

Holland Family History Part 2 – From Howard to Holland

Now that we have discussed Enoch, Eliza, Greenberry, Maria, Brice Worthington, Martha and Susanna, we will continue with Leatha and her descendants who are not only connected to Canada, but the Amherstburg Freedom Museum through Museum co-founder Betty Simpson. Leatha Howard was the second child of Jack and Polly Howard. Thanks to Janice Harris, I can include the information found in a Bill of Sale for Leatha Howard from February 1841 which says “At the request of Harriet Ann Howard and others, the following Bill of Sale was recorded the 26th day of February 1841 to wit: Know all men by these presents that I, Jeremiah B. Howard of Montgomery County in the State of Maryland, have and do hereby give and grant as presents unto my three children hereinafter named, the following mulattoes and blacks, they being slaves for life, hereby relinquishing and forever renouncing all right, title, interest and claim to the said negroes and mulattoes and their issues, to with: To my daughter, Harriet Ann Howard, her heirs and assigns a negro girl by the name of Mary, commonly called Bid, also a negro boy by the name of Charles, commonly called Jack, they being the children of a negro woman by the name of Sophia Green. To my daughter, Margaret Rebecca Howard, her heirs and assigns, I give a mulatto boy by the name of William with his sister, a mulatto child by the name of Emily, these being the issue of my mulatto woman, Leatha. To my son, Brice W. Howard, his heirs and assigns, I give a black man by the name of Richard Green, commonly called Dick, also Horace and a mulatto commonly called Gustus Holland with a mulatto boy by the name of Dick, he being the son of the before mentioned Sophia Green. The said Sophia herself and the before mentioned Letha, I give unto my son, Brice Worthington Howard, his heirs and assigns. As witness my hand and seal this 8th day of February 1841. Jeremiah B. Howard.”

Leatha married twice. Her first marriage was to William August(us) Howard circa 1833 and the second was to Josiah Webster. *African Canadian Online* mentions that William was the son of William and Chloe, but not further records could confirm this. Leatha and William had at least six children: William Henson, Martha Ann, Caroline, Thomas John, Emily and Lela/Leatha. William and Emily are the children of Leatha mentioned in the Bill of Sale.

It is believed that William Augustus died around 1850 and at the time she was manumitted, 1856, Leatha married her second husband Josiah Webster of Mount Zion, Maryland and had two children, Josius and Mary Alice Webster. Some of this information can be confirmed in Leatha (Howard) Webster's Manumission document from 1856 which says "At the request of Lettie Webster the following deed of manumission was recorded 3rd June 1856. To wit: To all whom it may concern, be it know that I, Brice Howard of Montgomery County in the state of Maryland, for diverse good causes and considerations me thereunto moving as also in further consideration of two hundred and fifty dollars current money to me in hand paid have released from slavery liberated manumitted and set free and by these presents do hereby release from slavery liberate manumit and set free me negro woman named Leatha Webster and her two children named Josius and Mary Alice, the said Leatha being of the age of forty years and able to work and gain a sufficient livelihood and maintenance. The said Josius being four years old the sixth of May last and Mary Alice, five months old the twelfth of May last and her the said negro woman Leatha Webster and her two children Josius and Mary Alice I do declare to be henceforth free manumitted and discharged from all manner of servitude and service to me my executors or administrators forever. In testimony, whereof I have hereunto set my hand and affixed my seal this second day of June in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and fifty six. Brice W. Howard."

As mentioned, Leatha was first married to William Howard and their children included William Henson, Martha Ann, Caroline, Thomas John, Emily and Lela/Leatha. According to a document from a descendant, Janice Harris, "In 1857, William Henson Holland took flight through the Underground Railroad and escaped to Canada. His brother, Thomas John, followed him in 1860. They both arrived in Canada safely along the same basic routes. They both found safe haven in a church in St. Catherine's [sic], Ontario, moved on to Hamilton, Ontario, on to Toronto, and subsequently settled together in Bronte. It was there that they separated. Thomas John was interested in trying his hand at business, and William had an affinity for the land and as a consequence, Thomas John remained in Bronte and went into business for himself. William Henson moved farther west and developed a farming operation near Amherstburg, Ontario. William Henson Holland met and married Margaret Felson, a full blooded Cree Indian, who had been educated by Quakers, and who subsequently taught him to read and write. Thomas John married Henrietta Short (descended from the Shorts of Port Tobacco, Charles County, Maryland), and raised two successful, prolific families who have made their presence felt in the evolution of black society in the Canadian provinces."

A further note about William Holland's journey to Canada was provided by the Bronte Historical Society which shared some information from the 1994 edition of *Oakville on the Sixteen* by Hazel C. Matthews which says that James Wesley Hill followed the North Star to Canada and settled on a farm on the 9th Line, in Oakville, south of the railway tracks. He became an agent of the Underground Railway bringing people to Oakville and gave them work on his farm to allow for them to repay their expenses. According to the Bronte Historical Society, William Holland is listed as one of the people James Wesley Hill assisted in this way.

