

The Law-Abiding and Law Enforcing Banks Family – Part 2

Erving Banks' siblings included John Banks who was born in roughly 1850 and married Mary Matthews. There is not very much information on this couple, but they had no children and John died of cancer of the nose. Erving and John's sister, Martha Banks Baker, was born circa 1854 and died young of tuberculosis. Thomas Banks, born circa 1845, was a cook on a steamboat and sailed on Lake Superior for twenty-four years. His first marriage was to Cora, who died young and they had one son, Anthony. Thomas later married Mary L. Jones (1860-1937), the daughter of Samuel Jones, and the couple had several children, including Charles (b. 1883); Arthur (b.1888); Clarence (b.1891), Myrtle; William; Grover (b. 1893) and Carl "Curly," who married his first wife Phoebe Chavis and had three children Carl, Patty and Yolanda, and married his second wife Lillie Norris. Thomas and Mary's children also included Lulu who married Robert Gaskins (no children) and Annie who married Lionel Conway and had 9 children: Clarence "Buddy," Gerald, Lionel, Mary Jane, Shirley, Louella, Louise, Sandra and John.

The most well-known member of the Banks family is Anthony Banks, son of William and Esther and sibling of Erving, Thomas and Martha who are discussed above. Born a free person on 29 June 1840 in Colchester Township South, Anthony was named after his grandfather who lived in Bellefontaine, Ohio. He also became one of the founders of Central Grove B.M.E. Church in Harrow. It was on 12 April 1881 that the Crown Attorney of Essex County, S.S. MacDonnell, appointed Anthony Banks as the Constable of Essex County, making him the first African-descended person to hold this position in Ontario. This was a significant moment, especially considering the discrimination that Anthony, and all African Canadians, endured on a daily basis, including segregated institutions, unfair laws and racist treatment. Despite the

racism African Canadians faced, men like Anthony were able to overcome obstacles and remain devoted to his career. According to Cordella Anne MacRae, daughter of Cora (Banks) White and granddaughter of Anthony, “Travel was very slow during the 1800s and the family often discussed how my grandfather sometimes found it necessary to bring a prisoner home late at night; and in order to deter him from escaping, my grandfather would often handcuff the prisoner to one of his sons. On several occasions, he was confronted with the precarious task of arresting a member of one of his friends.” In 1892, he was also appointed the Deputy Warden for the Ontario Game and Fishing Commission, which meant that he enforced game and fishery laws for the province. This was in addition to acting as a school trustee, Treasurer and Roadmaster, as he was labelled in the *Amherstburg Echo*. Anthony Banks held the position of Constable for Essex County for almost 50 years and when he retired, the *Amherstburg Echo* gifted Anthony with a lifetime subscription. He certainly earned this gift. Don’t worry. There is more history to come. Stay tuned.