Sally Ainse and the Intersection of Black-Indigenous Histories in the Thames River Valley, 1780–1865

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Sally Ainse was an Oneida woman who purchased a large property in the Thames River Valley in the late eighteenth century. Ainse also owned enslaved peoples, including a Black man named Frank, who, along with Josiah Cutten, were included as part of the transactions when Ainse sold plots of her land to European American settlers. The intersecting stories of Ainse, Frank, and Cutten along a newly formed international border complicate narratives of settler colonial development. They highlight the complex relationships between settler expansion and racialized violence that help explain the region's shifting political landscape from 1780 to 1865, and, by doing so, illustrate the importance of local identities to settler colonialism.

Sally Ainse était une femme Oneida qui avait acheté une grande propriété dans la vallée de la rivière Thames à la fin du XVIII^e^ siècle. Ainse possédait également des esclaves, dont un Noir dénommé Frank, qui, avec Josiah Cutten, figuraient au nombre des transactions réalisées au moment où Ainse vendait des parcelles de sa terre à des colons européens américains. Les histoires entrecroisées d'Ainse, de Frank et de Cutten sur une frontière internationale nouvellement formée compliquent les récits du développement colonial. Elles mettent en évidence les relations complexes entre l'expansion du peuplement et la violence racialisée qui contribuent à expliquer l'évolution du paysage politique de la région entre 1780 et 1865 et, ce faisant, illustrent l'importance des identités locales dans la cadre de la colonisation.

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IN 1787, SALLY AINSE, an Oneida woman and wealthy trader, move from Detroit to the Thames River. She purchased a large tract of property on the river from Anishinaabe friends five years earlier. Shortly after her move, she sold a parcel of land to William Brown, who later sold the land to Arthur McCormick, who then sold the land to Thomas Duggan. Duggan paid for the land with an enslaved Black man named Josiah Cutten.[1] In 1789, Ainse sold another parcel of land and an enslaved Black man named Frank to Joseph Cissney.[2] The lives of Cutten and Frank are a stark reminder of the legacy of racialized slavery in Canadian history—before Upper Canada became home to settlements of the Underground Railroad, it was home to enslaved peoples. However, the intersecting stories of Ainse, Frank, and Cutten along the Thames River also complicate narratives of settler colonial development by highlighting the role of complex local identities spanning a newly formed international border, including Indigenous women who owned enslaved peoples.

The border in the Detroit region drastically changed between the late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century, which impacted the lives of Black and Indigenous peoples. In 1780, the border was nonexistent. Britain claimed the region for the two decades following the French and Indian War, but on the ground, it was Indigenous space and the home of many Indigenous peoples, such as the Anishinaabek (including Ojibwe, Odawa, Potawatomi, and Mississauga peoples) and the Wendat (Wyandot/Wyandotte). The international border was formed after Britain and the United States signed the Treaty of Paris in 1783. For towns along the newly formed border such as Detroit, little changed until the implementation of the Jay Treaty in 1796. Once the Jay Treaty was enacted, the British finally ceded their forts in the southern Great Lakes to the Americans and many British residents moved across the newly created border.

In the case of Detroit, British settlers and other immigrants streamed into recently founded communities on the other side of the river. At the same time, Upper Canada and the Northwest Territory (later Michigan Territory) both enacted a series of gradual abolition laws that initially created opportunities for enslaved Black peoples to find freedom on both sides of the international border. As the nineteenth century progressed, shifting legal decisions and laws created a one-way flow of enslaved persons of African descent seeking freedom in Upper Canada. Some newly arrived Black peoples founded communities such as Buxton and Dawn. These towns were important destinations in the Underground Railroad and home to thousands of Black peoples who escaped slavery in the United States. In Canadian popular memory, settlements founded by Black refugees represent a history of racial

1 Duggan had previously purchased Cutten from a corporatized group of Detroiters that included William St. Clair. Duggan paid for Cutten with corn and flour worth 120 pounds New York Currency. Milo M. Quaife, *John Askin Papers*, 2 vols. (Detroit: Detroit Library Commission, 1928), vol. 1, pp. 287–288; Tiya Miles, *The Dawn of Detroit: A Chronicle of Slavery and Freedom in the City of the Straits* (New York: The New Press, 2017), p. 106.

2 Library and Archives Canada (LAC), Upper Canada Land Petitions, RG1 L3, vol. 1, Bundle A Misc. 1788-1843, Microfilm Reel: C-1615, p. 511, "Sally Ainse" Petition 19, 1792 (hereafter Petition 19).

tolerance in Canada.[3] However, only remembering this aspect of the region's history erases other important aspects of Canadian history, including the enforcement of legal systems that targeted Indigenous women's political and economic agency and how enslaved people found opportunities for freedom on both sides of the border at the turn of the nineteenth century.

Historians have examined the history of slavery in Canada since European arrival in the seventeenth century and its eventual decline in Upper and Lower Canada during the nineteenth century, ending with the British Emancipation Act in 1833 (enacted August 1, 1834). Marcel Trudel's pioneering work from 1963 documented the lives of enslaved peoples of Black and Indigenous descent in French Canada and argued that despite a desire for enslaved Black workers, most of those who were enslaved in New France were of Indigenous descent.[4] Afua Cooper has focused on slavery in eighteenth-century Montréal by examining the case of Marie-Joseph Angélique, an enslaved woman of African descent who was executed for allegedly setting the city on fire.[5] Frank Mackey has examined the abolition of slavery in Lower Canada.[6] Other historians, such as Daniel G. Hill, Heike Paul, and Renford Reese, have focussed on Canada's role in the Underground Railroad.[7]

There is also growing literature on slavery and abolition in the Detroit borderland region. Karen Marrero has examined how powerful French Indigenous family networks increased their political power and wealth by controlling the flow of trade goods and enslaved peoples. Gregory Wigmore has focused on the development of the international border in the Detroit River region and the laws that created limited opportunities for freedom on both sides of the border. Christian Ayn Crouch has focused on the experience of Black peoples in the lower Great Lakes, including Detroit, from the 1750s to 1780s. Tiya Miles has illustrated how slavery of peoples of African and Indigenous descent is intertwined with the history of Detroit and the surrounding region.[8] All of these works are part of a body of literature focused on the distinct sociocultural, political, and economic landscape of the Detroit River

3 Abigail Bakan, "Reconsidering the Underground Railroad: Slavery and Racialization in the Making of the Canadian State," *Socialist Studies,* vol. 4, no.1 (Spring 2008), pp. 5–6, 15–16.

4 Marcel Trudel, *Canada's Forgotten Slaves: Two Hundred Years of Bondage* (Montréal: Véhicule Press, 2013).

5 Afua Cooper, "Acts of resistance: Black men and women engage slavery in Upper Canada, 1793-1803," *Ontario History*, vol. 99, no. 1 (2007), pp. 5–17; Afua Cooper, *The Hanging of Angélique: The Untold Story of Canadian Slavery and the Burning of Old Montreal* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007).

6 Frank Mackey, *Done with Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal, 1760–1840* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010).

7 Daniel G Hill, *Freedom Seekers: Blacks In Early Canada* (Toronto: Stoddart Publications, 1994); Sigrid Nicole Gallant, "Perspectives on the Motives for the Migration of African-Americans to and from Ontario, Canada: From the Abolition of Slavery in Canada to the Abolition of Slavery in the United States," *The Journal of Negro History*, vol. 86, no. 3 (Summer 2001), pp. 391–408; Heike Paul, "Out of Chatham: Abolitionism on the Canadian Frontier," *Atlantic Studies*, vol. 8, no. 2 (May 2011), pp. 165–88; Renford Reese, "Canada: The Promised Land for U.S. Slaves," *The Western Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 35, no. 3 (2011), pp. 208–17.

8 Karen L. Marrero, *Detroit's Hidden Channels: The Power of French-Indigenous Families in the Eighteenth Century* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2019); Gregory Wigmore, "Before the Railroad: From Slavery to Freedom in the Canadian-American Borderland," *The Journal of American History,* vol. 98, no. 2 (September 2011), pp. 437–454; Christian Ayn Crouch, "The Black City: African and Indian Exchanges in Pontiac's Upper Country," *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal,* vol. 14, no. 2 (Spring 2016), pp. 284–318; Miles, *The Dawn of Detroit*.

region in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[9] There has been little work, however, on the connections between Indigenous and Black peoples and the relationships between settler colonialism, slavery, and abolitionism on the British Canadian side of the Detroit River.

Focusing on Sally Ainse's property along the north shore of the Thames River and the enslaved peoples tied to the property demonstrates the importance of understanding the Thames River through a regionally distinct lens that complicates the identity categories often found in studies on settler colonialism. This perspective centres the experiences of Indigenous and Black peoples in the settler colonial development of the region and demonstrates how both groups encountered potential opportunities and risked violence. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, increased settlement on both sides of the border limited the space where Indigenous women's property rights were recognized by settler powers. At the same time, enslaved Black people faced an increased risk of violence. However, by the early decades of the nineteenth century, gradual abolition laws passed in American and British territory increased opportunities for Black people to seek freedom on both sides of the border. By the 1820s, this shifted to a one way flow of Black freedom seekers from the United States to Upper Canada and the creation of free Black communities. The complex relationships between settler expansion and racialized violence explain the dramatic changes to the region's political landscape from 1780 to 1865 and illustrate the importance of local identities—including Indigenous women slaveowners and Black freedom seekers—to understanding settler colonialism.

