

PERSPECTIVES ON THE PAST

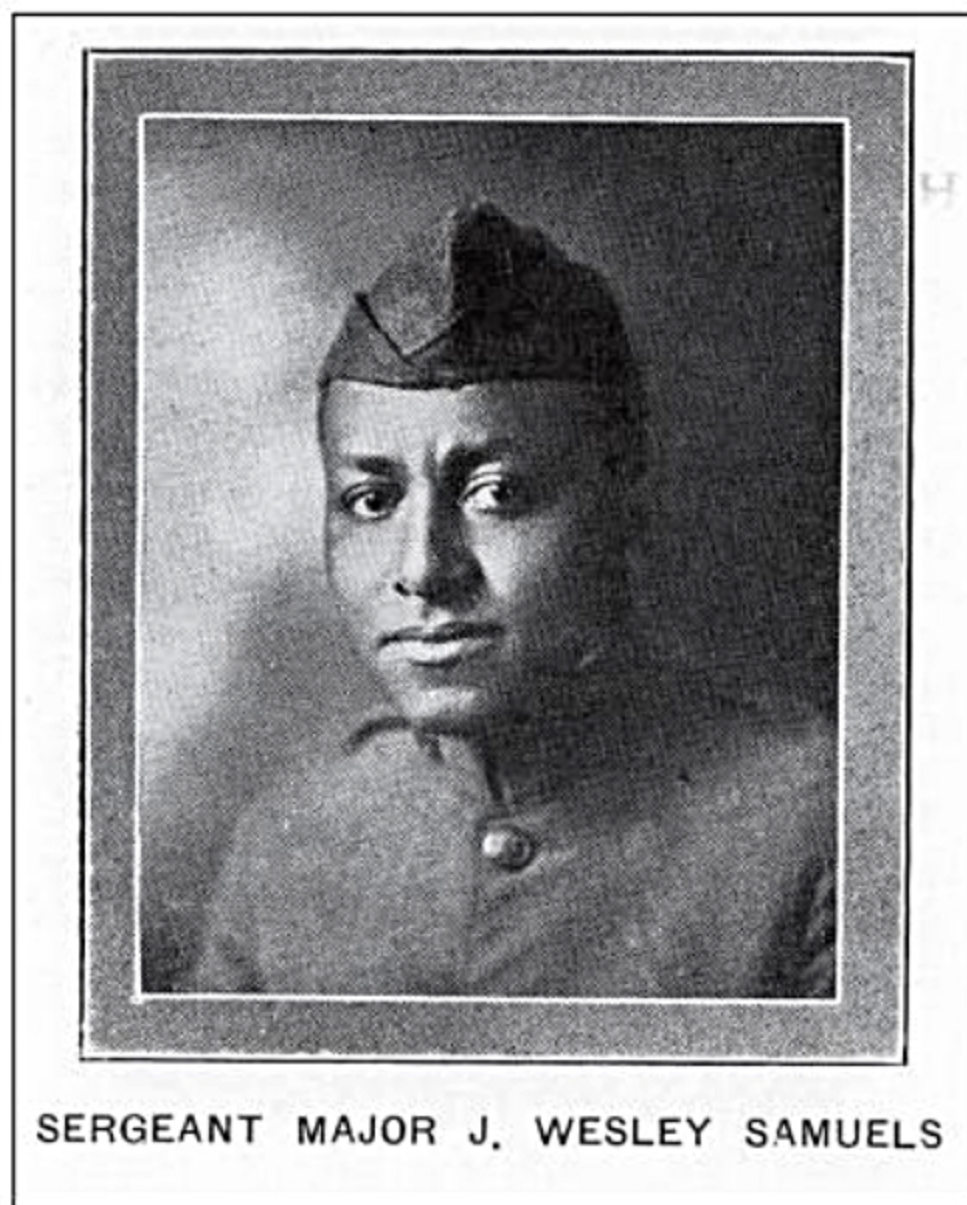
Uncovering the story of J. Wesley Samuels, WWI veteran and longtime Everett resident

By Neil Anderson

Everett history has always been fascinating to me. The city has an incredible story with such an interesting past. A great mill town, incorporated in 1893, built along the shores of Port Gardner Bay and the riverbanks of the Snohomish River. People from all over the world settled in the town as workers were needed to operate the equipment in the shingle mills, sawmills, paper mills and other waterfront industries. Needless to say, the city has a rich history. Even today, new historical discoveries continue to surface.

