

## **The Butler/Fitzbutler Family History Part 1 – Freedom in New Canaan**

Amherstburg has many significant figures to be proud of, and among them is Dr. William Henry Fitzbutler. I've shared his importance on the Amherstburg Freedom Museum's social media pages and decided to conduct further research into Dr. Fitzbutler's life, but also his family. Dr. Fitzbutler changed his last name from Butler to Fitzbutler (for reasons that are unknown) so this month's family history will feature the Butler and the later established Fitzbutler family. I'll begin with William Butler and his wife Ann Calvert.

According to Milo Johnson's book *New Canaan*, William Butler was enslaved and a coachman in Richmond, Virginia. Johnson adds that William Butler's wife Ann Calvert was an indentured servant born in England in 1812 of Irish and English heritage. The couple was married in Virginia circa 1832. They escaped and came to Essex County, settling in New Canaan some time before 1833.

William Butler's death record states that he passed away on August 1, 1872 in Colchester at the age of 75. This record also states that he was born circa 1797 in Richmond, Virginia and was a farmer. William's wife Ann died on December 14, 1886 in Adrian, Michigan. Her death record states that she was born September 16, 1812 in Sunderland, Tyne and Wear, England. I wasn't able to find any notice of William's death in the press, but I did find a death notice for Ann in *The Amherstburg Echo* on December 24, 1886 which said "BUTLER – At Adrian, Mich., on Tuesday, 14<sup>th</sup> December, Mrs. Ann Butler, formerly of New Canaan, aged 74 years, 2 months and 28 days."

William and Ann Butler had at least seven children including Mary, Emaline, Philip, William Henry, Sidney, James, Elizabeth. The only information that I could find for Mary was a

reference to Mary in her brother Henry's obituary which refers to her as Mrs. J. Henderson of Columbus, Ohio. Mary's sister Emaline is referred to as Mrs. Emaline Ward of Dakota in her brother Philip's obituary, but I could not find any further information for her or Mary.

Mary and Emaline's brother Philip married Mildred, sometimes listed as Mary, Kirtley who was born circa 1842. According to Philip's obituary, Mildred was a schoolteacher and Philip's career is also noteworthy. In his obituary from September 30, 1910, it says "Philip Butler, one of the best known colored men in South Essex, passed away at his home here Thursday morning of last week, following a few months illness with heart trouble, aged 75 years, 5 months and 17 days. Mr. Butler was born in Malden township, being one of a family of seven children of whom two sisters and one brother survive – Mrs. Grace Foster, of Monroe, Mich, and Mrs. Emaline Ward, of Dakota, and James Butler, of Adrian, Mich. He was married in 1861 to Mildred Kirtley, a school teacher, and she with two daughters are left to mourn – Mrs. Charles Mitchell and Mrs. Thomas Pearl, both of this township. Two sons, Walter and Gordon predeceased their father. Mr. Butler's name will go down to posterity as one which stood for honesty and probity. He was a hard worker, and in his prime was one of the strongest men in the township. For many years he was a county constable and his services towards the preservation of peace and good order were invaluable. The funeral took place Sunday to Rose Hill cemetery, Amherstburg. Services were conducted by Rev. Mr. Bowden, pastor in charge of this community, and by Star Lodge, No 17, F. & A.M., of which deceased was a member, and Lincoln Lodge, No. 8, F. & A.M., of Amherstburg. A very large number of friends and relatives turned out to pay their last respects. The pall bearers were Anthony Banks, James Davis, Jerry Harris, Jonathan Strawthers, Dan W. Woodson and Frank Artis."

A few years later, on December 30, 1921, *The Amherstburg Echo* printed Mildred Kirtley Butler's obituary which said "Mrs. Philip Butler, an old resident of this place, died in Detroit Saturday, aged 81 years. The remains were brought to Amherstburg, Monday, and after funeral services at the A.M.E. church, conducted by Rev. W.F. Seay, burial was in Rose Hill cemetery by the side of her husband, who predeceased her several years. Mrs. Bulter's maiden name was Kirtley. She is survived by two daughters, Mrs. Charles Mitchell, of this place, and Mrs. Olive Pearl, of Detroit; one brother, George Kirtley, who lived with her and a nephew, William H. Bush, of Amherstburg."

Mildred and Philip had at least four children: Samuel Walter, Gordon Calvin, Olive and Clara A. There was not any information for Samuel Walter, but Gordon was a farm labourer, born circa 1867. Gordon's sister Olive was born March 25, 1868, and married more than once. Olive married Thomas P. Pearl, a stone mason and the son of Bazzle Pearl and Catherine Hilton, on July 11, 1897, in Detroit. According to Olive's death record, years later, she married someone with the last name Hulett, but the first name is difficult to read and may say "Ury."

Mildred and Philip's last child, Clara, married Charles J. Mitchell, the son of Levi and Annie Mitchell, on January 6, 1891, in Amherstburg. According to her death record, Clara was born on July 16, 1869, in New Canaan and she passed in May 1949 in Ann Arbor, Michigan at the age of 79. She is also listed as a widow. Clara Butler Mitchell's children included Ella, Mira Ann, Mabel Orphella, Fulton Fremont, Clara Janette, Mary Gertrude and Charles Clayton.

Ella Mitchell, the first child of Clara and Charles, married Roman Hall, a 29-year-old farmer and the son of Jessee Hall and Mary Allan, on June 28, 1916. At the time, Ella was 23 and her occupation is listed as "farmer's daughter." Ella's sister Mira Ann was born on October

2, 1894 in Colchester North and she married John D. Day, the son of Samuel Day and Sarah Hunt, on February 19, 1919 in New Canaan.

Mira Ann's sister Mabel Orphella was born on January 27, 1897 in Colchester, while her brother Fulton Fremont Mitchell was born on August 15, 1899. Fulton Fremont married Gladys Berdue on November 1, 1924 in Ann Arbor, Michigan. The names of Gladys' parents are not listed in their marriage record, but it does say that she was 20 years old, a cook and born in Kalamazoo, Michigan. It also mentions that Fremont's occupation was "Trucking." Following the passing of his first wife, Fremont married Dona Gunn Gutierrez, the daughter of James Gunn and Emma Ledbetter, on June 2, 1939 in Lucas, Ohio. According to their marriage record, both spouses of Fremont and Dona passed away because they are listed as widower/widow. This record even states Dona's first husband's name: Elias Gutierrez. Dona was also born in Indiana and worked as a domestic.

Next is Clara Janette Mitchell who was born on September 24, 1904 in Colchester North, while Mary Gertrude was born on December 6, 1907 in Colchester North and Charles Clayton Mitchell was born on July 11, 1910, also in Colchester North. On June 12, 1931 in Lucas, Ohio, Charles Clayton married Virginia Reese, the daughter of George and Helen Reese. Their marriage record states that Clayton was a gardener and that neither he nor Virginia were previously married.

**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.**