

The Crawford Family History Part 2 – The King Street School

There was significantly more information available for George's sister Annie Crawford who was born on February 15, 1861 in Amherstburg. She married John Henry Alexander, the son of Thomas and Catherine (Harding) Alexander, on July 24, 1883 in Amherstburg. John was also a respected teacher and principal at the King Street School in Amherstburg. He taught from 1878 to 1917 at several schools beginning with Puce and North Buxton in 1878 but remained at the King Street School for 30 years. He also served as an Amherstburg Town Councillor from 1923-1926 and, in 1930, he was also appointed Town Assessor, in addition to acting as town auditor and Superintendent of the A.M.E. Sunday School for 20 years.

Sadly, on August 16, 1935, the *Amherstburg Echo* shared that Annie Crawford Alexander passed away. Her death record states that she passed away on August 10, 1935. In her obituary, the *Echo* writes "Mrs. Alexander Dies At Her Home in Amherstburg – Long And Useful Life Comes To An End – A peaceful end came to a long and useful life when Mrs. J.H. Alexander passed away at her home on Alma Street, Amherstburg, Saturday afternoon. Born February 15th, 1861, Mrs. Alexander had lived in Amherstburg all her life. She was the daughter of George M. and Laura Virginia Crawford who settled in Amherstburg nearly 96 years ago. Mr. Crawford was of Cherokee Indian descent and came north from the Southern States when a young man. He was a master carpenter and many of the house 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. Mrs. Crawford was born a slave in Covington, Ky. Escaping from slavery when a girl of 15, she reached Amherstburg and was married to Mr. Crawford soon afterward.

Mrs. Alexander attended the King Street school in Amherstburg, of which Mr. Alexander later became principal and which he taught for over 30 years. She was a life-long member of the

First Baptist Church that had been built by her father. In 1883 she was married to J.H. Alexander, who survives her. She was devoted to her home and family, her church and community. Though her health had been failing for several years, she had remained active until a month ago, when she took to her bed.

Six children were born to Mr. and Mrs. Alexander, and all of them are living. They are Dr. J. Harold Alexander, at home; Miss N. Mae Alexander, Welland, Ont.; Arthur H. Alexander, North Buxton, Ont.; Miss Ethel L. Alexander, Belize, British Honduras; Anna, Mrs. Charles A. Webb, Detroit, Mich., and Marjorie, Mrs. J.A. Foster, Amherstburg. Also surviving is one sister, Mrs. P.N. Thomas, of Oberlin, O. One brother, George H., and one half-sister Martha (Mrs. J.H. Gant) predeceased her a number of years ago. There are 12 grandchildren. Funeral services were held at the home Tuesday afternoon. Rev. I.H. Edwards, of Windsor, conducted the services with Rev. H. A. Wright, of Christ Church, assisting. Interment followed in Rose Hill cemetery.”

Sadly, just a few days later, on August 31, 1935, John Alexander passed away. The *Amherstburg Echo* wrote a lengthy tribute to him on September 6, 1935 which said “Former Member Town Council Dies Saturday – John H. Alexander Played Active Part In Affairs – A life of service to his people and his community was closed on Saturday, August 31st, when John H. Alexander, former school teacher, assessor, councillor and auditor, passed peacefully away at his home on Alma Street, Amherstburg. Mr. Alexander was one of the most prominent citizens of the colored community and possessed as he was with exceptional teaching and speaking ability, he was esteemed and respected by both the white and colored citizens of the town. Ill health forced him to retire from the activity of everyday life last year and although he was able to go about the house, he was forced to resign from his position as town assessor. On Saturday he

was stricken with a heart attack and an hour or so later, at 11:00 o'clock in the evening, he passed away.

Mr. Alexander was born on October 15th, 1857, in Anderdon, the son of Thomas and Catherine Harding Alexander. His parents had come to Anderdon from Kentucky and settled on the riverfront. He attended Public School at Anderdon and after completing his studies there entered the Windsor High School, from which he graduated. He entered the London Normal School and received a teaching certificate and taught school from 1878 to 1917. His first school was at Puce and North Buxton in 1878. The next year he went to Dresden and then he returned to his district to teach in the King Street School at Amherstburg. This school was established to provide an educational institution for the colored people of the town and district. It was a log structure situated where Geo. D. Pettypiece's cement block factory now stands. Mr. Alexander took the position of principal of this school in 1879 and remained for 30 years. When he first started he had an enrolment of 62 pupils. Because of his ability, his knowledge of youth and his kindly understanding of their difficulties both in and out of school hours he was loved by all his pupils and he set them a sterling example that helped many to win success in both American and Canadian cities. Of the original pupils only six are living; two of these are David Holbert and Thos. Thompson, of Amherstburg. In 1909 Mr. Alexander left Amherstburg to teach in Tilbury and again in 1912 he returned to this district to teach school in Anderdon until 1917.

