

Wilson Family History Part 3 – “Amherstburg’s Strongest Men”

As mentioned, there was substantial information available for Albert Wilson, son of Washington and Mary Elnora, so to avoid confusion he will be discussed last. Albert was born May 6, 1863. According to Milo Johnson’s book *New Canaan, Freedom Land*, “Albert was very popular in town [Amherstburg] and was known as having a quiet lifestyle and for being the strongest man in the town.” In an article from February 7, 1936, titled “Amherstburg’s Strongest Men,” it gives further details, saying “You’ve heard the saga of Paul Bunyan and his blue ox that performed feats of strength which only the imaginative French-Canadian mind could devise. Amherstburg has had its own Paul Bunyan, only he wasn’t a mythical character, albeit he did things that hardly seemed possible for one man. That was the late Al Wilson, who bore the title of the strongest man in town, past or present. He was a muscular . . . man who had 275 pounds distributed over a commanding stature. He got a lot of fun out of demonstrating his strength, not boastfully, but because of the surprise his actions caused. Now a barrel of salt to an ordinary man is a hefty as well as an awkward article to handle. But Al tossed barrels of salt (they weighed over 300 pounds) about like an empty keg. He could grasp one by the ends and toss it on a wagon without apparent effort while the eyes of the strangers popped. He was always a handy man to have around because he could take the place of a block and tackle or lever. Threshing gangs have seen Al lift one end of a threshing machine, and that’s a big lift. He used to do a little lumber jacking now and then, too, and at times when men struggled with logs Al would step and move them around as though they were match sticks.”

Albert’s 1932 obituary also mentions that Albert “was for twenty years employed by the Mullen Coal Company, and as gardener and handyman around the Mullen home. Then was foreman of labor on Bois Blanc Island for thirteen years. He was a splendid florist and an expert

tree surgeon, and saved many fine shade trees in this community by means of tree surgery. He was a man of very quiet life and habits; was a member of the First Baptist Church.” On March 21, 1913, the *Amherstburg Echo* also published an article about Albert’s skill as a tree surgeon, writing “Albert Wilson gave a demonstration in arboreal surgery at the rear of the Lake View House Friday, the outcome of which will be watched with interest. He skimmed off all the decay from a large scar on the side of a tree, cleaned out the wound thoroughly, gave it antiseptic treatment and then applied a coat of cement, over which he expects the bark to grow within a few years, just as it was before the wound was received. He has treated trees in a similar manner with great success on Bois Blanc.”

Albert married Margaret Hulbert, who was born in Colchester on March 9, 1865 and was the daughter of John Boyd and Rebecca Hulbert-Boyd. Impressively, Albert’s wife Margaret lived to be 100 years old and, at the time of her passing, had 55 grandchildren and 300 or more great grandchildren. According to their marriage record, Albert and Margaret were married on August 9, 1880 in Detroit. The couple moved to Amherstburg and lived in a house on George Street which has since been torn down and replaced by a modern structure. According to the *Amherstburg Echo* Albert Wilson purchased a house which stood on the corner of Ramsey and Gore since 1812. Circa 1917, the house was dismantled and moved. The house “was built of square logs dovetailed to a centre post and at the corners. Every piece of timber is sound.”

Albert and Margaret had twelve children: Lillian (1881), Grace (1884), Albert (1884), Rebecca (1887), William (1889), Simon Peter (1890), Cornelius (Neil) (1892), Norman (1894), Arkard, Ira Laird (1897), Washington, and Norval (1909). Albert Sr.’s obituary also mentions two additional children, Margaret and Isabel, who were deceased at the time of Albert’s passing on May 1, 1932 in Amherstburg.

According to the marriage record for Lillian Wilson, daughter of Albert and Margaret Wilson, she married a farmer named Andrew Boyd who was born on May 7, 1872 in Colchester and was the son of John Boyd and Ellen/Eleanor Nolan (see Nolan Family History <https://amherstburgfreedom.org/nolan-family/>) on July 28, 1901 in Amherstburg. According to the 1911 Census, Andrew and Lillie had at least four children: Marguerite (born February 13, 1902 in Amherstburg), John T. (born March 8, 1903 in Amherstburg), Andrew (born February 11, 1906 in Amherstburg) and Joseph (born January 7, 1909 in Amherstburg). There is also a death record for an Esther Valeein Boyd, who is listed as the child of Andrew and Lillian Boyd. She passed on March 4, 1914 in Amherstburg and was under the age of 2.

