

## The Butler/Fitzbutler Family History Part 4 – Trailblazers

Now that I have discussed Mary, Philip, Emaline, William Henry, Sidney, and James, I will end this family history by discussing the last child of William Butler and Ann Calvert who is Elizabeth, also called Lizzie. She married James W. Foster, the son of Levi Foster and Elizabeth Waring, on August 20, 1867 in Detroit. I was also able to find the marriage certificate for James and Lizzie which says “This certifies that on the twentieth day of August 1867 I joined in Holy Matrimony James W. Foster of Amherstburg aged 25 years. Born in Amherstburg, province of Ontario. By trade a Mason. And Lizzie A. Butler of the same place aged 19 years. Born in the town of Amherstburg in the province aforesaid. There were present as Witnesses May Chase and Amy Russell both of Detroit. Dated at Detroit this 20<sup>th</sup> day of August 1867. Supply Chase Pastor 2<sup>nd</sup> Bap Ch.”

The 1880 Michigan Census lists James’ occupation as “keeps livery stable” which is interesting because his father Levi owned several businesses in Amherstburg including a livery stable on Apsley street (Sandwich street). This business did so well that Levi Foster started a stage coach business which was in operation during the 1850s. According to one advertisement in *The Amherstburg Echo*, its route began at Mr. Marie’s Tavern in Amherstburg at 8am on Monday and Saturday mornings and from Mr. Beeman’s Hotel in Windsor at 9pm on the same days. This was in addition to operating a hotel from 1848 to 1873 and also a tavern in Amherstburg, which closed for an interesting reason. Levi Foster attended a public debate that was held at the local Sons of Temperance Hall, which resolved that “the Slave Holder is better than a tavern keeper.” At the debate, Henry Botsford, son of Daniel Botsford, spoke to the affirmative side and succeeded in winning the debate. At the time, the temperance movement was very influential, encouraging people to moderate their drinking or stop altogether. As a

result, Foster, who was previously enslaved, put a notice on his closed tavern that stated that he would not allow himself to be perceived as worse than a slaveholder.

Following the closure of his tavern, Foster continued his livery business and accumulated valuable real estate, eventually owning several houses and farms in Amherstburg. By 1861 he also had livestock that was valued at \$1,000, in addition to seven carriages worth \$7,000 and forty-four acres of land. Foster also owned several houses and lots on south George Street.

Levi Foster was also involved in the community, as is evident in his participation in a General Convention that was held in Amherstburg in 1853. This convention brought together delegates from the US and Canada to Amherstburg to discuss issues such as agriculture, temperance, and education. Among those in attendance were Josiah Henson, who was elected chairman, Henry Bibb, and Levi Foster. Levi was also active in anti-slavery debates and chaired at least one anti-slavery gathering in Amherstburg in 1846. He also assisted in the organization of the True Band Society in Amherstburg which was created to assist Freedom Seekers in Canada. He is a very important figure in Amherstburg's history.

According to Levi's obituary from *The Amherstburg Echo* "after farming for twenty-four years he learned the plastering trade, and came to Amherstburg in 1838. Here he followed his trade for ten years, and then started the first livery stable in town, and ran a daily line of stages between Amherstburg and Windsor. About eighteen months since two of his sons succeed him in the livery business and he moved to his farm where he died. His first wife, who was a daughter of David Waring of Coshocton, Ohio, died in 1855, and left him four sons and five daughters. All of the sons and two daughters survive him. Mr. Foster became a member of the Disciple Church, and has continued so ever since, and bore his last illness with meekness and resignation.

He was a peaceable citizen and was respected by all who knew him. His funeral on Sunday last was largely attended.”

As mentioned in Levi’s obituary, two of his sons ‘succeed him in the livery business’ and one of those sons was James, the husband of Elizabeth Butler. He was born circa 1842 in Amherstburg. According to a letter found in the Museum’s Foster family binder, it says that James, Elizabeth and their children moved from Amherstburg to Monroe, Michigan in 1878. Their children include Ella, Myrtle, Grace, Mae/Maria Henrietta, William, Jay Walter, and J. Ernest. Before I discuss their children, I will share a few more details about Elizabeth and James. Elizabeth’s death record reports that she was born on February 11, 1848 in Canada and passed on July 12, 1921 in Monroe, Michigan. It also records that she was a widow. That is because James passed away in 1900. His obituary from *The Amherstburg Echo* from July 20, 1900, reports “In Monroe, Mich., on Wednesday July 11<sup>th</sup>, Mr. James William Foster, aged 58 years. Deceased was born in Amherstburg on March 8<sup>th</sup>, 1842. He was the third son of the late Levi Foster, of this town. He leaves to mourn his loss a wife, four daughters and one son, the youngest being 18 years of age. Also four brothers – Levi, of Wisconsin; George H. of Malden; Joh, of Amherstburg; Thomas, in the Klondike. Three sisters – Mrs. J.L. Hyatt; Mrs. H.P. Jacobs, of Natchez, Miss., and Miss Elizabeth, of Monroe.”