After his retirement as teacher he took a position at the Bruner Mond Canada, Limited in the lime department. In 1923 he was elected as a councillor of the town of Amherstburg and served in that capacity for the years 1923, 1924, 1925, 1926. In 1930 he was appointed town assessor and retained this position until ill health forced him to retire in 1934. At different times he was town auditor.

He was interested in promoting the spiritual welfare of the colored folks in Amherstburg and he superintended the A.M.E. Sunday School for 20 years. His ability as a public speaker also gained him much prominence in the community and he was in demand at many public gatherings throughout his career.

On July 27th, 1883, he was married to Annie Louise Crawford, who predeceased him exactly three weeks before his death. Surviving him are six children: Dr. John H. Alexander, at home; Miss N. Mae Alexander, Welland; Arthur H., North Buxton; Miss Ethel L., Belize, British Honduras; Anna, Mrs. Charles Webb, Detroit, and Marjorie, Mrs. J.A. Foster, Amherstburg. Also one sister, Mrs. Martha E. Simms, Providence, R.I. There are 12 grandchildren. A large number of friends and relatives attended the funeral service held at his late residence on Tuesday afternoon to pay their last tribute of respect to his memory. Rev. H.A. Wright conducted the service at which vocal solos were rendered by Mrs. William Wilson, who sang 'Face to Face,' and Mrs. Alfred DeZon, who sang 'One Sweetly Solemn Thought.' Mrs. H.A. Wright acted as accompanist. The pallbearers were: Messrs. Peter Brooker, Jerry Harris, Martin Green, Richard Brown, William Brown and Peter Stokes. Burial was in Rose Hill cemetery."

As mentioned in their obituaries, John and Annie had six children named John Harold, Nina Mae, Arthur H., Ethel Ladonia, Anna, and Marjorie. I uncovered a birth record for an additional child named Daphne who was born on June 1, 1885 in Amherstburg, but found no further records for her.

I found a birth record for a John Crawford Alexander who was born on April 11, 1884 in Amherstburg and this is likely the correct John. Other records mention he was born on April 19, 1883. He married Leila Theodosia Plummer, the daughter of William T. Plummer and Inez A. Larter, on September 12, 1911, in Toronto. There are also references to John living in Ottawa in

the *Amherstburg Echo*. John and Leila had a daughter named Inez who married Dr. Alan Jackson of Burtford, Connecticut and a son named Plummer.

John Harold Alexander passed away unexpectedly on March 29, 1951 in Highland Park, Michigan. The *Amherstburg Echo* printed an extensive article about his life which was printed on April 5, 1951 and said "In Detroit – John Alexander Dies Suddenly – John Harold Alexander, born in Amherstburg April 11, 1881 and eldest child of the late Mr. and Mrs. J.H. Alexander, died in Detroit, March 29, 1951, age 66 years, 11 months. In early childhood he lived with his paternal grandparents in Anderdon Township, where he received his public school education, passing the High School Entrance Examinations at the age of 11 years, under the tutorship of the late Alexander Mackenzie.

After the death of his grandmother Alexander he returned to reside with his parents in Amherstburg where he attended the continuation school from which he graduated with honors. With the ambition of becoming a physician he worked at various jobs to accumulate the necessary funds. He did part-time work for the *Amherstburg Echo*, was bookkeeper for the late J.D. Burk, and waited tables on Bob-Lo Island. After taking a correspondence course in accounting he procured a position with the Dunbar and Sullivan Dredging Co. He did some newspaper reporting and successfully engaged in many literary contests. He entered Toronto University in 1907 but after two years transferred to the University of Michigan in order to ? himself of an offer of part-time and holiday employment with the Dunbar and Sullivan Co., as accountant.

After graduating from Ann Arbor with the degree of M.D. in 1911, he married Miss Ella Plummer, a Toronto teacher. They moved to Detroit where he practised medicine with notable success for several years. A period of ill health led to his retirement as a physician and he

returned to Canada and spent a few years with his aging parents. He was elected to the Town Council in 1930? and served as chairman of the Park and Cemetery Committee. During World War II, Dr. Alexander worked as clerk in the offices of the Federal Government in Ottawa, and afterwards secured employment as a bookkeeper with the Shell Gas Company (The Bannerman Service Dept.) of which he was a valued employee at the time of his death.

