

The Stephens Family History Part 1 – One of the oldest houses in Amherstburg

In last month's family history about the Gant family, an editorial written by John Gant mentions an Amherstburg resident named Ezekiel Stevens, saying "Now as for the municipal honors that have been conferred on my colored brethren here: Ezekiel Stevens served as councillor with honor attached to his record." This is what inspired me to write about the Stevens (sometimes spelt Stephens) family. Ezekiel Stevens was the son of Major Stevens and Mary Harris. *The Amherstburg Echo* printed a brief article on June 27, 1973 that looked into the past and mentions Major Stevens. It says "One of the oldest houses in Amherstburg, the old Conway house on King Street was torn down Monday. This house was built of oak logs held together by wooden pegs. Its date is 1840 and according to early records was build by Major Stephens grandfather of the John A. Foster family. About 75 years ago, George and Pearl Conway bought it from the Stephens estate and their 13 children were born there." The only other information I could find for Major and Mary (Harris) Stevens was in the 1861 Census which lists Major Stephens and wife Mary, along with two of their sons Ezekiel and Joseph. The census also records that Major worked as a labourer. Major and Mary had several children including William, Ezekiel, Joseph, Sarah, LeAnna, Mary and Martha. I was unable to find any information for Mary or LeAnna, except that LeAnna died in Detroit according to Ezekiel's obituary.

Although there was not any information for LeAnna and Mary, I was about to find information for William, Ezekiel, Joseph, Sarah and Martha. Let's start with William. He married Ann Swatman. Their children were Fannie, Eliza, William, George, and Mary Kate. Sadly, George died in infancy and Mary Kate passed away at age 15. Based on the Census records, it appears that Mary Kate passed away between 1871 and 1881 because she appears in

the former, but not the latter. Before discussing their other children, I will share a few more details about William and Ann. According to his death record, William passed away on February 3, 1886 in Amherstburg. His death record states that he was born circa 1827 in Colchester and worked as a labourer. William's obituary which was printed in the *Amherstburg Echo* on February 5, 1886, shares more details. It says "Another Old Resident Gone. Wm. Stephens of this town, died at the family residence, Brock street, Wednesday of this week. Deceased was the eldest son of Major Stephens, and was born in Colchester about the time of the rebellion in '37. He was married in Amherstburg in 1851 to Miss Ann Swatman and their family consisted of five children, three sons and two daughters. Three of these, (Mrs. Fannie Caldback of Parker, Dakota, Mrs. Joseph Lester and William, of this town), as well as the widow, survive. Those deceased are George who died in infancy, and Mary Kate when aged 15 years. Ezekiel and Joseph of Amherstburg, and Mrs. Harris, of Adrian, Mich.m brothers and sister of deceased, are still living. Mr. Stephens injured himself while lifting, last June, so that he has been suffering ever since, gradually falling all the time, though he was confined to his bed but eight days. The funeral will take place today (Friday) at 2 p.m. Rev. A.S. Falls, A.B., will conduct the funeral service at the family residence, from where the remains will be conveyed to the Amherstburg cemetery."

I was also able to find Ann Swatman Stephens death notice in the *Amherstburg Echo* from April 26, 1907 which says "STEPHENS – In Colchester North, at the residence of her daughter, Mrs. Joseph Lester, Tuesday, April 14th, Mrs. William Stephens, of Amherstburg, aged 67 years."

As mentioned, I was able to find information for three of William and Ann Stevens' children: Fannie, Eliza, and William. Fannie married Robert Samuel Caldback and lived in South Dakota. According to *Find a Grave*, Robert Samuel Caldback was born in Ireland and their

children included Kathleen, Minnie, and Robert. Kathleen Isabelle Caldbeck Hulke married to Otto Hulke and they had a daughter named Marcella C. Hulke Lorenz. Minnie Elizabeth Caldbeck Calhoun married Edgar Woodruff Calhoun on July 6, 1910. Their children include Loilla Margaret Calhoun Ferguson who married Thomas Crawford Ferguson and Robert Edgar Calhoun who married Dorothy Rae Price in 1939. Robert Emmett Caldbeck married Pearl Ethel Caldbeck.

William and Ann (Swatman) Stevens' next child is Eliza. She married Joseph Lester, the son of Joseph and Emma Lester, on October 9, 1878 in Amherstburg. The children include Ada, Charles, Frances, William, Rosey, Annie, John, Jessie, and Joseph. Ada married George Watson Aphony, the son of George Aphony and Catherine Luckingham, on February 19, 1902 in Amherstburg. Charles was born on July 22, 1881 and according to his death announcement from *The Windsor Daily Star* on January 22, 1959, "LESTER – Charles, 76 years, Jan. 22, 1959, at his residence, 107 Seymour St., Amherstburg. Husband of the late Honor Lester. Dear father of Mrs. Ernest Cadarette (Alice), Amherstburg; Kenneth, St. Thomas. Dear brother of John, William and Joseph Lester. Colchester North; 5 grandchildren; 6 great-grandchildren. Resting at the James. H. Sutton Funeral Home, Sandwich and Gore Sts., Amherstburg."