As mentioned, Elizabeth and James’ children include Ella, Myrtle, Mae/Maria, Grace, William, Jay Walter, and J. Ernest. I only found limited information for William, Jay Walter and J. Ernest. William was born on April 22, 1881 and sadly passed away the next month on May 3, 1881. Jay Walter was born on March 12, 1883 and passed on January 13, 1911, while J. Ernest passed on August 1, 1896.

I have significantly more information for Ella, Myrtle, Grace and Mae/Maria. Ella was born on May 16, 1873 in Amherstburg. She married Marion Elmore Author on April 26, 1905. Ella and Marion were a very accomplished couple. Together they founded the first Black bank in Ohio – Toledo’s Star Building and Loan Association, in addition to establishing Woodland Park, a summer resort for African American tourists/residents, in 1921. Woodland Park is located near Bitely in Newaygo County’s Merrill Township (Michigan). I have Tom Adamich and Dianna Cross Toran to thank for much of the information on Ella and Marion because Tom Adamich wrote several articles about Ella Foster Author and the Foster family in *The Monroe News* and Dianna Cross Toran includes information about Ella, Marion and Woodland Park, in her books *Woodland Echoes-A Cottage in My Heart* and *Shadows Beyond the Pines: A Story about Woodland Park Michigan, A Black Resort During Segregation*. Adamich shares in his articles that the Foster family of Monroe Michigan had several successful business ventures including a thriving livery business, a 23-acre fruit/dairy farm called the Willow Bend Dairy, and a confectionary and candy business (started by Ella) called the Sugar Bowl which opened in 1899 and was located at 9 W. Front Street, near the Foster family home (corner of East 6<sup>th</sup> Street and Scott Street). The Sugar Bown was later franchised to include a second location in Ann Arbor and some have argued that the Sugar Bowl was Monroe’s first soda fountain. Ella continued this legacy with the Woodland Park resort which used to be an old lumber mill called Brookings Mill. Woodland Park was a prime destination for Black travellers, and others, and included amenities such as a hotel called the Royal Breeze, clubhouse, convenience store, café/tavern called Pine Cone Tavern, realty office, community centre, church, funeral parlor, and a school which was called ‘The Sweet Childs Rest Building’ according to a photo caption. According to Adamich, Ella only hired accredited Black teachers for this school. The first person to purchase a property

in Woodland Park was Mattie Keller described as an ‘enterprising middle aged [B]lack woman from Atlanta, Georgia,’ who settled in Woodland Park in 1922 and opened its first store and gas station. According to Adamich, Keller would later open and operate two of the four main hotels within the resort.

According to Adamich, following the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the established ‘segregated business structure’ was altered, but many Black families chose to keep their properties in Woodland Park, while others opted for more integrated vacation and land ownership opportunities. There are roughly fifty families that still live in Woodland Park as residents.

Dianna Cross Toran adds further evidence to the significance of Ella Foster Author and her family sharing their contributions. She states that Ella’s mother Elizabeth contributed to the Monroe Ladies’ Aid Society which often met at the Foster home. Cross Toran also argues that Ella not only preserved a part of America’s Black economic and family history, but also her writing and photography helped to fill in gaps in Black history that had “either not been written, visually preserved or were ignored.” According to Cross Toran, Ella took pictures of everything in Woodland Park and turned many of them into postcards which could be purchased. Because there are only a few places that remain at Woodland Park that existed during Ella’s time, the photographs/postcards help to locate different parts of the resort (ex. The clubhouse) and preserves this history. Ella’s images also include Black leaders who visited Woodland Park such as W.E.B. Dubois, John Overton, Hallie Q. Brown and the Johnson Brothers who wrote the song ‘Lift Every Voice and Sing.’ In addition to her photography, Ella also contributed to preserving history by writing articles that ‘were rich with detail and meaning’ for the newspaper *The Chicago Defender*. It is not clear if the following article appeared in *The Chicago Defender*, but Ella often wrote advertising articles that encouraged people to purchase lots at Woodland Park. A

section of one of Ella's advertising articles, titled "What Does Woodland Park Mean to You?" says "It offers you the opportunity of bringing to a full realization your fondest dreams, the dreams and ambitions of everyone who has the desire to better himself physically, mentally and morally. It is absolutely essential to the well-being of everyone who is compelled to earn his livelihood and the nerve racking turmoil of a great city that he spend a portion of each year some place where he can throw off the cares and worries of his monotonous, routine life...meeting and mingling with his friends and acquaintances in such a place, give himself up to pure, unalloyed pleasure and recreation ... Be one of the progressive ones and act now."

