**Major Benjamin Steele Biography**

Major Benjamin Steele’s life was short but he was born into an interesting family. His father Joseph P. Steele was a barber who owned his own shop called Steele and Barker Barber Shop. Joseph was in a partnership with Joseph W. Barker. Joseph married Theresa McCoy on September 27, 1891. The 1900 Montgomery County Census listed the Steele family renting a house at 215 North Fifth Street in Clarksville, Tennessee. Joseph, aged 29, worked as a barber, Theresa, aged 25, worked as a seamstress. They had three children: Julia, aged 7, Joseph, Jr., aged 6, and David, aged 3.

The house at 215 North Fifth Street must have suited the family because 10 years later when the 1910 census was taken, they were still there. Joseph, aged 39, worked as a barber, Theresa, aged 32, was not working outside the home. Julia, aged 16 and Joseph, Jr., aged 15 were attending school. David, aged 13, was an apprentice in a meat shop. The family had grown by three children since 1900. Violet, aged 7, Lillian, aged 2, and Roy, aged 1.

On July 25, 1914 the family welcomed Major Benjamin Steele. Unfortunately, Major would only be with them four years, six months and twelve days. On February 7, 1919 Major Benjamin Steele died of pneumonia following influenza. Major was one of the statistics in what is known as the 1918 Influenza Pandemic. Shortly after Major’s death, the family would separate for a time. The 1920 Montgomery County census shows Theresa, aged 38, was not working outside the home, Julia, aged 23, worked as a teacher, David, aged 21, worked as a Post Office Clerk, Violet, aged 17, was not working outside the home, but was married to Roy Drane, 22, an iron furnace laborer. Both were living with Theresa. Daughters Wynell, aged 12, and Lillian, aged 10, and son Lawrence, aged 6, were all attending school. The family had added a daughter, Narine, aged 2, in 1918. They were now renting 152 Henry Street.

Joseph had become part of what is known as the First Great Migration (1910-1940) when large numbers of Southern African-Americans migrated to Northern cities to get away from Jim Crow Laws. The 1920 Cook County, Illinois census listed Joseph, 49, working as a barber and living with his widowed sister Mary Montgomery, aged 50, at 2515 Wabash Avenue in Chicago. Also listed are Mary’s son Noble Reed, 35, a Chief for the rail road and his wife, Eliza Reed, aged 26, who was a book keeper in a mail order house.

Eventually Theresa, David, and Lawrence join Joseph in Chicago because on January 15, 1925 Theresa dies in Chicago. The 1930 census shows Joseph, aged 60, working as a barber and Lawrence, aged 30, working as a stock exchange messenger. They are living on Michigan Avenue in Chicago as boarders of William and Margaret Adams.

David is listed in the 1930 Kane County, Illinois census as a patient in Elgin State Hospital. Elgin State Hospital was a mental hospital located in Elgin, Illinois just outside of Chicago. It opened on April 3, 1872 and is still in operation today. The 1940 Kane County, Illinois census listed David again as a patient in Elgin State Hospital. On May 6, 1940, Joseph P. Steele died in Chicago. Currently this is all the information available on the fate of Major Benjamin Steele’s family.

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