

A History of Educators in the Alexander Family – Part 2

Among the personal details of his life, John married Annie Louise Crawford on July 27, 1883 and the couple owned a large house and part of lot 12 on Alma street. John purchased the house and property from a Dr. Hobley in 1889. Annie was the daughter of George M. and Laura (Virginia) Crawford who settled in Amherstburg in roughly 1845. Annie's father George was described in the *Amherstburg Echo* as “of Cherokee Indian descent and came north from the Southern States when a young man. He was a master carpenter and many of the houses he built in Amherstburg of timbers and lumber that had to be hewn and dressed in the bush are still standing as proof of their sturdy construction. The First Baptist Church is one of them.” Annie's mother Laura was born into slavery in Covington, Kentucky and escaped enslavement at the age of 15, reaching freedom in Amherstburg. Soon after she met and married George.

Several years after their arrival in Amherstburg, the couple welcomed Annie into the world on February 15, 1861. Annie was born in Amherstburg, where she lived all her life until her passing on August 10, 1935. Annie attended the King Street school in Amherstburg, of which John Alexander later became the principal and taught there for over 30 years. Annie was also a life-long member of the First Baptist Church that had been built by her father. She was described as a woman devoted to her home and family, her church and community. John and Annie had six children: Dr. John Harold Alexander; Miss Nina Mae Alexander (Welland, Ont.); Arthur H. Alexander (North Buxton, Ont); Miss Ethel L. Alexander (Belize, British Honduras); Anna, Mrs. Charles A. Webb (Detroit, Mich.), and Marjorie, Mrs. J.A. Foster (Amherstburg).”

Three of John and Annie's children, Mae, Ethel Landonia, and Arthu Alexander, chose to follow in their father's footsteps by also becoming teachers. In August 1914, Mae and Ethel replied to an advertisement posted by the Six Nations School Board and were hired. Mae and

Ethel both taught at the No. 2 School, while their brother Arthur taught at No. 7. Mae, Ethel, Arthur and Arthur's wife (Ethel) lived together in the teacher's residence in Ohsweken. While teaching for the Six Nations School Board the three Alexanders experienced discrimination firsthand after the President of the Indian Moral Association, Mrs. George D. Styres, requested their dismissal based solely on the colour of their skin. Styres believed that they would not set a good example for the students, despite the fact that they received very favourable reports on their teaching. Ethel also held a third-class teaching certificate and had five years of teaching experience, while Mae had a second-class certificate. The Alexanders were respected teachers who each had multiple teaching opportunities, but racist beliefs unfairly called into question their abilities. Deputy Superintendent, General Duncan Campbell Scott, consulted "Indian" Agent Gordon Smith who defended the Alexanders saying that there were no complaints from parents and "they were "highly respectable and well thought of." He also warned that if they were fired, the local newspaper would raise attention to this racist act and that it was "un-British" to dismiss them based on their skin colour. Mrs. Styres was then told that the Alexanders would not be dismissed from their teaching positions but soon after, Arthur left his position in 1920 for a better paying job in Buxton. Following his departure, Gordon Smith stated that Arthur "has given better satisfaction at No. 7 School than any other teacher who has been there before, and the Trustees admitted that. It is a great misfortune to the Reserve to lose this teacher." A few years later, there was another protest which may have led to Ethel and Mae's departure. After they left Ohsweken, Mae returned to Amherstburg to teach there. Ethel worked for many years as a missionary teacher in Belize (British Honduras) beginning in the summer of 1922 and she remained there until 1950. While on a trip to Belize, a former Amherstburg resident, Harold Pillon, recalled that Ethel worked as a missionary there and asked one of the residents if he

remembered Ethel. As the man's face lit up, he said "I remember her with affection." There's still more to come next week. Stay tuned.