Ella passed away on November 22, 1941 in Detroit. According to Adamich, there is a historic marker placed near the Brookings Mill Schoolhouse which highlights the significance of Woodland Park and Ella and Marion's role in developing the resort.

Ella's sister Myrtle also made a significant impact. Myrtle was born on April 17, 1870. She married twice. Her first marriage was to Dr. Louis G. Todd and second to Hugh Cook Sr. who was born on October 31, 1873 in Washington, D.C. Just as with Ella, others have written about Myrtle. In *Notable Black American Women, Book 2* edited by Jessie Carney Smith and Shirelle Phelps, there is a substantial writeup by Ruth A. Hodges about Myrtle on pages 140-143. Because the writeup is so thorough, it will appear in the next few pages of this family history. It says "Myrtle Foster Cook (1870-1951) – Editor, clubwoman, educator, civic worker, political worker – As a member of an affluent immigrant Canadian family, Myrtle Foster Cook was privileged with many educational, religious, social, and cultural advantages. Her early experiences resulted in her lifelong devotion to civic and women's club work at both the local and national level. She also held leadership positions with the Republican party. Cook served for many years as the national program chair of the National Association for Colored Women

(NACW), the premier women's organization of her time, and in 1922 she became the second editor of the association's newsletter, eventually transforming the one-page leaflet *National Notes* into a magazine. During her years as a leader in the NACW she worked with such notable women as Mary McLeod Bethune, Hallie Quinn Brown, and Mary Church Terrell, with whom she frequently corresponded."

The writeup continues by saying "Myrtle Foster Cook was born in Canada on April 17, 1870, to James William and Elizabeth Butler Foster. She died of bronchopneumonia on August 31, 1951, in Los Angeles, California, at the age of eighty-one. Funeral services were held at Peoples Funeral Home in Los Angeles. Cook's family immigrated to the United States in 1877 or 1879 from Amherstburg, Canada, and settled in Monroe, Michigan. She became a citizen of the United States as a child, when her parents became naturalized residents of Monroe. James E. Devries, in *Race and Kinship in a Midwestern Town: The Black Experience in Monroe, Michigan, 1900-1915*, discusses the ambiguity in classifying the racial status of the Foster family. He indicates that several Monroe County records classified them as mulattos; the U.S. census lists the Fosters as black in 1880, white in 1900, and mulatto in 1910; and Grace Foster Schmitt died 'white' in 1954 according to Devries."

Hodges also writes "The fathers of James and Elizabeth Foster were both slaves who escaped to Canada, presumably on the Underground Railroad during the abolitionist years. Elizabeth's father, William H. Butler, was a native of South Carolina and her mother, Ann Calvert, was English and white. James Foster's father, Levi, a leading black figure in Amherstburg, was originally from Ohio or Virginia, and James' mother was Elizabeth Waring, a native of Virginia. It appears that Levi Foster was not pleased with life in Canada between 1866 and 1873. He petitioned several times to end the separate school department for 'coloreds' in his

community, but each time the trustees turned down his request. Daniel G. Hill, in *The Freedom Seekers: Blacks in Early Canada*, states that Mrs. Levi Foster also appealed to the district school board to allow her to send her children to the common school but was refused. According to the board, the separate school ‘was sufficient for the wants of the colored people.’”

“Hill also writes that Levi Foster was a tavern owner in Amherstburg when he attended a public debate at the Sons of Temperance Hall, where it was resolved, ‘The slave holder is better than a tavern keeper.’ The day after the debate Levi Foster hung a notice on his closed tavern stating that, since he was a former slave himself, he could not let it be said that he was worse than a slave holder. Levi Foster was affluent in Amherstburg, operation, in addition to a livery business, a successful stage line and hotel from 1848 to 1873. After closing the tavern, he continued his livery business and built up large holdings of valuable real estate, eventually owning several houses and farms in Amherstburg. In 1861 his property included livestock valued at one thousand dollars, seven carriages worth seven thousand dollars, and forty-four acres of land. When James and Elizabeth Foster arrived in Monroe, they had the cash and the know-how to thrive in their new surroundings ...”

