

# Early Negro Families Who Settled in Owen Sound are Recalled by Ex-Resident

**Interesting Word Picture of Some Well Known Characters and Families Among the City's Negro Population is Given by Mr. J. J. Pratt, of Harrow. Such Men as "Daddy" Hall and "Father Miller" Were Among the Notables of the Early Days Here**

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By J. J. Pratt

It has often been a source of wonder and surprise to me that some local knight of the quilt has not before now set forth, in print, in the Sun-Times, a pen sketch portraying the many excellent characteristics, religious fervour, and sometimes amusing peculiarities of the coloured citizens of my home town.

There was a time, in my boyhood days, when I was acquainted with every family residing in the valley and on the hills. The majority of them were exceedingly estimable and law-abiding citizens, who attended to their own business, industrious, courteous, and who worshipped faithfully and diligently in the church of their fathers, which in those days was situated on 2<sup>nd</sup> avenue west.

True, like the white race, who had and will always have a sprinkling of "white trash" in its national make-up, so it is with the coloured race. It seems to be an immutable law of nature that such is the case. But I am pleased to say that the good of both races far exceed the bad.

## Early Recollections

My first recollection, as a boy of seven or eight years of age, of a coloured gentleman, was that of Old Daddy Hall. Some 50 years ago "Daddy" was our local town crier. He must have



*John "Daddy" Hall  
Well known Owen Sound  
Negro character of the  
early days whose habit of  
announcing the important  
events led him to be called  
the 'town crier'.*

been then in his 80<sup>th</sup> year, and was a quaint and pathetic figure as he trundled down Poulett street ringing his bell and announcing the coming events of the day.

The last time I remember seeing “Daddy” was on a cold, blustery day in January on my way home from the Old Hill street school. He was standing on the corner of Division and Bay streets where the late Mr. John Tucker conducted a grocery store. What he was announcing I cannot bring to mind, but I distinctly remember he wound up his discourse in a sonorous voice with a “God Save the Queen.”

“Daddy” had a squatter’s right to a piece of land on the East Hill Pleasure Ground, where he had his home. Many times the city fathers had endeavoured to move the old man from the property, but all the King’s horses and all the King’s men never could budge him, for evidently possession was nine-tenths of the law. If my memory serves me right “Daddy” laid his case before the late Queen Victoria, who, it is said, allowed him the right to retain his home, and to his heirs and assigns. I wonder if the old shacks are still adorning the Pleasure Grounds?

### **Rev. Thomas Miller**



*“Father” Miller  
Another familiar figure  
among the early Negro  
population in Owen Sound.  
He was the religious leader  
and preacher in the old BME  
church.*

My next recollection of the genus homo of our coloured citizens was that of the Rev. Thomas Miller.

He was a man whom any community might be well proud to claim as a citizen. He was God’s good man in every respect. For many years he conducted divine services in the church aforesaid mentioned, and at times on the Sabbath evening at the close of a summer’s day we youngsters in the vicinity would gather at the doorway and listen to the reverent gentleman’s discourses, which were generally a clear, concise and thoroughly orthodox expounding of Holy Writ. He was a thorough type of true Christian gentleman, and left behind him a heritage that his family of boys and girls should be exceedingly proud of to this day.

### **The Green Family**

Then there was the Green family, whom I distinctly remember. One of the boys for years and years was a trusted and faithful servant of the Davis-Smith-Malone Company. The other boys and girls were in the same category. An exceedingly estimable family was that of Mr. & Mrs. Molock, who resided on the street leading to Harrison’s mill. They had a large family of boys and girls who grew up to be sons and daughters worthy of all

expectations of such honourable parentage. Their son Frank was a schoolmate of the writer and was extremely popular with all classes of citizens.

### **“Ned” Patterson**

I must not omit “Ned” Patterson who some 50 years ago drove the bus for the City Hotel (now the Patterson House) when Archie Duncan was the genial and good-natured Boniface. Ned resided in a roughcast house just south of Dowsley Carriage Works. He had one son, also named “Ned” and whatever became of him I do not know, but old “Ned” was an upright citizen.

The white family I well remember. They resided on the East Hill and always held the respect and esteem of the good people of Owen Sound.

### **“Chris” Johnston**

Probably the most outstanding figure in the days that have passed beyond recall was that of Christopher Hannibal Johnson. “Chris” was certainly a character in every respect and the fun we had with him was certainly humorous. If “Chris” sauntered down Poulett Street and no body hailed him and had a joke he thought that there surely must be something amiss. His wife was an excellent cook and was for many years in the employ of the Coulson House when Hank Crozier was the proprietor.

The boys turned out to be excellent citizens. Billy, for many years being a prominent and sincere member of the Salvation Army.

### **The Cosby Family**

Fifty years ago, I remember when Jerry Cosby ran a small confectionery store in the old Butchart Block on Main Street. This was before the big fire when the whole block from Baker Street and McLauchlan’s store went up in smoke one Sunday morning.

It was at Jerry’s that I sipped my first milk shake as ice cream was unheard of in those days. The mixture consisted of milk, sweetened with sugar and nutmeg, and was the fashionable cooling drink in those good old days of yore. Mr. Cosby was the father of Jerry Cosby, Jr., a bright, clever young man who studied law with the late H. G. Tucker and who with the late J. A. Tucker ran “The Sun” for two years. Later he went to the Yukon, where he passed away, unable to stand the rigor and cold of the country. There was no more respectable family in town than the Cosbys.