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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.

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On the cover:

Art Rosenbaum, *Self-Portrait with Fiddle*, 2004, oil on linen, 50 x 40 inches. Smithsonian American Art Museum, gift of the artist, 2014.38. Used with permission.

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Art's Spark—Remembering the Life and Art of Art Rosenbaum

by Dennis Harper

Georgians recently mourned the passing of Art Rosenbaum, who died September 4, 2022. A resident of Athens for more than forty years, Rosenbaum was widely regarded in Georgia as a living cultural treasure. Clearly, that high esteem extended well beyond his adopted home state, attested by the tributes that appeared shortly after his death in the *New York Times*, *Seattle Times*, *The Guardian*, and at the American Folklore Society.¹ As a visual artist, teacher, musician, author, and documentarian, Rosenbaum touched the lives of many. An obituary in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* noted: “As word circulated that Rosenbaum was ill, students from around the country flocked to Athens to thank him and say good-bye.”²



Art Rosenbaum in his studio in Athens, GA, ca. 2003.

I count myself among that grateful cohort, after having Rosenbaum serve as my major professor in graduate school at the University of Georgia. In 2006 I had the pleasure of organizing a fifty-year retrospective of his paintings and drawings, *Weaving His Art on Golden Looms*, while working as a curator at the Georgia Museum of Art.³ The exhibition title came from a playful song written

¹ See <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/14/us/art-rosenbaum-dead.html>, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2022/sep/21/art-rosenbaum-obituary>, <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/obituaries/this-weeks-passages-298/>, <https://americanfolkloresociety.org/art-rosenbaum-1938-2022/>. (Accessed November 29, 2022.)

² <https://www.ajc.com/news/art-rosenbaum-georgia-artist-musician-teacher-dies-at-83/GDKKN6EP5VDTNHXMWC5C6RPBNN/>. (Accessed November 29, 2022.)

³ *Weaving His Art on Golden Looms: Paintings and Drawings by Art Rosenbaum*, Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia, October 21, 2006-January 7, 2007.

by the Reverend Howard Finster, the renowned visionary artist from northwest Georgia. Appearing in a letter from Finster to Rosenbaum, the lyric reads in part: “Art Rosenbaum has a lot of fun / Playing his banjow [*sic*] in many tunes weaving his art on golden looms.”⁴ Finster was just one of many creative individuals—both self-taught and academically trained—that Rosenbaum came to know closely, performed with, and promoted during his years in Georgia. Other notable figures include Mabel Cawthorn, Vic Chesnutt, Dilmus Hall, Bonnie Loggins, R. A. Miller, Joe Rakestraw, and Michael Stipe, all of whom Rosenbaum also engaged as subjects in his visual art. Research for the exhibition revealed the extent of Rosenbaum’s wide-ranging experience, expertise, and influence. A polyglot and polymath, he appeared to have an insatiable desire for knowledge. He mastered old and new technologies alike, from fresco painting to video editing. His memory was prodigious, especially when calling up quotes from artists throughout history or an arcane ballad appropriate to whatever situation was at hand. Above all, he created extraordinary paintings that weave together a vivid sense of place and time, companionship, mystery, and revelation.

Arthur Spark Rosenbaum was born in 1938 in Ogdensburg, New York, near the United States-Canada border. He was the eldest of three children born to David Rosenbaum, a pathologist, and Della Spark Rosenbaum, a medical illustrator. Showing precocious talent, Art benefited from his mother’s guidance. At an age when other children might still be wielding crayons, he completed his first oil painting in 1947, a view of vacant lots near his grandmother’s house in New Jersey.

His father’s military service relocated the family to Augusta, Georgia; Hattiesburg, Mississippi; and Patterson, New Jersey. They ultimately settled in Indianapolis, Indiana. Throughout high school in Indianapolis, Art took private art lessons and Saturday classes at the Herron School of Art and Design. He also spent a summer with his grandmother to be within commuting distance of Manhattan, where he enrolled in painting classes at the Art Students League.

Additional encouragement for his art came via a paternal uncle, Samuel Rosenbaum. Samuel had worked in the United States office for art restitution after World War II. Stationed in Munich, he amassed a personal collection of German Expressionist prints that included works by Max Beckmann, Max Pechstein, and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, alongside examples of nearly all of Käthe Kollwitz’s *oeuvre*. The hours Art spent sifting through his uncle’s print

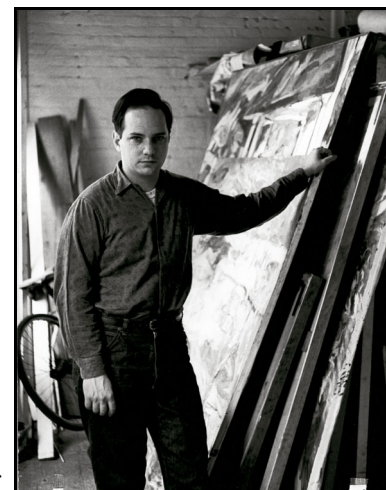
⁴ Howard Finster to Art Rosenbaum, undated correspondence in Rosenbaum’s possession.

cabinet was a formative experience. Those images’ incisive lines and thrusting compositions bore a considerable imprint on his own paintings and graphic art in the years to come.

Rosenbaum’s creative pursuits never fixated solely on the visual arts, however. He cited his father’s amateur musicianship as a significant influence in that same direction. A telling event from his high school days aptly illustrates Art’s intertwined interests in music and art. At fifteen, he won first prize for a painting submitted to the 1953 Indiana State Fair Art Show, juried by artist Peter Hurd. Upon receiving the cash award, Rosenbaum chose not to replenish his art supplies. Rather, he used the twenty-five dollars to purchase his first five-string banjo.

After high school, Rosenbaum enrolled at Columbia College, the liberal arts component of Columbia University in New York City, where he earned a bachelor’s degree in art history while continuing to make paintings in his dormitory. Art once bragged to me that his dorm room there was probably the only one at the time decorated with original prints by Beckmann, Schmidt-Rottluff, and Kollwitz—all, of course, courtesy of his uncle’s collection.

After finishing his bachelor’s degree, Rosenbaum moved directly into the graduate program at Columbia University and completed a Master of Fine Arts degree in painting in 1961. ... His thesis exhibition included both representational and abstract works,



Art Rosenbaum in his Beekman Street studio loft, New York, ca. 1963.

with the latter reflecting the prevailing influence of Abstract Expressionism. While they shunned identifiable forms, Rosenbaum’s non-representational compositions evoked an impression of unfolding events purely through his sensitive handling of color and contrast. The figural works, however, offered a more direct and broadly accessible means to express his love of storytelling and descriptive elucidation. Their subjects were variously his friends, elder musicians, or the artist himself. In these visual narratives he often situated his protagonists within a crowded, phantasmagoric setting—a format that he pushed to extremes in subsequent

years. Rosenbaum half-jokingly described his proclivity for densely packed compositions as evidence of his *horror vacui*, or fear of empty spaces.⁵

Rosenbaum's *Hurricane Season*, from 1999, is a vivid example of where that inclination would eventually take him. (See centerfold of this issue.) The large-scale triptych, painted in Athens, Georgia, nearly forty years after his graduate show, barely contains the bustle of frenetic activity within its six-by-eighteen-foot framework. Figures, ground, sky, and water commingle unsteadily across three seemingly unrelated panels, as if scattered by their titular swirling winds. Yet, Rosenbaum enforces a rhythmic order through repeated patterns, textures, and juxtaposed colors interlaced throughout each section.

As earlier, he drew upon his musical companions and local observations as subjects for the composition. The central canvas features the one-armed blues and gospel singer, Neal Pattman, on the harmonica. Spiraling outward from Pattman is a group of figures that includes blind pianist Fleeta Mitchell; the Reverend Willie Mae Eberhart; Rosenbaum, in the distance holding a video camera and again at far right handling a microphone; and Andy LeMaster, a student of Rosenbaum's and co-owner of a recording studio, shown here at his mixing board. The left flanking panel depicts an improvised skate park in downtown Athens where a different sort of performance is taking place. The right panel looks out on a lush view of Watson Mill State Park near Comer, Georgia, where folk musician Edgar Fortenberry from Woody Gap plays the banjo amid lovers, artists, and documentarians, each singularly focused on their own pursuits.

Interestingly, in the creation of this complex work Rosenbaum followed an intuitive approach much in line with his earlier abstract paintings. He set out with little inkling where the process would lead him. Rosenbaum remarked that it all began with the sole of Andy LeMaster's footwear. "I noticed the bottom of his shoe, and the tread patterns made me think of a city with blocks and streets and canyons, seen from above. I asked him if he would model for a painting I was about to start, and told him I wanted it to hinge on his shoe."⁶ Everything else evolved from there.

After graduating from Columbia Rosenbaum remained in New York. By then he was immersed in the downtown folk scene, performing and teaching

⁵ Personal interaction with Rosenbaum.

⁶ Art Rosenbaum, email to Paul Manoguerra, April 29, 2010 (now in Georgia Museum of Art curatorial files). For further discussion of *Hurricane Season*, see Manoguerra, *One Hundred American Paintings* (Athens, Georgia: Georgia Museum of Art, 2011), 298-301.

old-time music on banjo, guitar, and fiddle. His painting continued apace in a cold-water loft between Chinatown and Wall Street, barely warmed by a pot-bellied stove and the cumulative body heat from traditional pickers' performances he hosted there. His painting efforts led to a Fulbright fellowship in 1964-65, which he spent in Paris. Upon returning to New York, he again found work teaching: this time watercolor and design at the Craft Students League.⁷

Rosenbaum moved to Athens in 1976 and began his thirty-year tenure at UGA's Lamar Dodd School of Art. He and Margo quickly became integral and beloved members of the cultural community. Art's exceptional teaching garnered significant awards including a Senior Fulbright Professorship in Freiburg, Germany, and Visiting Exchange Professor of Art at De Montfort University in Leicester, England, along with several UGA-based honors. Similarly, he received considerable recognition for his studio and creative practices, earning individual artist grants through the Southern Arts Federation, Georgia Council for the Arts, and National Endowment for the Arts—Folk Arts Division.

He was equally accomplished in music, winning the 2008 Grammy Award for Best Historical Album, for a compilation of his field recordings covering fifty years of American traditional music. Perhaps as the best tribute to his lifelong contributions and service in all these fields, he received the Georgia Governor's Award for the Arts and Humanities in 2003.

As I began work on his retrospective exhibition, Rosenbaum was preparing for retirement from teaching. One of his paintings struck me as both an emblem of the project and that transitional moment in his life. We chose to feature it on the cover of the catalogue. Painted in 2004, *Self-Portrait with Fiddle* (see front cover of this issue) presents an unvarnished view of the grizzled but resolute artist. Uncombed hair flutters around a balding and furrowed pate, the mouth ajar as if caught mid-breath. Rosenbaum, the artist, neither slimmed the sitter's midriff nor smoothed his complexion to create a more flattering likeness. In art historical terms, the painting embodies more a sense of *vanitas*—a reminder of the transience of life—than of vanity. Other elements offer further insight into the disposition and identity of its subject. The backward writing on his T-shirt and a reversal of bow and fiddle between his dominant right and left hands form a subtle in-joke on the conventions of self-portraiture, since artists in past centuries had to rely on mirrors instead of photography for self-reference. That was obviously not the case here, but

⁷ Not to be confused with the Art Students League. For further information see <https://www.craftcouncil.org/post/craft-students-league> (accessed November 29, 2022).

Rosenbaum inverts his own likeness to pretend so. Note, too, that musical instruments stand in for an artist's palette and brush as if they were the means of this production.

The richly variegated colors of Rosenbaum's camouflage jacket pick up all the hues of the surrounding landscape. They literally and metaphorically merge figure into ground to cement the artist's intimate connection with his locale. For me, the composition's most intriguing aspect involves the two groups of mobile signboards in the background. Humorously, they point directly at Rosenbaum's head before heading away "over the hill." Surrounded by such portentous symbols, the image of the artist looms large on the canvas. Turning his back on the slings and arrows of time's misfortunes, his head is shifted to engage eye-to-eye with the audience. While readying a chord on his fiddle, he lifts the bow to begin again.

I often thought about this painting during the weeks in which Art's health steadily worsened. Its details, at least in my interpretation, seemed ever more poignant. Yet I always returned to the defiant and authoritative deportment I saw in that nimble portrayal of his ageing self.

