

Memory Illumines Days for Samuel G. Harrison, 93 Years Old and Blind

**One of the Oldest Citizens of Owen Sound and Member Pioneer
Coloured Colony, recalls early days in Sailing,
Building and Business Circles**

This article is as it appeared in the *Owen Sound Daily Sun Times*,
April 3 1943.¹ *Republished with kind permission of the Sun Times.*

Dorothea Deans



Samuel George Harrison used to be a familiar figure on the streets of Owen Sound, but now he sits quietly in the little living room at his home, 1729 Fourth Avenue East. For Mr. Harrison is blind. Even Spring-time is only a procession of shadows before his eyes.

But despite the affliction of cataracts over both eyes, Samuel G. Harrison is still a picturesque and wonderfully young figure for his 93 years. His gentle face with its calm broad lines is smooth and unwrinkled, his brown eyes give no hint of the blight which has fallen upon them. His smile reveals two rows of strong teeth, his voice is steady and his words wise and his brow surmounted with a halo of abundant white hair.

As if to compensate for the loss of sight, he has acute hearing and is able to enjoy conversation and music and follow the activities about him with his ears, if not his eyes.

Obligingly Mr. Harrison consented to pose for the photograph on this page in which the cameraman has caught the peace of his upraised countenance and the grace of his tranquil

¹ With the addition of the final two images.

hands. But he was unprepared for the sudden flare of the flashbulb. It was his first revelation of bright light in many years and came as such an unexpected surprise that he burst into long and delighted laughter.

Mr. Harrison is one of the oldest survivors of Owen Sound's once large colony of coloured folk, members of which were among our earliest citizens.

Born at Peel County, he came to Williamsford, which he still calls the Sauble, as an infant of a year and a half, and was reared by his grandparents, Mr. & Mrs. James Douglas, who came to Canada from across the border.

He explains that his grandparents had a family of 20 children, all of whom were grown and left the home at the time that he came with his parents to pay a little visit. So his grandmother persuaded the young couple, who were moving from Peel County to Owen Sound (then Sydenham village) to leave the baby boy with her.

When Samuel Harrison first remembers life on his grandparent's farm, the land was practically all bush with the exception of ten or fifteen acres. By the time the boy was big enough to help with the logging, the farm was about half reclaimed from the virgin wilderness. From the first he took a keen interest in the pioneer tasks and his father made him a little hand spike to use side by side with the men.

"But I got into mischief with it," Samuel Harrison confesses today, looking down the long years to his carefree childhood days on his grandparent's farm.

A lover of animals, he can still name the oxen which drew the crude implements. There were "Buck and Bright," "Dick and Tom," and other favourites. Bob Gillis kept the store at the Sauble and the neighbours in those faraway days included George Davidson and David McClure.

Owen Sound wasn't a very big place when Samuel Harrison came here about 65 years ago. First he and his grandfather settled near Jones Falls, where they farmed for a few years. Mr. Harrison then moved to Owen Sound and joined his Mother and younger brothers and sisters, who numbered fifteen in all.

Many pictures of Owen Sound, in those early days flit across Samuel Harrison's crystal clear mind. The first coloured man he met after coming here was Ned Patterson, who drove an omnibus to meet the trains. But the station was a way down north of Boyd's Wharf, he explains.

Samuel Harrison first identified himself with the shipping trade. He worked on many of the early boats and also sailed as deck hand on several. He worked on the Frances Smith, the Silver Spray and sailed the Campana and later the Athabasca. In the days when the

Polson Iron Works Company built handsome ships down on the east shore – the Algonquin, Rosedale, Ontario and others – Owen Sound really prospered, he claims.

He remembers also the early buildings in the era when Owen Sound's fine churches and public buildings went up. He helped haul stone and mortar for St. George's Church, and worked on several other edifices.

When still a young man Samuel Harrison learned the butcher trade with William Wootten and worked with him for some years. He followed the trade for the greater part of his life being employed at different times by a number of Owen Sound's early butchers, Ben Hopkins, Alex Spears, Brignell, Wilkinson and Boyd. He is proud to recall his skill at judging the weight of cattle. He remained active in the business until about fifteen years ago when his eyesight began to fail.

Over fifty years ago Samuel Harrison was united in marriage to Priscilla Courtney, who passed away six years ago. A son and daughter, Herbert Harrison and Mrs. Stella Bole, both make their home in Owen Sound. Another daughter, Ida, Mrs. Percy Ringo, passed away some years ago. The family has been identified with the BME Church for many years.



St. George's Anglican Church



Steamer Waubuno seen from the Silver Spray, pre March 1878