

## Stokes Family History Part 1 – Service in the War of 1812

This month's family history will feature the Stokes family. Throughout the research process there were several roadblocks, but also instances where a treasure trove of information was found, particularly in newspaper records. We will start with John Stokes who is written about in Elise Harding-Davis' book, *The Black Presence in the War of 1812 – Unsung Military Volunteers of North America*. In her book, Harding-Davis writes "John Stokes, Black veteran of the War of 1812, was granted land on Garrison Grounds in Amherstburg, Ontario. This property was claimed by John and passed down through generations of his family. His son Peter Stokes was a founding member and staunch supporter of the Amherstburg Regular First Baptist Church. In 1844 at the Amherstburg Association meeting in Chatham, Ontario, Peter Stokes entered the Gospel ministry at the Association's first ordination service. In 1847, the Colchester Church entered the Amherstburg Association under the leadership of Elder Peter Stokes. Deacons and elders of the Amherstburg First Baptist Church acted as Conductors on the Underground Railroad; the town was one of the busiest terminus sites welcoming scores of refugees ... The Stokes family took a prominent place in Amherstburg society. Peter Jr. worked as a gardener on Boblo Island. The last known member of the Stokes family to live on the family land was Estella King Stokes, wife of Peter Stokes Jr., who passed away in the late 1975." This is all that could be found for John Stokes, but his descendants will be discussed throughout this family history. As mentioned, John had a son named Peter, but records also show that Peter had two brothers named Grafton and Randolph. No further information was found about Grafton, but information for Randolph and Peter's lines will be shared. We will begin with Peter Stokes Sr.

Peter Stokes Sr. married Mary Ann Robinson, daughter of Alfred Robinson and Margaret Fuller. The death notice for Mary Ann's mother Margaret shares a few more details about her

family and says “In Anderdon, on Sunday, December 20<sup>th</sup>, Mrs. Fuller, aged 84 years. Deceased was born in slavery in London Co., Virginia, in 1807, and lived in the United States all her life until two years ago, when she came to live with her daughter, Mrs. Peter Stokes. Besides Mrs. Stokes, her surviving children are John Fuller, of Cleveland, O., and Mrs. Annie Johnson, of Pittsfield, Mich. The funeral took place on Tuesday to the Amherstburg cemetery. Rev. W.S. Kane officiating.”

Mary Ann Robinson married twice: first to William Jones and then Peter Stokes Sr. Before we move on to discuss Mary Ann and Peter’s union, there are further details to share about Mary Ann’s first marriage, including details about her children: Virginia/Sarah, Leandor, Elizabeth and Margaret. Virginia, sometimes referred to as Sarah, married Henry Banks, the son of Henry Daniel Banks. Valuable information about Henry Banks and his father are revealed in his obituary and we felt it important to share. According to his obituary “One of the district’s oldest residents, Henry Banks, died at his home on the second concession, Anderdon, Sunday, October 10. Deceased was born in Malden 94 years ago, the son of an escaped slave, and resided in this district all his life. Because his life was a link between the bondage of the colored people and their freedom The *Echo* interviewed Mr. Banks two years ago and the following biographical sketch was published.”

Henry’s obituary continues by saying “Colored Patriarch – The oldest man on the grounds at the Emancipation Day celebration at Amherstburg Thursday last was Henry Banks of Anderdon. He was the patriarch, the prophet, the historian of his people. Ninety two summers and winters had passed over his head, dimming the eye, silvering the curly black hair and moustache but leaving unimpaired the upright figure and retentive memory of the adventurous youth who once possessed that body. It is his memory that impresses one. In a half-hour chat this

colored gentleman depicted for an *Echo* reporter a cavalcade of events connected with his personal history and that of all North American colored folk that began with the dark days of slavery, passed through the underground railway and ended with the free and happy colored race of today.”