Several years ago, I was browsing in one of the Snohomish antique shops. I came across a book titled "Snohomish County in the War" by William Mason. This book gave detailed accounts of Snohomish County residents who served in the military during World War I. As I thumbed through the book, I found my grandfather, Lt. Edward Hartley of 2320 Rucker Ave. I also stumbled upon another Everett serviceman, Sgt. Maj. J. Wesley Samuels of 2214 Wetmore Ave. Both men were Minnesota transplants, Edward Hartley of Minneapolis and J. Wesley Samuels of St. Paul.

J. Wesley Samuels went by the name Wesley and he lived with his parents, John and Jennie. Both Wesley Samuels and Edward Hartley graduated from Everett High School in 1912. I found my copy of the 1912 Everett High School yearbook, the Nesika, given to me



SERGEANT MAJOR J. WESLEY SAMUELS

by my grandfather. As it turned out, both young men had roles in the high school senior class play, "The Crisis," performed at the Everett Theater in May 1912. They lived about four blocks from each other. When the United States entered

WWI, both men served in the U.S. Army and were sent to France. Fortunately, both Wesley Samuels and Edward Hartley survived the war that was to end all wars, and returned home to Everett in 1919.

Like most Everett residents in

that time period, Edward Hartley was of European descent. Wesley Samuels was African-American. So I wondered. I wondered what happened to Wesley Samuels after his World War I service? Did he stay in Everett? What was his story? My next step was to visit the Northwest Room of the Everett Public Library. There I could review the Everett Polk City Directories. Sure enough, with the information contained in the Polk Directories, I could easily follow the lives of the Samuels family members living at 2214 Wetmore. In addition to the Polk Directories, Everett historian, the late David Dilgard of the Everett Public Library, had additional information on the Samuels family, including a 2010 Daily Herald article written by Herald columnist Julie Muhlstein.

The Samuels family arrived in Everett in the early 1900s. The City Polk Directories provide quite a bit of detailed specific information. In 1901, John Samuels was listed in the Polk directories as a cook. In 1902, he is listed as a porter for the Great Northern Railway. In 1907, John Samuels is listed as a janitor in the Wisconsin Building in downtown Everett and this would be his occupation for many years. After high school, Wesley Samuels attended Acme Business College in 1913. That same year, he worked as a clerk at Bayside Ironworks on the Everett waterfront, near the western end of Hewitt Avenue. After World War I, Wesley Samuels is listed as bookkeeper for Bayside Ironworks.

By 1925, Wesley was employed as an accountant with American Boiler Works at 700 Hewitt Ave. In 1933, Wesley was still employed with American Boiler Works. The city directory lists Martin Berring as the company president, Philip Foubert as the company treasurer. Secretary of American Boiler Works is Wesley Samuels.

For many years, the Samuels house at 2214 Wetmore Ave. was listed in a travel publication known as the Green Book, a travel guide for African-Americans. The Samuels' residence was listed as a tourist home for black motorists needing overnight accommodations in Everett. Jennie Samuels was active in forming the Washington State Chapter of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs during the 1920s. The records show that Wesley Samuels remained with American Boiler Works at least through 1941 but by 1944, he is no longer listed in the Polk directories.

Jenny Samuels died in 1948 and her husband, John, died in 1955. Wesley Samuels passed away in 1954.

The information from David Dilgard noted the gravesite locations for John and Jennie Samuels at the Evergreen Cemetery in Everett. But, there was no information on their son Wesley. After a trip to the Evergreen Cemetery office, the helpful staff provided me with the burial site location for Wesley Samuels. The gravesite for Wesley was next to his parents. The site is a short walk from the cemetery office and on my first visit to the gravesite location, I could find no marker for World War I veteran Wesley Samuels. I double-checked with the office and confirmed once again the location. I did notice however on my previous visit, there seemed to be an extra wide empty space just to the east of the burial site for John and Jennie.



Above: Neil Anderson uncovered a 5-by-12-inch concrete marker at J. Wesley Samuels' gravesite at Evergreen Cemetery in Everett.

Right: Anderson left an American flag at the grave of Samuels, who served in World War I.

On my next visit, I took along a small steel rod and poked the instrument into the ground, searching for something that might just be under the grass surface. Sure enough, after perhaps 30 seconds, there was a "click" sound and a solid tap on some object just below the surface. With a small garden tool, I cut away the grass and

removed some turf and dirt. Buried under 4 inches of the grass, was a small 5-inch-by-12-inch flat concrete marker. On the marker was the name, Wesley Samuels. The flat concrete marker had probably been buried under the turf surface for a number of years. It was an honor to place a small American flag at the site.

I can only hope that someday, a new headstone will be installed at the gravesite for Sgt. Maj. J. Wesley Samuels noting his World War I service.

I think he would like that. I am also certain that his Everett High School classmate, Lt. Edward Hartley, would fully agree.