Then too, in recalling our remote communications, I was reminded of Rosenbaum's username for email. Not surprisingly it was a clever play on words: ARTSPARK. Although I knew it derived from his first and middle names, I always perceived it as referring to the creative spark that lay within him, and which he shared so generously. That spark was self-evident in his fiddler's portrait and throughout the vast body of work he left behind. May it continue to kindle new beginnings.

Dennis Harper is a visual artist, former exhibition designer at the Georgia Museum of Art, Co-Curator of the 2006 Art Rosenbaum exhibition at the GMA.

The View from Easley's Mill, Present and Past

by Jane McPherson

My office at the University of Georgia (UGA) School of Social Work is located in the old Athens Factory, an antebellum cotton mill that was the first industrial mill in the City of Athens.¹ (See Figure 1.) Looking out of my window at the North Oconee River, I see turtles sunning themselves on the rocks below. The river is a pleasant roar in my ears, and I hope to see a blue heron light.

Looking out, I'm also looking back in time: Water still rushes over the remnants of the Athens Factory's dam and, across the river on the east bank, the remains of Daniel Easley's pre-industrial mills are just visible. In the winter, with the leaves fallen from the trees, I glimpse the Easley Mill Overlook that Athens-Clarke County opened on the Firefly Trail in Fall 2022—an overlook that tempts me to escape into the warm January afternoon and into the antebellum history of this portion of the river.



Figure 1. *The Athens Factory (circa 1880) as seen from the east side of the North Oconee River. From the Georgia Photograph File (MS3705) at the Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries.*

Easley Mill Overlook and Cedar Shoals

The Easley Mill Overlook perches above a rocky shoals where it's quite possible that explorer and naturalist William Bartram visited during his 1786 meander through Georgia. In *Bartram's Travels*, he described the "Ocone" as

¹ Michael J. Gagnon. *Transition to an Industrial South: Athens, Georgia 1830-1870*. Louisiana State University Press, 2012, 29.

a “beautiful” river and wrote of coming to a spot where the waters were “still and shoal, and flowed over a bed of gravel just beneath a rocky rapid.”² Before Athens was Athens, this spot was known as Cedar Shoals.

By 1796, Daniel Easley had purchased title to Cedar Shoals and built a water-powered mill—quite likely on the site that became the Athens Factory—before setting up shop more permanently on the east side of the river near his future eponymous overlook.³ As Dr. Henry Hull, whose own memories of Athens begin in 1803, reports in *Annals of Athens*, Easley “slightly dammed” the rapids to operate “an excellent flour mill...a saw and common grist mill” and with the “intention to add a cotton machine.” In those days, the river was full of fish, including shad which ascended the river “in great perfection.” Though the ascending shad have vanished, the intrepid can scramble down to the riverbank and see the ruins of Easley’s mills and dip a toe into what was likely Easley’s mill race. In 1801, John Milledge and a committee of university trustees came to Cedar Shoals scouting to locate the University of Georgia. The site they chose belonged to Daniel Easley, who sold Milledge 633 acres, but kept plum land on both sides of the river, including Cedar Shoals, for himself.⁴

Easley’s mills and landholdings passed into the hands of William Carr in 1820⁵ and, though not a miller himself, Carr rented the mills to other operators, including Noah Philips who advertised “wool carding” services at ten cents per pound in 1829.⁶ During this period, Hull remembers the area just downriver from Easley’s mills as “the most beautiful place for small boys to bathe and learn to swim that was ever made.” As I imagine the hoots and splashes from those swimming boys, I am drawn away by the boom that came next: “the blasting” that created “the waterway for the cotton mill” in the early 1830s destroyed that splendid swimming hole.⁷

² William Bartram (1739-1823), and Mark Van Doren. *The Travels of William Bartram*. [New York]: Macy-Masius, 1928, 60-61. HathiTrust Digital Library. [https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.\\$b281934](https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.$b281934) (Accessed 23 January 2023.)

³ Greg Yoder, personal communication, 29 November 2022.

⁴ Augustus Longstreet Hull. *Annals of Athens, Georgia, 1801-1901*, 1906, 2-4. <https://archive.org/details/annalsofathens00hull/> (Accessed 23 January 2023.)

⁵ Charlotte Thomas Marshall. *Oconee Hill Cemetery of Athens, Georgia, Volume 1*. Athens, GA, Athens Historical Society, 2009, 346.

⁶ “Wool carding.” *The Athenian* [Athens, Georgia], 13 October 1829, 3.

⁷ Hull, *Annals*, 78-79.



Figure 2: A detail from the 1832 plat of the property sold by William Carr to Augustin Clayton, William Dearing, John Nisbet, and Abraham Walker shows three pre-existing mills on the east side of the North Oconee River. This hand-drawn map is included in the *Chicopee Manufacturing Company records (MS1664)* at Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries.

The Athens Factory

In 1832, Augustin Clayton, William Dearing, John Nisbet, and Abraham Walker bought 55 acres straddling both sides of the river at Cedar Shoals from William Carr (see Figure 2) for the purpose of building a cotton and wool mill. When the Athens Factory (first known as the Athens Cotton and Wool Mill) opened its doors in 1833, it brought industrial-scale thread and cloth manufacturing to the City of Athens, and continued the recent local shift into manufacturing cotton products that had begun in Whitehall in 1830.⁸ Fittingly, the land purchase included the riverside field where Daniel Easley had tended Athens’ first cotton patch a few decades before. Today, the Easley Mill Overlook—with its excellent view of the former factory (now UGA School of Social Work)—is a perfect spot to consider a few of the Factory’s stories and characters. (See the author’s photograph of this view in the *Athens Photogravure* on page 31.)

One such character was Augustin Clayton. Clayton, an original investor in the Athens Factory, was a member of UGA’s first 1804 graduating class and

⁸ Gagnon, *Transition*, 29.

went on to become a Judge and political leader. He was instrumental in expelling indigenous peoples from Georgia and was a lifelong patron of UGA.⁹ Clayton Street in downtown Athens bears his name, and when he died “each of the three churches of Athens [Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist] suspended their regular [Sunday] morning worship for the purpose of uniting their respective congregations in one.”¹⁰

Clayton and his partners were also enslavers who imagined a Southern manufacturing system whose enslaved laborers (unlike those in the North) “could neither strike nor quit.”¹¹ After the factory reorganized as the Athens Manufacturing Company in 1835, several enslaved individuals—Bob, Cuffee, Charles, Ezekiel, and Dinah—were mentioned in the company’s minutes by name, while others—including Ezekiel and Dinah’s two children and a person known only as “yellow boy” are simply referenced; still others are merely enumerated.¹² In 1863, in the midst of Civil War, the factory agent was authorized “to sell the negroes belonging to the company.”¹³

We get another picture of the Athens Factory workforce from British chronicler James Silk Buckingham, who visited Athens in 1839, when the mill at Whitehall and the Athens Factory had been joined by a third mill in Princeton (near today’s Five Points). In Buckingham’s telling, the workforce at all three factories was a mixture of enslaved Black and free white individuals, both adults and children:

[There] are three cotton factories, all worked by water-power, and used for spinning yarn, and weaving cloth of coarse qualities for local consumption only. I visited one of these, and ascertained that the other two were very similar to it in size and operations. In each of them there are employed from 80 to 100 persons, and about an

⁹ Claudio Saunt, *Unworthy Republic: The Dispossession of Native Americans and the Road to Indian Territory*. W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2021, 98, 163-165.

James Silk Buckingham, *The Slave States of America*. London: Fisher, Son & Co., 1842, 60. HathiTrust Digital Library. <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015018024474> (Accessed 23 January 2023.)

¹⁰ Buckingham, *The Slave States of America*, 61.

¹¹ Gagnon, *Transition*, 20.

¹² *Athens Manufacturing Company. Minute Book. 1835-1904*. June 1836 and May 1843. Chicopee Manufacturing Company records, MS 1664, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Georgia.

¹³ *Athens Manufacturing Company*, June 1863. Chicopee Manufacturing Company records, MS 1664, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Georgia.

equal number of white and black. In one of them, the blacks are the property of the mill-owner, but in the other two they are the slaves of planters, hired out at monthly wages to work in the factory. There is no difficulty among them on account of colour, the white girls working in the same room and at the same loom with the black girls; and boys of each colour, as well as men and women, working together without apparent repugnance or objection.¹⁴

According to Buckingham, “The white families engaged in these factories live in log huts clustered about the establishment on the river’s bank, and the negroes repair to the huts allowed them by their owners when they are near, or stay at the mill, when their master’s plantation is far off.”¹⁵

George Cooke, an artist who was also likely an investor in the Athens Factory,¹⁶ painted *The View of Athens from Carr’s Hill* in 1845 as a wedding gift for Augustin Clayton’s daughter, Augusta.¹⁷ (See this image in the *Athens Photogravure* on page 31.) The painting depicts the mid-century manufacturing complex—factory buildings, dam, pond, and what appear to be factory workers’ lodgings—situated on the west bank of the North Oconee. The workers’ houses are situated in what is now the School of Social Work’s vast parking lot. If these “log huts,” as Buckingham called them, were reserved for the white millworkers, where did Ezekiel and Dinah’s family live? As I look out at the antebellum mill, I wonder how these enslaved and free laborers rested and nourished themselves.

As Buckingham recounts, the plan to rely exclusively on enslaved labor for the mills failed because enslaved labor proved more expensive than free:

[Enslaved] labour is dearer than that of the whites, for whilst the free boys and girls employed receive about 700 dollars per month, out of which they find themselves [food and lodging], the slaves are paid the same wages (which is handed over to their owners),

¹⁴ Buckingham, *The Slave States of America*, 112.

¹⁵ Buckingham, *The Slave States of America*, 113.

¹⁶ *Athens Manufacturing Company*, August 1848. Chicopee Manufacturing Company records, MS 1664, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Georgia.

¹⁷ M. A. Rudolph, *George Cooke and His Paintings*, in *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, June, 1960, Vol. 44, No. 2 (June, 1960), 117-153.

and the mill-owner has to feed them all in addition; so that the free labour is much cheaper to him than the slave.¹⁸

Whoever performed the work, it seems to have been both unhealthy and unsafe. Buckingham complained about the “unavoidable confinement in a heated temperature” and wrote that the whites looked “miserably pale and unhealthy.” Local newspapers carried tales of danger, reporting, for example, the case of Mr. McDonald, whose hand was torn off above the wrist when it was caught in the cotton picker.¹⁹

Looking back at the *Carr’s Hill* painting, careful observers will note that the current building is not present in the painting. (See page 31.) Indeed, the Athens Factory was destroyed by flood or fire three times during its first 25 years, and the current structure opened in 1858, after a fire completely gutted the previous structure.²⁰ The 1858 mill was a state-of-the-art facility which allowed the Factory to robustly support the Confederacy in the Civil War, supplying the thread, flannel, jeans, and cotton duck needed for everything from underwear to tents. The war also left the Factory flush with profits and able to purchase and expand into the former Confederate Armory (now UGA’s Chicopee Building) just up the river.²¹ The gingham fabrics produced at the newly-renovated “Check Factory” were prize-winning.²²

There are many more stories to tell, but space is short and I need to get back to my office. Walking across the Oconee Street Bridge, I look down at the river and think of Robert Shepherd, an emancipated Athenian who earned 68 cents per day for his services ferrying cotton, thread, and cloth on a barge that once traveled this stretch of the North Oconee between the Athens Factory and the Check Factory.²³ I wonder how Athens will preserve this river and its histories for the future.

¹⁸ Buckingham, *The Slave States of America*, 112-113.

¹⁹ “An Unfortunate Accident.” *Southern Banner* (Athens, Georgia), 6 September 1834, 2.

²⁰ “The Athens Factory.” *Southern Banner*, 9 December 1858, 3.

²¹ Gagnon, *Transition*, 195.

²² *Best Display of Ginghams*. Chicopee Manufacturing Company records, MS 1664, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Georgia.

²³ *Federal Writers’ Project: Slave Narrative Project, Vol. 4, Part 3, Kendricks-Styles* (1936), Robert Shepherd, 246-263. Library of Congress, Manuscript/Mixed Material. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mesn043/>.

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Dr. Jane McPherson is Associate Professor and Director of Global Engagement at the University of Georgia School of Social Work. She conducts archival research exploring how local Georgia histories of charity and social work entwine with ideologies of white supremacy and capitalism, and asks questions about how these histories echo in social work practice today.

