

A SKETCH  
OF THE  
BUXTON MISSION  
AND  
ELGIN SETTLEMENT,  
RALEIGH,  
CANADA WEST.

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THE Buxton, or, as it is sometimes called, the Elgin Settlement, is situated in the township of Raleigh, county Kent, Canada West, about eight miles south-east of Chatham, which is a station on the Great Western Railway. It lies between the river Thames and Lake Erie, and at present covers about eighteen square miles of country, embracing a population of over 1,200 persons.

It was formed by the Rev. William King, in the year 1849, with a view to the social and moral improvement of the colored population of Canada. The circumstances which led to its formation were these: Mr. King, a native of Londonderry, Ireland, had come over when a youth to the United States, and had fixed his residence in Louisiana, where during some years he occupied an influential position in connection with the Louisiana College at Jackson. Here he associated and mingled freely with the first families in the State, and became familiarly acquainted with their peculiar institutions. Holding strongly to the principle that personal freedom is the inherent and inalienable right of every man, and not hesitating on suitable occasions to acknowledge this view, he nevertheless avoided such rash words and acts as would have caused him at once to forfeit the confidence of those amongst whom he dwelt; and meantime he used his favorable stand point to make himself familiar with the strongest arguments that could be brought forward in favor of Slavery, with the laws of the country respecting it, with its political and social

working, and with the character and capabilities of the colored man, in order that no knowledge of the strength of the system should be wanting to him when the anticipated time should arrive for action.

Believing Slavery to be a great moral and social evil, at variance with the laws of God, and opposed to the pure precepts of the Gospel, he perceived that it was fast hurrying to destruction the people by whom it was maintained. He was further convinced that it was impossible, while living in the midst of it, to bring up his family free from its contaminating influences; he therefore determined, whatever sacrifices it should cost him, to free himself from its trammels, and to separate himself entirely from it. In consequence however of legal difficulties, this resolution could not be carried into immediate execution. He therefore, with a view to its furtherance, purchased a plantation, on which he placed his slaves, giving them the proceeds of their own labor, until the time should come that would enable him to set them free; thus developing in them the spirit of self-reliance, and training them for the exercise of the duties of the state of freedom in which he purposed to place them.

The legal difficulties which had hitherto stood in his way having been overcome, he sold his plantation, and in April, 1848, removed the slaves, fifteen in number, to Canada, and there gave them their freedom; these settling around him became the nucleus of the Elgin Settlement, now covering so large a space.

Shortly after the passing of the Fugitive Slave Bill which deprived the Slave refugees of all safety in the United States, a general movement was made by them towards Upper Canada. This sudden accession roused the latent jealousy of the white settlers into active hostility, which was just at its height when Mr. King arrived with his charge. Animated by a noble Christian philanthropy which led him to regard these outcasts as men and brethren, he had previously designed a plan for the amelioration of their social condition, and the elevation of their moral and intellectual character, which consisted in providing the adults with a home, and the youth with the means of Christian education, by forming a settlement in which land

should be granted to them on easy terms, and provision made for their spiritual wants as well as their mental development.

The rumour of Mr. King's design having preceded him, he encountered on entering the Province the most violent opposition. Combinations were formed, in which the parties swore to take his life if he should show himself in their vicinity; threatening letters were sent to him expressing furious indignation at his project, and a public meeting from three counties was convened by the sheriff, to influence popular feeling, in order to prevent him from carrying his design into effect. Only one man was found to lift up his voice in that assembly, professing to give a home in their midst to the wanderer!

A committee was appointed to watch his proceedings, and petitions, numerous and influentially signed, were sent to the Commissioner of Crown Lands earnestly demanding that no grant should on any consideration be made for his purpose. A less resolute spirit must have retired before such obstacles, but Mr. King, assured of the righteousness of his cause, gathered new stimulus from difficulty, and securing the co-operation of Lord Elgin, then Governor General of Canada, succeeded in carrying his point, and thus saved Britain from the disgrace of refusing that asylum to the outcast which it has long been her glory to afford. A grant was made of a tract of land which had been selected and approved by competent judges, and which practical men, interested in the scheme, pronounced one of the most desirable in the Province.

Mr. King, with his assistants, immediately set about surveying and laying off the nine thousand acres of which the grant consisted, into lots of fifty acres each.

