

# Richard Pierpoint

## Slave, Loyalist, Soldier, Farmer

*Researched and Written by: Capt (N) (Ret'd) M. Braham*

*Edited By: Carole Koch*

**Introduction:** Richard Pierpoint (1744-1838), was born in Senegal. When he was about sixteen he was captured and sold as a slave. He survived the crossing of the Atlantic and was sold in New York to a British officer named Pierpoint. It was common for the slaves to take the last name of their owner. The officer owned land on the Hudson River and Richard Pierpoint acted as his personal servant.

**The American Revolution:** In 1776, with the outbreak of the American Revolution, many African American slaves were offered freedom on the condition that they fought on the side of the British. By 1780 Pierpoint was one of about a dozen former African slaves fighting with Butler's Rangers. The exact number of black soldiers in Butler's Rangers is unknown, although Pierpoint is the only one who is entered into the historical record.

Following the British defeat many of the Rangers settled in Niagara. Among the United Empire Loyalists who came to Upper Canada were several hundred blacks (the "Black Loyalists"). Blacks represented about 10% of the total Loyalist emigration. Communities such as the Pierpoint Settlement and the Queen's Bush Settlement were examples of how blacks created communities and helped develop many of the communities in Southern Ontario. Blacks were entitled to the

same proportion of land as their fellow white Loyalists.

In 1788 Pierpoint, under his more common name of Captain Dick or Black Dick, was granted 200 acres of land on Twelve Mile Creek, in what later became Grantham Township. He received his patents for the land on 10 March 1804, only to sell his lots on November 11, 1806.



**Richard Pierpoint**  
Drawing by David Meyler

In 1794 Pierpoint signed the *Petition of Free Negroes* which was presented to Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe. This brief document provides a rare glimpse into black settlement. The group consisted of veterans of the "late War," and "others who were born free with a few who have come, into Canada since the peace." Apparently landless and socially isolated for the most part, they were "desirous of settling adjacent to each other in order that they may be enabled to give assistance (in work) to those amongst them who may most want it." They urged Simcoe "to allow them a Tract of Country to settle on, separate from the white settlers." The Petition was read by the Executive

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Council of Upper Canada Government on July 8, 1794 and dismissed.

Between 1806 and the War of 1812 Pierpoint probably resided in Grantham Township, earning his living as a labourer.

**The War of 1812:** Following the outbreak of the War of 1812, Pierpoint proposed to organize a Corps of Men of Colour on the Niagara frontier. His offer was refused, but a small black corps was raised locally by a white officer, Jordan tavern-owner, Robert Runchey.

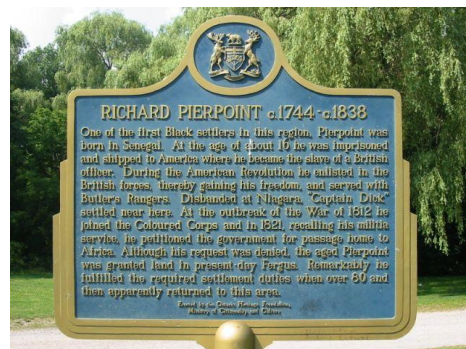
Pierpoint volunteered immediately, although he was at least 60 years old. The corps served with distinction at the Battle of Queenston Heights, the siege of Fort George and the Battle of Lundy's Lane as well as other engagements. For the remainder of the war the corps was used for labour and garrison duty.

**Postscript:** In 1821 Pierpoint petitioned Lieutenant Governor Simcoe for passage back to his homeland in Senegal. His request was denied and instead Pierpoint and approximately 8 to 10 other black families, including other 1812 veterans, were given land grants in Garafraxa, just outside present day Fergus. The settlement became a terminus for the underground railway for slaves escaping from the United States.

Pierpoint died in 1838 and many believe that when he died the strong

leadership that held the community together also died. Some Scottish families purchased the settlement land and the black community dispersed.

There is a plaque in his honour in the park at the parking lot off Oakdale Avenue north of Westchester Avenue, St. Catharines.



### References:

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**Captain (N) (Ret'd) M. Braham, CD**



Mike Braham is a graduate of the Royal Military College (1965) and a former naval officer and senior official with DND. He has an abiding interest in military history.