More on Dr. McPherson's Complex Cloth project, which locates these histories of the Athens Factory, can be found at <https://complexcloth.org/>.

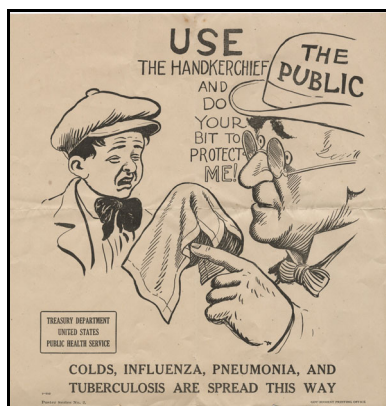
The Great Leveler?

Race, Poverty, and the 1918-19 Influenza Pandemic in Athens, Georgia

by Brian Allen Drake

When the “Spanish influenza” arrived in Athens, Georgia, in October 1918, it might have been tempting for the city’s residents to accept it as fate. But natural disasters are never wholly natural in either cause or effect, for their consequences often unfold along very human fault lines of race and class. The “Classic City” in 1918 had the outward appearance of an ideal modern town: peaceful, prosperous, and growing.¹ But it was also one riven by divisions of class and, especially, by the segregation typical of the Deep South. In the past, those divisions set the terms for epidemic diseases like smallpox. How did they affect—or not affect—the great epidemiological events of 1918?

Home to nearly 20,000 residents in 1918, Athens was the epitome of a small New South city. Its downtown hosted a vigorous and diverse business district, bolstered by a significant manufacturing sector, a state-of-the-art water treatment system, electric trolley lines, and multiple railroad links to Atlanta, Augusta, Macon, and beyond. The well-to-do displayed their affluence in fine Greek-Revival houses built along Prince and Milledge Avenues. Churches, social clubs, fraternal organizations,



This 1918 poster might have worked well for the COVID outbreak over a century later. Courtesy of Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library / University of Georgia Libraries.

¹ This 1918 public health poster was found in the collection of Dr. William Lorenzo Moss, an Athens native, whose medical research in the early 1900s led to the development of preventive practices to minimize the spread of flu and tuberculosis. From the Heery-Moss Collection, MS 4077, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Georgia.

and charity groups abounded. At the center of it all was the state’s flagship university, augmented by a state normal school, an agricultural school, and a number of private secondary schools.²

That summer, Athens was fully focused on America’s involvement in World War I. The university’s student body had been drafted *en masse* into military training corps while many more local men enlisted directly. Local leaders stumped for bond drives, and a number of local women joined the Red Cross, rolling bandages, and assembling care packages for the troops overseas. The city’s two newspapers, the *Athens Banner* and the *Athens Daily Herald*, crammed their pages full of good news (bad news was often censored in the U.S. press during the war) about the latest Allied victories in Europe and the war stories of local doughboys. Patriotism and unity were the order of the day.

But unity in Athens could be a problematic concept, for the city was split deeply by race and class. It was home to a large African American population, most of whom lived in one of numerous neighborhoods segregated in fact, if not explicitly by law. There was nothing random about their location. If a section of town was low-lying, poorly-drained, uneven, inconvenient to downtown (or all of the above), rent and property prices were low and thus the odds were high that its population was poor and black.³ While there was a small black professional class in Athens, most adult black men worked as laborers, teamsters, and so on, while most adult black women worked as domestic servants for white families. As a result of their work and living conditions—magnified by the fact that the city’s water and sewer systems did not reach their neighborhoods—black Athenians were less healthy than their white fellow citizens. A 1918 University of Georgia study, for example, classified most black homes, yards, and privies as “dirty” or “filthy” and swarming with flies and litter.⁴ Specific health data for this era is difficult to

² The Sanborn Fire Insurance Company maps of Athens, April 1918, show many details of the city at that time, including water facilities, fire departments and prevailing winds. https://dlg.usg.edu/record/dlg_sanb_athens-1918 (accessed Dec. 1, 2022). P.A. Megahee and Bird Little, eds., *City Directory of Athens 1916-17* (Atlanta: Publisher’s Press, 1916), DLG.

³ T.J. Woofert, “Phelps-Stokes Fellowship Studies, No. 1 – The Negroes of Athens, Georgia,” in *Bulletin of the University of Georgia XIV* (December 1913), 10, 39;

⁴ H.S. O’Kelley, “Phelps-Stokes Fellowship Studies, No. 4 – The Sanitary Condition of the Negroes of Athens, Georgia,” in *Bulletin of the University of Georgia XVIII* (July 1918), 3, 12, 18.

find, but city Board of Health statistics for 1911 noted that black Athens had rates of tuberculosis and typhoid several times that of whites.⁵

Indeed, white Athenians had a long tradition of racializing disease, especially smallpox. The dreaded virus visited or came close to Athens many times in the years after the Civil War, and newspapers almost invariably linked its arrival to black people, who were assumed to be lacking in personal hygiene, medical knowledge, and social responsibility. An article in the *Athens Banner* in 1899 was typical. After smallpox erupted in Gainesville, some “d*****s,” the paper claimed, attempted a large gathering in nearby Danielsville and had to be dispersed. Meanwhile, a black man with smallpox had allegedly escaped quarantine in Gainesville and was at large near Athens. “The city authorities have been notified,” the paper assured readers, “and will watch for him.”⁶ It responded similarly to reports of smallpox in Carlton, “where several cases have broken out among the negroes.” It would be impossible to maintain a quarantine, the *Athens Banner* lamented, “as the d*****s could easily slip through the country into Athens in the night.” But police were on the lookout for any “suspicious looking or strange” black people. Meanwhile, city ordinances mandated quarantine for individuals with smallpox. Provided the occupants posted a guard to keep people away, they could remain at home. Due to the cost, most poor black smallpox victims instead found themselves locked in the city’s “pest house” until they either recovered or died.⁷

Thus the 1918 pandemic unfolded in an Athens where race and class shaped both the experience and the understanding of disease. Its arrival was quiet but steady. There was no mention of the flu in the *Athens Banner* or *Athens Daily Herald* until mid-August 1918, despite the fact that it had first appeared in Kansas that spring and had ripped through Europe and elsewhere

⁵ “Health Board Report,” *Athens Weekly Banner*, January 5, 1912, 1, in the *Georgia Historic Newspapers Collection*, Digital Library of Georgia (hereinafter referred to as DLG). For the African-American history of Athens, see Michael L. Thurmond, *A Story Untold: Black Men and Women in Athens History*, 2nd ed., (Athens: Green Berry Press, 2001).

⁶ “Smallpox Scare in Neighboring Towns,” *Athens Weekly Banner*, August 4, 1899, 1, DLG.

⁷ “The History of the Public Health Program in Athens and Clarke County,” *Athens Board of Health Papers*, MS 2092, Box 3, Folder 4, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries. The pest house ordinance was still in effect when the epidemic arrived in 1918, although the pest house was seemingly no longer in use. See Section 215 and Section 592 of *Charters and Ordinances of the City of Athens* (Athens: The MacGregor Company, 1918), 63, 146.

that summer. But by September its presence in the Athens papers had grown as it inched ever closer, and by October 4th it was front-page news.

Having received a desperate warning from the Atlanta Red Cross, Marie Lustrat of the Athens chapter put out a desperate call for volunteers to make 10,000 masks immediately. “All other work,” she wrote, “is being put aside for this call.” The next day, the University reported several cases among the student body.⁸

Many Athenians expected the flu to pass quickly, confident their city would be spared any long-term consequences. But they were not passive in the face of the threat. The police threatened to jail anyone violating the city’s “no spitting” ordinance (it was an empty threat as there were never any arrests), and the Board of Health ordered the closure of pool halls, theaters, schools and churches. Still, all would soon be well, the *Athens Daily Herald* declared, as long as people kept their wits about them, got plenty of exercise and fresh air, and avoided too much food and “all stimulants.” But things were worsening quickly, and by October 12th the city has its first pandemic death, that of a white teenager named Sam Warner.⁹

Or was he the first? Athens’ newspapers of the era, it is important to remember, were published by and for white Athenians. Black citizens appeared only occasionally in their pages, often in mocking pieces riddled with stereotypes of criminality and vice. Thus it was no surprise that Warner was not, in fact, Athens’ first pandemic victim. That unfortunate distinction belonged instead to a 50-year-old black woman named Annie Walker, who died on October 7th, according to city mortuary records. She lived at 328

⁸ “New Yorkers Are Reassured Against Spanish Influenza,” *Athens Daily Banner*, August 15, 1918, 3; “Spanish Influenza Spreading in Camps,” *Athens Weekly Banner*, September 20, 1918, 4; *Athens Daily Banner*, October 4, 1918, 1; “10,000 Influenza Masks Must Be Supplied By Athens,” *Athens Daily Herald*, October 4, 1918, 1, 3; “Spanish Influenza Makes Appearance at University,” *Athens Daily Banner*, October 5, 1918, 1, DLG.

⁹ “Safeguarding the Public Welfare,” *Athens Daily Herald*, October 7, 1918, 6, DLG. Athens Board of Health papers, *Minutes 1898-1943*, Box 1, Folder 2, *Minutes 1908-1924*, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia; *City of Athens Police Records*, vol. 32 (September 17, 1918 to August 2, 1919), Heritage Room, Athens-Clarke County Library, Athens, Georgia; “Health Board Closes Schools, Churches, Pool Rooms and Movies - Places Ban on Carnivals and Similar Amusements,” *Athens Daily Herald*, October 8, 1918, 4; “Sam Warner Victim of Influenza,” *Athens Daily Herald*, October 12, 1918, 6, DLG.

Lyndon Avenue with her husband William, a baker, and her three children. Her death went unreported in the papers.¹⁰

Indeed, details about black Athenians' experiences with the flu are very difficult to find. There were no black newspapers in town at the time, and local archival collections for the period are almost entirely "white," a reflection of the era's segregation. Even white Athenians' experiences are hard to pin down. One good source of information, however, is the *Athens Banner* and *Daily Herald* "society pages." Normally, such pages were filled with trivial news from middle-class white readers: vacations, visitors, shopping trips, etc. Now they were full of Athenians "down" with influenza. Others mentioned "a recent illness" affecting one, two, or even several people in a single family, the rapid onset and severity of which very strongly suggested influenza, even if it was not mentioned specifically. Over the course of the pandemic, hundreds of such references appeared. And these were only a self-selecting group.

On October 21 the *Daily Herald* suggested that there were "approximately 700 cases of influenza [active] in the city" at that time.¹¹ Given the length of the epidemic, the society pages' small sample size, and the average rates of infection elsewhere in the country, the total number of infected white Athenians probably numbered in the many thousands.¹²

By late November 1918 the epidemic had passed as quickly as it had arrived, only to come roaring back a second time in early 1919, fading for good by March. "The flu seems to have [finally] vanished," wrote a relieved Steadman Vincent Sanford to his son later that spring, "and we are not sorry."¹³

The final death tally is difficult to determine because of incomplete records. Some influenza deaths appear in the city mortuary records but not the papers, and *vice versa*. Some show up only in state death certificates, which Georgia counties did not issue with regularity until January 1919.

¹⁰ *Athens, Georgia, City Records—Mortuary Records, 1898-1924*, MS 1633, Box 103. *Athens City Directory 1916-17*, 183. Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries.

¹¹ "Believe 'Flu' is Now Under Control," *Athens Daily Herald*, October 21, 1918, 6, DLG.

¹² By way of comparison, Floyd County—one of the few Georgia counties to submit detailed records of the epidemic to the state—reported over 10,000 cases, which was "much below what many communities have suffered," in the words of the *Annual Report of the Georgia State Board of Health for 1918* (Atlanta: Byrd Printing Company, 1919), 64, 70.

¹³ Steadman Vincent Sanford to Shelton Sanford, April 6, 1919, *Steadman Vincent Sanford Papers*, "Correspondence 1919 - April-June," MS 1578, box 2, folder 7, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries.

Isolating an exact cause of death is similarly difficult. Pneumonia, for example, was an extremely common result of the 1918-19 influenza virus, but influenza is not the only cause of pneumonia so it cannot be guaranteed that any pneumonia victim during that time was also a pandemic victim. Further, city mortuary records were inconsistent in categorizing flu deaths—some they listed as a result of influenza, some as a result of pneumonia, and some as both.

