

On Their Own Terms

Temperance in Southern Ontario's Black Community (1830-1860)

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Article abstract

This article examines the role of African Canadians in southern Ontario's temperance movement and the extent to which temperance offered them freedom. It discusses African Canadians who drank, including the Reverend John Jackson and James T. Rapier, and the participation of key figures such as Henry Bibb, Mary Ann Shadd Cary, William Whipper and the Reverend Israel Campbell, who supported the cause of temperance by offering individual support, organizing voluntary reform and endorsing legal enforcement. Also analyzed are the contributions of Whites to African-Canadian temperance. It concludes that African Canadians played a more important role in the cause of temperance than previously known.

ON THEIR OWN TERMS: TEMPERANCE IN SOUTHERN ONTARIO'S BLACK COMMUNITY (1830-1860)

by Lorene Bridgen

During the mid nineteenth century, African Americans entered Canada in search of freedom. They found their place in Southern Ontario through their participation in the temperance movement, which played a major role in the African-Canadian community's struggle for equality and respect. Through it, Black temperance advocates sought to improve the lives and reputations of their fellow community members. This paper will document the extent and diversity of this significant activism in Southern Ontario's Black community and the degree to which temperance offered freedom.¹

Enslaved and free Blacks continuously struggled for freedom in the United States; the law kept many enslaved, while many Whites refused to recognize the citizenship of those who were free. As a result, many free Black leaders encouraged temperance, which was linked to respectability. The fight for freedom through temperance was also critical to African Canadians, but there has been little discussion of it in Canada, possibly because Canadian Black history emphasizes issues such as the incoming of refugees. Although Canadian Blacks were legally free after 1834, Whites still saw them as economically and socially inferi-

or. Black leaders believed that remaining temperate would prove to Whites that they were a moral people, who deserved their freedom.

The Black community was far from homogeneous, as their attempts to achieve a temperate society clearly demonstrate. Some believed in the right to drink any kind of alcohol, either all the time or in moderation, while others only accepted beer and wine. Of those who practised temperance, some believed in organized voluntary temperance, while others preferred the rigours of legally enforced temperance. Still others followed the ideal of individual temperance which consisted of practising temperance in all things, without the assistance of laws or societies. No matter the method, temperance advocates chose to be involved.

This article begins with a brief description of the historiography of temperance before going on to discuss drinking among African Canadians, including the negative stigma that some associated with it. Finally, there will be a discussion of African-Canadian temperance in three groups: individual supporters, organized voluntary temperance reformers, and advocates of legally enforced temperance. These types will also include Whites who worked with Black leaders directly or on

¹ I would like to thank Dr. Christina Simmons and Dr. Nina Reid-Maroney for their advice and assistance in writing this article.

a more independent level.² Primary documents such as personal narratives, and newspapers such as the *Voice of the Fugitive* and the *Provincial Freeman* illustrate the extent to which these groups were or were not involved.

A Brief Historiography of Temperance

Temperance in the African-Canadian community has long been overlooked. Historians have written about Whites and Aboriginals in Canada, and Whites and African Americans in the United States. But temperance was a critical issue to African Canadians as well, mainly because temperance offered them a way to take control of their lives in a country without slavery. This is a key point that scholars have ignored.

Drinking and temperance were affected by the broad cultural changes brought about by industrialization. E.P. Thompson argues that a change in the sense of time affected labour discipline, including the use of alcohol. The pre-in-

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Résumé: Dans cet article nous examinons la participation des Afro-Canadiens dans les mouvements de tempérance dans le sud de l'Ontario, et dans quelle mesure ces mouvements purent contribuer à leur libération. Nous étudierons le cas d'Afro-Canadiens comme le Révérend John Jackson ou James T. Rapier, qui buvaient, et le rôle clef joué par des personnes comme Henry Bibb, Mary Ann Shadd Cary, William Whipper et le Révérend Israël Campbell. Offrant des soutiens individuels, incitant à des réformes volontaires, appuyant le recours à des mesures légales, ils se firent les champions de la tempérance. Les contributions des Blancs à l'action des Afro-Canadiens dans les mouvements de tempérance, seront aussi analysées. De cette étude, il ressort que les Afro-Canadiens ont joué un rôle beaucoup plus important que celui qu'on leur accorde généralement dans la défense de la cause de la tempérance.

dustrial English working class used alcohol to escape the pressures of labour, but with industrialization time became money to employers and drinking was seen to hamper discipline and productivity. As pre-industrial, home-based production was replaced by a more efficient, factory model, drinking, once

² The Reverend William King, a White minister, worked independently with African Canadians. In 1849, he established the Buxton/Elgin settlement which voluntarily abstained from all intoxicating liquor. Donald George Simpson, *Under the North Star: Black Communities in Upper Canada Before Confederation* (1867) (Trenton: Africa World Press, Inc., 2005), 267.

part of familial bonding, was now discouraged.³

While labour provides a deeper understanding as to why people would practise temperance, it is not the only catalyst at work. Paul Johnson, in his study of Rochester, New York, argues that the middle class saw evangelicalism as a way to rid the world of sin while providing a more efficient workplace. And Sharon Anne Cook argues that in the late nineteenth century the Ontario Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) had a vision for society which resulted in an "evangelical feminism;" a climate in which women felt liberated from the constraints of their inferior status just as working-class men might. The emancipating theology of evangelicalism eventually caused them to view temperance as a moral and religious issue.⁴

Jan Noel, in her study of abstinence in British North America, argues that temperance evolved from a zealous, religious movement into a more worldly concern and that temperance altered factors such as labour, and the economy.⁵

Rather than emphasizing abstainers, Craig Heron discusses those who

drank, arguing that the production and consumption of alcohol corresponded to social and cultural categories such as labour, family life, and economic development. He examines the social history of drinking in Canada and shows that temperance advocates drastically changed perceptions of alcohol over the course of the nineteenth century.⁶

These sources provide a clearer understanding of temperance, but they do not include the Black community. In a valuable American source that does, Donald Yacovone argues that the organizational experience African-American leaders gained in the fight for temperance helped the emergence of an independent black nationalist movement, and also that Black leaders joined this cause in support of principles such as industry and economy designed to uplift the race. Although Yacovone mentions African Americans who owned property in Canada, he does not investigate how their time in Canada might have contributed to their thoughts on temperance.⁷ This study will demonstrate how active the cause of temperance was in the African-Canadian community and therefore how it influenced incoming African Americans.

