

The Life and Times of Caddy Norris

IT WAS THE biggest funeral St. Andrews had ever seen. All Saints Anglican Church, a large building in its own right, was full to overflowing. Bankers sat side-by-side with fishermen. A crowd of mourners stood outside, straining to catch phrases of the service. Children were present in unusual numbers. Under the direction of Willa Walker, eighty-five of them had fashioned an eight-by-four foot floral mat, with a white cross inside, so large it took four men to carry it. Flags on cottages, municipal buildings and even the stately Algonquin Hotel stood at half-mast.

If this had been a service for a person of state, such as Mr. Howard Winthrop Pillow, President of the American Bank Note Company, who was given a magnificent service here in 1952, such splendour might have seemed less remarkable. But the recipient of all these tributes was no banker or politician. He was a simple black labourer named Caddy Norris, who was born here in 1890, and died on August 27, 1948 after being run over by his wagon and team of horses out on the Algonquin golf course.

What made Caddy Norris so special, so loved by persons of all walks of life, such an institution in this town? The answer to that question lies partly, of course, in the man that was Caddy Norris, partly in the unusual social circumstances in which he found himself. For this man was by all accounts a remarkable person in his own right, but he was also the last representative of the only black family this town had known in quite some time.

Caddy was the child of Charles Norris and Maria Brickson. Charles was born in 1844 in Maryland, and seems to have served as a cook for the North during the Civil War. He came to St. Andrews in 1879 with two children, Helen and Jessie, who had been born in Portland in 1873 and 1875. His wife was Maria Brickson (or Brixon), the daughter of Jessie Stewart, herself the daughter of Moses and Elizabeth Stewart. The Stewarts were of St. Andrews provenance, and lived on what is now Cedar Lane but which at that time was known colloquially as Slabtown, a poor community of blacks and

Irish. They were quite a large family, if the various censuses from 1851 onwards are any indication, though the exact relations among them are obscure. Charles continued work as a cook, working mainly for Kennedy's Hotel, which opened in 1881. He fathered six children; aside from Helen and Jessie, there were in order Charles (or Ned), Clifford, Kathleen and John Cadman, the subject of this story.

By modern standards the St. Andrews of 1948 was highly stratified both by class and color, with the wealthy summer residences perched on the hill at the Algonquin, the working citizens labouring below, and the black population a cut below them, but the phenomenon of Caddy Norris seemed to cut across these lines. If he was treated "almost" as an equal, the children had a great deal to do with it. Every account of Caddy Norris emphasizes that he loved, and was loved by, children. For the longest time he drove the "sloven" or low-bodied wagon for William McQuoid's trucking service, delivering luggage and ice to the Algonquin Hotel, and taking away the garbage. According to Margot Mais of Bayside, it was impossible for Caddy to drive from one end of a street to the other without picking up at least four children. It was a local tradition, and an experience many of the children of wealthy summer residents took back with them to Toronto, Montreal and the United States, to "learn to drive" with Caddy. In some families, this tradition spanned several generations, as one particular nursemaid discovered to her surprise.

George Goodeill, for a time the local jailer, relates how once a family of summer children were taken aboard by Norris but reprimanded by their nurse, who felt that perhaps this was an inappropriate or dangerous thing. Much put out, the children would not eat their lunch later that day. In Goodeill's words: "They started crying and stuff like that, and when the old grandfather wanted to know what the trouble was, the older sister told him what had happened. Well, the grandfather got up from the table, walked over to the desk, wrote out a cheque, handed it to the nursemaid and said 'the train leaves here at four o'clock this afternoon.'"

Ms. Mais recalls: "He took great care of children. If they were on his wagon, he made sure they were away from the wheels if they were going to turn a corner or anything. And you know mostly we were very strictly supervised by nannies and parents. But I don't

remember anybody telling me I couldn't ride in Caddy's cart - ever."

Caddy also had a vein of mischief the children liked. Willa Walker recalls that sometimes, on his way back to the Algonquin from Katy's Cove, where guests swam and socialized, Caddy would often give rides to small crowds of little girls, in starched white dresses and straw sun hats. After a slow start he would give the team a smart slap on the rear, which to the accompaniment of many squeals of delight, would then charge up the hill.

But there was more to Caddy Norris than simply a man who gave kids a ride on his wagon. The plaque put up in his honour in All Saints Church, for instance, the various summer birthday parties thrown for him, the house donated to him, and the cemetery stones for him and his family, say a great deal about the kind of respect he engendered in the town.