“Shortly after James and Elizabeth Foster arrived in Monroe, they purchased a home and livery stable business, which was operated at a profit until 1893 when James Foster retired and sold the concern; the family then bought a homestead of twenty-three acres on the outskirts of the city and ran a successful fruit and dairy farm for several years. As an affluent family in Monroe, they resided in two of the community’s better homes. At the time of his death in 1900, according to Devries in ‘Home Grown,’ James Foster’s estate was valued at \$10,000, which included real estate assessed at \$5,500 and bank savings and credit totaling \$4,530.02. Because



of the Fosters' standing in the community, they participated fully in Monroe's economic, political, school, and church activities."

"While James Foster never ran for political office, he was a dependable and committed Republican. Both Myrtle and Ella Foster were elected as speakers for their high school graduation exercises in 1889 and 1893, respectively. In his Baptist church James Foster was elected several times to positions of deacon, treasurer, and trustee; he also chaired annual meetings when the church was without an ordained leader. All the Foster children were baptized in the Baptist church, and the daughters took leading roles in the Baptist Young People's Union. Meetings of this group and the Ladies' Aid Society were held at the Fosters' home ..."

The next section of the article from *Notable Black American Women* is titled "Combines Teaching Career with Club Work" and shares that "Myrtle Foster Cook attended the University of Michigan. She served as a part-time teacher in Monroe for a few years before a desire to do missionary work led her to Kentucky, where she served as principal of a small normal school supported by the Baptist district association. She then accepted a position offering professional advancement at a high school in Frankfort. It was in Frankfort that she met and married Dr. Louis G. Todd, a descendant of a prominent Kentucky family. The Todds settled in Muskogee, Oklahoma, around the early 1900s. Cook was immediately asked to teach in the government high school for black children of American Indians. Responding to the generally poor health of blacks in the community, she organized the Dorcas Club in order to establish a hospital, which was completed by others who continued her work after she left Oklahoma. In Oklahoma Cook also organized a series of lectures and recitals, arranging statewide tours with the assistance of the State Teachers' Association. Coming to Oklahoma were individuals such as Richard B. Harrison,

who played the 'De Lawd' in Green Pastures and Dr. Kelly Miller, educator, lecturer, and scientist.”

“Cook was a charter member in the writing of the constitution of the Oklahoma State Federation. Louis Todd died on December 23, 1911. In 1916 Cook moved to Kansas City, Missouri, to head the English department of Lincoln High School. There she joined the Book Lover’s Club, the City Federation, and the Woman’s League. After four years of teaching, Cook married Hugh Oliver Cook, head of the mathematics department and later principal of Lincoln High School. Myrtle Cook laughingly told the NACW that she had married a family, for Hugh Cook had two young sons, Hugh Oliver and Hartwell Cook, and a foster daughter, Chloe, in college. The Cooks supported and aided dozens of other children; some were adopted, reared as their own children and sent to college, and others were given financial aid to help them finish high school or college. Through the Woman’s League of Kansas City, Cook initiated a movement to found a home for ‘colored’ boys. She was the organizer and secretary of the Colored Children’s Association, working nine years to secure the erection, equipment, and staffing of the Jackson County Home for Negro Boys in Jackson County, Missouri. After Hugh Cook retired from the school system in January 1944, he and Myrtle Cook moved to Los Angeles, where Hugh Cook died in 1949.”

Before continuing with the excerpt from *Notable Black American Women*, I will share a few more details about Hugh. According to a biographical article about Hugo Oliver Cook, written by Megan Dennis, in the 1910s, Hugh Cook led a campaign for the construction of a YMCA facility for African Americans and served overseas during WWI as the YMCA secretary who represented the organization in an all-Black unit, the 371<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment. He was also recommended for the Distinguished Service Cross after being gassed during the Champaign

offensive in France in 1918. For his efforts in teaching, Cook was also awarded the Missouri State Association of Negro Teachers' Distinguished Service Medal award. Not only was he awarded this medal, but he also served as the association's secretary for twenty-one years and as President in 1923. Following his retirement as principal at Lincoln High School, Hugh Cook, his wife Myrtle and family moved to Los Angeles County where Hugh was involved in the Boy Scouts, sold real estate and fire insurance and, along with his wife, raised funds for a low-income housing project. The newspaper the *Kansas City Call*, described the Cooks as “part and parcel’ of every forward movement which took place in Kansas City over a period of 40 years.”

