

**Unedited Notes for  
Presentation by Lloyd G. Wheeler  
At the First Wheeler Family Reunion**

**Chicago, Illinois  
July 15, 1995**

**T**he history which I will present of the Wheeler family, begins in Mansfield, Ohio. The family was very active in the Abolitionist movement and the Ohio Underground Railroad. After the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850, it became a criminal offense to aid a fugitive slave in any way. The family was forced to flee Ohio in the early 1850s for Chatham, Canada, where both the original Hiram and his wife Juliet Ann died in or before 1867.

There is some evidence that son Lloyd spent some time in Detroit pursuing studies in law, however, Lloyd and several of his siblings migrated to Chicago at various times. According to the 1880 U.S. census, brother Hiram D. and James A. (Abner?) were recorded as a part of Lloyd's household. Brother Robert Foster, however, subsequently migrate to Hartford, Connecticut, but Lloyd decided to stay in Chicago.

In 1868, Lloyd Garrison married the niece of John Jones, a man who with his wife, came to Chicago in 1845 and made lasting history here. The niece, Ranie Petit, was born in 1848 in North Carolina, and was raised in Chicago by John Jones as his adopted daughter. No history of the Lloyd Garrison branch can be written without noting the impact of John Jones.

John Jones was a politician, businessman, abolitionist, friend of Frederick Douglass and John Brown. He is credited with being the person most responsible for bringing about the repeal of the so-called Black Codes

of the State of Illinois. The Black Codes were a set of laws designed to keep Blacks in a status of slavery in the free State of Illinois. John Jones built, owned and occupied a 4-story office building in the heart of downtown Chicago on the northeast corner of Madison and Dearborn Streets, commonly known as 119 Dearborn St., according to the street numbering system then used. He was considered the richest Black in Chicago until his death in 1879. John Jones and Lloyd Garrison became life-long partners as well as in-laws due to the marriage of Ranie Petit to Lloyd Garrison.

Grandpa Lloyd was a very impressive, aggressive, highly intelligent and very civic-minded person. He read law and also graduated from the Union College of Law. On April 20, 1869, which was more than a month before his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, he became the 1<sup>st</sup> Black to be admitted to the practice of law in this State of Illinois. Your attention is called to the fact that his admission to the Illinois Bar came just 4 years after Appomattox which, as you know, officially ended the Civil War.

Politics was in Grandpa Lloyd's veins. In this connection, he went to Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1870, with the intention of setting up a Negro republic, according to family lore. In due time, he had to leave Arkansas between suns because of his political activities. As a youngster, I found a billy club of very impressive and durable dimensions hidden away in our house which attracted my curiosity. I was told that it was a family keepsake which Grandpa Lloyd had used for his protection when being hunted by those opposed to his political persuasions, namely, the Ku Klux Klan.

While in Arkansas, he joined with a Mifflin Wester Gibbs in a law firm under the name of Wheeler and Gibbs. In 1870, he was a delegate to the Republican congressional nominating convention held in Fort Smith, Arkansas. In 1871, he was elected county attorney for Pulaski County, and

was re-elected the following year. His original mission in going to Arkansas came to an end with the coming to power of the Democrats, so he made a hurried departure for very obvious reasons.

After Grandpa Lloyd returned to Chicago, he became, for instance, a major in the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the State militia. This outfit was the nucleus of the famous 8<sup>th</sup> regiment of the Illinois National Guard which fought so valiantly in World War I in France with the regiment as a captain.

Grandpa Lloyd was sponsor of the Evolution Club, a prominent literary society in Chicago. He was a member of a group of 100 that got up the Washington Celebration in 1889. He was associated with various churches as a teacher of philosophy and in such a setting, he would interact with various ministers on an inter-racial and inter-denominational basis.

