

**REVEREND  
WILLIAM KING**



Reverend William King (1812-1895) was born in Londonderry, Ireland on November 11, 1812. He was the youngest of seven children. In 1830, King moved to Scotland, where he attended the Glasgow University. One of the most debated issues in his day was slavery. William Wilberforce and Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, both of whom were opposed to the institution of slavery, greatly influenced young King.

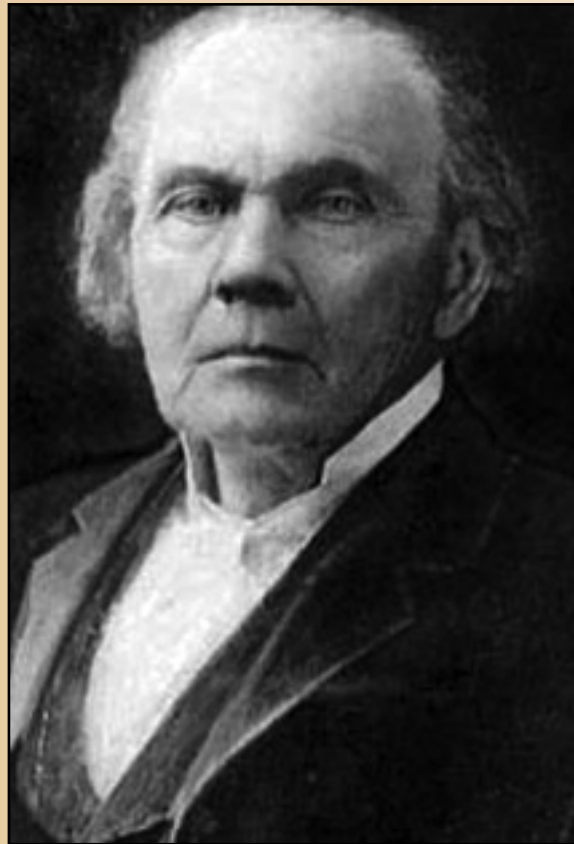
The King clan relocated to North American in 1833, when William was 21 years old. They sold their farm in Ireland and shipped the potato crop to New York to sell. The Kings purchased 640 acres of wilderness in Maumee, Ohio (near Cleveland). William King and his brothers cleared the land - after two months he could work an axe all day without tiring. Once the King family were established at their new homestead, William eagerly set out on his own to apply the university degree he'd earned.

In 1836, King moved to Louisiana to accept a teaching position to tutor the children of three wealthy families for an annual salary of \$800. The boys were quarrelsome. King would not tolerate such conduct and disciplined them with thrashings. One father, offended that King would treat his son as he was accustomed to treating his slaves, removed him

from King's care. However, the other families were pleased with the good education their children were receiving and asked King if he would teach children from other families for the same wage. King's school grew from two to 40, which was all the school would hold.

Due to his reputation for handling difficult students, he was offered the job of headmaster for Mathews Academy of Louisiana College in 1839. He accepted the position under the condition he had the "power to correct" teachers and pupils. Radical changes that King implemented included creating

dorms from previously private rooms and confiscating student weapons (bowie knives, pistols, stiletos). In his new position as headmaster, King acquired a measure of wealth and his social standing was elevated to mingling with the privileged classes. At age 28, King married Mary Mourning Phares, the daughter of a wealthy local planter, in 1841.



King was deeply religious and a man of strong convictions. The Sunday before beginning his work at Mathews Academy he listened to the words of his predecessor, who in his farewell address preached from the Gospel of Mark, "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" This text stayed with King, and he credits it with having a "forceful effect" on his life.

During the years, King lived in the southern states; he observed the laws made it difficult for a person to remain moral. King became a slave owner, because in the south it was impossible to hire servants (white people refused to do 'slave' chores) and it was illegal to free a slave.

After the birth of his son, Theophilus, King became more concerned about the society in which he would be raising his family. In 1843, King resigned his position at Mathews Academy and bought the plantation adjoining his father-in-law's. In January of 1844, King travelled to Scotland to pursue a divinity degree from the University of Edinburgh (Free Church College), leaving his young family and holdings in the care of his father-in-law.

King returned to the U.S. to collect his family on the ship Patrick Henry, working as the first mate, because he could not book passage and landed in Jackson, Louisiana in June 1845. Before returning to Scotland, King, Mary, and Theophilus, travelled to Ohio to visit the King family farm.

