

The Powell Family History Part 1 – The Carpenter

In last month's Matthews' family history, I shared a few details about Eldred Powell. I decided to do further research on the Powell family which will be highlighted in this month's family history. I was able to find two branches of the Powell family. The first is for Willis Powell and the second is for Lewis Powell, who is the father of the previously mentioned Eldred Powell. I could not determine whether Willis and Lewis are connected, but both resided in Essex County and are both listed on the 1861 Census as living near each other.

Willis Powell married a woman named Prilia, also referred to as July Ellen. The 1861 Census for Willis Powell lists him as 84 years old and Prilia is 73 years old, although the Census lists her as Mrs. Powell, not Prilia. The Census also mentions that Willis was a farmer. Milo Johnson's book *New Canaan – Freedom Land* shares a few more details about Willis. It says Willis was born in Virginia and Prilia escaped enslavement in Waterford, Kentucky. They relocated to Lexington, Stark County, Ohio, with their son Nathan. In roughly 1846, the Powells came to Colchester, Essex County. I was unable to find out whether Willis and Prilia had any other children, but was able to find information for their son, Nathan.

Nathan was born circa 1807 in Virginia. He married twice. His first marriage was to Eliza Crosby while they were living in Ohio. Eliza Crosby was the daughter of Caswell Crosby and Elizabeth Davis. I was able to find an obituary for Caswell Crosby in the *Amherstburg Echo* on March 30, 1894, which says "Caswell Crosby, whose death we announced last week, was born in Virginia and at the time of his death was 83 years of age. He came to Canada about 55 years ago and has resided in this township ever since. He was for years a local preacher in the B.M.E. church and his funeral took place to the church of the denomination in Harrow on Sunday of last week. His wife died about two years ago but several children are living, most of whom are in the

United States. One son Elijah, and one daughter, Mrs. Washington Hurst, are living in this township.” Eliza is not mentioned in this obituary because she passed away before 1894 when her father’s obituary was published. Nathan and Eliza had at least ten children, but according to Milo Johnson, eight of Nathan and Eliza’s children passed away shortly after Eliza’s passing. The children that survived were named Pleasant and William, and they are listed on the 1861 Census. No further information was found for them.

Following Eliza’s passing, Nathan married Mary/Martha Jane Seymour, the daughter of Malachi and Francis Seymour. According to their marriage record, they were married on December 15, 1858. I was able to find a death record for Nathan Powell, but no obituary. His death record says that he passed on February 26, 1888, in Colchester at the age of 81. It also mentions that he was a farmer. I was able to find an obituary for Nathan’s wife Martha Jane in the *Amherstburg Echo* from March 13, 1914. It says “The funeral of Mrs. Martha Jane Powell, aged 83 years, 2 months and 9 days, was held at the A.M.E. church, Central Grove, on Sunday, March 8th, at 2 o’clock p.m. Services were conducted by Rev. D.M. Lewis, pastor of the B.M.E. church, Harrow, and burial was in Gilgal cemetery. Mrs. Powell was born in Woodford county, Kentucky, on the 23rd December, 1830, and died at the home of her daughter, Mrs. Henry Harris, on the 4th con., Colchester South, Thursday. She was the daughter of Malachi and Francis Seymore, the youngest of a family of five children, namely, David, Spotswell, Nathaniel and Mary, the late Mrs. Joseph Thurman, of New Canaan. She came to Canada in 1856 and was married to the late Nathan Powell on November 30th, 1858. Her husband predeceased her 26 years ago on February 26th. There were five children born to them, all of whom are dead except Nathan S. Powell and Mary C. Harris, both of Colchester.”