Settler Colonialism and the Thames River

For centuries before the formation of the Underground Railroad, Indigenous peoples asserted their control over the Thames River Valley and the larger Ontario Peninsula, which is roughly bound by Lake Ontario and the Niagara River to the northeast; Lake Erie to the southeast; and Lake Huron, the St. Clair River, Lake St. Clair, and the Detroit River to the west. Wendat, Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe, and other Algonquian peoples all lived in the region or along its edges.[10] The Thames River enters Lake St. Clair on the southeastern shore, almost directly south from Walpole Island or, as it is known to the Anishinaabek, Bkejwanong ("where the waters divide"). At the southwestern end of Lake St. Clair, the Detroit River

9 Catherine Cangany has argued that Detroit was uniquely positioned between the Indigenous interior of the continent and the Atlantic World to become an important metropole in eastern North America. Lawrence Hatter has focused on the challenges British subjects experienced when American presence increased in the region after the Jay Treaty was enacted in 1796. Guillaume Teasdale has examined French land occupation in the Detroit River region during French, British, and American control and demonstrates how French title to land in the Detroit River region was a complex issue that was not resolved until the mid-nineteenth century. Catherine Cangany, *Frontier Seaport: Detroit's Transformation into an Atlantic Entrepôt* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); Lawrence B. A. Hatter, *Citizens of Convenience: The Imperial Origins of American Nationhood on the U.S.-Canadian Border* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2017); Guillaume Teasdale, *Fruits of Perseverance: The French Presence in the Detroit River Region, 1701–1815* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill- Queen's University Press, 2018).

10 Tiya Miles, "Of Waterways and Runways: Reflections on the Great Lakes in Underground Railroad History," *Michigan Quarterly Review*, vol. 50, no. 3 (Summer 2011), pp. 435–436; Teasdale, *Fruits of Perseverance*, p. 11; Marrero, *Detroit's Hidden Channels*, pp. 24–26.

(which the Anishinaabek called Wawaetonong or "crooked way") flows south, eventually connecting to Lake Erie. In the eighteenth century, the Detroit River, the Thames River, and their tributaries were home to a nexus of multiple Indigenous territories.[11] Bkejwanong and Wawaetonong, for example, were located along the southeastern rim of Anishinaabewaki, the homeland of Anishinaabe people. For other Algonquian peoples, such as the Miami, the Detroit River was part of the eastern edge of the territory they regularly traveled. The river was part of the western boundary of Haudenosaunee and nearest to the Seneca, the nation at the western door of the confederacy.[12]

In the mid-seventeenth century, the French arrived in the region in search of furs. European posts were subsequently erected along the edges of the Ontario Peninsula. These posts were along the boundary of the peninsula and none were located in the interior along the Thames River. The closest European American settlement to the Thames River Valley was Detroit, a French fort approximately 50 miles away. Established in 1701, Detroit was located on the north side of the river between Lake St. Clair and Lake Erie. A few decades later, the British built Fort Niagara near the mouth of the east side of the Niagara River at the southwestern end of Lake Ontario and approximately 200 miles from the Thames River. The only forts on Lake Huron were established by the French in the late seventeenth century and were located further north, near the Straits of Mackinac and the St. Mary's River, and further away than Niagara.[13]

In 1763, at the end of the French and Indian War, the French withdrew from North America after suffering defeat to the British. In the Great Lakes, the British maintained control of forts such as Niagara and gained control of forts, such as Detroit, but did not build any more forts. As a result, European American peoples moved through the region as part of the fur trade and military expeditions, but few of them stayed and created homes. During the American Revolutionary War, the Thames River Valley fell within the region claimed by the British. At the end of the war, the Treaty of 1783 divided the lower Great Lakes between British and American territory and the United States technically gained forts, such as Detroit. The British remained in control of both sides of the Detroit River, however, until the enactment of the Jay Treaty in 1796. In the wake of the war, British colonial officials continued to assert a claim to Detroit. Lord Dorchester (previously known as Sir Guy Carleton) served as the first Governor General of Canada and, shortly after the war, unveiled a plan for creating four new judicial districts. The westernmost district, Hesse, encompassed the Ontario peninsula and stretched west (including present day Michigan) and north (to Hudson's Bay). Despite Hesse's large size, Detroit (technically an American holding) was the only major population centre within its borders. When Hesse's courts and land board were established in 1789, the colonial officials used buildings on the legally British south side of the river. The

11 While this region is still home to sovereign Indigenous nations, the Indigenous polities in the region and their locations have shifted from the eighteenth century to the twenty-first century, largely due to processes of settler colonialism.

12 Marrero, *Detroit's Hidden Channels*, pp. 24–26.

13 Helen Hornbeck Tanner, *Atlas of Great Lakes Indian History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), pp. 40–41, 75.

land boards created by Dorchester were in control of land grants until November 1794, after which land claims had to be made through the clerk of peace of the districts.[14]

Although British colonial officials claimed the land that became the District of Hesse, in reality they held no functional jurisdiction outside of Detroit until the early 1790s. Before that time, the region was Indigenous space controlled by the Anishinaabek and other Indigenous peoples.[15] The region's lack of British influence is evident in the history of the Thames River's name. Anishinaabe people call the river Askunessippi, which means the "antlered river." French fur traders and settlers named it La Rivière à la Tranche, which translates to "the river that cuts through."[16] Detroit River region historian Karen Marrero has explained that in the 1790s, British colonial officials adopted an English name—the Thames—from the famous river of the same name in England. It took years, however, for the English name to replace the French because many English speaking locals anglicized the French name into Tranch or Trench River.[17] Detroit was part of a larger borderland region where a variety of peoples converged. Since the 1760s, British men from the Northeast and the Southeast crossed the Appalachians to reach the town.[18] Many of these traders worked as agents for larger merchant firms in New York and Montréal. They competed with the large numbers of merchants and traders with French ancestry who continued to live in the region, including Jacques Dupéron Bâby and Joseph Campau.[19] Many French peoples intermarried with Wendat, Miami, Haudenosaunee, and Anishinaabe peoples.[20] These family networks controlled valuable resources in the region, including trade goods and enslaved Indigenous and Black peoples. Marrero has described these powerful French Indigenous family networks as veins that carried European and Indigenous policy-makers' voices from east to west in an ever-widening arc that transformed Detroit into its own centre of diplomacy and commerce.[21] Indigenous peoples involved in the fur trade also visited the town for the economic opportunities. Some of these peoples travelled from far-flung locations in the Great Lakes and Ohio Valley while others lived on land adjacent to Detroit or in nearby regions, such as at Saginaw Bay.

In the decades following the American Revolutionary War, there was a sudden and dramatic increase of settlers into the Thames River Valley as British Loyalists resettled across the recently formed international border between Canada and the United States. Political theorists such as Patrick Wolfe and Lorenzo Veracini have demonstrated how nations such as the United States and Canada were founded on colonial structures that extend into the present. While extraction based colonialism relies on the domination of Indigenous labour forces, settler colonialism relies on the eradication of Indigenous presence, thus allowing settlers to imagine themselves

14 Cangany, *Frontier Seaport,* p. 122; Teasdale, *Fruits of Perseverance*, pp. 74–75.
15 Tanner, *Atlas of Great Lakes Indian History*, p. 80.
16 Marrero, *Detroit's Hidden Channels,* p. xviii.
17 Marrero, *Detroit's Hidden Channels,* p. xviii.
18 Miles, "Of Waterways and Runaways," p. 436.
19 Cangany, *Frontier Seaport*, p. 27.
20 Marrero, *Detroit's Hidden Channels,* pp. 53, 82–83.
21 Marrero, *Detroit's Hidden Channels,* p. 63.

as the virtuous and rightful inhabitants of the land. According to Wolfe, settler colonialism depends on settlers' desire and need for access to Indigenous land, the erasure of Indigenous claims to the land, and the subsequent development of a new colonial society that believes it has a legitimate claim to the land.[22]

In settler colonialism's strictest form, as political theorist Carole Patemen has explained, settlers refuse to recognize Indigenous sovereignty and the land title of Indigenous nations by deeming their lands unoccupied and vacant. Nations such as the United States and Canada, however, also implemented a modified system of settler colonialism by acknowledging Indigenous sovereignty and then using this acknowledgement as a way to claim lands.[23] Treaties, for example, acknowledge Indigenous sovereignty but are also used by British Canadian and American officials to shrink Indigenous territory and remove Indigenous peoples from their lands. Even in this partial version of settler colonialism, settlers occupy and claim unceded territory by violating treaties and agreements over land grants and cessions. As a result, in many areas across Canada, including parts of southern Ontario, settlers continue to occupy unceded territory.

In his study of the experiences of Indigenous communities and enslaved Black peoples in early-nineteenth-century Georgia, Patrick Wolfe has argued that once Indigenous peoples are removed, settlers use cheap, racialized labour to profit from the land's resources.[24] Similarly, Lorenzo Veracini has argued that settler colonialism consists of a tripartite relationship between settlers, Indigenous peoples, and exogenous others. As settlers dispossess Indigenous peoples of the land and replace Indigenous claims to sovereignty with their own, they bring in exogenous others, who serve as a racialized labour force. Exogenous others are coerced and coopted to serve settler colonial projects while also targeted for permanent segregation or assimilatory selective inclusion.[25] In the southeastern United States, European Americans forcibly removed Indigenous peoples and brought in enslaved Black peoples to work the land.

22 Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol. 8 no. 4 (December 2006), p. 388.

