

The Henderson Family History Part 4 – Military Hero

I will now continue by discussing Jesse Henderson, the next child of Thomas Jesse and Bertha Henderson. Jesse was born on April 17, 1909 in Amherstburg. On July 21, 1951, it was reported “Henderson - Davis married at the B.M.E. Church in Windsor by Rev. I.H. Edwards, Jesse Henderson, son of Rev. J.A. and Bertha Anne (Talbot) Henderson, of Amherstburg, to Enith Davis, daughter of William and Isabella C. (Tucker) Davis, of Somerset, Bermuda.”

Elise shared that Jesse was a reporter for the Michigan Chronicle and later worked at Ford Motor Company. Jesse also bravely served during WWII, after enlisting on August 28, 1942. He served in locations such as Belgium, France, Sicily, and Germany. While serving, he saved the life of Lieutenant Mike Young after he was buried by an artillery shell. Jesse was discharged on November 15, 1945, and was awarded several medals including the 1939-1945 Star, The Italy Star, The France & Germany Star, and The Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp. These medals are on display in the Amherstburg Freedom Museum’s permanent gallery.

An article from *The Amherstburg Echo* titled “Writes From Italy” includes letters from Jesse to his mother. The article says “Mrs. Bertha Henderson, George Street, has had several short letters from her son Gunner Jesse Henderson who is attached to the Royal Canadian Artillery in Italy. In one letter Gunner Henderson told his mother that he was the only colored boy in the company and that the officers were very nice to him. A more recent letter mailed September 16 and received October 15 says: ‘I was glad to hear from you. Tell all the folks and Mrs. McGregor hello. It is nice to hear that everything is alright. I was glad to know that a few folks back home asked about me. I am now somewhere in Italy and the weather has been fine. Am well and doing fine.’ Some time before she received the letters mentioned above Mrs. Henderson got a very small (3”x4”) form card from her son date July 21 with such terse

sentences as, 'I am quite well,' 'I have been admitted to hospital,' 'Received your letter, telegram, and parcel dated – etc.' The sender marked out the sentence not required and signed his name only. Gunner Henderson is a graduate of the General Amherst High School and before enlistment was employed at the Auto Specialties Mfg. Co., Windsor." On October 4, 1945, *The Amherstburg Echo* reported Gunner Jesse A.L. Henderson among the Servicemen who arrived home.

Decades later, *The Windsor Star* printed an extensive writeup about Jesse titled 'Jesse's Story.' This article from August 4, 1987 says "White-haired Jesse Henderson, at 78 still strong and with perfect eyesight, attributes a long, full life to his belief in God. 'I figured I would place myself in God's hands,' Jesse says, as he recalls moments of his youth with an anti-aircraft unit of the Royal Canadian Artillery. The time was the Second World War. 'I was in Belgium, France, Sicily, Germany – all over northwest Europe – and was very lucky.' He got through without a scratch. 'I got Lt. Mike Young out from under a pile of dirt when he was buried by a shell. He was white as a ghost by he made it.' Jess, or Uncle Jess, as he is known by just about everyone in town, is proud of his heritage. His grandparents, Catherine and George Henderson, were runaway slaves from Virginia. 'The Wigle family in Kingsville helped him (grandfather Henderson) get an education,' Jesse says. They also gave his grandfather a 20-hectare farm. Jesse was still a youngster when his grandmother died, so, he has few memories about her. 'I only want to tell what's true,' he says, adding that some of what he recalls are 'only tales. But I do know that her word was bond. When she said something, she was as good as her word.' Jesse's father, Thomas Jesse Henderson, was a circuit preacher who packed in a crowd whenever he sermonized at the 150-year-old First Baptist Church, 232 George St., where Jesse himself has been a deacon for 50 years. In those days, you had to get there early to find a seat. Today only about 25 families are

church members. His preacher-father travelled and delivered sermons through Dresden, Chatham and even Michigan. While Jesse was still a youngster, his father took the family – one sister and six brothers – to Washington, D.C. Mother and children ended up back in Amherstburg and Thomas Jesse died in 1949 away from the family. Today, only Jesse and sister Rena Evans survive, but Jesse's late brother, Roland had 10 children. Jesse married Enith Davis 36 years ago [Elise was the flower girl] and they live on George Street, in the house where Jesse was born in 1909. One of Jesse's first jobs was as a correspondent for the Detroit Independent, a newspaper then widely read by blacks. He wrote stories from Windsor, Amherstburg and Sandwich, and delivered papers to 250 local customers. 'I gave that job up in the '30s.' Until his retirement, Jesse worked as an oilman at Ford Motor Co. He has watched the town grown and change. But Jesse says there still remains 'our togetherness. I have friends from way back when I was a kid. 'Sure, we had our fights, me and some of the Catholic boys in town. Today, we see each other and we laugh at how we were.'"

Jesse Henderson was not only known for his military service as he was also a deacon at the Amherstburg First Baptist Church. On March 5, 1986, *The Amherstburg Echo* reported that he was honoured for his service to the church. The article titled 'Deacons honored for century of service' says "Two deacons of the First Baptist Church on George Street in Amherstburg were honoured recently for a combined century of service to the local place of worship. Jesse Henderson and William Brown have been serving as deacons with the church for 48 years apiece, and were presented with plaques in recognition of their dedication to their fellow parishioners.

