

# The Elgin Settlement

*"I left the states for Canada for rights; freedom and liberty. I came to Buxton to educate my children."*

The Elgin Settlement, also known as Buxton, was one of four organized black settlements to be developed in Canada.

The black population of Canada West and Chatham was already high due to the area's proximity to the United States. The land was purchased by the Elgin Association through the Presbyterian Synod for creating a settlement. The land lay 12 miles south of Chatham.

When news of the Elgin settlement spread, white settlers became worried, and attempted to block its development with a petition. Regardless of sentiment, plans for the settlement went ahead and many of Buxton's settlers feared for the life of William King due to the [resistance](#) of whites.

William King believed that blacks could function successfully in a working society if given the same educational opportunities as white children. "Blacks are intellectually capable of absorbing classical and abstract matters."

Being a reverend and teacher, the building of a school and church in the settlement was a necessity to him. The settlement also was home to the logging industry.

George Brown, who later became one of the Fathers of Confederation, was a supporter of William King and helped build the settlement.

The first settler, [Isaac Riley](#), was already waiting at the settlement before King even arrived. Mostly all adults living in the settlement had been slaves before.

The settlement was made of 9,000 acres of land, 6 miles in length and 3 miles in width, situated between the Great Western Railway and Lake Erie. The land was divided into farms of 50 acres each. Certain standards had to be maintained in the settlement regarding [property conditions](#).

Land had to be purchased by the settlers at the price of \$2.50/acre. The payments could be made in ten equal installments with 6% interest. Ten years was allowed for the settlers to pay for their farms, most settlers would have had a deed in possession by then. The settlers were given no money, no grants of land, or farming tools; the only thing given was protection and advice.

## TIMELINE OF THE ELGIN SETTLEMENT

DATE	EVENT	PEOPLE	OBJECTS
1848 >	Work begins to organize a settlement and get approvals.	Rev. William King	1848 Letter
1849 >	<b>Resistance to Settlement</b>  <b>Rules For Settlement</b>	First Settlers  Isaac Riley  Frances Rouse	
1850 >	Built in April SS#7 or the Buxton Mission School opens; night school offered for adults taught by Rev. King.	George Chase, Sr.  John Rennie	
1851 >	<b>Buxton Brickyard</b> and kiln established by the knowledge and labour of two former slaves; 300,000 bricks produce in the first year.  <b>Standard classical subjects added to the curriculum ;</b> 69 pupils in SS# 7	Catherine Toyer  Erwin Steele  William Hooper  Isaac Brown	Mission School Library
1852 >	March 27: <b>Canada Mill &amp; Mercantile Co.</b> was formed to establish a sawmill, gristmill, and general store. Wm. Abbott and Henry Thomas volunteered to raise the capital among prominent Blacks in Toronto and Buffalo, NY. The venture was enormously successful, raising the necessary \$3,000 in just a few months. Within the year, the settlement had the saw and grist mill and general store.  By August 1, there were 400 settlers. Twenty-five families had purchased land close together, furthering the community atmosphere. Within the district, there were about 100 families.  350 acres of land cleared by this time, 204 of those were under crop. The land had been adapted to grow corn, tobacco, and hemp.  A court of arbitration was set up to encourage peace among the settlers.  A settler named Alfred West built the <b>Temperance Hotel</b> , a 2 story brick building.	Eliza Parker  George Bolivar Shreve	

	<p>A shoe store and carpenter shop were also established in Buxton Village.</p> <p>Rev. King petitioned for regular postal service in the Raleigh District and opened a Buxton post office.</p> <p>A <b>pearl ash factory</b> was built under the guidance of Mr. F. Gates from Delta, Ohio to manufacture fertilizer ('black salts') from lumber burnt to clear the land.</p> <p>A fugitive from Georgia introduced barrel making (coppersmith) production for export to Cincinnati and Buffalo, which was a money crop more profitable than lumber.</p>		
1853 >	<p>130 families had settled on Elgin Association land. There were 520 settlers.</p> <p>500 acres had been cleared and were under fence; 135 were partially cleared. 263 acres were planted with corn, 60 acres with wheat, 29 with oats, and 90 with various others.</p> <p>159 pupils were enrolled at the Mission School.</p>		Elgin Assoc. Stock-holders
1854 >	<p>More houses were built in the settlement; one person even constructed a brick home.</p> <p>There were approximately 150 families settled in Elgin.</p> <p>By this time, 726 acres were cleared and under fence, 174 trees were cut down and ready for clearing. 334 acres were planted with corn, 95 with wheat, 48 with oats and 100 with other assorted crops.</p> <p>At a community meeting Buxton settlers voted to work together to clear the proposed Centre Road to ship their produce inexpensively — on Lake Erie. They organized teams and cut the road (Centre Road) from the 7th Concession past the 14th Concession to Lake Erie. The pearl ash from the elms alone was sufficient to cover the cost to build the road.</p> <p>However, due to drainage problems, the road was difficult to traverse much of the year (mud). Therefore, the settlers petitioned Raleigh Township and obtained permission to build a tramway along the road. In 1854, the settlers organized into teams and in one month a track was laid from Buxton square to the Lake Erie cliff edges. The tramway permitted a team of oxen to haul</p>	Henry Johnson	