For one thing, he was an unusually kind and thoughtful person. Harry Mallory, whose grandfather employed Caddy as a young man in his taxi business, showed me the porcelain Wedgwood picture plate that Caddy presented his father as a wedding gift. He says that that gift was given "for his relationship with the family." Maybe, but as Mr. Mallory notes, Caddy was in general just a very thoughtful person. He remembered that when his grandfather died, Caddy showed up "all dressed up, black suit on, white collar. He was very black. And he came in and paid his respects. And I watched him as he went out and up the street, and I could see him bring out the white handkerchief and wipe his face. And it impressed me, you know. He was a very kind, sympathetic sort of a guy."

By some standards, Caddy seems to have lived a rather solitary life. He did attend Sunday service regularly, where he pumped the organ, and also played the drum in the local orchestra and town band, but beyond that and long days at work, he seems to have kept pretty much to himself. There was some reason for this. His father died in 1911, and by the time he was 21, four of his five siblings were dead. And so Caddy was left to care for his mother, who lived until 1922, and after that his sister Helen, who was blind. She died in 1942, aged 69. Some still recall Caddy accompanying her to church, where he would disappear for a time to pump the organ, then return in time to escort her home.



Cadman Norris
1890 - 1948.
Charlotte
County
Archives
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Even here, though, we are left to wonder what those who knew him mean when they say that there was “something unusual” about him, or that he was “quite a character,” or a “respected friend.” According to Willa Walker, he broke convention by calling people by their first names. To him the Honourable Marguerite Shaughnessy, daughter to Thomas Shaughnessy, President of the C. P. R. and sometime hostess to Prime Minister MacKenzie King, the Governor-General the Earl of Athlone, and Lord Beaverbrook, was simply “Marg.” Though as Willa Walker writes, she liked everyone to call her by her first name, I get the feeling that Caddy Norris wanted to fit in, that he spoke and acted as though he were just one of the townspeople. Just how true this actually was is another question.

Helen Norris
1873 - 1942.
Charlotte
County
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Except for a small contingent of the Stewarts, St. Andrews was white when the Norris family arrived, and it was white when the last of the Norris children died in 1948. For six years Caddy Norris was the only black person in town. What would that have been like - for him and for the town? It is surely a significant fact that none of the Norris family ever married or had children. With the possible exception of Edward, whom Rose Haughn believes moved away to Houlton, Maine, the Norris family simply died out. Certainly Jesse, who died in 1901 aged 26, was of marriageable age, as was Edward, whose stone in the local cemetery lists him as having died in 1915, aged 36. The same is true of Caddy, of course, but he remained a bachelor all his life, and is not remembered even to have had a girlfriend.

Perhaps this was partly out of duty to his sister, but there is an anecdote about his having once attempted suicide that throws a shadow on the otherwise rather too sunny portrait of Caddy Norris. Several remembered hearing a story about the time Caddy jumped off the town wharf. How serious he was is hard to say, since the wharf was full of people - it being midsummer - and he



immediately shouted for help. But several recall that the incident, which happened when he would have been about 30, is thought to have involved a woman he liked and who apparently rejected him. This is ordinary enough, but as a black man in a white town, it is one thing to like a person, quite another to marry them. Mr. Mallory remembered that mixed marriages were not common in those days.

Color aside, Caddy had another strike against him – a cleft palate which had been repaired on a table at Kennedy's Hotel by some visiting physicians when he was still a young man, but which left him with a speech impediment. That and color made him a target of the occasional jibe by immature kids and adults. Mallory remembered one time when Caddy was in the barbershop getting his haircut, and taking good-naturedly – as was his wont – some digs by some of the local hangers out when a stranger made the mistake of joining in. Caddy jumped up

**Home of Caddy
Norris, 100
Queen St.
This house
was purchased
by private
subscription
for Norris after
the death of his
sister Helen.**

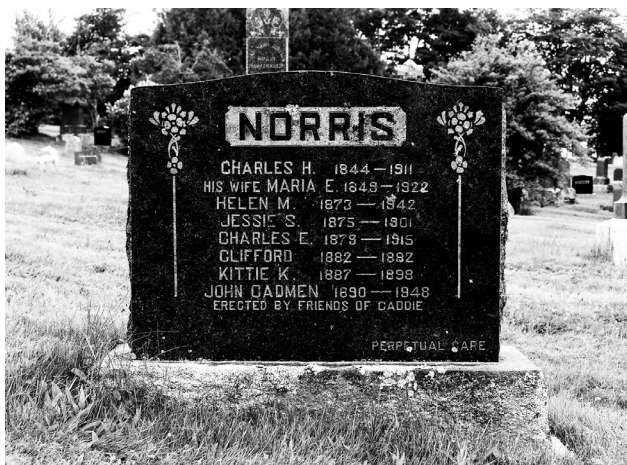


Caddy Norris
played the
drum in the
town band.
Charlotte
County
Archives.
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and grabbed the man, who was taken aback and protested that he was only following along with what the others were saying. “That’s all right,” said Caddy, “they’re my friends.”

