

The Chavis Family History Part 1 – Chaves, Chivers, Chavers, Chavis

This month's family history features the Chavis family, beginning with Wiley Chavis. He married Clarissa Ann Evans, the daughter of John and Mary Evans. Milo Johnson's book *New Canaan* mentions the Chavis family and says "It is very challenging to explain the Chavis family beginnings, as much information is conflicting and disputed. We do know that the family name Chavis (Chaves, Chavers, and Chivers) was popular in the Carolina area. According to a theory in *'The Heritage of Blacks in North Carolina,'* the name Chavis originated from the Spanish name Chavez given to the Indians by Spanish conquistadors and was anglicized by the people of the early United States to read as Chaves, Chivers, Chavers, Chavis, and other varied spellings. Chaves families originated in Virginia before 1650 and in North and South Carolina before 1750. They were free and of mixed race. The families spread through Kentucky and Tennessee through the late 1700s and early 1800s. Most information indicates Chavis as a known Lumbee Indian name although some note a mixing with Cherokee background. There were also mixed marriages with Free Blacks and Whites."

Milo Johnson adds "Wiley Chavis and his wife Clarissa were married July 5, 1841, in Clark County, Illinois, USA. The fact that their marriage is registered indicates they were 'Free Peoples' living in Illinois or neighboring Indiana. They must have then moved to Indiana since all children listed as born in the USA have the State of birth as Indiana. We know that Wiley and Clarissa arrived in Essex County, from Indiana, USA, somewhere between 1849 and 1852. They probably landed at Amherstburg and later settled in New Canaan, Colchester North, Essex, Ontario, Canada."

Further research indicates that Wiley and Clarissa had several children including William, James, John Franklin, Nancy, Thomas, Amanda, Eveline, Sarah, Theresa, Louisa, and

Mary. There was no available records for William, James, Eveline, Sarah, Theresa, and Louisa, but I was able to find information for John Franklin, Nancy, Thomas, Amanda and Mary. I will start with John Franklin. He married three times. His first marriage was to Phoebe Milton, second to Caroline Melinda Harris and third to Dianah Scott/ Galloway. John first married Phoebe Milton, the daughter of Josiah Milton, in the late 1860s. Their children included Isaac Thomas, Elnora and Elzona (twins), Henry Courtney, John Franklin Wiley, Daisy May, and Eva Ardella.

John and Phoebe's son Isaac Thomas was born on February 8, 1871 in Essex County. He married Mary Ann Golden-Artis-North. On May 21, 1897, the *Amherstburg Echo* wrote "On Sunday of last week a very pretty event occurred at the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Artis, it being the marriage of their adopted daughter to Isaac Chavis, son of John Chavis of New Canaan." Their marriage record names Mary Ann's mother, Catherine Artis. Mary Ann's obituary shares more details about her life and says "Mrs. Isaac Chavis an old resident of this district, passed away Friday in the 57th year of her age. She had been ill a month. Funeral services were conducted in the A.M.E church Sunday afternoon by Rev. Wm. Seay, P.E. of Chatham, followed by burial in the Davis cemetery. Mrs. Chavis' maiden name was Mary Ann Golden and she was first married to an Englishman, by name of E.H. North. The only child by that marriage is Mrs. Donald Campbell of Amherstburg. Her second marriage to Mr. Chavis who survives her, was childless. She is also survived by one brother, Jefferson Gold, of Ypsilanti. A sister, Mrs. Coates, of Cincinnati died two months ago."

The 'Mrs. Donald Campbell' mentioned in Mary Ann's obituary is her daughter Nellie from her first marriage. This is confirmed in the 1911 Census for Isaac Chavis which also lists his wife Mary and their daughter Nellie, in addition to their two nephews Franklin and Marwood.

