

This is A Few Forgotten Women Story



This story was written, in November 2023, as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of women who studied at The Grange School of Housewifery in Street, Somerset.

Bessie Louisa Bennett's Story

Bessie Louisa Bennett was born 7 July 1885 in Long Sutton, Somerset, England. She was the first daughter born to Hezekiah Bennett and Susan Sams. [1]

Hezekiah was born 1850 in Podymore Milton, Somerset and was established as a shoe and boot maker, a trade obtained as an apprentice under his father. [2] His wife, Susan, was born in Long Sutton and baptised on 3 February 1850 at the parish church, Holy Trinity [3]. They were married in the same church on 19 September 1872. [4]

Hezekiah and Susan were residing on Harsland's Row in Long Sutton. By the year 1881, they had been graced with four sons - William John, Albert, Edwin and George Edward. [5] William John

was baptised on the 26 January 1873 and Albert on the 27 June 1875 at Holy Trinity Church. Brothers Edwin and George were baptised at a later date along with their three additional siblings, Jessie [born 7 December 1882]; Bessie Louisa [born 7 July 1885]; and Alice May [born 14 February 1888]. [6] The baptisms were held at Holy Trinity Church on 27 May 1888.

Hezekiah was respected in his community. In 1891 he was one of six highest candidates elected for Council under the Parish Council Act for Long Sutton. This is a position he held until his death. [7]

Bessie Louisa Bennett attended The Grange School of Housewifery . She was fifteen years old when she was a pupil studying 'house work' in 1901. [8] The school opened in 1897. The objective of such education was to provide skills valuable in running a household, either as a homemaker or as a paid servant. Classes included household routines; needlework (mending and darning); hand-labour (making beds, house and furniture cleaning), cookery, household accounts and nursery training. Upon completion the student received a Certificate in Housewifery. It is not known if Bessie used her training in the workplace after graduation. [9]

Twenty-four year old Bessie married William Lawrence at Holy Trinity Anglican Church on Tuesday, March 15th, 1910. Witnesses to their nuptials consisted of Bessie's family members; her sister Alice, brothers William and Jessie, and her future sister-in-law, Bessie Beatrice Sheppard. William was a 'rock driller' as per the marriage registration. [10]

Prior to the wedding, the young couple made the decision to emigrate to Canada to start their married life together. Six weeks after the ceremony, they boarded the S.S. Virginian on 29 April 1910 from the Port of Liverpool.

Travelling across the Atlantic Ocean to the mouth of the Saint Lawrence River, they arrived in Montreal on the 7th of May. Once the necessary paperwork was complete and their worldly possessions were retrieved from the Allan Line Steamship Company, the adventure continued on the Canadian Pacific Railway heading west to their final destination, Toronto, Ontario. [11]

William had found employment as a 'builder' and Bessie used her training skills as a homemaker. On 29 September 1911, at their residence, 99 Burton Avenue, Toronto, they welcomed their first child, a daughter, Alice Louisa Lawrence, named affectionately after her Aunt Alice Bennett. [12] Their little family expanded. William John Lawrence was born on 17 August 1913 at 33 MacAuley Avenue, Toronto, followed by his brother, Leslie George Lawrence on 3 September 1915. [13]

Travelling on her own, Bessie took her three young children (under the age of four), to meet their maternal grandparents, aunts and uncles back in England. They sailed on the S.S. Scandinavian, arriving in Liverpool on 21 October 1916. Their destination was Tengor Lane, Long Sutton, the now residence of her parents. [14]

In 1923, it was time for Bessie to make a visit back 'home' as her mother's health had been deteriorating for some time. She and her

youngest son Leslie, set sail on April 21st on the S.S. Montrose from St. John's, New Brunswick. [15] They arrived in Liverpool on April 21st. Susan Sams Bennett succumbed to her illness and passed away on the 29th of June. Bessie stayed another six weeks before booking their return home to Canada. [16] This was the last time she saw her father. Hezekiah died on 27 November 1926. Her parents are interred at the Holy Trinity Churchyard in Long Sutton, Somerset. [17]

The 1931 Canada Census, shows the Lawrence Family resided at 275 Perth Avenue in Toronto. [18] Their brick home consisted of six rooms. The value at the time was \$5000.00 Canadian Dollars. They owned a radio. Many families still found the extravagance unattainable during The Great Depression. William had a secured job as a Concrete Inspector for the City of Toronto. He would evaluate the infrastructure of bridges and buildings. Their two eldest children were employed as clerks - Alice worked for the Gas Company and William for a Tin Manufacturer. Leslie is a student and Bessie a homemaker.

Bessie's husband, William died in 1961 in Toronto. She was a widow for thirteen years, thus passing away in 1974 in her 90th year. They are interred at Park Lawn Cemetery in Toronto. [19] Leaves behind her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren.

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Sources

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- [19] <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/136339876/bessie-lawrence>