



PROFILES OF COURAGE

A CELEBRATION OF LABOUR'S BLACK LEADERS



BLACK PROFILES
HISTORY OF
MONTH OF
COURAGE

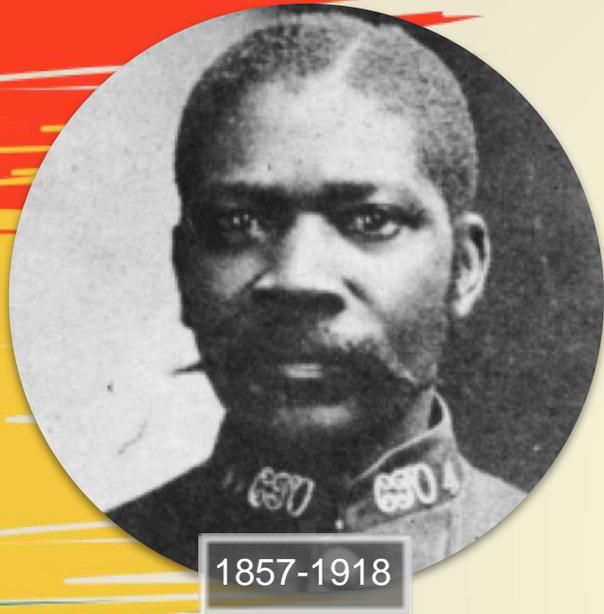
Toronto & York Region Labour Council - Equity Committee - 2021

Labour's Black Leaders



As we celebrate the achievements of Black contributors in the labour movement, it is important to acknowledge that labour unions have not been immune to the anti-Black racism that has and continues to exist in Canadian society.

It is essential that as Toronto & York Region Labour Council celebrates it's 150th anniversary we share these stories and acknowledge the courage and leadership it took to overcome the barriers of racism.



Albert Jackson

FIRST BLACK LETTER CARRIER

- ❖ Albert Jackson is thought to be the first Black letter carrier in Canada.
- ❖ Jackson was born into enslavement in the United States, and escaped to Canada with his mother and siblings when he was a toddler in 1858.
- ❖ In 1882, Jackson was hired as a letter carrier in Toronto, but his co-workers refused to train him on the job. While his story was debated in the press for weeks, the Black community in Toronto organized in support of Jackson, meeting with Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald to have Jackson reinstated.
- ❖ Jackson returned to his post days later and served as a letter carrier for almost 36 years.



Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters

FIRST UNION FOR BLACK WORKERS

- ❖ The vast majority of sleeping car porters were Black men and it was one of only a few job opportunities available to Black men in Canada. Black railway employees were also prevented from joining the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees.
- ❖ Black Canadian porters formed the first Black railway union in North America (1917) and became members of the larger Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters in 1939. Both unions combatted racism and the many challenges that porters experienced on the job.
- ❖ The impact that the BSCP made within Canadian history is profound: at a time when [Black people](#) were fighting for their basic [human rights](#), it was a much-needed group that helped to fight for the rights of Black men in the workplace.



Ladies Auxiliary

BROTHERHOOD OF SLEEPING CAR PORTERS

- ❖ The Ladies Auxiliary was the backbone of the BSCP movement with its own regional and international officers, conventions and whose mandate included education, fundraising and scholarship initiatives.
- ❖ The Auxiliary actively educated other women and children about the labour movement, staged consumer protests, and organized local and national civil rights campaigns.
- ❖ These women played an essential role in shaping public debates over black manhood and unionization, setting political agendas for the Black community, and crafting effective strategies to win racial and economic justice.

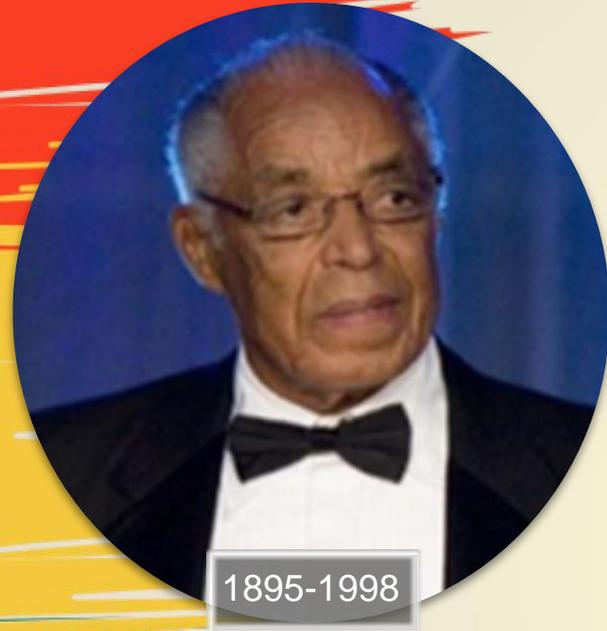
Elizabeth A. McClure

SEAFARERS' INTERNATIONAL UNION



1895-1998

- ❖ “Eliza” was one of the daughters of William Henry & Martha Harrison in Owen Sound, ON.
- ❖ Along with many Black people in the Owen Sound area in the 20th century she worked "on the boats". She was a marine stewardess.
- ❖ This Seafarers' International Union card was issued to her in 1955. This S.I.U. membership card was donated to the Grey Roots archival collection by her son, Alonzo McClure.