	huge cargos on wagon beds on the greased wooden rails.		
<b>1855 &gt;</b>	<p><b>Superintendent Report Facts</b></p> <p>827 acres were under fence, 216 trees have been chopped down.</p> <p>There is a considerable amount of tobacco being farmed.</p> <p>A sawmill and market are completed on July 4th, 1855.</p>		
<b>1856 &gt;</b>	<p><b>Political Awakening</b></p> <p><b>Superintendent Report Facts</b></p> <p>There were close to 800 people living in the Elgin Settlement. The settlement now had a school and mission's church. The Buxton mission was named after the Earl of Buxton (British Parliament) who passed the Emancipation Act of 1833.</p> <p>The Elgin settlement had a post office, store, a two-story hotel, a blacksmith, a carpenter, shoe shops, factories, and a savings bank.</p> <p>Six men had finished their education at King's school. Nearly, 300 children were enrolled in Buxton schools (120 in the mission school).</p>	<p>John Travis, Sr.</p> <p>Thomas Stringer</p> <p>Jerome R. Riley</p> <p>Richard Johnson</p> <p>Alfred Lafferty</p> <p>William H. Rann</p>	
<b>1857 &gt;</b>	<p><b>Slave Catchers In Chatham</b></p> <p>The settlements schools were doing well bringing the total student population to 140.</p>	Lucy Brooks	
<b>1858 &gt;</b>	<p><b>Chatham Convention</b></p>	Sarah Scott A.D.Shadd	
<b>1859 &gt;</b>	In 1859, the ringing of the mission bell awakened and warned the settlement of a fire in their midst. As residents rushed from their homes to investigate, they saw a tower of flames in the night sky near the Town Square — the pearl ash factory was ablaze! Men quickly armed with pails and sped through the bush to reach the fire with hopes of putting the fire out –or at the very least to contain it. Unfortunately, the pearl ash factory could not be saved and a source of income was lost to the community.		
<b>1861 &gt;</b>	SS #13 Raleigh opens and is still standing today on the museum site.		SS # 13 Raleigh
<b>1863 &gt;</b>	<b>Buxton Civil War Participation</b>		

## RESISTANCE TO SETTLEMENT

Edwin Larwill was a white, English born Tory who came to Chatham in 1841. He was a member of the Raleigh Township Council, West District Council, Legislature, and School Commissioner for the district. He also was the editor of the Chatham Journal. Larwill was strongly opposed to the black settlement of Elgin. He felt that a black settlement so near Chatham, would bring down property values and the "good" settlers (whites) would leave. Larwill considered blacks inferior. He arranged for a public debate on the issue of the black settlement on August 18, 1849 at the Royal Exchange Hotel in Chatham. The sheriff of Kent warned William King that Larwill had a vigilante group.

On the day of the debate between Larwill and King, 300 people came to watch. This included a group of blacks as well as whites. The debate took place on the balcony of the Hotel so the public could watch. The only white person to face the crowd with King was Archibald McKellar.

When King spoke, he was booed and hissed at for his position. Yet, he was not intimidated and continued. King's arguments received little support and Larwill's fears prevailed. William King then went to Chatham's Presbyterian Church to answer any questions. There were neither arguments nor violence. Later, he was escorted safely back to the hotel. Larwill continued his opposition to blacks. He persuaded the West District Council to send a protest to Parliament. Then he added recommendations of his own without Council's knowledge.

Larwill's recommendations would have:

- barred blacks from public schools
- barred blacks from public office
- forced blacks to pay poll tax
- forced blacks who were allowed to vote to be re-examined
- forced blacks to post bonds if they wished to stay in Canada

Reaction - Council felt Larwill was far too extreme. Therefore, his actions hurt his cause.

King moved to the Elgin Settlement November 28, 1849 with his former slaves. The settlement flourished because it was well organized. Under King's guidance the land was cleared, education maintained an importance, hard work, and pride were established and a mail service was started as a link to the rest of the world.

On September 24, 1856, a celebration was held on the lawn of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church. There Chatham whites saw the success of the settlement. Also celebrated was the defeat of Larwill by Archibald McKellar in the Kent Election of 1856. Most blacks had come in to Chatham from Elgin to vote against Larwill. This defeat ended Larwill's political career. Rev. King, "From that time (of Larwill's defeat) forward all opposition to me and the coloured people ceased."

By 1864, the settlement received a good report indicating: good conduct, a hard working community, good moral standards and political awareness and participation.

## RULES FOR SETTLEMENT

- No liquor allowed on the settlement
- Land could only be sold to blacks and had to remain in their hands for ten years
- Land had to be purchased not leased
- Each house had to be built at least 24x18x12 feet with a porch across the front
- Each house had to be built 33 feet from the road, with a picket fence and flower garden in front; prizes were given for the most attractive home (made from the logs cut down from the thick bush surrounding the area)

### Reasons for the Strict Rules

William King wanted a stable settlement for the black settlers. By requiring the inhabitants to pay for their own property and possessions he hoped to instill a sense of pride in the community. The settlers also had to live on the land for ten years, which made many stay a reasonable length of time in Buxton. The rules paid off, as Buxton has been hailed as the only successful black settlement in Canada.