³ E.P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism," *Past and Present* 38 (1967), 57, 61, 74-76.

⁴ Sharon Anne Cook, "Sowing Seed for the Master: The Ontario WCTU and Evangelical Feminism, 1874-1930," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 30:3 (1995); Paul Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 3-4, 39-48, 55-60, 121-23.

⁵ Jan Noel, *Canada Dry: Temperance Crusades before Confederation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 8-9, 12, 16, 40, 150.

⁶ Craig Heron, *Booze, A Distilled History* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2003), 51.

⁷ Donald Yacovone, "The Transformation of the Black Temperance Movement, 1827-1854," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 8:3 (1988), 282-83, 297.

African Canadians in Canada

African Canadians from all classes participated in the temperance movement. Middle-class African-Canadian/American narratives contribute most of the information on this group,⁸ but members of the working class were sometimes active supporters. During the early and mid-nineteenth century many working-class African Americans came to Canada working, for example, on the tobacco crops. But Blacks in Canada were not restricted to the lower class; many, through their work as teachers, doctors and business owners, achieved middle-class status. In addition to their labour, the colour/caste system, a practice among some antebellum free Blacks, determined class; factors such as free-born status and skin colour established social position, with lighter skin being equated with the higher class, a factor that prevented the lower class, often darker-skinned, from eleva-

tion. Fortunately there were exceptions: Samuel Ringgold Ward, a dark-skinned former slave, rose to middle-class status through his activism and his role as editor of the *Impartial Citizen*.⁹

Choosing to Drink



Samuel Ringgold Ward. From Samuel Ringgold Ward, *Autobiography of A Fugitive Negro, His Anti-Slavery Labours in the United States, Canada, & England* (London, 1855).

Although many African Canadians hoped that temperance would lead to respectability, not everyone chose that path. People who supported the right to drink saw themselves as pragmatic because they realized that White society would never fully accept them, whether they drank or not. Those who chose to drink did so for many reasons. For example, informal groups of Masonic lodges in the United States often created bonds through activi-

ties such as gambling, story telling and drinking.¹⁰ Some individuals just wanted a break from the new demands of work, while others may have wanted to rebel

⁸ Class among African Canadians was a bit ambiguous during the nineteenth century, mainly because even Canada's White working class did not emerge until the 1840s and 1850s. Heron, *Booze*, 64.

⁹ People such as Mary Ann Shadd Cary, the free-born editor of the *Provincial Freeman* and wife of Thomas F. Cary, rejected this colour/caste system because she wanted to erase boundaries that caused conflict between refugees and free Blacks. Although figures from all classes supported temperance, not everyone followed their lead. Robin Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History* 2nd ed. (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 144-46, 167; Christian Olbey, "Unfolded Hands: Class Suicide and the Insurgent Intellectual Praxis of Mary Ann Shadd," *Canadian Review of American Studies*, 30:2 (2000), 154, 161; Jane Rhodes, *Mary Ann Shadd Cary: The Black Press and Protest in the Nineteenth Century* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), 45, 53, 112; C. Peter Ripley, *The Black Abolitionist Papers (BAP)*, vol. II Canada 1830-1865 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 23, 177.

¹⁰ James Oliver Horton, "Freedom's Yoke: Gender Conventions among Antebellum Free Blacks," *Feminist Studies*, 12:1 (1986), 65.



Henry Bibb. From Henry Bibb, Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave (New York, 1849).

against a society that fundamentally restricted their rights.

Freed Blacks wanted to celebrate, but in doing so they often clashed with the ideals of respectable leaders and activists who did not hesitate to lecture former slaves on how to live good lives characterized by hard work, frugality and abstinence. According to Ira Berlin, describing northern free Blacks in the early nineteenth century:

Much of [the leaders'] intended audience hardly heard the message...More importantly, many of their black compatriots also paid them no mind. Eager to enjoy the immediate rewards of liberty, these new arrivals to freedom spent their wages on new frocks and waistcoats. While the respectables met in the quiet decorum of their sitting rooms

to debate the issues of the day, the newcomers joined together in smoke-filled gaming houses and noisy midnight frolics. Their boisterous lifestyle, colorful dress, plaited hair, eelskin queues, and swaggering gait scandalized the respectables, who saw such behaviour as a calumny upon the race and a special threat to their own efforts to secure full recognition. The newcomers sneered at their pretensions.¹¹

That many former slaves chose to ignore the advice of the Black leadership is also evident in African-Canadian newspapers.

The *Voice of the Fugitive* (edited by Henry Bibb, a former slave and the manager of the Refugee Home Society [RHS],¹²) and the *Provincial Freeman*, two Southern Ontario Black newspapers that published in the 1850s, provided important information on community members who chose to keep drinking alcohol.¹³ The *Voice of the Fugitive* clearly assumed the temperance stance when it reported, "There are but two hard cases in the place, and those we have never succeeded in getting [sic] out to our meetings."¹⁴ Also mentioned is a fugitive slave, living in Sandwich, who frequented the

¹¹ Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 110.

¹² The RHS began as a Detroit-based society in 1851, and merged with the Fugitive Union Society, a Windsor-based moral improvement association, to form a new RHS in 1852. Although White abolitionists controlled the settlement from afar, they gave local leadership to David Hotchkiss, and Mary and Henry Bibb. At the Sandwich Convention on 11 November 1850, Ezekiel Cooper opposed temperance as a prerequisite for membership in the Fugitive Slave Union. At a later date, he shared a similar opinion toward the RHS. Afua Cooper, "Doing Battle in Freedom's Cause": Henry Bibb, Abolitionism, Race Uplift and Black Manhood, 1842-1854" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 2000), 227-28, 257; Ripley, *BAP*, 23, 217, 147 n.

