

The Chavis Family History Part 2 – An Appearance in a NFB Film

As mentioned, John Franklin Chavis married three times (Phoebe, Caroline, and Dianah). Now that we have discussed his first marriage to Phoebe, we will move on to discuss Caroline. Following the passing of his first wife, Phoebe, on June 27, 1888 in Colchester North, John married a second time to Caroline Melinda Harris, who was previously married to Albert White. Caroline and John married in April of 1891. Caroline was the daughter of Thomas James Harris and Mary Ann Pearl. John and Caroline's children include William C., Frederick Edward A., David, Ida Belle and Phoebe Anne, but before we discuss them, I would like to share Caroline Melinda's obituary. She passed away on May 13, 1909 and her obituary states "Mrs. John Chavis, who has been in failing health for some time, passed away at her home on Thursday evening last from pulmonary trouble. The funeral took place on Saturday last with services at New Canaan church and interment in the Chavis family cemetery. Rev. Mr. Mickens officiated, and the pall-bearers were Jonathan Strauthers, J. Thurman, Mr. Leatherman, Alex Nolen, Sam Carter and Chas. Mitchell. Deceased was in her 41st year and was born in Colchester South being a daughter of Jas. Harris, of that township. She was married 17 years ago to Mr. Chavis and to their union were born five children, all of whom are living at home. The community will sympathize with the family in their bereavement."

Caroline Melinda and John's first child was William. He married Beatrice Murchin, the daughter of Fred Murchin and Bertha McCurdy, on May 26, 1913 in Colchester North. William's brother Frederick E. Chavis married Ethel Scott, the daughter of Joseph Scott and Deanah (Dianah) Galloway, on October 16, 1915. Fred and Ethel had a daughter named Viola but she sadly died in infancy at the age of two months on January 12, 1916. Ethel's obituary from July 2, 1942 in the *Amherstburg Echo* shares more details about her life and says "Mrs. Chavis Dies – Mrs. Ethel Chavis, wife of Mr. Fred Chavis died at her residence on Park St.,

Amherstburg, Wednesday, July 8. She is survived by her husband, a daughter Gertrude and two brothers Walter Scott of Amherstburg and Daniel Scott of Detroit. The funeral will take place Saturday at the Church of God In Christ Windsor, Elder Morton will officiate.” Ethel’s obituary states that she was 45 years old at the time of her passing.

Details of Ethel’s sister Sadie are also shared in her obituary from May 23, 1930. It says “After suffering for some time with an attack of diabetes, Mrs. Sadie Young died at the home of her sister, Mrs. Ethel Chavis, Park street, at midnight, Friday. Mrs. Young’s maiden name was Sadie Scott, daughter of the late Joseph Scott of Colchester South. After attaining young womanhood she went to Buffalo and was married there to Frank Young. They had no children. After his death she remained there for some years and came to Amherstburg three months ago to live with her sister. She was then quite poorly and her malady became complicated with heart trouble causing her death. Her parents died some years ago and she leaves the following brothers: Frank and Daniel of Detroit: George and Walter of Amherstburg, and one sister, Mrs. Chavis mentioned above. Funeral services were conducted at the home of Mrs. Chavis on Monday by Elder Martin, pastor of the Church of God in Christ, and burial was in Rose Hill Cemetery.”

Following the passing of Frederick’s first wife Ethel, he married a second time to Laura E. Dickerson, the daughter of John and Muriel (Woodson) Dickerson. Laura’s 2018 obituary says “With heavy hearts, we announce the death of Laura Evelyn (Woodson) Chavis (Windsor, Ontario), who passed away on February 22, 2018 at the age of 94 ... She was predeceased by: her children, Gertrude Brown (late Moses) and Fredrick Chavis (Linda); and her parents, John Dickerson and Muriel Dickerson. She is survived by: her husband Fredrick; and her children,

Deborah Colombe, Sheila Cobbler, Freda Jo-Anne Lovell (Thomas), Reginald Chavis (Jennifer) and Gregory Scott (Sophie).”

