WS 5.1: Detroit or Bust! Interview

Interview a family member about how their family came to settle in the Detroit Metropolitan area. Use the following questions for your interview, adding a few questions of your own.

1. Around what year did you or your family come to settle in the Detroit area?

2. Why did they come to Detroit?

3. Where did your family originally settle in the Detroit area?

4. In how many different homes have you lived while in the Detroit area?

5. Did your family live somewhere else before coming to settle in the Detroit area? If so, where?

6. What caused your family to settle here?

7. Other question(s)
## WS 5.2: Detroit’s Ethnic Communities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>When did this group come to Detroit?</th>
<th>Why did this group come to Detroit?</th>
<th>What influence did they have on Detroit’s culture?</th>
<th>Where did they first settle?</th>
<th>Where are they today? (in Metro Detroit)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African-Americans</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab-Americans</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armenians</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadians</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cubans</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Asians</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Europeans</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germans</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greeks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hmong</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italians</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexicans</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Americans</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scandinavians</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WS 5.3: Metro Detroit Neighborhoods, 2011

Using the information from your “Detroit’s Ethnic Communities” chart, fill in this map to show major locations of various ethnic groups today.
A Trip from Utica, New York to Ingham County, Michigan in 1838

On the 13th of January, 1838, my father, Silas Beebe, left Utica, NY for Detroit, Mich., keeping a diary of the trip. Proceeding over bad roads, he reached Buffalo on Jan. 27th. On the 28th, at 11 P.M., he left Buffalo for the West in a stage, the wind blowing gale, snowing hard, roads rough. After several break-downs and some walking he arrived at Erie on the 30th at 4 A.M.

They arrived at Lower Sandusky, Feb. 8th, at 4 A.M., "very tired sore, and cold. Camped down on a table with buffalo skins; could not get to sleep. Could not sleep in the road,- dared not risk it. At daylight found the house full of people,- travelers, stage passengers from the west, all complaining of impositions on the part of stage proprietors, tavernkeepers, etc., to which our experience was but an echo. We got the worst breakfast! Cakes as black as your hat. The hog of a landlord refused to take any money excepting currency of New York or Ohio. Not liking that appearance of things, and ascertaining the fare to Detroit, 104 miles to be $7.25, and that we had to take an open wagon for a stage through the Black Swamp, five of us hired a yellow fellow who has a good team, cushioned seats and buffalo skins (far preferable to stage accommodations) to carry us to Toledo, 42 miles for $2.50 each since it was 75 cents less than the stage fare to the same place.

We arrived at Toledo, tired and sleepy, at 7 o'clock. From this place to Detroit is 66 miles. We left Toledo at 5 A.M., and drove 22 miles, to Monroe, Michigan. The following day we left Monroe at 9 A.M., and dined at Gibraltar, a pretty little village at the mouth of the Detroit River. It has a light-house and shore-houses. We arrived at the Michigan Exchange at Detroit at half past six P.M.

"Feb. 16th. I met in the street Mr. Stanton, the man I was going to see in Sharon. Made arrangements to go with him on his return to Sharon the next day.

"The streets were so very muddy. Gentlemen are seldom seen in the streets without their boots outside their pantaloons, prepared to wade through the soft mud or mortar on the sidewalks, or where the sidewalks should be. The middle of the street is so constantly stirred up by the carts that it is a sea of mud so deep the little French horses often get set with almost an empty cart.

"Feb. 17th. Left at one o'clock in the splendid [train] car "Gov. Mason" on the Detroit and St. Joseph Railroad, which is finished as far as Ypsilanti, 30 miles. The "Gov Mason will seat fifty-six persons. It is a spacious, pleasant vehicle to ride in, and was nearly full of gentlemen and ladies; but the track being covered with snow and ice, and not being prepared to contend against them, we were obligated to stop often while the attendants removed the obstructions with shovels, we progressed slowly. We got to Dearbornville [now Dearborn], where we had to grad supper and started on; but after making headway about a mile and a half, we met with so much obstruction that a vote was taken and we resolved to return to Dearbornville and stay over night. The old iron horse backed us up, when Mr. Stanton and myself received back one dollar each of our fare, and started on foot to overtake a Mr. Fellows. After walking about a like and a half we found his team of horses. There we took a must hideous supper, and left with him comfortably seated in a sleigh, and drove over a tolerable road to Sheldon's, where we stopped for the night. Mr. S. keeps a very good house, about twenty miles west of Detroit."

