

## Canada, Incubator of Black American Surgeons

Shannon Prince; Catherine Slaney, PhD; Vivian C. McAlister, MB, FACS;  
and Don K. Nakayama, MD, MBA, FACS

Canada was a haven for Blacks escaping the antebellum American South by way of the Underground Railroad. Sterling Allen Brown, professor of poetry at Howard University in the mid-20th century, noted that Canaan, the promised land of African American spirituals (*"I'm on my way...up to Canaan land!"*), stood for Canada, the land that promised freedom and a land of opportunity free from racial discrimination.<sup>1</sup>

Such was the case for many Blacks who became prominent figures in U.S. medicine and surgery. Some were born to Black Americans who escaped to Canada; others were free Blacks who went there to escape racist laws and social strictures in the United States. Several got their primary schooling at the remarkable Buxton Mission School, the first racially integrated school in North America. Canadian medical schools accepted Black Americans who were denied entry into schools in the United States.

Here are biographical profiles of several prominent Black surgeons who were educated or practiced in Canada during their careers. Elsewhere in this book are full chapters devoted to others with strong ties to Canada, including Martin Robison Delany (1812–1885; Chapter 5), Alexander

Augusta (1825–1890; Chapter 4), Nathan Mossell (1856–1946; Chapter 11), and Charles Drew (1904–1950; Chapter 21).

### Okah Tubbee

Perhaps the first Black person to practice medicine in Canada was Okah Tubbee (1810 or 1811–?), the fascinating subject of a book written by Angela Pulley Hudson of Texas A&M University<sup>2</sup> and a hagiography by Tubbee's wife, recently edited by Daniel Littlefield, Jr., of the University of Arkansas, Little Rock.<sup>3</sup>

A self-taught musician and exceptional entertainer, Tubbee performed throughout the United States while claiming an Indian identity to hide his enslaved childhood in Natchez, MS. He was born William McCarey, the youngest child in a household of enslaved persons, young and adult, some of them his half-siblings. Under the terms of their owner's will at his death, all were freed except young William, who was to remain under the ownership of the other children in the home. He was regularly whipped and beaten, first by his putative mother, then by a blacksmith under whom he was apprenticed.

He absconded from the smithy and worked odd jobs up and down the Mississippi. A natural showman, he had a street act imitating bird calls and whistling popular tunes, a performance he took to New Orleans. Once his half-siblings freed him in 1839, he became a popular stage performer. One impresario wanted to promote his performances but had misgivings about his race. Hudson wrote of the promoter's qualms, "It did not 'seem exactly proper for a negro [sic] to appear on the stage'"<sup>2</sup> in a South still unsettled by the Nat Turner revolt (1831). It was decided that William would perform as a Choctaw Indian with the adopted name Okah Tubbee ("oak tub," in crude pidgin). With a new identity, he married Lucy, a devout Mormon woman of Anglo-American parentage who also claimed Indian heritage. The two wandered the United States, Okah providing musical entertainment and Lucy proselytizing her sect of Mormonism.

Throughout his travelling life, Tubbee had a sideline practicing medicine. He claimed to have been an assistant to a U.S. Army surgeon, who had been stationed in Natchez.<sup>3</sup> As his identity as an Indian matured, he set himself up as an Indian medicine man and sold cures for a variety of diseases. He had settled into a medical practice in Missouri when a man who knew of his slave past in Mississippi threatened to expose him as a charlatan. Even though Tubbee had been manumitted, the man's extortions and the recently passed Fugitive Slave Act (1850) chased Tubbee and his family into Upper Canada.

In Toronto, he continued his career as native healer, physician, and musician. In a newspaper advertisement, Tubbee proudly wrote that he had:

*...succeeded in curing cases that had withstood for years the efforts of the best practitioners. ... [Rheumatic] affections, spinal and nervous affections, toothache, scrofula, piles, cancer, tetter, sore eyes, dyspepsia, white selling, bronchitis, asthma and phthisic, female diseases, general debility, neuralgia, fits, gravel, chills and fever, diarrhoea, &c.*<sup>3</sup>

A movement to rid Upper Canada of quacks and patent medicine caught up with Tubbee. In 1854

he was accused of defrauding a Grey County family of \$10. The Medical Board of Upper Canada challenged his lack of credentials. Two years later, his history disappears without further trace.

Littlefield writes that Tubbee's story reveals "often terrifying glimpses into the social condition of the non-white population in the Old South."<sup>3</sup> Enslaved by both to his original white owner and later by his free Black half-siblings, he took advantage of being able "to pass" as an Indian. He thus gained a measure of freedom by concealing his Black identity.<sup>3</sup>

### The Buxton Mission School

The Buxton Mission School was established by Rev. William King (1812–1895) in Buxton, Ontario, a story chronicled by Fred Landon of the Western University in London, ON.<sup>4</sup> Unique in that it offered a classical education to Black students and accepted both Black and white students, the school had a remarkable group of six Black graduates in its inaugural class, all of whom completed university and had successful professional careers.

King, an Irish immigrant, married into a Southern American family. He inherited 15 enslaved persons when his wife died in 1846. Because of state laws against manumission, King took them to Canada in 1848, effectively freeing them. With other abolitionists in the Free Presbyterian Church of Canada, King established the Elgin Association, an organization devoted to the resettlement of refugees from America.