23 This modified version of settler colonialism is apparent in eastern and central Canada where treaties were signed throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Other areas of Canada, such as British Columbia, are unceded territory—no treaties were signed. Canadian settler states laid claim to these lands through "terra nullius" policies in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Some parts of southern Ontario are also unceded territory. For example, the Grand River Mohawk's land claim, often known as both the Grand River land dispute and the Caledonia land dispute, continues into the present day. For the versions of settler colonialism, see Carole Patemen, "The Settler Contract," in Carole Patemen and Charles W. Mills, eds., *Contract and Domination* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2007), pp. 46–53. For unceded territory in southern Ontario, see "Conflict in Caledonia: A timeline of the Grand River land dispute," *APTN National News* (Winnipeg, Manitoba), October 15, 2020, accessed June 24, 2021, https://www.aptnnews.ca/national-news/conflict-in-caledonia-a-timeline-of-the-grand-river-land-dispute/; Justin Chandler, "Broken promises, unceded land: The history behind the Land Back Lane protest," *TVO* (Toronto, Ontario), January 5, 2021, accessed June 24, 2021), https://www.tvo.org/article/broken-promises-unceded-land-the-history-behind-the-land-back-lane-protest; Desmond Brown and Samantha Craggs, "Year-long Six Nations protest forces cancellation of major development in Caledonia, Ont," *CBC News* (Toronto, Ontario), July 2, 2021, accessed July 2, 2021, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/caledonia-development-cancelled-protests-1.6088130?fbclid=IwAR3a5l8N5n9hb-QOfpKFz1PF1WrQ3HgilSiJZAlrefY7eYIjTUZ4j56pj70.

24 Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination," p. 392.

25 Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), pp. 16–27.

Scholars have differing views on the role of exogenous others in Canadian settler colonialism. Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua have asserted that Canadian antiracist theorists tended to ignore the Indigenous peoples whose land they were on and, as a result, were furthering the colonial project that Canada continues to be engaged in. They have also suggested that people of colour in Canada should be considered "settlers" on Indigenous land.[26] Nandita Sharma and Cynthia Wright have pushed for a more nuanced understanding of the divide between "native" and "non-native" and have argued that these distinctions are a response to the intricate webs of interdependency that connect people across the globe.[27] In 2009, Bonita Lawrence revised her earlier position with Zainab Amadahy, noting that peoples who were forcibly taken and transported from their homelands and enslaved on other peoples' lands (such as Black peoples in North America) are different from "quintessential settlers." Lawrence and Amadahy have argued, however, that free Black peoples in Canada have been involved in some form of settlement processes.[28]

While political theories illustrate larger transnational and national settler colonial trends, historians focusing on the Detroit River and Ohio Valley region have argued that broad metanarratives are not always useful in understanding Indigenous and European American relations in the lower Great Lakes. Focusing on the local level, they propose, allows for more attentive analysis of the backstory of these larger narratives.[29] This local lens is particularly useful for examining the Thames River Valley. Sally Ainse's property is a reminder of the centrality of Indigenous peoples to the history of the southwestern Ontario Peninsula. Her life and identity also illustrate how such categories as "settlers" and "exogenous others" can be blurred. Lorenzo Veracini has argued that hybrid identity forms (such as mestizaje) "structurally upset a settler population economy."[30] While at first glance, the Thames River Valley appears to fit neatly into the modified settler colonial paradigm, distinctive local identities—Indigenous women property owners Black freedom seekers—upset the settler economy.

In the late 1780s, there were few people in the Thames River Valley who were not of Indigenous descent. In May of 1790, Anishinaabe and Wendat leaders negotiated a treaty with Samuel McKee, an Indian Agent and representative of the British Crown, and, in an agreement known as the McKee Purchase, ceded their land in the southwestern portion of the Ontario Peninsula.[31] Subsequently, Anglo and European settlers flooded into the region. However, viewing the Thames

26 Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua, "Decolonizing Antiracism," *Social Justice*, vol. 32, no. 4 (2005), pp. 120–143.

27 Nandita Sharma and Cynthia Wright, "Decolonizing Resistance, Challenging Colonial States," *Social Justice*, vol. 35, no. 3 (2008), pp. 93–111.

28 Zainab Amadahy and Bonita Lawrence, "Indigenous Peoples and Black People in Canada: Settlers or Allies?" in A. Kempf, ed., *Breaching the Colonial Contract: Anti-Colonialism in the U.S. and Canada* (Springer: New York, 2009), pp. 105–136.

29 Charles Beatty Medina and Melissa Rinehart, eds., *Contested Territories: Native Americans and Non-Natives in the Lower Great Lakes, 1700–1850,* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2012), p. xxx.

30 Veracini, *Settler colonialism*, p. 30.

31 Larry Nelson, *A Man of Distinction Among Them: Alexander McKee and the Ohio Country Frontier, 1754–1799* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1999), pp. 139–140.

River Valley through a local lens challenges the assumption that settlers' access to Indigenous land and the expansion of cheap, racialized labour, such as chattel slavery, were invariably related and reveals the tenuous nature of settler colonial categories. In particular, focusing on the property of Sally Ainse illustrates both how free Black peoples in Canada were involved in settlement processes and how some Indigenous peoples relied on enslaved labour. In other words, centring Ainse's property shows how the growth of settler colonial development and racialized hierarchies are intrinsically connected.

Sally Ainse's Property Along the Thames River

Sally Ainse, a multiethnic Oneida woman, moved to Detroit during the American Revolutionary War to expand her prosperous fur trade business. Originally from the Susquehanna Valley, she identified as Oneida throughout most of her life and asserted kin ties to Oneida communities. She also had connections to Conoy, Nanticoke, and Shawnee peoples.[32] Since Oneidas are matrilineal and the Shawnee, Nanticoke, and Conoy are patrilineal, her mother may have been Oneida and her father might have been some combination of the closely tied Algonquian social formations from the Atlantic coast. After divorcing her mixed ancestry husband Andrew Montour (the son of the renowned interpreter Madame Montour), she worked as a trader throughout the Great Lakes, in the Mohawk River Valley region in western New York to Fort Michilimackinac in the upper Great Lakes.[33]

In multiethnic Detroit, Sally Ainse lived in the heart of town along the busy commercial sector of Ste. Anne Street. She was a successful trader who had large accounts with many prominent merchants and who used her wealth to become both a landowner and an owner of enslaved peoples.[34] Ainse is first recorded as an owner of enslaved people in the Detroit census of 1779. She also appears as a

32 Conoy peoples are a coalescent people consisting of Piscataways and other Algonquian survivors of colonial violence in the Chesapeake. During the early eighteenth century, some Nanticoke, Conoy, and Susquehannock communities were incorporated into the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. In the 1730s, some Susquehannock, Conoy, and Shawnee people blended together at Logstown, a Shawnee village that became the center of trade, politics, and diplomacy due to its location near the forks of the Ohio River. For more on Ainse's life, including her marriage, see Frederick Hamil, *Sally Ainse: Fur Trader*, (Detroit: Algonquin Club, 1939). For Ainse's description of her early life and marriage, see LAC, Upper Canada Land Petitions, RG 1 L3, vol. 16, Bundle A Misc. 1788–1843, Microfilm Reel C-1615, pp. 503-505, "Sarah Monture" Petition 17, 1789 (hereafter Upper Canada Land Petition 17). For Ainse's Conoy, Nanticoke, and Shawnee kinship ties, see Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Richard Peters Papers, vol. 44, Richard Peters Diary (no. 15) September-November 1758, October 25, 1758; Moravian Archives (MA), Box 152, Folder 7, David Zeisberger Diary, November 7, 1785; LAC, Upper Canada Land Petitions, RG 1 L3, vol. 3, Bundle A4 1796-1798, Microfilm C-1609, p. 842, "Sarah Ainse" Petition 45, 1797 (hereafter Upper Canada Land Petition 45). For connections between Shawnee, Nanticoke, and Piscataway peoples, see American Philosophical Society (APS), Frank G. Speck Papers, Mss.Ms.126, Box 24, "The Nanticoke Community of Delaware," 1915; APS, Frank G. Speck Papers, Mss.Ms.126, Box 22, Folder 1, "Indians of the Eastern Shore of Maryland," 1922; Stephen Warren, *The Worlds the Shawnees Made: Migration and Violence in Early America*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), pp. 136-180.

33 For more context on what brought Ainse to the Detroit River region, see Emily Macgillivray and Tiya Miles, "'She Lived in Fashion': A Native Woman Trader's Household in the Detroit River Region," in Karen Marrero and Andrew Sturtevant, eds., *A Place in Common: Telling Histories of Early Detroit* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, forthcoming).

34 Quaife, *John Askin Papers,* vol. 1, p. 193.

slave owner in the 1782 Detroit census.[35] In 1780, Sally Ainse bought a tract of land from Anishinaabe friends that stretched from the mouth of the Thames River (at the southeast corner of Lake St. Clair) for 25 miles along the north side of the river to where the Thames intersects with McGregor's Creek, near present-day downtown Chatham, Ontario.[36] In 1787, Ainse moved from crowded, bustling Detroit to this spacious acreage on a key waterway. At her property, she maintained her house, tended gardens and orchards, and prepared food for sustenance and trade.[37] Political shifts across the region, however, quickly threatened her ownership of the land.