The article continues, “Fugitive slaves in huddled quarters in the land of promise called Canada; tilling the soil on the Elliot farm; nightly gatherings at Hell’s Corners; storm-tossed ships on Lake Superior; quiet days of retirement; that is the life of Henry Banks. Born in Malden – Henry Banks was born on the Elliot farm in Malden. His father had been a slave at Richmond, Va. When he discovered that he might be ‘sold down the river’ he had decided to escape with the aid of a white man. The two of them walked from the plantation to Culpepper, Va. Daniel Banks found work in the salt mines there and remained for some months. Deciding to get to Toledo, he took the ‘underground railway,’ which was a covered wagon in which a load of colored people were transported from one ‘station’ to another until they reached their final destination, which in Mr. Banks’ case was Toledo. He remained there until the Fugitive Slave Law was enacted when he again fled the bonds of slavery and escaped by way of boat to Canada. The Elliot farm was a Canadian terminal for slaves and Mr. Banks went there. He rented a piece of land from Col. Elliot, as many other escaped slaves did, and remained there for some years. Then he moved to the White farm in Anderdon, about a mile from the intersection of the third concession of Anderdon and Texas Road.”

Before we share more of Henry’s obituary, it first needs to be added that the Elliott property was owned by Matthew Elliott, who was an enslaver. Not only was this property later a terminus in the Underground Railroad, but before that it was a place of enslavement. Matthew Elliott “owned” roughly 60 enslaved persons on this property.

Henry's obituary also shares details of his career as a sailor saying "Started Sailing – When he grew up Henry Banks decided, as so many others from Anderdon, to become a sailor and in 1864 shipped on the steamer B.F. Wade as a deck hand with Capt. L.J. Goldsmith. The Wade was the first steamer on the lakes and the only one besides the Water Witch, to have a crosswalking beam. The Witch was lost in Saginaw Bay and the Wade was scrapped after many years of service."

It continues by saying "The most perilous trip that Mr. Banks ever experienced on the lakes was in November, 1913, when the worst storm in the history of lake shipping caused the loss of a great many lives and damage to a number of lake boats. Mr. Banks was on the C.P.R. passenger steamer Assiniboia which, with the steamer Hammonie, was the only boat to navigate Lake Superior during the tempest. When the Assiniboia arrived at Fort William it was necessary to take axes and chop the ice from the pilot house before the captain and other members of the crew could be liberated. Mr. Banks still has a picture of the Assiniboia taken when she was covered with ice."

Henry's lengthy obituary ends by saying "Took Up Farming- He finally gave up sailing and began farming on lot 15, first concession, Anderdon, where he has resided since. He was married twice, first to Virginia Jones in 1869, who died some years later; and then to Lucy Lewis, who is also dead. He has one son, Henry, employed as chef at the Lake View Hotel, Amherstburg, and two grandsons."

As mentioned in Henry's obituary, he married both Virginia Jones (also known as Sarah Stokes) and Lucy Lewis. Virginia Jones/Stokes Banks passed away on July 17, 1891 and according to her obituary, she passed at the age "45, 14 days. Deceased was step-daughter of Mr. Peter Stokes, and was born in Lowdon Co., Virginia, on July 14<sup>th</sup>, 1846, and came to this country

with her parents many years ago.” The 1871 Census lists Henry Banks and his wife Sarah Stokes, but it is not until the 1881 Census that a child is listed. This Census lists Henry and Virginia (not listed as Sarah) living with their son Henry, in addition to Henry’s father Daniel Banks who, at that time, is listed as 101. Why the names Virginia Jones and Sarah Stokes appear interchangeably is not explained but it is likely that one is a middle name. This can be said with confidence because Henry Bank’s obituary lists Virginia Jones as his wife, but his death record lists his wife as Sarah. Additionally, Sarah and Virginia were born in the same year and no documents show Sarah and Virginia being listed at the same time or in the same year. Following Virginia/Sarah’s death, Henry Banks married Lucy Lewis, daughter of Burriss and Lucy Lewis, on January 11, 1893, at the home of Mrs. Leander Jones (who is the wife of Virginia/Sarah’s brother Leander and the sister of Lucy). Lucy’s obituary from July 1906 shares further details saying “She and her daughter in law, Mrs. Henry Banks, jr. had been living together, both their husbands being employed as stewards on lake steamers ... She had no children, but there was a stepson, Henry. She was about 56 years of age.”

