

# Athens Historian

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*The East Athens Night School in 1901*

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**The purposes of the Athens Historical Society are:**

1. To discover, collect, and preserve all materials, especially original and source materials, pertaining to the history of Athens, Clarke County, adjacent counties, and related areas.
2. To disseminate this knowledge for enlightenment of our citizenry through preparing, editing, and publishing historical materials descriptive of Athens and related areas, or sponsoring programs and activities of historical interest.
3. To promote historical research.
4. To promote preservation and perpetuation of historic sites.
5. To bring together those interested in the history of these areas.
6. To promote and stimulate public interest in and appreciation of the history of Athens and related areas, and to develop in every way an understanding of their historical past.

# Athens Historian

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**On the cover:** The students and teachers of the East Athens Night School gather in front of their school on Oak Street, from an article about the school featured in the Centennial Edition of the *Athens Daily Banner*, June 16, 1901, page 20.

## The East Athens Night School

by Maxine Easom and Patsy Arnold

*The following is an excerpt from the forthcoming book, Across the River, by Maxine Easom and Patsy Arnold, chronicling the history and impact of East Athens and its people on the city of Athens and Clarke County as a whole.*

As we reflect on our schooling and that of our children, most of us have images of elementary schools where children have the opportunity to engage in learning and reflect on the wonders of the world. We forget that there were children who did not have the opportunity to attend school—children who had to work to support families—and who grew to be adults without acquiring literacy skills. Certainly we would not consider that this would have happened in our own neighborhood.

As early as June 6, 1888, Superintendent Eugene C. Branson reported to the Athens City School Board that some children began working in the factories at the age of seven, and therefore were beyond the reach of the current daytime-only school system. Superintendent Branson requested even then that the Board should provide “moral support” for the movement to outlaw child labor. Because employing children was common in our industrial area, he concluded his remarks with the idea of establishing a night school for the children and adults already affected by childhood employment.<sup>1</sup>

In 1892, Branson’s successor, George G. Bond, described in detail the magnitude of the educational gap and how it could be remedied:

The First Ward contains over one thousand children between the ages of 6 and 18, not more than five hundred of whom are at present taking advantage of the privileges of our schools. This is due largely to the fact that numbers of them have to toil in the factories for daily support. It is a great pity that these children must spend their youth within the dingy walls of a mill without any opportunity to develop their higher and better natures. What kind of citizens will children thus reared

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<sup>1</sup> “Minutes of the Athens City Schools Board of Education,” June 6, 1888, vol. 21, 1885-1894, page 79, MS 3179, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library/ University of Georgia Libraries.

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become? It seems to me that our skirts will not be quite clear of their blood if we allow this to continue without at least making an effort to alleviate it. I therefore recommend that the City council be asked to appropriate the sum of seven hundred dollars or such other amount as you see fit to ask, the same to be expended in establishing and maintaining a night school in the Oconee Street School building. This would give an opportunity to such of the juvenile operatives as might wish to improve themselves.<sup>2</sup>

A group of local women identified in the Athens City School Board records as the “Board of Lady Managers,” and other times as the “City Board of Missions,” were instrumental in the establishment of a Night School in East Athens. Leading this work were Dr. Annie Young, Ms. Marion Alexander Boggs, and Ms. Laura Speer. It is difficult to ascertain if these women embraced the visions of Professors Branson and Bond, or if the superintendents were challenged by the visions of the women, but without exception, these women and other local women were key in planning for the school and securing the resources needed. When the school began, they reported to the local papers that “This school was established as the result of the labors of a number of the good women of Athens, and is completely equipped.”<sup>3</sup>

The East Athens Night School opened its doors in early December 1897 and a heart-warming chapter of East Athens history began to be written. The school first held classes in the vacant store of Frank Patat on Oconee Street.<sup>4</sup> Ms. Louie Lane began as the only teacher at the school, and ten students attended on the first night. Within a month, forty students were being taught, and a waiting list was created while a new room could be constructed to accommodate the demand. By the end of the first term, East Athens Night School had a total of sixty-eight

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<sup>2</sup> G. G. Bond, “Report of the Superintendent,” *Seventh Annual Report of the Athens City Schools, Athens, Georgia, 1892-1893*, (Athens: The Banner Press, 1893), page 10, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library/University of Georgia Libraries.

<sup>3</sup> “A Night School Has Been Started,” *Athens Daily Banner*, December 8, 1897, page 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

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students.<sup>5</sup> Records indicate that eventually the Night School numbers grew to over 150 students.



*Miss Louie Lane (1860-1939) was the first teacher at the East Athens Night School.*

Classes were held in the evenings from 6:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., Sundays through Fridays. Most students came to school after working an eleven-hour shift in one of the area mills. The first year, students decided not to take a Christmas break, so they could learn as much and as quickly as they could.<sup>6</sup>

The Night School curriculum focused mostly on elementary skills their students had never had the opportunity to learn. Courses in skills to improve employment opportunities were also offered, such as a well-attended bookkeeping class provided by Moses G. Michael, a member of the Athens City School Board and co-owner of Michael Brothers Department Store. H. E. Choate, the bookkeeper at Michael Brothers, taught the class at no charge to students. Moses G. Michael also promoted essay contests for the students. In 1900, Cornelia Watkins won for her essay entitled "Industry and Idleness," and in the same year, Elmer Jackson received an essay prize, on top of his perfect attendance and honor roll achievements. Both essays were published in the newspaper.<sup>7</sup>

Beginning in 1898, the East Athens Night School began to host an annual exhibition and closing exercise. With no hall large enough to accommodate the event in East Athens, Mr. H. J. Rowe, who owned the newspaper and had championed the cause of the school, donated the use of the Opera House for these annual programs. Students who had "...attended regularly and deported themselves properly were permitted to

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<sup>5</sup> "The Honor Rolls of Night School," *Athens Daily Banner*, January 30, 1898, page 1.

<sup>6</sup> "The Night School is Succeeding," *Athens Daily Banner*, December 28, 1897, page 1.

<sup>7</sup> "Honor Roll for the East Athens Night School for March," *Athens Daily Banner*, April 8, 1900, pages 3, 5.

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take part.”<sup>8</sup> Each year the students who exhibited their work and their talent were commended “... for the splendid exhibition given ... at the Opera House.”<sup>9</sup>

A library was established at the school with donations from the community solicited in the local newspapers. Books and magazines covering a range of subject areas and reading levels populated the library, providing students with free access to reading materials otherwise beyond their reach.<sup>10</sup> An article published in the *Athens Daily Banner* explains the pride the whole community had in the Night School project.

The East Athens Night School is one of the most important educational institutions of Athens, covering as it does an educational field into which no special endeavor had been carried previous to its founding. ... Enrollment has now reached more than 150 students. ... Studies are largely elementary, but higher departments have been added such as bookkeeping. A great majority of pupils are young in years, although there is no special age limit and many adults attend. ... Since the founding of the Night School, twelve married men, heads of families and voters have been taught how to read and write. ... Student work compared favorably with any on exhibit from the Athens City Schools during recently held school exhibit.<sup>11</sup>

There was such support from the community, the Grand Jury from the 1898 October-December Term recommended that:

Resolved, That we hereby recommend to the commissioners of roads and revenues that they set aside from the dispensary

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<sup>8</sup> “The East Athens Night School,” *Athens Daily Banner*, July 8, 1899, page 1.

<sup>9</sup> “Annual Exhibition Was a Big Success,” *Athens Daily Banner*, July 9, 1899, page 3

<sup>10</sup> “The Night School Will Have Exercises,” *Athens Daily Banner*, July 1, 1899, page 1.

<sup>11</sup> “The East Athens Night School,” *Athens Daily Banner*, Centennial Edition, June 16, 1901, page 18.



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fund such a sum as in their dictation may be wise and necessary towards furnishing a suitable schoolhouse for the night school in East Athens, provided, that the title for the land be vested in the county for the purpose specified, and also that the benefits of the school shall be open to all white citizens of Clarke County.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to the elementary and secondary academic work being addressed at the Night School, a free kindergarten was also housed there. It was supervised and funded by the Athens Woman's Club, starting as a pilot program in the summer of 1902, and because of its success, continued the following fall. Miss Louie was given the responsibility of advising how to run the kindergarten, in addition to the regular Night School. The first teacher of the kindergarten, Miss Marion Carlton, attended school in Louisville, Kentucky, learning about kindergarteners and their educational programs.<sup>13</sup> The free kindergarten continued to support families with economic needs.

In 1905, the Night School served a total of 197 students: 157 in the academic night classes and forty students in cooking classes. These students were people who had to work in the mill during the day. They also cared for and taught fifty-seven kindergarteners while their parents worked in the mills.<sup>14</sup> Ms. Louie and her staff worked to create a regular school environment for the students in the Night School program, in spite of their pupils' busy and complicated lives. Students received awards for perfect attendance, were placed on the Honor Roll for exceptionally good studies, and given accolades for a variety of other school endeavors.

Perhaps some of these names might ring a bell:

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<sup>12</sup> "Grand Jury Presentments," *Athens Weekly Banner*, December 23, 1898, page 2.

<sup>13</sup> "Minutes of the Athens Woman's Club," vol. 1, page 51, *For Our Mutual Benefit: The Athens Woman's Club and Social Reform, 1899-1920*, Athens-Clarke County Library Heritage Room, presented in the Digital Library of Georgia.

<sup>14</sup> G. G. Bond, "Report of the Superintendent," *Nineteenth Annual Report of the Athens City Schools, 1904-1905* (Athens: Athens Banner Press, 1905), page 10, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library/University of Georgia Libraries.

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## *February 1900:*<sup>15</sup>

1st Division: Elmer Jackson, 99.83; Alonzo Dudley, 99.75; Frank Spratlin, 99.60.

2nd Division: Jim Spratlin, 99.8; Adolphus Wood, 98.9; Andrew Patterson, 98.

3rd Division: Lillian Allgood, 99.3; May Randolph, 98.4

4th Division: Lucy Spratlin, 98; Columbus Roberts, 98.

## *March 1900:*<sup>16</sup>

1st Division: Elmer Jackson, Alonzo Dudley, 100; Cornelia Watkins, 99.50; Leila Patat, 99.20; Frank Spratlin, 99.50.

2nd Division: Andrew Patterson, 90.20; James Spratlin, 98.30.

3rd Division: May Randolph, 99.70; Pearl Randolph, 99; Newton Smith, 98.4.

## HONOR ROLL AT NIGHT SCHOOL

For the Month of September, 1901.

Special— Jack Ginn, 99.90.

Class 1, division 1— Andrew Patterson, 99.2; Leila Patat, 99; Cornelia Watkins, 98.7; Maggie Center, 98.4

Division 2.— Kenney Hill, 99; Wylie Gannells, 98.8; Parks Hosey, 98.7; Purl Randolph, 98.5; Nolie Adams, 98.5.

Division 3.— David Teat, 99.4.

Class 2, division 1.— Nina Blair, 99.55; Frank Suddeth, 99.55; Julia Suddeth, 99.50; Max Adams, 99.43; Sam Kirk, 99.43; May Randolph, 99.1; James Patterson, 99; George Hayes, 99; Tom Teat, 98.43.

Division 2 — Emmett Wood, 98; Lee May, 97.

Class 3.— Ophelia Hughes, 98; Lillie Potter, 97.75; Claude Bridges, 97.50.

*Honor Roll from the Athens Daily Banner, October 13, 1901, page 2.*

<sup>15</sup> "Honor Roll at Night School" *Athens Daily Banner*, February 9, 1900, page 4.

<sup>16</sup> "The Honor Roll of the East Athens Night School for March," *Athens Daily Banner*, April 8, 1900, page 3.

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*Alonzo Gordon Dudley (1880-1947) was mayor of Athens 1926-1935 and 1938-1939.*

## *April 1900:*<sup>17</sup>

1st Class, 1st Division: Frank Spratlin, 99.80; Elmer Jackson, 99.33; Alonzo Dudley, 99.

2nd Division: James Spratlin, 99; 10; Andrew Patterson, 98.80; Adolphus Wood, 98.50.

2nd Class: Lennie Cooper, 99.60; May Randolph, 98.30.

In the *Athens Daily Herald* on June 16, 1916, Tom Jackson, Modine Barrett, Bonnie Barrett, and Lois Patat were recognized for their perfect attendance in the Night School program. No small accomplishment when one is working all day and going to school at night.

By 1901, the Night School had experienced such growth that it had to be moved from its original location. The Board of Lady Managers, who had been instrumental in beginning the Night School, purchased a lot on the corner of Oak Street and Kent Street and erected a school building for the Night School program. The address was an Oak Street address, but the rear of the building was actually much closer to Georgia Depot Street, providing a large front yard for the facility. Miss Louie became the principal of the school, and as they were able, added more teachers to meet the demand, first hiring Ms. Mae Smoak and Ms. Nellie Brown, then Ms. Ina Cooper and Ms. Gussie Woods. Guest lectures ranging in topic from the organization of the solar system to rules of elocution were offered by local experts, as well.<sup>18</sup>

The school was initially funded by a \$300 appropriation from the City of Athens, with the remainder being secured by private

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<sup>17</sup> "East Athens Night School, April 1900," *Athens Daily Banner*, May 11, 1900, page 5.

<sup>18</sup> "Night School Lectures," *Athens Daily Banner*, December 29, 1899, page 1.

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donations.<sup>19</sup> In early 1900, women from the Board of Lady Managers and Miss Louie appeared before the city council and gave a detailed report of the successes of the school during its initial years. After strong accolades from the council members, they unanimously approved an increase in appropriations to the Night School from \$15 per month to \$25 per month, with the general opinion that "... no money expended by the city yields so beneficent results as does this appropriation to the night school."<sup>20</sup>

Superintendent George G. Bond reported his experiences evaluating the work at the East Athens Night School over eight years:

One of the most agreeable duties I have is to make a weekly visit to the Night School. The more I see and study this institution the more I am impressed with the great work of Miss Lane, and the good ladies of Athens. The moral and spiritual side of this work is its chief asset. This observation is made without any intention of disparaging the educational side. Considering the difficulties under which they labor, the results are little short of marvelous. The pupils come to school after ten or eleven hours of hard labor with no recreation. In this exhausted condition of both mind and body, they begin their school work. The only wonder to me is that they ever learn anything.<sup>21</sup>

Upon request of the Athens City Council, the Board of Education of the Athens City Schools brought the night school and free kindergarten in East Athens into the city school system in February 1905. The Board of Education assumed authority and entire control of the schools, including the responsibility for maintaining the facility on Oak Street and all other equipment, which was loaned to the BOE with the understanding that the facility and equipment would be returned to

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<sup>19</sup> "The East Athens Night School," *Athens Daily Banner*, Centennial Edition, June 16, 1901, page 18.

<sup>20</sup> "The Night School," *Athens Daily Banner*, January 25, 1900, page 2.

