

The Christian Family History Part 3 – A Millionaire

Ada's sister and the next child of Elizabeth Christian and William Kelly is Alice Yvonne (or Evonne). According to her birth record, Alice was born on March 29, 1897 in Windsor. She married Lloyd Charles Kirtley, the son of Moses Kirtley and Annie Simpson. Alice and Lloyd married on August 23, 1918 in Windsor. Their marriage record lists Alice's occupation as a Dental Assistant, while Lloyd was a Sheet Metal Worker. Alice's death record from June 14, 1948 reveals that she married a second time because she is listed as Alice E. Smith. Not to be confused with her aunt (Alice Christian Smith), this Alice E. Smith is listed as the daughter of Elizabeth Christian and William Kelly. This record also reveals that she lived with her husband in Detroit.

Alice's sister Ruth was born on November 25, 1898. She later married Lawrence Simpson, the son of Charles Simpson and Eunice Shadd. The couple married on December 26, 1917 in Windsor and had four children named (Alice) Elizabeth, Lillian, Charles, and Ettolla (Betty). The Museum's family history collection lists two marriages for Elizabeth. Her first marriage was to James Talley and the second marriage was to Gene Hess. A Petition for Naturalization for Alice Elizabeth Simpson Talley states that she was born on June 1, 1920 in Windsor and married James on January 23, 1937 in Detroit. This document also states that James Talley was born in Gaffney, South Carolina on March 8, 1912 and where it lists "now resides" it says U.S. Army. This Petition also says that the couple did not have any children at that time. At the time, Elizabeth's occupation was a Rooming House Manager, but she later worked for the US Postal Service.

Ruth's next child, Lillian, married William Marshall. A Petition for Naturalization for Lillian Clarice Marshall, nee Simpson, states that she was born on October 26, 1921 in Windsor

and married William on August 17, 1946 in Windsor. William was born in Dallas, Arkansas on December 1, 1882. At the time, the couple had two children named Barbara Anne (born May 13, 1945 and married Roger Giroux) and William M. (born August 30, 1946). Both children were born in Canada. William was featured in the 1974 documentary *Hearts and Minds*. To see a clip of William please click <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YmvAx0joQwE> . Please be advised that the video link contains explicit language.

According to another document (<https://www.encyclopedia.com/education/news-wires-white-papers-and-books/marshall-bella-1950>), Lillian and William Marshall had a third child named Bella who became one of the youngest women, and one of a few African Americans, to be the head of the finance department of a major American city – Detroit – where she was Director of Detroit’s fiscal activities. She held this position until the early 1990s. Bella married Don Barden. Together they became successful developers and, according to *Essence* magazine, Bella is one of the richest African American women in the country with a net worth of approximately \$25 million. Just like her siblings, Bella was also born in Canada (Windsor), but grew up in Detroit. Bella’s father sadly passed away when she was 19 and her mother, Lillian, was a clerical worker. Bella earned a law degree from the University of Michigan and in 1975 was hired as staff counsel by the Detroit office of the Michigan State Housing Development Authority. Just three years later, Bella became its youngest and first female directors.

Next up is Helen, the next child of Elizabeth Christian and William Kelly. She was born on August 21, 1901 in Windsor. On May 23, 1921 she married William Henry Thompson (some records list him as Peter Thompson) in Windsor. William Henry Thompson was the son of George Thompson and Mary Peet. According to the Museum’s family history collection Helen’s daughter was named Marie and she married George McCurdy who played a significant role in

the closure of S.S. #11 (a segregated school) and went on to become the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commissioner. Marie and George had nine children. In addition to Marie, Helen also had a son named Lloyd Thompson and another daughter named Ada who married Dr. Lewis Milburn and had two children. There was limited information for Helen's brother Leonard Russell Kelly who was born on July 21, 1904 in Windsor. The 1911 Census lists a different date of birth for Leonard as July 7, 1903.

Now that we've discussed Elizabeth Christian Kelly and her family, we can move on to discuss her siblings Susan, Sarah Ellen, Alice, Charles Henry, Thomas and Ada. We will start with Elizabeth's sister Susan who married William Gee. Their children include Bruce, Ronald, Dorothy, and Cyril. By the 1921 Census Susan was a widow and is listed with three of her children: Bruce (with his wife Edna who is German), Cyril, and Dorothy. Interestingly, Susan and her children are listed as English under their "race." According to Irene Moore Davis, they lived fully as white members of society.

The next child of Henry Christian and Anne Wilson is Sarah Ellen. She married Augustus Adams who worked as a clerk and later as a grocer. The 1911 Census lists Augustus Adams and Sarah Ellen (listed as Saliar E. Adams) along with their niece Annie Smith, but there are no children of their own listed. On March 30, 1894, the *Amherstburg Echo* writes that Augustus "who has been employed for a number of years as a clerk in G.T. Florey's grocery, will leave on Monday for Sandwich where he will have charge of the ship supply department of the store of Page & Desroalers(?). Gus has been for years connected with the Sunday School and church of the First Baptist church, as one of their best workers and will be greatly missed. His many friends unite in wishing him success. He is trustworthy and will undoubtedly give his new employers perfect satisfaction."

The *Amherstburg Echo* also shared details of the Amherstburg Literary Society. As a member, Augustus acted as an Assistant Secretary in 1881 and also participated in several debates including whether “A thief is a greater curse to the community at large than a liar.” The affirmative was led by Benjamin Green and the negative by Augustus Adams. A debate from April 1881 lists Augustus Adams on the affirmative side of a debate that asked which is more pleasing to the eye, nature or art? Augustus was the winner of the debate against D.H. Smith. The *Amherstburg Echo* also writes that Augustus also appeared in two dialogues and one chorus “and acquitted himself in good style and was each time greeted with hearty applause.”

In Augustus’ obituary further details are shared which reveal “Mr. Adams was born in Amherstburg, his father being Ralph Adams. The only member of the family now living is a brother, William H. Adams, chef on the steamer Plummer. The subject of this sketch was married in Amherstburg about 12 years ago to Ella Christian. Their union was childless. After the death of his mother they moved to Sandwich where he kept store near the Pittsburgh Coal Co.’s dock. Since last fall he had been employed in the White Lead Works, Detroit.” The 1871 Census reveals that Augustus’ mother’s name was Sarah and this record also lists his siblings as William and Elish.

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 4.