Laura’s obituary mentions her son Fred Chavis who also appears in an *Amherstburg Echo* article on August 2, 1951 which says “Amherstburg Tots In Movies- Four Amherstburg children, Shelia and Fern Chavis, daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Fred Chavis and Richard and Charles Hurst, sons of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Hurst, were movie stars for a couple of hours on Saturday afternoon. They took part in scenes shot at the site of Eliza’s Cabin, King’s Highway No. 18 Malden Township by the National Film Board. This is a section of a movie short which the board is making about Canadian negroes. Allen Stark, director, brought W. Hewitson and W. Sutton, camera men to Amherstburg to shoot the picture. On Sunday and Monday they took additional pictures at the Emancipation Celebration held in Windsor.”

The *Amherstburg Echo* also shares Frederick’s (father of Fred who was just mentioned) obituary which says “Father passes – Frederick E. Chavis, 78, of Amherstburg, died at Grace Hospital last Friday [March 23, 1973]. He was the husband of Laura E. Dickerson. His first wife was Ethel Scott. Mr. Chavis was the son of John and Melinda Harris Chavis of New Canaan. The Chavis ancestors were originally from South Carolina. He was the father of Fred Jr. of Windsor, Reginald, Gregory, Richard and Sheila at home. Mrs. Moses (Gertrude) Brown of Detroit, Mrs. Richard (Deborah) Colombe of Amherstburg and Mrs. Thomas (JoAnne) Lovell of Amherstburg; brother of David of Ypsilanti and Mrs. Forrest (Ida) Grayer of Harrow and six grandchildren. Bishop F. Walls officiated at the funeral in St. John the Baptist Church last Monday. Burial was in Rose Hill Cemetery.”

Frederick's brother David is the next child of John and Caroline Chavis. He married Beatrice Scott, the daughter of Walter Scott and Loue/Lula Harris, on November 7, 1927 in Amherstburg. The only further information that could be found was that Beatrice passed away on November 10, 1930 in Detroit. Her death record states that she was born on April 1, 1908 in Colchester. Her obituary from November 14, 1930 shares more information and says "Amherstburg Girl Dies in Detroit – Mrs. Chavis passed away in Detroit, Sunday, aged twenty-one years, following a week's illness with pneumonia. She was formerly Beatrice Scott, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Walter Scott, Park Street, and was married to Mr. Chavis three years ago. He survives her with one daughter Arlene, two years of age. She is also survived by her parents and the following brothers and sisters: Joseph, Wreatha, Evaline, Frances, Walter, Fred, Kelly and Raymond. Her remains were brought to the parental home and the funeral took place from there Wednesday afternoon."

Next is David's sister Ida Belle. She was born on August 14, 1900 in New Canaan and later married Forrest Albert Grayer who was born on November 20, 1893 in Colchester South and was the son of James Hatfield Grayer and Mercilla (Mercy) Clingman. The couple married on November 1, 1916. Forrest worked as a farmer but was also employed at Ford Motor Company. In March 1918, Forrest's father James Hatfield Grayer sold Forrest one acre of his fifty-acre farm on the 3rd Concession for \$1. The Grayer Homestead farm had horses, cows, pigs, ducks, geese, and chickens. Forrest's wife Ida was a homemaker, but she also helped manage the family farm and worked as a domestic in the Harrow area. Both Forrest and Ida financially contributed to their family's income. Forrest also never drove a motor vehicle but chose to drive a team of horses using various kinds of wagons, buggies, and sleds as transportation. To supplement his farm income, during the summer months, Forrest also travelled

to different farms in Harrow on Thursdays and Fridays, purchasing fruits and vegetables from local farmers. He would then rise early on Saturday mornings, drive his loaded freight wagon to Amherstburg where he sold his product, making a substantial profit. Forrest also later drove a variety of used milk wagons rather than a freight wagon which was slower. He was often accompanied by one or two of his grandchildren who would assist him by going door to door with baskets of fruits and vegetables.

