

Holland Family History Part 4 – The Railway Porters

Harriet ‘Hattie’ Ruth Holland married Harland Ernest Johnson on September 15, 1909. On September 17, 1909, the *Amherstburg Echo* printed “Harley Johnson, son of James Johnson, and Miss Kathleen [should say Hattie] Holland, of Hamilton, went to Windsor and were quietly married on Wednesday, returning here Thursday to take up their residence. Mrs. Johnson had been visiting in the township a few weeks prior to her marriage. The *Echo* extends congratulations.” Harland was born in 1881 in Colchester and spent his entire life in the township. In the *Amherstburg Echo* Harriet is described as a “shinning example.” She was strongly connected to the A.M.E. Church and “her greatest delight was in spreading the gospel, which she did in both word and song.” According to the *Amherstburg Echo* she had a “contralto voice of exceptionally fine quality and in her long career delighted audiences in many parts of Ontario with her vocal solos.” Interestingly, it was while singing at a concert that Harriet met Harland. Harriet and Harland were married in Windsor but took up residence on the Gore Road in Colchester South.

In a statement from Hattie, she shares details of her life and says “I am Hattie Johnson first local president of Women’s Mite Missionary Society of Central Grove A.M.E. Church, Harrow. I was born Hattie Holland of Bronte, Ont. Between Hamilton & Oakville. When my parents visited Harrow, I met Harland Johnson. We married in 1909 and we have 5 children named Edna, Margaret, Lloyd, Betty & Worthington. I joined Central Grove Church in Harrow. In 1921, I was appointed by Rev. Wm. Seay pastor at that time and became president of first local ‘Women’s Mite Missionary Society’ in A.M.E. Conference. Sometimes I would have to walk the five miles from my home to the church to hold a meeting. My officers are – Sc’y Maude Grayer, Treas, Mary Books, Members are Belle Curran, Bertha Kersey, Leona Brooks, Lottie King, Almedia Lewis, Alzora Banks, ... later Viola Johnson joined and became our

pianist. As Tabitha in New Testament and others sewed for the poor and patched Jesus' shabby clothes, so we, in this time, want to make contributions to the poor. So, we devised a plan to make a quilt, and charge 10cts to anyone wishing their names sewn on it. We also have dinners, sell oyster suit, pies & cakes, and other methods of making money to send to foreign missions in the A.M.E. Conference. Sometimes Leona & I sing a duet. I sing contralto and she has a coloratura voice. The congregation is always happy to hear us sing. I accompany us on the organ. We meet once a month and always conclude our meeting with 'Missionary Benediction' 'In the name of 'Our ... God' may the spirit of Christian Missions enter into every heart. This we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.'" Additionally, Hattie also enjoyed teaching children about the Bible.

According to Hattie's obituary titled "Esteemed Resident Dies - This district was deeply saddened Sunday when one of the most prominent and esteemed members of the colored community, Mrs. Harland Johnson, passed away following a lengthy illness. Deceased was born in Hamilton 37 years ago and from the age of 14 was connected with the A.M.E. Church in that city. She possessed a contralto voice of exceptionally fine quality and in her long career delighted audiences in many parts of Ontario with her vocal solos. It was while she was singing at a concert in this district that she met Mr. Johnson and 32 years ago they were married in Windsor. They took up residence on the Gore Road, Colchester South, and had resided there since. Mrs. Johnson became a member of Central Grove A.M.E. Church and during her residence here was one of its most devoted and enthusiastic workers. She gave willingly of her time and energy to the promotion of the gospel among her people and set them a shininy [sic] example with her own life and habits. She was President of the Missionary Society, Superintendent of the Sunday School and was corresponding secretary of the Ontario Conference of A.M.E. Churches. She had a certificate as an evangelist from the Moddy Bible Institute and

also from the Boston College of Vitosophy. Deceased also had a gift for writing and through weekly contributions to The Echo she chronicled the activities of her people in the district. Her budgets of news were among the most valued to come to this desk. Surviving her are her husband, who at this time is seriously ill with the 'flu and was unable to attend the funeral, and the following children: Edna, Mrs. Virgil Grayer, of Harrow; Margaret, Mrs. Orville Taylor, of Windsor, Lloyd, Worthington and Betty, at home; and three sisters, Mrs. B.W. Payne of Beckley, W. Va.; Mrs. Gertrude Bell of Hamilton and Mrs. Evelyn Sparkman of Detroit. A large number of friends and relatives attended the funeral which was held at the Central Grove Church Tuesday afternoon. Rev. Joseph Brockington, pastor, was assisted in conducting the service by Rev. Penny of Tanner A.M.E. Church, Windsor, and Rev. Dr. Henderson of Amherstburg, presiding elder of the A.M.E. Conference. Mrs. Gerertude [sic] Day sang Mrs. Johnson's favorite hymn, 'When I've Gone the Last Mile of the Way.' Mrs. Gladys Scott of Detroit read the obituary and messages of condolence. Burial followed in the church cemetery with the following as pall-bearers: Eli Banks, Harvey Clingman, Robert Kersey, William Kersey, Forest Mathews and Fred Carter."

