

THE WORMLEY FAMILY

BY C. G. WOODSON

THE Wormley Family of the District of Columbia deserves rank among the outstanding families of the nation according to any method of evaluation of their record which may be employed. This family had its beginning in the United States about the time that the colonies assumed their position as the United States of America and these people attained the status of Free Persons of Color who since that time have made themselves assets of the nation in many useful walks of life. The service and sacrifices of members of this family have influenced the course of history in every section of this country and at strategic points abroad for more than a century. Their story, therefore, is an important part of the past of the United States.

The earliest known Wormley to impress himself on the public was Pere Leigh Wormley whose wife, Mary Wormley, was practically white whereas he was a dark brown man with straight black hair and was sometimes referred to as a Madagascan. He and his wife, so far as the dates can be determined, were born not long before or after the beginning of this nation in 1789. They had lived as free people with a family in Virginia and moved to Washington in 1814. He came into prominence in Washington, D. C. as the successful proprietor of a livery stable in the city and thus served efficiently for many years the best element in this community. His establishment was on Pennsylvania Avenue between 14th and 15th Streets, Northwest, near Willard's Hotel. This enterprising man prospered in his business, raised a family of five children who likewise found their way into useful channels and left an impression on the general public by emulating the sterling qualities of their father.

One of these children, a son, born in 1820, was named James. By dint of energy, he, like his

father, acquired the rudiments of education and added considerably to his attainments by business contacts as a hacker for his father and later in his own business as the proprietor of the universally known Wormley Hotel which stood on the corner of Fifteenth and H Streets, Northwest. He married Anna Thompson of the City of Norfolk, Virginia. This son was in many respects the most distinguished of this family. On the occasion of his death on October 18, 1884, the *Washington Star* said two days later:

"Mr. James Wormley, the well known hotel proprietor, died in Boston Saturday. The remains arrived here yesterday afternoon, accompanied by the members of the family, who were present at the death bed. The body was taken to Wormley's Hotel, corner of Fifteenth and H Streets, and placed in a room called the 'Sumner parlor' on account of the fact that the furniture in the room was purchased by Mr. Wormley from the residence of Senator Sumner after the latter's death. The esteem in which the deceased was held was manifested by the large number of prominent persons who called at the hotel yesterday to express their sympathy with the family. The flags on the hotels of the city yesterday were suspended at half mast in respect to the memory of the deceased. Arrangements have been made for holding the funeral at two o'clock tomorrow afternoon from the hotel.

"Mr. Wormley was one of the most remarkable colored men in the country and had a national reputation as a caterer. He was born in this city 64 years ago and began business as a driver of a hack; subsequently he served as steward on various naval vessels. Returning home, he was employed as steward of the Metropolitan Club. A little before the war he secured a house on I street near Fifteenth

and went into business for himself. Among his patrons were many of the most prominent public men of the day. He accompanied Reverdy Johnson to England when Mr. Johnson went as Minister to the Court of St. James, and his skill as a caterer is said to have largely contributed to Mr. Johnson's diplomatic success. Mr. Wormley opened a hotel at the corner of Fifteenth and H streets, which bears his name, in 1871. The list of guests entertained there include many of the most eminent men of the day in every walk of life. The parlors of Wormley's have been the scene of many distinguished gatherings. His strict business integrity won for Mr. Wormley the con-



ANNA WORMLEY COLE

fidence and friendship of the wealthy and influential citizens of Washington.

"The pall bearers will be as follows: Active—John F. Cook, John T. Given, Isaac Landis, M. W. Galt, James G. Berret, Hon. B. K. Bruce, Henry Birch and R. H. Gleaves. Honorary—T. E. Roessle, C. W. Spofford, C. C. Willard, O. Y. Staples, Franklin Tinney, Theophile Felter, George S. Kraff, and William Henry Smith. The follow-

ing clergymen will officiate: Rev. William Waring, Berean Baptist Church; Rev. Byron Sunderland, Four-and-a-half Street Presbyterian Church, and Rev. Frank Grimke, Fifteenth Street Presbyterian Church."

