

GRANDMA TOLD ME ALL ABOUT IT

Impressions of Wrights, Taussigs, and Lawrences through the eyes of Marianna L. Langmuir

A final gathering of members of the family was held at 156 Linden Avenue on September 29, 1976, the day after the memorial service for Marianna Taussig Lawrence. The people present were those shown in the photograph on page 77 of the albums. Nancy Langmuir talked to the group about many events and characters from the past, drawing upon memories of long hours spent talking with her grandmother Taussig. She introduces the discussion by showing the picture of the Wright family group made in 1892 (page 16 of the albums):

This picture includes everyone in the generation I am mainly going to talk about except the youngest, my mother. Actually she is in the picture too, rather prominently displayed in her mother's womb.

The mother of the oldest woman in the picture was Eliza Bailey, whose miniature always stood on a table in the front hall of the household that had custody of it (see page 11). She grew up in Peterborough, New Hampshire, and fell in love with a young neighbor named Jesse Smith, who was a student at Dartmouth and planned to become a doctor. They were engaged in 1815, but since he was not able to support Eliza in the manner in which anybody thought anybody should be accustomed to in those days, they waited for seven years. During this time Eliza taught at a young ladies seminary in Charlestown, Mass. Jesse finished his medical training at Dartmouth and then at Harvard. They were married by the President of Harvard in 1822, and drove by horse and buggy to Cincinnati, where he set up practice and became a professor of anatomy at the new medical college there. In the next ten years seven children were born to them, including twins (Jesse himself was a twin). But tragedy

struck them over and over. Six of the children died in early childhood, three of them just before and after the birth of Mary Elizabeth, called Molly, our ancestor in the picture. Then in 1833 at the end of a frightful cholera epidemic, Dr. Jesse Smith, who had been taking care of everybody in town, contracted the disease and died within 14 hours. Eliza was left alone with three year old Molly and a son four months old. The little boy died four years later.

Eliza was a Unitarian and very religious, but her religion did not sustain her after the blows she had suffered. A new faith called Methodism was sweeping the country, and Eliza embraced it ardently. She began to talk, work and help people, and in return, was greatly helped herself.

During this time she met an itinerant Methodist minister named John Flavel Wright, a widower with a son and daughter. They were married in 1848. Molly was eighteen and her new stepbrother was twenty.

Three years later the stepbrother, John Reynolds Wright, who had graduated from Delaware College, said, "Molly, go wash your hands." She obeyed, and when she came back John said, "Molly, I'm going to marry you. Here is a ring." And, he put this ring on her finger.* They became engaged forthwith and were married in 1851. Their parents were his father and her mother.

The whole family lived together. John Reynolds Wright and Molly had nine children, of whom six lived to maturity. The oldest was Gordon, a practical joker beyond belief. Molly always apologized, saying she was so happy and merry during the pregnancy that Gordon could not help the way he was. Whenever he played a prank on someone Molly took the blame.

Gordon married Aunt Celia, who is next to him in the picture, a lovely person. They had two daughters, Louise and Bailey, both Vassar graduates. Louise married Malcom McAvoy, a lawyer, and Bailey became the wife of Smith Hickenlooper, a judge. They lived in Cincinnati all their lives.

*The ring passed down to Nancy Langmuir, who wears it.

The next child of John and Molly was a girl, Jessie. She married Fred Foster. Their only child, Helen, was also a Vassar graduate. She married John Gould; they had no heirs.

The third child was Clifford, portly and spacious inside and out. The whole family started leaning on him when he was a little boy, and kept on as he grew up. He married Virginia Ramsay. Their children were Ethel Wright Luther (whose husband Howard Luther and daughter Francie some of you know) and Clifford junior, some of whose progeny still live in Cincinnati along with Luthers and numerous Hickenloopers. His son Clifford lives with his family in Santa Barbara.

Next came Mamie, whose real name was Mary, after her mother. She married Will Goodman. They had no children. She died shortly before I was born. Will Goodman's second wife, Mary Hamilton Pike, gave Mamie's flat silver to Nancy Langmuir as a wedding present.

