich. There, they were given refuge and settled on a farm on Huron Line near Malden Road. Later, they moved into Sandwich and lived on Sandwich Street near Lot (now Watkins Street) as Charles had found other work. A third child, Susan, was born.”

Winifred continues by writing “The family joined the Colored Baptist Church on Peter Street. (In the ‘Pathfinders of Truth’, the record of deacons and trustees of Sandwich Baptist Church – 1851 – includes, Bill Watkins, O. Buckner, Willie Watkins, Morris Small, Bro. McCurdy, George Jones, Bob White, John Brooks and Charles Christian). Henry Christian, son of Charles Christian, worked for the Great Western Railway. He met Anne Wilson of Lancastershire, England, the daughter of Thomas Wilson and M.E. Lund, while in Toronto. They married there. Henry brought her to a farm in Anderdon. They had seven children: Elizabeth, Susan, Sarah Ellen, Alice, Charles Henry, Thomas, and Ada.”

As mentioned in Winifred’s story, Susan and Charles had three children: Margaret, Henry and Susan. There was no further information available for Margaret and Susan, but substantial information for Henry and his descendants who are the focus of this essay. “The Christian Family Story” mentions Susan and Charles’ son Henry who married a white woman from England named Anne Wilson, the daughter of Thomas Wilson and M.E. Lund. According to Anne’s 1914 obituary, Anne was 77 at the time of her passing which means she was born circa 1837. Her obituary also mentions that she lived in the town of Sandwich for the past nine years but lived in Amherstburg before that.

What we publish is not a complete history of any family and is based on the documents that are available. We welcome photos and information to fill in the gaps. See you next week for part 2.