

The Butler/Fitzbutler Family History Part 2 – An Apple A Day

Now that I have discussed Mary, Emaline and Philip, I'll continue with the next child of William and Ann (Calvert) Butler, who was William Henry Butler. He later changed his last name from Butler to Fitzbutler, so I will refer to him as Henry Fitzbutler throughout this family history. Henry was born in Amherstburg in 1842 and attended school in Amherstburg. Family accounts state that he often borrowed books from physician, Dr. Daniel Pearson, who was previously enslaved. He would later accompany Dr. Pearson on his medical rounds and became the apprentice of a young white doctor practising in Amherstburg. In January of 1871, Fitzbutler became the first Black student in the Detroit Medical College, soon after transferring to the University of Michigan School of Medicine. It was in 1872 that he became the first Black graduate from the University of Michigan Medical School to earn a medical degree. Dr. Fitzbutler, his wife Dr. Sarah McCurdy Fitzbutler and their children moved to Louisville, Kentucky where Henry became the first Black physician practicing in Louisville, Kentucky (for 29 years).

Henry married Dr. Sarah Helen McCurdy on May 7, 1877 in Essex County. Sarah was the daughter of William and Mary Ann McCurdy. Sarah's father William McCurdy (the son of Nasa McCurdy and Hannah Ann McGill) was a respected resident of Colchester. William McCurdy's obituary appeared in *The Amherstburg Echo* on January 20, 1888 and said "Death of Wm. McCurdy, J.P. – On Monday evening of this week, William McCurdy died at the family residence north of Harrow, after being confined to his bed for more than a year with a stroke of paralysis. Deceased was in his 71st year, having been born in the state of Pennsylvania in April 1817. He came to Essex in 1855, and after residing at the Waters farm for one year and at Gilgal for another, he purchased the ? farm on which he has ever since resided. He was regarded by the

colored people of South Essex as one of their best representative men and was looked up to and respected by them all and was held in the highest esteem by his neighbors of all nationalities. He several times filled the office of school trustee, was a steward of the A.M.E. Church, and in 1879, he was created a Justice of the Peace for Essex by the Ontario Government – the first of his people, who ever held the office in Essex, if not in Ontario, and the duties of which he discharged ably and impartially. His wife, three sons and four Daughters survive him. His sons are Alvin, of this township; William ? of Detroit, and Joseph, at home; and his daughters are Mrs. Henry FitzButler, Louisville, Ky.; Mrs. George Eveans, of Whittaker, Mich.; Mrs. Robert Mitchell, of Windsor Post office; and Miss Minerva Alice, residing at home. George McCurdy of Sandwich is a brother of the deceased and another brother, Nasa McCurdy died at Amherstburg, some 18 months ago. William McCurdy was a true man. He was a staunch and active Liberal in politics, and at the Provincial election in December, 1886, although unable to sit up he insisted on being carried from his residence to the polls at Harrow to cast his vote for Mr. Balfour, whose firm friend he had been for years. His funeral will take place today (Friday).”

I was also able to find an obituary for Sarah’s mother, Mary Ann Grinage McCurdy which appeared in *The Amherstburg Echo* on June 1, 1917. It says, “Mrs. William McCurdy, a former resident of the 7th concession and widow of the late William McCurdy, died in Saginaw, Mich., on Wednesday of last week. The remains were brought here Friday and interred in Central Grove cemetery. Deceased was a daughter of the late Rev. Alexander McCurdy, who died in Nova Scotia just a few weeks ago. Her mother has been dead some years. She is survived by one brother, William Kersey, of this township, and one sister, Mrs. Crosby, of Salem.”

Sarah Helen McCurdy Fitzbutler attended the Louisville National Medical College and became the first Black woman to receive a medical degree in Kentucky. She gained an excellent

reputation, particularly in the fields of obstetrics and pediatrics. Among her other accomplishments, she became superintendent of the Louisville National Medical College's auxiliary hospital, in addition to acting as supervisor of the College's nursing program. Her hospital was considered to be one of the cleanest and best operated hospitals in the US in 1909.

