

The Matthews Family History Part 5 – The Mayor of Hillsville

Now that Matthew Matthews and his descendants have been discussed, I'll move on to his sister Ellen who married Ransom Hurst circa 1844. Ransom came to Colchester through Amherstburg from Ohio, most likely before 1845 and the earliest record for Ransom and Ellen in Essex County goes back to 1851 with the Personal Census for the Township of Colchester. It lists Ransom and Ellen, along with their children: William, who was 5 at the time, Solomon (4), Hilliard (2) and Lydia/Lydy Ann (1). This Census also tells us that Ransom was a farmer who was born in the United States. At the time, he is listed as 28, meaning that he was born in roughly 1823, while Ellen was born in roughly 1831, considering she was 20 years old at the time of this Census. It is in the next Personal Census for 1861 that we see the addition of four more children: Sarah, Almeda, Ellen and Henry. This is not including four more children in the 1871 Census under the household of "Ranson Herst" which includes Emery, Caledonia, Luenda/Lucinda and Philip.

Ten years later, with the 1881 Census, there are two more children added including George (10 years old) and Almede (7), which is a similar name to Almeda, but their ages do not match up: Almeda has a birth year of 1856, while Almede was born circa 1874. This is too big of a gap in years to conclude that they are the same person, meaning that they either had similar names or Almede's name was spelt incorrectly. Additionally, some sources also state that there was a Ransom Jr., but he does not appear on the census with the rest of his family. In total Ransom and Ellen had at least 14 children: William, Solomon, Hilliard, Lydia Ann, Sarah, Almeda, Ellen, Henry, Emery, Caledonia, Lucinda, Philip, George and Almede. Sadly, the 1881 Census lists Ransom as a widower, revealing that his wife Ellen had passed away within the last ten years, between the 1871 and 1881 Census.

There is information available for nine of Ransom and Ellen's children (William, Hilliard, Sarah, Henry, Emery, Caledonia, Lucinda, George and Almede), which is what I will discuss first. The oldest child of Ransom and Ellen was William. On June 23, 1877, he married Henrietta Artis who was the daughter of Amanda and Mathew Artis. At the time, William was a farm labourer in Colchester where he was born. William was also 28 when he married, while Henrietta was 19. William's brother Hilliard is the next oldest child, but his direct line is traced the most extensively and makes up the majority of this family history, so to avoid confusion Hilliard will be discussed after his other siblings. Hilliard's sister Sarah married James George Morgan and the couple lived in Windsor, while Sarah's brother Henry was born circa 1859 in Harrow. He married Alzora Lewis on June 2, 1884 and Alzora was the daughter of Matthew and Eliza Lewis. On their marriage record, Henry is listed as a farmer and 23 years of age, while Alzora, who was also born in Harrow, was 16. Henry's brother Emery was born circa 1861, but sadly passed away at the age of 38 on September 28, 1899 in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Emery was married to Harriet "Hattie" Henry and lived in Ann Arbor, Washtenaw, Michigan.

Emery's sister Caledonia was, according to her death record, born on December 25, 1862 and later married Frank Schuran on March 23, 1914 in Detroit, Michigan. Her husband Frank was a labourer who was born on February 9, 1873 in Kansas and was the son of Henry and Eliza Schuran. Frank was 41 at the time of their marriage, while Caledonia was 42. Both Frank and Caledonia were previously married: on their marriage record Caledonia is also listed with the last name "Marshall." The same thing occurs on Caledonia's brother George's obituary which also lists her as Mrs. Marshall. Additionally, on her death record she is listed as Caledonia Bennett, meaning she married a third time. Next is Caledonia's sister Lucinda who married William Marshall and lived in Colchester South. Similar to Emery, George also passed away at a young

age. According to his March 1899 obituary, George passed away at 28 years of age and was also married. Three years before his passing he married Cora Coats and the couple had two children, one being 2 years old and the other only six weeks. George's sister Almede married Albert Lewis and lived in the Colchester Township area.

As mentioned, the majority of this family history traces the direct line of Ransom and Ellen's son Hilliard Sr., so he is discussed last to avoid confusion. Hilliard Sr. was born on March 29, 1850 in Colchester South and was quite the businessman. He purchased the Wilkes Baptist Church located in the Matthews Settlement and moved it to land he purchased on Lot 10 in Hillsville, next to the railway tracks on the 3rd Concession. This building was referred to by locals as Hilliard's Hall and was used as a space for meetings and social events, but it may also have been used as a restaurant and ice cream shop. The *Amherstburg Echo* mentions that Hilliard was to "open an ice cream parlor at Hillsville on June 12th, [1924] and will continue every Thursday and Saturday during the warm weather, selling ice cream and all kinds of soft drinks." The *Amherstburg Echo* also reported that Hilliard was opening a restaurant and it is most likely that Hilliard's Hall was the location of the restaurant and ice cream shop. After reading this you might be asking yourself, where was Hillsville? It was a name used to describe a concentration of Black residents living on the 3rd Concession. The community, according to Milo Johnson, "stretched westward, from 3rd Concession at the Richmond drain, towards the McLean Side Road, east of Walker Road; and from Roseborough, near 3rd Concession, it stretched north towards the 4th Concession." Hillsville had two main churches: Mount Calvary Church of God in Christ (Baptist Church) and Central Grove on the corner of the 4th Concession and Walker Road. Hilliard was very active in the community and was referred to as the "Mayor of Hillsville."

In addition to opening a few businesses, Hilliard was also a farmer who married Manda/Amanda Minerva Chavis who was born circa 1852 and the daughter of Wiley and Clarissa Ann (Evans) Chavis, who were married on July 5, 1841 in Clark County, Illinois. According to Milo Johnson's book, *New Canaan: Freedom Land*, "the fact that their [Clarissa and Wylie's] marriage is registered indicates they were 'Free People' living in Illinois or neighboring Indiana." Wiley and Clarissa arrived in Essex County some time between 1849 and 1852, most likely landing at Amherstburg and settling in New Canaan, Colchester North in Essex County. The 1861 Personal Census for Colchester lists Manda and her siblings which included: William, James, John, Nancy, Thomas, Eveline, Sarah, Louisa, Mary, and Theresa. Clarissa Chavis later married Henry Artis in June of 1874, so it is most likely that Wiley passed away shortly before that. It was over a decade later, in 1887, that Clarissa passed away.

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.

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.