In the editorial columns of *The Star* of October 25, 1884, the following appeared:

"Mr. Wormley's funeral was attended by two sets of pallbearers—one active and the other honorary. The first was colored and the last white. What folly at the grave.—*New York Graphic*.

"This is an absurd and mischievous misstatement," *The Star* replied. "There was no color line observable on the occasion referred to, the active pallbearers included both colored and white citizens of prominence, among the latter being the Chief Justice of the United States District Court, a mayor of the city at the beginning of the war, and leading business men, while the list of 'honorary' was made up mostly of men in Mr. Wormley's occupation including also one or two of his own color. Both the esteem in which Mr. Wormley was held and the liberal and catholic spirit prevailing in Washington was shown by the fact that his funeral was attended by an imposing concourse of people, largely made up of men prominent in public and private life and their wives, including many gentlemen now or formerly occupying high positions in the civil, military and naval services of both the United States and the late Southern Confederacy."

It is sometimes said that Negroes could not stop at the Wormley Hotel. This statement was both true and untrue. Neither colored nor white persons expecting to secure a room for 50 cents a day and meals for half that amount could stop there. The Wormley Hotel was projected to entertain statesmen, diplomats, and aristocrats. Negroes in this class found a welcome there. Imogene Wormley, the granddaughter of the proprietor, mentioned to the writer incidentally

the entertainment of the Haitian minister at this hotel. Dr. Francis J. Grimke, referred to above, said in the following letter to G. Smith Wormley, a grandson, of the hotel keeper (*Journal of Negro History*, vol. xxi, pp. 57-58) that the scholar and diplomat E. W. Blyden was a guest at the hotel.

My dear Mr. Wormley:

I remember your grandfather, Mr. James Wormley, very well. Physically, he was a fine specimen of a man. He was tall, well built, with clean cut features, and piercing black eyes. He was what I would call a handsome man. He was a manly man, a man who respected himself and who demanded respect from others. A man was a man with him. There was nothing cringing or obsequious about him in his contact with white people as so many colored people are. He was a race man, in the sense that he was thoroughly interested in the welfare of the race. He was highly thought of by Charles Sumner, and he kept in close touch with Mr. Sumner and other prominent friends of the race as long as he lived.

As a business man, he was a conspicuous success. No hotel in Washington stood higher than his; no hotel in the city was better conducted, or was patronized by a finer class of customers. The fame of Hotel Wormley has even gone beyond the bounds of our own country, so that distinguished foreigners coming here sought its shelter. He not only proved his ability as a first class business man, but also showed his good common sense, in that he saved his money: so that when he died, he left a considerable fortune. I remember spending one evening with him in company with Dr. Edward Wilmot Blyden, the noted African scholar, at his farm, a little out of the city. We were both invited by him, and were driven out in one of his vehicles. It was a very pleasant evening. We talked about many things, especially bearing on the race question. And among them, of the Commission which President Grant had sent to Haiti and on which

Mr. Douglass had a place. There was something about the affair that greatly displeased Mr. Wormley. I cannot now recall exactly what it was; but I do remember very distinctly that he was much wrought up over it, and expressed himself in very forceful language.¹

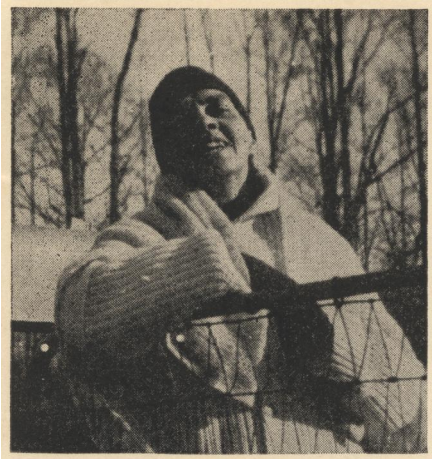
The evening ended with a delicious oyster supper, which we all thoroughly enjoyed. I may mention also, before closing, that Dr. Blyden, at this time on his visit to this country and city, was stopping at the Wormley Hotel. I mention this to show that Mr. Wormley did not shut the door of his hotel against a member of his own race, which was greatly to his credit.