Bromley Armstrong

UNITED AUTOMOBILE WORKERS, URBAN ALLIANCE ON RACE RELATIONS

- ❖ Black trade unionist, community organizer and activist, Bromley was a pivotal figure in the early anti-discrimination campaigns in Ontario that led to Canada's first anti-discrimination laws.
- ❖ A self-described “blood and guts” ally of the working poor, Armstrong demonstrated a lifelong commitment to the trade union movement and the battle against disadvantage and discrimination.
- ❖ For more than six decades, Armstrong worked for human rights, helping to generate civic and government support for racial equality and advocating for human rights reforms in public policy.



1918-1991

Hugh Burnett

PRESIDENT

NATIONAL UNITY ASSOCIATION

- ❖ Burnett started as a carpenter before becoming a prominent civil rights activist.
- ❖ Burnett was a key figure in the fight for anti-discrimination legislation in Ontario. Through the 1940s and early 1950s, he rose to prominence as a leader and organizer of the National Unity Association (NUA), pushing for equal rights in Dresden and the surrounding area.
- ❖ By 1954, the NUA began working in earnest with the Toronto Joint Labour Committee for Human Rights to push for further anti-discrimination legislation in Ontario.



1935-2017

Fred Upshaw

PRESIDENT, 1990-1995

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE EMPLOYEES UNION

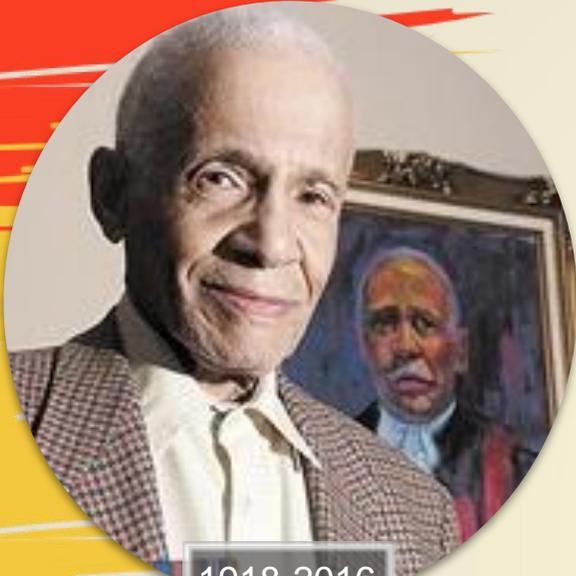
- ❖ Fred was the first Black trade unionist to lead a major Canadian union. His early years as a debater and professional singer helped make him a spellbinding orator, which came in handy when he began his union career.
- ❖ During his term as OPSEU president, Upshaw secured wage increases for public employees and helped win unit reform and human rights language in OPSEU contracts.
- ❖ He also worked to achieve broad-scale pay equity legislation and employment equity policies, as well as the right to strike for Crown employees.



June Veecoock

DIRECTOR OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND RACE RELATIONS
ONTARIO FEDERATION OF LABOUR

- ❖ An anti-racism activist and Human Rights advocate, June was the first Black woman to work for a central labour organization when she became Director of Human Rights for the Ontario Federation of Labour in 1986.
- ❖ June championed the case of a group of Black and Visible Minority nurses which brought the first successful case of systemic discrimination on the grounds of race to the Ontario Human Rights Commission in 1994.
- ❖ Among her many other accomplishments, June was founding member of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists – Ontario Chapter.



1918-2016

Stanley G. Grizzle

LOCAL PRESIDENT, MPP CANDIDATE

BROTHERHOOD OF SLEEPING CAR PORTERS, CCF

- ❖ A former Citizenship Court judge, railway porter, World War II veteran, political candidate and labour union activist, Stan was a dynamic force in the African Canadian civil rights community.
- ❖ As a railway porter, he helped organize workers under the banner of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, serving as the local chapter's president for 16 years.
- ❖ In 1959, Grizzle and Jack White became the first African Canadians to seek seats in the Ontario legislature for the CCF.
- ❖ Stan was the recipient of many honours, including the Order of Ontario in 1990, and the Order of Canada in 1995. In the 1990s, he was inducted into the Labour Hall of Fame.



Jack White

IRON WORKERS, CUPE & CCF

- ❖ Originally from Halifax, Jack was the first Black hired to work in the Car Department of the CNR (Halifax).
- ❖ He became the first Black representative elected in the Iron Workers Union. After a period as interim Director of Social Services at the OFL, Jack was hired as a National Staff Rep by CUPE (one of the first minority members in that position).
- ❖ Alongside Stanley Grizzle, they were the first Black candidates to run for the Ontario legislature.
- ❖ Over the next two decades he serviced many locals and made a significant contribution in the area of Workers Compensation.