Dr. Sarah McCurdy Fitzbutler's husband Dr. Henry Fitzbutler, according to his death record, passed on December 27, 1901 in Louisville, Kentucky at the age of 64. On January 17, 1902, Dr. Fitzbutler's passing was reported in *The Amherstburg Echo* which stated "Word has been received here of the death of Dr. H. Fitzbutler, which occurred on Dec. 29th, at Louisville, Ky., after an illness extending over a period of three months. Decease was sixty four years and seven days old and was a native of this county, having been born near the village of Harrow, but was reared in New Canaan, his parents moving there while he was quite young. He taught school for a number of years at New Canaan and Gilgal and afterwards studied medicine and was a graduate from the medical department of the University of Mich. In 1866 he married Miss Sarah McCurdy, daughter of the late Wm. McCurdy, J.P. of the township of Colchester South, and by their union there were six children: Prima, at home, Mary, Mrs. Dr. Wengate [should say Waring], Chicago, Elizabeth, Mrs. Harper, Chicago (deceased); James, a practicing physician, Louisville, Myra, in Chicago, and Wm. at home. He moved with his family to Louisville about 30 years ago and has since resided there, where he had a large and successful practice. He was interested in a Medical Institute there and was Dean of the Faculty. Besides his widow and children he leaves two brothers and three sisters, Philip, New Canaan, James, Adrian, Mich.; Mary, Mrs. J. Henderson, Columbus, O.; Elizabeth, Mrs. J.W. Foster, California, and Myra, Mrs. M.J. Ward Caster, S.D., to mourn his loss, besides many other relatives and friends."

I could not find an obituary for Henry's wife Sarah, but I found her death record which lists her as Sarah Helen Fitzhartler [should say Fitzbutler]. This record states that she passed on January 12, 1923 in Chicago at the age of 75.

Sarah and Henry had at least seven children named Prima, Mary, Sarah, Elizabeth, James Henry, Myra and William. According to *Find A Grave* Prima Augusta Fitzbutler Washington was born on August 3, 1868. She became a teacher circa 1866. According to her marriage record, Prima married James L. Washington, the son of George and Sarah Washington, on November 27, 1918 in Louisville, Kentucky. Her death record states that she died on April 2, 1962 in Louisville, Kentucky at the age of 93 and she was a widow.

Prima's sister Mary married Frank B. Waring, who was born on March 31, 1864 in Chicago and was the son of Mary Jane Gray and Robert Crutchfield Waring. On June 25, 1891, Frank signed a Marriage Bond (which guaranteed that two people were legally available to marry each other). Their marriage license which is from June 26, 1901 records that Mary's parents, Henry and Sarah Fitzbutler, were both present. Based on the evidence Mary and Frank did not have children.

Dr. Mary Fitzbutler Waring was a very impressive woman. She taught in Louisville before she graduated from the Louisville National Medical College in 1894. She then graduated from the National Medical College of Chicago in 1923 and was one of the earliest Black female physicians. Among her other accomplishments, Dr. Waring was also an activist and protegee of journalist, educator and activist, Ida B. Wells-Barnett. She was also heavily involved in Black women's organizations and from 1933 to 1937, she served as the tenth President of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs, founded by amazing women such as Harriet Tubman, Ida B. Wells-Barnette and Mary Church Terrell in Washington, DC on July 21, 1896. This

organization took on many causes including childcare, education and the vote and had the motto “Lifting As We Climb.” It also raised funds for kindergartens, vocational schools, summer camps, and retirement homes. Dr. Fitzbutler Waring also advocated for women of African descent to join the health care professions and solicited partners to offer health care training programs for women.

