

THE RILEYS and the WRIGHTS of TACOMA, WASHINGTON

George Putnam Riley was born in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1833. At the age of 16, he sailed around Cape Horn into San Francisco to search for gold. After a "kangaroo court" decided that only white men could keep the gold found there, George found employment with the U.S. Customs where he worked until 1855. That year, he and other black men (including William Gross and Archie Fox) migrated to Canada to mine for gold. Accumulating some wealth, George came to Washington Territory in 1865 and purchased land in Seattle and Centralia. He and a group of black men then formed a cartel and purchased more land in Seattle as well as Tacoma and Portland.

George returned to Boston where he met and married Harriet Gordon. After their only child, Bonita, was born in 1869, the Rileys returned to Washington Territory. They ran a hotel in Centralia for a number of years. George also worked in the Washington Hotel in Seattle, and later owned and operated a barber shop in Tacoma. He sold some of his land, but most was lost by his heirs because they were unable to pay the taxes due.

Bonita Riley married Arthur Wright, a sailor from London, England, in January 1888. They settled in Tacoma, Washington, where their six children were born, the first in 1889. The Wright family home was located on East 29th Street off of Portland Avenue. Arthur spent most of his working life as a cook on ships going to Alaska. Between sailings, he sometimes worked as a cook in hotels in Seattle and Tacoma. On several occasions when he had saved enough capital, he would open his own restaurant. Although Arthur was an excellent chef, he was not a very good business man. Consequently, even though his food was good, he would go broke and have to return to sea. The Wright children, all born in Tacoma, were:

George Augustus Wright, 1889 to 1981. He and Gertrude A. Harvey of Seattle were married in July 1914. George worked for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, first in Twin Falls, Idaho, in 1914 as a clerk. Their first son, George Harvey Wright, was born in Twin Falls in 1915. The Wrights returned to Seattle in 1917 where their second son, Charles Arthur Wright, was born in 1918. George continued to work in Seattle until 1942, when he transferred to San Francisco. He retired from there as Chief Administrator of the district Bureau of Animal Industry in 1953.

Irene Wright, 1890 to 1966. A childhood illness caused Irene to have poor health all of her life, preventing her from reaching her full potential--she was an excellent mathematician. Irene worked with her mother, Bonita, in a Tacoma theater until 1942.

Claudine Wright, 1892 to 1921. Claudine married Giles Graves in April 1914. They followed her brother, George, to Twin Falls, where Giles worked for a rancher. Their daughter, Irene, was born in 1915. When the Graves returned to Seattle, Giles worked as a policeman while he attended school. Their son, James, was born in January 1918. Shortly before Giles finished school and became a Doctor of Podiatry in Seattle, Claudine took ill and died suddenly at the age of 28.

Adele Wright, 1894 to 1970. For a number of years, Adele owned and operated her own beauty parlor in Tacoma. The years that she spent on her feet eventually took their toll: her legs gave out, and she had to sell her shop. Adele worked for awhile in Hollywood where she met and was a neighbor of movie actress sisters Olivia de Havilland and Joan Fontaine. Adele returned to Seattle in about 1936. She married the widowed William Dixon, son of Rebecca (Gross) and Robert L. Dixon, in 1942.