Yours truly,

FRANCIS J. GRIMKE.

Honorable mention, however, must be given other members of this family. Betsey, a daughter of Pere Leigh Wormley, married a Browne and became the mother of Hugh Browne, a minister and educator who distinguished himself in both Africa and America. This daughter was the grandmother of Mena and Frank Downing of Brooklyn. Andrew, a son of Pere Leigh Wormley, married a colored woman of the District of Columbia, later separated from her, went west, and married into a branch of the family controlling the Wells Fargo Express. Pere Leigh Wormley's son William had a beautiful daughter whom they nicknamed "Babe." She began to receive attention from a Frenchman attached to his nation's legation in Washington. Thereupon her father objected on the grounds that it was not the custom for a colored lady to receive attention from a white gentleman. He replied that he would never cease to call on her until she had absolutely refused to become his wife. He married her and settled in Paris. They had two

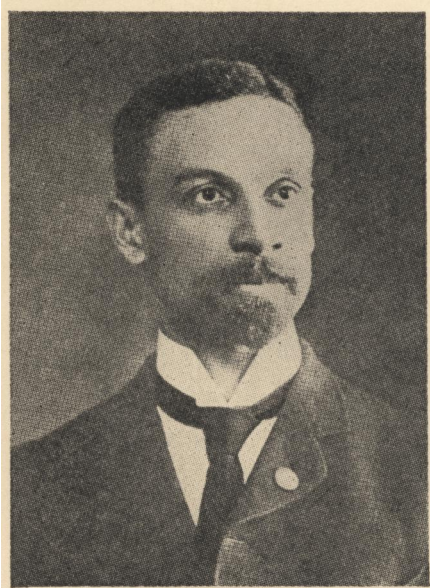
¹Mr. Wormley believed that in accepting the position as assistant secretary to the Commission to Santo Domingo, Frederick Douglass had taken a position unworthy of the great orator. Wormley said, if he had been in Douglass' place, he would have refused President Grant's empty honor. (*Ibid.*)



JULIA WORMLEY McADOO

sons. Pere Leigh Wormley's other daughter, Mary Wormley, became a pioneer teacher of a private school for Negroes in the District of Columbia long before the Civil War. Her school was located in the Northwest on Eye Street between 15th and 16th Streets.

The oldest child of James Wormley, William H. A. Wormley, married three times and had children by two of his wives. He had one child named Eunice who married into the Dickey Family and the offspring from this group were conspicuous in Washington, D. C. at one time until most of them passed into the white race.



WILLIAM STANTON WORMLEY

From his second marriage came ten other children. The oldest of these, Julia became a teacher and an elocutionist after completing her education in the local schools and the Bridgewater Normal School in Massachusetts. She went on a tour as an elocutionist with the Jubilee Singers who toured Europe, Africa and Australia in early 1890's and married Eugene McAdoo, the brother of the manager of the musical company. She later settled at her home in Washington, D. C., where she taught English in the Armstrong Manual Training School until her demise. She had two children one of whom, her son Leigh, survived her. He had two children, but only one of them is still living.

William Stanton Wormley, of this branch of the Wormleys, was educated in the local Washington schools, took special work in art and taught this subject in the Armstrong Manual Training School until he died in 1918. He never married. Nor did his sister Jessie, another product of the local school system in which she distinguished herself as an excellent teacher and finally attained a position on the faculty of the Miner Normal School through which she did much to train the teachers many of whom are engaged in the system today. Her brother Ashburton never married. Furman, another brother, married and brought up two children named William and Constance. Helen, his sister, married, but left no children. She returned to teaching for which she had prepared herself early in life and taught in Wilmington, Delaware until she recently retired. Her sister Adelaide married and had two children, only one of whom survived her. He attained the rank of Lieutenant in the United States Navy. Leonard, another brother, married but died early, leaving a daughter now residing in New York City. Lawrence, another brother, now serving as the assistant superintendent of custodians of the Public Schools of the District of Columbia, is the father of

Dr. Stanton L. Wormley, a product of the Graduate School of Cornell University now functioning as the head of the department of German of Howard University. Miriam, educated at the Miner Normal School and at Howard University later obtained the Master's degree from Columbia and is now teaching at the Shaw Junior High School in Washington. She married Clarence Lewis and from this union came a son Burton who has grown up and married, and has two children. Burton served in the Second World War and attained the rank of major.