Dr. Waring also travelled throughout the United States and sporadically abroad, where she lectured, wrote and provided valuable health care information to African Americans, who were often excluded from mainstream health care services. Dr. Fitzbutler Waring’s 1920 US Passport Application also shares some interesting details. For purpose, she writes “Sight seeing and to attend the conventions of the International Council of Women at Christiana Norway” and she planned to visit Italy, France, Belgium, Switzerland, Norway, Sweden and British Isles.” At this point, her application lists her as a teacher and that she was born on November 1, 1870.

Mary’s husband Frank, according to his death record, passed away on October 3, 1923 in Chicago at the age of 58. This record also states that he worked as a lawyer. A few decades later, on November 5, 1958, at age 86 in Chicago, Mary passed away. According to her obituary “Dr. Mary Fitzbutler Waring, formerly of Louisville, died Thursday in a Chicago hospital. The daughter of two physicians, she was born in Amherstburg, Ontario, and came with her parents to Louisville at an early age. She was a graduate of Central High School and Louisville Normal College. In 1898 she was graduated from the old Louisville National Medical College which her father, Dr. Henry Fitzbutler, founded. Before moving to Chicago some 50 years ago, she taught here. She is survived by two sisters, Mrs. Prima Washington, of Louisville, and Mrs. Myra Vincent, Los Angeles. The funeral will be Tuesday at St. Thomas Episcopal Church in Chicago. Burial will be in Lincoln Cemetery there.”

I could only find limited information for Mary's sisters Sarah and Elizabeth. The only reference to Sarah appears on *Find A Grave* which says that she was born in Canada in 1872 and died on October 29, 1899 in Louisville, Kentucky, at the age of 26 or 27. I could not find any information for Sarah's sister Elizabeth except that she is listed in her brother Henry's obituary as Elizabeth Harper of Chicago.

Sarah and Elizabeth's brother Dr. James Henry Fitzbutler is the next child of Henry and Sarah Fitzbutler. He was born on February 25, 1873 (some records say 1875) in Amherstburg. He married Mae A. Hamilton, the daughter of Joseph Hamilton, on August 25, 1904 in Chicago. Mae passed away on October 18, 1934 in Chicago at the age of 64. Her death record also states that she was born on August 10, 1870 in Barry, Illinois.

Over a decade later, James passed away on August 27, 1948 at the age of 75 in Norwood Park, Illinois. He is listed as a physician and widowed. James' obituary appeared in *The Chicago Tribune* on August 31, 1948 which said "Services for Dr. James Henry Fitzbutler, 73, of 352 W. 92nd St., who died Friday, will be held 1:00pm Wednesday in the chapel at 4136 S. Michigan Av. Burial will be in Burr Oak Cemetery. He was graduated from the Louisville National Medical College in 1896, and from the Illinois Medical College in 1904. He had practiced in Chicago, Gary, Joilet, and in the Philippines. He leaves a son, James Jr., a daughter, Mrs. Theresa Filait, and three sisters, Dr. Prima A. Washington, Dr. Mary F. Waring, and Mrs. Myra Vincent."

James' sister Myra is next. She was born on October 12, 1878 and married at least three times. In her brother Henry's obituary, she is listed as Mrs. M.J. Ward of Custer, South Dakota. Further research shows that she married Washington Ward and that the couple had a son named Barton Warring Ward who was born on February 17, 1891 in Custer, South Dakota. Myra's second husband had the last name Dennison. I could not find any documents that list a first name

for her husband, but in the 1910 Illinois Census, Myra is listed as Myra L. Dennison. She, along with her daughter Leona Dennison, were living with Myra's sister Mary and brother-in-law Frank Waring. Myra passed away in 1963 in Los Angeles and she is listed as Myra Luella Vincent, meaning she married a third time.

The last child of Sarah and Henry Fitzbutler is William. The only information that I could find for him is that he was born in November 1881 and passed away at the age of 23, on May 5, 1905, in Louisville, Kentucky.

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.