Anna Bramhall Wright, the future Mrs. George Washington Taussig, our grandmother, was next. Their son (our Uncle Wright, Peter Taussig's father) is in the picture wearing a dress, five years old. As mentioned before, Annie is standing in the picture, pregnant with Marianna.

Uncle Glen was the youngest child of John and Molly. He became the principal family adviser after Uncle Cliff. His first wife died, I think in childbirth, and several years later he married her best friend, Ethel Mary Moss.

The report is that the usual number at the table for breakfast, lunch and dinner in John and Molly's home in Cincinnati was at least twenty. There were the two grandparents Eliza and John F. Wright, the parents John and Molly, the six surviving children, "Aunt Lila" (maiden daughter of Eliza's youngest sister), the seamstress, and apparently an average of about eight guests or other relatives. They lived in a big house on the river called "On the Heights" surrounded by beech trees, which became Annie's favorite trees for the rest of her life. Pictures of the house and many of its inhabitants are shown in Volume 1 of the albums.

Let me tell more about the grandparents, Eliza and John Flavel Wright.

Eliza always had certain jobs in the house. She was custodian of fluids. Cocoa, milk, tea, coffee, and water were on a tray at her place at table, and she would dispense them to the family. She was

also in charge of the gardens. There was a gardener, but the growing of the vegetables and flowers were under her direction. Her eye for beauty inside and out contributed much to the atmosphere of the home.

Now back to John Reynolds Wright. He had ups and downs in business affairs, and at one point lost almost everything. Then, with the help of his wife's "buoyant nature" (according to her daughter Annie), he gathered himself together and embarked upon what seemed a rather wild speculation with a friend who was involved in a new gadget called a sewing machine. He knew the value of such things because of the seamstress who lived with them. Having seen the amount of time it took her to keep his ladies dressed, he thought the sewing machine a good idea. The venture became the Wheeler and Wilcox Company, the first big sewing machine company (Singer came later). The machines caught on, and people started to buy them heavily. John Reynolds Wright and his partner did very well, and were considered affluent. Probably they really were, judging from the wedding present they gave to each of their children. You will be interested and perhaps sad to hear this, because it is one of the traditions that we have not been able to maintain. The present was a fully furnished house, including as a matter of course, a carriage and team of horses.

There is lots of family lore about John and Molly. It is told that John manned the gates at Cincinnati during the Civil War. As a result of being out night after night on duty, he caught what was probably tuberculosis, and after that had weak lungs. He therefore retired at the age of fifty because of health. Another reason was because, as my grandmother Annie would say, "He had good judgment." (One of the traditions in the family, you will be glad to know, is "good judgment"!)

My impressions of my great grandfather John R. Wright come mostly from my grandmother Annie Wright Taussig and Uncle Glen, the two youngest of his six children, and also from Cousins Louise, Bailey, and Helen, daughters of his two oldest children, who knew him best. They described him as wonderfully gentle, sensitive, and perceptive--sometimes perhaps overly perceptive. My grandmother (Annie) said that when he was abroad with her and Mamie, they often went to concerts. (Taking or sending children to Europe is another family tradition--concerts likewise). One morning, after sleeping late, Mamie and Annie found a handwritten note slipped under the door that said, "Dearest daughters--Wasn't it a wonderful concert last night! I'm so glad that you enjoyed it as I did. I want to say, though, that your applause was a bit too violent. Maybe the next time as you are applauding you will think of more than just totally

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letting yourself go . . ." Those are not his exact words, but they were similar; somewhere we have that note that Grandma kept.

Assisting in education of the children is a policy that goes back to the Methodist minister John F. Wright and his wife Eliza. Eliza had taught at the young ladies' seminary, and her first husband, Jesse Smith, had taught anatomy. John F. and Eliza paid for the college education of their grandchildren. Clifford and Gordon went to Delaware College, and Glen to Yale. Granddaughters Jessie, Mamie and Annie were sent abroad to finishing school in Germany and Switzerland, acquiring fluent French and German, and some Italian. A generation later John R. and Molly sent three granddaughters to Vassar--Helen Foster and Louise and Bailey Wright. When my grandmother Annie was left a widow they sent her son John to Cornell, and my mother to Europe. When Annie had grandchildren she provided summer camp, school and college tuitions for Hicks, Ethel and me (Yale, Connecticut College, and Vassar respectively).