Nathan and Martha Jane had at least four children named Nathan S., Martha, Mahalia and Mary. I could not find any information for Martha, but her sister Mahalia married Peter Jackson. According to the Census, their children include Julian, Eliza, William, Grace, Rebecca, Mary, Susan, Walter, and Melvine. I could not find any information for Julia, Eliza, or Walter, but found documents for the rest of their children. William's death record states that he was born on April 1, 1857 in Canada, was single, and passed away on August 20, 1924 in Ypsilanti, Michigan at the age of 67. William's sister Grace married Stephen Fleming, the son of Stephen and Harriet Fleming on August 9, 1881 in Gilgal, Essex County. Grace's sister Rebecca passed away on April 25, 1900 in Ypsilanti, Michigan. At the time, she was single and a Housekeeper. Rebecca's sister Mary married M. Harrison Banks, the son of C.P. and Adeline Banks, on November 25, 1890 in Windsor.

Mary's sister Susan married George A. Perry, the son of John Perry and Amy Simpson, on November 19, 1887 in Detroit. Susan and George's children include Willie, Ruth, Mina, and Genevieve. Sadly, Willie Perry passed away on June 15, 1905 in Ypsilanti, Michigan, shortly after his birth. Ruth Perry married John Williams, the son of William Williams and Mary Peycon, on February 2, 1918 in Jackson, Michigan. Ruth's sister Mina Perry Crowder passed away on May 3, 1947 in Jackson Michigan. Her death record mentions that she was born on May 10, 1898 in Ypsilanti, and that she was 48 years old and a widow. Her husband's first name is not mentioned, but his last name was Crowder. Mina's sister Genevieve Perry Cuyler, passed away on July 29, 1923 in Jackson, Michigan. Her death record also mentions that she was born on July 1, 1898 in Michigan and that she was married, but her husband's first name is not mentioned.

Susan's sister Melvine is the next child of Mahalia Powell and Peter Jackson. She passed away on June 17, 1910 in Ypsilanti, Michigan. She is listed as single and a 26-year old domestic. I did find a marriage record for a Malvina Jackson, age 20, and George W. Johnson (son of William H. Johnson and Carrie B. Jones) from September 9, 1902, but I could not find further evidence to determine whether this is the correct Malvina.

Now that I have discussed Mahalia, I will move on to share information about her siblings Mary and Nathan. According to the records, Mary married twice. Her first marriage was to Henry Harris, the son of George Harris and Margaret Dennis, on June 12, 1907 in Harrow. Their marriage record says that Henry was born in Chatham and he was a widower and farmer. Mary is listed as 40 years old and not previously married. The 1911 Census lists Harry and Mary, along with Henry's son Wellington and Mary's mother Martha Powell. Wellington is likely from Henry's first marriage to Celistia Matthews (see Matthews' family history - <https://amherstburgfreedom.org/matthews-family/>). I found a death record for Henry Harris from September 1, 1915, but on the record his mother's name is listed Margaret McConlin rather than Dennis which is on his marriage record. The record mentions that he was born in Chatham and was the son of George Harris. If this is the correct death record, I was able to find an obituary from the same date in the *Amherstburg Echo* which says "Henry Harris, Sr., an old resident of this township, died very suddenly Wednesday noon while sitting in his chair. He had been ailing for some time. Mr. Harris leaves a wife and family of six, his sons being settled in Detroit, Chicago and Colchester South. The funeral will take place Saturday afternoon."

As mentioned, Mary Powell Harris married a second time to William Kersey, the son of Alexander Kersey and Amanda Denmon (some records say Amanda Watters), on January 5, 1921 in Harrow. According to their marriage record, William worked as a mechanic, and both

were widowers. William was previously married to Annie Sawyer, the daughter of Thomas and Elizabeth Sawyer, and also to Armina Ann Johnson. William was born in 1852 in Terre Haute, Indiana, and came to Colchester with his parents at a young age.