A member of the branch of this family from the second child of James Wormley, James Thompson Wormley, was the first graduate of the Howard University Pharmaceutical School. He finished the course there in 1870, and conducted the first colored drug store in the District of Columbia. His business was located on the corner of Connecticut Avenue and L Street, Northwest. He married Mary Ringgold. They left a number of children who became useful and honorable. Imogene, his oldest child, another product of the local system, further trained at Cornell, Ypsilanti, Columbia and Chicago, distinguished herself as a model teacher, and an able assistant of Miss E. F. G. Merritt, the director of elementary instruction in the Colored Schools and later as director of the kindergarten of the same system. These two women took over the graduates of the Miner Normal School after they had been trained in theory under the direction of Dr. Lucy E. Moten, showed them the practical way of applying what they had been taught and thus developed the efficient corps of teachers who were mainly instrumental in enabling the Negroes of the District of Columbia to rise to their present high level.

Her brother James was afflicted and did not live to maturity, but another brother, Clarence King Wormley, built upon his training in the Washington schools with a course in art in Boston and taught

this subject successfully in the same system until he recently retired. He married twice, and by his first wife had a son, James Wallace Wormley, who was educated at Hiram College in Ohio and at Howard University where he obtained the degree of Master of Arts. He is now an instructor in Texas College at Tyler, Texas. Sylvia Wormley, Clarence's daughter, taught once in Cleveland, Ohio, and then married J. D. Graves for whom she has borne two children—Du Ane and Donnet Josephine Wormley, a sister of Imogene Wormley and Clarence King Wormley, was educated in

music in Boston, at Cornell and Columbia. She taught music for years in Washington, D. C., and attained the position of director of music of the Colored Schools which she creditably served. Don Cameron, her brother, left no offspring. Nor did their sister Louise, the late wife of State Senator Harry E. Davis, of Cleveland, Ohio. There she became an outstanding worker for humanity.

Another son of James Wormley and grandson of Pere Leigh Wormley, was Garrett Smith Wormley. His oldest son, named James A.



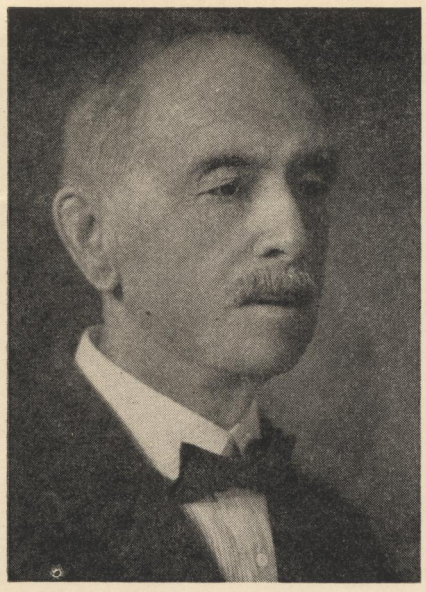
STANTON L. WORMLEY

Wormley, became a prominent physician in Newark, New Jersey, where he rendered efficient service to his community for many years. Garrett, his brother, assisted his father at the hotel, and he left only two children. The next son in line was Dr. Charles Sumner Wormley, named for the distinguished anti-slavery senator of Massachusetts. This son was educated in dentistry at Howard University where he served as an instructor for many years. Later he retired from teaching and restricted himself to his large practice, but he found time to serve his alma mater as member of its board of trustees. As an avocation "Sumner Wormley," as he was popularly known, gave much time to the study of music and with his beautiful baritone voice he became very popular as a singer in Washington and other cities in the East. At times he was encouraged to try the stage, but he adhered to his profession until his death in 1935. He never married. Clement Wormley grew up, married and left one child. His brother Hunster Wormley died early and left no offspring.

