

The Dennis Family History Part 3 – A.M.E. Trustee

Mary Eliza's brother James Walter Dennis is the next child of Peter and Margaret Dennis. He married at least three times. The 1871 Census lists James Walter with his first wife Esther (Crump) and their children William, Frederick, and James Francis. The 1881 Census lists James Walter and Esther living on the property next to his sister Margaret Dennis Crosby and close to his brother Robert M. Dennis and parents Peter and Margaret. It also lists James Walter and Esther's children: Perda, Fred, Frank, George, Eva, Louisa, and Rosanna, with the 1891 Census adding Mable and a separate birth record listing another daughter named Margaret. An interesting note about Perda. He is actually William and is sometimes also listed as Purdy. An article from the *Amherstburg Echo* helped to piece this together and says, "Charles Davis' name was changed to John Davis and Wm. Peter Dennis to Wm. Purdy Dennis." According to his death record, Perda Dennis passed away on January 27, 1928, in Detroit at the age of 60. He was married at the time, but his wife's name is not listed.

William 'Perda/Purdy' Dennis' brother Fred married Frances Hill, the daughter of William Hill and Minnie Steward, on October 15, 1895 in Detroit. At the time, Frances was 21 and Fred was 26, a cook and born circa 1869. Fred's brother George, according to his death record, passed away on June 23, 1914, in Wayne, Michigan, at the age of 37. This record also reveals that he was born circa 1877 and that he was single and working as a labourer.

George's sister Eva E. married John E. Peters on May 31, 1902, in Detroit. John was the son of London Peters and Mary Ann Lee. Their marriage record does not list Eva's parents, but we can confirm that this is the correct person because the witnesses to this marriage are Louisa Dennis and Perda Dennis, who are Eva's siblings. We were also able to find Eva's death record which lists her as Eva Peters and the daughter of Walter J. (James Walter) Dennis. She passed

away on June 20, 1952, in Detroit and was a widow. This record also records that she was born circa 1876 in Harrow.

Eva's sister Louise married a man with the last name Fields but, despite our best efforts, no documents could be found that list her husband's first name. According to her death record from April 22, 1947, Louise was married and born on December 23, 1879, in Harrow.

Next up is Louise's sister Rosanna, or Rose, who was born on August 18, 1880, in Colchester South. She married Virgil M. Ward, son of Virgil M. Ward and Mary E. Snowden. The couple married on October 25, 1905, in Detroit. According to her marriage record, Rose was born circa 1880 in Canada and Virgil was born in Michigan circa 1873. At the time, Rose worked as a Domestic, while Virgil was a Labourer. According to the 1910 US Census, Rose and Virgil were living in Detroit where Virgil worked as a door man at a grocery store. No children are listed on this Census, but it is certainly possible that they had children after this Census was recorded.

Rosanna's sister Mabel was born on June 27, 1885, in Colchester South, while her sister Margaret was born August 8, 1887, also in Colchester South.

As mentioned, James Walter Dennis married more than once. He also married Julia L. Meriday, the daughter of William Dalton and Maria Griffin. They married on September 17, 1902, in Windsor. At the time, Julia was 43, while James was 58, a widower, and a contractor. This record also states that James was born circa 1844 in South Carolina. James Walter also married Maria (Chinn) Green on September 23, 1915, in Detroit. Both James Walter and Maria were married twice before. According to his death record, James Walter Dennis passed away on January 6, 1929, in Detroit at the age of 84. This record states that he was a widower and born on May 7, 1844, in Atkinsville, South Carolina.

An article printed in the *Amherstburg Echo* on January 20, 1933, also mentions James Walter's connection to Central Grove A.M.E. Church. The article says "Founded in 1888, the Central Grove, A.M.E. Church, is now one of the principal places of worship for the colored population of Colchester South. Its location was selected by the late Josephus O'Banyoun, who was the founder and pastor of the church and his foresight has been proven by the large congregations which has worshipped in the original, and afterwards in the new building ... The name 'Central Grove' was given the church because it was centrally located between Pleasant Valley and New Canaan, and because it was build in a grove of exceptionally fine timber. The high-sounding names of these places testify to the love of the people for descriptive and pleasing words. The first trustees of the church were: James Johnston, Henry Graham, James Walter Dennis, Squire Hamilton and Peter Jackson, all of who are now deceased."

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.