Following the McKee Purchase, British officials created the province of Upper Canada, which was named after its proximity to the headwaters of the St. Lawrence River and encompassed the Ontario Peninsula.[38] Subsequently, a land board was formed in each district in the new province. Ainse's property fell under the district of Hesse. While the land board initially intended to settle the north shore of Lake Erie, townships could not be laid on the lakeshore because the high banks impeded the ability to access the water. The Thames River had accessible shores and was deep enough to navigate by boat, so the board decided to develop townships for Loyalist British settlers there instead.[39] Settlers flocked to the region; Moravian missionaries at the town of Fairfield, upstream from Ainse's property, described the drastic change: In 1792 there were no settlements within thirty miles of their community, yet by 1795, settlers lived within three miles of the town.[40]

In the wake of British expansion along the shores of the Thames River, Sally Ainse engaged in a 25-year legal battle against the land board and the Executive Council of Upper Canada to attempt to have her property ownership legally recognized by the British Crown.[41] Ainse filed her first petition with the land board in 1789.[42] She included her deed for the land from the Anishinaabek and claimed her tract was excluded from the McKee Purchase. On multiple occasions, the Anishinaabek testified in support of Ainse's claim, but the land board continually denied her title, asserting that the McKee Purchase applied to all the land in the

35 *Michigan Pioneer Historical Collection* (MPHC), 40 volumes. (Lansing: Thorp & Godfrey, 1888), vol. 10, pp. 316, 609.

36 There are multiple records of the land sale. For instance, Upper Canada Land Petition 45; LAC, Upper Canada Civil Secretary's Sundries, RG5A1 vol. 8, Microfilm reel C4505, pp. 3262–3264 (hereafter Upper Canada Sundries); and LAC, Detroit Notarial Register, vol. 6, 1776-1784, p. 143. For Ainse's life as a trader, see Hamil, *Sally Ainse*; Alan Taylor, *The Divided Ground: Indians, Settlers, and the Northern Borderland of the American Revolution* (New York: Random House, 2006), pp. 398–399; Cangany, *Frontier Seaport,* pp.18–22; Macgillivray and Miles, "'She Lived in Fashion.'

37 Upper Canada Sundries, p. 3284.

38 Cangany, *Frontier Seaport,* p. 124.

39 Frederick Hamil, *The Valley of the Lower Thames*, *1640–1850* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), p. 16.

40 Linda Sabathy-Judd, *Moravians in Upper Canada: The Diary of the Indian Mission of Fairfield on the Thames 1792–1813* (North York, ON: Champlain Society, 1999), p. 89.

41 For example, Upper Canada Land Petition 17; LAC, Upper Canada Land Petitions, RG1 L3, vol. 16, Bundle A Misc. 1788-1843, Microfilm reel C-1615, p. 508-9, "Sally Ainse" Petition 18, 1789 (hereafter Upper Canada Land Petition 18); LAC, Upper Canada Land Petitions, RG1 L3, vol. 1, Bundle A 1796-1840, Microfilm reel C-1609, p. 52-7, "Sally Ainse" Petition 21, 1809 (hereafter as Upper Canada Land Petition 21); Upper Canada Land Petition 45.

42 Teasdale, *Fruits of Perseverance,* pp. 74–75.

area.[43] Other influential Indigenous leaders in the region, such as Joseph Brant (Mohawk), spoke up in support of Ainse. Like Ainse, Brant had a prosperous and influential career. He also owned enslaved Black people.[44] Even John Graves Simcoe, the Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada, initially sided with Ainse and ordered a deed be issued to her.[45] Yet, the land board continually delayed the issue and hired a surveyor who claimed he did not know a person named Sally Ainse and only knew "Sarah Willson an Indian woman has laid her claim to a large Tract … if it can be said [that] she has any just claim to land there, the land cannot justly be deemed her property alone, as her husband, Mr. Wilson is now living at Niagara or near it."[46]

Sally Ainse had multiple intimate partnerships with Indigenous and British men throughout her life, including a short relationship with merchant John Wilson during her years at Detroit. While no marriage records exist for any of Ainse's relationships, British officials may have assumed that Ainse and Wilson were married "in the manner of the country," a term used during the fur trade to describe the frequent marriages between French (and later British and American) traders and Indigenous women throughout the Great Lakes.[47] Alternately, the surveyor may have purposefully manipulated Ainse's identity by claiming she was Wilson's wife. Under British common law, no married women could hold legal title to real estate.[48] This was in stark contrast to many Indigenous polities, such as the Oneida and other Haudenosaunee nations, where women were not prohibited from possessing property.[49]

Other Indigenous women who owned land in Upper Canada were also targeted by settler colonial regimes during the early nineteenth century. For instance, in 1846, Nahnebahwequay, an Ojibwe woman, purchased 200 acres of land from the Newash Ojibwe band at Owen Sound on the Lake Huron shoreline of the Ontario Peninsula. After building a prosperous homestead on the land, Nahnebahwequay and her husband (a Methodist minister) moved several times in the region. When they returned to Owen Sound almost a decade later, they found her land had been surveyed, laid out in town lots, and offered for sale by the government of Upper

43 Upper Canada Land Petition 45; Upper Canada Sundries, p. 3260–3263, 3287, 3291, 3294.

44 Benjamin Drew, *A North-Side view of slavery. The Refugee: or the Narratives of the Fugitive Slaves in Canada* (Boston: John P. Jewett, 1856), pp. 192–195, accessed June 28, 2021, https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/drew/drew.html#p192; Archives of Ontario, "Sophia Burthen Pooley: Part of the Family?," *Enslaved Africans in Upper Canada*, accessed June 28, 2021, http://www.archives.gov.on.ca/en/explore/online/slavery/sophia_pooley.aspx.

45 Upper Canada Sundries, pp. 3278–3292.

46 Upper Canada Sundries, p. 3282.

47 Sylvia Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur-Trade Society, 1670–1870* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press,1980; 1983). Recent scholarship has emphasized how Indigenous women used intermarriage as way to extend kinship ties. For example, Odawa women incorporated French men into their communities through marriages in the Upper Great Lakes; see Michael McDonnell, *Masters of Empire: Great Lakes Indians and the Making of America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2015), pp. 101–109; Susan Sleeper-Smith, "'An Unpleasant Transaction on this Frontier': Challenging Female Autonomy and Authority at Michilimackinac," *Journal of the Early Republic*, vol. 25, no. 3 (Fall 2005), pp. 417–418.

48 Taylor, *The Divided Ground,* p. 401; Anne Marie Wambeke, "Robert and Elizabeth Rogers: The Dissolution of an Early American Marriage," in Denver Brunsman & Joel Stone, eds., *Revolutionary Detroit: Portraits in Political and Cultural Change 1760–1805* (Detroit: Detroit Historical Society, 2010), p. 49.

49 Taylor, *The Divided Ground,* p. 401.

Canada. During Nahnebahwequay's travels, the Indian Department secured claim to the land by treaty and refused to recognize the validity of Nahnebahwequay and her husband's land title. Unlike Sally Ainse, Nahnebahwequay travelled to England and successfully petitioned to get her land back. Other Ojibwe families who lost their land through the same process, however, were unsuccessful in securing their land.[50] Guillaume Teasdale has demonstrated how French settlers successfully petitioned the land board throughout the 1780s for land grants along the Thames River and adjacent waterways.[51] The relative ease with which French settlers received land titles stands in stark contrast with the experiences of women such as Ainse and Nahnebahwequay. In Ainse's case, her identity as an Indigenous woman provided British officials the excuse they needed to deny her claim.

At her Thames River property, Sally Ainse was unable to regain the prosperity she once enjoyed at Detroit. Along with devoting resources to her legal battle, American restrictions on vessels from British territory implemented in the early nineteenth century limited her ability to trade at Detroit. In the face of these challenges, Ainse continued to seek compensation for her property in 1808, 1809, 1813, and 1815; she remained unsuccessful by the time of her death in 1823.[52] Before her death, Ainse had been renting property in the nearby community of Sandwich, on the southern shore of the Detroit River—no longer living on her Thames River property.

Sally Ainse's move to the Thames River was initially motivated by her desire to extend her trading business. Her decision could be viewed as modelling the practice of prominent merchants in the Detroit River region, who were also agriculturalists and farmers controlling large tracts of land.[53] However, in a number of ways Ainse's goals were strikingly different from those of the European American settlers. Ainse was not establishing a new political order in the region: At a time when local governments enforced colonial laws aimed to diminish Indigenous women's political and economic power, Ainse was establishing a household where she had authority over her own land and resources. Joseph Brant illustrated the difference between Ainse's intentions and those of European American settlers when he informed John Graves Simcoe that the Haudenosaunee would "think it very bad should the land jobbing Detroit merchants gain against Sally Ainse."[54]

Sally Ainse's property partly followed the trajectory stipulated by the modified settler colonial paradigm discussed by the above theorists: From 1780 to 1790 the tract of land along the north side of the Thames River shifted from the Anishinaabek to Ainse, who ran her homestead through the labour of those she held in slavery. Yet focusing on Ainse's property also complicates the settler colonial paradigm by

50 Donald B. Smith, "Nahnebahwequay," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 9 (Toronto: University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003), accessed June 23, 2021, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/nahnebahwequay_9E.html.

51 Teasdale, *Fruits of Perseverance,* pp. 76–82.

52 Upper Canada Land Petition 21, pp. 52, 57; Upper Canada Sundries, pp. 3254, 3295–3302.

53 Miles, *Dawn of Detroit,* pp. 25–26.

54 Land jobbing is a type of land speculating or buying large tracts of land with the intent of reselling them to make a profit. Wisconsin Historical Society (WHS), Lyman Draper Manuscripts, vol. 12, Joseph Brant to John Simcoe, April 3 1796.

highlighting the need for a regional lens that accounts for the role of local identities, such as Indigenous and mixed ancestry women slaveowners.