¹³ Bibb published the *Voice of the Fugitive* from 1851 to 1853, with the help of James T. Holly in 1852, while Ward held nominal editorship of the *Provincial Freeman* when it first appeared on 24 March 1853. Shadd Cary, William P. Newman, Isaac D. Shadd and H. Ford Douglass became the editors of the *Provincial Freeman* until 1856, after which Shadd Cary was no longer editor. Ripley, *BAP*, 23-24.

¹⁴ "Temperance Among the Fugitives," *Voice of the Fugitive*, 23 April 1851.

local rum-shop.¹⁵

Newspapers often remained silent about the identity of drunkards, but sometimes they named them. Their stories demonstrate two things: that drinkers were on the defensive, and that, even though the middle class drank themselves, it was the working class that was stereotyped as drinkers.

One fascinating example from the *Voice of the Fugitive* showed how one landless Black minister living in the Windsor barracks¹⁶ fought back against his accusers. On 26 February 1851, the *Voice of the Fugitive* printed a letter from O.H. Fifield, a White man, who stated that the Rev. John Jackson, a Black man from Canada West, came to his door with whiskey on his breath. Another witness, Lonson Wilcox, claimed that the Rev. Jackson was in his store, with the smell of liquor on his breath, the same day that Fifield encountered him. Fifield added that the accusations against the Rev. Jackson were true and that, although he did not witness him drinking, his sense of smell convinced

JACKSON, April 9, 1851.
 MESSRS. WILLIAMS AND BRENT:—As my name has been referred to in Mr. Fifield's letter, I wish to add that Jackson came into my store on the morning of the day referred to by Brother Fifield. I discovered from his excited state of mind, and from his breath that he had been taking liquor—having never heard of such a fact I immediately went after Mr. Fifield and stated the fact to him, he then stated to me that he had discovered the same, and was not willing to entrust to him the articles gathered by him here. I know nothing more of Jackson, having never seen him since that time or before, except two or three times he called on me for charities in the way of his mission.
 Respectfully,
 LONSON WILCOX.

“Messrs. William and Brent,”
Voice of the Fugitive, 23
 April 1851.

him of this fact. When confronted, Jackson denied the accusations, became enraged and threatened them.¹⁷ Fifield said that he “appeared more like a demon than a gospel minister.”¹⁸ He also added, “if he is [guilty], it may prove his ruin for time and eternity—be as-

sured gentlemen, that I am the last man that would injure one of your race, mar the peace, or defame their character.”¹⁹ The Rev. Jackson, who was an agent for the Colored Industrial Society,²⁰ felt his reputation was at stake which explains why he reacted the way he did; the negative stigma of drinking could ruin a person's reputation. Henry Bibb, George Williams and others, concerned about the reputation of the Society, even cautioned people against the minister, despite that fact that there had been no witnesses to his actual drinking. As well, many of Fifield's accusations were based on his unfounded belief that Jackson had lied about how he obtained a silver watch.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Ministerial positions generally linked people to middle-class status, but it was possible for ministers to fall into a different class, as in the case of the Reverend Jackson.

¹⁷ “Caution,” *Voice of the Fugitive*, 26 February 1851; “Messrs. William and Brent,” *Voice of the Fugitive*, 23 April 1851; “Caution,” *Voice of the Fugitive*, 23 April 1851.

¹⁸ “Caution,” *Voice of the Fugitive*, April 23, 1851.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ The Colored Industrial Society later became the RHS. Simpson, *Under the North Star*, 288-89; “Is This True?,” *Voice of the Fugitive*, 23 April 1851; “Colored Settlements,” *Voice of the Fugitive*, 12 February 1851.

When the accusations against him went to court, Judges Freeman and Walker ruled that the Rev. Jackson was “clear.” Bibb and Williams, on the other hand, were found guilty of spreading lies about Jackson while he worked for the settlement. In a final newspaper article, Williams and William Keyes retracted their previous opinion of the Reverend.²¹ Jackson’s story clearly demonstrates the policing that occurred. In this case, a lower class



James T. Rapier. Buxton National Historic Site & Museum Website <<http://www.buxtonmuseum.com/History/james.html>>

man, who supposedly drank, found himself in conflict with middle-class supporters of temperance. But members of the middle class also drank.

People associated with intemperance were not only working class. For example, the middle-class James T. Rapier was also believed to be “living in sin.” Rapier

was well educated and his family was financially comfortable, all factors that would, according to the colour/caste system, have placed Rapier among the middle class. But some of his behaviour negatively affected his reputation. In the

fall of 1856, he travelled from Florence, Alabama, to Buxton, Canada West, to further his education. Shortly before and during his time in Buxton, Rapier was known to gamble and drink, which violated Buxton’s strict moral code:²² “nothing that intoxicates is made or sold in the settlement.”²³ Yet he changed during his Buxton experience, as was evident on 24 September 1858 when Rapier wrote, “I have not thrown a card in 3 years touched a woman in 2 years smoked nor drunk any liquor in going on 2 years[.]”²⁴ This demonstrates that, although he eventually became temperate, during the early part of his stay in Buxton, he drank. As a young man, Rapier was not a model example for the middle class, but with time he changed his ways.

Rapier is a rare case in that he admitted to drinking; the Rev. Jackson, by contrast, was associated with intemperance because of accusations. These cases demonstrate how easy it was for temperance supporters to accuse males of drinking, but there is evidence that women, who were generally seen as the victims of alcohol, also drank. Ward reported that drinking in Canada was “so fashionable that ladies who profess religion, minister’s wives included, drink without blushing.”²⁵ Whether these people, male or female,

²¹ “Caution,” *Voice of the Fugitive*, 23 April 1851; “Is This True?,” *Voice of the Fugitive*, 26 February 1851; “Imposition on the Public,” *Voice of the Fugitive*, 23 April 1851.

²² John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *In Search of the Promised Land: A Slave Family in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 37, 142-44.

²³ Benjamin Drew, *The Refugee: Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada* (Hawaii: University Press of the Pacific, 2004), 295.

²⁴ Howard University Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Rapier Family Papers, Box 84-1, Folder 12, James T. Rapier to John H. Rapier Jr., Florence, Alabama, 27 September 1858.