It was in December, 1849, that Mr. King, who had been unanimously appointed agent of the Elgin Association, fixed his residence on the settlement, to which the name of "Buxton" was given in honor of that friend of humanity, Sir T. F. Buxton. Mr. King's house, which stands some way back from the middle road running east and west through the southern part of the settlement, had been

built and occupied for several years by a white settler. It is a long low building of log, and was at first of most unpretending appearance, but buildings which were for a while used as a church and school house have since been incorporated in the dwelling house; and a gallery in front shaded by luxuriant grape vines, a belfry rising high above the house, the erection of a handsome barn and outbuildings at the rear, together with the long avenue of shade trees leading up from the road, and the tasteful white fences with which the premises are enclosed, have contributed to give to the whole, when seen against the brilliant blue sky and embosomed in the rich green foliage of a Canadian summer, a picturesque and charming aspect. More recently a church, school-house and post-office have been put up on the premises, immediately fronting the main road; these are likewise of log, yet they have about them a degree of rustic beauty, though they are designed shortly to be succeeded by more permanent structures.

In a very short time a number of the fifty acre lots were disposed of to actual settlers at two dollars and a half per acre, to be paid in ten equal annual instalments with interest; the whole being paid up, the settler to receive a title to the land in fee simple. These terms have been fulfilled, and the settlers have received their deeds. It was also required that each settler, on entering his lot, should immediately put up a house, not inferior to a prescribed model, which was of log, twenty-four feet long, by eighteen feet wide, and twelve high, to be set back thirty-three feet from the road, and enclosed in front with a picket fence. Any who wished were at liberty to make their houses as much larger and better as they chose, and in many cases did so. Some came in with nothing but their strong right arm to help them; others had acquired a little property, and commenced at a much greater advantage; the former had, in a literal sense, "to take their bread out of a stump," and hard enough their work proved. The land was heavily timbered with elm, hickory, oak, maple and ash, which must be hewn down, consumed, and the brushwood cleared out before an ear of corn could be raised.



The land being level and the soil clayey, it was necessary to open numerous ditches in order to carry off the water to the creeks, which, when properly kept open, supply sufficient drainage.

The parallel roads or concessions which intersect the settlement at intervals of 200 acres, existed only on the charts, and the towering giants of the forest, who had so long held undisturbed possession, would not yield an inch except to the fatal stroke of the axe. The difficulties were indeed great, each man however understood, on coming in, that all he was to receive was the opportunity to make a home and acquire independence—"work or sink" was the motto—and results abundantly testify that almost all adopted the former alternative.

Meanwhile, in furtherance of the moral interests of the settlers, a mission was formed, supported by the "Canada Presbyterian Free Church," and Mr. King, being a minister in that body, was appointed to the charge. Schools were opened in which, in addition to the ordinary branches taught in the common schools, opportunities were afforded for acquiring a knowledge of the classics, and higher branches of literature, to such as might aspire to the professional or scientific walks of life. Three other school-houses have since been erected in the more remote parts of the settlement, which are conducted on the common school system of the country, so that there are now four schools, with an attendance of three hundred scholars. Two hundred of these attend the Sabbath schools. Seven hundred have already passed through the mission school, and received a good common education, whilst others have been trained as teachers and are now occupying important posts both in Canada and the States. One of the former pupils is teaching in the City of Washington, another in Chatham, Canada West. Two others are engaged as Surgeons in the hospital at Washington, and another has nearly completed his Collegiate course at Toronto. The schools are now all self-supporting : the settlers have subscribed this year (1866) one thousand dollars for educational purposes, besides four hundred dollars which has been raised towards the erection of a brick school

house in the village of Buxton. The church in good weather is well attended, and a large number of the hearers are church members; the Sabbath school opens immediately after the morning service, at which time also Mr. King conducts a Bible class for the adults at his own house. Libraries have been provided for the use both of the schools and the congregation.

The Methodist and Baptist forms of worship, in which more freedom and license are allowed to the hearers, are however better suited than Presbyterianism to the impulsive and demonstrative feelings of the African. A large majority therefore are attached to these denominations; and, as perfect liberty has been afforded them, they have erected churches of their own; and a very large proportion of the population are to be found every Sabbath day attending some place of worship.

