

## **The Brown/Nelson Family History Part 1 – The Adopted Family**

For this month's family history, we are going to do something a bit different. Recently, the Museum received a kind donation from Jo-Anne and Remo Mancini who gave their donation in memory of a person of African descent named Fremont Nelson who lived in Amherstburg and Anderdon. This made us want to learn more about Fremont (sometimes spelt Freemont or Freemount) Nelson and his family. What makes this family history unique is that it combines the history of two families: The Nelson family (Fremont's birth family from Ohio), but also the Brown family who adopted Fremont as a family member in Amherstburg. So, for this month's family history, we will share the history of the Brown and Nelson families in connection with Fremont Nelson.

Although we could not find any documents that explained why Fremont was adopted into the Brown family, we can share the history of both families, along with their connections to Fremont. Let's begin with Fremont's adopted family: The Brown Family. According to notes from the Museum's collection, John Daniel Brown was born in the US "on a plantation near Baltimore, Maryland" circa 1827. He escaped enslavement and settled in Anderdon in 1852-1853. Our records also indicate that Brown built a residence with the assistance of Nasa McCurdy in the winter of 1852-1853.

Also included in our records is an account from Fremont Nelson, describing the life and escape of John Brown which says "John D. Brown was a mulatto, his father being a white man and master of the plantation. His mother was a slave on the plantation. He was an inmate of the household and was brought up with a half-sister and a half-brother, children of his father's white wife. Hard times induced his father to agree to his sale as a slave. His white half-sister overheard the bargain and informed John. The resolution was taken to attempt escape. His half-sister

provided him with a purse of money, and gave him her own horse and John left in the night after the household had retired. He was missed in the morning as also the horse, and the half-brother made pursuit. Brown was caught up with by his half-brother, who first attempted to persuade him to return, and when John refused, he pulled out a pistol and threatened to shoot him unless John gave up the horse and agreed to go back. They wrested for possession of the gun, which John succeeded in taking away from the half-brother, but in the act the pistol discharged and the half brother was shot and killed. John then made his way to the Detroit frontier and crossed into Canada.” A further note. Other references to this story state that John’s half-brother was stabbed rather than shot.

More details of John Daniel Brown’s life are provided in his detailed obituary which appeared in the *Amherstburg Echo* on March 30, 1906. It says “The death of John D. Brown, an aged and well known colored resident of this township, occurred with startling suddenness Friday last at noon. He and his son had been at Capt. Burns for a load of straw. He assisted with the loading and though exhibiting signs of fatigue no one was prepared for what followed. The son drove over a plowed field while Mr. Brown walked behind the wagon. He was seen to stumble and fall, and when his son reached his side he was gasping his last breath. He literally died in the harness. The remains were removed to his home near the quarry and preparations were made for the funeral which took place on Sunday afternoon. Mr. Brown was well known and highly respected and had been a substantial farmer in Anderdon for half a century, so that a large number turned out to the funeral. Upon arriving at Amherstburg, the cortege was met on Sandwich street by a large contingent from Lincoln Lodge No. 8, F.&A.M., of which the deceased had been a member for over fifty years, and under whose auspices the funeral was held. This lodge was accompanied by twenty-two members of Palestine Preceptory, Windsor, in full

regalia, and the Windsor Masonic band, twenty strong, who together with a number of friends came down by special car. Preceded by the band, playing 'Flowers of Hope' and the dead march, the procession proceeded to the A.M.E. church where very impressive services were conducted by Rev. A Hackley, of Windsor, assisted by Rev. D.M. Lewis, pastor of the church. The altar, pulpit and choir gallery were all draped in deep mourning, and the choir augmented for the occasion sang appropriate hymns while Mrs. James Kirtley rendered 'Some Sweet Day,' very sympathetically. At the conclusion of the services due regard was shown their departed brother by the members of the Masonic bodies present. The remains were taken to Rose Hill cemetery for interment, the pallbearers being John Welsey, Philip Alexander, Leander Jones, Ezekiel Stevens, I. Ward and Simuel McDowell. John Daniel Brown was born in Baltimore, Maryland, 78 years ago and came to this country in 1853. Mr. Brown was married to Miss Sarah Chancellor, of Oberlin, Ohio, on the first day December, A.D. 1852, and after residing in Oberlin awhile came to this country and settled on the farm where his homestead now is, in the Township of Anderdon, residing there until his death. They had three children and an adopted son, namely, William R., who died in Cleveland, Ohio, on July 8<sup>th</sup>, 1897; John S.H. who resides on the adjoining farm; Sarah E., wife of James A. Nall, who resides in Amherstburg, and his adopted son Fremont Nelson, and these together with his widow, Mrs. Sarah Brown, and five grand children survive him. He was converted about the year 1865 and was a consistent Christian up to the time of his death. He was a member of the A.M.E. church, of Amherstburg, at the time of his decease. He was made a Mason in 1853 and was one of the strong supporters of that institution and endeavored by precept and example to inculcate into the minds of the younger members the true teachings and principles of the order. He was a member, and one of the Past Masters of Lincoln Lodge No. 8. A.F.&A.M., Amherstburg and at the time of his decease was the M. Ex.

High Priest of Ebenezer Chapter No. 4.; He was also a member of Damascus Commandry No. 4., all of the Province of Ontario. He was a Liberal in politics and subscribed for The Echo from its first issue.”

**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.**