<sup>21</sup> G. G. Bond, "Report of the Superintendent," *Twentieth Annual Report of the Athens City Schools, 1905-1906* (Athens: Athens Banner Press, 1906), page 11.

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the Board of Lady Managers in the condition received in the event the Board of Education ceased to operate the schools. Teachers became city employees; Ms. Louie Lane was elected principal of the new school; and Ms. Marion Carlton was elected as teacher of the Kindergarten, with salaries specified.<sup>22</sup>

To demonstrate the progress of the East Athens Night School students, the Athens newspapers would sometimes publish short compositions by the pupils, describing the school and their lives. Their words indicate how grateful they were for the opportunity to learn, as well as the challenges they had to overcome each day. The following compositions were printed on page seven of the November 10, 1914, issue of the *Athens Daily Herald*:

## *Trying to Learn*

I am going to night school and am in the fourth grade. I am trying to learn all I can. I work in the hosiery mill and I oil the machines. My work is hard. I have reading every night. I have spelling too. I have a good teacher. Her name is Miss Susie Bell. I have a good boss man. His Name is Mr. Smith. I have some boy friends in the mill. I have a boy working with me. His name is Je Ray.

– Dewey Carter

## *Work Days and Go to School Nights*

All the rest of the scholars were writing to *The Herald* and so I thought I would write also. I go to night school. We learn a lot. Miss Louie Lane is the principal. Miss Sue Bell is our teacher. We work every day and go to school at night. Miss Sue is a good teacher. We have seventy-five scholars in our school. Miss Louie Lane gave the school a Halloween party last Saturday night. We all had a fine time. – Lena Shurley

## *Likes to Read the Herald*

I wish to write about our night school. We hear from you every evening and like to read *The Herald*. I wish to write about our night school. We have some pictures in our room and some

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<sup>22</sup> “Minutes of the Athens City Schools Board of Education,” February 27, 1905, v. 23, 1904-1915, page 15, MS 3197, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library/University of Georgia Libraries.

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flowers, too. I am in the fourth grade at night school. I work in the Climax hosiery mill. I run four machines. There are a lot of boys and girls working there. We run eleven hours every day and do not work on Saturday afternoons. We go to work at 6:45 and work until 9:15. – Lady Bell Bradley

### *Gets Tired From Work*

I have been working very hard today, and I am tired tonight. But I love to go to school because I learn lots there. We have seventy-six pupils in our school. – Willie Parr

### *A Letter from the Fifth Grade*

I have been working all day in a cotton mill where lots of machinery is to be seen, and while we often have fun, sometimes it is dangerous work if you are not careful. Tonight we have a record class of scholars. The fifth grade is doing fine work in fractions, arithmetic and spelling. We have a reading lesson every Wednesday and Friday and sometimes a spelling match. – Ben Boles

Similar scenarios were described on page two of the February 2, 1915, issue of the *Athens Daily Herald*:

### *Second Grade*

I am a boy 15 years old. I work in the mills. I am learning to do all kinds of work. I have not worked any for four weeks because my collarbone was broken. I go to Oconee Street Night School and we are doing good work learning.

– Wilson Higginbotham

### *Second Grade*

I am a girl 14 years old. I work in the Climax Hosiery mill. I top for five machines. I go to school at night. My teacher's name is Miss Darlina. I go to Oconee Street Night School. I am in the third grade and my teacher thinks I am learning fast. My desk mate is Dora Aiken. – Maud Bradley

This letter to the *Athens Daily Herald* was printed with others on page six of the April 11, 1916, issue:

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Dear Herald: I am going to Oconee Street Night School. I am in fifth reader and study spelling, arithmetic, writing and language. I love all my books dearly, and I must say I sure do love my teacher. Her name is Miss Sue Bell. I am a member of the "Band of Mercy" and I also love that. We have a gathering at our school every month. I also work at the Climax Hosiery Knitting Mill. I am a looper. I work every day, but I haven't been working long. I make anywhere from twenty to twenty-five dozen a day and get 3 cents a dozen. When I learn how to loop good I will make fifty or sixty dozen a day. I am 15 years old, 5 feet and 5 inches tall, weigh 105 pounds. I have light hair, blue eyes. This is all for tonight. Love to all the writers. – Madame Barrett

Ms. Louie was known for her dedication to developing the whole student, not just their academic sides. She was an advocate of anything that developed morals and character, so all performances and productions were based on these teachings. Among the lessons Ms. Louie advocated was giving back to one's community, and the school year's closing ceremonies, featuring student programs of oratory, music, drama, and other arts, charged ten cents for all except mothers of students, and donated the money to other causes in East Athens.<sup>23</sup>

One of the unique groups supported by Ms. Louie was the Angell Band of Mercy, an elementary school program aimed at teaching students to be kind to all creatures—human and animal. The East Athens Night School Angell Band of Mercy was the nineteenth in the state of Georgia when it was founded. It was a branch of the Parent American Band of Mercy organized by George T. Angell in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1882. George T. Angell based its importance on the statistic that "... out of 7,000 children carefully taught kindness to animals in Scotland in the public school, not one had ever been charged with an offense in a criminal court."<sup>24</sup> The bands were one of the earliest forms of humane societies in the United States. This East Athens organization was greatly promoted within the Athens community.

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<sup>23</sup> "Closing Ceremonies of the East Athens Night School Will Be Held Saturday Night," *Athens Banner*, June 1, 1906, page 1.

<sup>24</sup> "Band of Mercy," *Athens Banner*, March 9, 1916, page 2.

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Over time, even as part of the city school system, the East Athens Night School and Kindergarten building began to show its heavy use. In April 1912, Building Committee chair Moses G. Michael, Superintendent Bond, and Board Secretary C. D. Flanigen conducted inspections of the Athens City School buildings and found the situation at East Athens Night School particularly dire. A report was given by Moses G. Michael about the condition of the school.

Ruskin said, "If you can paint one leaf you can paint the world." I don't know how many worlds we could paint if we painted the night school building, a building which does not belong to the City, and costs the City nothing for rent, but mutually agreed that the City should keep it in repair and yet it has gone for years without paint until the wood is exposed to the elements and nothing to protect it. Blinds are broken, porch decayed and liable to prove dangerous in a short while. Both rooms are in bad shape, and if we believe that "cleanliness is next to Godliness" both these rooms should receive immediate attention. Your committee recommends in addition to having this building painted, blinds repaired, broken window panes replaced, porch repaired, that the east corner of the lot be raised, this work has been made necessary since the building of the new road on the east side of the building that a wall be built on the north side and the water pipes be lowered as they are now exposed and freeze in winter.<sup>25</sup>

In 1913, the East Athens Night School and the East Athens Kindergarten were moved to the Oconee Street School across from the Methodist church. At the September 1913 Board meeting, Superintendent Bond submitted a resolution of thanks to the ladies owning the Night School building, which was approved. He then requested that the property be sold and for the amount received to be donated for school purposes.<sup>26</sup> The East Athens Night School became the Oconee Street Night School, and the East Athens Kindergarten

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<sup>25</sup> "Building Committee Report," Minutes of the Athens City Schools, April 22, 1912, page 1, C. D. Flanigen Collection, MS 3, Box 1:12. Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library/University of Georgia Libraries.

<sup>26</sup> "New Teacher," *Athens Banner*, September 20, 1913, page 1.



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became the Oconee Street Kindergarten. Ms. Louie Lane remained the principal of the East Athens Night School and Ms. Carlton continued to run the kindergarten program.

In 1917, the Oconee Street Kindergarten was discontinued for seven years, then reinstated in 1924 and placed at the Neighborhood House due to overcrowding in the Oconee Street School building. Norma Keener was employed to teach the kindergarten at that time. The public kindergarten was moved to Oconee Street in 1930-31. It remained a part of the kindergarten program until kindergartens were discontinued in the public schools in 1958.<sup>27</sup>

The Night School remained in the Oconee Street School building until it was closed in 1928. This school and program served the comprehensive needs of the citizens of East Athens for many years. It filled a huge void in the education of youngsters, as well as adults. The school provided more than educational needs, as described by Laura Speer: "The crowning glory of the East Athens Night School is the culture of the heart which lies beyond the sphere of direct tuition and is received from the unconscious influence of noble examples. The teachers and other benefactors of this institution will be remembered as illustrations of lofty moral and religious principles, of loyalty to truth and devotion to duty."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> B. M. Grier, "Report of the Superintendent," *Forty-Fourth Annual Report of the Athens City Schools, 1931-1932*, page 27. Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library/University of Georgia Libraries.

<sup>28</sup> Laura Speer, "The East Athens Night School," *Athens Daily Banner*, Centennial Edition, June 16, 1901, page 20.

## Athens Model Cities Program: Quantifying the Neglect

by Maxine Easom and Patsy Arnold

*This is a sample of the information compiled by Maxine Easom and Patsy Arnold as they worked on their book about the history of East Athens. These statistics clearly demonstrate the situation faced by the city government after neglecting these areas of Athens for decades as mill and other industrial work declined. It also gives a context for the challenges that the citizens of the area faced as they worked to improve the lives of their neighbors.*

*Many more details about the Model Cities Program and the enduring accomplishments of the initiative can be found in the appendix of Easom and Arnold's forthcoming book, Across the River.*

The areas with the greatest needs in Athens were supported by the (Model Cities) grant and were identified as the “target” areas. The areas identified contained a high concentration of the city’s social, physical, and economic problems: “Of the city’s 13 square mile area, 4.37 square miles were in the target area, with 3.02 square miles in the eastern part and 1.35 square miles in the western part.”<sup>1</sup>

The eastern part included most of the eastern and northern sections of the city bounded on one side by the Lexington Road and on the other side by Barber Street, with the city limits forming the outer boundary. The western section included an area bounded by Baxter Street on the south, Hull Street on the east, Alps Road on the west and the Plaza and Old Broad streets on the north.<sup>2</sup> The larger of these areas was the area that was basically the former First Ward—Lexington Road to North Avenue. (Of course, from North Avenue to Barber Street was not in the First Ward).

Preliminary statistics, gathered to support the grant application and analyze the problems, painted a vivid picture of the needs of these areas: “In general, it was concluded that the model neighborhood area

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<sup>1</sup> “Questions and Answers about the Athens Model Cities Program,” City of Athens, Georgia, Community Development Department, n.d., 13; “Athens Model Cities Program,” MS 879, 1:4, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library/University of Georgia Libraries.

<sup>2</sup> Hank Johnson, “Plan to Improve Living Conditions,” *Athens Banner-Herald and Daily News*, September 14, 1969, page 3.

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suffer[ed] more from extreme problem conditions rather than a multitude of problem conditions. That is, although the MNA generally ha[d] a greater number of problems than the rest of the City, it [was] the magnitude of the problems and their overwhelming effect on the residents of the area that is intolerable to a concerned and progressive society.”<sup>3</sup>

While these data include statistics from all of the Model Neighborhood Area (MNA), they paint a clear picture about what had become of the First Ward by the 1960s. Most of this information was taken from the “Problem Analysis” section of the *Athens Model Cities Program Comprehensive Plan Revision* document that was filed with the Department of Housing and Urban Development, which administered the Model Cities grants across the nation.

## Physical Environment

- “The MNA contains 8.06 miles of unpaved streets, compared to 2.00 miles in the rest of the city, or 76% of the total unpaved streets in the city.”<sup>4</sup>
- “The MNA contains approximately 423 residential lots which are served by outdoor toilets, compared with 74 lots in the rest of the city. Hence, 85% of all lots in the city with outdoor toilet facilities are located in the MNA.”<sup>5</sup>
- “The MNA, although containing relatively large amounts of commercial land use and commercial zoning, has few easily accessible, convenience goods shopping centers.”<sup>6</sup>

## Recreation and Cultural Services

- “There is a very limited variety in programs, both in types of activities and for participation by different age groups.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> City of Athens Model Cities Program, “Problem Analysis, Goals and Program Approaches. Section 1. Problem Analysis,” Athens Model Cities Program Comprehensive Plan Revisions, 1969, page 8; Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library/ University of Georgia Libraries.

<sup>4</sup> City of Athens Model Cities Program, “Problem Analysis,” page 8.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> City of Athens Model Cities Program, “Problem Analysis,” page 19.

<sup>7</sup> City of Athens Model Cities Program, “Problem Analysis,” page 53

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- “According to national standards, a recreational building should have a minimum of 10,000 to 12,000 square feet of space. Not one of the five community centers in the MNA offers this large of a building according to the model cities staff.”<sup>8</sup>

## Housing

- 40% of the housing units in the MNA were considered in sound condition, while in other parts of the city, 81.8% of the houses were classified as sound.<sup>9</sup>
- 27% of the city’s population live in the Model Cities neighborhood, yet the area contains over 95% of the sub-standard housing.<sup>10</sup>
- “15% of all housing units had no heat.”<sup>11</sup>

## Education

- “There exists no comprehensive pre-school program for children of the MNA.”<sup>12</sup> There are approximately 1,151 three-, four-, and five-year-old children of which only 196, or 17%, are involved in any type of year-round pre-school program.
- In addition, 208, or 18%, are enrolled in Summer Head Start Programs.”<sup>13</sup>

## Employment

- In model neighborhoods, 42.5% of the households were maintained on incomes below \$3,000, and the median income in

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<sup>8</sup> Mike Davis, “Play Health Needs Big in Model Neighborhoods,” *Athens Daily News*, April 25, 1969, page 1.

<sup>9</sup> Hank Johnson, “Model Cities Approaches Third Year,” *Athens Banner-Herald and Daily News*, February 27, 1971, page 2J.

<sup>10</sup> Sharon Bailey, “Athens as a Model City,” *Athens Banner-Herald and Daily News*, February 23, 1969, page 9E.

<sup>11</sup> City of Athens Model Cities Program, “Problem Analysis,” page 73.

<sup>12</sup> City of Athens Model Cities Program, “Problem Analysis,” page 134.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

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the MNA was \$3,607 a year, compared to \$6,079 outside the area.<sup>14</sup>

- “Many MNA household heads are occupied in semi-skilled jobs.”<sup>15</sup>

## Healthcare

- “There is a lack of doctors offering for general practice. 33% of respondents (to the Model Cities questionnaire) indicated that general health service was the greatest health need. Athens has fifty practicing physicians for the City-County population of approximately 64,000 ... only three general practitioners operated out of the MNA neighborhoods.”<sup>16</sup>
- “It is difficult for the very ill and infirm to receive home medical attention.”<sup>17</sup>

## Law Enforcement

- “Area is source of approximately 90% of the complaints filed with city police department.”<sup>18</sup>
- “Minority group members perceive the police as anti-minority, prejudiced, and desirous of maintaining such a position, as evidenced by the apparent inability of ethnic group members to find employment as police officers.”<sup>19</sup>

## Social Services

- “Of all persons who indicated that they experienced a period over the last five years with no income, over 27% indicated that they were not able to get help. Similar conditions exist with other problems.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Johnson, “Model Cities Approaches Third Year, “ page 2J.