"Feb. 18th. Left after breakfast and passed over a very beautiful county. Passed Ypsilanti, and arrived at Mt. Stanton's in Sharon at nine P.M.

"Feb. 23rd. Left with Mr. Stanton for Ingham county. We drove over and around many marshes and through some as fine farming country as I ever saw. Stayed in Ingham county and about 3 and a half miles east of this a beautiful site for a village. We think of calling it 'Perkin' [now called Stockbridge]. We bantered the owner, a Mr. Smith, for the whole village plat, 55 acres, which he offered at $25 per acre.

My father left by steamboat for Buffalo, April 11th, proceeded to Utica, N.Y., and on the 15th of May 1838, as appears from the same diary, he left Utica with his family and "2,240 pounds of furniture and 4,009 pounds of merchandise" for Michigan. They reached Buffalo, May 29th, took passage on the steamboat 'United States' at 9 P.M. of that day, arrived at Detroit, May 22nd, at 3 P.M. The family arrived at Stockbridge about June 1st, 1838. My father died in 1857, at the age of 53.

He settled in Stockbridge under impressions that it would be on the line of the Michigan Central Railroad to a point on Lake Michigan; but when the road reached Dexter it shot off in another direction, and Stockbridge was left out in the cold.
My father emigrated with his family, consisting of my mother, my younger sister and myself, from Rochester, N.Y., to Detroit in September, 1824, when I was a child seven years old. I have indistinct memories of a late night ride in a stage coach, and of our arrival in Buffalo before daylight; making this forced journey that we might be in time to take passage in the "Superior", the only steamer then on Lake Erie which only made weekly trips.

In the summer of 1825, I think the military troops were removed to Green Bay, and the fort and its adjoining grounds speedily became a most delightful play-ground for the children in the neighborhood. Often have my friends and myself, climbed up the steps made in the embankment at one corner of the fort, and enjoyed a romp around the top, then descending a few feet on the inside, we would run in the path of the sentinels, stop at every stand of the now torn down cannon and peep through the port holes.

The “Savoyard,” a small stream in summer, and in the spring and autumn large enough to float canoes, was spanned by a bridge, on Woodward Avenue. I used to stop in the bridge on my way home from school and watch the minnows in the bright clear water. What an terrible fate awaited that beautiful little stream; it is now the principal sewer of the city.

The market was a long shed-like building, in the center of Woodward Avenue, extending from Jefferson Avenue toward the river. Immense sturgeon fish were then caught in the river, below the city, and were often landed on the sand at the foot of the avenue, below the market.

When we had lived in Detroit two years we moved to a house on Jefferson Avenue, two doors down from the old Campau house, and from out back patio we had a fine view of the river. I never worried [sic] of watching the white winged vessels as they sailed up and down the beautiful stream. I wanted no other pastime. Every pleasant evening in summer, all along the river, canoes were launched, and parties rowed up and down stream, meeting and exchanging greetings, or side by side trying the strength and speed of their oarsmen. The large birch canoes of Governor Cass with its crimson canopy in the center, was always an object of special attention to the spectators on shore.

Mrs. E.M.S Stewart
Written in 1891

Courtesy of Michigan Pioneer Collection
DE 5.3: Photos: Detroit Streets, ca. 1860s
DE 5.4: Narrative: Mr. Palmer

I came to Detroit in May, 1827, with my mother and two sisters, on the steamers “Henry Clay”. Our trip up the lake to Detroit was uneventful. We had a pleasant passage that occupied, I think, two or three days. The “Henry Clay,” commanded by Captain Norton, was a floating palace, we thought, and we greatly enjoyed the time spent on it.

When the “Clay” rounded Sandwich port, Detroit lay before us and, though small, the city presented quite an attractive appearance. The most conspicuous object in the distance was the steeple of the statehouse was located, where is now Capitol Square, and where the remains of Michigan’s first governor, Stevens T. Mason, now rest.