Slavery, Property, and Racial Violence in the Detroit River Borderlands

Sally Ainse first appears as an owner of enslaved peoples in the Detroit census in 1779, which lists her as owner of 3 enslaved people.[55] In a 1782 census, she is listed as owning one enslaved woman.[56] Her ownership of enslaved peoples may seem to reflect the increased British and American presence in the Great Lakes and Ainse's acquiescence to Anglo American values. Focusing only on assimilative narratives, however, erases the larger history of Indigenous slavery practised in the Great Lakes and elides how Ainse's ownership of enslaved peoples was part of a broader pattern of investing in enslaved peoples to run successful fur trading businesses in the Detroit River borderland.

Before the arrival of Europeans, Indigenous people from various polities dealt with political conflicts by partaking in reciprocal slave raiding, trading, and negotiating. These practices were driven by the political and cultural imperatives of enslavement and the desire to create alliances within the multiethnic, politically fragmented world of the Great Lakes.[57] Indigenous slaveries, unlike those which fuelled chattel slavery, were not motivated by a high economic demand for enslaved people. Captured slaves were adopted by their captors in varying ways: Sometimes they would replace a deceased family member and become fully integrated members of the family; other times they would become lowly ranked members of a household.[58] Since Indigenous polities did not maintain a state structure controlled by coercion, enslavement was a main strategy to deal with prisoners of war until the enslaved accepted membership within their captors' community.

As French and British traders and officials inserted themselves into the political and economic networks of the Great Lakes, Indigenous social formations transitioned from Indigenous forms of slavery to trading in enslaved Indigenous peoples as commodities. When French fur traders travelled throughout the Great Lakes in the first half of the eighteenth century, they sometimes acquired and traded in enslaved Indigenous peoples to make alliances with other Indigenous polities such as the Odawa (Ottawa) and Illinois. Indigenous allies of the French often acquired enslaved people from their political enemies; fur traders usually brought these people to larger settlements in the lower Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Valley, such as Detroit and Montréal.[59] In the process, French colonists acquired a cheap

55 MPHC, vol. 10, p. 316.
56 MPHC, vol. 10, p. 609.
57 Brett Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance: Indigenous and Atlantic Slaveries in New France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), pp. 24, 29.
58 Alan Greer, *Mohawk Saint: Catherine Tekawitha and the Jesuits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 26; Sophie White, *Wild Frenchmen and Frenchified Indians: Material Culture and Race in Colonial Louisiana*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), p. 103. Roland Viau, *Enfants du néant et mangeurs d'âmes: Guerre, culture et société en Iroquoisie ancienne* (Montréal: Boréal, 1997).
59 Brett Rushforth, "'A Little Flesh We Offer You': The Origins of Indian Slavery in New France," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 60, no. 4 (October 2003), pp. 789, 793.

source of forced labour that was more accessible than enslaved peoples of African descent.[60]

During this transition process, Indigenous forms of slavery collided with transatlantic chattel slavery, especially at important economic and political hubs such as Detroit. Powerful French Indigenous families in Detroit controlled resources like trade goods and enslaved peoples as a way to bolster their prosperity and political standing.[61] The British gained control of Detroit in the early 1760s, at the end of the French and Indian War. During the first decades of British control at Detroit, British settlers' desire for enslaved Black peoples, access to New York markets, and slave raids in southern territory led to an eightfold increase of the number of enslaved Black people.[62] Following the American Revolutionary War, the slave trade at Detroit continued to grow and the number of enslaved Black people increased.[63] When Americans gained control of the town in 1796 (after the enactment of the Jay Treaty), 200 to 300 enslaved people of Black and Indigenous descent resided in the community. In places such as Detroit, Indigenous peoples fell into a liminal space among the developing racialized hierarchies. On the one hand, if Indigenous peoples were enslaved, settlers viewed them as similar to Black peoples: part of a racial group fundamentally different than European Americans. On the other hand, Indigenous peoples were also members of sovereign polities in North America. Due to the essential roles of Indigenous political organizing and commercial trade networks in the region, it was impossible for Indigenous peoples to be singularly reduced to the degraded category of "slave" and racialized as a fixed, inferior caste.[64]

In the wake of the Jay Treaty, prominent Loyalist families moved to British territory on the southern side of the river and brought the enslaved people they owned with them. Along both sides of the river, elite families such as the Elliots, the Girtys, the McKees, the Bâbys, the Grants, the Macombs, the Askins, the Campaus, and the Mackintoshes owned enslaved people.[65] The slave-owning community on the British side of the river was part of a larger pattern of elite families in Upper Canada who owned enslaved Black peoples. Around the turn of the nineteenth century, there were 14,000 settler colonists and approximately 500 enslaved people in Upper Canada.[66] Despite the relatively small number of enslaved peoples in the colony, owners of enslaved people were the wealthiest and most influential settlers in the main towns, including Niagara, York, and Kingston. These families wielded power in the colonial government: Six of the sixteen members elected to the House

60 Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance,* p. 29; White, *Wild Frenchmen and Frenchified Indians*, p. 103. For more on how Indigenous peoples participated in reciprocal forms of slave raiding, trading, and negotiating throughout the Great Lakes, see Michael Witgen, *An Infinity of Nations: How the Native New World Shaped Early North America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), pp. 122–123, 142, 232, 310.

61 Marrero, *Detroit's Hidden Channels*, p. 48.

62 Miles, *Dawn of Detroit*, p. 120.

63 Miles, *Dawn of Detroit*, p. 102.

64 Miles, *Dawn of Detroit,* p. 73.

65 Miles, *Dawn of Detroit*, pp. 60, 120.

66 Wigmore, "Before the Railroad," p. 439.

of Assembly were owners of enslaved peoples.[67] Just a few short decades before the height of the Underground Railroad, families who owned enslaved Black peoples influenced the political and economic landscape of the Detroit borderland region and Upper Canada.

Throughout her life, Sally Ainse was exposed to Indigenous, Atlantic, and hybrid forms of slavery. In Haudenosaunee communities, where Ainse was raised, women influenced ceremonies and protocols regarding slavery, captivity, and adoption. They might choose to ritually adopt war captives to replenish their communities' populations.[68] Their actions were shaped by Indigenous customs, protocols, and traditions. As Ainse travelled to colonial hubs in Pennsylvania and New York, she was exposed to racialized chattel slavery. As she expanded her business into western fur trade hubs such as Detroit and Michimackinac, she lived in communities practising a hybrid Indigenous–Atlantic form of slavery. While Ainse's ownership of enslaved peoples was informed by Haudenosaunee practices of captivity and slavery, it was also distinctly different. Ainse's ownership of enslaved peoples was shaped by such market forces as her involvement in the commercial trade of goods and her goal to own property under expanding settler colonial regimes.

Sally Ainse's possession of enslaved peoples was distinct from the practices of Haudenosaunee women and representative of a different pattern: Ainse was part of an elite group of Indigenous and mixed ancestry women in the Detroit River region who owned enslaved peoples to help with subsistence and agricultural labour. Indigenous and mixed ancestry women who owned enslaved peoples were often married to French and British men.[69] Marie Suzanne Richard, for instance, was of French and Miami descent. She inherited enslaved peoples, including an Indigenous woman named Marie-Marguerite, when her husband died. Tacumwah, a Miami woman, acquired enslaved peoples by trading in rum.[70] Other prominent families who owned enslaved peoples in the region included European American men married to Indigenous women. In the wake of the American Revolution, Loyalist Matthew Elliott moved to the southern side of the river and developed a large farm where he lived an upper-class life with his Shawnee wife. Enslaved peoples owned by Elliott laboured on his 2000-acre property, which included a whipping post made from an iron ring and shackles attached to a locust tree. Observers described the property as a plantation. Along with working on the Elliott property, enslaved peoples also attended to his wife.[71] At a time when British colonial regimes sought to limit the movement of economically prosperous and independent Indigenous women, this elite Shawnee woman was transported throughout the region by her husband's enslaved men.[72]

67 Wigmore, "Before the Railroad," p. 440.
68 Viau, *Enfants du néant et mangeurs d'âmes.*
69 Karen Marrero, "Founding Families: Power and Authority of Mixed French and Native Lineages in Eighteenth Century Detroit*"* (PhD dissertation, Yale University, 2011), pp. 271–272; McDonnell, *Masters of Empire,* pp. 102–105.
70 Miles, *Dawn of Detroit,* p. 60.
71 Miles, *Dawn of Detroit,* p. 111.
72 Marerro, *Detroit's Hidden Channels,* pp. 109–110.

While Sally Ainse and a select group of Indigenous and mixed ancestry women owned enslaved people in the Detroit River area, other Indigenous women in the region were enslaved or at a significant risk of enslavement. In fact, Indigenous women made up the largest portion of the enslaved population in fur trade communities. One of the significant differences between Indigenous women who owned slaves and Indigenous women who were enslaved was their kinship networks: Indigenous women slave owners had kinship connections to influential Indigenous and/or European American families in the region, whereas enslaved Indigenous women in the Great Lakes were outsiders who lacked kinship connections to protect them from the risk of enslavement.