Grandpa Lloyd became one of the founders of the precedent-setting Provident Hospital and Nurse Training School which opened on May 4, 1891. He was the first or second president of its Board of Trustees. In that venture, he was associated with Dr. Daniel Hale Williams, distinguished as the first physician to operate successfully on the human heart. It should be here noted that Provident Hospital was the only place in the country where a Black girl could get nurse training at that time.

Most importantly, he was associated with John Jones in John Jones' tailoring business which was established in 1845 when John Jones first came to Chicago. John Jones was called a merchant tailor and as such, he became wealthy making tailor-made clothes. On John Jones death in 1879, Grandpa Lloyd took over the full management of the business, and made "lots of money" according to Uncle John, my father's oldest brother.

Subsequent to 1900, the business began to fail. In 1903, Grandpa Lloyd's friend Booker T. Washington, offered him the position of Business Agent for Tuskegee Institute, which he accepted. In 1909, Grandpa Lloyd died.

Of the five offspring who survived Grandpa Lloyd, only two had children, namely, Mabel Augusta Evans and Hiram Hannibal.

Mabel Augusta married a George Evans, and they made their home in St. Louis. To that union, the following four children were born:

- Ruth Evans (Horn)
- Lloyd Wheeler Evans
- Mabel Evans
- Marion Evans

Contact with these cousins has been lost, although there were times in the past when there was personal contact with all of them.

Hiram Hannibal married Madge Anna Thomas in 1905 and to that union five children were born, namely:

- Lloyd Garrison (Aug 26, 1907)
- Mabel Jane (Kersey; Mason) (Jun 23, 1909 – Jun 13, 1993)
- Madge Ann (Bush) (Jun 13, 1909)
- Edwin Thomas (Jul 24, 1917 – Sep 16, 1987)
- Hiram Hannibal (Nov 3, 1918 – born two weeks after his father's death)

My father, Hiram Hannibal, was the first of his brothers and sisters to die. His death was on October 16, 1918, of influenza which was then a raging epidemic. He was at home in Urbana, Illinois, on a two-week

furlough before going to France with a special services unit of the YMCA in connection with World War I. My dim memory of him is of a dedicated, caring, loving father and husband.

As a member of the class of 1904 at the University of Illinois, he had distinguished himself as a football player in the position of quarterback. As an Illini alumnus who lost his life during World War I, the University planted a memorial tree in his honor on the Urbana campus. The tree still lives strong and healthy, identified by a brass plate embedded in concrete under the tree.

In 1910, my father decided he did not like teaching, so he broke his teaching contract with Tuskegee, and moved his family to Ogema, Wisconsin, a farming community in North Central Wisconsin. Fate, however, was destined to give him some hard, unkind blows. After a few months there, a devastating forest fire completely burned out the family.

Without resources of any kind, he went "hand in hand", so to speak, back to his contact at the University of Illinois where he was told the only thing available to him was work at students' pay. He accepted. While there, he was able to befriend many Black students, such as Attorney Earl B. Dickerson, with miscellaneous jobs.

My father's associates at the University of Illinois, realizing that there was no future for him there, or in Urbana, arranged for his acceptance by the YMCA in its special war work. It was understood that after War was over, he would become a YMCA executive secretary, a very prestigious position at that time.

With my father's death, he left a widow of 34 with five small children, no income, and less than good health. She was a wonderful woman who in her 97<sup>th</sup> year could look back with satisfaction and pride, and know that her

husband Hiram and his father Lloyd Garrison, Sr. would be please with her job well done.

In 1923, about 4 1/2 years after my father's death, we were able to move to Chicago. In a way, it seemed like coming back home. The name still carried much prestige and made us feel as though we had always been here.

My father's brother John, known as "Pete" in Baltimore, moved to Los Angeles with his new wife after retirement, where he passed in 1945.

His brother Lloyd Garrison, Jr., died in Chicago in 1970. He had assumed a different racial identity prior to his death, as far as we knew.

I am uncertain of dates that his sister Mabel Evans and brother Robert Foster died.

Respectively submitted,

Lloyd Garrison (3<sup>rd</sup>)