There is substantial documentation on William Sr., particularly in the *Amherstburg Echo*, including a write up which states “There are 21 barns and as many or more houses in the Colchester district that were constructed under the skillful workmanship of William Kersey, Sr., who was at one time one of the best-known carpenters in the district. Maybe he was so adept at this work because he learned to manipulate saw and hammer almost as soon as he could walk. Whatever the reason he learned his trade well and now as one of the oldest residents in the township of Colchester South he can look back on a successful and unblemished career. Mr. Kersey was born in Terre Haute, Indiana, in 1852, but came to Colchester with his father and mother, Alexander and Amanda Kersey, when he was about a year old and has lived here since. His parents took up farming on the fifth concession near where the No. 14 school is now located. When he grew up he left the farm to ply his trade. He was married three times, first to Annie, daughter of Thomas Sawyer; next to Emma Daughter of James Johnson; and lastly to Mary, daughter of Nathaniel Powell. He has two sons, William, with whom he lives, and Robert of Colchester South, and one daughter, Mrs. Ada Naranjo of Lorain, Ohio. Two sisters, Mary and Rebekah, and one brother Isaiah, are dead. Mr. Kersey is a staunch member of Central Grove Methodist Church and still likes to attend the services. Although his eyesight has failed he is still able to get about by himself and is in good physical condition despite his ripe old age.”

William Sr. was also a devoted member and trustee of the Central Grove Church in Harrow and was very active in a gathering at the church called Decoration Day, which involved members of the congregation cleaning up the Central Grove cemetery. Participants were

requested to bring spades, shovels, ferns and flower seeds to beautify the property. Following the clean up bee, participants enjoyed a social which included a concert. On the committee was Superintendent of the Sunday School, A. Mulder, Treasurer, Walter Banks and Assistant Superintendent, William Kersey Sr., who just a few years later became Superintendent and manager of the clean ups. The *Amherstburg Echo* reported on these clean up bees from 1926 to at least 1933, meaning that this was an annual event for several years. William Sr.'s son, William Jr. also participated on this committee and was the Secretary. The *Amherstburg Echo* also reported on December 28, 1894 that William Kersey Sr. was also involved in a "large gathering at the Gilgal school house on Wednesday evening of last week. Wm. Kersey was chairman; Fred H.A. Davis gave an interesting address on 'Civil Rights and Social Privileges of the Colored People,'" and Gordon Day gave several guitar solos. Others contributed to the entertainment which was also a financial success."

Mary Powell Harris Kersey passed away on August 21, 1934 in Harrow. Her obituary from August 24, 1934 in the *Amherstburg Echo* which says "Mrs. William Kersey Dies – The death occurred at her home in Harrow on Tuesday morning of Mrs. William Kersey, aged colored resident. Deceased had been ill for a number of years, suffering from heart trouble. Her maiden name was Mary Powell, and she was born in Colchester South. She was twice married, the first time to Henry Harris, who died 25 years ago, and 15 years ago she was married to William Kersey, who survives her. Mrs. Kersey was a sister of the late 'Doc' Powell, well known for his herb remedies. Funeral services were held on Thursday afternoon at Central Grove Church. Rev. Bird, of Windsor, conducted the services."

A few years later, Mary's husband William Kersey passed away. His obituary appeared in the *Amherstburg Echo* on April 15, 1938 and says "A large number of mourning relatives and

friends attended the funeral of the late William Kersey held at the Central Grove Church Wednesday afternoon. The service was conducted by Rev. Henderson of Amherstburg and interment followed in the church cemetery with the following as pallbearers: M. Coates and H. Hurst. Mr. Kersey who was one of the highly respected colored residents of the community, died Monday night at his home in Harrow, aged 86 years. He was a well known carpenter but had lived retired for the past few years when his eyesight began to fail him. He was a staunch member of the Central Grove Church and was a trustee at the time of his death. Deceased was born in Terre Haute, Indiana, in 1852, but came to Colchester with his father and mother, Alexander and Amanda Kersey, when he was about a year old and has lived here since. His parents took up farming on the fifth concession near where S.S. No. 14 schoolhouse is now located. He was married three times, first to Annie, daughter of Thomas Sawyer; next to Emma, daughter of James Johnson; and lastly to Mary, daughter of Nathan Powell. Surviving him are two sons, William with whom he lived, and Robert of Colchester South, and one daughter, Mrs. Ada Naranjo of Lorain, O. Two sisters, Mary and Rebekah, and one brother, Isaiah, predeceased him.”

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 2.