Using only "influenza" as an official cause of death, mortuary records list only seventeen deaths. But that number is likely far too low. On the other hand, if we include every "pneumonia" death, as well as specified influenza deaths in state death certificates and in newspaper obituaries, the number rises to 84.

Most likely the actual number was slightly less than that, given the looseness of the "pneumonia" category. All told, 52 white and 32 black Athenians died from flu and/or pneumonia, a tally roughly proportional to the racial makeup of the general population. The average age of death for both races was between 33 and 34 years old. This was right in line with global statistics; the 1918 pandemic was infamous for its tendency to kill young adults. Such numbers might seem small. But had "Spanish influenza" struck Athens today, when the city's current population is some six times larger than in 1918, it would have killed approximately 500 people—more than twice the death rate of the COVID epidemic, which to date has killed 233.¹⁴

Interestingly, black Athens in 1918 seemed not to have suffered disproportionately from the flu, at least in terms of mortality. Nor do there seem to be any examples of white Athenians linking the disease to black people. Both of these are rather surprising in light of Athens' previous history with epidemics. Why the difference? It certainly cannot be attributed to any change of heart among the city's whites. More likely, it was simply that the 1918 pandemic was so widespread and so overwhelming across all of Athens that even the most committed segregationists could not plausibly blame it on

¹⁴ *Athens, Georgia, City Records—Mortuary Records, 1898-1924*, MS1633, Box 103. Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries.

State death certificates for Clarke county for 1919 may be found at the Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia, or online at <https://vault.georgiaarchives.org/digital/collection/gadeaths/> (accessed 1 December 2022). For Athens' COVID statistics, <https://www.accgov.com/coronavirus> (accessed 1 December 2022).

On the 1918 epidemic's effect on younger people, see "Age-dependence of the 1918 Pandemic," *British Actuarial Journal*, Cambridge University Press, 12 Feb 2019. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/british-actuarial-journal/article/agedependence-of-the-1918-pandemic/3BCBF4BDFBD8C5F0F4FBFDF34DF42209> (accessed 30 January 2023).

their black neighbors. It was, in effect, a kind of great leveler, a stark epidemiological reminder of human equality.

Life went on in Athens after the epidemic much as it did before, with little change in the approach to public health. Jim Crow certainly remained unchanged, as the Klan came to town early in the 1920s and the city witnessed the abduction from jail and lynching of a black man in 1921.¹⁵ The Civil Rights movement arrived a generation later.

A half-century later, COVID-19 proved to the world that history, as the saying goes, doesn't so much repeat as it does rhyme. Across the state of Georgia, African Americans and other non-whites suffered at levels well above those of whites, reproducing historical patterns seen in Athens for least a century and a half. The 1918-19 epidemic was something of an exception, but seems to have also proved the rule.¹⁶

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¹⁵ "Evidence was not sufficient said Clarke Grand Jury" (Grand jury presentments on lynching of John Eberhart on February 16, 1921), *Athens Banner*, February 27, 1921, 7, DLG.

¹⁶ See Grace Potter, *et al.*, "Racial Disparities in the Epidemiology of COVID-19" in *Georgia: Trends Since State-Wide Reopening*, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33778312/>.

The Legacy of the Fairhaven Tuberculosis Sanitarium

by John Patrick Dillon

I. Introduction

Despite this quiet university town's outward appearance, Athens, Georgia, has long been embroiled in a brutal conflict, a microscopic war. Invisible disease-carrying pathogens have killed billions of people throughout human history, and *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* is one of the deadliest among them, second only perhaps to malaria.¹ Humanity, brimming with self-preservation and self-importance, tends to resist this return to the earth. One of the most enduring and simple methods to do so comes with a twinge of irony. To prevent the encroachment of deadly foreign organisms, one should rest outdoors with plenty of sunlight and fresh air—a return to nature to prevent a return to nature. A quiet TB facility in Clarke County, led by one devoted nurse, employed these methods to rescue its citizens from death's clutches in the 1920s to 1930s. The untold story of the Athens Fairhaven Tuberculosis Sanitarium is the story of disease and health, race and class, life and death in Georgia.

"Captain of All These Men of Death"

Tuberculosis (TB) has received many epithets, including scrofula, consumption, and the "white plague," due to the pallid complexion of its victims.² In the 19th century, at the peak of its epidemic in North America and Western Europe, one in four deaths were due to TB, and it came to be known as the "Captain of All These Men of Death."³ It has left an indelible mark on humanity, both in terms of population and the perception of disease and death.

According to Katherine Ott's *Fevered Lives*, consumption was used as an umbrella term for any chronic wasting disease in the 19th century, and medical

¹ Ilaria Barberis, *et al.*, "The History of Tuberculosis: From the First Historical Records to the Isolation of Koch's bacillus," in *Journal of Preventive Medicine and Hygiene*, 58:1 (March 2017), 1-9.

² *Ibid.*

³ Thomas Daniel, Joseph Bates, and Katharine Downes, "History of Tuberculosis," in *Tuberculosis: Pathogenesis, Protection, and Control*, ed. by Barry Bloom (Washington DC: ASM Press, 1994), 13-24.

care was so anarchic and rudimentary that such ailments were liable at any point to turn fatal.⁴ Even so, tuberculosis was heavily romanticized in the art and culture of the American upper and middle classes, yielding images of feminine beauty or the male starving artist, as demonstrated by the likes of Poe, Chopin, and Keats. A popular medical textbook of the period described the consumptive as “slim” and “delicate looking,” with a “pretty oval face, a clear complexion, bright eyes.”⁵ For the lower classes, however, “life-threatening conditions were much more real and unavoidable,” painting a far grimmer picture of the disease.⁶

For most of its history, TB was misunderstood by physicians and victims alike. While acute epidemic diseases like smallpox, yellow fever, and cholera periodically swept the population, tuberculosis quietly and chronically afflicted the majority of Americans. Instead of epidemics, middle-class progressive reformers conceived of so-called “Lung Blocks,” where destitute, unsanitary, tuberculosis-ridden tenements infected occupants and passersby.⁷ Even after revolutionary scientist Robert Koch identified the *M. tuberculosis* bacteria as the cause of the disease in 1882, practitioners still hesitated to shift paradigms. The then-controversial germ theory clashed too strongly with the vitalist and miasmatic theories of the time. After the eventual acceptance of bacterial etiology in the early 1900s, the lack of treatment options led to a “nearly universal agreement among physicians and lay people about rest, fresh air, and nutrition as the best treatment for tuberculosis.”⁸

Sanitaria in the U.S. and Georgia

The sanitarium, also spelled *sanitorium*, supplied these therapies to suffering consumptives who could afford the time and cost to visit. George Bodington and Hermann Brehmer popularized the idea of open-air, resort-style hospitals in the mid-19th century in Europe.⁹ This approach first came to the United States with Edward Trudeau’s sanitarium, opening in 1885 in Saranac Lake in the Adirondacks of Upstate New York.¹⁰ In the mid-20th century, after the discovery of more effective tuberculosis treatments, this style of care

⁴ Katherine Ott, *Fevered Lives: Tuberculosis in American Culture since 1870*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 13.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 147.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 41.

became more popular for other chronic, incurable diseases—mental disorders. The word *sanitarium* carries to this day an association with the crude psychiatric “care” of the 1940s and 1950s.

TB sanatoria emphasized a connection with the natural environment, offering fresh air and sunshine to maintain health; nourishing food to combat emaciation; and medicines of varying effectiveness from morphine, opium, and quinine to whiskey, tar, gold, and cod liver oil.¹¹ Prior to the invention of vaccines and antibiotics, such treatments were not considered quackery, and sanatoria often provided the best chance for consumptives to find remission or recovery. Brehmer’s sanitarium, for instance, predated Koch’s discovery of the *M. tuberculosis* bacteria by nearly two decades, nonetheless “surpassing any previous treatment.”¹² Modern research tends to attribute sanatoria’s success to the high-calorie diet, sanitary environment, and the removal of patients from close sources of reinfection, rather than the popular amenities of the day, like sunshine exposure or high-altitude climates.¹³

Sanitaria were sometimes considered a diversion of the upper and middle classes; due to the chronic and protracted nature of the disease, lower-class consumptives often had no choice but to continue their lives and labor, taking bed rest whenever possible. Others found new uses for the sleeping porches that were common before the widespread use of air conditioning.¹⁴ Sleeping porches could approximate the fresh air and sunshine treatments touted by sanatoria while decreasing interpersonal contact, thereby reducing the rate of infection within families.

Georgia was home to a tuberculosis sanitarium starting in 1911 with the construction of a large, state-funded institution near Alto in Habersham County.¹⁵ Influenced by Progressive Era thinking, the state sanitarium was one of the most ambitious health projects the state had ever undertaken. The facility was segregated, with 300 beds reserved for white patients and 100 more for patients of color.¹⁶ It saw the treatment of thousands during its decades-long

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹² O. R. McCarthy, “The key to the sanatoria,” in *Journal for the Royal Society of Medicine*. 94: 8 (2001): 413-417.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ De Vries, Susan, “A Breath of Fresh Air: A Short History of the Sleeping Porch,” in *Brownstoner*, July 8, 2022, <https://www.brownstoner.com/architecture/sleeping-porch-history-brooklyn-tuberculosis/>

¹⁵ Howard Weaver, “State Institution at Alto, in the Blue Ridge, Will Soon Take Care of 70 Patients,” in *Atlanta Constitution*. January 15, 1911, 14. Newspapers.com.

¹⁶ Joy Purcell, “Lee Arrendale State Prison to close under proposal from Dept. of Corrections,” in *Now Habersham*. January 19, 2023.

operation before the facility was converted into a state prison in 1951. However, the legacy of the Alto Tuberculosis Sanitarium is largely overshadowed by that of Lee Arrendale State Prison, as it was named, which has a “reputation as one of the most violent prisons in the state.”¹⁷

Tuberculosis and Race in the South: “The Deadliest Enemy of the Negro”

The turn of the 20th century saw the Jim Crow Era in full force, with the height of scientific racism, the greatest number of racial lynchings, and the perseverance of slavery via sharecropping and tenant farming. Tuberculosis exploded among African Americans during this period, largely because of the mass migration to Northern cities where the disease was endemic. This quickly dissipated the “romantic connotations” of TB, and it developed an association with poverty and people of color.¹⁸ A 1909 Houston County, Georgia, newspaper called TB the “deadliest enemy of the negro” and blamed the sufferers themselves, using eugenic reasoning to suggest that their “uncleanliness” and “tendency to abandon the field and flock” of Southern plantations precipitated their illness.¹⁹ The “ameliorative conditions of slavery” were often used to explain the apparent disparity in health between enslaved and free African Americans, though the exaggerated picture of the healthy slave does not survive historical scrutiny.²⁰ This racist conjecture exhibits the unmistakable biases of Southern physicians and journalists but simultaneously reveals a substantial shift in public perception.

The fear of the spread of TB from black to white populations became a rallying cry for racist, pseudoscientific medical theories, especially targeting black female domestic workers, who “transgressed the boundaries of racial segregation in their movement across the color line.”²¹ A 1905 issue of *The La Grange Reporter* proclaimed the dangers of “the servant as a factor in the spread of tuberculosis,” suggesting that servants be sent for physical examinations.²² A 1921 issue of the *Winder News* declaring that “the whites

¹⁷ “\$500,000 For New Hospital.” *The Leader-Tribune* (Fort Valley, Georgia). Jun 23, 1921, 7.

¹⁸ Ott, *Fevered Lives*, 28.

¹⁹ “Is the Negro Disappearing?” in *Home Journal* (Perry, Georgia). October 14, 1909, 8. In the Georgia Historic Newspapers Collection, Digital Library of Georgia (hereinafter referred to as DLG).

²⁰ Tera W. Hunter, *To ‘Joy My Freedom, Southern Black Women Life and Labor After the Civil War*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 189-191.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 188.

²² “The Servant as a Factor in the Spread of Tuberculosis,” in *The La Grange Reporter*. January 20, 1905, 3. DLG.

will never be safe from infection until the negroes, as well as the whites, have been freed from the plague” of TB.²³ In cases like these, Jim Crow racism occasionally ironically supported egalitarian public health reforms.