Garrett Smith Wormley, a brother of Dr. Charles Sumner Wormley, likewise reflected credit upon his family. He was educated in the



SHERYL EVERETT WORMLEY



JAMES THOMPSON WORMLEY

Washington Public Schools, at Howard and Columbia. From the last mentioned he received the degree of Master of Arts. He taught for a few years in the elementary schools, then became an instructor at the Miner Normal School, and finally the principal of the Randall Junior High School of the same system. He acquitted himself with credit at all these stations and at the same time worked faithfully in religious and uplift efforts wherever he saw the opportunity to help his fellowman. Like his brother, Charles Sumner Wormley, he was generous to a fault. Neither one ever turned away empty a good cause. G. Smith Wormley, as he was popularly known, married a daughter of Congressman H. P. Cheatham from North Carolina. From this union came three children who have lived up to the brilliant record of the Wormley family. Dr. Lowell Cheatham Wormley, their son, a product of Dartmouth College and the Howard University Medical School, once practiced in New York City but is now serving successfully in Phoenix, Arizona where he conducts the St. Monica Hospital. Edith, his sister teaches a class of Indians at this same place. Mavis, another sister is married to Dr. John Davis, professor of economics at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania.



IMOGENE WORMLEY IN 1902

Edith, a daughter of Garrett Smith Wormley and sister of Garrett, G. Smith, Sumner, and James Wormley, was educated in the Public Schools of the District of Columbia, taught in the same system and



IMOGENE WORMLEY

then married Harry Minton, a prominent physician in Philadelphia and for years, until his voluntary retirement, superintendent of Mercy Hospital in that city. Edith's sister Alice, also a teacher



JOSEPHINE WORMLEY ON THE STEPS OF HER HOME



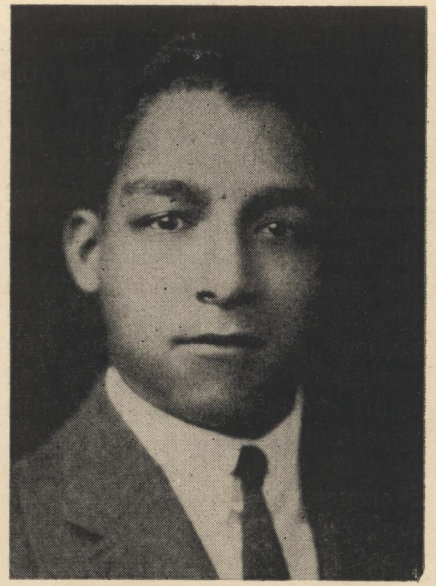
DON CAMERON WORMLEY, SYLVIA WORMLEY, CLARENCE WORMLEY AND GERTRUDE DODSON WORMLEY

for a number of years, married Dr. John Francis, a dentist in Washington, and they had four children who have given a good account of themselves. Their son,

H. Minton Francis, made an excellent record at the West Point Military Academy where he was graduated and since then has rendered honorable service in the