The Elgin Association obtained land near Chatham, then a rural area in Kent County in Southwestern Ontario and a terminus of the Underground Railroad. The refugees brought into Canada by King formed the nucleus of the settlement. New arrivals were given the chance to obtain up to 50 acres of land at \$2.50 an acre, payable in ten annual installments. In just three years, the settlement grew to 75 families and 400 inhabitants; in 1857 it had 200 families and a population of 800, with a sawmill, a brickyard, a pearl ash factory, a blacksmith, a carpenter, shoe shops, and a good general store.

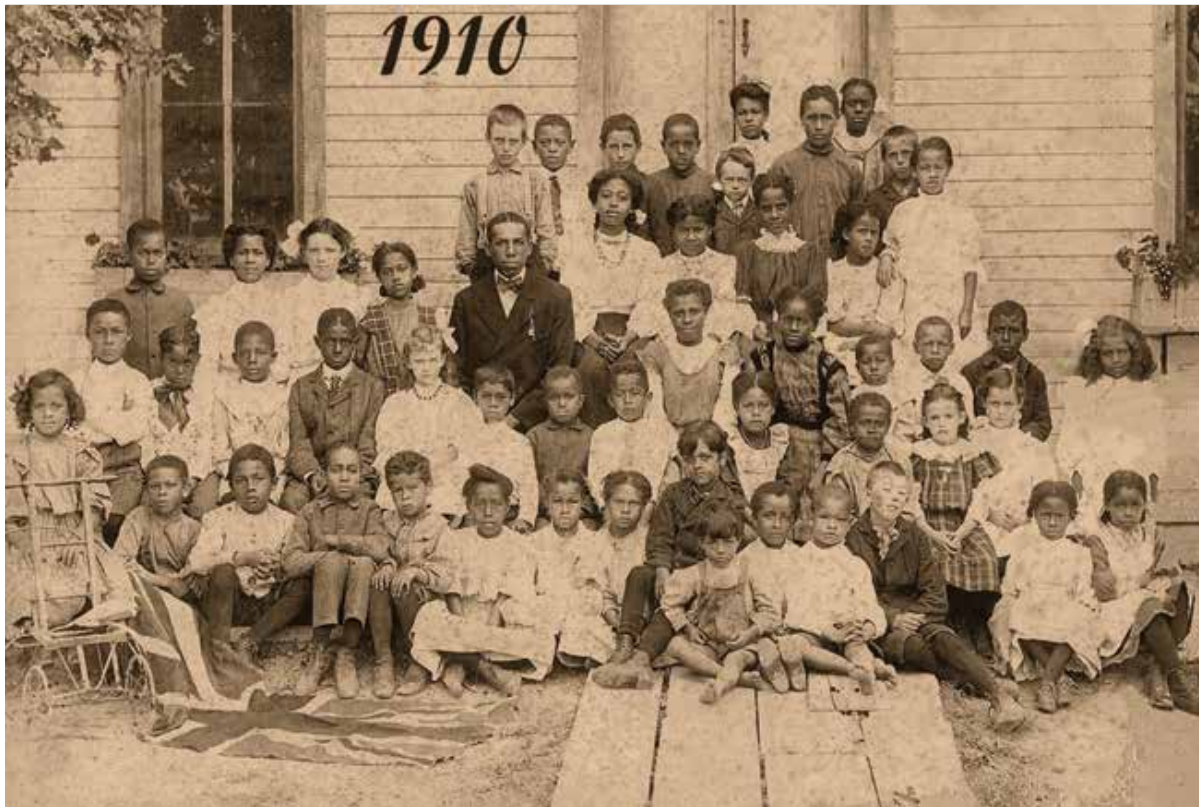


Figure 1

The two schools at the Buxton settlement—one for boys, the other for girls—grew quickly, with a combined enrollment of 140 (Figure 1). King believed that Black children deserved a standard classical education, and not just vocational training. The Buxton Mission School quickly developed a reputation for excellence. In 1850, an act of the provincial Parliament ended the practice of segregating schools by race and religion. Within two years, the Buxton Mission School became the first racially integrated public school in North America.<sup>5</sup>

There were six Black students in King's first class of 1850, four of whom became physicians. Anderson Abbott, Jerome Riley, and John Rapier served in the Civil War as surgeons under Alexander Augusta at Freedmen's Hospital in Washington—a connection between Buxton and Freedmen's Hospital not widely recognized in American history. Richard Johnson (c. 1840–?) attended medical school at Edinburgh University

and became a missionary in Africa. The other two graduates also became prominent Canadians. Thomas Stringer built churches and schools in Ontario and in Mississippi, where in 1869 he became its first Black state senator. Alfred Lafferty graduated from the University of Toronto and became a well-known lawyer and educator.

### Anderson R. Abbott

Abbott (1837–1913, Figure 2), was Canada's first native-born Black physician, whose history was chronicled by Catherine Slaney, his great-granddaughter.<sup>5</sup> His father, Wilson Ruffin Abbott, was a prosperous free Black of mixed-race parentage who was a merchant and landowner in Mobile, AL. After a serious injury, he was nursed to health by Ellen Toyer, a Black woman who was an indentured servant. Out of gratitude, Wilson paid her obligation and married her. He also paid for the freedom of Ellen's sisters.



