

# From Slavery to Freedom: African Canadians in Grey County ~ Artefact Highlights

Items of interest from Grey Roots Museum Collection

Joan Hyslop

## Marbles

2007.051.001-005

The donor, Joanne Monk, kept digging up "hundreds" of these items on her land in Owen Sound, Ontario and was perplexed as to what they were. They looked like old children's marbles (sometimes called "taws"), but the sheer quantity of them suggested another



function. Amelia Ferguson, who works at Grey Roots, has studied archaeology and suggested that they could possibly be stone shot. So for a while, we thought that this might be what they were and wondered if the items were from some sort of shooting range. As Registrar, I looked up the property's previous occupancy in an old directory in the Archives at Grey Roots, and realized that the items were found behind a residence formerly owned by the William Henry Harrison family, at 1769 8th Ave. East (formerly known as Douglas St.). Mr. Harrison was a black quarryman who had a quarry of his own for a while, and then later

worked as a foreman for the S. J. Oliver quarry on the east side. The Oliver-Roger stone quarry was situated nearby, in the 18th St. East area of 9th Ave. East. Mr. Harrison and his wife, the former Martha Jane Douglas (of Williamsford), celebrated their 64th anniversary on August 9, 1950. Mr. Harrison died in 1951, and Mrs. Harrison passed away the following year.

On August 1, 2008, Ron Harrison of Orillia visited the museum and solved the mystery of the little stone spheres. He provided the information that the Harrison sons had hundreds of "alleys" (marbles) and used to keep them in boxes. Sam Harrison, Fred Harrison and Bill Harrison were apparently all keen marble players (called "shooters") and challenged other players. When they won, they received their opponent's alleys. Their sister Martha (Mattie Earls) remembered that she could only shoot marbles with her brothers if there were no other boys around. Ron (whose father was Sam Harrison) has occasionally heard his "Aunt Mattie" reminiscing about the marble games of old.



Mattie Earls

## Calculator Booklet 2002.003.005

Speaking of the Harrisons, another interesting item at Grey Roots Museum & Archives is William Henry Harrison's "calculator" booklet. In the 1881 census of Owen Sound, Wm. Henry Harrison is listed as 15 years of age and working as a butcher, and his older brother Sam, then 17, is as well. They were trained by a butcher named William Wooten. Ron Harrison said that William Henry Harrison was



James and William Henry  
Harrison

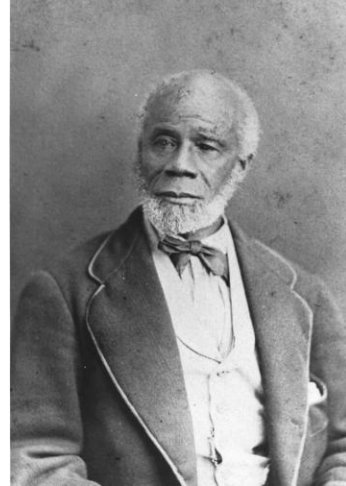
very much self-taught as a young man, and later, when working as a stone quarryman, used this booklet surreptitiously to help him determine that he was getting a fair deal when bartering stone, etc. As an older man, he received his engineer's papers, so despite having to learn a lot on his own, he did quite well. The red cloth-bound booklet is called *Ropp's Commercial Calculator*, and was copyrighted in 1887. It provided convenient printed tables and methods for rapid calculation, and was published by the Guide Publishing Co. of Toronto. In Mr. Harrison's day, stone was transported in town in horse-drawn wagons, and quarry work was definitely hard work.

## Bible 1962.017.002



It is rather tattered-looking now, but another treasure at Grey Roots is Ned Patterson's Bible. Blacks were not officially allowed to learn how to read and write in slavery days, so we wonder when and how Edward Patterson, known as "Ned", learned how to read, and when he came to Canada. Ned (who was born somewhere in the United States in the 1820s) was involved with Owen Sound's British Methodist Episcopal Church, and did some preaching there in the early days. He also worked as a stage driver and hostler (took care of horses at a hotel). This Bible was published in 1858, and was donated in 1962 by Mrs. Essie Miller of Owen Sound. She said that it was a pulpit Bible at the B.M.E. church for a while, when Patterson preached there. In the 1850s, the log church was known as "Little Zion".

According to an Owen Sound Sun Times article by J.J. Pratt, entitled *Early Negro Families Who Settled in Owen Sound Are Recalled by Ex-Resident*<sup>1</sup>, Patterson drove the stagecoach from Owen Sound to Meaford for Dave Stoddart circa 1885. Mr. Pratt also recalled that Ned Patterson drove the bus (stage) for the City Hotel (later called the Paterson House) in Owen Sound when it was under the proprietorship of Archie Duncan and that Patterson resided in a roughcast house just south of the Dowsley Carriage Works. He and Thos. Green were 1st cousins. Their fathers changed their names when escaping from slavery. This source also said that Edward had two sons, Allan and Ned junior, and he was the great-great uncle of Mrs. Wm. Miller. Edward was known as "Ned".



Ned Patterson

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According to the 1881 Census of Owen Sound:

Edward Patterson  
Age: 55  
Occupation: Teamster  
Birthplace: United States

Susanna Patterson  
Age 42  
Birthplace: Ontario

Thomas Patterson  
Age: 7  
Birthplace: Ontario

Frederick Patterson  
Age: 5  
Birthplace: Ontario

Edward Patterson  
Age: 3  
Birthplace: Ontario

Susanna Patterson  
Age: 1  
Birthplace: Ontario

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In 1902-1904, Ed Patterson and Allan Paterson were listed as labourers and lived at River Street. In 1913, a Mrs. E. Patterson worked as a domestic at the Seldon House hotel.

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<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately the article was found as a clipping without a date, but is estimated to be from the 1930s or 40s.