

“among the early settlers of Amherstburg” - The Thomas Family – Part 2

George and Maria's second son, Philip Thomas, married Beatrice Lillian Crawford on April 4, 1894. Beatrice was born in Amherstburg on July 28, 1872 and was the daughter of George M. and Laura J. Crawford, who were mentioned in last month's Alexander family essay, while discussing Annie (Crawford) Alexander. It was mentioned that Annie and Beatrice's father George was “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.” Beatrice's mother Laura escaped enslavement in Covington, Kentucky at the age of 15 and journeyed via the Underground Railroad through Oberlin, Ohio and found freedom in Amherstburg. It was in Amherstburg that George and Laura met and married. In an article discussing Beatrice, it mentions that her mother Laura's escape is documented in the book, “Reminiscences of Levi Coffin,” but she may have used a different name or was nameless because, upon review, there is no Laura mentioned in the book. Beatrice was an active member of Mount Zion Baptist Church since her arrival at Oberlin, Ohio in 1912. In a write-up discussing her life, it was said that “The main interest of Mrs. Thomas in life besides her family, was church work; her devoted husband and children are thankful for her unflinching trust in God and her sublime faith in the Christian way of life.” This quote is very accurate considering she was involved with most of the church's organizations including the Senior Choir, Missionary Society, Sunday School and BYPU, which may have stood for Baptist Young Peoples Union. She also served as a deaconess for 25 years and after her failing health no longer allowed her to be active in this work; she was made an honorary deaconess. Outside of the church she was involved in several other organizations, including the

Martha Chapter of the Order of the Eastern Star, a member of the Women's Progressive Club and a Girl Scout leader. Beatrice and Philip had seven children: Thelma, who married a labourer, Rollin Clyde Godette, the son of Henry Godette and Etta Fields, in February 1928; Annie married a teacher, William Frederick Hardgraves, the son of Hammond Arthur Hardgraves and Anna Dere Langford, in June 1930; Linny (Leach); Philip M. (m. Betty); Wilbur C. (m. Marie); Gladys (Wallace) and Mary who married Clinton Ward. Philip and Beatrice also had a daughter named Beatrice Virginia, but she sadly died in infancy.

Interestingly, Mary Ward was a celebrated resident of Lorain, Ohio, and was described as "one of the 'richest women of the locality in friendship and respect.'" She gave her time and talent to both civic and humanitarian causes, and on March 2, 1971 the community honoured and thanked her with a civic testimonial dinner that had 250 people in attendance. Sadly, Mary passed away the next day at the age of 68. She had two children: Clinton Jr. and Marion (m. John Marshall). **There's still more to come. See you next week.**