²⁵ “LETTERS FROM CANADA.-NO. III,” *Frederick Douglass’s Paper*, 12 February 1852;

were accused or openly chose to drink, their association with drinking gave them a negative reputation. This explains one of the many reasons why a number of African Canadians chose temperance, but their decision goes beyond this point.

Why Temperance?

African Canadians, like Whites, had their own reasons for supporting temperance, including economic incentives, religion, the desire to combat prejudices, and the desire for freedom from the bonds of liquor; at times their reasoning echoed that of Whites. As Johnson stated, Whites experienced pressure to be temperate at the workplace, but the Black community also experienced a similar pressure as well as business opportunities for being temperate. For example, the *Voice of the Fugitive* offered employment as a travelling temperance lecturer and agent, when it stated, “if an experienced laborer in this reform would come well recommended to us, and will take the field under our direction, we will hold ourself responsible for his being liberally sustained for two or three months.”²⁶ In this case, temperance created employment, but this was not always the result.

Endorsers of the liquor trade often faced the harsh tactics of those supporting temperance. In Buxton, an Englishman named Woods acquired a license to sell

whisky in his general store. But the settlers, along with the community’s founder, the Rev. William King, worried that the sale of liquor would demoralize the residents of Buxton. Having no legal recourse to close Woods’ store, the settlers decided to boycott his store until he stopped selling alcohol, and in the end the settlers were successful.²⁷ There was clearly pressure to abstain from alcohol; to oppose temperance often meant to risk being employed.

Economic incentives played a large role in one’s choice to be temperate, but religion was just as important. During the nineteenth century, many slaves embraced Christianity, something their ancestors had not done. Slaves who experienced changes in slavery and the cotton revolution, being torn violently from their homes and families on the eastern seaboard during the 1810s through the 1830s and taken to the frontier lands of Alabama and Mississippi, formed bonds as a result of these hardships. The Christian message offered a way to understand their suffering and to survive it. Turning their lives over to Christ gave the enslaved a sense of value and offered them an opportunity to take greater control of their lives, which was a new concept for them. In the evangelical religion God spoke directly to his followers, which convinced slaves that they were God’s children and possibly the chosen ones.²⁸ As a result

Shirley J. Yee, *Black Abolitionist Women: A Study in Activism, 1828-1860* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 83.

²⁶ “An Advocate of Temperance Wanted,” *Voice of the Fugitive*, 19 November 1851.

²⁷ Sharon A. Roger Hepburn, *Crossing the Border: A Free Black Community in Canada* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 82.

²⁸ Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 162, 192-94.

of their new found faith, evangelicals adopted practices such as temperance as a form of discipline.

A key aspect of evangelicalism is the religious revival, a conversion to evangelicalism, and according to the *Provincial Freeman*, such revivals did occur in Ontario's Black community. In an article from 6 May 1854, William P. Newman, a former slave and editor of the *Provincial Freeman*, stated that there had not been too many revivals this past winter, "yet several have enjoyed seasons of refreshing from the Lord, and among them we may number our own."²⁹ An 1857 article noted that there had been revivals at several churches, while the minutes of the Amherstburg Regular Missionary Baptist Association state that during 1851 the Rev. Horace Hawkins converted forty-eight members.³⁰

As further evidence, James Rapier drank until his conversion in the spring of 1857, at a Methodist revival, where he, along with seventy residents of Buxton accepted Christ into their lives. Rapier wrote, "the spirit of the living god changed me from very old ways and I am endeavouring to walk in the newness of life and his ways are paths of peace[,] it is pleasant and Eternal life [that] is promised to all them that endureth to the e[nd.]"³¹ After his conversion, Rapier

gave up alcohol, completed his education and became, for a time, a teacher in Buxton,³² which is an ironic twist, considering he originally defied the rules of the community by drinking. He was able to alter his reputation after his conversion.

An additional reason for practising temperance was to fight prejudice. African Canadians constantly faced racist thinking that judged an entire group by the behaviour of individuals. As a result, Black leaders felt pressure to police the unrespectable, like drinkers, even though they were aware, from experience, that racism was a prior judgement that actually had nothing to do with behaviour. But this did not stop many African Canadians from trying to change how Whites perceived them. According to Afua Cooper, "among Blacks, like whites, allegiance to temperance signified middle-class respectability and good moral character,"³³ which is why many adopted temperance; it gave them, at least in their own eyes, equality with Whites. Temperance could serve this function because of its growing power in Ontario's Protestant culture. Even for Whites temperance was a way to maintain decency and respectability in the community, but it must have been that much more important for Blacks who carried the added stigma of being former slaves. For example, a *Voice of the*

²⁹ Ripley, *BAP*, 302-303n; *Provincial Freeman*, 6 May 1854.

³⁰ "Local Matters," *Provincial Freeman*, 21 February 1857; *Pathfinders of Liberty and Truth: A Century with the Amherstburg Regular Missionary Baptist Association* (Compiled from the Minutes and Historical Essays, 1940), 77.

³¹ Howard University Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Rapier Family Papers, Box 84-1, Folder 8, James T. Rapier to John H. Rapier Jr., Buxton, Canada West, 29 August 1857.

³² Franklin and Schwenger, *In Search of the Promised Land*, 148-49.

³³ Cooper, "Doing Battle in Freedom's Cause," 288 n.

Fugitive article discusses Edwin Larwill, a man known for his racist views, who cancelled his subscription to the *Essex Advocate* when it included an article supporting the establishment of Black settlements in Canada. Larwill stated that, in his “opinion, every decent white man is opposed”³⁴ to Black settlements. In response, the author, who was White, stated that Blacks owned land, had churches, and participated in temperance societies, factors clearly suggesting respectability.³⁵ When Whites respected African Canadians, many thought, social elevation was possible, and temperance was clearly viewed as a way to gain such elevation.