The prominent Askin family is illustrative of the intricate dynamic of Indigenous women as both enslavers and the enslaved. John Askin was an Irish fur trader who arrived in the Great Lakes in the mid-eighteenth century and became a wealthy merchant and influential property owner. His daughter, Catherine or "Kitty" Askin, was born from Manette, an enslaved Indigenous woman who was owned by Askin until he legally freed her in 1766. Kitty was raised by Askin and his second wife, Marie-Archange Barthe, and had no connections to Manette or her Indigenous community. Marie-Archange was part of the Barthe family on her father's side and the Campau family on her mother's side—both were prominent French slaveholding families in Detroit.[73] Although Kitty Askin's biological mother was an enslaved Indigenous woman, as a teenager and young adult, Kitty owned and benefitted from the labour of an enslaved Indigenous woman named Cecile. Tiya Miles has explained how Kitty "luxuriated in the lifestyle generated by the sale of other Indigenous girls, whose impending sexual subjugation allowed her to enjoy a proper continental wedding."[74]

It is impossible to know the specific experiences of enslaved peoples owned by Indigenous and mixed ancestry women such as Sally Ainse, Marie Suzanne Richard, Tacumwah, or Kitty Askin. While it is important to recognize that enslaved peoples owned by Indigenous and mixed-ancestry women might have had a range of experiences, it is also dangerous to try and tease out the differences between these experiences. Tiya Miles has noted that comparing degrees of enslavement is a hollow and violent exercise, even if it is one formerly enslaved peoples found necessary to engage in.[75]

It is unclear exactly how many enslaved peoples Sally Ainse brought with her from Detroit to the Thames River and it is also unclear if she acquired more enslaved peoples after the move. Due to the extent of her holdings and the amount of infrastructure she had built within a few years, local historians have surmised that Ainse must have had more people than her one known enslaved Black man (named Frank) to work on the property.[76] It is possible that Ainse acquired Frank after her move to the property in 1787, but she probably brought him from Detroit. It is also

73 Miles, *Dawn of Detroit,* p. 89.
74 Miles, *Dawn of Detroit,* p. 91.
75 Tiya Miles, *Ties That Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2005), p. 43.
76 Kent Black Historical Society (KBHS), Sally Ainse, Binder H-2, "Unknown Sally Ainse Article," p. 6, accessed February 29, 2016, https://ckbhs.files.wordpress.com/2015/07/sally-ainse01.pdf.

unclear if Frank is listed as one of the enslaved people on the Detroit censuses. Ainse is listed as owning an enslaved man (and three women) in the 1779 census, but no men in the 1782 census. Ainse may have bought Frank after 1782, or Frank may be the enslaved man from 1779 who was then rented or leased to one of Ainse's neighbours in 1782. Other than Frank, it is uncertain if Ainse owned other enslaved peoples of African descent or Indigenous descent. The Detroit censuses do not mention the enslaved people's races, and the amount of both enslaved Black and Indigenous peoples in Detroit increased during the American Revolution, leaving few contextual hints about the races of the enslaved people Ainse owned.[77]

Like other owners of enslaved peoples in the region, Sally Ainse aimed to own property where she could harvest natural resources, increase her agricultural development, and rent plots of land to family friends.[78] Charging rent created capital and income streams she could use to increase her investment in trade goods, acreage, and enslaved peoples. On both sides of the border in the Detroit River region, owning land reinforced and enhanced the enslavement of people and vice versa. Enslaved peoples were used as capital to acquire land and the labour of these people was used to make land habitable and profitable.[79] While Ainse's goals sometimes paralleled those of European American property owners—like increasing her land holdings and trading business—they also differed. Like other Indigenous women who owned enslaved peoples, Ainse acquired property to exert her own political and economic power. She invested in multiple forms of property with the end goal of acquiring the legal title to her land and using it to generate income through rental plots and the production of trade goods.

Shortly after moving to the property, Sally Ainse sold a plot of land to William Brown, a merchant from Detroit.[80] This sale led to a series of legal disputes demonstrating how both land and enslaved Black peoples were sold as property. The legal disputes also illustrate how violence towards enslaved people increased at the same time as Indigenous women's property claims were threatened. The lot sold to Brown was 9 acres wide and 150 acres in depth, bounded on the east by Ainse's homestead and on the west by a plot she had given to her son Nicholas Montour.[81] In April of 1787, Brown resold the land to Arthur McCormick, an assistant storekeeper in the British Indian Department.[82] In March of 1791, McCormick sold his property to Thomas Duggan, an officer in the British Indian Department. In 1789, Ainse sold the neighbouring plot to Joseph Cissney from River Rouge. Cissney paid 200 pounds for the 12-acre tract, which included a house built with a cellar and stable and six acres of clear fenced land.[83] Along with the land, Ainse sold Cissney

77 LAC, Detroit Notarial Registers, vol. 3, p. 344. For the 1779 and 1782 census, see MPHC, vol. 10, pp. 316, 609.

78 Upper Canada Sundries, p. 3284.

79 Miles, *Dawn of Detroit,* pp. 76, 85.

80 KBHS, Sally Ainse, Binder H-2, Frederick C. Hamil, "Slave Exchanged for Dover Farm Later Dies in Sandwich Gallows," p. 85, accessed February 29, 2016, https://ckbhs.files.wordpress.com/2015/07/sally-ainse02.pdf.

81 Hamil, "Slave Exchanged," p. 85.

82 Hamil, "Slave Exchanged," p. 85.

83 Cissney never lived on the property, allowed the house to go to ruin, and apparently let several apple trees be dug up and carried off. Petition 19.

the enslaved Black man named Frank, who was about 25 years old at the time of the sale.[84]

After the McKee Purchase, the government of Upper Canada sent surveyors to the Thames River; they found that Thomas Duggan and Joseph Cissney's farms both fell within the same lot of Dover Township East: Lot 7. In 1793, when the land board issued grants to property owners, they only recognized Duggan's right to the lot. They told Cissney to seek compensation for his losses from Sally Ainse, who, according to the land board, had no right to sell the land in the first place.[85] The land board's decision was supported by the paternalistic Royal Proclamation of 1763, which stated that "no private person" should purchase lands from "the said Indians of any Lands reserved to the said Indians."[86] The land board, however, regularly granted land titles to French settlers who obtained their property from Indigenous peoples during the decades between British acquisition of the territory in 1760 and the McKee Purchase of 1790. The land board refused to recognize Ainse as a titled property holder (and therefore refused to recognize her right to legally sell her property) because she purchased the land from Indigenous peoples, yet the land board often granted titles to White men who squatted on land along the Thames River. In the eyes of the board, squatting was considered a legitimate way to gain property, but purchasing lands from Indigenous peoples was not. Furthermore, the board ignored that *both* Cissney's and Duggan's claims to the property were initiated by Ainse. While Ainse's direct sale to Cissney remained unrecognized and illegitimate in the eyes of the land board, Duggan's claim was legitimate because two British men (McCormick and Brown) owned the property before Duggan took ownership. The economic transactions between Ainse, Brown, McCormick, Duggan, and Cissney illustrate how enslaved Black peoples were viewed as fungible property.

While little is known about Frank after Sally Ainse sold him to Joseph Cissney, Josiah Cutten's story is an especially glaring reminder of the racial violence experienced by Black men during the founding of Upper Canada. In the fall of 1791 after being sold to Thomas Duggan, Cutten broke into a merchant's store in Detroit. He was arrested and imprisoned for stealing furs and liquor. While in prison awaiting his sentencing, John Askin (Kitty Askin's father) purchased Cutten, with a condition that if Cutten was sentenced to death, Askin would not have to make payment.[87] Askin never became Cutten's owner: Cutten was convicted of burglary and hanged in L'Assomption on the south side of the Detroit River in 1792. He was the first person to be executed in Upper Canada.[88] As settler colonial regimes

84 LAC, Detroit Notarial Registers, vol. 3, p. 344.

85 Teasdale, *Fruits of Perseverance*, pp. 43–53; Petition 45 and Upper Canada Sundries, pp. 3254–3292.

86 The Royal Proclamation – October 7, 1763," *The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy*, accessed June 22, 2017, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/proc1763.asp.

87 Quaife, *John Askin Papers*, vol. 1, pp. 410–411.

88 Other enslaved people have been executed in Canada under French and British regimes before the establishment of the colony of Upper Canada in 1791. The execution of Marie Joseph Angélique in 1734, for instance, is probably the most well known story of an executed enslaved person in Canadian history. Other enslaved peoples were executed in the Detroit River borderlands, including an enslaved Indigenous woman who bludgeoned her owner, trader John Clapham, to death in 1762. The woman was aided by an enslaved man who escaped from British custody before the trial. In 1777, a French Canadian man, Jean

solidified their control over the region, they threatened Indigenous women's access to property and put enslaved Black men at further risk for violence, including executions.

The Border and the Underground Railroad

After the enactment of the Jay Treaty in 1796, an international border was officially established between settler powers in the Detroit River. For the first time, there were distinct jurisdictions on each side of the river, which had effects on slavery in the region. Most British community members in Detroit also moved to the south shore. While the border succeeded in creating different legal jurisdictions, residents of Detroit, Sandwich Town (established 1797), and nearby communities largely ignored the border and freely crossed the river.[89] In the late 1700s and early 1800s, Black people on both sides of the river escaping slavery also crossed the porous border in search of freedom in the discrete jurisdiction on the other side.