A more detailed explanation appeared in *AFRO Magazine* in July 1977 and is titled “The story of what happened to slaves who followed the North Star on the Underground Railroad – The Holland family of Canada.” The article says “In the early 1930s Aileen Bell and her cousin, Evelyn Payne Starling started asking questions about where did they come from and who were their kin. They knew that their maternal grandfather had been a slave in Montgomery County, Maryland and had followed the North Star to Canada. They also knew that their grandfather William August Howard and his brother John changed their names from Howard to Holland when they arrived in Canada. Recently, Laura Holland of San Francisco visited Baltimore and Montgomery County, Md. To trace the family Bibles of the Howard family. In May 1977, the *AFRO Magazine* printed the story of Martha Elizabeth Howard Murphy Wife of *AFRO AMERICAN Newspaper* founder. She was the daughter of George Enoch Howard and was born in Unity, Montgomery County, January 20, 1846.”

The article continues by saying “Mrs. Laura Holland, in searching the Howard Family Bibles, was struck by the similarity of family names like Greenbury and Harriett and the facial resemblances between Howards in Canada and Howards in Maryland. The Holland Family has been traced back to Leatha, said to be of African, Portuguese and Watkins (Irish) descent. She was born a ‘Freeman.’ She married a black man, William August Howard in Montgomery County, Md. Their children were William Henson (1839-1920); Martha Ann (1840-??); Caroline (1842-1925); Thomas John (1843-1928); Emily or Emaline and Leatha/Lela. These children took the legal status of their father and were born slaves. William, when he was about 19, found out he was going to be sold further South. He decided to follow the North Star. There are two versions of his escape. In the first version, William and his brother John were assisted by an Irishman, Henry Curse. He disguised them, along with three other blacks, as his slaves and got

the five out of Maryland. They were taken to a station of the Underground Railroad and reached Canada. The second version is that William escaped alone. The plantation owner, furious at having lost his intelligent, well-grown property threatened the mother. His threat was to sell her remaining son South. John remained outwardly passive until he felt there was no longer any danger to his mother. John made his escape and in 1860, joined William in Bronte, a small village in Ontario Province, Canada.”

It continues saying “The brothers changed their slave name from Howard to Holland. William and John worked for others until they were able to buy their own land. They both loved music and had sensational voices. They were active in the colored church in Hamilton and became members of the famous Obanyan [sic] Jubilee Singers, touring Canada and the British Isles. John decided to go into business and opened a small feed and grain store. John married Henrietta Short who was born in 1855. From that marriage were William Henry Holland, Abigail, Florence, Leatha, John Christie Holland, Garnet Greenbury and Kathleen. A Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Felson lived near the farm of William Holland. Mrs. Felson was known as ‘Granny Felson’ and was described as being six feet tall, powerfully built with the features of a full-blooded [Indigenous person]. She had been reared by the Quakers and was considered an educated woman.” It is said that Margaret taught her husband William how to read and write.

The article continues by saying “William Howard married the Felson’s daughter, Margaret. Only six of their children lived to adulthood. John Augustus Holland moved to Pittsburgh, Pa. and remained unmarried. Gertrude Elizabeth Holland married William James Bell; moved to Hamilton and had three children, Aileen, Jerry and Euan. Rebecca Martine Holland moved to Chicago and married Brown W. Payne. She then moved to Washington, D.C.

then Beckley, W. Va. Harriet Holland moved to Harrow, Canada where she married Harland Johnson and had five children, Edna, Worthington, Margaret, Lloyd Felson and Betty.”

“William Chappio moved to Atlantic City, N.J. and married Jean Watson. Evelyn Howard moved to Hamilton, married Richie Wilson and had one daughter Madlyn. She later married William Sparkman and moved to Detroit.”

The article concludes by saying “The Hollands of Canada hold regular family reunions in Harrow, Ontario, Canada and most recently in July 1976 at Beckley, W. Va. At these reunions while the facts are few there are stories aplenty. The Hollands were blessed with good minds and excellent bodies along with fierce determination to be independent. Wherever they live, they share a love of the land and they have a great sense of community.”

More will be shared about William Henson and Thomas John, but first I will discuss their siblings Martha Ann, Caroline, Emily or Emanline, and Lela/Letha. Martha Ann Holland (born circa 1840) married Benjamin Thomas of Montgomery County, Maryland and settled in Holy Grove, Maryland and had at least twelve children. Caroline Holland (1842-1925) married twice, but I could only find reference to her second husband Tilghman/Tillman Mitchell of Baltimore. No further information was found for Emily, but Lela/Leatha Holland married Augustus Campbell of Montgomery County, Maryland.

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.