As you know, Annie's daughter Marianna and her husband Hicks Lawrence sent all of their grandchildren to college and to Europe.

I think the first member of the family who has gone to Dartmouth since Jesse Smith is John Taussig Jr.'s youngest son Timmy, who is there now. He is a good hockey player.

Because of ill health John Wright went to places like Harbor Point in Michigan, Clifton Springs near Saratoga, N. Y., and resorts in Colorado. He would stay for long periods, such as an entire summer, inviting the whole family to join him--children, spouses, and babies. Everyone would come for as long as they could, a week or a month.

On these long vacations the youngest children, John Wright Taussig (Peter's* father) and Clifford (older Clifford's son), were not perfectly behaved. On one memorable day the two got into the electric box and plunged the hotel into darkness by pulling the switches during supper. Despite much distress among the guests, nobody seemed to have hard feelings toward "Jonny and Cliffy," except possibly the "maitre d."

John Wright Taussig seemed to have a genius for this type of caper. As a small boy he and a friend managed to readjust the

*Peter Taussig, Marianna's nephew and executor.

switches on the street railway, and to learn about electricity at a very young age by short-circuiting trolley cars.

The tradition of family vacations was carried on by Marianna and Hicks Lawrence, and has provided some of the happiest memories for their children and grandchildren. The next generation will undoubtedly try to continue this, although it will be hard to do so on the scale established by John R. Wright.

The story of Annie's engagement is interesting. It begins when she was 21, a shy girl living at home in the big Cincinnati house. Mamie, Jesse, Clifford and Gordon had all been married. Someone from St. Louis came to visit the family. In those times, a visitor did not just spend the night, but might stay as long as a month because traveling was onerous. Shortly before returning to St. Louis this friend suggested that Annie come along too.

It was explained that she would need a "dress-up" dress to wear at the Mardi Gras ball. Molly and Annie rushed to the attic to look for something suitable. In one of the trunks they found Molly's "second-day dress." (In those days, a young bride's trousseau consisted of the dress she was married in, a going-away dress, a first-day dress, second-day dress, and as many other-day dresses as one's parents were able to provide.) Molly's second-day dress was her favorite, and she said to Annie, "Maybe you could take this." The year was 1884, and the dress was made in 1851. So it was old-fashioned even then. They packed it, and Annie went off on the train to St. Louis with her friend.

On the night of the Mardi Gras Annie, wearing the dress and with a tortoise shell comb in her hair, went to the ball. It was a very large party at which everyone wore masks. Educated in Europe, she spoke French and German. Charming and shy, she hardly knew anyone. A young man who asked her to dance turned out to be of German-Austrian descent. He started speaking German, and she did also. Then they switched to French. The young man kept returning to dance with Annie.

At midnight it was the custom for everyone to take off masks and for the ladies to choose partners. The young man said, "Please choose me when the time comes." Since all the men were dressed the same, she replied, "How will I know you?" He requested a red rose from her corsage to put in his buttonhole. She promptly complied, and when the moment came to unmask she knew whom to choose. The party continued.

The ball was on a Tuesday and the young man, who was a busy lawyer, finally came to call on Annie the following Sunday. Not being an avid churchgoer (although theologically and philosophically disposed), and having the bad judgment to call during church hours, he missed her. Annie found his calling card when she returned. In those days, of course, there were no such things as telephones, and it would have been unseemly to return a gentleman's call. And she was going back to Cincinnati the next day. As was the custom, people came to see her off at the train. She had been in St. Louis a month, and many friends were there to say goodbye. It was a bit disappointing, though, that a young man by the name of George was conspicuous by his absence. She boarded the train at the last minute, and as she sat down in her compartment a box was delivered to her. In it she found a single velvety red rose. She was delighted, but remembering her father's instructions about delicacy managed to turn her eyes away from the rose and wave out the window to her friends on the platform. As the train pulled away from the station the door opened and there was George Taussig, who asked, "May I travel with you to the next station?"