The pathos of his situation was not entirely lost on the townspeople. Donnie McFarlane, for instance, who once visited Caddy and Helen in their house, and who would have been about twenty when Caddy died, speculates that at least some of his popularity derived from his status as St. Andrews’ only black person, and that in a sense the town adopted Caddy, especially after Helen’s death, as though there was a certain loneliness and doom attached to his fate; that this lover of children would never have any of his own.

Caddy Norris’s death occasioned a number of tributes in the local newspaper, *The Saint Croix Courier*. The most feeling and noble, by Frederick Worrell, local dentist and one of the town’s best writers, remembered Caddy as



*Norris, Charles
H.*

1844 - 1911.

His wife Maria E.
1849 - 1922.

Helen M.
1873 - 1942.

Jessie S.
1875 - 1901.

Charles E.
1878 - 1915.

Clifford
1882 - 1882.

Kittie K.
1887 - 1898.

John Cadmen
[sic] 1890 - 1948.

*Erected by
Friends of
Caddie.*

Rural Cemetery

one who had been treated “almost” as a white person; one whose sensitive nature “knew that there was distinction, however slight, and for this reason . . . learned to show his appreciation more than most for every little kind word and friendly act.” Worrell concluded to say that though Caddy did not have an easy life, “those who knew him best believe it was a happy one and that he would not have wished it different.”

That is a generous opinion but it is not difficult to believe that Caddy must sometimes have wondered at the fate which had befallen him and felt dimly that the many kindnesses that were offered him were tinged with pity and guilt. Or maybe not. As a child he is reported once to have said, when he and the rest of the school band got new uniforms, “Now we’ll all look the same.” Perhaps a part of what made him so loved and respected was that in spite of various reasons he had for self-pity, he tried to live as though he were the same colour as everyone else. And maybe that did not go unappreciated by his friends. ~

St. Croix Courier

Aug. 20, 1936

"Shiretown Items"

A Sincere Tribute

About 250 people helped Caddy Norris, the Shiretown's one and only colored gentleman, celebrate his birthday last Tuesday evening in Elite Hall. The party was typical of that ideal democracy practiced by Mr. Norris himself. Pauper or millionaire alike were welcomed by the friend-loving, friend-making host. No person remains long in St. Andrews without knowing "Caddy" and everyone who knew him was welcome. Miss Edna Smith and Larry Lace took charge of the dance program, and the music was provided by Caddy's orchestra, which plays in Elite Hall several nights a week. Several solos were sung during the evening, which was enjoyed by everyone. A cash presentation was made to Caddy by the steward of the Algonquin Hotel on behalf of the staff of the hotel.

St. Croix Courier

Sept. 2, 1948

"Caddy" Norris fatally injured at St. Andrews.

Children's Friend Paid Striking Tribute at Largest Funeral in Years

John Cadman Norris, better known to St. Andrews residents as "Caddy," died in hospital in St. Stephen Friday morning as the result of injuries sustained in an accident Thursday afternoon at St. Andrews, where he was born and lived all his life. The circumstances of the fatality are not completely known but he was found unconscious on the golf links about noon Thursday, not far from a team of horses he was driving for W. J. McQuoid and Sons, with whom he was employed.

He was born in St. Andrews in August, 1890, the son of a civil war veteran, Charles Norris, and Maria (Brickson) Norris, and was the last surviving member of a family of six children. He lived in St. Andrews all his life, attending school and later playing in the band and the St. Andrews orchestra. A great favorite with all, the children of the town and summer people especially looked upon him as a friend because of his kindness toward them.

Many and varied were the floral tributes sent by townspeople and prominent summer visitors in token of the esteem in which he was held. Among those who sent beautiful flowers and set pieces were Lieutenant Governor McLaren, Algoma Steel employees, staff of McQuoid's, management and staff of the Algonquin Hotel, and staff of Fort Tipperary. One of the finest tributes in the group was a blanket of flowers eight feet by four feet centered with a white cross, sent by 85 children in the town.

The funeral service was held Saturday afternoon, Aug. 28, at All Saints Church, and was one of the largest ever held in St. Andrews. People from all walks of life came to pay their respects to a beloved citizen and friend. The rector, Rev. Joseph McAlden, conducted the service, during which the hymns, "Unto the Hills" and "Abide with Me" were sung. Pall-bearers were Hope McQuoid, Warren Stinson, Henry McQuoid, Alfred Cummings, Forrest Ross, and Frank Dougherty, Sr. Interment was made in the St. Andrews Rural Cemetery.