Forrest and Ida had ten children: Thelma Beatrice (born April 12, 1918 and married Erwin Mulder); Alma Mercilla (b. October 30, 1919 and m. Floyd A. Walls); Freeda Mae (b. September 5, 1921 and m. Albert Crutchfield); Melda Elaine (b. October 22, 1923 and m. James Arthur Mulder); Floreen Winnifred (b. October 15, 1925 and m. David Daniel Johnson); Forrest Melvin (b. February 6, 1929 and m. Virginia Adelaide Payne and Donna Jean Ramsey); Ethora Ann (b. February 28, 1932 and m. Robert Walker, George Mitchell and Roy Lee Cohen); Ida Margaret (b. April 18, 1934 and m. Hiram Cecil Miller and Robert Spidell Jr.); James William (b. October 12, 1937 and m. JoAnne St. Pierre, Agnes Ford and in a relationship with Sandra Rutter); Maryannette (b. December 4, 1942 and m. Lee A. Young and Alonzo McCullers).

I was able to find both Ida and Forrest's obituaries in the *Windsor Star*. It printed "Forrest Albert, 69 years, June 6, 1963. Beloved husband of Ida Belle Chavis. Father of Melvin, Mrs. Irwin Mulder (Thelma), Mrs. James Mulder (Melda), Mrs. Daniel Johnson (Floreen), Harrow, James, Toronto; Mrs. Floyd Walls (Alma), Mrs. Cecil Miller (Margaret), Ypsilanti; Mrs. Albert Crutchfield (Freida), River Rouge; Mrs. Robert Walker (Ann), Detroit; Annette, Windsor. Resting at the Gerald A. Smith Funeral Home, Harrow. Funeral Saturday 1 p.m. Elder M.R. Stewart officiating."

Twenty years later the *Windsor Star* wrote “Ida Belle, 82 years, January 19th, 1983. Late of Harrow. Predeceased by her husband Forest (1963). Dear mother of Melvin, Harrow; James, Toronto; Mrs. Erwin Mulder (Thelma), Mrs. James Mulder (Melda), Mrs. Daniel Johnson (Floreen), Harrow; Mrs. Floyd Walls (Alma) Mrs. Cecil Miller (Margaret), Ypsilanti; Mrs. Roy Cohen (Ann), River Rouge; Mrs. Al MacCullers (Anette) of Detroit. Predeceased by Mrs. Albert Crutchfield (Freida) (1980). 71 grandchildren, 84 great grandchildren. Dear sister of David Chavis of Ypsilanti. Resting at the Gerald A. Smith Funeral Home, 197 King St. W., Harrow.”

Ida’s sister Phoebe Ann is next. She was born on September 14, 1906 in Colchester North. She married Carl ‘Curly’ Banks, the son of Thomas Banks and Mary L. Jones. The couple had three children named Carl, Patty and Yolanda. I also found a death record for their daughter Dorothy who was born on March 14, 1926, but sadly passed on January 23, 1927.

On January 8, 1973, Phoebe Ann Chavis Banks passed away at the age of 66 years old. Following her passing, the *Windsor Star* wrote “Phebe Ann, 66 years, January 8, 1973 at Grace Hospital. Late residence 764 Patricia. Member of North West Church of God in Christ, Detroit. Beloved wife of Carl. Dear mother of Carl Jr., Mrs. Arthur (Patricia) Tukes, Miss Yolanda Banks of Windsor. Sister of Fred Chavis of Amherstburg; Daniel of Ypsilanti, Mrs. Forest (Ida) Grayer, of Harrow, 4 grandchildren. Friends may call at the James H. Sutton Funeral Home, 1567 Ouellette Avenue until 12 noon on Wednesday. Funeral service from the Ontario Church of God in Christ, Windsor at 2 p.m., Bishop G.D. Moore officiating. Internment Rose Hill Cemetery, Amherstburg.”

