

The Brooks Family Part 3- Military Service

John Walter Brooks and Mary Harris had two sons named Oliver and Earl Chester. Oliver was born in 1891 and later married Louise Viola Watkins, the daughter of William Watkins and Mary Redd and they resided in Windsor. According to their marriage record, Oliver worked as a cook while Louise was a forewoman born in Sandwich, Ontario. Sadly, Louise passed away from influenza at the age of 24 on February 3, 1920. Louise, referred to as Lulu in a death notice, passed away at her parent's home on Peter Street in Sandwich.

Based on articles from the *Amherstburg Echo* and *The Border Cities Star* there was an influenza outbreak in Essex County at the time of Louise's death. In an article from *The Border Cities Star* it mentions an influenza and pneumonia outbreak and refers specifically to Louise Watkins Brooks. It says "Influenza and pneumonia still continue to take heavy tolls in the Border Cities, although the number of deaths during the past 24 hours is somewhat less than has been the case since Saturday. Doctors and nurses are being worked to the limit and the beds in the hospitals are full, and with a large waiting list"

The article continues by referencing resident's whose lives were claimed by the illness including Louise Brooks and says "Mrs. Oliver Brooks (nee Louise Watkins) died at the home of her mother, Mrs. Mary Watkins, 733 Peter street, Sandwich, early Monday morning. The deceased was well known in the younger set in Sandwich. She was 23 years of age and was married to Mr. Brooks in August ... She is survived by her husband and mother; three brothers, Clarence, Raymond and Homer; and five sisters, Mrs. Idell Small, Mrs. Lillian Jones, and Mrs. Maud Pritchett, of Sandwich; Mrs. Eliza Foster, Detroit; and Emma at home."

Oliver's brother, Earl Chester, was born in 1896 and married Leona Anderson, who was the daughter of Munroe Anderson and Matilda Addis Stewart. At the time of their marriage, Earl worked as a cook as is recorded on his marriage record and a record of Border Crossing at the port of Detroit in April 1914. Earl also worked as a farmer and as a Rural Postal Carrier for the Harrow Post Office. A message of thanks from Earl and Leona is printed in the *Amherstburg Echo* on January 8, 1937 and says "Thanks – Mr. and Mrs. Earl Brooks, couriers of R.R. No. 1 of Harrow, again desire to express their appreciation to the boxholders for the many gifts during the holidays and extend to each their best wishes for a very prosperous New Year." Additionally, according to the *Amherstburg Echo*, Earl was a clerk for the Central Grove A.M.E. Church and acted on a committee for a 1935 Emancipation Day Celebration which included activities such as picnics, speeches and a baseball game.

Following a move to Detroit, Earl bravely served in the United States Army during WWI. According to Earl Chester Brooks' draft registration card for WWI, he worked as a labourer for Michigan Copper and Brass in Detroit and lived on Jefferson. Further evidence of military service in the Brooks family is found in the Museum's family history binders. According to a Certificate of Service found in the collection, Oliver Brooks enlisted in 1st Depot Battalion, W.O. Regt. on May 25, 1918 and he served in Canada, England and France with the Canadian Forestry Corps. It also says that he was discharged at London, Ontario on May 23rd, 1919 because of "DEMOBILIZATION" and that he received British War & Victory Medals. A 1919 letter discusses the military service of Pt. Ollie Brooks and mentions his parents Mr. and Mrs. Walter Brooks. It says "The following is a letter sent to Rev. Jefferson, pastor of the A.M.E. church, Central Grove, from the Senior Chaplain, London: London Area, O.I.S.M.F.C., 8&9 Terminus Place, Victoria Station, S.W. London, Eng., O.I.S.M.F.C., 31st March, 1919."

The letter goes on to say “4005165, Pte. Ollie Brooks. Harrow, Ont. Dear Sir, - The marginally named Soldier will be returned to Canada probably for discharge, in the near future. Our information is that he is a Methodist and that before enlistment he belonged to the congregation of which you are now the pastor. We are not able to say precisely when he may be expected home, and it is also important to state that the decision as to final discharge from the army depends upon the exigencies of the military situation or the circumstances in any particular case. The probabilities are, however, that in the majority of cases such as this, men are going back to civil life. It goes without saying that those who have taken an active part in the defense of the institutions and privileges of our Homeland will appreciate them more than ever after temporary separation from them; and we hope this will prove to be true, in a special sense, of worship as carried on in their home churches, and in general, of everything our churches have to offer their members in opportunity and responsibility. We know that you need only to be advised of any men of your congregation returning home to extend all your church privileges. Yours very sincerely, D.V. WARNER, Major, Senior Chaplain, London Area, O.S. Military Forces of Canada. The correspondent, who has known Ollie Brooks from childhood, wishes to say that Mr. and Mrs. Walter Brooks should be proud of a son who has shown loyalty to his country and reverence to his Maker whilst engaged in military service. There will be a grand reception and a hearty welcome extended to the soldier boy on his arrival home.”

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.