

# Pre-Confederation

## Revolutionary War

### Butlers Rangers

Butler's Rangers fought for the Crown during the American Revolutionary War. The Rangers were formed by Lieutenant Colonel John Butler and were composed of Loyalists who after the war came to Canada. Slaves were offered freedom by the British if they fought during the war. Several locals joined John Butler.

### Richard Pierpoint

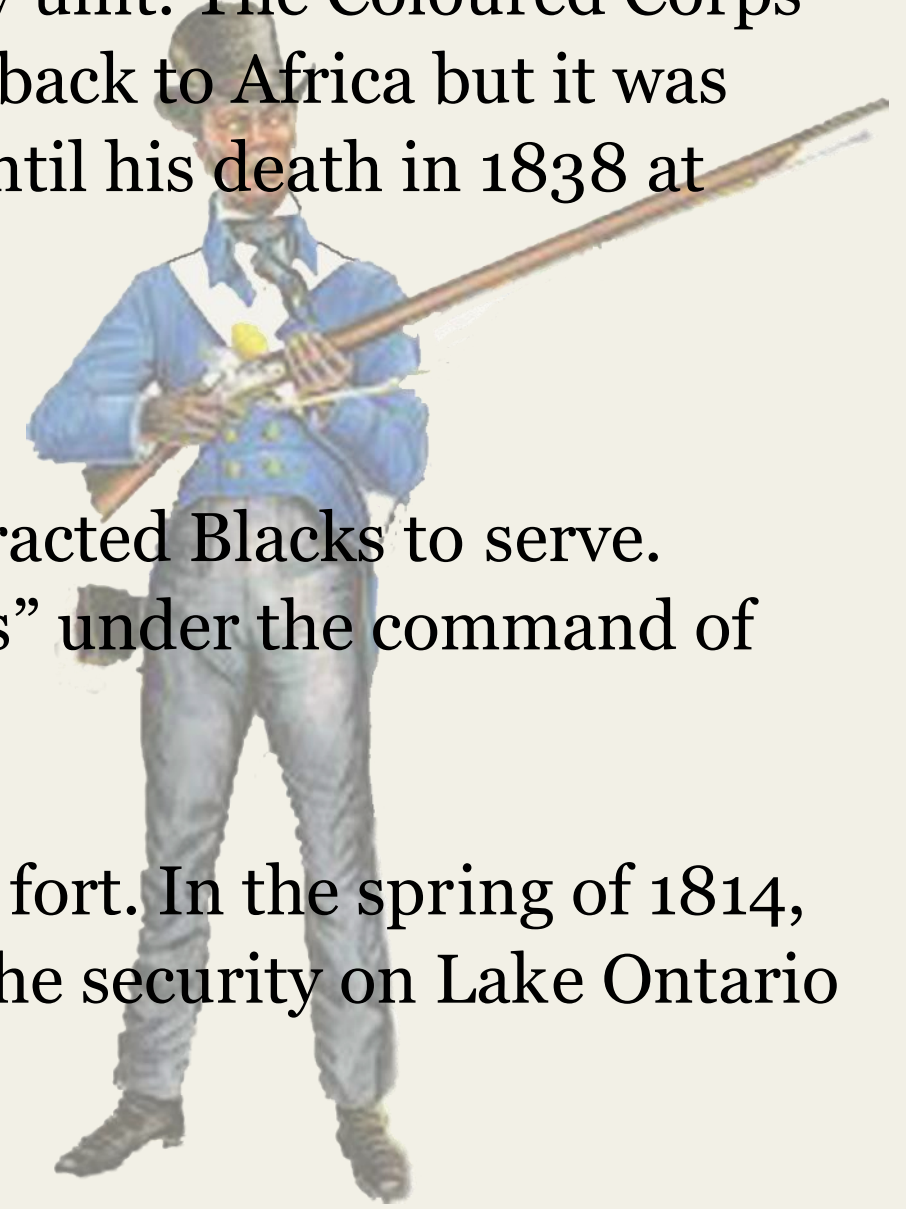
Born in Africa, Pierpoint was captured by slave traders at the age of 16. He joined the Butler Rangers and in 1784 for fighting for the British he was given freedom. In the War of 1812 Pierpoint petitioned Major General Sir Isaac Brock's administration to form an all Black military unit. The Coloured Corps was formed under Captain Raunchey. In 1821 he had petitioned to be sent back to Africa but it was turned down. He moved to what is now known as Fergus and lived there until his death in 1838 at about age 94.

## War of 1812

On June 1812, the United States declared war on Great Britain. The British promise of freedom for slaves attracted Blacks to serve. Richard Pierpoint's petition for an all-Black militia to fight alongside the British formed the "Coloured Corps" under the command of Captain Robert Raunchey. The Coloured Corps played an important role in the Battle of Queenston Heights.

In December 1813 the Coloured Corps was attached to the Royal Engineers to help repair fortifications at the fort. In the spring of 1814, the Coloured Corps was ordered to construct Fort Mississauga on the Canadian shore. It was important for the security on Lake Ontario from naval attacks from the Americans. The corps was disbanded 24 March 1815.

