

The Chavis Family History Part 4 – The Mail Carrier

So far, we have discussed Wiley Chavis and Clarissa Evan's children William, James, John Franklin, and Nancy. There was no information available for Wiley and Clarissa's other children Eveline, Sarah, Theresa, or Louisa, but I was able to find documentation for Thomas, Amanda, and Mary who will be looked at next. Thomas married at least twice. The 1891 Census lists Thomas with his wife Mary A., but I could not find a last name for her. The following Census for 1901 lists Thomas and Mary A. with their daughter Bessie.

I found a marriage record for Thomas' second marriage to Melvina Woodson on September 25, 1916 in Windsor. Melvina was the daughter of Reuben and Caroline Struthers and, according to a marriage notice in the *Essex Free Press*, Melvina was previously married to William Woodson. Melvina's obituary from March 23, 1929 in the *Border Cities' Star* shares more details of her life and says "Plan Last Rites – Mrs. T. Chavis to be Buried at Amherstburg – Amherstburg, March 23 – Funeral services for the late Mrs. Thomas Chavis will be held tomorrow afternoon in the A.M.E. church, the Rev. C.M. Skyles, pastor, officiating. Mrs. Chavis was born in New Canaan, her maiden name being Melissa Struthers. Her first husband was R.W. Woodson, who died many years ago. She became the wife of Thomas Chavis 12 years ago. Surviving are the husband and six children of her first marriage, Daniel of New Canaan; William of Ecorse; Mrs. Travis and Mrs. Beecham, of Detroit; Mary and Ada at home; a brother, John Struthers, of Windsor and a sister, Mrs. Jones of Dunbridge, Ohio."

A year later, on March 21, 1930, a lovely tribute to Melvina was printed in the *Amherstburg Echo* which says "In loving memory of our dear mother, Mrs. Melvina Chavis, who passed away one year ago, March 20th, 1929. To our hearts there comes a longing. If you only could come home. Forgive us, Lord, for asking why. But, oh! Why did you have to die? Life has not been the same to us. Since you were called away. You were true and very patient.

Through the years you struggled on. Those dear hands of yours that now are resting forever. Made a home that now is gone. And some day our dreams will come true. When we see you again, Mother. And fold you in our arms and kiss you once again. – Sadly missed by her Lonely Daughters and Two Sons.”

I also found a brief obituary for Melvina’s husband Thomas Chavis in the *Windsor Daily Star* from January 8, 1945 which says “Thomas Chavis, 94-year-old resident of Amherstburg, died Sunday at Leamington. Funeral services will be Tuesday at 3:30 p.m. from the A.M.E. Church, Amherstburg. Burial will be in the Rose Hill Cemetery.” There is no further mention of Thomas’ daughter Bessie, from his first marriage, so I cannot say with certainty what happened to her.

Thomas’ sister Amanda is the next child of Wiley Chavis and Clarissa Evans. Amanda married Hilliard Hurst. On the marriage record for Manda and Hilliard, the former is listed as Manda Runells, not Chavis. The record states that she was a widow explaining the different last name, but “Runells” is a misspelling of “Reynolds” from a previous marriage to William Henry Reynolds. Manda and her first husband William had two children: Emaline who was born on May 3, 1872 and Alfred who was born on June 27, 1873. Both children were born before Manda’s second marriage to Hilliard on March 24, 1875, meaning that William passed away between the birth of his second child Alfred, in 1873, and Manda’s next marriage to Hilliard in 1875. During their marriage, Manda and Hilliard Sr. had at least seven children: Rhoda, Almeda, Ellen, Hilliard Jr., Blanche, Wylie and Everett Walter Farrington Hurst.