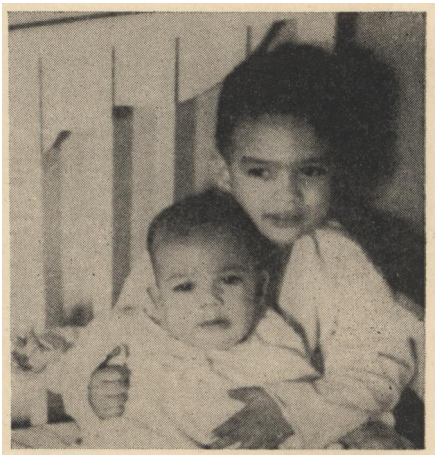
CLARENCE KING WORMLEY



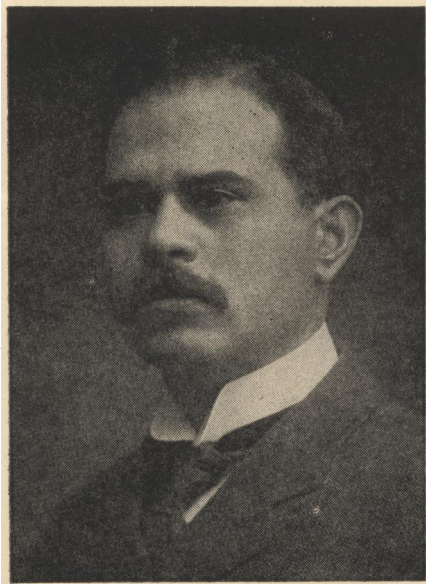
JAMES WALLACE WORMLEY



LOUISE WORMLEY DAVIS WITH HER DOG IN FRONT OF HER HOME IN CLEVELAND, OHIO



DU ANE AND DONET GRAVES



DR. JAMES THOMPSON WORMLEY

United States Army. His brother John is an employee of the United States Government, and his two sisters, Betty and Genevieve are teachers in Washington, D. C. Lieutenant Francis has one child, Marsha Ann; and so has his brother John, a daughter, Mary Joanne.

Leon W. Wormley, another brother of G. Smith Wormley and Charles Sumner Wormley, was educated in the Washington schools and served as a mail-carrier in Washington for some years. He later studied theology at Howard

University and became a minister of the Baptist faith in his native city. He has one daughter who is now married and living in New York City. His other brother Roscoe C. Wormley studied dentistry at Howard University, practiced in Washington, but later, after marrying Beatrice Nalle, moved to

Plainfield, New Jersey where he has successfully practiced his profession. They had six children five of whom have made themselves useful and honorable. One died recently.

The oldest of these six children, Charles Sumner Wormley, named for his uncle, attended the Plainfield High School, became a ser-



LOUISE WORMLEY DAVIS



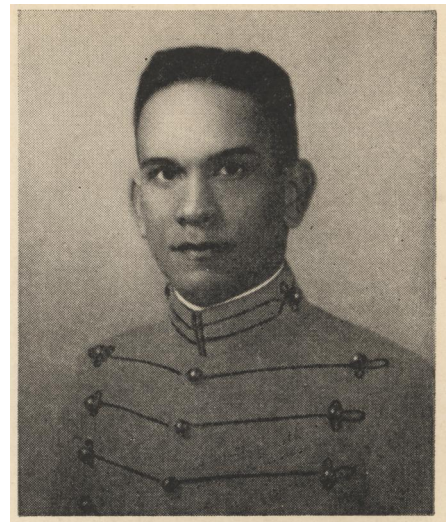
DR. CHARLES SUMNER WORMLEY



MARSHA ANN FRANCIS



ALICE WORMLEY FRANCIS



LIEUT. H. MINTON FRANCIS



THE FAMILY OF GARRETT SMITH WORMLEY AND AMELIA BRENT WORMLEY. FROM LEFT TO RIGHT, SITTING, GARRETT WORMLEY, ALICE WORMLEY FRANCIS, AMELIA BRENT WORMLEY (MOTHER), GARRETT SMITH WORMLEY (FATHER), EDITH WORMLEY MINTON, AND JAMES THOMPSON WORMLEY; STANDING, CHARLES SUMNER WORMLEY, CLEMENT WORMLEY, DR. ROSCOE C. WORMLEY, G. SMITH WORMLEY, AND THE REV. LEON WORMLEY.