We landed at Jones’ dock, between Griswold and Shelby streets, on a fine day, about ten o’clock in the morning and all walked to the residence of my uncle, Thomas Palmer, corner of Jefferson avenue and Griswold Street. There were no public conveyances in those days. Thomas Palmer lived over his store, as did many of the merchants doing business here at the time.

Well, the land boom that struck Michigan in 1837, changed very much the aspect of things. Steamboats and sailing crafts got to be quite plentiful; thousands of people came from New York and the New England States, and Detroit awoke from its sleepiness and became slowly the most giant that she is now.

General Friend Palmer
Written in 1905

Courtesy of Michigan Pioneer Historical Collection
Ethnic Population of Detroit, 1850

Total Population = 21,019

Population of Detroit for the years 1810 through 1870
DE 5.6: Photo: Railroad Depot
DE 5.7: Map: 1830s Detroit
DE 5.8: Painting: A View of Detroit, c. 1853
MICHIGAN CENTRAL RAIL-ROAD LINE.
THROUGH IN 34 HOURS IN OPPOSITION TO A VOYAGE FROM 4 1-2 TO 9 DAYS LONG.
FOR DETROIT, CHICAGO,
AND OTHER PORTS ON LAKE MICHIGAN.
Cabin Fare through, (Meals and Berks on Lakes Erie and Michigan included,) $

THROUGH TO DETROIT WITHOUT LANDING!
THROUGH TO CHICAGO IN 34 HOURS—TO MILWAUKEE IN 44 HOURS,
AND TO ST. LOUIS IN 3 1-2 DAYS.

By way of
MICHIGAN CENTRAL RAILROAD.
DISTANCE TO O'HAGO
318 MILES.

THE NEW AND SPLENDID STEAMER
ATLANTIC,
CAPT. S. CLEMENT,
Leaves the Michigan Central Railroad Wharf, EVERY MONDAY and THURSDAY EVENING, at NINE O'CLOCK, P. M., in connection with the MICHIGAN CENTRAL RAILROAD, through without landing, arriving at Detroit in time for the Evening Train going West.

From Buffalo to Detroit in 17 Hours. From Detroit to New Buffalo in 11 Hours.
From New Buffalo to Chicago in 4 Hours. From Chicago to St. Louis in 48 Hours.

PASSENGERS arriving by the Eastern Cars wishing to take this Boat will please have their Baggage placed under the MICHIGAN CENTRAL RAILROAD SIGN, in the Depot. A Baggaman will be in attendance to convey Baggage to the Boat.

For Passage or Freight, apply on board, or at the Office, at the Michigan Central Railroad Wharf, Buffalo.

DE 5.11 Essay: Exploring Detroit’s Ethnic Communities

People have come to Detroit from almost every country in the world. Most Detroiter are either immigrants or descendants of immigrants. Native Americans are indigenous residents, because they were the first settlers. They hunted here and they came to trade. From 1795 to 1842 a series of treaties between the Native Americans and the federal government forced them to give up their lands. The Native Americans received little in return. Today, there are about five thousand Native Americans living in Detroit.

As early settlers made their way westward during the 1700s and 1800s looking for better farmlands and greater economic opportunities, many stayed in Detroit or settled in other parts of Michigan. During the last 150 years, many people have come from other areas of the United States or from foreign countries. Little has changed today. People still come to seek out opportunities in the city.

When the Erie Canal opened in 1825 more people were able to come to Detroit. When the potato crop in Ireland failed in 1846, many Irish came looking for work and land to farm. The Scottish and the Germans, too, made their way to Detroit. Often, these people wanted to be farmers, but many of them stayed in Detroit and took jobs in shops and factories. Canadians often crossed the Detroit River and made Detroit their home.

Canada abolished slavery in 1834 and many enslaved African Americans came by way of Detroit to reach freedom in Canada. Some decided to remain in Detroit. By 1850, 2,583 African Americans lived in Detroit. Before the Civil War many people came from Poland, Italy and Holland. The number of foreign-born people living in Detroit grew every year from 1850 to 1930.

After 1900 more people came from eastern and southern Europe. Polish, Russian, Italian, Greek, Hungarian, Jewish, Armenian, Syrian, Romanian, and others came for a better place to work and raise their families. They found jobs in many new factories and businesses. They quickly became homeowners.

