

Tales from SoHo's Black Community

When you refer to someone as a member of a “visible minority”, you use a piece of local history. Kathleen ‘Kay’ Livingstone, born here in 1919, coined the term. Later an important Canadian activist and broadcaster, Livingstone found a wealth of inspiration in her community.


It began at home with Livingstone’s activist parents, James Jenkins and Christina Jenkins Howson. Publishers of *The Dawn of Tomorrow*, the couple reported on issues of importance to Black Canadians, countering the silence of American newspapers. Readers learned of incidents of racism like a cafe’s refusal to serve a Black man and the heinous activities of local Ku Klux Klan members. They also encountered efforts to combat that racism, particularly in education and employment. Black people faced legal barriers, such as segregation, in both areas well into the 1960s.

The Dawn of Tomorrow connected the Black community. Notices from local churches invited others from around southwestern Ontario to picnics, concerts, and baseball games. And news coverage promoted key community events such as the August 1 Emancipation Day celebrations. This annual event celebrates the *Slavery Abolition Act 1833*, which freed slaves under the age of six. At the time, it helped to make Canada a haven for American freedom seekers. One of Emancipation Day’s most loyal attendees was yet another inspirational SoHo resident, Paul Lewis. This activist, musician, and community leader attended more than fifty-four consecutive Emancipation Day ceremonies!


Celebrated actor Richard B. Harrison was a SoHo native too, born in 1864. He was the son of American freedom seekers. They had travelled the Underground Railroad, a secret network of Black people and their white allies, which brought many formerly enslaved people to London. They, their descendants, and those born free, were among London’s earliest founders. Racism barred many from finding gainful employment outside of manual labour. But many, like Harrison, succeeded. Some, including AB Jones, became successful businessmen. Sharing his success with his community, Jones donated land for the construction of the Second Baptist church. Congregants no longer needed to meet in each other’s homes.

Yes, Livingstone had many SoHo residents to look to as role models. The Black SoHo community is one to admire.

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| 0 | Reference/AFC Number, date, University Western Archives) |  |

Front of the Sign Images

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| 1 | <p>The Dawn of Tomorrow was truly a family effort! Pictured here are the Jenkins family. From Donald assembling the paper, to Marion assisting her mother as a secretary, to Christina Jenkins Howson leading the way as editor-publisher, to Christine managing the clipping service, and David overseeing advertising - everyone had a part to play. In its heyday during the 1970s, the newspaper had a circulation of over 40,000! What a team! (LFP 1950-09-13, University Western Archives)</p> |  |
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James Jenkins was a co-founder of Canadian League for the Advancement of Coloured People (CLACP), the only organization in Canada chartered to improve the health, education and social support of Black Canadians. In 1927, he brought together hundreds of people from all over southwestern Ontario for CLACP's first convention. Together, they discussed important issues like race prejudice, unemployment, and Black education. (*The Dawn of Tomorrow*, 1925-04-18, University Western Archives)



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Here amongst his favourite people, children, Paul Lewis shows them the bible awarded to him by Beth Emanuel Church for his many years of service. Paul 'Dad' Lewis has held hundreds of children during the annual picnics. Through the years, he saw those children grow and some even become grandparents themselves. (LFP 1970-04-27, University Western Archives)



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| 4 | <p>In the 1880s, Richard B. Harrison and his family left London to start a new life in Detroit. Mere hours after their departure, their old home was destroyed in a suspected attack by the Ku Klux Klan. But fast forward fifty-four years, Mayor George Wenige gave Harrison, now a successful Broadway performer, the Freedom of the City. (<i>Green Pastures</i> Program, Box #75A, Ivey Family London Room, London Public Library)</p> |  |
| 5 | <p>Baseball teams, such as the Elite Girls, provide opportunities for the community members to socialize. You can spot Helen Ball from the Ball Family Jubilee Singers front and centre in the first row. The Ball family toured the country, raising money for Black churches. Pearl Brown, the 1927 CLACP secretary, is three spots from the left in the second row. (Courtesy of the Ball family)</p> |  |
| 6 | <p>The Coloured Stars were London's first Black team since the 1860s. In July 1923, they played an exhibition game at Labatt Park against the Perrins factory team in the London Manufacturers League. (<i>The Dawn of Tomorrow</i>, 1923-08-1923, University Western Archives.)</p> |  |
| 7 | <p>Kathleen Livingstone advocated for the rights of Black women and was a driving force behind the establishing of the Congress of Black Women, which is dedicated to improving the lives of all Black women and their families. As a broadcaster, she ran several popular radio shows. She credits Richard B. Harrison as her inspiration to go into acting. We gratefully acknowledge the generous support of the Toronto Star in providing archival material for this sign</p> |  |
| 8 | <p>Benjamin Drew's 1856 book, <i>The Refugee: Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada</i> preserves some of Mr AB</p> | <p>https://www.hearherelondon.org/stories/aby-b-jones/</p> |

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| <p>Jones' story. In this episode of Hear, Hear, we get to learn about his escape from slavery, his move to Canada, and his experiences exploring churches in London.</p> | |
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