<sup>15</sup> City of Athens Model Cities Program, “Problem Analysis,” page 115.

<sup>16</sup> City of Athens Model Cities Program, “Problem Analysis,” page 180.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Johnson, “Plan to Improve Living Conditions,” pages 1, 3.

<sup>19</sup> City of Athens Model Cities Program, “Problem Analysis,” page 192.

<sup>20</sup> City of Athens Model Cities Program, “Problem Analysis,” page 172.

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- “Lack of mobility inhibits full utilization of services.”<sup>21</sup>
- “Approximately two-thirds of the MNA population fall below the poverty level of income.”<sup>22</sup>

## **Legal Aid Services**

- “... in the Model Neighborhood there are 350 families with an annual income of less than \$1,000, 470 families with \$1,000-2,000 annual income, 550 families with \$2,000-3,000 annual income, 500 families with \$3,000-4,000 annual income, 350 families with \$4,000-5,000 annual income, and 330 families with \$5,000-6,000 annual income. The usual maximum income for a family having three children to be eligible for legal aid is \$5,200.
- Accordingly, the above statistics indicate that there is a potential of 2,200 families eligible for direct assistance by legal aid, and 330 families eligible for referral. According to the survey, 1,940 heads of families in the Model Neighborhood possess nine years or fewer education, and 3,310 families were unaware of the availability of free legal aid.”<sup>23</sup>
- “In the Model Neighborhood there are 2,900 Negro families, but there are no Negro attorneys in Athens.”<sup>24</sup>

## **Citizen Participation**

- “Residents of the target area are not aware of activities available to them.”<sup>25</sup>

## **Transportation Availability**

- “An estimated 40% of (MNA residents) do not have automobiles.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> City of Athens Model Cities Program, “Problem Analysis,” page 173.

<sup>22</sup> City of Athens Model Cities Program, “Problem Analysis,” page 138.

<sup>23</sup> City of Athens Model Cities Program, “Problem Analysis,” page 215.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> City of Athens Model Cities Program, “Problem Analysis,” page 221.

<sup>26</sup> “Model Cities Can Provide Public Transportation Start,” Editorial. *Athens Banner-Herald and Daily News*, September 2, 1970, page 4.

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- “... transportation has an important bearing on employment, shopping habits and commercial isolation, and the fact that MNA residents are limited to travel to the functions and shops close to their homes was emphasized. A mass transit system would ... provide “frequent, comfortable, convenient and low-cost service to the MNA and to the rest of the city.”<sup>27</sup>

Following a year of data collection and analysis, the city applied for and received the comprehensive planning grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in April 1970. This grant changed the First Ward physically, economically, and socially.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Mike Davis, “Model Cities Looks at Deterioration,” *Athens Daily News*, April 29, 1969, page 1.

<sup>28</sup> Mike Davis, “Document Looks at ‘Extreme Problems,’ ” *Athens Daily News*, April 24, 1969, page 1.

## **Evelyn Neely and the Athens Model Cities Program**

by Martha deBeaugrine

*Martha deBeaugrine, a retired teacher and long-time Athens resident, writes, "It was May 7, 2007, when Evelyn Neely and I first sat down to record the story of her life. Having known her years ago, I knew the story would be fascinating." Evelyn Neely, an African-American, was instrumental in implementing the Model Cities Program in Athens in 1968. As deBeaugrine writes, "Helping people, especially children, to have better lives was the heart of her work for decades." The following article, adapted from the booklet deBeaugrine wrote for the Neely children after many visits with their mother, reflects the history of those times as Mrs. Neely told it.*

### **Childhood and Youth**

Born in Athens on March 18, 1925, Evelyn Corene Billups was raised by her grandmother, Donnie Taylor, who was part Native American, and her grandfather, Hop Taylor.<sup>1</sup> Corene, as she was then called, had a happy childhood living with Donnie and Hop and three of their children. The children played hopscotch, ball, and jackstones (with real stones), and Corene attended nearby East Athens Elementary School. For middle and high school, however, she had to walk quite a distance across town to the schools on Reese Street, running fast past the Chicopee Mill, where the white men in the mill would spit tobacco juice from the windows on passing black children. In addition to the education she was getting in school, Corene was learning some powerful lessons from her grandmother: "She told me that I could be whatever I wanted to be. It doesn't matter if you are white or black, you are just as good as anybody. She told me I was beautiful and that things ... just don't happen. You have to make them happen. [She] told me to have the faith of a mustard seed, and if God knew you had that faith, God would let it happen. ... She told me to have a dream."

Corene graduated from Athens High and Industrial School, the black high school at that time. When she was eighteen, a girlfriend introduced her to Charles Neely, a twenty-six-year-old army veteran.

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<sup>1</sup> There is no known connection between Evelyn Corene and Aunt Laura Billups, whose story is found elsewhere in this volume. The name Billups is found frequently in the Athens area.



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When asked if it was love at first sight, Corene gave an enigmatic smile: “He had a car, a Chevrolet, and my friends liked to ride with him. He had nice manners and he went to church. The more I saw of him—he grew on me. Later he told me that, when he saw me, he told himself, ‘That’s my wife, right there!’” Perhaps the final reason Corene decided to marry him was that her grandmother approved, telling her that Charles would make a good husband. And so on April 9, 1947, Corene and Charles were married.

## Family Life

Charles and Corene first lived in public housing, notable to them for its indoor plumbing. Charles worked hard, painting automobiles at Trussell Ford, cutting lawns, repairing lawn mowers, and working at a filling station every other weekend. He also took a business course using the GI Bill and did income tax work on the side. Before too long, Corene and Charles were able to buy a house on Fairview Street, and it was there that they raised their four children—three girls and a boy. Shelia was born in 1948, Dyann in 1950, son Garfield in 1952, and Elwanda in 1955. Being attuned to children, Corene filled their yard with fun things—a slide, swings, and other toys to stretch their minds and bodies. “The neighborhood children gathered in our yard to play, and I kept them,” she said. “I had a childcare center and didn’t know it.”

As the children grew older, they too went to East Athens Elementary School. Corene was active in the PTA there, and volunteered as a substitute teacher. Corene said, “Mrs. McWhorter, the principal, used me as a spokesperson for the school when the SACS<sup>2</sup> committee and other visitors came to the school.” In an uncanny foreshadowing of the future, Mrs. McWhorter one day asked Corene why she didn’t start a childcare center.

But Corene was then busy raising her own children. Wanting the best for them, she and Charles tried to protect them from experiencing racial discrimination: “We were careful about our children’s friends and the places they went. They didn’t see movies. We guarded the music they heard.” But Corene did remember that “when Garfield was five years old, I took him to town with me to shop at Lamar Lewis’s shoe

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<sup>2</sup> Southern Association of College and Schools, an accrediting organization.

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store. Kress's, the dime store, was next door, so I took him there and gave him a nickel with instructions not to touch anything. When I came back for him in a few minutes, Garfield was sitting at the lunch counter licking a nickel ice cream cone and twirling around on the seat. The lady behind the counter was fussing at him, telling him he wasn't supposed to be there." Corene chuckled, "That was probably the first 'sit-in' of the many to come."

Corene and Charles's children went on to graduate from Lyons Middle School and Burney Harris High School. Corene had been determined to have enough money to send them all to college, and knew the family income had to be augmented. Not wanting to work for white women as a cook or housekeeper, she opened a beauty shop in a room Charles built for her at the back of the house. But her work did not bring in enough money, and they could not get financial aid (Charles's income was too high) or a loan (banks would not lend money to African-Americans). Corene realized she needed to go to work full-time.

### **Work with Action Incorporated Childcare Programs**

Her opportunity came in the late 1960s when President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty established Action Incorporated, a federally funded program under the Office of Economic Development that provided services such as home improvements, emergency financial assistance, and childcare for economically disadvantaged citizens.

A local Action Inc. Board, headed by Wilbur Jones, was set up to make decisions as to how the grant money would be spent in Athens. A certain percentage of the board was required to be made up of those most directly affected—the "economically disadvantaged." A Citizens Participation Committee was thus established to train individuals in community participation. Corene became a member of this committee, along with two other black women, Miriam Moore and Jessie Barnett. These three women eventually came to play leading roles in preparing Athens's Model Cities plan.

Corene's profession in Athens childcare, however, had begun earlier when the Athens Action Board received Head Start money to open a half-day childcare center in a house on Childs Street owned by St. Joseph's Catholic Church. Training was provided to employees for a career ladder. Corene climbed that ladder: she began as a teacher's aide, then moved up to assistant teacher and then to assistant director.

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When, in 1970, Head Start opened a second full-day, year-round childcare center in a house on Pope Street owned by Emmanuel Episcopal Church, Corene applied for the position as its director. The Action Inc. board wanted to hire an applicant with a college degree in business, but the Policy Advisory Board of Head Start wanted Corene, who was experienced in childcare. After a much-publicized dispute between the two boards, Corene was given the position.

Under Corene's leadership, the Pope Street Head Start program was a resounding success. After only one year, Corene was offered the directorship of Athens Child Development, Inc., a federally funded agency that oversaw a network of childcare homes and centers: four homes that provided care for newborn children up to the age of eighteen months as well as after-school care; the Broad Acres and Rocksprings centers, which served children eighteen months to three years of age; and the Maddox Center, which served children three to five years old. During the years of supervising these homes and centers, Corene became fast friends with Walt Denero, a former Catholic priest from Syracuse, New York, who was a student at the University of Georgia. They discussed social issues and ways to improve opportunities for African-Americans. This friendship was later to prove important to them both and to the city of Athens.

## **Planning the Model Cities Grant**

Meanwhile, the Johnson Administration had introduced the Model Cities Program under the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). This program offered grants to cities willing to improve the lives of their economically disadvantaged citizens. In 1968, with the consent of the Athens City Council, Mayor Julius Bishop made plans to apply for a Model Cities grant. The guidelines for this project called for a Citizens Participation Committee to offer their ideas for the application. Corene, Miriam Moore, and Jessie Barnett were among the African-Americans asked to advise. However, the mayor appointed a committee of University of Georgia professors to actually write the proposal. The University committee accepted recommendations from the Citizens Participation Committee, but the proposal the professors wrote embodied their own ideas of what they thought would best serve Athens.

Coincidentally, Miriam Moore was the housekeeper for Dr. Paul Deutschberger, a professor in the UGA School of Social Work and a

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member of the University committee. She had discussed the needs of the community with Paul and his wife, Sophie, and when the proposal was completed, Paul lent Miriam a copy to read before it was submitted to the City Council and to HUD. Miriam, a woman with a fiery temper, was incensed by what she read.

The day came when the citizens committee, the mayor, the City Council members, and HUD officials were to meet at the courthouse and see for the first time the Model Cities application the professors had written. Corene, Miriam, and Jessie were among those at the courthouse. When response from the citizens committee was solicited, Miriam stood up and, holding a copy of the application, said in a loud voice, "This is not what we asked for! There is nothing here for black folks! The only thing is jobs for janitors and maids. That's not what we want! We want real jobs, training, and health services. We want our communities improved!"

Corene was shocked at such an outburst. Probably everyone else was, too. Surprisingly, after some discussion, the City Council responded with, "The proposal has to be submitted in sixty days. Can you rewrite it the way you want and have it ready by then?"

Miriam answered, "Yes!"

So the work began. Corene's eyes glowed with the memory. Citizens Participation Committee member Jimmy McCurry gathered friends and students, both black and white, and they went door to door asking people what they wanted. Corene said, "We worked night and day and we drafted a new application. Parts of the city where the poor lived were to be designated as the 'Model City Neighborhoods,' and anyone who lived in these areas would be eligible to benefit from the grant. We asked for adult education, childcare, training for parents, health services, and job training. We wanted parks and recreation facilities, we wanted our streets paved and sewers updated, we wanted aides in the public schools, and we wanted a neighborhood health center. We asked that the head of the program have a degree but that the assistant head be a Model Neighborhood resident. That way the assistant would be trained and could be considered for directorships when spots were available."

Was it difficult? Yes. Was there opposition? Yes. Desegregation of local schools had only recently been implemented. (The University of Georgia had been integrated in 1961 with the enrollment of Charlayne Hunter and Hamilton Holmes, but Athens public schools were not fully

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integrated until 1970.<sup>3</sup>) Thus many still resisted change. For example, Athens school Superintendent Dr. Charles McDaniel was at first skeptical of having “disadvantaged citizens” in the classrooms as aides, but when he learned they would be trained for their jobs, he changed his mind. Later, he was on national television saying how good it was to have these aides in the classrooms.

In spite of such resistance, the application was completed. The City Council, the mayor, and the Citizens Participation Committee approved it, and it was sent to Washington. The grant, containing thirty-six projects, was approved in the amount of \$2.6 million. Athens, Georgia, became home to one of five Model Cities Programs in Georgia. The three women, Miriam, Jessie, and Corene—later referred to as the “Band of Sisters”—had taken on leadership roles in weaving the requests of the residents into meaningful, effective programs that would improve the lives of all Athenians.

## **The Model Cities Program in Athens**

The first director of the Athens program, a young man not accustomed to strong black women such as Corene, Miriam, and Jessie, did not stay long. In 1970, Corene’s friend Walt Denero, who had finished his degree and interned with the Atlanta Model Cities Program, applied for the position and was hired. Corene felt that “he was God sent.” Together, Walt and assistant director Ray Ware established warm relationships with the Citizens Participation Committee, the mayor, and the City Council. Trust was established between the races and the work proceeded smoothly.

Corene continued her directorship at Athens Child Development, but at night she did unpaid Model Cities Committee work, assuming a leadership role. She said, “All the sitting and meeting and talking we did—but somebody had to do it. I was away from home at night so much that I thought Charles was going to leave me.” Soon, a Policy Advisory Board was formed, made up of a variety of task forces with a paid staff. Economic Development was chaired by Miriam Moore, Physical Improvement by Jessie Barnett, and Social Services by Corene. It was during these years that Corene decided to change her

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<sup>3</sup> In September 1970, the Clarke County high school for black students, Burney Harris (formerly Athens High and Industrial School) and the high school for white students, Athens High, were merged to establish Clarke Central.

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*The “Band of Sisters” who changed the proposed Model Cities Grant: Jessie Barnett, Miriam Moore, and Evelyn Neely, with Athens Mayor Julius Bishop. (Picture from Wayne Ford, “East Athens activist Evelyn Neely dies,” OnlineAthens.com, posted May 28, 2013. Courtesy of Athens Banner-Herald.)*

name; she told her friends that now her professional name was “Evelyn.” (From here on she is referred to as Evelyn.)