Historically, the newcomers were not always accepted and treated fairly in the workplace and in the community. Oftentimes, they tended to make their homes near others with similar backgrounds and language for security and acceptance. Therefore, different sections of the city tended to draw racial and ethnic groups.

In 1913, Henry Ford announced $5 a day pay for anyone working in his factory. The prospective workers did not need any training. Many of the immigrants were farmers in their own countries, and often lacked education. However, they could easily be hired to work on the assembly line. Farmlands were slowly disappearing and many decided to work in the automobile factories. The need for unskilled workers sparked an explosion of immigration to the Detroit area that continued throughout World War I.

However, in 1929, when the stock market crashed and many people lost their homes and their jobs, immigration came to a temporary halt. This was reversed during World War II, 1941-1945, when Detroit and Michigan became the “Arsenal of Democracy”. More workers were needed and more immigrants and migrants traveled to Detroit to work in the “bomber plants”. After the war Detroit still needed immigrants to work in producing peacetime cars and other products. This change drew 400,000 African Americans and whites from the southeastern United States to work in the Detroit factories and live in Detroit.

In the 1950s the development of interstate highways enhanced roads. Change in the Federal Housing Authority loan procedures in the 1950s encouraged Detroiter to move to the suburbs. This move caused the ethnic population of the city to change from predominately white to predominately African American.

Today, the Detroit metropolitan area is home to a large population of Arab Americans, Jews, Latin Americans, Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, and more recent arrivals such as Filipinos, Vietnamese, Hmong, and Laotians. It is impossible to mention all the different ethnic groups that lived and continue to live in Detroit. It is important to note that today people have to be more creative about finding jobs for themselves. The demand to unskilled workers has dwindled. Many of today's immigrants manage small stores and restaurants, while others find jobs as laborers. Everyone adds something different and special to the metropolitan Detroit community.
Since the days when the British and French fought each other for the right to displace the Native American Indians, scores of nationalities and races have moved in, attracted first by Michigan's abundance of fresh water and natural resources, and later by good-paying jobs.

**African Americans**

During the 19th century Michigan was an important stop on the Underground Railroad and many runaway slaves decided to make their homes here. Today, 14 percent of Michigan's population is African-American.

The first sizeable black migration into Michigan began in the 1840s, and by 1850, 2,583 blacks lived in Detroit. The industrialization of Detroit and the rise of the auto industry in the 20th century lured southern blacks -- and whites as well -- from hard-scrabble Southern farms with the promise of a better life. Detroit's black population ballooned from 5,741 in 1910 to 200,000 by 1943.

They first settled on the near east side in an area called Black Bottom because of its rich, dark soil. They set up stores, nightclubs and restaurants where blacks and whites mixed easily. The area thrived until the 1960s when it was wiped out by construction of the Chrysler Freeway, but not before a unique style of music developed that the city shared with a generation of Americans -- Motown.

**Germans**

A fourth of the population in metro Detroit claims German heritage, a million in Michigan as a whole. During the middle of the 1800s Michigan needed farmers and settlers to help the state grow and hired promoters and printed pamphlets proclaiming the glories of the state. Representatives sent to New York and as far away as Germany and Bavaria sought to attract hardworking citizens to the state. Germans, who were viewed at the time as religious, well-educated and prosperous, were heavily recruited and thousands came. These early German settlers played a large role in developing the state's education system.

Many retained their German language and customs in the new world, creating problems for the community during the First World War. Laws were passed by suspicious legislators requiring their newspapers to be printed in English instead of German.

In Detroit Germans settled on the east side along Gratiot. A few settled along Michigan Avenue. Many later moved to Macomb County.

**Poles**

About 850,000 ethnic Poles live near Detroit, centering on Hamtramck. One and a half million Michiganders claim Polish heritage, the largest group of all. A great wave came in the late 1800s and early 1900s, with many Poles attracted to Detroit by Henry Ford's offer of $5-a-day jobs in 1914. Many settled near Canfield and developed a strong Catholic heartland, constructing magnificent churches. Sweetest Heart of Mary, built in 1892, and St. Albertus, built in 1884, are only a block apart. Some later moved to the west side, near St. Hyacinth, then on to Dearborn. Others moved east to Warren, Sterling Heights and elsewhere in Macomb County.