Nationwide, there was a high barrier to access to tuberculosis care for African Americans as well. Black medical schools were exceedingly rare, with only four in the country in the 1890s, and there were no all-black sanitariums until the 1910s. As Ott notes, “many African American consumptives who made it into the medical system found that the only beds for them were in prisons and mental asylums.”²⁴ TB care options for people of color were especially scarce in the South, where Jim Crow laws and attitudes severely hindered African Americans seeking treatment. This made those few available facilities, including the State Tuberculosis Sanitarium in Alto and the Fairhaven Sanitarium in Athens, all the more valuable and important.

Many public health initiatives in Georgia focused on Progressive Era societal reforms as a means of combating TB. A 1910 op-ed in the *Athens Banner* from Mary McCullough (Mrs. E.R.) Hodgson, who later became chair of the Clarke County Tuberculosis Sanatorium Building Committee, focused on the relationship between disease and class. She argued that the “crusade against tuberculosis” required “the removal of one cause of poverty—by insisting upon stricter sanitary supervision... housing reform... physical examination of school children.”²⁵ It is no stretch to consider the interplay between race and class for these measures, granted that the county was roughly 50% African American at the time.²⁶ Between the mid-1800s and early 1920s, TB was thoroughly transformed within the public consciousness from a tragically beautiful malady of the white upper class to a dirty plague of the working class and African Americans.

II. Athens’ Fairhaven Tuberculosis Sanitarium

In the early 1920s, Clarke County, Georgia, was faced with a crisis: tuberculosis infections and fatalities were on the rise with no signs of stopping. J. C. McKinney, chairman of the Athens Board of Health, proclaimed as much

²³ “Southern Baptists Wage Vigorous Warfare Against Tuberculosis in This Section,” *Winder News*. Nov 24, 1921, 5. DLG.

²⁴ Ott, *Fevered Lives*, 109.

²⁵ Hodgson, “Morning Session,” in *Athens Banner*. November 5, 1910, 1. DLG.

²⁶ Jayson Ross, Lyric Maze, and Justin Maloney, “A Short History of Black Athens,” in *Death and Human History in Athens*, Willson Center Digital Humanities Lab, 2016. <https://digilab.libs.uga.edu/cemetery/exhibits/show/brooklyn/short-history-of-black-athens> (Accessed July 22, 2023)

in the December 10, 1922, edition of the *Athens Banner* with the bold headline, “TUBERCULOSIS IS ON INCREASE IN ATHENS.”²⁷ Though it arguably never reached true epidemic proportions, it was a silent killer that posed a significant threat to the community. In 1921, Clarke County saw 37 TB deaths, and 1922 was no better.²⁸ This death rate was 30 percent higher than the national average, and the effect was most strongly felt among the African American population of the county.²⁹ One potential solution to these alarming numbers was the sale of Christmas seals—decorative mail labels (not official postage stamps) sold during the holiday season to raise funds for treatment.³⁰ The practice had been common in Georgia since the 1910s, to comparatively little success. This time, though, the Athens Christmas Seals Committee, had a concrete goal: employing a dedicated tuberculosis nurse to serve the community.³¹

The 1922-1923 sale of Christmas seals proved successful. In 1923, a nurse named Miss Rose Magdalena “Lena” McGinley (variously referred to by newspapers as Madeline, Madalene, Madelon, etc.) came to the town’s aid, employed by the newly-formed Clarke County Anti-Tuberculosis Association.³² Her sister Miss Agnes McGinley, also an experienced nurse, had been the head nurse at the Athens General Hospital since its establishment in 1921.³³ Working out of Athens General Hospital, Lena McGinley was able to successfully treat dozens of patients in her first year.³⁴ In November 1923, however, she warned that the state of public health remained dire, with over 300 active cases of TB among 137 families in the county.³⁵ Clearly more drastic action was necessary for the fight against the disease.

²⁷ J.C. McKinney, “Tuberculosis is on Increase in Athens,” *Athens Banner*. Dec 10, 1922, 11. DLG.

²⁸ “Committee Seeking Funds to Fight Tuberculosis Here by Employing Nurse for County,” *Athens Banner*. Nov 24, 1922. 1. DLG.

²⁹ “Tuberculosis Situation in Clarke Explained by Christmas Seals Committee,” *Athens Daily Banner*. Nov 29, 1922, 2. DLG.

³⁰ National Tuberculosis Association, *Stamp Out Tuberculosis: Buy Christmas Seals*. 1924 poster image from the *History of Medicine* (IHM). <https://profiles.nlm.nih.gov/101584655X10>.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² “T.B. Nurse,” *Athens Herald*, Feb 9, 1923, 5. DLG.

³³ Piedmont Directory Company. *Athens, Georgia, City Directory, 1926-1927*. <http://dlg.galileo.usg.edu/acd/do:acd1926-27>. (Accessed August 10, 2023)

³⁴ “To Open Its Doors Next Week,” *Athens Daily Banner*, June 5, 1921, 10. DLG.

³⁵ “Over 300 Tuberculosis Victims Found in Clarke, Says Nurse,” *Athens Banner-Herald*. Nov 25, 1923, 1. DLG.

“Build a sanitarium. Educate the afflicted. Relieve suffering. Save lives.”

Calls to build a sanitarium in Athens to supplement the state facility in Alto go back to 1922 in a *Banner-Herald* letter to the editor that called for “boosting the sale of Christmas Seals in December,” to fund a sanitarium that would “wipe out tuberculosis in Clarke county [sic].”³⁶ This position skyrocketed in popularity in October 1924 with Nurse Lena McGinley’s series of persuasive op-eds in the *Athens Banner-Herald* titled “Findings of ‘T.B.’ Nurse.”³⁷ Her poetic advocacy for a community sanitarium—also included in the subheading above—to combat the “devastating inroads of this dread disease” generated indispensable grassroots demand for the facility.³⁸ The op-eds coincided with a visit by a nurse from the National Tuberculosis Association, lending further credibility to the position.

The people of Athens loved the idea. Considering the hundreds of active cases, everyone in the small town likely knew a family member, friend, or churchgoer suffering from TB. Moreover, this charitable opportunity coincided with the post-war economic prosperity of the Roaring Twenties. Consequently, by 1925, the people of Clarke County were eager to join in the “splendid fight against T.B.” as they banded together to form a public organization called the Clarke County Anti-Tuberculosis Association.³⁹ The people of Athens unreservedly celebrated the campaign against TB, especially the work of Nurse Lena McGinley, whom the Anti-Tuberculosis Association pointed to with pride as doing “the best work... that can probably be found in the entire country.”⁴⁰ In 1925, Clarke County voters elected to reserve \$50,000 worth of bonds for the sanitarium’s construction.⁴¹ The \$5,500 raised from that year’s sale of Christmas seals was icing on the cake to fund the Clarke County Anti-

(Continued on page 35)

³⁶ A Reader, “City Ownership and Its Responsibilities,” *Athens Banner-Herald*. Oct 29, 1922, 12. DLG.

³⁷ Lena McGinley, “Findings of a ‘T.B.’ Nurse,” *Athens Banner-Herald*. Oct 12, 1924, 2. DLG.

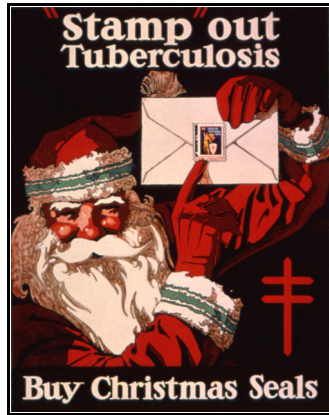
³⁸ McGinley, “Findings of a ‘T.B.’ Nurse” *Athens Banner-Herald*. Oct 7, 1924, 2. DLG.

³⁹ “Splendid Fight Against ‘T.B.’ Made in Clarke,” *Athens Banner-Herald*. Feb 6, 1925, 6. DLG.

⁴⁰ “Clarke County is Being Saved from Tuberculosis,” *Athens Banner-Herald*. Feb 5, 1925, 1. DLG.

⁴¹ “33 Deaths from T.B. In Clarke in 1926,” *Athens Banner-Herald*. Dec 4, 1927, 7. DLG.

The Legacy of the Fairhaven Tuberculosis Sanitarium,
by John Patrick Dillon (pages 24-30, 34-40)



Each Christmas season from 1907 onward, posters like these encouraged the public to buy the “penny stamps” (a sheet of 100 stamps cost one dollar!) to raise much needed funds to fight tuberculosis. At one cent per stamp, millions were raised for local health campaigns and to hire trained nurses, since most of the funds stayed within the community!



The former Fairhaven Sanitarium building now serves as the Memorial Park Office and Clubhouse, a community center for the people of Athens. (Photograph by Naomi Doerr-Garcia, used with permission.)

An Athens Photogravure

The View from Easley’s Mill, by Jane McPherson (pages 10-17)



UGA School of Social Work as seen from the Easley Mill Overlook. (Photo by Jane McPherson.)



George Cooke’s *A View of Athens from Carr's Hill* (1845). The Athens Factory and workers’ residences are included in the tableau. Courtesy of Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries.

Art's Spark—Remembering the Life and Art of Art Rosenbaum, by Dennis Harper (pages 4-9)



Art Rosenbaum, *Hurricane Season*, 1999, oil on linen, three panels, 72 x 210 inches (overall), Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia, gift of the artist, 2007.11.1-3.

HURRICANE SEASON (1999)

“Art Rosenbaum drew upon his musical companions and local observations as subjects for the composition. The central canvas features the one-armed blues and gospel singer, Neal Pattman, on the harmonica. Spiraling outward from Pattman is a group of figures that includes blind pianist Fleeta Mitchell; the Reverend Willie Mae Eberhart; Rosenbaum, in the distance holding a video camera and again at far right handling a microphone; and Andy LeMaster, a student of Rosenbaum’s and co-owner of a recording studio, shown here at his mixing board. The left flanking panel depicts an improvised skate park in downtown Athens where a different sort of performance is taking place. The right panel looks out on a lush view of Watson Mill State Park near Comer, Georgia, where folk musician Edgar Fortenberry from Woody Gap plays the banjo amid lovers, artists, and documentarians, each singularly focused on their own pursuits.” (from page 7)

(Continued from page 30)

Tuberculosis Association and the Red Cross.⁴² Clarke County was all in on stamping out TB.

Immediately, the ball began rolling. By February 1925, a committee led by John Pittard selected a site for the sanitarium—a beautiful, secluded plot near the city “as ideal as could be found in the county.”⁴³ On February 17, the county commissioners created the Clarke County Tuberculosis Sanatorium Building Committee to oversee the facility’s design and construction, which included County Health Commissioner Dr. Applewhite, City Engineer Captain Barnett, and the aforementioned Mary McCullough Hodgson.⁴⁴ Commissioner Applewhite received much praise for the committee’s success, though it seems that women like Nurse Lena McGinley at the Clarke County Anti-Tuberculosis Association, Nina Phillips at the Red Cross, and Mary McCullough Hodgson at the Sanatorium Building Committee completed much of the leg work.⁴⁵ By the end of that year, blueprints were in place, specifying “nothing but the very best or first class [*sic*] job of stucco work,” for the sanitarium.⁴⁶

Finally, in early 1926, the aptly named Fairhaven Sanitarium opened to the public. The building was constructed in a bold Spanish eclectic style, evoking the Mediterranean countryside and whatever tranquil, rejuvenating qualities associated with it in the eyes of the public.⁴⁷ This design is visible today in the stucco walls and Spanish-style clay tile roofing that set the Memorial Park Office Building, as it currently serves, apart from the Greek Revival and styles

⁴² “Confident the Full Amount Will Be Subscribed by Thursday Noon,” *Athens Banner-Herald*. Feb 18, 1925, 1. DLG.

⁴³ “Applewhite Heads Committee Named For T.B. Hospital,” *Athens Banner-Herald*. Feb 18, 1925, 1. DLG.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ “Confident the Full Amount Will Be Subscribed by Thursday Noon,” *Athens Banner-Herald*. Feb 18, 1925, 8. DLG.

⁴⁶ Daniell & Beutell, *Specifications for a One Story Stucco Tuberculosis Sanitarium for the Clarke County Building Committee*, 1925. Athens City Records MS1633a, Box 1, Folder 11, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Georgia.