Figure 2

Despite his business success, Wilson and his wife had to register with the state and post a monetary bond with two white men “of good standing.”<sup>5</sup> In public they had to wear an armband to verify that the bond had been posted. Black Codes, laws that restricted the movement and activities of free Blacks, became more severe after the Nat Turner uprising of 1831. Among them were prohibitions against assembly in groups, bearing arms, free speech, and testimony against whites in court. These strictures against the liberty of Blacks failed to allay the fears of the white community. Blacks were regularly the targets of racial violence. Successful Blacks like Wilson Abbott, whose financial station approached those of prosperous whites, were a particular target.

Blacks were also prohibited from learning to read and write. With an infant son and their lives in danger, Wilson Abbott and his family migrated north. After a brief stay in New York City, the Abbott family emigrated to Canada, settling in Toronto in 1835. With his experience buying and selling land, Wilson once again prospered.

Canada had banned the importation of slaves since 1793, and slavery had long since disappeared from the country when the Abbotts arrived. Racism was

still present, but in essence, Black Canadians freely participated in society. Later Abbott wrote:

*I do not claim that there is no race prejudice in Canada. In Toronto, at least it is innocuous. There are no indications of it in our churches, schools, societies, hotels, and places of public resort. . . . Afro-Americans in Toronto are just entitled to the respectful treatment they receive for several reasons. They are and always have been loyal, peaceful, and law-abiding. By providence and industry, they have secured homes and educated their children, who are employed as tradesmen, mechanics, laborers; some are in the service of government and a few are following professional pursuits, besides the usual quota of waiters, barbers, restaurant and boarding-house keepers.<sup>5</sup>*

Wilson and Ellen moved to Buxton to enroll their children in the Buxton Mission School. After graduation, young Anderson completed his studies at the Toronto Academy of Knox College as one of its first three Black students. After two years in the preparatory department at Oberlin College in Ohio, Abbott enrolled in University College in Toronto to study chemistry. He then studied medicine at the Trinity Medical College, also in Toronto.<sup>5</sup>

During his study of medicine, Anderson Abbott met Alexander Augusta, who was in practice in the city and had preceded him at Trinity. At Augusta’s suggestion, Abbott, licensed but yet to receive his medical degree, applied for and received a commission as captain and acting assistant surgeon to the Union Army in 1863.

Abbott was stationed in Washington, D.C., on Augusta’s staff at the Contraband Hospital, which in 1865 would become Freedmen’s Hospital under the Freedmen’s Bureau.<sup>6</sup> After Augusta stepped down from the position in 1864, Abbott served as the Contraband Hospital’s executive officer and surgeon-in-charge.<sup>7</sup>

Despite his position and his officer’s uniform, Abbott still was subjected to racist attacks. He and Augusta’s wife were accosted in July 1863 at the New York train depot just days before the



draft riots that killed hundreds of Black men. Just months later, Abbott and Augusta attended a White House reception where they were warmly received by President and Mrs. Lincoln. Anderson was among the surgeons who sat vigil in the President's final moments. Later, Mrs. Lincoln sent Abbott a plaid shawl that the President had worn at his first inauguration as a personal memento.<sup>7</sup>

Abbott worked for the Freedman's Bureau after the war before returning to Canada in 1866, still just 29 years old. He received his degree in medicine from the University of Toronto in 1867 and in 1869 became a member of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario. He practiced in Chatham, ON, where he was the first Black person in Canada to be appointed coroner. He was active in the racial equality movement and led the integration of schools in the community.

Abbott lived in both the United States and Canada. In 1894, he was appointed surgeon-in-chief of Provident Hospital in Chicago, succeeding its founder, Daniel Hale Williams, and serving until 1897. Abbott died in Toronto in 1913.<sup>7</sup>

### Jerome R. Riley

Born in Detroit, Riley (1840–1929, Figure 3) was only four years old when his family moved to Buxton, where he attended the Buxton Mission School. Riley attended Knox College at the University of Toronto with Abbott, his Buxton classmate. After passing the examination in medicine with the Upper Canada Medical Board in 1861, Riley set up practice in Chatham.<sup>8</sup>

Abbott convinced Riley to join the Union Army as a contract surgeon in 1864, and later to join Abbott's surgical staff at Freedmen's Hospital. After the war, Riley decided to complete a degree in medicine in the United States. He went to the Chicago Medical College (the forerunner of the Northwestern University School of Medicine) but only stayed for one year (1869). Augusta, now on the faculty at the just-organized medical department at Howard University, convinced Riley to transfer to the new medical school, where he received his degree in 1873.<sup>9</sup>



Figure 3

Riley went to Pine Bluff, AR, for four years, where he was its county physician and coroner. Unlike most Blacks in the Reconstruction South, who were members of the Republican party, Riley was an active Democrat and served as a delegate to the state's constitutional convention of 1874. He relocated to Washington, DC, where in addition to his practice he remained involved in politics as president of the Democratic party in the city and serving two terms as head of the William J. Bryan Colored Democratic Club. He also had an appointment as a watchman to the U.S. Senate, a function now performed by the U.S. Capitol Police.

