

Kirtley Family Part 4 – A Love of Music

In part 3, it was said that Ella and James H. Kirtley's obituaries both mention that they had eight children, but only list the four surviving children: Frances, Flossie, Kenneth and William. The remaining children include Hervey/Harvey, James Edgar, Norman and Azalia. We will discuss the children of Ella and James in order of birth. First is James Edgar. He was born on December 23, 1894, but no other information was available for him. Next is Azalia whose academics and love of music were spoken of in the *Amherstburg Echo* which in 1908 writes that Azalia, along with her sister Frances, attended the King Street School and received their certificates of promotion. A few years later, in August 1911, the paper mentions a successful function given by Mrs. J.H. Kirtley "Wednesday evening, in honour of Misses A. Madeline Foster, Marjorie Alexander and Azailia Kirtley, the former having passed the examination for entrance to Normal schools, and the two latter the entrance examination. A short musical and literary program was given with J.H. Alexander as chairman. Instrumental numbers were given by Misses Azalia Kirtley, B. Moxley, Marjorie Alexander and Charles Jones ... The dining-room had been beautifully decorated for the occasion and a sumptuous repast was served, covers being laid for forty. Among those present were Miss Daisy Jones, of South Carolina, Miss Ena K. Tucker of Chicago, and Dr. J. Harold Alexander."

This article mentions that Azalia was a musician. She also played an instrumental solo at the Harvest Home services in the A.M.E. church in October 1910, which featured a display of fruits, vegetables and grain. The event also had something called a guess cake (guess exact weight) which weighed five pounds and was won by Mrs. Cora Jones.

Sadly, Azalia passed away at the young age of 20 and it was reported "The sympathy of the whole town will be extended to Mr. and Mrs. James Kirtley and family in the loss of their

talented daughter Azailia, ... a victim of the great white plague. Miss Kirtley had a brilliant career through the Public and High schools of Amherstburg and the St. Joseph's Conservatory of Music to become a professional musician. She used her talents in the advancement of the First Baptist church, of which she was a devoted member and organist for years. The struggle of her parents to give her the chance she deserved is a worthy example of the town in general, and the blow of her death comes doubly hard on this account. Her loss not only to the community, but in church life will be felt for years to come ... The esteem in which the family was held and the love borne the young lady by the community was evidenced by many beautiful floral offerings under which the casket was smothered."

Azalia's sister Frances was born on November 28, 1898. Just like her sister Azalia, Frances participated in the Harvest Home Services at the A.M.E. Church, but instead of an instrumental solo, Frances performed a recitation. She participated in 1910 and 1919. Frances was also a talented singer and at a memorial service for the Ruth Chapter of the Order of the Eastern Star she sang the song "One Sweetly Solemn Thought" to honour deceased members. Frances' sister Florence Kirtley acted as accompanist. An interesting note about Frances is that an immigration record lists her occupation as a machine operator.

Frances married Alphonso DeZon in August 1933. According to the *Echo* "A pretty summer wedding was solemnized at the home of the bride's parents, King Street, Amherstburg ... A profusion of summer flowers with potted palms and wedding bell decorated the room in which the marriage took place. The bride looked lovely in a wedding dress of egg-shell satin, fashioned on long lines, with a wreath of pearls and white tulle, and white brocaded shoes. She carried a banquet of pink tea roses and asters. Miss Florence Kirtley, sister of the bride, was bridesmaid, and was gowned in pale green orgrandie with pink accessories, and carried a

bouquet of American Beauty roses. Mr. Harold Lewis of Detroit, acted as best man. Preceding the ceremony a wedding breakfast was served to the members of the two families, and following the ceremony a wedding luncheon was served to the guests who numbered about 80. Mrs. J.H. Kirtley, mother of the bride, received the guests, dressed in a lace-trimmed grey chiffon dress with close-fitting black hat and black accessories. The groom's mother, Mrs. DeZon, assisted at the reception, in a blue and grey dress with matching hat. Following the reception the happy couple left on a motor trip to Toronto and other eastern points. On their return they will reside in Detroit.”

