

The Dennis Family History Part 5 – The Justice of the Peace

The last child of Peter and Margaret Dennis is Robert Maxwell Dennis. He married Almeda Jacobs, the daughter of Aaron and Jane (Johnson) Jacobs. Before sharing more about Robert and Almeda, we wanted to include what was written about Aaron Jacobs in his obituary that was printed in the *Amherstburg Echo* on May 7, 1920. It says “There died in Gosfield South Sunday evening, Aaron Jacobs one of the best known colored residents of the district, aged 90 years. Mr. Jacobs was the father of the late Mrs. R.M. Dennis, and as Mr. Dennis is now the only heir left, the estate, which is of considerable importance, is left to him. The funeral took place on Wednesday afternoon to Pleasant Valley cemetery.”

Robert and Almeda married on August 1, 1877 in Kingsville. This records states that Robert was born in 1851 in Indiana, while Almeda Jacobs was born circa 1860 in Gosfield. The 1881 Census lists Robert (a farmer) and Almeda with their son Ira, as does the 1891 and 1901 Censuses. Before we discuss Ira, we want to share a bit more about Robert and Almeda. Robert is mentioned several times in the *Amherstburg Echo* because of his work as a Justice of the Peace not only because of the cases that were brought before him, especially assault cases, but also because of the people he knew. For example, in 1894, one article from the *Amherstburg Echo* states “Robert M. Dennis, J.P., and wife have been the guests of D.R. Davis, barrister, Amherstburg.” D.R. Davis was a respected lawyer in Amherstburg and was the third Black lawyer in Canada and the first Black person appointed to the King’s Counsel on November 10, 1910. When Robert M. Dennis was appointed a Justice of the Peace, the *Echo* printed that he was “tendered a dinner by a number of his friends.” Robert is also mentioned in the press for other reasons including his appointment by Windsor Council as a member of the City Board of Health in March 1913.

Around 1911 Robert Dennis moved from Colchester South to Windsor. We know this because of a few articles in the *Amherstburg Echo* that mentions he rented out his farm for a year to William Loop and held an auction to sell off his “live stock and machinery” because “Mr. and Mrs. Dennis, on winding up their affairs in this township, will take up their residence in Windsor for the present, though they by no means have severed their connection with the banana belt, but hope to return here after awhile again to make their home.” The reason why he moved is explained in an article from October 20, 1911 which says “Mr. Dennis’ farm is one of the best places in Colchester South. He is reaching an age when after many hard years’ work he desires more leisure, and will eventually dispose of his holdings here.”

Robert M. Dennis passed away on April 22, 1921, in Windsor. According to his death record, he was widowed and for occupation it says “merchant-grocery.” This record also states that he was born on March 7, 1852 in Indiana. According to Robert’s obituary which was printed in the *Amherstburg Echo* on April 29, 1921 “Many old friends gathered at Central Grove Tuesday afternoon to attend the funeral of the late Robert Maxwell Dennis, a former well known resident of this township, who passed away in Windsor Saturday night. The remains were brought to Kingsville by special car and taken to Central Grove by motor hearse. A short service was held there by Rev. T.J. Henderson, and burial was by the side of his wife, who died in February 1920. Mr. Dennis was for many years a resident of Pleasant Valley. He was well educated and as Justice of the Peace dispensed justice throughout the district in a very satisfactory manner, as his decisions could always be relied upon. His wife was Miss Almeda Jacobs, only daughter of the late Aaron Jacobs, of Gosfield South. They had one son, Ira, who is now residing on his grandfather’s farm near Kingsville. He was the leading spirit in Central Grove church, having been supervisor of the erection of the present church, and also one who

established same, being on the trustee Board of the land officials. In the bereavement the church loses a faithful member, and the community a frank and outspoken citizen. Besides the above he is survived by two brothers and a sister, John and James Dennis and Mrs. John Crosby, Detroit. Mr. and Mrs. Dennis moved to Windsor ten years ago. The pallbearers were nephews – Robert Crosby, Theron Crosby, Charles Dennis, Fred Dennis, W.P. Dennis.”

There is also an obituary for Almeda Jacobs Dennis in the *Amherstburg Echo* which says “Mrs. Robert M. Dennis, for years a highly respected resident of this township, passed away at her home in Windsor on Monday, and the remains were brought here on the train Wednesday afternoon for burial in Central Grove cemetery. Mrs. Dennis was the only daughter of Aaron Jacobs, of Gosfield South, and besides her husband is survived by one son, Ira E. Dennis, now of Detroit.” Her death record adds that she passed away on February 23, 1930 in Windsor at the age of 57, that she was a Housewife, and her date of birth was December 30, 1863.

As mentioned, Almeda and Robert Dennis had a son named Ira. According to the *Amherstburg Echo*, following the passing of his grandfather “Ira Dennis, grandson of the late Aaron Jacobs, fell heir to Mr. Jacob’s farm on the corner of the third concession and Division Road in Gosfield South. When overhauling the old log house he came across an old rusty biscuit tin containing nearly \$1000. Much of it was in English gold. Mr. Jacobs, an eccentric, probably placed it there before there were banks in Kingsville.”

Based on the evidence, Ira married twice. The 1911 Census lists Ira with his wife Lillian. On December 12, 1902, the *Amherstburg Echo* added further details when it wrote “Ira D. Dennis was married last month in Windsor to Miss Lily Wells. They are spending their honeymoon at his father’s, R.M. Dennis’, and he will settle down to farming. Congratulations.”

The following Census for 1921 lists Ira with his second wife Sophia Moore and their children Mahlin (Mahlon) Churchill, Mildred Almeda and George Robert. Their children also include Franklin and Irene.

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.