Temperance became symbolically and practically caught up with the idea of freedom from slavery, as the language showed, when it was described as “freedom from the bonds of liquor.” Many figures such as Samuel Ringgold Ward, Henry Bibb and William Whipper, a wealthy, educated, African American with a history of activism, equated intemperance with slavery because they be-

lieved that each was a form of bondage.³⁶ In an address delivered before the Colored Temperance Society of Philadelphia, Whipper stated, “All that I have said, or that can be said against slavery, is truly applicable to intemperance.”³⁷ He added:

If the slave has wealth, he may purchase his freedom. But to the subject of intemperance, wealth only strengthens his chains: for [it] furnishes him with materials to revel in his guilt, and fans the flame of his destruction. The slave [has] his situation, and only remains in it because [his] bonds are forcible. The other loves it, because [hav-] ing slain his reason and self-respect, it promotes [his] animal luxury.³⁸

Slavery and intemperance were seen as one and the same, except one was forced upon people, while the other was self-inflicted; temperance gave the Black community a way to combat these forms of bondage. James Forten, a man devoted to reform, believed that through temperance “the black community would take out of the mouths of the enemies of liberty their objections to the colored man’s liberty.”³⁹ Forten, along with other African Americans, used temperance as a



William Whipper. From William Still, The Underground Railroad (Philadelphia, 1872); Richard P. McCormick, “William Whipper: Moral Reformer,” Pennsylvania History 43 (1976).

³⁴ Heron, *Booze*, 12; “Prejudice against Color in Canada,” *Voice of the Fugitive*, 26 February 1851.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Richard P. McCormick, “William Whipper: Moral Reformer,” *Pennsylvania History* 43 (1976): 23-28, 40-41.

³⁷ *The Liberator*, “Address Delivered Before the Colored Temperance Society of Philadelphia, 8 January 1834,” 21 June 1834.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Julie Winch, *A Gentleman of Color: The Life of James Forten* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 4, 318.

way to take what was rightfully his and because temperance was so absorbed into the anti-slavery cause it was possible to celebrate the two as one. For example, on 1 August 1842, a group of African Americans in Philadelphia participated in an organized temperance march which was a joint celebration of emancipation in the British Empire and temperance.⁴⁰ The two causes were so closely linked that temperance, the marchers believed, offered an important way to attain and celebrate their citizenship.

Even in Canada, the Black community felt that its freedom was limited. Canadian Blacks were legally free, but many Whites still saw them as inferior and undeserving of citizenship and felt that granting them citizenship would taint Canadian society. Choosing temperance, an exercise of freedom in itself, allowed Blacks to take control of their own lives and convince Whites that they were worthy.⁴¹ Thus many American Black leaders brought their preoccupations with sobriety to Canada, where they applied temperance principles, developed societies, and created temperance work. This is contrary to many representations of the African-Canadian community, which assume they had more important issues to deal with than citizenship and respect. African Canadians were vitally concerned with their own freedom and

that of others. For example, the *Provincial Freeman* stated:

There is an importance in the position of the Colored Population of Canada....which we, nor our friends here, or in the United States, sufficiently estimate. In no country, in the world, does the condition of our people bear relation so important to the cause of the enslaved, as here. We have....two great Yankee lies that we....know, are doing us the greatest mischief, on more than one Continent. They are, 1st. The Negro is unfit for Freedom. 2nd. The Negro cannot live on terms of equality with the white man. All we ask attention to....is, that the development, educating and progress of Canadian colored men, will do more to stamp those two Anglo-Saxon assertions with their native falsity, than anything else this side of Heaven, can do.⁴²

Shadd believed that what happened in Canada could have repercussions in the United States, which is why she encouraged others to be temperate; “Canada was a showcase, where African-descended people could demonstrate their equality.”⁴³ African Canadians believed that they were equal and were determined to have Whites acknowledge this.⁴⁴

Thus the Black community supported temperance for the economic benefits it conferred, for religion, for personal needs, and as a way to combat prejudice. But how African Canadians supported temperance also demonstrates their diversity.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 351.

⁴¹ Yacovone, “The Transformation of the Black Temperance Movement,” 284.

⁴² “NUMBER TWO,” *Provincial Freeman*, 25 March 1854.

⁴³ James Walker, “Approaching African-Canadian History,” in *Multiple Lenses: Voice from the Diaspora Located in Canada*, edited by David Divine (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 5.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

Individual Temperance

African Canadians supported temperance in a variety of ways; some acted as individuals, others joined organized voluntary temperance societies and still others urged the government to enforce sobriety. Individual supporters of temperance believed that they could self-regulate their habits, abstaining from alcohol without relying on the guidance of societies or laws. Figures such as the Rev. Israel Campbell, a former slave, Baptist minister and educated activist from Greenville County, Kentucky, who came to Canada West in the late 1840s supported individual temperance.⁴⁵ He came to this decision because of two encounters, the first being with Miss Gibb. He encountered her while asking the Rev. Isaac Rice, a White Presbyterian missionary, for clothing in Amherstburg; she was assisting Rice. When Miss Gibb asked Campbell never to drink again, he said that he did not like to make such promises and that he never drank enough to hurt himself. It took another meeting with an Edward Justice to fully convince him. While at a house-raising, Campbell confronted Justice, a man who “took his liquor pretty freely,”⁴⁶ because he was worried that this man’s intoxication would cause him to fall off the house. Justice became so

angry that he began swearing at Campbell and left the house-raising. Because of this, Campbell realized the hold that liquor had on Justice and he never drank again. These encounters changed his opinion of liquor, but he said “I have never joined any Temperance Societies, for I believe in being temperate in all things.”⁴⁷ Campbell is a rare case; advocates of temperance were more likely to join societies.



Israel Campbell. From Israel Campbell, *An Autobiography. Bond and Free: or, Yearnings for Freedom, From My Green Brier House* (Philadelphia, 1861).

Organized Voluntary Temperance

Abstaining from alcohol was a serious issue for many, especially for those who voluntarily joined temperance societies and took a pledge. Michael Gauvreau states that evangelicals based social integration on the principle of “voluntarism,” which “implied not only the free association of equal individuals, but social participation and fellowship for the achievement of a common purpose.”⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Israel Campbell, *An Autobiography. Bond and Free: or, Yearnings for Freedom, from My Green Brier House. Being the Story of My Life Bondage, and My Life in Freedom* (Philadelphia: C.E.P. Brinkloe & CO., Printers, 1861), 208; Ripley, *BAP*, 164-65 n.