Sadly, a few days later Hattie's husband Harland passed away. According to Harland's obituary "Death of Harland Johnson – Following closely the death of his wife, Harland Johnson well-known colored resident of this district passed away on Thursday, April 3. Mrs. Johnson died on March 30. Deceased who was 57 years of age had been ill for some time. He was born in Colchester South and spent his entire life in the township. He is survived by the following children: daughters Edna, Mrs. Virgil Grayer of Harrow; Margaret, Mrs. Orville Taylor of Windsor; Lloyd, Worthington and Betty at home. A large number of friends and relatives attended the funeral which was held at Central Grove on Sunday afternoon. Rev. Joseph

Brockington, the pastor, conducted the services. The pallbearers were Eli Banks, Harvey Clingman, Robert Kersey, William Kersey, Forest Mathews and Fred Carter.”

The couple also had several children: Enda Warner (1910), Margaret Elizabeth (August 30, 1915-June 6, 2004), Lloyd (1918), Harland “Zip” (1920-July 7, 2017) and Betty (May 11, 1925-April 4, 2014). Enda was born on August 21, 1910 in Colchester and married Virgil Grayer (see Grayer family history <https://amherstburgfreedom.org/grayer-family/>), who was the son of Wiley Grayer and Maude Mulder. Virgil also operated Virgil Grayer Trucking Company in Harrow. Edna and Virgil’s children include Everette, Mervyn, Doreen, Evelyn, Brenda, and Marilyn.

Edna’s sister, Margaret, married Orville Taylor, the son of James Taylor and Jessie Walls (See Taylor family history <https://amherstburgfreedom.org/taylor-family/>). Orville was born on November 7, 1912. Margaret was also previously married to Russell Hurst who passed away in 1984. Margaret, along with her sister Edna were members of the Hattie Johnson Missionary Society and both worked in various jobs like farming, canning and as letter carriers. Edna was also a volunteer midwife. Margaret and Orville’s children include Len (deceased), Shirley Pulley, Ron (Judy), Linda (Wayne) Logan and Janice (Donald) Harris who kindly shared information on the Holland family.

Thanks to Janice Harris, we can also share parts of an interview with Janice’s mother Margaret, who was the daughter of Harriet Holland and Harland Johnson. The interview was conducted by Janisse Browning as part of the Museum’s Aural History Project in 1992. Rather than including the entire interview in this document, I have created a pdf which has been uploaded onto our website (See document titled ‘Interview with Margaret Elizabeth Hurst’

below). This interview shares significant details about farming, women as workers and financial contributors, and the school system.

We still need to discuss Margaret's siblings Lloyd, Harland and Betty. Lloyd married Ruth Anderson and their children include Lloyd, Ivan, Debbie, John, Sarah, Clarisa, Vanessa.

Lloyd's brother Harland "Zip" was a farmer and married Dorothy Scott, who was the president of the Hattie Johnson Missionary Society. Harland was also the proud owner of H.W. Johnson & Sons Trucking, a local trucking company that later changed to J&A Johnson Brothers. Harland and Dorothy had five children: Jerry, Tony, Denise, Philip and Ralph.

Harland's sister Betty Ruth Beatrice Simpson, the co-founder of the Museum, was born on May 11, 1925 and married twice. Her first marriage was to Burnie Hurst and her second marriage was to Melvin "Mac" Simpson, who founded the Museum with Betty. She worked at Hotel Dieu Hospital (Windsor Regional Hospital) for 25 years. She began her career as part of the hospital's kitchen staff, later becoming an electro-diagnosis (EEG) technician. Sadly, she passed away on April 4, 2014. Betty's daughter Joan Patricia Bray continues Betty's legacy as a Board Director for the Museum.

Now that we have discussed Hattie and her children, we will discuss her sister Evelyn, the last child of William and Margaret (Felson) Holland. According to our records, she was born in 1889. She married twice and moved to Detroit, Michigan. Her first marriage was to Richie Wilson and her second was to William Sparkman, who worked as a Porter and was the son of Berrell and Amanda Sparkman, on October 16, 1918, in Detroit. Evelyn also had a daughter named Madlyn. Sadly, Madlyn passed away on April 28, 1927, and her obituary shares more details. It says "M. Sparkman born Oct 25, 1911 at Toronto, Ontario attended public school Toronto, Ont. Moving to Detroit, 1918 finish public at Wingsit? School & later becoming a pupil

of N.W High S. until her death on this Ap[ril] 28. Deceased was just beginning to take an interest in church club & schoolwork, a member of Junior choir ... She attended Easter services which was the last time she was able to be out. Stricken critically ill Wed. soul departing this life ... last leaves to mourn their loss mother, father, aunt, cousins & a host of friends." In a heartfelt telegram to Evelyn, her niece and nephews (Ewan, Gerald and Aileen) wrote "the Lord knows best. He always picks the sweetest flowers." Evelyn and William also shared a moving message saying "Like a little butterfly was, she caught in the rain that was; Her little wings crush But God took her home to Heaven."