The 1921 Census shows that Nellie was no longer living with her parents and was married to Donald Campbell of Anderdon. The 1921 Census also lists Donald and Nellie's children Margaret, Donald, Nellie and Aileen. Further mention of Donald, Nellie and Margaret appear in the 1921 Census and *Amherstburg Echo*. The 1921 Census for Isaac Chavis lists his wife Mary and their grandchildren Mary Margaret Campbell and Donald Campbell. On July 10, 1936, the *Amherstburg Echo* also shares details of Nellie's wedding and says "Wagner – Campbell Wedding – A quiet wedding was solemnized at St. Andrew's Manse Monday afternoon, July 6, at 4.00 o'clock when Rev. A. Neil Millier united in marriage Miss Nellie Campbell, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Donald Campbell, Fort Street, and Harry Wagner, son of Mr. William M. Wagner of Woodslee. The bride, who was charmingly attired in a pink crepe ensemble with white hat and accessories, was attended by Miss Evelyn Wagner sister of the groom, dressed in green flowered crepe with white accessories. The groomsman was Joseph Schihl of Woodslee. Mr. and Mrs. Wagner will make their home in Woodslee."

Nellie's stepfather Isaac Chavis is also mentioned in the *Amherstburg Echo*, but for a different reason: farming. On September 27, 1901, the *Echo* mentions "The threshings in this vicinity are just about wound up and corn cutting is the special attraction just at present. On Thursday of last week at 8 o'clock, Ed. Campbell, Will Allen and Isaac Chavis started in on an eleven acre field of 100 bushels to the acre and quit at twelve, started again at 2 p.m., accompanied by John Chavis, and at six o'clock, quitting time, only four rows remained uncut."

Isaac Chavis passed away on January 15, 1933. His obituary which appeared on January 20, 1933 in *The Essex Free Press* says "Isaac Chavis, well known colored resident on the Malden Road, west of Gesto, passed away quite suddenly on Sunday afternoon at his home. Death followed a hemorrhage due to a heart attack. Deceased was in his 62nd year, was a son of

the late John Chavis and was born on the Chavis farm, lot 18, S.M.R., and has resided in the township all his life. He was married twice, first to Mary Ann Golden and second to Sarah Gilbreath, of Detroit, to whom he was united on November 14th, 1931. The latter survives. A brother, Courtney died some years ago. The funeral was held on Tuesday afternoon with services at the A.M.E. Church and interment in the cemetery on lot 18.”

An interesting detail appears in Isaac’s obituary which mentions that Isaac married a second time to Sarah Gilbreath of Detroit, whom he married on November 14, 1931. A second document, a notice to creditors, appears in *The Essex Free Press* and refers to Mrs. Sarah J. Chavis as the ‘Administratrix of the estate.’ The article from March 24, 1933 says “In the Matter of the Estate of Isaac Thomas Chavis, late of the Township of Colchester North, in the County of Essex, Farmer, Deceased. – Notice is hereby given, in pursuance of Section 51, Chapter 150, R.S.O., 1927, to all persons having any claim against the estate of Isaac Thomas Chavis, deceased, who died on the 15th day of January, 1933, to send by post, pre-paid, to the undersigned Administratrix of the estate of the said deceased, full particulars of their claims, verified by an affidavit and a statement of the securities (if any) held by them, on or before the 15th day of April, 1933. And that after the last mentioned date the Administratrix will proceed to distribute the assets of the said estate among the parties entitled thereto, having regard only to the claims then received by her, and that she will not be liable for the said assets or any part thereof so distributed to any person of whose claim she shall not have had notice at the time of such distribution. Dated at Essex, Ontario, this 22nd day of March, 1933. FORBES B. GEDDES, Essex, Ont. Solicitor for the said Administratrix Mrs. Sarah J. Chavis, R.R. No.2, Essex, Ontario.”