⁴⁷ Charles Rowland, “Memorial Park: A Five Points Treasure for Fifty Years,” <https://friendsoffivepoints.org/newsite/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/scanmempark.pdf>. (Accessed Jul 24, 2023)

that dominate Athens.⁴⁸ (See a color photograph of the building as it exists today in the *Athens Photogravure* in the center of this issue.) Though it may seem frivolous today, the physical beauty of the building was considered paramount in its design, enhancing the mental and physical health of the patients. Equally important was its location in the bucolic Georgia countryside, surrounded by undeveloped nature with plenty of shade. The open floor plan and large windows brought in the sunlight and fresh air that ostensibly provided “cure from tuberculosis.”⁴⁹ On May 12, 1926, hundreds of visitors from around the county climbed the “hill on sixty acres of property off the Athens-Watkinsville highway” to visit the sanitarium’s open house, demonstrating a high degree of popular awareness and approval of the facility.⁵⁰

When it opened under the direction of Nurse Lena McGinley, who received a smaller nurse’s home on the property, Fairhaven had 30 beds split equally between white and African American patients.⁵¹ It is worth noting that, while it upheld the ubiquitous practice of segregation in separate wards, it did not relegate its black patients to a smaller or inferior facility, as did many medical institutions of the time such as the Georgia State Sanitarium at Alto, which did not even treat patients of color until 1928.⁵² It even offered treatment free of charge to those who could not afford it.⁵³ The primary beneficiaries of this altruistic policy—and arguably the entire sanitarium—were African Americans. One failing of this historical account, however, is the lack of access to black newspapers from this era. To hear the voices of African American patients, journalists, or members of the public would clarify just how effective and equitable the facility truly was.

⁴⁸ Clarke County Tuberculosis Sanitarium, circa 1930. Georgia Photograph File, MS3705, Carton 2, Folder 122, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Georgia.

⁴⁹ “Fairhaven Sanitarium To Open January 1 Under New Agreement With County.” *Athens Banner-Herald*. Dec 30, 1928, 4. DLG.

⁵⁰ “Tuberculosis Sanitarium Visited by Hundreds Wednesday.” *Athens Banner-Herald*. May 13, 1926, 1. DLG.

⁵¹ Daniell & Beutell, *Specifications for a One Story Stucco Tuberculosis Sanitarium for the Clarke County Building Committee*, 1925. Athens City Records MS1633a, Box 1, Folder 11, Hargrett Rare Book & Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Georgia.

⁵² “Alto, Ga., Sanitarium Will Care For Negro Tubercular Patients,” *Jackson Herald*. March 8, 1928, 6. DLG.

⁵³ “Charity Work at Fairhaven Cost It \$3963.” *Athens Banner-Herald*. Oct 21, 1928. 1. DLG.

The Closure of the Sanitarium

As 1926's TB rates continued to make headlines, with 33 deaths and over 300 active cases, the highest levels since 1921, Clarke County came prepared with brand new facilities and skillful, experienced practitioners.⁵⁴ But when 1927 saw death rates decline, the focus of the Clarke County Anti-Tuberculosis Association shifted to other issues. It supported a cooperative effort to financially support underweight schoolchildren—malnutrition is a threatening symptom and risk factor for TB. The county ensured that the milk it supplied to these children was uncontaminated—cow's milk is a vector for tuberculosis transmission. By 1927, Nurse Lena McGinley herself had left Fairhaven Sanitarium to work as a nurse at the General Hospital and to join the Athens Child Health Demonstration, a newly formed organization that collaborated with the Board of Education to teach the importance of hygiene and health.⁵⁵ But for the most part, Clarke had accomplished all it had set out to in the crusade against *M. tuberculosis*. The buzz surrounding TB died down. Eventually, cases died down as well.

On October 14, 1928, less than two years after its construction, the Athens Board of Health and the County government ordered the suspension of all operations of Fairhaven Sanitarium. "The number of cases of Tuberculosis being treated per year at the Fairhaven Hospital," they argued, "does not justify the County in its continuance."⁵⁶ Furthermore, it came to light that the sanitarium's "charity work," providing free treatment as necessary, had cost nearly \$4,000 in the first 11 months of operation alone.⁵⁷ Budget pressures and the apparent lack of demand were enough to close Fairhaven indefinitely.

The people of Clarke could not accept this, however. Immediately, letters poured in from physicians and members of the public alike. On October 24, 1928, only ten days after the announcement of the suspension, Dr. Faulkner, managing director of the Georgia Tuberculosis Association, gave a speech at the packed courthouse meeting of the Clarke County Anti-Tuberculosis Association. He urged county commissioners and Georgia legislators to reconsider, arguing that unreported cases had dulled the urgency and effectiveness of the sanitarium, but that "the spirit of Athens built Fairhaven

⁵⁴ "33 Deaths from T.B. In Clarke in 1926," *Athens Banner-Herald*. Dec 4, 1927, 1. DLG.

⁵⁵ "Child Health Demonstration," *Athens Banner-Herald*. June 6, 1926, 10. DLG.

⁵⁶ "Clarke County Grand Jury Presentments," *Athens Banner-Herald*. Oct 14, 1928. 4. DLG.

⁵⁷ "Charity Work at Fairhaven Cost It \$3963," *Athens Banner-Herald*. Oct 21, 1928. 1. DLG.

hospital" and its cooperation could save it.⁵⁸ Others, such as Dr. Abercrombie, spoke on the "value of saving life" and asked for state subsidies to support local tuberculosis hospitals.⁵⁹

The outpouring of public support for the preservation of Fairhaven proved victorious. On December 6, 1928, it was announced that the Clarke County Anti-Tuberculosis Association was to take over the sanitarium property. The *Athens Banner-Herald* framed this in deeply philanthropic terms: "the protection of humanity from the ravages of the dreaded disease... caused philanthropic citizens to become interested in preserving the hospital."⁶⁰ The desperate sale of Christmas seals during the holiday season of 1928 lightened this financial burden.⁶¹ The spirit of Athens managed to protect the victims of tuberculosis once more.

Fairhaven reopened on January 1, 1929, to less fanfare than its original open house.⁶² However, in a familiar story, tuberculosis cases continued to decline in the following years, and the sanitarium received less attention. By 1930, TB was scarcely mentioned in the papers, crowded out by the devastating financial downturn of 1929. Maybe the decline in cases was a simple coincidence that punished overeager Athenians, or maybe it was a sign of a job well done by the sanitarium and its staff. Regardless, after further budget cuts owing to the Great Depression, falling TB rates, and declining popular support, Fairhaven finally closed its doors for good in 1938.⁶³ Its final patients were transferred to the Alto Sanitarium or sent home for bed rest. No one wrote in.

III. Legacy

TB is an interesting case among diseases. As a highly contagious and deadly bacterial infection, it represents the frontlines of the battle between humanity and rebellious microbes. But many consumptives found respite and

⁵⁸ "Continuance of Fairhaven Asked by Dr. Faulkner." *Athens Banner-Herald*. Oct 24, 1928, 1. DLG.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*.

⁶⁰ "A Philanthropic Organization," *Athens Banner-Herald*. Dec 06, 1928, 4. DLG.

⁶¹ "Sale of T.B. Sales Slow; Need Money," *Athens Banner-Herald*. Dec 17, 1928, 1. DLG.

⁶² "Fairhaven Sanitarium To Open January 1 Under New Agreement With County," *Athens Banner-Herald*. Dec 30, 1928, 4. DLG.

⁶³ Athens Board of Health Minutes, September 14, 1938. Athens Board of Health Papers, MS2092, Box 1, Folder 4, Hargrett Rare Book & Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Georgia.

recovery in the natural world they were fighting against. That is the paradoxical nature of tuberculosis sanatoria.

In the end, Fairhaven left without a fuss. It was successful enough to outlive its usefulness. Despite their fervent initial support, the people of Clarke County seemed to soon forget about it. When other budgetary priorities took precedence over the sanatorium, the local government very rationally diverted those funds elsewhere. The eventual development of antibiotics like streptomycin and the BCG vaccine made the sanatorium and all TB facilities like it obsolete.

The legacy of Nurse Lena McGinley, one of the medical heroes who “saved” Clarke County from tuberculosis, mirrors that of the sanatorium itself. Though popular demand brought her to the county, Lena’s time in Georgia was brief. Her name never appears in the *Athens Banner-Herald* after 1928, and it is unlikely that she saw the closure of the sanatorium in 1938.

After lying vacant for several years in the 1940s, however, the Fairhaven building was transformed to meet the needs of a developing community. In July 1945, the property was transferred to the city of Athens for use as a memorial park to honor world war veterans.⁶⁴

After undergoing renovations, the Fairhaven building reopened as the Memorial Park Clubhouse (see a current photo in *An Athens Photogravure* in the center of this issue), and the old sanatorium’s restorative grounds became the public park enjoyed by countless Athens families to this day. The park covers 72 acres and includes the Bear Hollow Zoo, Birchmore Trail, a children’s playground, a dog park, a fishing pond, and several acres of undeveloped woods. The old Fairhaven Sanatorium, indicated by a historical marker, is now home to the park offices and Athens Creative Theater.⁶⁵ In a sense, it never gave up its purpose of providing Clarke County residents, regardless of their skin color or class—rejuvenation in nature.

Acknowledgments

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to Eve B. Mayes, whose genealogical expertise was invaluable to this paper. Many thanks to Professor Chamosa and Professor Drake at the University of Georgia for granting me this opportunity and guiding me through the publishing process. Finally, this would

⁶⁴ “Athens Memorial Park Site Given,” *Atlanta Journal*. July 9, 1945, 4. Newspapers.com. (Accessed August 20, 2023.)

⁶⁵ Darren Clay, “Former Site of Fairhaven Tuberculosis Sanatorium.” *Georgia Historical Marker Database*. (May 24, 2022)

not have been possible without Naomi Doerr-Garcia, the talented photographer and supportive partner who inspired this paper from the beginning.

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Digging A Little Deeper:
Who Was T.B. Nurse McGinley?

by Eve B. Mayes

In 1923, with funds raised from the sale of Christmas seals, the Clarke County Anti-Tuberculosis Association hired Miss Lena McGinley as a trained tuberculosis (TB) nurse to combat the outbreak.¹

Miss Rose Magdalena (called “Lena”) McGinley (1886-1975) came to Athens from Salem, Massachusetts, in October 1923. She was the younger sister of Miss Agnes Philena McGinley (1884-1965), head nurse and superintendent of the Athens General Hospital that opened in 1921.² We believe the sisters received their nursing training at the hospital in Salem, where they both were living and working 1907-1910.³

Within a few months of her arrival in Athens, TB Nurse McGinley diligently canvassed the households in the county, looking for people who were ill. By the end of November 1923, she found that more than 300 Clarke County residents were infected. She also reported that 260 individuals had been in close and constant contact with persons dying of TB, and some already were showing unmistakable symptoms of the disease themselves.⁴ This report shocked the community into action—a bond referendum was passed to build a tuberculosis sanitarium in Athens to provide care for both white and black TB patients in separate wards, and the Fairhaven Sanatorium was the result. (See John Dillon’s history of this facility above.)

TB Nurse McGinley used her knowledge of nursing procedures to teach the people who needed it most how to take care of their sick family members, and to prevent others from catching the disease. By 1924, they were also

¹ “Map out plans for sale of “T.B.” Seals Here,” *Athens Banner-Herald*, October 21, 1923, 1, DLG.

² “To Open Its Doors Next Week,” *Athens Banner-Herald*, June 5, 1921, 10, DLG.

³ *The Naumkeag Directory for Salem ... [Massachusetts], Number 17, 1909, 303.* (Salem: Henry M. Meek Publishing Co.). Ancestry.com.

⁴ A.S. Edwards, “Over 300 Tuberculosis Victims Found in Clarke, Says Nurse,” *Athens Banner-Herald*, November 25, 1923, 1, 5, DLG.

teaching healthcare and hygiene in the schools under the auspices of the five-year Child Health Demonstration project.⁵

By 1928, the six public health nurses of Clarke County had made over 48,000 home visits, teaching health measures, giving skilled care when needed, and reducing the incidence of such diseases as measles, diphtheria, TB, and typhoid fever. The *Journal of the American Public Health Association* recognized the work being done in Athens with twenty pages of detailed statistics and photographs.⁶ Thus the training of nurses and the general public by Lena and Agnes McGinley continued to benefit the whole community.