The next child of Ella and James Henry Kirtley is Hervey/Harvey, but it is difficult to decipher the correct spelling in documents. He was born on November 28, 1900, but no other information is available. Next is Norman Henry Kirtley who was born on January 26, 1902 in Amherstburg. In 1907, a four-year-old Norman experienced a terrible accident while playing with some matches which caused his shirt to catch fire. He was badly burned, but at the end of the article it says that he was getting along nicely. Norman's brother Kenneth Augustus Kirtley was born on December 19, 1905, while William Kirtley was born on November 11, 1907. Clearly, the Kirtley children loved music and William was no exception. At a “musicale and chicken supper” hosted by the Ladies' Sewing Circle of the Baptist church in 1925, William Kirtley, accompanied by his sister Florence, gave a violin solo. It's clear that music was important to this family.

William's sister Florence was born on March 23, 1910 in Amherstburg and was a dedicated student. In 1930 she received a scholarship medal at General Amherstburg, along with Murial Atkin, Marion Wigle, Marion Grondin and Margaret Maloney. As mentioned, Florence loved music. She performed at a meeting of the Literary Society in 1927 and “in her usual

pleasing manner gave a piano solo” and at a concert in the A.M.E. Church in 1928, playing an instrumental selection called “Meditation,” in addition to accompanying, on the piano, Mrs. Henry Hall who sang “The Wayside Cross.” Florence also played the “Wedding March” at the wedding of Alva Norma Wilson and Ralph McCurdy in 1935.

In addition to playing music in the church, Florence also acted as secretary of the Amherstburg branch of the Missionary Baptist Association and attended their annual convention in 1933. Florence was joined by her mother, Mrs. J.H. Kirtley (Ella) who was appointed a delegate of the church and missionary society.

Florence passed away in 1937 and in her obituary it says that she was “born in the parental home on King Street, Amherstburg, March 23, 1910. She was educated in the Amherstburg public and high schools and, after her graduation she went to Detroit and became a stenographer in a legal office in that city. She was a member of the First Baptist Church and took an active part in church and Sunday School work. Popular in her social set, her services were always in demand and were always given freely ... The floral tributes were many and beautiful, and a large number of out of town cars were in the long cortege to Rose Hill cemetery.”

As mentioned previously, there is information available for another child of Hiram and Fanny Kirtley, Moses (brother of James Henry), so he will be discussed next. On December 6, 1888, Moses, a cook, married Annie Simpson, the daughter of James and Susan Simpson. Annie was born circa 1868 in Springwells, Michigan.

Moses and Annie had at least four children: Lavernia, Ralph, Lloyd and James Hiram. Lavernia attended the King Street School and in February 1898 was listed on the Honour Roll. She later married Royal Hall, son of David Hall and Rachel Thomton, on July 21, 1913 in

Sandwich, Ontario. The previous year, Lavernia is listed as a guest for a masquerade party hosted by the “Mutt and Jeff” club. According to the *Amherstburg Echo*, the “evening was well attended and proved a brilliant success. Dancing commenced about nine o’clock and the light fantastic was tripped until about four a.m. There were about fifty couples in attendance, and all left the hall with warm spots in their hearts for ‘Mutt and Jeff’ ... A delicious luncheon was served at midnight.”

According to an immigration record for Ralph Kirtley, he worked as a mechanic and was over 6 foot tall. Ralph’s brother, Lloyd, was born on December 13, 1893 in Amherstburg. In April 1911, the *Amherstburg Echo* reported that “James Kirtley, chef, and Lloyd Kirtley, porter, left Tuesday for Milwaukee to fit out the big steel steamer James B. Wood, of the Hanna Fleet.” Years later he worked as a sheet metal worker and married Alice Evonne Kelly, a 21-year-old dental assistant and the daughter of William Kelly and Elizabeth Christian. Did you know, Alice’s sister was Ada Kelly Whitney who became the first Black teacher hired by the Windsor Board of Education? Alice and Lloyd were married on August 23, 1918 in Windsor. For Lloyd’s brother James Hiram, all that could be found was his birth record which states that he was born October 1889.

The 1901 Census lists Annie Kirtley (occupation: domestic), along with her children Lavernia, Ralph and Lloyd, living in the household of Matilda Simpson. Annie is listed as married, but Moses is not listed. A possible explanation can be found in an immigration record for Moses Kirtley from 1915. At the time, Moses was a 53-year-old cook. For nearest relative or friend, is says “no Rel,” meaning no relative and for the question “Ever in U.S.” it says from 1900 to 8-25-1915. The record also states that he intends to remain permanently in the US.

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 where we will celebrate another amazing family.