



## Barney and Katherine Gabriel Class of 2023

Barney and his wife Katherine are being inducted together as their business success was truly a team effort. Both graduated from Oroville High School (OHS), Barney circa 1932 and Katherine in 1941. Katherine played basketball as a freshman and sophomore and was in the glee club her freshman year. She attended Chico State College for one year, taking business classes that would serve her well in business later in life. Barney, upon his graduation from OHS, used his savings to buy his own bootblack stand. The two were a team in the truest sense.

Barney's parents were one of the first Black families to arrive in Oroville, coming to town in 1921. They migrated from Neeryville, LA. Katherine's parents migrated from Dusett, TX in 1935. Young Barney and Katherine inherited their parents' optimism and belief in the value and necessity of hard work and independence.

Barney and Katherine married in 1941 and in 1942, after noticing that the local cab driver spent more time in a bar than helping customers, Barney decided to start a cab company. He saved money from his shoe shine business and obtained a license from City Hall. His first vehicle was a 1940 Buick Century, with a friend doing the driving while Barney shined shoes and answered the phone. At first, some customers did not want to ride in a car with a Black man, but customers' needs and Barney's services won out.

1942 also saw Barney and Katherine founding the first Yellow Cab company in Oroville and the first Black family in the United States to own a Yellow Cab Franchise. At first, they operated the business out of their home on El Noble Street, eventually moving the business to 1825 Montgomery Street in downtown Oroville. Gradually, the business boomed amid the Jim Crow climate that included court battles and harassment. In 1957, the business became the Oroville Bus Lines. Barney and Katherine surpassed their original dream of owning five cabs and came out of the 1960's with a school bus service and ten cabs.

In 1980, they contracted with the city and county to run the Oroville Area Transit and senior citizen shuttle. By 1993, they had 50 employees working the cabs, two city buses and several school buses. The couple worked 24 hours a day seven days per week and an article appeared in the San Francisco Examiner newspaper stating, ***"Mrs. Gabriel worked 19-hour days alongside her husband, who would relieve her at night so she could be with their three sons and daughter."***

After 52 years of service, the Gabriel's shut down their Montgomery Street facility. Oroville was without a cab service for a short while and employees sought new forms of employment. The family operated the company continuously 24 hours per day since 1942. The parents and their four children shared a division of labor plan where each member had a specific responsibility.

With the entire family involved in the business, Barney found time to devote considerable time and effort into service to his community. His memberships included the Oroville Olives Board, Southside Fire District Board, Southside Improvement Club Board Chairman, American National Red Cross, OIDCO Transportation Chairman, Oroville Hospital Board, Boy Scouts of America Troop 63, Mount Lassen Area Council, Table Mountain District Board, and Private Industrial Board.

In 1967, Barney and Katherine were recognized by the Butte County Board of Education for transporting Special Education students for 12 years without a serious accident. Their company vehicles travelled 356,653 miles without an accident. On November 5, 2022, the Gabriel's were

honored by the South Oroville African American Society at a dinner at Feather Falls casino with the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Southside Legacy Award, for their hard work and service to their community.

Brian Powers, 1969 OHS graduate, writes in his letter of support, *“The Gabriel’s story is compelling and unique in Oroville history. They succeeded despite significant obstacles, including de facto segregation, with a minimum of education and no financial support from the sources available to other citizens of Oroville. They are a remarkable example of success based on initiative, resourcefulness, faith in themselves and courage as well as dedication to family and the entire Oroville Community.”*

Barney was born on March 6, 1914 and passed away on January 21, 1995. Katherine was born on April 13, 1921 and passed away on July 5, 1989.