Sadly, young Theophilus caught a fever and died during their visit in Ohio, at only three years old. In late 1845, the Kings had a daughter, Mary Elizabeth Chalmers. Shortly after learning of the death of her father, Mary developed consumption (tuberculosis) and passed away on Feb. 25, 1846. Tragedy struck again, when baby Mary died on May 9, 1846.

In August 1846, King became a licensed minister with the Edinburgh Presbytery and accepted a commission as a missionary to Canada. After a brief visit to his holdings in

Louisiana, King headed to the Toronto Presbytery. During the winter of 1846/47, he preached at various locations in Canada. In the spring, he received word that the Phares family wanted to settle his father-in-law's estate. As the only surviving member of Mary Phares' family, King inherited her portion of the estate, which consisted primarily of slaves. He had never informed the Presbytery of his situation as a slave owner, but with the necessity of travelling to Louisiana, he was required to tell them.

In King's words, *"The secret that I had kept with regard to my position had now to be made known. I would have to resign my commission, and tell the Presbytery that I was the owner of a plantation and slaves in Louisiana. When the Presbytery met I informed them of my position. The news fell like a bomb shell on the members of the Presbytery."*

King advised the Presbytery of his intention to free his slaves and bring them to Canada where they could be free. The Presbytery became excited by this news and granted him a leave. In the fall of 1847, King headed to Louisiana, beginning what would become the great mission of his life. He kept his intention to free his slaves a secret, and when offered the sum of \$9,000 to sell his slaves he refused.

Before concluding his affairs, King purchased a young child named Solomon for the sum of \$150, so he could remain with his mother. By April 1848, King headed north with his 15 slaves, travelling 1,500 miles on the Mississippi in a steamer and switching to a freighter for the final 500 miles on the Ohio River, to the King farm in Ohio. As the news of King's



intention to free (*manumit*) his slaves spread, his story was printed in several newspapers, making him a celebrity and awakening public attention to the hopeless conditions of fugitive slaves.

Once in Ohio, King freed his 15 slaves and left them in Ohio with his brother, where they learned the basics of survival in the north - preserving food, building shelter, and farming. King realized that just 'freeing' slaves would make them victims. Meanwhile, King returned to Toronto in June 1848, reported to the Toronto Synod (Presbyterian) proposing the social and moral improvement of blacks in Canada. He presented an outline for a proposed mission settlement with the essential requirements for success: land, church and schools.

As he wrote in his autobiography, *"I believe that these persons who had escaped slavery, when placed in favourable circumstances, were able and willing to support themselves and become respectable members of society; and to accomplish that I believe it was necessary to provide homes where parents could support themselves by their own industry and their children with the blessings of a Christian education."*

#### ELGIN SETTLEMENT (1849-1873)

The Presbyterian Church created a Synod committee that met with Lord Elgin, Governor General of Canada. Lord Elgin agreed to support such a venture and the Presbyterian committee, realizing the scope of this plan was beyond their capabilities, issued the 'Prospectus of a Scheme for the Social and Moral Improvement of the Coloured People of Canada' to the other denominations for them to recommend to their

parishioners. As a result, many influential members of the Christian community supported this appeal. The Elgin Association was created and King was made managing director of the Elgin Settlement.

*"The committee having taken into consideration the peculiar circumstances in which the coloured people came into the Province and the debasing influences exerted by slavery on their character, and having held extensive correspondence with gentlemen in various parts of the Province and of different religious denominations who are known to have an interest in this matter, have come to the conclusion, that it is highly important to the successful operation of a Christian mission among this class of people, that a tract of land be purchased and a settlement formed in a suitable locality, consisting entirely of coloured persons, placed under a careful and judicious supervision; they are also of opinion that a tract of unoccupied land containing 9,000 acres lying in the township of Raleigh in the western district presents greater advantage as regards to soil, climate, and nearness to market, and adaptation to the physical constitution and habits of the coloured race, than any other tract that has come within our view.*

*The committee after careful examination of the whole subject, have resolved to submit to the Christian public, a proposal to form an Association, under such a name as may afterwards be agreed upon, for purchasing the tract of land above referred to in order that it may be opened for settlement by people of colour and to solicit for this purpose the aid of all who are desirous to promote the improvement of the long neglected and deeply injured race.*