George had arranged with a friend to meet the train at the next stop to pick him up. During this, their second meeting, they had a very congenial conversation for about a half an hour. As George prepared to depart, he pulled a small box from his pocket, and gave it to Annie. She thanked him, and he left.

The box contained an edelweis. (The pressed edelweis is at this moment at home on my bureau in Santa Monica.) Annie did not know, unfortunately, that it was a custom in Switzerland to give an edelweis to the lady of whom you were extremely fond. It grows only at high altitudes in Swiss mountains where obtaining it is hazardous, and so it is always saved for a very special person. Anyway, she thought it was lovely.

Upon returning home she had the bad judgment not to write to thank him. We do not know why, except that she thought that she had thanked him on the train, and being a shy retiring person did not know quite how to thank him again in written form. So a year passed. She heard nothing and he heard nothing.

Then in New York at another dance she happened to meet a man from St. Louis. Annie asked casually if he knew anyone named George Taussig. The response was, "Certainly I do. Shall I take him a message?" Annie replied, "Just send him my regards." The man went back to St. Louis and delivered Annie's regards to George.

Enlivened by this response after a year, George put pen to paper without further ado. For the next year they exchanged voluminous letters. Both were good letter writers, and wrote about almost everything. So they had a marvelous correspondence. But the fact remained that they were still very far apart.

This long story is leading up to one of the summer vacations--I believe in Colorado Springs--when the whole family was present. George wrote Annie there and asked if he might come to visit her. He had seen her only twice. So, the day came. He arrived, and after meeting her parents and family, took Annie out for a walk. They did not come back when expected, and they did not come back, and did not come back. . . . Grandfather John Reynolds Wright, the punctilious gentleman of good judgment, began to be alarmed. He asked around the hotel, but no one knew which direction they had taken. Then, someone said that they had gone toward the Carriage House. John spoke to the boy in charge of the carriages, saying, "Do you know anything about my daughter and a young man? Did they get a carriage?" The young boy answered, "They sho nuf did, and that young man says to me, he says, 'I want a horse that can be driv with one han'."

George and Annie were married on December 15, 1886, 2-3/4 years after the masked ball. He was 35, she 24.

Annie's wedding dress was made, I believe, by the seamstress who had grown up with them all. It is the same wedding dress that my mother wore when she was married. I was married in it, and a little later so was Ethel. Marianna, Diana, Jean, and Teddy Taussig's daughter Debbie also wore this same wedding dress. It is interesting that five of these brides were 24--my grandmother, my mother, I, Diana and Jean. Christie has tried the dress on, and it is almost a perfect fit, but she is not yet 24! Here is a picture of Annie in the dress. You may not recognize it, as the bodice has been changed to accommodate her "bustier" descendants. Molly's second-day dress is also still in good repair and was worn by me at Ethel's wedding (page 47 and 62 in the album).

In accordance with family custom George and Annie received a fully furnished house as a wedding present. It was in St. Louis, where George had established his law practice.

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Their son, John Wright Taussig (Peter's father) was born the following October. Annie had a hard time with the birth.

Sometimes when George Washington Taussig was walking and cradling his son in his arms, he would sing this song to quiet the child:

"You are my darling boy; you're your mother's
Hope and joy.

You have no sister; you have no brother.

And, your dear mother says there will never
be another."

Annie was not well. She loved the out of doors, the country, and beech trees. So they moved to Kirkwood, a suburb of St. Louis. (See pages 19 and 20) After five years, they had another child. That child was Marianna.

Little John Wright was the kind of child that you would put down somewhere and after two or three breaths be unable to find. His energy and movement kept everyone very busy. Marianna, however, when put down on the lawn would sit very still, pick leaves and grass, and look at the bugs. She would stay in one place and be entranced with what was there. When the parents would turn around, she would be right where they had put her. They were happy to have both types of children.

George Washington Taussig was a marvelous pianist. As a young man he saved his money and bought the piano that is now in this Englewood house. He played it every day. My mother remembers, as a growing child, how her father would sit down at the piano the minute he came home from work, and how he played her to sleep at bedtime. When I was a little girl my mother played me to sleep on that same instrument. When my children were little I played them some of the same things my mother had played to me, though on a different piano.

