

Simpson Family History (James' Line) Part 3 – A Man Named “Apples”

We would like to thank Derrick McBounds and Allen Simpson for providing information and photographs that will be shared about Oswald Simpson and his line throughout this section. Oswald married Hattie Hurst, the daughter of Jonas and Harriet (Marshall) Hurst. According to Harriet Hurst's obituary “Mrs. Harriet Hurst, widow of the late Jonas Hurst, Brock street, Amherstburg, passed away at an early hour Wednesday morning, aged 72 years. She was in her usual health until Sunday, but suffered a stroke of paralysis on Monday, and the end came rapidly. Mrs. Hurst's maiden name was Harriet Marshall, daughter of the late Alexander Marshall, of Colchester South. Of the family there are two brothers and one sister – David and Hezekiah Marshall, of Colchester South and Mrs. Lucinda Mickens of Malden. She was married to Jonas Hurst and became the mother of sixteen children of whom eight survive her – Norman, Gary, Early, Charles, Mrs. Lizzie Day, Mrs. Mina Mann and Mrs. Hattie Simpson, all of Amherstburg. There are besides thirteen grandchildren. They moved from Colchester to Amherstburg 21 years ago, and Mr. Hurst died here 12 years ago. The funeral will be held at the B.M.E. church, Harrow, this (Friday) afternoon, at 3 o'clock, conducted by Rev. Ware, assisted by Rev. P. Brooks, and burial will be at the lake cemetery.”

The obituary for Hattie Hurst Simpson's father Jonas Hurst was also available and says “JONAS HURST, one of the best known colored men in Amherstburg died Thursday of last week, at the age of 58(?) Years. The funeral was held Saturday forenoon, the remains being taken to the B.M.E. church, Harrow, where services were conducted by Rev. T.W. Johnson, after which the remains were interred in the B.M.E. cemetery at Colchester village. The pallbearers were: - William Thompson, William Brantford, John Dickenson, Simon Hulbert, John Young, and James Holton. The deceased was born in Colchester South in the year 1844. He was a son of

the late Washington Hurst. He was married to Harriet Marshall and they had fifteen children, nine of whom are living. – Norman of Colchester South; Albert, Earnest, Charles, Gary, of Amherstburg; and Lizzie, Mima, Della, Hattie at home. He has two brothers, Washington and Albert, of Colchester South. He had been sick about four years with heart trouble, which later developed into dropsy, which caused his death.”

As mentioned, Oswald married Hattie Hurst who was born on October 28, 1890 in Malden, which later amalgamated with Amherstburg. On September 21, 1909, Hattie married Oswald Simpson in Amherstburg. At the time, Oswald was a 22-year-old labourer.

According to Hattie’s obituary from August 1978 “Death came to Hattie, Mrs. Oswald Simpson, Fort St., Amherstburg, Thursday in her 88th year. Her husband died in 1962. Mrs. Simpson was born in Colchester South a daughter of Jonas and Harriet Marshall Hurst. Her only son Clarence (Jake) died in 1965. She leaves 7 grandchildren and 9 great grandchildren. Rev. Lloyd Jenkins conducted the funeral in Tanner A.M.E. Church, King Street, Saturday. Burial followed in Rose Hill Cemetery.”

Both Derrick McBounds and Allen Simpson shared that Oswald had the nickname “Apples.” Allen added that Oswald Simpson was called “Apples” because he could crush an apple in the palm of his hand. Derrick also shared a great article from *Our Canada Our Country Our Stories: Inspirational Tales From the Heart and Soul of This Great Land*. The article, by Wyman Atkinson, is called “A Man Named ‘Apples’: A memorable summer spent with a real-life hero” and says “Way back in 1941 or may ’42, I experienced the most exciting summer of my life. This was back in the days before television, air conditioners, refrigerators and cellphones. Back when Borden’s milk was delivered by a horse-drawn milk wagon, as were the

25-pound blocks of ice for your icebox. Party lines were normal; we all had our own number of rings. Food tasted better. Everything was grown naturally.”