**Irish and Italians**

The next largest groups, the Irish and the Italians, claim 500,000 and 400,000 respectively. The potato famine of the mid-1800s drove many Irish to seek a new life in America. In Detroit, they settled in the Corktown region just west of downtown, quickly assimilating and strengthening Detroit's Catholic underpinning. St. Patrick's Day is still a huge tradition in Detroit, and Michigan's political history is riddled by Irish names.

Many Italians settled on the east side around Eastern Market near St. Elizabeth and Holy Family churches. Many later moved eastward and into Macomb County.

**English**

The English claim about 300,000, but seem to be largely ignored as an ethnic group. Smaller numbers of Cornish and Welsh, along with about 110,000 Finns, found their way to the Upper Peninsula in the middle of the 19th century. Many were miners who left their homes when the ores were depleted. They came to the copper and iron areas of Upper Michigan around Houghton (named after Douglass Houghton who first discovered the copper) and Keweenaw counties, settling in Ishpeming, Iron River and Iron Mountain. Their arrival in the 1840s rivaled the later California gold rush.
rush and made the beef "pastie" a staple of Upper Peninsula cuisine.

**Finns**
The Finns, the last of the Upper Peninsula arrivals, persevered to become the most influential ethnic group in the U.P. Many initially took work as miners and lumberjacks, but quickly switched to farming. They became the largest Finnish group in the United States and fostered their own education and religious traditions. Suomi College was founded in Hancock in 1896 to train clergy, and it still serves the community.

**Canadians**
The 1800s also saw many Canadians, both English and French, cross into Michigan. These immigrants included farmers, fishermen, lumbermen, trappers and miners. About 60,000 in Michigan claimed French Canadian heritage in the 1990 census in addition to the 160,000 claiming European French heritage.

**French**
Detroit and Michigan history is riddled with French names, including Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac, founder of Detroit; Father Gabriel Richard, founder of the University of Michigan and St. Anne's; Robert Cavalier de la Salle, Great Lakes explorer, and Father Jacques Marquette, Michigan explorer and missionary.

**Hispanics**
Hispanics in Michigan numbered 160,000 in the 1990 Census, and comprise the largest foreign language-speaking group in the state. In 1999, they accounted for 44 percent of new immigrants, many settling around what has become known as Mexicantown, a popular restaurant district west of Corktown.

**Greeks**
There are more than 150,000 in Michigan who claim Greek descent, 120,000 in the Detroit area. Well assimilated, they still maintain the best known ethnic enclave, Greektown, on Monroe just east of downtown.

The first Greek immigrants settled in Detroit at the turn of the century and were followed soon after by a wave of immigrants who came in 1914 seeking Ford's $5 a day jobs. Many came to escape political persecution of Greeks in Turkey which began in 1912.

**Dutch**
The Dutch, more than 120,000 of them, settled on the west side of the state near Grand Rapids and Holland, where the tulip festivals are a popular tourist attraction.

Immigration in Michigan slowed to a trickle in 1924, when the United States limited the influx of foreigners to only 164,000 per year, fewer than 20 percent from Southern Europe, and none from Asia. This quota system was not relaxed until 1968.

**Eastern Europeans**
In the 1980s, established enclaves in the Detroit area offered asylum to Poles, Hungarians, Serbs, Croats, Bulgarians, Romanians, and Slovaks seeking to escape the turmoil in Eastern Europe as the old Soviet systems collapsed.

**Asians**
In 1999, Asians accounted for 26 percent of new Michigan immigrants. In the 1990s, the Asian population around Detroit grew to more than 55,000. This group, including Indians, Koreans, Chinese, Japanese and Filipinos, are generally well-educated and live in affluent communities in the metro area.

Detroit had a Japanese presence as early as 1892, but Japanese started moving to Detroit in more significant numbers around 1946 as the notorious relocation camps were disbanded. About 5,000 Japanese live in Metro Detroit. At the end of the Vietnam war, significant numbers of Vietnamese, Cambodians and Laotians settled in and around Detroit.

**Arabs**
Arabs began settling in Detroit as early as the 1920s. They established a tight-knit community that welcomed arrivals pouring out of the Middle East to escape the turmoil following World War II. Estimates put the number of Arabs in the Detroit area, many of them in Dearborn, at more than 100,000. The community includes Chaldeans, Iraqi, Lebanese, Syrian and other Middle Easterners. Prominent Arab-Americans include Ed Deeb, president of the Eastern Market Merchant Association, who was honored by President George Bush with a Point of Light award for his service to the community, and U.S. Sen. Spencer Abraham, of Michigan.