The Model Cities grant began to impact every area of Athens government as well as the residents of the designated neighborhoods. While Athens had had a bus system in the 1940s and 1950s, it was no longer in service. The grant reinstituted the bus system. The rickety bridge that had crossed the Oconee River from downtown to East Athens was torn down and replaced with a strong bridge that served the city for years. The Council on Aging came into being, along with the Neighborhood Health Center. The grant funded the additional childcare centers that Evelyn supervised. The house used for the Athens

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Welcome Center was moved to its present location, and the Lyndon House was renovated to make the arts center. Family Counseling came into being. Financial assistance became available for neighborhood residents and for startup businesses.

In Model City Neighborhoods, roads were paved, sidewalks installed, and water and sewer systems added or repaired. In some homes, indoor plumbing was introduced. The East Athens and Rocksprings centers, along with Bishop Park, were built with recreational facilities to serve the residents.

Many jobs were created for Model City residents because of the stipulation that they would have first call on the jobs if they had the necessary skill level. The new recreation facilities created more jobs for residents, especially males. The Athens Council on Aging trained and employed aides. Because Model Cities dollars could be used for seed money to draw other grants, the Athens Housing Authority was able to get funding to build and improve housing in the Model City neighborhoods. In 1970, an initiative named the Police-Community Unit was created. Made up of six black men and six white men called Neighborhood Service Officers (NSOs), they were uniformed members of the Athens Police Department.

Though they were civilians with no arrest power, the unit promoted strong police-community relations. Jack Lumpkin, later to become the Athens police chief, was one of those first twelve NSOs.

By 1973, the Model Cities grant had evolved into a Community Development Grant with funding of \$7.6 million. Athens Vocational Technical School trained individuals in early childhood education so they could work in the childcare centers. The Teacher Corps became part of UGA's education program, so that school teachers could be trained.

Realizing there were few black professors at the University, the Citizens Committee consulted with



*Evelyn in later years, with Harry Sims at a Barrow Elementary School retirement party held in Sims's honor in the early 2000s. (Picture from Wayne Ford, "East Athens activist Evelyn Neely dies," OnlineAthens.com, posted May 28, 2013. Courtesy of Athens Banner-Herald.)*

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UGA about bringing African-Americans into faculty positions. The University hired several African-American faculty members including Larry Blount, who became part of the School of Law and along with Michael Thurmond, a local black lawyer, helped the Committee interpret the law.

The “Band of Sisters” remained together. Miriam Moore became head of the Citizens Participation Committee, and Jessie Barnett became director of nutrition for the Council on Aging. Evelyn continued as executive director of Athens Child Development Inc. Looking back on the teamwork of the three women, Evelyn said, “Jessie ... always asked for things to be explained and repeated. Miriam was the outspoken one, and I would come after Miriam and say ‘She really didn’t mean it that way.’ We learned how to put it all together to get the job done.” But it was Walt Denero who perhaps best described Evelyn’s quiet, effective role on the Model Cities team: “She had the love. There was a sense of caring that came through her. ... She had the warmth and compassion to hold all the parts together.” Evelyn Neely was, he concluded, “the heart of the movement.” The Model Cities Program itself ended in 1974, but many of its programs remain, still benefitting Athenians, both white and black, today.

## AFTERWORD

*All four of Evelyn’s children graduated from college. Evelyn went on to be the first black woman on the Athens Board of Education. In 1985, she was named the Outstanding Black Woman of Athens by the Athens Courier. In 2000, the local battered women’s shelter named their newly constructed park after her, and she received the Leadership Award from the East Athens Development Corporation. In 2002, the Girl Scouts of Northeast Georgia conferred on her their Athens Woman of Distinction Award, as did the City of Athens. In 2004, she received the University of Georgia President’s Fulfilling the Dream Award. And in 2007, a street cut to give access to the new Georgia Department of Labor building was named “Evelyn Neely Drive.” Evelyn Corene Neely retired from Athens Child Development in 2003; she died on May 27, 2013, at the age of 88. In 2017, an eight-month training session for young African-American community leaders was initiated and named for Evelyn Neely.*



## “The Finest Cook in All the South!” Aunt Laura Billups of Athens

by Eve B. Mayes

An advertisement for Gold Leaf Flour appeared in numerous southern newspapers in the fall of 1924, remembering Aunt Laura Billups of Athens, Georgia.<sup>1</sup>

*“The finest cook in all the South!” That’s the glowing tribute that thousands paid, back thirty years ago, to Aunt Laura Billups of Athens, Georgia. Oh, those childhood days. Warm breezes laden with sweet intoxicating odors of honeysuckle and jessamine fanned in through the windows of the kitchen to mingle with the palate-teasing aroma of the soft, fluffy biscuits Aunt Laura was baking.*

*It sure was thrilling to whet the appetite when you knew that in a short while it would be so genuinely satisfied. Will there ever be another cook like Aunt Laura?*

*Aunt Laura always used Gold Leaf Flour – that was one of her rules. Gold Leaf, the fine-texture, snow-white, soft winter wheat flour, so excellent for biscuits, hot bread, cake and pastry baking, has long*



**“The Finest Cook in All The South!”**

THAT’S the glowing tribute that thousands paid, back thirty years ago, to Aunt Laura Billups of Athens, Georgia.

Oh, those childhood days. Warm breezes laden with sweet intoxicating odors of honeysuckle and jessamine fanned in through the windows of the kitchen to mingle with the palate-teasing aroma of the soft, fluffy biscuits Aunt Laura was baking.

It sure was thrilling to whet the appetite when you knew that in a short while it would be so genuinely satisfied. Will there ever be another cook like Aunt Laura?

Aunt Laura always used Gold Leaf Flour—that was one of her rules. Gold Leaf, the fine-texture, snow-white, soft winter wheat flour, so excellent for biscuits, hot bread, cake and pastry baking, has long been the rule in thousands of Southern kitchens. Today it is everywhere called “The Flour of the South.”

Your Grocer Has Gold Leaf or Cuts Out In Five Yrs.  
CAPE COUNTY MILLING COMPANY, JACKSON, MISSOURI

ADAMS BROTHERS CO.  
MADE IN U.S.A.

**Gold Leaf FLOUR**

**“The Flour of the South”**  
Patented Self-Rising

**Try These Gold Leaf Biscuits**

1 cup Gold Leaf Flour  
1/2 cup shortening  
1/2 cup milk  
1 egg  
1/2 tsp. salt  
1/2 tsp. baking powder

Mix together dry ingredients with fork. Add milk and egg. Knead lightly. Roll out. Cut with biscuit cutter. Bake in hot oven.

<sup>1</sup> Macon [GA] Telegraph, October 17, 1924, page 5, from digital newspaper archives on [www.genealogybank.com](http://www.genealogybank.com).

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*been the rule in thousands of Southern kitchens. Today it is everywhere called "The Flour of the South."*

*Cape County Milling Company, Jackson, Missouri.*

Just who was Aunt Laura Billups? And how did she get to be so famous for her cooking? The text writers for this ad got much of it wrong, unfortunately. She was famous, not only in the South, but even in Washington, D.C., and New York City. But it was her cakes that made her reputation, not her biscuits. Nor do we know what she looked like.

## Who was Aunt Laura Billups?

Laura McCray was born June 7, 1818, in Wilkes County, Georgia, to Dolly Billups, a slave belonging to Colonel John Billups. Her father is unknown. She is known as Laura McCray mostly on legal documents and as Aunt Laura Billups in newspaper accounts. According to the *Athens Banner*, she came to Athens at the age of eighteen, and "except for a few trips with her owner's family, and only one or two since the days of freedom, she has remained here ever since."<sup>2</sup>

Prior to 1870, enslaved African-American citizens of the U.S. were listed only by age and sex, under the name of their owner, in the federal slave censuses of 1850 and 1860. Only free-born or freed African-Americans would be named in the federal population censuses for those decades. This makes it difficult to track Laura McCray and her mother Dolly Billups earlier than 1870 with those records.

But newspapers occasionally carried stories about both the white and African-American residents of the city. Thus it was very intriguing to find an entry for "Miss Laura McCray (servant), care of Major Henry Billups" in the April 1841 list of letters being held in the post office at Athens.<sup>3</sup> Henry Carlton Billups was the son of Colonel John Billups, the original owner of Laura's mother Dolly Billups. Unfortunately, we will never know who might have written this letter to her, especially since Laura was unable to read or write.

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<sup>2</sup> "Ninety-Three Years Old and Still Baking Cakes," *Athens Banner*, January 29, 1910, page 8, from the Newspapers Archives of the Digital Library of Georgia (hereinafter designated as DLG).

<sup>3</sup> "List of Letters Remaining in the Post Office at Athens, Geo., on the 1st of April, 1841." *Athens Southern Banner*, April 16, 1841, page 4, DLG.

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In early 1863, the town wardens of Athens enacted a requirement for all slave owners and employers to pay a fee for any slaves or free persons of color not living on that owner or employer's property. In a list of licenses that had been applied for was Dr. H. C. Billups, who paid \$10 for "old woman Dolly."<sup>4</sup>

On the 1880 U.S. census, she is listed as Laura McCray, 60 years of age, a single mulatto, and her occupation is given as confectionary baking. Living with her are her 83-year-old widowed mother, Dolly Billups, who is designated as being black. Also in the household was Sally Thomas, age nineteen, whose relationship is listed as "granddaughter," but it is not clear whose granddaughter she actually was – Laura's or Dolly's. Also listed in this household are the 27-year-old mulatto male M. B. Morton and his first wife Amanda, who would die in 1885, as would their only child, Chester. Monroe Bowers "Pink" Morton would become the wealthiest African-American resident of Athens by 1890.

Clarke County deed records do not show how Laura McCray acquired the property where her home and bakery shop were located, but a 1907 article in the *Atlanta Georgian and News* seems to indicate that both the shop and house were furnished by Myrtis Thomas Franklin, whose own unusual house that she designed and built herself, stood almost directly across Prince Avenue from Laura's shop. Mrs. Franklin was the mother of the artist Mary Jett Franklin.<sup>5</sup>

The cottage where Laura McCray lived on Prince Avenue was unique, built by Moses Young, who cut the lumber, did the work, and moved Aunt Laura in without costing her a cent.<sup>6</sup>

In 1889, the property of Laura McCree [sic] was valued at \$1,150, placing her in the top twelve African-American property owners in the city of Athens at that time. Her next-door neighbor, builder "Pink"

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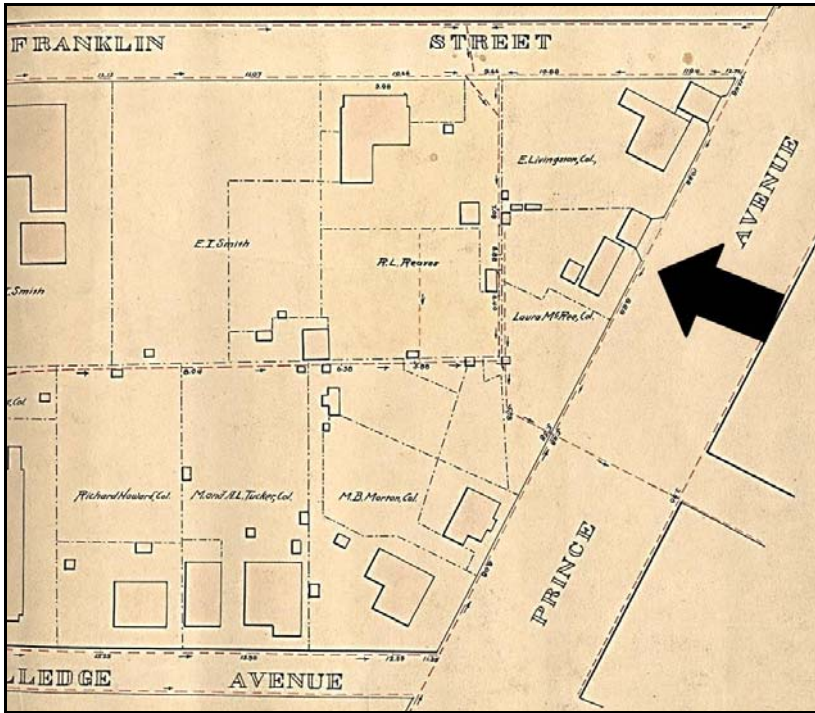
<sup>4</sup> "Council Proceedings, Council Chambers, February 14, 1863." *Athens Southern Banner* February 18, 1863, page 3, DLG.

<sup>5</sup> "Miss Franklin in Athens" *Atlanta Georgian and News*, May 7, 1907, page 8 (DLG), as quoted from the *Athens Evening Call*. See also Charlotte Thomas Marshall, ed., *The Tangible Past in Athens, Georgia*, vol. I, pages 325-328, for more information about Myrtis Corinna Thomas Franklin and her house, and her daughter, the artist Mary Jett Franklin.

<sup>6</sup> "Ninety-Three Years Old and Still Baking Cakes," *Athens Banner*, January 29, 1910, page 8, DLG.

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Morton, was the wealthiest, with real estate and furnishings valued at \$3,300.<sup>7</sup>



*Laura McCray's house and shop stood on the south side of Prince Avenue between Franklin Street and Milledge Avenue. The next property toward town belonged to Monroe B. "Pink" Morton. Detail from Block 13 of the Athens drain maps drawn by W. B. Barnett in 1893. Courtesy Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia, Athens.*

No photographs of Aunt Laura Billups' home or her little shop have been located.

Laura McCray is 82 on the 1900 U. S. census, still baking cakes. Living with her were her 7-year-old nephew Alvin Holsey, who was attending school, and Richard Livingston, a 21-year-old mail carrier.

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<sup>7</sup> "Colored Property Owners. They Own Real Estate and Personal Property Amounting to Over \$129,670." *Athens Weekly Banner-Watchman*, April 23, 1889, page 7, DLG.

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Several sources indicate that Laura McCray never married or had any children. In 1902, she gave a lot on Prince Avenue to her “niece,” Laura Drake. However, when Laura Drake died on May 24, 1905, at her home after six months illness, the *Athens Banner* referred to her as the “daughter of Aunt Laura Billups.” The funeral was held at the home of Laura McCray.<sup>8</sup>

On the 1910 U.S. census, Laura McCray is 92, head of the household and still running her bakery. This is the only census to list her as a widow (instead of single as earlier censuses did), and having borne one child, who was no longer living. The census shows also in the household her “son-in-law” Cornelius Drake (widower of Laura Drake), age 46, and his four children: her “grandson” Franklin Bernard Drake, age 18, and “granddaughters” Laura E. Drake, 15, Ruby R. Drake, 13, and Emmie F. Drake, 10. The precise relationship between Laura McCray and Laura Billups Drake – whether daughter or niece – cannot be defined at this time; however, they are not buried in the same lot at Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery.<sup>9</sup>

An extensive article about Aunt Laura Billups just before her 93rd birthday appeared in the *Athens Banner*, filling most of two columns on page 8.<sup>10</sup> She remembered seeing Halley’s Comet and the meteor shower that accompanied it seventy-two years earlier while living in Milledgeville, the state capitol, with her owner’s family at that time. Because John Billups was so active in state politics, she saw such political luminaries as Robert Toombs, Henry W. Grady, Ben H. Hill, and the first Governor Brown.