The establishment of the border was part of the larger trend of asserting jurisdiction over the lower Great Lakes. In the late eighteenth century, British and American powers were attempting to map out the region and assert their own claims through the creation of new territories, provinces, districts, and counties. On the American side, the 1787 Northwest Ordinance created the Northwest Territory. The Ordinance braided together colonialism and slavery by asserting American claims to the territory (which became Michigan Territory in 1805) and by opening land in the lower Great Lakes region for settlement. Detroit became officially part of the Northwest Territory after the enactment of the Jay Treaty. The Ordinance also outlined paths to statehood, resulting in the creation of Ohio (1803), Indiana (1816), Illinois (1818), Michigan (1837), and Wisconsin (1848), and it initiated the gradual abolition of slavery by including a clause forbidding the introduction of new enslaved peoples.[90] While the Ordinance banned blatant slavery, it still protected access to the labour of enslaved peoples through a system of long-term indentures, rental contracts, enforcement of statutes, and a solidification of enslaved status for all enslaved people in the territory before 1787.[91]

On the British side, Parliament passed the Constitutional Act of 1791, which divided the province of Quebec into Lower Canada (present-day Quebec) and Upper Canada (present-day Ontario). Lower Canada was located in the St. Lawrence Valley and included Montréal and Québec, while Upper Canada was comprised of the

Coutencinau, and an enslaved Black woman named Ann (or Nancy) Wyley were accused of robbing and burning a local storehouse. Both were found guilty, but Detroit lacked an official executioner and Wiley was pardoned for agreeing to hang Coutencinau. C. W. Topping, "The Death Penalty in Canada," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 284, no.1 (January 1952), p. 149; *The Hanging of Angélique* and George Elliott Clarke, "Raised Raced and Erased Executions in African-Canadian Literature; Or, Unearthing Angélique," *Essays on Canadian Writing*, no. 75 (December 2002), pp. 30–61; Cangany, *Frontier Seaport*, pp. 111, 115–116; Miles, *Dawn of Detroit*, pp. 65–71.

89 Taylor, *The Divided Ground*, p. 111; Miles, *The Dawn of Detroit*, p. 117; Teasdale, *Fruits of Perseverance*, p. 115; Catherine Cangany, "'The Inhabitants of both Sides of this Streight constitute a french Colony': The Detroit River and the Politics of International Milling, 1796–1837," in Guillaume Teasdale and Tangi Villerbu, eds., *Une Amérique française, 1760-1860: Dynamiques du corridor créole* (Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2015), pp. 41–60.

90 Cangany, *Frontier Seaport*, pp. 128–130.

91 Miles, *Dawn of Detroit,* p. 100.

area along Lake Ontario and Lake Erie, including the Ontario, Niagara, and Bruce Peninsulas. Ordinances and acts cleared the path for a rapid increase of European American settlers in the Detroit River borderlands. The increased settlement in the area led to political unrest, including the outbreak of the Northwest Indian Wars on the American side of the border and Sally Ainse's legal battle on the British side of the border.

Two years after the Constitutional Act, British officials passed their own set of gradual abolition laws (The Upper Canada Act Against Slavery). This act, however, was influenced by colonial officials who still owned and sold enslaved people. While it prevented the further introduction of enslaved peoples to the colony, the Act reaffirmed the property rights of slave owners and never freed a single enslaved person within the colony.[92] Like the Northwest Ordinance, the Act Against Slavery outlined the framework for abolition but legally sanctioned slavery by prescribing rules that allowed it to continue.

The Northwest Ordinance and the Act Against Slavery created legal complexities surrounding slavery in both territories. This led to enslaved peoples finding freedom by crossing from Michigan Territory (known as the Northwest Territory before 1805) to Upper Canada *and* from Upper Canada to Michigan Territory. At this time, Canada was not yet seen as a safe haven for escaping slavery. For example, in 1797, a Black man named Sampson escaped from his owner in Detroit and fled south through the swamps of Ohio rather than north to Canada.[93] Due to their attempts to solidify their own jurisdictions, Americans and British people also refused to return refugees to one another. The Detroit River region's chronic labour shortage ensured that enslaved people who ran across the border could find employment in a variety of ways: on ships sailing the lakes, in army garrisons, or at the farms and shops of local residents.[94] Miles has argued that the aquatic nature of the border benefitted enslaved peoples on multiple levels: "Like the unruly waves that composed its position, the political and cultural edges of the border would always be blurred, resulting in multifaceted opportunity for African Americans who sought to cross over."[95]

In response to an increasing flow of illicit goods and people across the border, the United States began to assert jurisdiction over the border and, in 1800, appointed its first customs collector at Detroit. [96] Duties were collected on all wine, spirits, and tea imported across the border. The United States also worked to enforce maritime laws that required any vessel trading with Canada to carry documentation. Until the federal government intervened, however, local beliefs and practices held that small vessels were exempt from licenses, registers, and manifests. By 1820, Congress passed an act to further regulate merchandize imported into the United States and required all unregistered vessels arriving from foreign territory to carry and present

92 Wigmore, "Before the Railroad," p. 441; Gallant, "Perspectives on the Motives," p. 392; Cooper, "Acts of Resistance," pp. 5–17.
93 Miles, *Dawn of Detroit*, p. 121.
94 Wigmore, "Before the Railroad," p. 446.
95 Wigmore, "Before the Railroad," p. 445; Miles, "Of Waterways and Runaways," p. 436.
96 Cangany, *Frontier Seaport*, pp. 171–174, 191.

a cargo manifest to the nearest customs inspector.[97] Throughout the early nineteenth century, the United States increasingly asserted its jurisdiction on the flow of goods and people over the border. These changes made it harder for Indigenous women, such as Sally Ainse, to profit from trade, since their mobility and ability to trade on both sides of the border was crucial to their success. Yet, these changes also led to increased opportunities for enslaved peoples to find freedom on the opposite side of the border from their owners.

Michigan court decisions between 1807 and 1809 further solidified the jurisdictional function of the border by preventing owners of enslaved peoples from claiming refugees who escaped across the river. These legal decisions virtually invited any remaining enslaved peoples on either side of the border to seize their freedom.[98] As a result, the enslaved labour force melted away. The 1810 Detroit census lists only 17 enslaved people and the 1820 census lists none.[99] The earliest postwar surveys for the British Canadian side of the river, in 1818 and 1820, do not mention enslaved people. Enslaved people in the Detroit River region and neighbouring Thames River Valley were able to acquire their freedom long before enslaved people elsewhere in Upper Canada and Michigan.[100]

After 1810, Upper Canada's reputation as a safe haven for refugees swelled.[101] While slavery was technically still legal in Upper Canada, 150 Black people crossed the Detroit River from Michigan to Sandwich, Upper Canada between 1817 and 1822.[102] While Black peoples seeking freedom initially found opportunities on both sides of the border, within a few decades the border created a mainly one-way flow: Thousands of refugees throughout the United States travelled to Michigan and nearby states with the intent of crossing into the Ontario Peninsula region of Upper Canada. Due to the increased migration of Black freedom seekers, several free Black communities were founded in Upper Canada, including the Wilberforce settlement (established in 1829) and Dawn (established in 1836).[103]

Josiah Henson escaped from slavery in the United States in 1830 and purchased 200 acres of land in Upper Canada, which helped found the community of Dawn. At its peak, Dawn had mills, a brickyard, and 500 residents who exported black walnut lumber and grew corn, tobacco, and wheat.[104] Much like Sally Ainse's property, Henson's journey to freedom is a reminder of interconnected histories between Indigenous and Black peoples in the lower Great Lakes. In the fall of 1830, Henson, his wife, and their young son escaped slavery in Kentucky and became

97 Cangany, "Politics of International Milling," p. 42; Cangany, *Frontier Seaports*, pp. 174, 180, 194; Teasdale, *Fruits of Perseverance,* p. 123.

98 Wigmore, "Before the Railroad," p. 453; Tiya Miles, "Slavery in Early Detroit," *Michigan History* (May/June 2013), pp. 36–37; Miles, *Dawn of Detroit,* pp. 172–184.

99 Wigmore, "Before the Railroad," p. 453.

100 Slavery persisted in Michigan until the 1830s. Wigmore, "Before the Railroad," p. 453; Miles, *Dawn of Detroit*, p. 228.

101 Gallant, "Perspectives on the Motives," p. 395.

102 Slavery technically remained legal in the colony until Britain passed the Emancipation Act in 1833 and abolished slavery in its colonies. Hill, *Freedom Seekers*, p. 48; Gallant, "Perspectives on the Motives," p. 400.

103 Reese, "Canada: The Promised Land for U.S. Slaves," p. 213.

104 Reese, "Canada: The Promised Land for U.S. Slaves," p. 213.

lost in Ohio Valley. Multiple Indigenous peoples, including Wendats, Mohawks, Shawnees, and Cayugas still lived and hunted in northern Ohio Valley, and the starving, exhausted Henson family eventually stumbled onto an Indigenous camp in the woods.[105] The Hensons, fearful of how they would be received, were surprised with a hospitable welcome: They were given food, lodging, and assistance to Lake Erie, approximately 25 miles away.[106] On their journey to freedom, the Henson family crossed the Ohio River, travelled through Indigenous lands, and crossed a Great Lake and an international border before helping to establish Dawn.

