

## **Adams Family Part 1 – The Locket**

This month's family history will highlight members of the Adams family beginning with Ralph Adams. According to his April 1886 obituary, Ralph was the son of Jerry Adams but no further details about his father are given. Ralph's obituary does reveal further information about his life and says "Ralph Adams, an old and highly respected resident of this town passed away to join the great majority, on Tuesday last ... Mr. Adams was a son of the late Jerry Adams, and was born in Mason county, Kentucky, on 27<sup>th</sup> of January 1808 and lived in that state until he came to Amherstburg, on November 30<sup>th</sup>, 1856, since which time he has been a permanent resident of the town. He was married to Sarah Jane Moade?, at Flemingsburg, Kentucky, on the 28<sup>th</sup> of December, 1846. She survives him, but out of a family of six sons and four daughters, only two, (Wm. H. and Augustus) survive. Deceased was a member of the lodge of colored Masons, which existed here, but which has not met for some time, and was well known as an industrious and upright man. He had accumulated considerable property by his thrift and energy, so that his family will be left in comfortable circumstances. The funeral took place yesterday (Thursday) forenoon from the Baptist church to the cemetery and was largely attended."

According to his death record, Ralph was born enslaved. What is also not mentioned in his obituary is that Ralph Adams was the Town Cryer in Amherstburg. Ralph was married to a woman named Sarah Jane and their children included Leonard, William Henry, Jerome/Jerry, Elisha, Martha, John, Augustus and Lennah. Sadly, several of Ralph and Sarah Jane's children did not live into adulthood. As a result, we will share what little details are available for them, but the focus will be on two of Ralph and Sarah Jane's sons, William and Augustus, who lived significantly longer lives. The parts about William and Augustus will be discussed last, but we'll start with Leonard who was born in 1839 and died on June 4, 1848. His brother Jerry was born

May 1851 and passed away in April 1852. Elisha was born in 1856 and lived to be 18, passing away in June 1874. His sister Marth was born in October 1857, but sadly passed on November 5, 1858. John was born in 1859 and passed away on January 28, 1864, while Lennah was born in April 1852 and passed on October 3, 1853.

As mentioned, there is substantially more information about William and his brother Augustus. We'll start with William. He was born circa 1848 and later married Laura Dorcas Holton who was born circa 1857 and was the daughter of John and Susan Holton. The 1871 Census lists Laura with her parents, John and Susan Holton, along with some of her siblings John, James and William. According to their marriage record, William Henry Adams and Laura Ann Holton were married on December 20, 1876 in Amherstburg. At the time Laura was 19 and William was a 27-year-old cook. They had twelve children which included Lena, Lula, Nellie, Rallie, Laura, Susan Arabella, William F., Milton Augustus, Reginald, Ralph, Ethel and Faustine. Before we discuss their children, we'll share a few more details about William and Laura.

According to his November 1921 obituary, William "who had been a resident of the town for over seventy-two years, passed away at an early hour Saturday morning at the family home on Murray street, in the 80<sup>th</sup> year of his age. Mr. Adams had been in failing health for two years, but had only been bedfast since July, dropsy having developed following an attack of the flu. He was a native of Kentucky and was seven years of age when he came with his parents, the late Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Adams, to Amherstburg. Old citizens will remember that his father was the town bell-ringer in the early days, announcing public meetings, auction sales, etc. When they came to this historic town the early colored families were the Johnstons, the Stevens, Vineys, Ballantynes, Brantfords, Turners, Monroes, Smiths, Dodsons, and Waynes. Mr. Adams, when he

grew up, first learned the barbering business and is well remembered as an employee of the late John Gant and the late H.L. Drouillard. He studied hard and became later a school teacher and was one of the earliest teachers in Anderdon township. It was while employed there he fell in love with one of his scholars, Miss Laura Holten, daughter of John Holten, and they were married fifty-two years ago on the 20<sup>th</sup> of December coming, in the First Baptist Church, Amherstburg, by the Rev. Mr. Boner. Both their attendants are still living, Walter Anderson, now a resident of Detroit, and Miss Clara Hawkins, now Mrs. Moses Brantford, of Amherstburg.”

William’s obituary continues by saying “Later Mr. Adams became a cook on the Great Lakes and when he quit marine life was in charge of the kitchen at the Union Hotel, and then for some years on Bob-lo Island. His early career as a student was under the tuition of Jacob Taylor, who taught school on King street. Mr. and Mrs. Adams had a family of eleven children, eight of whom are living. There was Lula, Mrs. Robert Thomas, of Oberlin, Ohio; Nellie, Mrs. Charles Gentry, of Mansfield, Ohio; Ralph, of Chicago; Lena, Ethel and Faustine are deceased; Laura, Mrs. George McCurdy, and Bella, Mrs. Simon Wilson, of Amherstburg; William, of Detroit; Milton, of Windsor; and Reginald lives at home with his mother. They have eleven grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. Mr. Adams was a patient sufferer and conscious to the last, and he died happy in the knowledge that all his children were at his bedside at the end. He was a member of the First Baptist Church and the funeral took place on from there Monday afternoon, services being conducted by the Rev. Mr. Edwards, pastor, followed by burial in Rose Hill cemetery. Four sons were pallbearers.”

The obituary for William’s wife, Laura, also shared details about her life. In the *Amherstburg Echo* it says “One of the most highly respected colored residents of Amherstburg, in the person of Mrs. William Adams, aged 76, died at her home on Murray Street, Wednesday

morning following an illness of six weeks duration. Mrs. Adams, whose maiden name was Lauren Holden, was born in Kentucky and at the age of one came with her parents to Anderdon. Her marriage to Mr. Adams was the culmination of a school girl romance, where the scholar married the teacher. Her late husband, who died in 1928, will be remembered as one of the best known colored residents of this district. He was one of the pioneer teachers of Anderdon township. Later he was a cook on the Great Lakes, and latterly was employed on Bois Blanc Island. Five of a family of eleven are surviving. They are: Mrs. Robert Thomas (Lulu), of Oberlin, Ohio: Mrs. Charles Gentry (Nellie), of Chicago: Ralph, of Chicago: Mrs. George McCurdy (Laura), of Amherstburg: and Milton, of Windsor. The deceased are Lena, Ethel, Faustine, Mrs. Simon Wilson (Bella), William and Reginald. Mrs. Adams was a member of the First Baptist Church, and took an active interest in the Ladies' Sewing Circle and the Missionary Society of the church. Funeral services will be held from her late home on Murray Street, Friday afternoon at 2.00 o'clock, to the First Baptist Church, where the pastor, Rev. Edwards, will preach."

More information is shared about Laura Holton Adams in a separate article that tells the story of a locket that has been in her family for generations. The story says "The locket ... was her mother's gift when the daughter was 18 years old. She had formerly received it from her mistress, one Mary Kirk. After Mrs. Kirk's husband, Richard, died, she took Laura and her brother and their mother to Cincinnati, across the state line in Ohio, and purchased their freedom for them. The family moved to Canada around 1859. The very special locket survived the trip, and at some time Laura had her initials, L.A., engraved on it."

**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 2.**