

## **The Saunders Family Part 2 – “Our fight for freedom isn’t through yet”**

Aaron’s brother Leonard married Julia Hawkins, daughter of James and Sarah Hawkins (see Hawkins Family History - <https://amherstburgfreedom.org/hawkins-family/> ). Leonard and Julia married on March 28, 1893 in Amherstburg. Our family history collection states that Leonard and Julia had a son named Virgil who was born on August 1, 1895 but passed away a few days later. The 1901 Census lists Leonard (a lake cook) and Julia Saunders with Fredrick Crofferd who is listed as “ad. son,” which I believe means adopted son. Several years later Fredrick is listed with the last name Saunders and the son of Julia Hawkins and Leonard Saunders. Fredrick married Leona Mortimer, the daughter of John Johnston and Catherine Spotswood, on December 10, 1914 in Franklin, Ohio. Leona was previously married to Charles Mortimer. The 1911 Census only lists Julia and Leonard Saunders in their household and no other birth records for any child were found, leading us to believe that they had no other children.

That same year, 1911, Leonard and Julia experienced a significant loss when “catching fire in the attic from a defective flue, their residence was burned to the ground. The roof was almost destroyed before neighbors noticed it, and though about fifty rushed to the scene, nothing could be done except save the furniture, which was taken out and removed to a small house adjoining, where Mr. and Mrs. Saunders have taken up their residence for the present. The place was insured in the Western with Falls Bros. for \$1550, but this will not cover the loss, as the house was a large and practically new one.” A few days later, on February 10<sup>th</sup>, the *Echo* prints that Leonard “received a cheque from the Western Fire Assurance Co., through Falls Bros., their agents, for \$1281.25, in settlement for his loss by fire on January 19<sup>th</sup>. Prompt payment.” Several months later, on June 16<sup>th</sup>, “Mrs. Leonard Saunders, of Anderdon, has purchased the Charles

Kett place on St. Arnaud street for \$900, with a view to having a place to retire later on.” The next year, on March 29, 1912, the *Amherstburg Echo* adds further details to the story and said “Leonard Saunders entertained nineteen of his friends at a house warming at his home in Anderdon Tuesday evening, March 26<sup>th</sup>. The table was laden with many good things, and the evening was spent in games and music until the wee hours of the morning.”

According to his May 1924 obituary from the *Essex Free Press*, Leonard “was distinguished by his height, he being some 6 feet 8 inches tall. He was an industrious farmer, and for years had been living on the 2<sup>nd</sup> concession.” A separate obituary from the *Amherstburg Echo* says “Funeral services for the late Leonard Saunders were held Friday afternoon under masonic auspices, at the First Baptist church, Amherstburg. Mr. Saunders had been a member of the First Baptist church 44 years, was a member and Past master of Lincoln Masonic Lodge; also of Ebenezer Chapter, R.A.M., and Damascus Commandery No. 4. He had led a quiet unassuming life and died peacefully.”

Just like Leonard, his wife Julia was also active in organizations. The Amherstburg First Baptist Church had organizations including the Church Aid Society, the Amherstburg Guild and the Women’s Guild. From the Church Aid Society came the Amherstburg Guild in 1899, and then the Women’s Guild in 1909 due to the efforts of Mrs. Julia Saunders and Mrs. Nancy Jones. Julia was also members of Amherstburg’s Central Grove Club, a religious organization from the twentieth century. In 1933 the *Amherstburg Echo* wrote about a party that was held for her by members of the Amherstburg Ladies’ Guild which says “An enjoyable Hallowe’en function was held at the home of Mrs. Julia Saunders, St. Arnaud street, it being the occasion of her birthday. The Ladies Guild of which she is a member, gave a party in her honor under the leadership of the Guild president, Mrs. Peter Stokes. The rooms were decorated with black and orange streamers,

lighted pumpkins, black cats, witches and a profusion of chrysanthemums. The varied and striking costumes of the guests added both beauty and jollity to the occasion. Covers were laid for sixteen and a beautiful birthday cake held the place of honor on a heavily laden table. The evening was spent in music, story-telling and games and after the last stroke of twelve the guests departed, leaving behind many kind wishes for their hostess.” A few years later in 1938 Julia Saunders is mentioned in the article “Amherstburg Church Founded By Former Slaves, To Mark Centennial” and lists Julia as in charge of the Mothers’ Night Committee.

Julia is mentioned on a separate occasion in another article titled “Days of Slavery Still Seem Real.” The article first recounts memories from her niece Sarah’s husband Peter Stokes and says “And to others in the Windsor district the days of slavery seem as real as though it were actually yesterday, or perhaps the day before. The parents of many local folk were once actually sold on the slave block. Peter A. Stokes, 112 King street, Amherstburg, brings out an old muzzle-loading rifle and hand-made knife, brandishes both when the subject of freedom is broached. Born in 1870, he has never for one moment lost sight of the value of being a free man. ‘My grandfather was beaten to death in the United States,’ he says. ‘My father was a slave in Kentucky, and ran away with his whole family because he wanted to be free. This is the gun he carried with them. It claimed three lives in my father’s fight for freedom. This knife also did its part. Both the knife and the gun would be used again if my freedom were threatened. Freedom means everything to us. It means life. I’d just as soon be dead or die fighting rather than be a slave the way my father and his folks were.’”

The article continues with an account from Julia Hawkins Saunders and says “Mrs. Julie Saunders, of Amherstburg is 79 years old. Her father was bought by Abolitionists in Kentucky at 17, and brought to Canada by the Underground Railway, a system of farms at which the runaway

or freed slaves found shelter, food, clothing and understanding. Her mother was a slave woman, and Mrs. Saunders recalls hearing them speak of the beatings at the whipping post suffered by the colored folk across the border. 'Our race has made rapid progress,' she says, while she studies a gilt-framed portrait of Queen Victoria with a look of devotion. 'But we have yet a long way to go. Our fight for freedom isn't through yet. We want our young people to take their place in industry, to appreciate to the full the freedom for which so many of our fathers and mothers died.'"

**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 3.**