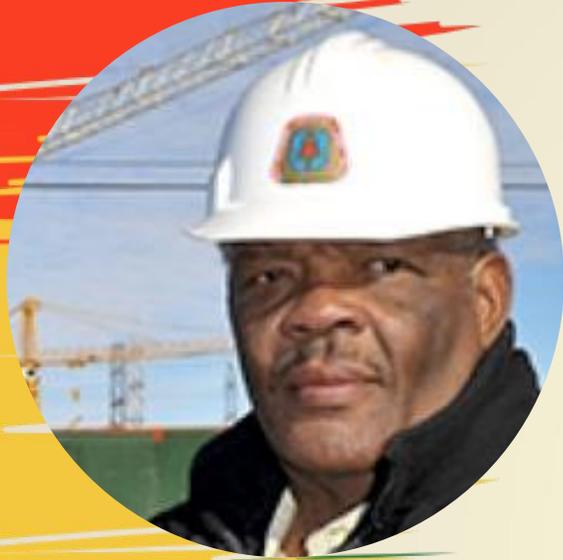


Herman Stewart

PRESIDENT

INTERNATIONAL LADIES' GARMENT WORKERS UNION

- ❖ Originally from Jamaica, Herman got his first taste of union involvement when he played a key role in organizing his workplace into the United Steelworkers.
- ❖ In 1986, he became the first Black person in Canada to be elected head of a union, the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union, where he implemented many progressive changes.
- ❖ Herman has been a strong advocate on behalf of the Afro-Caribbean community in Ontario speaking out and lobbying governments on issues such as employment equity, human rights, police/community relations and immigration.



Ucal Powell

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY TREASURER
CARPENTERS' DISTRICT COUNCIL OF ONTARIO

- ❖ Ucal immigrated to Canada from Jamaica in 1969 and joined the Carpenters' Union in 1970.
- ❖ Under his leadership, the Carpenters' Union built a world-class apprenticeship program and has earned a reputation as a giving and compassionate organization.
- ❖ Ucal was a big believer in volunteering and particularly believed unions had a responsibility to give back.
- ❖ In 2011, he was appointed to the Order of Ontario.



1968-2020

Megan Whitfield

PRESIDENT

CANADIAN UNION OF POSTAL WORKERS, TORONTO LOCAL

- ❖ Megan began her career at Canada Post in 1998 as a postal clerk.
- ❖ It did not take her very long to become involved with the union – first as a shop steward – and by 2014, she became the first Black woman elected President of the Toronto local.
- ❖ An ally to workers worldwide in the fight against oppression, she was a dynamic and fearless leader at the forefront of struggles for pay equity, health and safety, full-time staffing, and respect at the workplace.



Terry Downey

EXECUTIVE VICE-PRESIDENT, 2005-2011

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF LABOUR

- ❖ First African-Canadian to serve as an OFL executive officer, elected as Executive Vice-President in 2005.
- ❖ Originally from Nova Scotia, Terry previously worked at the Ontario Human Rights Commission and was an OPSEU member-activist for 19 years.
- ❖ Terry championed inclusive and equitable changes to public health and education systems, advancing the cause of working people by cementing the linkages between the struggles of labour and the struggles of all those who are marginalized in our society.



Jan Simpson

PRESIDENT

CANADIAN UNION OF POSTAL WORKERS

- ❖ Nearly 30 years after being a shop steward in her workplace, Jan is the first Black woman to lead a national union in Canada.
- ❖ Jan has been breaking barriers at CUPW for many years since starting at Canada Post in 1985. She was the first Black woman elected to the national office and to the national board.
- ❖ Simpson has been a fierce advocate for her members particularly through the pandemic.



Marie Clarke Walker

SECRETARY-TREASURER
CANADIAN LABOUR CONGRESS

- ❖ Marie started her career working in a home for the elderly, later with adults and children with developmental disabilities, as a counsellor and family-support worker in Toronto.
- ❖ Marie made history in 2002 when she was elected as the first Black woman and youngest person elected as Executive Vice-President of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC).
- ❖ She served in that position for five terms before once again being “first”, elected as the first-ever Black woman to serve as CLC Secretary-Treasurer.



Roodney Clarke

PRESIDENT

UNITED ASSOCIATION OF PLUMBERS AND STEAMFITTERS, LOCAL 46

- ❖ Roodney was just recently elected as President, becoming the first Black leader of the plumbers union.
- ❖ Roodney has served on numerous committees within the local, is a CBTU member and is a mentor to apprentices with the Hammer Heads program supported by Local 46 and the Building Trades.
- ❖ Roodney is highly active in the community, volunteering his time for many causes. Always hard at work and keeping a close eye on his Local's well-being, he is known for his agile thinking, always preparing for future challenges.



Brandon Haynes

PRESIDENT

CUPE LOCAL 4948, LIBRARY WORKERS

- ❖ Brandon is the youngest, and first Black President of the Library workers.
- ❖ He's worked at Toronto Public Library for over 15 years, most recently at the North York Central Library.
- ❖ He became involved in the union after his job was eliminated and they helped him redeploy: "I decided right then that I needed to give back to my Union. I wanted to join the fight to advocate for libraries and help protect the Library Workers who deliver top-notch service to the world's busiest urban library system!"



discover a new
legacy
every day this month

labourcouncil.ca/equity