Settlers continued from the first to come in every year. In 1855 a good saw and grist mill was put up in Buxton, by means of which abundance of excellent timber was supplied, so that the erection of good houses proceeded more rapidly than before. In the ensuing year a brick yard and pearlash factory were added; likewise a store, a two-story brick hotel and a good frame house, intended for a private boarding house; and a new branch of industry was opened, which has already proved of the greatest possible advantage. This is the making of black salts, which are prepared from the ashes of various kinds of timber, and are afterwards disposed of to the manufacturers of pot and pearlash. The only expense incurred is the purchase of the large kettle for boiling. By this means also the work of clearing the land has been greatly stimulated, and vast quantities of wood, which must otherwise have been utterly wasted, have been converted into an article of high commercial value, and become a valuable source of wealth to the community.

Indoors, many are engaged in preparing and spinning flax and wool for garments, and there is no doubt that this most desirable branch of industry will shortly be practised to a much greater extent. The hindrance hitherto has been the impossibility of raising

sheep on damp or newly-cleared lands. This obstacle is becoming less every year, and we have good hopes of seeing in a few years the every-day garb of the community entirely of their own manufacture. The land on the older clearings is already fit for raising flax and tobacco. Several of the settlers are well acquainted with the cultivation of these plants, and the mode of preparing them for use or for the market, and are proposing to devote a considerable portion of their time and land to these purposes.

From its commencement till the present time, the history of the Buxton settlement has been one of gradual advancement in all things which constitute the prosperity of an agricultural people; yet, like all similar movements, it has had its fluctuations. The zeal and enthusiasm with which many at first entered upon their arduous but hopeful task, gave way for a time before the continuance of severe labor, unaccompanied by present requital, these persons leaving their farms and going elsewhere to seek employment; of course, their own lands were neglected, or nearly so, and it is obvious that such neglect would be injurious in an unopened country not only to the interests of the individual, but also to those of his neighbours. Two or three years' desultory labour, which, though for the present more remunerative, did not advance their permanent interests, served to show most of them their error, and they returned to Buxton with renewed determination to persevere in the work, which, though barren and toilsome at first, was a sure road to independence and plenty.

In 1857, the Elgin settlement was honoured with a visit from Lord Althorpe, now Earl Spencer, in company with several other gentlemen. Besides calling on some of the settlers, and witnessing the condition of their houses and farms, he had the opportunity of seeing them gathered together on the occasion, when a banquet—of which several hundreds partook—was provided in an arbor erected for the purpose in a grove on Mr. King's farm. The settlers and their distinguished guests were mutually delighted with the novel scene. Since that time similar festivals have been held on the

first of August to celebrate West India Emancipation. These occasions, on which the dinner is furnished by the community *from their own produce*, would satisfy the enquiring stranger that there was no scarcity among them of the necessaries, and even of the luxuries of the table. Turkeys, fowls, ducks, roast pigs, geese, venison, beef, mutton, and lamb, load the board. Vegetables of all kinds, potatoes, parsnips, peas, French beans, asparagus, &c., with pickles and preserves, are on hand ; whilst rich iced cakes and pastry, in various forms, display the taste and skill in cookery, so characteristic of the race.

Lord Althorpe and his friends were highly satisfied with what they saw of the prosperity of this interesting community ; and the same feeling has been expressed by numerous other intelligent visitors to Buxton.

Sixteen years ago, when Mr. King first came to Buxton, the whole country was one unbroken forest ; the wild deer and the wolf roamed unmolested through its dark solitudes. Roads, there were none, with the exception of the military line running from London to Sandwich through the centre of the peninsula—laid out by Colonel Talbot after the war with the United States in 1812, and settled on each side with British subjects, who received grants of 100 acres each on condition of erecting a log cabin and clearing a certain portion of land on each side of the road. At the present time upwards of 2000 acres of forest land have been cleared and laid under cultivation. Twenty-five miles of road have been opened up through the settlement in various directions, the same extent of drainage has also been completed, rendering the whole land dry, with a good road to each farm.

Two hundred and fifty families have here made themselves comfortable homes, where they now live supporting themselves by their own industry. In most of these dwellings the family altar has been set up, whence the voice of praise and prayer ascends from grateful hearts to the Father of all mercies. It is satisfactory also to be able to state that, both as regards health and morals, the settlement will

bear favourable comparison with any community of the same size. Nothing that intoxicates is made or sold in the settlement, and drunkenness is a crime almost unknown among the settlers.

Most of their houses have been put up on the prescribed model, but many are of frame which have a much neater appearance, and are capable of a much higher degree of finish, besides which there are several brick houses, the bricks for which were made at the brick-yard in Buxton. The log and frame houses are whitewashed ; some are shaded with galleries and creeping plants, and surrounded with neat fences enclosing tasteful gardens.