Militiaman of Raunchey's Co  
of Coloured Men Circa 1812



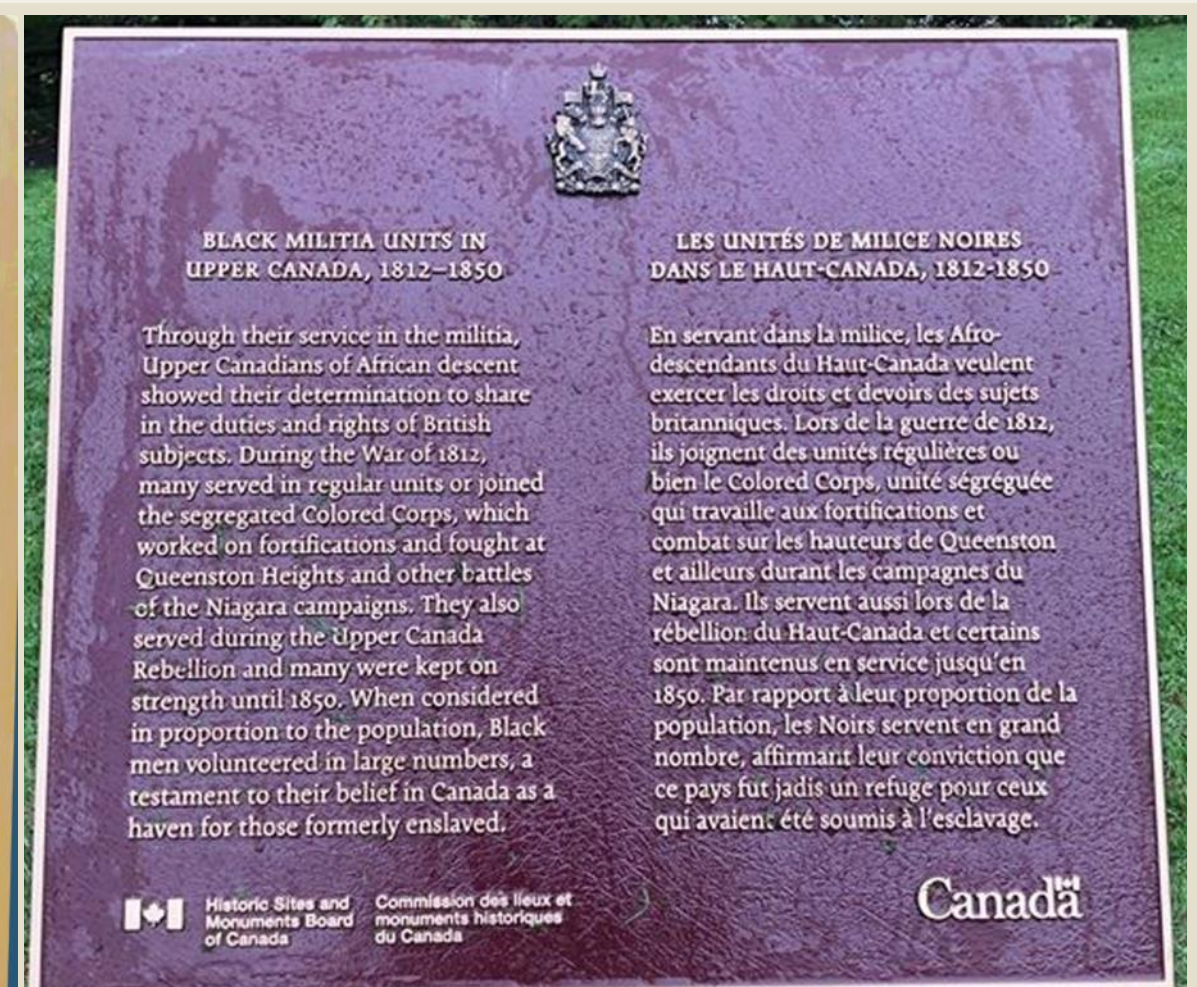
### RICHARD PIERPOINT c.1744 - c.1838

One of the first Black settlers in this region. Pierpoint was born in Senegal. At the age of about 16 he was imprisoned and shipped to America where he became the slave of a British officer. During the American Revolution he enlisted in the British forces, thereby gaining his freedom, and served with Butler's Rangers. Disbanded at Niagara, "Captain Dick" settled near here. At the outbreak of the War of 1812 he joined the Coloured Corps and in 1821, recalling his militia service, he petitioned the government for passage home to Africa. Although his request was denied, the aged Pierpoint was granted land in present-day Fergus. Remarkably he fulfilled the required settlement duties when over 80 and then apparently returned to this area.