A prolific writer, in 1897 Riley wrote a popular book, *The Philosophy of Negro Suffrage*. In it he discusses how American Blacks, just emancipated from slavery, can best assume a place among the major white political parties on equal footing.<sup>10</sup> An example of the political independence he sought, Riley was a member of the National Negro Anti-Expansion, Anti-Imperialist, Anti-Trust, and Anti-Lynching League, a group formed in opposition to U.S. wars against Spain (1898) and the Philippines (1899–1902). He died at age 89 in New York City on New Year's Eve, 1929.

## John H. Rapier, Jr.

John H. Rapier, Jr. (1835–1865, Figure 4), was a member of the remarkable Thomas-Rapier family, the subject of a book by John Hope Franklin of Duke University and Loren Schwening of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. The matriarch of the Thomas-Rapier family was Sally Thomas, an enslaved woman whose grandsons included John Jr. and his brother James T. Rapier, who became the second Black U.S. congressional representative from the Reconstruction South. Another line of her offspring was from her union with John Catron, one of the seven Supreme Court justices in the majority in the Dred Scott decision (1857). Catron and Sally Thomas's son was James Thomas, who was born enslaved but, after he was freed, became wealthy speculating in real estate in St. Louis.<sup>11</sup>



Figure 4

John Rapier, Jr., was born in Florence, AL, where John H. Rapier, Sr.—his father and a freed slave—ran a profitable barber shop. John Jr. and his two brothers were sent to Chatham to board with their uncle Henry Thomas and attend the Buxton

Mission School.<sup>12</sup> Despite his modest financial success, John Sr. resented the social strictures of the South and the lack of opportunity for his children. He encouraged his sons to seek opportunities elsewhere. Thwarted by racism in every corner of the United States, John Sr. was convinced that emigration the only feasible route to liberty.<sup>12</sup>

John Jr. shared his father's view of the racial climate in the United States. In 1854, the younger Rapier wrote to the American Colonization Society, the organization that sponsored Black emigration to Liberia, but received no reply. Like many Black Americans determined to leave the country, Rapier looked to Central America and the Caribbean as potential havens.<sup>11</sup>

He heard of the exploits of William Walker, a soldier of fortune who was trying to establish his own private colony in Central America, allegedly fighting for the freedom of the native people of Nicaragua. Rapier visited his uncle James Thomas in Nashville and showed him a news clipping of Walker's adventures.

Thomas and Walker were boyhood friends despite their racial difference. Even though Thomas had made a comfortable living as a barber since being freed in 1851, he and Rapier decided to join Walker in Nicaragua. Once they got there, however, they soon recognized Walker's despotism and discovered his plans to reintroduce slavery in the lands under his control. Both of them quit the expedition after only a few months.<sup>13</sup>

Rapier became the secretary to Walker's associate Parker French, who was responsible for recruiting and fundraising for Walker's schemes in the U.S. The two parted ways in Minnesota, where Rapier became a freelance journalist for newspapers in the area. He wrote scores of articles on civil rights issues, such as the absence of schools for Black children despite the taxes Blacks paid, and federal officials not accepting homestead applications from Blacks.

Rapier then left Minnesota to seek better social and professional opportunities in the Caribbean. He first went to Haiti, where slaves had rebelled

in 1791 and established a Black republic in 1804. Black Americans saw the country as a place where they might live in freedom. However, few of the 7,000 to 10,000 Black Americans who went there stayed, unable to surmount the cultural and language barriers and finding poverty and living conditions even more dire than in the U.S. South.<sup>14</sup>

Rapier travelled on to Jamaica, where he apprenticed himself to a dentist. Unable to make ends meet, he decided to return to the United States and seek a career in medicine. He attended Oberlin College for a year before applying to the medical department of the University of Michigan. With his light skin and recent travels in the Caribbean, Rapier represented himself as being of mixed race and a native of Jamaica, hoping to avoid the racism that might meet a free Black from the United States. But the ruse did not protect him from racial harassment by the all-white and male student body. Embittered, he left Michigan and received his medical degree from the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Keokuk (IA) in 1864.<sup>15</sup>

Degree in hand, Rapier applied for a position as a medical officer in the U.S. Army, this time emphasizing his upbringing in Alabama and status as a free Black. He was assigned to Alexander Augusta's staff at the Contraband and Freedmen's Hospitals.<sup>6</sup>

Rapier died in Washington sometime in 1865 from unknown causes at just 30 years old, a tragic illustration of an intelligent, energetic man frustrated at every turn by the strictures of a racist society.