Now that we have discussed Isaac, we can move on to his siblings (Elnora, Elzona, Henry Courtney, John, Daisy and Eva). All that could be found for Elnora and Elzona was their birth certificates which state that they were born on February 13, 1873 in Colchester. Their brother Henry Courtney was born on August 1, 1877 in Colchester. His death record states that he passed away on April 25, 1917 in Colchester and that he was single and a labourer. A brief writeup appears in *The Essex Free Press* on April 27, 1917 and says “Henry Courtney Chavis, son of John Chavis, died at his father’s home on Wednesday, after a year’s illness with consumption, aged 40 years. Deceased was unmarried. Interment will take place in the New Canaan cemetery today (Friday).”

Henry Courtney’s brother John Franklin Wiley was born on March 11, 1881 in Colchester. He married three times. His first marriage was to Ada J. Vaughan, second to Bertha E. McCurdy, and third to Maggie Gates-Turner. John and Ada, the daughter of Isaac Vaughn and Fannie Fairfax, married on January 25, 1904 in Detroit. I was able to find birth records for two of John and Ada’s children. The first is for Kenneth Franklin Chavis, who was born on May 11, 1904 in Colchester North and the second is for Marwood Chavis, who was born on February 6, 1906, also in Colchester North. As previously mentioned, the 1881 Census lists Franklin and Marwood as living with their aunt and uncle Isaac and Mary Chavis.

John’s second marriage was to Bertha E. McCurdy who was the daughter of Alvin McCurdy. Their marriage record states that they were married on December 15, 1912 in Detroit. John’s third marriage was to Maggie Gates-Turner , the daughter of William Gates and Mary McElroy. They married on March 11, 1925 in Detroit.

John Franklin Wiley Chavis’ sister Daisy is next. She was born on February 9, 1884 in Colchester North. She married twice. Her first marriage was to Edward Johnson, the son of Noah

and Martha Johnson, on November 29, 1901. Her second marriage was to George Robinson, the son of George and Jane Smith Robinson/Robison. It is possible that Daisy married a third time to a man named Harry Knight in Detroit on December 4, 1916. The marriage record lists her father as John Chavis and her age matches other documents, but no further information was found to confirm this.

Daisy's sister Eva Ardella was born on May 1, 1886. She married George H. Thompson, the son of Elijah Thompson and E. Holden (some references says Golden, not Holden). Eva and George married on January 9, 1904 in Windsor. I was able to find birth records for three of their children: Elijah, Mabel Bernice and Wilfred Laurier. Elijah was born on December 13, 1904, while Mabel Bernice was born on March 9, 1909 and Wilfred Laurier was born on August 26, 1911.

Eva Chavis Thompson passed away on March 22, 1917 in Amherstburg and her obituary from the *Amherstburg Echo* shares more details of her life. It says "Mrs. George Thompson, a life long resident of this township, passed away Thursday night last at Amherstburg, following an attack of typhoid fever. She was thirty one years of age. Her maiden name was Eva Chavis and she was a daughter of John Chavis. She and Mr. Thompson and family moved to Amherstburg later last fall. The funeral was held Sunday afternoon being conducted by the Rev. Mr. Payne. Burial was in New Canaan cemetery. Surviving her besides her husband and four small children are three full brothers and three half brothers, one full sister and two half sisters. The pallbearers were her brothers John, Isaac, Clarence and Fred Chavis."

Following Eva's passing George Henry Thompson remarried. A Petition for Naturalization for George states that he was living in Cincinnati, Ohio with his wife Joanna Marie. This document shares several other details including that George was working as an 'Hod

carrier,' was born in New Canaan on July 28, 1886, and married Joanna Marie on March 24, 1917 in College Hill, Ohio. It also shares more about Joanna who was born in Cincinnati on June 19, 1891. I previously mentioned that Eva and George had three children (Elijah, Mabel, and Wilfred), but this document adds a fourth child, Manford who was born on March 15, 1907 in New Canaan. A final document listing George is the 1940 Census for Springfield Township, Hamilton, Ohio. It lists George with his wife Joanna M. and their grandson William Charles Thompson.

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.