The article continues by saying “My sister Betty and I lived with my grandparents in Amherstburg, Ontario, while my mother and dad worked at John Inglis in Toronto, making guns for World War II. I had a rat terrier named Teddy and tiny metal toy soldiers to play with. The radio was our only source of entertainment. My favourite programs centred around the cowboy heroes of the day: The Lone Ranger, Hopalong Cassidy and Gene Autry – they were the good guys. You used your imagination and the Wild West magically came to life. Back then, my grandparents had what you might call a hobby farm. A black man by the name of Oswald Simpson, a.k.a. Apples, was the man who worked the land for them. He was a large man – he weighed more than 300 pounds – and he had a team of horses he called by name. Mr. Simpson would show up at sunrise and leave at sunset. He wore bib overalls and a straw hat. The work was hot and difficult. Mr. Simpson and his team would work the ground as he sat perched on a spring-loaded seat on his three-furrow plow. Back and forth, back and forth, as the sun punished all three of them.”

“For breakfast, my grandma made oatmeal porridge. This stuff would not only stick to your ribs but it could also be used in wallpapering. I didn’t much care for oatmeal porridge, so when Grandma went to her sewing room while Betty and I had breakfast, I would take my bowl and place it on the floor for Teddy to gorge himself. Thank goodness for Teddy; I ate the toast, he ate the porridge. After breakfast, Grandma would suggest I go outside and play. With straw hat in hand, I would make my way out to the field and watch Mr. Simpson. Wherever he happened to be, he would yell ‘whoa’ to the team and motion for me to come over. Once I arrived ‘Apples’

would put my hat on my head and pick me up, placing me on the back of one of his giant steeds. He told me to ‘hold onto the horse’s mane and hang on tight!’”

The article adds, “Boy, it was a long way to the ground. The smell of a horse and freshly ploughed earth are odours you never forget. It was wonderful. When Apples said ‘giddy-up,’ the two matching drafts knew it was time to work. They plodded along, ploughing their furrows, but imagination enabled me to be whomever I chose. I could pretend to be any one of my cowboy heroes. I whiled away my time in a cloud of dreams on a horse that could fly. ‘Whoa, whoa,’ Apples would shout; my dream interrupted, it was time for lunch. Apples lifted me like a feather and placed me back on earth. It’s hard to walk after you’ve been riding a horse at breakneck speed. I got my balance as I walked over to the shade of a tree. Before any lunch was eaten, Apples took care of his dutiful drafts. They came first because, as he said, ‘they worked the hardest.’ The two of us sat under the shade of the tree and ate our lunch. Oh, my, if anyone ever wondered why Apples weighed 300 pounds, I think I found the answer! Notwithstanding the fact that he had brought both his lunch and dinner, Apples unleashed a cornucopia of food. Most of it was homegrown or homemade, except for the half roll of bologna. Anything served on homemade bread is delicious.”

The article concludes, “Once lunch was finished, he would tell me to lie down and take a nap. He’d place my straw hat over my face and the next thing I knew, I’d wake up to see Apples and his horses hard at work. Now, Hollywood can have all of their cowboy radio heroes, but for me, that summer, Mr. Simpson was my real-live hero. Thank you, Apples.”

The *Amherstburg Echo* also published an interesting (although brief) story in connection to Oswald when it wrote “When Mr. and Mrs. Oswald Simpson were in Detroit this week, he

was a guest at the Joe Louis home, the world's heavy weight champion.” No other details are shared about this meeting, but how exciting it would have been to be a guest of Joe Louis.

As mentioned, Oswald and Hattie had one son named Clarence D. ‘Jake’ Simpson who was born on December 10, 1909. He married Orla Harris who was born on April 29, 1923 in Amherstburg. The couple married on Saturday, June 5, 1943 and Orla was the daughter of David Leonze Harris and Sadie Allen. According to Derrick McBounds, Hattie was also a member of the A.M.E. Church. Clarence and Orla had seven children: Marilyn (m. Carvin McBounds), Reginald (m. Sherry Wilson), Ricky, Linda (m. Artie), Allen, Clarence (m. Gladys Sims) and Darrell (m. Emma Jane Scott).

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.