Although he had undergone a major operation a year ago and had influenza this year, he seemed in fair health on arrival on Easter Sunday for a visit to the family home, Alma Street. [illegible sentence] in Detroit and was due to fly back to Ottawa early Friday morning apparently he had a seizure while visiting at the home of his son as he was found unconscious in the tub with hot water tap running. He died in Highland Park Hospital, Thursday evening. Surviving him are one daughter, Inez, wife of Dr. Alan Jackson of Burtford, Connecticut; one son, Plummer and grandson, Gary of Detroit; three sisters, Ethel and Marjorie (Mrs. John Foster) of Amherstburg, Anna (Mrs. Webb) of Detroit; and Arthur H., of North Buxton. A sister, Nina Mae, predeceased him last June.

During his residence in Ottawa the deceased had joined the Roman Catholic Church and was an active member of the Parish of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. For several years the study of various religious beliefs had interested him. While resident in Amherstburg during his late father's long illness he was a student of the Catholic faith with the Rev. C. Todd as tutor. Funeral rites were solemnly and beautifully conducted in St. John the Baptist Church, Amherstburg, Monday morning, April second with Rev. V.A. Thomson officiating. Pallbearers were Max Simpson of Amherstburg, five nephews, Philip Alexander of Windsor, Arthur Alexander of Chatham, Charles and Donald Webb of Detroit and John Foster Jr. of Sarnia. Dr. Alexander endeared himself to many people wherever he lived and his sudden death was a shock to his

relatives and a wide circle of friends. The floral tributes and spiritual bouquets were many and beautiful. Burial was in the family plot in Rose Hill Cemetery with Rev. D.S. Henry, B.A. officiating.”

John’s sister Nina Mae is next. She was a teacher. An article from December 24, 1909 in the *Amherstburg Echo* mentions “Misses N. Mae Alexander and Ethel Alexander and J. Harold Alexander leave to-day (Friday) for a week’s visit in Toronto. Miss Mae has resigned her position in S.S. No. 5, Mersea, to go on the occasional staff at Toronto, but was offered \$475 to take Union S.S. No. 11, Mersea, and accepted.” A separate article from ten years later, printed on July 11, 1919, says “Miss N. Mae Alexander left on Monday to attend the summer session at the Ontario Agricultural College at Guelph. Miss Ethel Alexander is taking a course in physical culture at the Toronto University.”

Nina Mae Alexander passed away several decades later on June 18, 1950 at the age of 65 which was reported in the *Amherstburg Echo* on June 22, 1950. Her obituary says “Death Of Miss Mae Alexander – Following an illness that had led to her recent retirement as a schoolteacher, Miss Nina Mae Alexander died at Metropolitan Hospital Windsor, June 18th. Miss Alexander was born in Amherstburg 65 years ago the eldest daughter of the late J.H. Alexander who had also retired from teaching after nearly fifty years of service.

She received her preliminary education in Amherstburg schools and her academic training at Windsor Model and Toronto Normal Schools. Her first years of teaching were spent in Merriton, Shrewsbury, several schools in Mersea and Gosfield townships, and on the Six Nations Reserve at Ohsweken, Ontario. Twenty-six years ago she became a member of the staff of Maple Leaf school, Lowland Township, Welland county and remained there until her

resignation. The occasion of her retirement was marked by many presentation parties held in her honor by various groups to whom she had given loyal service.

Miss Alexander was a member of Holy Trinity Church Welland and took a prominent part in the activities of all organizations connected with the church as well as the Church Sunday School. During her vacations which she always spent in Amherstburg, she was a well known figure in Christ Church of her native town. She has held important posts in the Women's Business and Professions Club and was past president of the Women's Teacher's Federation. She is survived by two brothers, John H. of Ottawa and Arthur H. of North Buxton; three sisters, Miss Ethel of Belize, British Honduras, Mrs. Anna L. Webb, of Detroit, Mich., and Mrs. Marjorie C. Foster of Amherstburg; one aunt, Mrs. P.N. Thomas of Oberlin, Ohio and several nieces and nephews and grandchildren.

A prayer service was held at the family residence Tuesday evening at which Mrs. Doris Stainton sang two solos. On Wednesday afternoon a special memorial service was held in Holy Trinity Church Welland, by Arch Deacon J.A.H. Davis of the Welland Diocese. Rev. R.W. Lane officiated at the burial service from Christ Church, Wednesday afternoon. Six nephews served as pallbearers. The floral tributes were many and beautiful. She was laid to rest with her mother and father in Rose Hill Cemetery."