*The sum necessary to effect this purchase is about \$4,000; it is proposed to raise this sum in shares of ten pounds each, one tenth of the subscription to be paid in hand and the remainder in nine equal annual installments with interest so far as it may be necessary that the stock be paid out but it is probable that not more than four installments will be required; as soon as the stock is subscribed, it is proposed to call the stockholders together in order to appoint officers for the Association and to make arrangements for the immediate settlement of the lands.*

*The entire management as to the terms of settlement and the financial concerns of the Association will continue in the hands of the stock holders, and be administered by those whom they may appoint. The only conditions which the committee propose are that the lands shall be exclusively reserved for coloured settlers and sold to them on the lowest terms which will remunerate the stockholders for their expenditure. As the object of this effort is one of pure benevolence undertaken solely with the view of improving the social and religious condition of the coloured people in Canada, we confidently expect and earnestly solicit the sympathy and aid of the Christian community in behalf of it."*

Some residents of Chatham and Raleigh Township were unhappy about the proposed settlement; wild rumours were circulated, and threats were made to the members of the Elgin Association, particularly at King. Edwin Larwill, a local politician and tavern owner, led the opposition to the settlement.

A petition, signed by 300 people voicing their arguments

against the settlement, was sent to Parliament and the Presbyterian Church. King faced his accusers on several occasions and even commanded their respect for his courage and conviction. Despite opposition, King proceeded to have the land surveyed and split into 50-acre lots.

King travelled to Ohio to fetch his former slaves as the core of the newly-established Elgin Settlement. They reached the settlement on November 28, 1849 and were met by several families eager to become pioneers of this planned community. King purchased 100 acres from William White in December 1849, as he himself did not qualify to purchase settlement lands, in the centre of Buxton.

King preached Sunday worship services from his barn to both black and white, due to the existing animosity and began the process of breaking down racial prejudices. King was not bound by narrow sectarianism, as long as the settlers were able to hear the Gospels and read it for themselves, he was pleased. King himself organized the 'raising bee' to build The First Baptist Church in Buxton.

King trained 'cabin raising crews,' and with 12 men and a team of oxen, a cabin could be essentially built in a day (7 a.m. to 7 p.m.). A cabin crew consisted of two men cutting logs, one man hauling logs in, four men cutting corners and laying saddle logs down, and five men staying on the ground to put logs in place.

A large log structure was built to act as a school and church, on King's property due to threats of violence if a black school



opened. The settlers organized 'chopping bees' to clear the main road to church and schools. In April 1850, the Mission School (SS #7) opened and was taught by John Rennie, a Presbyterian Knox College graduate (University of Toronto). On the first day of school, 10 black and two white children were enrolled. King began a night school for adults; black adults learned to read the Bible for themselves and many local whites joined to learn the classics or the rudimentary knowledge required to pass a teaching exam.

Northern sympathizers in Boston sent boxes of clothing for the settlers, which King initially distributed, but declined future donations of this kind. The settlers wanted to show that they needed only "fair field and no favour."

By the summer of 1850, King was heavily in debt. He had used his savings from Louisiana to pay for the seminary and used his inheritance to bring his slaves north. King learned the Free Church of Scotland was not depositing wages for him, and a draft he wrote against the bank of Edinburgh bounced. The settlement grew faster than anticipated because



of the Fugitive Slave Act and he had been paying for the school supplies himself. Both King and the Elgin Settlement were known in three countries and the new settlement could not afford to have questionable credentials.

King got a second mortgage for his farm, which helped, but the need for funds was still dire. Later in the year King accepted an invitation to visit Pittsburgh (which was a Presbyterian stronghold), to raise funds for the settlement.

The sum of \$400 was raised and King formed a close relationship with the Presbyterian congregations in Pittsburgh. Shortly, after his return to Buxton, the ladies of Allegheny City sent the Presbyterian Library several boxes of books and five Missionary Maps for the Mission School which were gratefully received.

Soon after the library arrived, the settlement received a gift that is giving to this very day. The Buxton Liberty Bell came from the Colored Inhabitants of Pittsburgh. It weighed 500 pounds and was the first steeple bell west of London. The Buxton Liberty Bell rang at 6 a.m. each morning and 9 p.m.

each evening to remind the settlers of their brethren still in bondage, and every time a slave reached freedom in Buxton.

