

The Harding Family History Part 2 –The Freedom Seeker

Now that I have discussed Martha Harding, I will move on to share information about her brother William. He was first married to Elizabeth Williams, the daughter of Richard and Jane Coleman, on December 5, 1879 in Kent, Ontario. Witnesses included William's sister Lavina and her husband Henry Enos. William and Elizabeth had a daughter named Kathleen. William also married Rachel Madison, daughter of George and Laura Madison, on July 3, 1909 in Detroit. Elise contributed an article titled "Essex County Haven for Slaves" to *The Windsor Star* (June 5, 1986) which includes more details about Rachel's father George Madison. It says "Madison was born into slavery in 1823, the son of a slave master in Missouri, and was granted his freedom before the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863. At the age of 21, he left for Detroit where he sold fish in order to raise enough money to buy freedom for his wife and four children. Madison kept his father's surname even after obtaining freedom. The Madison's fifth child, Rachel, was born after the couple settled in Dresden, Ont. She later married William Harding, a train porter from Buxton, and bore 3 sons, including Davis' father, Morris."

The 1931 Census lists Rachael as widowed, meaning that William passed away before 1931. This is confirmed by William's death record from May 23, 1920 in Raleigh, Kent County. This record also states that William was an "Occupation Machinist helper" and that he was born on December 25, 1865 in Peel Township. On June 9, 1920, *The Border Cities' Star* published a "Card of Thanks" which says, "Mrs. Rachel Harding and sons, wish to thank their friends and neighbors for their kindness and floral offerings during the sad bereavement of her husband, William Harding, who died May 23rd, 1920."

William's wife Rachel lived to be 88 years old. On January 23, 1959, *The Windsor Daily Star* reported "Close friends celebrated Mrs. Rachel Harding's 88th birthday with her at her

home, with her son and daughter-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. George Harding of Windsor Ave. Among the guests at the Harding home Thursday afternoon were Rev. and Mrs. I.H. Edwards, Mrs. Susan Garrel, Mrs. Jack Richardson, Mrs. Ted Talbot, and Mrs. James Stewart.”

Sadly a few months later, on August 20, 1959, *The Windsor Daily Star* shared Rachel’s obituary which says “Mrs. William Harding – Mrs. Rachel Harding, 88, of 1136 Windsor Ave., died Wednesday at her residence after a short illness. A native of Dresden, she lived in Windsor 49 years. She was a member of the British Methodist Episcopal Church Missionary Society. Her husband, William, died in 1920. Surviving are three sons, George and Morris, Windsor, and William, Owen Sound; seven grandchildren and one great-grandchild. The body will be at the Windsor Funeral Home, 411 Riverside Dr. E. until 10 a.m. Saturday. Funeral services will be held at the British Methodist Episcopal Church at 2 p.m. Saturday, Rev. E.A. Richardson will officiate. Burial will be in Green Lawn Memorial Cemetery.”

Elise shared a few more details about Rachel Harding. She states that Rachel Harding was married at thirteen years old to Hence Chase, which was a marriage arranged by Rachel’s father. Elise adds that Rachel was a midwife and helped raise the children of Albemy Janisse (funeral home owner). Elise also shared that Rachel taught her that cobwebs were good to stop bleeding. Additionally, she was a founding member of the Hour-A-Day Study Club and was a member of the British Methodist Episcopal Church Missionary Society and the Sewing Bee. A window in her memory can be seen at the present B.M.E. Church in Windsor.

William and Rachel’s children include George, William, and Morris. I was only able to find a few documents for George and William, so I will share information about them first.

George is listed in the 1921 and 1931 Census. He is listed as a cook in a hotel. George was also a

cook on Great Lakers Steamers and was a janitor at Kodak Camera Company in Detroit, Michigan. George married Luise Hudson from South Carolina. They had no children.

George's brother William Robert Harding was born on December 17, 1911 in Windsor. He married Frances May Molock Harding. William became a Stationary Engineer after his stint in the Royal Canadian Army and later drove for Greyhound Bus lines. Frances' obituary was published in the *Windsor Star* on August 24, 2006. It says "Peacefully at the Grey Bruce Regional Health Services in Owen Sound on Monday, August 21, 2006, in her 93rd year. Frances May Harding (nee Molock) the beloved wife of the late William Harding. Loving mother of Terry and his wife Pauline, and George and his companion Karen Steward. Loving grandmother of George, Lisa, Kim, Terry, Randy, Tina, Chris, Kevin, William, Tanya and Teri Anne. Great grandmother of 22 great grandchildren. Fondly remembered by her sisters-in-law Leona Molock and Doris Molock. Predeceased by her brothers George, Gordon and Don, and by her sister Gladys (Mrs. Lawrence Smith). Also fondly remembered by her nieces Maureen Mulder, Elise Harding-Davis, Shelley Harding-Smith and Jaynelle Harding."

Elise adds that "Frances was a renowned pianist and singer. She was on the Board of the Owen Sound Hospital and was instrumental in keeping the Emancipation Celebrations going in Owen Sound for over 30 years." I searched the website for The Grey Roots Museum and Archives, and it includes further information about Frances. It says "Frances Harding was formerly Miss Frances Molock of Owen Sound, Ontario. She was descended from the Molock family, an African-Canadian family. Her father, George Wesley Molock, worked as a Cook. He had married Mary Le Burtis at Collingwood, Ontario, on May 7, 1909. They had a daughter Mary born Oct. 5, 1912 at 242 11th St. West, Owen Sound. Frances was born in 1914. Her other siblings were George Molock ..., Gordon Molock ... and Donald Molock ... The Molock family

residence at Owen Sound was built on land purchased in 1884 by Francis Ebenzer Molock from William Manners. Francis and his wife raised their family there, on Beech Street (after 1909, it was known as 242 11th St. West. Francis Ebenezer Molock had escaped from slavery in Maryland in 1856, and with assistance of the Underground Railroad, and abolitionist William Still, made his new home in Canada, arriving in Owen Sound ... In the 1930s, Frances was a member of the Sea Island Merry Makers band, that played in Owen Sound. This group had [B]lack musicians ... She was mentioned in a c. 1933 article about a concert that featured the group ... Frances married William (Bill) Harding of Windsor. They had two sons, George William Gordon Harris Harding, and Terry Robert Lawrence Harding.” According to Elise, son George worked for many years for Kentucky Fried Chicken in Owen Sound and Terry was in the Canadian Armed Forces.

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 3.