Nina Mae's brother Arthur Harding Alexander is the next child of Annie Crawford and John Alexander. Arthur was born on November 2, 1886 in Amherstburg. He married Ethel May Shreve, the daughter of Charles and Elizabeth (Dyke) Shreve, on June 29, 1914 in Chatham. Before becoming a teacher, Arthur worked in several occupations before he became a highly respected teacher and principal. He worked as "the Printer's Devil" for the *Amherstburg Echo*, which involved an apprentice or errand boy working in a printing office doing tasks such as

sweeping and cleaning the ink off the ink rollers. Arthur also worked as a cook on the “Alexander Leslie,” a freighter that sailed the Great Lakes. He used the money he earned on the freighter to further his education.

From there Arthur became a teacher, later a school principal. He taught in the North Buxton area for 40 years at S.S. No. 13 and was honoured several times for his dedication to education. An *Amherstburg Echo* article from July 1, 1954, reported “Arthur Alexander honored – A record of 46 years in the education field, close to 40 of them in the same school, was honored Saturday night when Arthur Alexander principal of North Buxton Public School, S.S. 13, Raleigh, a former resident of Amherstburg was guest at a reception at the B.M.E. Church Hall, North Buxton. Among those present were Mr. William Newby, a school trustee at North Buxton for more than 40 years. Mr. Lloyd Perry, former pupil of Mr. Alexander, and now a solicitor with the Attorney General’s Department. Also one of his earliest pupils, Captain Abe Allen of the Chatham Fire Department, who was a student of Shreve’s School, Concession 5 Raleigh, 42 years ago. Mrs. Alexander, then Ethel Shreve, was a classmate of Mr. Allen.”

Just two years later, on August 2, 1956, the *Echo* reported another honour bestowed upon Arthur Alexander. It wrote “A.H. Alexander Honored By Federation – In the June 1956 edition of the Educational Courier, the monthly publication of the Public School Teachers’ Federation, in the column, Federation Honours, was the following story of Arthur H. Alexander, an Amherstburg native and brother of Miss Ethel Alexander and Mrs. Marjorie Foster. The article read: “Perhaps the most deeply affected person at the O.P.S.M.T.F. Annual Dinner in December of 1955, was Arthur H. Alexander. His sentiments were such because this was the first time in O.P.S.M.T.F. history that Honorary Life Membership had been conferred on a member of his race by the Federation.

Born in Amherstburg seventy years ago and the son of a school teacher with fifty year's experience, Mr. Alexander himself taught completely in rural schools for forty six years – thirty-seven of these in S.S. No. 13, Raleigh. His education commenced in Amherstburg Public School and Continuation School continued through Windsor Model School (1905) and London Normal School (1911-12). He holds a number of special certificates via summer school work as well as university credits. His activities in church affairs and young people's organization in his community were outstanding. In his last year of teaching (1953-54) he was President of Kent County Branch.

Upon his retirement in June 1954, a function in his honour saw several hundred former pupils pay tribute to him as did a communication from the Minister of Education.

This 'good man' is now spending his hours of leisure on a small farm not far from the village of Fletcher."

Arthur was also awarded the Fred L. Bartlett Memorial Award which was given by the Ontario Public School Teachers Association to honour teachers who made a valuable contribution to education in the province. He received the award at the age of 89 and Arthur was the first Black educator to be nominated for the award. It was said that "Mr. Alexander's outstanding leadership was known far beyond the area" and he "lifted the educational standards of an entire community." He taught in a one-room school house, later a two- room school house at the Buxton school and was recognized as one of the best educators in the area. This was despite dealing with the racial climate of the time. It has been said that other educators felt that "he would have advanced higher in Ontario education but was limited because he was a black teacher in an era when opportunities were limited to a few segregated schools." To be recognized for his work through the Bartlett Award despite these obstacles shows his true dedication to

education. Arthur never had less than 50 pupils in his class which included eight grades and he loved music. He even used a mandolin as a teaching aid to instruct students on how to sing. According to Arthur, “The mandolin looked like a potato bug ... So that’s what I called it. The students usually got a kick out of that.” Arthur’s grandson Philip also recalled his father (Philip V.) saying that the school inspectors always made a point of going to the North Buxton School at a time when they would be able to enjoy the performance of “Pirates of Penzance” or other Gilbert and Sullivan productions by Arthur’s students. Arthur retired in 1954 and positively influenced countless student’s lives while teaching.