George Taussig was also a scholar and an excellent linguist. He spoke Latin and Greek flawlessly, and was fluent in Italian, German, and French. There was a case in St. Louis connected with some Spaniards which no one in the city could take because of language difficulties. George did not speak Spanish, but in the time before the case (six weeks, I believe) he learned enough to conduct the case. He had a large library, most of which is in this Englewood house, and he

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read everything. He was interested in art, philosophy, literature, music, drama, science, economics, and government--just about anything you can think of. (See page 58, showing his 1876 copy of The Origin of Species sandwiched between the volumes of The Bible for Learners). At a party, when he was still single, he was introduced to a young man named Brookings. They had a long talk and struck up a friendship. At the end of the party, Mr. Brookings said, "Mr. Taussig, I have a strange request to make of you. I have recently made a great deal of money. I never went to college and have an inadequate education. My grammar is not good, and I really don't know anything. But I would like to spend my money intelligently. Also, I'm suddenly being thrust into a new world, filled with knowledgeable people. I have never met anyone like you before, and I wonder if you would be good enough to call on me a couple of times a week and instruct me in what I need to know about culture and literature and history and the world. I don't know how else to absorb all that I need to know. If you would be kind enough to assist me, of course I would pay you."

Mr. Taussig replied that he would be delighted to accommodate Mr. Brookings, but that he would not take any money, for it would be sheer enjoyment. So, for months and months, Mr. Taussig spent long evenings with Mr. Brookings, educating him. Today the Brookings Institution is a large foundation in Washington which dispenses funds for all sorts of cultural and scientific investigations. This is an interesting sidelight on the kind of guy George Washington Taussig was.

George Taussig was not very good with money. He was a brilliant lawyer who had trouble collecting his fees. An extremely generous heart made it unbearable to press for payment if it would cause hardship to his client.

He died when Marianna was 13. Until his first illness, he had never been sick. My mother remembers the day when he came home after work and climbed the stairs, looking up laughing at his beloved Annie and saying, "You know, I went to the doctor today and he gave me a pill. Isn't that funny?" Then he showed the pill to the family. That was the first time he had taken a pill. He had arteriosclerosis and was progressively ill for two years. He remained at the house in Kirkwood and died there.

The family survived because of money that was in Annie Wright's name, her income from her father's trust. After her husband's affairs were settled Annie had a small income to live on.

This is an appropriate place to discuss the financial history of the Wright family, and the philosophy that underlay it for nearly a century.

John Reynolds Wright, the white-haired gentleman in the picture, became quite wealthy, and retired at age 50 in 1878. He decided that he would prefer to pass on as much as possible of his good fortune to his children while he was alive. So in 1890 he divided his money into seven parts, six for his children and one for himself and Molly. Everyone agreed that they wanted Uncle Cliff, the third child and second son, to take care of all the funds. As I understand it, a single trust was set up for all six children. It was specified that this trust was to be for the children themselves. This meant that each of the three daughters would have money in her own name to be used as she wished, separate from any money her husband might have. This was rare at that time.

The income from this trust was to be thought of in three parts. One third was to be for the children's use and enjoyment. This was not an enormous amount in those days, but was quite a nice sum. The next third of the income was to be entrusted to Clifford to save or re-invest. The final third was also to be re-invested by Clifford, but to be kept as a standby in case the parents had any special unexpected needs. So there was always a backup for them. Clifford had jurisdiction over the money, and distributed the income. Everyone talked to him about financial concerns, and in administration of this money he always took account of problems the children might be having. If one child had a special need Clifford would arrange to give all the children a bigger share for that particular year in order to accommodate the need, but also to keep the disbursements equal. Clifford was sensitive to the whole family and in touch with everyone. He was the president of the biggest bank in Cincinnati, and as you remember a spacious fellow inside and out. Everyone trusted and loved him. My grandmother told me there was never the slightest feeling of distress on the part of Gordon, the oldest son, or anyone else, about his being in charge.