In 1851, King was appointed trustee of the Chatham Collegiate Institute, the only qualified college preparatory school west of Toronto.

*“I saw it rise from a class of 12 pupils to be the first collegiate institute in the Dominion with a full staff of teachers and 300 pupils on the roll, sending out annually a number of well-qualified teachers and others to enter the University to qualify for the different learned professions.”*

The new high school was built in 1855 and King was honoured to give the dedication. He retained the position of trustee for 28 years.

King married again, to Jemima Nicole Baxter, of Scotland.

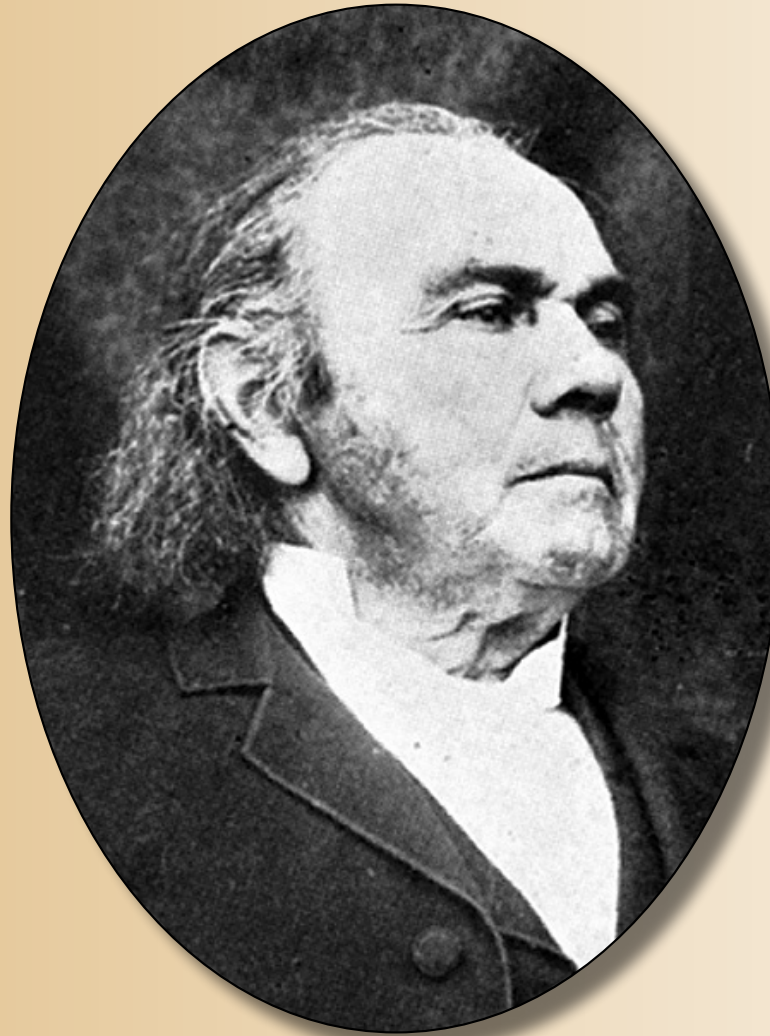
They had met after King was widowed and working at the Free Church in Scotland. By 1853, industry was establishing in the settlement as a means to be self-sufficient and provide ready cash for ‘luxury’ unessential items.

*“The Elgin Settlement now having demonstrated by actual ex-*

*periment, that coloured men when placed in favorable circumstances were capable of supporting themselves and improving socially and morally the same as the white race. The lands had*

*all been settled many years ago and nearly all paid for. The Elgin Association took the necessary steps to wind up the whole affair. All families who entered on the land were living comfortably on their farms, having paid for them by their own industry and received deed for the same.*

*They had opened out the roads, cleared and drained them. The children who had grown up and been educated in the Settlement, went all nearly south, where they obtained useful and profitable employment, some as teachers, some as lawyers and doctors and some as preachers. The affairs of the settlement were finally wound up in March, 1873; by spring a final report to the Ontario government, I giving my services to the settlement for 25 years without fee or return, and concluded my connection with in 1880.”*



Rev. King moved to Chatham and lived at 66 West Street in Chatham, until his death in 1895.