Arthur was also active in the community considering he was a church deacon for more than 50 years, Superintendent of the Sunday School and chairman of the local Temperance League. He also assisted in the establishment of the Buxton National Historic Site and Museum. Arthur had the personal philosophy that the world should be viewed with humour and enthusiasm, which is something he incorporated into his career as a teacher, his work in the community, but also his marriage to Ethel May Shreve who was born in North Buxton. She was the daughter of Charles Shreve and Elizabeth Dyke and they had four children: Gloria Roby (Detroit), Philip (Windsor), John Arthur (Chatham-Kent) and Ronald (California).

Arthur Alexander sadly passed away on March 20, 1977 at the age of 91. The *Echo* shared a tribute which said “Amherstburg native dies in Buxton – Arthur Alexander, a native of Amherstburg area, died in North Buxton, March 20th in his 91st year. He was a son of John and Annie Crawford Alexander. Mr. Alexander was a one-time school master in Amherstburg and later a municipal man. The Alexander home was on Alma Street. The subject of this sketch Arthur Alexander was a prominent school teacher in Kent County and during the years and on his retirement was acclaimed for his excellent leadership in the field of education. His wife

survives him. He was father of Gloria Ruby of Detroit, Philip of Windsor, Arthur of New Brunswick, Ronald of California, 13 grandchildren and six great great grandchildren. Mrs. John (Marjorie) Foster of Sarnia is his surviving sister. Predeceasing him were sisters Ethel Alexander, a Missionary teacher in British Honduras, and Mrs. Annie Web and Brother Dr. John Alexander. The funeral was in the First Baptist Church, North Buxton, Wednesday afternoon with Rev. Adam Vinson officiating. Burial in North Buxton Cemetery. Friends from here who went to North Buxton to pay their respects were Mr. and Mrs. Alvin McCurdy and Mr. and Mrs. Jesse Henderson.”

Arthur’s wife Ethel May Shreve Alexander passed away a few years later as was reported in the *Echo* on January 17, 1979. Her obituary states “Wife of late Arthur Alexander – Ethel May Alexander, 84, of RR6 Merlin, North Buxton, wife of the late Arthur Alexander of Amherstburg, died on Sunday, January 7 at Public General Hospital, Chatham. She was born in Raleigh township, the daughter of the late Charles Shreve and the former Elizabeth Dyke. Mrs. Alexander is survived by a daughter, Gloria Roby of Detroit; three sons, Philip of Windsor, John Arthur of Raleigh township and Ronald of California; two foster sons, Orion Shreve of Toronto and Gregory Shreve of Chatham; a sister, Harriett Overton of Detroit; four brothers, Elbert of North Buxton, Harry of Raleigh township, Ervin of Toronto and Winston of Kitchener and 14 grandchildren and eight great grandchildren. Mrs. Alexander was predeceased by her husband Arthur in 1977 and by two sisters and five brothers. Funeral services were held on Tuesday afternoon, January 9 at the First Baptist Church in North Buxton with Reverend Adam Vinson officiating, assisted by Reverend Donald Wright. Internment was in the memorial cemetery in the village.”

As mentioned, Arthur and Ethel had four children named Gloria, Philip, Arthur, and Ronald. Gloria became a music teacher and taught many North Buxton residents to play piano. Gloria's brother Philip Valoure, who was a carpenter and cabinet-maker, went on to marry the daughter of the Reverend H. Talbot (Windsor), Elsie Adele Talbot, on October 2, 1940. Philip was a long time Sunday School Superintendent at the First Baptist Church in Windsor and taught Sunday School classes. Philip and Elsie had two sons named Philip Henry and David Valoure (Belleville).

Philip's brother Ronald became a Professor of Communication at Stanford University and taught documentary filmmaking for 18 years in the graduate program of the Department of Communication. In 1970, he was invited to Stanford as a visiting lecturer for six months and was soon after offered a permanent position. This is all despite not having a bachelor's degree. Ronald retired in 1988 but was a beloved mentor to countless students. Ronald's career in film began while he worked as a sleeping car porter on the Canadian Pacific Railway. It was while working that he met the wife of the commissioner of the National Film Board of Canada and she was so impressed by him that she introduced Ronald to her husband who then recommended Ronald for a job in the technical research department. He also worked as a re-recording sound mixer at the National Film Board of Canada and his name is listed in the credits of almost 300 films. Ronald also developed and patented a soundtrack-mixing device known as CUE VUE, which is a system still in use today.

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.