

Browning Family involved in Harpers Ferry – Part 1

How well do you know your family's history? Have you ever wanted to learn more? The Amherstburg Freedom Museum is here to help. The Browning family has a connection to the Amherstburg Freedom Museum through J. Lyle Browning, who formerly acted as the President of the Museum's Board of Directors, but his family's connection to Southern Ontario goes beyond his dedication to the Museum. Did you know the Browning family settled in Sandwich (Windsor), Ontario almost 150 years ago, and in an article discussing the family, entitled, "Meeting the Browning Family," they are described as one of Canada's "most distinguished" Black families? If you've ever wondered about the contributions of the Browning family make sure to keep reading.

Ever heard of Harpers Ferry or John Brown? On J. Lyle's mother's side of the family were members of the Richardson family, who were involved in the events of Harpers Ferry, which involved John Brown leading a small group, including a member of the Richardson family, in a raid against a federal armory in Harpers Ferry, Virginia. The raid was an attempt to start an armed slave revolt in order to end the institution of slavery. The raid was unsuccessful, but what an honour it must be to have such an important connection to North American history. On J. Lyle Browning's paternal side, his great grandfather escaped enslavement in the United States and came to Canada, where he met and married a Miss Duval. A 1932 land title from the museum's collection also tells us that James Clinton Browning, the grandfather of J. Lyle Browning, lived in the Township of Chatham, County of Kent. The son of James Clinton Browning was Joseph Browning, J. Lyle Browning's father, who married Gladys Richardson, whose family we just discussed at Harpers Ferry. Joseph and his family lived on Assumption Street in Windsor and he was for many years a foreman for the City of Windsor. He left that job

to become Windsor's leading Black barber. Anyone have memories of going to Joseph's barbershop in Windsor? In "Meet the Browning Family," Joseph says, "As his children grew up, he was more and more impressed with the necessity of giving each of them a better- than- average education, in a world that knew and recognized distinct barriers of color. That he was successful, with the kind and careful assistance of his wife, is evidenced by the fact that of five Browning children, all hold good positions, and two of them hold responsibilities which no other Negro in Canada has ever attained." Stayed tuned for more next week.