Rhoda was born in Harrow on October 31, 1876. According to her August 1, 1895 marriage record, she married a labourer named Henry Smith, who was born in Stratford, Ontario. Henry was the son of Kirk Smith and Larene Hirrer, although Henry’s mother’s name

might be Sarene or something similar, because the beginning of her name is cut off in the marriage record and it is difficult to determine her full name. At the time, Rhoda performed housework as her occupation and she was 20, while Henry was 32. Both lived and were married in Romeo, Michigan. According to the 1900 census, the couple moved to Armada, Michigan and that is where Rhoda remained until her passing on August 6, 1947. Over the years, the census records also reveal that Henry worked as a “teamster” in 1900, while the 1910 census states that Henry was a “labourer” who does “odd jobs,” while Rhoda worked as a “Laundress” out of her house. Henry and Rhoda had a least one child, a son, named Clarence Henry who was born on December 4, 1895 in Romeo, Michigan. On Clarence’s WWI draft registration card, it states that he was 30, a “Common Labourer” and single. According to Clarence’s draft registration card during WWII, he was age 46, living in Armada, MI, unemployed, 6 foot 2 inches tall, 145 pounds, with brown eyes and black hair. On the gravestone for Clarence H. Smith it says CO.C. 372 INF (Infantry) U.S. Army. The gravestone also states that he passed away in 1942, meaning that he was likely killed in action during the war, but it must be added that Clarence is not listed on the National Archives WWII Army Casualties list for Macomb, Michigan where he is from. It remains unclear what happened to him.

Rhoda’s sister Almeda is the next person to be discussed. She was born circa 1877 in Colchester South to Hilliard and Manda Hurst. On April 18, 1898, she married Albert Lewis who was born in Colchester South and the son of Matthew Lewis and Eliza Simpson. According to their marriage record, Almeda worked as a domestic while Albert was a cook. The couple had one daughter named Eliza who was born on July 17, 1898. She married a carpenter named William Scott, who was the son of Henry Scott and Mary Hill. The couple was married on September 19, 1917.

There was little information available for Almeda's sister Ellen, but she does show up on the 1891 Census for Colchester South and was 12 years old, meaning that she was born circa 1879. There is more information about the rest of her siblings: Hilliard Jr., Blanche, Wylie and Everett who we will discuss next. Hilliard Jr. was married at least two times. His first marriage was to Rose Thermond on October 13, 1906 in Windsor. Hilliard was 24 and worked as a Porter at the time of their marriage, while Rose was 19 and the daughter of James Thermond and S. Scott. Neither had been married before. According to Hilliard's 1912-1913 Immigration record, he was widowed, meaning that his first wife Rose passed away some time before 1912-1913. His immigration record also states that he entered Detroit with the destination of Cheboygan. Hilliard's second marriage was to Goldie Burch on November 12, 1913. According to their marriage record, Hilliard Jr., a labourer, was 30 and living in Detroit, while Goldie was 25 and living in Flint. Goldie was the daughter of Richard and Maggie Burch. Their marriage record also states that there was "No Ceremony."

According to the 1891 Census for Colchester South, Hilliard Jr.'s sister Blanche was born circa 1883 because she is listed as 8 years old at the time of the census. Her brother Everett was born, according to his death certificate, on October 30, 1886 in Harrow. He later married Fannie L. Laster, who was born in Georgia, the daughter of L.L. Laster (mother's name not given) and was a cook. The couple married on January 8, 1910 in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and at the time, Everett worked as a Porter.

The last child of Amanda and Hilliard is Wylie. He was born in 1885 and later married Martha Thompson who was born in Colchester North on November 30, 1887. She was the daughter of Elijah Thompson, a farmer born on February 14, 1860, and Elsie Golden, a housewife, born on November 5, 1870. Elijah and Elsie had 13 children: George Henry (b. July

28, 1885), Elsie Jane (August 9, 1889), Daniel Lee, William Raleigh (May 25, 1892), Enoch Elias (May 10, 1894), Andrew Theodore (November 4, 1896), Eliza Elizabeth (October 3, 1898), Linnie Josephine (April 23, 1900), Lawrence German (November 11, 1902), Florence Gertrude Ives (July 25, 1905), Verna Almeda (January 5, 1907), and Elijah Sufise (July 28, 1908), in addition to Martha.

