

Our Untold Stories: This page is used to tell a few of the stories that unfold during our genealogical research. If you wish to submit a family story for publication, please send no more than one typewritten, single-spaced page and a copy of a family photo if possible to: FHWGS Our Untold Stories, 5201 Woodward Ave., Detroit, MI 48202.

Submitted by: *Barbara K. Hughes Smith, Ph.D. - The great-great-great niece of Reverend Anthony Binga, Sr. She is an administrator with the Detroit Public School and serves on the Board of Directors for the North American Black Historical Museum, Amherstburg, Ontario. She has been a member of the Fred Hart Williams Genealogical Society for several years.*

“THE WALKIN PREACHER”

Some of you may be familiar with the original song made famous in the 1960's by Nancy Sinatra and Lee Hazelwood, "These Boots are made for Walkin". Every time, I muse over my ggg uncle, the Reverend Anthony Binga, I begin singing that title line. Binga was called *The Walking Preacher*. Moreover, his powerful influence earned him the title *Father of the Black Baptist*. Binga's boots kicked down barriers to freedom and built strong bonds of hope, friendship and cooperation, throughout Canada West. Oral history says that the Binga Family came from Arabia, but changed their surname upon coming to America, to sound less ethnic. In 1895, Elder Anthony Binga was interviewed by Wilbur H. Siebert about his flight to freedom. In Siebert's *Escape from Newport, Kentucky by way of Cincinnati, 1836*. Binga recounted, "I was born in Green County Kentucky. As near as I can tell, I am between 76 and 77 years old. John Bucknel was my first owner, and when I was six years old, he sold my family to General Taylor, an uncle of Zachary Taylor. I never saw the day, since I know anything that I didn't want to be free. Both Bucknel and Taylor liked to see their slaves happy and well treated, but I always wanted to be free."

While enslaved, Binga's life changing break came when his brother found a pocket book containing \$500 near the road to Louisville. Employing clever strategies, along with the assistance of Quakers and the Underground Network, Binga, his brother and other relatives, bought their way to freedom, arriving in Amherstburg six days later. "At Amherstburg, I kept a station. When we went there first, it was almost a miracle to see 15 coming there at one time, and a wonder when one came. A long time after, they would come 30 in a day, and after the Fugitive Slave Law took effect, by 50's every day like frogs in Egypt. Isaac J. Rice, a white man, who belonged to the Presbyterian Church and myself and Hiram Wilson at Amherstburg, would receive the fugitives and provide for the, distribute provisions, take care of them if they were sick, settle them among the white people who wanted to hire. The whites would send to our mission house for laborers." A year later, Binga began to preach. Fugitive slaves began building the First Baptist Church in 1838, with Binga as its pastor. The building served as a final station of the Underground Railroad for hundreds of fugitive slaves. In 1841, Binga's church hosted a meeting to organize a union of Black churches. Among them were Second Baptist of Detroit and Sandwich First Baptist. They formed the Alliance of the Baptist Association for Colored People. The name later became the Amherstburg Regular Missionary Baptist Association (ARMBA). In 1845, Binga traveled and preached from Detroit to Toronto collecting the money to complete the building of his Amherstburg church.

This missionary work earned him the title "The Walking Preacher", because it was common for him to walk from Amherstburg to Buxton, Canada west, stopping and resting at homes of worshipers and friends along the way. In 2001, appreciation for his accomplishments resurfaced. The Detroit Tricentennial Companion Monuments on both sides of the Detroit River commemorate abolitionists, conductors and operatives of the Underground Railroad. Both monuments display an inscription of Reverend Anthony Binga.

On October 20, 2001, as my tear-filled eyes gazed at the newly-dedicated International Memorials, I realized I was standing on sacred ground, in the footsteps of Binga and others who risked their lives for freedom. The battle is not won. We must put on our walkin' boots and stride forward until victory is won.