

## **Book Report** by Ivy Trumpour

### **To Stand and Fight Together, Richard Pierpoint and the Coloured Corps of Upper Canada**

By Steve Pitt. Dundurn Press, Toronto, Ontario ISBN 978-1-55002-731-0

This book of 144 pages is easy to read, and full of information. It is a summary of history that reminds me of lessons from my school days, but from a different viewpoint, like looking at a mountain from two different sides. It is world history from an African perspective.

The first chapter explains that from the beginning of human interaction slavery was a fact of life that existed everywhere in the world and was accepted as normal. When the New World economy was in need of labour the use of slave labour among African tribes was expanded to become an intercontinental financial enterprise. The story starts with an individual who was captured in 1760.

This person was given the name of Richard Pierpoint and the book describes world events as they shaped his life. It is about his life but includes facts about many other things, both micro and macro that were happening at the same time. In this way it is more like a general history covering the time from pre revolutionary America, the American War of Independence, life in Upper Canada after this war, the French Revolution, the War of 1812, and the Upper Canada rebellions of 1837-38.

Pierpoint joined Butler's Rangers and later received land in Niagara, but having no wife or family he struggled to clear it alone. At the age of 68, to support the British in the War of 1812, he raised a Coloured Corps of 30 Black men when there were only about 100 free Black men in all of Upper Canada! He served as a private since commoners and Blacks were not allowed to be in command.

Most members of the Corps were skilled tradesmen so the Corps was engaged in the dangerous and important task of building Fort Mississauga, a job done mostly at night. After the War of 1812 Pierpoint asked only for enough money to return to Africa, but instead he was awarded more uncleared land. He lived into his nineties but his will states that he had no heirs nor relations.

The story of the Coloured Corps continues through its participation in the 1837 rebellion, its demise and reactivation for building highways and constructing the Welland Canal. There is further discussion of the American Civil War and the First and Second World Wars.

There are a few pictures and almost half the pages in the book have a "Fascinating Fact" or "Wordplay" box. The facts cover a wide range of topics such as the origin of the name of Penny Lane in Liverpool, pineapples and wealth, the Iroquois Confederacy, soul food, and Prince William of Orange. Wordplay explains the origins or meanings of various words, for example, point blank, rout, picket line, quartermaster.

There is a useful timeline for the years from 1444 when the Portuguese started capturing slaves to 2005 when Michaëlle Jean became the first Black governor general of Canada. There is also a selected reading list of books and websites.

I expect to refer to this book in future to remind myself of the interconnection of historical events, especially how they impacted Black people.