Lillian's sister Grace is the next child of Albert and Margaret Wilson that we will discuss. According to her marriage record, Grace married Earnest Boyd on December 9, 1900 in Amherstburg. Earnest was the son of Ellen and John Boyd. According to her obituary, Grace moved to Detroit in 1900 and she and Earnest (who is listed as William) had one son named Ernest.

Grace's brother Albert Tobias is next. We would first like to thank Albert's great granddaughter Debora who shared information and photographs of the Wilson family. Albert married Ella Gains, daughter of Frank Gains and Sarah Daley, on August 9, 1905 in Windsor. Albert and Ella had at least two children: William Albert and Cornelius. William Albert was born July 1, 1906 in Windsor, while Cornelius' birth record states he was born on January 29, 1911 in Amherstburg.

An interesting account of a shipwreck, found in the *Amherstburg Echo*, mentions Albert and says "A November 13th blizzard brings death and destruction to three million dollars worth of shipping on the Great Lakes. Shores from Lake Superior to Lake Erie strewn with wreckage

and drowned sailors. The steamer J.T. Hutchinson in command of Capt. Walter Lawler was blown ashore near Iroquois Point and was a total wreck. Among his crew were mate Herman Cornwall and chefs James Kirtley and Albert Wilson Jr. all of Amherstburg.”

Albert’s sister Rebecca married twice. A marriage record for October 19, 1908 states that Rebecca married a lawyer named William B. Hughes, the son of S.C. Hughes and Hannah Binga, in Windsor. Rebecca’s obituary also states that she married Albert Kersey and was mother of Wilbert who lived in Chicago.

The next child of Albert and Margaret has a special connection to the Amherstburg Freedom Museum. Their son William lived in the Taylor log cabin that is on the Museum’s property. William married Azalia Thompson, the daughter of Emma Taylor and Thomas Thompson. Before we move forward, here is a bit more about Azalia and her family. Azalia’s mother Emma was the daughter of George Taylor and Mary Ann Brooker. Interestingly, the Taylor cabin on the Museum’s property is named after George Taylor. According to George, Emma was born on July 25, 1880. In 1901, she married Thomas Thompson, a Mason, when she was 21, and following their marriage Thomas, who was 24, moved into the Taylor Cabin. In Emma’s 1926 obituary it states that “She was a hard working woman, a devoted wife, a loving mother and sister, ever ready to do an act of kindness, a devote member of Nazrey A.M.E. church and of the Women’s Guild Society.”

William Wilson’s wife Azalia, was born in 1895 in Anderdon Township and she lived her entire life in the Amherstburg district. William was a Mason, just like Thomas, and Azalia was a school teacher and active member of the First Baptist Church in Amherstburg. According to the Church statistics for the Amherstburg Regular Baptist Association (ARMBA), Azalia also acted as a Clerk for the First Baptist Church from 1932 to 1944. Azalia, just like her mother,

was also involved in the Women's Guild in Amherstburg. In a 1931 edition of the *Amherstburg Echo*, it records that the Women's Guild hosted a Home Coming at the First Baptist Church, which included dinner and entertainment from Windsor's B.M.E. choir and a solo performance by Azalia Wilson. She is listed as the secretary for this organization as well. Singing was not an uncommon practice for Azalia, who in October of 1909, also sang at the town's Harvest Home Concert and Social in the A.M.E. Church. In October of the following year, the *Echo* writes that she also sang a solo "Seek ye first the kingdom" in the A.M.E. junior choir and her performance was described as "very acceptably rendered."

William and Azalia had at least five children: Harold, Marwood, Grenville, Marian and William. Marion went on to marry William Henry Vincent, son of Ernest Vincent, on April 10, 1943. They were married in the First Baptist Church in Amherstburg by the Reverend. I.H. Edwards and resided in Detroit. Billy and Marwood, a labourer, remained in Amherstburg, but a tragic end met William and Azalia's son Private Harold Wilson who was killed in action in North Africa on July 17, 1943, while serving in the US Army. He was married to Marjorie Sopher (m. 1939) with two children: Harold Jr. and Beverly.

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.