DR. ROSCOE C. WORMLEY OF
PLAINFIELD, N. J.

geant in the United States Army, married, and is now employed by **Wanamaker in Philadelphia**. Roscoe C. Wormley, Jr., attended Lincoln University, studied embalming, married, and, after serving in the United States Army with the rank of second lieutenant, has settled down in his chosen field in Philadelphia. Thelma Wormley, a daughter, educated at the West Virginia State College, married Attorney Herbert G. Hardin of Philadelphia, and they have two children, Marilyn and Herbert, Jr. David Nalle Wormley, the second son of Dr. Roscoe C. Wormley, Sr.,



DR. LOWELL CHEATHAM WORMLEY



G. SMITH WORMLEY



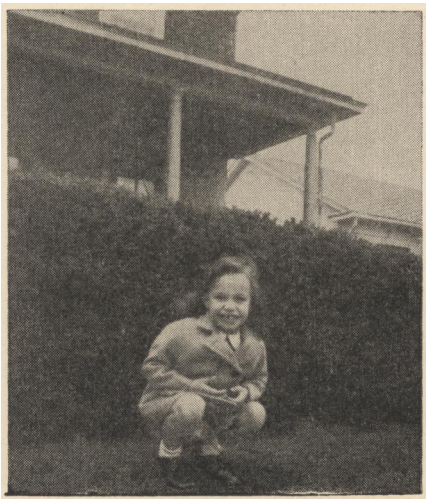
EDITH WORMLEY



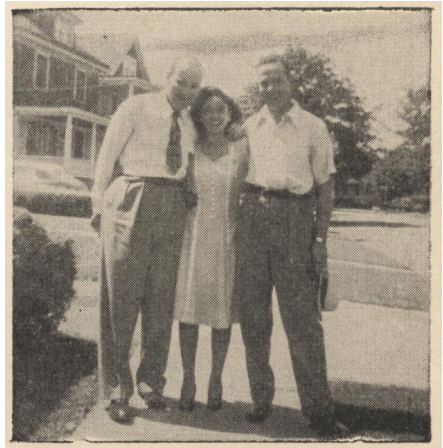
MAVIS WORMLEY DAVIS



MARY WORMLEY



MARILYN WORMLEY HARDIN



SUMNER, MARY AND ROSCOE
WORMLEY, CHILDREN OF
DR. ROSCOE C. WORMLEY



EDITH WORMLEY MINTON



MARY JOANNE FRANCIS



BETTY ALICE FRANCIS



EDITH GENEVIEVE FRANCIS BURKE

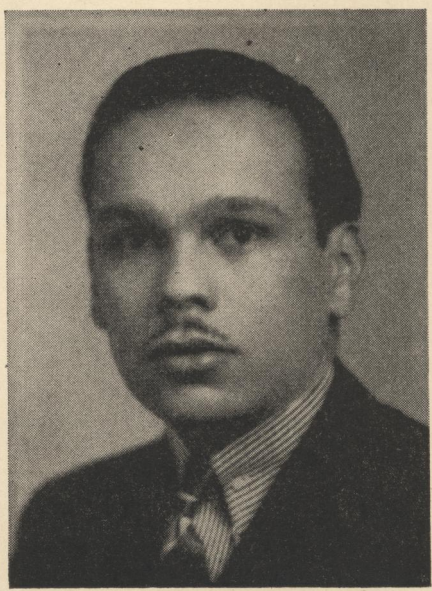
attended the local schools at his home in Plainfield, served in the late war with the rank of staff sergeant, and is now prosecuting his studies further at Lincoln with a view to studying dentistry. James A. Wormley, another son, was graduated at the Plainfield High School and took up the study of art in which he showed great promise, but death overtook him October 15, 1947. Mary B. Wormley, his sister, completed the course of the same high school, finished the work leading to the degree of Bachelor of Arts at Howard in 1943, and specialized at the University of Pennsylvania toward the Master's de-

gree which she received in 1944. She is now teaching French at Morgan College in Baltimore.

Anna Wormley the youngest of the children of James Wormley, the son of Pere Leigh Wormley, her grandfather, married a man named Will Cole, an assistant supervisor of a division in the United States Pension Office. They had one child that died in infancy.



BONNIE JEAN BURKE



JOHN R. FRANCIS, JR.



CLEMENTINE AND SWAN WORMLEY