

Parker Family Part 2 – Legacy Hero

The next child of Immanuel Crawford and Ida Parker is Alton. Alton Parker's dedication to the community and to young people is unmatched. Born in Windsor on July 3, 1907 to Immanuel Crawford Parker, who owned a confectionery store on Mercer Street, and Ida Mae Joiner, Alton was a lifelong resident of the city and went on to do so many great things for the community. He received an education from Mercer Street School, followed by Windsor Collegiate Institute, Lowe Technical School and finally at the Detroit Institute of Technology in Diesel Engineering. He served as a member of the Central Citizens' Association, which called for City Hall to hire persons of colour because, at that time, there had never been a Black policeman in Windsor. Parker was a man of action and, as a result, joined the Windsor Police force on September 1, 1942, making him the first Black uniformed Police Officer in Windsor.

Previously, Alton Parker was a mechanic in Detroit, but took a pay cut to work for the Windsor Police. According to Alton, "I asked for a six-month leave of absence from my mechanic's job, so I could join the police, open the door for my people and then go back to my other job." He never went back and continued to make an impact in the community. Alton recalled the first few months as being pretty rough because he experienced resentment from some of the people he arrested, but also from some of his fellow officers. With time, Alton got a reputation of being a fair, no non-sense cop. He also made history in 1951 when he became the first Black detective in Canada. He dedicated 30 years to the police force.

In addition to the Central Citizens' Association, Alton Parker served in other organizations including the Goodfellow's Club, Windsor Male Chorus, Greater Windsor Foundation, Baptist Men's Council, Alpha Group (built homes for the handicapped) and Brentwood. He was also a founding member of Apartment Living for Physically Handicapped

Adults. The Goodfellows even presented Alton with an illuminated scroll and gold pen and pencil set to honour his community work and his 34-year commitment to the organization.

Alton's wife Evelyn (Perkins) Parker attended Patterson Collegiate, Wayne State and Michigan State University. She was the Chairman and Director of the volunteer nurses of the Red Cross, in addition to vice-president of the Interdenominational Church of Greater Windsor and Treasurer of the Missionary Circle of the First Baptist Church. She was also a member of the Women's Auxiliary of Hotel Dieu Hospital, President of the Community Friendship Group, and a Charter Member of the Hour-A-Day Study Club.

Have you ever heard of Uncle Al's Kids' Party in Windsor? If it were not for the Parker family, thousands of children who could not afford to go to camp would not have experienced a day completely devoted to them. Alton and Evelyn made it their mission to make sure children knew they were important and worth celebrating. One day, Alton and Evelyn saw small children playing at the park near their house in Windsor. It was then that Evelyn asked what they could do to help, and Alton suggested throwing a party for the local kids. The first party had 45 kids in attendance, but after 25 years they had over 1,000 children attending the Kids' Party. The kids were given treats like sandwiches, ice cream and pop to enjoy, along with go-carts, clowns, puppet shows and pony rides. With the assistance of a few donations, The Parkers paid, out of their own pocket, for this event each year. According to Alton, "My wife and I don't drink or smoke so we take that money we would have spent and put it aside for the children." They hosted Uncle Al's Kids' Party every summer, beginning in 1966.

In 1976, to honour him, the park where this event was hosted, Broadhead Park, was officially renamed Alton C. Parker Park. Did you know, Alton Parker also received a Citizen of the Year Award from the Museum? When he was given the award, he said "I have received

many awards over the years. But when it comes from your own community, it means so much more.” Among his other accolades, he was given the Ontario Medal for Good Citizenship, which was presented to him on June 30, 1976 at Queen’s Park. This medal was awarded to people who contributed to the common good of society, acting in a particularly generous way without the expectation of a reward. He was also named to the Order of Canada on 16 January 1976, received the Queen’s Silver Jubilee Medal, was recognized for his commitment to youth with a Harry Jerome Award and was given an Honorary Doctorate of Law from the University of Windsor. Alton Parker was a true gift to the community.

After Alton’s death, Uncle Al’s Kids’ Party was hosted by his family, including his granddaughter Cherie Steele who said “Instead of having grandpa here looking across the park at all his guests, I’m sure he’s looking down today.” At the museum’s Emancipation Celebration, we had the honour of presenting the Legacy Hero Award to Cherie, on Alton’s behalf, and she gave a moving speech recalling memories of her grandfather.

What we publish is not a complete history of any family and is based on the documents that are available. We welcome photos and information to fill in the gaps. See you next week for part 3.