

The Harris Family Part 1 – Defending Your Country

-Did you know Jeremiah Harris fought in the 1837-1838 Upper Canada Rebellion. Read more below.

Members of the Harris family generously shared a wealth of information on the ancestors of Mr. Donald Herbert Harris who was born and raised in Amherstburg and just a few months ago celebrated his 99th birthday. It is because of this that we are sharing the history of Donald's family for this month's family history.

The earliest presence of the Harris family in Essex County is with Jeremiah Harris, who was born in Kentucky circa 1807. He fought for the Crown in the 1837-1838 Upper Canada Rebellion, which places Jeremiah in the Amherstburg area before 1838. With last month's Mulder family history, it was mentioned that John Joseph Mulder also fought in this war as a member of Captain Caldwell's Company of Colored Volunteers; Jeremiah Harris fought as a member of the Essex Colored Militia in the same war. The 1837-38 Rebellions occurred in Upper and Lower Canada and was a result of political unrest that developed soon after the War of 1812. This caused resistance against the British Crown, which ruled the colonies of Upper and Lower Canada. There were numerous Black soldiers who were loyalists and they assisted in defending against rebel attacks.

In the book *A Fluid Frontier: Slavery, Resistance and the Underground Railroad in the Detroit River Borderland*, Irene Moore Davis' article "Canadian Black Settlements in the Detroit River Region" discusses the participation of Black Canadians in defending Essex County. She says "In December 1837, during the 1837-38 Mackenzie Rebellion, the Reverend Josiah Henson's company of black volunteers attached to the Essex Militia was part of the group that captured the rebel schooner *Anne* and made prisoners of its crew ... Josiah Henson's unit

defended Fort Malden [in Amherstburg] from Christmas 1837 to May 1838 ... The black volunteers showed such bravery that Lieutenant Governor Sir Francis Bond Head commented on their service in his remarks to the legislature of Upper Canada in March 1838.”

Jeremiah married a woman named Elizabeth who was born circa 1821 in Virginia. Following Jeremiah’s passing, Elizabeth later married John Lang. The 1851 Census lists a “Jaramiah” and Elizabeth living on the 6th concession in Colchester and they owned a 50-acre farm of which 6 acres were under crops, while the remaining 44 acres were wooded. Some members of the Colored Militia were granted land for their loyalty and service to The Crown, so it is certainly possible that Jeremiah gained his land through his military service.

Jeremiah and Elizabeth had two children: Francis and James. Francis ‘Frank’ Harris was born in 1836 and later married Nancy Simpson (born 1839). Francis and Nancy had 4 children: Mary, Lavina, Cora Ann and Jerh. H. Harris. Mary was born in 1864 and Lavina Ellen Harris was born in 1864 and married David Foster (born April 1861). Lavina and David had three children: Fredrick (1893), David II (1897) and Willfred Foster (1903).

Lavina’s sister Cora Ann Harris was born in 1866 and married Mead Mitchell (1857) on September 15, 1886. They had five children: Emerson Lester Mitchell (1888), Elmer Harris Mitchell (1889), Hazel Mitchell (1894), Otto Eugene Mitchell (born August 12, 1896) and Harold Mitchell (1899). Cora Anne’s brother, Jerh. H. Harris, was born in 1868. After Francis Harris’ passing, circa 1875, Nancy married Franklin Wells and had four more children: Albert, Maude, Lilian and Levi Charles. Nancy then married Robert Thomas in 1904.

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 2.