

Holton Family History Part 3 – The Locket

William's sister Laura Dorcas Holton is next. She was born circa 1857 and later married William Adams who was born circa 1848. According to their marriage record, William Henry Adams and Laura 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 80th 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 20th 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 Holton, 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 [Holton], 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."

Now that we have shared details about Laura and William Adams, we'll discuss their children Lena, Lula, Nellie, Rallie, Laura, Susan Arabella, William F., Milton Augustus, Reginald, Ralph, Ethel and Faustine. There were only a few documents that mention Lena. She is listed in the 1881 Census along with her parents William and Laura, and sister Lula, but is also mentioned in her father's 1921 obituary as deceased at that point. The same applies to Lena's siblings Ethel (passed away December 30, 1888 at age 3) and Faustine who are also mentioned in their father William's obituary as deceased at that point.

There is more information for their sister Lula (some records say Lulu) who will be discussed next. Lula married Robert Thomas, the son of George Thomas and Maria Buckner, on December 20, 1901 in Amherstburg. Robert W. Thomas was a cook, while Lula was active in the community, joining several organizations in Amherstburg. As a young girl, she was a member of the Buisy Gleanors [sic] which was an educational group for young people, along with her sisters Lena and Nellie. Lula, along with her sister Nellie, was also a member of the Frederic [sic] Douglass Self-Improvement Club, which focused on education and etiquette, in addition to joining the Oxford Club which hosted socials and other entertainment at the A.M.E. Church. Robert and Lula had three daughters and one son: Roberta, Fern (Georges), Lola, and Orville. Roberta married a musician, Harold W. Coleman (son of Stephen and Mamie Duger Coleman), in July 1926, while Lola married Elmer Hamlin. On the 1940 census for Lorain, Ohio, Lola is listed as a Maid at Oberlin College. Robert and Lula's last child, Orville, was born on February 2, 1911 and is listed as an undertaker's assistant in the 1940 Ohio census. He married a woman named Ethel. Robert and Lula also had another child named Justine Dorcas Thomas, who was born on November 15, 1919, but sadly passed away a few days later, on November 27, 1919.

William and Laura Adams' next child is Ella Mae/Nellie. According to her birth record, she was born on October 9, 1881. There was no available marriage record for her, but in her father's obituary Nellie's husband is listed as Charles Gentry. Nellie's death record lists her as Ella Mae Gentry and at that point (December 26, 1965) she was a widow living in Chicago. Nellie's brother Rallie/Rollie was married to Lillian Stuart, the daughter of Edward Stuart and Elizabeth Baskerville, on November 21, 1906 in Cuyahoga, Ohio. Rallie worked as a Steward.

More information is available for Rallie's sister Laura Arena/Irene Adams who was born on November 2, 1887 in Amherstburg. She married George D. McCurdy on December 3, 1910 in Amherstburg. George D. McCurdy, a sailor at the time, was the son of George McCurdy (son of Nasa McCurdy and Permelia Bailey) and Mary Almede Thomas (daughter of George and Maria/Mariah Thomas). In his obituary, George D. McCurdy is described as "A life-long resident of Amherstburg ... Mr. McCurdy lived at 108 Seymour St. In 1964 he retired from politics after serving for 15 years on the Amherstburg Council, the 1st 12 years as deputy-reeve. He also served on the Essex County Council for 12 years. Mr. McCurdy was a member of the Amherstburg Goodfellows and a life member and past patron of the Eastern Star. He joined Lincoln Lodge of Ontario. He was a member of Amherstburg's First Baptist Church. Mr. McCurdy's wife – Laura Irene – died August 29. He is survived by four sons: Howard, of Toronto, Ralph and Alvin, of Amherstburg, and George Jr., of Ottawa; two daughters, Mrs. Lloyd (Dorothy) Watkins of Windsor and Mrs. Walter (Laura Jean) Heron, of Detroit. He is also survived by a brother, LeRoy, of White Plains, New York, 22 grandchildren and 23 great grandchildren."

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 became 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.

Now that we have discussed the family of Laura Arena Adams McCurdy, we will move on to discuss her remaining siblings: Susan Arabella, William F., Milton Augustus, Reginald and Ralph. Susan Arabella or "Bella" married Simon Peter Wilson on December 23, 1911 in Amherstburg. According to the *Amherstburg Echo* "A pretty wedding took place at the Baptist parsonage Saturday evening, December 23rd, when Miss Belle Adams, fourth daughter of William Adams, and Simon Wilson, third son of Albert Wilson, were made man and wife, the Rev. Allen Peavey officiating. The happy couple have taken up housekeeping on King Street. They received many beautiful presents. Mr. Wilson is chef on a big Steel Trust steamer." The 1921 Census lists Simon and Arabella with their daughter Lena.