Now that we have discussed William Henson Holland, we will move on to discuss his brother Thomas John Holland. He married Henrietta Short (1855-193) and the couple had at least thirteen children. I was able to identify ten children including William Henry, Abigail, Florence, Leatha, John Christie, Garnet Greenberry, Kathleen, Arthur, Grace, and Rosatta Beatrice.

According to the Museum's family history binders, William moved to New York, was a Porter, and worked in radio, and as a singer and actor. He married Irene Diggs DeMassey (Blossom) who worked as a Wardrobe Mistress in the theatre.

William's sister Abigail remained in Hamilton and married Richard Hammond, while her sister Florence married Ernest Johnson. Florence's brother John Christie remained in Hamilton and worked as a Porter of T.H. & B Railway. According to *African Canadian Online*, John Holland joined the Brotherhood of the Railway which was the Canadian chapter of The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters Union from the US. This source also says that he served as a Porter for 35 years. He was also a Pastor of St. Paul's Stewart Memorial Church. He married twice. His first marriage was to Josephine L. Idenia Johnson in 1901 and they met while working in a hospital. Their children included Gilbert (m. Lois), Gladys, Alfreda, and Oliver (married

Elizabeth Bryan). His second marriage was to Rachel Elizabeth Grizzle. In 1953, Reverend John Christie Holland received the Citizen of the Year Award in Hamilton to which the Reverend Holland said "I'm deeply conscious of the honor and little dreamt while selling papers on Hamilton Streets as a boy that I would ever stand before such a distinguished gathering." *African Canadian Online* shares further details about him and says "He volunteered to tutor fellow students in need. His diligence and tireless spirit were reflected in the hours he spent helping in his parent's hay and feed business and delivering newspapers before and after school. In his early teens John found work in "Little Africa" (the Hamilton Mountain) and had to climb up the escarpment then walk miles each day to work for a local farmer. John also sang in the church choir, all while still achieving excellence in school! The values his parents instilled in him encouraged his walk in an exemplary direction. They taught him integrity, compassion, belief in oneself, a respect for hard work and a high regard for learning."

The *Amherstburg Echo* mentions John Christie on July 1, 1954, and says "At cousin's funeral – Mrs. Virgil Grayer, Mrs. Burnie Hurst and their aunt, Mrs. Evelyn Sparkman of Detroit motored to Hamilton last week to attend the funeral of their cousin Rev. John Holland. Rev. Holland was chosen as the citizen of the year in Hamilton. He was well known and a highly respected citizen and hundreds attended the funeral, Bishops, ministers as well as representatives of every department of the city of Hamilton, paid their last respects. Bishop Geo. W. Baker of Detroit spoke of the life of the deceased as 'a finished product on the assembly line of Christian living,' a person who had been a friend to anyone who he could help."

Our records show that Garnett Greenbury was married first to Lilliam (Lillian) Smith and second to Marie (last name not listed). His children are also listed including Fred, Laura who

married Amherstburg-born ragtime piano player and composer Shelton Brooks, Garnet (married Carmen), and Marjorie.

Garnet's sister Kathleen married Lewis Reynaldo P. Forbest. Kathleen was also a musician and started playing the organ at the age of six, despite her feet not being able to reach the pedals to pump it. She graduated from the Hamilton Conservatory of Music in 1919 and taught music and worked as an organist at the Hamilton A.M.E. Church. In 1923 she and her husband, Lewis Forbes, moved to Cleveland, where she was the organist at St. John A.M.E. Church for ten years and at Mount Zion Congregational Church for three years. In 1936 she became the organist at St. James A.M.E. Church where she served for 42 years. She also is the first person of African descent in Ohio to receive the degree of "Associate of the American Guild of Organists."

Arthur remained unmarried, while his sister Rosetta Beatrice moved to Toronto and her children include Vivian, Verda, and Charles. Rosetta's sister Grace Phyllis remained in Hamilton and married Erasmus Toliver. Their children included Augustin (married Helen Bryant), Betty (married Desmond Davis-Melanie) and Kathleen who married civil rights and labour union activist Stanley Grizzle. He was born in Toronto and was the son of Theodore Grizzle and Mary Sinclair. At the age of 22 he became a railway porter to help support his family and in 1938 Grizzle helped form the Young Men's Negro Association of Toronto. He also founded the Railway Porter's Trade Union Council and served as president of the Toronto Canadian Pacific Railroad (CPR) Division of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP) from 1946 to 1962. In 1960, Grizzle was appointed an Officer of the Ontario Labour Relations Board, making him the first African Canadian to hold a position at this level of provincial government. This was a position he held until 1978 when Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau appointed him Judge of the

Canadian Court of Citizenship, which was another first for an African Canadian. Among his accolades, he was named to the Order of Ontario in 1990 and the Order of Canada in 1995. In 1996, Grizzle released "My Name's Not George" which described his experiences as a sleeping car porter, but also his activism.

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.