

Town of Apex Black History

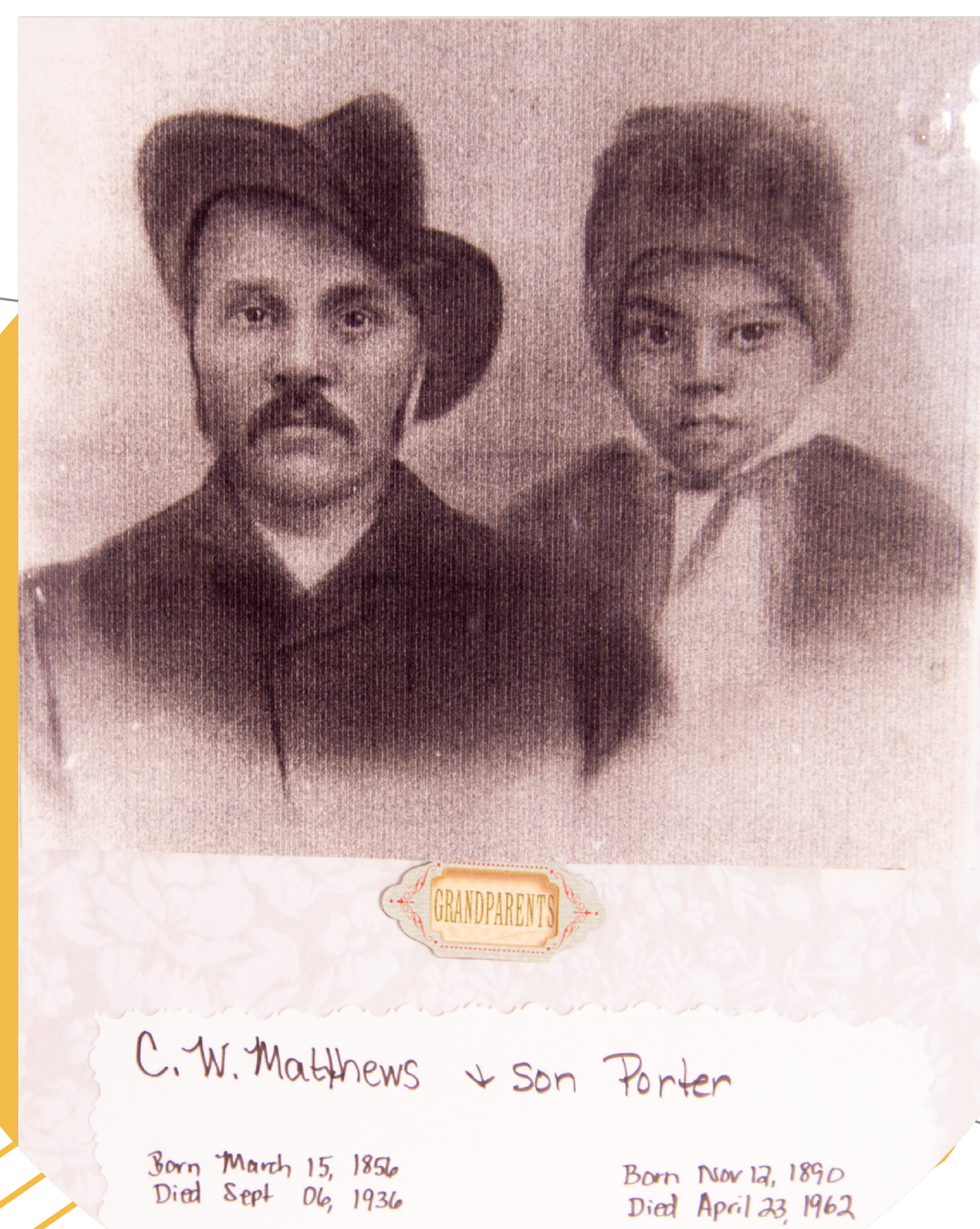


THE ESTABLISHMENT OF BLACK CHURCHES

The first Black church, Christian Home Christian Church, was established in 1866 under a brush arbor. Other Black churches were established in the following years. Contributing to Apex's growth and economy, their members came into town to purchase food, clothing, and other necessities.

BLACK-OWNED BUSINESSES

In the 1880s, Columbo Whalen (C.W.) Matthews was the first Black man to build and own a business in Apex. The building, located in downtown Apex at 119 N. Salem Street, was rented to local white business owners. At that time, C.W. Matthews could not legally enter the front door of his own building. He instead had to collect rent in the back alleyway.



APEX SCHOOLS

In the 1880s, Apex Normal and Collegiate Institute was established as the only known private school for Black students. From 1923 to 1932, three Rosenwald Schools opened in the areas of Apex, Friendship, and New Hill through the national Rosenwald Fund and local contributions. The Rosenwald School concept was created through a partnership with Booker T. Washington and Julius Rosenwald.

Their shared ideals resulted in nearly 5,000 schools opening across the United States to create better lives for Black youth through education and resources. In the 1950s, the Friendship and New Hill Rosenwald schools closed and students from both schools then attended the Apex Rosenwald School, which later became Apex Consolidated.



BLACK COMMUNITIES

There were many Black farming communities surrounding Apex. The communities consisted of privately-owned farms and tenant farms. They were generally formed around a church family and were close-knit in nature. Communities included Friendship, Green Level, New Hill, Low End, White Oak, Whops, and many more.

BLACK HISTORY IN GOVERNMENT

The Town of Apex has benefited greatly from the contributions and service from Black staff members and elected officials. James Herbert Matthews Sr., a Black electrician, received a special commendation in 1966 from the Town Commissioners. Other influential staff members include the first Black Town Clerk, Donna Hosch, who organized the first Black History Celebration, the Town's first Black Town Manager, Catherine (Katy) Crosby, and the first Black Police Chief, Jason Armstrong.

Elected officials have also played a significant role in the diversity of the Apex community. Clarice Atwater and Nicole Dozier both served multiple terms, and both held office as Mayor Pro Tempore. In 2019, history was made again as Jacques Gilbert was elected the first Black Mayor in the Town's history.