The last section of the biographical article from *Notable Black American Women* is titled “Named Editor-Manager of *National Notes*” and says “Myrtle Foster Cook’s numerous social and charitable activities began in Monroe, Michigan, and continued in Kentucky, Oklahoma, and Missouri. Cook held a number of positions within the NACW, including teller, national program chairperson, editor-manager of the *Nationals Notes*, and chairperson of the Publicity Committee. From 1918 to 1928, while serving as national program chairperson and as editor-manager of the *National Notes*, Cook frequently corresponded with Mary Church Terrell, the first president of the NACW, soliciting articles and pictures for the *Notes* and outlining special programs. Cook succeeded Margaret Murray Washington in 1922 as editor-manager of the *National Notes*. Conceived by Washington, *Notes* was adopted as the official organ of the association in 1897 and was circulated at a subscription price of twenty-five cents a year. It was originally a small sheet of facts published by Washington at her own expense at Tuskegee Institute and distributed at the national convention. Cook expanded the newsletter into a sixteen-page magazine full of a variety of reports, articles, and personal comments, along with illustrations of clubwomen, convention groups, and projects.”

“With the expansion of national projects – the restoration of the Frederick Douglass Home in the District of Columbia, the scholarship loan fund, plans for a national headquarters – *Notes* functioned effectively in disseminating information, inspiring enthusiasm, unifying sentiments, and coordinating state and national support. In addition, *Notes* prospered financially under the management of Cook, who was able to return \$619.28 of the association’s subsidy as projected in her Second Biennial Report of the NACW for 1924-26, the NACW’s fifteenth biennial session. In 1926 Myrtle Foster Cook resigned as editor of *Notes*. Mary McLeod Bethune, the NACW president at the time, stated in the ‘Special Notice’ section of the *National Notes*, ‘We hope that our splendid organ will go forward in the future with the same interest and efficiency as it has in the past. The standard has been set very high and we hope the succeeding editor will keep it so.’ Cook’s expression of appreciation to the organization also appeared in the same issue of the *Notes*.”

*Notable Black American Women* continues, “Cook was nationally known for her work with the Republican party. She served as chairperson of the Women’s Division in Jackson county during the 1920 presidential campaign, and in 1924 she was designated national chairperson of the Black Division and a member of the National Speakers’ Bureau. During the 1924 campaign she assisted Hallie Quinn Brown, who was director of Colored Republican Women in the Republican National Committee. In the early 1920s Cook was appointed by the governor as a committee member of the Missouri Negro Educational and Industrial Commission and served for six years. Cook, along with her husband, was involved in other activities as well. Myrtle Foster Cook helped organize the NAACP branch in Kansas City and served as its secretary and treasurer for many years; she also organized the Paseo branch of the YWCA, serving as a member of its first Committee of Management and chair of the Public Affairs Committee. Both

of the Cooks were pioneer workers in the Peoples Finance Corporation, of which Myrtle Cook was the major stockholder. The couple also helped organize the Home Seekers Savings and Loan Company in 1926.”

Hodges ends by saying “Myrtle Cook spent a lifetime in the service of organizations that sought to improve the conditions of blacks. She was a clubwoman, educator, businesswoman, and civic and political worker. Her keen intellect enabled her to contribute much to the development of *National Notes* and to the realization of the NACW’s goals of self-improvement, woman’s suffrage, and the uplift of the black community. More research is needed to further examine her role in organizations such as the Home Seekers’ Savings and Loan Company, the Peoples Finance Corporation, the Republican National party, the NAACP, and the YWCA.”

Thank you to Ruth A. Hodges for such a thorough account of Myrtle’s life.

Now that I have discussed Ella, Myrtle, William, Jay Walter, and J. Ernest, I’ll continue with Grace and Mae/Maria Henrietta. Grace was born on April 30, 1879 and remained in Monroe, Michigan to take care of her mother Elizabeth. Following her mother’s death, she married Carl Schmitt who worked as the Foster family’s (German) hired hand. Grace passed away in May 1954.

Mae, also known as Maria Henrietta, was born on December 29, 1876 in Amherstburg. In the book *Notable Black American Women* edited by Jessie Carney Smith and Shirelle Phelps, it briefly mentions Mae was born on December 29, 1876 and was later married to John Fields circa 1900. Mae also assisted her sister Ella in the operation of the family’s candy store business. Mae’s death record which lists her as Henrietta Fields, states that she died on May 25, 1913 in Toledo, Ohio.

**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 where we will celebrate another amazing family.**