

The Buckner Family History Part 2 – Museum Connection

Now that I have discussed John and (possibly) Thomas, I'll move on to discuss George Burrell Buckner. He married Eliza Gibbs. According to Eliza's death record, she was born in 1822 in Louisiana and died on May 8, 1876 at the age of 54 and is buried in Battle Creek, Michigan. She is also listed as widowed and a labourer. The 1861 Census lists George and Eliza with their children Maria (Mariah), James, George, Mary, William, Daniel, Elliot, and Jon. Our records also indicate that George and Eliza had two other children named 'Babe' and Anthony. I could not find any information for Babe but found information for Anthony which will be discussed at the end of this family history.

Mariah/Maria is the first child of George and Eliza Buckner. She married George Thomas. According to George and Mariah's marriage record from the Wesleyan Methodist Church, George and Mariah were married on July 25, 1861. George's father's name is not mentioned in this record, but his mother's name was Clarissa Thomas. George was born in Covington, Kentucky in 1843, while there are several possibilities for where Mariah was born. Her son George Alexander's death certificate lists her as being born in Evansville, Indiana, and her marriage record states that she was born in Kentucky, while her obituary in the *Amherstburg Echo* states that she was born in Malden and lived there her whole life, except for the few years that she lived in Battle Creek, Michigan, following the passage of her husband, George in May 1922. Mariah's complete obituary from April 27, 1927 says "Mrs. Maria Thomas, widow of the late George Thomas, whose illness was mentioned last week, passed away Friday morning. Funeral services took place Sunday afternoon to the A.M.E. Church, conducted by the Rev. Mr. Edwards, and burial was in Rose Hill cemetery. Mrs. Thomas' maiden name was Maria Buckner, and she was born in Malden over 80 years ago. Her father and mother are long since dead, but

she has three brothers living: William, Elliott and David Buckner, all of Battle Creek, Michigan. She was married to George Thomas some 65 years ago and he died on the 10th of May 1922, in Amherstburg. Their family comprised four sons and one daughter, all of whom are living: George, chef for twenty-one years at Overland [Oberlin] College, Ohio; Mrs. Mary A. Davis, widow of the late F.H.A. Davis, of Amherstburg; Philip and Robert, of Overland [Oberlin]; and Daniel W., of Cleveland. They were all home for the funeral. Mrs. Thomas spent practically her whole life in Amherstburg, with the exception of a couple of years after the death of her husband, when she lived in Battle Creek.”

According to George’s obituary from May 12, 1922 “On Wednesday morning, George Thomas, an old resident of the town died at his residence, corner of Simcoe and King streets. The deceased had been a sufferer for some years with neuritis, but was up and around working in his garden on last Saturday afternoon. He was taken ill Sunday early in the morning and after three days illness died with peritonitis. He is survived by his widow.”

In a booklet describing the Fifteenth Annual Thomas Family Reunion, it states that “Members of our family have achieved prominence in many fields of endeavor and we are scattered through twelve states in the U.S.A. and the Province of Ontario, Canada ... We are a family traditionally motivated to the highest ideas of Christian living and citizenship, and wherever we live, members of the family have played and continue to assume leading roles in the religious, civic, and political life of their communities.” This booklet also says that “George and Mariah Thomas were among the early settlers of Amherstburg, Ontario and were the parents of four sons and one daughter – indeed, a lovely family.” These five children were George Alexander, Philip, Daniel, Robert W. and Mary Almede.

George Alexander Thomas was born in Amherstburg on May 28, 1864 and is listed as a cook in his 1945 death certificate and an Affidavit for License to Marry. He retired in 1935.

George Alexander married Frances Jones on December 21, 1896 in Detroit, Michigan, although he is listed under his middle name, Alexander. His death certificate also lists a second marriage to Lydia Lott. George Alexander and Lydia had several children: Juanita Vivian, Robert S.,

George Leslie, Lydia Opal and Harry N. Juanita Vivian was born on January 6, 1899, and later married Charles W. Mason, a chauffeur and son of Charles E. Mason and Florence Smith, in

1938 in Cuyahoga, Ohio. Robert S. was born on September 30, 1901 and later married a woman

named Dorothea. George Leslie was born on October 1, 1903, and in September 1925, married

Helen M. Anderson, who was born in Jacksonville, Florida and was the daughter of Henry and Maude (Smith) Anderson. In their marriage record, George Leslie is also listed as a musician.

Lydia Opal who was born on March 27, 1906, sadly died on March 3, 1940. Her death certificate states that she was a "recreation teacher" and the wife of Harold Gaines. Finally, Harry N. was

born on May 17, 1908 in Lorain, Ohio, and according to his death certificate he worked for the U.S. Postal Service. He also married a woman named Anne.

George and Mariah'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. George Crawford 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 unfailing 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).

George and Mariah's third son, Daniel Wallace Thomas was a mariner. On December 27, 1893, in Amherstburg, he married Anna Permelia Stevens, the daughter of M.J. and Mary Stevens. According to the 1910 Census they had three children: Viola (or Viva), Granville and Burrel/Burl. Granville was born on December 6, 1895, while Viola (or Viva) was born the year before on December 27, 1894, and later worked as a housewife and married Edwin Gray Cowan. Daniel and Anna's third child, Burrel (Burl) Buckner Thomas, was born on January 18, 1898 and later married Helen L. Divelle, who was born in South Carolina and the daughter of George Divelle and a mother with the last name Cummings. They married on June 27, 1923 in Detroit, Michigan. By 1920, the census for Ashtabula, Ohio, states that Daniel was no longer a mariner, but now a machinist in a factory. It also lists Granville and Burl still living at home at this point (before their marriages) and the census lists Granville working as an "oiler" at a steel mill, while Burl worked as a chauffeur for a private family.

