

# Solving the 102-Year-Old Mystery of My Father's Paternity

**Doug Wren uses DNA testing and genealogy site resources to learn the identity of his grandfather**



**G**rowing up, I was familiar with the story of my father's birth. Thomas and Annie Duke and their daughters emigrated from England to Canada soon after the turn of the 20th century. Mary, the oldest daughter, married a Canadian and lived in Toronto. Mary's parents and her sister Edith ferried across the Detroit River and settled in the

United States. In March 1918, Mary traveled to Detroit and gave birth to my father. Mary eventually returned to Ontario, leaving her infant son in the care of her mother. On her deathbed a few years later, Annie Duke asked Edith to take custody of the boy. Edith and her husband Robert Wren adopted little George and raised him in Chicago.

LEFT: *The author with his father, George Wren, in 1956. (Courtesy of author)*

RIGHT: *George, Mary and Annie Duke in 1919. (Courtesy of author)*

Even as a child, I knew something was missing. Who was George Wren's biological father? Was he Mary's husband or someone else? I suspected the latter. Dad did not seem to be curious in the least. He died without ever



400 Class E Debarred  
**MANIFEST** Port of Post, Huron, Mich. Date 10-14-18 Serial No. 468-41-1  
 Family name: HALH Given name: GEO-ARTHUR Accompanied by:  
 C.I.V. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Place and date of issue \_\_\_\_\_ Section and subdivision \_\_\_\_\_ Quota country charged \_\_\_\_\_ R.F. No. \_\_\_\_\_  
 Place of birth (town, county, etc.) Toronto, Can. Age 47 Yrs. Sex M S. Occupation W. D. Congressman Read \_\_\_\_\_ Write Y  
 Language or dialect \_\_\_\_\_ Race \_\_\_\_\_ Nationality Canada Last permanent residence (town, country, etc.) Toronto, Canada  
 Name and address of nearest relative or friend in country whence alien came Wife: Rosal - 233 Heath St. Toronto  
 Ever in U.S. From \_\_\_\_\_ To \_\_\_\_\_ Where \_\_\_\_\_ Passage paid by Self  
 Destination, and name and complete address of relative or friend to join there Chicago, Ill.  
 Money shown 5.00 Ever arrested and deported, or excluded from admission \_\_\_\_\_ Purpose in coming and time remaining 1 wk.  
 Height 5 ft. 5 in. Complexion Med. Hair Brown Eyes Blue Distinguishing marks \_\_\_\_\_  
 Debarred 5 Fl. 5 in. Support and date of landing, and name of steamship \_\_\_\_\_ Cas. Im. Identification card No. \_\_\_\_\_  
 Records by \_\_\_\_\_ Previously examined at \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Previous disposition \_\_\_\_\_ Present disposition, P.I. 9T Arrived by \_\_\_\_\_  
 U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR, Immigration and Naturalization Service. Form 548. 14-2180

DISPOSITION BEFORE U.S.A. Rejected as and date \_\_\_\_\_  
 Debarred for and date \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date admitted \_\_\_\_\_ Decision and date \_\_\_\_\_ Data admitted \_\_\_\_\_ Trip No. \_\_\_\_\_  
 VISITOR OR TRANSIT Visa No. \_\_\_\_\_ Ticket issued at and date \_\_\_\_\_  
 Steamship \_\_\_\_\_  
**MEDICAL CERTIFICATE**  
 Afflicted with: Blind R. Eye  
 Part of body afflicted: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Signature of alien: J. Oliver Fred Immigration Inspector.  
 REMARKS AND ENDORSEMENTS  
Left U.S. at Detroit  
 U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR, Immigration and Naturalization Service. Form 549. 14-2180

My grandfather's manifest card, dated 14 October 1918 and marked "Debarred". When my grandfather made a second attempt to enter the United States, my father was 28 weeks old. (From "Vermont, St. Albans District, Canadian Border Crossings, 1895-1954", FamilySearch)

George's border crossing records, which documented his attempts to visit the States six months after my father was born. Closer examination of the records revealed the proverbial smoking gun. George's reason for traveling – written on each document – was to visit his friend, "Anna Dooke" at 723 Roscoe Street, Chicago, Illinois. I knew that Thomas and Annie Duke were living in Chicago by fall 1918. It seemed likely that Mary, separated from her husband by the time my father was born, was also living there with her infant son. I confirmed the address by checking U.S. census records and learned that Thomas Duke was living at 723 Roscoe Street with his wife Annie, daughter Edith, and grandson George in 1920.

My grandfather may never have made it to Chicago to visit his namesake son and paramour. "Rejected" appeared at the top of one border crossing document and "Debarred" was written on his manifest card. We can only surmise why my grandmother returned to Toronto shortly thereafter, leaving her baby in the care of Annie Duke. Mary left Canada for good in 1930 and moved to California. Six years later my grandfather died and was buried in Toronto's Mount Pleasant Cemetery.

Although solving the century-old mystery of my dad's paternity was fascinating, the part I enjoyed most was discovering my Canadian cousins and emailing with them regularly. Susan lives in Ontario, not far from Robb. Ed became a U.S. citizen years ago and lives in Florida. I am also learning about my other Ontarian cousins, including one who currently lives in Brazil. When the search for my grandfather ended, an unanticipated fifth step began: getting to know my new family. ☞☞☞

APPEAL MEMORANDUM  
 653  
 7/11/18  
 Arthur Hall  
 718  
 41  
 Married on \_\_\_\_\_  
 Occupation Congressman  
 Able to read? Y Able to write? Y  
 Able to read what language? Eng or \_\_\_\_\_  
 Ground for exemption \_\_\_\_\_  
 Nationality Can  
 Race Eng  
 Last permanent residence Toronto  
 Name and complete address of nearest relative or friend in country whence alien came 723 Roscoe St Toronto  
 Destination Chicago  
 Ticket # 5 Who paid passage? S  
 Amount of money shown 50  
 Reason for U.S. entry When? \_\_\_\_\_ Where? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date of last departure from U.S. \_\_\_\_\_  
 Reason for return when? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Name Annie Dooke  
 Address 723 Roscoe St  
 Relationship \_\_\_\_\_  
 Whether alien intends to return to country whence he came Y  
 Whether alien engaging temporarily in laboring work in the United States \_\_\_\_\_  
 Length of alien's intended stay in the United States \_\_\_\_\_  
 Whether alien intends to become citizen of the United States \_\_\_\_\_  
 Height \_\_\_\_\_  
 Complexion Med  
 Color of hair Brown Color of eyes Blue  
 Marks of identification \_\_\_\_\_  
 Place of birth \_\_\_\_\_  
 Country Can  
 City or town Toronto  
 Head tax \_\_\_\_\_  
 If not found, grounds for exemption  
 1 Canada  
 2 220 Bath St Toronto  
 3 Aug 19 - 1916 at Toronto  
 4 Jan 23 - 1917 at Toronto  
 5 Medically unfit  
 6 no passport  
 7 \_\_\_\_\_  
 M.F. 1107/015  
 J.F. 546/037  
 1073

U.S. Immigration Services Primary Inspection Petition dated 11 September 1918. The writing at the top of the card indicates that my grandfather's appeal was rejected and he was debarred from entering the United States. (From "Michigan Passenger and Crew Lists, 1903-1965, Port Huron, Michigan", Ancestry)



**DOUG WREN**, a retired public educator, lives with his wife, Heather, in Virginia Beach, Virginia, where he writes, works as a consultant, and researches his ancestry.