## The Cake Baker of Athens

According to an 1884 article in the Athens newspaper *Banner-Watchman*, one Mr. Caughy of New York described Laura Billups as “the famous cake baker of Athens.” He said that “this colored

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<sup>8</sup> “Worthy Negro Woman Dead.” *Athens Banner*, May 25, 1905, page 3, DLG. Also see Laura Drake’s grave marker at Find-a-Grave Memorial #179224492. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/179224492/>.

<sup>9</sup> No marker for Laura McCray has been found in Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery in Athens. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/179224492/>.

<sup>10</sup> “Ninety-Three Years Old and Still Baking Cakes,” *Athens Banner*, January 29, 1910, page 8, DLG.

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woman has a reputation as a pastry cook in New York and other Northern cities, and is better known among the epicures there than at home. ... at several feasts [in the] North he has eaten her cooking, and it ranks as the best.”<sup>11</sup>

At the Colored Fair for 1887, the *Weekly Banner-Watchman* reporter wrote, “The display of cakes by the world renown Laura Billups is very large and complete. Laura Billups not only ships cake over the United States, but even fills orders from France. Her cakes are too well known in Athens to need any comment. We dare say they will carry off the prize at the colored fair.”<sup>12</sup>

“She has baked cakes in the Classic City of unparalleled lightness and delicacy, and the famous recipe for them is still known only to her and her children.”<sup>13</sup> In March 1904, there was an exhibit of Gold Leaf Flour at the Commercial Hotel in Athens, featuring free samples of cake made by “Aunt Billups” with Gold Leaf Flour. A shipment of the flour fresh from the mills was on hand for sale. Amusingly, just below this announcement was an advertisement placed by local ice cream impresario, W. D. Bowden, who offered the ladies of Athens cake made by Aunt Laura Billups at no charge, served with his ice cream.<sup>14</sup>

For nearly half a century, Aunt Laura’s cakes were famous and no reception, dance, wedding, or other social function of the city would be considered complete without them. She even shipped them across the ocean to Japan, Paris, London, and Algiers. We suspect the cakes

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<sup>11</sup> “A Cake Baker.” *Athens Banner-Watchman*, March 18, 1884, page 3, DLG.

<sup>12</sup> “The Colored Fair.” *Athens Weekly Banner-Watchman*, November 14, 1887, page 1, DLG.

<sup>13</sup> “Ninety-Three Years Old and Still Baking Cakes.” *Athens Banner*, January 29, 1910, page 8, DLG.

<sup>14</sup> “The Great Exhibit of Gold Leaf Flour.” *Athens Banner*, March 22, 1904, page 1, DLG. “Gold Leaf Flour Praised by All - Yesterday the rooms in the Commercial hotel building on the corner of College avenue and Broad streets were crowded by the ladies who went there to see the exhibition of Gold Leaf Flour.” *Athens Banner*, March 23, 1904, page 3, DLG.

## ATHENS HISTORIAN

shipped to Paris and Algiers were being sent to her beloved friend, the artist Mary Jett Franklin.<sup>15</sup>

One story has it that one of her cakes was ordered well in advance of the coronation of King George V of England! When President-elect Howard Taft visited Athens in 1909, one of Aunt Laura's cakes was served at the evening reception. Unfortunately, no photograph of any of these masterpieces has been located.

Aunt Laura Billups remained active until she fell and broke her hip in late April 1913. She was discovered just inside her shop door later that morning by the butler of Mrs. W. T. Bryan, who lived across Prince Avenue. She was given the best medical care possible – they were the first doctors to wait on her in her life! “She always maintained that when the Good Lord was ready to take her she would place no doctor in the way. When friends pleaded with her to have attention for the broken hip bone she yielded. A trained nurse also is attending her and while her condition is very serious, she has been resting easier for a day or two.”<sup>16</sup>

Laura Billups McCray died on December 5, 1913, and was buried in the Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery in Athens.<sup>17</sup> Stories about her life and her funeral were published in several newspapers around the country.

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<sup>15</sup> “Miss Franklin in Athens. Miss Mary Franklin, an American, who is famous both in the cities of this country and in Paris, for her paintings of negro life, is spending some time in Athens. Miss Franklin has scores of friends who are extending to her a cordial welcome. A beautiful example of the love existing between a negro of the old regime and her “white folks” is the friendship between Miss Franklin and old Aunt Laura Billups. Aunt Laura belonged to the Franklin family during slavery times, and when freedom came, Miss Franklin’s mother had built the little cake shop which is now standing on Prince avenue. There Aunt Laura set up her little business and started cooking cakes, which have been carried all over the country by Athens people. When Miss Franklin pays her rare visits to our city, there is no one who welcomes her more warmly than Laura, who is never forgotten by her young ‘mistis.’ ” *Atlanta Georgian and News*, May 7, 1907, page 8, DLG. Quoted from the *Athens Evening Call*.

<sup>16</sup> “Aunt Laura Billups, Whose Cakes Have Gone Around the World, Had a Bad Accident Yesterday.” *Athens Banner*, April 29, 1913, page 8, DLG.

<sup>17</sup> “Day Before She Fell, She Showed Where Deeds Were and Clothing She Laid Aside for Her Burial.” *Athens Banner*, May 8, 1913, page 1, DLG.

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**Funeral of Aunt Laura Billups on Sunday** - The funeral services of Aunt Laura Billups were held Sunday afternoon at the house on Prince avenue where for many years she had lived. Many of her white friends were present – the last act of respect they could show to a woman who by her kindness, her loyalty, her uprightness had won their admiration and affection. For every one who knew her did love Aunt Laura with the love that existed between the masters and the servants in ante-bellum days. She was a good woman and her influence will long be felt in this community where for fifty years by example she tried to bring about a perfect understanding between the white race and her own; with what success was shown by the number who with tear-dimmed eyes gathered round her bier.

The services were simple – as she would have had them to be. Dr. Haines read part of the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians after which Dr. E. L. Hill of the First Presbyterian church offered prayer. Mr. E. R. Hodgson, Sr., said a beautiful tribute to Aunt Laura, extolling the virtues, lamenting her death. He said that her passing was sad not only as an individual but because she represented a type which was fast passing away. He spoke feelingly of her loyalty and her devotion to the members of her master's family and even to those who had shown kindness to it. Nothing could sever the bond which bound her to them, her faithfulness was faithfulness to death. In closing, Mr. Hodgson said, 'She was my friend and I loved her,' and these words were echoed in the hearts of all.

Dr. Haines made a short, beautiful talk taking for his text Hebrews nine, verse twenty-seven – "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." A quartette sang several songs, *Jesus, Lover of my Soul, Rock of Ages, Swing Low, Sweet Chariot* and *Steal Away*, being among the number. Those that were distinctively negro melodies were lovely in their plaintive sweetness and as they were among Aunt Laura's favorites touched the hearers deeply.

Aunt Laura is gone. Age and toil had whitened her head and bent her form and made furrows in her dusky brow, but her heart was ever young.



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Her humble life-work is finished, she has passed from the shadows to light beyond the stars. May the green turf rest lightly on her ashes and wild flowers deck the grave where until the resurrection morn she rests in "His beloved sleep."<sup>18</sup>

When her will was probated in February 1914, Franklin Bernard Drake was named as her executor.<sup>19</sup> She left everything to his sisters, Laura, Emma, and Ruby Drake, although the legal advertisement of the probate mentions numerous other relations around the country for whom the exact kinship has yet not been established.<sup>20</sup> In 1914, Cornelius Drake, acting as legal guardian for his two younger daughters, sold this lot along with Aunt Laura's home and shop property to James C. O'Farrell, owner of the *Banner* printing establishment.<sup>21</sup>

## A Final Moving Tribute to Aunt Laura Billups

The *Miami [FL] News* republished a tribute to Aunt Laura Billups from the *Savannah [GA] Press* that sums up her life wonderfully:<sup>22</sup>

**Aunt Laura** (*Savannah Press*.) – Aunt Laura Billups, maker of cakes for the weddings of presidents, one of the few noble

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<sup>18</sup> "Funeral of Aunt Laura Billups." *Athens Banner*, December 9, 1913, page 3, DLG. Other tributes to her appeared in the *Atlanta Constitution*, December 7, 1913, page 3 (Newspapers.com); "Casual Conversations and Observations," by James Callaway. *Macon [GA] Telegraph*, December 12, 1913, page 4 (Genealogybank.com); and an extensive obituary "An Honored Old Auntie. Best People of Athens, Ga., Mourn the Passing of Laura Billups" appeared in the *Ocala [FL] Evening Star*, December. 9, 1913, page 2 (Genealogybank.com).

<sup>19</sup> Franklin Drake was approved as executor of Laura McCray's will on Jan. 5, 1914. Clarke County, Georgia, Letters Book C 1890-1924, page 177; *Athens Daily Herald*, February. 2, 1914, page 8, DLG.

<sup>20</sup> "Probate of Will" and "Notice of Leave to Sell," *Athens Weekly Banner*, January 9, 1914, page 8, DLG.

<sup>21</sup> "Guardian's Sale," *Athens Weekly Banner*, March 13, 1914, page 8, DLG; "Valuable Real Estate Changes Hands," *Athens Banner*, June 4, 1914, page 1, DLG.

<sup>22</sup> "Aunt Laura." *The Miami News*, December 17, 1913, page 4 (Newspapers.com).

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survivors of the faithful servants of ante-bellum days, was buried in Athens on Sunday.

Aunt Laura was more than 90 years old. She was a colored woman. Yet the whole of Athens did her honor, and her death was a sad event in the history of that city.

The Rev. E. L. Hill, pastor of First Presbyterian Church, conducted the services and said the prayer over her grave. Wreaths of flowers from her friends, especially from women whose weddings long ago were graced by her cakes, covered the mound of earth above Aunt Laura's clay.

For Aunt Laura Billups, a colored woman, was a beloved personage, not only in Athens, but throughout the entire South.

Aunt Laura was originally a slave of the Billups family. When yet a young woman, she was their cook. The fame of Aunt Laura's cooking did not detract from the luster of the Billups' name. From New Orleans to Baltimore, Aunt Laura was famous for her cakes. To eat one of her cakes was bliss; and, even before the war, many weddings were thought incomplete unless a mound of delicate cake and creamy icing, as only she could make, adorned the table at the feast. She was proud of belonging to the Billups family, and they were proud of her.

After the war, she had cheerfully and faithfully borne her full burden in helping the brave women left at home while their men folks were fighting for the South. Aunt Laura, though still faithful, was free. Her old "marster" was dead. Her "white folks" were no longer able to care for her. So Aunt Laura adopted the name of Billups, and baked cakes.

Aunt Laura was a servant of the old South. She was more than that – she was a highly successful woman, a master of an art. But she did not know that. All she knew was to respect the white folks and to cook cakes as they had taught her when a young girl to do.

Soon, after the horrors of the reconstruction period had passed, the fame of Aunt Laura and her cakes began to spread. Her cooking was such as to command fame. And she herself was one of the few remnants of the faithful servants of the old South.

Soon, in North Georgia, weddings were not complete without Aunt Laura's cakes. Without them, the blushing bride

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would feel almost as if she were not married. Henry Grady ate Aunt Laura's cake at his wedding, and the pinnacle of her fame was reached when the delectable product of her art graced the wedding feast of President Grover Cleveland in the White House.

Tradition has it, in Athens, that King George V of England ate Aunt Laura's cake at his coronation, having put in a special order for one of her world-famous confections months before the occasion. In Athens they think he would not have been properly crowned without the taste of her cake in his mouth.

Aunt Laura lived in a fine little house on Price [Prince] avenue, a fashionable street where the white folks lived. But none of them ever objected to her as a neighbor. Rather, they thought it lucky that her house and baking kitchens were within easy distance.

On Sunday in Athens when Aunt Laura was laid to rest, Mr. E. R. Hodson [Hodgson], Sr., delivered a touching eulogy over her grave. And many tears fell for Aunt Laura from eyes of the women of Athens.

The *Athens Banner*, in speaking of the death of Aunt Laura, said: 'Her humble life work is finished; she has passed from the shadows to the light beyond the stars. May the green turf rest lightly on her ashes and wild flowers deck the grave where until resurrection morn she rests in "His beloved sleep."'

When we think her life work was not humble, her cakes alone would insure Aunt Laura of a passport within the Pearly Gates. Her cakes were the result of the highest care and most faithful work in doing the one thing she knew best, the best she possibly could.

Aunt Laura represented a type now almost gone, that of the faithful servant of the time before the war. Perhaps other Georgians whose lives are as good as the life of Aunt Laura, may some day clasp her black hand and – delightful thought – eat some of her Angel cake, baked in a Celestial oven.

I wish I could have known her.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to Theresa Flynn for her editing skills and Mary Bondurant Warren for saving Mary Jett Franklin's letters to the Moss family.

## Portrait of a Legend: Edward Baker Mell

by Mary Bondurant Warren

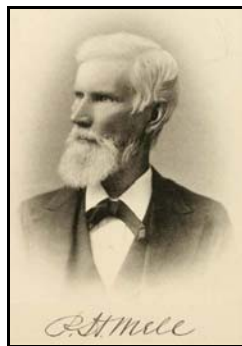
*One of the Athens Historical Society's projects for 2018 has been to raise funds for restoration of a portrait of Edward Baker Mell, affectionately called "Mr. Ted" – Athens's longest-serving high school principal. It was painted by Athens artist Mary Jett Franklin about 1924,<sup>1</sup> and proudly hung in the new city auditorium, a building on the Athens High School campus on Prince Avenue at Hill Street. The building was named Mell Auditorium for Mr. Ted.*

*The portrait was mysteriously lost until recently and, thanks to generous donors, the restoration has been completed. The portrait will be presented to Clarke Central High School in the new year, to hang in the present Mell auditorium near a second portrait of an older Mr. Ted, painted in 1946 by University of Georgia art professor Reuben Gambrell (a gift of the Athens High School Class of 1945).<sup>2</sup>*

*Here follows a sketch of Mr. Ted's life and career, so that those who did not know him personally can understand the love the community felt for this man.*

Mr. Ted's father, Patrick Hues Mell, D.D., a Baptist minister and teacher, came to the University of Georgia in 1856 from Mercer University as professor of ancient languages. With his first wife, Lurene Howard Cooper, their family grew to eight children.

When Georgia seceded from the Union in January 1861, Dr. Mell recruited young men to form a company for Confederate service in Virginia. Organizing in Athens in July, they elected Dr. Mell as their captain and took the name "Mell's Rifles." The death of Mrs. Mell in childbirth in July 1861 ended Dr. Mell's military



*Dr. Patrick Hues Mell,  
father of Mr. Ted Mell.*

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<sup>1</sup> See the *Athens Historian*, vol. 17 (2017), pages 3-17, for more details on Mary Jett Franklin.