According to historian Arthur Woodford, Detroit has "the largest multi-ethnic population of any city in the United States. Detroit has the largest Arabic-speaking population outside of the Middle East, the second largest Polish population in America (only Chicago has more), and the largest U.S. concentration of Belgians, Chaldeans and Maltese."
DE 5.13: Map: Detroit Neighborhoods, 1904
DE 5.14: Photo: William Lambert
DE 5.15: Photo: Finney’s Barn
DE 5.16: Illustration: Underground Railroad Routes in Michigan
Freedom’s Railway

Reminiscences Of The Brave Old Days Of The Famous Underground Line

HISTORIC SCENES RECALLED Detroit The Center Of Operations That Freed Thousands Of Slaves

The western underground railway paid no dividends, never had a general meeting of its directors. Its objective was Canada and Freedom, its trade was derived from the slave plantations of the south, its patrons were people of color, and its promoters and managers had their headquarters in Detroit. Some of them still live and all of them recall the days of the underground road with the hearty satisfaction that comes from a good work accomplished.

Among those living here, well known and highly respected, is William Lambert, age 70; occupation, tailor and philanthropist; son of a slave father and free mother; a man of education, wide read, rare argumentative power; the founder of the colored episcopal church of this city, and the leader of his race in this state. It is no wonder that William Lambert was chosen as active manager of the underground railway service. His energy was unflagging and his executive qualities of the highest order. Associated with him was George DBaptiste, also colored, and like Lambert, possessed good executive ability. DBaptiste is dead, but Lambert still lives, his mind and eye undimmed and his enthusiasm for the advancement of his race sparkling as bright as ever. He told the greater part of this story which follows, but the charm of its narration is lost in the writing, for Lambert’s modulated voice, his careful gesticulation and the carefully chosen and accurately pronounced words with which he clothes his (teaching) ideas can only be suggested here. Nearly 40,000 slaves were made free by crossing them into Canada over Detroit and St. Clair rivers between the year 1820 and 1862, when the last one was ferried over. In the last twenty years of that time $120,000.00 were collection and expended to bring slaves from the south to Canada, by way of Detroit. There escaped to Canada in all the estimated number of 50,000 slaves. A few of these were not travelers on the underground railroad, but they were a small minority. The larger number were brought from Florida and Louisiana and from the border states. They were never left unprotected in their journeys, and the hardships they underwent to secure liberty were not only shared with them by their conductors, but repeated time after time by the hundred or so men who cheerfully assumed this arduous task.

Taking up Mr. Lambert’s story of personal reminiscences he begins with 1829, at which time a band of desperadoes, something in general character like the James’ Boys, were the terror of the south-western states. McKinseyites they were called, and in number were some sixty or seventy. They robbed and pillaged whenever they could with safety, and these people were the first southern agents of the underground railway system of Detroit. “It was a long time,” said Mr. Lambert, “before we could make up our minds to make use of these scoundrels, but we at least concluded that the end justified the means. Indeed, we went further than that before we got through our work. These men would, with the permission of the slave himself, steal him away from the owner who had title to him, and then sell him. From this second bondage they would steal him again and deliver him to us on the line of the Ohio River. They got their profit out of the sale, although they had to commit two thefts to do it. There were no steam railways in those days. We traveled at night, or if in the daytime, with peddling wagons with false bottoms, large enough to hold three men, traveling though the south. Our association with the McKinseyites was from the very necessities of the case of short life. They were sure to be caught sooner or later, and at last some more daring robbery than usual brought some of them to prison and dispersed the rest.

“We began the organization of a more thorough system and we arranged passwords and grips, and a ritual, but we were always suspicious of the white man, and those we admitted we put to severe tests, and we had one ritual for them alone and a chapter to test them in. To the privileges of the rest of the order they were not admitted.”

He took from a desk where “Walker’s Appeal for Freedom”, and the letters of Mr. John Brown, Lloyd Garrison, and Wendell Phillips, two books bound in sheep, and of the pattern called memoranda books in the trade. In Lambert’s own handwriting was the ritual, the test words, grips, description emblems and lessons. The order using was composed of nearly 1,000,000 free negroes in the United States and Canada.

