

The Paul and Hutchinson Families

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Two other servants who eventually came to live with the Silverthorns of Cherry Hill after Dinah Green were Lettie and Fanny Paul. Fanny, or “Old Fan” as she came to be known, had been born in the United States around 1832, arrived to live with the Silverthorns in Dixie around 1861.¹ According to Hicks, there is record of her trying to get married at Dixie Union Church, but they wouldn’t marry them because she was black.² She was never married, however at some point she was left with an illegitimate daughter, Lettie Paul, born around 1871-72. These two women worked and lived at the Silverthorn’s house until the death of Fanny, and the marriage of Lettie in 1894. Legend has it that Fanny was famous for her salt raising biscuits and the recipe died with her. It seems that they were loved by the community. One only needs to read the newspaper clipping of Lettie’s wedding to know this is true.

“On Wednesday September 15th at 5 o’clock at the pretty little church of St. John was a day to be long remember by those whose happy lot of fell to be there. It was the marriage of Ms. Lettie Paul, (coloured) to Mr. Wm. Hutchinson (coloured) of Toronto. The bride was attired in a red cashmere dress, tan shoes and hose, drab hat and a smiling countenance. The groom wore a black suit, dude pants, open vest, Prince Albert coat, knock-about hat, red tie and piccadilly shoes. The knot was tied by the Rev. Ralph Hinds. The church was crowded to the doors. There were people from all parts of the section, some came them a distance of five miles to pay their respect to one of our esteemed citizens. After the knot was securely tied, and the newly married were proceeding to the residence of the bride’s guardian, at Cherry Hill, they were literally covered with showers of rice and good wishes. Arriving at the house, they were seated to a very sumptuous spread of all the delicacies of the season, after which they were escorted to the C.P.R. depot by a number of friends. At the station there were nearly one hundred people to wish them bon voyage and much joy as they stepped on the express to spend their honeymoon in Toronto, Oakville and other inland towns, after which they will return and take up house keeping in Mr. Robt. Pallett’s villa on the Middle Road, east of Corn Dilley Valley.”³

The Silverthorns are her “guardian” in this depiction, not her employer or her boss. It seems that she was a greatly respected member of the community, not simply a servant of one of the prominent families. As the census data shows, she lived with them since she was a small child, was maybe even born there, and was a member of the family.

¹ Kathleen Hicks, “The Life and Times of the Silverthorns of Cherry Hill” 230.

² Ibid

³ Wedding Announcement, *The Brampton Conservator*, 20 Sept 1894, page 1, column 3. Indexed by Beettam, Margaret -- [Oakville, Ont.] : Halton/Peel Branch O.G.S., c1989, Period of Coverage: 18 Oct 1876- 26 Dec 1889. Referenced at the Region of Peel Archives, Brampton, Ontario.

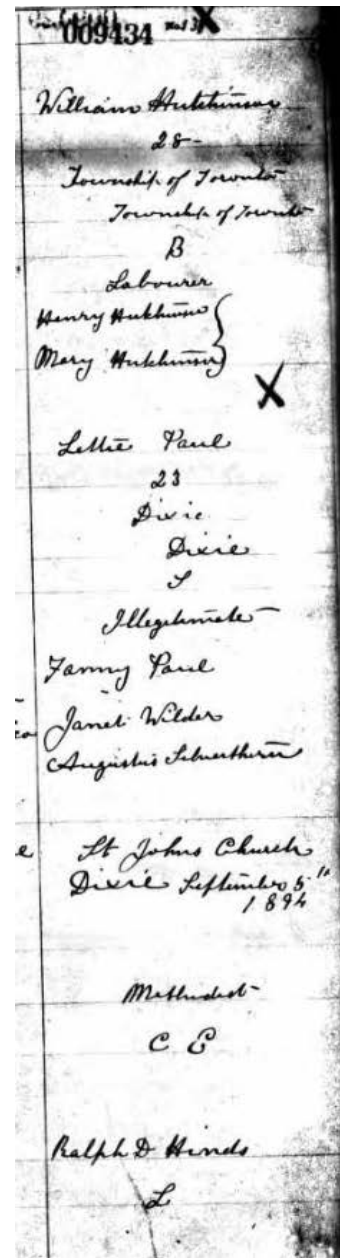
By 1871, patriarch Henry had passed away, and his widow and several children had moved to Oakville. The family listed in the Oakville census of 1871 included Isabella, now a widow, and her children James, William, Julia, Margaret and Annie. The eldest daughter, Jane, was already married and living elsewhere. By 1881, only brothers Joseph and William remained at home with their mother. In 1890 Isabella was living in Toronto, and her daughter Annie was employed as a domestic servant. It is believed that Isabella died in Toronto around 1892.

