

Alexander Hunter

By Erin Brubacher; Edits by Justine Lyn

Another Black resident of Port Credit was a man named Alexander Hunter. He had married a white, Irish woman, named Bridget, and together they lived in a three room shack on the bank of the credit river, adjacent to what is now Riverside School.¹ He worked doing odd jobs for a man named James Robinson Shaw who owned a local grocery store, and was an avid church goer. Some of Hunter's tasks included sweeping the store or dusting the church for Sunday service.² One warm story is remembered in Betty Clarkson's "The Story of Port Credit: Credit Valley Gateway". One Saturday morning Hunter was sent to sweep and dust the church in preparation for service the next morning. When Sunday morning came, Shaw couldn't find the key to open the church. He ventured over to Hunter's house to get it, and after searching for some time found it on the floor beside Hunters bed. The story goes that it had fallen out of Alexander's hair when he had knelt to say his prayers the night before.³ What a key was doing in his hair is a mystery, but it's still quite an endearing story likely meant to evoke Hunter's devotion to his faith.

Alexander Hunter and his wife appear on the 1881 census of the Peel region. They cannot be found before or after, anywhere in Canada, but their presence here gives us some insight into their lives. Looking through local records, Hunter can be found in the minutes of the Toronto Township Council from 1887:

*"Resolved- that the petition of James R. Shaw and 32 others in reference to Alexander Hunter and wife that the Reeve be instructed to have them placed in the house of Providence or some other public institution."*⁴

In other words, they sent Mr. Hunter to the poor house. It seems like a callous thing to do, but these were the times. It seems Alexander Hunter died that year because in February of 1888, the following is recording in Toronto Township Council Minutes:

*"Moved by Mr. Cook seconded by Mr. Price that the sum of \$5.00 be paid to W.D (unreadable) for building a Cu(unreadable) and four dollars for removing Mrs. Hunter an indigent to the House of Providence as certified by Mr. H Shook."*⁵

¹ Clarkson 171.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Toronto Township Council, Meeting Minutes, 26 Nov 1887. Records were obtained at the Mississauga Central Library.

⁵ Toronto Township Council, Meeting Minutes, 25 Feb 1888. Records were obtained at the Mississauga Central Library.

Mrs. Hunter was taken away alone, without her husband. A rather sad end to the story that begs the question: Why? Why was Mr. Hunter sent to the poor house and why was Mrs. Hunter taken away as well?

Likely council believed it was kinder than leaving him to suffer in his house. However, it is in stark contrast to the actions of the council for another contemporary Black resident, Samuel Carter, who was a freedom seeker who had lost his legs due to exposure during his escape. Council looked after him in his last months. Why such vastly different treatment? It is possible that locals pitied Carter more than they did Alexander Hunter, or perhaps locals disliked Hunter's marriage to a white woman. Whatever the reason, we will likely never know. What it does tell us is that not all early Black residents had the same experiences here in historic Mississauga.