## W. Henry Fitzbutler

W. Henry Fitzbutler (1837?–1901) founded the Louisville National Medical College in 1888, the first Black proprietary medical school in the country. In addition to his role of dean and professor of surgery and *materia medica* at his institution, he was a vigorous public advocate of education and other causes relevant to Blacks in Kentucky, contributions that were reviewed by W. Montague Cobb, professor of anatomy at Howard University and longtime editor of the *Journal of the National Medical Association (JNMA)*.<sup>16</sup>

Fitzbutler's enslaved father worked as a coachman; his mother was an indentured servant from England. They escaped by way of the Underground Railroad to Essex County, Ontario, where Henry was born. Christened William Henry Butler, he later added "Fitz" to his last name—perhaps to hide a name that denoted servility<sup>16</sup>—and dropped his first name, because "Bill" was too common.<sup>17</sup> An outstanding student, he showed an early interest in medicine and took a medical preceptorship with Daniel Pearson, a local physician and a former enslaved person who had an extensive medical library.<sup>18</sup>

To pay for his further education, Fitzbutler worked on a farm, taught school, and cleared land. He used his earnings to attend Adrian College in Michigan, followed by medical school at the Detroit Medical College (1869, soon after the school's founding in 1868). After one year, he transferred to the medical department at the University of Michigan—the same school where, a decade previously, John Rapier had been dismissed because of his race—becoming the school's first Black graduate in medicine in 1872.

He settled in Louisville as Kentucky's first Black physician. Fitzbutler became known as a good practitioner but ran afoul of a clique of white men that acted as unofficial overseers of Black commerce and public affairs for Blacks in the city. "Few colored people sought business or notable positions without consulting these 'intermediators,'" Cobb wrote.<sup>17</sup> In setting up his practice without the explicit approval of the group, Fitzbutler's stay in Louisville was predicted to be short-lived.

But he held fast. In 1873, Fitzbutler was named to a commission charged with reviewing the education of Black children in the state. He was named the group's chair, a position that no one wanted because of the dangerous issues that might be discussed. The actions of the commission resulted in the great improvement of education of Black children. Fitzbutler was a consistent opponent to the establishment of separate schools for Blacks. To publicize his political views, he was a writer and editor for two Black-owned newspapers

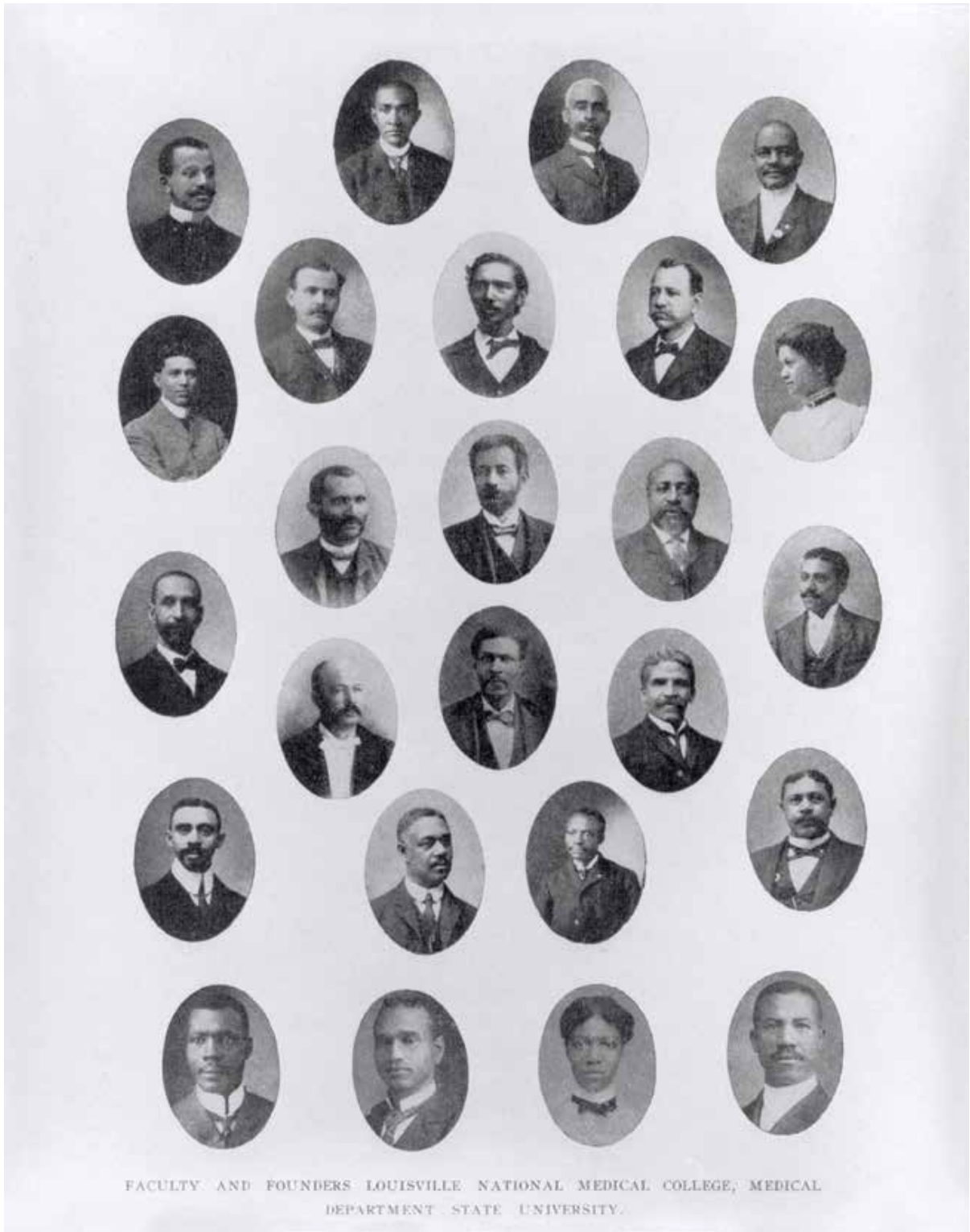


Figure 5



in Louisville, *The Weekly Planet* and the *Ohio Falls Gazette* (1879), the latter being the first Black periodical to achieve long-term success in the city.