We know that Lena was hospitalized for some illness that required an operation in July 1927, and went back home to Salem, Massachusetts, to recuperate.⁷ In 1940, she was living with her mother Rose in Salem, and in 1950, she was assisting Agnes with her convalescent facility there. Agnes died on November 6, 1965, and Lena April 6, 1975. They were laid to rest in St. Cecilia’s Cemetery in Warrensburg, New York, near their parents.⁸

Now we know a bit more about the McGinley sisters and how their dedicated work in Athens affected the lives of so many people for years afterward. Thank you, ladies, for making such a difference!

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Eve B. Mayes has enjoyed doing genealogical and historical research for many years. She has assisted with the formatting of the *Historian* for over 20 years, as well as editing the *The Scribe*, the Georgia Genealogical Society’s quarterly newsletter, and the newsletter of the Bondurant Family Association.

⁵ “Health Progress in Athens During Last Five Years,” *Athens Banner-Herald*, December 30, 1928, 1, 13, DLG.

⁶ “Health Journal Commends Work Done in Athens,” *Athens Banner-Herald*, October 13, 1927, 5, DLG.

⁷ *Athens Banner-Herald*, July 19, 1927, 3, DLG.

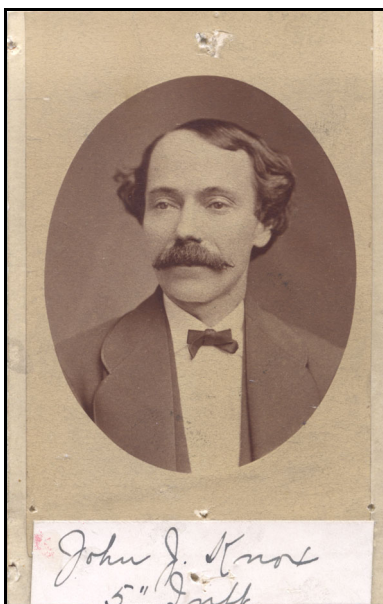
⁸ 1940 and 1950 Federal Census for Essex County, Massachusetts, Ancestry. Find-a-Grave memorial for Agnes P. McGinley, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/153298948/agnes-p-mcginley>. Find-a-Grave memorial for Rose M. McGinley, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/153298961/rose-m-mcginley>.

Triumphs and Tragedies of John J. Knox: The Freedmen's Bureau of Athens and the Fight for Reconstruction

by Sophia Dodd

From February 1867 to November 1868, Major John J. Knox of Michigan was the Freedmen's Bureau agent in Athens, Georgia. Even though the amount of time Knox spent in Athens was short, his impact would be known for generations most notably in the form of a school, the Knox Institute, which for many years stood on the corner of Pope and Reese Street, just west of downtown Athens. Despite his original positive standing in the community among white and Black residents, his time in Athens would end desperately, fleeing from his place of residence and leaving behind the community of he was part for almost two years.¹

John J. Knox's experience was similar to that of many white allies of the former slaves in the South. Knox was forced to work within the framework of white Southern Democrat visions for the Reconstruction. Any attempt to challenge the *status quo* was met with violence. Because of the



Major John J. Knox (1835-1877) came to Athens in 1867 to oversee the operation of the Freedmen's Bureau.

¹ This *carte de visite* of Major John J. Knox is in the Archives of Michigan, RG 2021-76, Portrait Collection, AOM#006451. <https://public.3.basecamp.com/p/dcbMaWVv2o76y5iRjQJUB155>. (Accessed August 22, 2023)

record Knox and others have left behind, we are able to see how this work in Reconstruction Georgia was done with the partnership of Black Athenians. While there is a voluminous archival record of Northern whites who went South during the Reconstruction, the same cannot be said of documentation for the freedmen themselves. As a result, the narrative is skewed to view those recently emancipated as working under those Northern men and women rather than alongside them. While this paper focuses more heavily on Major Knox due to the available primary source material, his story sheds light of some key aspects of Black Athenians life after Emancipation. It is important to remember that white allies worked alongside freedmen while analyzing Major Knox's work in Athens.

Knox's Arrival in Athens

By the time Knox became a Bureau agent and arrived in Athens he had been permanently disabled and suffered from chronic respiratory problems as a result of a nearly deadly neck injury at the Battle of Fair Oaks in 1862.² His obituary states that he survived this injury by quite literally "[refusing] to die"; the obituary also noted him as a man who "clung to true friends with bull-dog tenacity" and "hated his enemies with all his heart."³ The man who walked into Athens that February was not a man faint of heart nor one to be pushed around. He was a staunch critic of Andrew Johnson and his Reconstruction efforts writing, "Every action of the President's in the way of apologizing for and strengthening the hands of the Rebels... is but an excuse for the additional outrages on the col'd man who stand nobly by the principles union Liberty and equal rights to all."⁴

Once in town, he quickly made friends with Athens freedmen, actively visiting and participating in Black social life.⁵ His initial goal was to make

² Paul Cimbala, *Under the Guardianship of the Nation: The Freedmen's Bureau and the Reconstruction of Georgia, 1865-1870* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 55.

³ Obituary of John J. Knox, n.d., John J. Knox Papers, MS 3119, Box 1, Folder 8, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Georgia. According to Hargrett's website, Knox was born February 3, 1835 in Onandaga, NY. He died in Washington, DC, April 13, 1877, and was buried in Lakeview Cemetery in his hometown of Clarkston, Oakland County, Michigan. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/15924620/john-j.-knox>.

⁴ Cimbala, 55.

⁵ Al Hester, "The Freedmen's Bureau in Athens, Georgia: A Tough Job!" *Al Hester's Blog*, July 7, 2012. <https://www.alhesterauthor.com/blog/category/major%20john%20j%20knoxaa300f7fac>.

sure all freedmen knew their new rights.⁶ The *Southern Watchman*, one of Athens' two secessionist newspapers, made note of his arrival indicating that Athens had a neutral feeling towards him, but criticizing that the Freedmen's Bureau thought it needed an additional agent. "We were not aware that it required any nursing in this locality," but "We take it from what we hear, however, that the Major is a sensible man."⁷ Regardless of the *Southern Watchman* remarks, Knox reported duty of the Freedmen's Bureau, helping the Athens freedmen to built the city's first Black private school.

The Knox Institute

In January of 1867, prior to John Knox's arrival, reports came out that the Freedmen's Bureau would be building a school in partnership with despised missionaries who were currently in Athens. The *Watchman* reported that these missionaries had been converting "heathen" and now needed "express accommodation for a school house" at the expense of "poor whites."⁸ Without naming them, the *Watchman* was making reference to the American Missionary Association, or AMA, given that the Bureau aided in building the Knox Institute with direct assistance from the AMA. It was not uncommon for the AMA and Bureau to work together to assist freedmen after the war, and this partnership falls in line with AMA goals post-war to focus on educational pursuits for Black children.⁹ The *Southern Watchman's* disdain for the idea seems largely rooted in hatred for the missionaries, however, it is also possible that jealousy was a factor. While Black communities and Northern individuals immediately worked to educate and build schools after the war, education for poorer white children was still largely inaccessible and would continue to be until the establishment of public schools in Georgia in 1872.¹⁰

Athens freedmen and their allies dedicated the Knox Institute in December 1867, less than a year after Knox's arrival in Athens. To dedicate the school to him after such a short amount of time in Athens, gives some indication of his impact. In the months leading up to the dedication, the *Southern Watchman*

⁶ Cimbala, 76.

⁷ "Local Matters," *The Southern Watchman* (Athens, Georgia), February 13, 1867, 3. In the Georgia Historic Newspapers Collection, Digital Library of Georgia (hereinafter referred to as DLG).

⁸ "Street Yarn," *The Southern Watchman*. January 23, 1867, 3. DLG.

⁹ Joe Martin Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction: The American Missionary Society and Southern Blacks, 1861-1890* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 62.

¹⁰ Allen Conway, *The Reconstruction of Georgia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966), 84.

speaks highly of his work and dealings with freedmen which was a quick turnaround from the passive aggressive nature the paper had discussed the Bureau before Knox's arrival. When Knox delivered an address in Gwinnett County it "gave universal satisfaction, not only to the colored people, but also the whites."¹¹ "His subject was the necessity of labor and a strict compliance with contracts, together with the importance of education... We are assured that he did not abuse the occasion by indoctrinating the negroes in politics. He contented himself with informing them that they had a right to register and vote."¹²

By stressing the importance of complying with the Bureau work contracts, he appealed to white landowners' fears that freedmen would not do the work they signed onto or follow their orders. The *Watchman* certainly appreciated this emphasis along with the fact that Knox did not cross the line into the political sphere by bolstering support for the Republican party. It is important to understand that white fear of the Black vote was not necessarily their participation in voting as evidenced here, but rather who that vote was going towards. This is reinforced as the report continues by celebrating the conduct of Knox versus that of the "pretended missionaries—wolves in sheep's clothing—who, under the pretense of delivering addresses on the subject of education-endeavor, for the purpose of securing the negro vote on behalf of the Radical party."¹³ It is quite clear that the AMA and its missionaries were viewed as radical troublemakers attempting to indoctrinate freedmen into a Radical Republican education.

White Athenians were pleased with Knox's work because of the way in which he reinforced ideas of order and control for white men in regard to contracts and also did not, at this time, encourage freedmen to vote Republican. The 'radicals' were a huge threat to the white southern Democrat who needed the leeway to continue as much control over Black individuals as possible and resist further infiltration of Republican politics on Southern soil. Alternatively, though, Knox ensuring that freedmen followed contracts precisely was in the interest of the freedmen as the alternative could easily result in legal or criminal trouble.

Knox also made sure to calm down retaliation from emancipated Blacks against oppression from white Athenians. In December of 1867, the paper reported a "difficulty" between unnamed and presumably white men and a freedman. This led to a chain of instances which ultimately resulted in a

¹¹ "Major Knox's Address," *The Southern Watchman*. June 5, 1867, 2. DLG.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

gathering of armed Blacks. The entire incident was calmed down and dispersed by Major Knox.¹⁴ Whatever controversy sparked the affair was insignificant to the *Southern Watchman*, but they did not hesitate to publish the story of the potential ‘riot’ and credited Knox with dispersing the mob. The view of the paper of Knox instilling order and justice into a crowd of seemingly unruly and unjustified individuals certainly appealed to white Athenians. However, once again in considering dueling perspectives, the possible consequences for those freedmen had they carried out whatever they were planning, are unimaginable making it in the interest of Knox to ensure prevention of such a matter. This is all in the effort to note the incidents that were taking place in Athens while the Knox Institute was being built leading up to its dedication and subsequent 1868 opening. Despite hatred of the missionary, it appears that John Knox calmed down fears of the impending Radical Republican education of freedmen and gained the trust of whites in Athens.

At the Knox Institute’s dedication, Knox stated “I feel almost entirely unworthy of the honor you have conferred upon me by giving this building my name for the feeble efforts I have made in securing a place in which to educate your children.”¹⁵ While the article in 1867 noted plans for the building, it seems that Knox, while downplaying it, did have a significant role in securing the plans to build the school. While this is speculative, it may not be far off based on previous reactions to missionaries that Knox’s gain of white trust could have made this process easier. Knox specifically recognizes the American Missionary Association as well in development of the school.¹⁶ Additionally, he also notes recognition of the Black citizens who bought the land for the school—Davis, Hill, and Beal.¹⁷ Davis being Madison Davis, the formerly enslaved and future representative in the Georgia Assembly. Either the Bureau would not, or just as likely, could not afford purchase of the land of which freedmen took the initiative to buy seemingly with the promise of the Bureau to build the school as long as land was secured.

After this, the Knox School opened in spring of 1868 and was used for more than just education. In October 1868, the *Southern Watchman* reported the building being used by the Grant and Colfax Club for meetings where

¹⁴ “Threatened Riot,” *The Southern Watchman*. December 18, 1867, 2. DLG.

¹⁵ “Address of Major J.J. Knox, Sub Ass’t Commissioner to the Freedmen, at the Dedication of Knox’s Institute at Athens, Ga.,” December 4, 1867. John J. Knox Papers, MS 3119, Box 1, Folder 7, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Davis and Knox both made speeches.¹⁸ Importantly, the Knox Institute was not solely a school; it was a community building. Schools and churches at this time are not solely important because of education and religion, but because they are buildings which can be used for anything the Black community needed it to be used for. Even a singular building could allow a community to have a safe space for gathering, events, and privacy, making the impact of Knox’s securing of such a building a multi-faceted positive impact on the community.

