

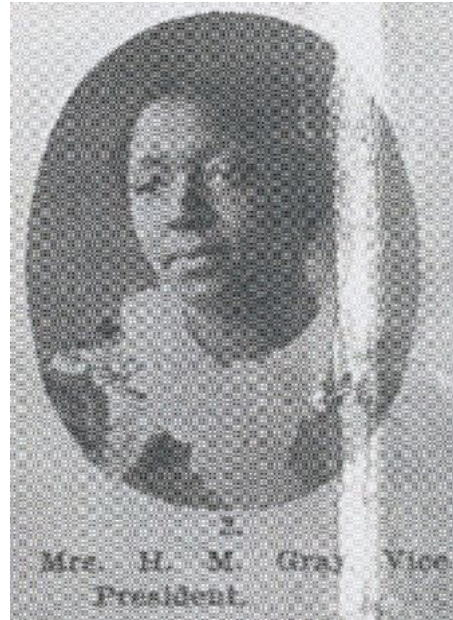
Katherine Gray Biographical Summary

FAMILY, RESIDENCES AND WORK

Katherine West was born in Kingston, New York in 1870, daughter of Frank and Eliza West. Her father was a canal boatman in 1870 and he could not read or write. In 1888 she married Harry M. Gray and by 1895 the couple was living in Portland, Oregon. Harry was born in Tennessee and was recorded as a gold miner in the 1900 census and an unspecified miner in 1910. In the latter year, Katherine was recorded as a laundress working on her own. In 1900 the couple had four children, ages five to 12, living with them; a son Severn died of tuberculosis in 1909 and Archibald died in 1912. A third child, Catherine Elizabeth, died shortly after her birth in August 1914. The two older children, Ethel, 21, and Edith, 20, worked as a private nurse (1906-1910) and a hairdresser (1909-1910), respectively. In both census years, Katherine's mother, Eliza West, resided with the family. Harry Gray passed away in February 1920.

With so many employed family members, the Grays enjoyed a measure of economic prosperity. Starting around 1906, for several years they lived in a house at what is now a vacant lot at 3962 NE Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard. There was an unsuccessful effort several years ago by local historians of Black Portland, including Kim Moreland and Tanya March, to preserve the house, owned by Teresa Raiford's uncle Andre Raiford, which for many years was the Burger Barn restaurant and had been a Black-owned business for decades. The Burger Barn was the site of a notorious 1981 racist incident in which two Portland Police Bureau officers left four dead opossums at the restaurant, which led to protests, national news coverage and a lawsuit against the City of Portland.

The Grays purchased a home at 4827 Franklin Street in 1917. The home stayed in the family through at least 1956. The Gray family dispersed in 1920, just after Harry's death, but at least three family members continued to live in Portland. In 1917 elder daughter Ethel married Burt Turner, a Black musician, and the couple settled in the city, with Bert working first as a janitor, later as a musician and then a music director.



KATHERINE GRAY, 1913, FROM "OFFICERS OF THE COLORED WOMEN'S COUNCIL."

Burt Turner was the bandmaster for a neighborhood children's band funded by the Works Progress Administration, which marched in parades, especially the Portland Rose Festival Parade. Katherine's daughter Ethel taught piano and Burt taught the youth band in the basement of the YWCA on the corner of Tillamook and Williams. During a later period, they both played in the jazz ensemble the Dixieland Strollers. Katherine continued to live in Portland, working at a public rest room between 1920 and 1931. By 1930 Katherine was recorded in the Portland census as a 59-year-old widow living with her 78-year-old mother. Katherine worked as a matron in a rest room and owned their home, valued at \$3,000. Mother and daughter continued to live together in Portland in 1940, at 4827 SE Franklin Street, the house Katherine had purchased in 1917. By 1940 Burt and Ethel lived only a few doors away from Katherine and Eliza. Katherine continued to work as a matron of a rest room in a city park, now at the age of 68. Eliza died in 1941 and Katherine passed away, still living at SE 4827 Franklin Street, in 1956.

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WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE LEADERSHIP

Katherine and her younger daughter Edith played significant roles in the Portland's women's suffrage movement beginning in 1912. The suffrage campaign that year was the fourth such effort in Oregon since 1906. The three previous campaigns had been defeated and Oregon's women's suffrage movement was sharply divided in these years by the imperious leadership of Abigail Scott Duniway.

In early 1912 Black residents of Portland came together from the black churches in the city to form the Colored Women's Equal Suffrage League (CWESL) and to join in the campaign that year for women's suffrage, Katherine Gray became the League's vice president and Edith served as treasurer. In September, the Woman's Home and Foreign Missionary Society held a fundraising event at the First AME Zion church in Portland and Katherine Gray gave an address to the group titled "Women's Suffrage." A representative of the CWESL worked with white suffragists on the State Central Campaign Committee, which coordinated the statewide effort that succeeded in winning women the vote in November 1912. When the Central Campaign Committee issued proclamations on the eve of the election, they did so on behalf of "Presidents of all the suffrage organizations in Portland," which pointedly included the CWESL.

Katherine registered to vote in April 1913 and remained committed to community work. In 1914 she served as president of the Colored Women's Council. In 1917 the Council joined with other Colored Women's Clubs across the state to form the Oregon Federation of Colored Women's Clubs (OFCWC), with Katherine serving as its first president. In January 1930, as president emeritus, she presided over the annual conference of the OFCWC.

CHURCH AND COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

Katherine participated actively in broader church and community affairs in Portland before and after the granting of women's suffrage. She was one of the founders of the Harriet Tubman Club in Portland, an affiliate of the National Association of Colored Women. In 1911 and 1916 she sang solos in celebrations of the Emancipation Proclamation, an annual event in Portland's Black community. In 1919 she served as treasurer with responsibility as well for the sabbath observance and anti-narcotics department of the Lucy Thurman Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), a colored branch of the WCTU. She was also a member of the Enterprise chapter of the Order of the Eastern Star, a Black fraternal organization. In 1915, she joined with two other Black suffragists, Hattie Redmond and Beatrice Morrow Cannady, to protest the showing of "The Birth of a Nation" in Portland. In 1918 she was appointed district president of the Women's Home and Foreign Missionary Society of the AME Zion Church. In September 1920, Katherine was serving as president of the Colored Women's Republican Club and she pledged the club's support for the current Republican campaign. A 1921 article in the Oregon Daily Journal notes that she served on a YWCA committee that established and managed a colored branch of that organization. Her obituary in February 1956 noted that she was a founder of the AME Zion Church in Portland and served as the director of the church choir for forty years. She was memorialized by the Katherine Gray Club, one of the members of the Oregon Association of Colored Women's Clubs, and by the awarding of the annual Katherine Gray Scholarship.

SOURCES

[*Biographical Dictionary of the Woman Suffrage Movement in the United States*](#)

Biographical sketch of Katherine Gray written by Thomas Dublin, Distinguished Professor Emeritus State University of New York at Binghamton

Additional information added by E.V. Armitage, Executive Coordinator, Central City Concern, from individual research conducted on Katherine Gray