To complete the ritual, which was the one actively used by the underground railway managers:

Word – “Leprous”.
Password – “Crossover” – spoken thus:
Question – Cross?
Answer – Over.
Fir – Lecture.
Q. Have you ever been on the Railroad?
A. I have been a short distance.
Q. Where did you start from?
A. The depot.
Q. Where did you stop?
A. At a place called Safety.
Q. Have you a brother there? I think I know him.
A. I know you now. You traveled on the road.

This conversation was the test. It was taught to every fugitive, and the sign was pulling the knuckle of the right forefinger over the knuckle of the same finger of the left hand. The answer was to reverse the fingers as described. It is an interesting feature of this history to remember that nearly 40,000 slaves used this test, and it was on the lips of every Quaker in America, the first and only time forgoing the use of “thee” and “thou” in order to make the test more certain.

The Grand chapter lodge had its rooms on Jefferson between Bates and Randolph about where No. 202 now is. When the applicant for the degree of captive was brought up for examination he was detained without while asked what it was he sought.

“Deliverance” was the answer.
“How does he expect to get in?”
“By his own efforts.”
“Has he faith?”
“He has hope.”

It was from this body that John Brown took on his task of raiding Harper’s Ferry. One of the prominent members was Mr. Lambert. John Brown’s raid on Harper’s Ferry was planned here, and much of the used was subscribed here.

It was on some of the personal qualities of John Brown that the reporter continued the interview with Lambert.

“When did you meet Brown first?”

“Here in Detroit. I was expecting a train from the south and we were waiting for it at the lodge on Jefferson Avenue. This was our custom. The fugitives were brought in from the country from Wayne and Ann Arbor so as to arrive at night. They would be brought to the vicinity of the lodge, when we would go and test them and all those with them. Some twenty or thirty came on the night I speak of, and I went down to test them. Among others to whom I applied the test was a tall, smoothly-shaven man. When he had answered correctly I cried out, ‘Are you John Brown? You are. I know it brother.’ ‘Yes brother, I am John Brown.’ From that moment he and I were the firmest friends.

“He stopped with me at my house, then in the western part of the city, and became a conductor on the underground railway. He brought to Detroit more than 200 fugitives. Here are the books. If you care to go over them you will see the reports that give the dates and names, and from whence they came. He penetrated every part of the south and visited every colored man that it was possible to get at, who had intelligence to grasp the idea of freedom, and yet make no boast of it. He was indefatigable in these respects. He was always on time, and his personal courage tested a thousand times, was beyond dispute.

“When we had received the people at the lodge, we took them to the rendezvous, which was the house of J.C. Reynolds, an employee of the company then constructing the Michigan Central Railway. His residence was at the foot of Eight Street, just opposite the place where the first elevator was subsequently built. The house has long since been torn down. We would fetch the fugitives there, shipping them into the house by dark one by one. There they found food and warmth, and when, as frequently happened, they were ragged and thinly clad, we gave them clothing. Our boats were concealed under the docks, and before daylight we would have everyone over. We never lost a man by capture at this point so careful we were, and we took over as high as 1,600 in one year. Sometimes we were closely watched and other rendezvous were used. Finney’s barn used to be filled with them sometimes. It stood opposite the hotel property which bears Finney’s name. Well, one night we had reason to believe we were watched. Two persons were skulking about and we turned upon them. Brown seized them both and dropped them over the pier head first into the water. He had scarcely done so when he threw off his coat and plunged in after them and brought them safely to land. They would have certainly been drowned had he not interfered to save them.

Once in Indiana, near Indianapolis, he was driving a covered wagon with nine fugitives concealed under some old furniture. He was pursued by some slave hunters who had got on the trail in some way, and although they were armed and fired at him he boldly faced the crowd and droved them away, and brought his charge through in safety. But those incidents of Brown were the recurring ones to every conductor, of whom we had as many as a hundred employed. It was fight and run – danger at every turn, but that we calculated upon and were prepared for. Our organization of stations was very good. We sent many white men to take up farms at convenient places, and as these stationmasters multiplied the operation of the road became less difficult. Many of the men were of good means, for it was necessary at times to have bail at hand and influential people to help us out of our troubles. In 1859 our organization was so complete that we could get through an invoice of freight by our own road from the river to the lake in ten to eleven days. If the war had not come we would have had 33 percent of the 3,000,000 of slaves of the south in Canada by the year 18__.