⁴⁶ Campbell, *An Autobiography*, 208; Ripley, *BAP*, 164-65.

⁴⁷ Campbell, *An Autobiography*, 208.

⁴⁸ Michael Gauvreau, “Protestantism Transformed: Personal Piety and the Evangelical Social Vision, 1815-1867.” In *The Canadian Protestant Experience: 1760-1990*, George A. Rawlyk (Burlington, Canada: Welch Publishing Company Inc., 1990), 57.

These factors would have appealed to slaves who recently found freedom.

Temperance societies emerged in British North America in 1826-1827 and by 1855, "between a quarter and a third of the population in the Province of Canada had taken the [temperance] pledge."⁴⁹ Organized voluntary temperance became popular among African Canadians at the same time in Southern Ontario, especially in Essex County where they had their own societies. An article from the *Voice of the Fugitive* stated that in 1826 there had been 623,600,000 gallons of spiritous liquors, wines and beers consumed in "this country," but that by 1850 that number had been reduced by 40,000,000 gallons. Such a reduction at a time when the population was increasing shows, at least in the opinion of the newspaper, that temperance was gaining ground. Temperance support was also strong in specific areas; in July 1851, 1,634 people of Sandwich and 1,100 from Malden signed a temperance pledge.⁵⁰ Clearly, organized voluntary temperance made a difference.

Temperance pledges, often associated with temperance societies, took many forms. Frequently people signed a universal pledge while others created pledges of their own. One pledge stated, "I hereby

agree to abstain from the use of INTOXICATING LIQUORS, as a beverage & from the use of TOBACCO, in any form."⁵¹ The *Provincial Freeman* reported that former drinker William Johnson had signed a temperance pledge that he created for himself after a cold water lecture. According to the Rev. John Abbott, Johnson wrote, "I William Johnson, pledge myself to drink no more intoxicating liquor for one year."⁵² Many believed that he would not last three days, but after the year had passed, he signed the pledge again, this time in a different way. He wrote, "I, William Johnson, sign this pledge for nine hundred and ninety-nine years; and if living at the end of that time, I intend to take out a lease for life."⁵³ Even after being told by his landlord that alcohol was the only cure for a lump Johnson had discovered on his side, he was still determined to follow the pledge.⁵⁴

A large percentage of those who supported temperance organizations were social activists, including Whipper, Bibb, and the Rev. Charles C. Foote, a White minister, who worked alongside Henry Bibb, until Bibb's death on 1 August 1854, after which he became a chief spokesperson for the RHS.⁵⁵ Whipper strongly endorsed organized voluntary

⁴⁹ Heron, *Booze*, 53-54.

⁵⁰ In 1851, Sandwich had a population of 4,928 while Malden totalled 1,315. *Census of the Canadas, 1851-2, Personal Census, Vol. I* (Quebec: John Lovell, 1853), 44; Cooper, "Doing Battle in Freedom's Cause," 327; "GREAT LIQUOR COUNTRY," *Voice of the Fugitive*, 18 June 1851; "Great Temperance Reformation," *Voice of the Fugitive*, 2 July 1851.

⁵¹ Heron, *Booze*, 54.

⁵² "Signing the Pledge," *Provincial Freeman*, 29 April 1854.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Provincial Freeman*, 12 August 1854; Simpson, *Under the North Star*, 297.

temperance, but in a more traditional way. His support of temperance began in the earlier years of the movement, which is why he favoured temperance societies that banned ardent spirits only, not beer and wine.⁵⁶ Whipper believed that the Black community needed to join the organized temperance movement to gain status and respect: “If it be left to the whites, we shall be as widely separated in morals as complexion: and then our elevation is scarcely to be hoped for. To succeed and be respected, we must be superior in morals, before the balance of power will allow us to be admitted as their equals.”⁵⁷ Whipper felt that being individually temperate was not enough, African Americans had to be involved in the organized temperance movement. Much earlier, at an 1832 convention, he had resolved that the convention recommend the creation of a temperance society to achieve total abstinence from ardent spirits.⁵⁸

Whipper did not accept individual moderation as an alternative. He stated that moderate drinkers were “strictly in favor of temperance, but [they] hate....fanatical denunciations,....[and] cold water societies for reform. Let every man be his own guardian. [They] hate both drunkards and drunkenness. [They] like moderation in every thing.”⁵⁹ In other words,

they feared the power of organized groups policing the behaviour of others, which was an infringement of their freedom. In response to supporters of individual moderation, Whipper wrote:

under [a moderate drinker’s] very system of self-government, has the evil arisen with all its accumulated power. Will the same evil or the same legislation cure itself? Certainly not. And if this ‘uncontrolable [sic] liberty’ is to be the ruling monitor, it will be impossible to fix a moral boundary. The man who drinks his small glass of brandy in a day or a week, will infringe on another’s rights, if he reproves him who drinks his quart a day or an hour – for each, in the exercise of his guaranteed liberty, only satisfied his own thirst.⁶⁰

Whipper believed that when people claimed individual control of their drinking they affected themselves and those around them because they could not set a fixed moral boundary. He believed instead that through organized temperance societies, making the best moral choice could give the Black community true freedom. When moderate individuals practised their “freedom” they took away the freedom of others, while collective organized temperance activities could have a larger impact on the Black community’s public image because newspapers and societies made their support of temperance visible to the public.

Bibb also strongly advocated organ-

⁵⁶ Yacovone, “The Transformation of the Black Temperance Movement, 285.

⁵⁷ *The Liberator*, “Address Delivered Before the Colored Temperance Society of Philadelphia,” 21 June 1834.

⁵⁸ McCormick, “William Whipper,” 28-29.