<sup>2</sup> "Mell Portrait Is Presented in Program Thursday." *Athens Banner-Herald*, December 6, 1946, from Hargrett Library's clipping files.

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career. His troop, however, became Company D of Cobb's Legion and fought throughout the war until it was surrounded and captured just two days before the surrender at Appomattox, Virginia. The eldest Mell son, Benjamin, died in October 1862 from wounds received in the Battle of Crampton's Gap, Maryland.

Meanwhile, after the death of Dr. Mell's wife, her younger sister Eliza came to help him with the children. She and Dr. Mell married the following December. They had two daughters and four sons; Mr. Ted was their youngest. In all, fifteen children were born to Dr. Mell and his two wives, but four died before adulthood.



*The Chancellor's House stood where the Main Library is now.*

When "Mr. Ted" was born on February 27, 1873, the family lived in Lustrat House on the University of Georgia campus. Five older brothers and four sisters were still at home. He never lacked for playmates in his family and among other faculty families on the campus.

With Dr. Mell's appointment as chancellor in 1878, the family moved to the larger Chancellor's House, where the Main Library now stands. Mrs. Mell became the hostess for the University, and frequent visitors enlivened mealtime. Some of the more humorous events during such occasions were related by Mr. Ted in his memoir *Reminiscences of Athens, Georgia, About 1888 to 1900*.



*The Mell House stood on the corner of Milledge Avenue and Rutherford Street.*

Dr. Mell taught and served the University for thirty-two years, the last ten as Chancellor. He died in office in January 1888, when Ted was 15.

His widow and children moved from the campus to a large frame house on the corner of Milledge Avenue and Rutherford Street. This remained the "Mell House" for half a century. Zeta Tau Alpha's chapter house now stands on its site.

When Athens opened its first public school, Washington Street School, across

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Jackson Street from the courthouse, all grades were included. Mr. Ted, age 13, became a pupil. After graduation, he went to Alabama Polytechnic Institute, now known as Auburn University. After finishing college, Mr. Ted taught away from Athens for several years. Returning, he taught general subjects at the Washington Street, Jackson Street, and Baxter Street schools.

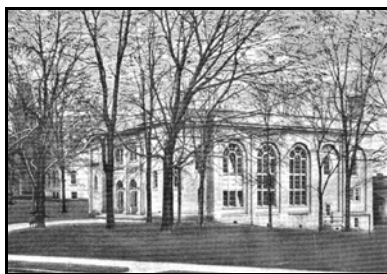
In 1896, Mr. Ted and Belle Witcher married and made their home on Hill Street, not far from the Athens High School campus.

When the Board of Education opened a central high school in 1909, Mr. Ted was named its first principal. The site of the school was the former Clarke County courthouse on Prince Avenue, which was gradually expanded as student population increased. The abandoned jail on the campus, still standing, was used for manual training and later R.O.T.C.



*Belle Witcher Mell (1876-1911), taken about 1910.*

After fifteen years of marriage, tragedy struck Mr. Ted, when his wife died in childbirth July 1911. Now alone, Mr. Ted moved back into the Mell house on Milledge Avenue, where he lived the remainder of his life. He never remarried.



*The original Mell Auditorium at the old Athens High School on Prince Avenue. Courtesy of Growing Up in Athens, Georgia, Facebook page.*

In 1923, the city built a new auditorium on the Athens High School campus, and named it Mell Auditorium in Mr. Ted's honor. It was the scene of recitals, plays, various entertainments, and, most importantly, high school graduation. The young graduates in Sunday best or party dresses were called individually to receive their diploma. To the applause of family and friends, they shook hands with Mr. Ted as he gave them his

heartfelt congratulations. It was the high point of their school years.

There are many stories of Mr. Ted and his love and concern for his students. There are also humorous ones. I heard this story from my

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father, an Athens High School student at the time. One young man arrived very early at school, proceeded to attach a pair of girl's "bloomers" where the flag should go, hoisted the trophy to the top of the school flag pole, and tied the rope up out of reach! Mr. Ted ignored the bloomers, and the school day began as usual. School started with the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag. Mr. Ted knew his pupils so well that he knew who was likely to have put the panties up. Once students were in their classes, he went to the door of a classroom and motioned to the malefactor to exit the room. When the boy came into the hall, all he needed to say was "Take it down."



*Mr. Ted (wearing suit) and his students from the 1943 high school year book. Firehall #2 is visible in the background.*

Dedicated as he was to his students, Mr. Ted had other hobbies and interests that he shared with the community. In 1925, he purchased fifty-five acres of farm and woodland west of Athens. Here he built a log cabin near a spring, and then created a small lake. He often welcomed visitors to share the beauty of his woods where he charmed them with his bird calls, nature walks, and cool spring water. A high point for the little girls at the Athens Y.W.C.A. summer camp nearby was walking through the woods to sit at Mr. Ted's feet and hear him carry on a conversation with the birds. For once we children sat quietly and listened!

Clearly, Mr. Ted was enshrined in the hearts of his students. The Athens High yearbook, the *Maroon*, was dedicated to him several times.<sup>3</sup> On his 69th birthday in 1942, the students published a tribute "To Our Friend – Mr. Mell ... The students sincerely wish Mr. Mell the happiest birthday he has ever had, and hope he will continue to serve for many years as A.H.S. principal, allowing students to observe and

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<sup>3</sup> Several years of the Athens High School yearbook, called the *Maroon*, have been digitized and are available online on [www.Ancestry.com](http://www.Ancestry.com). Snapshots of Mr. Ted interacting with his students are scattered throughout.

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benefit from his sterling character, unfailing good nature, and unassuming manner.”<sup>4</sup>

In spite of his popularity, mandatory retirement came on February 27, 1943, Mr. Ted’s 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. Ironically, his brother, the Rev. John D. Mell, was chairman of the school board that was requiring him to retire. But the students would not let him go. The seniors staged a protest, walking out of school and parading downtown.<sup>5</sup> They wanted *Mr. Ted* to award their diplomas in June, not his replacement. Peace was restored when the board allowed Mr. Ted to remain at the head of the school through their graduation in June.

An *Athens Banner-Herald* reporter wrote,

Surrounded by gifts expressive of the esteem in which he is held, E.B. Mell, retiring principal of Athens High School, stood on the platform of the school gymnasium Friday afternoon, the eve of his 70th birthday, and gently motioned to be seated a capacity crowd which had risen in respectful tribute when he began to speak. Mr. Mell began, “This is my 49th year of loving young people – 47 of those years have been spent in Athens. I did not want to teach – said that was the one thing I would never do. But I had not been in the school room three months, before I knew I would never be happy anywhere else. And as a 49’er, I have been digging gold – pure gold – in the affection of these young people. I have laughed and joked, and cried and prayed with young people. I hope my work does not stop. I hope it goes on, as my love of you high school students goes on. I have tried, and whether or not I have succeeded is not for me to say. But I have been happy through it all. And I thank you from the bottom of my heart.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> “To Our Friend – Mr. Mell”, *Athens Banner-Herald*, February 27, 1942, from Hargrett Library clipping vertical files.

<sup>5</sup> “Student Strike to End on Promised Return of High Principal.” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 6, 1943, page 7, from archives on [www.newspapers.com](http://www.newspapers.com).

<sup>6</sup> “Retiring Principal Mell is Paid Touching Tribute by High School Students, Other Friends.” *Athens Banner-Herald*, February 26, 1943, clipping from Hargrett Library vertical file.



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A gala retirement party in his honor was given in June 1943. Mistress of ceremony Nell Hodgson read a poem she had written about him. Barbara Adams, representing the Student Council, presented him with an arm chair. Then Robert Dunlap of the BAT men's student organization gave him a two-year subscription to *Reader's Digest*. A touching tribute came from a representative of the African-American schools in the city. "Somehow oratory is not necessary where love speaks more loudly and permanently than words," Mr. Morton Hodgson said as he presented Mr. Ted with a basket of flowers and a \$1,000 war bond.

Hardly had Mr. Ted entered retirement when Madison County called him to fill in as interim principal at Danielsville, which he did into 1945.

But, when he finally actually did retire, he was free to follow his favorite hobby – hunting arrowheads and Indian artifacts throughout northeast Georgia, an interest begun when he found Indian arrowheads in the soil where the foundation of his cabin was laid. Now he had time to look for more. He became a regular visitor in Lincoln and Wilkes counties, searching along their creeks and the Savannah River. Farmers would telephone to say they were plowing a field the next day and invite him to come inspect their fields before they were planted.

Mr. Ted shared the fun of the search with a long-time friend Walker Word and his son Walker, Jr. Mr. Ted's great nephew, Carlton Mell, also went along on some excursions. He tells of going by boat to islands created by Clarke Hill Lake, where they hunted arrowheads on presumed early settlements. On another expedition along Fishing Creek, they found so many tomahawks that they couldn't carry them all. Secreting the remainder in the bushes to retrieve on the next visit, they went home. Imagine their surprise upon their return when they discovered that their cache had been found and removed by persons unknown!

Carlton Mell described Mr. Ted's bedroom in the family home as a museum. Mr. Ted had bookcases with shelves filled with his prized finds. The rest were carefully boxed for preservation. As his collection grew, the relics occupied more and more space. Eventually there were just paths between bookcases and boxes to his bed, closet, bathroom, and hall. So that these Indian relics were not lost, Mr. Ted made sure that his large collection would go to the University of Georgia archaeology department.

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Mr. Ted also spent time writing. In December 1956, at the request of friends, he penned *Reminiscences of Athens, Georgia, About 1888 to 1900*.<sup>7</sup> A typescript copy was donated to the University's Hargrett Library.

Mr. Ted also wrote a history of the First Baptist Church of Athens.<sup>8</sup> An active member his entire life, he served as deacon, Sunday School teacher, and superintendent of the Sunday School. The Baptists said he had given more than 400 years of service in his various activities for the church.

In 1959, Athens Mayor Ralph Snow declared May 18th "E. B. Mell Day."<sup>9</sup> The event was kicked off by a testimonial banquet at the Georgia Center, bringing notables from far and wide, as well as many of Mr. Ted's former students and friends. The featured speaker was Tom Dozier, associate editor of *Life Magazine*, an Athens High graduate.

Mr. Ted's life ended on August 21, 1959. He was laid to rest beside his wife and infant son in Oconee Hill Cemetery. Mr. Ted had served Athens in many capacities, but most of all as principal of Athens High from 1909 to 1943. During those years he had served more than 10,000 students.<sup>10</sup>

The tribute in the 1941 Athens High School yearbook perhaps best expresses the feelings they had for him:

"Dedicated to Mr. Edward B. Mell, our beloved principal, who in the years we have been in Athens High School has been a counselor, a guide, and a friend to every one of us. Not only has he set us a high standard of mental culture, but he has been

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<sup>7</sup> In 1964, Jones Drewry published a 26-page typed version of this memoir with photos from the collections at Hargrett.

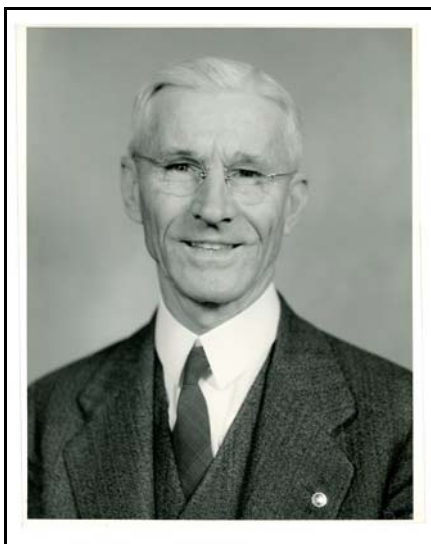
<sup>8</sup> *A Short History of Athens Baptist Church, Now The First Baptist Church of Athens* was privately published by Mr. Mell in 1954.

<sup>9</sup> "Testimonial Banquet May 18th Honors Educator E. B. Mell." *Athens Banner-Herald*, May 17, 1959.

<sup>10</sup> "A Legendary Gentleman." from *Athens Area Lives and Legends* series written by Mary Bondurant Warren and published in the *Athens Advertiser*, June 26, 1964, pages 6-7.

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an example of kindness, courtesy, and of all those admirable personal qualities which make a noble character. Although he stands for high ideals in scholarship, he never forgets the human side – an attribute which brings him very close to the student body, and wins for him our esteem and affection. No matter how far we may go in life, we shall always carry with us the memory of him as a great man who has an understanding heart.”<sup>11</sup>



*Edward Baker Mell, courtesy of the First Baptist Church of Athens.*

## **Acknowledgements**

*The author wishes to thank Charlotte Thomas Marshall and Kenneth Storey for procuring the photo of Mr. Ted Mell from First Baptist Church of Athens. Thanks also to Steven Brown of the Hargrett Library, UGA, and Eve B. Mayes for their research assistance.*

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<sup>11</sup> Athens High School *Maroon* 1941 yearbook, page 5, Ancestry.com.

## **The Death and Funeral of Brigadier General Thomas Reade Rootes Cobb**

by Gary L. Doster



*Thomas Reade Rootes Cobb  
(1823-1862)*

One of Athens's most famous and revered citizens was Thomas R. R. Cobb (1823-1862), son of John Addison Cobb (1783-1855) and Sarah Robinson Rootes Cobb (1792-1865), and brother to the equally famous Howell Cobb, Sr. (1815-1868). When Tom Cobb was born, his father announced in a letter to a friend that his newborn son weighed twenty-one and one-half pounds! However, when Tom's mother recorded the birth in the family scrapbook more than forty years later in 1864, she put it down as seventeen pounds.

The Cobbs moved to Athens from Cherry Hill Plantation in Jefferson County, Georgia, when Tom was about one year old. Howell and Tom Cobb had a younger brother, John Boswell Cobb (1826-1893), but he was never as prominent or well known as his older siblings. In addition, the Cobb brothers had four sisters: Laura Battaile Rootes Cobb Rutherford (1818-1888), Mildred Lewis Cobb Glenn (1820-1900), Mary Willis Cobb Erwin (1828-1899), and Sarah Martha (Mattie) Cobb Whitner (1831-1906).

Tom and Howell both graduated from the University of Georgia. There was no law school at UGA at that time, so after graduation Howell studied law under Edward Harden (1784-1849), an Athens lawyer, and Tom studied law under Athens attorney William L. Mitchell (1805-1882). Howell and Tom both began practicing law in Athens. In 1859, Tom Cobb, William Hope Hull (1820-1877), and Tom's father-in-law, Judge Joseph Henry Lumpkin (1791-1867), founded a law school in a small building next to Tom Cobb's house. This school proved to be very popular and soon became part of the curriculum at the University of Georgia and was given its present name,

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the Lumpkin School of Law. Howell and Tom's brother, John Boswell Cobb, attended UGA for a while, but opted for a business career and became successful in the insurance field.