According to Susan Arabella's obituary "She was well and favorably known among a large circle of friends as a hard working and industrious woman, a faithful member of the First Baptist Church and took part in all its activities. She was born in Amherstburg, Bella Adams,

daughter of William and Laura Adams. Her father died some years ago, but her mother is still living. She was married 19 years ago in the First Baptist church to Simon Wilson, son of Mr. Albert Wilson, the officiating pastor being the Rev. Mr. Peavy. They have lived continuously on King street. Mr. Wilson survives her, without family. She also leaves her mother, and the following brothers and sisters: Mrs. Lula Thomas, of Oberlin, Ohio; Ralph, Mrs. Gentry and William of Chicago; Mrs. George McCurdy of Amherstburg and Milton of Windsor. Her brother, Reginald Adams, died at her home on the 6th December last year. Funeral services for her were held at the First Baptist church on Wednesday afternoon by Rev. Mr. Edwards, followed by burial in Rose Hill cemetery. Much sympathy is extended the bereaved families.”

Susan Arabella’s brother William Fenton was born on September 14, 1891 and married a woman named Marion. At the time of his death on February 18, 1931, he was living in Chicago and worked as a chef. His obituary states he died “February 18th, aged 39 years, the third member of the family of Mrs. Laura Adams and the late William Adams to die in two months. Reginald died here on December 6th and Mrs. S. Wilson on February 8th. The receipt of this news was a crushing blow to Mrs. Adams, the mother. It seems that Mr. Adams had been ill with pneumonia for a few days and was taken to the hospital just twenty-four hours before his death. The funeral took place in Chicago on Sunday. Mr. Adams after several years as chef on the lakes, settled in Chicago where he had a good position in a local hotel kitchen. He is survived by his wife, his widowed mother in Amherstburg; sisters Mrs. Lula Thomas, of Oberlin, Ohio; Mrs. Gentry, of Chicago; Mrs. George McCurdy, Amherstburg; brothers Ralph of Chicago and Milton of Windsor, to all of whom deep sympathy is extended.”

Next is Milton Augustus Adams. According to Kathy Grant, he served in the CEF during WWI, enlisting in London, Ontario, on February 25, 1918. Milton’s draft papers state that he was

single and a cook living in Amherstburg. A few years earlier, on December 20, 1912, the *Amherstburg Echo* printed an article confirming that he was a cook, writing “Lake sailors are coming home to enjoy the comforts of their own firesides. William Adams and son Milton, Raymond McDowell, Normal Wilson, George McCurdy, James Monroe, Theo Foster, all first-class chefs, will cook up something for the home folks for the next few months. They have had a prosperous season.” Milton’s marriage record also reveals that he married Anna Washington, the daughter of James Washington and Anna Thompson. The couple was married on September 25, 1919 in Detroit and, at the time, Milton worked as a metal worker. According to the obituary for Fern Marie (Adams) Roberson, Anne and Milton Adams had two daughters: Fern Marie Roberson and Dr. Aline Rivers Jones.

Milton’s brother Reginald was born in September 1897 in Amherstburg. According to the *Amherstburg Echo*, he was a member of the Lincoln Lodge, No. 8 (Masonic Lodge) and was elected as an officer in 1928, along with other members including Simon Wilson, Alonzo Harris, James H. Kirtley, Jerry Harris, and Wilfred Simpson. Sadly, Reginald passed away a few years later, on December 6, 1930 at the age of 33. At the time, he was single and a labourer. As mentioned, the Adams family suffered great losses in a short period of time as three members of the Adams family passed away within two months of each other during the years 1930-1931. According to his obituary “Reginald Adams, youngest son of Mrs. William Adams passed away Saturday night at the home of his sister, Mrs. Simon Wilson, King. St., in the 33rd year of his age. He has been ill for over a year with tuberculosis of the lungs, which developed from a heavy cold he contracted while working on the ice. A hemorrhage [sic] of the lungs followed the first attack of abscess and he gradually declined in strength till he was beyond hope. The funeral took place Tuesday afternoon from the house to the First Baptist Church, where services were solemnized

by Rev. Mr. Burton and burial was in Rose Hill cemetery. Reginald was born at the family home on Murray street, September 22, 1898, and always lived in Amherstburg. At the time of his first illness he was employed on Bois Blanc island. His father died two years ago on 5th November last. Surviving him are his mother; and the following brothers and sisters: Lulu, Mrs. Robert Thomas of Oberlin, Ohio; Nellie, Mrs. Charles Gentry, of Chicago; Ralph of Chicago; Laura, Mrs. George McCurdy and Bella, Mrs. Simon Wilson of Amherstburg; William of Chicago and Milton of Windsor, to all of whom deep sympathy is extended.”

Reginald’s brother Ralph is the last child of William and Laura Holton Adams that we will discuss. Ralph was born November 1892 and at the time of his passing in December 1968 he was a widower living in Chicago.

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.