

Holland Family History Part 1 – Family Reunion

This month's family history was made possible because of the generosity of Janice Harris and Patti Smart-Leard who generously provided me with information and photographs to help with my research on the Holland family. Thank you Janice and Patti! As mentioned, this month's family history is about the Holland family, but to tell the Holland family history it is important to start with the Howard family beginning with Jack and Polly Howard. The connection between these two families is described in a *Windsor Star* article from July 10, 2006, which discusses a family reunion of the Howard-Holland family. The article says "Ancestors from Canada and the U.S. meet every two years to maintain bond" – "Ancestors of a family torn apart by slavery continue to rebuild the bonds strengthening them with each reunion every two years. They celebrate, remember, reunite. They call their effort 'Bridging the Gap,' and their two-day event in Windsor and Harrow over the past weekend crosses both the U.S. and Canadian border, as well as history and 12 generations. 'We don't have to be separated anymore,' said Denise Johnson, pastor of the Central Grove African Methodist Episcopal Church on Walker Road, north of Harrow. Like more than 150 from both sides of the border who attended the Howard Holland reunion with activities at the church and Mic Mac Park, Johnson, 44, traces her ancestry to Jack and Polly Howard. Their eight children were born into slavery on a Maryland farm in the early 1800s. A daughter Leatha's two sons William Henson and Thomas John sons fled to Canada through the underground railroad at Niagara Falls, becoming patriarchs of the Canadian Holland family tree. The family continued to grown branches far apart for generations, until descendants in the 1970s searching for their roots miraculously discovered their connections across the border."

The article continues, “A small reunion in 1982 grew into a biennial event. The family’s 13th gathering comes complete with ‘Bridging the Gap’ t-shirts, mugs, a commemorative photo booklet and, most importantly, organizers say, the fellowship and display of memorabilia. The sales help defray expenses for each reunion. ‘I just get a kick out of seeing these people,’ says Johnson’s mother Dorothy, 80, of Harrow who can trace both sides of her family to slavery. ‘They all know what a hard time it was to get together.’ They catch up on the latest family news and share memories. People still remember the sweet corn Dorothy and her husband Harland once served for the reunion at their family farm. There are stories, too, like the one about the Howard couple’s son Enoch. After slavery, he became a landowner with large holdings and bailed out his former master. Asked how many descendants there are, Mable Thomas, of Silver Spring, Maryland says simply: ‘We’d fill a stadium. There are thousands.’ She adds they represent all walks of life. But they feel the separation so deeply, she and others maintain their sense of family includes practically anyone who attends the reunion. ‘We don’t have in-laws,’ Thomas said firmly. ‘We have members of the family. We make a rule anyone who comes to the family reunion is not a friend but a member of the family.’”

According to a pamphlet from the 1990 Howard-Holland Reunion, these families were reunited because of “a chance visit by someone who was not even a member of this Jack and Polly Howard family brought together the Amherstburg members and family in Maryland. The story goes that someone ‘just visiting the Amherstburg museum’ went back home to Washington, D.C. and told John King, a Howard family researcher about the Amherstburg branch and now the members meet every two years.”

As mentioned, the Holland family is descended from Jack and Polly Howard who were enslaved on plantations of the Gaither, Howse, and Griffith families and on the various farms of

Jeremiah B. Howard. According to a pamphlet titled “The 6th Reunion of the Descendants of Jack & Polly” the journey of the Howard-Holland family begins on “March 8, 1813 when a 16 year-old mulatto slave girl named Polly was sold by Edward Howse to Ephraim Gaither in Montgomery County, Maryland. The sale of Polly is central to the evolution of our family as we know it today. From 1814 to 1838, Polly gave birth to eight children, and they are our ancestors.” Jack and Polly’s children include Enoch George Howard (1814-1895), Leatha Howard Webster (1816), Eliza Howard Pratt (1821), Greenberry Howard (1825), Maria Howard Green Oliver (1831), Brice Worthington Howard (1832), Martha Howard Johnson Thomas (1835), and Susanna Howard Nugent (1838). I will share the information I have found on each child, but Leatha Howard Webster, whose two sons (William and John) came to Canada, has the most information to share. This is because Leatha is the great grandmother of Museum co-founder, Betty Simpson. Betty collected information on the Holland family and the information she gathered has also been used to write the Holland family history. Before discussing Leatha and the Holland family, I would like to share information about Leatha Howard’s siblings first, starting with Enoch George Howard.