Barred because of his race from any of the hospitals in the city and from attending lectures at the medical school at the University, Fitzbutler and two other physicians, W.A. Burney and Rufus Conrad, decided to open a medical school open to all students, Black and white. In 1888, the Kentucky legislature granted them a charter for the Louisville National Medical College (Figure 5; Fitzbutler is center, third row). They had begun teaching students as early as 1886, anticipating passage of the act, so the College's first class was ready to receive their degrees in medicine in 1889.

Fitzbutler was the school's inaugural dean and professor of surgery and *materia medica*. The Kentucky Board of Health certified the school in 1891 and "declared [it] to be a regular legal medical college, commended to Kentucky and the world."<sup>17</sup> In 1895, Fitzbutler opened the Auxiliary Hospital, a proprietary eight-bed facility connected to the school, as a site to train medical students and nurses. His wife, Sarah Helen Fitzbutler, was also a physician and served as superintendent of the nursing school.

Fitzbutler continued as dean until his death in 1901, succeeded by his partner in founding the school, W.A. Burney. The school and its tiny inpatient facility were likely foundering at the time of Fitzbutler's death, unable to keep pace with advances in medical education, science, and technology. Without access to adequate numbers of inpatients, and with nonexistent study spaces and a poor library, the school was one of the schools that Abraham Flexner recommended closing in his report to the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching in 1910.<sup>20,21</sup> Of the 29 students graduating from 1903–1911, only 11 passed the state board exams.<sup>17</sup> The school closed in 1912.

To honor Fitzbutler's life in promoting medical education, two undergraduate medical student associations are now named for him: Fitzbutler College at the University of Louisville School of

Medicine, and Fitzbutler House at the University of Michigan Medical School.

## Charles V. Roman

Charles Roman (1864–1934, Figure 6) was the inaugural professor of ophthalmology and otolaryngology at Meharry Medical College and the first editor of the *JNMA*. Known as well for being a Sunday school teacher as for being a figure in Black medical world, he was a national leader in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. A lengthy obituary on Roman, written by Cobb, provided most of the facts in this section.<sup>22</sup> Roman's history of the Meharry Medical College included several anecdotes from his own life that are retold here.<sup>23</sup>

Born in Williamsport, PA, young Charles, only eight, moved with his parents to Hamilton, ON. He befriended "an eccentric root doctor"<sup>22</sup> who gave the lad a few pennies for his help gathering herbs for his nostrums and poultices. Charles soon decided he had picked up enough knowledge to offer therapies on his own. A young man with diarrhea took him up on his offer. Charles mixed up a concoction and gave it to the young man, which immediately stopped the flux but caused other symptoms that sent the patient to a trained physician. The doctor both admonished and encouraged young Charles, predicting, "You'll be a doctor someday."<sup>22</sup>

Roman received his secondary education at the Hamilton Collegiate Institute as its first Black student. He finished the four-year curriculum in two. Inspired by one of his instructors to become a teacher in the American South, Roman took his first position at Hopkinsville, deep in the tobacco-growing region of rural Kentucky. Teaching school suited him, and he soon took another position as principal in a public school in Columbia, TN.

Roman never gave up his ambitions in medicine, however, and made plans to return to Canada and medical school at McGill University. In Tennessee, he learned of the medical department of the Central Tennessee College (CTC) and decided to take his degree there. (The CTC's medical school was renamed the Meharry Medical College in