Charles' sister Frances was born on September 2, 1887 in Amherstburg. She later married William Couch, the son of John Couch and Mary Aikens, on March 19, 1913. Frances' brother William was born on March 23, 1890 in Amherstburg. I also found a second birth record for William B. Lester for May 22, 1892 in Kingsville. Both records list him as the son Joseph Lester and Eliza Stevens. William's sister Rosey was born on May 26, 1893 in Colchester North, while her sister Annie was born on May 3, 1896, also in Colchester North. Their brother, John Kent Lester, was born on January 28, 1898. His death announcement from *The Windsor Star* from

February 26, 1979, states “– LESTER – John K., 81 years, February 23, 1979, at I.O.D.E. Hospital, late of 110 Albert St., Essex. Dear son of the late Joseph Lester (1947). Dear brother of the late Charles, Joseph, William, Mrs. George Ciphery, Mrs. William Couch and Mrs. George Woods. Resting at the Stewart L. Kennedy Funeral Home.”

John’s sister Jessie is next. She married twice. First to Frank Piper, the son of Frank Piper and Sarah Davis, on August 31, 1904 in Gesto (Essex County) and then to George Woods, son of Charles Woods and Sarah Wilson. They married on May 20, 1915 in Windsor. In this document Jessie is referred to as Jessamine. Jessie passed away on January 12, 1931 in Windsor. According to her death announcement which was printed in *The Amherstburg Echo* on January 16, 1931, “WOOD – In Hotel Dieu, Monday, January 12th, 1931, Mrs. George Wood, of Gosfield North, aged 47 years. She was taken to the hospital that same day at one o’clock, for an operation, and passed away at seven o’clock that evening. She was a daughter of Joseph Lester, of Colchester North, and is survived by her husband and one son.”

Jessie’s brother Joseph David Lester is the last child of Joseph Lester and Eliza Stevens. He married Lillian Russell Sherrill, the daughter of William Sherrill and Alice Raymond, on April 5, 1915. Joseph’s passing was reported in *The Windsor Star* on November 19, 1966 and said “LESTER – Joseph David, 81 years, Nov. 17. Late residence 9th Concession, Colchester North. Beloved husband of Lillian. Dear father of Abraham, John and Gordon, Colchester North; Donald, at home; Joseph and Robert of Essex. Brother of John, Colchester North; 14 grandchildren, 4 great-grandchildren ... Interment Rosehill Cemetery, Amherstburg.” An obituary was also printed in *The Windsor Star* which said “LESTER – Joseph David, 81, of Concession 9, Colchester North Township, died at home Thursday. Mr. Lester was born in Amherstburg and lived in Colchester North all his life. He was a retired farmer. Surviving are his

wife, Lillian (nee Sherrill); sons, Donald, at home, Joseph and Robert, both of Essex, Abraham, John and Joseph, all of Colchester North; a brother, John of Colchester North.”

According to her death record, Eliza Stevens Lester passed away on July 27, 1919 in Colchester North. Her obituary from the August 8, 1919 edition of the *Amherstburg Echo* states “The death of Mrs. Joseph Lester occurred at the family home on the Blight farm near Gesto on Sunday last. Deceased had been in poor health for two years past from Addison’s disease, and had been in a serious condition for two weeks past, so that her death was not unexpected.

Deceased was in her 63rd year, and was born in Amherstburg, her maiden name being Eliza Stevens. She was married about 40 years ago to Mr. Lester, and they resided in this township for about 30 years. The funeral was held on Tuesday afternoon with services at the family home conducted by Rev. Joseph James, and interment in North Ridge cemetery. The pallbearers were: Jos. Calhoun, Jos. Huggins, Harvey Fick, Thos. Bullock, M. Wagner. Deceased is survived by her husband and three sons, Joseph, William, and Charles, and three daughters, Mrs. George Wood of Gosfield North; Mrs. Wm. Church, of Colchester North, and Mrs. G.W. Ciphery, of Kearney, Ont.” I could not find an obituary for Eliza’s husband Joseph, but the Death Announcement for their son John Kent Lester reveals that Joseph passed away in 1947.

The last child of William Stevens and Ann Swatman is William. He married Rachel Collison, the daughter of George and Emma Collison, on August 25, 1884 in Amherstburg. *The Amherstburg Echo* printed an announcement about their wedding on August 29, 1884 which said “STEPHENS – COLLISON – On Monday, August 25th, at the Rectory, by the Rev. Alex. S. Falls, A.B., Mr. William B. Stephens, to Miss Rachael Collison, all of Amherstburg.” Based on the 1901 Census record, William and Rachel had the following children: Emelia E., Miles W., Felix B., Edward E., Kate V., and Henry J.” The marriage record for Hester Amelia Stevens,

says that she married Reginald Charles G. Williams, the son of William Williams and Lucy Watt, on November 11, 1904. She married a second time. The marriage record for Esther Amelia Williams says she married Thomas Arthur Lambert, the son of George Lambert and Agnes Cameron, on July 10, 1919 in Windsor.

Esther/Hester Ameila's brother Felix Benson Stevens was born on October 15, 1893 in Amherstburg, while Felix's brother Edward Earle Stevens was born on February 7, 1896. Edward later married Gladys May Nohl (possibly Nall) the daughter of Alex. Nohl and Emma Vroman, on April 29, 1921 in Montrose, Michigan. Edward's sister Kate Viola Stevens was born on May 14, 1898 in 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 for part 2.