

## The Foster Family Part 1 – The Entrepreneur

Among Amherstburg's earliest Black residents is Levi Foster which is why this month's family history will highlight the Foster Family. Levi Foster was born in Stark County, Ohio on March 29, 1811, and later moved to Perrysburg, Ohio (a known stop on the Underground Railroad), before he and his family moved to Amherstburg in 1838. Levi worked as a plasterer and innkeeper until he opened his own business circa 1842. He owned several businesses in Amherstburg including a livery stable on Apsley Street (now Sandwich St.) and this business did so well that Foster started a stage coach business which was in operation during the 1850s. According to one advertisement in the *Amherstburg Echo*, its route began at Mr. Marie's Tavern in Amherstburg at 8am on Monday and Saturday mornings and from Mr. Beeman's Hotel in Windsor at 9pm on the same days. This was in addition to operating a hotel from 1848 to 1873 and also a tavern in Amherstburg, which closed for an interesting reason. Levi Foster attended a public debate that was held at the local Sons of Temperance Hall, which resolved that "the Slave Holder is better than a tavern keeper." At the debate, Henry Botsford, son of Daniel Botsford, spoke to the affirmative side and succeeded in winning the debate. At the time, the temperance movement was very influential, encouraging people to moderate their drinking or stop altogether. As a result, Foster, who was previously enslaved, put a notice on his closed tavern that stated that he would not allow himself to be perceived as worse than a slaveholder. Clearly, Levi Foster was a man of integrity.

Following the closure of his tavern, Foster continued his livery business and accumulated valuable real estate, eventually owning several houses and farms in Amherstburg. By 1861 he also had livestock that was valued at \$1,000, in addition to seven carriages worth \$7,000 and forty-four acres of land. Foster also owned several houses and lots on south George Street.

Levi Foster was also involved in the community, as is evident in his participation in a General Convention that was held in Amherstburg in 1853. This convention brought together delegates from the US and Canada to Amherstburg to discuss issues such as agriculture, temperance and education. Among those in attendance were Josiah Henson, who was elected chairman, Henry Bibb, and Levi Foster. Levi was also active in anti-slavery debates and chaired at least one anti-slavery gathering in Amherstburg in 1846. He also assisted in the organization of the True Band Society in Amherstburg which was created to assist freedom seekers in Canada.

According to Levi's obituary from the *Amherstburg Echo* "after farming for twenty-four years he learned the plastering trade, and came to Amherstburg in 1838. Here he followed his trade for ten years, and then started the first livery stable in town, and ran a daily line of stages between Amherstburg and Windsor. About eighteen months since two of his sons succeed him in the livery business and he moved to his farm where he died. His first wife, who was a daughter of David Waring of Coshocton, Ohio, died in 1855, and left him four sons and five daughters. All of the sons and two daughters survive him. Mr. Foster became a member of the Disciple Church, and has continued so ever since, and bore his last illness with meekness and resignation. He was a peaceable citizen and was respected by all who knew him. His funeral on Sunday last was largely attended."

As mentioned in his obituary, Levi Foster married more than once. His first marriage was to Elizabeth Waring and his second marriage was to Lucy Harris. We'll discuss his first marriage first. Levi and Elizabeth married on January 8, 1835 in Coshocton County, Ohio and had nine children, but sadly two (girls) passed at birth. Their remaining children include David Waring, George H., James W., M. Louisa, Elizabeth, Sarah and Levi Wellington.

According to documents from the Museum's Foster family binder, David Waring was born on September 26, 1836 in Perrysburg, Ohio, and according to his January 1897 obituary "shortly after his parents moved to Amherstburg. He left here [Amherstburg] in 1882, for Natchez [, Mississippi], where he has since resided. He leaves a wife and two children to mourn his loss." Unfortunately, there were no available documents that name his wife and children.

Waring's brother, George H., was born on July 3, 1838 in Ohio and he married Sarah J. Smith, the daughter of Captain James A. Smith and Mary Underwood. George H. and his brother James W. also continued their father Levi's livery stable business after he passed away. Advertisements for their business can be found in the *Amherstburg Echo* and one ad from April 30, 1875 says "FOSTER & BROTHER'S Livery Stables – Apsley Street, near Richmond, Amherstburg – All parties requiring horses for hire can obtain the best in town, with stylish Buggies or Cutters at their stables. Commercial travellers supplied with fast and reliable horses and good buggies or wagons on short notice. All visiting this town who require anything in this line will do well to call on FOSTER & BRO."

George H. and Sarah had at least seven children: George H. Jr., Waring, Philo Smith/Smithie, Maud, Evelyn, Madeline and Sarah. Their children will be discussed shortly, but first a bit more about George H. and Sarah. George H. also worked as a porter on the Great Lakes fleet, and the *Amherstburg Echo* mentions that in April 1895, George H. worked as a steward on the steamer 'State of Michigan,' while in August 1898 "Mrs. George H. Foster left on Wednesday morning for Port Stanley to visit a week with Mr. Foster who is steward on the steamer Flora." When his wife Sarah (Smith) sadly passed in 1899, George H. stopped working in this profession and was left to solely care for their children on their farm.

In Sarah's 1899 obituary found in the *Amherstburg Echo* it says "This township suffered a keen and distinct loss on Thursday last, in the death of Mrs. George H. Foster. The deceased lady was widely known and her many estimable qualities endeared her to a large circle of friends ... The funeral was held on Sunday, and was one of the largest seen for sometime. Services were conducted in the First Baptist church, by Rev. J.H. Holt, pastor assisted by Rev. W. T. Artis, pastor of the A.M.E. church, and Rev. W. Dickey, of Chicago. The church was crowded to the doors and many stood outside listening to the very impressive services ... Mrs. Foster was born Jan. 12<sup>th</sup>, 1854, and so was 45 years 2 months of age at her death. She was one of a family of ten, being a daughter of Capt. James A. Smith, of Amherstburg. The other members of the family are John W., of Erie, Pa.; Joseph L., of South Dakota; Clarence E., of Amherstburg; Mary E. (Mrs. Samuel McDowell), of Windsor; Gertrude (Mrs. W.H. Bush), of Amherstburg; Roman J., of Cleveland, Ohio; Phylo G., of Wanesburg, Pa., and Annie M., of Shelbyville, Ky. Mrs. Foster was married to Geo. H. Foster, at Amherstburg, on May 6<sup>th</sup>, 1874. Seven children were born to them, all of whom are living – 3 sons and four daughters – George, aged 23, Waring, 16; Philo, 14, Maud, 13, Evelyne, 11; Madaline, 6, and Sarah, 4. The deceased was an earnest Christian and was a member of the Baptist church the past 31 years. Her Christian fortitude enabled her to bear her last illness without a murmur. She expressed herself as ready and willing to go at her Master's bidding. She frequently told her husband not to grieve, for she was all right. Liberality and kindness were two great traits in her character and her home was open to all whom she could assist. The sorrowing family wish to return sincere thanks to their many friends who were so kind and attentive to their loved one in her last illness, some especially being particularly attentive, whose names it will be unnecessary to mention."

**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 2.**