### THE "COLORED CORPS" 1812 - 1815

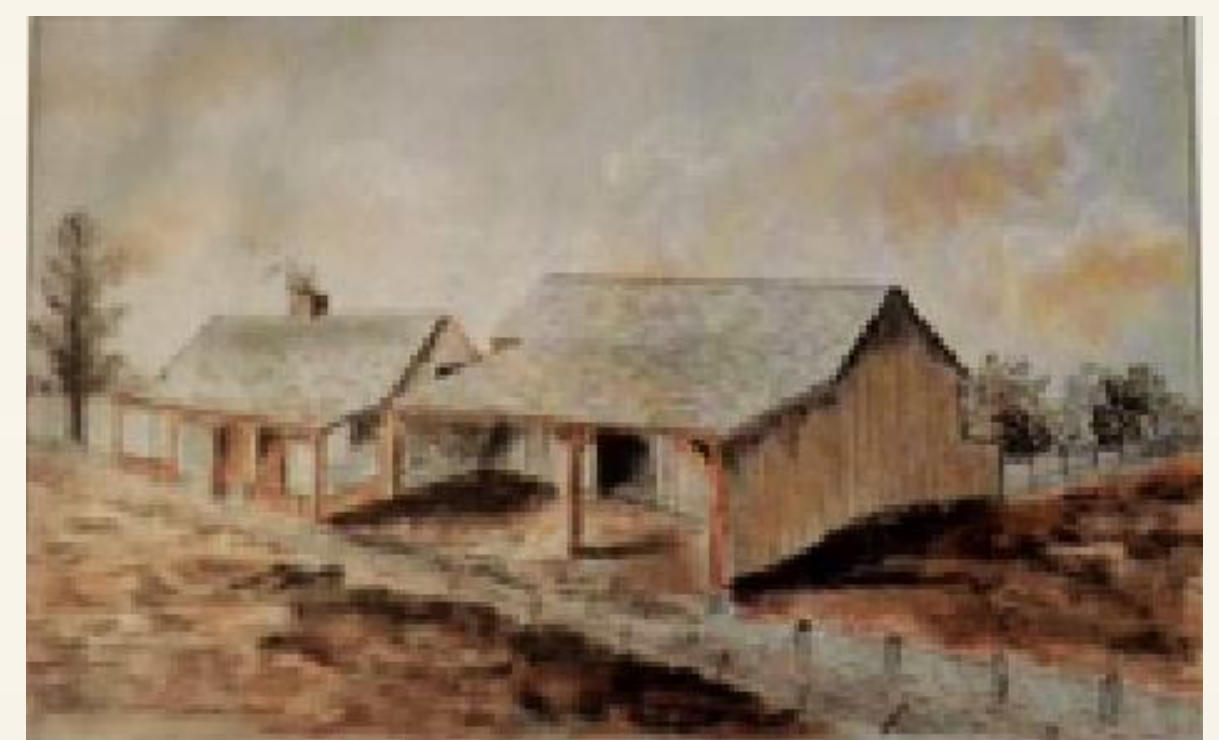
When the War of 1812 began, people of African descent in the Niagara peninsula feared an American invasion. They were anxious to preserve their freedom and prove their loyalty to Britain. Many joined the militia; others offered to raise their own militia company. Authorities responded by forming a "Colored Corps" of about thirty men commanded by white officers. Based in the Niagara region throughout the war, it fought at Queenston Heights in October 1812 and at the siege of Fort George in May 1813. The corps was disbanded soon after the peace, but had nonetheless set a precedent. Black units were a feature of the Canadian military until the First World War.



## The Battle of Slabtown: Merritton and The Welland Canal

During construction of the first Welland Canal in 1824 and the second canal in 1842, workers, the majority being Irish, turned to violence over hazardous conditions, disease, extreme weather, and infrequent pay. The Irish Catholics also had long history of religious rivalry and violence against Protestants, known as Orangemen. Due to ongoing fights and riots the Coloured Corps was hired to maintain the peace.

"Slabtown" on the outskirts of Merritton, was a neighbourhood of canallers' shanties, constructed from slabs bought cheaply from nearby sawmills. On 12 July 1849 about 50 Orangemen were dining at Duffin's Inn when hundreds of Catholic canallers surrounded the inn and fired shots. The armed Orangemen inside opened fire, leaving two Catholics killed and six or seven injured in what became known as The Battle of Slabtown. Lieutenant Roberts and twenty-five men from the Colour Corps, headquartered at Port Robinson, was called to the scene. The strength of the Coloured Corps consisted of approximately four sergeants, four corporals, one drummer and eighty privates.



Duffin's Inn – 1849 From Ontario Historical Society,  
*Upper Canada's Black Defenders*



## American Civil War

The Civil War, which lasted from 1861 to 1865, was a battle to determine whether the United States of America would survive or splinter into independent states. The war pitted the Unionist north against southern Confederates. War is always dangerous, but it was even worse for these Black soldiers, who, if captured, could be killed or enslaved. This was a fight that very much mattered to the African-Canadians of the time.

### William Chandler

William Chandler was born 1 January 1843 in London, Canada West. He was a farmer before the war living in Fort Erie. Chandler signed up 19 August 1863 in Buffalo, NY for a 3 year contract at the age of 19. At the Battle of Olustee, Florida on February 20, 1864 he was shot in the arm then had it amputated. In 1865 he went back to Fort Erie, married Lavina Taylor and had 9 children. Chandler died 19 February 1913.

What risks would Black Canadians have fighting in the US Civil War?