⁵⁹ *The Liberator*, “Address Delivered Before the Colored Temperance Society of Philadelphia,” 21 June 1834.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

ized voluntary temperance in the RHS and the *Voice of the Fugitive* whose stated purpose was the causes of moral reform and temperance. He felt money for alcohol could be utilized for more important things, such as clothing, food, and land purchases. Numerous articles in the *Voice of the Fugitive* expressed his sentiment, including one that discussed a large group of “colored inhabitants” who gathered in Sandwich for a temperance meeting. At this meeting Robert Ward offered a prayer, while Bibb read the temperance pledge. After several people signed the pledge, Bibb and others gave addresses on the issue. It was at this meeting that Ward was appointed president of the society and Bibb the secretary. Additionally, it was Bibb’s leadership that made the RHS committed to achieving moral elevation through industry, education, and temperance.⁶¹ The constitution and by-laws of the RHS, created by Bibb and the Reverends Foote and McConoughy, state that, “No house shall be used for manufacturing or vending intoxicating liquors on any lot received from this Society.”⁶² The RHS, along with his newspaper, thus stood firm in the cause of temperance.

Bibb also founded a temperance society in Windsor, recorded in the 16 November 1852 *Voice of the Fugitive* as meeting in a brick school room. The Rev. A.

McArthur, the society’s president, gave an address, followed by a speech from the Rev. Hoag of Detroit. Before the conclusion of the meeting they circulated their temperance pledge.⁶³

The Rev. Foote also believed in organized voluntary temperance. The *Voice of the Fugitive* noted on 17 March 1851 that Foote attended a temperance festival, during which he presented an “old-fashion, soul-stirring temperance speech,” after which the temperance pledge was circulated.⁶⁴ He also supported the cause through the RHS, in particular his contribution to its constitution and by-laws that restricted alcohol.

The creation of the WCTU, formed in both Canada and the US in 1874, made temperance into a distinctive women’s issue. However, even in the earlier period, both Black and White women such as Laura Smith Haviland and Miss Gibb, were advocating temperance societies among African Canadians. Haviland, an abolitionist born in Kitley Township, Canada West, taught at a Windsor school, and in a letter published in the *North Western Christian Magazine*, she discussed her time with Black settlers in Canada West. She stated that, although there had been a few people with intemperate habits, it should not be considered a characteristic of their class or their

⁶¹ “Introduction,” *Voice of the Fugitive*, 1 January 1851; Peter Carlesimo, “The Refugee Home Society, Its Origin, Operation and Results, 1851-1876” (Master’s thesis, University of Windsor, 1973): 6; “Temperance Meeting in Sandwich,” *Voice of the Fugitive*, 1 January 1851; Ripley, *BAP*, 147 n.

⁶² “Constitution and By-Laws of the Refugees’ Home Society,” *Voice of the Fugitive*, 29 September 1852.

⁶³ Cooper, “Doing Battle in Freedom’s Cause,” 257; “The Windsor Temperance Society...,” *Voice of the Fugitive*, 16 November 1852.

⁶⁴ “Our temperance festival on the 17th...,” *Voice of the Fugitive*, 26 March 1851.

race.⁶⁵ She added that the Black community organized temperance societies and that Black people were “generally industrious, temperate and law-abiding.”⁶⁶

In addition to Haviland, a Miss Gibb contributed to the temperance cause. In the autobiography of Israel Campbell, he reports that she asked him if he drank spirituous liquor. When Campbell responded that he only drank a dram⁶⁷ in the South to keep warm, Miss Gibb replied that water was just as good. She then asked him to promise that he would never drink again, and handed him a Bible. She then reminded him that “when you take a dram,...God sees you.”⁶⁸ Miss Gibb strongly encouraged Campbell not to drink, but female support extended beyond Whites.

Black women such as Mary Bibb, an educated, middle-class abolitionist and a Black Quaker turned Methodist who was known for her activism in anti-slavery and Black uplift even before marrying Henry, also supported temperance.⁶⁹ This is clear in her work with the *Voice of the Fugitive*

and the RHS. Though not officially in charge of the newspaper, recent scholars have included her as a possible co-editor and co-publisher, especially during 1851 when Henry was away on lecture tours.⁷⁰ In addition to the *Voice of the Fugitive*, Mary was active in the RHS whose local leadership fell upon her and her husband. They shared a common interest in activism for racial uplift through education, industry and temperance.⁷¹ Henry even stated, “I found that her principles and my own were nearly one and the same.”⁷² In Bibb’s efforts at Black uplift, he was “at all times aided by his wife and partner, and fellow-abolitionist, Mary Miles Bibb.”⁷³ Her involvement in the RHS gave her a visible profile in the temperance movement.

The *Voice of the Fugitive* does not specifically label Mary a temperance advocate, but many women supported this cause. The newspaper stated that a committee of ladies was sent to visit members of the Sandwich community, after those members refused to attend temperance meetings.⁷⁴

⁶⁵ Cook, “Sowing seed for the master”; Laura Haviland, *A Woman’s Life Work: Including Thirty Years Service on the Underground Railway and in the War* (Chicago: S.B. SHAW Publisher, 1881), 9, 119, 192; Simpson, *Under the North Star*, 291; “From the North Western Christian Magazine...,” *Provincial Freeman*, 13 October 1855.

⁶⁶ From the North Western Christian Magazine...,” *Provincial Freeman*, 13 October 1855.

⁶⁷ A dram is a measurement roughly equal to 1/8 of an ounce, rather than a specific type of liquor.

⁶⁸ Campbell, *An Autobiography*, 207.

⁶⁹ Ripley, *BAP*, 110-11n, 147n.

⁷⁰ “Fugitive slave Henry Bibb founded and edited the *Voice*, but the contrast between his private correspondence and the paper’s polished style suggests that his well-educated wife, Mary E. Bibb, had a good deal to do with the paper’s style and content.” Ripley, *BAP*, 108, 110-11n.

⁷¹ Ripley, *BAP*, 147n; Cooper, “Doing Battle in Freedom’s Cause,” 178, 219.

⁷² Henry Bibb, *1815-1854 Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (New York, Author, 1849), 191.

⁷³ Cooper, “Doing Battle in Freedom’s Cause,” 219.

⁷⁴ “Temperance Among the Fugitives,” *Voice of the Fugitive*, 23 April 1851.