Martha Thompson's father Elijah also has an interesting connection to the Amherstburg Freedom Museum because he was the youngest child of Elizabeth Ford (born in London, England) and George Henry Thompson Sr., of East Malden. According to family lore, George Sr. was from Madagascar, but before coming to Canada, he lived in Boone County, Kentucky. He came into Canada at Trois Rivieres, Quebec and worked as a coachman for an English gentleman named Mr. Ford. According to family stories, George ran away with Mr. Ford's daughter Elizabeth and settled in East Malden. They were married and had fifteen children. George Henry Thompson was also an expert Blacksmith and wagon carriage maker and potter, by trade. His occupation as a Blacksmith is what connects George Sr. to the museum, because the Hurst family donated a plow that was forged by George Sr. and that plow is on display at the Museum in the Taylor Cabin.

Wylie and Martha Hurst married on February 24, 1906 in Colchester South, the former being 21 while the latter was 18 years of age. According to an article published in the *Amherstburg Echo* titled "Going 21 Years" Wylie Hurst "has attained his majority as mail carrier in this district and is still going strong. For twenty-one years he has been serving patrons or carrying mail to post office and this Christmas tide had the lightest mail he ever carried at that time. Mr. Hurst recalls that during many Christmas seasons he found it necessary to put on two rigs to carry surplus mails. This year it is quite light in keeping with all kinds of business. There

are not as many Christmas presents as usual being sent by mail, but that's no reason why people shouldn't show their appreciation of Mr. Hurst's service, and in fact, the service of all the carriers by leaving presents in their mail boxes." In addition to being a mail carrier, Wylie also worked for Ford Motor Company in Windsor.

The couple had nine children: Lornie, Douglas, Sylvia, Wylie Jr., Wava, Lonnie, Greta, Burnie and Gladys. Lornie Sr. was born on March 17, 1907 in Colchester South. On March 18, 1932, Lornie married Ida Evelyn Grayer, of Harrow, who was the daughter of Wiley Sylvester Grayer (son of William and Elizabeth Green Grayer) and Maude Louella Coates (Mulder) who married in April 1900. Wiley and Maude were also born in Harrow. Wiley and Maude Grayer lived on a farm on Gore Road on the 2nd Concession and had sixteen children: Estelle Mae (1900), Mazie Luella (1902), Ruby Beatrice (1903), Virgil Sylvester (1905), Olive Marie (1907), Lovedy Bernetta (1909), Helen Josephine (1910), Wilfred (1911), Ida Evelyn (August 14, 1911), Gerald (1915), Sylvana (born circa 1916), Mary (born c. 1918), Gladys Leone (born c. 1917), Violet Winifred (1916), Marvin Lester (1918), and Kenneth (1920). Wiley Grayer was one of the first mail carriers in Colchester South Township in the early 1900s and delivered mail on Rural Route 2 and Rural Route 4. Wiley and Maude delivered the mail by horse buggy at first, but in 1920 Wiley purchased a car that made things easier.

We will end the Chavis family history with Amanda's sister Mary. All that could be found for her was a death record from December 24, 1937 in Amherstburg and her obituary from the *Windsor Daily Star* from December 27, 1937. It says "Mrs. Mary Norris – AMHERSTBURG, Ont., Dec. 27 – Funeral services will be conducted tomorrow afternoon for Mrs. Mary Ann Norris, who died at her home in Amherstburg Friday night, following a short illness. Services will be conducted at the home at 2 p.m. and at the First Baptist Church at 2:30.

Interment will be in Rose Hill Cemetery. Seventy-two years of age, Mrs. Norris was born at New Canan [Canaan], Ont. She lived in Detroit prior to coming to Amherstburg two years ago.

Surviving are her husband, David A. Norris, and a brother, Thomas Chavis, of Amherstburg.”

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.