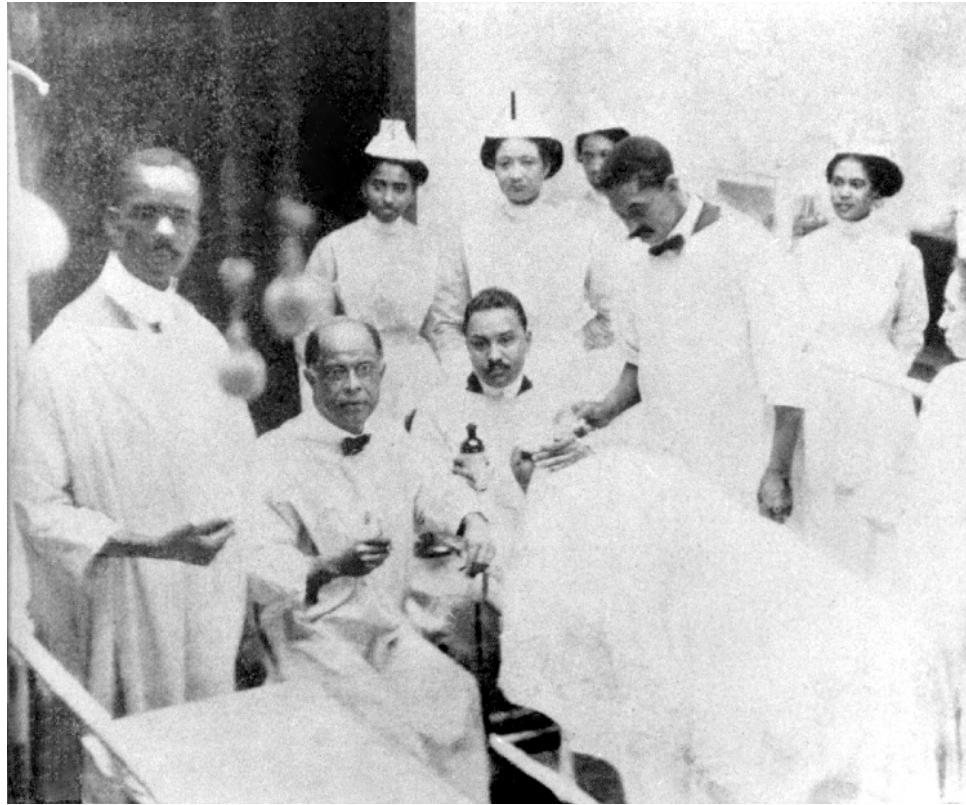


Figure 6

1910, and we will refer to it as such throughout.<sup>23</sup>) To support himself during his studies, he won a teaching position in the Nashville public schools, a highly publicized post that had attracted a pool of 100 white and 70 Black applicants.

After graduation from Meharry in 1890, Roman ran a solo practice in Clarksville, TN, then joined the practice of another Meharry alumnus in Dallas. In 1899, he attended a postgraduate clinic held at Provident Hospital in Chicago, where he formed an immediate friendship with its founder, Daniel Hale Williams. At their first meeting, Williams invited Roman to his office, where he had just met with George Hubbard, president of the CTC and dean of Meharry. Hubbard wanted Williams, then the nation's foremost Black surgeon, to invigorate the school by holding clinics in Nashville.

At first, Williams was disinclined to commit to the project. He asked Roman for his opinion on the proposal. What Roman said to Williams

was not recorded, but when their conversation ended, Williams wrote to Hubbard and accepted the invitation.<sup>23</sup> During Williams's first visit in 1899, the visiting surgeon did four operations by lamplight in a makeshift two-room facility in the basement of the building where R. F. Boyd, one of the professors at Meharry, had his office. Williams's clinics grew to be seven- to ten-day sessions that included surgery and demonstrations, hugely popular events that also attracted white doctors.<sup>24</sup>

At the end of the visit, Williams asked Hubbard about Roman by name, greatly increasing Roman's stature in the dean's office at Meharry. When Roman returned to Nashville for the 1903 meeting of the National Medical Association, Hubbard took him aside and offered him an appointment at Meharry as its inaugural professor of ophthalmology and otolaryngology. Roman had planned on practicing in a bigger city, such as New York or Chicago, or perhaps staying in Dallas. Hubbard said:

*I will not be responsible for taking a man away from what you have here. I can only say, I have never been able to get a competent white man to teach this subject and you are the only colored man I know that can do it*<sup>23</sup>

Hubbard got his man, and Roman became the founding chair of the department of ophthalmology and otolaryngology in 1904, a post he would hold until 1931.

Roman was also elected president of the National Medical Association in 1903. At the end of his term in 1904, he was named “journalist” of the organization and was later the JNMA’s inaugural editor-in-chief.<sup>25</sup>

Roman was active in the civic life of Nashville and served as director of the Peoples Saving Bank and Trust Company, a Black-owned bank that served the local Black community. A leader in the African Methodist Episcopal church, in 1911 he was one of five lay representatives to the decennial Methodist Ecumenical Conference. His lectures at Meharry—philosophical as well as medical—earned him the title, “the Sage of Meharry.”<sup>23</sup>

### Alfred S. Shadd

Alfred Shadd (1870–1915, Figure 7) came from a family of Black activists in Ontario, and his story is told by Colin Thomson of the University of Lethbridge in Alberta.<sup>26</sup> After he graduated from the Buxton School, Shadd remained there as a teacher. He began medical studies at the University of Toronto but ran short of money. To earn cash, he taught school in Kinistino, some 90 miles northeast of Saskatoon in the region of the North-West Territories that would later become the province of Saskatchewan.

Shadd returned to medical school to graduate with honors in 1898. He returned to his adopted home in Kinistino as a doctor, caring for patients throughout the Carrot River valley. In 1904, he moved to nearby Melfort, where he had a pharmacy. Shadd abandoned his plans for further studies in Europe and settled for good in the town.

He was active at all levels of civic life, founding a hospital, serving as Saskatchewan’s first coroner and holding positions on the Kinistino town council and school board. An amateur farmer, he was one of the founders of the local agricultural society and of an elevator company. He unsuccessfully sought higher office in the territorial government as a member of the Conservative Party.



