

My name is Amy Wheeler and I am Archie Grant's granddaughter. My grandfather and his sister, Fannie Lee Grant, were born near Barbourville in Knox County, Kentucky in the early 1920s. They were raised in eastern Kentucky and at the Masonic Widows and Orphans Home in Louisville. This is a brief history of how that came to be and some of the events and circumstances that shaped their lives.

My grandfather and his sister were the children of Archie O. Grant, senior and Flossie Mae Terrell who were also born in this same area in 1891 and 1896. My grandfather was known as Junior to his friends. To me, he has always been Papaw.

My great grandfather, Archie senior, was serving as a constable in Knox County when an unknown illness took his life on December 31, 1925 at the young age of thirty-four. Fannie Lee was two and Papaw was still an infant of six-months.

After the death of her husband, Flossie Mae was unable to support and care for her children. Custody of little Archie and Fannie Lee was given to Archie senior's surviving sister, Pearl Grant Warfield and her husband Willie, who had a small girl and boy of their own. The children lived with Aunt Pearl, or Mommie as my Papaw called her, in the country near Barbourville until July of 1929.

At that time, Pearl, Willie and their two children moved twenty miles to the coal camp at Black Star in Harlan County to manage a boarding house. Fannie Lee and Papaw had to go elsewhere and were accepted for admittance to the Masonic Widows and Orphans Home in Louisville. Because their deceased father had been a member of the Masonic Fraternity, they were allowed to enter the Home on July 15, 1929. Fannie Lee was now five and a half and Papaw was four. All the members of this new family had grown close so this was a difficult time. But everyone had to be provided for and this separation was a sad necessity and a reflection of the hard life that existed in many places.

After arriving at the Home, brother and sister were placed in boys and girls only cottages with other children of similar age on opposite sides of the campus grounds. But they would see and talk to each other daily.

Originally founded in 1867 as the Masonic Widows and Orphans Home and Infirmary, this Louisville facility was and still is the oldest Masonic Home in North America. In 1930 the Home was still primarily self-sustaining. The children – under adult supervision – would help farm the surrounding fields, tend to the orchards, clean the buildings, manicure the grounds, prepare meals or work in any of several small profit-making industries that also served the needs of the orphans and widows. Their new home proved to be a godsend for these two children (and for many others) and they soon grew accustomed to their new surroundings.

That following June, after their first ten and a half months at the Home, Fannie Lee and Papaw returned home to Black Star for the summer. They loved their time at home, back in the mountains, and would return every summer until after graduation from high school. Their relatives and friends in the coal camp also eagerly

anticipated their return each summer. Staying there year round was impossible, for Pearl was unable to raise them and her own kids too and run the boarding house.

Flossie Mae was nearby but was unable to keep the children where she lived. However, she enjoyed frequent visits and stays with her children while they were in Black Star. She was also able to make occasional trips to Louisville. Papaw still holds on to the memory of walking across the Masonic Home grounds, holding hands with his mother...he on one side and Fannie Lee on the other.

Papaw recalls the excitement of boarding the train in downtown Louisville and the rail trip to Corbin, where someone from Black Star would be waiting for them. He would take his bike along with him on the train so he could ride it all summer. Fannie Lee and Papaw were not made to work when staying with Pearl, so they were free to play during those warm, pleasant months of each season in the hills.

Unfortunately, that first summer of 1930 in Black Star would not be an easy one. After one week, Fannie Lee and Papaw contracted the smallpox virus from a miner in the boarding house. Fannie Lee recovered quickly but Papaw remained deathly ill throughout the summer. There were days when his chances for survival did not look good but in the end, he survived his battle with this horrible illness and returned to the orphan's home in the fall. Archie had to learn to walk again after months of being bed ridden. After facing and rising to this challenge, he began kindergarten and Fannie Lee entered the first grade.

A new head master and nursing staff were brought into the Home around this time. They were extremely caring and competent, and made sure that all the children received proper preventive medical treatments, including vaccinations against diseases such as smallpox. From then on, Fannie Lee and Archie Jr. would be happy, safe and well cared for at the Masonic Widows and Orphans Home.

A Masonic Home Journal was published frequently which included reports from the children concerning every aspect of campus life. Stories about life in the cottages, classrooms, sports, new arrivals, picnics, field trips and other outings, news of interest and just general gossip were all covered. If a sense of humor is an indicator of the condition of life, then life at the Masonic Home must have been pretty good. Clever humor and a sense of well being seem to be the hallmark of all these reports.

To quote one story, it was reported that Everett "Scrub" Harrell was searching on the ground around a lamppost one night when Mr. Ringo asked what he was looking for. "A nickel," replied Everett. "Where did you lose it?" was Mr. Ringo's next interrogation. "Back in the field." "But why are you looking for it here?" "Because there is no light back there," was Everett's reply.

