

Town Crier

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Despite the fact that Owen Sound had as many as three newspapers to carry the news of the day, as well as advertisements, many companies employed the use of a Town Crier or Town Bell Ringer to announce their sales or other events in the 1850s and 60s. A popular Town Crier who worked the streets of Owen Sound was John “Daddy” Hall.

“Daddy” Hall’s family arrived in Owen Sound in the 1850s and he is considered by some local historians to be one of the first Black citizens of this community. He lived on the north end of Victoria Park, which was then known as the “Pleasure Grounds”.

Each day, at about 10:00 in the morning, “Daddy” Hall would arrive at the corner of Division Street (10th Street East) and Bay Street (3rd Avenue East) and commence to announce the “news” of the day. He would ring his bell and announce his message. An example of the type of message that Hall would deliver was quoted in the March 22, 1952 issue of the *Owen Sound Daily Sun Times*:

To whom it may concern: Be it known unto you and to all to whom you may deliver this message, that there will be sold on the market square in the Town of Owen Sound, by George James Gale, licensed auctioneer for the County of Grey, in the Province of Upper Canada, under and by virtue of power of sale, contained in a certain chattel mortgage which will be produced at the time of sale; namely six sheep and four lambs, two cows and one yoke of oxen. Terms — Cash. Remember the hour this afternoon at half - past two o’clock, on the Market Square. God Save the Queen.

After delivering his message, Hall would proceed to the corner of Division Street (10th Street East) and Poulett Street (2nd Avenue East). While he walked, he would swing his bell over his shoulder, and around in a circle. After making his announcement, Hall would then proceed in a similar fashion along Poulett Street (2nd Avenue East), stopping at the corner of Scrope Street (9th Street East) and then halfway between Union and Scrope Street (8th and 9th Streets East) to once again call out his message. “Daddy” Hall would complete his route with a ringing message at the Market Square.

At 2:00 pm Hall would repeat this process, perhaps with the same message or a new one. The one constant in each of Hall’s pronouncements was that he ended every message with “God Save the Queen”. This work must have agreed with Hall. He was a popular figure around town and was well-liked by everyone. Working out of doors in all types of climate did not seem to impact on his health as he lived to be more than 100 years old. In fact, some claim that when he died on April 9, 1900 he was 117 years old!

How “Daddy” Hall arrived in Owen Sound is an interesting story in itself. He claimed to have been a scout for Tecumseh in the War of 1812. But before the war was over he returned to his home near Amherstburg. Here, he and his family were captured by American troops and sold into slavery.

Hall was sent to Kentucky to work on a plantation, but he escaped and made his way back to Amherstburg. When he could not find his family he moved on to the Rocky Saugeen area north of Durham and eventually ended up in Owen Sound. Hall also spent a number of years in the Toronto/Newmarket area.