When Clifford died of a sudden heart attack in 1920, Uncle Glen took over the family's money management. He was in Wall Street at the time.

After John Reynolds Wright died in 1900, Clifford felt that the single trust should not be continued as such. He divided it into six parts, the income going separately to each of the six children, three girls and three boys. These trusts, based upon the sewing machine money, were conducted with a definite policy about their use for the

family. On the death of any beneficiary, the income would continue to the spouse for the spouse's life. That was all spelled out. The spouse did not have the use of the capital, which was held in the trust. On the death of the spouse, the income would go to the children. If there were no children, the whole trust--that segment of the six-- would be divided among the remaining five.

Of the six children of John Reynolds Wright, Gordon died before his wife Celia. So Aunt Celia received the income from his share of the trust for the rest of her life. They had two daughters who had children (Louise McAvoy and Bailey Hickenlooper), and their line at this moment is enjoying the results of that same money.

The next child was Jessie, who had one daughter, Helen. Jessie died before her husband, and he benefited from her income until he died, when it was given to Helen. Helen married John Gould; they had no children. She was the only one of my mother's generation who wanted to handle everything herself. She did not want it done by Uncle Glen, so, her trust was handed over to her. Unfortunately, most of the money was lost. The family helped her at the end of her life.

The third child was Uncle Cliff, who was managing everything. He was a wealthy man. The trust grew considerably under his direction, and when finally divided into six it was much larger than when first presented by his father. Cliff had two children, Ethel Wright Luther and Clifford, Jr., and their progeny are benefiting from their share of the trust.

The fourth child was Mamie, who married Uncle Will Goodman. They had no children, so her part of the trust was put back into the general trust and divided among the others.

The fifth child was Annie Wright Taussig, my grandmother. The capital from her sixth of the original trust will now be divided among her grandchildren, three Lawrences and three Taussigs, in accordance with the provisions for dissolution of the trust.

Uncle Glen, the youngest of the six, had no children, and the money in his trust was divided among the remaining ones.

As I have said, my grandmother was absolutely saved by this money when her husband died. A generation later she was able to play a vital role in sustaining the Lawrence family when the crushing blow of the great depression of 1929 struck them. To visualize the

situation you must understand that she owned the Englewood house in which the Lawrence family lived. My father and mother decided not to move out and live by themselves when they married. They lived with her until her death, and after that continued to live in the house when it was owned by her estate. She occupied the best room of the house. Her area of responsibility was the second floor, and all the darning. She mended everything. As she grew older, the darns did not always match the socks!

Annie Taussig always had her own money and took care of herself. For the first twelve years my father paid for the running of the house--the maid, etc.--and his expenses, and for the beautiful four car garage which he designed and loved. Then he lost everything in the stock market crash of 1929, and was heavily in debt. It seems absolutely unbelievable. There were men all around who could not bear their financial tragedies. A friend of my father's committed suicide because he could not stand the tremendous debts. My father was in an impossible condition.

My grandmother said that she would take care of her daughter, Marianna and the children and household expenses. So she supported all of us from 1929 until 1941, when Hicks and I got jobs. She did not pay the rent for Daddy's office in New York, or any of his business expenses.

Because Grandmother, and later Mother, had the money in their names, none of it was accessible to his creditors. He was eventually able to resolve all his debts and recoup his own fortunes. A succession of miracles seemed to be involved here, combined with enormous courage and fidelity to his own ideas and principles, which he stuck to in the face of a chorus of eminent opinions telling him he was mistaken. He managed to pull himself out when everybody was telling him that the situation was hopeless. The fact that he did not have to take care of his family was, of course, instrumental in enabling him to make such a remarkable recovery.

There are endless things I have not said, but I will stop after one more thought. Louise Wright, the daughter of Gordon, oldest of the six children, married Malcolm McAvoy. He was a general lawyer who concerned himself with everyone in the family. His relatives always went to him for any legal problem. It means a great deal to me that we have a lawyer in this generation of the family who steered my father and mother through all the complexities involved in their estates, and is now serving as executor, guide and counselor to all of us in this new situation - Peter.