"Shiretown Items"

Cadman Norris

A fatal accident resulting in the death of Cadman Norris occurred here last Thursday. "Caddy," as he was popularly known, had been teamster for McQuoids for many years and was an excellent horseman. How the accident happened will never be known. After the team had returned home without their driver a search was made and Mr. Norris was found lying by the road, unconscious. He was taken to Chipman Hospital but died early next morning without having regained consciousness. The funeral, held Saturday afternoon, was one of the largest in the history of the town and the profusion of flowers surpassed anything ever seen here. This whole-hearted tribute by permanent and summer residents alike showed human nature at its finest. Mr. Norris was a colored man, for many years the only one living in St. Andrews but beneath that colored skin there was a heart of gold, and when angels write his name upon the scroll it is sure that they will mark him down as "one who loved his fellow men." From childhood up he had been treated "almost" as a white person, but Caddy who had a sensitive nature, knew that there was a distinction, however slight, and for this reason he learned to

show his appreciation more than most for every little kind word and friendly act. He loved the children of the town and of the cottages and they all adored him as they proved by weaving an enormous mat of flowers which took four men to carry. He was a member of the St. Andrews Band, and the boys as an acknowledgment of this fact and to pay respect to his memory, donned their uniforms and attended the funeral service in a body. Living alone for many years, always working hard, early and late, Caddy did not have an easy life but those who knew him best believe it was a happy one and that he would not have wished it different. He has left no family and no relatives to whom we may express our sympathy and regrets. For many years the whole community has been his family, more carefully and more tenderly providing for his needs when necessary, and his comforts when occasion offered, because his color and consequently his situation in life, was not just like our own. Caddy was one of the landmarks of the town. In fact, he was more than that - he was an institution, now closed forever by his tragic death. In that beautiful plot of ground just outside the town, where broods the spirit of everlasting peace, his mortal remains are now forever laid. May he rest in peace.

The day broke beneath a misty mid-summer sun. There was a stillness in the air and even the cry of the gulls seemed hushed. Then I remembered. This was the children's day of mourning, the day they would always remember for a few years with a sense of loss and sadness, but later in their lives with pride and gratitude that they had shared and been part of a great lesson in spiritual values.

"Caddy" is dead. Who was he? To a stranger in town, he would probably be just the "colored boy" who drove a team of old horses hitched to an old cart, doing all the hundred and one chores that always need doing in a small town.

But to the children he was a most glamorous and beloved friend. His old cart seldom passed by without three or four youngsters sitting up behind him "learning to drive," and no day was complete for them without a "ride with Caddy."

Today, at his funeral the little church was filled with men and women from all walks of life, who had come to pay their last tribute to a good, respected friend. But the greatest tribute of all was from the children, who all morning had gathered flowers and with loving little hands had made a beautiful white cross for Caddy.

And so as the day ended beneath a misty mid-Summer sun, with a stillness in the air, a great lesson in spiritual values entered our hearts and we could truthfully say, "His ways are past finding out."

- Marguerite Shaughnessy

Good-bye to Caddy

In the little town of St. Andrews, New Brunswick, 58 years ago, was born a colored boy named Caddy Norris, the son of a chef at a local hotel. The chef and his wife died, leaving a daughter also. She was an invalid for many years and Caddy looked after her patiently and cheerfully until death came. There were times when Caddy became depressed owing to his color and some insulting remark he may have overheard. However, he was treated kindly by most people, and some understanding person always cheered him up and he soon felt better and went about his work. He drove a pair of black work horses and was a familiar figure on our streets where he will be greatly missed.

As the only colored resident for many years at St. Andrews, he went to school with the white children, entered into their sports and later played in the band. As St. Andrews grew into a fashionable summer resort, the children of families coming here looked forward to seeing Caddy and hearing his welcome "Hello Jean" or "John" or whoever it was and seeing the smile of welcome on Caddy's face.

Caddy is dead. But his welcome to all will not be forgotten. Today flags are at half-mast and the English church where his funeral service takes place is filled with people from all walks of life, paying respect to Caddy. There is a profusion of flowers and one large blanket of wildflowers, forming a cross in the center, is from the school children. It reminds one in a small way of "The Miracle of the Bells." He was grateful to his employers and appreciated even a good morning greeting or any recognition. Now he is honored in death.



Caddy Norris.
Charlotte
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We can all learn a lesson of gratitude, cheerfulness and many other things from this man of lowly birth, who had so little of this world's wealth but always gave out some happiness, if only a smile and a cheery "Hello Jim."

St. Croix Courier

Jan. 17, 1979

Memorial to Caddy Norris

Muriel Grimmer

"The hotel guests were all fond of Caddy and it was fitting that the hotel orchestra during its 29 August Sunday evening concert in the lounge should play a series of three selections 'In Memory of Caddy.'"