Now that we have discussed the first stepchild of Peter Stokes, Virginia/Sarah, we’ll move on to Leander. According to his July 1907 obituary, Leander Jones was a “native of this township, died at Ann Arbor, Mich., where he was taken for treatment Thursday last week. Mr. Jones had been suffering for some time with enlargement of the heart, and as the disease had not responded to local treatment, it was decided to take him to a specialist at Ann Arbor, but he had been there only a few days when he took a turn for the worse and passed away before his wife could reach his bedside. The body was brought home on Friday and word was sent to his sons, but they were unable to get home for the funeral, which took place Saturday afternoon to Rose Hill cemetery. Services were [at] the First Baptist church, of which deceased had been a member

for several years. Mr. Jones was born in Virginia and came to Essex county with his parents when young. After the death of his father his mother was married to the late Peter Stokes of this township. In the two marriages there were eleven children, only four of whom survive – Mrs. Leonard Saunders and Mrs. Mary Kelly of Ann Arbor; Peter Stokes, of Anderdon, and Abbie Stokes, of Ann Arbor. Deceased was married some twenty-five years ago and besides his wife three children are left: Louis, at home: Charles and Thomas, who sail in the summer and live in this township during the winter. Mr. Jones was ... highly respected by his neighbors and will be much missed by his family.”

In his obituary, Leander’s wife is not named, but the Census reveals that her name was Nancy. Further research shows that her maiden name was Lewis. In Nancy Lewis Jones’ obituary other details are shared and says “an old resident of this township, widow of the late Leander Jones, passed away on Monday night of last week very suddenly, aged 55 years 6 months and 10 days. The funeral took place on Thursday afternoon, services being conducted at the First Baptist church, Amherstburg, of which the deceased was a beloved member. A large number of friends and relatives were in attendance, among them being John Lewis, brother of deceased, from Salem, Mich. Mrs. Jones maiden name was Nancy Lewis and she was she was born at Glen Run, Ohio, coming to Anderdon when a child. Here she was married to Leander Jones, and to them were born three sons, Thomas who sails on the steamer Shenango; Charles, a teacher at Beaverton, Ont., and Louis, who died a year ago. Mr. Jones died in 1907. One sister, who also is dead, was Mary Jane Davis, wife of the late James Davis, of Gesto. Mrs. Jones was a woman who was very highly respected in the community. She was industrious, and always doing some kind act for somebody.”

Both Nancy and Leander’s obituaries mention their children: Thomas, Charles and

Lewis. According to his marriage record, Thomas Jones, married Edna Campbell, the daughter of Charles Campbell and Lile Davis, on November 4, 1919 in Detroit. At the time, Thomas worked as a Janitor. Thomas' brother Charles Leroy was born on December 19, 1888 in Anderdon and later married Mary Maud Foster, the daughter of George Henry Foster and Sarah Jane Smith Foster, on December 19, 1911 in Amherstburg. The *Amherstburg Echo* gives a nice description of their wedding day and says "A very quiet and pretty wedding was solemnized last Tuesday afternoon, when Rev. Allan Peavy using the ring service, united in marriage Miss Maud Foster, eldest daughter of the late Geo. H. Foster, and Charles L. Jones, of Anderdon. The bride was daintily attired in white dotted Swiss, and was attended by her sister, Mrs. Evelyn Foster McCurdy, who was also in white. H.W. Foster served as best man. Those present were in immediate relatives of both families, the out-of-town guests being Mrs. Louisa F. Jacobs, of Los Angeles, Cal.; Mrs. George H. Foster, of Cleveland, Ohio; Mrs. Leroy N. McCurdy and son Foster, of Conneaut, Ohio, and Philo G. Smith, of Waynesburg, Pa. The bride was the recipient of many handsome and useful presents. Mr. and Mrs. Jones will be at home to their friends at his mother's home in Anderdon for the present." Charles and Maud had at least one child named Charles Leroy who was born on December 21, 1912 in Anderdon. Leander and Nancy's youngest son, Lewis, married Stella Mathews, daughter of Mathew J. Mathews and Sarah A. Reynolds, on December 3, 1914 in Windsor. At the time, Lewis worked as a Marine Cook. Sadly, Lewis died at the young age of 29 in July 1915 in Anderdon.

The only information about Leander's sister Margaret is that she married Gilbert Howard. Margaret's sister, Elizabeth, married Andrew J. Lucas, the son of Anthony and Annie Lucas. The couple was married on November 11, 1873 in Anderdon. No death record was available for Elizabeth, but we were able to locate Andrew's death record from October 7, 1895. At the time

he worked as a labourer in Ann Arbor, Michigan. His death record also reveals that he was born in Kentucky circa 1832 and at the time of his death, he was 63 years old.

**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.**