

The Growing Grayer Family – Part 1

The Grayer family's roots in Essex County begin with William Henry Grayer Sr., who was born in Virginia in 1823. Family lore says that William's father carried him in his arms most of the way on their flight from enslavement in Virginia, until they arrived in Detroit. They then traveled to the Colchester South area in roughly 1830. There is a possibility that a man named David Grier was William's father/relative considering David arrived in Colchester South in roughly 1830 and lived next to David Grier's property. David was originally from Maryland, but sadly was captured and forced into slavery in Kentucky. Once David arrived in Colchester, he lived on Gore Road. In Benjamin Drew's book "Northside View of Slavery," there is an interview with David Grier which tells his story. He says, "I was born free in Maryland,--was stolen and sold in Kentucky, when between eight and nine years old. In Kentucky I was set free by will, and as they were trying to break the will up, some of my claimant's friends persuaded me to come off to Ohio. From Ohio, I came here [Colchester] on account of the oppressive laws demanding security for good behavior,--I was a stranger and could not give it. I had to leave my family in Kentucky. I came in 1831. I have cleared land on lease for five or six years, then have to leave it, and go into the bush again. I worked so about thirteen years. I could do no better, and the white people, I believe, took advantage of it to get the land cleared. This has kept me poor. I guess I have cleared not short of seventy or eighty acres, and got no benefit. I have now six acres cleared."

Again, whether David was the father of William has not been proven fact, but it is a theory. David's narrative says that he left his family behind, but it is certainly possible that he lied and hid details of his family's escape from enslavement to protect them. At that time, David

may not have trusted his interviewer, Benjamin Drew, and thought it best to keep certain information to himself. The connection between David Grier and William remains a mystery.

The first available record for William is the 1851 Census which lists William Grier (Grayer) as a servant in Malden Township. Ten years later, in the 1861 Census, he is listed as single and a labourer. It is not until the 1881 Census that we see William listed as a farmer with his wife Mary E. Grayer and their children: William Jr., Maria, Emnily, George, James and Sylvester Wiley, who is listed as “Selvesta” on the census. William Sr. married Mary Elizabeth (Eliza) Green circa 1862 in Colchester South Township. Mary Elizabeth was the daughter of Joseph Green and Elizabeth Hutchins and was born on October 9, 1839 in Colchester. Mary’s father Joseph Green was born in Hardin, Tennessee in roughly 1794 and he passed on September 3, 1863 in Colchester South. Mary’s mother Eliza Hutchins was born circa 1815 in Tennessee and passed away circa 1849 in Colchester South. William and Mary Elizabeth inherited the farm on lot 5 & 6 on Gore Road from Eliza’s father, Joseph Green, and the couple had several children: William Jr., George, Mariah, James, Charles, Emnily, Wiley and John.

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.