Between 1780, when Ainse acquired her Thames River property, and 1836, when Dawn was established, the Thames River Valley transformed from an Indigenous space to one of the most popular endpoints for the Underground Railroad.[107] Settler towns like Amherstburg, Sandwich, and Chatham had large Black populations, and other Black communities developed, such as Buxton.[108] Founded in 1850, Buxton was less than ten miles from the Thames River and contained 480 hectares of cultivated farmland, a profitable farm supply store, tobacco farms, a pearlash factory, two sawmills, a gristmill, a brick-making company, and several large livestock herds. A school was founded with the help of the Presbyterian Church, and some White students attended as their parents felt it offered the best education in the area. By the mid-nineteenth century, the Thames River Valley was home to multiple settlements of free Black communities.[109]

In 1850, the United States passed the Fugitive Slave Act, stating that any enslaved person who escaped without being discharged should be returned to their owner. This legislative shift heightened the importance of crossing the border into Upper Canada because enslaved people could no longer safely seek refuge in northern states.[110] The law essentially made the United States into a vast hunting ground for bounty hunters and civilians. Black people who were caught seeking freedom faced horrific, brutal punishments.[111] As a result, the flow of refugees into Upper Canada increased: Approximately 3,000 new Black residents arrived in the month after the passage of the law. In the 1850s, Upper Canada's population of Black peoples multiplied to 40,000.[112]

Despite the opportunities that the Thames River Valley provided refugees, racism and racial violence continued to exist within Upper Canada. During the establishment of Buxton, a group of colonists attempted to prohibit the sale of public

105 For Henson's narrative, see Josiah Henson, *The Life of Josiah Henson, Formerly a Slave, Now an Inhabitant of Canada, Narrated by Himself* (Boston: Arthur D. Phelps, 1849). For analysis of the narrative, see Miles, "Of Waterways and Runways," p. 437.

106 Henson, *The Life of Josiah Henson,* pp. 53–55, 58.

107 Paul, "Out of Chatham," p. 169.

108 Paul, "Out of Chatham," p. 169.

109 Paul, "Out of Chatham," p. 214. Gallant, "Perspectives on the Motives," pp. 403–404.

110 There was a previous Fugitive Slave Clause (passed in 1793) that provided legal authority to return refugees, but this more lenient clause was also less enforced, particularly in the Northwest Territory, since enslaved people could seize their freedom by crossing the river into Upper Canada. Gallant, "Perspectives on the Motives," 398–399; Bakan, "Reconsidering the Underground Railroad," p. 14; Sharon A. Roger Hepburn, "Crossing the Border from Slavery to Freedom: The Building of a Community at Buxton, Upper Canada," *American Nineteenth Century History*, vol. 3, no. 2 (2002), pp. 25–68.

111 Reese, "Canada: The Promised Land for U.S. Slaves," p. 209.

112 Reese, "Canada: The Promised Land for U.S. Slaves," p. 209.

land to foreigners, particularly those who were Black.[113] In certain communities in the Ontario Peninsula, Black people were prohibited from purchasing property and banned from marrying White citizens.[114] Unlike Anglo and European descended settlers, Black peoples' property and marriage rights in the Thames River Valley were limited because of their race. While some White settlers recognized the quality of schools in the Black communities, other White settlers argued for segregated schools and public facilities.[115] Black peoples were involved in settlement processes in the Ontario Peninsula in the nineteenth century but were denied the same property rights or privileges as European American settlers.[116] After the Civil War, many Black peoples in Canada returned to the United States. Their decisions were likely due to a combination of the racism in Upper Canada and the desire to reconnect with family members who never made it across the border.[117] Despite the legal possibilities for freedom that existed within Upper Canada, racism and racial hierarchies persisted.

Conclusion

In the time between Sally Ainse's death in 1823 and the end of the American Civil War in 1865, migration of Black people to the Thames River Valley significantly increased. The movement across the border illustrates the opportunities for freedom found in the region and also complicates the presumed relationship in settler colonial development between Indigenous peoples losing land and racialized bodies being forced to work the land for White settlers' profit. Although Indigenous women such as Sally Ainse lost property and Indigenous nations were dispossessed of land, Indigenous people were not removed from the region. The Thames River Valley and adjacent areas are currently home to multiple Indigenous communities, including Walpole Island First Nation (Anishinaabek), Kettle & Stony Point First Nation (Anishinaabek), Wyandot of Anderdon Nation (Wendat/Wyandot), the Oneida Nation of the Thames (Oneida), and the Delaware Nation at Moraviantown (Leni Lenape). Some of these nations reside on their traditional territories and others arrived in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as violence and settler colonial policies drove them from their own territories.[118]

The growth of Black communities in the Thames River Valley approximately three decades after enslaved peoples worked the land for an Oneida woman forces a rethinking of settler colonialism from a local lens. Sally Ainse arrived in the region

113 Reese, "Canada: The Promised Land for U.S. Slaves," p. 214.

114 Reese, "Canada: The Promised Land for U.S. Slaves," p. 214; Gallant, "Perspectives on the Motives," p. 402.

115 Reese, "Canada: The Promised Land for U.S. Slaves," p. 215; Gallant, "Perspectives on the Motives," p. 403.

116 Amadahy and Lawrence, "Indigenous Peoples and Black People in Canada" p. 107.

117 Gallant, "Perspectives on the Motives," pp. 405–406; Karolyn Smardz Frost, "African American and African Canadian Transnationalism along the Detroit River Borderland: The Example of Madison J. Lightfoot," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, vol. 32, no. 2 (2013), pp. 78–88.

118 For a discussion of the formation of Walpole Island and Anderdon/Huron Church reserves during the McKee Purchase of 1790, see Teasdale, *Fruits of Perseverance,* pp. 74–75. On the Anderdon reserve, see also Kelly McKelvey, "Seven Generations: Emotion Work, Women, and the Anderdon Wyandot Cemetery, 1790–1914" (MA thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 2019).

and gained access to land through her relationships with the Anishinaabek. She also relied on the labour of enslaved Black people to work the land. Indigenous women's land was threatened by the solidification of settler colonial legal institutions in the region, while Black people were at risk of racialized violence. By the turn of the nineteenth century, British and American settlers enacted laws that created small chances for enslaved Black peoples to find freedom on both sides of the border. By the 1820s, there was mainly a one-way flow of enslaved peoples fleeing to Upper Canada in search of freedom. These refugees created new settlements in the Thames River Valley, but they were targeted by settler institutions and restricted from owning property and marrying White settlers. By the end of the U.S. Civil War, slavery was illegal on both sides of the border, yet settler colonialism and White supremacy hardened racial hierarchies both in Upper Canada and the Midwest.

Karen Marrero has described how there are seams in Detroit's French-Indigenous history that reveal the contingent and complicated nature of national borders and local identities.[119] Focusing on Sally Ainse, Frank, Josiah Cutten, Josiah Henson, and the Thames River Valley similarly reveals the contingent and complex nature of local identities, settler colonialism, and international borders. This regional story is a reminder of the interconnected histories between Indigenous and Black peoples within Canada. It includes Indigenous women who resisted settler colonialism while owning enslaved peoples, Indigenous and Black peoples who were enslaved and risked being executed for transgressing settler colonial property laws, and Black peoples who founded new prosperous communities after escaping slavery.

In Canadian popular memory, settlements such as Dawn and Buxton are representative of a history of racial tolerance.[120] Remembering, however, the history of the area only in terms of the Underground Railroad obscures other important aspects of Canadian history, including the dispossession of Indigenous peoples from the land and the enforcement of legal systems that targeted Indigenous women's political and economic agency. In 2021, the detection of unmarked Indigenous children's graves at residential schools throughout western Canada brought international attention to Canada's violent settler colonial policies.[121] Since the early twenty-first century, there has been growing reclamation of Indigenous lands, leading to the spread of the "land back" movement across Canada and the United States. Land claims initiated in the late eighteenth century by Indigenous leaders such as Joseph Brant have been integral to the movement. For example, the Grand River Mohawk's active land claim at 1492 Land Back Lane extends back to the

119 Marrero, *Detroit's Hidden Channels,* p. xxv.

120 Bakan, "Reconsidering the Underground Railroad," pp. 5–6, 15–16.

121 For examples of the coverage of Indigenous children's graves at residential schools, see Emma Sandri, "Discovery of 215 Indigenous graves had 'profound emotional impact' on Canadians, survey finds," *National Post* (Toronto), June 10, 2021, accessed July 4, 2021, https://nationalpost.com/news/discovery-of-215-indigenous-childrens-remains-had-profound-emotional-impact-on-canadians-survey-finds; Kiara Alfonseca, "As recently discovered unmarked Indigenous graves in Canada nears 1,000, activists demand justice," *ABC News* (New York), July 3, 2021, accessed July 4, 2021, https://abcnews.go.com/International/recently-discovered-unmarked-indigenous-graves-canada-nears-1000/story?id=78472829 and "Canada: 751 unmarked graves found at residential school," *BBC News* (London, England), June 24, 2021, accessed July 4, 2021, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-57592243.

turn of the nineteenth century, when colonial officials worked hard to assert settler jurisdiction in Upper Canada.[122]

Focusing on Sally Ainse's property and the surrounding Thames River Valley region suggests the development of settler colonialism and racial hierarchies in Canada need to be recognized as linked processes connecting Indigenous and Black peoples. These Black-Indigenous histories illustrate the limitations of common settler colonial categories and demonstrate the important role of regionally specific identities—including Indigenous women slave owners and Black refugees founding free communities. The sociopolitical transformation of the Thames River Valley between 1780 and 1865 demonstrate how regionally distinct perspectives in Canadian history account for historical complexities, local identities, Indigenous politics, and racial violence.

122 For the Grand River Land dispute and 1492 Land Back Lane, see "Conflict in Caledonia," *APTN National News*; Chandler, "Broken promises, unceded land," *TVO*; Brown & Craggs, "Year-long Six Nations protest forces cancellation," *CBC News*; and Julien Gignac, "1492 Land Back Lane," in *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (April 29, 2021), accessed July 4, 2021, https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/1492-land-back-lane.