On January 9, 1844, Tom Cobb married Marion McHenry Lumpkin (1822-1897), the eldest of the thirteen children of Judge Joseph Henry Lumpkin and Callender Cunningham Grieve Lumpkin (c.1803-1871). The Lumpkins lived in nearby Lexington, Georgia, but they bought a house in Athens on Prince Avenue and moved there in the early 1840s. Later, they bought the house next door as a wedding present for Tom and Marion. The Lumpkin house still stands on Prince Avenue, but the Cobb house was relocated a couple of blocks away at 175 Hill Street.



*Marion McHenry Lumpkin  
Cobb (1822-1897)*

When Abraham Lincoln was elected president in 1860, southern states began seceding and severing ties with the Union. At that time, Howell Cobb was secretary of the U. S. Treasury under President James Buchanan. He resigned and returned to Georgia to assist in forming the Confederate government. Brother Tom Cobb joined the effort, and it was he who drafted the Confederate Constitution. Both brothers became generals in the Confederate Army. Howell survived the war, but Tom was killed at the Battle of Fredericksburg, Virginia, on December 13, 1862.

Tom Cobb's death was one of the most severe blows suffered by Athens during the war. His family had a detailed account of his death because his nephew (John Cobb Rutherford<sup>1</sup>) and four of Marion's brothers (Charles M. Lumpkin, called Charlie; Edward P. Lumpkin, called Eddy; Francis Grieve Lumpkin, called Frank; and Miller Grieve Lumpkin) were serving with him. Eddy and Frank were actually present at Cobb's death and provided their father with the details of his demise.

Between fifteen and twenty years ago, Athens historian Charlotte Marshall gave me a photocopy of the handwritten transcription of a

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<sup>1</sup> John Cobb Rutherford (1842-1891) was Tom Cobb's nephew, the son of Williams Rutherford (1818-1896) and Laura Battaille Rootes Cobb (1818-1888). He was a member of the Georgia Troopers, also known as Delony's Company, a unit attached to Cobb's Legion.

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letter she thought would interest me. That was a gross understatement! When I saw the photocopy, I recognized the handwriting of Susan Frances Barrow Tate, wife of William Tate, the legendary dean of men at the University of Georgia. Mrs. Tate worked in Special Collections (now Hargrett Library) at the University of Georgia's Main Library for many years.

Upon reading Mrs. Tate's transcription, it was immediately obvious that Judge Joseph Henry Lumpkin had written this letter to his daughter Callender ("Callie"), who was married to Porter King and was living in Alabama. The letter was written soon after Tom Cobb's burial to give Callie the details of his death and funeral.

Because the transcription was in Mrs. Tate's handwriting, I assumed the original letter probably was in UGA Library's Special Collections. I went there the next day, and in a few minutes the folder containing the letter had been located and was lying on the table in front of me.

When I saw the original letter, I realized that we are fortunate that Mrs. Tate had already transcribed it. The handwriting was atrocious, and I doubt that I could have read most of it if she had not already done so. Few people are as capable as Mrs. Tate was in interpreting such penmanship. I eventually did manage to decipher five words that she did not figure out and confirmed a few others that she questioned. Charlotte used excerpts from this letter in her book *Oconee Hill Cemetery of Athens, Georgia, Volume I* in the entry about T. R. R. Cobb.

Judge Lumpkin received a first-hand account of Cobb's death from his sons and Chaplain Porter and conveyed this information to his daughter Callie in the letter Mrs. Tate had transcribed. Here is the letter just as Lumpkin wrote it:

Athens [GA] Decr 30, 1862

Dearest <sup>2</sup>

I wrote you last night [so] that my letter might go off by mail this morning. They are only a few hurried lines. I wish to give you the particulars of Mr. Cobb's death [on December 13]. After the repulse of the enemy the third time, a random cannon

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<sup>2</sup> "Dearest" was Judge Lumpkin's daughter and Tom Cobb's sister-in-law Callender "Callie" Lumpkin King (1826-1905), who was married to Porter King and was living in Alabama.

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shot was fired at the House behind which he was standing at the time. It was a conical ball fired by a fuse. It entered the house at the Fredericksburg side, penetrated both rooms, & exploded just as it came out of the building on the side where he was standing; Killing Gen'l Cook<sup>3</sup> of N.C. and wounding several others. It just grazed – that is a piece of the shell – the right thigh and struck the left, where it lodged, breaking the bone & lacerating the femoral artery. This was about two o'clock. Mr. Cobb raised himself on his right elbow, asked tranquilly for a tourniquet—the instrument used for binding up a limb to prevent the effusion of blood. None was at hand but a handkerchief was substituted. He was carried off on a litter by a ravine which passed over the hills just in the rear of the House, till they met an ambulance to which he was transferred & borne to the Hospital in the rear of the hills. He expired a little after two. The Rev. Mr. Porter,<sup>4</sup> his chaplain, supported his head in his arms. He spoke not a word of his family, nor did he seem conscious that death was so near. For about a quarter of an hour before he died he became speechless and could not [speak] I hear, but Eddy<sup>5</sup> thinks he was conscious, for he says he looked steadfastly at him and pressed his hand three times. Mr. Porter who accompanied his body home thinks he died from the summary effect of the blow upon his nervous system. But from all I can learn, and the appearance of his corpse, I think he bled to death. He died on Saturday & arrived here Thursday afternoon & was buried Friday and his body exhibited no signs of mortification or decay. It seemed to be entirely exhausted of blood. It was brought in a box to Richmond & then put in a metallic case & had not bled a drop

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<sup>3</sup> Confederate Brigadier General John Rogers Cooke (1833-1891). Cooke was severely wounded at Fredericksburg, but not killed. He had been wounded seven times previously, but lived until 1891. His father was Phillip St. George Cooke, a major general in the Union Army.

<sup>4</sup> Rufus Kilpatrick Porter (1827-1869), chaplain of Cobb's Legion.

<sup>5</sup> Edward Peyton (or Payson) Lumpkin (1833-1873), Judge Lumpkin's son and Tom Cobb's brother-in-law, was a member of the Troup Artillery, an Athens unit attached to Cobb's Legion, with his brothers Frank and Charlie.

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Athens Dec 30<sup>th</sup> 1862  
 Dear Callie I write you by night - that  
 my letter might go off by mail this  
 morning - They were only a few hurried  
 lines - I wish to give you the  
 particulars of Mr Cobb's death - after  
 the rupture of the artery - the third time  
 a random cannon shot - he was pierced  
 at the heart - being a wound he was  
 searching as he lay in a critical  
 state - he died by a fatal - I am sure  
 the wound at the throat - they said  
 the wound at both wounds & exploded  
 just as it came with the bullet  
 up the side of the neck - he was  
 getting quite cold & it was  
 some time before he was  
 put in the coffin - the right thigh and  
 I think the left arm were  
 broken - the body was  
 buried at night - The way about his right  
 eye - Mr Cobb raised himself on his right  
 elbow - and was talking to a friend  
 - the instrument used for bandaging  
 a limb to prevent the effusion of  
 blood - were used of him - but he was  
 faint - very faint - a warm  
 compress of ice was put on a nerve  
 which passed over the throat - just in  
 the bend of the neck - the body was  
 an ambulance - where he was  
 was transferred & borne to the Hospital  
 in the rear of the Hotel - He expired a  
 little while later - The Rev. Mr. Porter - his  
 Chaplain - supported by his  
 arms - He spoke of a new  
 family - was dying he was  
 that death was near - He died  
 a quarter of an hour before he  
 by the great spirit - and was  
 near - but I do not think he was  
 for he says - he looked

First page of Judge Joseph Henry Lumpkin's letter to his daughter Callender (Callie) Lumpkin King about the death of General T. R. R. Cobb, dated December 30, 1862. Courtesy of Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library/ University of Georgia Libraries.

from the time it was washed at Fredericksburg. He asked them to tighten the handkerchief as they were conveying him to the Hospital.



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The three children<sup>6</sup> were disinterred and buried in the same grave with him in the New Cemetery.<sup>7</sup> Little Marion<sup>8</sup> was baptized by Mr. Porter in the presence of his remains on Friday morning in the Library before his removal. Mr. Porter had slept with him in the same bed for the last three months and was very much devoted to him. She was named Marion Thomas. Eddy had telegraphed from Charlotte, N.C. to be ready for immediate burial. He inferred that putrefaction had commenced. This cut poor Marion to the quick. She said it seemed that God intended she should drink the cup to its dregs. When it reached the Depot and we were assured by Dr. White<sup>9</sup> who had come across and met the party at the Point,<sup>10</sup> that it could be taken to the House and remain one night with the family, you can't imagine what a relief it was to us all & to Marion. Such a scene I never witnessed. Thursday afternoon and Friday every store was closed in Athens and every man, woman and child met to witness the arrival and burial of the Town favorite.

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<sup>6</sup> Tom Cobb's three deceased children were originally buried on the grounds of the family residence on Prince Avenue but were disinterred and buried with their father in Oconee Hill Cemetery. They were 16-month-old Joseph Henry Lumpkin Cobb, born June 21, 1850, and died October 26, 1851; 6-month-old Thomas R. R. Cobb, Jr, born August 14, 1852, and died February 8, 1853; and 13-year-old Lucy Cobb, born October 7, 1844, and died October 14, 1857. Lucy, of course, was the namesake of Lucy Cobb Institute.

<sup>7</sup> Lumpkin was referring to Oconee Hill Cemetery, which opened in 1856. Tom Cobb was one of the original Trustees.

<sup>8</sup> Marion Thomas Cobb (1860-1919) was Tom Cobb's youngest daughter. She was named for her mother, Marion, and her father, Thomas, and was called "Birdie." She married Michael Hoke Smith (1855-1931) in 1883. Hoke Smith was U. S. secretary of the interior from 1893 to 1896 during the presidency of Grover Cleveland. Smith served as governor of Georgia from 1907 to 1909 and was re-elected in 1911. However, he soon resigned to accept an appointment as U. S. senator to fill the unexpired term of Alexander S. Clay, who died in office. Smith was re-elected several times and served as senator until 1920.

<sup>9</sup> Dr. Samuel Gore White (1824-1877) from Milledgeville, Georgia, was a surgeon in Cobb's Legion.

<sup>10</sup> Union Point, Georgia, where a 39-mile-long spur of the Georgia Rail Road went to Athens.

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The body was exposed to view in the Church<sup>11</sup> which was hung in mourning, and everybody [was] permitted to take a last look at his familiar and beloved face. There was not a tearless person present. Dr. Hoyt<sup>12</sup> preached a capitol & most appropriate sermon. Mr. Porter followed with a most feeling and appropriate address & the Methodist Minister, Mr. Scott,<sup>13</sup> closed the meeting. Letters of condolence pour in from everyone. Dr. Stiles,<sup>14</sup> Mr. Pettigru,<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> First Presbyterian Church in Athens.

<sup>12</sup> Dr. Nathan Hoyt (1793-1866) was the pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Athens for 36 years.

<sup>13</sup> This probably was William J. Scott (1826-1899), who was born in Salem, Georgia, in what was then Clarke County (now Oconee County). Scott was a Methodist minister, lawyer, newspaperman, author, and publisher. In 1865, he founded *Scott's Monthly Magazine* with 5,000 subscribers. Scott also was director of the Georgia Hospital Association, headquartered in Augusta, and in December of 1862 he was assigned to Athens.

<sup>14</sup> This likely was William Henry Stiles (1809-1865), lawyer, planter, politician, and Confederate officer. Stiles served as speaker of the Georgia House of Representatives, was a member of the Georgia Senate, and ran for governor of Georgia. During the war, Stiles raised the Sixteenth Georgia Regiment and was colonel of the unit. However, this could be B. Edward Stiles, who served as major under General Howell Cobb.

<sup>15</sup> Mr. Pettigru likely was James Louis Petigru (1789-1863), attorney general of South Carolina and author of the first codification of South Carolina law. He attended Willington Academy, an esteemed school for young men founded by Dr. Moses Waddel (1789-1840). The school accepted students from Georgia and South Carolina and focused on classical literature, languages, and oratory skills. Waddel served as president of the University of Georgia in Athens from 1819 to 1829.

A known Unionist, Petigru remained a strong advocate for states' rights, and was widely respected for his honesty, wit, and intellect; his observation that "South Carolina is too small for a nation, but too large for an insane asylum" has remained in circulation. A bust of James Petigru is on display in the City Council chambers of Charleston, South Carolina.

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Judge Tucker,<sup>16</sup> Judge Nisbet,<sup>17</sup> Dr. Lipscomb,<sup>18</sup> who is absent in Alabama, & others. Ladies write poetry and the press in Richmond & Georgia seemed to vie with each other in their eulogies. Still, all this, Callie, does not & cannot reconcile poor Marion & her dear children to their irreparable loss. A kind of apathy seems to pervade Marion. She cares not for the world nor the things of the world, and God does not see fit to reveal to her now His Mysterious Providence. Frank<sup>19</sup> also was with Mr. Cobb when he died. Charlie,<sup>20</sup> who was acting as aide-de-camp, was sent off about five minutes before he fell with orders to Gen'l McLaws,<sup>21</sup> did not see him [word undecipherable] his death. Miller<sup>22</sup> was 30 miles [away] absent with the cavalry. Considering the inequality of numbers engaged and the inequality in the results Mr. Cobb's Brigade made the greatest fight of the war, 1700 or 1800 men withstood & finally repulsed with terrible carnage between 15 or 20,000. I have said nothing about the fight made below the city

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<sup>16</sup> Henry Holcombe Tucker (1819-1889) was a Baptist minister, lawyer, and president of Mercer University. During the war, he organized the Georgia Relief and Hospital Association to aid wounded soldiers and their families. He served as editor of the *Christian Index*. Tucker also was the first native Georgian to serve as chancellor of the University of Georgia, a position he held from 1874 to 1878.

<sup>17</sup> Eugenius Aristides Nisbit (1803-1871) was a lawyer and politician. Nisbit variously served as a Georgia state representative, Georgia state senator, and as a U. S. representative. Nisbit also served as one of the first judges on the newly-formed Georgia Supreme Court, along with Joseph Henry Lumpkin and Hiram Warner.

<sup>18</sup> University of Georgia Chancellor Andrew Adgate Lipscomb (1816- 1890).

<sup>19</sup> Francis Grieve Lumpkin (1842-1876), Cobb's brother-in-law. He was a member of the Troup Artillery, an Athens unit attached to Cobb's Legion, with his brothers Eddy and Charlie.

<sup>20</sup> Charles M. Lumpkin, Cobb's brother-in-law, was acting as aide-de-camp, and was a member of the Troup Artillery with his brothers Frank and Eddy.