Elizabeth Shadd Shreve. Buxton National Historic Site & Museum

We have no evidence that Black women organized clubs and conventions until the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Their later efforts are evident in a letter addressed to Elizabeth Shadd Shreve of Buxton, from S. Walker in 1881. Walker, a member of the WCTU writes, “Your name was given me as an earnest worker. Do you think a Union could be formed in your settlement? And if so will you make an effort to have one formed?”⁷⁵ Clearly Black women were organizing, but it was not until they created their own temperance societies, much later, that they were recognized by men and White females.⁷⁶

Legally Enforced Temperance

Some supporters of voluntary pledges, a method that once dominated the temperance cause, accepted the stricter alternative of prohibitory legislation during the decade and a half after 1840.

Although it was possible for supporters of legislation to endorse organized voluntary temperance, which carried on into the 1870s, the point of legislation was the belief that results would only occur with strict laws; that people would not abstain voluntarily. In the 1840s the Government of Canada West passed laws against public drunkenness, including the first Lord’s Day Act in 1845, which disallowed drinking on the Sabbath. However, temperance supporters, including African Canadians, wanted stricter legislation. In the 1850s, they demanded a ban on liquor in each province; they were inspired by the 1851 Maine Liquor Law, which outlawed the sale and consumption of all intoxicating beverages.⁷⁷ Support of stricter legislation remained strong, as is evident in African-Canadian newspapers.

In the *Provincial Freeman*, Shadd Cary demanded a prohibitory liquor law when she responded to an article in *The Planet*, which called for a law that targeted African Canadians:

The colored people are not *wild* Indians, neither do they drink more whiskey than their white friends hereabouts. One colored man passed under your office window drunk, and if he had not “hurt” somebody he might have done so, bah! They must be out of a subject

⁷⁵ University of Western Ontario Archives and Research Collections Centre, Papers of Mary Shadd Cary, Teacher, Black Spokesman and Editor of *Provincial Freeman*, Canada West, 1851-1859 [microform] Series B: Cary-Shreve Correspondence, S. Walker to Elizabeth Shadd Shreve, Chatham, Canada West, 27 December 1881.

⁷⁶ In those later organizational efforts, Black women were restricted not only from male groups, but also those of White females; for some time Black women were excluded by White organizers of the WCTU in Canada. As well, these same White women used “racialized language when describing the “evils” of intemperance on Canadian society.” Cooper, “Doing Battle in Freedom’s Cause,” 327.

⁷⁷ Noel, *Canada Dry*, 150; Heron, *Booze*, 133, 136, 146, 152; “The Maine Liquor Law in Canada,” *Frederick Douglass Paper*, 20 January 1854.

to write about down at that office! Every colored man must be prohibited from drinking because one drank freely. Who patronize the saloons, taverns &c., in this place? Indians and colored men only? No! We believe in passing a strictly prohibitory law that will not only prevent Indians and colored men from getting drunk, but will stop white men from drinking as well and not only the 'inferior' classes about Chatham, but a drunken Editor occasionally.⁷⁸

Shadd Cary supported the Maine Liquor Law and published extensively on the subject. After she stepped down as editor in 1856, however, the number of articles decreased significantly. Nevertheless, Shadd Cary remained loyal to temperance and continued to support it.⁷⁹

While not as well known as Shadd Cary, William Henry Bradley openly supported liquor legislation. Bradley, who may also be recognized by his slave name Abram Young, was a land owner and former slave living in Dresden, Canada West. When interviewed by the American abolitionist, Benjamin Drew, Bradley said, "If there were a law

to abolish the use of liquor as a beverage, it would be a good thing for Canada."⁸⁰

Canada did not achieve full-fledged prohibition until the end of World War I,⁸¹ which demonstrates that not everyone supported legislation. In the 1850s many African Americans in Canada had just been emancipated and may have viewed legislation as a violation of their rights, just as individual temperance supporters viewed organized voluntary temperance as violating freedom. It is reasonable to assume that they would want to take control of their lives; being under the watchful eye of the policing middle class must not have appealed to them. Still many supported the promising path of legislation; to them it was the only way.

Conclusion

It is clear that many, diverse African Canadians were involved in the temperance movement and that it occasioned a considerable amount of cooperation between Whites and African Canadians. As a result, many Blacks became loyal to tem-



Mary Ann Shadd Cary. Courtesy of Public Archives of Canada/ C 29977; C. Peter Ripley, The Black Abolitionist Papers, Vol. II Canada 1830-1865 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986).

⁷⁸ "INTEMPERANCE," *Provincial Freeman*, 26 July 1856.

⁷⁹ Shadd Cary never joined the WCTU but, after the 1870s, temperance became a dominant theme in her lectures; at her appearances she strongly encouraged her audience to sign the temperance pledge while she sang temperance songs that she wrote. Shadd Cary linked temperance to other causes such as education and women's suffrage and by 1888, she was still lecturing on temperance. Rhodes, *Mary Ann Shadd Cary*, 198-99; "For the attention of all temperance reformers..." *Provincial Freeman*, 28 March 1857.

⁸⁰ Drew, *The Refugee*, 312-13.

⁸¹ Heron, *Booze*, 151.

perance principles. Eager to gain respect, advance economically and combat prejudice, they embraced temperance, whether as individuals, as voluntary members of a society, or as champions of legal enforcement.

In many cases, Black leaders, regardless of class, who were active in other freedom causes such as anti-slavery and moral reform, also strongly supported temperance. Thus temperance too became a path to freedom—moral, social and political freedom. Through it Blacks could show, by example, that they deserved both liberty and citizenship. And by choosing for themselves not to drink they could gain both self-respect and the approval of the African Canadian community as a whole.

Temperance in Canada affected visiting African Americans. They experienced activism outside of a pro-slavery society and developed new approaches and ideas that they could take back to the US. Canada became a showcase for Black achievement and respectability.

Many scholars have overlooked or underestimated the role of African Canadians in the temperance movement. This article helps develop another aspect of Canadian and Black history while creating an additional link to African-American history. It also demonstrates that Blacks were deeply concerned with critical issues once associated only with Whites. Temperance reform gave African Canadians the opportunity to fight for a cause significant to their race.