Figure 7

Shadd died of appendicitis of 45. A local paper wrote of him, “No drive was too long; no night too dark; no trail too rough to deter the doctor when the call for assistance came.”<sup>26</sup>

### Wilson R. Abbott

Wilson Abbott (1873–1938) was born in Chatham when his father, Anderson Abbott, practiced there. Like his father, Wilson received his early education at the Buxton Mission School. The younger Abbott went on to the University of Toronto, where he received a degree in pharmacy. The Abbott family moved to Chicago when Wilson’s father was appointed surgeon-in-chief and superintendent of Provident Hospital in 1894.

After earning a baccalaureate from Cornell University, Abbott received his medical degree from the University of Illinois, where he taught chemistry and biology in the medical department.

He published several papers on clinical topics such as vaccination and liver abscesses due to appendicitis.

Abbott was clinical director of the Chicago Tuberculosis Institute, where he advocated for therapeutic pneumothorax and devised a method to safely induce bilateral pneumothorax. During the World War I, Abbott joined the U.S. Army and was assigned as chief of staff, with the rank of major, at the veteran's tuberculosis hospital at Fort Bayard, New Mexico. After his return to civilian practice, Abbott became chief of staff and chairman of the medical executive board of the Henrotin Hospital in Chicago.<sup>27</sup>

### John Douglas Graham Salmon

Douglas Salmon (1923–2005, Figure 8) is considered Canada's first Black surgeon of the modern era. His life was memorialized by Philip Mascoll, a writer with the *Toronto Star*,<sup>28</sup> and on the University Health Network of Toronto website.<sup>29</sup>



Figure 8

A product of Toronto's Jamaican immigrant community, Salmon was born to a veteran of the Boer War and a nurse with the Black Cross (a medical organization started by Marcus Garvey, the charismatic advocate of Black nationalism and pan-Africanism in the 1910s–1930s). His parents died when Salmon, the youngest of six children, was only six years old. Raised

by his aunt, he was strong-willed from early childhood. He rebelled at being tracked toward industrial labor at his school and aspired toward higher education.

Salmon entered the Toronto Conservatory of Music to study piano. When he and some friends were denied admission to the Palais Royale, an entertainment venue in Toronto famous for hosting jazz greats such as Earl Hines and Duke Ellington,

he led a protest that led to Ellington switching his performance to one that allowed Blacks to attend. The campaign convinced Toronto's mayor to ban racial discrimination at public events.<sup>29</sup>

Salmon's piano teacher encouraged him to attend night school so he could matriculate at the University of Toronto; he did, graduating with honors in physiology and biochemistry in 1951. He entered medical school as one of only four Black students and later became class president. He received his degree in medicine at the university in 1955. During medical school, he and his band continued to entertain at functions throughout Toronto.

After an internship in Toronto, Salmon took a residency in surgery in Detroit. He received an offer to join a practice in the United States, but Salmon instead chose to return to Toronto with his new wife, a nurse with the Victorian Order of Nurses. He built a successful practice at the Centenary Hospital in Scarborough, ON, where he specialized in bariatric surgery and became surgeon-in-chief at the facility. He was a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada and of the American College of Surgeons.<sup>29</sup>

Salmon received the African Canadian Achievement Award of Excellence in Medicine in 1994. After his death in 2005, his family established the John Douglas Graham Salmon Award for Black Medical Students at the University of Toronto.<sup>28</sup>

### Conclusion

Canada was a haven for American Blacks escaping the antebellum South. Blacks in Canada had educational opportunities not available to them in the United States, notably at the remarkable Buxton Mission School and the century-and-a-half tradition of racially integrated medical education at the University of Toronto.

But racial barriers still existed. Black physicians weren't expected to be more than "a country doctor." As late as 1960, Salmon still had to seek postgraduate training in surgery across the border in the United States.



With the same energy they exerted to overcome educational barriers in medicine, Canada-educated Black surgeons started hospitals (Fitzbutler, Mossell) and medical schools (Fitzbutler) open to Blacks. They were active in racial politics at all levels and types, from membership on local councils and committees (Abbott, Sr.; Shadd) to conventional national politics (Riley), quixotic campaigns for Black nationalism (Delany), and international misadventures in Nicaragua (Rapier).

Combating racism continues in Canadian medical education today. The 2020 medical class valedictorian at the University of Toronto was a Black woman, Chika Oriuwa.<sup>30</sup> Its entering class of 2024 has 24 Blacks among its 260 students.

**Note:** Dr. Catherine Slaney, a co-author of this chapter, is Anderson Abbott's great-granddaughter and Wilson Abbott's grandniece.

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## Legends

1. Buxton Mission School. Buxton National Historic Site and Museum.
2. Alexander R. Abbott. Oblate Sisters of Providence.
3. Jerome R. Riley. Public domain.
4. John H. Rapier, Jr. Anne Straith Jamieson Fonds, Archives and Special Collections, Western Libraries, Western University, London, Canada.
5. Faculty and Founders of the Louisville National Medical College Hospital. National Library of Medicine. Henry Fitzbutler is center, third row from top.
6. Charles V. Roman (seated), about to perform the first operation at the George W. Hubbard Hospital, 1910. Meharry Medical College Archives.
7. Alfred S. Shadd. The Melfort & District Museum, Melfort, SK.
8. Douglas Salmon. *Toronto Star*.