The war ended the usefulness of the railroad. The line of freedom crossed the lakes and moved south, keeping step with the battle line of the union.”

“Who was the first and last person who traveled over the road?”

“Ah, well; I suppose the first has long since gone over another river to a greater country. I do not remember who he was, nor do I recall the last. It was April, 1862 we sent him. When a fugitive got here our first object was to secure for a means of making a livelihood, then to bring him his family.
For the former purpose we had the fugitive home and employment society on the other side. We took up land, and the rest of that part of the task was easy. Then we had the fugitive photographed. This photograph with all the necessary directions, were given to a conductor with orders to bring that family. He would seek it out. The photograph served as credentials, and when we had shown it to the people all he had to do was to use the best means to get them over the river and on to the line of one of the routes of railways. After that it was hard to capture them again. We did not lose many.”

“All of these conductors and the rest of it must have cost money?”

“Yes, but we got enough, although at times much hampered for the lack of it. Perhaps it was better that we not get more than we did for our enthusiasm, if not expended in the necessary channel of getting money, might have led us into greater mistakes. We were impatient and might have gone so fast as to defeat our own purposes. However, we got the money. One of the reasons, though by no means the important one, that led us to get a man his family, was that he would always be willing to contribute something to help that being done when he might otherwise have hesitated to share his means. The chief reason, though, was to sweeten the cup of liberty for him, because without his family about him his happiness was only partially secured by his own escape from bondage. He was not likely to become a good citizen and a man to do good in the world without his family, and our aim did not end with the deprivation of the slaveholder of his property. It looked toward the civilization of the man, the raising of him up, so that one object was only half gained when he was free. That our success has been marked is proven by the condition of 50,000 good citizens contributed to the dominion of Canada.

“Now about incidents. Reynolds, of whom I spoke, was a very ardent worker. He had been with Levi Coffin in Cincinnati and had been very successful in getting slaves away. Cincinnati was the shopping place for a good many southern people who used to come with their servants. We used to get so many of these away that their trade was almost lost to the city and went to St. Louis instead. Then the merchants remonstrated, but we kept on and sent out people into the south to secure fugitives. We kept them on the boats on the Mississippi and Ohio rivers, sent them down to become overseers, and every place we could think of where they could do the best work. We worked every thing we could that way, and were very successful. We got a good many from Louisiana at first while that state remained under the laws of the old French code. It provided that no child of a while mother could become a slave. The amount of proof adduced about this time to give claimants for liberty white mothers was simply outstanding. But when the law was changed, the distance to Louisiana was so great as to seriously interfere with our work there. Nevertheless, we used to get a great many.

“It would be a picture if you could only have seen it, never to be forgotten, if you could have witnessed many of the scenes of families reuniting and of freemen reaching Canada. For any labor, or cost, or danger, that was our ample reward. I guess more of the incidents that happened in Detroit were pretty well known. After we got to Michigan we didn’t have a regular route, but we did have others. We used to work up the Wabash river to Ft. Wayne, and then cross into Washtenaw county, where Ann Arbor is, you know. There we had lots of friends and help. Then if the hue and cry had been sharply raised we would keep our people in concealment and get them over the ferry when we could. They used to lay in barns and all sorts of retreats and doubtless underwent many hardships, which at time caused them almost to regret their flight, but we got them through all right at last. Girls were often brought as boys, and women disguised as men, and men and women were frequent arrivals. When railways began to be built we used to pack them in boxes, and send them by express. We got thirty or forty through in that way, but the danger of their lives by reason of lack of careful handling and fear of suffocation made that means dangerous.

“Well, our work went forward here just thirty-three years. It was a great one, and I am satisfied with my share of it. I have told more of it to you than I ever did to any one before. Indeed, I am quite hoarse with talking.”

The old gentleman rose, indicating thereby that he had talked himself out for one sitting, and giving me a courteous good night, added that, some other day, he would like to tell about the Bulwer-Clayton treaty at length. F.H.P.