In the year 1862, there were three hundred acres sown in wheat ; six hundred in Indian corn ; two hundred in oats ; two hundred and fifty, meadow ; about four hundred were devoted to potatoes, peas, turnips, buckwheat, &c. ; fourteen to tobacco, and sixteen to flax. There were owned by the settlers, one hundred yoke of oxen (used in farming), one hundred and thirty horses, two hundred and fifty milch cows, eighty sheep, and hogs without number, and every succeeding year has been adding to the wealth of the settlers.

Indoors, their homes consist of a large room with a plank floor ; at one end is a huge chimney, where, during the long cold winters, the blazing logs diffuse cheerful light and heat. In most cases a small room is partitioned off for a sleeping apartment ; the whole is ceiled with boards, and the space between these and the shingled roof is also divided into two compartments as sleeping lofts. In the meanest of these dwellings there is at least one decent bedstead, a table, a few chairs, &c. In most, these conveniences are much more numerous, and some of the better houses are both comfortably and neatly furnished, and adorned with gay prints ; and happily there is no fear of distraining for rent or any such calamity.

The natural taste of the coloured race for music has been developed and cultivated by the formation of singing classes, conducted by one of themselves, on Hullah's vocal system, in which they have made very creditable progress. Two musical bands have been formed, one in connection with the military company ; the other, a brass band,

for festival occasions, is now under training by a gentleman of much experience, who speaks highly of their progress.

Writing in February, 1866, Mr. King says : " This settlement is a standing protest against the charges brought against the Negro, of idleness and incapacity to manage his own business. Just at this critical period in the reconstruction of the slave states, and the settlement of other questions connected with the freedom of the slave, it is well that we have at least one community of freed men, of whom it can be said that they are self-supporting and industrious. While enjoying all the rights of freemen, they are well behaved, and exercise their civil rights with as much judgment as any other settlers coming into the province. To-day, the thermometer stands five degrees below zero, with snow a foot deep, and yet there is not an able-bodied man in the settlement who is not in the woods with axe and crosscut saw making staves for the foreign market, and taking saw logs to the mill. There is a high price for timber and staves ; this is the motive to exertion and all are busy. The mill this year will deliver 500,000 feet of timber at the end of the Centre Road, which is now completed to the lake, and in summer is one of the loveliest drives in the west. From the middle road to the lake is a straight wide avenue, with the primitive forest trees of stately growth on each side ; at the end of the avenue Lake Erie bursts upon the view in all its majesty. The opening up of this road has given a new impulse to the industry of the settlers, as it has given them access to a ready market for any amount of staves, firewood, lumber, &c. The settlement never has been in a more prosperous condition than it is this year."

A. M. HARRIS.

*Lozells,*  
*Birmingham.*



**PLAN**  
 OF THE  
**ELGIN SETTLEMENT**  
 IN THE  
**TOWNSHIP OF RALEIGH**  
**COUNTY OF KENT,**  
**CANADA WEST.**

**NOTE.**

*The Elgin Association was incorporated by Act of Parliament 10<sup>th</sup> August, 1850, for the Social and Moral Improvement of the Colored Population of Canada.*  
*The Settlement is nearly 6 Miles long & 3 Miles wide containing about 250 families embracing about 1200 Souls.*  
*The land is divided into Farms of 50 Acres each, and the houses built along the Concessions after a Model 18 feet by 24-12 feet high, and set 33 feet from the Road enclosed in front with a Picket fence.*

- References*
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|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <i>A. Rev. &amp; W. King's house.</i> | <i>I. Brick Yard</i>                  |
| <i>B. Mission Church.</i>             | <i>J. Steam Saw &amp; Grist Mill.</i> |
| <i>C. Buxton Post Office.</i>         | <i>K. Carpenter's Shop.</i>           |
| <i>D. Mission School.</i>             | <i>L. Shoe Shop.</i>                  |
| <i>E. Store.</i>                      | <i>M. District School.</i>            |
| <i>F. A two story Brick Hotel.</i>    | <i>N. Lots of 50 Acres each.</i>      |
| <i>G. Blacksmith Shop.</i>            | <i>O. Houses on Lots.</i>             |
| <i>H. Pearlash Factory.</i>           | <i>P. Buxton Square.</i>              |

L A K E E R I E