<sup>21</sup> Confederate Major General Lafayette McLaws (1827-1897).

<sup>22</sup> Miller Grieve Lumpkin, Cobb's brother-in-law. He was a member of the Georgia Troopers, also known as Delony's Company, another unit also attached to Cobb's Legion.

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between Gen'l Jackson's Corps<sup>23</sup> & the enemy. It was equally successful to our cause, but with much greater mortality to our men. Nor have I spoken of Gen'l Barksdale's<sup>24</sup> gallant stand in resisting the enemy when constructing their pontoon bridge. This preceded Mr. Cobb's fight on Saturday. Does it not seem strange that, exposed as the building was behind which he was standing, but a single ball penetrated it, which, from its horizontal direction, was evidently fired from a cannon in the streets of Fredericksburg and not from the Heights or the other side, and does it not seem strange that the ball should have penetrated both rooms & exploded just as it came out of the weather boarding where Mr. Cobb was standing? Mr. Cobb was rising rapidly in the estimation of Gen'l Lee<sup>25</sup> & other officers of the army as a military man and he had become cheerful & happy.

Well, Callie, I thought you would like to hear these details & now I repeat what I hurriedly said last night—don't expose the lives of yourself or the children in your anxiety to visit us. Love to all—God bless you.

Affectionately your father,  
J. H. Lumpkin

During the battle, Cobb was conferring with other officers at the rear of a house that served as headquarters. In the distance, toward Fredericksburg, he could clearly see "Federal Hill," the house where his mother had lived as a child. A conical cannon shell passed through the house where Cobb stood and exploded, mortally wounding Cobb. Different accounts of this incident vary; some say Cobb was talking with one other officer; other accounts say there was a group of men and that several others were wounded. Judge Lumpkin's letter states that Confederate Brigadier General John Rogers Cooke was with Cobb and was killed. Cooke was severely wounded but he did not die. Judge Lumpkin, or his informant, may have confused General Cooke with

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<sup>23</sup> Confederate Lieutenant General Thomas Jonathan "Stonewall" Jackson (1824-1863).

<sup>24</sup> Confederate Brigadier General William Barksdale (1821-1863).

<sup>25</sup> Confederate General-in-Chief Robert Edward Lee (1807-1870).

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Lieutenant Colonel Cook, commander of Phillips Legion, who was killed at Fredericksburg. In addition to Cobb, Confederate Brigadier General Maxcy Gregg also was killed at Fredericksburg, along with two Union brigadier generals, George Dashiell Bayard and Conrad Feger Jackson.

When the shell that killed Cobb exploded, he was struck in the



*Confederate troops commanded by Generals Cobb and Kershaw fire at attacking Union soldiers from behind a stone wall during the Battle of Fredericksburg.*

thigh with a fragment of shrapnel that broke his femur and severed his femoral artery. A tourniquet was applied and he was taken to a field hospital located nearby in the private home of a widow named Stevens. After he reached the field hospital, Cobb did not do or say anything that indicated that he knew death was imminent. He either did not realize the seriousness of his wound or was in severe shock, probably the latter. He died shortly afterwards, his head cradled in the arms of the Reverend Rufus Kilpatrick Porter, chaplain of Cobb's Legion. Cobb was 39 years old.

On December 17, 1862, four days after his death, an Athens newspaper, *The Southern Watchman*, printed the following article:

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## **Death of Gen. T.R.R. Cobb.**

It is with profound regret that we chronicle the death of Gen. Thomas R. R. Cobb of this place, who was killed at Fredericksburg, Va., in an engagement with the Abolitionists on Saturday last.

The sad tidings produced a stunning effect in this community, where he was born and reared and spent all the years of his life. [Of course, we know that Cobb was not born in Athens, but his family moved there when he was about one year old.]

The deceased was of an ardent, enthusiastic, and impetuous temperament. Of rare mental endowments, a mind well cultivated and untiring industry, he was distinguished for his usefulness. Whatever he undertook he went at it with all his might and consequently was enabled to accomplish what to most men would have been impossibilities. He was, emphatically, a working man.

As a lawyer, Gen. C. leaves no superior behind—while as a military man, he was fast building up an enjoyable reputation and had endeared himself to the men under his command. But, better than all, Gen. Cobb was a pious man—having been for many years a member and, we believe, an elder in the Presbyterian Church.

His death will be regretted by the entire community, and his memory cherished by all our people. Among the long list of martyrs who have fallen in the cause of Southern independence, the name of Thomas R. R. Cobb will shine conspicuously on the pages of history.

On the way home, the South Carolina Railroad carrying Cobb's body did not arrive in Augusta in time to connect with the Georgia Rail Road that would carry the remains to Athens via Union Point. Consequently, the body remained overnight in Augusta. Here is an account of the event copied from the *Chronicle & Sentinel*, an Augusta newspaper:

## **Honor to the Gallant Dead.**

The remains of Gen. Thos. R. R. Cobb, who was killed at the battle of Fredericksburg, Va., on Saturday, Dec. 13th,

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arrived in this city by the South Carolina Railroad yesterday afternoon. The body was in charge of R. K. Porter, Chaplain of Cobb's Legion, John C. Rutherford [Assistant Adjutant General], C. M. Lumpkin, Aide de Camp, and Edward Lumpkin. Jesse, the faithful body servant of Gen. Cobb and greatly beloved by him, also accompanied the escort.

A procession was formed at the depot, composed as follows: A detachment of the Richmond Hussars, Cos. [Companies] A and B, the hearse with the remains, the body servant, Jesse, and the escort above mentioned, the clergy, members of the bar, Mayor and members of the City Council, and citizens. The train having arrived too late to make the connection with the Georgia Road, the cortege moved to the City Hall, where the body laid in state in the council chamber during the night. It will proceed on its way to Athens this morning.

A committee from companies A and B of the Richmond Hussars was detailed to remain with the body of the deceased last night.

The members of the Bar will meet this morning and join in conveying the remains to the Georgia Railroad depot. Citizens generally are invited to attend.

We should mention that the body was encased in a strong box, the only decoration being some evergreen wreaths placed upon it by ladies of Aiken [SC] to testify their respect for the departed hero.

The body reached Athens the next day. An account of the events surrounding Cobb's funeral was published in the *Southern Watchman* on Wednesday of the next week, December 24, 1862, as follows:

### **Funeral Obsequies of Gen. Thomas R. R. Cobb.**

The mortal remains of Gen. T. R. R. Cobb reached this place on Thursday evening and were escorted from the railroad depot to his residence by a large number of citizens.

The funeral obsequies took place at the Presbyterian Church at 10 o'clock on Friday morning, and were conducted by Rev. N. Hoyt, D.D., assisted by Rev. Mr. Scott of the Methodist Church and Rev. Mr. Porter, Chaplain of Cobb's Legion. The exercises were grand and solemn and mournfully interesting.

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At the conclusion of the services an opportunity was offered the citizens to look for the last time upon the body of him they had loved so well, and whose death is mourned by the whole Confederacy.

A procession was then formed under the direction of Gen. Frierson and his Aides according to the following programme, drawn up by the Committee of Arrangements appointed at the meeting of citizens, held on Wednesday. Here is the order listed:

Clergy.

Hearse.

Pall bearers, on foot.

Family and relatives of deceased.

Military escort, and all officers and soldiers who have served under deceased.

Other officers and soldiers in the Confederate service.

Members of the legal profession,

Justices of Inferior Court and county officers.

Committee of arrangements.

Faculty and Trustees of the University of Georgia,  
including President and Professors  
of the University High School.

Trustees, Principal, and Instructors of the  
Lucy Cobb Institute.

Intendant [mayor], Wardens [city council members],  
and other town authorities.

Masonic Fraternity.

Athens Fire Company.

Citizens on foot.

Citizens in carriages.

Never in the history of our town was such a funeral procession seen. All the citizens, old and young, male and female, black and white - aged sires and matrons and prattling children - all, all, followed the honored remains of the Christian hero to their last resting place. All were anxious to testify their respect for the remains of him whom a nation mourns - and never did any community more sincerely mourn the loss of any citizen.



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## AUTHOR'S AFTERWORD

After Tom Cobb's death, Confederate General Robert E. Lee wrote the following letter to Howell Cobb and expressed his condolences:

Camp near Fredericksburg 18th December 1862

General Howell Cobb

General:

I beg leave to express my deep sympathy in your great sorrow. Your noble and gallant brother has met a soldier's death, and God grant that this army and our country may never be called upon again to mourn so great a sacrifice.

Of his merits, his lofty intellect, his accomplishments, his professional fame, and above all his Christian character, I need not speak to you who knew him so intimately and well. But as a patriot and soldier, his death has left a deep gap in the army which his military aptitude and skill render it hard to fill. In the Battle of Fredericksburg he won an immortal name for himself and his brigade. Hour after hour he held his position in front of our batteries, while division after division of the enemy was hurled against him. He announced the determination of himself and his men never to leave their post until the enemy was beaten, and with unshaken courage and fortitude he kept his promise.

May God give consolation to his afflicted family, and may the name and the fame of the Christian statesman and soldier be cherished as a bright example and holy remembrance.

With great esteem,

Your obedient servant

R. E. Lee

This important letter from Lee to Howell Cobb has been reproduced in several books including John Stegeman's *These Men She Gave*, William B. McCash's biography of Cobb, and *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. However, the location of the original letter has not been discovered.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the following for their assistance with this article:  
Charlotte Thomas Marshall, who first showed Judge Lumpkin's letter to me and for her editorial comments on this manuscript.

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Theresa Flynn, for her editorial and research skills.

Eve B. Mayes for her diligent search for the identity of Mr. Pettigru.

Gary L. Doster

## ILLUSTRATIONS

Page 48: Portrait of Thomas Reade Rootes Cobb in his Confederate uniform, painted by Weygant, donated to the University of Georgia School of Law by Hoke Smith in 1949. <https://digitalcommons.law.uga.edu/portrait/53/>. Used with permission.

Page 49: Portrait of the young Marion McHenry Lumpkin, wife of T. R. R. Cobb, c. 1844, from the "The Hulls of Georgia" website, <http://www.thehullsofgeorgia.com>.

Page 52: The first page of Judge Joseph Henry Lumpkin's letter to his daughter Callie Lumpkin King in Alabama, telling her about the events that culminated in the death of Thomas R.R. Cobb, dated 30 December 1862. The four-page letter is part of the Joseph Henry Lumpkin Family Papers collection in the Hargrett Rare Books and Manuscripts Library/ University of Georgia Libraries (Mss. 32, Box 2, Folder 7). Used with permission.

Page 57: "*Confederate troops commanded by Generals Cobb and Kershaw fire at attacking Union soldiers from behind a stone wall during the Battle of Fredericksburg.*" An engraving created by A.C. Redwood shows the fighting at a stone wall on Marye's Heights on December 13, 1862, during the Battle of Fredericksburg, Virginia, which was published on page 104 of *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, Volume Three* by Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel, editors. New York: The Century Co., 1887. The entire book may be downloaded online from Google Books.

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### DVD

Bogue, Ronald. *The Presence of the Past: Historic Houses of Athens, Georgia*. 23-minute color DVD edition of the original 1987 videocassette. 2016. \$12

**MAPS** (*standard sizes suitable for economy framing; all sold in protective tubing. The maps have a slight blank margin that can be trimmed as desired for framing.*)

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## NOTECARDS WITH ENVELOPES

- \* W.W. Thomas's 1874 Map of the City of Athens, Ga., 3" x 5" on cream stock, 10 cards, \$12
- \* Franklin College, Athens, Georgia. North Campus. Unsigned lithograph c. 1850, 5" x 7" in color, 8 cards, \$20
- \* George Cooke's 1845 painting *View of Athens from Carr's Hill*. 5" x 7" in color, 8 cards, \$20
- \* Four each of Franklin College and Carr's Hill cards, \$20

## BOOKS AND AHS PUBLICATIONS

- Aldridge, Dan. *To Lasso the Clouds: The Beginning of Aviation in Georgia*. 2016. Hard cover, 200 pages, illustrations. \$29
- Dooley, Vince, and Sam Thomas. *The Legion's Fighting Bulldog: The Civil War Correspondence of William Gaston Delony, Lieutenant Colonel of Cobb's Georgia Legion Cavalry, and Rosa Delony, 1853-1863*. 2017. Hardcover, 369 pages, illustrations, signed copies. \$35
- Athens Historian* (AHS's annual journal). Individual issues of Volumes 2-9, 11-18 (1997 to 2018) \$3 each. Bundles containing Volumes 2-18, \$10. Note: *Historian* articles for 1996 to 2018 are listed by issue on our website, [www.athenshistorical.org](http://www.athenshistorical.org). Click on "History" and then, on the dropdown menu, "Athens Historian." No *Historians* were printed between 2008 and 2012
- Hester, Al. *Putting on Blue: Confederates from the Athens, Georgia Area Who Became Galvanized Yankees*. 2015. Paperback, 118 pages, illustrations, bibliography, index. \$3
- Marshall, Charlotte Thomas. *Oconee Hill Cemetery, Athens, Georgia. Vol. I*. 2009. Hard cover, dust jacket, 656 pages, illustrations, bibliography, index. \$55.
- Papers of the Athens Historical Society, Volume I* (1963) and *Volume II* (1979). \$2.50 each. The contents of these volumes are listed on our website, [www.athenshistorical.org](http://www.athenshistorical.org). Click on "History" and then, on the dropdown menu, "Papers of Athens Historical Society"
- \* A portion of each sale of this item is donated to map preservation at the University of Georgia's Hargrett Rare Book & Manuscript Library.

## The Augustus Longstreet Hull Award

The Athens Historical Society created the Augustus Longstreet Hull Award as a way to publicly recognize and honor those individuals whose long and extraordinary service to our organization and the community at large has significantly impacted the study and documentation of the history of Athens, Georgia, and its surrounding area. In bringing attention to those who have helped to preserve the historical record of the Classic City and the surrounding counties, we hope to generate interest in the general public for the mission of the Athens Historical Society, as well as to recognize the accomplishments of those receiving the award.\*

### The Name of the Award

This award honors the author and editor of *Annals of Athens, Georgia 1801-1901*, Augustus Longstreet Hull. Through his own research and writing, and compiling the memories of his father, Reverend Henry Hope Hull, *Annals of Athens* preserved much of the early history of Athens, Georgia, and provided detailed, unique information which otherwise would have been unrecorded and lost to future generations. This book now serves as a foundation for modern historians and researchers of Athens's rich nineteenth-century history, and provides an example of the type of service his namesake award is intended to honor.



Augustus Longstreet Hull,  
1904

### Recipients of the Award

- 2015 Augustus Longstreet Hull (*accepted by his descendants*)
- 2016 Patricia Irvin Cooper (*accepted by her daughter, Alice*)
- 2017 Mary Bondurant Warren
- 2018 Charlotte Thomas Marshall
- 2019 Gary L. Doster