Jesse passed away on August 27, 1992 and his obituary from *The Windsor Star* says "HENDERSON – Jesse Arlington Louis, 82 years, August 27th, 1992 at Richmond Terrace

Nursing Home, late of Amherstburg after a lengthy illness. Mr. Henderson was the beloved husband of Enith A. (Davis); Dear brother of Rena. Dear brother-in-law of Luther Evans of Detroit; Katherine Henderson of New Jersey; Iona Richardson; Hilda & Iris Davis of Bermuda. Dear friend of Dr. Olivia Tucker, Bermuda; Rosalind Trotman and Densmore Davis of Bermuda. Also survived by many nieces and nephews and many many friends. Mr. Henderson was a Deacon at the First Baptist Church Amherstburg for 56 years, he enlisted in the Canadian Army August 28, 1939 and served until November 1945, served in the United Kingdom and Central Mediterranean Theatres as a gunner. He was the recipient of 5 medals of honor, very active in the Black Museum and Golden Age Club in Amherstburg ... Mr. Henderson will lie in state at the church from 11 a.m. till time of service at 1p.m.”

Jesse’s wife Enith was the daughter of William Alexander and Isabella Churchill (Tucker) Davis of Bermuda. According to Elise, Enith was a beloved figure in Amherstburg. She worked for Mr. Marsh from *The Amherstburg Echo* and was regularly spotted on her walks throughout Amherstburg. Elise also shared that Enith assisted in putting together the very first exhibit in the North American Black Historical Museum (now the Amherstburg Freedom Museum) the night before it opened. Enith also won the Ontario volunteer award for 25 years of service to her community. She was also the President of the Golden Age Club and a member of the Amherstburg Travel Club. Interestingly, Enith liked to travel home to Bermuda and would bring treats to and from each location. On October 4, 1972, *The Amherstburg Echo* wrote “As a treat from the Sun-parlor of Canada, when Mrs. Jesse Henderson flew to her parental home in Bermuda a few weeks ago she took along an 11 quart basket of peaches and tomatoes. Mrs. Henderson said laughingly that she had offers of purchase on the plane, and also when she arrived ‘at home.’ We here take such delicious fruits and vegetables as a matter of course, but

elsewhere they are almost gourmet items.” A few years later on December 3, 1975 *The Amherstburg Echo* reported a different trip where “Bermuda brought home by Mrs. Jesse Henderson has been a treat. This honey has an unusual but delectable taste. Delicious on hot tea biscuits or toast.”

Enith passed away on March 15, 2005 which was reported in *The Windsor Star*. Her obituary says “HENDERSON, Enith (nee Davis) May 24, 1910 – March 15, 2005 Passed gently into Gods arms at Hotel-Dieu Grace Hospital at the age of 94. Beloved wife of the late Jesse Arlington Henderson (1992). Cherished daughter of the late William Alexander and Isabella Churchill (Tucker) Davis of ‘Daviston Heights’ Bermuda. She is survived by her sister Iris Davis of Bermuda, and predeceased by four siblings.”

The last member of the Henderson family to be discussed in Rena, the last child of Thomas Jesse Henderson and Bertha Ann Talbot. Rena also worked as a nurse after training in Michigan. It’s important to note that Black women could not train to be nurses in Canada until 1948. Her first marriage was to Albert Barrett and their marriage announcement from July 1, 1938 in *The Amherstburg Echo* said “Barrett – Henderson Wedding – A pretty summer wedding was solemnized at the home of Mrs. T.J. Henderson, George Street, Amherstburg, Saturday evening at 8 o’clock when her only daughter Rena Marie was united in marriage to Albert Barrett, son of Alvin Barrett of Detroit. Rev. I.H. Edwards, of the First Baptist Church, Amherstburg, performed the ceremony. The bride was prettily attired in a wedding dress of white lace over satin fashioned on long lines. Her veil was of tulle and was caught to the head with a wreath of orange blossoms. Her bouquet was of blue delphinium and white carnations. Mrs. Idella Small of Sandwich was matron of honor and wore blue organdie; Miss Gloria Alexander of North Buxton, maid of honor, wore blue crepe de chene; and Miss Ruth Henderson of

Windsor, bridesmaid, wore pink volle. During the ceremony Mrs. William Burnie of the St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church choir, Windsor, and her daughter Annie rendered a vocal duet, and Miss Janetta Woodcock of Windsor sang a solo. Mrs. Florence Monteer of Sandwich played the Wedding March and accompanied the vocalists. Following the ceremony a buffet lunch was served and later in the evening the couple left for Detroit where they took the boat to Cleveland. On their return they will reside in Detroit." Elise adds that they had one son who died in infancy.

Rena was married to her second husband Luther Evans, the son of David Evans and Lurenda Tramble, on October 11, 1947 in Ohio. Luther Evans was a Tuskegee Airman. Luther was a mechanic and he and Rena were stationed in Arizona.

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.