However, this also meant privacy to begin challenging ideas. The mention of the Grant and Colfax meeting is found in the article titled “Radical Mass Meeting on Saturday”.¹⁹ While the Radical speeches were at an earlier meeting in the day, talks continued at the Knox Institute, and while the report notes that the discussions weren’t inflammatory, they were still discussing and advocating for Republican candidates for the 1868 election. Knox would become much more vocal in 1868 regarding his own politics which would quickly become problematic for the Bureau agent.

“Lay Athens in Ashes”

It is unknown what the white Athenians believed Knox’s political ideology to be when he first arrived in Athens. While he was a Union veteran, the *Southern Watchman*’s comparison of him as the calm, rational, and logical counterpart to the radical missionaries indicates that either they didn’t know, or they assumed his Republican views were more moderate. By April of 1868 this facade had slipped away as Knox vocally began advocating for Republican candidates and celebrating their supposed ‘radicalness.’ In April 1868, Bureau agents reportedly were ordered not to interfere in the current election that would be happening near the end of April, and some believed Knox was doing just that. “Maj. Knox, the Bureau man here, made a speech before the negro Loyal League Saturday night, urging the negroes to vote unanimously for Bullock, Wimpy, Harris and all the other Radicals—assuring them that all these men were Radicals!”²⁰ Another wrote that the person “running for Congress in this District, denies being a Radical, but Major Knox assured the negroes Saturday night that he is one!”²¹

When Knox made speeches supporting contracts between Black laborers and white landowners, settled down attempts at Black resistance, or supported

¹⁸ “The Radical Mass Meeting on Saturday,” *The Southern Watchman*. October 21, 1868, 2, DLG.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ “How is This?” *The Southern Watchman*, April 22, 1868, 2, DLG.

²¹ “The Preacher of Righteousness” *The Southern Watchman*, April 22, 1868, 2, DLG.

education without the push of new age ideas, the *Southern Watchman* reported celebratory articles. The moment Knox stepped out from the confines of white comfort he became a target. Conway notes that vocal and active white allies of African Americans were “*persona non grata* in [their] own community. Social ostracism, when ruthlessly and uncompromisingly put into action, rapidly dried up the wellsprings of overt sympathy.”²² Knox, however, was immune to social ostracism. White Athenians had not power to compromise his position in the Freedmen’s Bureau and he did not need his fellow whites’ sympathies since he had already developed a close relationship with the local Black community.

In the meantime, Knox had to deal with the negative attention and rumors that targeted him. At the October 1868 meeting in the Knox school house, Major Knox denied rumors that he had “told the negroes in Jackson County, or anywhere else, that they would get forty acres of land, or anything else that they did not pay for.”²³ These allegations were likely made up, in retaliation for taking part of the “Radical Mass Meeting” earlier in the day. A crowd of 2,500 to 3,000 mostly Black individuals “marched in procession” through the streets “to an open lot in the west end of town” in which Davis and Knox both made speeches to the large crowd.²⁴ By 1868, in fact, Knox was not only a vocal Radical Republican, he had also very clearly aligned himself with Madison Davis, one of the two freedmen from Athens who were some of the first Blacks to be elected to the Georgia Assembly.²⁵ White Democrats contested Davis’ election as everyone was gearing up for the incoming Presidential election.²⁶ So, on the heels of an already divisive and heated April election, Knox continued advocating for Republican candidates and encouraging freedmen to vote Republican. The election of two formerly enslaved enraged white Athenians as saw their world turn upside down. Unsurprisingly they blamed Knox for their defeat, creating the conditions for the eruption of violence.

On November 21, 1868, Knox had spent the entire day monitoring the polls and was subjected to various insults and threats.²⁷ In a frantic letter to his brother, Major Knox details what happened later that day. A white Athens

²² Conway, 63.

²³ “The Radical Mass Meeting on Saturday,” *The Southern Watchman*, October 21, 1868, 2, DLG.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Michael L. Thurmond, *A Story Untold: Black Men and Women in Athens History*. (Athens: Deeds Publishing, 2019), 28.

²⁶ Thurmond, 29.

²⁷ Cimballa, 76.

resident named Tom Frierson reportedly “drew his revolver” on Knox “that day of Election” and pursued Knox into his room armed with a wooden weapon telling Knox he would “beat [his] brains out.”²⁸ When he was within two feet of him, Knox shot Frierson in the thigh assuming he had killed him and warning a mob that was gathering he would do the same to them if they came any further. This held them off until the arrival of the troops.²⁹ The *Southern Watchman* reported on the incident a few days later inaccurately reporting that Frierson was unarmed and calling the dispute involving Frierson brandishing a revolver at Knox during election day a “quarrel.”³⁰ Left out in the newspaper report, but not of Knox’s writing, was the role that freedmen played in the incident.

Knox writes “I am again indebted to the Col’d People for my life—At least two hundred remained around my room guarding me until the arrival troops and they publicly declared that if the mob interfered with me they would not only kill the citizens but would Lay Athens in ashes.”³¹ Not only does his letter detail an act of bravery from the two hundred who rushed to protect him, but also suggests that this had not been the first time the freedmen protected him from white violence. Unfortunately, no surviving document offers more information about those events. As the authorities arrested Knox for the election day incident, he wrote to his brother: “I am in imminent danger—Should anything happen you will find all my money and effects in the hands of Mat Davis.”³² These were not small sums either. He detailed what Davis was holding onto, including a \$500 bond, 380 greenbacks, and gold that was entrusted into the hands of the Black Athens representative.³³ The Black defense of Knox and his reliance on Davis are testimonies of the strength of the alliance between Knox and the Black Athenian community.

Davis and the other two hundred freedmen put themselves in danger to protect Major John J. Knox. Violence against freedmen was increasing in Athens in the run-up to the 1868 elections. According to a Freedmen’s Bureau

²⁸ Correspondence from John J. Knox to William W. Knox, November 24, 1868, John J. Knox Papers, MS3119, Box 1, Folder 23, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Georgia.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ “Shooting Affray,” *The Southern Watchman*, November 25, 1868, 2, DLG.

³¹ John J. Knox to William W. Knox, November 24, 1868.

³² John J. Knox to William W. Knox, November 21, 1868.

³³ *Ibid.*

report eight black individuals were shot or killed by white Athenians in 1867.³⁴ For instance, a white student called R.W. Westmoreland stabbed Andrew Price, a Black servant, “for not bringing Westmoreland a cup of coffee immediately when asked for.”³⁵ In another incident, Albert Thrasher, a white man, shot freedman Hilliard Thrasher in his back for contradicting him. Violence only became worse in the tense political climate of 1868. The Bureau reported 38 instances of anti-Black violence between January 31st to October 31st of that year. This figure, of course, does not account for unreported incidents. According to the report, whites physically punished Black citizens, many of them domestic servants, for reasons ranging from contradicting statements to being absent from the master’s house for too long, being impudent, sending children to school, or complaining about a white man whipping his son.³⁶ Considering the violence visited upon Black Athenians for minor offenses, it is only imaginable what would happen if they protected Knox against the mob.

Knox was acquitted from injuring Frierson. He received the temporary protection of Union infantrymen sent to Athens for that purpose. However, the threats against Knox’s life did not stop. He decided that when his protection ended he would have to leave, too, as he wrote to his brother: “When they leave I think I shall as the [brothers] and friends of Frierson say I shall be killed.”³⁷ He did indeed leave Athens and went back to his hometown in Michigan where he lived out the rest of his life before he passed at forty-two years old.³⁸ As stated earlier, white allies were also targeted, however, Knox’s incident was a more extreme reaction of violence than that of the typical social ostracism. Frierson’s goal of getting rid of Knox one way or another ultimately worked and seemingly.

Knox’s ability to flee from the hostility and be acquitted of the incident, however, displays a huge difference between white allies and freedmen. By

³⁴ “Report of the number of Freedmen murdered and assaulted with intent to kill in the sub-District of Athens year 1867,” 1867, *Freedmen’s Bureau Online: Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands*, <https://www.freedmensbureau.com/georgia/gaoutrages2.htm#Athens%201867>.

³⁵ “Report of the Number of Freedmen murdered, assaulted in the sub-District of Athens, from January 31 to October 31, 1868,” 1868, *Freedmen’s Bureau Online: Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands*, <https://www.freedmensbureau.com/georgia/gaoutr7.htm>.

³⁶ John J. Knox to William W. Knox, November 24, 1868.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Obituary of John J. Knox, n.d., John J. Knox Papers, MS 3119, Box 1, Folder 8, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia.



This photograph of the Knox Institute was taken by David Lewis Earnest, an Athens educator and photographer, probably ca. 1916. Courtesy of Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library / University of Georgia Libraries.

either leaving town or distancing themselves from freedmen, white allies could regain safety. However, white allies still benefitted from privileges within the legal system. Conversely, freedmen were not awarded the same legal benefits and were seen as individuals who needed to be ordered and domineered.

The privileges that benefitted white allies was one of the reasons why the Black community relied on them for protection.

Conclusion

Forty years after Knox’s hasty departure, the Knox Institute immortalized Major John J. Knox with an entry in the 1915-1916 catalogue stating “The old “Knox School” building was erected by the Freedman’s Bureau for the education of colored youths... In honor of Major John J. Knox, a United States Army officer, who was stationed at Athens and manifested much interest in the welfare of the freedmen.”³⁹ A generation later the school still made sure its origins and its namesake were known. The Knox Institute would lay the

³⁹ American Missionary Association, *Catalogue of the Teachers and Pupils of Knox Institute and Industrial School, Athens, Ga., with Course of Study and General Information 1915-1916*, (Athens: McGregor Company). University of Georgia Libraries Microforms Area, FILM LC2852 .A8 K74.

groundwork for the development of other private and city/county schools for Black youth. Reconstruction-era Athens is an example of how freedmen and white allies worked together in the attempt to build a better future through education.⁴⁰ While freedmen had the initiative for the school, the Freedmen's Bureau had the political power and funding to assist. This alliance was supported by mutual respect and recognition of the efforts of the freedmen, including Madison Davis, in conjunction with the efforts of John Knox, the Freedmen's Bureau, and the American Missionary Association.

The potential of that alliance led to the end of John J. Knox's position as an agent in Athens. Navigating Reconstruction in the South meant negotiating the parameters of what possible to do in favor of the Black community. For Knox, that principle gave allowance to the building of a schoolhouse, but did not give allowance to the subsequent bolstering of Radical Republican ideas, some of which occurred in the newly constructed school building. Knox ensuring the safety of freedmen to cast votes in April 1868 led to two Black men representing Athens. For some whites, what Knox did to ensure the freedmen vote was a last straw.

The relationship between Knox and the freedmen led to measurable accomplishments for Black Athenians, but the end of that partnership also reflects some of the failures of Reconstruction, including the success of white resistance to such alliances. John Knox did not die at the hands of Frierson and the white mob. Still, the white goal was accomplished. Knox was sacked and Athens' freedmen lost an irreplaceable ally, a phenomenon all too common in the years after the war.

⁴⁰ The new Knox Institute building was constructed in 1912 with funds from the philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, at the cost of \$15,876.28, leaving one penny in the bank! (*Athens Banner*, August 1, 1912, 8, DLG). The photo of the new building, with students and teachers, may have been taken about 1916, when the spring term enrollment numbered 252 students (*Athens Banner*, January 6, 1916, 5, DLG). From the David Lewis Earnest Photographic Collection, MS 1590, Box 1, Folder 19, Image e109, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, The University of Georgia Libraries. https://dlg.usg.edu/record/guan_earnest_e109.

Despite this bitter end, John J. Knox and the freedmen of Athens remain forever etched in history as a fascinating example of the triumphs and losses that was the great experiment of American Reconstruction.⁴¹

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⁴¹ See Dr. Al Hester's series of four special articles about Major John Knox published in the *Clarkston News*, Clarkston, Michigan, August 4-September 8, 2010, <https://clarkstonnews.com/local-soldier-major-knox-never-backed-down/>; <https://thecitizenonline.com/major-knoxs-untold-story-with-freedmens-bureau/>; <https://clarkstonnews.com/knox-concentrates-on-freedmens-bureau/>; <https://oxfordleader.com/major-knox-links-clarkston-to-civil-rights-campaign/>.

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