Phoebe’s husband Carl passed over a decade later, in 1987, and the *Windsor Star* printed “Carl J. Banks (Curly), 91 years. Feb. 27, 1987 at Riverview Hospital. Late of Windsor. Mr. Banks had been retired from Allied Chemical and was a member of the Harrison Memorial

Church of God in Christ. Predeceased by his first wife Phebe (nee Chavis) (1973). Beloved husband of Lillie. Dear father of Carl J. and wife Naomi, Windsor, Mrs. Patricia Tukes, Windsor and Yolanda Banks of Ottawa. Dear brother of Mrs. Annie Conway of Tecumseh. Dearest grandfather of Debra Ohlerking, Michelle Banks, Shannon Tukes of Windsor and Michael Banks of Montreal. Great grandfather of Christopher and Jessica Ohlerking of Windsor. Friends may call at the James H. Sutton Funeral Home, 1567 Ouellette Ave., Mon., from 12-4pm. Thence, Mr. Banks will lie in state at the Harrison Memorial Church of God in Christ, 810 Mercer St., from 6-9 pm with family hour at 7pm Funeral Service Tues, March 3, from the Harrison Memorial C.O.G.I.C. at 11 am. Rev. Bishop Arthur T. Harrison officiating. Interment Rosehill Cemetery, Amherstburg.”

So far, we have discussed the first two marriages of John Franklin Chavis to Phoebe Milton and Caroline Melinda Harris, but he also married a third time to Dianah Scott/Galloway. According to their marriage record, John and Dianah married on April 2, 1910 in Detroit. It also lists Dianah’s father as Daniel. A separate marriage record lists Dianah’s father as Rand Goloway (Rand looks like Daniel or David on the marriage record).

Dianah passed away in 1914 and John passed away on September 18, 1927. His obituary from the *Amherstburg Echo* says “Funeral Service of the Late John F. Chavis – The death of the late John F. Chavis, of Anderdon, took place September 19th, that the home of his daughter, Mrs. Daisy Knight, with whom he had lived. The late Mr. Chavis was born in the State of Illinois eighty-four years ago. He came to Canada when quite a young man and settled in New Canaan where he lived for many years. He was a trustee and faithful worker of the A.M.E. Zion Church of New Canaan. Three times was he united in marriage, his three wives having preceded him in death. He leaves to mourn their loss one brother, Thomas Chavis, of Amherstburg; one sister,

Mrs. M.M. Norris, of Detroit; five sons, John and Clarence, of Detroit; Isaac, of Gesto; Freddie and David of Amherstburg; and three daughters, Ida, of Harrow, Phoebe, of Amherstburg; and Daisy, of Anderdon. Funeral services were conducted on Thursday afternoon by the Rev. W.C. Perry from the A.M.E. Church. The high esteem in which the deceased was held in the community was evidenced by the large number who attended the services. The Rev. Mr. Perry spoke very impressively on 'The Immortality of the Soul,' ... 'If a man die, shall he live again?' The Rev. J.T. Dawson, of the B.M.E. Church, Windsor, spoke very comforting to the bereaved ones, having been acquainted with them for some time. The scripture lesson was read by Rev. Frye, formerly of the A.M.E. Church. There were also two vocal selections by relatives of the deceased from Detroit, supplementing suitable selections by the choir, with Miss Wava Davis presiding at the organ."

Following John's death, the *Amherstburg Echo* wrote about an incident that occurred a few days before John's passing. It says "Fred Chavis, his wife and two friends, Rosy Wilson and Margaret Allan, had a narrow escape from death on the Sandwich street pavement about 8:30 yesterday (Thursday) morning, when they were returning from the death bed of Mr. Chavis' father, John Chavis, of Anderdon. A Ford sedan driven by Arthur Monforton, and containing Felix Stewart of Tecumseh, and George Blue of Ridgetown, ran into Mr. Chavis' car from the rear, wrecking it and throwing the occupants out on the pavement. Mrs. Chavis was very badly hurt while the rest of them were bruised and shocked. The three men were placed under arrest by Chief of Police Timmis and lodged in the town lock up, and were to appear yesterday (Thursday), forenoon before Police Magistrate McCormick for hearing."

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 3.