George Enoch Howard was freed in 1851 by Sarah Griffith. He married Harriet Lee (1808-1882) who was freed in 1853 by Samuel Gaither. Enoch and Harriet had four children: John Henry Howard, Mary Alice Howard Coxen, Martha E. Howard Murphy and Greenberry Howard. After Harriet was freed, she purchased her four children from Samuel Gaither in 1860. In 1862, Enoch George purchased 289 acres of land from the Griffith family for \$3,000 and in 1867 Enoch petitioned the Montgomery County Government for a school to educate Black students, posting collateral and a parcel of land for the school, which opened circa 1880. When he passed in 1895, his estate was divided among his three surviving children and his

granddaughter, Harriet Coxen. Enoch and Harriet are buried in the cemetery on his farm above Howard Chapel.

Enoch and Harriet's son John Henry Howard (1839-1923) married Harriet A. Gaither (1843-1917) and they had fifteen children. John Henry Howard built Howard Chapel and Howard Chapel Road is named for him. John's house still stands on Howard Chapel Road and he along with his wife and several of his children are buried there.

John Henry's sister Mary Alice Howard is next. She married Henry Coxen and the couple moved to Baltimore and had two children, Mary Ella and Harriet Coxen. Mary Alice's sister Martha E. Howard (1846-1915) married John Henry Murphy. John Henry Murphy was born into slavery on December 25, 1840 in Baltimore, Maryland and was freed in 1863. He also served in the Civil War and later founded *The Afro-American* newspaper in 1892 which became one of the leading Black newspapers of the 20th century. The paper began when Murphy merged his church publication, *The Sunday School Helper* with two other church publications titled *The Ledger* and *The Afro-American*. The paper challenged Jim Crow practices in Maryland and promoted racial equality and economic advancement for Black Americans. John Henry Murphy served as editor until his death on April 5, 1922, after which five of his sons, who were each trained in different aspects of the paper's management, took over. This included Carl and Arnett who served as editor-publisher and advertising director. Carl served as the newspaper's editor-publisher for 45 years, after which his daughter Frances L. Murphy II served as chairman and publisher. *The Afro-American* also employed many influential Black journalists including Langston Hughes, William Worthy and J. Saunders Redding, and was the first Black newspaper to employ a female sportswriter after hiring Lillian Johnson and Nell Dodson.

Martha's brother, Greenberry Howard (1848-1927) is the last child of John Henry and Harriet Howard. He married Rebecca Nettles and settled on a farm adjacent to his grandfather Enoch's farm. The couple had nine children.

Enoch's sister Eliza, the next child of Jack and Polly Howard, will be discussed now. She married William Henry Pratt. According to a family history written by Harold Howard, a Howard descendant, Eliza was freed in 1849 by Sarah Griffith, while William Henry was freed in 1846 by Ann Hayes in Ohio (formerly Ann Riggs of Montgomery County). William Henry purchased property in 1852 and the couple had four children including Mary Augustus Pratt Cook (married Branson Cooke), Howard Pratt, Elizabeth Pratt Waters (married John Waters) and Ella Pratt.

Greenberry Howard, the next child of Jack and Polly Howard, is next. According to Harold Howard, Greenberry was born in 1825 and freed by Charles Holland in 1849-1850, while Greenberry's sister Maria was born in 1831 and freed by William Brown in 1853. Additional records state that Maria married Dr. Jacob Oliver of Brazil, Indiana and settled in Baltimore.

Maria's brother Brice Worthington Howard is next. He was born in 1832, sold into Virginia and returned after the Civil War. According to a pamphlet "The 6th Reunion of the Descendants of Jack & Polly Howard," Brice Worthington "was the only member among the eight to be sold, and he returned to Maryland alone in 1967. It is also rumored that he fathered children, however, we have been unable to confirm that as well."

There was limited information for Brice Worthington's sister Martha. All that could be found is her year of birth, 1835, and a reference to her as Martha Howard Johnson Thomas. Her sister Susanna married Joseph Nugent and the couple had ten children, but I could not locate the names of their children.

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.