

Adams Family Part 3 – A Family of Trailblazers

In George's obituary it mentions that he and Laura had six children: Howard, Sheldon Ralph, Alvin, George Jr., Dorothy and Laura Jean. Howard Douglas was born on August 5, 1911 in Amherstburg. He married twice. The first was to Marian Bernice Logan and the second was to Fran. Howard and Marian had two children: Howard and Marilyn Bernice Seabury (McCurdy). Dr. Howard McCurdy Jr., son of Howard and Bernice, became a Professor at the University of Windsor and the first tenured African Canadian faculty member in Canada. Dr. McCurdy was also elected as an alderman in 1979 in Windsor and was a civil-rights activist and co-founder of the National Black Coalition of Canada, of which he was also the first President. He also served as a Member of Parliament from 1984 to 1993 and was the first African Canadian MP for the NDP. He was also the second African Canadian elected to Parliament, following Lincoln Alexander.

Howard Sr.'s brother Sheldon Ralph McCurdy was born circa 1914 and was married to Norma Alva Wilson. Ralph worked at Ford Motor Company for 36 years. On July 7, 1933, the *Amherstburg Echo* printed an article in recognition of his contributions to the community which said "To recognize the contributions made to this community by the late Sheldon 'Ralph' McCurdy, town council has placed his name on the track and field complex at H. Murray Smith Centennial Park. The bylaw authorizing the dedication of the "Sheldon 'Ralph' McCurdy Track and Field Complex" received its final reading on June 28 in a council chamber filled with Mr. McCurdy's family and friends. Mr. McCurdy's widow Clair, and his son, Sheldon, were presented with a framed copy of the bylaws recognizing the many civic contributions of the honouree. Mr. McCurdy, a member of the town council from 1965 to 1974, passed away on December 18, 1992. He will be remembered by community members for his efforts in

spearheading local park-development and recreational activities. Mr. McCurdy was the founder of the Amherstburg, Anderdon and Malden Track and Field Club, and was the ‘motivating force’ of the construction of the complex in Centennial Park ... In addition to serving as a council member, Mr. McCurdy was a member of the Mayor’s Committee which was organized to deal with human rights issues. He was also a member of the Amherstburg Public School Board, the AAM Goodfellows, the Amherstburg Rotary Club, the 1967 Centennial Year Celebrations Committee, and the local Community Centre Committee.”

Ralph’s brother Alvin was born in 1916 in Amherstburg and married Margaret Wilson. He worked as a carpenter and was a member of the Carpenters and Joiners Union, in addition to participating as a member of the Masonic lodge. Alvin was also a member of the Amherstburg Community Club and the Amherstburg Progressive Association of Coloured People. Alvin loved history and collected countless documents relating to Black History including photographs, newspaper clippings, scrapbooks, minute books, and correspondence. His collection, the Alvin McCurdy Fond, is now located at the Archives of Ontario.

Alvin’s brother George William Frederick McCurdy was born in 1918 and married Marie Thompson, the daughter of Helen Kelly and William Henry Thompson. In the article “Civil rights loses a champion” it says “One of Amherstburg’s most famous native sons, whose life had an impact on citizens in the Maritimes and throughout Canada, died last Sunday (April 18th) in a London hospital. A funeral service was held for George F. McCurdy, 71, at the town’s St. John the Baptist Church on Thursday (the 12th). The member of one of this communities oldest black-settlement families, Mr. McCurdy battled for human rights in several ways: first as a union activist, seeking better working conditions for the carpentry trade; and then as a governmental human rights administrator. In both roles, he applied lessons he learned in fighting racial

discrimination and segregation in this area in the 1960s to jobs with the federal Department of Labour's Fair Employment Practices Branch, and then as director of the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission. He held the latter post until his retirement four years ago, when he moved back to the Windsor area and launched the writing of his memoirs. Mr. McCurdy's unwavering efforts in the field of human rights won him several honours. His work in the Maritimes was rewarded with an honorary doctorate from Halifax's Dalhousie University, and an induction into Nova Scotia's 'Black Hall of Fame.' He was also named as the first recipient of the 'Black Citizen of the Year Award' by the board of directors of Amherstburg's North American Black Historical Museum and Cultural Centre in the mid-1980s, during local Emancipation Day festivities. Indeed, Mr. McCurdy made a point of returning to his home-town every August for that celebration of the British Empire's abolition of slavery ... the entire country is poorer for the loss of his voice."

The next child of Laura and George McCurdy is Dorothy Mae. She married Lloyd Watkins. Dorothy and Lloyd's children include Lloyd Randall and Raymond Richard Watkins. She lived to be 97 years old and passed on February 26, 2019. Her obituary says that Dorothy was "a strong and independent woman, who lived on her own until her 96th year. She was a dedicated wife, mother, grandmother and friend to many. Dorothy had a deep sense of faith and prayer and was blessed with a happy and prosperous life. She will be sorely missed. Her quick wit, sage advice and one-liners will be forever remembered." Dorothy's sister and the last child of Laura and George McCurdy is Laura Jean. She married Walter Heron.

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.