

## Black History Month

The Windsor Police Service has a unique and outstanding history of equality in the hiring of black employees. At a time when attitudes towards blacks were substantially different than today, the Windsor Police Service was taking the initiative and employing black members of our community.

Blacks in positions of authority were rare. Black municipal employees were a rarity as well. Despite this, the Windsor Police gave these black members the opportunity to prove themselves and, as such, opened the doors to people of diversity. Being the first black employees these pioneers met with some resistance. These employees were dedicated to their duty and their community, and eventually all were accepted by members of the Service.

To commemorate Black History Month the Windsor Police Service would like to recognize three of our historical black employees

### Constable Charles Peterson 1930-1965

**Det. Alton Parker 1942- 1970**

**Det. Howard Watkins 1948-1968**



**Charles D. Peterson** was hired on May 16<sup>th</sup> 1930 making him the first black Employee of the Windsor Police Service. Peterson was born March 18<sup>th</sup> 1900 in Hamilton Ontario. Peterson attended school in Hamilton from 1905-1918. He completed 3 years of further education at Cass Technical in Detroit. Peterson was employed by Ford Motor Company in Detroit as an electrician. He brought with him his experience as a radio technician, and electrician to become a mechanic within the Police Department.

On December 29<sup>th</sup> 1954 Peterson was transferred to Uniform Division as a constable. He served in patrol until June 23<sup>rd</sup> 1963 where he was transferred to Traffic Branch.

Peterson retired as a constable on March 31 1965.

Peterson died on April 5<sup>th</sup> 1983. He was survived by his wife Laura, and his children Charles, Bonnie, and Laura. Peterson's Funeral was held on Friday April 8<sup>th</sup> 1983 in Windsor.



**Alton Parker** was the first black individual hired by the Windsor Police to be a constable. He was hired on September 1<sup>st</sup> 1942. Parker was born in Windsor in 1907, and spent his entire life within the city that he loved. Parker had been involved with many community organizations. He joined and later went on to become the president of the Central Citizens Association. This group was organized to represent members of the black community in their attempt to seek out fair and equal treatment within the City of Windsor. One of the issues that this group addressed was the limited employment opportunities for blacks within the City structure. A presentation was done to the city administration. The response of "send us qualified people and we will employ them" opened the door for Parker.

At 34 years old Parker, a mechanic by trade, left his job working as the foreman of the used car department of Nash Detroit, took a decrease in pay and became Windsor Police's second black employee, and first black constable. The first black employee Charles David Peterson was hired as a mechanic in May of 1930.

Parker enjoyed his new duties as a police officer despite some of the resistance he met with from both other officers, and members of the public. Undaunted, Parker became involved with the Windsor Police Association. In 1949 a few 7 years after being hired Parker went on to be the first black member of the executive committee of the WPA. He became the first black member from any police department in Ontario to attend the Police Association of Ontario as a representative. He worked tirelessly to ensure fair treatment, equal representation, and proper working conditions for all members of the association.

On July 28, 1951 Parker was appointed to the rank of detective, under Chief Constable Farrow. This appointment made Alton Parker Canada's first black detective. Parker was confirmed in the rank on January 1, 1953. Parker went on to have an exemplary career with the Windsor Police which included many honours in his lifetime. He received numerous awards, including the Order of Canada, the Ontario Bravery Medal for Good Citizenship and the Queen's Silver Jubilee Medal. In 1986 Detective Parker received the Harry Jerome Award in recognition of his commitment to youth. In 1988 Detective Parker was named Person of the Year by the North American Black Historical Museum. Alton C. Parker passed away February 28, 1989.



**Howard Watkins** joined the Windsor Police Service on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June 1949 as a probationary Constable. Watkins was born on July 7<sup>th</sup> 1927 in Windsor. He attended Western Primary school from 1932-1939. He continued on with his education at Sandwich Collegiate and graduated in 1945. He attended Windsor Business College from 1946 thru 1947. Watkins then worked at the Norton-Palmer Hotel. The Hotel occupied the corner of Park Street at Victoria, the current location of Victoria Park Place. Watkins began his career as a 3 month probationary constable in uniform patrol where he remained for 8 years. On June 19<sup>th</sup> 1953 Watkins received the following notation on his service record "Highly commended for his devotion to duty while off active police duty in the arrest of Marford Stevens and Lloyd Johnson. "

On June 6<sup>th</sup> 1957 Constable Watkins was transferred to Traffic Branch. Watkins excelled in Traffic Branch and on August 21<sup>st</sup> 1960 Watkins was transferred to Youth Branch. On May 6<sup>th</sup> 1960 another commendation was entered into Watkins's file. "Commended in the arrest of G. Miller and A. O'Neil and L. Fairburn re: armed Holdup of Maple Leaf Hotel on Feb.12 1960". On November 5<sup>th</sup> 1961 Watkins was transferred to plain clothes duty within Youth Branch. It was on May 1<sup>st</sup> 1963 that Constable Watkins was made an acting Detective. He was confirmed in this rank on November 1<sup>st</sup> 1963.

On June 13<sup>th</sup> 1968 at 700am, at the age of 40 years, Detective Howard Watkins succumbed to a heart ailment and died. A full police funeral took place on Monday June 17<sup>th</sup> 1968 at the Sandwich Baptist Church on Peter Street. Detective Alton Parker served as an honorary pallbearer. Watkins was survived by his Wife Leverda Watkins, and his children David, Martin, Abby and Julie.