In reports from the cottages, children boast that their quarters are the best and prettiest on campus, and that improvements are never done unless they can be done

well. In another, boys in one cottage bragged that their dorm mothers, Miss Lambert and Mrs. Griffin, were two of the dearest and most beautiful matrons on campus.

There were reports on the infirmary and various injuries and medical treatments. One young boy had the mumps and had also bumped into his bedpost, so he was being treated for mumps and bumps! One child seemed happy to report that a few more children had been added to the list to take cod-liver oil, and that he hoped they would enjoy it as much as the rest of us who had to take it.

Since they had been given unwanted, surplus golf clubs and balls, the children planned and laid out a nine-hole golf course on the expansive front lawn. The grass for the greens was neatly cut and tomato cans from the kitchen were used for the cups. The boys cut slender poles as the girls were cutting out white numbers and sewing them onto red flags, thereby transforming these poles into pins. One of the girls exclaimed, "We used to play baseball some; but we like golf ever so much better!"

Students were not short-changed when it came to their education. Many excelled in the classroom and would continue to do so later on in their adult lives. In 1933 it was reported that Mabel Brummett won the Jefferson County Spelling Bee championship. This was the Home's fourth time to compete for the Courier-Journal Spelling Bee Plaque, and they were successful in three of these. In succeeding years the Home Kids, as they were known, continued their dominance in this event.

The nature of their daily routines and responsibilities on the campus instilled a work ethic that would serve these kids well throughout their lives.

In reading through these journals, I found several references to awards for scholarship, conduct and citizenship given to Fannie Lee and Papaw during their years there. Both were recipients of the Hiram Bassett Award given to those who exhibited academic excellence and good character. It was the highest honor bestowed on a Home Kid. One sports article noted an anticipated upcoming track meet and predicted that Archie Grant would win all the dashes.

Papaw has many wonderful stories of life at the Home. When he was eleven, Mr. Morris, the grand master, wanted him to work on the farm with the older boys. Archie, being afraid of some bullying from the older boys replied, "Mr. Morris, I don't want to work on the farm." Mr. Morris then asked the cook, Mr. Short, if he wanted Archie in the kitchen. He was referred to as Chef Short because his food preparations were held in such high esteem. But Chef Short said, "No." Next, Mr. Metcalf, the butcher, also said, "No." The print shop was asked and gave the same reply. Lastly, the baker, Mr. Ray, was asked and he said, "Yeah, I'll take him." They built Archie a pedestal to stand on so he could reach the counter to roll biscuits...and he rolled those biscuits in the bakery for six years.

Another story is of Archie as a mischievous teenager, sneaking out to the movies. Boys could go to the movies on Fridays and girls on Saturdays, providing their

parents or relatives had sent money, or they had earned some doing odd jobs. Archie and some pals had the money but decided they wanted to go on a Wednesday. Needless to say, the boys got caught by the bell—which the dorm mother had attached to the inside of the cottage door. As punishment, the gang was forced to remain up all night and then go to work and class the following morning with no sleep. Time dragged on for the boys during that long night and every fifteen minutes one of the boys would ask, "What time is it?" At six A.M. Archie was off to roll biscuits. Luckily, Mr. Ray loved him and allowed him to make a bed on a pallet behind a stove and sleep for an hour before starting work.

In 1937, at the age of twelve, a new girl, Betty Craycraft, came to the Home. She was in the company of her younger brother Bob, who was only three years old. They came from Greenup County, Kentucky after their mother and father died of illnesses. It was upon her arrival that Papaw and my grandmother first met.

After earning their eighth grade diplomas, Fannie Lee, Papaw and Betty attended the Foundation High School at Berea College in Madison County. While completing their studies, Fannie Lee worked in several student industries, Betty worked in the Boone Tavern Hotel and its' restaurant located in the center of the campus and Papaw learned skills in woodworking. The Boone Tavern and Berea Woodcrafts remain as renowned parts of the college to this day.

After service in the army during World War II Papaw and Gran, as my grandmother Betty was known, were married on April 7th of 1946. They celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in 1996 shortly before Gran passed away a few months later on July 26th. Everyone in our family adored Betty Grant. She was contagious with personality and loved unconditionally. Papaw says the two best things that have happened to him are Gran and me. I cherish that comment. I suppose that Black Star, which disappeared long ago, and the family and friends that were there and the people of the Masonic Home are close behind.

Today, Papaw lives near to me in Louisville where I can visit him often, and Fannie Lee is in Marietta, Georgia. There are many children and grandchildren both nearby and scattered in other states.

Over the years, I have attended many Masonic Home Reunions with Papaw and Gran Betty, before her passing. The love and friendship between these orphans is amazing. These reunion halls are always crowded with the orphans who grew up at the Home; and their love and admiration for this Home and one another runs deep and fills the ballrooms where these reunions take place. The stories of their days together are endless and precious to them, and those who are lucky enough to hear them.