The eldest Hutchinson child, Jane, and her husband George Coursey (1831-1894), lived in Oakville, raised six children, and are buried at St. Jude's Cemetery. They were members of the African Episcopal Methodist Church (Turner's Chapel) in Oakville after it was founded in 1891.

Sibling Mary Elizabeth ("Margaret") and her husband, Frank Howard (1855-1893), lived in York with their four children, and brother James Hutchinson and his wife Mary Pierce, lived in Toronto and Oakville over time. James passed away in the House of Refuge (Peel Manor) in Brampton in 1942 at the age of 98 and was buried in the adjacent cemetery (Eventide Cemetery).

So, what happened to William and Lettie? After their 1894 wedding here in historic Mississauga and the reference to setting up housekeeping at the "villa" of the aging Robert Pallett (1828-1906), they seemingly disappear from records. Or at least Canadian records...

By 1902, they were living in Pittsburgh, in a house on Francis Street, which was an area of the city where many Black "day labourers" who worked in the steel mills lived. One article from the 1920s referred to area as the "Francis Street Projects", highlighting the difficult financial and social circumstances of residents in the area. Nearby, at the intersection of Wylie Avenue and Francis Street in Pittsburgh, an African Methodist Episcopal Church was built in 1902-03, known as the Trinity A.M.E. Church., and is said to have been the hub of a large Black community in Pittsburgh.



Right: Hutchinson-Paul Wedding Registration, 1894

Why William and Lettie left historic Mississauga and resettled in Pittsburgh is unknown, but perhaps highlights the lack of security – keeping house for the aged Robert Pallett was not likely a guaranteed long-term employment option – and job prospects for many early Black families may well have been scarce. Pittsburgh was home to some of the largest steel mills in the world, and between 1901 and 1910, they were rapidly expanding. There were dozens of steel mills, and they employed hundreds of thousands of workers, many of whom were Black. Black workers faced discrimination, racism, dangerous working conditions, and received lower wages, but were able to find jobs, and large Black communities developed. Was this William’s story? We do not know, but the place and time perhaps suggests the possibility.

Sadly, we have come to learn that the story of William and Lettie was not a happy one. Lettie gave birth to a son, James Herbert Hutchinson, on April 6, 1902. Unfortunately, James Herbert died on September 5, 1902. The heartbreaking loss of a child was far too common.

Lettie herself died only a few years later, on September 14, 1905, at the age of 32. She was buried in Highwood Cemetery in Pittsburgh. Lettie’s grave is unmarked, much like that of her mother, Fanny, who is believed to be buried in the Silverthorn plot at Dixie Union Cemetery here in Mississauga. What little we know of both mother and daughter gives a glimpse into the lives of, and challenges faced by, many early Black residents. Admittedly there is much that we still do not know.

As for Lettie’s husband, William Hutchinson, to date we have been unable to positively find him after 1905.

1. Full name of child,	James Herbert Hutchinson			✓	OK
2. Sex,	Male				
3. Color,	Black				
4. Full name of father,	William Hutchinson				
5. His occupation,	Laborer				
6. His birthplace,	Canada				
7. Full name of mother,	Lettie Hutchinson				
8. Her birthplace,	Canada				
9. Date of birth of the child,	April 6 th	1902			
10. Where born,	No. 12 Francis	avenue, street,	13 th ward,		
11. Date of return,	July 1 st	1902			
12. Name of physician or other person signing return,	Dr. Aaron M. D.				
13. His or her office or residence,	No. 2254 Mylic	avenue, street,	13 th ward,		
14. Date of registration,	September 22 nd	1902			

Above: James Herbert Hutchinson Birth Record, Pittsburgh, 1902