

# Online panel to discuss Windsor-Essex area's hidden history

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Local artist Dennis Smith is shown at his LaSalle home on Tuesday, February 22, 2022. PHOTO BY DAN JANISSE /Windsor Star

## Article content

Partly lost to history is that many Black farmers helped keep Windsor and Essex County out of American hands during the War of 1812.

Black volunteers from farms and elsewhere around Southwestern Ontario rose up to join the battles that helped decide what would eventually become the Canadian border, says LaSalle artist Dennis K. Smith.

A chance for anyone to learn a bit more about local “hidden histories” is being offered online Wednesday in an event hosted by the Art Gallery of Windsor.

*These are stories not always known*

The online Hidden Histories of Windsor-Essex discussion will feature three guest panelists in the AGW’s fourth Community Conversation. The event will explore historic events in Windsor-Essex that perhaps have not received much attention.

The three panelists for the online session are: Walter Cassidy, chairman of the Windsor/Essex Rainbow Alliance; author D.A. Lockhart; and Dennis K. Smith, president and co-founder of the Artists of Colour collective.



Local artist Dennis Smith is shown at his LaSalle home on Tuesday, February 22, 2022. PHOTO BY DAN JANISSE /Windsor Star

Smith, 73, says participating in a discussion about moments in Black history that may have been forgotten are “very important” because many such histories were never provided to him growing up.

His artwork over six decades has always focused on capturing or expanding upon important moments or portraying his own personal history as it occurred around him, said Smith, raised in the communities of Harrow and Windsor.

“I always try to tell the story in the way I visualize it,” he said.

Among those historic stories he has come across are the value of Black volunteers — many from farms in Harrow or Chatham and elsewhere — who stepped up to participate with the British in critical battles fought to prevent an American takeover of Amherstburg during the War of 1812.

Many also again stepped up, along with Indigenous forces, to assist General Issac Brock when the Americans invaded in the area of Sandwich.

“These were free men or those who basically came from their farms to fight,” Smith said. “They stepped up when needed, often because they couldn’t get enough whites to enlist, so they used these Black volunteers.”



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Smith often reflects and builds upon important moments to create art depicting events as they might have occurred.

“You have others such as Alton Parker who was the first Black detective in Canada,” he said. “These are stories not always known.”