

# Jes' everybody knows Ole Henry

He says he is eighty-eight, and I guess that is about right. He also says his last name is Perrelte — pronounced Polarity — and I guess that is right, too, but in any case it is a matter of no consequence for in Clarkson and its environs, including Lorne Park, Port Credit, Park Royal and Oakville, he is just Old Henry to one and all. When I was trying to locate him nobody knew his last name. When I did locate him, Old Henry seemed very doubtful about it himself.

He is a new Mississaugan of long-standing having been a resident of Clarkson, he thinks, for forty years — or maybe nearer fifty.

"A real long spell," he chuckled. "Long enough so's people know me good."

They know him good, sure enough, and they know him mostly for the little kindnesses he is in the habit of doing — unspectacular kindnesses mostly, the cheery word, the gloom-dispelling chuckle.

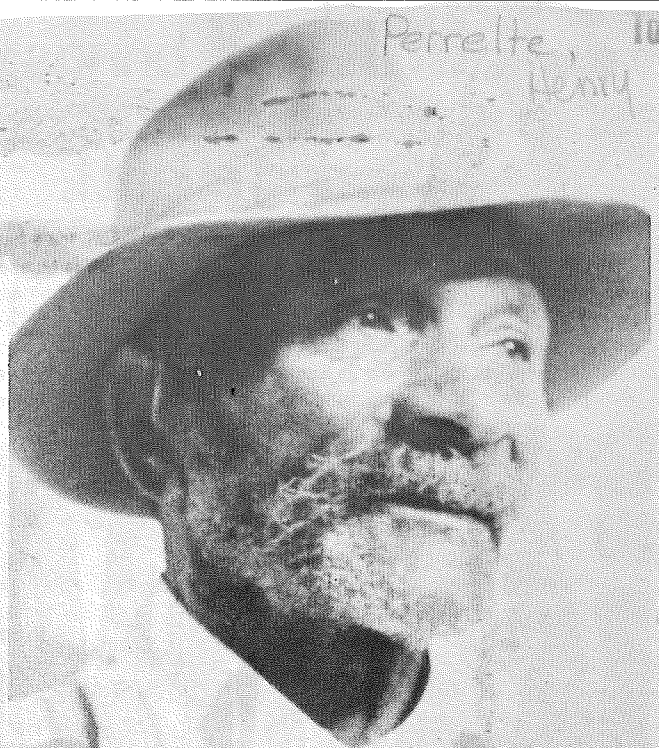
Everybody knows him, but few know where he lives, and I had quite a job locating his address — which proved to be only four doors from our office. He has a one-room apartment alongside the photographer's studio on Lakeshore road.

### Still Working

He was just back from work when I called to see him, for he is out every day fixing up people's gardens and mowing their lawns. He lives alone and he does for himself — in somewhat Spartan fashion, I judged.

His room contained a chesterfield, covered with protective plastic, an arm-chair, two garden chairs, a two-ring electric plate, a TV set and a cot, very neatly made up. It was all very neat, very ship-shape. There was a big jar of peanut butter on a small table in the corner, and that looked to me to be about all in the way of provender.

Henry was born in Manitoba, he told me, but he didn't remember much



Old Henry

about the early days. He remembered he had a brother — a long time daid.

It was the current things he remembered most clearly — the small plot he owned at one time in the Birchwood area, his shack down in the sand-pit back of George Eby's house, the time he took his fingers off trying to fix a lawn-mower.

"Couldn't get a job no-how, so I figure I'll get me a lawn-mower and start a-cutting lawns. The first one to give me a job was Howard Wood along in Port Credit, and from then on I did fine cuttin' lawns at \$1.25 an hour. But lordy, lordy dat lawn-mower am mighty heavy. Yassuh, old and heavy she was. Well suh, the time come when I got me ahold of a power mower, an' I'm doing fine with all the work people give me.

"But one day that little ole lawn-mower gets stuck an' I reaches in my hand to get the chain back on the sprockets. Fool thing to do because she started up all of a sudden —" His face puckered into a big smile, "— an' before you know it that little ole machine has mowed off a couple of mah fingers.

"Well, suh, it don't take 'em off neat. They're hanging like, so up I go to the lady of the house to borry a pair of scissors.

"She takes a look an' she says you ain't fooling around with no scissors; you're going to hospital. An' bless me if she don't mean it, so she done bind up my hand in a towel and takes me to hospital in her car."

He dropped his voice

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By  
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and when he spoke again it was filled with amazement. "D'you know in that there hospital they wouldn't let me walk by myself. One nurse comes alongside and takes one arm and up comes another nurse and takes the other, an' they led me to a bed jes' like I wasn't safe walking. Brother they done treat me good."

Old Henry has treated others pretty good, too. One day, when he was living down in the sand-pit, he was approached by a beleaguered citizen whose truck was about to be sequestered by the bailiff, said citizen having fallen behind with his payments.

**Helps Friend**

"Can you keep it down here for a day or two until I get some money together?" he asked Henry. "If the bailiff takes it I won't see it again, but if I can hold on for a few days I can pay what is owing."

"Yo' leave that truck right heah, Mistuh, an'

nobody ain't gonna touch it," Henry assured him. He got a shotgun from the wall. "See what I mean. Not nobody ain't gonna touch it."

An' nobody did until the citizen was able to pay what he owed and reclaim his truck.

On one occasion Old Henry found a wallet containing \$3,000 in the sand-pit and it turned out that the owner of the pit had dropped it while

working a bull-dozer. It was returned before he knew it had gone.

"People around heah have been real good to me," says Old Henry. "'Tain't often I'm short of a job — gardening and the like. And I have to work, mistuh — " He breaks into a huge chuckle. "I ain't no gentleman."

And that, of course, is where Old Henry is wrong.