George and Mariah's fourth son was Robert W. Thomas and he was a cook. On December 20, 1901, he married Lulu Adams in Amherstburg at the age of 22; Lulu was 23 and her parents are listed as William Adams and Laura Holton (see Adams Family History <https://amherstburgfreedom.org/adams-family-2/>). Lulu was also active in the community, joining several organizations in Amherstburg. As a young girl, she was a member of the Buisy [sic] Glenors which was an educational group for young people. She was also a member of the Frederic [sic] Douglass Self-Improvement Club, which focused on education and etiquette, in addition to joining the Oxford Club which hosted socials and other entertainment at the A.M.E. Church.

Robert and Lulu had three daughters and one son: Roberta, who married a musician, Harold W. Coleman (son of Stephen and Mamie Duger Coleman), in July 1926; Fern (Georges); Lola, who married Elmer Hamlin and on the 1940 census for Lorain, Ohio, is listed as a maid at Oberlin College. Their last child, Orville was born on February 2, 1911 and is listed as an undertaker's assistant in the 1940 Ohio census and he married a woman named Ethel.

George and Mariah's only daughter was Mary Almede Thomas who was born in November 1863 in Anderdon Township and lived there for 75 years. She married twice: first to George Douglas McCurdy, son of Nasa McCurdy and Permelia Bailey, in 1884 and then to Fred H.A. Davis, son of Nancy Jane Mitchell and Delos Davis, in April 1913. Mary was a member of the B.M.E. Church in Amherstburg and the Ruth Chapter of the Order of the Eastern Star.

According to Mary's obituary from the *Amherstburg Echo*, printed on November 12, 1953, "Mrs. F.H. Davis passes – Mrs. Mary A. Thomas Davis, widow of Fred H.A. Davis, died at her home on Sandwich Street, Tuesday, in her 86th year. Mrs. Davis was a daughter of George and Maria Buckner Thomas. She was born in the old Haiti Settlement in Anderdon and had lived in Amherstburg for 75 years. Mrs. Davis was a member of A.M.E. Church of Amherstburg and of Ruth Chapter of the Eastern Star. Her husband a prominent Amherstburg barrister, died in 1926. Surviving are two sons George D. McCurdy of Amherstburg and Leroy N. McCurdy of White Plains, N.Y., and a daughter Mabel, Mrs. Rome Simpson of Amherstburg. She also leaves three brothers, Philip and Robert Thomas of Oberlin, Ohio and Daniel Thomas of Cleveland; 14 grandchildren and 31 great grandchildren. The funeral will be from her late residence to the B.M.E. Church Friday afternoon at two o'clock with Rev. I.H. Edwards officiating. Six grandsons will be pallbearers for the burial in Rose Hill Cemetery."

As mentioned in her obituary, Mary had two sons named Leroy McCurdy of White Plains, New York (b. December 12, 1885 and m. Evelyn Foster) and George D. McCurdy (b. September 7, 1890) of Amherstburg who married Laura Adams, the daughter of William H. Adams and Laura Holten, in December 1910. Mary also had a daughter, Mabel Edith, who was born on March 24, 1888. Mabel married Jerome Simpson in June 1905 in Amherstburg and they were the parents of Melvin Mac Simpson, who founded the Amherstburg Freedom Museum, formerly the North American Black Historical Museum, with his wife Betty. Jerome and Mabel had several children in addition to Melvin, including Dorothy (b. August 19, 1905 and m. John Dwelle); Wilfred (b. November 27, 1906 and m. Odessa Campbell); Everett (b. January 26, 1910 and m. Dorothy Williams); Corinne (b. February 12, 1912 and m. Vincent Bryant); Sheldon, and Kathleen (b. May 10, 1914) who married Burton H. Clemens, an electrical engineer from California and the son of Isaiah Clemens, on June 10, 1948. At the ceremony, Kathleen's brother, Melvin, sang the song "Because" and Kathleen wore a pastel pink silk jersey gown. Her veil had pink rosebuds on it and she also wore a corsage with pink tea roses. Kathleen and Burton married under a white canopy with ferns and roses in the background.

I could not find an obituary for Mabel but found her husband Jerome's obituary which was printed in the *Amherstburg Echo* on September 9, 1954. It says "Jerome 'Rome' Simpson, 71, of 212 King, Amherstburg, a life long resident of Amherstburg died last Thursday at Grace Hospital following a lengthy illness. Mr. Simpson was employed by the Bob-Lo Excursion Company for 55 years and was well known around the island. He was the son of the late James and Matilda Simpson. Surviving are his widow, the former Mabel E. McCurdy; three sons, Wilfred J. and Everett G., of Detroit and Melvin T. (Mac) of Windsor; three daughters, Mrs. John Dwelle (Dorothy), Detroit, Mrs. Vincent Bryan (Corrinne), Hamilton, and Mrs. Burton

Clemons (Kathleen), of China Lake, California.; one brother Oswald of Amherstburg; two sisters, Mrs. Carrie Banks and Mrs. Henry M. Marbly (Mamie), both of Detroit; also 10 grandchildren. Rev. I.H. Edwards officiated at the funeral Sunday afternoon in the BME Church and burial was in Rose Hill Cemetery.

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.