

In 1860, Grose and his wife Sarah arrived in Seattle. He worked at the trade he knew best—cooking. In 1876 he opened his own business, a combination inn and restaurant named “Our House.” In 1883, he expanded his business by building a three-story hotel on Henry Yesler’s wharf. Grose also bought 12 acres of land from Yesler for \$1,000 in gold. This land was rolling farmland in what is now the Central District.

It may be hard to imagine farmland in what is definitely the urban area now, but many parts of Seattle in Grose’s day were isolated rural communities, inhabited by wild animals such as bears. Black urban pioneers settled all over the city, from Queen Anne to Green Lake, and very often had cows, chickens and large gardens to sustain themselves. The most urban part of Seattle was the Pioneer Square area, and many Black families started out there. Later on, particularly after the fire of 1889, Black families bought land in the heavily wooded and undeveloped outlying parts of Seattle.

William Grose followed this same pattern, first buying a lot on Sixth and James and developing it, and later buying the acreage from Yesler in what would become the Central District. He became a prosperous rancher as well as a restaurateur. Despite the fact that the fire of 1889 destroyed his restaurant and hotel, he still remained a wealthy man. In 1891, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* reported his assets at \$250,000.

William Grose and his family played a key role in the Black middle class in the late 1890’s. Their house was the center of social life, and Grose sponsored the first Black grand ball. In their leisure time, members of the Black middle class participated in musical programs, picnics, barbecues, balls and excursions. An all-Black performance of Shakespeare’s *Richard the Third* and *Macbeth* was presented at the Seattle Opera House. While some members of the white community were experiencing the age of opulence, wealthier Blacks were also enjoying luxuries and entertainment.

William Grose appreciated the finer things in life, but his

“OUR HOUSE.”

WM. GROSS & SON, Props.,
Mill Street, Seattle, Wash. Ter.

This hotel is located on the steam-boat wharf, and is the best and cheapest hotel in the city for workingmen. Table always supplied with the best the market affords.

Board and Lodging \$5.00 Board, per week \$1.00 Meals 25 cents Beds 25 cents.

Baggage conveyed to and from the house free of charge.

*Advertisement for “Our House,”
a hotel owned and operated by
William Grose*

concern for those less fortunate remained. Like Manual Lopes before him, Grose never turned away a person in need. Legend has it that Grose sold his restaurant business to two young men just prior to its destruction in the fire of 1889. The business was uninsured, and the two men would have been instantly bankrupt had Grose not quietly returned the purchase money to them and sustained the loss himself.

The love and respect his fellow men held for Grose were clear when he died sometime around 1898. It is reported that so many people attended his funeral that sixteen carriages were insufficient to carry all of them to his burial plot at Lakeview Cemetery.